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Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?
by Darren Dalcher
Featured Paper

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Darren Dalcher

We all seem to recognise that we live in changing times with rapid advances and wider interactions with nature, ecosystems, and societal concerns. For guidance and direction in such unprecedented times we turn to our leaders. Indeed, leaders are crucial to navigating and guiding organisations, especially in times of turbulence, change and uncertainty.

Deloitte's 2019 Global Human Capital Trends Survey draws attention to the crucial role of leadership in a world characterised by disruptive digital business models, augmented workforces, flattened organisations and an ongoing shift to team-based work practices (Volini et al., 2019). The study indicates that leaders are being pressured to '*step up and show the way forward*'. Yet, the study concludes that while organisations expect new leadership capabilities to deal with the emerging challenges, they are still largely promoting traditional habits, models and mindsets—when they should be developing skills and capability, and measuring leadership in ways that enable leaders to navigate through greater ambiguity, take charge of rapid change, and engage more deeply with external and internal stakeholders.

"*Year after year, organizations tell us they struggle to find and develop future-ready leaders. In this year's Global Human Capital Trends survey, 80 percent of respondents rated leadership a high priority for their organizations, but only 41 percent told us they think their organizations are ready or very ready to meet their leadership requirements.*" (Volini, 2019: p.1)

And this was before the Covid-19 global crisis…

"*We see leadership pipelines and development at a crossroads at which organizations must focus on both the traditional and the new. Organizations know that they must develop leaders for perennial leadership skills such as the ability to manage operations, supervise teams, make decisions, prioritize investments, and manage the bottom line. And they know that they must also develop leaders for the capabilities needed for the demands of the rapidly evolving, technology-driven business environment—capabilities such as leading through ambiguity, managing increasing complexity, being tech-savvy, managing changing customer and talent demographics, and handling national and cultural differences.*" (ibid.)

The Deloitte survey reports that eighty percent of respondents indicate that leadership now seems to impose unique and new requirements on organisations. These in turn suggest that new approaches are needed to manage organisations in times of change and turbulence. The new skills required from leaders are identified in Table 1.

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www.pmworldjournal.com

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Table 1. New leadership needs (after, Volini, 2019)

Unique requirements for 21st century leaders:	Percent identifying need:
Ability to lead through more complexity and ambiguity	81%
Ability to lead through influence	65%
Ability to manage on a remote basis	50%
Ability to manage a workforce with a combination of humans and machines	47%
Ability to lead more quickly	44%

Whilst organisations have traditionally struggled to identify and develop leaders with the requisite capability, experience and motivation to address existing challenges and requirements, the enormity of new environments and contexts and the new situations that emerge present a new order of novel challenges.

May you live in interesting times

The Deloitte study refers to an intensifying combination of economic, social and political issues that appears to fundamentally challenge existing models, approaches and capabilities. Indeed, management consultant, educator and author, Peter Drucker famously observed that '*the greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence, it is to act with yesterday's logic*'.

Approaching today's problems with yesterday's frames of thought and tools for action may miss the insights from both yesterday and today and ignore the emerging opportunities of tomorrow, and the operational necessity to identify potential disruptions and new players within the external environment. Strategic management thinking has thus developed an appetite for disruptive players, emerging platforms, blue ocean thinking, lean start-ups and transformational change indicating an acceptance of the transformative capability of new players and technologies, and the need to widen the scope of interest to new contexts, players and potential stakeholders, and thereby learn to encompass new opportunities.

When faced with a crisis or a new challenge, many leaders are found to be wanting. Donald Sull (2009) observes that we often respond to turbulence by accelerating activities that worked in the past. "*We lapse into inertia when we should adapt with agility, and we cling to rigid dogmas when we should improvise. But throughout history, volatility has not only dethroned incumbent leaders, it has also created untold possibilities to create economic value.*" (ibid., front sleeve).

Occasionally excessive turbulence can begin to overpower us. Alvin Toffler's book, *Future Shock*, released in 1970, has become a perennial best seller, with over six million copies and multiple translations into other languages. Toffler contends that society is undergoing an enormous structural change which overwhelms people. The notion of *future shock* which can be broadly defined as 'too much change in too short a period of time', overwhelms people resulting in shattering stress and disorientation. Toffler contends that the majority of social problems are symptoms of future shock as society struggles to adjust to rapid post-industrialisation. *Future shock* erases known certainties and familiar aspects replacing them with unprecedented new conditions, where past history becomes questionable, and past habits and approaches no longer

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apply. Perhaps some of the events we are witnessing in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic are a new form of *present shock*, an accelerated period of rapid shifts and changes resulting from a perceived immediate threat that shakes and transforms society with immediate effect, destabilising known certainties and established methods and diminishing the safety of the known or the familiar.

