



Successful Leadership During Times of Crisis and Uncertainty: Contouring The Profile of the Apeirogon Diamond Leader

Oana-Diana Roth

Email: diane.erdei@gmail.com

Email:

USA

ABSTRACT

COVID-19's emergence and its unfolding across the globe have elevated the significance of crisis leadership, to a premier rank. First, the present research explored the concept of crisis, suggesting additional categorizations of crises. Next, using the COVID-19 global crisis as a backdrop, the author considered how descriptions of leaders during COVID-19 fit in existing leadership theories such as adaptive, authentic, transformational, servant, and skills models. The study then discussed the limitations of the current theoretical models in the framework of crisis. Next, the present research proposed an alternative conceptual foundation to the profile of crisis leaders, suggesting a definition of crisis leaders as Apeirogon Diamond Leaders. The present study aimed to add the profile of the Apeirogon Diamond Leader and the Roth Crisis Leadership Model to the leadership literature and lay out the theoretical foundation of the model. The present study concluded by discussing implications and directions for future research.

Keywords: crisis leadership model, apeirogon diamond leader, adaptive leadership, authentic leadership

1. Introduction

Leadership during the crisis has been a topic for academic exploration for decades and narrowing down key traits defining successful leaders has been a long-term endeavor of prior leadership research. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a petri dish, handing all companies a similar challenge relatively at the same time. Together with the 1918 Spanish Flu outbreak and the Black Death of 1346, the COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019) pandemic stands out as a top 3 most impactful pandemics in recorded history, having sent out shockwaves across the fabric of societies globally and placing the ability to lead during crisis and uncertainty under a magnifying lens. The rapid unfolding of the COVID-19 crisis coupled with a very fast response from companies in terms of furloughs left millions of people unemployed and led to the largest GDP decline since the Great Depression in the 1930s. After a decade of prosperity, with unemployment at its lowest in history, the stock market crashed in the beginning phases of the pandemic (February 20-April 7, 2020) (Wikipedia, 2020), in line with investors' uncertainty around the future. On February 25, 2020, the bonds curve inverted. During periods where bond yield curves invert, long-term debt instruments have lower yields than short-term debt instruments for the same credit quality, predicting in this case a recession in 2020. Resulting of large geographical shutdowns, severe economic disruption has been experienced globally, with widespread shortages of supplies driven by panic buying, disrupted supply and transportation chains due to lockdowns, shelter-in-place orders, and closed borders.

A key index to have immediately reacted to uncertainty was unemployment. This key metric responded immediately in the US to reflect the general economic uncertainty and soared within less than 2 months to over 14.7% of the population (as of May 8) with 23.1 million people unemployed overnight as of April 2020, the highest level recorded since 1941. The new unemployment claims logged as of May 13 were set to top 35 million (Bartash, 2020). "This is the highest rate and the largest

over-the-month increase in the history of the data (available back to January 1948)" noted the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2020.

The magnitude of the figures, with millions of people directly and indirectly affected by decisions made by political and corporate leaders, point mercilessly towards how critical a leader's ability to process events unfolding in a fast, unpredictable pattern is, not only for organizations but also for the broader society.

While crisis leadership has been researched in the past, the literature to date seems primarily geared toward finding narrowly defined "silver bullets" or restricted sets of specific attributes or actions which were deemed critical for success during crisis periods. Some authors focused on personality traits, others on skills, and others on the interaction between leaders and their teams. To date, no literature reference could be identified by the researcher acknowledging the true complexity of a leader's operating theater and that a leader's profile has countless facets which will shine at different points in time and in different situations. Yet, the same person will activate different skills or display behaviors and act in certain ways sometimes within less than 1 hour. The same leader may be visionary in one meeting and then become transactional and micromanage the meeting after. The same leader will need an entire "toolbox" of skills, abilities, attitudes, and behaviors to succeed in effectively leading their organization.

Leadership is inherently complex; leadership in crisis sharpens every action and behavior up to a maximum resolution. A leader generally, and a leader during a crisis specifically, need a whole arsenal of "silver bullets" to be effective and successfully lead their organization during such situations. The complexity of the situation coupled with the multifaceted way leaders must be and act during crisis times, leave many top executives to continue to struggle for solutions when time is of the essence for survival or for capitalizing quickly on one-time opportunities for their organizations.



Same as a diamond-shaped with countless facets that each pinpoint various dimensions pertinent to characterizing how a leader acts during a crisis, the present study proposes that a model describing a crisis leader's actions and behavior has to consider the leader holistically, acknowledging a broad range of traits of character coupled with existing hard and soft skills and competencies, anchored within the hard reality of their operating theater. By laying out the theoretical foundation of this concept and describing traits and prerequisites of success for Apeirogon Diamond Leaders, the researcher proposes an alternative crisis leadership conceptual framework, which it labels the Roth Crisis Leadership Model or RCLM.

2. Leadership and Crisis: Definitions and Perspectives

Crisis can take a multitude of forms: geopolitical (e.g., the Israel-Palestine conflict), economic (e.g., 1920 depression, 1929-1939 great depression), financial (e.g., the 2006 global markets crash), wars, natural disasters (e.g., tsunamis, earthquakes, floods), environmental (e.g., the Fukushima nuclear plant explosion), medical (e.g., 2017 SARS crisis, COVID-19 pandemic), organizational. The Cambridge Dictionary defines crisis as a time of great disagreement, confusion, or suffering, an extremely difficult or dangerous point in a situation. For the present study, the crisis is referred to as a time of intense difficulty experienced in an organizational setting, not during a personal (private) event.

