What Should a Leader Do During a Crisis?

MOM SGSecure@Workplaces

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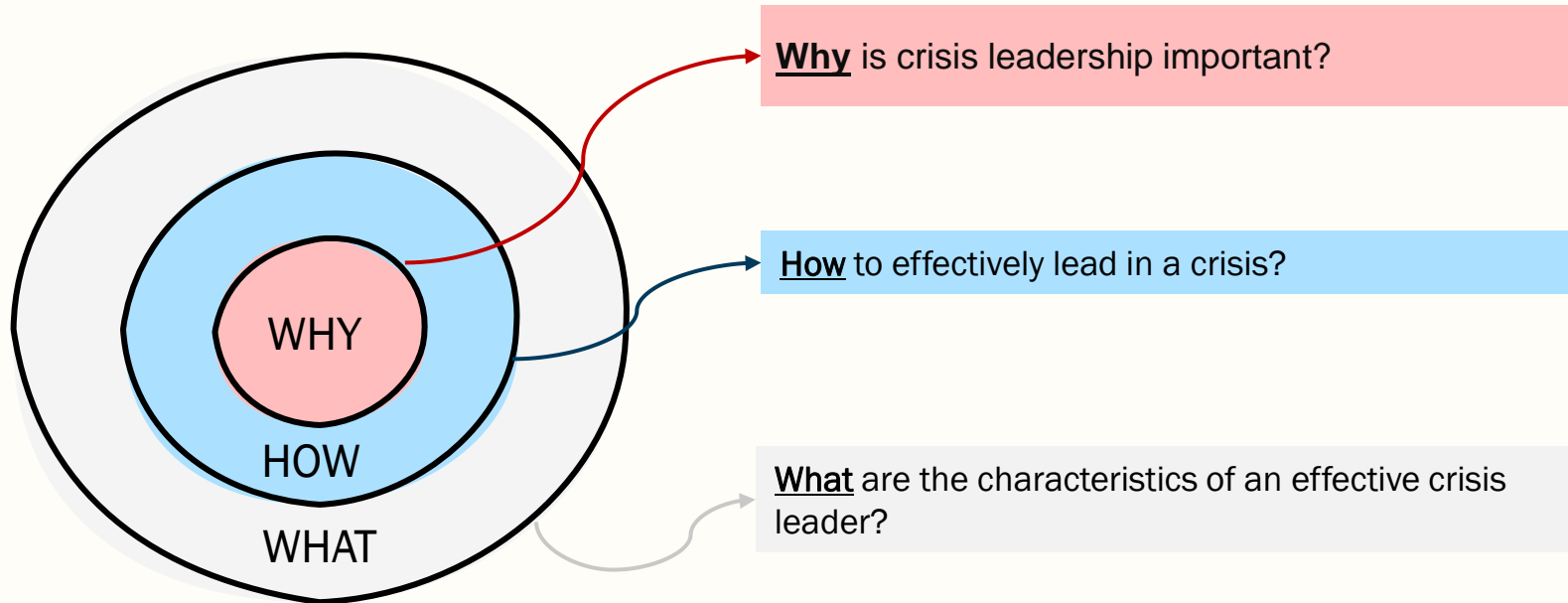SUSS
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Dr Sheryl Chua is a lecturer at Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), Public Safety and Security Programme.

Sheryl was a psychologist with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Her work involved developing the Assessment Centre exercises for the selection and assessment of scholars and high-potential officers. Her research with MHA was in the areas of crisis and command leadership.

She is a certified para-counsellor and is trained in critical incident stress management (CISM), suicide first aid and psychological first aid.

Her research interests include crisis and command leadership, critical incident management, and entrepreneurship.

What I'll be sharing

Why is crisis leadership important?

How to effectively lead in a crisis?

What are the characteristics of an effective crisis leader?

What is Crisis Leadership?

Crisis leadership is the process of leading group members through a **sudden** and **largely unanticipated**, intensely **negative, and emotionally draining** circumstance.

