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5: Leadership and Crises: incubation, emergence, and transitions

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OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter:

- Investigates leadership in crisis conditions using the lens of a chronology from incubation, emergence and transitions in a crisis lifecycle
- Notes how leadership can itself contribute to the generation of crisis events
- Describes and assesses various models in the development and handling of crises

Introduction

The relationships that exist between the generation of 'crises' and the role that 'leadership' plays in the process can be considered at multiple points in the incubation, escalation, and aftermath of a crisis event. The onset of a crisis has the effect of accentuating the search for effective leadership to deal with the task demands of the event. Inevitably, there is also immediate, heightened and intense scrutiny on the leadership within the organisation and a search for culpability around causality. At the same time, crisis conditions can also generate opportunities for new leaders to emerge and to do so at different levels within the organisation. The leadership skills and capabilities needed at different stages of a crisis are also dependent on the environmental context in which the crisis occurs as well as the dynamic capabilities of others who work within the organisation.

There is also a darker side to the process of crisis leadership and this becomes manifest in the ways in which leadership practices can lead to the generation of crisis events. For some, the combination of strong and charismatic leadership brings with it the risk of shaping the core beliefs and values of the organisation and restricting the

creativity and challenge that comes from a more democratic process (Hanlon, 2016). For others, such strong leadership is potentially important in allowing for an effective response to crisis (Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2004; Judd, 2000; Pillai, 1996; Probst & Raisch, 2005). The role of leadership within crisis does not fall neatly into such a binary relationship and it is important to see it within a holistic context that embraces the actions of leaders, the behaviours of followers and hostile actors, and the environmental context in which such interactions occur (Boin & Paul 't, 2003).

The aim of this chapter is to consider the relationships that exist between leadership and the onset and escalation of crisis. The core argument developed here is that organisational leaders can play a significant role in the development of a crisis as well as being critical in the management of the task demands that it generates. In particular, the actions of leaders can create the conditions that can cause the organisation to fail (Reason, 1990b, 1997; Turner, 1976, 1978, 1994), especially as the organisation moves away from its designed-for state into a potentially unstable one (Fischbacher-Smith, 2014; Hodge & Coronado, 2007; Tsoukas, 1999). As part of this discussion, the chapter considers the nature of a crisis and illustrates how its various stages generate task demands for those in managerial and leadership positions to deal with. It also considers how the actions of senior members of an organisation can create the conditions that ultimately lead to a crisis, especially in terms of dealing with the transitions that take place within the crisis generation process. Thus, leaders can become the “authors of their own misfortune” (Smith & Fischbacher, 2009) as they generate the conditions for the very crises that they subsequently have to manage. The double-edged nature of this process also generates questions about the potentially destructive nature of leadership and how, under some conditions, those negative characteristics may prove to be of value in dealing with the task demands of a crisis event. The approach taken in this chapter is framed within

the systems management literature, which both reflects some of the dominant approaches that have been taken towards crisis management and also allows for the relationships between leadership and crisis management to be framed in a holistic manner. Finally, the chapter will consider the processes by which toxic leaders can play in the incubation processes associated with failure across the three main stages associated with a crisis - the crisis of management, the operational crisis, and the crisis of legitimation (Smith, 1990a, 1995).

Leadership and crisis management as strategic issues

Crises would appear to be a common aspect of organisational life and have the potential to cause considerable harm to the organisation (Mitroff, Pauchant, & Shrivastava, 1988; Mitroff, Shrivastava, & Udwadia, 1987). This damage can occur across a range of organisational activities and may extend into the organisation's wider value chain (James, Wooten, & Dushek, 2011; Uta & Stan, 2011). Despite their prominence the study of crisis is generally an under-represented in the curricula of business education and leadership programmes (Fischbacher-Smith & Fischbacher-Smith, 2013; Lalonde & Roux-Dufort, 2013; Powley & Taylor, 2014). At its core, effective crisis management is a strategic process and one in which leadership and management (as both a function and a process) are central components (Greening & Johnson, 1996; Mitroff, Pauchant, Finney, & Pearson, 1989; Mitroff et al., 1988; Smith, 1992). The relationships between decision-making and crisis are well-established, both in terms of the responses made to crisis events and also in terms of the ways in which decisions contribute to crisis incubation. Thus, in both the creation of, and response to crisis, the role of leadership can be seen to be an important factor (Barton, 2008; Kapucu & Van Wart, 2008). Strong and effective leadership can be instrumental in ensuring that an organisation deals with the task demands of a crisis

and recovers from the damage that such an event can cause whereas weak and ineffectual leadership can have the opposite effect. Whilst such a statement is axiomatic, it masks some of the complex dynamics associated with crisis incubation and leadership. It is the case, for example, that 'strong leadership' can lead an organisation, or even a nation state, into crisis. Illustrations of this exist throughout history where leaders have been able to manipulate others to follow their destructive lead (Post, 1991; Rees, 2012; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Clearly extreme despotic behaviour is thankfully rare, however it has, and still does, manifest itself in a more muted form across political regimes and geographical areas (Allum, 2011; Herbert, 2011; Shaw, Erickson, & Nassirzadeh, 2014).

The relationships between failure, crisis, and leadership are, therefore, complex, multi-level issues (Yammarino & Dansereau, 2002, 2008). However, they do not easily lend themselves to empirical research before a crisis event occurs and so much of the work in this area has been retrospective. Organisations are, perhaps naturally, reluctant to allow for the personality testing of senior teams prior to a crisis and once a crisis has begun there are few opportunities to assess the importance of specific leadership characteristics in shaping the complexion of the event. Most work is, therefore, carried out after the event and is subject to post-crisis bias, constrained information flows, and the process of organisational scapegoating that often occurs. Despite these constraints, there are some studies that have sought to identify the characteristics of toxic leadership and done so to provide an alternative view to the dominant literature that focuses on the positive aspects of the leadership construct (Kellerman, 2004; Tourish, 2013).

Within an organisational context, research on the darker aspects of leadership has focused on the so-called dark triad of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007; Paulhus & Williams, 2002) and the

potential that these psychological factors can have on organisational performance. In particular, the processes around organisational psychopathy and narcissism have been areas that have attracted considerable attention (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Boddy, 2011, 2014; Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011; Marshall, Ashleigh, Baden, Ojiako, & Guidi, 2014; Pech & Slade, 2007; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006; Stein, 2013). The examples of Enron, along with a range of behaviours that occurred across a number of financial organisations prior to the 2008 crisis, have been used to illustrate how such dark leadership behaviours can lead organisations into crisis (Aebi, Sabato, & Schmid, 2012; Boddy, 2011; Earle, 2009; Stein, 2013; Stein & Pinto, 2011).