Whether taken as a blessing or a curse, the phrase '*may you live in interesting times'*, often implies a similar penchant for the exceptional uncertainty characterised by a mix of the opportunistic with the disruptive. The fusion of unprecedented hazards with unparalleled potential to restructure and organise can thus be presented as a disquieting, yet, intriguing, potential for new events, occurrences and resulting potential, that extend beyond the habitual reality that we normally occupy. Indeed, for Rumelt (2009), crises represent a *structural break* with the past; the point where past trends and patterns of association cease to apply, and existing models, approaches and solutions are rendered obsolete. The key consequence of such a structural break is the strong signal that things will have to be done differently.

US politician and lawyer, Robert F Kennedy, noted in a speech given to National Union of South African Students in June 1966 at the University of Cape Town on the University's Day of Reaffirmation of Academic and Human Freedom, that: '[Comfort] *is not the road history has marked out for us. There is a Chinese curse which says "May he live in interesting times." Like it or not, we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty; but they are also the most creative of any time in the history of mankind. And everyone here will ultimately be judged - will ultimately judge himself - on the effort he has contributed to building a new world society and the extent to which his ideals and goals have shaped that effort.*'

And it appears that the majority of human society now finds itself in just such unprecedented, uncharted and 'interesting' times with the unfolding coronavirus epidemic. Yuval Noah Harari (2020) observes that humankind is facing a global crisis, perhaps the biggest of our generation, which will ultimately shape our health care systems as well as our economy, politics and culture. Short-term emergency measures often become fixtures of life. Meanwhile many countries and their economies engage in large-scale social experiments as citizen are instructed to work from home, eschew traditional school and work arrangement, communicate from a distance and develop measures for social distancing and separation.

Peter C. Baker (2020) maintains that times of upheaval are always times of radical change, and the pandemic is a once-in-a-generation chance to remake society and build a better future. A mere two or three months ago it would have been unthinkable that most schools would be closed, billions would be out of work, individuals would be confined to their homes, all children would be home educated, our elders would be locked up, food and toilet paper would disappear from shelves, landlords will not collect rent, banks will suspend mortgage payments, public gatherings will be banned, governments will put together the largest economic stimulus packages seen in a generation in order to maintain national economies and the homeless will be housed in hotels. It is increasingly becoming clear once again that crises can rapidly reshape society, the economy and life as we know it. Meanwhile national and local governments engage in experiments related to healthcare provision, ethics, the provision of living wage, housing and other means of social intervention, protection, surveillance and control.

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020
www.pmworldjournal.com

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Featured Paper

What's different now?

A crisis is a wakeup call. The current pandemic has shaken many of the foundations and deeply held assumptions underpinning society and government. Mitroff (2019) observes that beyond the immediate harm wreaked by a crisis, there is a more insidious impact with an existential component where all the important assumptions, the notions of what might be safe and the deeply held models become invalid all at once. The pandemic has thus questioned the wisdom, perceived capability and desired inclination to control nature through technology, bringing the physical and natural environment, our wider ecosystem and our complex connections with it into sharp focus. It has accelerated the need to define our relationship with nature, prioritise sustainability and resilience, and reform our thinking regarding community and the wider social, ethical and responsible impacts of our actions across boundaries and systems. Remembering that we are not detached from the physical, material and social world is a start. Ivan Krastev (2020) distils seven major differences that characterise and emerge from the current crisis, which are reframed, elaborated, enhanced and contextualised below:

1. The current crisis will force **the return of big government**: Greater government intervention in reducing death and debt and controlling social behaviour, employment and economics may amend conditions for investment, social responsibility and society at large, with residual impacts on how projects are conceived, arranged and managed. It may also offer the potential for major new types of gigaprojects to rebuilt shattered economies, societies and systems, utilising the expanding reservoirs of the unemployed and underutilised resources. However, it is not clear if more aggressive state intervention will be tolerated beyond the crisis and the inevitable rebuilding effort.

2. **The return of borders**: Crises enable repositioning of boundaries. Citizens are being asked to fortify communities and regions to avoid infection—the erection of walls, barriers and prioritised local distribution of scarce resources will increase the focus on smaller communities and encourage nationalism. It may also re-prioritise local in favour of global and broader collective concerns, resulting in potential impacts on how distributed and cross-national projects are conceived and governed and how different interests, including international dependencies, may compete and collaborate at different times.