(DuBrin, 2013)

Poll: Crisis Leadership vs. Crisis Management

Crisis leadership and crisis management differ in terms of scale, scope, and characteristics
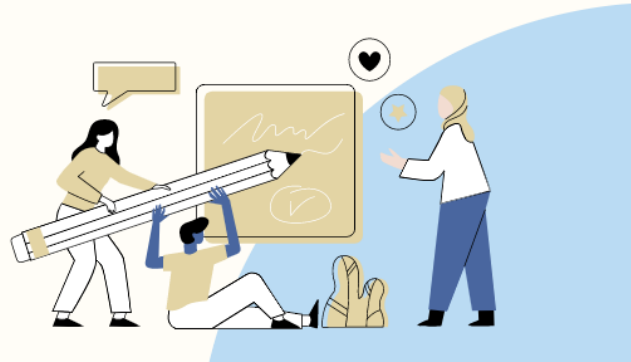
Crisis Leadership	Crisis Management
• Strategic • Proactive • Pre-crisis prevention & preparation	• Tactical • Reactive • Dealing with consequences of crisis

(Boin et al., 2013; Mutch, 2015)
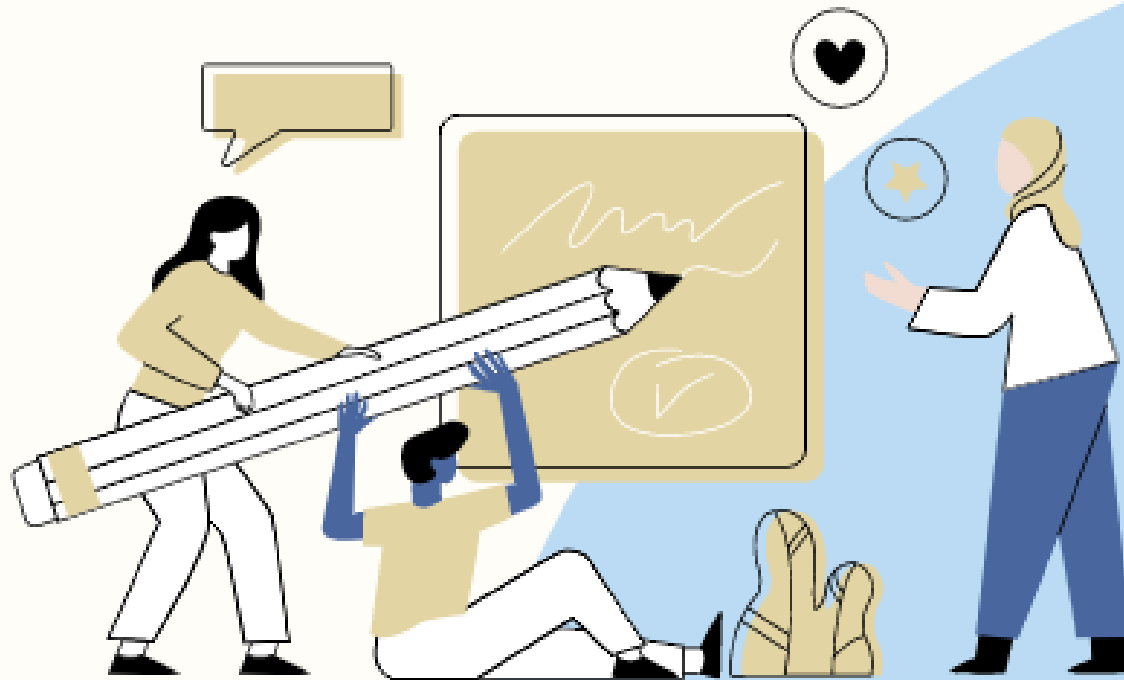
How to effectively lead a crisis?

