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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS SCENARIOS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
EXAMINATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CORPORATE LEADERS DURING
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Global Leadership and Change

by

Natasha Brown

November, 2021

Paul Sparks, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

The coronavirus pandemic unleashed a host of challenges worldwide including political instability, financial turmoil, and public health concerns in 2020. As a result, new constraints including remote work environments, shifting consumer demands, and supply chain disruptions created a complex landscape for businesses. Leaders within companies have been confronted with crisis scenarios. The purpose of the study was to understand the role of authentic leadership in helping corporate leaders navigate the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The central research question was: To what extent, if any, does authentic leadership enable leaders to navigate crises effectively? The research is focused on the intersection of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 pandemic era leadership and is grounded in the theoretical framework of social constructivism. The corporate landscape and the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 constituted the backdrop for the study.

Keywords: COVID-19, coronavirus, pandemic, global leadership, authentic leadership, crisis leadership, social constructivism, COVID-19 pandemic era leadership, corporate leadership

Chapter 1. Introduction

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic sparked a public health emergency, economic turmoil, and political instability globally. As of January 3, 2021, a staggering 1,831,702 individuals had died due to the coronavirus, and as of September 18, 2021, that number increased to 4,666,334 (World Health Organization, 2021). Citizens, communities, countries, and regions have faced arduous journeys to navigate unknown territories of crisis fraught with urgency and intensity. The pandemic unleashed a host of challenges worldwide that are of great magnitude. However, the crisis is emergent, and its effects are volatile. Hence, there is an absence of clear existing tools or frameworks to support the resolution of the pandemic's impact (Likhotal, 2020; Marien, 2020).

Similarly, within the context of COVID-19, companies and organizations are encountering complex scenarios for which there are no plans or playbooks. New financial constraints, including remote work environments and shifting consumer demand, have created a complex landscape for corporations (Bartsch et al., 2021; Graves & Karabayeva, 2020; Mather, 2020). Leaders within companies are confronted with numerous crisis scenarios. There are concerns around business continuity, supply chain disruption, customer safety and health, and corporate social responsibility. Executives are also faced with a challenge to continue profit and growth targets and deliver value in a year that has looked very different from the one imagined pre-pandemic.

Tending to employees' emotional, physical, and intellectual welfare has also arisen as a top concern and focus for corporate leaders (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Dirani et al., 2020). The pandemic has presented a very human problem for corporations with employees struggling to

navigate work and parental duties, facing health challenges, mourning the loss of life, and dealing with significant degrees of uncertainty and ambiguity.

As a result, employee engagement in the workplace has suffered. Rewards and benefit systems are being re-examined and re-evaluated to adapt to current conditions (Hu et al., 2020; Mani & Mishra, 2020). Companies are moving quickly to develop appropriate policies for governing new models, including flexible, remote, and hybrid work for employees. Finding best options to solve organizational health and culture needs has taken on a new priority. In addition, approaches to recognition have taken center stage, with leaders focusing on the importance of strong communication, appreciation of work, and positive reinforcement for employees (Dirani et al., 2020).

Statement of the problem

The COVID-19 pandemic brought pervasive challenges in the realms of public health, financial stability, and political processes in 2020. It impacted the lives of individuals, communities, organizations, and nations, bringing a wrath of hardship around the globe (Comfort et al., 2020; Van Barneveld et al., 2020). Coronavirus vaccines have been developed, and deployment is underway (Oxford Economics, 2021). Financial markets appear to have begun recovering from the trauma of the COVID-19 experience. Nevertheless, companies are struggling to regain momentum and restore stability following the pandemic's disruption (Mather, 2020). Questions remain about implications for the new normal in terms of workplace policy, infrastructure, physical space, and employee wellbeing (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Dirani et al., 2020). Plus, vulnerabilities have been exposed in national abilities to weather public health emergencies.

It is critical to understand best practices for leaders to navigate crises in the corporate world (Mather, 2020). Given that the crisis scenario of the COVID-19 global pandemic is unparalleled, there isn't an exact playbook to guide leadership approaches. The pandemic offers an opportunity to explore the best strategies for crisis leadership.

Within this context, a leadership challenge has emerged, raising questions about which approaches to, tools for, and types of leadership are best suited for leading in crisis, and specifically for COVID-19. One approach for examination would be to look to trait theories of leadership to examine specific types of characteristics of individuals that inform their approach to leading in a crisis (Dinh & Lord, 2012; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). The intent would be to identify whether certain types of leaders are inherently best positioned to lead in such scenarios.

Another approach would be more in the behaviorist canon. In response to critiques of the shortcomings of trait theories of leadership—namely, that they omit essential recognition of contexts and situations—behaviorist leadership theory was forged. Within this behaviorist approach, it is argued that leadership is the result of the overall environment in which a leader serves; context and situation matter more than individual characteristics or traits for understanding leader performance (Shaw & Stogdill, 1974; Stogdill, 1948). The purpose of this approach might be to identify particular leader behaviors that are most effective in the context of crisis.

However, the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic is one complex crisis with a highly human component. Leaders of corporations are confronted with concerns about wellbeing, a range of employee emotions, and a web of uncertainty in addition to the ordinary financial and strategic challenge of business. Neither the trait theorist nor the behaviorist approach appear to be robust enough of a lens for the study of leadership in COVID times.

Compared to trait and behaviorist theories of leadership, authentic leadership, which draws on empathy, self-awareness, and strong values-orientation, takes a far broader perspective (Gardner et al., 2011). Authentic leaders connect with and encourage followers, admit mistakes and weaknesses, focus on strengths and personal growth, and ground their leadership practices in ethical principles. There is also some evidence to suggest that authentic leadership is increasingly in demand with a rise in catastrophic world events (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). By focusing on purpose, values, relationships, self-discipline, and heart, authentic leaders display great strength in their humanness (Cashman, 1998; George, 2003).

Purpose Statement

A path of inquiry emerges in terms of understanding more about the impact of authentic leadership in times of crisis. The opportunity unfold to explore how authentic leadership supports leaders in crisis. A corollary question about the same constructs, with a different focus on directionality, also emerges. The ways in which a crisis grows a leader's authenticity can thus be explored. There is evidence that the process of experiencing difficulties creates opportunities for leaders to know themselves truly and deeply and to work in the service of others authentically (George, 2003).

The purpose of the study, therefore, was to understand the role of authentic leadership in helping corporate leaders navigate the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. This phenomenological study lies at the intersection of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and pandemic leadership. In order to best support the phenomenological study, a strong appropriate theoretical grounding was needed. Social constructivism provides a helpful foundation for the analysis of authentic leadership in crisis. The premise of social constructivism is that meaning is made, and knowledge is constructed through the social interactions of people. Leadership is, by nature,

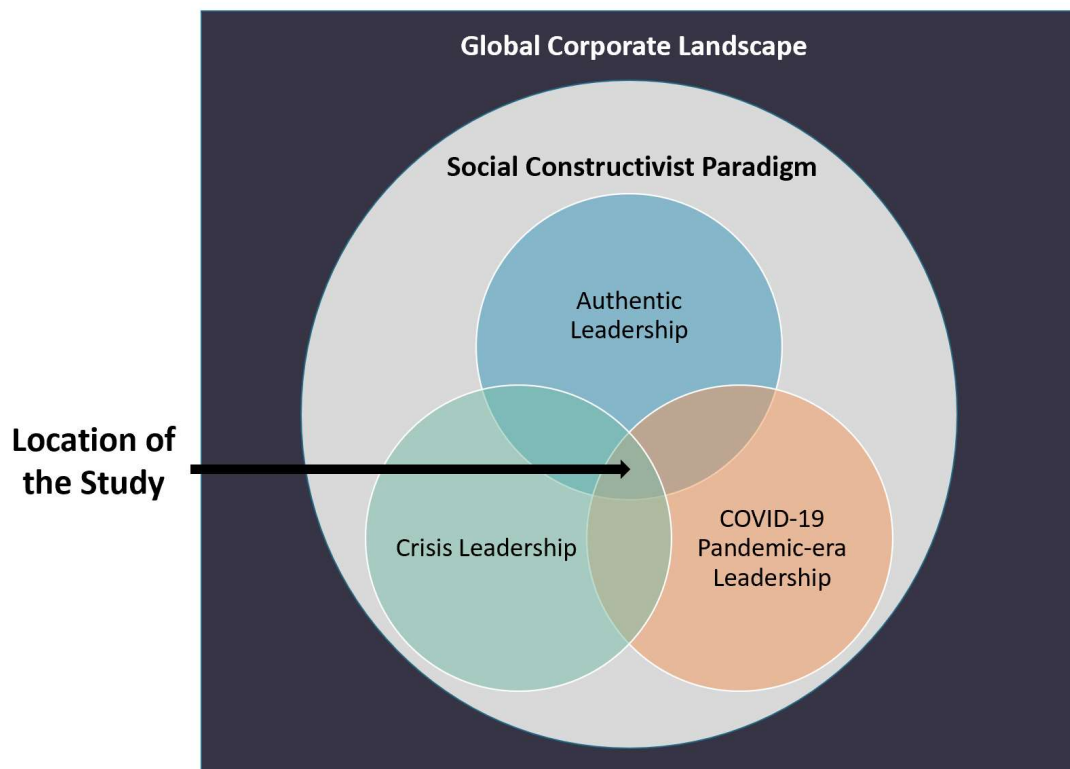
based on interactions between people such as leaders and followers. Hence, the paradigm of social constructivism supports the phenomenological research design with a firm grounding in relevant theory.

Research Questions

A visual diagram of the proposed research depicts the location of the study (Figure 1). The study lies at the intersections of the theoretical constructs of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 pandemic era leadership. It was grounded in the theoretical paradigm of social constructivism. Lastly, the broad focus of the study was the corporate landscape, and the context for the research was the coronavirus pandemic.

Figure 1

Location of the Study



The central research question for the dissertation study was: To what extent, if any, does authentic leadership enable leaders to navigate a crisis effectively? The research study's subquestion was: To what extent, if at all, does the experience of navigating a crisis develop authentic leaders? The COVID-19 pandemic was the backdrop for the study, and the population in focus was corporate business executives.

Methodological Approach

The study encompassed a qualitative research method with a phenomenological research design. The purpose of the study was to understand the role of authentic leadership in supporting the ability of corporate leaders to navigate the coronavirus pandemic. The central research question was: To what extent, if any, did authentic leadership play a role in helping corporate leaders' navigation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With such a purpose and central question in mind, a qualitative methodology was best suited to support an understanding of the phenomenon in question. As a research design, phenomenology is ideal in that, at the very core, it is focused on the essence of a phenomenon. Through phenomenology, the lived experience of a group of individuals who have knowledge of the phenomenon is explored. For this study, the lived experience of corporate executives who served at the helm during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis was investigated through qualitative research.

The sample population for the study included leaders in the top 1% of leadership in their firm or with "chief" in their title. The leaders were executives of Global Fortune 500 companies who served during the calendar year 2020—the onset and potential height of the global pandemic. A four-fold sampling strategy was used. First, criteria sampling was applied to identify only those executives who met the requirements for participation. Second, convenience

sampling was used to identify executives within my network and extended network. In addition, as needed, snowball sampling and opportunistic sampling were available to incorporate into the study. This means that participants could be recommended or nominated by those who know them and that allowances would be made for unexpected or serendipitous opportunities to meet or get connected with potential participants for the study who met the required criteria.

As participants were identified, they were invited to participate in a semi-structured video conference interview for data collection. All Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards and Belmont Principles were distinctly adhered to for the consideration of human subjects. The confidentiality of participants was thoroughly protected through intentional strategies and procedures. Informed consent was provided and secured before research began.

Through semi-structured interviews, data were collected. An interview protocol with prompts was designed in consultation with the literature and through the incorporation of concepts from the well-known and used Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio et al., 2007). In advance of usage, the interview protocol was reviewed by expert colleagues. Their feedback was discussed, and changes were incorporated into the interview protocol. In addition, the interview protocol was submitted to and reviewed by the IRB prior to any research being conducted.

Interviews were held with study participants by video conference using the Zoom platform. With consent, the sessions were recorded. Recordings were subsequently transcribed using transcription software. Qualitative coding software was used to code the transcripts thematically.

In accordance with phenomenological research design principles, several steps of the research process and data analysis for phenomenology were incorporated (Creswell & Poth,

2018; Moustakas, 1994). Prior to the data analysis phase, the phenomenon to be studied was selected. In this case, the phenomenon in question was the role of authentic leadership in supporting crisis navigation skills of leaders. At the outset, I bracketed my own experience with the phenomenon. This means that I identified my own beliefs, experiences, and perspectives on the topic and formally set them aside so as not to influence the outcome of the research. This was done at the start of the process. In addition, I kept a research journal to identify any emerging thoughts, feelings, or beliefs along the way in the journey of research. Next, data were collected from participants who have experienced the phenomenon. This means that data were collected through semi-structured interviews, from corporate executives in the top 1% of leadership or with “chief” in their title at Global Fortune 500 companies during the coronavirus pandemic.

A strict process of data analysis steps and procedures were undertaken (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). First, transcripts and coding were reviewed for significant statements. These significant statements were then grouped into themes. Through a review of the themes, I first created a textural description to explain what participants experienced. Next, a structural description was written, which explains how the participants experienced the phenomenon and what the context or situation was when they experienced it. Finally, a composite description was written, which synthesizes the textural and structural descriptions. The composite description yields an overall essence of the experience. The essence revealed the sense of the lived experience of corporate executives and what the experience of the phenomenon was like for them. It gave a flavor for or feeling of the experience.

Researcher Assumptions

Several assumptions predisposed the study and should be noted. My assumptions include the core tenet of social constructivism: (a) that meaning is made through interactions, (b) that the

COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a crisis, (c) that the pandemic impacts corporations and people within those corporations, and (d) that learnings about the leadership of executives during COVID can be relevantly applied to other scenarios.

Social Construction of Knowledge. The study is grounded in the social constructivist theoretical paradigm. As is described in the following section on the theoretical framework, social constructivism holds that meaning is made and knowledge is contracted through interactions between people and in social environments (Adams, 2006; Martin & Sugarman, 1996; McCaslin & Hickey, 2001; Raskin, 2015). Therefore, a key assumption is that human interaction and social connection are important for the development of knowledge and that meaning is made through the exploration of those interactions.

Pandemic as Crisis. The study is about understanding a particular crisis scenario and exploring authentic leadership as a factor in helping leaders to navigate a crisis. The backdrop for the study was the COVID-19 global pandemic and the lived experience of corporate executives in navigating through the challenges brought on by the coronavirus. Thus, a second key assumption is that the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a crisis.

Pandemic Impact on Business. The landscape for the study was the realm of business. I interviewed corporate leaders from Global Fortune 500 companies about the lived experience leading in COVID-19. Hence, I assumed that corporations had been impacted directly by a global pandemic and that they had endured some mix of consequences as a result.

Relevance and Applicability. For the purposes of this study, I assumed that lessons can be gleaned from the corporate sphere and applied elsewhere with relevance. In addition, I believed that lessons from leadership in the pandemic can be applied to other kinds of crises and that there would be some level of value in such application.

Delimitations of Study

The study is bound by several delimitations. Boundaries for the research include delimitations of time, type of crisis, landscape, and sample population.

Time. The study was time-bound. The COVID-19 virus was identified in 2019. The spread of the virus hastened, and global impacts emerged in 2020. This study was conducted in 2021 about the experience of leaders during 2020. Thus, one delimitation is time and is focused on the specific year of 2020.

Type of Crisis. While the focus of the study was on the calendar year 2020, there is an additional delimiter on the type of crisis in question. 2020 marked a year of great activity globally and within the United States. For example, social unrest, political unrest, and natural disasters such as wildfires impacted much of the globe. However, a delimiter for the study was the experience of corporate leaders in the specific crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting consequences and impact from that crisis.

Landscape. A third delimitation of the study is landscape. The coronavirus has impacted governments, communities, nations, and organizations. However, the focus of this study is the corporate environment. Hence, a third delimiter is that the sphere of analysis is within the private sector, in corporate business specifically.

Sample Population. Lastly, a delimiter for the research is the identification of participants themselves. The purpose of the research was to understand the role of authentic leadership in helping corporate leaders navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. This study narrows the broad pool of corporate leaders to those who are either in the top 1% of leadership in their firm or have “chief” in their title, who work in Global Fortune 500 firms, and who served in that

capacity during the calendar year 2020. The year 2020 was selected as a time during which time the global pandemic was deeply active.

Theoretical Framework

The core foundation from a theory point of view for the study is social constructivism. Scholars within the social constructivist paradigm assert that knowledge is made or constructed through social interaction between people (Adams, 2006; Martin & Sugarman, 1996; McCaslin & Hickey, 2001; Raskin, 2015). Meaning comes through connections and interconnections between people. Social constructivism provides the cornerstone and founding principles for the study. If knowledge and meaning are constructed through interaction, then the experience of leaders leading through crisis is the appropriate target of analysis. Social constructivism frames the research within a paradigm that focuses on constructing meaning based on the interactions between individuals. It sets the stage for consideration of further constructs for the theoretical framework.

Beyond the broad grounding paradigm of social constructivism, three core constructs were considered for the study. These included authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 leadership. Authentic leadership is embodied by a sense of purpose, strong values, trusting relationships with others, self-discipline, and empathy (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005; Gardner et al., 2011; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Authentic leaders are devoted to their own development and growth, as well as that of their followers. They admit weakness, strive to adhere to ethical principles, and demonstrate self-awareness.

Within the body of literature on authentic leadership, several themes emerge. The first theme centers on authentic leadership theory, which comprises both an exploration of the modern origins of authentic leadership and its grounding in principles of positive psychology. A second

theme within the literature is focused on authentic leadership in action. These works describe the actions, behaviors, and experiences of authentic leaders. Next, a broad set of literature details approaches to developing authentic leaders. Lastly, a thorough review of literature explaining options available for assessing outcomes and measuring the impact of authentic leadership is presented.

Crisis leadership details the ways in which individuals and teams lead, guide, and offer support in challenging and unexpected times (Mitroff, 2005; Mitroff & Alpaslan, 2011; Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001). Organized around five pillars, a section of chapter two reviews literature in the field on crisis leadership. The literature review presents an overview of the leadership on crisis leadership through an organization around five pillars. First, fundamental approaches to crisis leadership and frameworks for its evolution and development are shared. Next, a section of the review presents cases of real-life crises, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and oil spills, and explores crisis leadership in action within those scenarios. The microscope focuses more deeply on leader actions in crisis, with a thematic review of literature presenting a view of the leader. Culture, change, and organizations in crisis constitute an additional thematic bucket of crisis leadership. Lastly, a deeper dive into research on crisis communication, an important tool of leaders in crisis, is presented.

Additionally, a set of new and emergent literature explores the various approaches to leadership during the coronavirus pandemic. I clustered the literature on the topic together under the heading of COVID-19 pandemic era leadership. This body of literature is quickly growing and evolving. Nevertheless, distinct themes are present in the current research. First, literature focused on exploring COVID leadership through the lens of leadership models is shared. Second, writings that focus specifically on COVID leadership within corporations are reviewed. Third,

the importance of trust is illustrated thematically within the literature on COVID leadership.

Lastly, the global scale and nature of COVID-19 and its related impact are explored.

As the literature review in the second chapter details, a great deal of research has been conducted to examine each of these constructs independently. Some exploration has been done at the intersections of pairs of the constructs, such as at the confluences of authentic leadership and crisis leadership, crisis leadership and COVID-19 pandemic era leadership, and COVID-19 pandemic era leadership and authentic leadership. However, a gap exists in the research at the confluence of all three. Hence, the focus of this study is to further research and contribute to the field at the particular gap—the intersection of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 pandemic era leadership. More specifically, the purpose of the research is to understand the role of authentic leadership in helping leaders navigate the particular crisis of the global pandemic.

Key Definitions

For the purposes of this study, a number of key and relevant terms are defined. Most of the definitions included have been created through synthesizing and paraphrasing explanations for terms in the literature. This was necessary because, for several of the key terms used in the study, a number of authors refer to the terms with slight variations. Definitions that offer a synthesis are helpful in identifying themes in the literature.

One definition on the list, for authentic leadership, is taken verbatim from the literature. Given that the primary focus of the study was authentic leadership, it was meaningful to select the definition that features prominently in the literature and on which other researchers are grounding and aligning.

The summary list of key definitions for the study are as follows:

- Authentic leadership: Authentic leadership is defined as “a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behavior that encourages openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting follower’s inputs.” (Avolio et al., 2009, p. 423)
- Balanced processing: Balanced processing is a component of authentic leadership defined as to what degree a leader sufficiently engages in soliciting viewpoints and opinions before making a decision. (Avolio et al., 2007)
- Crisis leadership: For the purposes of this study, crisis leadership is defined as the ways in which a leader proactively and reactively addresses an unexpected difficult or event. (Mitroff, 2005; Mitroff & Alpaslan, 2011)
- Empathy: Empathy is defined as having care and concern for other individuals and an interest in understanding their experience. (Cashman, 1998; George, 2007; Goleman, 1995; Goleman, 2017)
- Ethical/moral behavior: Ethical/moral behavior is a component of authentic leadership defined as to what degree the leader sets a high standard for moral and ethical conduct. (Avolio et al., 2007)
- Self-awareness: Self-awareness is a component of authentic leadership defined as the degree to which the leader is aware of their strengths, limitations, how others see them, and how the leader impacts others. (Avolio et al., 2007)
- Social constructivism: For the purposes of this study, social constructivism is a theoretical paradigm asserting that knowledge is made, and meaning is created through social interactions and connections between people. (Adams, 2006; Martin & Sugarman, 1996; McCaslin & Hickey, 2001; Raskin, 2015)

- Transparency: For the purposes of this study, transparency is a component of authentic leadership defined as the degree to which the leader reinforces a level of openness with others that provides them with an opportunity to be forthcoming with their ideas, challenges, and opinions. (Avolio et al., 2007)

One final definition is needed to give context for the study. However, it describes an emergent occurrence that has not yet been clearly documented or defined. Thus, I crafted a definition for the newest term relevant for the research. Covid-19 pandemic era leadership is an evolving occurrence globally and within companies, nations, organizations, and communities. I constructed my own definition to describe and refer to a current trend identified in the review of the literature.

- COVID-19 pandemic era leadership: COVID-19 pandemic era leadership refers to the collection of actions, behaviors, approaches, and styles of individuals and groups of leaders during the coronavirus pandemic. (Natasha Brown)

Significance of Research

As described in the previous section on the theoretical framework, a gap currently exists in the research at the intersection of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 pandemic era leadership. Significant research has been conducted in each of these fields independently, and limited work has been completed on the intersections and pairs of the constructs. Specifically, there is a gap in the literature exploring the confluence of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 era leadership. This study examines the application of authentic leadership during the most critical crisis of our time, the coronavirus pandemic.

Several expected outcomes are compelling for this research. First, there is a significant opportunity to contribute to scholarship in authentic leadership, crisis

leadership, and COVID-leadership individually. More importantly, the study aims to pioneer research and findings at the intersection of these constructs. There is not yet significant scholarship at the confluence of COVID-leadership, crisis leadership, and authentic leadership, which is an emerging opportunity. Next, there is an opportunity to glean best practices for leadership in crisis scenarios that can be applied to vaccine deployment and preparedness for future crises by national, community, and international organization leaders.

Given the newness of this emergent situation, blueprints do not exist for helping leaders lead. The researcher supports the concept that learning about pandemic era leadership will support preparedness for the future. There is a need for roadmaps for leaders in the wake of COVID and to prepare for future crises. Our leaders need blueprints for crisis prevention and public health planning. Public health agencies, international organizations, and leaders of nations and communities need leadership training infused with lessons and practical application of the real-world scenario of the pandemic.

The current context of the COVID-19 pandemic presents the critical and urgent scenario of a combined financial crisis, public health emergencies, political instability, the dismantling of international institutions, and a vacuum of leadership. In the corporate landscape, companies are struggling to restore momentum, help workers navigate work from home, and face difficult financial scenarios. No set of instructions exist for navigating COVID-19 as leaders. There is some evidence that authentic leadership is valuable in navigating human-centered, complex crises like the current pandemic, but further exploration is needed.

The impact of the pandemic has a broad reach. There are severe global implications, national consequences, and local costs. The COVID-19 pandemic has produced a multi-

thronged scenario of a public health crisis, political instability, social unrest, economic distress, and financial crisis. The pandemic has also furthered inequality and access to technology and education. This study details the opportunity to explore and learn about best practices for crisis leadership in the corporate context. Lessons learned can be applied to vaccine deployment scenarios and future preparedness for national, community, and international organization leadership.

Understanding the role of authentic leadership in navigating crisis situations for corporate leaders during COVID-19 can support local, regional, national, and global outcomes. There is an opportunity for the application of lessons learned for COVID-19 leadership. This includes options within the political arena nationally in the United States, for international organizations, and for developing nations. A critical opportunity also exists for the application of relevant findings to processes for deployment and development of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Positionality

In a previous section on reflexivity, a plan was outlined for identifying researcher thoughts, experiences, and feelings about the phenomenon in question. The plan includes bracketing before beginning research and continuously throughout the research process through the usage of a research journal.

Additionally, in the previous section on my assumptions, my worldview of social constructivism was outlined. My core ontological and epistemological assumptions are that meaning is made, and knowledge is constructed through social interactions and connections between people. In addition to exercises of reflexivity and identifying assumptions, it is also important to document, through a positionality statement, my location in socio-political contexts, as well as core views and biases.

