## Effective Leadership for Crisis Management: A Cognitive-Affective Approach

| Author | Abstract |
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| Jose Mathews, Senior Lecturer, Gedu College of Business Studies.<br><br>**Key words:**<br><br>crisis leadership, cognitive resources, affective resources, individual differences, effective leadership | The leadership approaches and styles are situational. Leading in normal circumstances is different from leading in times of crisis. The latter demands a new and innovative style of leading and responding to change. The effectiveness of leadership in crisis situations can be conceptualised in relation to the pattern of the cognitive and affective resources of the leader. The extent of the differences of the cognitive resources and the emotional strengths that a leader is endowed with determine the extent of the effectiveness of crisis leadership. Therefore, this paper will discuss effective leadership for crisis management from a cognitive-affective approach. Further, the combination of the cognitive resource and the emotional resource of the leader is brought forward as the leader's own style of dealing with crisis. The two significant cognitive-affective processes examined in this paper are the cognitive styles and the frames of the leader. |

## Introduction

"Agreeing on the definition of a crisis has proven challenging for crisis theorists and practitioners…" as crisis is interpreted to be unstable and without a unitary phenomenon that characterise it (Wang et al., 2009, p.25; Reilly, 1993). Despite the variations, a crisis is typically recognized as a low probability, high-impact situation that is unexpected, unfamiliar, and precipitated by people, organizational structures, economic forces, technology, or natural disasters (Pearson & Clair, 1998).

A.H. Maslow (Olson & Gawronski, 2010), known for his contribution to the study of human needs presented the need hierarchy model in which he discussed the way needs are structured in the human system. In this hierarchical pattern of needs the basic needs like physiological needs come first, then safety and security, love and belongingness needs, self-esteem needs, and finally self-actualisation needs take predominance in the satisfaction process. From the perspective of needs hierarchy when a natural disaster like earthquake, drought, flood or other natural hazards occur, it "interacts with latent human and community vulnerabilities, a disaster and sometimes a catastrophe results" (Olson & Gawronski, 2010, p.207). In this perspective when a disaster strikes the need hierarchy of the people who were on the upper part of the hierarchy find themselves upside down, their priorities changed, and they literally scramble for necessities. "These sudden needs reduction ("Maslowian Shock") …creates a crisis in the community or in the nation which can also swell into a political crisis." (Olson & Gawronski, 2010, p.208).

**General nature of crisis management**

Crisis management essentially involves the handling of crises, the procedures effected to turn back the tide of events or the deviant path that the organisation is plunged into (Runyan, 2006; Wang et al., 2009). In the crisis management, the disruptions that the organisation is going through, the abnormal situation is normalised so as to resume the operations and that business is restored to the pre-crisis state (Wang et al., 2009). In the reactive approach to crisis management, the efforts to contain the crisis is initiated following the onset of the crisis and in the proactive approach, it generally involves prevention of crises that starts with the prediction of crisis in relation to the vulnerability analysis in the organisation (Mitroff, et al., 1987). Combining the reactive and the proactive approaches Sahin et al. (2015) provide five different crisis management approaches.

In the escaping approach the organisation should take all precautions and install early warning systems to escape the onset of any crisis. It involves constantly scanning the internal and the external environment to identify potential areas of trouble. The solving approach depends on the "the prediction of conditions before a crisis and on a timely move for the problem resolution during a crisis" (Sahin et al.2015, p.2301). The solving approach can be characterised by a combination of both proactive and reactive approach and in the unavoidable crisis the solution is affected in relation to the predictions already made. In the proactive approach alternative

solutions are worked out in the event of a potential crisis. The reactive approach is one of bringing back to normalcy after a crisis is broken out. In addition, in the interactive approach there is evaluation before, during and after the crisis event that leads to the organisational learning processes.

