

# Leadership Strategies, Employee Engagement, and Organizational Resilience: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Global Crises

Moira Kelley  
Business Administration - Management  
March, 2026

Faculty Adviser: Marion Eberly, Ph.D.

Essay completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Global Honors,  
University of Washington, Tacoma

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## Table of Contents

1. Abstract .....	2
2. Introduction .....	3
3. Body of Work .....	5
○ Crisis Leadership: Theoretical Foundations .....	5
○ Employee Engagement and Organizational Resilience .....	8
○ Psychological Safety and Trust .....	11
○ Cross-Cultural and Global Perspectives on Crisis Leadership .....	15
○ Case Study Analysis: Leadership Responses During the COVID-19 Crisis.....	18
○ Synthesis and Conceptual Model.....	21
○ Gaps and Future Research Directions .....	23
4. Conclusion .....	25
5. References .....	26

## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted a prolonged and multifaceted global crisis that significantly disrupted organizational operations, employee well-being, and leadership practices across sectors and geographic regions. This literature review examines how leadership strategies influence employee engagement and organizational resilience during global crises, with particular emphasis on empirical findings from the COVID-19 pandemic. Looking at interdisciplinary research from organizational psychology, management, healthcare leadership, and cross-cultural studies, the review synthesizes evidence demonstrating that leadership behaviors grounded in transparent communication, empathy, and employee empowerment are central to sustaining employee engagement under crisis conditions.

Across diverse organizational and cultural contexts, psychological safety and trust consistently emerge as key mediating mechanisms linking leadership behavior to employee engagement and resilience outcomes. When leaders communicate clearly, demonstrate empathy, and empower employees to participate in decision-making, employees are more likely to remain engaged during periods of disruption. The review further highlights cross-cultural similarities and differences in crisis leadership practices, emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive, human-centered leadership approaches.

By integrating crisis leadership theory with employee engagement and resilience research, this paper proposes a conceptual model positioning leadership as the primary driver of engagement-mediated organizational resilience. The findings offer practical implications for organizations seeking to strengthen crisis preparedness and inform future research on leadership development, engagement strategies, and long-term organizational resilience.

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic stands as one of the most significant global disruptions in modern organizational history, fundamentally reshaping how organizations operate and how employees experience work. Businesses across industries were forced to rapidly adapt to remote and hybrid work environments, supply chain disruptions, public health uncertainty, and widespread psychological strain among employees. These sudden and sustained disruptions exposed vulnerabilities in traditional organizational structures and highlighted the critical role that leadership plays in navigating uncertainty and maintaining stability.

While leadership and management are often discussed together, they represent distinct yet interconnected functions within organizations. Management typically focuses on maintaining order, coordinating processes, and ensuring operational efficiency under relatively stable conditions. Leadership, in contrast, involves interpreting uncertainty, inspiring direction, and motivating individuals toward shared goals, particularly during periods of disruption. Scholars have long noted that while management emphasizes planning and control, leadership becomes especially important during crises because it enables organizations to interpret complex events and mobilize collective action (Riggio & Newstead, 2022).

Research on crisis response further demonstrates that organizations frequently struggle when leadership communication is unclear or fragmented. Boin, Hart, McConnell, and Preston (2010), in their analysis of Hurricane Katrina, show that ineffective leadership coordination and communication failures significantly undermined the crisis response. These findings show how crises expose the limitations of purely managerial approaches and underscore the importance of leadership behaviors that provide clarity, meaning, and emotional support for employees.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations were required not only to maintain productivity but also to support employees experiencing anxiety, burnout, and social isolation. Within this context, the concept of organizational resilience has become increasingly important. Organizational resilience refers to an organization's ability to anticipate, adapt to, and recover from disruptive events while continuing to function effectively. Rather than simply surviving a crisis, resilient organizations are able to adjust their strategies, support their workforce, and learn from disruption in ways that allow them to sustain performance over time. As a result, leadership expanded beyond traditional administrative roles to encompass communication, empathy, and trust-building. Leaders who communicated transparently demonstrated concern for employee well-being, and empowered employees to adapt to changing conditions played a critical role in sustaining engagement and maintaining organizational functioning during prolonged uncertainty.