I am a White, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-aged woman living in Portland, Oregon. I am Christian in faith and attend a Presbyterian church. I have traveled to more than 30 countries and lived in northern Europe for more than a decade. Socioeconomically, I am upper middle class, work in a white-collar profession, and hold an advanced degree from an Ivy League University. I currently work in a large corporation, have above-average personal income, and have a great deal of autonomy at work.

Professionally, I have served in the business field designing workplace strategies for the post-pandemic era. A student of leadership studies, I am interested in understanding approaches to leadership. As a practitioner of organizational development and change management, I am concerned with leadership in terms of leaders themselves, as well as the impact of leadership on organizations, teams, and employees.

For purposes of this study, I endeavored to identify and suspend my beliefs and experiences with the phenomenon in question. However, based on my position in the world, both conscious and unconscious biases may exist in the process of conducting research and analyzing data. Through a thorough identification of my positionality and the lens, it is hoped that transparency was brought to the process.

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic is a once-in-a-hundred-year event of severe consequences with global magnitude. With the spread of the coronavirus has also come the spread of financial turmoil, political instability, and a crisis of public health. Corporations have been impacted with concerns about business continuity and the preservation of supply chains, as well as customer and employee safety. Employees have struggled to maintain wellbeing and engagement amid ambiguity, uncertainty, and remote work. Corporate leaders have been faced with an

unprecedented leadership challenge to lead their workforces and organizations through these times. There is some evidence that authentic leadership is effective in times of crisis, and particularly when a complex, thorny, human component is fundamentally woven into the fabric of the experience.

The purpose of the phenomenological dissertation is to understand the role of authentic leadership in corporate leaders' navigation of crisis amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. The location of the study lies at the intersection of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 era pandemic leadership and is grounded in the theoretical framework of social constructivism.

Following the introduction of the topic in the current chapter, the following chapters explore a review of the literature and methods for the study. The methods chapter outlines participant sampling, as well as data collection, analysis, and synthesis. The phenomenological research process begins with researcher reflexivity. This includes bracketing, identifying research assumptions, and establishing a research journal. Next, participant identification and sampling occurred with a sampling strategy comprised of stages of criteria sampling, convenience sampling, snowball sampling, and opportunistic sampling. Following sampling procedures, an invitation was sent to potential participants with informed consent. Alignment on times and dates for semi-structured interviews were sent. Lastly, interviews were conducted via video conferences. The interviews were recorded, and the recordings were transcribed. The methods chapter includes plans for adherence to IRB protocols and Belmont Principles for ethical research.

In the following chapter, a thorough review of the literature in authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 pandemic era leadership is presented along with a grounding of the

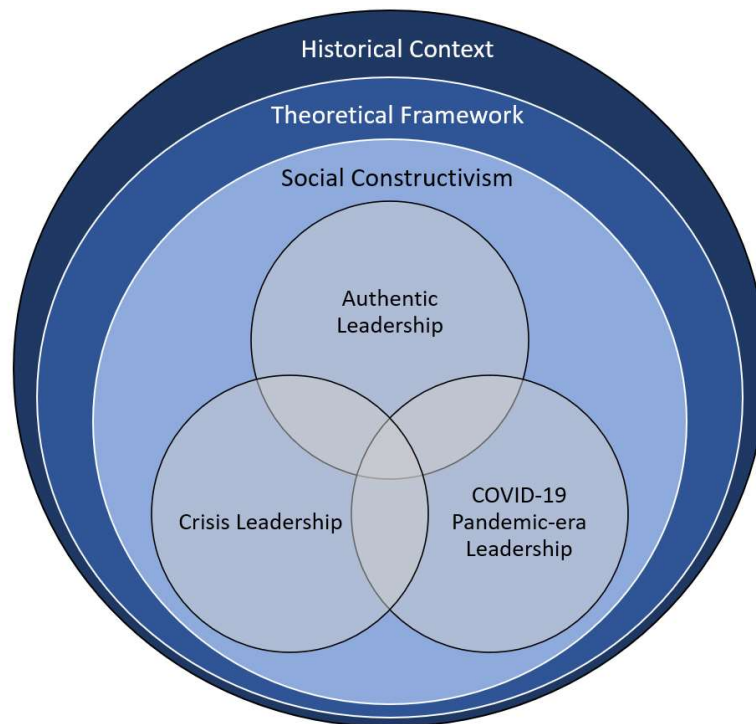
social constructivist paradigm and a presentation of the historical context for the explored constructs. The literature review reveals a gap at the intersection of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 leadership—hence, the impetus for the research study.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The study examines the role of authentic leadership in helping executives navigate the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic in the global corporate landscape with a social-constructivist lens. In order to locate the study contextually, a thorough review of the relevant literature is presented after a grounding of the topic within its historical context. Themes within bodies of literature on authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 leadership are explored in detail following a summary description of the corpus of literature on social constructivism. A visual map depicts the review of the literature (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Visual Map of the Literature Review



Historical Context

The following literature review examines as distinct and independent constructs the literature on authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 leadership, respectively. Authentic leadership and crisis leadership have longer histories and an evolution of literature. COVID-19 leadership is a developing field with a new body of literature rapidly evolving in response to the pandemic. There is a significant amount of research exploring and detailing each of these categories of leadership independently. However, the focus of this study is the intersection of all three. This center locale is both new and emergent. Currently, there is a gap in the literature at this intersection. Hence, there is both motivation for and significance of research exploring the confluence of these three categories of ideas together. Nevertheless, a relevant historical context can be traced in dyads of authentic leadership and crisis leadership, crisis leadership and COVID-19 leadership, and authentic leadership and COVID-19 leadership rather than the triad of all three. Therefore, salient points at these dual intersections are reviewed before turning to each section individually.

The Intersection of Authentic Leadership and Crisis Leadership

A relatively limited and emergent subsection of literature at the intersection of crisis leadership and authentic leadership suggests that the unique and developing of challenges today, including catastrophic events such as terrorism and the SARS virus, have created renewed calls for leadership that is more genuine (Avolio et al., 2005). In this sense, the crisis has spurred interest in and development of authentic leadership. The experience of trauma and loss has sparked desires for leadership that bring hope and optimism, and truth through self-awareness, truth, and meaning. It is also argued that crises help leaders discover or uncover their true

leadership identities (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). In the heat of a crisis or within the crucibles of life, a true leader's identity is forged.

It is also proposed in the confluence of leadership literature on the two topics that authentic leadership is a supporting or bolstering factor for effective crisis leadership (George, 2009). Authentic leaders know who they are, possess both self-confidence and self-awareness, and as such, are better prepared to tackle the impact of extreme scenarios. A crisis can test or challenge the skills of leaders as they navigate difficult decisions, traumatic consequences, and stressful encounters. Nevertheless, one study suggests that a leader's charisma can be a more significant factor than the leader's authenticity in driving voter behavior during a crisis (Williams et al., 2012).

The Intersection of Crisis Leadership and COVID Leadership

COVID-19 is the preeminent crisis of our times and presents an opportunity to examine in real-time effective crisis leadership (Forster et al., 2020). Forster et al. (2020) noted that leadership is not something to be embodied only by those at the top, but rather that leadership can be displayed by individuals at all levels. Particularly during times of crisis, it is important not to adopt a top-down type of leadership but rather to look for leaders to emerge from within a society, community, or organization. Effective crisis leadership during COVID and other times embodies transparency, role modeling, and continuity of leadership through the recovery phase. Measuring the effectiveness of COVID-19 crisis leadership is challenging in that the crisis is still unfolding; the benefit of hindsight is not yet captured.

Describing the historical context for understanding the intersection of crisis leadership and COVID-10 leadership realistically means reviewing the literature within the last year. It appears that, for some of the literature in that space, the backdrop of COVID-19 was applied to

already in-progress work (Balwant, 2020; Eldridge, 2020). For instance, Balwant's used the pandemic to frame approaches to teaching crisis leadership skills at the start of the introduction. The author then continued to describe research within the educational setting on the learnable skills of crisis management, such as communication, without returning to a discussion of the relevance of connection to COVID-19. Similarly, Eldridge's work exploring communication as a crisis leadership skill that can save lives is only thinly wrapped in the context of COVID-19. The claims are compelling, and the genesis of ideas appears sound, but perhaps given the emergent nature of COVID-19, direct applicability and relevance are explored in a limited fashion. Overall, there has likely not been enough depth given to the intersection of COVID-19 and crisis leadership. Nevertheless, there is great potential for this space.

The Intersection of Authentic Leadership and COVID Leadership

Against the backdrop of COVID-19 and the struggle corporations faced in making decisions to adapt through reinventing business models or shutting down either temporarily or permanently, Fox et al. (2020) explored the relationship between authentic leadership, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and flexibility models adopted by businesses in crisis. Their findings suggest that authentic leaders are successful in steering their firms through crises, such as COVID, because they are more engaged with stakeholders (Fox et al., 2020). The degree to which a firm enjoys a flexible business model also was reflective of agility and stakeholder engagement; more flexible firms were better engaged and better positioned to navigate the impact of the pandemic. Finally, Fox et al. discovered that corporate social responsibilities undertaken in the corporate sphere are most successful when they are headed by authentic leaders. Fox et al. represents a rare look into the intersection of authentic leadership and COVID crisis, noting the uniqueness of the pandemic experience for leaders with no reference point or

case study to guide actions and decisions. The field is quickly expanding, however, and it is likely that further research will grow. An opportunity for further investigation from the Fox et al. springboard would be to compare the impact of authentic leadership during COVID on employee wellbeing in addition to the corporate bottom line.

An Opportunity at the Confluence

Some overlap exists between the literature on authentic leadership and crisis leadership, crisis leadership and COVID-leadership, and authentic leadership and COVID-leadership. A significant body of literature exists for understanding authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 leadership and individual constructs independently. An opportunity exists to explore the confluence of thinking around and research on all three. This study presents at its core the intersection of these theoretical constructs. For the purposes of this paper, the theoretical framework is used to explore in detail thematic groupings of literature on authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 leadership following an overview of the grounding theoretical framework of social constructivism. After, a brief review of social constructivism and the individual bodies of literature on authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 leadership are explored individually.

Theoretical Framework

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is based on the concept that meaning is made or constructed through interactions and social connections between people (Adams, 2006; Martin & Sugarman, 1996; McCaslin & Hickey, 2001; Raskin, 2015). Knowledge is socially constructed, and in the sense that it is done in concert with others, it is co-constructed. Knowledge is essentially a social phenomenon in that it is made through interaction with others.

Language is also a social phenomenon. Initially tracing the relationship between words and consciousness, or language and thought, one of the foundational theorists of cognitive science argued that speech is social in nature and is the root cause of thought (Vygotskiĭ & Kozulin, 1986). For Vygotsky and other social constructivists, community is critical because meaning is made through the social interaction of community (Vygotskiĭ & Cole, 1978). Neither an individual nor their mind can be understood in isolation from the community of which they are a part. This dualist view, based on an understanding of the human mind as separate from the world around it, is a common grounding concept of both social constructivism and its critics (Liu & Matthews, 2005).

Though the space of what a child or person can learn or do on their own is somewhat limited, the surrounding zone in which social interactions with others occurs, or zone of proximal development, provides an expanded opportunity for learning (Lloyd et al., 1999; Wertsch, 1984). This zone is a space for potential growth and for achievement and progress through social interaction that could not be achieved alone (Wertsch, 1985). Learning is, therefore, an active and collaborative process based on connection rather than an individual process (Fox, 2001). Knowledge is constructed, or built, rather than discovered or absorbed, and the construction happens socially.

Earlier social constructivist theorists such as John Dewey argued that the most important experiences a person has are not reflective or based on their own thought, but rather are tied to interactions with others (Dewey, 1971). In this sense, the very notion of experience comes through interaction with one's environment—social and physical—versus with oneself (Dewey, 1938). Further, within educational settings, because of the experiential importance of the social, learning should be designed to emphasize connection, relation, and interaction. Learning is

something that should be done together in social environments. The role of the teacher is to suggest or deposit ideas, but they must be digested and processed together as a group for learning to take place (Prawat, 2000).

This study is grounded in the theoretical perspective of social constructivism. As the following sections turn to an exploration of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 leadership, the underlying assumption is that social interaction is the unit of focus and that meaning is made through social environments and the interconnections of people between each other.

Authentic Leadership

There is both breadth and depth to the literature on authentic leadership, though it tends to revolve around a few key themes and is comprised of writing by a cadre of expert authors. Themes within the body of literature on authentic leadership emerge that include authentic leadership theory, authentic leadership in action, development of authentic leadership, and methods for measuring and evaluating impact. Calls have been made for future exploration into the practical application of authentic leadership beyond the conceptual understanding of the construct as a means to further advance the field of leadership studies (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019). Nevertheless, as outlined in the subsection on measurement and impact, significant ground has been covered in the literature on both the result and benefit of authentic leadership practices.

Authentic Leadership Theory. The genesis of modern authentic leadership theory was borne out of concern about the actions of business leaders and the devolving commitment to ethics and adherence to sound principles within business (Gardner et al., 2011). The origination of the canonical business-focused literature on the value of authentic leadership was thus rooted

in concern for its future. Based on the poor conduct of leaders, leadership authors and consultants began to look for alternatives in defining the form of more values-based leadership.

Much of the troubles and dilemmas of the modern world can be traced to the root cause of a crisis of authenticity and a lack of purpose (Cashman, 2003b; Cashman & Forem, 2003). Central to Cashman's (2003b) premise is that in order to grow a leader, the person inside of that leader must first be the center of focus and developed as such. In order to grow, several founding principles are needed, including authenticity; purpose; essence, which is the soul of leadership, relationship; value creation; and coaching (Cashman, 2003a). Once this person is discovered or awakened within, a leader can emerge with a solid grounding in their core values and purpose. By following a set of principles, authentic self-expression becomes a method through which to lead (Cashman, 1998). These principles include taking responsibility for one's actions, listening to feedback, becoming aware of underlying beliefs, and developing a sense of character. Authentic leaders are able to match their inner selves with the external displays of their persona. An in-depth focus on purpose helps to achieve such congruence. To coach leaders to grow and develop, a focus on awareness, commitment, and practice is needed (Cashman, 2003c).

At the core, authentic leadership comprises a dual ability in leaders to recognize and cultivate natural abilities and strengths and also develop an awareness of shortcomings with tangible actions (George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007). Authentic leaders hone in on their own personal skills, channel strengths, and work in the optimal zone of action of their capabilities. Critical to succeeding in authenticity, leaders within this model actively work to identify and address blind spots; by knowing their weaknesses and understanding them, such individuals can best overcome shortcomings and move along a process of continuous growth and personal development. Authentic leaders must be very clear on their personal values, leadership

principles, and ethical boundaries (George & Sims, 2007). Most importantly, authentic leaders practice their values and principles actively (“Authentic Leadership,” 2017). Their leadership is an action as much as a philosophy. The critical dimensions of authentic leadership include purpose, values, heart, relationships, and self-discipline (George, 2003). Such leadership, George (2003) argued, is needed in order to move forward out of a corporate crisis and into a future that is characterized more broadly by values and ethics.

Positive psychology, which focuses on positive individual traits and experiences, focuses on relationship skills, authenticity, capacity for love, willingness to forgive, and a forward-looking perspective, often infused with optimism (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). At the collective level, positive psychology harkens civic values such as tolerance, altruism, and citizen responsibility. A central theoretical foundation of authentic leadership theory is the positive organizational behavior which is based on positive psychology (Luthans, 2002a; Luthans, 2002b; Luthans & Jensen, 2002; Luthans & Youssef, 2007; Peterson & Luthans, 2003). Positive organizational behavior focuses not on the shortcomings of individuals but on their strengths. In a number of ways, authentic leadership is associated with the capacities of positive psychology, on which positive organizational behavior is based. Positive psychologists assert that rather than focusing on negative aspects of psychology, such as depression, frailties, and pathologies, intent should instead be given to highlighting individual vitality and strength. Positive organizational behavior examines the ways in which individual and leader strengths can be harnessed and managed in service of the performance of the overall organization. Authentic leadership stresses drawing on, leveraging, and developing individual strengths for leadership.

Authentic Leadership in Action. Authentic leadership can be defined as “a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behavior that encourages openness in sharing information needed

to make decisions while accepting follower's inputs" (Avolio et al., 2009, p. 423). Authentic leadership can be readily identified and visibly witnessed since authentic leaders in action emit a sense of hope and optimism. Their actions are seen as genuine, and they are considered reliable and trustworthy (Gardner, 2009). Often associated with authentic leadership are traits such as consistency, strong ethics and moral foundation, and success in supporting positive social relationships. Resilience is also an ability related to authentic leaders. Very critical to authentic leadership success is the ability to self-regulate and to develop a strong sense of self-awareness, including of one's own emotions.

Dynamic in nature and ever-changing, emotions are an intricate element within organizational behavior. Emotions exist within several levels of organizations, including within individuals, between people, within interpersonal interactions, in groups and teams, and at the organizational level (Ashkanasy, 2003). Regulating one's emotions requires several steps including attentional development, cognitive change, and response modulations (Grandey, 2000). Though emotions are challenging to study per se, Grandey (2000) shows there is intentional labor to the process of emotional regulation and that leaders can develop and grow the skill with training, reflection, and practice. Self-awareness and self-management play an important role in authentic leadership. Self-awareness and self-management are also the skills, along with social awareness and social skill that form the essential elements of emotional intelligence, which is an individual's ability to effectively manage both themselves and their relationships (Goleman, 1995, 2017). Importantly for Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence can be both taught and learned. It constitutes a major influencing factor in a leader's success.

Some critique of emotional intelligence research suggests that emotional intelligence playing a factor in real-world success has not been validated, that emotional intelligence is not

necessarily different from the summation of a person's intelligence quotient and their personality, and that too many views or constructs exist to define emotional intelligence (Waterhouse, 2006). However, strong contradictory claims have been made citing mounting literature on the positive effect of emotional intelligence curriculum for children as proof of impact, noting the distinction between emotional intelligence and the intelligence quotient, and synthesizing the canon on emotional intelligence into a cohesive view (Cherniss et al., 2006).

Authentic Leadership Development. Authenticity, as a leadership skill, can be cultivated. Authentic leadership can be passed on from leaders to followers through self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive modeling of authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005). By nature, authentic leaders prioritize the growth of others and foster positive self-development. Authentic leaders inspire others to develop their own authenticity, not through coercion or persuasion but rather through inspiration. The process of authentic leadership development creates a heightened level of trust among individuals. This, in turn, supports more robust organizational health fueled by a climate of caring and inclusivity and a strengths-based approach. By tapping into hope, trust, and positive emotions, authentic leaders are able to support commitment, job satisfaction, and engagement among followers.

Followers benefit from learning the methods of authentic leadership in other ways as well. Authentic leadership practices boost both follower performance and wellbeing (Ilies et al., 2005). Several more recent studies also suggest that authentic leadership is a factor in supporting the wellbeing of followers, as well as a sense of empowerment and job satisfaction, and that it promotes active engagement between leaders and followers (Giallonardo et al., 2010; Macik-Frey et al., 2009; Wong & Cummings, 2009). As a side note, it is argued that authentic leadership boosts follower perceptions of leadership, and that follower psychological capital

yields trust in leadership, which is directly tied to the entity's financial performance (Clapp-Smith et al., 2009). More on the result of authentic leadership in organizations is explored in the measurement and impact section of the literature review. One pivotal study illuminates that capturing the benefit of authentic leadership is more difficult for women than men (Eagly, 2005). The field of research on the benefits of authentic leadership and the transfer of the skill from leaders to followers would benefit from further exploration into the dynamic of gender.

Authentic leadership drives organizational performance as well as individual performance. Clapp-Smith et al.'s (2009) suggested that leaders role model authenticity and demonstrate its impact through actions. Specifically, leaders can influence and inform the behaviors, attitudes, and activities of followers (Avolio et al., 2004). In an authentic leadership development model, budding authentic leaders take stock of who they are and how they are supported with positive examples around them. These leaders draw on what they experience in order to design how they want to develop and behave and what they want to become (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Developing authentic leadership also requires a moral component (May et al., 2003). Needed for such growth in individuals is the ability to evaluate decision options transparently and to act authentically. Thus, both cultivating authentic decision-making and authentic behavior are factors within authentic leadership development that require moral courage, moral resiliency, moral capacity, and moral efficacy in addition to self-awareness.

Though formal programs exist for leadership development and can be used, many such programs fail to achieve targeted development results or fall short of intended learning goals. However, another path to developing authentic leadership exists in which leaders learn in natural settings from high-impact experiences (Avolio et al., 2006; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Meanings attached to life experiences play an essential part in shaping authentic leadership. A trail of

crucial moments within the life of a leader can be seized as a pathway of learning from experience. By following a practical approach to intentional learning through life experiences, leaders can progress their authenticity, leadership, and authentic leadership skills.

Measurement of Authentic Leadership. After exploring theories of authentic leadership, describing authentic leadership in action, and illustrating thinking and research on authentic leadership development, common or established methods for evaluating authentic leadership's success and impact shall now be detailed.

A leading measure for authentic leadership was developed through a comprehensive study incorporating five different sample sets from multiple countries (Avolio et al., 2007; Avolio et al., 2018; Walumbwa et al., 2008). The result is a comprehensive, authentic leadership construct called the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ). The scale is comprised of 16 measures. The 16 items are grouped to represent the self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing of an authentic leader. The instrument successfully demonstrated predictive validity. Interestingly, the results of the research to develop the scale also unveiled a positive relationship between authentic leadership and performance, as rated by supervisors. The Walumbwa et al. scale is a significant contribution to the field for three key reasons. First, it is grounded in authentic leadership theory and includes those at the forefront of authentic leadership theory as authors. Second, it consists of a broad scale to address all factors of authentic leadership with an itemization through specific measures for thorough and concrete assessment. Third, the instrument achieved predictive validity.

A number of further studies have been used to research features of authentic leadership using Walumbwa et al.'s Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ). A study of over 300 executives working in businesses in predominantly eastern India administered the ALQ (Datta,

2015). The research suggests that authentic leadership supports manager effectiveness as well as positive attitudes and behavior within groups in the workplace. The study also found that authentic leadership helps drive commitment and supports problem-solving. Other measures have been developed to indicate particular levels of effectiveness or specific impacts of authentic leadership. For example, using the ALQ as an instrument, a study of over 200 employees in Portugal determined that authentic leadership is a predictor of employee creativity (Rego et al., 2012). In the academic context, a study using the ALQ instrument demonstrated the correlational relationship between authentic leadership and job satisfaction of university teachers (Raziq et al., 2019).

In addition, more fundamental studies have been conducted to investigate the validity of the ALQ. A study in Pakistan within the context of institutions of higher education tested the construct, finding all four dimensions of the ALQ to be reliable and valid (Akbar et al., 2019). Similarly, the ALQ was validated after an invariance between sample participants in Portugal and in Brazil was discovered (Cervo et al., 2016). A Polish language version of the ALQ was validated through a study of Polish registered nurses with a sample size of over 3,000 participants (Panczyk et al., 2019). While finding the ALQ to be both reliable and valid, one set of researchers has proposed an alternative instrument called the authentic leadership inventory (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011). While also proven to be valid and reliable through their research, the instrument has been less widely adopted or used when compared to the ALQ.

Though not specific to authentic leadership per se, there are a set of measures developed to address authenticity as a part of authentic leadership. Though not as relevant for this study as the Walumbwa (2008) model, they do help to frame the body of literature on measurement. An individual difference measure for dispositional authenticity was developed by Kernis and

Goldman (2006). The model centers on identifying individual components of authenticity as awareness, unbiased processing, behavior, and relational orientation (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). The scale consists of 45 items within these four constructs. It was developed through research conducted with samples of both male and female college students. It is unclear whether the findings would be scalable to older populations both inside and outside of the United States. After a thorough review of the literature on authentic leadership, it becomes clear that the Walumbwa (2008) model is both widely used, accepted, and referenced as a valid and reliable measure of authentic leadership.

Crisis Leadership

After a thorough discussion of the literature written discreetly on authentic leadership, the focus now turns to the second of three core constructs for the study: crisis leadership. Crisis leadership offers a view of leader actions, behaviors, and strategies in the most challenging scenarios. The literature broadly falls into the following five categories: approaches to crisis leadership and frameworks for development and evaluation, crisis leadership in action, a view of the leader in crisis, crisis communications, culture and change leadership for organizations in crisis, and the ethics of leadership and the role of followership in crisis.

Approaches to Crisis Leadership and Frameworks for Development and

Evaluation. While crises are inevitable, and even on the rise in industrialized societies, specific steps such as preparation and looking for warning signs of trouble can help mitigate the impact (Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001). Mitroff and Anagnos also propose that crises are opportunities for valuable learning that can be applied to future prevention. Strong individual leadership, adherence to ethics, and personal accountability are some of the features offered as best practices for crisis management. The authors challenge leaders to consider the totality of a crisis situation

in addition to the details, to avoid taking on the role of victim, and to look to innovative thinking as a means for creative solutions. Mitroff and Anagnos proposed a unique model for holistically managing crisis, which takes into account types of crisis and risk, stakeholders involved, mechanisms for managing crisis, and existing systems in addition to the overall crisis scenario. The model offers a helpful roadmap for both understanding and navigating a crisis as a leader.

Mitroff (2005) expanded the view of crisis management from the leader to the enterprise level with an exploration of seven specific lessons learned from companies that navigated disasters. Mitroff built on earlier thinking by including in the seven lessons a need for creative thinking and embracing preparedness. Mitroff expanded suggestions relevant at the company level of analysis explaining that crisis management is built into organizational design (Mitroff, 2005). In addition, optimizing paranoia to develop practical cautiousness and creating a mix of social and political skills are encouraged for organizational crisis management. Finally, specific leader actions are encouraged, such as building tolerance for ambiguity, cultivating emotional intelligence, and a recognition of the spiritual element of leadership. Mitroff (2005) included a valuable appendix with documentation of a span of significant crises and demonstrated that their recommendations are grounded in research.