**Role of Leadership in Crisis Management**

Crisis leadership is considered to be one of the most important factors in crisis management but ignored in studies (Jaques, 2012). "Leadership" comes first among the achievement criteria in crisis management" Fener & Cevik, 2015, p.698). "…evaluations of effective leadership vary across contexts, and there is no one prototype for a "good leader" (Haddon et al., 2015, p.613). No single leadership is found to be effective in all the situations as leadership is contextual dependent and follower dependent (Haddon et al., 2015; Fragouli & Ibidapo, 2015). In their observation James et al., (2011) crisis responsive visionaries and charismatic visionaries are two distinctive styles of leadership that matter in crisis situations. Crisis responsive visionaries "…tend to act first and then seek ways to justify their actions" and charismatic visionaries "represent leaders who engage in interpretation and sense-making of the crisis situation before taking action" (James et al., 2011, p.473). In accordance with the observations of Haddon et al., (2015) leadership patterns of authoritative style, charismatic leadership, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership produce varying effects in different crisis and non-crisis situations. In other words, no consistent style of leadership is found to be effective in crisis management situations, be it laissez-fair style, or charismatic style or transactional style or transformational style (Bhaduri, 2019).

In the event of many interpretations of leadership being considered, discussed, practiced and researched, it is but natural that one confronts multiple theories in this sphere. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (Fragouli & Ibidapo, 2015) the three key domains of leadership effectiveness to be considered are leader-follower-situation. The effectiveness may be dependent on the interaction between the three domains. On the other hand, Haddon et al., (2015) observe that leadership competencies become paramount in a situation of crisis. The situation being known and given the followers what stands out in a crisis management is the leader competencies, resources, skills, abilities, knowledge, and the personality (Wooten & James, 2008). The effectiveness of crisis management is thus dependent on the leader, the other two domains being known and remains constant regardless of other variations.

Leader being the key player in crisis management, the effectiveness of crisis management is contingent on the leader's behaviour of overt and covert nature. The elaborate lists of leader competencies identified in the literature are varied in nature that extends to the whole of the leader personality. Boin et al., (as cited by Jaques, 2012) proposes five ability processes—sense making of the crisis, effective decision-making, sharing the crisis with shareholders through framing and making meaning, restoring the normalcy and steering the organisation in the aftermath of the crisis.

James and Wooten (2004) refer to six competencies— building and the development of trust to manage expectations in the accomplishment of goals, generating corporate mindset that enables the firm to come out of the crisis for, identifying the (not so) obvious organizational vulnerabilities overcoming the ego needs and psychological defence mechanisms, making wise and rapid decisions of the broadest and expertise nature, taking courageous action "to think and act big" and learning from the crisis to "change the way they think about and respond to crisis situations or turbulent environments" (James & Wooten,2004,p,21, 23).

On the other side of the analysis of importance of leadership in crisis management. The competencies researchers have identified personal resources pertaining to the affective and the dynamics of a leader. Borrowing from literature, Bhaduri (2019) refer, to the emotional intelligence competencies like empathy, social skills, interpersonal skills, persuasion, and teamwork skills for crisis management. In the same vein researchers also place greater importance on the cognitive processes of the leader in the management process of crisis (Kim, 2021; Fener & Cevick, 2015).

The studies in crisis management and the role of leadership in crisis indicate the general pattern of crisis and the way different crisis situations differ. The containment of crisis involves the role of leadership wherein the leader-specific behaviour and the leadership process that involves the follower and the situation matter in determining the effectiveness of crisis management.

**A leadership model of crisis management**

In the light of the nature of the crisis examined and the role of leadership and its varied processes that permeate every kind of leadership styles (Kapucu & Ustun, 2018; Bhaduri, 2019), what is required is to settle on the basic intra-individual leadership processes in the management of crisis that embrace the varied leadership competencies. In other words, "although there are some elements of commonality between these and similar lists (or

leadership processes) …" (Jaques, 2012, p. 368) the task is to search for the underlying intra-individual sub-systems that are key processes in the enactment of crisis leadership as presented in Fig.1.

