LEADING THROUGH TURBULENT TIMES AND CRISES: A PERSPECTIVE OF HUMAN ATTRIBUTES PLAYING A ROLE IN THE ABILITY OF WOMEN LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to highlight the behavioral traits that can enable exceptional leadership capabilities, which can help a leader navigate an organization through a crisis. Therefore, this research, via phenomenological interviews, depicted seven major human behavior traits that played a role in the ability of women leaders to navigate crises in their organizations. A She leadership model was introduced through the research and literature review of this study which may be an essential tool for leaders' worldwide navigating turbulent times and crises in their organizations. The model is a systemic synthesis of leadership where positive leadership, coaching as a leadership style, and Neuro-leadership create a holistic web of effective relationships based on the seven major behavior themes that the research revealed. The She model introduces a different way of leadership which is more about nurturing the organizational relationships and being compassionate to the concerns of the people. The She model puts in the forefront a leadership methodology flexible enough to be utilized in different kinds of cultures and different kinds of crises. The She leader differentiates from the past and even modern male-oriented leadership theories where male leadership is predominantly a top-down approach, whereas the She leadership model emphasizes the circular leadership schema where the She leader is in the middle of the circular shape. This circular leadership schema is crucial when leading during an organizational crisis. This study highlighted the broad areas of women leadership and Neuro-leadership but still it has several limitations which can be considered by future studies. First, only nine participants were interviewed and the results cannot be generalized to all women (or men) leaders who are leading during an organizational crisis. Secondly, the She-model provided by this study was not empirically tested and future studies can test this model to ensure the reliability and practical implications.

Keywords: Leadership Crisis, VUCA, Positive Psychology, Coaching, Neuro-Leadership, Management, Women Leadership.

INTRODUCTION

A crisis is the ultimate test a leader can endure. A crisis can swiftly reveal a leader's capabilities and strengths, but it can also expose her underlying weaknesses. The unpredictable, dramatic, and highly charged events surrounding a crisis profoundly affect the people in an organization and threaten the organization's very existence (Klann, 2003). According to Houlder & Nandkishore (2017), for today's corporate leaders' turbulent times are everything from *"GDP growth and commodity prices to pace of product innovation."* Turbulent *is "Causing disturbance or commotion; disposed or inclined to disorder; tumultuous; unruly; violent. Having a disturbing effect; tending to produce disturbance or trouble"* (Turbulent, 2018). Crises

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generate enormous challenges for leaders who need to be prepared to lead through anxiety, insecurity, confusion, and ambiguity. They also need to be prepared to lead their people and organization and all the stakeholders surrounding their organization, their suppliers, clients, local communities, and government, all that in addition to leading themselves. Leaders must cope with their own emotions, uncertainties, needs, and this can sometimes be their greatest challenge of all (Klann, 2003).

The nature of corporate and business leaders' challenges, operating in a global financial market, is increasingly complex. In recent years the world has been continuously transforming and is facing the roughest economy the world has experienced since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Besides the recent global financial crisis (GFC) and its aftermaths—which are still ongoing and felt in many countries and regions globally— serious global issues continue to increase and escalate. Predicaments such as high unemployment rates in certain geographical regions, income inequality, social justice issues, and terrorism all affect the leadership capabilities of today's leaders (Bawany, 2016). *"In essence, the heart of the leadership challenge that confronts today's leaders is learning how to lead in a VUCA [Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity] world which includes situations of ever greater volatility and uncertainty in a globalized business environment, allied with the needs to deal with scale, complexity and new organizational forms that often break with the traditional organization models and structures within which many have learned their leadership trade."* This entails transformational leadership and systemic transformation, as today's organizations are over-managed and under-led (Ackoff, 1998; Kotter, 2001).

Despite the established research on management and leadership practices, few empirical studies have explicitly examined the roles and behaviors of leaders and managers in affecting employee motivation and productivity during an organizational crisis and/or turbulent times. To fulfill the purpose of generalized research, this study did not define what *"kind"* of crisis each leader has been through; each person is distinct and may perceive and experience a crisis differently from other leaders. Since the researcher of this study has personally experienced the recent Global Financial Crisis (GFC), as a leader, an individual, and as a parent, this study was based on the assumption that leaders who are knowledgeable of what skills and tools to use to cope with crises have the capability to lead effectively and aid their people and organizations during a crisis. Another crucial aspect of this study was that leaders learn from adversity and make ethical choices amid hardship. As organizations are complex adaptive systems facing macro and micro pressures and problems, leaders must ethically respond to complex factors to safeguard the health and survival of the business organization and its people (Elkington, 2017).