Mitroff and Anagnos (2001) and Mitroff (2005) appear to have built on the previous work of Pearson and Mitroff (1993), who years earlier proposed that leaders who successfully navigate crisis are aware of the vulnerabilities in their organizations, and as such, actively evaluate several areas of crisis management including types of crisis, phases of crisis, stakeholders involved, and organizational system. Planning for crisis though, is not necessarily the solution to crisis, and, in itself, will not mitigate the impacts of crisis (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). However, planning for crisis stimulates creativity within organizations, enables the ability

to consider scenarios that were previously unthinkable, and sets the stage for better leader performance.

The importance of preparedness and the concept of honing and developing skills in anticipation of crisis are themes that continue in the literature (Mitroff & Alpaslan, 2011). Mitroff and Alpaslan proposed that a variety of root causes lead to crisis scenarios. These root causes include the propagation of false beliefs, a lack of controlling problems such as arrogance and greed, and an inability to prevent corruption. Following the accurate recognition and anticipation of a crisis, leaders can then follow a framework to both prevent and ameliorate the impact of crisis. The authors advocated for an approach of considering multiple perspectives, including combinations of personal, impersonal, technical/scientific, and social/cultural to navigate crisis. Ultimately, Alpaslan and Mitroff applied new language, terms, definitions, and frameworks to long-standing issues of crisis. Their work provides a useful language for discussing and understanding the elements of crisis but, in doing so, adds many layers of complexity to problems that may be better understood in simpler terms.

The role of preparedness in successfully navigating crisis is a theme within the literature on crisis leadership beyond the broad work of Mitroff. For example, Boin (2009) documented the ways in which disasters and crises are changing over time and offered protocols for governments to follow for successful preparation. A notable challenge public leaders face in preparing for a crisis is a lack of a sense of urgency from constituents (Boin, 2009). Crisis preparation is also expensive, can stoke political tensions, and is difficult to define for as of yet inconceivable events. Nevertheless, preparedness is an essential task of public leaders in ensuring crisis mitigation. Boin's (2009) work is valuable in that it both details how crisis preparations can happen and why they are difficult.

In addition to detailing approaches to crisis leadership, the literature in the field contains research exploring frameworks for crisis leadership development as well as for the evaluation of leader success. The C-LEAD scale was designed as an instrument to measure leader effectiveness in crisis, with a particular focus on public health and safety scenarios (Hadley et al., 2011). Designed to examine both the ability to assess information and to make decisions, the C-LEAD scale was developed through interviewing experts and reviewing crisis leadership literature. Hadley et al. pointed to several studies that reveal a predictive ability of the measure, noting that the C-LEAD scale predicted decision-making confidence, motivation to lead, and volunteering to take on leadership roles in a crisis. The authors present a helpful theoretical model depicting the relationship between leader characteristics, which inform crisis leader self-efficacy, which, in turn, informs both motivation to lead in a crisis and crisis performance. A draw-back to the research study was that it relied on self-reported data from leaders, and the definition of leader was very loosely defined as someone who has at least one direct report. Questions arise as to whether the survey, in essence, targeted managers as a general group versus leaders and also how the validity of the scale and the research findings may have been different without reliance on self-reported data.

Oftentimes, in the immediate aftermath of crisis and disasters, public leadership is evaluated somewhat haphazardly with winners and losers declared (Boin et al., 2013). Boin et al. provided an examination of a number of headline crises and the superficial analysis of respective public figures involved. As an alternative to such speculative analysis, the authors proposed a framework for assessing the performance of leaders in crisis. They effectively identified ten specific tasks of leaders during crises, including early recognition, sensemaking, making critical decisions, orchestrating vertical and horizontal coordination, coupling a decoupling, meaning-

making, communication, rendering accountability, learning, and enhancing resilience. The authors proposed that the best framework for the evaluation of leaders in crises is to rate leader performance against each of the ten identified crisis leadership tasks. A strength of this article is the clear identification and articulation of tasks for leaders in crisis. However, the framework is only the list of tasks. The article leaves unanswered questions about how to engage in the evaluation of leaders against the list of tasks, what type of scale or rating to use, how to score such assessment, or how to interpret the results. While the proposed list of leadership tasks in crisis is a helpful beginning, it does not constitute a holistic evaluative framework.

Research within crisis leadership proposes frameworks for evaluation as a means to develop leadership skills for a crisis. Locating their study in the context of the modern VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) environment, Alkhaldi et al. (2017) endeavored through a comprehensive project to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of crisis response from leaders (Alkhaldi et al., 2017). Their qualitative phenomenological study presented a set of 11 online questions to a group of 41 participants. Ultimately, based on the research, the authors recommended installation of a support system for leaders navigating a crisis including: (a) preparation, such as certification; (b) a matching system to pair experienced crisis leaders with novice counterparts; and most importantly, (c) the installation of a formal advisor for real-time counsel during a crisis. Through the creation of this support scaffolding, the efficiency and effectiveness of leader ability in crises increase. Such reverse engineering of evaluation framework development is helpful in pinpointing practical avenues for boosting crisis leadership ability. Even in the most extreme of contexts, psychological, social, and organizational resources provide necessary scaffolding and can serve as attenuators of the impact of a crisis (Hannah et al., 2009).

A similar study proposes a framework for developing crisis leadership through the development of critical thinking skills (Powley & Taylor, 2014). Powley and Taylor aimed to teach graduate management students about leading in crisis scenarios and disruptive environments. An individual student assignment with analysis and a collaborative poster session were presented as approaches for developing crisis leadership in students. The question the authors sought to answer was how best to equip students for crisis management in a classroom setting. Though the approach was novel, it is unclear how the results of student preparation will fair in actual crisis scenarios beyond the walls of the classroom. This would be an opportunity for further research.

Crisis Leadership in Action. A helpful lens for exploring crisis leadership is through real-world scenarios and experiences. The literature on crisis leadership includes a body of research on particular crisis scenarios during real historical and sustained events to examine the application of leadership approaches. The literature also features an examination of leaders, their skills, behaviors, and efficacy through the lens of a crisis.

The presidential election of 2008 in the United States occurred at a time of profound financial collapse, affording the opportunity to examine the selection of a national leader during crisis (Williams et al., 2012). Through a study of over 400 individuals in three different regions in the United States, Williams et al. discovered that a leader's charisma, more than their authenticity, affected voting behavior during this crisis. The leadership attributes of Barack Obama and John McCain were studied specifically. The authors also examined the erosion of trust of political leaders and the rise of cynicism in attitudes towards leadership. Williams et al. offered a helpful contrast of attitudes towards of two leaders within an election and during a time of financial crisis. It is not clear from the study, however, to what extent responses were shaped

by the election context specifically, the financial crisis specifically, or the combination of the two. The context of 2008 provides a window into an atypical confluence of factors, and further research would benefit from an exploration of the relational aspects of the contextual elements.

A significant 2011 earthquake in New Zealand and the aftermath from a health point of view in a Christchurch ICU was the backdrop for a qualitative study on the leadership approaches of physicians and nurses during the crisis (Zhuravsky, 2015). The research is unique in that it examined manifold interactions between various levels of acute care staff in the midst of crisis. The author identified decision-making, ability to remain calm, and effective communications as the formal themes of crisis leadership. In addition, informal themes were identified, including motivation to lead, autonomy, emotional leadership, and viewing a crisis as an opportunity. Through the study of the interactions between staff, a theme of shared leadership, in which a group aims to lead each other toward a collective goal within the Christchurch ICU emerged. Zhuravsky (2015) suggested that deepening further research on shared leadership in a crisis would be beneficial to the field. With a small sample size and a single study location, the research would also benefit from expansion.

Also examining the 2011 earthquake in New Zealand, but with a lens of crisis leadership skills in schools, Mutch (2015) conducted interviews within four different school communities. Although students and parents tended to look to principals for leadership during the crisis, many principals were ill-prepared for such a role (Mutch, 2015). The analysis of research showed that dispositional (personal qualities), relational (skills in collaboration and relationship building), and contextual (assessment of the situation at hand) factors all shaped the crisis response of principals. A strength of the research was that a robust qualitative design with both interviews and focus groups was used. Furthermore, the semi-structured approach for interviews provided

an opportunity for participants to contribute their views without the constraint of solely responding to specific prompts. The research was collected over a two-year period. One weakness of the study is that potential differences in responses based on timing (closer to or further away from the moment of crisis) were not taken into account.

Nyenswah et al. (2016), in a study of crisis leadership during the Ebola crisis in Liberia, took a different approach to collecting data with a dedicated focus on document review, including systematic analysis of meeting minutes and decision processes. The unique feature of Nyenswah et al.'s work was incorporating analysis of the role of leadership across distinct phases of the Ebola crisis, including early mobilization, the emergency phase, the decline of the epidemic, and the enduring extended impact. Unlike other research on crisis in action, such exploration of leadership across the span of a crisis presents an opportunity for in-depth understanding. In other words, Nyenswah et al. moved away from a moment in time approach to focus more holistically on the full arc of a crisis and the leadership involved. With a contingency leadership lens, the authors proposed that a leader's effectiveness in crisis response is related to their ability to flex leadership styles according to the specific situation.

Similarly, a study from Sweden illuminated the sustained crisis state experienced in the manufacturing industry with continuous pressure from demands of schedule, production, and profitability (Snyder et al., 2018). Snyder et al. found a general absence of communications and a lack of understanding of corporate values and culture to be part of the somewhat frantic crisis mode of leaders to which employees did not respond well. However, the authors found that design thinking tools, including empathizing, storytelling, and coaching, helped leaders under pressure better engage employees, specifically in building a healthier organizational culture overall. A critical insight presented by Snyder et al. is that leaders can encounter sustained crisis

scenarios in everyday work scenarios, not only those triggered by historical events or at a specific moment in time. In addition, the research adds the innovation-focused design thinking tools to the list of helpful approaches for leaders to explore in crisis. Though outside of the context of the corporate environment, a study of a climbing disaster on Mt. Everest in 1996 showed a similar breakdown of the function of and learning with teams (Kayes, 2004). The qualitative study found that directive leadership, narrowly defined purpose, and lack of awareness of an ambiguous problem were the culprits of the disaster. Taken together, the studies illuminate the importance of high-functioning teams and empowering leadership that receives a mandate from followers in supporting a leader's ability to navigate a crisis.

The devastating events of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010 serve as a backdrop for the exploration of the crisis leadership approach of Admiral Thad Allen (Kearns et al., 2019). Allen's actions in crises were marked by direct and candid communication, quick thinking, and a willingness to try new and untested approaches. A strength of the Allen case study is that it includes tangible and practical points for use in classroom discussions on leadership. However, the study relies more on the descriptions of a series of Allen's actions in crisis than it does a summation of his leadership approach. Nevertheless, Kearns et al. concluded by drawing parallels between Allen's leadership in Hurricane Katrina and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and characteristics of leadership, including self-knowledge, systems-thinking, external perspective, stewardship, integrity and trust-building, accountability, and empathy.

Through an analysis of the series of vulnerabilities that led to the 2013 Lac-Mégantic train derailment in Canada, the complexity of crisis evolution was illuminated (Therrien et al., 2016). The crash itself left dozens dead and thousands evacuated and contributed to a domino

effect of failure in transport infrastructure, environmental damage, and economic difficulties. Therrien et al. (2016) used network governance, sensemaking, and regulation regime as foundational narratives for understanding the risk management failures contributing to the Lac-Mégantic crisis. Ultimately, the authors proposed lessons learned from the incident for crisis management. Their recommendations included developing the resilience of networks, improving collaboration and teamwork between actions, shifting cultural norms to allow for questioning of authority, and defining avenues for demonstration of leadership credibility. The work of Therrien et al. (2016), like other contributors to the body of research on crisis leadership through the study of historical events, provides valuable analysis, findings, and recommendations for potential crises that lie ahead.

A View of the Leader. After detailing numerous discussions of crisis leadership in action through the analysis of real and historical events, the focus now shifts to literature that documents specific actions, decisions, and characteristics of leaders in crisis.

The chemical industry serves as the backdrop for one researcher's view of leaders in crisis with a focus on executives through extensive interviews with CEOs (Jaques, 2012). Jaques explored the skills of top executives in preventing and preparing for crisis in the corporate context. The research adds to the field with empirical data about business leaders and crisis management. Notably, several categories of leadership roles in navigating crisis preparedness were uncovered including: (a) assessing risks, (b) building relationships, (c) actively communicating, (d) role-modeling a proactive culture, and (e) adhering to established standards and processes. However, with the focus on pre-crisis prevention, the research omits, from a practical point of view, the effectiveness or result of such skills in preparation. In addition, the

executives interviewed came from one region (Australia), and the implications of the potential impact of national culture were not addressed.

Deitchman (2013) sought to answer a similar question of which leader attributes are needed for successful crisis leadership within the context of public health emergencies. The attributes identified for leaders in public health to successfully navigate a crisis include knowledge of public health science, situational awareness, decisiveness, communication, and the ability to build trust and coordinate diverse groups of people. The attributes identified in the study taken together present a holistic view of crisis leadership and offer a helpful framework for developing public health leaders. However, the research for the article was conducted using a review of published sources only. An opportunity exists for further study and the collection of empirical data to validate the findings.

DuBrin (2013) took a focused approach to examine the specific traits, attributes, and behaviors of leaders who are demonstratively effective in crisis. Effectiveness in this context includes both bottom-line factors, such as productivity, and employee factors such as morale (DuBrin, 2013). Through an examination of theory and research, the author proposed that a set of clear attributes define successful crisis leadership: crisis leaders are strategic, charismatic, and have high emotional intelligence, meaning they are able to both express and understand emotion. Similarly, a theme of necessary behaviors for effective leaders in a crisis emerges. Those behaviors include strong communication and a directive style of leadership. Decisiveness, compassion, and agility are also highlighted as critical personal attributes for leaders to possess in order to be effective in crisis. DuBrin successfully extracted and synthesized lists and criteria for effective crisis leadership and accurately suggested an opportunity for further research into

identifying the specific combinations of personal attributes and leadership behaviors that would best equip leaders to navigate crisis.

Beyond who leaders are as individuals and who they are and what they do during difficult times is part of the body of literature on crisis leadership. Stern (2013) explicitly identified the task of preparing for crisis as a critical component of a leader's ability to navigate crisis. They prose that preparedness is an essential addition to traditional notions of crisis leadership actions, including sense-making, decision making, meaning-making, terminating or identifying the moment of an end to the crisis, and learning (Stern, 2013). Expanding the moment of evaluation of crisis leadership from not only performance in the moment of crisis but also to the stages of preparation in advance of the crisis is compelling. However, such analysis is difficult to complete in practical terms without advance awareness of the pending crisis. In a related article, Stern (2017) asserted that leaders face a specific set of challenges in crises. These include, for example, risk of trauma, acute physical or psychological harm, and material danger (Stern, 2017). Linking these two pieces of Stern's (2013, 2017) research together makes more apparent the relationship between preparation and crisis performance. Namely, the act of preparing for crisis arms and equips leaders to overcome some of the inherent challenges involved in the effective management of crisis.

Leadership agility is another leadership trait, skill, and behavior that can affect a leader's performance during crisis. The potential for success in navigating through crisis can be improved by taking an agile approach to leadership. In the field of human resources (HR), much like in information technology (IT), leadership agility is defined by several guiding principles, including valuing experimentation, decomposition work to smaller components, making incremental improvements, working in short spurts, encouraging teams to self-direct, and emphasizing

transparency and communication (Tarken, 2020). Tarken presented an innovative approach to documenting what Tarken called an “inverse relationship between time and satisfaction” (p. 20) through a visual chart depicting the downward slope of a curve plotted in a grid with time on the y-axis and satisfaction on the x-axis. The longer it takes to deliver on a project, the less likely an HR customer will be satisfied. For HR leaders, agile leadership enables speed to delivery and increases chances of meeting customer needs. Tarken proposed that leadership agility is a tool for HR leaders to draw on to help them face and respond to emergent crises and challenges such as the pandemic and racial injustice. Tarken made a strong case for the benefit of agile leadership in general and the outcomes it enables in the field of HR. Nevertheless, Tarken did not present a clear case for how or why leadership agility is useful during a crisis specifically. It is implied but not spelled out in the clearest of terms that agile leadership’s value is most evident in times when fast action is needed, and that crisis scenarios tend to incorporate an element of time pressure.

In addition to exploring what impact the leader has on crisis, there is a body of work focusing on what effect crisis has on the leader. For example, it is argued that a performative aspect of crisis leadership exists wherein there is an expectation that a leader's actions are viewed and evaluated (Gigliotti, 2016). There is often a perception that thinking should be secondary to acting in times of crisis for leaders. Gigliotti (2016) suggested that the practice of leading through a crisis actually shapes and evolves a leader’s identity. They suggested that leading in crisis is an innately human act and that a leader’s actions within crisis have significance both for followers and for leaders themselves. Gigliotti proposed that self-reflection broadly is a path to strengthening crisis leadership ability. Gigliotti’s research could be strengthened by further analysis of how and why this might be, along with greater depth to the empirical data to support the claim.

Challenging scenarios experienced in life, called crucibles, can help leaders develop (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). True leaders are not diminished by tragedy; they both learn and grow from it. Bennis and Thomas argued that people who are able to both navigate challenging scenarios and lead share four essential skills. Leaders, they asserted, on the whole, have four specific skills that enable them to learn from crisis. These skills include creating shared meaning with others, finding one's distinctive voice, being adaptable, and having integrity. Like Gigliotti (2016), Bennis and Thomas contributed to the body scholarship that suggests a two-directional relationship exists between leaders and crisis. Leaders have an impact on crises, and crises can also make leaders. Crises opens up the possibility of self-discovery and growth for leaders.

Beyond serving as a catalyst for growth and development for themselves, crisis can be viewed by executives under certain conditions as an opportunity (Brockner & James, 2008). The unique elements of a crisis scenario, such as a need for quick decision making, the element of surprise, and a sense of urgency, can be ingredients for positive organizational change. Brockner and James posited that viewing crisis as an opportunity is not new. Instead, their work brings the additional lens of exploring the specific factors that lead executives to view crisis as having possibility. The journey of perception from viewing a crisis as a threat to an opportunity is not necessarily an easy one to make and requires a combination of factor. These factors include self-efficacy on the part of the leader, perceived attainability of the opportunity presented by the crisis, the narrowness of scope of the crisis, the onus of responsibility for the crisis falling outside of the organization, and the presence of an optimistic belief system within the organization.

Organizations in Crisis: Culture and Change Leadership. Even for smaller organizations, organizational culture can shape approaches to crisis leadership. Through a case

study examining a family-owned hotel business in Pakistan, Afghan (2012) details a scenario of shifts in corporate culture relating to diminishing demand. A number of factors, such as the war on terror, economic decline, and challenges in maintaining law and order, created a crisis-like scenario for the family members leading the firm to navigate (Afghan, 2012). Amidst necessary headcount reductions, the company Avari Group was faced with conflicting core organizational values such as lifelong employment without retirement. Ultimately, the family succeeded in adapting and evolving culture while continuing to inculcate core cultural values throughout succession efforts. These values helped guide decision-making for the leaders in crisis.

Bhaduri (2019) outlined organizational crisis management through a review of organizational culture literature. Bhaduri proposed that there is a distinct crisis life cycle within organizations comprising five stages: signal detection, prevention, containment, recovery, and learning and that several leadership styles emerge in crisis, including directive, transactional, cognitive, and transformational. Bhaduri presented compelling questions about crisis management and how it is impacted by various leadership styles and types of organizational culture. Bhaduri offered a compelling proposition on the evaluation of which leadership styles are most effective in relation to the stages identified in the crisis life cycle. However, their investigation could be strengthened by empirical data collection in addition to the thorough literature investigation.

Like organizational culture, change leadership and a leader's ability to navigate change play a role in crisis management. Through an examination of a flooding crisis in Thailand, Jaroensutiyoton et al. (2019) found that skills in change leadership positively affect an individual's alertness and innovation and that these two factors, in turn, support the ability to lead through crisis. Jaroensutiyoton et al. suggested that change leadership enables crisis

leadership. In some ways, this assertion appears somewhat obvious, if not tautological (Jaroensutiyotin et al., 2019). Crises can be considered a kind of change, and therefore skills in leading change seem clearly related to skills in leading crisis. However, understanding crisis as change is, in fact, a valuable contribution to the field of crisis leadership. It expands the opportunity for further research and analysis into the relationship between change and crisis and implications for leadership to support organizations and communities through both.

A vital factor of the difficulty for organizations in times of crisis is uncertainty. To cope with uncertainty, organizations adopt various sense-making strategies from rule-based to more ad hoc models depending on the level of institutionalization of the organization (Lu, 2017). Lu examined four major crises and resulting emergencies in detail to identify themes and patterns in organizational sense-making as a means for navigating uncertainty. The crises include the 2005 New Orleans flood, the 2003 Space Shuttle Columbia disaster, the 1992 Los Angeles riots, and the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. However, the four crises selected for analysis represent only a small sample of U.S. crises. They are not necessarily tied together thematically, regionally, or based on a genre or period of time. The research questions posed by Lu have great potential for understanding how organizations cope with the uncertainty element of crises and would benefit from a broader exploration of other historical crises.

There is evidence to indicate that one important factor in how organizations cope with crisis successfully is organizational preparedness and decision making. It is important to note on the theme of readiness that organizations sometimes have a collective sense of the potential for crisis and disaster but do not take the threat or risk seriously (Gorge, 2006). In this case, Gorge recommended that leaders focus on security and business continuity as the first steps for building organizational understanding. Stressing the connections between crisis response plans, business

continuity, end eventual recovery post-disaster, Gorge offered some guidelines for developing strategies in advance of crisis and learning from actual happenings in post-mortem retrospectives post-crisis. Through such a process of evaluation, organizations can learn from their response and improve.

In addition to organizational learning, organizational decision-making in times of crisis is a theme in the literature on crisis leadership. An empirical study on the collective decision-making of crisis management teams in response to crisis examined 15 distinct crisis scenarios in 13 different organizations through leader interviews (Hale et al., 2006). A key finding from the research was that organizations tend to generate potential solutions and rapidly move through the evaluation of options before the selection of a course of action. It was discovered that judgment and bargaining were two tactics used to inform decision-making processes during crisis, and that organizational decision-making in crisis is iterative and can be plagued by delays. An exciting subsection of the Hale (2006) research is that it echoes findings from earlier research that showed that crises can be classified as having both internal and external triggers (Shrivastava & Mitroff, 1987). However, in both cases, it remains unclear what the relationship is between internally- versus externally-triggered crises on the actions of leaders, organizational decision making, and ultimately the outcome of crisis resolution. The distinction between the internal and external genesis of crisis is an opportunity for further research in the field of crisis management.

In the same way that individual leaders can take steps for crisis management through planning, organizations can prepare for the potential of crisis and disaster preparedness (Fowler et al., 2007). Fowler et al. discovered through an empirical study and the development and testing of a scale that variations exist in perceptions of preparedness within organizations. Leaders and managers, compared to employees, are more likely to have a heightened belief in an

organization's level of being ready for a crisis. The study focused on perception and uncovered an interesting finding in the difference between leader and employee notions of organizational preparedness. The study could have been strengthened with an alignment between perceptions of preparedness and actual preparedness. A question arises here as to why leaders may or may not accurately perceive organizational preparedness. If leaders have a greater sense of organizational readiness than what is factual, concerns about ethics may arise.

Ethics of Leadership and the Role of Followership in Crisis. Leadership ethics in times of crisis are essential at both the individual and organizational levels (Bauman, 2011). Bauman suggested that an ethical approach is necessary to lead an organization through crisis. Through an examination of studies about reactions to unintentional harm created by companies, Bauman proposed three frameworks for ethical approaches in organizations, including virtue ethics, an ethic of care, and an ethic of justice. Bauman argued that of the three, the ethic of care is the most effective approach for corporate crisis management from a stakeholder point of view. Ultimately, the ethics of care approach strengthens the company-stakeholder relationship and reduces perceived or real unintentional harm. As Bauman noted in conclusion, the degree to which a level of care or the magnitude needed in the ethics of care for successful crisis navigation remains yet to be unveiled. An opportunity exists for further research.

The relational and ethical dimensions of responsible leadership made it the lens of choice for a study of reputation management during crisis. The backdrop for the study was the airline industry. The focus of the research was on leadership behaviors of airline executives in the face of crisis and the correlation to reputation management, as measured by the stock price. It was concluded in the study that responsible leadership actions were strongly correlated to share price. It is argued that an ethical leadership approach helps corporations navigate a crisis at hand as

well as the aftermath. A focus on ethical and responsible leadership can help preserve a corporation's brand. Interestingly, the examples cited in the study were crises that were created by airlines. For example, the scenarios included having a passenger dragged from an airplane and a threat of jail time for a passenger refusing to give up a seat for an infant. Perhaps a stronger case could be made for the impact of responsible and ethical leadership in contexts outside of the creation of the corporations themselves.

In general, the field of leadership ethics is valuable for understanding best practices and decision making in crisis. Modern day leadership ethics draws on Aristotelian principles such as that morality is comprised not just of action but also of feeling (Price, 2008). Therefore, for leaders in crisis, ethical actions are as important as the ethical intent which underlies them. The combination of intent and actions helps empower leaders in difficult situations to do the right things at the right times.

