

Exploring Crisis Leadership Among Humanitarian Field Workers: A Case Study of the Private Relief Agency in Rwanda.

Christophe Gapira Nzayikorera^{1*}, Angela Ewhonne Nwaomah²

¹PhD candidate in Strategic Business Leadership at Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi Kenya

²Associate Prof. at Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi Kenya

*Corresponding Author: Christophe Gapira Nzayikorera

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Article History	Abstract	
Original Research Article	<i>Crises are unpredictable in human life. At the global level, natural disasters, health issues, famine, wars, disastrous winds, landslides, and heavy rain always make the news. Rwanda as a country of a thousand hills become a prone zone of disasters. The current research focused on the role of crisis leadership management among humanitarian workers with a case study of the Private Relief Agency. As qualitative research, a face-to-face interview was conducted for data collection. Three participants were selected based on their duties and responsibilities, positions, and firsthand experience in managing crises. Research investigated the way workers behave in critical situations and related decision-making, and how team spirit and morale were enhanced and boosted during crisis times. Findings indicated that good leadership in crisis management focused on effective risk management, resource allocation, decision-making, effective communication, past acquired experiences during crisis times, and the emotional intelligence of the workers during crisis times. The findings proved to be essential for equipping leaders and strengthening workers with the required tools to achieve humanitarian goals. The research found that crisis leadership management is paramount to increasing the performance of the humanitarian workers in Rwanda. The research revealed that the leaders should be good at crisis leadership management and have skills on hand to counteract potential crises.</i>	
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Introduction

Humanitarian organizations operate within complex and often unpredictable environments, where crises for example environmental catastrophes, conflicts, and health crises frequently occur and manifest themselves in multiple forms (Aarons, 2017). In critical situations, leadership is vital for providing essential services and safeguarding the well-being of the affected people. Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) scenarios by which are components of crisis leadership have received a considerable scholarly focus due to their importance for organizational and operational effectiveness (Boin, Hart, Stern, Sundelius, 2016). While extensive research on crisis leadership in corporate and governmental settings has been conducted, its application and dynamics in the humanitarian fieldwork are still a myth.

The studies of Clarke and Ramalingam (2021) and Wong et al (2019) found that Humanitarian field workers, who often operate at the frontline of emergencies, face many leadership challenges. This encompasses constraints on resources, the necessity for quick decisions in uncertain situations, and the challenge of managing various cultural and social environments. In such settings, Gurtner and Fletcher (2019) advocated that leaders should not only respond effectively to immediate crises but also foster team resilience and maintain alignment with organizational values and goals.

Crisis leadership has become an increasingly critical area of study, in the humanitarian sector, where crises often involve high stakes, complex dynamics, and urgent responses. Humanitarian organizations such as the ADRA Rwanda operate in challenging environments, requiring

field workers to demonstrate exceptional leadership to respond to the requirements of impacted communities effectively. For these contexts, leaders should balance organizational objectives with the immediate demands of crises, often under conditions of uncertainty, resource scarcity, and emotional strain. Thus, this study employed qualitative methods to explore how leaders handle crises, manage their teams, and maintain humanitarian efforts in difficult settings using the experience of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Rwanda.

Research Questions

Four key questions guided this research:

1. What role and behaviors do crisis leadership portray during crisis times?
2. How do ADRA Rwanda field workers perceive teamwork, collaboration, and communication during crisis management?
3. How do challenges from crises influence emotional resilience and empathy in leadership?
4. What are the reflective practices and lessons learned from crises?

Review of Literature

Theoretical Foundations of Crisis Leadership

Boin, *et al.* (2016) offered a fundamental framework that outlines five essential phases of crisis management: preparation, understanding the situation, making decisions, interpreting outcomes, and learning from the experience. These stages emphasize the importance of proactive planning, real-time problem-solving, and post-crisis reflection. The theories supporting crisis leadership include (1) Adaptive leadership theory, (2) Transformational leadership theory, (3) Situational leadership theory, (4) Attribution theory, (5) Ethical leadership theory, and (6) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).

Adaptive leadership theory, according to Heifetz and Linsky (2002), revolves around a leader's ability to rally individuals and organizations to confront intricate and systemic issues. While technical problems usually have clear solutions, crises often involve adaptive challenges that require leaders to explore, innovate, and learn as situations unfold. This theory highlights the need to balance technical and adaptive challenges, stimulate collaboration, and promote all that could enhance innovation. This theory is specifically essential in circumstances that involve both humanitarian and institutional crises, as standard control methods repeatedly do not prove adaptive. Effective leaders promote team spirit and collaborate to solve problems within the organization. They also focus on balancing between maintaining stability and flexibility. Clarke and

Ramalingam (2021) found that adaptive leadership is crucial in crisis management.