The leadership behavior is different in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as compared to multinational and national corporations and the leaders of labor unions must be labor rules and wage rates (Asad et al., 2018). According to Andersen (2010), there are substantial differences in leadership behavior between public and private managers and leaders; from his research, he concluded that they differ in two primary leadership behavioral elements: The public sector managers have a *"change-oriented leadership style"* and *an "achievement motivation profile."* The private sector managers are primarily *"relationship oriented."* Therefore, this study explored private and public organization leaders' behavior during a crisis; it is essential to unveil some significant differences between leaders from the private and public sectors. Moreover, the research explored, via phenomenological interviews, what human factors played a role in the ability of women leaders to navigate a crisis in their organization. In addition, it explored the humane attributes that supported leaders and their people to perform the

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challenging tasks demanded during turbulent times and crises. Based on the above-discussed objectives, the following research questions were developed:

1. RQ1: What human attributes play a role in the ability of women leaders to navigate a crisis in their organization?
2. RQ2: Could women leaders be successful and effective during turbulent times by systemically using a coaching leadership style, positive leadership, positive psychology, and neuroscience knowledge to support their people and their organizations?

The scope of this inquiry was to explore and analyze via a systems methodology, extensive literature review, and phenomenological interviews, the behavior, knowledge, tactics, and mindset women leaders can employ and be aware of, to support the people of their organization during turbulent times and crisis. The human factors are initially themselves, their people, and all stakeholders related to their organization.

DISCUSSION

The literature review highlighted leadership during turbulent times and crises, coaching principles, positive leadership traits, and women as leaders and examines how they interact to demonstrate successful women's leadership during turbulent times in organizations.

Leadership during Turbulent Times and Crises: The Epitome Test of Leadership

The cold, harsh truth about leading through a crisis is that crises are rarely predictable. They rarely follow a script; hence, leaders need to be active and engaged whenever they are called upon and must demonstrate the human attributes needed to withstand the pressures of the crisis within their organization (Baldoni, 2013; George, 2009). Grey (2013) claimed that the pace and pressures on 21st-century leaders drive them to be more resilient than ever before. She describes resilience as the ability to be authentic, flexible, and inclusive and concurs with Koehn (2017) by stressing that before leading others, leaders must be able to manage themselves. Leaders have always had strengths, needs, desires, and fears. If leaders' needs are met, a strong sense of self and happiness ensues. If they are not met, they lead to fear and anxiety. The challenge for 21st-century leadership is to be agile, flexible, inclusive, and resilient while managing their own health and happiness (Grey, 2013; Hanganu-Opatz et al., 2015; Helgesen, 1990; Kezar, 2014).

Leaders Develop through Crises

The financial crisis of 2008-2009 was not caused by subprime mortgages, credit default swaps, or even excessive greed. These were only symptoms of the real problem. The cause of the problem was failed leadership from leaders who did not follow their *"True North"* (George, 2009, Loc. 200). George (2009) defines True North *"as the internal compass of your beliefs, values, and principles that guide you through life."* Studying cases of leaders in crisis is beneficial, but no leader knows how they will react to the predicaments of a crisis unless they experience it themselves. *"Leaders who never get tested until they reach the top may be unable to cope with the inevitable unforeseen events that come with the job."* Some leaders may collapse under pressure. Others become immobilized. Still, others make big mistakes but try to learn from them to become better leaders the next time.

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Leadership for a Hard Future

Hougaard & Carter (2018) discuss the power of leadership and its responsibility to organizations and society as a whole. Leaders must have the courage to face the facts of the challenges lying ahead and be ready to make unpopular decisions when needed and such decisions are much needed in today's VUCA world (Elkington, 2017; Hougaard & Carter, 2018). Business leaders within the 21st-century world increasingly confront intense ethical dilemmas that call for extraordinary moral courage, resilience, and tough-mindedness to choose well amid great complexity.

"Times of adversity often give rise to unpredictability, fear, anxiety, and loss of confidence. Such circumstances call for inspirational leadership, which gives employees the motivation, commitment, and productivity to take advantage of the opportunities lying on the other side of what seems to be a dark curtain of misfortune."