Yukl and Mahsud (2010) refer to Pearson and Clair's 1998 definition of crisis as "an unusual and immediate problem that can have serious effects (...) include serious accidents, explosions, natural disasters, equipment breakdowns, product defects, supply shortages, health emergencies, employee strikes, sabotage, or a terrorist attack". As Nichols et al. (2020) wrote "During a crisis, cognitive overload looms; information is incomplete, interests and priorities may clash, and emotions and anxieties run high. Analysis paralysis can easily result, exacerbated by the natural tendency of matrixed organizations to build consensus." In 1998, focusing on the corporate world, Pearson and Clair summarized the research to date, defining organizational crisis as a "low probability, high impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and a means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly" (p. 60).

There are multiple ways of differentiating between types of crises: Bernstein (2018) referred to three categories of crisis: creeping crises (foreshadowed by a series of events that decision-makers don't view as part of a pattern), slow-burn crises (some warning before the situation has caused any actual damage) and crises (damage has already occurred and will get worse the longer it takes to respond).

From a complementary perspective, the present research is differentiating between crises driven by

- (a) external factors (e.g., hurricane Katrina, 9/11, COVID-19 pandemic) and
- (b) the crisis generated by internal factors (e.g., management of a company).

Furthermore, the present study also adds the lens of "relative predictability" when describing crises:

(a) "Relatively predictable crisis": e.g., during the turnaround of a company in crisis. Such a crisis, after identifying the issues and stopping gapping the "bleeding", usually has a medium-long term action plan attached to it and one can argue that once the plan is laid out and assumes a relatively stable external environment, the crisis is being managed and the focus lays primarily on executing the "curative" measures determined as key for solving the crisis and making period changes as needed to keep the plan on track.

(b) "Unpredictable but possible to partially control and manage through" crisis: e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic: while the external factors such as the development of the virus and the government response were impossible to control, the crisis could be managed through if companies were allowed to operate. Leading through such a crisis may be compared with driving a vehicle through the night without a navigation system: while one can only see about 400ft ahead and while reaching the desired destination is questionable, the driver can continue to drive the car and reach their destination little by little. Extending the analogy to the COVID-19 pandemic, while leaders were unable to take long-term strategic decisions, they could take "day by day" decisions if they were able to quickly adapt to new situations, thus keeping their businesses operating.

(c) "Unpredictable and impossible to control once started" crisis, e.g., the explosion of a nuclear powerplant during a tsunami supplemented by an earthquake (Fukushima Daiichi, Japan, 2011). In such an event, one can argue that leadership (if still alive) can only take measures to reduce the disaster, but not recalibrate and fix the situation anymore.

Last but not least, a further view on crisis could also be from the lens of the challenges' frequency. From this standpoint one could differentiate between:

(a) Single "challenge" timing of the event, e.g., an explosion of a power plant, whereas decisive and swift leadership action is expected and required to address the situation.

(b) Multiple "challenges" unfolding in succession for a protracted period, similar to an earthquake's aftershocks, e.g., the COVID-19 crisis. What was believed to be a 2-week event has continued to administer challenges intermittently, sometimes on an hourly basis, for longer than two years as of the time of the present research. Such crises have the added challenge of (a) fatigue both at the leadership and the followership level of the populations, as well as (b) potentially eroded or depleted reserve resources, capping subsequently the ability of organizations to continue to fight for survival.

3. Viewing Leaders During the COVID-19 Pandemic Lens

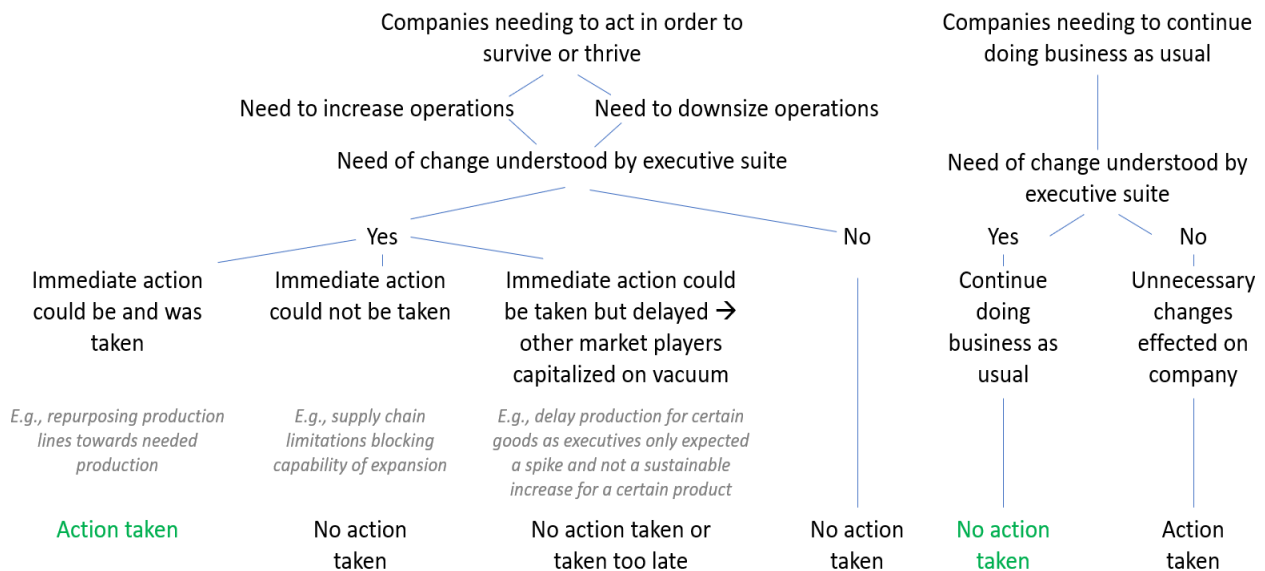
As the "world as we knew it" descended into accelerated transformation, unpredictability, and complexity, with companies and nations fighting for survival, leaders across the board have been confronted simultaneously with a "sink or swim" situation. Organizations needed to adapt fast to remain open, survive, or