Transformational leadership theory: Bass and Riggio (2006) established the transformational leadership theory that focuses on the leaders' ability to motivate and inspire workers to go beyond expectations. Transformational leaders demonstrate four essential behaviors: acting as role models (idealized influence), inspiring and motivating others (inspirational motivation), encouraging innovative thinking (intellectual stimulation), and providing personalized support (individualized consideration). During crises, this leadership approach is crucial for sustaining team cohesion and morale (Clarke, 2021).

Situational leadership theory, Hersey and Blanchard (1969) introduced the situational leadership theory, which underscores the need for leaders to adjust their leadership styles based on the circumstances and the individuals they are guiding. This approach suggests that effective leadership is influenced by followers' competence and maturity, along with environmental demands. Leaders may adopt various styles, including directive, coaching, supporting, or delegating, depending on the situation at hand. In crisis scenarios, situational leadership allows leaders to navigate urgency while demonstrating empathy, adapting their approach as the crisis unfolds.

Attribution theory examines how individuals perceive and assign responsibility during crises. Coombs (2007) highlights that the way leaders frame a crisis and their role in it significantly influences stakeholder perceptions. Leaders who take accountability and communicate transparently maintain trust and credibility, even in the face of adverse outcomes. This theory is particularly relevant in public-facing crises, such as corporate scandals or natural disasters, where leaders navigate reputational risks.

Ethical leadership theory, these are normative ethical theories, that highlight the significance of fairness, integrity, and accountability in making decisions. During crises, leaders often face ethical challenges, necessitating a balance of conflicting priorities and interests. According to Bass (2006), ethical leaders act as moral role models, positively impacting their teams through principled actions and open communication. In the context of humanitarian efforts and disasters, ethical leadership is essential for preserving trust and credibility with impacted communities. Leaders who emphasize equity and inclusivity can help ensure that crisis responses are effective and Socially Responsible (Hannah, *et al.*, 2009).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by Coombs (2007) underscores the importance of tailoring communication to the specific crisis and its audience. For example, in organizational crises caused by

external events, reassurance and support are critical, while crises stemming from internal failures demand accountability and corrective action. Leaders who align their messages with stakeholder expectations and cultural contexts can mitigate reputational risks and foster a sense of stability and trust.

Conceptual Review

Competencies in Crisis Leadership

Several essential competencies define effective crisis leadership. Among these, (1) **emotional intelligence (EI)** is often emphasized as a crucial quality, allowing leaders to navigate their emotions as well as those of their teams in high-pressure scenarios (Boyatzis, *et al.*, 2017). In this case, it helps leaders foster trust, reduce panic, and maintain team cohesion, particularly in volatile environments (Gurtner, *et al.*, 2019). (2) **adaptive decision-making**, which allows managers to provide answers rapidly and certainly to evolving circumstances. Adaptive decision-making entails managing immediate demands while aligning with long-term goals, often in situations of uncertainty and limited information. (Clarke & Ramalingam, 2021). This skill is particularly critical in humanitarian and disaster response settings, where conditions change rapidly. (3) **effective communication** is also very crucial in crisis management. Leaders must convey clear, transparent, and consistent messages to internal and external stakeholders, ensuring alignment and minimizing confusion (Morgeson, *et al.*, 2010). The ability to listen and respond empathetically is equally important, as it builds trust and rapport during challenging times. (4) **cultural competence** is an increasingly important skill in crisis leadership, especially in global and diverse contexts. Effective leaders should be good at cultural norms, values for wise collaboration, and decision-making. (Ang, et al. 2011).

Communication in Crisis Times

Communication in crisis times is fundamentally an aspect that alleviates crises, and it serves to disseminate needed information, it increases trust, and it informs stakeholders during the crisis period. Ang et al., (2011). During the crisis, psychological imbalance emerges, and that involves emotional reaction that could lead to misinformation for, its time management also seems to impose impulsive decisions. Related principles include a two-sided way in transparency to make everything plain and honest.