Leaders Handle the Human Responses to a Crisis

Klann (2003) discusses that managing a crisis and providing leadership in a crisis is not the same thing; although each addresses different aspects of a difficult situation, he differentiates the two by saying that crisis management relates mainly to operational issues, while crisis leadership principally deals with how leaders handle the human responses to a crisis, including their own. He continued to say that all people have natural behavioral responses to crises based on each person's needs and emotions. People may not be conscious of this, but their behaviors send messages to others about their underlying needs and emotions. It is within this set of behaviors that the core of crisis leadership is found. At its center, effective crisis leadership is comprised of *"three things— communication, clarity of vision and values, and caring relationships."* Leaders who develop, pay attention to and practice these qualities go a long way toward handling the human dimension of a crisis. *"In the end, it's all about the people"* (Klann, 2003).

Women's Contribution to Leadership

A great leader constantly listens for and to multiple sources of information. He or she asks, what does this tell me about my organization, its culture, and its working (Wolverton et al., 2009)? As Dr. Nancy Badore facilitated and coached her people to improve their interconnectedness, their performance, and the company's productivity, executive coaching for leadership can enable leaders to manage the plentiful challenges today's leaders face with enhanced confidence and capability. This is due to the *"action-oriented nature of the coaching process"* (Reiss, 2015). Thus, leaders will walk away from every coaching session with planned actions to take directly related to their present predicaments and/or challenges.

Positive Leadership

Human experience and scientific evidence concur that emphasizing the negative is necessary as people react to negative feedback more strongly than positive feedback. The dramatic effects have a more significant influence on humans than positive events as human survival instincts, by default, dominate human reactions. Therefore, during turbulent times and crises, leaders tend to have reactionary and protectionist behaviors against adverse events (Spreitzer & Cameron, 2012). Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000), who are regarded as the two

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founding members of positive psychology (Buller, 2013), claimed that psychologists and psychiatry have studied mental illnesses such as depression for many years, anger, and schizophrenia with great success. To better comprehend the other side of the spectrum, researchers began to explore the impact of the positive leadership traits in organizations and individuals, even amidst challenging circumstances. This generated a new course of inquiry named *"positive psychology"* (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) which aims to change the focus of psychology from its preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The Positive Approach to Leadership

Looking more specifically to the workplace environment, Youssef & Luthans (2013) found in a meta-analysis that *"hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism" predict "higher positive outcomes such as performance, satisfaction, commitment, wellbeing, and organizational citizenship behaviors"* as well as lower adverse effects such as *"cynicism, stress, anxiety, turnover intentions, and counterproductive behaviors."* They stated that overall there is growing research evidence that supports the value and effectiveness of positive leadership. Kelloway et al. (2013) focused on the effects of positive leadership concerning employee wellbeing and noted that positive leadership behaviors result in leveraging followers' experience of positive emotions. Cameron (2012) stressed that the *"key is not to avoid or eliminate the negative but to transform it into an opportunity for flourishing."* According to Cameron (2012), positive leadership intentions are not merely creating positive feelings in people so they are happy, but to considerably increase organizational performance. He stated that four strategies document performance improvements in organizations. They are,

1. Positive climate
2. Positive relationships
3. Positive communication
4. Positive meaning

Positive leadership can help in eliminating or reducing the organizational politics. The organizational politics is caused because of individual incompetence, greed for money, fame, power extroverts' behavior, nepotism, management financial interests, nature of organization and change in management (Asad et al., 2020). Therefore, the eradication of such politics is in the agenda of positive leadership as leaders are change agents.

Critics on Positive Psychology

Since the emergence of positive psychology, several critics have charged that it is based on suppositions about human nature and happiness, it failed to provide a sufficient challenge to the methods and approaches it criticizes and does not give adequate attention to the interplay between the individual and his social environment (Buller, 2013). Miller (2008) argued that the new science of positive psychology was founded on a whole series of erroneous arguments; these involve *"circular reasoning, tautology."* Whereas Christopher et al. (2008) concluded that positive psychologists have not dealt adequately with the challenge of rendering credible and illuminating accounts of human flourishing in a post-positivist era and in a pluralistic society.