If we accept the premise that leaders can shape the nature of an organisation's culture, affect its strategic direction, and enhance the capabilities of the organisation to perform against its task demands, then it also follows that weak, corrupt, or dysfunctional leaders can affect the organisation in a negative manner (Turner, 1994). This negative aspect of leadership and management actions and interventions sits at the core of the processes around the incubation of failure conditions within organisations (Reason, 1997; Turner, 1976, 1978) in which leadership can be a potent factor in shaping the potential for crisis. However, this is not a simple binary relationship between 'good' and 'bad' leadership practices and the onset of crisis, and we need to think of the interactions between these elements in terms of a spectrum of behaviours in which the organisation's environment is also a critical factor in shaping the development of a crisis. Early research in the field, for example, has also highlighted the importance of the mental state of individuals (both insiders and external agents) in causing harm, the role taken by leaders in generating vulnerabilities in control systems, and the role that such leaders can play in shaping the response to a crisis (both in an operational sense and in terms of learning from

the event) (Kovoor-Misara, 1996; Kovoor-Misra, 1995; Reason, 1990b; Smith, 1995). Similarly, the configuration and leadership of crisis management teams to cope with the task demands of a crisis event are also important ways in which leadership can contribute to the escalation (or control) of a crisis (Smart & Vertinsky, 1977; Smith, 2000a, 2004). Thus, leadership can be seen to be a central component of a crisis from its incubation, through realisation, and towards recovery (Barton, 2008; Sipika & Smith, 1993; Smith & Sipika, 1993; Turner, 1978). However, there has been a tendency to valorise leadership's role in this process rather than to consider how it might be a root causal factor within the generation of a crisis and our aim here is explore the darker side of leadership's role in the process. In order to explore this, we need to set out the nature of the crisis management processes and use it as a means of situating the role that leadership can play in both the creation of, and response to, crisis events

The nature of Crisis

The relationships between the development of crisis conditions within organisations and the leadership styles of those who manage those organisations have a long history within the academic literature (Mitroff et al., 1989; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Turner, 1976, 1978, 1994). In many respects, there is an assumption that those managers who preside over an organisation that is in a state of crisis are invariably responsible for the creation of that situation - leaders, and the processes around the leadership that they provide, are typically seen as having characteristics that help to generate the crisis (Turner, 1994). Of course, failures are not always the function of the actions of a single individual and there is a range of cultural and other socio-technical systems elements that play a role in this process (Gigerenzer, 2002; Perrow, 1984; Reason, 1987, 1997; Sagan, 1993; Tenner, 1996). Leadership can be

seen, therefore, as both a cause and a solution to the generation and management of a crisis. It has been seen as a dominant element in the development of failure due to its widespread influence in shaping the development of an organisation's culture, the recruitment strategies that are in place within it, along with the potentially toxic components of leadership personality and managerial style (Fraher, 2014; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Tavanti, 2011; Tourish, 2013). If managers are found to recruit like-minded people, sycophants, or those that make weak managers feel comfortable, then the potential for creating weak links within an organisation's management structure is high (South & Matejka, 1990). Ultimately, the result can be the generation of a crisis prone culture in which the leadership style of individuals can prove to be a significant factor in shaping the pre-conditions for failure (Mitroff et al., 1989; Mitroff et al., 1988; Reason, 1997; Turner, 1978). In addition, the self-reinforcing processes around groupthink can also serve to generate a cultural context in which constrained and potentially weak decision-making can remain unchallenged by those within the decision-making team (Herek, Janis, & Huth, 1989; Janis, 1982; Smith, 2000b). Such processes have been seen to lie at the core of a number of significant crisis events occurring across a range of organisational settings (Esser & Lindoerfer, 1989; Garnett & Kouzmin, 2009; Hermann & Dayton, 2009; Moorhead, Ference, & Neck, 1991; Sipika & Smith, 1993; Weick, 1990, 1993).

Within the broader 'crisis management' literature, there has been considerable debate concerning both the nature of crisis as a construct and the various stages through which a crisis develops (Allison, 1969; Burnett, 1998; Eichengreen, 2003; Evans & Elphick, 2005; Quillinan et al., 2009). Much of the research within the area of crisis management has been carried out across a range of disciplines including: political science, economics, communication studies, and business and management

and the focus here is primarily on the latter body of work. Even within the business and management literature, there is considerable diversity around the ways in which the various stages of a crisis are defined, identified and developed (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Pollard & Hotho, 2006; Roux-Dufort, 2007; Wilding & Paraskevas, 2006). There are also different definitions of the nature of a crisis, and this can also lead to issues around interpretation. For the purposes of the present discussion, a crisis will be considered as:

“a damaging event, or series of events, that display emergent properties which exceed an organisation’s abilities to cope with the task demands that it generates and has implications that can effect a considerable proportion of the organisation as well as other bodies. The damage that can be caused can be physical, financial, or reputational in its scope. In addition, crises will have both a spatial and temporal dimension and will invariably occur within a sense of “place”. Crises will normally be “triggered” by an incident or another set of circumstances (these can be internal or external to the organisation), that exposes the inherent vulnerability that has been embedded within the “system” over time”. (Smith, 2006) p. 7.

The key dimensions of this particular definition of crisis are the emergent nature of crisis events, the challenges that such emergence can generate for the dynamic capabilities required of organisations, and the role played by the incubation of a range of pre-cursor elements of failure within the organisation’s routine practices (Perrow, 1984; Perrow, 2004). It highlights the need to take a holistic perspective on the process and it recognises the importance of both internal and external actors in triggering and shaping the crisis as well as the environmental context in which it occurs. The implications for leadership processes within this context are considerable therefore, especially if we frame the various stages of a crisis as extending beyond a highly damaging event to include both the incubation processes that create the conditions for failure and the organisational learning (or reframing) that takes place in response to the event (Smith & Elliott, 2007).

Within the context of the definition outlined above, the framework of crisis used here is the three-stage model developed by Smith and colleagues (Smith, 1990a, 1995; Smith & Sipika, 1993). The first stage in this framework addresses how organisations can incubate the potential for crisis events through the range of processes outlined by Turner that concern the failures of managerial foresight (Turner, 1976, 1978, 1994). He argued that a series of factors result in the minimisation of organisational concerns around potential threats and these include: rigidities in the perceptions of key decision-makers; processes by which decision-makers become distracted by decoy phenomena (that is, potential threats that divert the attention of managers away from other viable threats); problems around information provision and interpretation that prevent effective sensemaking concerning the threats (this includes the reluctance to respond to external challenges); and a series of issues around conforming to regulatory requirements (Turner, 1976, 1978, 1994). In addition to these elements, Reason (1987, 1990b, 1997) has highlighted the role that both latent and active human errors can play in the generation of gaps in organisational controls and these can subsequently allow initial failures to escalate in an uncontrolled manner. This is especially problematic when the system in which these factors are contextualised as being both “tightly coupled” and “interactively complex” (Perrow, 1984). In such cases, the speed of interaction between elements of the system (tight coupling) ensures that the failure migrates through the system quickly and the interactions between those elements (interactive complexity), allows the failure to extend beyond the initial triggering event. The complexity within the system also allows for the generation of emergent conditions in which events occur that are beyond the designed-for parameters of the system (Smith, 2005). The actions that are taken in response to these emergent conditions can then create new problems that lie outside of both the control

parameters that are in place as well as the experience base of those who lead the organisation.

