

The Impact of Sub-crises on Follower Perceptions of Crisis Leadership Effectiveness

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Crisis leadership, follower perception, crisis event, Covid, Conflict

Abstract

This multi-faceted study explores the dynamics of crisis leadership by examining follower perceptions of leadership effectiveness during a primary crisis as well as the impact concurrent sub-crises may have on those perceptions. The research is set against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, a global crisis that tested leadership across industries. Simultaneously, sub-crises such as racial injustice, voter rights controversies, and political unrest amplified the complexity of leadership challenges in the US. The study was conducted in a Fortune 150 organization, to investigate how these sub-crises influenced follower perceptions of leadership effectiveness. A comprehensive view of crisis leadership was developed, assessing key leadership dimensions such as communication, health and safety, resource availability, consistency, fairness, and employee voice. Data from 334 employees were collected through a survey and analyzed using correlation, regression, and chi-square analyses. The findings demonstrate the significant impact crisis sub-events have on follower perceptions of leadership effectiveness. The results conclude that effective crisis leadership requires not only managing the primary crisis but also navigating the complexities introduced by sub-crises. Leaders who exhibit empathy, adaptability, and consistency in their decision-making are more likely to maintain trust and organizational stability. These findings have implications for developing adaptive crisis leadership frameworks that account for both immediate and cascading challenges.

Introduction

Crisis events in organizations have become more frequent and often play out in very public arenas creating demanding situations and consequences for both private and public organizations and their stakeholders. It has never been more evident as the global Covid 19 pandemic impacted airlines, hospitals, schools, supply chain management, restaurants, sports, and countless other enterprises as well as the millions of stakeholders' dependent upon them. A crisis is unexpected, requires urgent responses, and can threaten organizational values; however, when managed well, a crisis can also bring organizational benefit (Bechler, 1995; Garcia, 2017).

Ineffective leadership and subsequent ineffective crisis management can lead to significant brand damage and, in some cases, significantly threaten the viability of the organization. Effective leadership through a crisis is key to organizational profitability and maintaining employee morale and productivity (Radic, et al., 2020). General Motors and Enron provide past textbook examples demonstrating why effective crisis leadership is not only beneficial but imperative. The actions of a newly minted CEO stemmed the fallout for one while a lack of ethical leadership during a crisis doomed the other.

Leadership has rarely been the focus of crisis management studies. Focus is typically on planning and analysis of contingencies and reactions (Cook & Anderson, 2019). Events such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the global financial crisis of 2008 and, most recently, Covid-19 have made crisis events more common place and thus increase the need for crisis leadership (Bhaduri, 2019; Brandebo, 2020; Dalcher, 2020; Varma, 2020). Because leaders are expected to support both the organization and its people through a crisis, theories of people-focused leadership through a crisis are emerging. Leaders able to focus on their people while still managing the crisis event fare better (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Madera & Smith, 2009; Jung, et al., 2009).

Schoenberg (2005) proposed a crisis leadership model of information gathering, external conscience, preparation, and experience, combined with leadership attributes of effective communication, authenticity,

and influence. Powley and Taylor (2014) posited that leaders must possess characteristics that allow them to effectively lead their teams through a crisis event. Leaders should be able to identify signs of crisis, prepare and protect their organization, display efficient and effective decision making, possess an ability to effectively plan, organize, communicate, and coordinate effectively across all stakeholders. Fener and Cevik (2015) suggest leaders must be able to effectively use power and influence, culminating with a successful shift to a “new” normal, all the while learning. Varma (2020) said effective crisis leaders will often reap the benefits of improving their corporate reputation and more importantly, profits and shareholder value. The global Covid pandemic of 2020 and 2021 validated the importance of effective organizational and individual crisis leadership.

