Leadership is about imagining possible futures pro-actively, and realising a chosen, shared, desired future with followers making up a team, organisation, community or society. True leadership is pro-actively being the architect of a chosen, desired future, not the reactive victim of an imposed or reacted-to future. Formally described, leadership encompasses the exercise of persuasive influence by one or more persons (=leaders), engaging a set of stakeholders (=followers) in an enabling and empowering way with regard to a joint course of action (=dream), intended to bring about a collective, ensured future outcome with a desired effect (=legacy) within a specific context.

But how must leadership respond when a crisis arises? Crises will occur. This certainty is woven into the very fibre of life. Yet in the current VICCAS of increasing Variety, Interdependency, Complexity, Change, Ambiguity and Seamlessness, the likelihood of crises has increased significantly. Organisations that excel at Crisis Leadership will win the race to the future they desire.

My article sets out to explore and elucidate what I believe to be the appropriate leadership response to dealing with a crisis: navigating through an ‘In’ (=Frame)-‘Beyond’ (=Anchor)-‘Through’ (=Resolve) Crisis Response. The article covers nature of a crisis; the make-up of the ‘In’-‘Beyond’-‘Through’ Crisis Response; its critical success factors; the core crisis leadership capabilities required by this Response; and lastly, the 10 commandments of crisis leadership excellence.

NATURE OF A CRISIS

A crisis is an unexpected, threatening event, which as a significant interruption endangers the likelihood of a team, organisation, community or society realising its chosen, shared, desired future, contained and expressed in their shared dream with its intended legacy. A crisis threatens either to
derail the journey undertaken to realise the chosen shared, desired future; and/or to destroy the chosen, shared, desired future by rendering it highly undesirable as an outcome.

More specifically, a crisis can threaten to disrupt a system, structure, a way of doing/living, accepted values and/or people. A crisis is the unholy, wicked confluence of unexpectedness, threat, uncertainty and urgency. In short, a crisis is an emergency that detrimentally disrupts the expected status quo, resulting in dire consequences.

Often, a crisis is not so much a crisis in an objective, factual sense, but becomes such in the eyes of those who have to deal with and are impacted by the event, given their perceptions of the threat, as well as their stake in, the impact of, and the consequences of, the event. These perceptions give a certain rhythm or pulse to a crisis: fast/slow; positive/negative; trust/suspicion; good/bad; important/unimportant; contained/widespread; winners/losers.

Although the word ‘crisis’ as a dangerous threat invokes all of the foresaid, it also simultaneously triggers the opportunity to make or make things differently and/or better.

A crisis is always accompanied by a pressure cooker-like stress for a number of reasons:

- important decisions have to be taken under conditions of typically quite severe time pressure;
- there is often insufficient information, especially because of time pressure;
- the event is not static but evolving in its knock-on consequences and impact – frequently rapidly;
- choices and trade-offs have to be made between often unattractive alternatives;
- additional resources have to be found quickly to deal with the crisis; and
- the close, ongoing public scrutiny by stakeholders of every move made, even bringing to bear the history of past moves on other/related matters, strongly fuelled and given momentum by the social media in a uncontainable, runaway fashion.

MAKE-UP OF AN APPROPRIATE CRISIS LEADERSHIP RESPONSE

As a departure point, leadership needs to respond in an integrated, comprehensive and balanced manner to a crisis. The essence of such a response can be summed up in a single phrase: leadership has to navigate concurrently In, Beyond and Through a crisis.

In engaging with a crisis, leadership has to concurrently demonstrate the following responses:
• ‘Navigate’: leadership has to respond in a juggling, iterative, adaptive and systemic manner to a crisis, because a crisis cannot be managed in a programmatic, linear fashion due to its unexpectedness, uncertainty, ambiguity, evolving nature and unpredictable impact.

• ‘In’: leadership has to recognise that the organisation faces a crisis, and Frame the crisis correctly in order for leadership to engage appropriately with it.

• ‘Beyond’: leadership has to Anchor the crisis by using the Identity of the organisation as a secure reference point and fixed compass setting during the chaos of engaging with the crisis.

• ‘Through’: leadership has to Resolve the crisis by crafting and rolling out a fit-for-purpose solution – the intervention – to recover from the crisis.