**Figure 1**
*A Leadership Model of Crisis Management (designed by the Author)*
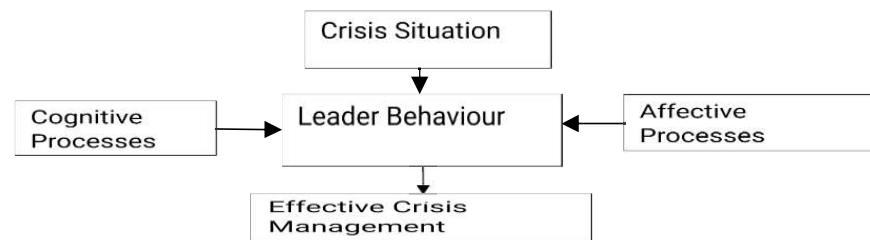


## Cognitive and affective processes in crisis leadership

Cognition and affect in an interactive process influence the behaviour and that one cannot be separated from another (Homburg, et al. 2006). In these interactional processes cognition can ignite emotions and vice versa leading to the emergence of a behavioural pattern. Newman, et al., (2009) state that separate intra-individual sub-systems in their interactions influence job performance. The cognitive structures and processes and the emotional dynamics or the cognitive affective personality system steer the course of behaviour of individuals in response to the situations. The cognitive structures and processes and the affective states "interact dynamically and influence each other reciprocally" in the development of behaviour (Mischel & Shoda,1995).

In the reciprocal interaction between cognition and affect, cognitive structures and emotional systems and processes are involved in the generation of cognitions which are representations and different forms of knowledge that differ in the degree of articulation, differentiation, and integration (Levy, et al., 2007; Schneider & Angelmar, 1993) and in the generation of affective dynamics. The types of cognitive-affective units that interact dynamically in the cognitive structures, process and the affective states according to Mischel & Shoda (1995) are encodings or representations for self, people and events, the expectancies and beliefs that the individual holds about self and the external environment, affects with regard to people, self and events, desirable outcomes of positive and negative nature and competencies and self-regulatory plans with regard to one's own capacities and plans for affecting outcomes. This being the blueprint for the interaction between the cognitive-affective systems, two

related constructs that are important in analysing the impact of cognition in the leadership processes are cognitive styles and frames (Armstrong et al., 2011; James et al., 2011)

Cognitive style is "a fundamental factor determining individual and organizational behaviour" (Armstrong et al., 2011, p.2). "Cognitive styles refer to consistent individual differences in how individuals perceive, think, solve problems, learn, take decisions and relate to others" (Armstrong et al., 2011, p.1). These enduring cognitive patterns of responses are heuristics in that the individual invariably and spontaneously applies them to make sense of the environment or in dealing with the environment (Armstrong et al., 2011). Cognitive styles are also interpreted as an individual's preferred mode of thinking, problem-solving and/or information processing.

Many researchers (as for example, Hayes, & Allinson,1994) have identified these consistent cognitive patterns of responding to situations that include field-dependence/independence, holist-analytic and verbal imagery, scanning-focusing. serialist-holist levelling versus sharpening (leveller assimilate new information into the existing and the sharpener keeps the distinction), impulsivity-reflectivity (impulsive is quicker response with more errors whereas reflectivity involves reflection and slower response), converging-diverging (convergers attempt single narrower solutions and diverges seek broad and varying solutions), adaptors-innovators (rigid/conventional thinking to flexible/newer thinking to solve problems), constricted-flexible control (constricted control is easily distracted with information and flexible control is resistant to information interference), equivalence range, and sensing-intuitive and thinking feeling, reasoning-intuitive/ active-contemplative (reaching solutions by reason or immediate insight and by direct participation or framing in the mind) (Hayes, & Allinson,1994).