As if one crisis weren't enough to deal with, imagine the difficulties introduced by the presence of multiple crises. It would be naive (and wishful thinking) for leaders to assume they will have to deal with only one crisis at a time. During the same timeframe as the pandemic, several other events (referred herein as “sub-events”) occurred that led to civil unrest. The murder of George Floyd, enactment of voter rights initiatives, attack on the US Capitol, and The Great Resignation all occurred during the 2020-2021 period. This study considers the impact, if any, crisis sub-events have on follower perceptions of crisis leadership effectiveness.

Crisis Defined

Crisis events are, by nature, unpredictable and disruptive. Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007) referred to them as “black swan events” that are rare, unexpected incidents with severe consequences. Seeger (2002) defined an organizational crisis as “specific, unexpected, and non-routine,” emphasizing its potentially devastating impact and the absence of a clear beginning or end. Organizations across industries have faced numerous crises that tested their leadership and resilience. Notable examples include BP's Deepwater Horizon explosion in 2010, which resulted in the loss of lives and significant environmental damage, and Boeing's 737 Max tragedies in 2019, which raised global concerns about corporate governance and safety culture. These events required decisive, ethical, and transparent crisis leadership. Some organizations navigated these moments effectively, while others failed leading to long-term reputational and operational consequences. Given that organizational crises can threaten a company's very survival, crisis management must be viewed as a strategic imperative (Preble, 1997). Importantly, crises are not always confined to a single, isolated event. As Pinsdorf (2004) noted, organizations often face overlapping and recurring crisis conditions, where the boundaries between onset, escalation, and resolution are blurred. This reality demands ongoing vigilance, adaptability, and leadership grounded in ethical and strategic decision-making.

Crisis Leadership Theory

Crisis management and crisis leadership are different constructs and require different competencies at separate times. In his 2017 book *Crisis Leadership*, Tim Johnson drew on academic research suggesting that crisis management should rely less on flowcharts and checklists and more on creating a crisis-ready culture that enables leaders to make deliberate and wise decisions. Each crisis requires different skills (Powley & Taylor, 2014; Van Wart & Kapucu, 2011). Effective crisis leadership requires the ability to provide stability, empowerment, encouragement, and optimism. It also requires an ability to maintain, allocate, and reallocate resources to manage through and recover from the event, all while ensuring organizational and economic survival (Kaiser, 2020). Research also confirms that leaders must remain composed, calm, and bold (Garcia, 2006). Leader provided stability through a crisis event serves dual purposes of protecting and positively impacting organizational reputation and maintaining/restoring trust of all stakeholders (Fragouli, 2020). Burnison (2020) said “no one thinks about a certain leadership quality-until the you-know-what hits the fan. Effective crisis leaders prepare for the earthquake and the aftershocks, differentiating between urgent and important, leave no one behind, meet people where they are in the crisis, and most importantly, know what to do when you don't know what to do”.

The term “wicked problem” was first used by Rittel and Webber (1973) to define social policy problems that have no definitive formulation of the wicked problem, are unique, have no defined end nor immediate and final solution, solutions are not true or false but better or worse, no opportunities to learn by trial and

error because every attempt to fix the problem is important, an enumerable set of potential solutions fail to exist and are often symptomatic of other problems, discrepancies representing the problem can be explained multiple ways and the explanation choice determines the nature of resolution, and the social planner can't be wrong. Schiefloe (2020) views the Covid-19 pandemic as a "wicked problem" with considerable ambiguity. Organizations and leaders are often guilty of trying to manage these wicked problems through traditional management skills and practices (Grint, 2005). We sometimes learn the hard way that complex problems require complex solutions. Gilpin and Murphy (2008) suggest that effective crisis leadership goes beyond checklists, protocols, contingency plans, and information distribution. It also requires leader improvisation, flexibility, listening, and an ability to know how to approach and make sense of the wicked problem. Crisis management is a top-down process focused on how to organize when a crisis occurs and how to solve the problem. Crisis leadership requires asking the right questions to better understand the situation from multiple perspectives. A complex crisis requires democratic and collaborative leadership (Muffet-Willet and Kruse, 2009).