3. **The return of the expert**: Previous crises undermined experts and their contribution. In contrast during the current crisis, governments are relying on experts as the basis for concerted, evidence-based and informed action. Renewed trust in experts as the basis for making complex decisions and trade-offs indicates greater respect for expertise and professionalism and a potentially greater role in shaping the future.

4. **The potential of big data**: We have all become more reliant on technology, leaving our footprint as we progress, traverse, connect and access. Big data, smart apps and new surveillance technologies alongside state censorship and behavioural tactics offer potential to control and monitor movement and actions of citizens in accordance with the preferences and needs of the state. Some countries have demonstrated tremendous success in controlling and monitoring their populations using new technology. Will our liberty and personal freedoms be irretrievably surrendered as we share medical and well-being data during the crisis, or will they be returned and re-established?

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)   *Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?*
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020   by Darren Dalcher
www.pmworldjournal.com   Featured Paper

5. **Crisis management**: The standard response to terrorist attacks, disasters and financial crises is to avoid panic, stay calm and get on with life. In contrast with previous disasters, the success of responses to the epidemic hinge on the ability of governments to 'scare' their citizens into compliance and changing their behaviour patterns, an approach that directly contradicts the normal response to crises.

6. **Intergenerational dynamics**: Younger generations have been critical of their elders for threatening their future, ignoring the environment and not adopting a long-term perspective. Ironically, the pandemic reverses this dynamic, as older generations feel more threatened and must inevitably rely on younger generations to change their way of living and also to agree to sponsor the long-term protection of the older generations. The financial and long-term implications of such a reversal are yet to be worked out but are likely to impact the younger generations who will bear the cost of the crisis for a significant period. Asking a younger generation that cannot afford housing, for a long-term sacrifice may lead to 'interesting' conversations.

7. **Tough choices**: Difficult decisions between containing the spread of the pandemic at the cost of destroying the economy, or tolerating a higher human cost in order to sustain or save the economy abound. Rebuilding shattered economies and markets will demand further difficult choices regarding priorities, sacrifices, present and future commitments and the need to build (and finance) greater resilience, redundancy and flexibility into societal structures and systems. It will also require demanding prioritisation of specific industries, sectors, and potentially regions as society begins to rebuild, retool and reorganise. Once the new normal is established, will the precautionary principle, informed by a risk averse attitude that stifles creative tendencies and ambitious endeavours, be replaced by the increasing emphasis on frugal innovation required to address emerging challenges, respond to opportunities and underpin recovery from a crisis? Indeed, innovation is often utilised as a driver of economic growth following crises, so new projects and societal undertakings may well encompass higher levels of ambition and risk.

Disasters, crises and emergencies are underpinned by harm, hurt and danger, but they also enable new developments. The responses to the current crisis have demonstrated that society can make and tolerate massive social change, when it recognises and accepts an immediate, significant threat. Solnit (2009) asserts that emergencies foreground ways in which human reserves of ingenuity, improvisation, solidarity and resolve enable recovery, and open up new possibilities. However, such potential is often choked by mismanaged responses, which tend to treat people as part of the problem to be managed, rather than an invaluable component of an emerging new solution. Klein (2007) observes that real disasters (Disaster 1) are typically followed by what she terms Disaster 2, a significant mismanagement of resources and tactics and the squandering of vital opportunities for improvement.

Weick and Sutcliffe (2015) have published the third edition of their successful book on *managing the unexpected*. Their work focuses on the identification of high reliability organisations (HRO) able to sustain high performance in the face of unforeseen change. HROs are able to consistently outlast bank failures, intelligence failures, quality failures and other organisational breakdowns. Their detailed analysis uncovers five key principles that are common to HROs enabling them to

PM World Journal *(ISSN: 2330-4480)*
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020
www.pmworldjournal.com

Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?
by Darren Dalcher
Featured Paper

manage the unexpected. Weick and Sutcliffe's principles are listed below, with some additional summarised and paraphrased elaboration on each item.