Examining leadership at the global level is particularly important because the COVID-19 crisis affected organizations across diverse cultural, economic, and institutional contexts. Although the pandemic was a shared global event, leadership responses and employee experiences varied significantly across regions due to differences in cultural values, communication norms, and organizational hierarchies. Cross-cultural leadership research suggests that expectations regarding authority, communication, and employee autonomy differ widely between cultures, which can influence how leadership behaviors are interpreted by employees (Meyer, 2019).

Understanding leadership during global crises therefore requires attention to both universal leadership principles and culturally specific leadership practices. By examining leadership responses across multiple countries and organizational settings, researchers can

identify strategies that consistently support employee engagement while also recognizing how cultural differences shape leadership effectiveness.

This paper argues that leadership strategies grounded in communication, empathy, and employee empowerment are central to sustaining employee engagement and organizational resilience during global crises. A review of recent studies examining organizational responses to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that psychological safety and trust function as key mediating mechanisms linking leadership behavior to employee engagement and organizational performance. While these leadership principles appear consistently important across regions, their application must be adapted to different cultural contexts in order to effectively support employees and sustain organizational resilience.

## **Crisis Leadership: Theoretical Foundations**

Crisis leadership differs significantly from leadership in stable organizational environments due to the heightened levels of uncertainty, time pressure, and emotional stress that crises create. Leaders must often make rapid decisions with incomplete information while simultaneously maintaining employee morale and coordinating organizational responses. As a result, effective crisis leadership requires skills that extend beyond traditional managerial functions such as planning and operational control. While management typically focuses on maintaining stability and efficiency, leadership becomes particularly important during crises because it helps organizations interpret uncertainty, mobilize collective action, and maintain employee commitment during disruptive events (Riggio & Newstead, 2022).

Riggio and Newstead (2022) conceptualize crisis leadership as a dynamic process involving sensemaking, sense-giving, and coordinated action. Sensemaking refers to leaders' ability to interpret complex and rapidly evolving situations, while sense-giving involves communicating those interpretations to employees in ways that reduce uncertainty and provide direction. During crises, employees frequently experience confusion, anxiety, and ambiguity about organizational priorities. Effective leaders therefore play a critical role in translating uncertain events into clear narratives that help employees understand both the nature of the crisis and the organization's strategic response. When leaders successfully engage in this sensemaking and sense-giving process, they reduce uncertainty and align employee behavior with organizational goals.

The importance of leadership communication during crises is widely supported in empirical research. Through consistent messaging, transparency, and clear guidance, leaders can reduce ambiguity and maintain employee engagement even in highly uncertain environments. Conversely, when leadership communication is unclear or inconsistent, uncertainty can spread throughout the organization, contributing to employee disengagement, reduced morale, and declining productivity.

Balasubramanian and Fernandes (2022) further develop the theoretical understanding of crisis leadership through a validated crisis leadership model developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their research identifies several key competencies that enable leaders to respond effectively to large-scale disruptions. These competencies include decisiveness, ethical decision-making, emotional intelligence, communication clarity, employee empowerment, adaptability, and collaborative problem-solving. Collectively, these competencies emphasize that effective crisis leadership requires both strategic decision-making capabilities and relational leadership

skills. Leaders who combine task-oriented action with empathy and emotional awareness are more successful in sustaining employee trust and organizational stability during crises.

The importance of leadership visibility and communication is particularly evident in healthcare environments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kaul, Shah, and El-Serag (2020) highlight how healthcare leaders were required to provide frequent updates, maintain visible leadership presence, and support frontline workers who were experiencing extreme pressure and elevated health risks. Transparent and consistent communication helped healthcare employees understand rapidly changing safety protocols while maintaining confidence in organizational leadership. This form of visible and supportive leadership helped reduce uncertainty among staff and contributed to maintaining operational effectiveness under extraordinary circumstances.