A casual glance at the media coverage of business performance will invariably highlight a range of issues concerning the practices around organisational leadership, the assumptions that such leaders often make around the validity of the controls that are in place to manage risk, and the relationships that both sets of processes can have on the incubation of crisis potential. A recent example that illustrates the nature of the problem is the Volkswagen emissions crisis. The issue emerged in September 2015, when it was revealed that Volkswagen cars had been fitted with software that masked the pollution emission characteristics of its engines when under test conditions and the revelation pushed the company into a state of crisis (Kretchmer, 2015). The manufacturer's chief executive resigned as a consequence of the allegations and the company was forced to make several high profile apologies about the incident across a number of countries (Anon, 2015b; Kretchmer, 2015). However in October 2015, a senior manager stated in evidence to the US congress that the problem may have been the result of two, apparently rogue, software engineers and that there was no evidence to suggest that senior management anywhere within the company had authorised such actions (Anon, 2015b). If this is the case, then it raises some concerns about the level of control that managers have over the behaviour of staff and the quality assurance processes that are supposedly in place. It is also somewhat worrying that two employees could generate such a significant crisis for the company and do so without detection. Given that it has emerged that between two and ten individuals may face charges over the scandal (Anon, 2015a) then this seems to be a potentially widespread issue. However, it does raise a question about the controls in place to prevent such rogue actions from occurring. If we accept the organisation's defence that the crisis arose due to the actions of a small number of

individuals, then it serves to highlight a range of processes around the management of insider threats, the culture of the organisation, and the processes around quality assurance controls. It seems likely that the scale of the crisis will increase, especially as, at the time of writing, it seems to be escalating to encompass petrol engines as well as diesel (Paton, 2015). Leadership is clearly required within the company to deal with the demands of the event, repair the organisation's reputation, and restore shareholder value.

If the tampering issues were not enough to cause reputational damage to the industry, it has also been suggested that a number of car manufacturers knew of the damaging health effects of diesel vehicles for some time but had sought to suppress them (Kenber & Mostrous, 2015). Another damaging revelation in this regard concerned the links that VW had with scientific research groups who were funded by the company and who acted to play down the effects of diesel engines on health and the environment (Mostrous & Kenber, 2015). It also highlights the ways in which those in positions of power are able to shape the debate by controlling the acceptability of certain forms of knowledge and evidence within such debates (Smith, 1990b). The VW example illustrates the complex relationships that exist between leadership processes and the incubation, generation, and escalation of crises. The case also highlights the ways in which crises can be incubated as part of the routine activities of organisations and how organisational misbehaviours can arise in apparent (but misguided) support of the perceived organisational objectives

A range of factors, in addition to those around incubation, can also serve to move the organisation away from the system's designed-for state. For example, Radell (1992) argues that organisations can engage in the process of "storming" in which the critical phases of the design process for a system are compressed in such a manner that they overlap. As a consequence, it is possible that problems which

should be identified in the early phases of a transformation process are only identified when the change processes is being implemented. This is akin to the embedding of “error cost” within the system and in a way that may only become apparent further down the timeline (Collingridge, 1992). As with the erosion of organisational controls, many of these problems may only become apparent when the system moves towards the point of failure. The inability to identify early warnings and weak signals is a key element of the crisis of management phase. In part, this can be explained by the ways that organisations collect and manage information. Seidl argues that organisations develop ‘structures of observation’ that shape the ways in which it collects and utilises knowledge around systems performance (Seidl, 2007). If organisations fail to recognise the complexity that is inherent in the system then it can serve to inhibit their abilities to make sense of the problems that they face. Underlying this is the view that:

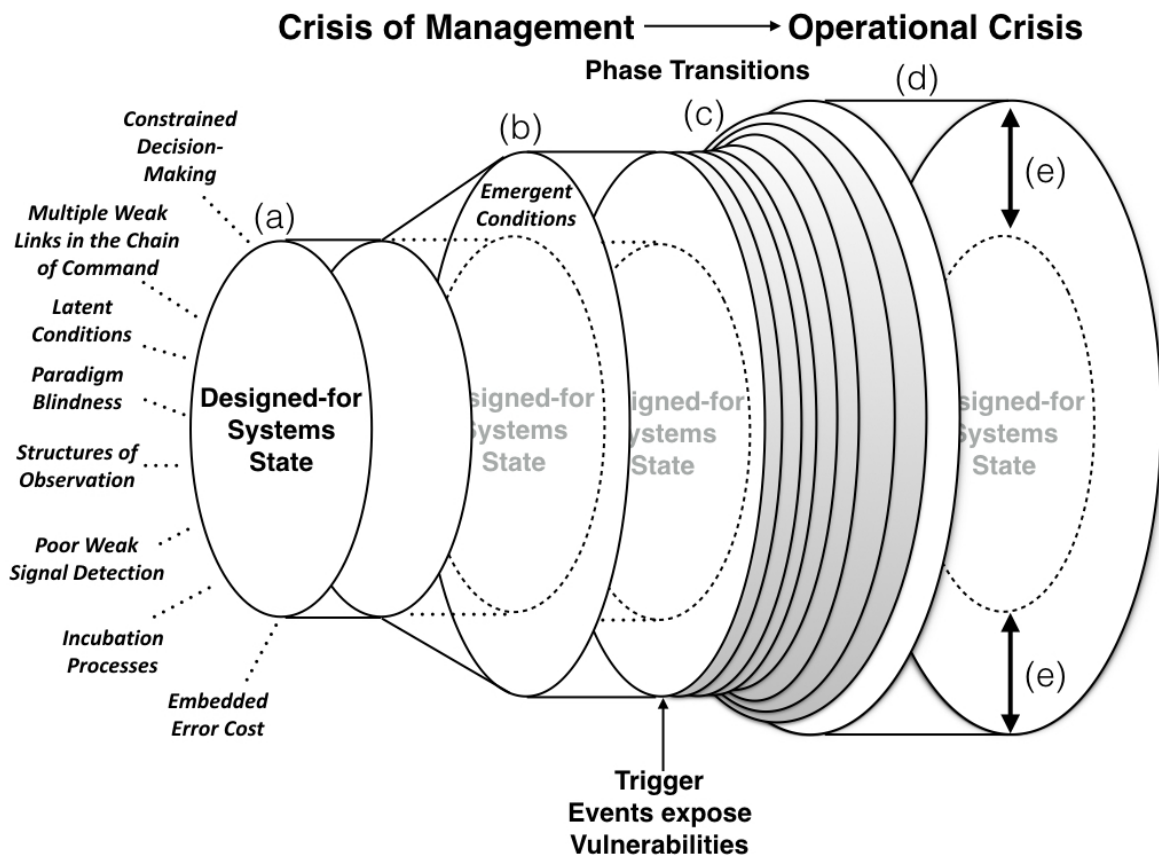
“Knowledge is situated, circumstantial and context driven. Acknowledgement of complexity leads a reduction in confidence in knowledge. By denying or repressing complexity, one can seemingly boost ‘confidence’ in knowing” - (Letiche, 2009), p. 59.