Principle 1: Preoccupation with failure: Implies paying attention to anomalies, cues, normalising, wariness and doubt

Principle 2: Reluctance to simplify: Implies sensitivity to variety and refusal to oversimplify

Principle 3: Sensitivity to operations: Implies situational awareness and staying in motion (i.e. think while doing, and by doing)

Principle 4: Commitment to resilience: Implies elasticity and recovery as a result of making sense of an emerging pattern

Principle 5: Deference to expertise: Implies (using expertise for) reorganising around problems

HROs master the five principles in order to sustain sustained performance. Weick and Sutcliffe give the typical exemplars of HROs as commercial aviation and emergency rooms, which provide examples of exceptional organisational preparedness. Yet, the current pandemic has hit with such size, scope and severity that seem to have overwhelmed even many of our most trusted HROs, requiring significant intervention and rebooting on an unprecedented national and global scale. The longer-term implications and the need to rethink and improve our ability to sustain sustained performance may require significant further investment and some out-of-the-box thinking about supporting our critical HROs and the essential social and societal capabilities.

It is often said that great leadership is forged in crisis. Disasters bring out the worst, and sometimes also the best in people. They certainly require the making of difficult decisions and trade-offs by officials and functionaries. In such unprecedented and turbulent times, when our most trusted lines of defence are breached we often yearn for a hero; a mythical figure to lead, guide us through the wilderness of the crisis towards a new promised land of security, safety and renewed prosperity. We also expect such leaders to make the difficult decisions for us to enable the re-emergence of hope, and the promise of enduring success. Non-leaders in turn, rally around the head figure, responding as a community.

In need of a leader?

We often lament the qualities and capability of our leaders, political or otherwise. Nicholson (2013: p. 261) observes that there are times when, manifestly, we would be better off without leaders, especially when we watch venal, greedy, lustful, punitive and selfish leaders at play. At other times we may want to question if we get the leaders we deserve:

'*Many of the leaders we encounter in all spheres of life place their desire to be right above the wish to achieve the right outcome. … As a result, many followers, citizens and workers remain concerned by the apparent lack of leadership skills. The World Economic Forum identified lack of leadership as one of the major global challenges facing the world in 2015, and commissioned a survey to investigate further. A staggering 86% of respondents worldwide agreed that there is currently a global leadership crisi*s.' (Dalcher, 2017: p.2)

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020
www.pmworldjournal.com

Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?
by Darren Dalcher
Featured Paper

Salicru (2017: p. xxxiii) maintains that leaders are more likely to create what he terms as the three Ds of leadership—distrust, doubt and dissent rather than the confidence and engagement we crave. Yet, in times of uncertainty, turbulence and crises we crave the control and certainty that come with established leadership. Boin and Hart (2003) therefore view crisis and leadership as closely intertwined phenomena. People experience crisis as episodes of threat and uncertainty requiring urgent action (p. 544). They turn to leaders to do something, and alleviate the threat and uncertainty. When crisis leadership results in reduced stress, they herald the "true leaders" for their role in mitigating harm and alleviating stress (ibid.). Kits de Vries ponders on the origin of dictators and what it tells us about society in general:

'*Dictators don't come out of nowhere. Their spawning grounds are social and economical disorder. They know that in stressful situations, people resort to a state of dependency, and will regress to looking for simplistic solutions to their problems, bond with powerful leaders, and give them unquestioning loyalty and obedience in exchange for direction and protection.*

But while it is easy to vilify dictators, we should also ask the more difficult question of who is responsible for their existence? In more than one way, we (the people) enable them. We (the people) are the enemy. After all, a dictator cannot function without followers. And although we may not admit it aloud, it's attractive to have others tell us what to do, what's right, what's wrong, and that there is nothing to worry about. But we seem to forget that the abdication of personal responsibility comes with the loss of our freedom of expression, the derailment of democratic processes, and the loss of our personal integrity.' (de Vries, 2018: 21)

Leaders then are employed to take control of a difficult, turbulent or crisis situation. Spicer (2010) invokes the metaphor of leaders as commanders, which often involves borrowing from the deep and rich language associated with military activities, when the leader becomes a commander. In a crisis situation, the commander's job is to define what needs to be done and get on with the job, often relying on coercive or hard measures to achieve the required results, as observed by Grint:

'*Here, there is virtually no uncertainty about what needs to be done – at least in the behaviour of the Commander, whose role is to take the required decisive action – that is to provide the answer to the problem, not to engage processes (management) or ask questions (leadership).*' (Grint, 2005: 1473-4)

In unpacking the position of the commander, Spicer (2010) identifies four potential types and roles of commanders: the leader of the charge; the ass-kicker; the antagonizer, and, the rule-breaker. The command stance proves that the leader is willing and able to put themselves on the line (p. 130). Commanders instil a mixture of fear and respect, enforce collective standards, and are able to draw on the power that continues to be associated with images of harsh masculinity, often exhibiting what is commonly referred to as alpha-male behaviour (131). The notion of commanders, allows leaders to defeat the enemy and overcome other hardships as they execute their role, address the crisis and resolve the situation.