thrive. As Heifetz and Laurie proposed almost 20 years ago: “Adaptive work is required when our deeply held beliefs are challenged when the values that made us successful become less relevant, and when legitimate yet competing perspectives emerge. (...) These adaptive challenges are murky, systemic problems with no easy answers.” (1997)

Figure 1 proposes a view of how executives chose to position their organizations during the pandemic.

Figure 1: Paths of Organizations Towards Action During the COVID-19 Pandemic



Reasons why some companies immediately reacted to the pandemic and why others may have resisted change could be linked to a belief that change was unnecessary or not feasible, economic threats, fear of personal failure, loss of status and power, the threat to old values and ideals and resentment of interference, lack of trust (Connor, 1995). Kotter too (2007) looked at the main reasons for failures in change efforts, proposing among others not establishing a great enough sense of urgency; not creating a powerful enough guiding coalition; lacking a vision; under-communicating the vision by a power of 10; not removing obstacles to the new vision; not systematically planning for, and creating, short-term wins; declaring victory too soon; not anchoring changes in the corporation’s culture. While his analysis was not specifically addressing crises, the need for change is rarely not driven by a crisis.

In such times of crisis and ambiguity, the need for leadership becomes visible, and leadership matters. Citizens look toward elected leaders expecting that they would be able to minimize a crisis’ impact (Boin et al, 2005). Boin et al. reviewed the disasters of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina and defined in 2013 crisis management as “the sum of activities aimed at minimizing the impact of a crisis. The impact is measured in terms of damage to people, critical infrastructure, and public institutions. Effective crisis management saves lives, protects infrastructure, and restores trust in public institutions” (p. 81). However, they do not refer to the opportunities which can arise out of a crisis and how a crisis can be leveraged to leap an organization forward. They suggest 10 executive tasks of crisis management: early recognition, sensemaking, making critical decisions, orchestrating vertical and horizontal coordination, coupling and

decoupling, meaning-making, communication, rendering accountability, learning, and enhancing resilience.

Also focusing on leadership during the 2020 pandemic, Wardman (2020) proposed 13 “crisis ready strategies for COVID-19”: planning and preparedness, narrating a clear-sighted strategy, meaning-making, direction giving, differentiating and supporting people’s needs, credibility, transparency, openness, partnership, empathy, solidarity, responsiveness and adaptiveness, media engagement.

4. Theoretical framework: Juxtaposition of existing theoretical models over scenarios of crisis

The section below explores leadership concepts in conjunction with the concept of leadership during crisis, focusing on adaptive leadership, authentic leadership, skills approach, resilience and grit, the concept of the holder of trust, and passion and love.

Adaptive and Situational Leadership Considerations

Cojocar (2009) referred to adaptive leadership as a developing theoretical construct emerging “as a contemporary leadership concept, evolving from situational, transformational, and complexity theories”. While both situational leadership and adaptive leadership theories focus on a need to change and adapt to situations and finding effective ways to influence and empower followers, adaptive leadership is centered on how leaders create environments to help followers cope with new situations. Situational leadership focuses on the leader and how they change their style to influence the followers (Google, 2021).

The situational approach proposed by Hersey and Blanchard in 1969, based on Reddin’s 3-D management style theory from 1967 in the theoretical framework refers to both a directive and a supportive component, which are to be applied



depending on the given situation. However, limitations of the situational leadership theory are that only limited research had been conducted to validate the assumptions and propositions presented in the research, the model of the followers' development levels is considered ambiguously conceptualized, and no link is established between competence and commitment levels and last, the research could not be replicated in subsequent studies (Northouse, 2016)

Following up on the situational leadership approach, Heifetz and Laurie suggested almost 20 years ago: "Adaptive work is required when our deeply held beliefs are challenged when the values that made us successful become less relevant, and when legitimate yet competing perspectives emerge. (...) These adaptive challenges are murky, systemic problems with no easy answers." (1997) Their article "The Work of Leadership" launched 1997 the concept of Adaptive leadership (AL) as a process of leadership where a leader seeks to engage, mobilize, and motivate followers to change (Arthur-Mensah and Zimmermann, 2017).

Along the same lines, Northouse noted in 2016, "An adaptive leader challenges others to face difficult challenges, providing them with the space or opportunity they need to learn new ways of dealing with the inevitable changes in assumptions, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that they are likely to encounter in addressing real problems." (p.258) However, the concept of adaptive leadership as suggested above appears to look at how leaders encourage people to deal with change which unfolds at a relatively controlled pace. The present study reasons that the change that they researched was not abrupt, but change that, although it may have urgency attached to it, it can unfold over a certain period, allowing leaders and followers to adapt behavior over a certain period. The qualities that may support a leader in addressing gradually unfolding crises may be fundamentally different from attributes that would need to be activated during crises.