For the insecure leader, this might be a compelling approach as it allows them to maintain the façade of being in control by simplifying the nature of the problems that they face. The result of these factors is the creation of a vulnerable organisation that does not address the problems that it has to deal with.

Figure 1 seeks to conceptualise these processes by outlining the key elements of the crisis of management phase and its evolution into an operational crisis. This evolution is shown as a continuous process and it is the contention here that these two phases are intrinsically linked. It is also contended that leadership plays a significant role across this space. In the first instance, leadership plays a role in

shaping the processes around the development of a system's designed-for state (shown at (a)) as well as helping to shape the range of processes that can lead to the generation of emergent conditions that have the potential to move the system from (a) to (b). The processes identified at (a) represent a level of complexity within the operation of the system that can begin to generate the emergent conditions that move it beyond its designed-for state towards a new operational state. As controls are put in place for the designed-for state, then it is likely that there will be no controls in place for the emergent conditions shown at (b). Similarly, if the organisation's structures of observation are constrained then managers will not actively seek to identify issues that sit outside of the accepted performance criteria. Put another way, we manage what choose to measure. The result is the creation of a set of vulnerabilities within the system and a series of fractures in controls. These vulnerabilities can remain dormant until a trigger event exposes them and allows the crisis to emerge, thereby moving the organisation to another systems state. This shift from one system state to another can take multiple forms and is dependent on the particular characteristics of the system, the actions of those who work within it, and the environment in which it operates. However, it may also be shaped by the actions of those who lead the organisation and who generate the latent conditions (Reason, 1990a, 1997) that create vulnerabilities within the system. This is a point that will be returned to in more detail later.

Figure 1: The crisis of management phase



A trigger event (at (c)) can expose these latent conditions and incubated elements of failure and move the system into an uncontrolled state in which the task demands that are generated sit outside of the 'normal' control requirements for the system. As the crisis moves into its operational stage (shown at (d)), then the decisions taken by those who are responsible for trying to control the event have the potential to generate further emergent conditions that will continue to move the system into a chaotic state. Given that many contingency plans will be designed to cope with the parameters around the designed-for state and the associated failures that seem likely within that context, then these emergent conditions will invariably not be covered by that contingency planning process. Indeed, one might argue that if the leadership of the organisation were aware of these potential failures then they would be honour-bound to try and mitigate that potential for failure. The result is

that the task demands generated by a crisis will invariably exceed the contingency limits that are in place and so the organisation will have to adapt to these additional task demands (shown at (e)).

Moving away from equilibrium

Taken together, this body of work explains how and why an organisation may move away from its designed-for state to a different equilibrium state, and do so in such a way that the organisation remains unaware of the changes in the systems state. This notion of a shift away from the designed-for state has been developed by a number of authors and the interaction between environmental shifts and the internal procedures at work in the organisation have been used as a means of explaining the processes that can lead to a move from equilibrium and, ultimately, to failure (Hodge & Coronado, 2007; Tsoukas, 1999). Tsoukas (1999), for example, argues that there are four major factors that are important in shaping the ‘texture of organizing’ and these are action (which is often determined at distance), processes around dematerialisation, the manner in which social reflexivity is carried out, and the mediated nature of communication. Hodge and Coronado (2007) frame these four issues – economy, action, perception, and social relations – within the setting of a three systems state which moves from a ‘close to equilibrium’ state towards a ‘far from equilibrium’ state (see figure 2). As the organisation moves away from its designed-for equilibrium state¹, the interactions between the four key elements become ever more complex and the cognitive distance between the elements can be seen to become extended. Put another way, we can see the task demands increasing the further the organisation moves from its equilibrium (or designed-for) state. These

¹ It is also possible for the organisation to achieve a new stable equilibrium state that is some distance from its designed-for state and which has vulnerabilities in its control parameters. The system appears to operate ‘normally’ but these latent conditions have the potential to cause it to fail if the system is subject to a shock event/trigger.

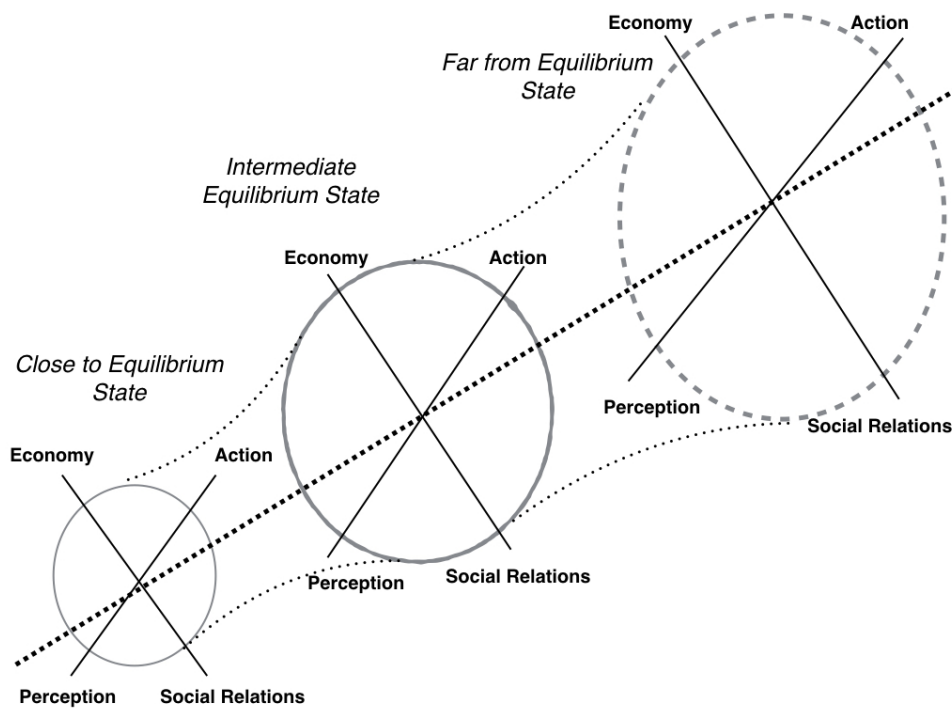
shifts are dependent on the nature of the environment, the capabilities of the organisation to respond to the task demands that are generated by environmental changes, and the effectiveness of organisational members (both leaders and other colleagues) in ensuring that the organisation does not spiral into a state of crisis (that is, a far from equilibrium state). The implication is that as the system moves further from its equilibrium state, then the abilities of leaders and management processes to deal with the task demands associated with each of the four elements will become impaired. The challenge for leadership within the organisation is to manage the transitions between these systems states in such a way that the organisation does not move into a state of crisis. Clearly, this is a challenging process and Hodge and Coronado argue that:

“In practice transitions take place unevenly, following a spiral rather than crossing discrete circles, moving backwards as well as forwards, across spaces rather than lines. Yet the circles have a heuristic value, representing transitions from one condition to the next, marking distinct conditions and logics” - (Hodge & Coronado, 2007), p.10.