Pre-Crisis

During Crisis

Post-Crisis

Pre-Crisis

Recommendations for Pre-Crisis

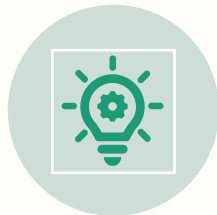Formulate comprehensive crisis plans

Invest in training

Build relationships prior to crisis

Increase capacity for decentralised leadership

Develop Foresight

A crisis plan supports decision-making in a time-pressured situation

- Crisis preparedness is "an indispensable process"

- Alleviates anxiety and cognitive load of leaders and responders

- Priorities:
  - Stabilise situation
  - Ensure safety of employees
  - Resume normal operations asap

(Doyle & Paton, 2017; Jacques, 2012; Leonard & Howitt, 2010; Liou & Lin, 2008; Sheaffer & Brender-Ilaan, 2014)

Issues on crisis plan need to be addressed to ensure effective implementation

Lack of specificity

Unfamiliarity

Failure to account for responses to stress

(Doyle & Paton, 2017; Jacques, 2012; Leonard & Howitt, 2010; Liou & Lin, 2008; Sheaffer & Brender-Ilaan, 2014)

Having a working crisis preparedness policy or framework is required for leading a crisis effectively

Mobilise resources

Address early warning signals

Create a culture of awareness

Integrate scientific or clinical experts' opinions

(Schafer et al., 2010; Tarrant, 2011)

What to include in a crisis management plan?

- Role of crisis management team
- Definition of crisis
- Roles & responsibilities
- Resources
- Activation/deactivation
- Stakeholders mapping
- Guidelines for initial actions
- Checklists
- Call lists
- Crisis communication plan

As leaders are required to make tough calls, they will benefit from intuition-led decision-making

- Coordination, mobilisation, facilitation, adjustment of pre-existing response

- Intuition-led, naturalistic decision-making beneficial in high-stake situations

- Amygdala hijack
  - Associated with poorer choices
  - Overt fixation of the threat

Amygdala

(Boin, 2009; Doyle et al., 2015; McNulty et al., 2018; 't hart et al., 2009)
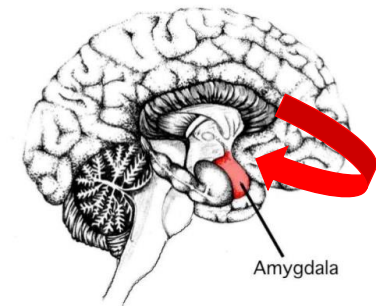
Instinctive reaction training to help to "free up" cognitive space

- Avoid "choking under pressure"

- Emotional modulation techniques – helping yourself and others ground better

- Cross-training help improve coordination across different agencies

Poll: How do you think you might react to a terrorist attack at your workplace?

Delay in communication can be potentially fatal and is therefore imperative for efficient multi-agency communication

- Tapping of social capital for sense-making, resource-sharing

- Utilise anchorage points to gather and relay information from stakeholders to crisis leaders

- Work with multi-disciplinary teams

- Trust plays a pivotal role in times of uncertainty

(Doerfel et al., 2010; Jong et al., 2016; Kayes et al., 2013; Teo et al., 2017)

Crisis management should not be strictly based on hierarchy but a collective leadership

- Gravitating toward 'Shared Leadership' or 'Joint Responsibility'

- Individuals possessing high degrees of autonomy & self-reliance

- Formal leaders could actively solicit counsel and assistance from their members

Be mindful & minimise cognitive biases

- Crisis leaders should identify and challenge the assumptions underpinning their analyses and decisions

  - Acknowledge & spot biases
  - Avoid groupthink and have a team member as 'devil's advocate'
  - Use tools to help you

  i Are we prepared for a completely different form of terror attack?

Food for Thought

Have you considered different scenarios in your crisis plan?