Whilst Framing-Anchorong-Resolving a crisis, leadership must ensure, grow and maintain adequate levels of Organisation and People Capitals (explicated later) within their organisation in order to address the crisis successfully. On the one hand, leadership must protect the running down of these Capitals during the crisis, while on the other, they must leverage these Capitals to deal with the crisis effectively.

Figure 1 depicts the above discussion in the form of a Crisis Leadership Response Triangle. The lines linking the three responses illustrates the navigating nature of addressing a crisis. Each ingredient of the Triangle is discussed below.

Figure 1: Crisis Leadership Response Triangle

‘In’ Leadership Response: Frame
The unexpected, threatening event has occurred; leadership is ‘in’ the crisis. As the initial triggering response to put the wheels in motion, leadership must put on the right set of glasses to ensure that they have a 2020 vision of the crisis. This set of glasses enables them to take stock of and position the crisis right if they are to have any chance of dealing with it appropriately.

At least three factors must be considered in framing the crisis right: territory, dynamics and engagement mode.

**Factor 1: Territory**

The territory of (or ‘space’ occupied by) the crisis has to be demarcated correctly by considering at least the following factors in order to accurately profile the threat faced:

- **Magnitude** – the variables/stakeholders implicated with the numbers per variable/stakeholder affected: uni-dimensional vs. multi-dimensional in a contained, extrapolative progression vs. unbounded, exponential progression.
- **Interdependency** – the interconnectedness of variables/stakeholders affected: independent vs. serially or reciprocally interdependent.
- **Urgency** – the timeframe required to deal with the crisis: sudden, acute, here-and-now threat vs. smouldering, creeping threat.
- **Uncertainty** – ‘knownness’ of crisis: unknown vs. known.
- **Severity** – degree of impact: temporarily (=deviation from normal) vs. permanent (=new normal).
- **Timeframe** – single, once-off event vs. unfolding, series of evolving events.

A high level static and/or dynamic model can be built based on the above to map the crisis in terms of different probable scenarios as the crisis unfolds, allowing predictions and thus enabling the proactive identification of recovery actions. The greater the scope, complexity, urgency, uncertainty, severity and timeframe of a crisis, the greater the threat it poses and the more difficult its manageability’.

**Factor 2: Dynamics**

Demarcating the territory of a crisis provides a relatively static picture of it. A more dynamic picture must therefore be built of the crisis based on the accurate recognition of the nature of the situational dynamics represented by the crisis that has to be addressed. The situational crisis dynamics represent the DNA code of the crisis.
A crisis can represent one of four types of possible situational dynamics, indicative of the complexity of the crisis faced. Table 1 provides an overview of the different types of situational crisis dynamics (cf. Kurtz & Snowden, 2003; Snowden & Boone, 2007).

**Table 1: Types of Crisis Dynamics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPES OF SITUATIONAL CRISIS DYNAMICS</th>
<th>LEVEL OF KNOWNNESS</th>
<th>SITUATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Simple Crisis                         | Known knowns       | Clear cause and effect relationships/repeating, stable patterns, apparent to everyone. One, self-evident, right answer exists. | • IT system crash  
• Mine fire  
• Volcanic disruption  
• Oil spill  
• Tylenol capsule poisoning |
| Complicated Crisis                    | Known unknowns     | Cause-and-effect relationships discoverable but not immediately apparent to everyone. Multiple right answers possible, of which at least one is the best fit at a given time. | • Pandemic like COVID-19  
• 2008/9 world economic crisis  
• Nuclear disaster |
| Complex Crisis                        | Unknown unknowns   | Flux and unpredictability. No right answers exist. The search is to uncover emergent, instructive patterns, with understanding emerging only after things have already happened. | • Global warming  
• Cyber attack |
| Chaotic Crisis                        | Unknownables       | High turbulence and fluidity with no clear causal relationships. Futile to search for the ‘right’ answer as it changes all the time. | • 9/11 |