Whilst appealing, in principle (with an agent directly placed for addressing the main concerns and challenges), Spicer raises a number of problems with the command model of leadership:

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)   *Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?*
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020   by Darren Dalcher
www.pmworldjournal.com   Featured Paper

- The model is highly unrealistic as leadership is assumed to flow from a strong figure who is able to lead a group through social conflict (134)
- It assumes that leadership is an act of command and is therefore highly authoritarian, with a single individual who is empowered and knows best what to do (134-5)
- It significantly blurs the line between management and leadership (135)
- And, most disturbingly, it promotes a masculine image of leadership (136)

The command approach works well in times of crisis and stress over a short duration, or when there is a well-defined enemy that can be overcome, however, it comes at a cost and clashes with the humanistic values that are associated with most organisations and groups (137). Nonetheless, in times of adversity and crisis it proffers a comforting model that individuals can subscribe to, which offers a heroic figure to lead and direct the battle on our behalf. Such a notion also conforms to Khang Kijarro Nguyen's maxim that '*true leadership is revealed in the crucible of a crisis*'.

While times of crisis represent an opportunity for a commander leader to emerge, it can also be argued that heroic leaders in waiting sometimes crave for an opportunistic crisis. Rachman (2020) views the current pandemic as an opportunity for 'strongman leaders' to grab the reigns, strengthen their grip on power, or establish new realities. Spector (2019) further demonstrates that leaders impose crises to strategically assert power and exert control. Such a view postulates that a crisis is a constructed claim asserted from a position of power or influence. Indeed, crises can often present special opportunities for leaders to command and take charge, with minimal restrictions.

'*At the same time, crises provide leaders with extraordinary opportunities to demonstrate their capacities to lead and fulfil aims that would be impossible to achieve under normal circumstances. When a sense of shock, vulnerability, loss and outrage pervades a community, crisis can produce strong criticism of the existing institutional order and of the policy processes that underpin it. Many crises nurture an appetite for radical change. Astute leaders will not hesitate to exploit this "window of opportunity." As Rahm Emanuel, President Obama's chief of staff during the financial crisis, put it: "you never want a serious crisis to go to waste*.' (Boin et al., 2016: p. 4)

George (2009: p. 67-8) similarly positions crisis as an opportunity for a leader to reinvent themselves for the long haul. Waiting for a crisis can potentially drift into baiting for one. Spector develops four propositions to the argument around the construction of crises (2019; p. xv):

1. A crisis is not a corporeal thing. It is rather a claim constructed by a leader from a position of power and influence and intended to shape the understanding of others.
2. The construction of a claim of urgency by a leader does not mean that it is necessarily legitimate; a claim may be legitimate, or it may not be.
3. The construction of a claim of urgency, even if legitimate, is not determinate of how people decide whether to believe the claim. Factors external to the content of the claim always help shape belief formation.
4. Finally, all claims, regardless of their legitimacy and believability, are attempts to enhance the power and advance the interests of the claims maker.

Leaders are often seen as the key respondents to objectively perceived crisis situations. However, the conclusion from Spector's critical perspective is that a crisis is not a thing to be managed, nor

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)   *Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?*
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020   by Darren Dalcher
www.pmworldjournal.com   Featured Paper

an objective threat to be responded to with a special form of heroic leadership; but rather it is a claim awaiting critical appraisal. The shift from positioning crisis as an event to viewing it as a claim in search of legitimacy refocuses attention on the leader, the narrative they develop, their proposed actions, and the perceived urgency of doing so. Spector accordingly cautions that the leader-follower dynamic that unfolds following declarations of crises is unhealthy and detrimental (p. 2).

McChrystal, Eggers & Mangone (2018) also take issue with the heroic models and the outdated notions of leaders as great men in command. The work builds on General McChrystal's earlier exploration of leadership and the prologue describes his progression through the ranks of the US army. McChrystal became a general and pursued traditional approaches until he was posted to Iraq and Afghanistan post-9/11, where he realised that command on twenty-first century, technology-enabled battlefield required not just traditional leadership skills, but also intuitive adaptations (p. xi).