Foster a culture of continuous vigilance & safe reporting

- Shared awareness that something can happen at any given moment

- Willingness to act on faint signals

- Without fear of punishment for false alerts

Case Example: Boston Marathon Bombing (2013)

- Large-scale event involving 8 towns and cities

- Boston Athletic Association (BAA) actively involved in pre-event and contingency planning

- Building relationships between organisers and responders

- Importance of pre-crisis coordination among agencies

During Crisis

Recommendations for During Crisis

Activate community-based support

Provide timely, credible, consistent crisis communication

Audiences are more likely to accept warning messages if they are confirmed by individuals close to them

- Partner with faith-based community organisations, NGOs, NPOs, grassroot community leaders

Crisis may be exacerbated by disrupted communication channels

- Delineate the procedures and POC during a crisis
  - Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

- Reduce harm, coordinate, and organise resources available for managing ongoing crisis

- Crisis leaders may face further difficulties in accomplishing key tasks during crisis

(Doerfel et al., 2010; Fillmore et al., 2011)

Communication with the general public and between organisations is extremely important during a crisis

- Break down in crisis communication can have severe consequences for the safety and well-being of those affected

- Goes beyond intermittent updates to key stakeholders

Leaders are expected to understand the ongoing situation from their own vantage point as well as all other stakeholders' point of views
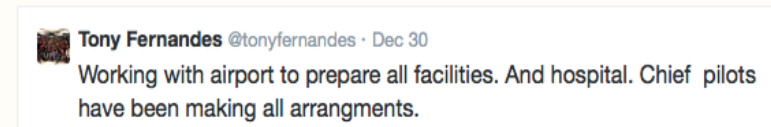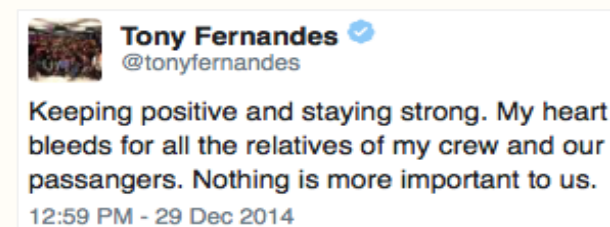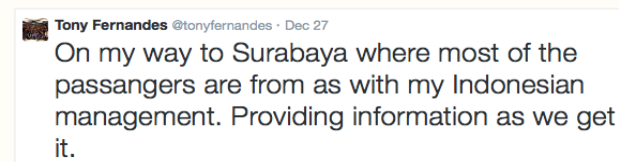
Information Sharing

- Crisis leaders are privy to information, expected to respond in timely manner

- Establish a picture of the situation, share it with stakeholders

- First statement vs. Official Statement

(Boin et al., 2013; Devitt & Borodzciz, 2008; Stern, 2013)

Leaders are expected to address the needs of stakeholders during a crisis

- Crisis leaders are expected to recognise diverse needs and feelings of stakeholders

- Encompass victims, their next-of-kin, first responders, emergency workers, general public, media

- Sensitive to diverse stakeholders

Tony Fernandes @tonyfernandes · Dec 27
We will be putting out another statement soon. Thank you for all your thoughts and prays.we must stay strong.
4.8K   1.6K

Tony Fernandes retweeted
AirAsia @AirAsia · Dec 27
AirAsia Indonesia regrets to confirm that QZ8501 from Surabaya to Singapore has lost contact at 07:24hrs this morning on.fb.me/1xpx5pl
47K   6K

Tony Fernandes @tonyfernandes · Dec 27
On my way to Surabaya where most of the passangers are from as with my Indonesian management. Providing information as we get it.

Tony Fernandes @tonyfernandes
Keeping positive and staying strong. My heart bleeds for all the relatives of my crew and our passangers. Nothing is more important to us.
12:59 PM - 29 Dec 2014

Tony Fernandes @tonyfernandes · Dec 30
Working with airport to prepare all facilities. And hospital. Chief pilots have been making all arrangments.