Like ethics, followership takes on particular meaning in crisis scenarios. Followership theory, in general, suggests that in order to engage in the act of leading, leaders must have a group of people who follow them (Uhl-Bien, 2014). Followership occurs when this group of individuals, in order to move towards shared goals, accept the influence of another person. Followership offers an alternative to traditional top-down notions of leadership with a bottom-up approach. Legitimacy of leadership comes not from declaration of the leader, but consent of the follower (Price, 2008).

In the context of crisis, followers have an important role to play, and a set of skills enables followers to support their organizations in adapting to change during challenging times (Young et al., 2020). For example, being a team player is a followership skill with great relevance in crisis. Further, followership skills in crisis can be grouped into three major

categories: professional followership skills, interpersonal followership skills, and political followership skills. Young et al. also explained that a maturity model exists in which followers can progress their skills over time moving from novice/apprentice to team player to decision maker, and lastly to leader/manager. As a counterpart to leadership, followership in crisis explores the skills and actions needed from individuals within organizations to help support adaptation and response to challenges. Leadership grows in proportion to the support of followers, and hence, leadership and followership are inextricably linked (Greenleaf, 2002).

Communications During Crisis. A critical tactic and tool for supporting culture and change within organizations communications. Errors, omission, and delay in communications can negatively affect crisis leadership, whereas accuracy, transparency, and speed in communications can enhance leader effectiveness (Eldridge, 2020). Important in all facets of leadership scenarios, effective communication is a critical skill in crisis scenarios. Within contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic, communication becomes an essential skill that enables leaders to save lives. Eldridge explored communication in times of crisis with a focus on processing information, principles of communication, and barriers to communicating effectively. They proposed that a variety of obstacles, including those psychological in nature, can block effective communication. Eldridge's claims, while intuitively compelling, could be strengthened with more in-depth research and further examination of the role of communication in the COVID-19 specific crisis context which is referenced.

When communication is not effective, a barrier to transmitting information occurs, and this impedes a leader's ability to effectively lead in crisis (Dearstyne, 2007). This was the case for the New York Fire Department in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. A study of oral histories from the time surrounding the event revealed a

chain of impact stemming from strained communication. Commanders lacked reliable, clear, and correct information, which led to confusion, improvisation, and difficulties in even conceptualizing the collapse of the towers. In order to successfully direct response efforts, leaders need access to information. Thus, channels of communication to transmit information are essential in crisis, and the ability to communicate well is a vital crisis leadership skill.

Crisis leadership, it is argued, is comprised of learnable skills, including effective communication, and can be honed in academic settings (Balwant, 2020). Through a mixed-methods investigation, Balwant equipped students with a playbook to learn about navigating crises and then tested their skills in a simulation involving a press conference. The study demonstrated that students gained a critical understanding of leadership concepts; it also showed an increase in the ability of students to communicate to external stakeholders successfully. Moreover, the research demonstrated an essential link between the ability to communicate clearly and concisely and crisis leadership aptitude. An intriguing introduction sets the context for increased interest in crisis communications amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the reference to the pandemic carries only through the introduction of the article; the rest of the article, presentation of research, and findings are isolated from the context of COVID-19. The article could be strengthened in terms of relevancy with an added examination between the training exercise and simulation and the pandemic.

Dixon et al. (2017) presented a unique approach to understanding and describing the role of communication in leader effectiveness in crisis through an in-depth study with interviews of army leaders in extreme military scenarios. Dixon et al. found that military leaders navigating crisis both participated in sense-making (or explaining their surroundings and contexts), and sense-giving wherein through communication these leaders established common meanings and

reduced ambiguity for their platoons. Sense-giving is an active and influencing leadership practice that happens through communication. It is a needed corollary to the more passive sense-making or creating understanding. Conveying critical information to subordinates in military crisis scenarios is a crucial ability for leaders. Similar guidance is given for leaders in crisis in the corporate sphere with an emphasis on responding quickly, speaking directly and with active engagement, being visible and inclusive, and communicating heavily, even erring on the side of over-communication (Farmer & Tvedt, 2005). Moreover, organizations with a culture of communication and excellence in communications management are more likely to have prepared for crisis and are better equipped to navigate a crisis successfully (Lee et al., 2007).

Strong communication is essential for teams navigating crisis as well as leaders. However, in a comprehensive study of public organizations and government in Greece in which both surveys and interviews were used to capture data from 177 participants, internal communications between teams were found to be positively correlated with the performance of crisis management teams (CMTs), particularly in terms of cooperation and integration (Tokakis et al., 2018). Data collection was limited to one country and was also arranged through snowball sampling. Hence, the results of the study may not be generalizable. Nevertheless, they indicate a meaningful potential relationship between communications and crisis management.

A particular type of communication was found to be critical following the 2014 Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 crash in the Ukraine: spoken words at memorials or remembrance ceremonies from mayors (Jong et al., 2016). Jong et al. discovered through analysis of social media and news articles that a community expectation proliferated in the wake of the crash for mayors to communicate publicly with words of comfort and remembering those lost. One-on-one communications from mayors directly to family members of the deceased were

also considered of critical comfort in the time following the Malaysian crisis. This research adds to the literature on the importance of communication during and after a crisis. The focus on communication as a soothing or comforting tactic for populations adds to the discourse on the more practical elements of communication as a tool for helping leaders navigate the mechanics of crisis.

COVID-19 Pandemic-era Leadership

Perhaps the defining event of modern history, the COVID-19 pandemic has sparked a flurry of research activity aimed at understanding and evaluating leadership actions during the crisis to best prepare for the future. Though highly new and emergent, this body of research and literature is quickly growing. Currently, COVID-19 research can be thematically grouped with a focused analysis of COVID-19 through the lens of leadership models, COVID-19 leadership in corporations, the importance of trust in pandemic leadership, and the necessity for global scale in COVID leadership.

COVID-19 Through the Lens of Leadership Models. A subset of the literature examines and explores leadership in COVID through the lens of existing leadership models. A cornerstone of the leadership literature focuses on the steps leaders take to mobilize others into successful action within organizations (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Organized into chapters, the proposed steps that a leader should take include role-modeling, inspiring through visions sharing, challenging the process, empowering and enabling others, and using recognition and celebration as encouragement. These steps form leadership commitments that together form an approach to leadership. One approach to understanding and evaluating leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic is to frame it through Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five leadership commitments (as cited in Stoller, 2020). Through this lens, it is illuminated that the proactivity of leaders in the

COVID-19 crisis was critical to mobilization given the rapid spread of the coronavirus disease. This leadership skill aligns with the “challenging the process” step of the Kouzes and Posner (as cited in Stoller, 2020) framework. Acting quickly in general, communicating effectively, balancing realism and optimism, and being clear about governance are additional tactics grounded in the five leadership commitments detailed by Kouzes and Posner (as cited in Stoller, 2020) that were highly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stoller’s (2020) approach to analyzing the COVID-pandemic through the Kouzes and Posner’s (as cited in Stoller, 2020) models is a valuable contribution to the field for two specific reasons. First, it draws on an existing framework that is familiar and widely accepted, which lends credibility. Second, it offers an explanation for why particular leadership actions during COVID were successful.

Within the lens of positive organizational psychology, a widely cited article explores resilience and how it is cultivated within organizations (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). Sutcliffe and Vogus defined resilience as “the maintenance of positive adjustment under challenging conditions” (p. 95). They argued that individuals, teams, and organizations can achieve excellent outcomes in the face of adversity through resilience. Building on the framework set by Sutcliffe and Vogus, Barton et al. (2020) proposed that resilience is something that is done and not possessed. Barton et al. suggested that in the context of the COVID-19 global pandemic, resilience is critical, particularly within the healthcare sector. Moreover, Barton et al. proposed that resilience can be instilled through leadership.

Similarly, in the 1970s, Horst et al. (1973) proposed that there are a number of problems that cannot be addressed or solved with traditional scientific or analytical approaches. They defined such problems as being “wicked problems” (Horst et al., 1973). Revisiting Horst et al.’s framework, Grint (2020), against the backdrop of the pandemic, proposed that even complex and

long-term problems can be solved with a combination of modes of decision-making, including leadership, management, and command. The author also noted that while needed in moments of imminent crisis, command-style approaches to governance pose more prolonged problems and ultimately becomes ineffective.

Another model brought forth in the analysis of COVID leadership is the CIP model of leadership, which suggests that charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic leadership enables sense-making pathways leaders can adopt for success in navigating crisis (Mumford, 2006). Through analysis of three global leaders during the COVID crisis, Crayne and Medeiros (2020) applied the CIP model as a framework for analysis. Crayne and Medeiros' (2020) findings suggest that sense-making is influential in leader response to COVID and that the pathways of charisma, ideology, and pragmatism afford a variety of outcomes, depending on the specific scenarios during the COVID-crisis in which they were used. The CIP framework is helpful in bringing into focus specific leader actions in crisis. However, patterns around outcomes related to the three pathways are unclear based on the research. In addition, Crayne and Medeiros (2020) used the COVID crisis in Canada, Brazil, and Germany for analysis. It is unclear whether the findings would be scalable to a larger sample size.

COVID Leadership in Corporations. For companies specifically, the ultimate impact of the COVID-pandemic will be shaped not only by economic, political, and environmental factors but also by the response of corporate leaders (Mather, 2020). Mather found that empathy, innovation, and clarity of communications were critical success factors for corporate leaders during COVID. Speed and decisiveness of decision-making are key components of how business leaders respond to the pandemic and its effects. Mather also argued that the COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity for broader lessons on organizational leadership, noting

that the scale and magnitude of the crisis are so large, it will likely change the trajectory of what is considered normal business operations for time to come. Mather's findings are both clear and compelling. However, they are based primarily on personal experience and observation.

Supplementing such analysis with more empirical data would benefit the study.

Several leadership and management approaches that were helpful for corporate leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic also proved effective outside of the bounds of for-profit business. For example, in the nonprofit sphere, boards that engaged in preparedness activities and developed approaches for continuity through governance contingency models fared best in the pandemic (McMullin & Raggo, 2020). In addition, a brief examination of leaders of a large sports organization and a national government showed that the most critical factors for successful pandemic leadership were speed, transparency, regular communications, empathy, and accountability for mistakes or error (Kerrissey & Edmondson, 2020). These approaches and findings mirror the results of effective leadership within the corporate context.

As a subsection of corporate executives, human resources leaders in the business environment have faced challenges during the pandemic due to significantly changed scenarios for work environments, a deluge of employee mental health concerns, and an immediate need for adjustments to and iteration of employee policies (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Dirani et al., 2020). They also are well-positioned to play an essential role in supporting employees as they navigate COVID through positive reinforcement, appreciation of work, and strong communication (Dirani et al., 2020). The effects and impacts of COVID-19 for employees and businesses are unlikely to resolve in the short term. Instead, an enduring new reality, or "new normal," will persist, requiring an extended focus and ongoing support from HR leaders (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). To best support the current and future environment, adaptive HR policies and approaches of

practitioners will be needed. Carnevale and Hatak's (2020) research on implications for HR leaders yielded a particularly interesting observation about the impact of COVID on a specific segment of workers—those who are childless and single. It was discovered that this population is of particular risk for some of the negative mental health impacts of COVID and should thus be of central focus for HR leaders and professionals.

While some companies have taken an approach of boosting employee morale and productivity through financial incentives, many COVID-era leadership actions taken to support employees moved beyond traditional measures of providing employee financial incentives. Nonmonetary support that has been found to be effective includes giving additional opportunities for renewal such as paid time off and sabbatical, flexibility and ways for employees to find greater work-life balance, strong corporate social responsibility, a nonmonetary lever for growth such as training, and a work environment in which growth and transparency are valued (Mani & Mishra, 2020). The pandemic has created an environment in which employee stress and anxiety run high and in which there is a concern for wellbeing and even fear of death (Hu et al., 2020). A style of servant leadership, in particular, has proven to be effective in helping employees find meaning and connection. Hu et al. (2020) suggested that corporate leaders have an obligation to support employees and to help mitigate the consequences of the pandemic on employee mental health. In this sense, corporate leadership in the pandemic moves beyond the traditional bounds of profits and return on investments to addressing the holistic wellbeing of employees within the organization.

A particular struggle for company executives during the COVID-19 pandemic has been the ability to lead a workforce remotely. This strain has been incredibly impactful for companies with workforces that have had to transition to remote work due to safety and security measures,

such as in the service industry (Bartsch et al., 2021). Through a study of over 200 service workers who had to rapidly transition to remote work unexpectedly due to the pandemic, worker performance was evaluated as an indication of leader effectiveness. The study found that both task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviors of leaders impacted worker performance. Through an innovative visual, Bartsch et al. also illustrated the mitigating impact of digital maturity; leader effectiveness and worker performance were both improved with access to and knowledge of how to use digital technologies prior to the pandemic. The authors noted a potential limitation of their research was the inclusion of predominantly female participants and suggested there may be an opportunity for future research to explore gender dynamics in remote work leader effectiveness.

Leading virtual teams requires a different skillset of managers in order to help employees navigate the unique challenges of working in the unexpected work environment triggered by COVID-19 (Graves & Karabayeva, 2020). To help employees navigate problems using technology, managers can provide hardware, software, and training. In order to support employees in balancing their workload and setting clear boundaries between work and home, managers can help set realistic expectations for their teams and set reasonable norms on availability which can be emphasized through role modeling. During COVID-19, employees have also suffered from a lack of social connection previously found at work. Managers can proactively work to create opportunities for conversations and connections with teams. Lastly, the very relationship between managers and employees can suffer in the virtual environment but can be boosted with regular communication, clear goals, and respect for autonomy. Though Graves and Karabayeva illuminated a number of challenges and solutions for managers, they omitted an exploration of trust, which, overall, is a critical facet of pandemic leadership.

Importance of Trust. A review of the emerging body of literature on COVID-19 era leadership within the last year reveals a theme around the importance of trust. New Zealand has been regularly regarded as a leader in COVID response with lower than average case counts and a strong display of best practices in emergency management response (Jamieson, 2020). New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has been profiled as a successful leader on the global stage amidst the difficulties and challenges of COVID, particularly in her ability to communicate effectively and transparently throughout the crisis (McGuire et al., 2020). Central to the success of New Zealand's pandemic response has been the government's ability to secure trust in leadership (Wilson, 2020). A number of definitive practices have helped build the public's trust in leadership during the pandemic, and these include the government's reliance on scientific expertise, mobilizing efforts through information sharing, and fostering an ability to cope through kindness and planning. These leadership practices have created a commitment to a shared and communal purpose of saving lives within New Zealand and, in turn, have successfully strengthened trust in leadership. Wilson conceded that the long-term effects and impacts of COVID in New Zealand, and other countries, cannot yet be known. Nevertheless, Wilson's research on COVID leadership illuminates a recurring theme in pandemic leadership literature which is the centrality of trust in enabling effective leadership responses.

Global Scale of COVID Leadership. COVID-era leadership is unique in that much of it requires action at a worldwide scale. At a minimum, actions taken locally within communities need to be grounded in an understanding of global context, trends, and patterns in order to best respond (Thomas, 2020).

Collective action has been a necessary component of the global pandemic response and is ultimately achieved through a multi-step process of decision-making in crisis, including

cognition, communication, coordination, and control (Comfort et al., 2020). Through an examination of the pandemic experience in South Korea, Italy, and the United States, Comfort et al. illustrated the criticality of a coordinated, global response. The authors also stressed the dual responsibility of national leadership to care for a country's own citizens, and well as the citizens of the globe. Further, they proposed the wake of the pandemic presents an opportunity for the redesign of some global apparatuses for risk management and communications. Though calls for enhanced global cooperation and coordination are clear, the article stops short of providing a roadmap for achieving such progress.

From a human security point of view, effective global leadership faces a number of challenges given the simultaneous need for robust knowledge-sharing systems and a decline in truth and transparency of leadership (Marien, 2020). Successful pandemic leadership at the global scale includes effectively combating silos of information, strong stakeholder engagement, and the creation of structures to support coordinated efforts. The coronavirus has exposed a vacuum of such coordinated global leadership (Likhotal, 2020). Marien made a bold concluding claim that the pandemic has exposed a broader need for a reorganization of the global financial system. Marien argued there are limits to the success of individual progress in post-pandemic leadership without shifts in global structures. Likhotal suggested that a new type of multilateralism is needed for the post-pandemic era in which synergies and opportunities are explored between nations, with an emphasis placed on managing risks and concerns shared at intersections globally.

The literature on COVID-19 has mostly been produced through research and analysis within the last year and will continue to grow and evolve. Currently, the literature can be grouped into themes and subsections around COVID-19 through the lens of leadership models,

COVID leadership in corporations, the importance of trust in pandemic leadership, and the need for a global scale for successful pandemic leadership.

Summary

Thematically, the literature on COVID-19 leadership can be arranged into sections on exploring COVID leadership through the lens of leadership models, COVID leadership in cooperation, the importance of trust, and the global scale of COVID leadership. The literature on crisis leadership is comprised of a number of key themes, including approaches and frameworks for development and evaluation; crisis leadership in action; a view of the leader; crisis communications; and culture, change, and organizations in crisis. Finally, authentic leadership literature includes thematic clusters on theory, authentic leadership in action, development of authentic leadership, and measurement.

The broad literature on COVID-19 leadership, along with crisis leadership and authentic leadership, have been presented individually, as well as with an exploration of the intersections of the constructs. A gap currently exists in the literature at the confluence of the three. Hence, further research was needed to examine the intersection of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 leadership. The purpose of a study at this intersection is to examine the role of authentic leadership in helping corporate executives navigate the COVID-19 crisis. The methods for the study in this field are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 3. Methods

The global crisis resulting from the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 created a difficult environment for corporate executives in which to lead. Political instability, financial turmoil, and public health concerns have resulted in a web of challenges and emerging constraints for business leaders. The purpose of this study was to understand the role of authentic leadership in helping corporate leaders' navigation the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The central research question was: To what extent, if any, does authentic leadership enable leaders to navigate a crisis effectively? The study's subquestion was: To what extent, if at all, does the experience of navigating a crisis develop authentic leaders? The COVID-19 pandemic was the backdrop for the study.

Methodology and Research Design

The research was conducted through qualitative methodology using a phenomenological research design with data collected through semi-structured interviews with business leaders about their crisis leadership experience during the COVID-19 global pandemic. A phenomenological study describes the lived experience of a phenomenon by a group of individuals and the meaning derived from it (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of phenomenology is to distill down to a universal essence from a set of individual experiences. It is about the lived experiences of individuals, not analyses of them or explanations for them. The research focuses on the lived experience of executives during the pandemic and on understanding the essence of that experience.

In general, the steps for a phenomenological qualitative study include: (a) selecting the phenomenon to be studied, (b) bracketing the researcher's experience, (c) collecting data from participants who have experienced the phenomenon, (d) analyzing the data and synthesizing it

into themes, (e) creating a textural description of what participants experienced and a structural description of how they experienced it, and (f) then combining these descriptions into a composite to yield an overall essence of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon selected for the study was authentic leadership in crisis.

Why Phenomenology

Given that the focus for the study was on understanding the lived experience of leaders and the phenomena of leading through crisis and engaging in authentic leadership, phenomenology is best suited as the research method. Other methods were considered and have various merits and detractors. For example, a narrative approach would have offered an in-depth perspective of a particular leader and their experience but would not have afforded the ability to extract themes across a variety of experiences to derive the essence. Similarly, a grounded theory approach was considered as a method. The benefit would have been the opportunity to explore leaders in crisis and develop a theory about them with an unbiased view. However, in focusing on developing a theory, the ability to center in on understanding the concept or phenomena of authentic leadership and leading in crisis would have been lost. Lastly, case study was considered as a method since it would have offered the potential to deeply examine end-to-end one particular case during COVID, such as that of leaders within a specific firm or a specific nation. However, given that the purpose of the study was to understand a broader concept of phenomena, one case study would likely not have yielded enough evidence. Phenomenology is less about researcher interpretations and more about the participants' lived experience. Hence, after careful consideration of the alternatives, phenomenology was selected as the most appropriate research design to address the research questions and to serve the purpose of the study best.

Some challenges exist in using the phenomenological approach. For example, bracketing may be complicated for the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To support any difficulties in bracketing, I adopted a recommended measure of keeping a research diary to record and track the analytical process, including thoughts, assumptions, biases, and commentaries on the process (Smith et al., 2009). A second challenge of phenomenology can be in the identification of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants need to be carefully chosen to ensure they understand the phenomenon in question. The following section addresses such potential challenges, clarifies the sample population, and describes the overall process of collecting data.

Reflexivity and Assumptions

As a reflexivity exercise, I began the study by identifying and documenting my own experience and perspective on the phenomenon. Called bracketing, or epoche, this process enables the researcher to set aside their own experiences and beliefs to conduct research with a fresh lens (Moustakas, 1994). Through actively engaging in bracketing, I intentionally identified and set aside my own experiences and beliefs.

A fundamental assumption for this study was that meaning is made, and knowledge is created through social interactions and connections between individuals. This assumption is grounded in the social constructivist paradigm detailed in the theoretical framework and literature review (Adams, 2006; Martin & Sugarman, 1996; McCaslin & Hickey, 2001; Raskin, 2015). Knowledge, for social constructivists, is co-constructed socially. Meaning is made by people engaging with one another. Other assumptions in this study are that the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a crisis and that leaders of corporations have been impacted by the crisis.

Sources of Data

In this qualitative study, sources of data were comprised of transcripts from a set of interviews with business leaders. For the phenomenological research design, semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from participants about their lived experience. In phenomenological studies, the researcher focuses not on the life of the individual participant but on a concept or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My intent was to understand the meaning of experiences of people who have encountered that particular phenomenon. Individuals who had experienced the phenomenon were identified, and I collected information from them primarily through interviews. Interview questions and data analysis procedures are detailed below.

Participants

To study on authentic leadership, it is essential that selected participants have had the experience of leadership in the corporate landscape during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a set of semi-structured interview questions, these leaders were asked to share their crisis leadership experience during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The research focuses on the lived experience of leaders in the top 1% of leadership in their firms. Specifically, participants in the study were business leaders in Global Fortune 500 firms, a list comprised of the world's largest 500 companies as measured by annual revenue by *Fortune* magazine (Fortune Global 500, 2021). The purpose of the study was to understand the lived experience of executives during the COVID-19 pandemic in regard to authentic leadership. By focusing on leaders—the top 1% of leadership in the world's largest corporations who served in their role in 2020 as the sample population—it can be assumed that all participants in the study had the lived experience of the phenomenon in question.

As described, the target population for the study was executives in the top 1% of leadership in their firm or with “chief” in their title as c-suite executives of Global Fortune 500 companies. The Global Fortune 500 is a list of worldwide companies with the most significant revenue. The specific list used for this study was the 2020 Fortune Magazine Global Fortune 500 list (Fortune Global 500, 2021). For purposes of this study, C-suite refers to executives with a C-level, or chief, title who are the top leaders within a firm. The C-suite includes executives such as the chief executive officer, chief operating officer, chief human resources officer/ chief people officer, chief marketing officer, chief learning officer, chief finance officer, etc. The top 1% of leadership refers to the most senior or highest ranking 1% of executives within a firm. Participants were therefore executives within the Global Fortune 500 who served in their role in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and were in the top 1% of leadership or had “chief” in their title.

Sampling

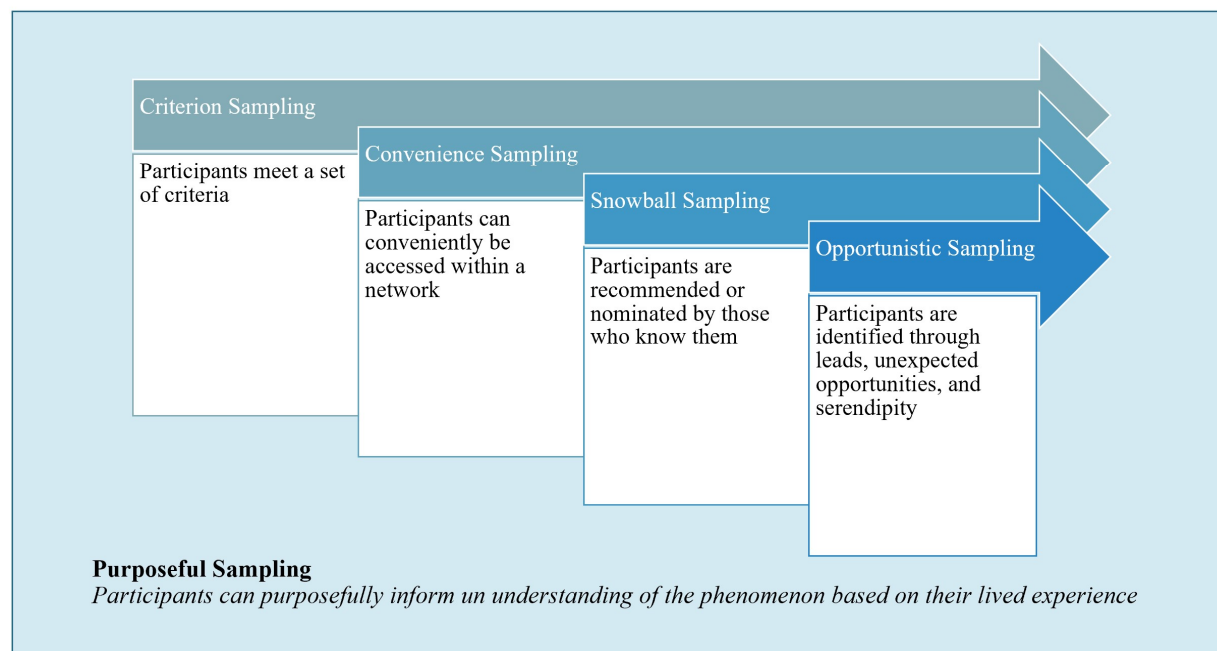
In terms of sample size for a qualitative study with a phenomenological design, Smith (2009) recommended three to six participants. Another methodologist advised incorporation of perspectives from three to ten participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on these recommendations, for the purpose of this study, a target range of eight to ten participants was set, meaning that a minimum of eight participants and a maximum of ten participants were targeted for inclusion.