Additional empirical research further reinforces the relationship between crisis leadership behaviors and employee outcomes. Yang et al. (2024) examined crisis leadership behaviors in primary care clinics during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that supportive leadership practices significantly improved staff engagement, workplace trust, and overall well-being. Leaders who demonstrated approachability, empathy, and clear communication were more likely to foster positive employee outcomes even under highly stressful conditions. These findings suggest that crisis leadership is not solely defined by strategic decision-making, but also by the relational behaviors that influence how employees experience organizational change during crises.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also prompted broader discussions about how leadership practices must evolve in the aftermath of large-scale disruptions. Kuofie and Muhammad (2021) argue that post-pandemic leadership increasingly requires adaptability, digital competence, and a greater emphasis on human centered leadership approaches. As organizations adopt remote and

hybrid work models, leaders must develop new strategies for maintaining employee engagement, organizational culture, and effective communication across dispersed teams.

Together, these theoretical and empirical perspectives suggest that effective crisis leadership is characterized by the integration of strategic decision-making, emotional intelligence, and transparent communication. Leaders who are able to interpret uncertainty, communicate clearly, and support employees psychologically are better positioned to sustain employee engagement and strengthen organizational resilience during prolonged crises.

These leadership competencies are particularly important because they shape how employees experience organizational crises. Consequently, crisis leadership directly influences levels of employee engagement, which in turn plays a critical role in determining whether organizations remain resilient during periods of disruption.

## **Employee Engagement and Organizational Resilience**

Employee engagement refers to the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral investment that employees make in their work and organization. Highly engaged employees demonstrate greater motivation, productivity, and commitment to organizational goals. During crises, however, employee engagement becomes particularly vulnerable due to heightened stress, uncertainty, and disruptions to normal work routines. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered employee work experiences across the world as organizations rapidly transitioned to remote or hybrid work environments, faced economic instability, and attempted to manage significant uncertainty regarding public health and organizational operations. Under these conditions, leadership support

and organizational communication became critical factors influencing whether employees remained engaged with their work.

Empirical research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of organizational practices that maintain employee connection and morale during periods of disruption. Chanana and Sangeeta (2020) examined employee engagement strategies in India during the COVID-19 lockdown and found that organizations implementing regular communication practices, virtual collaboration tools, and employee recognition programs were more successful in sustaining employee morale. These initiatives helped employees maintain a sense of belonging and connection to their organizations despite physical distance and social isolation. Similarly, Mustaffa, Lajuma, and Wider (2022) investigated employee engagement during the pandemic in Malaysia and found that leadership support and transparent communication significantly influenced employee engagement levels. Employees who perceived their leaders as supportive and communicative were more willing to adapt to organizational changes and remain committed to their roles.

Leadership communication also plays an important motivational role during crises. Tao et al. (2022) found that leaders who used motivational language, such as messages emphasizing shared purpose, encouragement, and empathy, were able to significantly increase employee engagement during the COVID-19 outbreak. Motivational language helped employees interpret crisis conditions in ways that reinforced their sense of meaning and organizational belonging, which in turn strengthened their commitment to organizational goals.

At the organizational level, employee engagement contributes directly to resilience. Margherita and Heikkilä (2021) analyzed crisis responses among several world leading companies and found that engaged employees were a key factor enabling business continuity

during the pandemic. Organizations that empowered employees to contribute ideas, experiment with new solutions, and collaborate across departments were better able to adapt to rapidly changing conditions. These findings suggest that employee engagement functions as a critical organizational resource during crises because engaged employees are more willing to participate in problem-solving efforts and support organizational adaptation.