(Cheng, 2013; Devitt & Borodzicz, 2008)   31

Post-Crisis

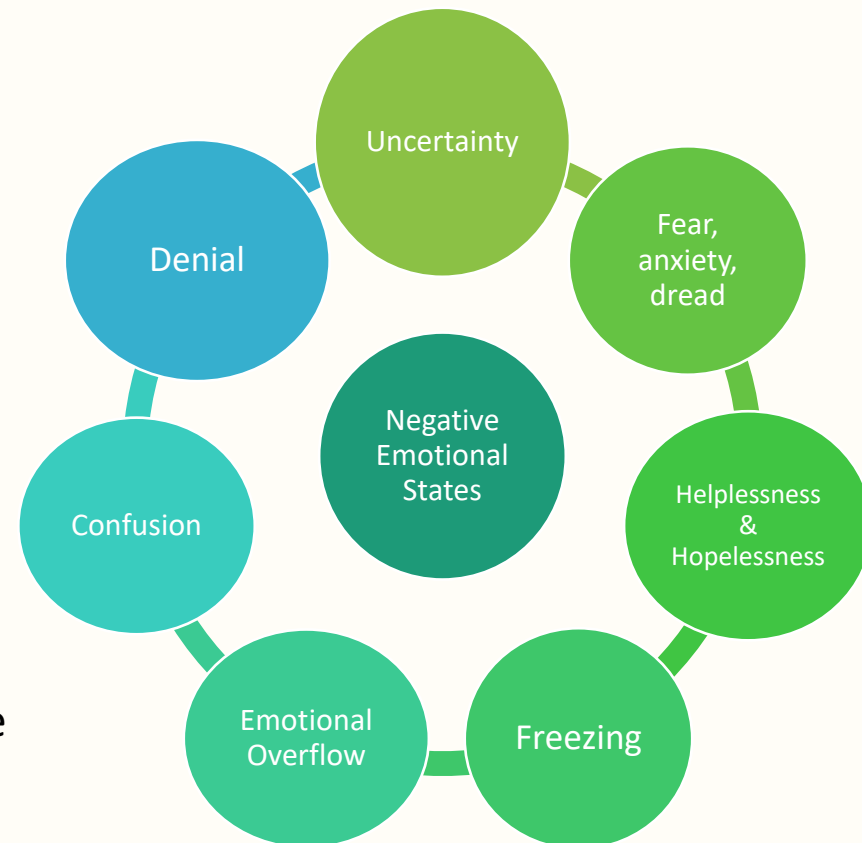# Recommendations for Post Crisis

 Address emotional impact

 Foster a learning culture

Reactions following a crisis

Crises do not only create negative emotions and behaviours.

Positive reactions include:
- Coping
- Altruism
- Relief
- Elation at surviving the crisis
- Feelings of self-worth, strength, empowerment, growth, and renewed sense of community may come from the experience.

Uncertainty

Fear, anxiety, dread

Denial

Negative Emotional States

Helplessness & Hopelessness

Confusion

Emotional Overflow

Freezing

Care for people

- "Culture of silence" amongst crisis responder team

- Feelings of loss and emotional trauma are often pervasive in the aftermath of disasters