It is this turbulence within the transitions to crisis that generates the potential for additional emergent conditions as the interactions between elements of the system can create challenges that move it further beyond its initial control parameters. Effective leadership is essential to managing the task demands around these transitional processes, but it is also likely that ineffective (or dysfunctional) leadership will be critical in impairing their abilities to do so. One element of Hodge and Coronado’s conceptualisation of the transition to crisis concerns the three stages through which the system moves and these can be seen to reflect the views expressed elsewhere around the nature of environmental shifts. Within systems biology, for example, Kaufmann and colleagues have conceptualised the environment as existing in three states – ordered, complex, and chaotic – in which the challenges presented to organisms that seek to function in that environment increase across this “fitness

landscape” (Kauffman, 1993; Kauffman & Johnsen, 1991). For the ordered state, the parameters within the environment are generally stable and well understood. Here the routine ways of operating are sufficient to ensure a satisfactory level of performance. As the environment becomes more challenging then the organisation can be seen to be operating within a complex systems state. Here the task demands generated by the environment have the effect of moving the system beyond its normal operating conditions. Decisions taken here, where the uncertainty around systems performance is invariably higher, have the potential of shifting the organisation towards a more chaotic, or crisis, state. Here, both uncertainty and emergence are high and the need for an effective response by decision-makers is essential in preventing organisational collapse. In such a chaotic state, the extent of the uncertainty facing decision-makers is high and the knowledge base needed to cope with high levels of emergent conditions is also problematic. The lack of prior experience of these conditions generates challenges for decision-makers, and this is often compounded by the high levels of ambiguity and codification associated with information flows under crisis conditions (Child, Ihrig, & Merali, 2014; Cohendet & Steinmueller, 2000; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). The four elements shown in Figure 2 do not have sufficient granularity within them to serve as an explanatory mechanism for the move towards crisis, but the conceptualisation does offer a starting point to help frame the transition to crisis that was shown in Figure 1.

Figure 2 – Hodge and Coronado’s conceptualisation of a move away from equilibrium

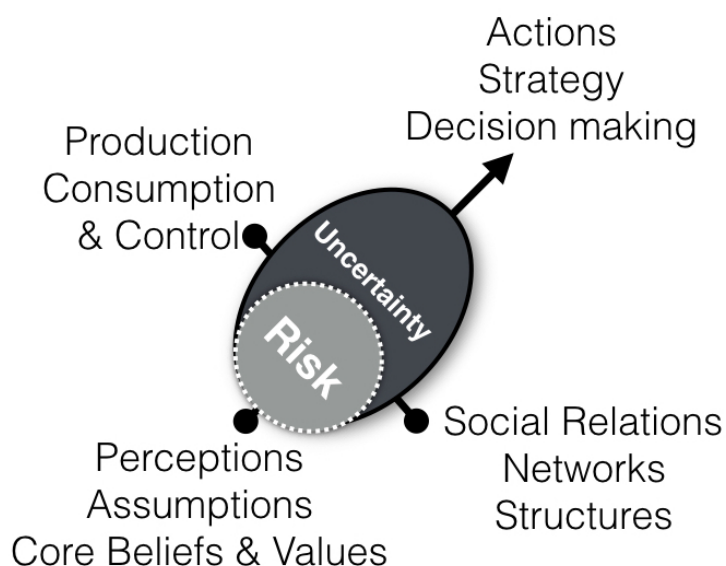


Source: (Hodge & Coronado, 2007), p. 9

Figure 3 expands on the initial conceptualisation set out by Hodge and Coronado and provides a more robust means by which we can frame the role of leadership in terms of the transitions within crisis management. Perception and its relationship to action remains a core axis within the transition to crisis but it is expanded to include the role of core beliefs, values and assumptions in shaping the nature of decision-making at both an operational and strategic level. These issues have been highlighted across the crisis management literature as being important elements in the emergence of crises (Mitroff et al., 1988; Pascale, 1990; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992). Central to this relationship is the way in which those who lead and influence the organisation’s behaviours are able to incorporate both risk (as relatively well known and understood probabilities and consequences) and uncertainty (where ambiguity is high) into their decision-making processes. As the organisation moves from its designed-for (equilibrium) state towards a more chaotic (far from

equilibrium) state, then the extent of both risk and uncertainty within the decision-making axis will invariably increase. It is also possible for the organisation to move to a new equilibrium state in which the incubation of failure potential makes that equilibrium essentially unstable and it will move rapidly to a chaotic state if a suitable triggering event occurs. Both the economy and social relations elements of Hodge and Cororado's framework have also been expanded. The economy label has been replaced with production, consumption, and control as this provides for greater granularity around issues relating to systems design (storming, coupling, interactive complexity), the processes around control (latent and active human errors, paradigm blindness, weak signal detection, structures of observation), and the role that consumption can play in driving organisational behaviours. Finally, social relations (which are seen here to include processes around communication and information sharing) are expanded to include the role of networks (as conduits for information sharing) and structures (including pre-crisis structures and temporary crisis management teams).

Figure 3 – Risk and uncertainty within crisis transformations



The resultant framework is one in which leadership processes operate and where the positive and negative aspects of leadership characteristics, the interactions with others in the organisation, and the environmental challenges, all play a key role in shaping the onset of, and response to crisis. As the environment moves to a more complex state, the dynamism within it generates additional task demands. This is partly a function of the emergence that arises out of the new interactions between elements of the system but is also a function of the difficulties involved in managing the increased information flows and the associated impact that this can have on sensemaking processes. Boisot has argued that the more complex and codified the information is, the more steps are needed to decode it (Boisot, 1995; Boisot & Child, 1999; Boisot & Cox, 1999), and this has considerable implications for the ways in which organisations respond to the demands generated in both a complex and a chaotic environmental setting. It is here that crisis management teams can play an important role in shaping organisational performance under conditions of uncertainty. Effective crisis teams remain an important element in the process of crisis management and they have to be trained and developed prior to any actual crisis occurring if they are to deliver a level of performance in the face of such threats (Smart & Vertinsky, 1977; Smith, 2000a). Again, leadership has an important role to play within the selection and development of those teams and weak managers and leaders can create ineffectual crisis teams (Smith, 2004; South & Matejka, 1990). Again, this interaction between leaders and followers within a crisis context has synergies with the transformational approaches taken towards leadership.

The final area of the crisis management framework used here concerns what Smith (1990a, 1995) has termed the “crisis of legitimation”. Leadership can play an important role in shaping the post-crisis learning processes that the organisation engages in (and which feeds back into the crisis of management phase) and also

shapes the organisation's performance in the turnaround process (Elliott & Smith, 2006; Elliott, Smith, & McGuinness, 2000; Smith & Elliott, 2007). For our present purposes, this phase will not be considered in detail.