The relationship between leadership behavior and employee engagement can also be explained through Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that relationships between employees and organizations are shaped by reciprocal exchanges of support and commitment. When organizations demonstrate care, fairness, and support for employees during crises, employees are more likely to reciprocate with loyalty, commitment, and increased effort. Mustaffa et al. (2022) found that this reciprocal relationship plays an important role in sustaining organizational resilience during periods of disruption. Employees who feel valued and supported by leadership are more willing to contribute additional effort and remain engaged even under difficult circumstances.

However, emerging research suggests that sustaining employee engagement beyond the immediate crisis period presents additional challenges. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations experienced a temporary surge in engagement due to collective solidarity and a shared sense of purpose. Over time, however, prolonged uncertainty and workplace disruption contributed to increasing levels of employee burnout. Gallup (2025) reports that global employee engagement levels declined significantly in the years following the pandemic, with only 21 percent of employees reporting that they felt fully engaged in their work. These findings suggest that while crisis leadership strategies may initially stabilize employee engagement, long-term

organizational resilience requires leadership approaches that prioritize employee well-being, sustainable workloads, and continued organizational support.

The literature demonstrates that employee engagement serves as a critical link between leadership behavior and organizational resilience. Leadership practices that emphasize communication, recognition, empowerment, and support help sustain employee engagement during crises, enabling organizations to adapt to changing conditions and maintain operational effectiveness. As a result, organizations that invest in engagement focused leadership strategies are better positioned to navigate disruptive events and recover more effectively from crisis conditions.

## **Psychological Safety and Trust**

Psychological safety and trust play a central role in shaping how employees experience leadership during periods of uncertainty. Psychological safety refers to employees shared belief that they can express concerns, ask questions, and take interpersonal risks without fear of punishment or negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Trust, closely related to psychological safety, reflects employees' confidence in the competence, integrity, and intentions of their leaders. During crises, both psychological safety and trust become particularly important because employees must rely on leadership guidance to navigate rapidly changing conditions and ambiguous organizational environments.

Research on crisis leadership emphasizes that trust is essential for effective organizational communication during periods of disruption. Riggio and Newstead (2022) argue that trust is a

prerequisite for successful sense giving, the process through which leaders interpret complex events and communicate meaning to employees. When employees perceive leaders as credible, transparent, and supportive, they are more likely to accept leadership interpretations of crisis situations and align their behavior with organizational goals. Conversely, when trust in leadership is weak, employees may interpret leadership communication with skepticism, which can undermine coordination and engagement during crises.

Empirical research further demonstrates that leadership behaviors strongly influence the development of trust and psychological safety in organizational settings. Balasubramanian and Fernandes (2022) found that leaders who demonstrate empathy, ethical behavior, and consistent communication are more likely to foster trust among employees during periods of disruption. These relational leadership behaviors signal reliability and concern for employee well-being, which strengthens employees' willingness to rely on leadership guidance. As trust increases, employees are more likely to remain committed to their roles and contribute to organizational adaptation efforts during crises.

Evidence from healthcare organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic further illustrates the importance of psychological safety in crisis environments. Healthcare workers faced unprecedented workloads, high emotional stress, and rapidly evolving safety protocols. Under these conditions, employees needed to feel comfortable raising concerns, reporting errors, and suggesting improvements to clinical processes. Yang et al. (2024) found that supportive crisis leadership behaviors, such as leader accessibility, empathy, and clear communication significantly improved staff engagement and well-being in primary care clinics. Employees who perceived their leaders as supportive were more willing to voice concerns and contribute ideas for improving crisis response strategies.

Similarly, Abdul Rahim et al. (2024) examined crisis leadership competencies within public healthcare systems and found that communication clarity, emotional intelligence, and collaborative problem-solving were essential leadership capabilities for maintaining trust and psychological safety during large scale emergencies. These competencies enable leaders to create environments where employees feel both supported and empowered to contribute to organizational decision-making during periods of uncertainty.

The importance of psychological safety and trust is also evident when comparing leadership practices across different organizational sectors. In the education sector, leaders were required to rapidly transition to online learning environments while simultaneously addressing the emotional well-being of both teachers and students. Crawford (2025) notes that educational leaders faced a dual responsibility of supporting staff while maintaining educational continuity for students. Schechter (2022) similarly found that school leaders who demonstrated technological competence and emotional support were more successful in maintaining teacher engagement and retention during the pandemic.