Yukl and Mahsud (2010) suggested that in situations when a "sudden, unusual event threatens to disrupt normal operations or to harm people or property, a rapid but appropriate response is needed to minimize the adverse effects for the organization. How well a leader handles these immediate crises is an indicator of flexible and adaptive leadership ". They also suggested that more research was needed on leadership in crises.

15 years later, analyzing how leaders were responding to the COVID-19 crisis, D'Auria and De Smet (2020) looked at behaviors and mindsets which helped leaders navigate the crisis: organize to respond to the crisis by setting up a network of teams, composed of "highly adaptable assembly of groups, which a united by a common purpose and work together in much the same way that the individuals on a single team collaborate, elevate leaders during a crisis by exhibiting "deliberate calm" and "bounded optimism", make decisions amid uncertainty by pausing to assess and anticipate, then acting, demonstrate empathy by dealing with human tragedy as a priority, communicate

effectively by maintaining transparency and providing frequent updates."

Focusing on the pandemic response, Ramalingam et al. (2020) talked about the 5 principles to guide adaptive leadership, referring to the 4A's when leaders respond to a crisis: "Anticipation of likely future needs, trends, and options; articulation of these needs to build collective understanding and support for action; adaptation so that there is continuous learning and the adjustment of responses as necessary; accountability, including maximum transparency in decision making processes and openness to challenges and feedback." They continued by calling out 5 guiding principles: "1. Ensure evidence-based learning and adaptation (...); 2. Stress-test underlying theories, assumptions, and beliefs; (...) 3. Streamline deliberative decision-making; (...) 4. Strengthen transparency, inclusion, and accountability; (...) 5. Mobilize collective action."

Also looking at leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, Nichols et al (2020) pointed out how a leader's roles and responsibilities had changed over a few weeks, moving from "fostering innovation, driving revenue and gaining market share" to "controlling cost and maintaining liquidity". Their assessment of 21,000 leaders among C-suite executives raised four key behavioral areas that leaders need to display to move forward in a crisis: (1) decide with speed over precision by defining priorities, making small trade-offs, naming the decision-makers, and embracing action without punishing mistakes, (2) adapt boldly by deciding what *not* to do, throwing out yesterday's playbook and strengthening (or building) direct connections to the front line, (3) reliably deliver by staying alert and aligned to a daily dashboard of priorities, setting KPIs and other metrics to measure performance and keeping mind and body in fighting shape, (4) engage for impact by connecting with individual team members, digging deep to engage the teams, asking for help as needed, ensuring a focus on both customers and employees and collecting and amplifying positive messages about successes, obstacles that have been overcome and acts of kindness.

The present study acknowledges and suggests that adaptability is a key defining factor in a crisis leader's profile. Adding to the research above the specific situation of crisis for the present assessment, the present research also considers a leader at times when the velocity at which the events unfold and the gravity of the consequences are so high that the leaders do not have the time to provide others with space or opportunities to learn new ways to deal with the crisis.

Authentic Leadership Considerations

Researching leadership from an authenticity lens, George (2003) in Northouse (2016) referred to purpose/passion, values/behavior, relationships/connectedness, self-discipline/consistency and heart/compassion as authentic leadership characteristics.

Authentic leadership has been defined from 3 perspectives: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and developmental. The intrapersonal perspective was described by Shamir and Eilam (2005) and refers to self-knowledge, self-regulation, and



self-concept, whereas authentic leaders “exhibit genuine leadership, lead from conviction, and are originals, not copies” (Northouse, 2016). From an interpersonal standpoint, Eagly (2005) defined authentic leadership as relational, created by leaders and followers together. From a developmental vantage point, Avolio and his associates wrote multiple research articles between 2005 and 2008, referring to authentic leadership as something that can be learned and developed, and not as a fixed trait. Walumbwa et al. (2008) called out: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency.

Outside the academic sphere, multiple authors have tried to define and characterize what a leader should do and be during the COVID-19 pandemic, to be successful. In Korn Ferry’s COVID-19 Leadership Guide, Kevin Cashman notes “The best leaders are not only connecting across everything they can within their organization to keep people engaged and motivated but also across the industry with collaboration that fits a deeper, broader purpose” (Korn Ferry, 2020). Being purposeful in front of a challenge acts as a catalyst toward action. Also focusing on the 2020 pandemic, Cashman noted: “It seems that the CEOs who are truly purpose-driven are thriving a bit more.” (Korn Ferry, 2020). In the same Leadership Guide, Stevenson notes “They are defining the firm’s values concisely, so people have the clarity and guidelines to make decisions” (Korn Ferry, 2020). Dettmann et al. (2020) called out “being steady at the wheel”, being empathetic and taking others’ perspective, being authentic, bringing perspective and appropriate humor and bringing it back to what matters most. Hatami et al. (2020) noted that successful CEOs during the pandemic are expected to display “deliberate calm”, “bounded optimism”, empathy, high engagement, and be fact-based in their actions. D’Auria et al. (2020) referred to awareness, vulnerability, empathy, and compassion as the four critical qualities for leaders in the COVID-19 crisis. Ray (2020) debated whether the appropriate leadership style during the pandemic was “command and control” or “consensus and team-think”. The qualities listed above point out the authentic leadership theory.

Overlaying the literature above over the evaluations performed by Korn Ferry, EY, and McKinsey, a rather high degree of juxtaposition can be observed. Therefore, it may be argued that leaders in the COVID-19 pandemic are also expected to be authentic leaders.