The characteristics of those who lead the organisation, their interactions with others, and the abilities that they have to respond dynamically to the environment, will be important in both shaping the move towards a more complex/chaotic systems state as well as determining how the organisation responds to the task demands of those environmental conditions. The remainder of this chapter considers the potential role that leadership can play within the context of a crisis. In many respects, this discussion is exploratory and seeks to raise issues that require further research and attention from both leadership and crisis management research. In particular, the synergies that exist between these two bodies of work have considerable potential to help develop our understanding of the transition to crisis and the contribution that leadership can make within that process.

Dark Leadership and Leadership in Crisis - two sides of the same coin or different currencies?

“Hubris is almost an occupational hazard for leading politicians, as it is for leaders in other fields, such as the military and business, for it feeds off the isolation that often builds up around such leaders.....a point often comes when such individuals are no longer living in the same world as the organisation they lead” – (Owen, 2012) p. xvi

The ways in which leaders of organisations can become isolated and out of touch with others has been the subject of a considerable body of research in recent years (Hiller & Hambrick, 2005; Kellerman, 2004; Li & Tang, 2010; Lipman-Blument, 2005). A similarly constrained form of thinking amongst leaders has been a dominant theme within the broad body of the crisis management literature (Sayegh, Anthony, & Perrewé, 2004; Turner, 1994; Vaughan, 1997). This isolation of leaders, along with

the presence of a number of potentially damaging psychological issues and organisational misbehaviours, may serve to move an organisation into a state of instability (and ultimately to crisis) and do so almost independently of the environmental challenges that the organisation faces (Boddy, 2011; Boddy, Ladyshevsky, & Galvin, 2010a; Owen, 2012). More recently, the importance of followers in shaping the behaviours of those who lead the organisation has also emerged as an important issue (Kellerman, 2008), as has the situational context and associated underlying processes that can serve to shape leadership behaviours (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011).

Haslam and colleagues raise a number of challenges that they frame within what they term the new psychology of leadership. The first of these is that we need to contextualise leadership in a non-individualistic manner and, in so doing, move away from the habit of valorising individuals (Haslam et al., 2011). The implication here is that there is no single profile that typifies the ideal (crisis) leader but that the characteristics of the individual need to be seen within the context of a wider set of interactions with other elements of the system. This interactive process is also compatible with the framework set out in figure 3, as well as with work in crisis management that has long seen the actions of the collective as being important in generating the potential for failure (Janis, 1982; Reason, 1997; Turner, 1978; Weick, 1993).

Haslam et al's (2011) second, and related, challenge is that we need to see leadership operating within its situational context. Of particular importance here is the role that space and time can play within a globalised organisational setting in shaping the interplay between production processes and the harm that can be caused arising from that (Fischbacher-Smith & Smith, 2015). Again, this has synergies with work on crisis management that generally focussed on the performance of complex

socio-technical systems and especially where emergent conditions are seen as a function of that system operating within space and time (Erikson, 1994; Perrow, 1984; Tenner, 1996).

Thirdly, the interactions between leaders and followers are seen by Haslam et al as being contingent and, once again, this is well suited to the holistic systems approach that is dominant within much of the crisis management literature. In particular, the challenges that can be generated by insider threats and organisational misbehaviours are important here (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Fischbacher-Smith, 2015). These threats can arise at multiple levels within the organisation and have the potential to create crises beyond the confines of the host organisation, as illustrated by the actions of Edward Snowden, Bradley Manning, and Nick Leeson amongst others (Berntzen & Sandberg, 2014; Brown, 2005; Greener, 2006; Greenwald, 2014; Madar, 2013).

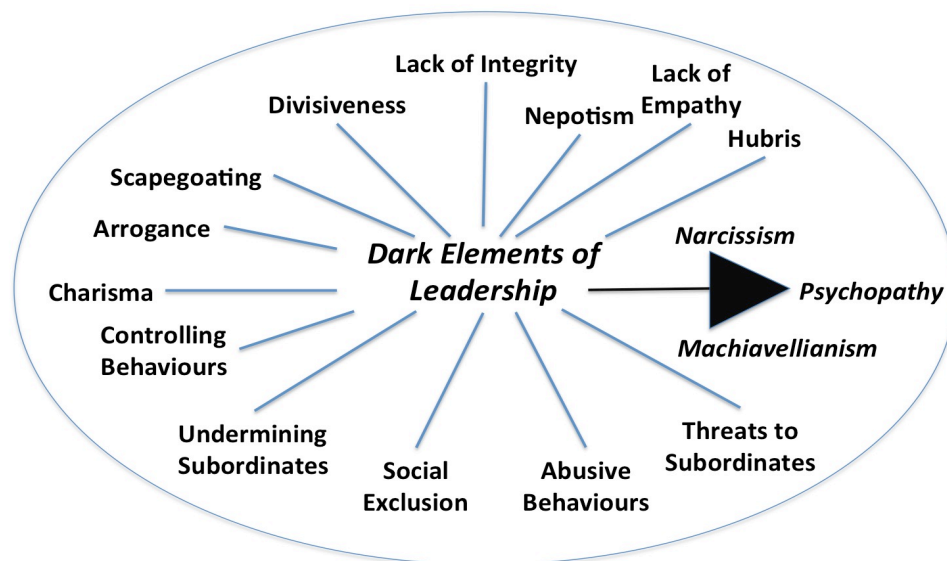
Haslam et al's fourth issue relates to the transformative nature of the leadership process and the role that inspiration and charisma can play in taking organisational members down a particular strategic route (Haslam et al., 2011). Whilst the concept can be traced back to the work of Weber and therefore has a strong social element, it has also become embedded in the psychological theories around leadership (Friedland, 1964; Joosse, 2014). Perhaps the most infamous example of the negative aspects of charisma is that of Hitler who, though a range of actions, was able to hold large sections of the German population in his thrall (Eatwell, 2006; Lepsius, 2006; Rees, 2012). Charismatic leadership is often something that is also evident in the aftermath of a crisis and can almost provide a halo effect for the individual almost irrespective of their actions (Bligh et al., 2004; Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999; Pillai, 1996).

The final element outlined by Haslam et al concerns the need to ground the leadership work within an empirical context. This tends to prove problematic within the crisis management area due to the relatively rare nature of such events and the difficulties that exist in gaining access to organisations that are undergoing a crisis. Typically, much of the work will be case-driven and retrospective and should include some of the more negative aspects of leadership as well as the positive attributes.

In order to frame crisis leadership within the holistic setting advocated by Haslam et al, we can highlight a range of dark leadership behaviours that may interact with a range of other factors to generate a crisis. Figure 4, highlights some of the issues that have been identified as forming part of the darker aspects of the leadership process. This is not meant to be an inclusive listing but rather meant to be illustrative of the broad spectrum of leadership characteristics that can impact on the generation of crisis conditions within an organisation. An obvious starting point here is with that wide body of work that deals with the so-called “dark triad” of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism and which has a potential impact on the ways in which organisation’s operate in a potential “toxic triangle” of leaders, followers, and environment (Padilla et al., 2007). The work on the dark triad has largely pointed to the negative role that the interactions between these characteristics can play in shaping organisational performance (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Boddy, 2011, 2014; Fraher, 2014; Jonason & Tost, 2010; Paulhus & Williams, 2002), although there is partial evidence that points to some, albeit limited, positive aspects of those behaviours (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). There are difficulties associated with an effective determination of some of the main elements of these dark behaviours and there are overlaps that exist between some of the terms, especially those in the dark triad (Ghaemi, 2011; Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). Some of the behaviours identified in

Figure 4 are also indicative of some of the characteristics of the dark triad, but are not the sole preserve of those behaviours. One of the likely outcomes relating to the interactions between these behaviours concerns the ways in which the organisation deals with risk and the provision of controls.