In the technology sector, the widespread transition to remote work allowed organizations to rely more heavily on decentralized decision-making and employee autonomy. Leaders who adopted transformational and empowerment-oriented leadership styles were better able to sustain engagement by focusing on outcomes rather than monitoring employee activity. These approaches encouraged employees to take ownership of their work while maintaining alignment with organizational objectives.

In contrast, manufacturing organizations faced different challenges because many employees were required to remain physically present in the workplace. Leaders in these environments had to balance strict safety protocols with efforts to maintain employee morale and

trust. While physical safety measures such as protective equipment and distancing policies were essential, organizations that also addressed psychological safety and communication were better positioned to maintain employee engagement during the crisis.

Leadership communication also plays a key role in strengthening trust during crises. Tao et al. (2022) found that leaders who used motivational and meaning-making language, communication that emphasizes shared purpose, encouragement, and empathy were more successful in fostering employee engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. This form of communication helps employees interpret crisis conditions in ways that reinforce organizational purpose and strengthen their sense of belonging.

Psychological safety also enables organizations to adapt more effectively during crises by encouraging employees to share ideas, identify problems, and experiment with new solutions. When employees feel safe acknowledging mistakes or proposing alternative approaches, organizations become more capable of learning and innovation under pressure (Edmondson, 1999). Without psychological safety, employees may withhold important information or avoid taking initiative, which can limit an organization's ability to respond effectively to rapidly changing circumstances.

Overall, the literature suggests that psychological safety and trust serve as critical mediating mechanisms linking leadership behavior to employee engagement and organizational resilience. Leaders who communicate transparently, demonstrate empathy, and encourage employee participation create environments where employees feel safe contributing ideas and collaborating during crises (Dirani et al., 2020; Edmondson, 1999). These conditions strengthen employee engagement and enable organizations to respond more effectively to complex and disruptive events.

Although the importance of trust and psychological safety appears consistent across organizations, cultural differences influence how leadership behaviors are interpreted by employees, making cross-cultural perspectives an important consideration in understanding crisis leadership effectiveness (Hofstede, 2001).

## **Cross-Cultural and Global Perspectives on Crisis Leadership**

Leadership effectiveness during global crises cannot be fully understood without considering the influence of cultural context, as cultural norms shape expectations regarding authority, communication, and decision-making across societies (House et al., 2004; Hofstede, 2001). As a result, leadership practices that are effective in one cultural context may not produce the same outcomes in another (Dorfman et al., 2012). Examining crisis leadership through a cross-cultural lens therefore provides important insight into how organizations sustain employee engagement and resilience globally.

Research conducted in Asian contexts, including India and Malaysia, highlights the importance of relational leadership and frequent communication in maintaining employee engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dirani et al., 2020; Chen & Sriphon, 2021). In collectivist cultures, employees often place strong value on group harmony, interpersonal relationships, and supportive leadership (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). As a result, leaders who demonstrate empathy and prioritize team cohesion may be particularly effective in sustaining engagement during disruption.

In contrast, research examining European organizations emphasizes flexibility, innovation, and decentralized decision-making as key drivers of organizational resilience (Margherita & Heikkilä, 2021). Employees in these contexts often expect greater autonomy and participation in organizational decision-making processes. Leadership approaches that empower employees and encourage collaborative problem-solving may therefore be particularly effective in sustaining engagement within these cultural environments.