In the Adaptation-Innovation (A-I), cognitive style, the information processing, and mode of problem-solving range from "precise, reliable and rule-focused thinking to more imaginative and innovative thinking in executing different tasks at the work place" (Jain & Jeppesen, 2013, p.350). In crisis management, it is evident that adaptors are better at solving problem within the existing cognitive patterns of responding while innovators explore newer and newer ways of dealing with the crisis (Jain & Jeppesen, 2013).

On the dimension of Analysts-Intuitive, the former is found to be preferring hard data and proceed in a step-by-step approach to crisis management whereas intuitivists' information processing is characterised by

synthesisation of multiple sources of information to solve the problem (Armstrong et al., 2011).

Field-dependent individuals interpret the situation in a fused way, not able to separate the elements from the situation whereas field-independent leaders can separate the content from the field. Field-dependent individuals follow a global-orientation to information processing and field-independent individuals are by style analytic in information processing and cannot be dependent on the field (Armstrong et al., 2011). It can be inferred that field-independent individuals are able to have innovative and unorthodox approach to solutions as they are also found to be superior in their social intelligence (Erez, 1980).

The MBTI dimensions of Extraversion-Introversion, Sensing-Intuitive, Thinking-Feeling and Judging-Perceiving are interpreted as cognitive styles, attitudes and personality constructs. However, it is to be recognised that these Jungian concepts are cognitive-emotion focused ways of interacting with the social and the physical environment wherein individuals can be distinctively differentiated in relation to their preferred pattern of responding (Hudak, 2013). It is found that the personality types of ESTJ, ISTJ and ESTP are found to be more effective in dealing with the crisis and ISTP oriented individuals are found to be lacking in resources to deal with the crisis (Farhani & Dadras, 2017). Studies also attest high importance to MBTI intuiting-feeling than sensing-thinking in generating paradigm modifying ideas and intuitive-thinking types are better team performers (Armstrong et al., 2011).

Following the consideration of the cognitive processes involved in crisis management, the next intra-individual sub-system of interactive nature is that of the frames. In accordance with the conceptualisation of James et al., (2011) frame enables individuals to "locate, perceive, identify and label most events or experiences… (and) the crisis response will be predicated largely on the manager's framing of the situation" (p. 475-477). In turbulent organizational contexts "managers interpret and make sense of ambiguous and complex signals through cognitive frames" wherein a frame can be a mental representation or a mental model or a mental structure that managers impose on the environment to make sense of the say, crisis situation (Hahn, et al.,2014, p.467). Framing simplifies and deconstructs the complex environment in the process of crisis management.

In their analysis James et al., (2011) state that frames of threat or opportunity or frames of optimism or pessimism can determine the course of the counterstrategy that the leader may unfold in the crisis management

situation. The way frames are framed are largely a reflection of the individual's cognitive and emotional processes that have much to do with the crisis management. In the language of cognition-affect interaction, (Lazarus,1991; James et al., 2011) the nature of frames are the outcomes of the emotional dynamics of the individual and the emotions elicited by frames are also contingent on the emotional dynamics of the leader. In other words, the emotional intelligence of the leader assumes significance in crisis management (McCleskey, 2014). Emotional intelligence of the leader can also interact with the framing process whereby the implication is that individual's emotional maturity and stability also tend to frame the crisis in a positive way or framing the crisis as an opportunity to be utilised for greater advancement.

The cognitive-affective interactive process examined in relation to the cognitive styles and frames of the leader shed light on the way leaders differ in their way of managing the crisis. These interactive processes that differ across leaders and in the leadership, process produce an outcome of crisis management that again differ dependent on the interactive process itself.

**Conclusion**

It is brought out that multiple leadership styles differ in their effectiveness and that crisis management is not an exception. The differential effectiveness of leadership is examined from the perspective of the nature of the cognitive-affective leadership processes. The cognitive styles of leaders that differ across leaders show varying results in dealing with the situation. The cognitive-affective frames of the leaders show varied effectiveness in the crisis management.

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