Skills Model Considerations

Less discussed by theoretical frameworks assessing leadership in general and crisis leadership in particular, skills and knowledge are suggested by the present study as being key to a leader’s effective action when handling crises.

Northouse (2016) refers to Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, et al. (2000) research as part of the Skills Approach leadership theory. They look towards problem-solving skills as a leader’s creative ability to solve new and unusual, ill-defined organizational problems. Such skills include “being able to define significant problems, gather problem information, formulate new

understandings about the problem, and generate prototype plans for problem solutions”.

While many leadership theories focus on how the leader should be and how they should act, leadership without domain expertise and competence can backfire severely on an organization. Executive teams with complementary domain expertise covering all areas of an operation and knowing how and where to find knowledge and information when needed are crucial to organizational success. The present study acknowledges that an executive team only having deep domain expertise but not displaying desired character attributes and social skills would be unlikely to have a long tenure at the helm of an organization.

At the Intersection of Theories: Resilience / Grit

Whetten and Cameron (2016) refer to resiliency as a means to “handle the stress that cannot be eliminated”, not only by developing the “capacity to effectively manage the negative effects of stress, to bounce back from adversity, and to endure difficult situations (Wright et al., 2013) but also (...) finding ways to thrive and flourish even in difficult circumstances – that is, they enhance well-being” (Spreitzer et al., 2005)” (p. 106). Psychological resiliency is defined as “the ability of a person to return to the original condition after experiencing trauma, challenge or threat. It is the ability to bounce back or withstand negative stressors. (...) also includes the idea of flourishing in the presence of negative stress. This is similar to “post-traumatic growth”, or excelling as a result of facing negative or difficult conditions.” Psychological resiliency is improved by “focusing on meaningfulness in work, reciprocity, and gratitude. (...) They are medium-term strategies that enhance hardiness over time.” (p.106-113)

Masten and Barnes (2018) suggested that resilience was “the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to challenges that threaten the function, survival, or future development of the system” and have suggested that “unifying evidence from different sciences concerned with resilience across disciplines and sectors is essential for adequate research, preparation, intervention, and recovery efforts in disasters and other multi-system calamities, including terror attacks or pandemics”.

Organizational Resilience. In 1973, Holling while researching ecological systems, suggested two behaviors: “termed stability, which represents the ability of a system to return to an equilibrium state after a temporary disturbance” and “termed resilience, that is a measure of the persistence of the systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables” (p.14). For Holling resilience is more of a “characteristic” (Teo et al., 2017). Looking at management, Holling suggested that a “management approach based on resilience (...) would emphasize the need to keep options open (...) and the need to emphasize heterogeneity. Flowing from this would be not the presumption of sufficient knowledge, but the recognition of our ignorance; not the assumption that future events are expected, but that they will be unexpected. The resilience framework can accommodate this shift of perspective, for it does not require a



precise capacity to predict the future, but only a qualitative capacity to devise systems that can absorb and accommodate future events in whatever unexpected form they may take. (p.19)

Initially, resilience had been referred to as “a personal characteristic of the individual or as a set of traits encompassing general sturdiness and resourcefulness and flexible functioning in the face of challenges” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003) suggested that resilience could be learned over time. Masten (1994) suggested it could be divided between “character trait” and “resilience as a process”.

Resilience as Trait of Character. Weick (1993) analyzing the death of 13 men in the Mann Gulch fire disaster talks about four potential sources of resilience such as “improvisation, virtual role systems, the attitude of wisdom, and norms of respectful interaction.”

Other traits called out by researchers on CEOs during the COVID-19 pandemic were the ability to energize in front of the challenge instead of being drained by it, the ability to retain their sense of humor, to be empathetic, calm, clear, and confident, be both action-oriented and reflective, be inspiring, be resilient, be aware of mindsets and be courageous. (Korn Ferry, 2020).

The present study proposes resilience and grit as key descriptors of a crisis leader’s profile.

The Invisible Intangible: Trust

Gourguechon (2017) refers to trust as one of the five essential cognitive capacities and personality traits a leader needs to have. Dirks and Skarlicki (2004) noted that trust has been recognized as important by multiple leadership theories: “Transformational and charismatic leaders build trust in their followers (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). Trust is a crucial element of the consideration dimension of effective leader behavior (Fleishman & Harris, 1962) and leader-member exchange theory (Schriesheim, Castro, & Coglisier, 1999). Other studies show that promoting trust can be important for leader effectiveness (Bass, 1990; Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994).”

Trust is arguably one of the key invisible intangibles which can make or break successful leaders as they set off to implement their agendas. Trust is also multidimensional: trust from stakeholders, from shareholders, from the other members of the leadership team, between the members of the leadership team, from the employees, and customers. Leaders need to be “holders of trust” in their ecosystems to be able to deliver on their goals.

When assessing “trust”, the past research focused primarily on it from an affective and cognitive lens, and an integrity view (Dirks and Skarlicki, 2004).

Assessing the issue of trust in organizations during periods of change, Men et al. (2020) found that charismatic leaders positively influenced employee trust, their openness to change, and their behavioral support for change. “Employee trust was revealed as a partial mediator for the positive impact of charismatic executive leadership communication”.

The current research postulates that generally in any situation, but more acutely in a crisis, trust that the leaders can navigate the company towards calmer safer waters and that they know how to do so becomes paramount.

Courage and defiance, passion and love

Almost like a secret ingredient, passion, and love for one’s industry, company, or field of expertise gives leaders the additional push towards pushing the boundaries, driving innovation, and tapping deeper into their pool of energy to keep going when others have long stopped.