Cross-cultural leadership frameworks help explain these variations in leadership expectations. Meyer (2019) suggests that cultural differences influence leadership practices through variations in communication style, hierarchy, and feedback norms. For example, high-context cultures often rely on indirect communication and relational cues, whereas low-context cultures emphasize explicit messaging and direct feedback. These communication differences shape how employees interpret leadership guidance during crises and influence the effectiveness of leadership communication strategies.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework provides another useful lens for understanding cross-cultural differences in crisis leadership (Hofstede, 2001). One important dimension is power distance, which refers to the degree to which hierarchical authority is accepted within a society. In high power-distance cultures, such as Malaysia, employees may expect leaders to provide clear direction and decisive guidance during crises in order to reduce uncertainty. In contrast, employees in lower power-distance cultures, such as the United States, may respond more positively to consultative leadership approaches that involve employees in decision-making processes.

Another relevant dimension is individualism versus collectivism, which reflects the extent to which societies prioritize individual achievement or collective well-being (Hofstede,

2001). In collectivist cultures, such as India, organizational practices that emphasize community and family engagement may be particularly effective in sustaining employee motivation. For example, some organizations implemented virtual events that included employees' families during the pandemic, reinforcing a sense of collective support and shared experience. Uncertainty avoidance also influences leadership expectations during crises. In cultures characterized by high uncertainty avoidance, employees may prefer structured guidance, detailed communication, and clearly defined procedures during periods of disruption. In contrast, cultures that are more comfortable with uncertainty may be more receptive to flexible leadership approaches and adaptive decision-making strategies.

Despite these cultural differences, several leadership behaviors appear to be consistently important across cultural contexts. Transparent communication, empathy, and trust-building practices repeatedly emerge in literature as critical factors supporting employee engagement during crises (Hartnell et al., 2019; Dirani et al., 2020). These findings suggest that while leadership strategies may need to be culturally adapted, certain human-centered leadership principles remain broadly applicable across diverse organizational environments.

At the same time, recent research highlights several important gaps in the study of crisis leadership across cultures. Much of the existing literature remains concentrated in Western contexts, limiting the ability to fully understand leadership dynamics in emerging economies and developing regions. Expanding research in the Global South would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural, economic, and institutional factors shape crisis leadership effectiveness.

Overall, incorporating cross-cultural perspectives into crisis leadership research is essential for understanding how organizations sustain employee engagement and resilience

during global disruptions. By recognizing both universal leadership principles and culturally specific leadership expectations, organizations can develop leadership strategies that are more responsive to the needs of diverse global workforces.

## **Case Study Analysis: Leadership Responses During the COVID-19 Crisis**

The COVID-19 pandemic provides real-world examples of how leadership strategies influence employee engagement and organizational resilience. Organizations across sectors faced sudden operational disruptions, health risks for employees, and rapid transitions to remote or modified work environments. Leadership responses during this period varied significantly, with some organizations prioritizing transparent communication, employee well-being, and psychological safety, while others focused primarily on operational continuity. Examining these differences illustrates how leadership behaviors influence trust, engagement, and resilience during crises.

### **Healthcare Leadership During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

A comparative case study by Glenn, Chaumont, and Villalobos Dintrans (2021) examines public health leadership responses during the COVID-19 pandemic across Chile, France, and the United States. Using Boin et al.'s (2005) crisis leadership framework, the authors analyze how leaders engaged in three key functions: sense-making (interpreting the crisis), decision-making

(choosing response strategies), and meaning-making (communicating and framing the crisis for the public).

The study finds that leadership effectiveness varied significantly across countries, particularly in how quickly and clearly leaders responded to emerging information about COVID-19. In Chile, centralized and decisive action allowed for relatively coordinated national responses in the early stages of the pandemic. In France, leadership evolved over time, with improvements in communication and coordination after initial challenges. In the United States, fragmented messaging and inconsistent coordination between federal and state authorities contributed to public confusion and uneven implementation of health measures.

Across all three contexts, communication emerged as a critical leadership function. Leaders who provided clear, consistent, and transparent messaging were better able to build public trust and support compliance with health guidelines. The study emphasizes that crisis leadership is not only about technical decision-making but also about how leaders frame uncertainty and maintain meaning for both the public and frontline workers.