**Factor 3: Engagement Mode**

With accurate recognition of the type of situational crisis dynamics faced within the demarcated crisis territory, leadership next has to choose the best overall mode to engage constructively with the crisis concerned. Table 2 gives different leadership engagement modes with their associated actions relative to the different situational crisis dynamics (cf. Snowden & Boone, 2007).
Table 2: Crisis Engagement Domains with Leadership Modes and Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPES OF SITUATIONAL CRISIS DYNAMICS</th>
<th>ENGAGEMENT DOMAIN</th>
<th>LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT MODE</th>
<th>LEADERSHIP ACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
• Ensure formalised, standardised, expert-referenced processes are in place  
• Communicate in clear, direct and inclusive ways |
| Complicated Crisis                   | Domain of experts   | Co-determination, ideas-based leadership - *Shared* - *Top down* - *Long term* - *Plan* | • Sense, analyse, respond  
• Investigate several options related to good practice  
• Enable and listen to conflicting, diverse advice from multiple sources |
| Complex Crisis                       | Domain of emergence | High involvement, pattern-recognition leadership - *Shared* - *Top down/Bottom up* - *Medium term* - *Improvisation* | • Explore/discover, reflect, respond  
• Creating situations and probing “safe to fail” experiments to allow innovative ideas to germinate and emerge in safe situations, and patterns to surface  
• Intense, inclusive interaction and communication |
| Chaotic Crisis                       | Domain of rapid response | Directive, pattern-discovery leadership - *Individual* - *Top down/Bottom up* - *Short term* | • Act, discover/understand, and transform context  
• Immediate action to re-establish order and staunch bleeding instead of finding the right answer  
• Clear, direct, top-down communication |
The basic thrust of the ‘Through’ Response (to be discussed below) is to move the level of the manageableability of the situational crisis dynamics as rapidly as possible from a Chaotic Crisis to a Complex Crisis, and then to a Complicated Crisis (see above table).

In summary, the ‘In’ leadership response enables leaders to Frame the crisis right by: demarcating the crisis territory appropriately; accurately recognising the situational crisis dynamics; and choosing the appropriate mode of engaging constructively with the crisis. It must be stressed that Framing is an iterative, ongoing process, where an initially adopted frame may change over time as the crisis unfolds, as a different/deeper understanding of the crisis emerges, and as the ‘manageability’ of the crisis is improved by leadership.

‘Beyond’ Leadership Response: Anchor

As an unexpected, threatening event, a crisis creates turbulence, fluidity, uncertainty and ambiguity. In countering these crisis qualities, leadership has to Anchor the organisation ‘Beyond’ the here-and-now existential threat of the crisis. They can do this by using the Identity of the organisation as a secure reference point and fixed compass setting. Organisational Identity must inform – in real time, all the time, in all places – leadership’s thinking, decisions and actions during the unfolding, and seemingly overwhelming, snowballing chaos of dealing with the crisis effectively.

Organisational Identity (we, us and them) relates to organisational members’ understanding of who and what their organisation is; what it stands for and does; who it belongs to; and what it aspires to. How do we see ourselves? What do we stand for? How are we seen? The constituent elements of the organisation’s Identity are depicted in Figure 2.
A strongly entrenched Organisational Identity empowers everyone at their level in an organisation to take the right decisions and actions because Organisational Identity serves as a common comparison base. In this way, everyone in the organisation and beyond can be turned into a leader in his/her sphere of action, and hence take on the burden jointly to deal effectively and successfully with the crisis. A leadership miracle can happen: everyone becomes an amazing leader. A strongly entrenched Organisational Identity also reduces the likelihood of short term, reactive, destructive thinking, decisions and actions compromising the future performance, success and sustainability of the organisation.
‘Through’ Leadership Response: Resolve

Relative to and in-between the ‘In’ Response: Frame – the right set of glasses in profiling the crisis accurately - and the ‘Beyond’ Response: Anchor, – Organisational Identity as secure reference point and fixed compass setting in the sea of chaos – the ‘Through’ Response has to occur. Leadership has to Resolve the crisis by crafting and rolling out a fit-for-purpose solution as an intervention to the crisis. The solution must enable leadership to work ‘Through’ the crisis by resolving it in order to recover sustainably.