Wise leaders need strategic preparations to enhance communication to address crises. Anticipating measures like planning for appropriate communication ahead of time, appointing the spokesperson, setting up the platform, and checking out the devices, boosting the capacity to respond efficiently. Communication platforms such as social media provide smooth interaction with the audiences, minimize

misinformation, and thus addresses issues promptly (Veil, et al., 2011). Keeping on messaging through channels improves credibility as structuring and restructuring techniques boosts partners' perceptions positively, focusing on finding out solutions and lead to progress (Ang, et al., 2011; Ulmer, et al., 2017)

Decision-Making in Crisis Times

Deciding in crisis time refers to a multifaceted process that requires leaders to act under intense pressure, manage limited and often ambiguous information, and address competing priorities (Weick, 2015). Crises demand rapid and effective decisions because delays can exacerbate risks and consequences. However, the high-stakes environment of crises often creates challenges such as cognitive overload, stress, and time constraints, which can impair judgment and decision quality (Hermann, 1963). Leaders draw on their expertise and situational awareness to make timely decisions, even when full information is unavailable (Klein, 2008).

Adaptability is another cornerstone of effective crisis decision-making. Leaders should remain flexible and open to revisiting and revising decisions as new information becomes available as the crisis evolves (Weick 2015). This requires cultivating a mindset that embraces uncertainty and views adjustments as part of the decision-making process rather than a sign of failure. Adaptive decision-making allows organizations to respond dynamically to rapidly changing conditions, thereby mitigating risks and seizing opportunities for recovery.

Collaboration and delegation also play significant roles in enhancing decision quality during crises. Engaging diverse perspectives through collaboration fosters a more comprehensive understanding of the context to reduce blind spots in decision-making. Delegation enables leaders to distribute responsibilities, allowing specialized team members to contribute expertise and share the cognitive load (Tichy 2007). Leaders evaluate the results of their decisions, extract key insights, and formulate strategies to improve readiness for future crises. Transparent communication about decision rationales and outcomes can strengthen trust among stakeholders and improve organizational resilience (Weick, 2015).

Teamwork and Collaboration in Crisis Times

Since crises often demand a unified approach among various groups, working together is crucial for finding prompt and suitable solutions. In intense situations, teams that operate harmoniously leverage their combined knowledge, skills, and resources to address complicated issues that individuals alone may struggle to resolve (Weick 2015). Collaborative efforts foster creativity, enhance

problem-solving, and enable organizations to adapt quickly to dynamic conditions (Salas, *et al.*, 2007).

Effective teamwork during crises begins with clear communication and role clarity. Leaders establish defined roles, responsibilities, and decision-making structures to ensure that team members understand their contributions and avoid duplication or gaps in effort (Palinkas 2023). Clear and open communication fosters an atmosphere where team members feel at ease sharing information, voicing concerns, and offering suggestions. This transparency builds trust and reduces misunderstandings, particularly detrimental in crisis scenarios

Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential in times of crisis, as it brings together people with different expertise and perspectives. This diversity improves decision-making by expanding the range of analysis and offering innovative solutions. However, interdisciplinary teams can face challenges due to varying communication styles, priorities, and work methods. To address these challenges, leaders must foster psychological safety, encouraging team members to respect differences and focus on shared objectives (Weick, 2015).

Crisis Leadership in Humanitarian Organization

Crisis leadership comprises necessary skills that guide and inspire individuals and institutions during times of uncertainty and adversity (Boin, *et.*, 2013) (Boin, *et al.*, 2013). Recently, the global humanitarian body proved to be increasingly perplexed due to a rise of natural disasters, conflicts, and the need for health aid and forced migration which have been frequent and severe (Van & Kapucu, 2011).

Humanitarian Organizations very often strategize to take the lead in addressing crises, and effective implication in such turmoil requires a particular leadership that can manage uncertainty, fund constraints, and emotional imbalance of workers on field (Dinh, *et al.*, 2014). A typical example of the most prevailing issues in humanitarian workers on field is to be prompt to find out quick and effective solutions in a decentralized way adapted to the changing type of the rising crisis, which very often imposes autonomous decisions without further delay to wait for the supreme body of the organizational leadership (Buchanan-Smith & Scriven, 2011). For a reason, leadership in this context does not abide with structural hierarchy for decisions to be taken from higher offices. It is rather a matter of flexibility, emotional balance, and the capacity to share the information at time with possible various actors (Hannah, *et al.*, 2009; Holton & O'Neill, 2020). Most of the research conducted on crisis leadership focuses on top-down leadership patterns in companies or public sectors (Boin, *et al.*, 2013). The latter often focus on faithful

hierarchical decision-making, which is not strictly applicable in the context of humanitarian context. Crises encountered in Humanitarian landscape often present specific challenges, including diverse cultural contexts, limited resources and protracted timelines. (Holton & O'Neill, 2020).