The overall approach to sampling for the study was purposeful. That is, participants were purposefully identified to ensure that they could inform an understanding of the phenomena in question (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sampling strategy for the study included four layers. The

first layer was criterion sampling. The second layer was convenience sampling. The third and fourth layers of the sampling strategy were snowball and opportunistic sampling.

The first level of sampling strategy used for this study was criterion sampling. Criterion sampling is a way to identify participants based on ensuring that the potential participants meet a particular set of criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The first criterion for study participants was that they were a C-level executive during the calendar year 2020. The second criterion was that the potential participant worked in a Global Fortune 500 firm in 2020. The third criterion was that the executive served during the full calendar year 2020, during which time the coronavirus pandemic was an active global crisis. These three criteria were verified using a combination of *Fortune* magazine, LinkedIn profiles, and company websites, including investor pages.

Next, convenience sampling was used. This is a method through which participants are identified based on convenience of access (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I drew on their academic and professional networks to identify target participants. Next, as needed, snowball sampling was introduced. This process means that new cases are determined based on people who know other people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Like a snowball growing in size as it rolls down the hill, the participant pool rises as participants are referred and recommend others. Finally, opportunistic sampling, in which chance or unexpected opportunities present the possibility of identifying new leads was introduced. Figure 3 depicts the order of events and the layers of approach within the sampling strategy for the study.

Figure 3*Sampling Strategy***Data Collection Strategies and Procedures**

Research activities include collecting data via semi-structured interviews of business leaders in global Fortune 500 firms about their crisis leadership experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the target population is identified using the above-described criterion sampling, I contacted potential participants to request interviews directly. The initial contact happened by phone, email, or through LinkedIn and was directed at either the target participant to request the interview or through a request for an introduction to the target participant, after which time the request for an interview was made. An invitation letter and informed consent (Appendix A) explained the context for the study and requested an interview. It also describes confidentiality and informed consent, detailed in sections to follow.

The rationale for this method of interview invitation process is three-fold. First, the target population is made up of executives who often have busy schedules and can be hard to reach. Incorporating a dual approach of both initiating direct contact with the target participants and requesting direct contact through an introduction helped ensure better access to interview participants. Second, business executives use a variety of forms of communication and have independent individual preferences. Including multiple contact options for extending the interview request, including via email, phone, or LinkedIn, allowed for a tailored approach for contact. Third, beginning the invitation process through an introductory letter helped set the context for participants, brought critical information about confidentiality and informed consent to the forefront early, and established an initial rapport with the target participant.

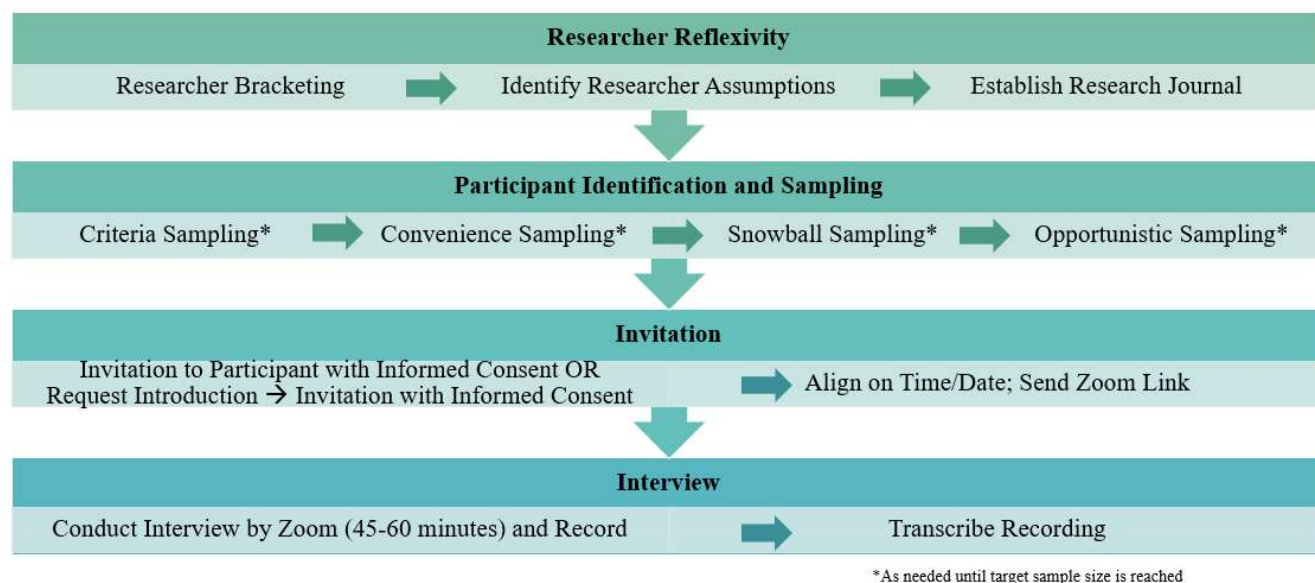
Data were collected via semi-structured interviews. The approximate time needed for each interview was 30-60 minutes. Given current travel restrictions and social distancing measures related to COVID-19, interviews were conducted via Zoom. Once a target participant accepted an invitation to interview and was given informed consent, a Zoom link was sent for the interview. The details of the invitation included time, date, and purpose and briefly reminded the participant of the context of the study and the measures from the informed consent form. In general, business hours were targeted for interviews. However, I worked to accommodate time preferences that best fit the schedule of the study participants.

Interviews are the primary method for phenomenological studies as they afford an opportunity for individuals who have experienced the phenomenon in question to describe it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The semi-structured interview protocol is designed with broad, open-ended questions in order to facilitate capturing substantive experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). A detailed interview protocol for the semi-structured interviews is described

in the following section. In addition, a visual summary of the overall process for data collection is included in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Data Collection Overview



Tools/Instruments Used

Interviews with participants were completed by video conference using Zoom. In advance of each interview, a link to the Zoom call with participants with instructions on using Zoom was sent to participants. During the interview, participants were asked a series of questions. The tool for data collection was semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted and recorded. Recordings were transcribed. Interviews are a helpful means of collecting data in the phenomenological research design because they allow participants the opportunity to describe the phenomenon in question and to describe how they have experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The semi-structured design specifically allowed for some flexibility

so that participants could answer in an open-ended way and explore their experiences, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings.

Interview Protocol

In order to document the prompts for the semi-structured interviews, a tailored interview protocol for the study was designed. The intent of the interview protocol was to incorporate some degree of structure to help elicit data from participants about the experience with the phenomenon in question, which is leading through COVID-19. It included seven prompts in total. One of the prompts consisted of parts a, b, and c. The complete interview protocol for the study can be found in Appendix C. A summary of the interview questions are:

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2020, what was the experience of leading within your firm like for you?
 - a. What feelings came up during the experience?
 - b. What thoughts from leading during COVID stand out for you?
 - c. What physical impacts or bodily changes were you aware of during the time of leading during COVID-19?
 - d. What part of leading during COVID in 2020 was most challenging for you?
2. Self-awareness is a component of authentic leadership defined as the degree to which the leader is aware of their strengths, limitations, how others see them, and how the leader impacts others. When you reflect on your experience as a leader in 2020, what role did self-awareness play, if any, in helping you navigate the COVID-19 crisis? Were there any ways a lack of self-awareness may have had an impact?
3. Transparency is a component of authentic leadership defined as the degree to which the leader reinforces a level of openness with others that provides them with an

- opportunity to be forthcoming with their ideas, challenges, and opinions. When you reflect on your experience as a leader in 2020, what role did transparency play, if any, in helping you navigate the COVID-19 crisis? Were there any ways a lack of transparency had an impact?
4. Ethical/moral is a component of authentic leadership defined as to what degree the leader sets a high standard for moral and ethical conduct. When you reflect on your experience as a leader in 2020, what role did ethics and morals play, if any, in helping you navigate the COVID-19 crisis? Were there any ways a lack of ethics/morals had an impact?
 5. Balanced processing is a component of authentic leadership defined as to what degree a leader sufficiently engages in soliciting viewpoints and opinions before making a decision. When you reflect on your experience as a leader in 2020, what role did balanced processing, if any, play in helping you navigate the COVID-19 crisis? Were there any ways a lack of balanced processing had an impact?
 6. Are there any ways you feel the experience of leading in crisis impacted your own leadership style or shaped how you show up as a leader? If so, what are those ways? Anything else?

I designed the interview protocol after consulting best practices for interview protocols in phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). In order to shape the questions on authentic leadership, definitions of authentic leadership from the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) were used (Avolio et al., 2007). As discussed in the theoretical framework and literature review section, the ALQ measures four components that comprise authentic leadership, including self-awareness, transparency, ethical/moral, and balanced

processing (Walumbwa et al., 2008). The actual test of the ALQ was not used for the purposes of this study; only the definitions of the four components of authentic leadership as given in the study were used. Hence, permission is not required. Nevertheless, the authors of the ALQ and the test itself are appropriately cited.

Human Subjects Considerations

This study addressed human subjects' protections with strict adherence to all the Belmont Report principles and policies. All requirements for the consideration of human subjects have been studied in detail, and all requirements were adhered to for the research in this study. All research plans were submitted for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix B). Neither data collection nor recruitment of participants proceeded until IRB approval was obtained.

The interview invitation and introduction included an informed consent form and noted that participation is voluntary. Given the non-invasive research method of semi-structured interviews lasting no more than 60 minutes, minimal hardship is anticipated for respondents. Risks are minimal and include the possibility of boredom and fatigue. Since the topic of the study is on leadership in crisis, some individuals may find the concept triggering, including, for example, individuals who have suffered from the impact of crisis in the past. The benefits of the study for the field outweigh any minimal risks to participants. An executive summary will be shared with participants following the conclusion of the study.

Due to potential risk, the interview protocol was respectfully created and submitted to two to three colleagues who are experts for review and feedback. Following a review of the interview protocol, a discussion session was held for me to hear and discuss feedback with the expert protocol reviewers. The feedback on the interview protocol was considered and discussed,

and changes were made to the interview protocol as needed. If the reviewers disagreed on potential changes to the protocol, an additional reviewer who is also an expert would have been added for consultation. Once an agreement was reached through a majority opinion of experts, necessary changes were made to the interview protocol, and it was adopted for use in data gathering through semi-structured interviews with participants.

Steps were taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants. Raw data were available only to me. Specific steps were taken to ensure that raw data weren't easily reverse-engineered, such as the use of numeric pseudonyms. Any identifying features were redacted in interview transcripts. There is no deception involved in the study. Interview sessions were recorded and transcribed using transcription software. Participants were reminded that the recording could be stopped at any time, that participation was voluntary, and that they could stop participating at any time in the interview without penalty. No requests were made of participants that went beyond the norms of a research interview.

In terms of data privacy, the identities of the potential participants are known only to me. Pseudonyms were given to names of participants and organizational affiliations. Participant names and organizations are stored in a master file separate from the research data. Identities of the participants have not and will not be revealed. The interview invitation request clearly stated terms around informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Data are stored in a password-protected 256 SHR encrypted file on my personal computer. No data are stored on a server or network. Data will be kept securely for the IRB required three years and beyond that point will be destroyed.

Analysis

A qualitative coding software (MAXQDA) was used to support the coding process. Recorded interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions were entered into the coding software. Data from the coding software, as well as transcripts from the interviews, were reviewed for analysis.

The analysis for the study is in accordance with phenomenological research design principles (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Steps for analysis included the following. First, I described my own personal experiences with crisis leadership during COVID, and these experiences were bracketed and set aside. Next, the coding and transcripts were reviewed. A list of significant statements from the interviews were identified. These significant statements were in regard to how the individual experienced the phenomenon. The data were horizontalized, meaning significant statements were listed. Then a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements was developed. Each statement was treated as having worth. Significant statements were grouped into themes or units of meaning. Next, a textural description was written. This includes what the participants in the study experienced. It describes what happened and includes verbatim statements. Then a structural description was written. This includes how the experience happened or the contexts and situations the individual was in when the experience happened. The structural description was intended to focus on context and setting. Lastly, a composite description of the textural and structural descriptions was composed to form a description of the essence of the experience. This explains what was experienced and how it was experienced in terms of context, and most importantly, what the overall essence or feeling was for participants.

Means to Ensure Study Validity

Steps to ensure reliability and validity are numerous, concrete, and specific. First, I set aside my own experiences, beliefs, and assumptions through the process of bracketing, which is recommended in the literature on phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). I also kept a research diary to track my opinions and perspectives throughout the study. I considered alternative conclusions in the analysis section.

Second, I ensured that participants were not influenced in a way that was not accurate by sticking to the interview protocol questions. A full review of the literature has been completed with relevant concepts translated into prompts for the interview protocol. The interview protocol was designed using definitions of components of the ALQ, which is a common method for assessing authentic leadership and which has been used in the field with demonstrated reliability and validity (Avolio et al., 2007; Walumbwa et al., 2008). In addition, the interview protocol was reviewed by experts who are colleagues and researchers of Global Leadership and Change. Validity involves asking the right questions, and the described steps helped ensure the right questions were asked.

Transcription software was used to ensure the accuracy of interview transcripts. I read all automated transcripts to double-check for accuracy and to ensure that it was possible to return from the textural and structural descriptions to the transcripts themselves to account for content and connections.

Additionally, the reliability of the study was supported through a detailed following of the procedures in conducting phenomenology outlined by respected researchers in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). These steps include identifying the phenomenon to be studied, bracketing, collecting data through interviews, and asking broad questions in those

interviews about lived experience and context for experiencing the phenomenon in question and for analyzing the data. Strict adherence to these phenomenological research design steps was followed in the collection of data for the study.

Plan for Reporting Findings

Chapter four reports, in detail, findings from the study. This includes data analysis. Chapter five locates the findings within the larger context of the field, thus identifying potential meaning and significance. Following the completion of the research, I may present findings at academic conferences. Following the completion of the dissertation, I may write additional related papers or articles for further dissemination of knowledge in the field. Finally, I will offer speaking engagements at academic institutions and professional organizations to further share learnings from the study.

Summary

The qualitative study incorporated a phenomenological research design in order to understand the lived experience of leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic and the role of authentic leadership in helping them navigate the crisis. A thorough review of the literature has been completed. Next, a method for conducting research has been outlined.

The research was conducted using a phenomenological research design and quantitative methodology. Semi-structured interviews of corporate executives in Fortune 500 firms were completed in which executives were asked about their crisis leadership experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary research question is: What is the role of authentic leadership in enabling leaders to navigate a crisis effectively? The following secondary research question was also explored: Does a crisis develop authentic leaders?

The structure of the study is based on best practices for phenomenological research design and includes analysis steps of identifying significant statements, creating meaning units, clustering themes, advancing textural and structural descriptions, making a composite description of textural and structural descriptions into an essence. Following the gathering of data, findings were analyzed and synthesized, and conclusions were drawn, written, and presented in a final oral dissertation defense. Through this process, I aimed to achieve the purpose of the study, which was to understand the role of authentic leadership in helping corporate executives navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of the study was to explore the role of authentic leadership in crisis scenarios by examining the lived experiences of corporate executives against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. To answer the research questions, I collected data through interviews with business executives. The following chapter details data analysis steps and procedures as well as findings from the study, including those that answer the posed research questions and several surprise findings.

Participants and Companies

Criteria for participating in the study included having served during the calendar year 2020 in Global Fortune 500 firms and were in the top 1% of leadership in their firm or had "chief" in their title. Data sources for the research came from a set of semi-structured interviews with study subjects.

Purposeful sampling was used to secure the requisite number of participants for the study. Based on recommended sample sizes for a qualitative phenomenological study, eight to ten participants were initially targeted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, the purposeful sampling approach yielded 11 participants total. Sampling was structured to purposefully create a sample set of individuals who could inform and understand the phenomenon of authentic leadership in crisis scenarios based on their lived experience.

The first stratum of sampling was criteria sampling, in which participants met the set of required criteria for the study. Next, convenience sampling was used in which participants could be conveniently accessed within a network. I drew from their corporate and academic networks for this sampling phase to yield participants through direct solicitation and introductions from additional network contacts.

Over the course of the study, I invited 14 to participate in the study and secured four interviews with participants from this method. Additionally, I contacted 28 people in their network to ask for introductions. A total of six contacts in my network made introductions to participants yielding an additional seven interviews for the study. This third planned stratum of snowball sampling refers to a sampling method in which participants are recommended or nominated by someone who knows them. I had planned a fourth stratum of sampling called opportunistic sampling, in which participants are identified through leads, unexpected opportunities, or serendipity. Such opportunities neither materialized nor were necessary as the first three strata of purposeful sampling produced a robust pool of qualified participants willing to participate in the study.

All research participants are Global Fortune 500 executives in the top 1% of leadership in their firm, have "chief" in their title, and served in the role during the calendar year 2020. Participants in the study represent a broad range of business functions. Pseudonyms were used for both the names of participants in the study and the names of their companies. Table 1 details the list of participant and company pseudonyms along with the business function of the participant.

Table 1

Pseudonyms and Business Functions

Company Pseudonym	Participant Pseudonym	Participant's Business Function
Red Company	Rory Redmond	Communications
Orange Company	Alani Tachibana	Human Resources
Tangerine Company	Alani Tachibana	Human Resources
Yellow Company	Amber Gold	Security

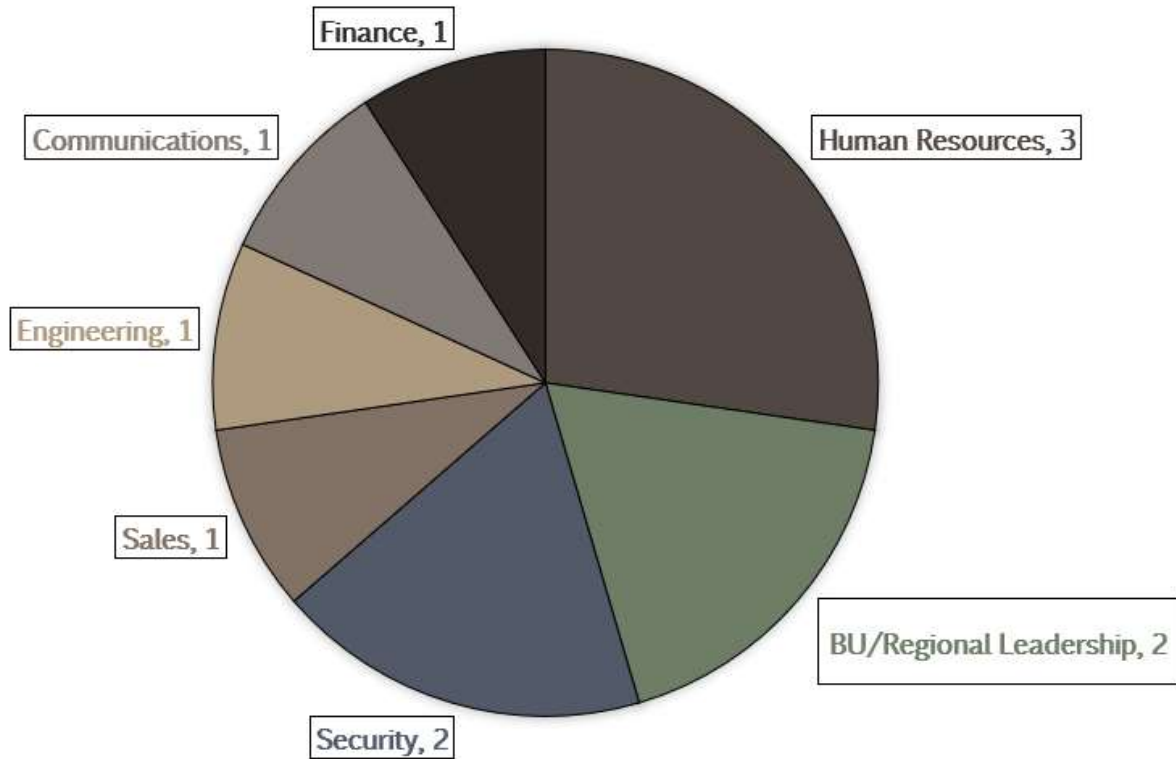
Company Pseudonym	Participant Pseudonym	Participant's Business Function
Green Company	Hunter Jade	Engineering & Product Development
Green Company	Olive Emerald	Finance
Blue Company	Indigo Bluford	Sales, Marketing, & Operations
Purple Company	Violet Amethyst	Human Resources
White Company	Albus Opal	BU/Regional Leadership
Brown Company	Bronson Brown	BU/Regional Leadership
Black Company	Ashe Onyx	Human Resources
Silver Company	Argento Sterling	Security

Eleven subjects total participated in the study, and 11 firms total were represented. However, one of the participants, Alani Tachibana, shifted company midway through the pandemic. She worked at Orange Company for the first half of 2020 and Tangerine Company for the second half. Both Orange Company and Tangerine Companies are ranked on the list of Fortune Global 500 firms, and Alani held positions in the top 1% of leadership or with “chief” in her title in both firms. Green Company fielded two participants for the study. Both Hunter Jade and Olive Emerald served in 2020 in executive roles in Green Company, though they represented different functions. Hence, although one company yielded two participants, and one participant represented two companies, 11 participants total and 11 companies total are represented in the study.

Participants in the study presented a rich diversity of business functions and perspectives from across companies. Figure 5 documents the multitude of business functions represented in the study, including human resources, engineering, finance, business unit, and regional leadership, sales, and communications.

Figure 5

Broad Representation of Participants Across Business Function

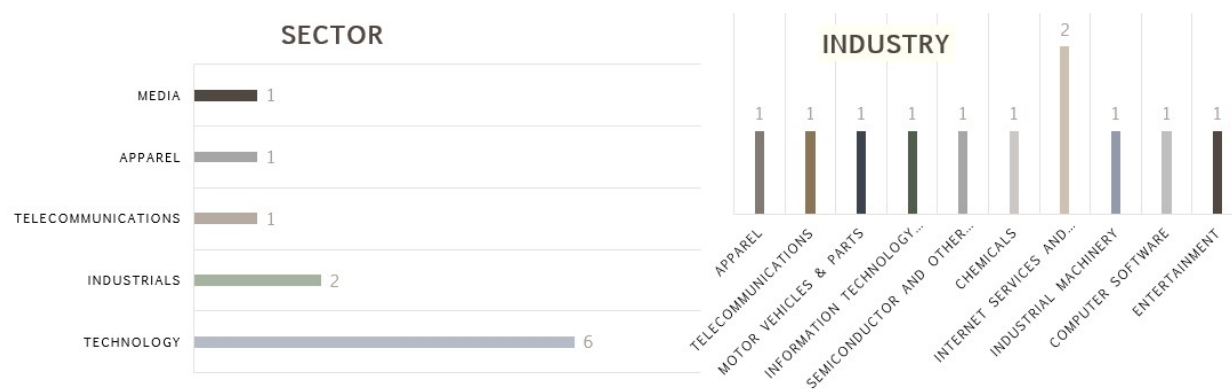


In addition to demonstrating diversity of business function, the sample population also afforded representation across industry, sectors, gender, and domicile. Of the study participants, four were women, and seven were men. Nine of the companies represented in the study are domiciled in North America. One is headquartered in Europe, and another is based in Asia. Media, apparel, telecommunications, industrials, and technology are five of the 21 Global Fortune 500 sectors represented in the research. In addition, ten different industries from the 56 Global Fortune 500 industry list were featured in the study. These are depicted in Figure 6 and include apparel, telecommunications, motor vehicles and parts, information technology,

semiconductor and other electronic components, chemicals, internet services and retailing, industrial machinery, computer software, and entertainment.

Figure 6

Global Fortune 500 Sectors and Industries included in the Study



Participants in the study on authentic leadership in crisis scenarios come from companies in strong positions on the Global Fortune 500 list. The median rank on the list of participating companies was 144 of 500. In terms of revenue, companies in the study had an average annual revenue of \$78.8 billion and an average employee base of 163,140 in 2020. Thus, on the whole, participants in the study held leadership roles in large (by revenue and employee numbers) global firms and represented a diversity of business functions, industries, sectors, gender, and geography.

Research Data and Analysis

For the study on authentic leadership in crisis scenarios, the lived experience of corporate executives against the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis was examined. Eleven interviews with Global Fortune 500 executives were recorded by Zoom. Trint software was used for transcribing the recorded interviews, and MaxQDA, a qualitative analysis software, was employed for coding. Six semi-structured interview questions were posed to each interview participant. One of

the interview questions was broken into four parts. Each of the eleven interviews was between 21 and 31 minutes in recorded length, with an average interview time of 30 minutes; a total of 365 minutes of interviews were recorded. These interviews produced 74 pages of single-spaced and 12-point font interview transcripts.

Detailed steps for data analysis were completed according to recommendations for qualitative analysis for phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). First, I engaged in thorough bracketing to identify, document, and set aside personal experiences and beliefs about the topic. Next was the creation of written transcripts through transcription software, and then the automated transcripts were corrected by listening to a recorded playback and manually editing the transcripts. The next stage of the data analysis process involved uploading transcripts to coding software.

