

Leadership in a Crisis

A look at the mindset, techniques and behaviours a leader needs in a time of crisis.

Purpose as a Guide

In a crisis, a lot of elements can move very fast, leaving some front-line decisions out of the hands of leadership.

A strong culture and clear organisational purpose will allow your teams to feel more empowered to make the right decisions.



Visible, Honest Leadership

Projecting a clear vision of how the organisation will get through the crisis will help leaders look like they are masters of the situation.

A leader's mood is viral, so staying calm and honest, while being realistic, will help your organisation remain positive.



Reflect and Learn

Simple methods such as dedicating a few minutes to take notes each day as a diary to refer to can help once the crisis has been alleviated to begin evaluating what happened. This can then feed into future crisis planning.



Clear Communications

Regular, clear and consistent messaging is paramount. Key to this messaging is giving the right people the right message at the right time; this may require staggering messaging throughout an organisation while solutions are worked on.



Calmly Optimistic

Great leaders will display several qualities during a crisis. One is 'deliberate calm', the ability to detach from a fraught situation and think clearly. Another is 'bounded optimism', or confidence combined with realism.



Confidence in the Chaos

Whatever the inner turmoil, leaders must project confidence during a crisis. Without it, morale can quickly spiral downwards.

Have a team of trusted advisors where you can ask the tough questions but, even with their most senior colleagues, leaders should be aware that their own fear can quickly spread throughout the organisation.



Demonstrate Empathy

The first consideration for a leader in a crisis is the people around them. Acting with empathy towards their personal and professional challenges will give people the psychological safety and trust to move forward.



The Leader's Wellbeing

During the stress of an ongoing crisis, leaders should be cognisant of their own wellbeing.

Being open to sharing your challenges with trusted advisors and taking mental and physical breaks will help leaders perform over time.



Evolve the Ecosystem

Major disruption may demand subtle new ways of doing things, or big organisational shifts. Create cross-functional teams that can design new processes and build support structures around the successful ones.



Reflective and Decisive

A test in leadership will come when the choice is to move fast or to wait for more evidence. While it is tempting to make quick, seemingly decisive decisions in the moment, leaders need to move with speed, not haste. A small period (if only a few minutes) of reflection will support better decision-making.



Sustain Performance

Wellness is a crucial part of any crisis management plan. Over time, wellness programmes and initiatives will keep employees more engaged, focused and productive.



Reinforce Resilience

A crisis will not just test the resilience levels in your organisation, it will naturally increase it.

Acknowledge the hard steps individual people are making and prepare them for future tests - this simple act will reinforce the natural resilience in people.



Centralise Decision-making, Decentralise Execution

While many decisions will need to be made centrally, leaders must devolve power in order for their decisions to be executed effectively.

Feedback loops here are vital to keep getting accurate information to key decision-makers.

Experiment Small, Scale Big

When a crisis occurs that fundamentally affects how you do business, you may need to quickly find new ways to carry out operations, either temporarily or permanently.

Experiment small across your organisation in collaborative teams but be ready to scale quickly when you decide on a course of action.



Build Trust

An overarching principle for any leader in a crisis is to take actions that build trust. Organisations with high levels of trust are more agile and responsive.