Methodology

Research Design

The present study is of qualitative research with a particular note on exploratory research design that aims at investigating intricate issues such as crisis leadership in humanitarian context. In this way, this method enables a more in-depth investigation into respondents' experiences, views, and actions that present more detailed and nuanced perceptions on the leadership tasks used by field workers during times of crisis (Creswell, *et al.*, 2018). The present adopted a case study analysis with focus on ADRA Rwanda.

Participants

The targeted population of employees working in the crisis management department was 8 employees, holding various positions. However, purposively, a sample of 3 participant employees was determined and selected. The selection of the three participants refers to the following criteria (a) firsthand experiences in crisis management, (b) respective duties and key responsibilities, and (c) diverse experiences in crisis management (Palinkas, 2023).

In line with boosting credibility and transparency in the sampling process, the research used the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research checklist. According to Tong (2007), the COREQ checklist supported participants selection process, particularly from items 9-13 of the checklist, focusing on the selection of participants, sample size justification, and sampling techniques.

However, the above framework confirmed and ensured the relevance of selecting three participants corresponded to the qualitative standards of power of information (Palinkas, 2023)

Research Instrument

As qualitative research, a guide interview checklist was developed to collect the primary data during face-to-face interviews with the participants. A semi-structured and open-ended questions were asked to enlighten, authentic answers (Merriam, 2015).

Setting of the Study

The present study is framed within the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Rwanda. This Agency is a humanitarian Organization that has been operating in Rwanda since 1978 as an extension of global

ADRA network. The Mission of ADRA Rwanda is to serve humanity and alleviate poverty through diverse programs in response to disaster, health, education, livelihoods and, social justice particularly during crises (Niyonzima, 2023).

ADRA Rwanda is an organization that plays a key role in the humanitarian sector with focus on natural disaster, public health, and conflicts. Following her decentralized structure, this organization empowers teams of her branches to address local needs in harmony with broader organizational goals. Her workforce is made up of field coordinators and project managers alongside, and that cluster is there for crucial, timely and effective delivery of the needful to ensure responses to crisis are well coordinated.

Ethical Consideration

To protect participants' rights and their well-being, the present study adhered to strict ethical guidelines. Informed consent and gatekeeper approval were secured to be sure that participants were reasonably aware of the purpose of the present study, its voluntary nature and that they were free to withdraw at any stage, (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, we ensured confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were protected by removing related identifiable information from the data. Moreover, we established secure storage measures to safeguard data and protect individuals' privacy and sensitive information. Not only did this approach comply with relevant privacy regulations, but it also fosters trust and encourages honesty among participants, (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Data Collection

For data collection, the study mainly relied on interviews as the researcher conducted the study in person (face-to-face). Before the interviews started, the researcher restated its objectives to explore field workers' perceptions on crisis leadership within ADRA Rwanda. Interview protocol with key open-ended questions was prepared to elicit discussions, and more questions were posed as follow-up depending on new information surfacing.

Data Analysis

Both interviews and data analysis were done at the same time to support full and dynamic exploration of the collected information. Meticulous transcription of the recordings was done and reviewed several times to point out recurring themes and ideas.

Findings and Discussions

From interviews conducted, four key themes were highlighted and pointed out as follows:

1. Leadership role and the field worker's behaviors in crisis management.

2. Teamwork, Collaboration, and Communication in Crisis Management
3. Emotional Resilience and Empathy in Leadership
4. Reflective Practices and Lessons Learned from Crises

Theme 1: The Role of Leadership and Behaviors during Crisis

Through the interviews conducted with the participants, both confirmed the great role of leadership in effective crisis management. They pointed out the role of leadership, and without being exhaustive, they highlighted the following major roles: (a) decision making, (b) risk management for both staff and organization, (c) resource allocation, and (d) motivation of the front staff in emergencies. Altogether, they commonly emphasize the importance of decision-making in crisis time to be situational compared to the routine procedures of decision-making.

a. Decision-making

Decision-making in ADRA Rwanda follows the structure already established, such as Boards of Directors for the major decisions, ADCOM (administrative committee) for daily operations, PROCOM (program committee) for program and project operations. This structure underlines the levels of decision-making at ADRA Rwanda, which leads to the strict adherence to the working Policy.