Business management is full of complexity and requires leaders to deal with significant pressure and often respond quickly to situations with scarce information (Collins and Jackson, 2015). Emotions can impact leadership (Madera & Smith, 2009). Anger, frustration, and poor leadership behaviors cause disruption (Krasikova, et al., 2013) and can lead to decisions that damage corporate reputations and their brands (Spreier, et al., 2006). Conversely, positive emotions not only positively impact follower performance and follower motivation but also affect the moral quality of leaders. Failure to include ethics as part of the decision-making process can quickly cause reputational damage (Messick & Bazerman, 1996). Four common mistakes made by leaders during a crisis are ignoring the problem, providing misleading information, claiming situations against the reality, and shifting blames to others (Garcia, 2006). All are ethical lapses of leaders that can cause damage to the corporate reputation.

Covid, Conflict, and Crisis

The Covid Pandemic of 2020 became elongated continuing through all of 2021. According to the World Economic Report published by the IMF in April 2021, the global economy contracted by 3.5% in 2020. Yeyati & Filippini (2021) said the impact on world GDP growth was massive, resulting in the largest and deepest global recession since World War II.

Leaders of all organizations, both private and public, were forced to grapple with the perceptions and realities of social injustices throughout the Covid Pandemic. One prominent example was the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, by Minneapolis Police Officer Randy Chauvin. Corporate Executives in many cases were struggling to keep their companies afloat yet were confronted with addressing the issues of racial injustices, not only in Minneapolis but in many cases, their own organizations, and communities in which they lived and served. One-third of Fortune 10000 companies made a public statement on racial equity between May 25, 2020-October 31, 2020. Ninety-three percent made internal or external commitments, and 57% made public commitments of \$66 billion to racial equity initiatives (Fitzhugh, et al, 2020).

Organizations have also had to confront election reform dividing work forces at the same time they were addressing the Covid 19 crisis. The Brennan Center for Justice published a report dated October 4, 2021, which shared the 2020 federal election drew the highest voter turnout in more than a century. In all but 7 states through September of 2021, 19 states enacted 33 laws some say making it harder for Americans to vote. At the same time, 25 states enacted 62 laws with provisions that expanded voting access. Many argue the restrictive voting laws were passed in Republican states and took aim at minority voters.

Another significant crisis facing leaders was the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. Business leaders were forced to make choices around their contributions to political leaders and PAC's or other supported organizations that actively engaged in trying to discredit the 2020 Presidential election. Shareholders began to demand accountability for disclosure of company political spending. The Business Roundtable, composed of CEOs of the nation's biggest corporations including Apple, JPMorgan, Chase, GM, and Walmart were quoted in a Time Magazine article dated January 17, 2021 as saying "with our country in the midst of a pandemic, business leaders recognize that ongoing division and distrust in our political system threatens the economic recovery and job creation our country desperately needs" (Shapiro,

2021). Late in 2021, business leaders began to struggle with the “The Great Resignation”. Americans have continued to quit their jobs in record numbers creating staffing shortages in most industries. Kumar (2021) said there were 11 million jobs available exceeding the 8.4 million unemployed. It has forced business leaders to confront a crisis that suggests work and the material well-being it provides many is not all there is. Worker shortages have caused issues across the gamut of industries resulting in some businesses closing their doors permanently, reducing hours, adjusting their business model, and simply competing with other businesses to hire, making recovery infinitely more difficult.