Researching the COVID-19 crisis, with its winners and losers, the researcher noticed that within the same industry, the same city, and the same street even, some companies endured and emerged stronger from the crisis and other companies failed to survive. Clear examples became restaurants: some well-known, even open for generations restaurants that had been around for decades had closed their doors within weeks of the beginning of the crisis while other restaurants across the same street, but less known, did not. At times when the entire economy had shut down and only critical manufacturing sectors were allowed to remain open, such as transportation or food and beverage, but only for curbside pickup, and when the American public’s top purchased items became toilet paper and guns and ammunition, some restaurants decided they would pivot their business model to remain open and started selling toilet paper and hand disinfectant. Other businesses scoured through legal texts to categorize themselves as “critical manufacturing sectors” and be allowed to remain open. Of course, the availability of resources, such as cash reserves or available loans from banks, had a role to play. But ultimately what became visible were the businesses and their leaders who decided they would fight. For one more day. That if they would have to go down, they would go down fighting and not hiding.

The research postulates that while acknowledging operating reality, such a nonetheless courageous and defiant attitude is highly needed in a crisis and that it can only be fueled by a deep passion and love towards one’s the business and industry. Such a dynamic is almost invisible during “normal times” or if visible, it may be hard to differentiate from other factors which may simultaneously influence outcomes and may cloud the picture. Yet passion, love, and leaders acting courageously and defiantly, swimming against the stream, became very visible during the COVID-19 crisis, characterizing multiple successful leaders and organizations.

5. Roth Crisis Leadership Model (RCLM): Conceptual Foundation and Definitions

Crises disrupt the status quo, forcing participants to enter willingly or unwillingly a new operating setting. Helping themselves and others to navigate the unknown of crisis times, leaders become very visible in times of uncertainty and crisis as beacons of light, lightning rods, or destructors for their organizations.

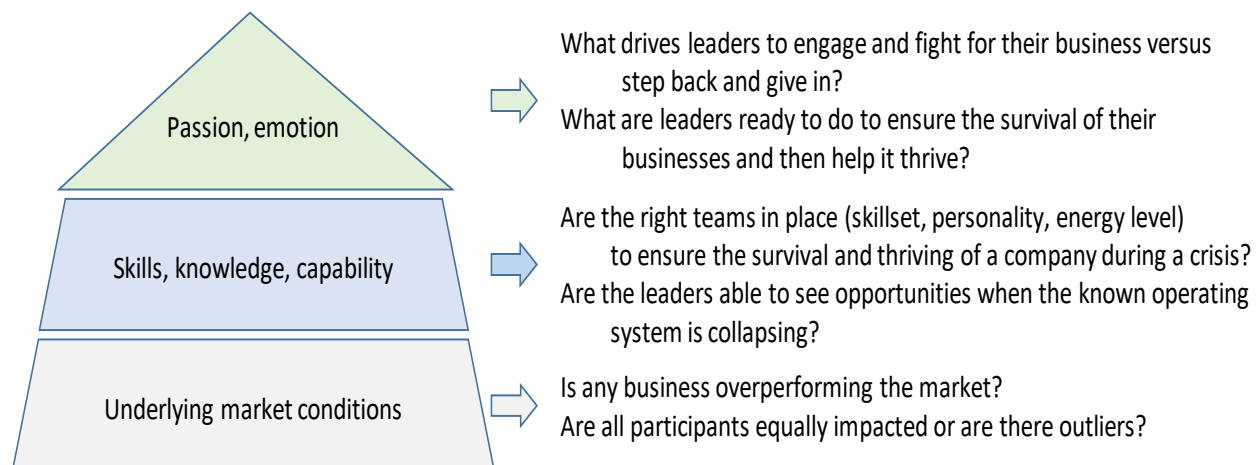
The question arises as to which leaders are likelier to succeed in times of crisis, navigating their businesses in



unchartered and uncertain waters. Which leaders would succeed even when all the doors are closing, such as what happened during the COVID-19 crisis when entire countries were ordered to remain at home with few exceptions?

Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a proxy, one could draw a parallel to the ecosystem of a leader (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The ecosystem of a Leader



At the bottom of the pyramid, all companies operate within a given market at any point in time. Looking at the COVID-19 pandemic as an example, one can assume from a general market standpoint, that all companies within a certain sector were handed, broadly seen, the same challenge at the same time. This makes the comparison between companies somewhat more straightforward while acknowledging that all companies have individual challenges that may have preceded the COVID-19 crisis. Yet, at this ground level, some businesses gained market share, over performed the market, and posted great financial results while other peers struggled.

Moving up on the pyramid, one can safely posit that all leaders and leadership teams need to have an underlying skillset and certain domain expertise coupled with critical thinking skills allowing them to effectively manage their businesses. However, the skills needed to manage a crisis may be different from than skills needed to manage a business in a day-to-day setting.

The present study proposes that businesses may be categorized into 5 "life" segments as follows: (1) startups or founding new operations of an already existing organization; (2) growth operations; (3) stable operations; (4) crisis operations; (5) discontinued operations (when businesses are exiting and closing). Different leaders excel at different types of operations, and while leaders may excel in various settings if viewed from the classification above, it is rare to find leaders who excel in all five phases of companies.