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Coaching in the workplace, Why Coaching Fail, Coaching as Leadership Style

The coaching concept is a holistic relationship that is concerned with the client's life and experiences. It is client-centered and promotes the client's agenda. The role of a coach is to help clients achieve their goals and answers through inquiry via self-discovery and to support the coachees in a learning process rather than teaching those (Pappas & Jerman, 2015). Coaching and leadership are two sides of the same coin (Hicks, & McCracken, 2011). People usually do not want to be managed, but they want guidance (Hicks, 2014). *"Leadership and coaching go hand-in-hand. A good coach must be able to relate to people in a way that will help them solve problems and pursue their goals"* (Hicks, 2014). A leader with a coaching leadership style approach will establish a collegiate style of communication that will develop relationships and facilitate persuasion and influence. The coaching approach leadership style and the competencies associated with the implementation of coaching and the behaviors associated with coaching can assist any leader in becoming more transformational (Hicks, 2014). De Meuse et al., (2009) examined the effectiveness of coaching. They said, *"The effectiveness of executive coaching is probably related to its overall coaching purpose. The objective of coaching when addressing a 'derailing' executive is to eliminate or modify a behavioral pattern. In contrast, the purpose of developmental coaching is to strengthen or expand a behavioral pattern."*

Neuroscience, Positive Leadership, and Coaching

Leaders and HR practitioners constantly look for new ways of engaging, connecting, and leading people. New neuroscience developments will help us unravel the physiology of leadership performance. Neuroscience is a study of how, when, and how the nervous system evolves. The area focuses on the function of the brain, and while initially classified as a subdivision of biology, it has become a more interdisciplinary science that closely interacts with other fields such as mathematics, linguistics, engineering, informatics, chemistry, philosophy, and medicine (Nordqvist, 2012). Neuroscience has begun to play an essential role in determining leadership and success (Good & Michel, 2013), and its participation in leadership research has grown from personal selection to team cohesion and corporate sustainability. The discipline provides large quantities of feedback to ensure an entity functions smoothly (Hanganu-Opatz et al., 2015). Hyland (2013) attempts to strengthen leadership research with the help of dimensions of thinking, feeling, and knowledge. The field of organizational neuroscience profoundly affects leadership and practice research both in terms of detection and action. The use of neuroscientific hypotheses and methodologies provides enhanced and refined forecasts of successful leadership. An amalgamation of reductionism with John Stuart Mill's Theory of Utility highlights the connection between neuroscience and leadership research. Under the umbrella of utilitarianism, Bentham and Mill shared their differences. Mill's exegesis is simplified in comparison to Bentham's original work (Sandel, 2011; Schuster, 2021).

Positive leadership and coaching are both interdisciplinary fields that combine epistemological foundations and concepts from neuroscience, biology, leadership, psychology, education, and sociology. Leading via concepts of positive psychology, coaching, and neuroscience encompasses the systemic operation of all these complex systems working together holistically. Thus, neuroscience, leadership, positive psychology, and coaching cooperate as separate entities to create a greater whole. According to the concept of emergence, the outcomes of complex systems cannot descend from the characteristics of the competent alone. Hence, as traditionally known, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; and as otherwise stated, *"the*

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properties of the parts cannot be understood except in their context in the whole" (Bello-Morales & Delgado-Garcia, 2015). Emergent properties are properties, which belong to the wholes. *"They do not belong to any parts, and are not aggregates of properties of the parts"* (Findlay & Thagard, 2012). Moving this concept to neuroscience, the brain is a complex system, a whole mechanism composed of its individual parts, working together as differentiated areas that link their neurochemical processes to one another in creating a holistic functional system. Although some linear aspects of brain function endure, like the tasks of the neurons and their firing through neurotransmitter release, the overall output of the brain is like a *"spider web of interconnected processes"* (Siegel, 2012). Coaching, as discussed, is a partnering relationship with clients to provide a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to expand their personal and professional potential, which is particularly important in today's ambiguous and complex environment (ICF International, 2018). This process triggers the neuroplasticity of the brain and creates new pathways to changing and learning. Hence, when leaders apply positive leadership traits and coaching modes, they can create transition mechanisms for optimal leadership and employee performance outcomes by tapping into the functionality of the brain and challenging it to think via alternative paths. Therefore, it creates new neuron connections, creating even more interconnections within the neuroscience, leadership, psychology, sociology, and coaching systems. Learning as a leader to be mindful of cognitive and subconscious states and knowing how to maintain receptivity in a relationship is crucial for any stage of collaboration and development. Leaders can prepare to engage and open themselves to the emergence of integrative connection with others by knowing what neuronactivity has triggered a certain reaction or behavior of an employee (Siegel, 2012).