While literature and studies regarding the impact of multiple crises events occurring within the larger Covid pandemic will emerge over time, it is imperative to consider how these events can impact followers’ perceptions of effective crisis leadership in their organizations. Klann (2003) said “a crisis can quickly expose a leader’s hidden strengths as well as his core weaknesses”. The smaller crises events that have occurred throughout the Covid 19 pandemic have required leadership courage. It has been said in many ways “courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to act in its presence.” Courage is a key component of crisis leadership because it demonstrates the leader’s willingness to do what’s right and act against one’s own and other’s self-interests to avoid long-term cost (Bazerman & Watkins, 2004). During times of crisis, leaders often find themselves not just managing a single crisis event but other conflicts that might be occurring simultaneously. Heifetz & Linsky (2002) offer those leaders that “get off the dance floor and go to the balcony” fare much better at managing the crisis. Organizational leaders must also be able to assess and reassess the organization’s purpose and values to ensure they are not only relevant in the current environment but positioned well for the future. Analysis that allows evaluation of the crisis response, whether the initial crisis or those events happening throughout the course of the initial event, provides an opportunity to realign and/or redefine organizational purpose to make it more relevant to all stakeholders (Klann, 2003). In a recent review of the crisis leadership literature, Chiwisa (2024) concluded “there is no one-size-fits-all strategy to effective leadership, since leaders need to adapt their tactics to fit the individual conditions influenced by internal and external forces”, (pg. 48).

Research Question and Hypothesis

The research question guiding this study is as follows:

RQ: Are follower perceptions of crisis leadership significantly changed by internal and/or external sub-events that occur during the main crisis event?

Hypothesis

H₀: Sub-events that occur during the main crisis event lifecycle have no impact on follower perceptions of crisis leadership.

H₁: Sub-events that occur during the main crisis event lifecycle significantly impact follower perceptions of crisis leadership.

Research Methodology

Prior to the conduct of the study, the methodologies to be employed during the study (e.g., sampling, survey design, data collection, data analysis) received approval from the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). Since the focus of the study involves followers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the leadership received, participation was limited to that from direct reports. These direct reports consist of Merit (i.e., salaried) employees below the Managing Director level and all hourly employees within a Fortune 150 company that were employed through the Covid-19 crisis period of March 1,2020 through December 31,2021.

Sampling Procedure/Data Collection

Using random email distribution lists, links to a questionnaire on Survey Monkey © were sent to over one thousand potential participants employed by the studied organization between March 1, 2020-December 31, 2021. Postings were also done on several social media websites used by past and present employees. Usable/completed questionnaires were obtained from 334 participants, representing a 33.4% response rate. A power analysis was done to determine if the obtained sample size was sufficient.

Computed using $\alpha = .05$, the sample size of 334 yielded an observed power of .994, confirming an appropriate sample size.

The questionnaire started off by collecting some respondent demographics (gender, race, seniority, and age). Based on research of recognized components of effective crisis leadership, five questions were used to develop a Composite View of overall crisis leadership (see Table 1 below for the specific items). The five components of safety, communication, resource availability, consistency and fairness, and valued opinions were selected based on previous research. Giles (2016) studied 195 leaders in 15 countries across 30 global organizations. Ethics and Safety were rated as the most critical leadership quality. Iordanoglou et al (2014) did similar research in five European countries and identified trustworthiness, interpersonal skills, and motivating others as key crisis leadership skills. Scores on the newly created composite variable could range from 5 (a response of negative or disagree on each of the five questions) to 25 (a response of positive or agree on each of the five questions). The question scores were totaled and a mean composite score for the five questions across all of the respondents was obtained of

Table 1: Survey questions comprising the Composite view of Crisis Leadership effectiveness.

Q#8: Communication from senior leaders to employees was effective throughout the pandemic.
Q#9: Senior leaders put the health, safety, and well-being of employees first throughout the pandemic.
Q#10: My company provided me with appropriate resources to make the best decisions for myself and family through the pandemic.
Q#16: I feel senior leaders partnered with all stakeholders fairly and consistently through the pandemic.
Q#17: My opinions as an employee were valued throughout the pandemic

21.04, an indication of greater than average effectiveness of crisis leadership as perceived by the respondents. More importantly, this indicates that there is still room for the perception of crisis leadership to move in either a positive or negative direction. This is imperative to adequately address the hypothesis.