Therefore, one can pose the following questions: does the business have the right leaders and right teams in place to manage through a crisis? Can leaders still see opportunities when everything is collapsing around them? Do they know well enough their resources, and their markets, are they observing fast

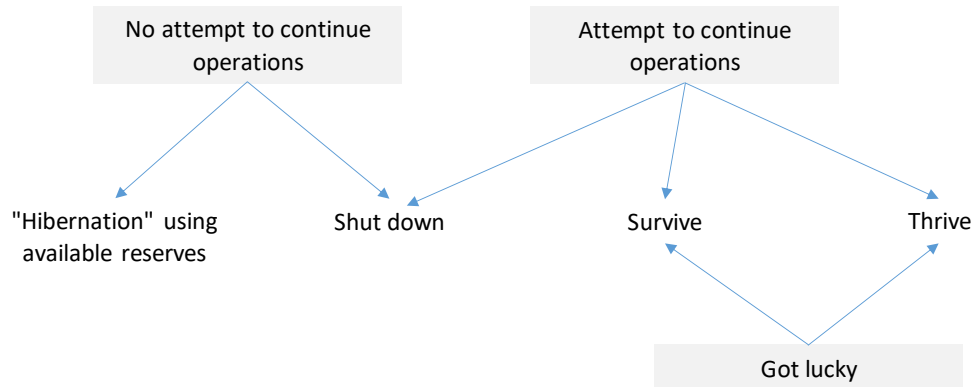
enough the trends around them and potentially trying to bend the curve by changing the direction of the trend? Are they willing to pivot their companies' core operations just to remain open and be able to fight another day? How resourceful and resilient are the leaders at the helm of the company? How far would leaders go and how deep would they dig their heels in before giving up on their employees and their businesses? How deep is their bench and how strong are their teams to be able to carry through during the hardest of times?

Such questions point towards the 3rd block on the pyramid, towards passion and emotion. Would a leader lacking passion for their business and industry stay in the ring and fight or would they acknowledge that the situation seems to lack an outlook and give in?

During the COVID-19 pandemic every company has become in a way a case study and looking at the current outcomes one could divide executive leadership teams as follows (see Figure 3 below):

- (1) *Didn't even try to stay open, keep employees in their seats and paid and continue operations. There are 2 options underneath this first category: (a) Go into hibernation and live off reserves until the market turns with the potential outcome that when reserves run out, the business would have the close out; (b) Straight out give up and shut business down.*
- (2) *Tried but failed and had to shut down*
- (3) *Tried and survived*
- (4) *Tried, survived, and thrived, bucking the trend and beating the market*
- (5) *"Got lucky" and did nothing different, just rode with the market and survived or thrived (e.g., toilet paper producers)*

Figure 3: Outcomes of Action Paths Taken by Leadership Teams



Even when allocating businesses across the axis of “luck”, while some may argue that a group of businesses just got lucky and another group just got unlucky, there usually is a 3rd category of a group that fares better than anyone else. The question is why? Is it just because of luck? Could it be because the leadership team was savvier, grittier, wiser, and more skilled than other teams?

The Apeirogon Diamond Leader Model: Definition and Key Conceptual Elements

In this section, the researcher presents definitions for the construct of the Apeirogon Diamond Leader (Roth, 2022), with the intent of further clarifying these constructs during subsequent stages of theory development.

Laying at the intersection of multiple leadership theories and models and defined by complexity, the crisis leader profile suggested by the present study proposes 6 elements that, same as in a toolbox, all give the leaders access to tools and resources needed during situations of uncertainty and crisis:

(1) **Effective crisis leaders are authentic leaders** highly energized by challenges, defined by their courage, passion, and love towards their work and organizations, resilient and gritty, resourceful and ready to capitalize on opportunities, and able to regulate distress in their organizations and act situationally

(2) **Effective crisis leaders are adaptive:** compassionate and empathetic towards their organizations and the families of their employees, but also towards other businesses or people who need support during crises; driven by strong ethics, and widely and effectively connected to a wide array of players (others in their organizations, peer companies, industry players), unbound by geographical limitations

(3) **Effective crisis leaders are highly skilled and knowledgeable in their business acumen,** able to rationally, critically, and creatively think through any challenge coming their way

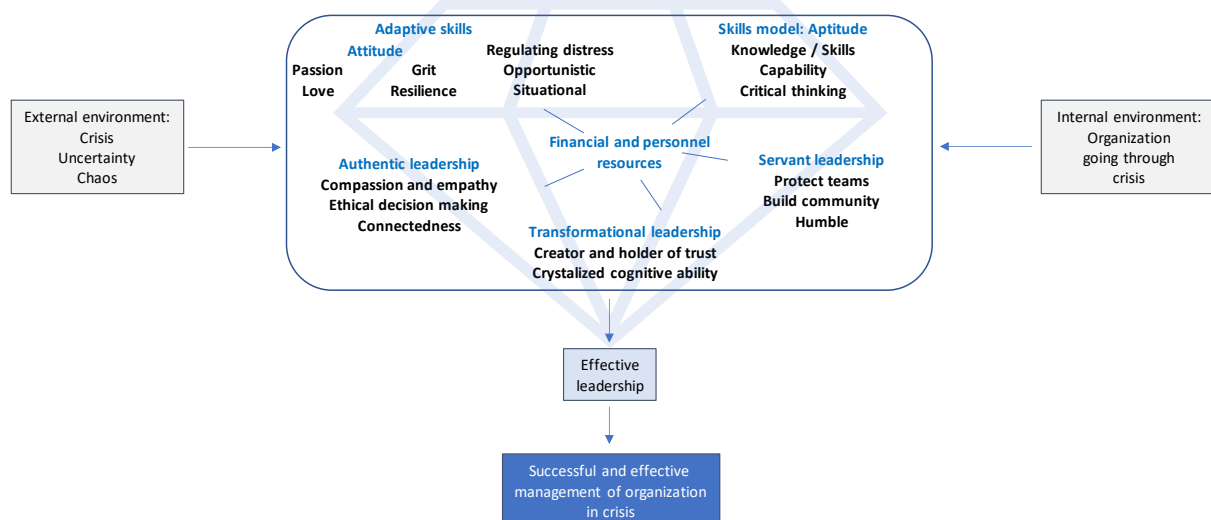
(4) **Effective crisis leaders are transformational leaders,** who hold and generate trust within and outside their organizations and possess a highly crystallized cognitive ability