Conclusion of Literature

Positive leadership, coaching, and neuroscience share the common mission of improving human capacities and bringing about development. Neuroscience provides a path into the biological level of behavior operating in leadership and coaching interactions, which deepens and expands the communication between leaders and employees, coaches, and coaches. In turn, positive leadership and coaching offer to neuroscience a framework of rich human relationships, development, and behavioral change. Today, the relationship between neuroscience and leadership is known as Neuro-Leadership, and it offers stimulating possibilities for research and practice. As this new domain advances, it is wise for leaders, managers, coaches, and educators to be well acquainted with Neuro-Leadership and *"Neuro-Coaching"* literature (Bachkirova et al., 2017). Knowledge about the distinctive functions of the brain enables individuals to gain ample distance from the problematic situation and hence use positive leadership traits to acquire a clear understanding and empathy for both the challenging situation, the people involved, and for themselves (Siegel, 2010). This aids leaders in persuading their people and bringing change for organizational sustainability and development. Brain-based leading, positive leadership, and coaching can create an open and brain-friendly organizational environment where persuasion is the ultimate key to change. *"Persuasion promotes understanding; understanding breeds acceptance; acceptance leads to action"* (Garvin & Roberto, 2005).

Analysis

The qualitative method of phenomenology was used to discover the behavior traits and how women leaders have led during crises and turbulent times. The study was based on the

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interviews of nine women leaders via phenomenological inquiry and analyzed the transcriptions of the interviews via qualitative coding and hermeneutics to discover the essences of their experiences leading during crises and turbulent times. Through this method, the researcher depicted the humane attributes of each organizational leader. The findings were studied and analyzed to detect which aspects aided them in coping with crises and in a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) world.

Phenomenological Inquiry

Phenomenology is used to obtain knowledge about how people think and feel and focuses on what goes on within the person about the phenomenon at hand (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). It assumes that people's world experiences are not as they appear to be, but they are constructed like that by people's consciousness. *"It is a sort of intellectual X-ray vision"* (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Phenomenological research entails the lived experience of a person or a group of people who share a similar phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), which, in this study, involved the experience of women leaders during an organizational crisis. For phenomenological inquiry, data were collected through the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. To get at the essence and/or basic fundamental structure of the meaning of an experience, the phenomenological interview is the principal method of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewee the opportunity to provide a detailed, rich account of her experiences. It also allows the researcher some flexibility to probe and explore interesting areas that may emerge during the interview (Rassool & Nel, 2012). Hence, open-ended questions were asked. The open-ended questions were not restrictive and were solely used to facilitate the interviewee to convey her story.

Data for Research

Creswell (2013) grouped the multiple qualitative methods into five broad research categories. Narrative phenomenological ethnography, grounded study, case study narrative, phenomenology, and grounded theory. Case studies examine groups of individuals participating in a single event or activity, or a single organization, while ethnographers look at entire cultural systems. Interviews, observations, and surveys with open-ended questions are very common in all these approaches. However, phenomenology and grounded theory rely primarily on interview data. Thus, the as the researcher, used a phenomenological inquiry interview approach, she generated a significant amount of raw data (e.g., interview transcripts and copious coding notes) that she had to find a way to securely store and organize this material (Creswell, 2013). Hence, as a phenomenological inquiry interview approach, the researcher explored the human characteristics and attributes those women leaders used to be successful during turbulent times and crises. Thus, raw data (protocols) from interviews were gathered for the phenomenological method of inquiry. The researcher has to protect the data from remaining in their primitive, raw form by recording the dialogue of the sample population and engaging as little as possible in editing. Also, the researcher must have an explicit psychological and linguistic critique of her own perception of the data and his/her cognitive biases (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). The collection of the data for the qualitative methodology for this dissertation was conducted via interviews. Transcriptions of the recorded interviews were used to code, analyze, and interpret the findings. Upon accepting permission, a confidentiality agreement was designed and signed and

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pseudonyms were agreed to be used. Hence, once permission was granted, data were gathered and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Following the interviews, all the protocols (raw data) were transcribed and translated when the original language was not English. Two professional transcription companies produced the transcriptions; a confidential consent form was signed between the transcription companies and the researcher. The interviews were conducted in English or the Greek language, depending on the geographical origin of the participants. Hence the transcriptions were transcribed in the original interview language, and then the researcher, a native Greek-American speaker and an official translator of the Greek Consulate in New York City, translated the Greek language transcriptions.