Five additional questions inquired about changes in perceptions and attitudes of crisis leadership through sub-events that occurred throughout the pandemic, which were subsequently coded and uploaded to SPSS for statistical testing. Table 2 below contains those questions.

Table 2: Survey questions assessing degrees of change in perceptions/attitudes through sub events.

Please indicate the degree to which your perceptions/attitudes changed about senior leadership responses to the pandemic as global social justice issues occurred.
Please indicate the degree to which your perceptions/attitudes changed about senior leadership responses to the pandemic as vaccine mandates were announced.
Please indicate the degree to which your perceptions/attitudes changed about senior leadership responses to the pandemic as our business was significantly impacted by travel restrictions.
Please indicate the degree to which your perceptions/attitudes changed about senior leadership responses to the pandemic during our Presidential election.
Please indicate the degree to which your perceptions/attitudes changed about senior leadership responses to the pandemic as voter rights laws were enacted.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data in this study used both descriptive and inferential analyses. A correlation analysis was done to analyze relationships between the items making up the Composite View of crisis leadership effectiveness and the sub events that occurred. A regression analysis was done to further analyze which of the variables had more significant impact. Chi-Square Analysis was done to evaluate the relationship between sub-events and demographic variables and finally, a Post Hoc analysis was completed to delve deeper into the found relationships.

Results

Respondent Demographics

Gender composition of the participants was almost evenly split with 177 females (representing 53% of the 334 total respondents) and 157 males (47%). Most of the participants were Caucasian (39%), followed

by African American (30%), Hispanic (18%), and the remaining 13% was comprised of Asian/Pacific Islanders, Multiple Ethnicity, and American Indian/Alaskan Native. The reported age group of the participants was almost evenly split between three periods, each of a decade's length (25 to 34, 35 to 44, and 45 to 54). These made up 23%, 27%, and 26%, respectively, of the respondents. The 55 to 64 years old group comprised 16% of the respondents, while the remaining 8% was evenly split between those at both ends of the scale (18 to 24 and 65 to 74). Seniority levels of the participants were not particularly skewed toward either end of the spectrum with: 18% possessing less than 2 years of experience with the organization, 17% possessing 2-5 years of experience, 30% possessing 6-15 years of experience, 13% possessing 16-25 years of experience, and 22% possessing more than 25 years of experience.

Correlation/Regression Analyses

Correlation analyses were done between questions outlined in Table 1 and questions outlined in Table 2. The correlation analysis revealed significant correlations at the $<.001$ level between the five components of crisis leadership perceptions and the identified sub events occurring through the Covid-19 crisis lifecycle. Results are found in Table 3. As all correlations are statistically significant, these findings provide initial support for the hypothesis.

Table 3: Correlation Analyses of Variables (all are significant at the $<.001$ level)

Variables	Social Justice	Vaccine Mandates	Travel Restrictions	Elections	Voter Rights Laws
Effective Communication	.308	.330	.438	.251	.205
Health/Safety	.399	.394	.421	.218	.207
Available resources	.368	.384	.443	.280	.271
Consistency/Fairness	.333	.363	.419	.229	.282
Valued Opinions	.382	.422	.515	.310	.322

Regression analyses were then done to further examine the significant correlations found in Table 3. For each sub-crisis event, the outcome variable (change in follower attitudes/ perceptions of effective crisis leadership) was regressed against the five predictor variables to assess the strength of the relationships. Table 4 displays the findings.

Table 4: Regression Analyses of Predictors of Change in Perceived Crisis Leadership

Variables	Social Justice	Vaccine Mandates	Travel Restrictions	Elections	Voter Rights Laws
Effective Communication			.046		
Safety/Well-being	.011				
Available resources					.048
Fairness/Consistency	.028	.001**	.006**		.022
Valued Opinions	.005	$<.001$ **	$<.001$ **	.003**	.001**

Significant at $p<.05$ unless denoted by ** indicating $p<.01$

Chi-Square Tests of Independence

Chi Square Analyses were done using demographic variables to examine whether gender, age, race, job classification or seniority could significantly impact follower perceptions of effective crisis leadership as sub events occurred during the main crisis event. Table 5 below illustrates those instances of statistically significant findings.