'*Reflecting on his experience as the commander of the US forces in Afghanistan in the mid-2000s, General Stanley McChrystal devised the notion of Team of Teams (McChrystal et al., 2015). McChrystal discovered himself facing an enemy organised in flat networks that enabled it to regularly change, adapt and reconfigure itself. To combat the enemy, McChrystal investigated the ideas of complex systems and thereby recognised the need to transit from a fixed and cumbersome traditional military hierarchy towards a set of dynamic teams operating as high-performance teams.*' (Dalcher, 2018a: pp. 5-6)

McChrystal, Eggers & Mangone (2018) profile thirteen iconic leaders from a wide range of eras and fields who followed unconventional paths to success. The work identifies new realities regarding leadership in practice. The realities identified by the research (396) state that:

1. Leadership is contextual and dynamic, and therefore needs to be constantly modulated, not boiled down to a formula.
2. Leadership is more an emergent property of a complex system with rich feedback, and less a one directional process enacted by a leader.
3. The leader is vitally important to leadership, but not for the reasons we usually ascribe. It is often more about the symbolism, meaning and future potential leaders hold for their system, and less about the results they produce.

The conclusion of the study suggests that "leadership is a complex system of relationships between leaders and followers, in a particular context, that provides meaning to its members" (p. 397). The position allows for a richer and more powerful conceptualisation of leadership across multiple aspects and perspectives. The implications are that we follow leaders partly so that we can achieve certain results, but also because of the sense of purpose they can offer. At times it is not the outcomes that we crave, but the fulfilment of the role or purpose that satisfies a need, offering a more delicate balance. Moreover, the network of relationships allows for influences rather than a one-directional causality from the leader. Finally, leadership cannot be made prescriptive.

'*Leaders are necessary because we tend to understand the world through individuals who organize into various structures as a way of fulfilling collective needs. ... (leadership) is something that helps us to make sense of the world, sustains our common identities and holds*

PM World Journal *(ISSN: 2330-4480)*
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020
www.pmworldjournal.com

Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?
by Darren Dalcher
Featured Paper

hope for a brighter tomorrow. Like leadership itself, our need for such symbols—meaning, identity, hope—is part and parcel of our human nature, which few ever saw as being so simple. Coming to terms with our own complex selves allows us to recognize that leadership too is necessarily difficult and yet endlessly inspiring.' (p. 398-9)

So where do we go in times of crisis?

Leadership offers the potential to make sense of difficult conditions and find our way out of crisis. Leaders maintain their importance in symbolic as well as practical terms but some of our approaches and models for thinking are overdue for a much-needed refresh, or an even more significant upgrade or major overhaul. Indeed, Drucker (1998: p.162) observed that many of our tools for observing (and shaping) the world are simply unfit for their purpose.

Contemporary research acknowledges that leadership is both difficult and perplexing. Leadership is situated in context, and is highly dependent on complex interactions, relationships and feedbacks that respond to and react with uncertainty, turbulence and changing conditions.

"*People who practice what we call adaptive leadership do not make this mistake. Instead of hunkering down, they seize the opportunity of moments like the current one to hit the organization's reset button. They use the turbulence of the present to build on and bring closure to the past. In the process, they change key rules of the game, reshape parts of the organization, and redefine the work people do.*" (Heifetz et al, 2009: p. 64)

Yet, if leadership under normal conditions appears difficult enough, what chance does leadership have in times of crisis, or indeed, extreme or mega- crisis, when our anticipated certainties and habits are so rudely shattered by a harsh and unforgiving reality?

Crises require repositioning and careful rethinking. Crisis situations are extreme because they threaten our very survival, creating an urgency to resolve them. While the deployment of the word crisis by politicians and the media is loose and imprecise (Johnson, 2017), the key attributes of crises can be summarised as follows (Kovoor-Misra, 2019: p. 5-6):

- **Threat**: the potential for grave loss for those affected which could undermine survival or the main goals of stakeholders

- **Urgency**: the longer it takes to resolve the situation, the greater the potential for losses

- **Ambiguity**: crisis situations are difficult to resolve because of uncertainty and a lack of clarity in the situation: ambiguity can pertain to the cause of the crisis, its effects, and how best to resolve the situation (Pearson & Clair, 1998)

- **Stress and emotions**: Threat and urgency trigger stress and emotions among those involved in the crisis, including fear, shock, panic, anger, hopelessness, and in some cases trauma

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020
www.pmworldjournal.com

Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?
by Darren Dalcher
Featured Paper

- **Opportunity and gain**: despite the threatening nature of the threat and the trauma, opportunities also exist to contain the negative aspects and gain some positive outcomes, including the opportunity to:

    o Improvise, innovate and develop solutions for complex problems
    o Communicate to stakeholders the positive character potential dimensions of the situation
    o Build and strengthen positive relationship with stakeholders
    o Fix problems to contributed to the crisis
    o Learn, grow and build greater individual, organisational and external stakeholder capacity to effectively handle future crisis