However, despite the structure already set in ADRA Rwanda, the participants revealed a shortfall of the traditional process of decision-making to meet the urgency of human life during crisis times. They collectively emphasized the flexibility of the routine procedures and adaptability to the situation in crisis times. The factors of time, resources, and commitment were underlined for effective decision-making.

In addition, participants pointed out the importance of the crucial element of delegation in decision-making during crisis and emergency times. The three participants confirmed the delegation of power to frontline staff during crisis time to avoid any delay in decision-making. In so doing, hierarchical approvals are rather issued next to the suggestions, and/or decisions from the ground level.

A vivid example refers to a heavy rain that baffled the western region of Rwanda in 2022. That disaster caused a massive displacement of vulnerable populations and, it so conditioned an urgent need to shelter the needy population. That critical decision was independently taken by the project manager to ease the frontline team on the ground to efficiently respond to the concurrent need of relief.

A similar example is about the conflict in the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that caused a surge of refugees fled to Rwanda. At this time inflow of

people came to the point where ADRA frontline staff were overwhelmed and superseded in times of logistics for transportation purposes. For the fact of delegation of power and empowering front-line staff, the emergency coordinator took decision to hire extra buses to move refugees from DRC boarder to Nkamira (transit center). Due to the situation that prevailed at that time, the decision-making was taken without further consultation that should delay the intervention and responses.

Participants highlighted a dynamic nature of decision making in crisis management which give necessity to adaptability, flexibility, time management, decentralization and confidence in decision making in crisis time.

Having said that, findings of the present study were found correlating the above-mentioned approach in terms of quick, prompt, reasonable and efficient response to immediate crisis. (Boin et al., 2016) found that effective leaders prioritize swift and informed decision-making to navigate high-pressure situations where delay have severe consequences.

Van and Kapucu (2011) similarly highlighted the importance of empowering frontline to act and react independently and maintain overall coordination in time of crisis. We therefore realize that ADRA Rwanda applied the case in response to the crisis that befell the Western region of Rwanda in 2022 in constructing shelter to meet immediate needs.

b. Risk Management to the staff of ADRA Rwanda

Interviewees in this study highlighted a critical aspect of ADRA Rwanda's approach to risk management and staff motivation in humanitarian context. They revealed that the organization provides additional insurance coverage, more specifically Accidental Death and Dismemberment (AD&D) insurance for staff actively engaged in the frontlines of emergency response. Referring to hazardous environment in which frontline staff operated, the additional insurance provided to them served as mitigative measures to meet the inherent risk of crisis management to boost the staff motivation and emotional by also promoting supportive work environment.

The fact of providing additional insurance to the frontline staff working in the emergency department constitutes an effective way of mitigating the risk from crisis management. This practice corresponded effectively with the study conducted by Parker (2019). This scholar found that risk management is a crucial element of crisis leadership, especially in high-risk zone. Emotional and physical risks associated with emergency response need to meet measures that give priority to the wellbeing and safety of staff involved. The above-mentioned working policy serves as motivation to the staff of ADRA Rwanda as

stipulated by the respondents. Maslach and Leiter (2016) confirmed the idea that organizational implication boosts morale and resilience among staff, more particularly in stress management. In so doing, ADRA Rwanda fosters a culture of balancing a leadership that quickly responds in times of crisis and the motivation of the involved staff.

c. Resource allocation

Respondents provided more insights on the storage and retrieval system established by ADRA Rwanda. Being a strategic and priority-driven approach to focus on material, human, and financial resources. Respondents on the ground said that financial resources are provided and allocated depending on immediate needs and related urgency. Basically, the unrestricted budget is directed at emergency response. Likewise, ADRA Rwanda gives priority to requesting approval from donors and the board of directors over restricted fund budget to sustain support for operations. This two-sided way enables ADRA Rwanda to effectively remain accountable to donors and other partners.

Referring to pre-positioning material resources, the respondents revealed the readiness of the head office of ADRA Rwanda to intervene in situational emergencies. ADRA Rwanda maintains a warehouse that stocks necessary items like tents, cups, and bed covers ready to serve rapidly as first aid during times of crisis. The establishment of prepositioning of material leads to effective performance to quickly address needs without further ado and so avoid routine procurement processes.