Table 5: Chi-Square Significant Findings between Sub Events and Demographic Variables

Variables	Gender	Race	Age	Seniority	Hourly/Merit
Global Social Justice					
Vaccine Mandates	.039				
Business Impact					
Presidential Election		.023		.046	
Voter Rights Laws		.023	.020	.006**	.023

Significant at $p<.05$ unless notated by ** significant at $p<.01$

Post Hoc analyses were then conducted on the demographic variables that demonstrated significant Chi-Square relationships. Findings relative to the significant differences found above are captured in Table 6.

Table 6: Post Hoc Analyses of Significant Demographic relationships to sub events

Demographic Variable	Sub Event changes in Perceptions and attitudes	Found Difference
Gender	Vaccine Mandates	Male respondents with “no change” in their opinions was lower than expected and “slightly positive change” was higher than expected.
Race/Ethnicity	Presidential Election	White/Caucasian with a “slightly negative change” was higher than expected. “Overall positive change” was lower than expected
Race/Ethnicity	Voter Rights Laws	White/Caucasian with a “slightly negative change” was higher than expected and “overall positive change” lower than expected.
Age	Voter Rights Laws	-Age group 18-24 experiencing “overall positive change” was higher than expected -Age group 25-34 with an “overall negative change” was lower than expected. -Age group 55-64 experienced “negative change” higher than expected
Seniority	Presidential Election	25 years or more experienced higher than expected “overall higher negative change” than expected.
Seniority	Voter Rights Laws	-25 years or more had higher “overall negative change” than expected. “Negative change” was notable. -Less than 2 years had lower “negative change” than expected. -6-15 years had higher “positive change” than expected but higher “no change” than expected.
Job Classification (Merit/Hourly)	Voter Rights Laws	Hourly employees experienced “slightly negative change” lower than expected and “no change” higher than expected.

Chapter Summary

The results of the quantitative analyses conducted leads to not accepting the null hypothesis, and instead, supports accepting the alternate hypothesis stating sub-events that occur during the main crisis event lifecycle significantly impact follower perceptions of crisis leadership. Further discussion of findings, implications for practice, and opportunities for additional study follow.

Discussion

While the components of effective crisis leadership (communication, care, health/safety, and well-being, available resources, consistency/fairness, and valued opinions of followers) were significantly correlated across the board to perceptions of change across sub-events (social justice issues, the presidential election, business impact because of travel restrictions, voter rights laws, and vaccine mandates), regression analysis was done to further examine if more significant explanatory variables could be discovered. Results of the statistical analysis revealed significance between some, but not all, of the sub-events and Composite view questions outlined in Table 4.

Abelson (1985) conducted a study that calculated the correlation between a Major League Baseball player’s outcome in a single at-bat and his overall batting average. The calculation yielded an r of .056. He was a bit surprised by the results but the resolution and overall implications in his study where small effects can matter “in the long run, albeit not very consequentially in a single episode” (p. 133). Abelson’s conclusions are an important consideration in this study as, even though none of the effect sizes were strong, statistically significant P-values were nonetheless identified among the variables. Using just the R^2 values

to determine the significance of relationships would be remiss and short-sighted if dismissed out of hand. The results indicate partial support of the Research Question. There are indicators that perceptions of effective crisis leadership are impacted by sub-events that happen over the course of a larger crisis event. Moving forward in the discussion, some of these relationships become more meaningful as we delve further into the findings.

Findings have confirmed that sub-events can affect follower perceptions of crisis leadership; however, understanding “where” these effects may lie is equally important when considering both practical and research implications. The “where” required an analysis of the demographic variables of gender, race, age, seniority, and job role (merit or hourly). An overview of significant findings using a Chi-Square Test of Independence is provided in Table 6.