Crises clearly involve higher stakes and therefore call for organised leadership and responsible decisiveness to mitigate the crisis and the perceived threat rapidly and break through traditional barriers and silos. Crises are dynamic and evolving, and therefore attract the attention of key stakeholders who continue to make judgements about the performance and culpability of the organisation and its leaders (Kovoor-Misra, 2019: p. 15). Hutson and Johnson (2016: p. 4) liken a crisis to the impact of a rogue wave on a ship at sea, which can be viewed as sudden, spontaneous, and significant. The intensity of a crisis can be escalated if stakeholders perceive the organisation or the leaders to be incompetent or untrustworthy in the handling of the situation. A slow or inadequate response creates negative judgements and escalates the crisis, as do poor planning, negligence, incompetence, dishonesty and a cover up (Kovoor-Misra, 2019: p. 15).

Crisis situations add pressure on leaders to deliver, continue to support, engage and remain visible and in charge. Boin, Kuipers and Overdijk (2013: 81) maintain that the effectiveness of crisis leadership can be assessed along the following dimensions:

- Making things happen: crisis management is about organizing, directing, and implementing actions that minimize the impact of a threat;
- Getting the job done: forging cooperation between previously unrelated agents; and enabling "work arounds" when routines and resources do not work;
- Fulfilling a symbolic need for direction and guidance.

In a crisis leadership context, the dimensions can remain agnostic to specific outcomes, focusing instead on improvement and adaptability to emerging conditions and unfolding opportunities. Ultimately, John Parenti's advice to 'treat this crisis as practice for the next crisis' may offer a practical way of embracing a responsive learning perspective, always a key tenet of effective leadership. Indeed, to only consider what crisis leaders do from the point the crisis is triggered would be negligent (Johnson, 2017) and overly simplistic.

The basic principles of leadership in modern contexts go a long way toward addressing the need for leadership under crisis conditions, but the level and scale are multiplied and expanded. Large crises have a complex and multifaceted nature that involves many different fields of inquiry and areas of concern as leaders manoeuvre through cycles of crisis recognition, containment and resolution. Crises are difficult and any attempt at resolving a crisis, much like engaging with a wicked problem or a mess, would require consideration of many areas and domains with far reaching consequences. Ultimately, as we have seen, a medical pandemic can rapidly entail

PM World Journal *(ISSN: 2330-4480)*
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020
www.pmworldjournal.com

Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?
by Darren Dalcher
Featured Paper

educational, financial, social, employment, well-being, transport, and manufacturing angles as well as political and existential considerations. It also opens a possibility for other interactions regarding defence, borders, competition for scarce resources, repatriation and wider considerations related to each proposed solution.

Retooling for crisis leadership

Crises shake the very foundations of normality and order, and challenge people, organisations, communities and societies in fundamental new ways. Hutson and Johnson unravel a set of persistent questions and dilemmas that test and obsess leaders in fraught and volatile times of crisis, including (2016; p. x):

- Transparency: How much truth telling should I really do?
- Strategy: We cannot recover the past, so where do we go next?
- Heroics: How can I take care of everyone?
- Sense making: How do I explain what just happened?
- Recovery: Does resilience training work? Really?

The inherent complexity and uncertainty of organisations, communities and society present significant challenges to crisis leaders. Dotlich, Cairo & Rhinesmith (2009; p. 157) note that in such turbulent contexts, leaders have no place to hide and must therefore look inside themselves instead to understand who they are, what they are trying to accomplish, and what they will have the courage to be known for. Crisis leaders need to balance contradictory demands and dilemmas employing a wider set of capabilities, capacity and emotions and relate to stakeholders, followers and their needs. This may entail psychological containing, holding, soothing and interpreting, thereby enabling others to make sense of events (Petriglieri, 2020). Mitroff (2005: xiii-xiv) identifies suggests seven essential challenges that leaders in organisations of all types need to overcome in order to survive contemporary threats and crises; the challenges include the need to develop the following embodied features:

1. Right Heart: Crises exact tremendous emotional costs; as a result, crises demand exceptional emotional capabilities, or emotional IQ. Effective crisis management (CM) demands high emotional capacity (e.g. sensitivity) and emotional resiliency.

2. Right Thinking: Crises demand that we are capable of exercising on-the-spot creative thinking. They demand that we are capable of thinking outside of the box that contains the box (known as double outside of the box thinking), and high creative IQ.