RESULTS

The participants of this study were nine female leaders who were interviewed. Each woman had the experience of leading people in organizations for over two years and had led her people successfully during a crisis in their organization. The Interviews were video and/or audio-recorded for data analysis; interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Two professional companies were engaged in transcribing the interviews gathered from the participants, utilizing appropriate protocol to assure confidentiality. The transcriptions-raw data came out to be approximately 160 pages of verbatim texts. Thereafter, data analysis commenced; each step is presented in the next section together with the established findings. Participants in the study mainly believed that their ability to communicate the vision of their organization clearly during turbulence and crisis was crucial in keeping their people together, aligned, motivated, and focused on the organization's goals. They all emphasized their experience leading from the center instead of from the top of their team so the communication may flow easier and they have a better feeling of what is happening as well as the needs and concerns of their followers. This way, they would also comprehend what was going on in other departments and higher organization ranks. All participants also felt that data were easily transportable when communication was open and transparent, which helped them navigate predicaments during the organizational crises. Seven participants discussed how supporting and creating a culture and a supportive environment aided them to lead through the turbulence and crises. As they supported their peers and led by example, a supportive culture emerged in their organizations, which increased trust and positive behavior traits. Via the use of dialogue, the supportive environment was created and maintained throughout the crises, which was key to leading through tough times.

Moreover, another essential human attribute that seven participants shared was to be collaborative. Again, by leading by example, these leaders created an environment of mutual trust and collaboration via dialogue and inclusiveness. They asked their people their opinions on organizational decisions depending on their expertise, experience, and knowledge. Furthermore, six participants stressed that being trustworthy and showing trust to their people helped them navigate the crises. They said that creating a trusting environment where each person was equally valued and trusted by the leader herself brought reciprocity, and thus trusting each other to move forward and get through the crisis was a crucial element of their leadership attributes. The fifth major human attribute that five participants shared was being a transparent and honest leader. They shared their experiences of how being transparent and honest helped them gain the

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trust of their followers and other leaders in the organization. This empowered them in many ways to navigate and be successful through the crisis as people supported them and shared their vision that was clearly communicated, as discussed earlier. Another human attribute that five participants in this study experienced was being an empathetic leader. Inclusiveness appeared here again as the leaders felt that being empathetic also meant to *"be one of them."* Understanding their needs and concerns and communicating them to find potential resolutions was part of their empathetic behavioral attribute.

The final human attribute that was raised in this study was being a positive leader. Five of the nine women leaders discussed their experiences of being excited and enthusiastic about their mission to get their people through and out of the mess they were in. They tried to transfer this positivity to their people, as they believed positive energy could get them through the organizational crises with fewer calamities, and possibly via positive energy and positive psychology, new ideas and opportunities may arise.

RESULTS ORINETED DISCUSSION

The women leaders' experiences of leading through crises in their organizations seemed to have been both a curse and a blessing. The human attributes each woman incorporated to navigate the crisis in her organization were a building block of human interaction and human relationships. Wolverton et al., (2009) said that *"a great leader constantly listens for and to multiple sources of information. He or she asks, what does this tell me about my organization, its culture, and its working?"*

The literature review of this study examined theoretical domains relating to women and leadership, leadership during crisis and VUCA, positive leadership, coaching as a leadership style, and their systemic interconnections with Neuro-Leadership. The results indicated seven primary human attributes that the women in this study utilized to lead the human factor through their organizational crisis. These leaders' seven major human attributes were communicative, supportive, and collaborative; they were trustworthy and trusted their people, transparent and honest, empathetic, and used positive energy and positive attitude to inspire and be successful leaders during their organizational crisis.

Being communicative was the first prevalent human attribute this study surfaced. Klann (2003) said that to be successful in providing leadership in a crisis deals with how leaders handle the human responses to a crisis as all people have natural behavioral responses to a crisis based on each person's needs and emotions. Personal communication skills related to appropriate body language and a clear, concise and straightforward writing style are also helpful during a crisis (Klann, 2003). All nine women leaders supported that being communicative was key to their success as leaders during their organizational crisis. One interviewee, Sara, described that, being communicative with a vision helped her people to focus and understand where they needed to go. She further said: *"so anything I can do to help people to come to sort of a shared vision on something."* So [I would tell] my team, *"let's talk about what it might look like, where might we be, what does the organization need, so we know what is needed to help."*

Elkington (2017) stressed the notion of being supportive as *"when you win, I win, and when you hurt, I hurt."* Hence, by helping and supporting each other, everybody wins and suffers less. Being supportive was prevalent in this study as seven out of nine women leaders emphasized supporting their people during the organizational crisis. Collaborative, was another major theme that came out of the interviews with the women leaders. Seven out of nine leaders expressed how being collaborative helped them during their organizational crisis. As discussed

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in the literature review, Bilas & Adeeb (2018) explored team cohesiveness as a vital leadership trait as leaders must create an environment and culture to permit collaboration. They affirmed that to build an effective, cohesive team stems from developing the participants in a team, as to change the world, one must change oneself first (Bilas & Adeeb, 2018).