Resolving the crisis with the aim of ensuring an effective recovery entails a number of steps that are depicted in Figure 3. Important to note from this figure is the interdependency amongst the steps, as well as the embeddedness of the ‘Through’ Response steps in the ‘In’ and ‘Beyond’ Responses in an iterative, integrated, complete and balanced manner. Given space constraints, only highlights of each step is briefly discussed.

**Figure 3: Steps making up the ‘Through’ Response: Resolve**

**Right Attitude**

As a departure point to the ‘Through’ Response, the right Attitude must be adopted and shared by all organisational members, modelled by leadership: “The crisis can and must be resolved whatever it takes. Our very future is at stake.” This ‘can do’, barrier-busting Attitude must be infused by, and leveraged from, the right People Capital (see below).
Inspiring a Crisis Resolution Vision

Next, a clear, inspiring Crisis Resolution Vision must be crafted relative to the Organisation Identity: “When we have resolved the crisis, what will our team, organisation, community or society look like in having successfully addressed the crisis with all of its impacts, consequences and knock-on effects?”

If the crisis is radical and fundamental in its impact, the Crisis Resolution Vision may have to describe a new normal. For example, the successful relocation of people displaced by rising sea levels; a healthy population immune to the COVID-19 virus; or, a different mode of working, e.g. working from home.

Coherent set of Solution Design Specifications

Given the right Attitude and a clear, inspiring Crisis Resolution Vision, a coherent set of Solution Design Specifications for a fit-for-purpose crisis solution must be generated, which is able to resolve the crisis. Examples of such specifications are: core value coherence; contextual-fit; requisite complexity; outside-in; stakeholder inclusivity; solution delivery anywhere, anytime, anyway, anyhow, to anyone; and the solution improves after every use (=minimum viable design).

Fit-for-Purpose Solution

Relative to the inspiring Crisis Resolution Vision and Solution Design Specifications, a fit-for-purpose Solution must be crafted to resolve the crisis in terms of its triggers, evolution, impact and consequences. The Solution must include a clear, robust Recovery Strategy with priorities and Recovery Plan, detailing the why, what, how, who, where and when.

Recovery Intelligence

The Solution must be accompanied by the formulation of an Intelligence Measurement Model to monitor and track the full range of possible Solution outcomes impact, in this way providing real time, in time intelligence with respect to the effectiveness of the Solution, i.e. a ‘smart’ Solution has to be crafted, enabling the monitoring and tracking of the crisis recovery.

The Intelligence Measurement Model’s ‘radar screen’ and ‘bandwidth’ must be broad enough to pick up the full dimensionality of the Solution outcome impact: intended and unintended; positive and negative; tangible and intangible.

Implementation, Monitoring and Tracking
Finally, the Recovery Solution is implemented, monitored and tracked in terms of the Intelligence Measurement Model, and course adjustments made.

**NAVIGATION**

Crisis implies change by its very nature; the unexpected has occurred, causing a threatening disruption which needs to be minimised or eliminated. From the moment a crisis has occurred and an ‘In-Beyond-Through’ Response is triggered, a sound change navigation strategy and plan must be crafted and rolled out in support of the Response.

It is outside of the scope of this article, given space constraints, to address change navigation in any great detail. Suffice to say that the same change navigation principles apply in the case of dealing with a crisis as with any large scale organisation intervention. The only difference being, given the features of a crisis - outlined in the introduction of this article as a threatening emergency which detrimentally disrupts the expected status quo with dire consequences, infused by unexpectedness, threat, uncertainty and urgency - impose a different flavour and rhythm on the application of these principles.

**PROTECTION OF AND LEVERAGE OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATION CAPITALS**

Navigating the In-Beyond-Through Response through *Framing-Anchorong-Resolving* requires the protection and leverage of two critical Capitals: People and Organisation. These Capitals must infuse the In-Beyond-Through Response into its very being.

**People Capital**

The occurrence of a crisis implies an event outside of the normal range of expectations, duties and functioning of organisational members, invoking a real and perceived sense of losing control over their destiny. The typical people responses are *Freeze, Flight, Fight* or *Face*. *Face* as constructive response will capacitate organisational members to regain and maintain a sense of coping and being in charge.