Figure 4: Dark elements of leadership



(adapted from information in Lipman-Blument, 2005; Pelletier, 2010; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006)

If organisational leaders do not see certain event scenarios as plausible, then it is unlikely that they will put controls in place to deal with them. One example of such behaviour can be found in a major bank where the chief executive removed all of the perimeter protection vehicle mitigation from the corporate headquarters plan, because he felt that it was expensive and ruined the appearance of the site². Following that individual's departure, the organisation had to retrofit protective

² This point was made anonymously by the head of corporate security for that particular bank on the understanding that the bank's name would not be revealed.

security measures, at considerable cost, to deal with the potential threats from vehicle borne improvised explosive devices and other potential threats to the organisation's security. As this individual was an extremely dominant leader, no effective challenge to his view was made, despite the fact that there was clear historical evidence supporting the use of VBIEDs against the banking sector (Rodoplu et al., 2005; Rogers, 2000). One can also point to this individual's habit of undermining subordinates and his tendency towards displaying controlling behaviours as being possible factors in both shaping this decision and the lack of effective challenge by corporate security professionals within the bank. Another characteristic of this leader was the tendency to recruit and promote individuals who were supportive of his managerial style. This lack of leadership integrity and nepotistic approaches to recruitment and promotion have also been seen as factors in shaping the wider organisational culture and creation of a sycophantic environment (McKenna, 1996; Schütz & Bloch, 2006; South & Matejka, 1990). Whilst it is not possible to generalise from one example to a wider set of corporate behaviours, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the power held by individuals can be a factor in shaping their behaviours (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Haslam et al., 2011; Owen, 2012).

Some of the work on dark leadership behaviours has focused on the relationships that exist between those leadership traits and the approach taken towards corporate social responsibility (CSR) by the organisation (Boddy et al., 2010a; Boddy, Ladyshevsky, & Galvin, 2010b). At its core, CSR is a reflection of the values that an organisation places on key activities and it has been argued that the approaches taken to CSR can also result in the incubation of crisis (Tombs & Smith, 1995). Again, one might argue that many of the negative behaviours shown in figure 4 would not be expected in an organisation that espouses a CSR approach to its operations. If we see leadership as central to the CSR process, then the link between

the core beliefs, values and assumptions held by those individuals will be significant factors in shaping the processes around crisis incubation and particularly in terms of framing the controls that are in place to deal with potential failures (Tombs & Smith, 1995).

Figure 5 contextualises the dark elements identified in figure 4 within the opening phases of a crisis – namely, the crisis of management and the operational crisis. These dark elements can be considered to shape the incubation phase of a crisis by helping to create the pre-conditions for failure and to undermine attempts at developing trust, building respectful interaction, and the development of mindful organising. They can also be seen to undermine the capabilities of an organisation to respond to a crisis event once the event has begun. Thus, at one level, these dark characteristics can contribute to the causal factors associated with a crisis and also undermine the organisation’s abilities to deal with the task demands that it generates.

Figure 5: Dark leadership and the onset of crisis



Taken as a whole, the elements identified in figure 5 represent the complex landscape of issues that integrates the negative aspects of leadership with the processes around the incubation of failure, through to the emergence of and response to a crisis event. At one level, it is clear that the range of dark behaviours highlighted could contribute to the development of a problematic operating culture within an organisation. For example, the domineering behaviours of leaders and the undermining of subordinates would lead to problems around information flows and weak signal detection such that potential failures would not be reported up the 'chain of command' within the organisation. Given that the identification of weak signals can be problematic in organisations that function normally (Fischbacher-Smith & Fischbacher-Smith, 2014), then anything that impairs the willingness of staff to report concerns will erode this capability still further. It is also likely that these constraints will become more apparent during the operational phase of a crisis

The relationships between negative aspects of leadership and crisis are not, however, clear cut. In a controversial claim, Ghaemi highlights what could be seen as an apparent dichotomy around the role that psychological factors can play within the processes of crisis management. His argument is that:

“...in at least one vitally important circumstance *insanity* produces good results and *sanity* is a problem. In times of crisis, we are better off being led by mentally ill leaders than by mentally normal ones” - (Ghaemi, 2011) p. 2.

He goes on to state that the:

“Four key elements of some mental illnesses – mania and depression – appear to promote crisis leadership: *realism, resilience, empathy, and creativity*” - (Ghaemi, 2011) pp. 3-4.

This perspective opens up a series of avenues for debate around the role that leadership does play in crisis and whether those that are charged with managing the organisation in a steady-state environment are the best to manage it under crisis

conditions. One might argue that as those charged with managing the organisation prior to the crisis had some responsibility for the incubation of failure, then they might not be best suited to dealing with the crisis itself.

A central element of this process concerns the processes by which leaders, and those that follow them, have the capabilities to deal with the task demands associated with transitions from a stable state to a more complex or chaotic one and this remains a challenge for further empirical research around the performance of crisis management teams. More recent work has highlighted the positive benefits that disorders such as ADHD may give in terms of an individual's capabilities and that these might be well-suited to the task demands of crisis situations:

“According to parents, teachers, and some researchers, doctors and anthropologists, children with ADD/ADHD also tend to: be free thinkers, move “outside the box,” approach problems from a nonlinear perspective, show heightened abilities to engage in synthesised thought, and gravitate towards a general instability associated with creativity “ - (Trammell, 2014), p. 228.

The abilities to function in a non-linear way in an organisational setting where emergent conditions generate complexity would be an attribute that is well-suited to a crisis management team. Here the creativity that is generated by such free-thinking individuals would correspond to the skill set required of such teams (Smith, 2000a)

What is evident is that our understanding of the role that leadership can play within a crisis is still open to debate but it is clear that the interaction between leadership, followership, and the environment in which the organisation operates are all key factors in developing this understanding. There are some challenges around the role that regulation and external governance arrangements can play in the process of shaping leadership behaviours (Mulvey & Padilla, 2010) and this is also an issue that has been seen as important within the crisis management literature (Elliott & Smith, 2006; Tombs & Smith, 1995; Turner, 1978). Thus, the role of regulation, the nature of the agencies involved in the regulatory process, and the complexity

generated by the resultant task environment seem likely to be areas where the interplay between destructive leadership and crisis management is in need of further attention (Elliott & Smith, 2006; Mulvey & Padilla, 2010).