- The psychological impact of crises is often long-drawn and enduring

Good leadership also involves emotional support

- Ensure adequate and timely delivery of mental health services post crisis

- Team-based psychological debriefing

- Reorganise the chronological sequence of the event and communicate that the immediate threat is over
  - Reduce confusion: caused by overloaded data (detailed facts, detailed emotions), view of the crisis that it has no ending point
  - Putting an end to the story: synchronise the order & reduce "flashbacks"
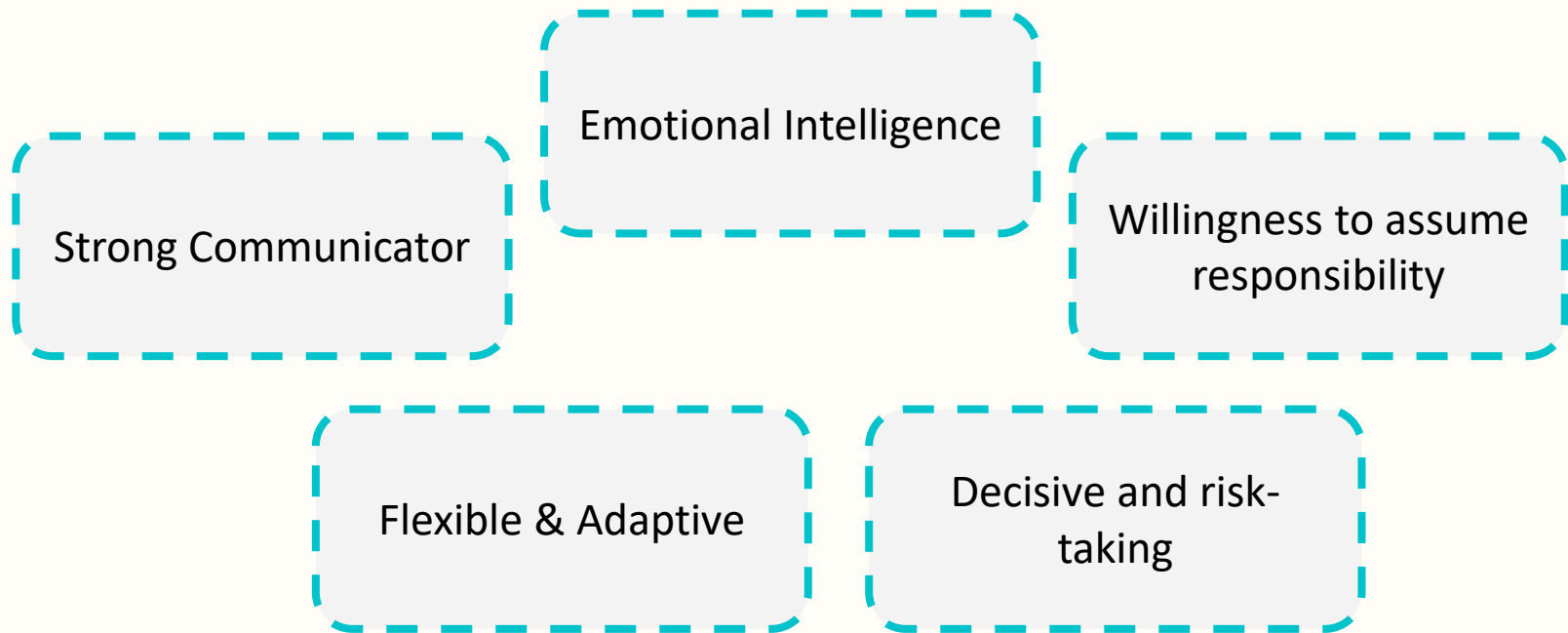
Avoid repeating mistakes & enhance prevention

- Crisis creates a window of opportunity

- Requires recreating, analysing, evaluating key procedures

- Extract learning points and to translate them into actionable measures

- Stigmatisation of failure may impede open sharing

What are the characteristics of an effective crisis leader?

What makes an Effective Crisis Leader?

Emotional Intelligence

Strong Communicator

Willingness to assume responsibility

Flexible & Adaptive

Decisive and risk-taking

Case Example: Christchurch Mosque Attack (2019)

- Firm crisis communication

- Composed

- Lead by compassion & humility

- Swift decision-making

"What happened today was despicable, it was hateful it was wrong. **It was carried out by an individual, not a faith**."

"I implore you, speak the names of those who were lost rather than the name of the man who took them. **He is a terrorist. He is a criminal. He is an extremist.** But he will, when I speak, be **nameless**."

"**Our time is for you to determine**."

"**Sympathy and love for all Muslim communities**."

Conclusion

- Effective crisis leadership begins from pre-crisis till post-event learning and implementation

- Crisis leadership faces novel challenges

  - "Transboundary" crisis leadership

  - Different expectations for accountability

- "Ideal" crisis leader faces continuous redefinition

Thank you!

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