To *Face* a crisis effectively, the People Capital of the organisation must be grown, nurtured and maintained by leadership in order to generate the required people energy to address the crisis. By implication, negative People Capital must be detected and countered.
The critical, major People Capital ingredients are (cf. Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007): *Efficacy* (instead of Helplessness); *Hope* (instead of Despair); *Optimism* (instead of Pessimism); *Confidence* (instead of Self-doubt); *Courage* (instead of Cowardice); *Passion* (instead of Disinterestedness), *Perseverance* (instead of Half-heartedness) and *Resilience* (instead of Overwhelmed).

**Organisational Capital**

During the In-Beyond-Through Response, leadership must protect and leverage core organisational capabilities to deal with the crisis. Core organisational capabilities are the ‘crown jewels’ of the organisation, which refers to what the organisation must be able to do exceedingly well in order to gain and retain an ongoing, competitive edge. These capabilities must not be compromised, thereby putting the sustainability of an organisation at risk.

The crown jewels to be protected and leveraged during the crisis therefore must be identified early on. At least the following core organisational capabilities are critical: Organisational Reputation; Stakeholder Goodwill; Leadership Reputation; Client Delivery (especially to strategic clients); Supply Chain (particularly strategic suppliers within the Chain).

**CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR AN EFFECTIVE IN-BEYOND-THROUGH LEADERSHIP RESPONSE TO A CRISIS**

At least the following critical success factors are essential (e.g. Jordan-Meier, 2017):

**Navigating Response**

- Know and communicate at any given time which *crisis life cycle stage* is active, and properly close out each stage: crisis acknowledgement, crisis assessment, crisis handling/containment/recovery, and crisis close-out.
- *Model the way* as leader by setting the example in all ways and in everything.

**‘In’ Response: Frame**

- *Acknowledge the presence of the crisis* with unconditional honesty, warts and all, in a realistic way from the start, and throughout.
- Set up clear, robust crisis *governance structures and processes* that work effectively and efficiently.
- Deal with the *true crisis* by accurately mapping the territory of the crisis with its situational crisis dynamics and associated mode of engagement.
• Show and express concern for the people of the organisation in tangible ways at all times, in all places. Demonstrate that their troubles matter more than those of the organisation.

• Reach out to, mobilise and engage all stakeholders, in this way engendering their trust and full support throughout the crisis.

• Be at all times physically visible and accessible as leadership at the front line in the ‘moments of truth’ where and when things happen that matter genuinely, in resolving the crisis and where reactions to the crisis are manifested. Do not delegate and/or disappear.

• Ensure substantive, quality communication. Say what you mean, and mean what you say. No waffling, posturing, dithering, and mixed messages.

• Communicate, communicate, communicate. Keep all stakeholders informed at all times, in real time, accurately and timeously. Plan intended communication frequency, and then multiply it by a factor of 10 to arrive at the actual frequency.

• Learn, relearn and unlearn from a crisis in order to enhance the future leadership’s In-Beyond-Through Response capability.

‘Beyond’ Response: Anchor

• Ensure a distinct, widely shared, and deeply entrenched and understood Organisational Identity to serve as a secure reference point and fixed compass setting. Re-inforce the Organisation Identity constantly in all communication, thinking, decisions and actions.

• Relative to the Organisational Identity, enable and empower as many organisational members as possible within their action domains to deal with the localised roll-out of the Crisis Resolution Solution, as well as dealing with knock-on effects, fall-outs and blow-backs of the crisis within their domains. Everyone must become a leader.

‘Through’ Response: Resolve

• Give credible assurances; no pipedreams or unrealistic expectations.

• Courageously stand up and be accountable and responsible for events, decisions, actions, consequences and outcomes. No ducking and diving; the blaming of circumstances beyond own control; and/or seeking scapegoats.

• Make the tough decisions required by the trade-offs inherent in resolving a crisis. Do not procrastinate in attempting to avoid making the tough decisions or attempting to please stakeholders. Timing is of the essence in successfully resolving a crisis.
• Generate real time, in time, all the time, accurate, timeous crisis intelligence.

• Apply big picture, innovative, out-of-the box thinking with no holy cows, using cross-functional, multi-disciplinary teams (especially critical in the case of Complex and Chaotic Crises).