The move away from traditional behavioural models of leadership, in which the actions of leaders are evaluated through the lens of a rational actor model, has allowed the transactional and charismatic approaches to place values, beliefs, and the emotional aspects of leaders at the core of the leadership process (Yukl, 1999). In that respect, these approaches to leadership have much in common with work on crisis management where the core beliefs, values, and assumptions of key organisational decision-makers are seen to lie at the core of the development of a crisis prone or prepared culture (Mitroff et al., 1989; Mitroff et al., 1988). Similarly, the emotional characteristics of crisis management have also begun to attract attention, recognising the relationships between tacit knowledge and emotion (Sayegh et al., 2004) within the sensemaking process (Weick, 1988, 1990, 1993). Other work has focused on the use of mindful organising as a means of coping with the emergence of crisis conditions (Butler & Gray, 2006; Gebauer, 2013; Sutcliffe, 2011; Weick, Roberts, & Obstfeld, 1999).

A particular body of work that is relevant to any discussion of crisis leadership concerns the development of what have been termed high reliability organisations (La Porte, 1996; Roberts, 1990). High reliability organisations (HROs) are contextualised as operating within an uncertain and emergent environment, where the potential threats are high (Bagnara, Parlangeli, & Tartaglia, 2010). These are organisations whose activities are rich in the potential for failure but which have developed ways of leading and managing that help to prevent those potential failures from being realised in practice. The task demands facing HROs are invariably high and the complexity within their operations invariably prevents the rigid development

of formal contingency plans in an attempt to deal with all potential outcomes. This complex setting requires the development of a series of dynamic responses that operate at all levels of the organisation. In this context, HROs seek to manage the uncertainty within the system by constantly adapting to the challenges that occur at the local level, and aim to do so without reference to senior managers. This process - one of respectful interaction (Sutcliffe, 2011) - implies that staff are trained, empowered, and trusted to make sensible decisions about the threats within the system and the actions needed to deal with them. As such,

“HROs develop capabilities to detect, contain and bounce back from inevitable errors that are part of an indeterminate world. The hallmark of an HRO is not that it is error-free but that errors do not disable it”. (Sutcliffe, 2011), p. 137.

In part, the approach taken to leadership within the HRO is allow those further down the organisational hierarchy to take responsibility for managing the task demands of the system. Within such a context, the trust between organisational members is seen as being of critical importance in shaping behaviours (Cox, Jones, & Collinson, 2006).

For organisations that display many of the darker traits of leadership, the provision of trust is likely to prove problematic and so the elements of a high reliability approach are unlikely to exist. Whilst the high reliability approach has been criticised (Leveson, Dulac, Marais, & Carroll, 2009; Sagan, 1993), it does offer some potential for understanding processes around transformational leadership and followership (Bellamy, Crawford, Marshall, & Coulter, 2005; Kellerman, 2008) and especially within conditions of crisis (Rousseau, 1989).

Conclusions

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; now I know in part” - (1 Corinthians 13: 12-13)

This chapter has sought to contextualise the processes around the darker aspects of leadership and to set them within a crisis management framework in which both the incubation of crisis potential as well as the actual damaging event are seen as an integrated process. It has sought to provide a context in which leadership can be seen to be a double-edged process that can, on the one hand, generate the conditions for crisis and, on the other, can also serve to bring that crisis back under control. The chapter has set out some of the main theoretical aspects of crisis management as a means of using that theoretical lens to provide counter perspectives to the dominant heroic view of leadership under conditions of crisis. Much of the literature around crisis leadership has framed the discussion in terms of the operational phase of a crisis, in which leadership is seen as an important element in the control of the event. The argument developed here is that leadership can also be an important factor in the processes that lead to the development of a crisis in the first place. If we fail to see the crisis management process as an integrated whole, then we will only ever develop a partial understanding of the role that leadership can play within it.

The chapter has outlined the importance of adopting a holistic approach to dealing with both leadership and the management of crises. In particular, a number of multi-level and transformational processes are seen as being of importance in shaping the nature of a damaging event and which serve to move the organisation from a position of relative order to a more chaotic state. These processes include: the role that leaders and senior managers play in the development of fractures in organisational controls; the manner in which shifts in environmental conditions can

expose these vulnerabilities; and the part played by insiders in triggering crises. Leadership actions and behaviours may also help to generate gaps in understanding, control, and information flows that are essential to dealing with the local adaptations that occur within organisations in response to shifts in the environment. These adaptations can move the organisation to a new systems-state in which the control processes in place are inadequate to deal with the new set of task demands. Poor leadership practices can fail to identify these gaps by inhibiting the identification of weak signals and early warnings whilst maintaining the façade of being in control. The interactions between those who lead the organisation and those who work at the operating core represent an important relationship in terms of shaping the information that is collected and communicated around early warnings. Whilst leader behaviour is one part of that process, it is also necessary to consider the roles played by followers within the crisis incubation process. The threats generated by insiders can also be damaging and they may be a response to the behaviours of those who lead the organisation. At one level, this can be as a result of resistance to management actions that are seen to be problematic; or it can be through the generation of multiple weak links within the organisation through weak recruitment practices that lead to the promotion of individuals beyond their level of competence. The complex interplay between leaders and followers combined with the transformations that take place under conditions of crisis can be seen to be essential challenges in terms of shaping our understanding of the role that leadership can play within crisis generation and response. In particular, the role that leadership can play in shaping the filtering of information flows within the organisation is an important aspect of the incubation process, and one that is exacerbated by dark leadership behaviours, the generation of a sycophantic culture, and the inhibiting of the organisation's abilities to learn from prior mistakes.

This chapter has set out some of the parameters of those relationships but it is clear that more work is required in order to fully understand both the double-edged role that leadership can play in crisis and the attributes that are needed to cope with the processes around transitions between crisis states. Research is needed that explores the role that leadership theory can play in shaping our understanding of the move away from an ordered systems state to one that is chaotic. In particular, the ways in which leadership theory can inform work around the performance of crisis management teams can be seen to be an important area of enquiry. This research needs to be carried out in real world settings rather than in a laboratory context, and this remains a significant challenge for the academic community in terms of access to organisations prior to a crisis.

A key challenge for leadership is the manner in which it is able to deal with uncertainty. This raises questions around the role of expert judgements in dealing with risk in complex socio-technical systems, the manner in which regulation and governance shapes leadership behaviours, and the difficulties of managing complex interactions across space and time. The interaction between knowledge construction, the management of uncertainty and the role of expertise therein, and the ways in which governance can be enacted within the context of crisis management, all present leadership theory and practice with a significant set of challenges.

Finally, leadership and crisis management theory can be seen as being potentially synergistic – each has a considerable amount to offer the other. Both bodies of work adopt a transformational perspective on the ways in which organisations deal with uncertainty and how changes in the environment can expose the weakness in controls. The nature of those transformations is such that the challenges that we face are ever evolving and our understanding of the interactions between crises and leadership processes will remain incomplete as a consequence.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does it mean to say that there is a 'double-edged' relationship between leaders and crises?
2. What are the benefits and limitations of viewing crisis leadership and management as part of lifecycle?

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EDITED BY JOHN STOREY

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