(5) **Effective crisis leaders are servant leaders,** who protect, mentor, and motivate their teams and the organization, build community, and are humble

(6) Effective crisis leaders recognize that **two resources underlay all endeavors during the crisis and secure their access to them:** access to skilled people and financial resources.

The present research, therefore, describes crisis leaders as “apeirogon diamond leaders” (see figure 4) conceptually visualized as a diamond with a countably infinite number of sides.

Figure 4: The Apeirogon Diamond Leader Model: High-Level Visualization of Key Conceptual Elements





The model proposed is considered to be able to be applied to any type of crisis, whether sudden or slowly unfolding.

Differentiation of the Apeirogon Diamond Leader Model from Related Leadership Theories

The Apeirogon Diamond Leader Model (Roth, 2022) draws heavily from elements of existing leadership theories. Areas of convergence are the lenses of adaptive, authentic, transformational, servant, and skill theories and models, and multiple elements of existing theories can be retrieved in the present theoretical model proposed. When carving out authentic leadership from other leadership theories, Avolio et al. (2004) and Gardner et al (2005) referred to the term a “root construct”, noting “we use the term root construct to mean that it forms the basis for what then constitutes the basis of other positive leadership.” The present study uses the term root construct when suggesting the Apeirogon Diamond Leader Model, which can act as a more general foundation for other theories dealing with leadership during a crisis. The focus of the proposed model is not to characterize prescriptively a short list of traits or skills, but instead to provide a broader conceptual framework and platform characterizing leaders in situations of crisis holistically. Furthermore, the model also is geared toward action and learning, potentially setting up the foundation of the Roth Crisis Leadership Training Model (Roth, 2022).

Key differences of the present model from other theories and models are the inclusion of courage and defiance, the readiness to see opportunities when all doors seem to close, the way of operating outside the boundaries of their “box” (geographies, industries) and the protection of access to resources, both in terms of people as well as financial, as additional core elements for a leader’s success during the crisis.

6. Discussion and implications for future research

The present study reviewed multiple leadership theories from the lens of crisis, proposing an emergent model that helps contour the profile of crisis leaders holistically. The researcher suggests that a simplification of the profile of the crisis leader only to make it fit into a simplistic theory would take away from the incredible complexity that such leaders handle on an hour-by-hour basis during sometimes extremely protracted periods, uncertainty, and crisis for their organizations, not doing justice to their real profile.

To gain a more thorough understanding of the topic, it is suggested that given the nascent state of the present theoretical model, it should be subject to academic validation through qualitative and quantitative studies, covering leaders in various countries and cultures. This would potentially provide additional

data regarding how various players in organizations handle crises, further crystalizing the concepts put forth by the present research.

Additional triangulation studies could also be performed by studying the employees of the leaders’ organizations or their shareholders, validating whether the leaders’ self-evaluation and perceptions can be confirmed by their organizations and whether other crisis leadership traits and behaviors emerge from the further assessments.

An additional study could be performed on non-corporate leaders and professionals who also cope with the crisis as part of their professions: Emergency Room (ER) personnel, fire department workers, pilots of aircraft, and military leaders. The study would validate if the same set of attributes identified in the present research extends outside the corporate world as well.

Further research could be performed in observing how leaders react to a sudden acute crisis versus a slower onset crisis and if different attributes, traits, and skills reveal themselves, or if the weighting shifts within the already identified categories in the present study.

Further research could be conducted on how people successfully deal with crises in their personal lives, outside of their professions. An extension of such a study could be done on children and teenagers aimed to identify coping techniques with the current realities of our present environment, preventing suicide and self-harm amongst minors.

The present study aims to add the profile of the Apeirogon Diamond Leader Model (Roth, 2022) to the leadership literature, lay out the theoretical foundation of the model as well as the foundation of an assessment model and potential blueprint which could be used to train leaders and employees in coping with crises.

Leveraging the model and findings of the present research, coaching programs could be implemented to help and support crisis preparedness both amongst leaders as well as their teams or even in schools. Like muscle memory, the ability to cope successfully with a crisis can be developed through training and the researcher believes that the proposed Apeirogon Diamond Leader Model has the potential of becoming a further help to leaders when coping with crises in their organizations. Crisis can be personal or professional, yet the approach taken by individuals when coping with it can mean the difference between success and failure, and sometimes, between life and death.

Acknowledgments

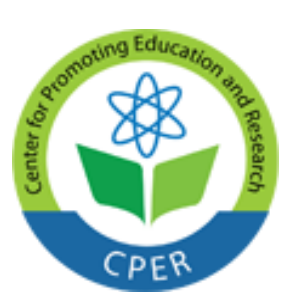
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