• Craft a real solution whatever the cost, and not a make-believe, public relations solution aimed at smoothing one’s own conscience and/or appeasing stakeholders.

• Prepare for unexpected contingencies to rapidly counter unexpected blowbacks from the recovery actions.

People Capital

• Positive People Capital (e.g., Efficacy, Hope, Resilience) must at all times be greater than any Negative People Capital in responding to the crisis.

Organisational Capital

• The organisation’s Crown jewels (e.g. Organisational Reputation) are well protected and effectively utilised in dealing with the crisis.

CORE CRISIS LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES FOR AN EFFECTIVE IN-BEYOND-THROUGH LEADERSHIP RESPONSE TO A CRISIS

Figure 4 depicts the minimum Core In-Beyond-Through Crisis Leadership Capabilities necessary to deal with a crisis successfully (e.g. Veldsman & Johnson 2016).
LEAD SELF
- Authenticity: unwavering honesty
- Integrity: stick to core values regardless
- Perseverance
- Stamina
- Pacing to prevent poor decisions because of fatigue and burn out

LEAD OTHERS
- Credibility and legitimacy: licence to lead
- Caring, compassion and support
- Communication
- Active listening
- Sense- & meaning-making and -giving storytelling

LEAD ORGANISATION

LEAD IN WORLD
- Agility
- Resilience
- Transparency
- Courage
- Responsiveness
- Creativity

Figure 4: Portfolio of the minimum Core In-Beyond-Through Crisis Leadership Capabilities

The chances of finding all of these Core Crisis Leadership Capabilities in a single leader is indeed slim: the futile search for the superperson leader. Instead, an organisation will have to switch to distributed (i.e. shared) leadership, where the total portfolio of Crisis Leadership Capabilities is distributed in its sum total throughout the leadership community of an organisation on an as-needs basis.

Another approach could be to categorise the portfolio of Capabilities by crisis – given the nature of each crisis – into ‘Essential’, ‘Desirable’ and ‘Nice to”. Those leaders who have the essential Capabilities would take the lead in a specific crisis. This implies a pro-active audit of Crisis Leadership Capabilities needed by an organisation, their development, and the rapid deployment of leaders according to the Capabilities needed as shown by the audit, as and when a crisis occurs. This Capability Inventory will form part of the Crisis Handling strategy and plan of the organisation.

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF CRISIS LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE THROUGH AN IN-BEYOND-THROUGH LEADERSHIP RESPONSE TO A CRISIS

The shaded box contains the suggested Ten Commandments for Crisis Leadership Excellence as manifested through an ‘In’-‘Beyond’-‘Through’ Crisis Response (adapted and expanded from Jordan-Meier, 2017).

Thou shalt...
1. always have an up-to-date, crisis handling strategy, plan, and process handy.
2. have a competent crisis handling team, who have distinct roles with clearly spelt out
   accountabilities, responsibilities (including consistently used, trained spokespersons, including
   persons from the front line) and a general mode of working.
3. have regular simulations to rehearse, practice and train in leading and managing crises.
4. face the unavering, true reality of the crisis faced without any denial, rationalisation or
   projections, and not a make-believe reality.
5. tell it all, tell it fast, and tell it honestly when a crisis has occurred, including how it is being dealt
   with and the expected outcomes.
6. keep all stakeholders fully informed at all times about all things, and use the media as fully
   fledged partners, not as enemies.
7. refuse the temptation to blame, speculate, muddy matters and obfuscate.
8. demonstrate compassion and care.
9. learn from each crisis in order to enhance the organisation’s crisis leadership capability.
10. celebrate when progressive milestones and successes are achieved in resolving a crisis and its
    consequences.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to explore and elucidate what I believe to be the appropriate leadership
response to dealing with a crisis: navigating through an ‘In’ (=Frame) - ‘Beyond’ (=Anchor) -
‘Through’ (=Resolve) Response. The article covered nature of a crisis; the make-up of this
Response; its critical success factors; the core crisis leadership capabilities required by this
Response; and lastly, the 10 commandments of crisis leadership excellence through this
Response.

Source

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REFERENCES

The sources below were accesses in compiling this article.