The transcription software helped automate the process of transcribing interviews. However, each written transcript needed to be manually checked for accuracy while an audio recording played. This process was time consuming but resulted in more accurate transcripts. These transcripts were loaded into the MAXQDA qualitative software. Ultimately, the software proved immeasurably valuable in identifying patterns and themes and supported the production of findings and conclusions. However, a fairly steep learning curve existed, and I needed to watch numerous videos and read multiple training guides to learn how to use the software. Nevertheless, the resulting robust set of coded data seemed worth the effort, and I believe the coding software was instrumental to the successful process.

The next step of the process was identifying statements. I completed this work by reading the transcripts several times and then using the coding software to highlight significant statements. The data analysis process continued with the creation of meaning units through

coding and then a clustering of themes. A codebook was created within the MAXQDA software and was revised throughout the analysis process. The coding software was used to track and monitor the frequency of occurrence of ideas which helped build themes.

Next, themes of meaning units were clustered and then grouped together. Grouping was done using color coding and reorganization of codes within the software. I also took notes on emerging themes during the data analysis process. Clustering themes together enabled me to advance a textural description of the experience of leading during COVID, as well as a structural description of the pandemic environment and context in which they led. Lastly, a composite description revealed the essence of corporate executives' lived experience navigating the pandemic crisis. The phenomenological research design steps of advancing textural, structural, and composite descriptions were first completed using bullet points in PowerPoint and then continued by writing sentences and passages within a word document.

Through the detailed data analysis process, 362 significant statements were identified, and 30 meaning units, or codes, were created. In total, the interview transcripts yielded 808 coded segments of data. An expert second-rater supported the data analysis process by checking 10% of the data collected. After the first review, there was a 50% alignment of coding by the second-rater compared to my alignment. I reviewed the coding of the second-rater, and then we engaged in helpful academic discussion. Following the consultation, four changes were made, including code collapsing, adding adequate coding to meaning-rich passages, reaching a collaborative understanding on a few initial discrepancies, and correcting one small coding error. After these changes were implemented, the second-rater rechecked the sample data. In this review, there was a 90% alignment of coding between the second-rater and I. Overall, the second rater's check and the resulting iterations to the coding system provided a crisper, tighter, and

more accurate code book and coding process and a more accurate and sophisticated overall data analysis.

Thematic Findings

Several thematic findings emerged to answer the central research question: To what extent, if any, does authentic leadership enable leaders to navigate crisis effectively? Authentic leadership is comprised of four key components. These include self-awareness, ethical/moral behavior, transparency, and balanced processing (Avolio et al., 2007). The data revealed a specific experience with each of the four components of authentic leadership for executives.

Self-awareness

The data revealed that self-awareness was valuable in helping leaders navigate the COVID-19. Leaders commented that self-awareness helped them build rapport with their teams during the pandemic.

(Self-awareness) was one of the prime capabilities needed through the crisis. One of the things I learned is the more I showed vulnerability, the more affinity my group showed towards me. (Ashe Onyx)

Having humility and admitting to not having all the answers, both elements of self-awareness, helped executives lead through the crisis. Rory Redmond, an executive at Red Company, explained, “The self-awareness was... I don't have the answer. I won't be afraid to say up front, just because I'm the boss doesn't mean I have the answers. I do not.” Leaders in the study expressed a sense that employees appreciated the willingness of executives to be forthcoming with things that were ambiguous or unknown.

You know, everybody wants a guarantee, and you can't do that as a leader. If I can't give a guarantee, the next best thing I can do is get clear. Here's where we are. Here's where we're going. As specific as possible. Every week. (Albus Opal)

Authenticity is a key element of self-awareness. The findings demonstrate that being authentic and showing vulnerability helped executives earn a mandate to lead. For example, Indigo Bluford shared, “Yeah, authenticity, I think authenticity comes from showing genuine concern, genuine care for both employees and customers. Responsiveness and communication (were) very important.” Executives in the study detailed a relatively common set of experiences in which demonstrating authenticity supported their ability to navigate crisis and lead teams and organizations.

Authenticity, especially when you are in crisis, is what binds people together. This is where your team believes what you're saying. They feel like they're in it with you and that you're in it with them. I think that the bonds that are forged there, this is where loyalty comes in. This is where, as a leader, you can inspire followership. (Violet Amethyst)

Additionally, demonstrating empathy for others helped executives lead during the pandemic. Empathy is an essential feature of self-aware leaders. Showing empathy took many forms during the pandemic, including creating psychological safety for employees, focusing on employee mental health, and listening to employees.

I'd like to think I'm pretty self-aware. It goes back to everything I was talking about. How do you connect with people? How is it you enable them and create that psychologically safe environment? I allow myself to be vulnerable where if there's something that I'm doing in a meeting to take the feedback and be able to implement and change. (Hunter)

Finally, as part of empathetic leadership, executives increased engagement during the pandemic. They added a dedicated focus on providing calm to employees, ensuring employee safety, coaching others, and, at times, playing the role of the parent.

For me was how do I help people feel a sense of belonging, feel a sense of engagement?

How do I help remove fear? For me, that was the hardest part, is how do I how do I help these humans make it through these life-transforming things. (Alani Tachibana)

Employee engagement was not as easy or straightforward during the pandemic as in ordinary times, but executives in the study found that it was essential to their ability to lead. For example, Bronson Brown asked, “How to keep the engagement with your customers, with your employees, with your organization? It's most important during this pandemic.” Participants detailed various approaches to engaging with employees. Albus Opal explained, “I committed to a weekly all-hands call. We still do it every Monday. Every member of the business. Thirty minutes. Fifteen minutes of it is just very informational in nature.” As part of demonstrating self-awareness, leaders during the pandemic endeavored to build trust with employees and customers.

Ethical/Moral

The data for the study revealed that ethical and moral leadership behavior, as a component of authentic leadership, helped executives lead in crisis, but not necessarily more than in regular, non-pandemic times. Executives interviewed for the study revealed that ethical and moral leadership is considered table stakes in all scenarios. Olive Emerald of Green Company explained, “I didn't find that there was really a shift there. I tend to have a pretty solid north star that I march towards.” Participants demonstrated a strong dedication and adherence to ethical and moral principles as part of business regardless of normal or pandemic times. For example, Silver Company Argento Sterling commented, “That has never been a problem in this

company, ever. Ethics and morality are at the top of our list of important qualities. You never have to question it.”

Nevertheless, though it was not necessarily more than in ordinary times, the executives interviewed for the study did relay that behaving ethically and morally helped them lead in the COVID-19 crisis.

Some employees probably refused to get a vaccination because of their belief or kind of religious reason, but we cannot ask. So, I think that's a lot of a challenge. I think a more sophisticated or mature leader needs to be here to do leading. (Bronson Brown)

An example that appeared in the interview transcripts with regularity was demonstrating respect for religious and political differences. As an element of ethical and moral behavior, leaders believed that this specific action helped them lead during the pandemic effectively.

As we get into the pandemic, there were religious issues, there were...political issues. My moral code is not the same as yours. My ethical thing is not the same as yours. We found at times that we were we could be at loggerheads with people. How do you penetrate the shield of this is my code and you're bringing your code to me? I don't want to hear what you have to say or the definition of ethics or I believe this, well I believe that. Well, then you're not ethical. There were situations where we had some interaction that was awkward and maybe hard and complicated at times because of the distance between people culturally. (Rory Redmond)

In some instances, the pandemic created unique or nuanced moral and ethical scenarios that leaders had to face that would not exist in normal times.

Going back to the ethical/moral, I weigh more strongly how will the individual be impacted by this business decision now? It might be the right business decision, but what

does it take to make it right for the person in in this year of unknown? You can't consider it the same way that you did in 2019. (Alani Tachibana)

New ethical and moral situations executives faced in the pandemic included deciding on the allocation of personal protective equipment (PPE), determining access protocols for vaccines, or designing requirements around testing. Amber Gold shared some of the ethical quagmires leaders wrestled at Yellow Company. She said:

More probably than I've seen any other time there was a lot of ethics involved in the discussions. If you look at vaccine inequity, is it right for us to have executives getting shots when they're not prioritized in their country? Tests are only either authorized or offered to people with symptoms. People were lying about their symptoms because they wanted to get tested, and we wanted our people tested, but we didn't want them to have to lie in order to get a test.

Leaders talked about the ethical and moral decisions they faced in terms of sharing supplies outside the company.

The care and the heart had to be at the center of it. Purple Company as a company, there were so many things that the company did, a lot of it not visible to the public. Things like we had a bunch of supplies of like N95 masks when they were nonexistent. People couldn't get them. We had them because of our construction sites. We just gave them away to first responders, sent to hospitals. And so those kinds of things where leaders were making really good, morally centered decisions. (Violet Amethyst)

In these scenarios, the executives interviewed believed that adhering to a strict sense of moral and ethical behavior helped them navigate the COVID-19 crisis.

I think the ethos of telling the truth as hard as that may be when a customer's begging you to supply them. For example, I had hundreds of people contacting me through LinkedIn saying I need (redacted). And then when I told them the Justice Department had made a ruling that we couldn't supply people other than the federal government, they got very upset. But I think telling the truth is always a good idea even if it's not something people want to hear. (Indigo Bluford)

Transparency

Unlike self-awareness and the ethical/moral component of authentic leadership, transparency, according to the executives interviewed, brought tremendous value in helping leaders navigate effectively but was challenging to achieve in COVID.

There's an old saying in leadership that if you ask for people's hands, you have to win their heart first. And I really believe that's where transparency is your best friend when you're very open with everybody. Here's the hard decisions we had to make. Here's the amount of teammates it impacted. Here's why we did it. Here's where we're headed. I think transparency is both the bad and the good, just being very specific. (Albus Opal)

Numerous leaders interviewed expressed that sharing information transparently across the business and collaborating with others in their firm helped them lead during crisis in 2020. In addition to the general notion of information sharing, the data for the study revealed that communications and communicating transparently enabled executives to navigate during the pandemic.

Transparency is so important because you need to tell people, almost everything you know and how you think about this, how you influence their decision, or you need to give them kind of advice to make their own decision. But at the same time, you need to show

them the whole picture. So, I think most of the information should be transparent. Then you can gather everybody you have kind of informed, everybody could be making informed and knowledgeable decision for themselves. So, this will change the whole organization environment, too. So, I highly think transparency, it's the way to help me. (Bronson Brown)

Subjects detailed numerous scenarios in which transparent communications played a role in effective crisis leadership. Particularly when clear information could not be readily accessed elsewhere, leaders found themselves playing a critical role in transmitting knowledge to employees.

With everything going on, people were not trusting the media. They definitely weren't trusting governing officials. So, they were turning to their employers and other places to find somebody they believed in. And I do think that we took a stance of being as transparent as possible with everyone, which we feel really paid off for us. (Ashe Onyx)

Although transparency, a component of authentic leadership, was important in helping executives lead, it was difficult to achieve due to many pandemic-era factors. Executives faced numerous challenges in communicating transparently. For example, leaders faced a constraint of often incomplete or imperfect information in communicating transparently. Alani Tachibana explained:

As it relates to Covid-19 specifically, I think the hardest thing around transparency was not even knowing what was going to be true. You would have loved to have been transparent about it if only you could because there just wasn't the information. There was so much ambiguity that couldn't be resolved as part of COVID.

In addition, corporate policies, legal issues, confidentiality, and other restrictions meant that leaders could not always share detailed information with employees in the way that they wished.

There were weekly (leadership team) meetings where we would get a report out from the world-wide pandemic, what's going, Green Company statistics, policies. There was a concern of sending that material out that it could get out publicly. In the spirit of transparency, I said, look, I need to send this to my leaders, so they know what's going on. I will protect it so that they can't forward it, print it. I want to make sure that at least my leaders, when they were asked questions by their teams, that they were as open and transparent as they could be and where it was sensitive, I would essentially highlight and say, hey, we can't talk about this at this time until it is ready to roll it out. (Hunter Jade)

Leaders in the COVID-9 pandemic were also plagued by challenges such as rumors and misinformation within the business. Executives worked to combat such misinformation, but the pandemic-era phenomenon posed a barrier to the much-needed transparent communications from leaders.

There has been a lot of discussion on the CEO communication to everyone on whether that was transparent enough, frequent enough. There was a discussion early on, should our communication be centrally controlled? There was a lot of frustration from some of the local leaders that they weren't allowed to sort of put out whatever they wanted.

Whether "we're so sorry for everybody" or "I don't want you to go to the office", we wanted to control that centrally, so it was the same message, and there was a lot of pushback on that. The (marketing and communications) people (got) involved (with) word smithing. It can take two weeks to get there, which makes it less authentic and less

transparent. There was a lot of centralized control on the messaging that I think made it seem less transparent, certainly less fast and reactive. (Amber Tachibana)

Balanced Processing

As with transparency, the data collected for the research study show that balanced processing helped business executives lead during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was more challenging to do than in ordinary times. Balanced processing refers to the process of collecting input and information from others before forming a final opinion (Avolio et al., 2007). During the pandemic, leaders interviewed found that the process of collecting and being responsive to feedback from their teams helped them lead.

I think because (of the) pandemic, we changed a lot on the on the decision-making process. We needed more engage[ment] to hearing different viewpoints. We don't have an answer for everything. So, even (as a) leader, you need some people to discuss with, your team members, need to hear from all your team members, hearing from their team members. We should listen more before we make (a) decision. I think this is balanced processing in this uncertain period. People's point of view (should) be valued, be listened, be heard. I think that's quite important. (Bronson Brown)

Additionally, it was expressed through a multitude of interviews that recognizing unique employee situations and finding innovative approaches to soliciting opinions helped executives navigate the COVID-19 crisis.

[There was] an emphasized awareness that you're not the expert in a lot of areas. In order to deal with this crisis, we have to rely on our doctors, on health and safety experts, on governments and agencies that are enacting requirements. Our employment lawyers deal with the legal impacts on our employees of some of the decisions that we're making.

Some of the decisions have to be negotiated with unions representing our employees.

There are our human resources people understanding the impact on the employees and decisions that we might be making, the communications people dealing with how to best communicate our concern for them, instructions that we're providing them. You just heighten awareness of the importance of the expertise of others whose opinions enter into the final recommendations that we will make to our, ultimately to our CEO. Just a deeper appreciation for the expertise held by those that you interact with frequently in order to get your job done. (Argento Sterling)

However, because of elements of the crisis, pandemic-era executives faced several challenges to being able to perform acts of balanced processing. Violet Amethyst explained:

Balanced processing was a constant thing. We had working groups for everything, and if we didn't have them, we created them to solve certain problems and to get the necessary inputs. Some of that was really hard because just getting people on the same page on things, especially if you have such a diverse set of people that you're getting inputs from, was difficult.

Due to the crisis mode of leadership, participants felt pressure to act with urgency and speed, which, at times, prevented them from seeking perspectives and opinions.

At some point, you need somebody to make a decision. At one point, I had to get on the call because the local leader did not seem to want to make a decision. And the minutes are ticking away. And good or bad, it doesn't make any difference. You just have to make a decision and get people moving one way or the other. Either (we're) going to have people spending the night in the office or they're going to be walking home, or we need to tell people to go home now. But you have to make a decision. And it won't be where

everybody's had their perfect input as long as you're not breaking the law and you can put people first. (Amber Gold)

In addition, the challenge of being virtual and remote made it difficult to gather sufficient input to generate balanced processed decisions. Thus, though leaders found balance processing a contributing factor to successful pandemic leadership, it was simultaneously tricky to achieve.

During COVID, because we're in a WebEx meeting or a Teams meeting, it's even more important to make sure that people are heard because there are some that are more introverted, and you would never hear them, or you never see their picture come up on the screen. And so, we tried with Teams in some cases, raise your hand or what I would do is I would ask hey (redacted) what do you think about this? (Hunter Jade)

Additional Approaches to Leadership

In addition to leveraging components of authentic leadership, the executives in the study consistently revealed several themes around additional leadership approaches that helped them effectively navigate the COVID-19 crisis. These included prioritizing self-care and agility, and decisively charting a course.

I think there was certainly the need to remain focused on, you know, mental health and physical health. I found I would do when I had a chance to take a break would be just to step outside, walk into the backyard, sit down for five, 10 minutes. Take a breather. I might say paying attention to your personal, mental or physical health was even more important at this point. (Argento Sterling)

Participants detailed a number of ways in which putting their own self-care at the forefront of focus helped them lead. In these instances, self-care included caring for their own mental and physical health and setting boundaries between work life and home life. Additionally,

leaders detailed ways in which they intentionally remained calm and exerted emotional regulation during the crisis and how this was valuable in supporting their leadership efficacy.

There was that very popular HBR article that's like we're going through the five stages of grief. I read that and I'm like, OK, I need to make some choices about how I live. And then I need to share those choices with my team so that they know they need to also be making some choices. Things like, hey, I'm signing off at 5:00pm every day. I literally closed my computer. I will not be seeing your email until tomorrow morning when work starts again. Don't text me unless there's like a straight up emergency. I started going for a walk every single day with my husband after work to sort of create that space between work and home, which was both physically healthy, but also like mentally healthy for that doing that transition. And I think if I hadn't been paying attention to what I needed in terms of managing my stress, I probably would have just continued going honestly... what we all do every day, which is I have another activity. I have another checkbox.

(Alani Tachibana)

In addition to prioritizing self-care, the data show that leadership agility helped support crisis leadership. Executives engaged in experimentation and actively worked to figure things out.

I've actually invested in a CRM tool to take notes on people because I could no longer rely on just my travel schedule or my memory, you know, it's just another face on a camera. And my brain is not able to lock that in the way I could if I was meeting in person. I've had to add some additional tools to my toolbox to be able to be a more well-rounded leader and do that without frying my brain. (Olive Emerald)

Participants in the study were innovative in defining new approaches to leading and solving problems, and this kind of business agility helped them lead through COVID.

Whiteboarding...we actually tried several different technical solutions. We were antiquated relative to where the rest of the industry was, and that created problems. There wasn't the flexibility within the IT environment due to security concerns to actually implement some of the tools that other companies had the benefit of using. Yes, I have to worry about cybersecurity, but people have to have the tools and capabilities that honestly, millennials, Gen Z folks have grown up using. (Hunter Jade)

Lastly, the executives interviewed widely discussed the importance of charting a course as part of the experience of leading during COVID. They relayed anecdotes and stories depicting the importance of decisiveness and the critical role of decision-making in pandemic-era leadership. The executives in the study felt an inclination towards forward motion as part of their intentional leadership. Rory Redmond explained that he would say to employees, "Let's keep going forward, keep doing your job." Other leaders expressed the same sentiment noting that they would just keep moving, regardless of incomplete information.

We got very clear that we were going to have very little information to make decisions on, and so you had to just pick and go, as we would say. (Ashe Onyx)

Many of the sample population referred to tools supporting their decision-making efforts, such as relying on crisis management plans or seeking external consulting support to help form sound crisis decisions.

We did have a couple of professors talk about, you know, how to manage in crisis. Just I can't remember the guy's name from (redacted), but like the stages of grief, you go through how to be move to acceptance, how do you provide psychological safety for your

employees, as well as making sure that they clearly understand what the requirements are for a physical safety. (Indigo Bluford)

The Development of Authentic Leadership Through Crisis

In addition to the central question (to what extent, if any, does authentic leadership help executives navigate crisis), I posed a subquestion at the start of the study asking: To what extent, if at all, does the experience of navigating a crisis develop authentic leaders? The findings from the research indicate that the experience of leading in Covid was one of difficulty and challenge, and also that distinct changes in leadership style came through leading in a crisis. When asked about the experience of leading in COVID, Violet Amethyst shared there was a sense of:

Overwhelm for sure. The... concern definitely... a lot of uncertainty for sure, because we've never gone through anything like this. And, you know, when you're faced with this crisis moment, there's so many emotions that go through. And I think all of those, like there's fear.

The study participants detailed accounts of managing fear, finding courage, and enduring the sustained nature of the crisis.

The Experience in Thoughts and Feelings

Participants described their feelings and thoughts from leading during COVID-19 which were, on the whole, marked by challenge and difficulty. Ashe Onyx of Black Company shared, “Feelings would be stress, uncertainty. Fear. Trepidation, all of the similar words that talk about feeling ambiguity.” Leaders in the study felt deep stress, a sense of shock and indicated that they were overwhelmed while leading in COVID.

We kind of experienced something. Something kind of turbulence. It's a kind of a tsunami type of experience. Overwhelming. I think it's pretty tough to lead in this

pandemic. I'm looking forward "back to normal" more than I think employees (are).

(Bronson Brown)

The Global Fortune 500 leaders interviewed described the impact of having no roadmap for leading in a pandemic and the pressure of getting added pandemic responsibilities. "I mean, there is no rulebook here. There are no right and wrong answers," Argento Sterling explained.

The introduction of remote work added to their stress. Indigo Bluford, like many other leaders interviewed, commented, "I think that when you're in a Zoom meeting. It's much harder to read the body language." For some of the participants, the experience of leading virtually was so intense that it caused significant anxiety.

There was a moment of dread. I've never felt like I was a strong virtual leader. I've looked for books on how to lead virtual teams. I've asked for tips and there's a little bit here and there, but there's not great stuff. And so, when suddenly my whole team was virtual, I realized that the inevitable was sort of upon me having to lead a virtual team. So there (was) certainly a little element of dread because I felt like I hadn't found the skills. I wasn't sure how to how to really approach it. (Olive Emerald)

Leaders also lamented the loss of the work/home boundary that existed in pre-pandemic times and the impact of this change on their wellbeing, noting a sense of confusion that came from the blurred line between work and home. Coining a new phrase to describe the experience, Red Company's Rory Redmond exclaimed, "You do not have a habitual lifestyle. It was shattering. I start to forget what day is it? It's Blursday! We never knew we'd be home for twenty-four hours a day."

The Experience in Physical Impact

In addition to sharing their experience in terms of thoughts and emotions, executives interviewed for the study indicated that part of the challenge of the experience of leading during COVID manifested in physical impact. “When I got to mid-May, I was like, why do I feel terrible? Oh, it's because I am not eating well and I'm not sleeping well and I'm not exercising. I felt isolated,” Alani Tachibana lamented. Almost every leader in the study recounted experiencing fatigue and sleep issues as a result of the long hours that resulted from leading in crisis. For example, Yellow Company executive Amber Gold conceded, “Well, I certainly am not getting nearly as much sleep. I started taking a lot of naps, but I'm not sure that's quite the same thing.” Other leaders detailed the intensity of pandemic-era work schedules and stress, and the resulting impact on sleep loss and fatigue.

I didn't sleep a lot. Sleep was definitely a luxury in some cases. In the worst of it, especially in the immediate days of when borders were closing, shelter in place was happening was, because we're global, there were meetings and discussions that I had to be involved in that were in other time zones. And so there literally were a couple of times I actually was up twenty four hours straight. (Violet Amethyst)

Leaders in the study also detailed facing a lack of exercise, closer proximity of the refrigerator in work from home environments, and the resulting physical impacts. Leaders experienced both weight loss and weight gain due to COVID. “I lost some weight the wake-up cycle a bit changed,” Bronson Brown shared. Many leaders gained weight in the pandemic. “I put on a little bit of weight. I wasn't eating well. The other thing was sleep,” commented Albus Opal. A twist on the “freshman 15,” which refers to weight gain in the first year of college, Ashe Onyx explained, “In the beginning, I gained my COVID 15 with everybody else.” Hunter Jade

referred to this phenomenon as “the COVID 19,” noting that he gained at least 19 pounds in the pandemic. Overall, leaders in the study described how working and leading from home disrupted routines and, in terms of physical impact, changed things even such as hunger levels.

So, for me the physical change was I'm working from home, I'm sitting on my skinny a** and I'm starting to gain some weight. So, you know, I was eating more, snacking more.

You know, you were hungry when you weren't hungry! (Rory Redmond)

Universally the participants noted the impact of the stress of crisis leadership and the toll it took on their bodies. The change from working in an office to working at home limited the regular physical activity leaders could capture in a day. Olive Emerald lamented, “I thought I used to sit a lot. I, had a day... I had three hundred and twenty-four steps total for the day. Are you kidding me?”

Distinct Changes in Leadership Style

Participants, on the whole, detailed distinct and noticeable changes in their leadership style that came from leading in crisis. “It's definitely shaped me. It's made me more thoughtful,” Albus Opal shared. Most broadly, leaders document a deepening of self-awareness, a component of authentic leadership, during the pandemic.

I think that's a part of self-awareness. This kind of a leading in crisis makes me think more about myself. For myself, I'm thinking what's my strength, what if this situation continues, what part I should play more. What part I should change for myself? What is kind of behavior, or what kind of pattern should be changed. (Bronson Brown)

Executives described, as part of the deepening of self-awareness developing greater empathy for employees, cultivating a greater sense of vulnerability, and prioritizing self-care.

I'm probably more empathetic now. Until this past year, (I) would sort of be like, "work life is work life and home life." I don't want to celebrate birthdays at work, and I can very much just let work be work and let home be home. (Now) I'm like, "there's no professional life and there's no personal life, it's just all life! I'm probably way more empathetic to when personal stuff gets in the way of work. (Alani Tachibana)

Many of the participants described, as part of their growing self-awareness in crisis, developing a greater sense of empathy for employees and a dedication to truly listening to the employee experience. An executive from Silver Company detailed the exercise of taking in information, reflecting, and developing awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of one's approach.