Trust was another human attribute of women leaders leading their people during an organizational crisis. Six out of the nine leaders interviewed thought that trust was an essential attribute that aided them during their harsh journey. Similarly, one interviewee, Cathy, said that, *"I generally trust people until they prove they're not trustworthy for some reason, trusting them that they will be helpful, and assuming positive regard."* She added that *"I think it would be very difficult to work in an untrustworthy environment."* Baldoni (2013) believed that a leader creates a trusting environment when facing a crisis and leading herself and her people through it. Ellinger & Bostrom (2002) claimed that leaders who succeed with coaching as a leadership style have empathy for and trust others, are less controlling and directing, facilitate the development of their people, are open to feedback and learning, and believe that people are open to learning.

Grey (2013) argued that the pace and pressures on 21st-century leaders drive them to be more resilient- which she defines as being authentic, flexible, and inclusive. This resonates with the findings of this study as authentic, which derives from the Greek word *αυθεντικός* (authentikos), meaning *"Real, actual, genuine; original, first-hand; really proceeding from its real source"* (Authentic, 2002). Hence, the human attribute of being transparent and honest in how they led during their organizational crisis is being an authentic, genuine, and truthful leader. Moreover, another essential major theme was being empathetic. It is the capability to understand or feel what another person is feeling or experiencing from within her frame of reference. That is the ability to place oneself in another person's shoes. In the literature review, empathy was examined from its neuro-scientific aspect. Siegel (2010) defined empathy as *"it is the capacity to create mind sight images of other people's minds. These you-maps enable us to sense the internal mental stance of another person, not just to attune to their state of mind. Attunement is important, but the middle prefrontal cortex also moves us from this resonance and feeling-with to the more complex perceptual capacity to "see" from another's point of view: We sense the other's intentions and imagine what an event means in his or her mind."*

Youssef & Luthans (2012) claimed that as organizational leaders today face extraordinary complexity, to meet the challenges of operating in an ever-changing global context, a new positive approach to leadership is needed. Positive leadership comprises the growing positivity literature and from leadership theories and adult learning theories. Positive leadership can leverage diverse strengths and competencies and enable development and growth over time, both individually and in the local and global environment (Youssef & Luthans, 2012). Considering the findings of this study, in conjunction with the literature review, positive leadership characteristics are embodied in all the major human attributes that surfaced from the interviews. Specifically, positivity was discussed with five out of the nine leaders interviewed. They emphasized using positive energy and a positive attitude to help their people during the organizational crisis.

Implications

The findings of this study are in line with the literature and research that indicate the seven human attributes of the nine women leaders, which are essential when leading during an organizational crisis. As the volatile nature of organizations is a permanent factor of contemporary leadership, it is imperative that leaders have the necessary knowledge and training

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of how to lead the human factor of their organizations. Hence, no matter the type, size, industry, geographical location, and organizational culture, leaders worldwide must acquire the capabilities to lead their human capital effectively. Although the participants in the current study represent a microscopic fraction of the organizational leaders' population, they shared foundational aspects of human attributes that can help all leaders, regardless of gender and ethnicity, be effective during an organizational crisis. With the expectation of economic fluctuations, environmental crises, political disturbances, and other additional unpredictable VUCA world complexities, this knowledge may be proven to be fundamental in leading an organization through a crisis with the least possible casualties. It may even be the key between the success and failure of an organization enduring a crisis. The implications of the current study results are the need to increase executive coaching training for leaders internationally. Leading via concepts of positive psychology, coaching, and Neuro-Leadership involves the systemic process of all these complex systems working holistically. Leaders can prepare to engage and open themselves to exceptional levels of collaboration and connection with their employees by knowing what neuron-activity has triggered an employee's specific reaction or behavior (Siegel, 2012). Thus, neuroscience, leadership, positive psychology, and coaching cooperate as separate entities to create a greater whole.

This study reflects a contribution to leadership knowledge and literature through (a) identification of the seven prevalent human attributes leaders should use to engage with the human factor when their organization is in crisis, (b) the benefits of utilizing positive psychology and coaching philosophy as a leadership style as they possess in their core the seven human attributes found in the research, and (c) the additional benefits leaders may have by being trained in Neuro-Leadership and scientifically know what neuron-activity produces specific reactions or behaviors of an employee. Hence, the leadership training model curriculum should emphasize the following disciplines: leadership theory, positive psychology, coaching, and Neuro-Leadership. The leadership training model curriculum should also include case studies and the relevant lived experiences of the training participants.