This case study demonstrates that effective crisis leadership during a global health emergency depends heavily on communication clarity, institutional coordination, and the ability to adapt leadership strategies to rapidly changing conditions.

### **Corporate Leadership Example: Zoom Video Communications**

Another example of crisis leadership occurred at Zoom Video Communications during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. As remote work and virtual communication rapidly expanded worldwide, Zoom experienced an unprecedented surge in users. At the same

time, the company faced security concerns related to “Zoombombing,” in which unauthorized individuals disrupted online meetings and raised concerns about privacy and platform security.

In response, CEO Eric Yuan adopted a strategy centered on transparency and trust-building. The company paused development of new product features for 90 days in order to focus exclusively on improving security and addressing user concerns. Yuan publicly communicated with both customers and employees about the company’s response and progress toward resolving these issues (Yuan, 2020). Transparent communication during this period helped rebuild trust among users while reinforcing employee confidence in leadership. Studies examining technology use during the pandemic highlight how organizations like Zoom were required to rapidly adapt leadership practices to support both employees and users in a rapidly changing digital environment (Wiederhold, 2020).

### **Leadership Gaps in Traditional Manufacturing Firms**

In contrast to organizations that emphasized relational leadership practices, some traditional manufacturing firms responded to the pandemic primarily through operational and physical safety measures. Many organizations implemented workplace protections such as mask mandates, physical distancing policies, and modified shift schedules to reduce the spread of COVID-19. While these actions were essential for protecting employee health, some organizations did not place equal emphasis on the psychological and relational dimensions of leadership during the crisis. Workplace engagement research suggests that organizations that focused primarily on operational safety without addressing trust and psychological safety often experienced greater levels of employee disengagement. In some cases, this disengagement

appeared in the form of “quiet quitting,” where employees perform only the minimum responsibilities required by their roles when they feel disconnected from leadership or organizational purpose (Harter, 2022). These contrasting examples demonstrate how leadership behaviors shape employee engagement and organizational resilience during crises.

Organizations that emphasized transparent communication, employee support, and trust-building were better able to sustain engagement and adapt to rapidly changing conditions, reinforcing the broader argument that leadership behaviors influence resilience through the mediating mechanisms of trust and psychological safety.

## **Synthesis and Conceptual Model**

Across the reviewed literature, several leadership strategies consistently emerge as most effective during global crises. Studies examining leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasize transparent communication, empathy, employee empowerment, and organizational flexibility as critical leadership behaviors that support employee engagement and organizational functioning (Riggio & Newstead, 2022; Tao et al., 2022; Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022). While these studies examine different sectors and cultural contexts, they converge on the idea that leadership behaviors influence employee engagement primarily through relational and psychological mechanisms.

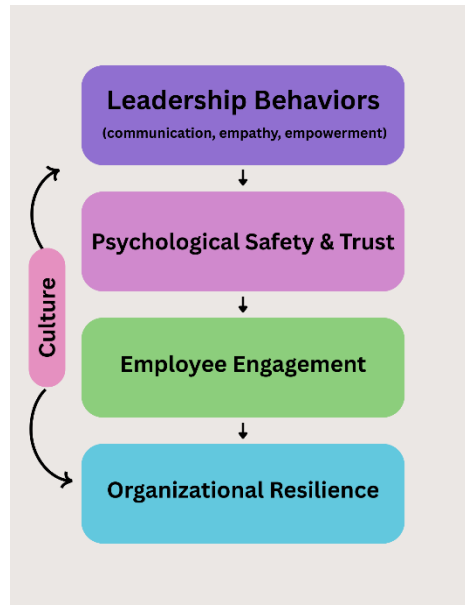
A key theme across the literature is the role of trust and psychological safety as mediating factors between leadership behavior and employee outcomes. Leaders who communicate openly, acknowledge uncertainty, and demonstrate concern for employee well-being foster environments

in which employees feel safe expressing concerns, asking questions, and contributing ideas. These conditions encourage employees to remain engaged even during periods of disruption and organizational change (Yang et al., 2024; Abdul Rahim et al., 2024).