Furthermore, a framework contract between ADRA Rwanda and suppliers is set forth beforehand to efficiently meet potential needs on time during emergencies. The framework contracts minimize the procurement processes usually known to take long, thus enabling ADRA Rwanda to acquire the needed materials on time. This pre-establishment strategy gives room to time management in terms of the availability of goods and services without further delay caused by procurement processes.

Respondents highlighted that the leadership of ADRA Rwanda gives top priority to the experienced team members made up of staff who used to intervene in previous crisis responses. The latter is composed of staff from logistics, human resources, and finance departments to make sure that operational and administrative norms are effectively observed.

In line with the study conducted by Kapucu and Van (2008), the importance of financial agility in crisis management, resource allocation at ADRA Rwanda is featured by a strategic and priority-governing approach to ensure that material, human resources, and financial resources are in place effectively. The right use of unrestricted fund budget for immediate intervention alongside approval requests to

secure restricted budget funds from the donor to sustain operations, and that refers to a balanced strategy to resource management.

Moreover, by establishing framework contracts and maintaining a warehouse ahead of time, ADRA Rwanda aligns with the study by Tatham and Spens (2016) that found the necessity of pre-positioning logistics and readiness in humanitarian operations.

In reference to humanitarian resources, prioritizing staff that is of great experience, this aligns with findings from the research conducted by Fernandez and Shaw (2020) that found the necessity of expertise and awareness in crisis to coordinate responses effectively.

Theme 2: Teamwork, Collaboration, and Communication in Crisis Management

a. Teamwork and Collaboration in Crisis Management

Our respondents indicated that ADRA Rwanda found among other strategies, the necessity of resorting to networking and close collaboration to effectively manage crisis hardships. Apart from the frontline team that leads right from the field, ADRA Rwanda has the culture of involving all other appointed actors to regardless of their daily duties.

As a matter of fact, respondents confirmed to us that, in times of crisis; top leaders from ADRA Rwanda join the managerial levels on ground to personally get involved in distributing relief items to the needy. It is worth noting that that total member involvement of ADRA Rwanda workers from all levels craves a sense of collaboration and unity. Therefore, ADRA Rwanda successfully manages to address the crisis related issues on time. The spirit of networking and collaboration to that extent does certainly put aside bureaucracy. For a given observer who is not familiar with ADRA Rwanda workers, he/she would hardly know who the country director is and who is not in time of effective crisis management. Hence, that inclusiveness promotes a wider team spirit and that networking channel surely leads by example in terms of tangible results in crisis management. Should we emphasize that for ADRA Rwanda to take the lead in crisis management, every worker acts as if he/she were racing with a goal to be rewarded the winner's medal.

Participants revealed that ADRA Rwanda's efforts in fluidity of roles and sharing information on how to network activities during the crisis, is a sign of sharp adaptability and sound inclusiveness. This practice of ADRA Rwanda leaders linked with the research conducted by Pearce and Conger (2003) who discovered that shared leadership boost teamwork, adaptability, motivation, and resilience particularly in complex of crisis management. In the same

angle, Fernandez and Shaw (2020) found that communication and collaboration during crisis management eliminate barriers of traditional structures of an organization to prioritize the necessity of the intervention effectively to meet emergency requirements during crisis management. For other hand, Participants consideration on networking during crisis times corresponds to the study conducted by Levesque (2001) who underlined the *interdependence of partners* in crisis responses.

b. Communication during crisis Management

Participants confirmed the effective use of communication by ADRA Rwanda during crisis management. They stated that communication is not only a fundamental operation principle but a must. Communication has served in ADRA Rwanda intervention as a tool of sharing critical information during crisis times to alleviate consequences of the crisis. The factor of time in communication was very crucial for effective communication in several interventions conducted.

In crisis time, ADRA Rwanda considers quick communication not as merely informing but rather waking up minds to save people in need. This practice led ADRA Rwanda to rescue lives by the time of a heavy rain in the western region of Rwanda and many more when Nyiragongo volcanic eruption flowed towards Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo with a severe impact on human lives to both DRC and Rwanda. Advanced technology was another tool that ADRA Rwanda used to manage crisis that forced refugees to flee to Rwanda. The availability of internet and mobile telephone networks played a major role in coordinating necessary activities to get to needy people at time irrespective of other imposing environmental barriers.