A leader needs to listen. He needs to hear their people. And if you self-assess, if you feel challenged, if when you speak to somebody about an issue and you get resistance and pushback and then maybe it's your approach! I think the lesson to really all of our leaders out of this Covid crisis has been the importance of listening, of listening to others and reaching collective decisions. (Argento Sterling)

Leaders also shared about a change in their leadership style borne out of the nature of remote work. They described learning to lead remotely and making space for different work styles in remote and hybrid environments. A number of participants commented on the appearance of pets on camera during work meetings and the importance of acknowledging pets as part of understanding and connecting with employees.

I was one of those leaders that really had preferred work in life to be separate. I don't really want to remember what your kids' names are. I can't remember what all the people who worked for me names are! And that that wasn't as acceptable. I have to know that the

French Bulldog in the corner's name is Barry and that I've got to say, "Oh gosh, Barry looks like you snoring!" And so, it extended this level of needing to really lead the whole person, the whole team, which is good. I think it is a good thing. I want to continue that as it goes forward. And it really helps me personally get comfortable with sharing more of more of my life. (Olive Emerald)

Executives in the study also shared a realization of the cathartic nature of informal communications. Rory Redmond asked, "What did you learn from this? Pay attention to your people more than ever. If they feel safe, you'll get personal stories which help you understand what they need." Many of the leaders detailed a shift in their style to taking a greater interest in the lives of employees and increasing their rate of responsiveness.

It reshaped me as a leader. I'm a lot more empathetic about people and their families than I was pre-COVID. It made me see what's possible and that you could go to a deeper understanding of people and their lives. (Hunter Jade)

Surprise Findings

In addition to uncovering findings that answer the study's central question and subquestions, the data reveal four surprising findings. First, the data suggest a great degree of business impact from COVID and a demonstration of the criticality of business. Second, an unexpected finding was around the intersectionality of crisis, revealing that the impact of multiple crises in 2020 was exponential. Third, participants revealed that leading in COVID brought unexpected gifts. Lastly, they shared gratitude and enthusiasm about the interview process and interest in the study.

Business Impact and Criticality

Executives interviewed for the study on authentic leadership in crisis scenarios resoundingly discussed a surprise theme of business impact from COVID. Executives spoke, unprompted, at length about the degree to which their businesses suffered during the pandemic, including supply chain issues, travel restrictions, and a tightening of the labor market.

Look at the supply chain issues. Oh my God, it's horrific. People talk about semiconductors and all the cars that are sitting stranded. If you want to buy a fancy appliance for your house, it's a six to eight month wait. Furniture is now six months. And it's the impact that this is this has continued to have across the world. I don't think we've even thought that through yet. And the ramifications. The labor turnover that I see, and its world-wide, by the way, I'm seeing where I used to have 18 percent turnover, in some cases I had 60 percent turnover of employees. (Hunter Jade)

Participants relayed the true global dimension of their businesses and international interconnectedness as part of the experience of leading in COVID. They discussed long-term ramifications of COVID on their businesses and the global reach of the crisis.

The thing that is interesting that we see today is that the supply chain has been significantly disrupted. If it's not chips for automobiles, that might be liners for a tape product, that might be chemical ingredients. One of the first things that happens in a crisis, everybody stops buying. Even the unevenness of this recovery with the Delta variant really crippling a lot of other nations. You've seen what's happened in Tokyo. Nobody's going to the Olympics. Australia, Sydney, largest city, probably going to have to shut down for a significant period of time. South Africa. Africa in general. India. And so, if this disease is going to circulate for another two, two or three years, then that that

recovery is going to be uneven because we are a global economy. And we depend on other people to buy our goods and services. (Indigo Bluford)

As part of describing the business impact of COVID, some of the Global Fortune 500 executives interviewed shared one of the human costs of the financial impact of the pandemic: layoffs. For example, the executive interviewed from White Company described his personal experience navigating this consequence.

Probably the one that stands out the most are the impacts. Because when you're doing a series of layoffs in a business that's not 50 thousand people, these are all people, you know on a first name basis. Many people have been to my house. I know their families. I know their stories. (Albus Opal)

Other leaders shared about the opportunities that COVID opened for their business, and some of the positive impacts on business. For example, online retailers experienced a boom from the shift to virtual shopping.

When Red Company made some really tough decisions to shut down our whole, not all but a big chunk of going to the wholesale, closed down accounts and went right to the direct to consumer, which is, you know, look at the millions of people who discovered Amazon. That they never bought online. Now, they couldn't go to the store because they couldn't be around people, and they had to have a mask. They get on the phone, place an order, toilet paper gets delivered to your house. Who would have thought? And our customers went just like that. So now it's service at the highest level than ever before. Convenience, free shipping, free returns, wear the clothes for 60 days. Take your time. So opened up a whole new way. (Rory Redmond)

Leaders also shared a sense of duty to serve in the pandemic and the criticality of their firms in enabling essential work and the creation of essential products.

Our product is what's keeping most people working during this phase of time. If our product goes down or if our product is not useful during this period of time, we are not only letting down ourselves as a company, but we're also letting down thousands of companies because of what our product is. Everyone's first response is going to require our product. (Alani Tachibana)

Overall, leaders discussed at length the significant degree to which COVID impacted their businesses, and the global nature and interconnectedness of their enterprises. Though the research questions were designed to ask leaders about their individual lived experience leading in crisis, all participants reflected on overall business impact as part of their experience.

Intersectionality of Crisis

The study revealed another surprise finding around the intersectionality of crisis. Echoing the sentiment of other participants, Violet Amethyst shared, “In the middle of that, we had all of the Black Lives Matter stuff with the George Floyd situation, right? I mean, that was just another layer on top of everything else.” Similarly, Ashe Onyx explained:

Remember, we were just coming off of Black Lives Matter and followed and before that was #MeToo. And so, it was just this cascade of events. And so, there was a bit of thinking around, like, what's next? Like aliens could have landed and no one would have been surprised.

Many of the executives discussed the various crises impacting their businesses and employees during the calendar year 2020. “It wasn't just the pandemic. The social injustice that was going on was horrific. Right. Breonna Taylor, George Floyd,” Hunter Jade shared. From

racial injustice and the murder of George Floyd and resulting social unrest to extreme weather events to the continuation of the #MeToo movement, leaders noted that the impact of multiple crises scenarios was exponential.

Because it was 2020. The questions around Covid. But the explosion of everything else that came up. It was not just a pandemic, it was racial. Black Lives Matter, working from home, people losing jobs because they had to stay home and take care of their kids.

Intensity in the household where there were some bad things happen. People were worried they're going to lose their job because they there are now going to be working from home and they weren't seeing their teammates on a daily basis. (Rory Redmond)

Participants in the study overwhelmingly reflected, with great detail, on the intersectionality of crises in 2020. It was not just COVID, they resoundingly explained, but there was a layering of multiple crises that resulted in extreme magnitude and exponentiality of impact.

Gifts of Leading in COVID

A surprise for executives, and a surprise finding for the study, was an abundance of gifts from the pandemic. Violet Amethyst offered:

I don't like to think of myself as somebody who likes crisis, but I guess I like crisis in some ways. Because it does bring out a different kind of muscle that you have to exercise that maybe you haven't had to (before).

A number of participants shared that leading in COVID gave them a chance to develop new capabilities or put to use skills they had trained and prepared for.

I'm relatively close to retirement, and if this had happened a month after I'd retired, I would have been really mad. After all the training I've been through to not have been in a

position where I could...you try to help the people in the company...it would have been very upsetting. (Amber Gold)

Some leaders, such as Albus Opal, found career progression opportunity as a result of the pandemic. “Before the Fourth of July, I got a call and was asked to move for my commercial role to being the president of businesses leading the business,” he explained. Others commented on how much they appreciated having more time at home with their families in the pandemic-induced remote work scenario. Rory Redmond shared, “The flip side is the gift of being home with each other and your kids.”

Executives experienced a sense that crisis somehow makes one a better person and a better leader. Argento Sterling offered, “The experience was one that was certainly challenging, but (it was) really a rewarding opportunity to be involved in making, in researching, reaching decisions and making recommendations to leadership to best address the crisis for the company.”

Leading in COVID brought unanticipated joys and delights for the participants. They received a host of career opportunities, the chance to apply training, and the ability to learn and grow. It was a surprise finding to uncover the theme of unexpected gifts and silver linings from the pandemic.

Gratitude and Enthusiasm

Lastly, a surprise theme that emerged from the data was deep gratitude for the interview process and interest in receiving and reviewing the results and findings. “Are you going to send a copy of your dissertation when it's done? I can't wait to read it,” Ashe Onyx asked and explained. Unprompted, Rory Redmon queried, “Can you give me a follow up when you're done to see notes of this?”

Executives shared that the interview gave them the first opportunity for introspection and reflection on the monumental experience of leading during COVID. “This is the really sticky stuff that I am appreciating you asking. I don't get to talk about very often, and it's something I'm very proud of,” Albus Opal revealed. The executives were curious about what their peers in the industry would have to say and what conclusions would be drawn from the data collected. For example, Violet Amethyst commented, “I would love to read anything that you have,” and Amber Gold shared, “It will be very interesting to see what you come up with.”

Phenomenological Data Analysis

The core focus of phenomenology as a qualitative research method is to explore the essence of the experience of a particular phenomenon by a target group. Through phenomenological data analysis, a textural description of the experience of leaders in COVID and a structural description of the context in which it was experienced can be documented following the process of identifying significant statements, creating meaning units or codes, and grouping together clusters or themes of meaning.

Textural Description

Stress, fear, and facing the unknown without a roadmap were part of the experience of leading during COVID. For executives in the study, the experience of leading during Covid was challenging physically, especially in terms of weight gain and sleep issues.

Self-awareness, transparency, and balanced processing helped leaders navigate the crisis. Prioritizing self-care, being agile, and charting a course were additional approaches to leading in COVID. Because of the nature of the crisis, transparency and balanced processing were challenging, though important. The ethical and moral components of authentic leadership was as important in crisis as in ordinary times. However, the scenario of COVID introduced unique

situations that called for moral and ethical behavior. Leading in crisis created an opportunity for deepening self-awareness and growth as leaders.

Structural Description

Households and daily life experiences of executives changed dramatically during the pandemic. COVID-19 created unfamiliar scenarios and new environments in the business world, such as remote work. The connectedness of the globe and the domino effects of difficulties in the supply chain impacted business. The intersectionality of multiple crises in the environment magnified the intensity and pressure of the year.

Composite Description

Leading during COVID-19 was fraught with challenges and difficulty emotionally, mentally, and physically. Elements of authentic leadership helped leaders navigate the crisis, but the crisis also made them challenging to execute. Leading in COVID catalyzed several positive changes for leaders and offered surprising gifts.

Summary

A number of relevant findings emerged that address the study's central research question: to what extent, if any, does authentic leadership enable leaders to navigate a crisis effectively? It was revealed that self-awareness was valuable in helping leaders navigate the pandemic. Additionally, ethical/moral behavior helped executives lead in the crisis, though not necessarily more than in regular times. However, in some instances, the pandemic crisis created unique or nuanced moral/ethical scenarios that leaders faced. Transparency brought value in helping leaders navigate effectively but was challenging to achieve in COVID because of multiple factors. Balanced processing helped executives lead during COVID but was more difficult to do than ordinarily because of the nature of crisis. Prioritizing self-care, demonstrating agility, and

charting a course combined with elements of authentic leadership to help leaders navigate the crisis.

Findings from the research also help address the subquestion of the study: to what extent, if at all, does the experience of navigating a crisis develop authentic leaders? Distinct changes in leadership style came from leading in crisis. Specifically, leaders experienced a deepening of self-awareness through leading in COVID in which they developed greater empathy, vulnerability, human touch, and focus on self-care. Leaders also learned to lead remotely and make space for different working styles in hybrid and remote environments. Lastly, leaders experienced a realization of the cathartic nature of informal communications and increased their responsiveness and level of interest in employee lives.

A few surprise themes emerged from the study on authentic leadership in crisis scenarios. The intersectionality of the crises of 2020 magnified the intensity of the experience. The interconnected nature of global business and the worldwide nature of the pandemic meant that the impact on business was severe. In addition, the experience of leading in COVID provided surprising gifts.

The overall essence of leading during COVID was both challenging and rewarding. Pandemic leadership as an experience for executives was fraught with challenges and difficulty emotionally, mentally, and physically. Elements of authentic leadership helped leaders navigate the crisis, but the crisis also made them challenging to execute. Finally, leading in COVID catalyzed several positive changes for leaders and offered surprising gifts.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Although vaccines for the coronavirus have been developed and deployment is underway, companies continue to struggle with concerns about workplace policy, physical space, and infrastructure. Business executives face a highly complex pandemic crisis with a profoundly human component. Some evidence through the literature suggests that authentic leadership, which draws self-awareness, is increasingly in demand. Understanding best practices for leaders to navigate the crisis in the corporate world through the lens of the pandemic offers an opportunity to explore strategies for crisis leadership.

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of authentic leadership in helping corporate executives navigate the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The study is grounded in a social-constructivist paradigm and anchored in an understanding of the bodies of literature within authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 pandemic-era leadership. The global coronavirus pandemic constitutes the backdrop for the study, and the population in focus is corporate executives in the top 1% of leadership in Global Fortune 500 firms who served during the pandemic in 2020.

Two research questions form the focus of inquiry for the research. The central question was, to what extent, if any, does authentic leadership enable leaders to navigate a crisis effectively. The study's subquestion probed, to what extent, if at all, does the experience of navigating a crisis develop authentic leaders. The study is significant in that it offers an opportunity to fill in the gap in literature at the intersection of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 pandemic leadership. It also provides potential to glean best practices for corporate leadership in future crisis scenarios. Lastly, these lessons learned from the

corporate experience can be applied to preparedness for national, community, and international organizational leadership.

A thorough review of the literature of over 150 sources explored bodies of knowledge within authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 pandemic era leadership. A summary of what is known about authentic leadership includes that values-centered leadership is fueled by empathy and self-awareness. Authentic leadership in action looks like hope and optimism and is reflected in reliable and supportive leader actions. Authentic leadership can be developed and passed from leader to follower, and it can be measured through assessment of key dimensions. A summary of what is known also includes that crisis leadership can be developed and evaluated through models and roadmaps. Crisis leadership in action looks like agility, speed, and decisiveness. Communications play an important role for leaders in crises, and organizations best navigate crises through a focus on generating and evaluating options and enabling clear decision making. Though an emergent field, a body of knowledge on pandemic-era leadership explores the global scale of COVID-19 leadership, offers commentary on the importance of trust, reveals how COVID-19 leadership is unfolding in corporations, and describes steps leaders should take with the application of various leadership models.

A phenomenological research design of qualitative methodology was selected for the study in order to focus on understanding the lived experience of leaders and the phenomenon of leading through crisis. The purpose of phenomenology is to distill down the experience of a group of individuals of a particular phenomenon to a universal essence.

Data were analyzed according to phenomenological research design protocol (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, I engaged in bracketing to set aside personal beliefs and assumptions, a process that continued throughout the study. Eleven executives in the top 1% of leadership in

their firms and representing a broad range of business functions from 11 Global Fortune 500 companies were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Interviews were transcribed, redacted, and coded, a process in which significant statements and resulting meaning units were identified. Themes were then clustered to produce a textural description of the experience of leaders, a structural description of the environment of leading in COVID, and a composite description revealing the overall essence. From the data analysis, findings were revealed, and conclusions were drawn.

Overall findings from the study suggest the essence of leading during the pandemic as one of difficulties for executives who endured emotional, mental, and physical challenges. Some components of authentic leadership helped leaders navigate the crisis. Findings from data suggest that authentic leadership helped leaders navigate the pandemic crisis. Ethical and moral conduct were also helpful in leading in crisis, but not necessarily different from regular times. Nevertheless, the crisis also made some elements of authentic leadership challenging to execute. Both transparency and balanced processing helped leaders navigate COVID-19, but the nature of the crisis placed challenges on achieving those components of authentic leadership. Leading in the pandemic offered a number of surprising gifts and catalyzed numerous positive changes for leaders. The data suggest that leading in a crisis helped develop authentic leadership, particularly self-awareness.

Two key conclusions can be drawn from the findings. First, on the whole, authentic leadership helped leaders navigate the pandemic crisis in general. However, the extent to which this occurred is nuanced according to each of the four components of authentic leadership. Secondly, in terms of self-awareness as a component of authentic leadership, the experience of navigating through crisis helps to develop authentic leaders. The following chapter will explore

these two conclusions from the research in further depth as well as locate them within the context of relevant literature. Recommendations for future research will be shared as well as a note on the personal reflections for the researcher before a final concluding summary.

Conclusions

Eleven semi-structured interviews with corporate executives in Global Fortune companies produced robust data which was analyzed using phenomenological methods. From the analysis, a set of findings emerged. From a review of the synthesized findings, two important conclusions can be drawn. First, overall, authentic leadership helped executives navigate the COVID-19 pandemic effectively. However, there were a number of nuances to this finding and distinctions according to each component of authentic leadership. A paradox of authentic leadership was revealed in which two of the components of authentic leadership simultaneously helped enable successful leadership in a crisis and create constraints on leading in a crisis. Second, it can be concluded from the findings that the experience of leading in COVID produced noticeable changes in the styles and approaches to the leadership of the executives interviewed. In particular, self-awareness, a component of authentic leadership, was deepened during the crisis. Self-awareness also helped leaders lead in crisis. Thus, a snowball cycle of self-awareness in crises emerges.

The Paradox of Authentic Leadership

The purpose of the study was to examine the role, if any, of authentic leadership in helping executives navigate the COVID-19 crisis. Authentic leadership is comprised of four components (Avolio et al., 2007). One component of authentic leadership is self-awareness, which reflects a leader's knowledge of their strengths and limitations, how people view them, and the impact they have on others. Transparency, another component of authentic leadership,

measures a leader's ability to create a sense of openness in which others feel comfortable sharing ideas, challenges, and opinions. The third element of authentic leadership is the ethical/moral component which depicts the degree to which leaders set high standards for moral and ethical conduct. Lastly, balanced processing is a component of authentic leadership in which leaders engage sufficiently in collecting opinions and viewpoints of others before making decisions.

The study explored all four components of authentic leadership in addressing the question, to what extent, if any, does authentic leadership enable leaders to navigate a crisis effectively? A conclusion can be drawn from the findings that authentic leadership helped enable leaders to navigate the crisis in general, but the extent to which is nuanced and varies according to each component of authentic leadership, including self-awareness, ethical/moral behavior, transparency, and balanced processing.

The importance of self-awareness in helping leaders navigate the crisis of COVID was clear, compelling, and apparent. Self-awareness was a valuable tool in helping executives lead during the pandemic. Having humility, admitting to not having all the answers, being authentic, and showing vulnerability, all of which are elements of self-awareness, help executives earn a mandate from their employees, teams, and organizations to lead during the pandemic crisis.

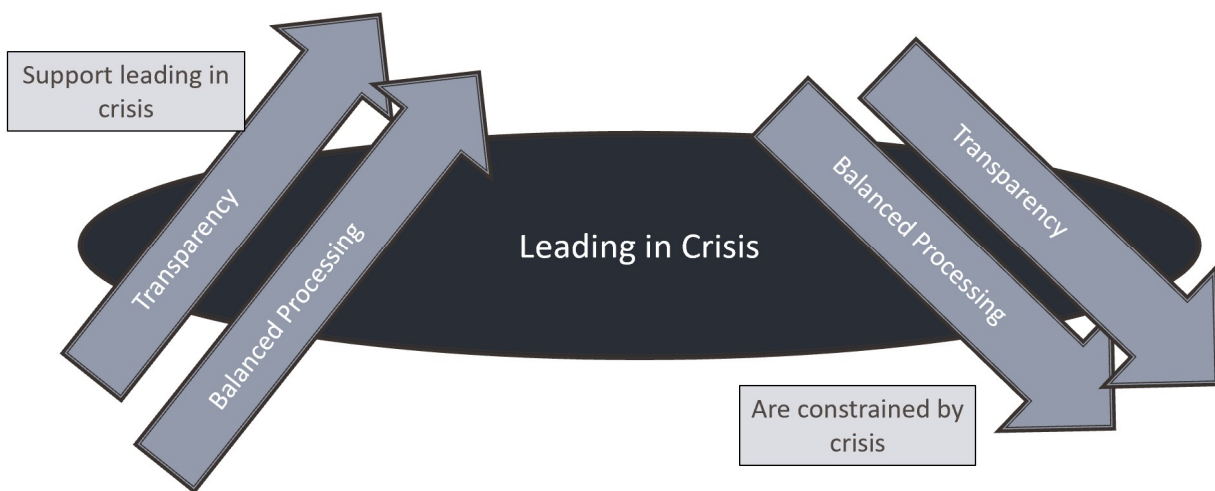
Though ethical and moral behavior was not needed more in COVID per se compared to ordinary times, there were unique and specific scenarios particular to COVID that arose that called for moral and ethical behavior. Demonstrating ethical and moral behavior in these scenarios, which included decisions on allocating personal protective equipment (PPE) and access to vaccines and tests, helped executives navigate the crisis effectively. Additionally, the pandemic presented unique and specific scenarios for leaders to demonstrate ethical and moral

behavior in extending respect for and acknowledging religious and political differences. These helped executives lead through the crisis.

For transparency and balanced processing, a further degree of nuance exists. Through analysis of the research study findings, it can be concluded that there is a paradox of authentic leadership in crisis involving these two elements of authentic leadership. The paradox, as depicted in Figure 7, is that while both transparency and balanced processing help leaders navigate crisis, the nature of crisis makes transparency and balanced processing challenging to execute.

Figure 7

The Paradox of Authentic Leadership in Crisis



Transparency, a component of authentic leadership, brought value in helping leaders navigate effectively. For example, sharing information and collaborating helped executives lead in COVID. In addition, communicating transparently helped executives navigate the crisis.

However, transparency was difficult for leaders to achieve in the crisis because of policies, legal issues, confidentiality, and restrictions that prevented leaders from engaging in the

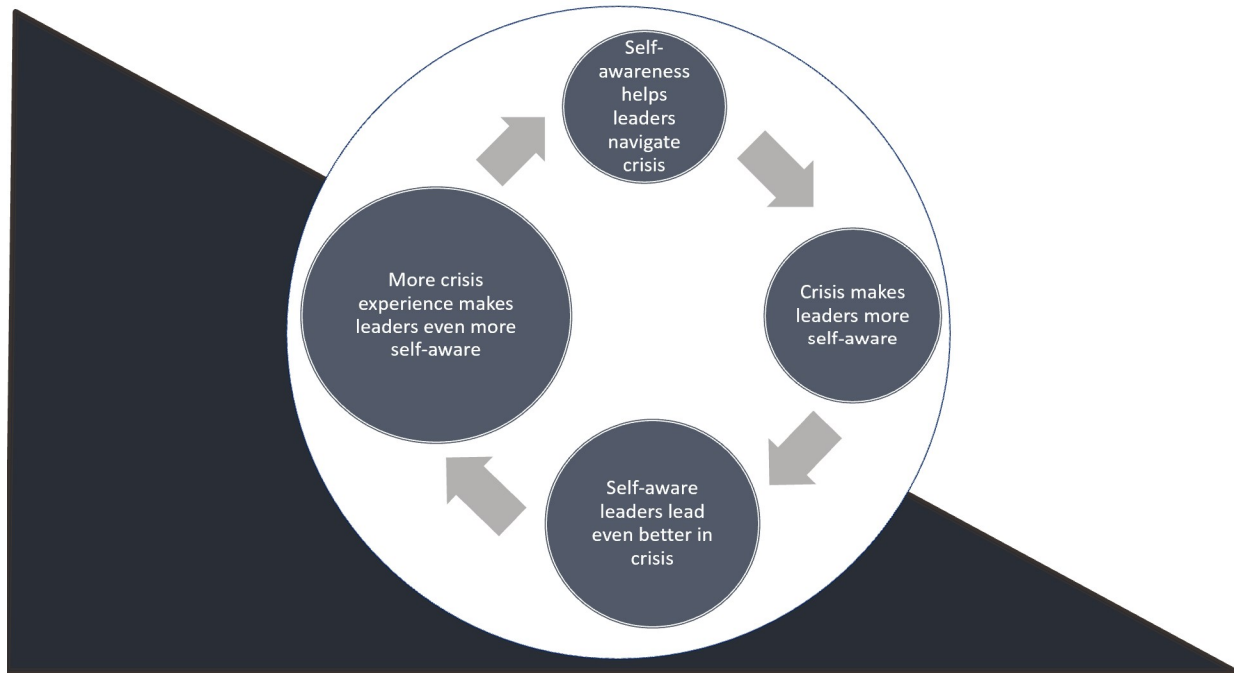
degree of open information sharing they desired. Leaders faced additional constraints to achieving transparency based on incomplete or imperfect information about the coronavirus and its spread, rumors from within the business and employees, and misinformation circulating both within and outside their companies. Hence, a paradox occurred. Transparency helped leaders navigate leading in the crisis, but the crisis itself made transparency difficult for leaders to achieve.

Similarly, a paradox arose around the balanced processing component of authentic leadership for corporate executives during the crisis. From the data collected via interviews with executives, it can be concluded that engaging in balanced processing helped leaders navigate the crisis. Collecting and being responsive to feedback from their teams helped executives lead. In addition, recognizing unique employee situations during and finding innovative approaches to soliciting opinions, particularly in remote environments, helped the Global Fortune 500 business executives lead.