3. Right Soul: Effective CM requires a special type of inner spiritual growth, or spiritual IQ. Without this our world is rendered meaningless by a major crisis. Most major crisis cause a person to suffer an additional crisis, a deep existential crisis.

4. Right Social and Political skills: Effective CM requires a special type of political and social IQ. This is absolutely necessary if we are to get the leaders of an organisation to buy into crisis management.

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480) Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020   by Darren Dalcher
www.pmworldjournal.com   Featured Paper

5. Right Technical Skills: Crises demand that we know different things and that we do different things differently; this is technical IQ.

6. Right Integration: Effective CM requires that we integrate previous forms of IQ; thus, integrative IQ is required.

7. Right Transfer: New knowledge and new forms of IQ are needed to be able to see the world anew. Aesthetic IQ enables crisis management to be viewed as an overarching discipline permitting new forms and design.

Crises force people to see in new ways. Former US Secretary of State and senior business executive, Robert McNamara once reflected that '*there is no longer such a thing as strategy; there is only crisis management*'. Crisis Management may be able to support the "business" bottom line in the face of rude surprises, future shocks and inconvenient truths; however, the wider dimensions of the crisis are often missing. The recent epidemic challenges the sole business focus on shareholder value and the primacy and the prioritisation of owner value. The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the need to create a more resilient, inclusive and just economy (Whittaker, 2020), and the impossibility of sacrificing significant sectors of our ecosystem in times of crisis. Corporate sustainability relies on maintaining links to the customer base, the employees, the supply chains, and most other players with which we engage. This may be amplified in turbulent times as unexpected pressure points build up.

Major crises always leave an indelible mark on society. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many governments across the globe to intervene and prop up their economies in order to adopt a long-term systemic perspective for wider societal benefit, in favour of typical short-term opportunism. John Maynard Smith observed that "*prioritizing short-term gains through profit maximization comes to the detriment of long-term value creation, which in turn yields weaker companies that contribute less to society.*" In other words, just focusing on management and optimisation of its needs and resources, is simply no longer sufficient.

Crisis Leadership, extends well beyond the firefighting elements of crisis management, to address the business/concerns of people and cover the wider context and impacts of a crisis. In doing so, it provides the means for focusing on Mitroff's set of challenges, navigating the turbulent, complex and interacting facets of crises and supporting the existential, emotional, socio-political and spiritual bottom lines that extend beyond the 'mere' business, or economic, bottom line. Crises are not about maintaining or re-establishing the status quo. Crises can uncover new heroes and often allow new leaders to emerge; particularly as 'ordinary' foot soldiers such as nurses, doctors, orderlies, drivers, and other front-line employees bravely play their part and thereby support and maintain organisations, networks, supply chains, customers, employees, the most vulnerable and under threat groups as well as whole communities and society at large.

Tsolkas (2020a) observes that crises often ignite a new sense of purpose that unifies, renews and drives new action. Crises require adaptation, innovation, transformation and growth. "*The first mistake in a crisis is underestimating the possible extent of change. The second mistake is preserving your organization to succeed in an environment that is no longer relevant*." (Tsolkas, 2020b).

PM World Journal *(ISSN: 2330-4480)*
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020
www.pmworldjournal.com

Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?
by Darren Dalcher
Featured Paper

Mitroff's challenges delineate an informed set of seven competencies required to fundamentally address and survive through upheaval and crises by resetting society and its priorities and engaging with a wider range of stakeholders with a new mindset fuelled by a common new purpose. This does not require searching for a hero figure, but an internal reset for a softer, more caring, considerate and purposeful set of priorities. The competencies can thus enable emergent turbulence to be used as the catalyst for probing forwards in new ways by fostering mutual and fairer societal and ecosystem-centric resiliency, rather than resorting to habitually anchoring in the safety of the past. Priorities surrounding crises shift from managing the early shock to leading the effort to engendering a new, sustainable and improved future. With crises such as the current pandemic, any attempt at generating a reboot of society would involve a complex mix of leadership skills and competencies that explore, balance and integrate with an eye to enabling improvement and maintaining a focus on the future. The resulting effort to reimagine society, its novel economic model and the new levers needed to control it can then be carved into projects, programmes and portfolios of initiatives and actions required to reinvigorate, rebuild and restore society as part of the much-needed post-crisis societal reboot.

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PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. IX, Issue V – May 2020
www.pmworldjournal.com

Leadership in times of crisis: What's different now?
by Darren Dalcher
Featured Paper

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