Employee engagement, in turn, contributes directly to organizational resilience. Engaged employees are more motivated to adapt to changing conditions, support organizational goals, and participate in collaborative problem-solving during crises. As demonstrated in studies examining organizational responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, engaged workforces enable organizations to maintain productivity, develop innovative responses to disruption, and recover more effectively from crisis conditions (Margherita & Heikkilä, 2021; Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020).

Based on this synthesis, this review proposes a conceptual model linking leadership behaviors to organizational resilience through the mediating mechanisms of psychological safety, trust, and employee engagement. Leadership behaviors such as communication, empathy, empowerment, and adaptability influence how employees interpret organizational decisions during periods of uncertainty. When employees perceive their leaders as trustworthy and supportive, they are more likely to remain engaged, collaborative, and adaptable.

Ultimately, sustained employee engagement strengthens organizational resilience by enabling organizations to anticipate challenges, respond effectively to disruptions, and recover from crises while maintaining core operations. This conceptual framework highlights the central role of leadership in shaping the psychological and relational conditions that allow organizations to remain resilient during global crises.



The figure above illustrates the proposed conceptual framework in which leadership behaviors influence employee engagement through the mediating mechanisms of trust and psychological safety, ultimately contributing to organizational resilience during crises.

## Gaps and Future Research Directions

Despite the rapid expansion of research on crisis leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, several important gaps remain. Many existing studies rely on cross-sectional research designs, which limit the ability to examine long-term leadership and engagement dynamics. Additionally, much of the available research focuses on large organizations or healthcare institutions, leaving other sectors underrepresented.

There is also limited research examining leadership responses in developing countries, where resource constraints and institutional differences may influence crisis management

strategies. Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies, comparative cross-cultural analyses, and leadership development programs designed to prepare organizations for future crises.

In addition, the long-term organizational consequences of prolonged crises remain underexplored. Early studies of the COVID-19 pandemic focused primarily on immediate crisis response; however, organizations now face challenges related to sustained employee burnout, declining engagement, and what some scholars describe as resilience fatigue following extended periods of disruption. Future research should examine how leadership strategies can support long-term employee well-being while maintaining organizational adaptability.

Technological transformation also presents new challenges for crisis leadership research. The rapid integration of artificial intelligence and digital technologies into the workplace has created new forms of organizational uncertainty. Employees may experience anxiety or distrust when algorithmic systems begin to influence decision-making processes. Future studies should therefore investigate how leadership practices can maintain trust and psychological safety in technology driven work environments.

Collectively, these gaps highlight the need for a more comprehensive and forward-looking approach to crisis leadership research. While the COVID-19 pandemic provided valuable insights into how leaders respond under pressure, it also revealed the limitations of existing frameworks in addressing prolonged, global, and technologically complex disruptions. Moving forward, scholars should adopt more diverse methodologies, and explore the evolving intersection of leadership, employee well-being, and technological change. By addressing these areas, future research can better equip organizations with the knowledge and strategies necessary

to navigate uncertainty, sustain engagement, and build resilience in an increasingly unpredictable global environment.

## **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided unprecedented insight into the role of leadership during global organizational crises. This review demonstrates that leadership strategies grounded in communication, empathy, and employee empowerment play a central role in sustaining employee engagement and organizational resilience during periods of disruption.

Across multiple sectors and cultural contexts, psychological safety and trust consistently emerge as critical mechanisms through which leadership behaviors influence employee outcomes. Leaders who communicate transparently, acknowledge uncertainty, and prioritize employee well-being create environments in which employees feel supported and motivated to contribute to organizational problem-solving efforts.

The findings of this review suggest that resilient organizations are not defined solely by structural preparedness or operational efficiency, but by leadership practices that foster trust, engagement, and adaptability among employees. As organizations continue to face global disruptions, including technological transformation, economic volatility, and public health challenges, investing in human-centered leadership development will be essential for sustaining long-term organizational resilience.

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