Results confirm that in all but one of the questions, demographic variables impacted perceptions of effective crisis leadership relative to one or more particular variables. Looking a little closer, the variables of race, age, and seniority required additional analysis as more significant explanatory variables impacting follower perceptions of crisis leadership as sub-events unfold. A Post Hoc analysis revealed specifically that white/Caucasians, tenured (25 years plus) and older (55-64), had pronounced negative changes in their opinions of effective crisis leadership as it related to the enactment of voter rights laws and the Presidential Election. In an internal memo, the CEO of the studied organization took a very strong stance on voter rights laws. He called one state’s voting bill “unacceptable”. In the same memo, he said “the right to vote is sacred...it’s evident that the bill includes provisions that will make it harder for many underrepresented voters, particularly Black voters, to exercise their constitutional right to elect their representatives. That is wrong” (Impelli, 2021). Gomez and Doherty (2021) shared a Pew Research Center study that supported the findings relative to race and age. In the study, 48% of White US adults surveyed July 8-18, 2021, said voting is a privilege that comes with responsibilities and can be limited. Only 21% of Blacks shared that opinion. Conversely, 51% of White adults surveyed said voting is a fundamental right for every U.S. citizen and should not be restricted but 77% of Blacks said the same. Older Republican Whites were the least likely to view voting as a fundamental right. Major et al (2018) in their study suggest that race/ethnicity is central to White Americans. Those high in ethnic identification supported Trump’s policies on immigration and his opposition to “political correctness” norms. The findings suggest that it is possible that some sub-events, particularly if they are politically and socially charged, may leave some groups of people feeling disenfranchised and thus with stronger negative perceptions of crisis leadership when leadership views and organizational stances collide with their personal views. Berg (2020), reinforcing why this is important, cited a Gallup poll conducted in the late spring of 2020 finding followers need trust, compassion, stability, and hope the most during a crisis. He posited that during times of crisis, employees look not only for honesty but behavioral predictability.

Leaders must be consistent and compassionate in their messaging, careful to be inclusive of all followers. Vakola (2014) suggested stress can make employees develop and/or harbor negative attitudes towards change, confirming Major et al study (2018) as they posit the changing racial demographics of America have caused Whites to become concerned about declining status and influence, perceived or real. This might suggest context matters when considering changes in perceptions of effective crisis leadership over the course of an elongated event. Certainly, tenured, and older people were concerned about their health and well-being through the Covid crisis and perhaps added in their race with age and seniority, held beliefs inconsistent with senior leaders’ views on specific issues like the Presidential election and Voter Rights Laws. The studied organization for more than 80 years was perceived as purposely conservative, born in the South, and intent on preserving a storied and family-like corporate culture.

The findings and conclusions reached in this study support the research question asked and the hypothesis put forth. Sub-events that occur during a main crisis event can and do impact followers’ perceptions of effective crisis leadership, not always for the betterment.

Conclusion

As stated previously, Garcia (2006) said effective crisis leadership is a competitive advantage. We are reminded that crisis situations threaten organizational reputation, stability, and survival (Fragouli, 2020). This study demonstrated follower perceptions of effective crisis leadership stem from organizational

leadership and their ability to effectively communicate and connect with their teams. Effective crisis leadership demands a leader not only understand their own emotions but equally important is the emotions of their followers. As this study demonstrated, follower perception is not always equal, consistent, or predictable. Wise leaders will recognize a “one size fits all” crisis leadership approach is destined to fail. Our findings provide empirical support for the same conclusion reached by Chiwisa (2024) upon review of the crisis leadership literature.

Dale Carnegie once said, “when dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion.” His quote goes directly to the components of this study: the importance of follower perceptions of leader care and communication through a crisis event. It has been said many times that people will never care how much you know until they know how much you care.

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