However, the ability for leaders to engage in balanced processing was constrained in 2020 because of crisis-mode urgency and the speed needed for decisions. In addition, leaders faced the challenges of receiving conflicting details from different stakeholders within the business. Also, being virtual and in remote environments meant that leaders couldn't rely on familiar tools for soliciting opinions and feedback, such as meeting informally with groups of employees. Therefore, while balanced processing is a component of authentic leadership that helped executives lead, engaging in the crisis was also constrained by the crisis. It can be concluded that there is a paradox of authentic leadership in crises in which both transparency and balanced processing, two of the four components of authentic leadership, are critical for leadership success but difficult to achieve.

The Snowball Cycle of Self-Awareness in Crisis

A subquestion of the study exploring the lived experience of executives leading during the COVID-19 crisis was intended to investigate to what extent, if any, the experience of navigating in a crisis develops authentic leadership. Through careful analysis of the findings, it can be concluded that leading in COVID created distinct and profound changes in the leadership styles of executives. Most notably, leading deepened executives' sense of self-awareness, a critical component of authentic leadership. Empathy, vulnerability, and focus on others are important parts of self-awareness. Leading in this crisis helped leaders develop greater empathy for others. It also enabled them to be more vulnerable as leaders. This crisis experience also gave executives more focus on the human touch and prompted them to take a greater interest in employees' lives. As such, leading made leaders more self-aware as depicted visually in Figure 8.

Figure 8*The Snowball Cycle of Self-awareness in Crisis*

The findings also suggest that self-awareness helped leaders navigate the crisis, particularly in terms of enabling them to earn a mandate from employees and their organizations to lead. Therefore, the second conclusion for this study acknowledges a cyclical process that can be described as the snowball cycle of self-awareness in crisis. Self-awareness helped leaders navigate the crisis. The act of leading in a crisis makes leaders more self-aware. Self-aware leaders lead even better in a crisis, and more crisis experience makes leaders even more self-aware. Thus, the more leaders lead in crises, the better leaders they will be, especially from a self-awareness point of view. Like a snowball growing in size as it gains momentum moving down a hill, there is a cycle of self-awareness in crises in which self-awareness and leading in a crisis build on each other and grow. This process can be described as the snowball cycle of self-awareness in a crisis.

Connecting Research to Literature

The two conclusions for the study are that there is a paradox of authentic leadership in crisis and that there is a snowball cycle of self-awareness. Both conclusions are firmly grounded in the findings gleaned from careful analysis of the data according to qualitative methodology techniques, phenomenological research design, and data analysis steps and procedures. In addition, the conclusions are supported by evidence from the literature.

Study Conclusion One and the Literature

Given the newness of the emergence of COVID and the absence of the depth of research at the intersection of crisis leadership, COVID leadership, and authentic leadership, there is no evidence from the literature to directly support the claim that authentic leadership helps leaders navigate a crisis or that there is a paradox of authentic leadership when it comes to transparency and balanced processing.

However, a specific element of conclusion one for which there is evidence in the literature is the criticality of the role of communications in crisis. I found that self-awareness helped executives navigate the crisis. One critical element of self-awareness is empathy for others, and executives relied on a variety of forms of communication for expressing empathy. For example, they intentionally listened to employees, showed vulnerability via open communication to build trust, and increased opportunities for engagement. In this way, communications supported leaders in their expression of empathy for others, which was an essential element of self-awareness as a component of authentic leadership. In addition, the research showed that transparency, though difficult in the crisis, was necessary for leaders to lead effectively. As part of transparency, the executives interviewed found that sharing information with employees and collaborating with other peers and stakeholders helped them lead.

Transparently communicating within their business was crucial for leaders to navigate the crisis. Thus, for two elements of authentic leadership relevant for conclusion one—self-awareness and transparency—communication played an important role in shaping the effectiveness of leadership in crisis.

This particular claim around communications in a crisis—that it helps executives lead effectively—is supported by the literature. As noted in the literature review, a subset of crisis leadership explores the role of communications in crises. It is also documented that mistakes, delays, or omissions in communications can hinder leader effectiveness in a crisis while speed, accuracy, and transparency of leader communications improve effectiveness in a crisis (Eldridge, 2020). One study specifically linked the ability for leaders to communicate effectively with their ability to lead in a crisis (Balwant, 2020).

In the study on authentic leadership in crisis scenarios, the specific claim of conclusion one—that transparency is critical for success in crisis but is also made difficult by the nature of crisis—is also supported by the literature. For example, through a review of oral histories of the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001, the chain of communications from within the New York Fire Department was explored (Dearstyne, 2007). It was found that confusion and other difficulties resulted from commanders lacking reliable and clear information. The research in the context of the pandemic and the article on September 11th reveal that transparent communications can be difficult in crisis but are necessary for successful leadership.

Study Conclusion Two and the Literature

The second conclusion of the study begins with the premise that the experience of leading in a crisis offers an opportunity for growth and development of leaders, particularly in deepening

their self-awareness, a component of authentic leadership. The research also shows that a cyclical process exists in which leading in a crisis makes leaders more self-aware and that self-awareness helps them lead in crisis. The conclusion reveals that the very act of leading in crisis, facing difficulty, and being challenged, strengthens the abilities of leaders.

Conclusion two is grounded firmly in the literature on authentic leadership. Authentic leadership theory notes that leadership growth comes from challenging experiences (George & Sims, 2007). The challenging times that leaders encounter are like crucibles in which strength, courage, and growth are forged (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). As the study on authentic leadership in the pandemic revealed, the literature validates that a crisis is a time in which leaders can experience tremendous growth and development.

Furthermore, conclusion two of the study explicitly addresses self-awareness and the deepening of self-awareness that came through the experience of leading in crisis. The literature suggests that self-awareness, as a specific attribute, can be learned (Goleman, 1995). Part of the learning comes through training and reflection, but some come through sheer practice. Thus, the executives believed that practicing self-awareness when leading in the pandemic helped them become even more self-aware.

Implications

The study on the lived experiences of corporate executives leading against the backdrop of the pandemic produced two key conclusions. The first conclusion addresses the question about the role of authentic leadership in a crisis; it can be concluded that authentic leadership helps leaders navigate crisis. Self-awareness directly contributed to the executives' ability to lead. Ethical and moral conduct helped leaders lead. Though this was not more significant than in non-crisis times, the pandemic did create a number of unique moral and ethical scenarios that leaders

faced. Additionally, both balanced processing and transparency—two components of authentic leadership—that helped leaders navigate the crisis, but the nature of the crisis made it difficult to achieve balanced processing and transparency. This phenomenon can be described as the paradox of authentic leadership in crisis.

From the first conclusion of the study, three important implications are yielded for executives leading in the corporate environment. First, I concluded that self-awareness helps leaders navigate a crisis. Companies, therefore, have an opportunity to support the development of self-awareness for leaders. This will, in turn, help leaders navigate crises. Self-reflection alone is not enough to fully build one's self-awareness (George & Sims, 2007). Rather, leaders need feedback from others to fully develop their self-awareness. Thus, an implication of the research is that it would be worthwhile for companies to invest in feedback mechanisms, such as 360-degree reviews, for leaders as a means to best prepare leaders for crises through the development of self-awareness.

Second, the data show that ethical and moral behavior helped leaders serve their teams and organizations. Though this phenomenon did not exist in the pandemic more than in ordinary times *per se*, leaders did face nuanced and unique instances in which moral and ethical decisions were needed. These scenarios included the need for decisions on the allocation of personal protective equipment (PPE), regulations around vaccine requirements in terms of religious exemptions, and access to COVID tests for leaders and employees. Given that there is no roadmap in crisis situations for the exact nature of moral and ethical decisions that will arise, an implication of the study is that companies should ground leaders firmly in the foundation of the core values of the firm. With a strong reliance on such principles, leaders will be best

empowered to make sound decisions when faced with unexpected moral and ethical scenarios during a crisis.

Third, I concluded that a paradox of authentic leadership in crisis exists in which balanced processing and transparency both help leaders navigate crisis but are difficult to achieve based on the nature of crisis. An implication for this conclusion is that companies should intentionally build and cultivate a culture of risk-taking and innovation. When faced with constraints on their ability to serve transparently and with balanced processing executives need to experiment, use creativity, and forge new paths. In the context of the study on the lived experience of executives navigating COVID, leaders drew on innovative tactics to collect points of view in remote environments and when under pressure and found new ways to share information transparently. A corporate culture that supports risk-taking and innovation will help empower leaders to think creatively and to act boldly when facing the paradox of authentic leadership in crisis. Thus, it is recommended that companies take intentional steps to weave an appreciation for risk-taking and innovation into the fabric of their corporate culture.

A second conclusion from the study can be drawn, which is that a snowball cycle of self-awareness in crisis exists in which self-awareness helps leaders navigate crises, and navigating crises helps executives to lead. The study revealed that the very act of leading a crisis produces an environment in which self-awareness can be developed. Participants in the study commented on the true value of the crisis in helping them learn and develop. Crises are therefore helpful for leaders, but crises are by nature unexpected events. Thus, an implication for the second conclusion of the study—the snowball cycle of self-awareness in crisis—is that corporations can and should create opportunities for executives to have tangible experience leading in crisis scenarios. This can be done, in a low-risk alternative, through the use of simulations and mock

crisis scenarios. Much as a fire drill helps students learn the paths to take to exit their school buildings in the case of a fire, simulations can be arranged at companies for leaders to exercise the muscle of leading in crisis.

In sum, four implications emerge from the study's conclusions. Companies should offer opportunities for gathering feedback to boost the self-awareness of leaders and best prepare them for crisis. Core values should be emphasized and embedded in leadership practices to help leaders navigate unexpected moral and ethical scenarios that arise in a crisis. An intentional corporate culture of risk-taking and innovation should be cultivated to help prepare leaders to face the paradox of authentic leadership in a crisis. Lastly, simulations should be employed to offer leaders the opportunity to practice leading in a crisis, thus developing self-awareness and growing their authentic leadership.

Limitations of the Study

Given the nature of the study and the environmental context in which it was completed with the pandemic continuing throughout the study, some limitations were faced. I worked to minimize the impact of these limitations. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize them and document them as such.

Travel

First, due to COVID, no travel or in-person meetings were possible for interviewing participants. Zoom was used as an alternative, with all interviews being conducted by video conference. It is possible that some of the subtleties of communication, such as body language, were lost in the video format.

Access

I was able to access executives for participant interviews through the designed sampling method. However, the sampling method relied on my network as convenience sampling was employed. Given that this network is mainly in the United States, eight of the 11 participating companies were domiciled in the United States, and all 11 participants currently live in the United States. A limitation of the study was access to a broader swath of participants outside of my network and particularly outside of the United States.

Lack of Previous Research

COVID is a new phenomenon, and research on COVID leadership is highly emergent. Though a new body of literature on COVID-19 pandemic leadership was identified, it is still unfolding. It is unclear what the bounds of the pandemic area are and when they will end. Although the research creates value by adding to a gap in the literature, there remains a limitation of the shallow depth of studies on pandemic leadership for comparison and grounding.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the study's limitations, topics that emerged as surprise findings in the research continued explorations of the literature, gaps within, and further researcher reflection, there are several recommendations for further investigation. Coming out of the study, five distinct yet related areas for further research emerge. These include the intersectionality of crisis, organizational effectiveness in remote and hybrid work environments, gender and authentic leadership in a crisis, national culture and authentic leadership in a crisis, and replication of the study in other sectors.

Intersectionality of Crisis

One of the vital surprise findings from the research is that there is an intersectionality of crises. 2020 marked a year of notable events beyond the global pandemic. George Floyd was murdered in Minnesota, shedding light on continued systemic racism and injustice catalyzing a wave of social unrest. Extreme weather events including wildfires and floods and other climate-related crises brought devastation. The #MeToo movement continued to expose gender discrimination and the pervasive horrors of sexual assault.

Leaders interviewed in the study noted that the combined and collective impact of these concurrent crises in 2020 led to an exponential magnitude of impact. The sense that it was *not only* the pandemic affecting businesses, employees, and customers, but also an intricate web of concurrent crises. It would be interesting for future researchers to explore the depth of the exponential impact of multiple concurrent crises and the concept of intersectionality. Is facing two simultaneous crisis events twice as hard for a leader? Could it be three or four times as hard? What leads to this amplification, and what tools and best practices are available for leaders at the locus of crisis intersection? These are fertile grounds for further consideration and could be research questions for additional exploration.

Organizational Effectiveness in Remote and Hybrid Work Environments

Many participants described the sustained nature of the COVID-19 crisis and referred to the “new normal” or “next normal” versus an anticipated sense of a return to the past. Participants also referred to the numerous challenges they faced in learning to lead in remote and hybrid environments. They found it challenging to connect with employees, facilitate active participation in meetings, and prevent burnout related to video calls. Leaders also discussed some small wins and successes they have by introducing experiments and innovation in remote

leadership. Adding brief check-ins, gathering teams for virtual all-hands calls, and taking time to introduce pets on video, all featured in the interview material.

What the study did not set out to explore and did not tackle in the analysis was the overarching topic of the workplace and team dynamics in virtual environments. How can organizations achieve maximum effectiveness when not all employees are on-site? How does crisis place an additional dimension for consideration on organizational leaders, and what techniques for building high-performing teams work best in these scenarios? A recommendation for further research is to explore these research questions and the specific nuance of achieving organizational effectiveness in remote and hybrid work environments, perhaps within the additional layer of crisis.

Gender and Authentic Leadership in Crisis

The study on authentic leadership in crisis scenarios included 11 participants from Global Fortune 500 firms. Three of these executives were women. The study did not set out to explore gender dynamics, similarities, or differences, nor was there any intentional sampling around gender. However, one of the participants made a comment that might inspire further research. In the context of inquiring about the role self-awareness played in helping her navigate the COVID-19 crisis, Violet Amethyst spoke about vulnerability as a component of authentic leadership with a gendered dimension.

I think vulnerability in the midst of all of this is something that I definitely, I... it's not something that is easy for me. I grew up in the business world where women were trained not to show vulnerability. You're going to be with the big boys like don't show weakness like this is not a thing that you want to do. I think that what was so necessary in this time, and I think is certainly something to take to carry forward is understanding that it's OK to

be human and it's OK to be vulnerable. And it's OK to say I don't know. And gosh, I'm overwhelmed, and I really need your help.

It would be valuable for the field to embark on further research to explore the phenomenon to which Violet referred. What lies at the intersection of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, COVID leadership, and gender? Violet's words indicate that much could be revealed through further exploration of the research question.

National Culture and Authentic Leadership in Crisis

The study succeeded in being global in two clear ways. First, the Global Fortune 500 list was used to identify participants. The Global Fortune 500 list surveys the world's largest companies, whereas the Fortune 500 looks at those headquartered only within the United States. Additionally, breadth was reached in that the sample population included companies domiciled in three regions: Americas, Europe, and Asia.

However, the study did not frame national culture or explore the impact of national culture on the experience of leaders navigating the COVID crisis and the relationship between authentic leadership and national culture. It could be a valuable exercise to overlay some of the cultural indices that map dimensions of culture onto the exploration of authentic leadership in crisis. Are certain national cultures more likely to produce authentic leaders? How is crisis tackled similarly or differently in different areas of the world? Like gender, national culture would be a helpful additional lens for further research and these questions could form the focus of future studies.

Replication in Other Sectors

The backdrop for the study on authentic leadership in crisis was the corporate landscape. Business leaders were interviewed about their lived experience leading in a crisis. Important findings were revealed, and two detailed conclusions can be drawn.

What would be the outcomes if the study were replicated in other sectors? For example, the military, government, education, the non-profit sector, and the healthcare industry all feature leaders who had to navigate the COVID-19 crisis. What was their lived experience, and how might it have been the same or different than corporate leaders? These potential research questions reveal that significant opportunity exists to continue to explore authentic leadership in crisis scenarios.

Replicating the current study in alternative sectors could shed new light and information. Adding dimensions of national culture and gender could produce a richer exploration of the topic. Exploring organizational effectiveness in remote and hybrid work environments within the context of crises offers an opportunity for further consideration. Lastly, the surprise finding of the exponential impact of the intersectionality of crisis could be a valuable topic for further research in the field.

Note From the Researcher

Phenomenological research design enables the researcher to explore the lived experience of participants with experience in the phenomenon being studied. Phenomenologists suggest that researchers should actively engage in the process of reflexivity in which the researcher's assumptions, ideas, and experiences are documented and set aside (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This is called bracketing. During the course of the study I maintained a research journal to document, catalog, and set aside my own opinions and points of view. It is also suggested that researchers write about their own experiences as part of the phenomenological research process. Three themes appeared with regularity in my journal.

First, I documented a journey of change in leadership style over the course of the project. Likely due to the frequent and consistent focus on the elements of authentic leadership, I found

myself evaluating their level of authentic leadership throughout the project. The most notable change for me came in terms of balanced processing. During the study, as documented in the journal, I increased the degree to which I actively sought out the opinions and perspectives of others before making a decision. The study helped bring my attention to their leadership style as the components of authentic leadership were in focus.

Second, I embraced a greater degree of authenticity as a component of self-awareness throughout the study. At the beginning of the project, my journal reflected an interest in self-awareness and authenticity and becoming more self-aware. After completing the interviews with executives, I noticed a willingness to embrace my authenticity and demonstrate a more genuine persona in the workplace. The exact reason for this change is unclear. It might be the result of a combination of exposure to authentic leaders, reading about authentic leadership, and an initial curiosity in the topic, an experimental mindset, and a willingness to explore growth and development.

Lastly, and likely connected to the process of embracing an authentic persona, I experienced a fairly significant epiphany in terms of career trajectory during the project. As noted in the introduction, I was moving along a career of corporate roles and responsibilities at the start of the study. Initially, I had planned to continue this course indefinitely. However, as the study progressed and I embraced my authentic and genuine leadership style, I became increasingly interested in pursuing an adjacent career in the field of academia. A strong sense of purpose and interest in enabling the growth and development of others emerged. I am currently exploring opportunities to teach courses and mentor students at the university level.

Overall, I found the process of writing a dissertation on authentic leadership and conducting qualitative research with human subjects in the field to be a profound and cathartic

experience. I was both humbled and deeply grateful for the willingness of study participants to share authentically about their leadership journeys during the pandemic. I also appreciate the new thinking and career planning that emerged from the personal journey of research on authentic leadership. On a final note, during the data analysis phase of the study, my husband contracted a breakthrough case of the delta variant of the coronavirus. Thus, I found myself isolated for many days alone in the basement of our home. Significant progress was made on data analysis during this time in quarantine, and I felt a very strong and personal connection to the COVID pandemic and its implications.

Summary

Two definitive conclusions can be drawn from a thorough analysis of the data collected via semi-structured interviews with executives in Global Fortune 500 firms about their lived experience in 2020 during the world-wide coronavirus crisis. First, it can be concluded that authentic leadership helped leaders navigate the COVID-19 crisis. Self-awareness significantly helped executives lead in a crisis. Elements of self-awareness, such as authenticity, vulnerability, and humility, helped leaders connect with employees, build trust, and earn a mandate to lead. While moral and ethical behavior, another component of authentic leadership, was not necessarily more important during COVID than in normal times, it did play a role in helping leaders navigate leadership in the pandemic. Particular moral and ethical scenarios emerged that were specific to the pandemic, such as respect for religious or political concerns around the virus, as well as moral and ethical decision making around topics such as vaccine access and the allocation of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Transparency and balanced processing were both found to be important elements that supported executives in navigating the COVID-19 pandemic to a great extent. However, the

nature of the crisis, including policies and restrictions, misinformation, the sense of urgency, and the remote work environment, posed challenges to authentic leadership. Thus, the first conclusion for the study reveals that though authentic leadership was indeed a critical element for crisis navigation, a paradox emerged. The paradox of authentic leadership in crisis is that while transparency and balanced processing specifically help leaders navigate crises, it was also challenging to execute based on the nature of the crisis.

The subquestion for the study sought to probe the extent to which, if any, the experience of navigating a crisis develops authentic leaders. Through examination of the research findings, it can be concluded that leading in crisis produces significant change for leaders and that self-awareness, a component of authentic leadership, is broadly deepened. Through the pandemic, participants developed greater empathy for others, became more vulnerable and authentic, and found themselves administering a more human touch and taking an interest in employees' lives.

Self-awareness helps leaders navigate crisis, and crisis makes leaders more self-aware which, in turn, helps them better navigate crisis. Thus, the second conclusion of the study is that there is a snowball cycle of self-awareness in a crisis. Through this process, both a leader's level of self-awareness and their ability to navigate a crisis grow exponentially over time in a symbiotic fashion.

The purpose of the study is to explore the role of authentic leadership in helping business executives navigate the global COVID-19 crisis. A phenomenological research design using qualitative methodology was used to develop an understanding of the lived experience of corporate executives during the pandemic in 2020. Eleven executives in the top 1% of leadership in their firm, or with "chief" in their title, were interviewed in a semi-structured format. Data

were analyzed using the phenomenological research data analysis process, and findings were cleaned.

Ultimately, through careful review of the findings, two conclusions were found to address the central and subquestions of the study. Authentic leadership helps leaders navigate crises, and that occurs to a great extent when considering the component of authentic leadership of self-awareness. Ethical and moral components of authentic leadership support leaders in crises, though not necessarily to a greater extent than in ordinary times, although the pandemic presented unique scenarios in which moral and ethical leadership behaviors were needed.

A paradox of authentic leadership in crisis was identified. Though both transparency and balanced processing support leaders in navigating crises, the nature of crises places constraints on authentic leadership and makes it difficult to execute. A second conclusion is that the experience of leading in crises does help develop authentic leaders, and this is strikingly so in terms of self-awareness. Self-awareness helps executives lead in crises, and the act of leading in crisis makes leaders more self-aware. Thus, there is a snowball cycle of self-awareness in crises. Taken together, the recognition of the paradox of authentic leadership and the snowball cycle of self-awareness in crisis form the key learnings of the study. These two concepts also represent the summary of understanding the lived experience of Global Fortune 500 leaders as they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic as uncovered through new research in the field at the intersection of authentic leadership, crisis leadership, and COVID-19 pandemic era leadership.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation and Informed Consent

Hello,

My name is Natasha Brown, and I am a Ph.D. student at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a study on authentic leadership in crisis scenarios, and I would like to invite you to consider participating in the study through an interview. If you worked in a Global Fortune 500 during the calendar year 2020 and served as a or in the top 1% of your firm's leadership during that time, you are eligible to participate. Participation is voluntary, and results will be shared confidentially.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

This is a research project that focuses on understanding the lived experience of corporate leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of the role, if any, that authentic leadership played in helping them navigate the crisis.

What will be done during this research study?

Participation in this study will require approximately 45-60 minutes for a semi-structured interview. Participation will take place remotely via Zoom video conference.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

There are no more than minimal risks for this study such as the possibility of mild boredom or fatigue. There may also be a potential breach of confidentiality.

What are the possible benefits to you?

The results of this study will be used to understand authentic leadership in crisis scenarios.

How will information about you be protected?

Your responses to the interview prompts will be kept confidential. Information will be collected through interview questions in the video conference. The session will be recorded and transcribed. Data will then be analyzed. In terms of data privacy, your identity will only be known to the researcher. Pseudonyms will be given to names of participants and organizational affiliations for data analysis. Participant names and organizations will be stored in a master file separate from the research data. Identities of the participants will not be revealed. Data will only be stored in a password-protected 256 SHR encrypted file on the researcher's personal computer with a back-up copy on the secured Pepperdine University network. No data will be stored on any other server or network. Data will be kept securely for three years, and beyond that point will be destroyed

What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. For study-related questions, please contact the investigator: Natasha Brown, natasha.brown@pepperdine.edu

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw") at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University. You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of Informed Consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By scheduling an interview with the investigator, you have given your consent to participate in this research. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: June 02, 2021

Protocol Investigator Name: Natasha Brown

Protocol #: 21-05-1591

Project Title: Authentic Leadership in Crisis Scenarios: A Phenomenological Examination of the Lived Experience of Corporate Leaders During the COVID-19 Pandemic

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Natasha Brown:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2020, what was the experience of leading within your firm like for you?
 - a. What feelings came up during the experience?
 - b. What thoughts from leading during COVID stand out for you?
 - c. What physical impacts or bodily changes were you aware of during the time of leading during COVID-19?
 - d. What part of leading during COVID in 2020 was most challenging for you?
2. Self-awareness is a component of authentic leadership defined as the degree to which the leader is aware of their strengths, limitations, how others see them, and how the leader impacts others. When you reflect on your experience as a leader in 2020, what role did self-awareness play, if any, in helping you navigate the COVID-19 crisis? Were there any ways a lack of self-awareness may have had an impact?
3. Transparency is a component of authentic leadership defined as the degree to which the leader reinforces a level of openness with others that provides them with an opportunity to be forthcoming with their ideas, challenges, and opinions. When you reflect on your experience as a leader in 2020, what role did transparency play, if any, in helping you navigate the COVID-19 crisis? Were there any ways a lack of transparency may have had an impact?
4. Ethical/Moral is a component of authentic leadership defined as to what degree the leader sets a high standard for moral and ethical conduct. When you reflect on your experience as a leader in 2020, what role did ethics and morals play, if any, in helping you navigate the COVID-19 crisis? Were there any ways a lack of ethics/morals may have had an impact?
5. Balanced processing is a component of authentic leadership defined as to what degree a leader sufficiently engages in soliciting viewpoints and opinions before making a decision. When you reflect on your experience as a leader in 2020, what role did balanced processing, if any, play in helping you navigate the COVID-19 crisis? Were there any ways a lack of balanced processing may have had an impact?
6. Are there any ways you feel the experience of leading in crisis impacted your own leadership style or shaped how you show up as a leader? If so, what are those ways?
Anything else?