CONCLUSION

The premise of this research was based on the notion that being a leader who encourages her people to be much more inclusive, where they would feel like their opinion matters and their ideas and input valued and acknowledged, can encourage a more robust and more sustainable organizational culture that may withstand extreme pressures in a VUCA world. This research suggests that specific behavioral attributes are strongly linked to this capacity and may actually construct it. As a scholar-practitioner, finding a set of specific behavioral attributes that serve the potential to contribute to the capacity of leading organizations and people through turbulent times and crises and producing the She leadership development model (Figure 1) has been vastly fulfilling.

The researcher is deeply indebted to the women leaders globally who comprehend that leading under conditions of extreme complexity and trying circumstances requires human adaptations in cognition and behavior. This study provides a systemic feedback loop to their work. The findings of this research and the She leadership model are one response to the question, *"Why do some organizations and societies successfully adjust and even thrive amid adversity while others fail to do so?"* (Van der Vegt et al., 2015). This study took up the *"grand challenge"* to study how female organizational leaders respond to adversity and what they do to

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succeed. The She Leadership model is the foundation for crafting an evidence-based leadership approach to improving leadership readiness during crises and as a proleptic developmental-behavioral tool for intentionally supporting organizations.

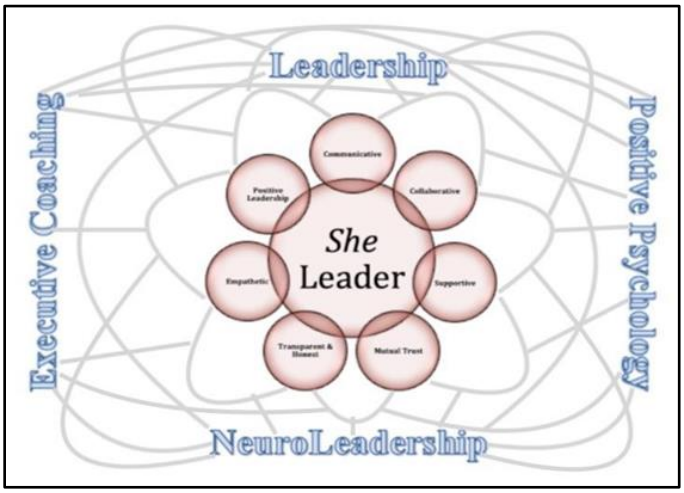

FIGURE 1
***SHE* LEADERSHIP MODEL**

Limitations

The limitations are not concepts designed into the study but instead emerge naturally. Hence, given that there were only nine participants in the study, the results cannot be generalized to all women (or men) leaders leading during an organizational crisis. Also, geographically speaking, the women leaders represented a geographical population primarily in the USA and Europe; hence studying additional women leaders from other continents and countries like Asia, Africa, and Russia could have possibly altered the findings. Also, if men were included in the study again, there could have been a more generalized humanistic concept of which human attributes are vital while leading during an organizational crisis. A final limitation is that this study was part of a doctoral dissertation held to a specific limited budget for the project's undertaking.

Research Recommendations

To justly determine the life experiences of women leaders navigating an organizational crisis, one recommendation that the researcher would like to make would be to consider the women leaders' side and the employees' stories. It may be possible that the employees felt that different or additional leadership human attributes were essential to them and empowered them to be collaborative and supportive with their team and leaders during the organizational crisis. Another recommendation would be to study a male leader group and identify which human attributes they felt aided them in navigating through an organizational crisis. Then, compare the results of the two studies to see the differences and/or similarities of the women versus the men's human attributes and create a gender-free list of prevalent human attributes for successful leadership during an organizational crisis. Moreover, the study would recommend future research on a more geographically diverse population, so leaders from Africa, Asia, and

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Australia are also investigated. Thus, they create a universal list of prevalent human attributes of leaders effectively leading their people during an organizational crisis. The She leadership model conveys an understanding of the broader women's leadership literature. Hence the application of the She leadership model may touch, influence, and be used in other areas as politics (Asad et al., 2020), entrepreneurship, social justice, and more. Lastly, future studies can use the She-leadership model proposed by this study, to analyze the leadership behaviors in small and medium enterprises as leaders' behaviors have a significant contribution in countries gross domestic product (Asad & Kashif, 2021).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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