To value this principle, ADRA Rwanda resolved to build up interrupted systems and policies that are of great necessity during crisis. Subsequently, ADRA Rwanda takes measures to budget for communication that could meet sustained connectivity to support the staff share needed information as top priority by means of social media.

Basically, budgeting for communication, setting measures to coordinate timely information and the total involvement of senior and supporting staff of ADRA Rwanda; was perceived by our respondents as an approach that helps ADRA Rwanda hit the goal in unison during times of crisis.

To avoid delays that can exacerbate risks in high-risk zones, proactive communication becomes a tool that serves to take appropriate and reasonable decisions to counteract disasters. Consistent monitoring, constructive discussions, and good communication as stressed by respondents fit Hackman's (2002) principles for well-informed teams that

rely on the necessity of set goals, adaptability, and performance awareness.

Else, Kapucu (2008) affirms that pre-established communication protocols and contingency plans are key instruments to address crisis. Similarly, in crisis times, ADRA Rwanda plans and acts and reacts rigorously with possible tools of communication as key to success to rescue perishing lives. Again, findings from this study correspond with Tatham and Spens (2016) who claimed for the integration of advanced communication technologies in humanitarian tools.

Besides, ADRA Rwanda was found good at investing in policies that enhance communication infrastructure as a strategy to efficiently respond in time crisis as supported by Robert and Bea (2001). By investing in these facilities, ADRA Rwanda promotes the culture of sharing necessary information on time and thus gives top priority to a smooth coordination to counteract disastrous harm in time of crisis.

c. Poor Communication

All along the interview, respondents gave examples reflecting poor communication that they personally experienced and their related impact by the time of crisis management. Respondents stated that during the relocation operation of refugees from Byumba, an old refugee camp in the northern region of Rwanda to Mahama (a new and current refugee camp) in Eastern Rwanda, they encountered serious challenges due to poor communication. The process typically involved having a manifest that listed everyone assigned to a specific bus. Before the convoy departed, staff would check the manifest to ensure every individual was accounted for on their respective buses. However, on this occasion, the manifests were misplaced, leading to total confusion. Two buses that were initially cleared for departure moved as planned. Following them, the next two buses also departed prematurely, assuming all checks were completed. Unfortunately, the final two buses, which had not yet been loaded with passengers, also joined the convoy, leaving behind a group of refugees. This misstep occurred because the individual authorizing movement failed to provide clear instructions.

This lapse in communication resulted in several issues. The empty buses incurred unnecessary costs, and more critically, refugees were left without immediate care. Fortunately, the error was identified midway through the journey. The empty buses were quickly recalled retrieving the remaining individuals. However, the delay caused a ripple effect: the refugees arrived late at their destination, received their first meals later than planned, and experienced delays in receiving non-food items (NFIs). This incident underscores the purpose of effective communication, and meticulous coordination of such

operations to avoid financial loss and ensure the well-being of those being relocated.

The second respondent shared his experience with poor communication due to inadequate coordination during crisis management. He often faced challenges between the field teams and the support teams at headquarters. The support teams were primarily focused on normal operations and adhered to established decision-making policies, while the field teams, who were directly addressing the crisis, viewed things differently, as a matter of urgency. Consequently, this discrepancy created friction among colleagues in operations and finance who faithfully remained focused on paperwork and procedure references. That miscommunication spoiled the whole response process for; it caused hesitation in decision-making on ground.

Having said that, a critical lesson drawn from these bitter experiences is the necessity of appointing and integrating a representative from every department into the response team right from the site at times of crisis.

The above challenges and bad experiences faced during reallocation of refugees of misplaced manifest highlight several consequences that occurred due to miscommunication and corresponded to the study by Moynihan (2008) who found that ineffective communication delayed operations and increased risks in crisis times.

ADRA Rwanda learnt a lesson to include representatives of various departments in crisis response team is in line with the research by Comfort (2007) that stipulated the value of integrating different expertise in crisis teams to cope with gaps between operational and strategic levels. Respondents' experience in the friction between the staff from the head office and the staff met on the field further underscores the necessity of alignment in communication. This matches with the study of Coombs (2015), who noticed that alignment in crisis communication over all structural levels is fundamental to maintaining unified responses and thus prevents procedure-related conflicts caused by the delay.

Theme three: Emotional Resilience and Empathy in Leadership

The emotional resilience and empathy in the leadership of ADRA Rwanda, was found by Participants as vital in addressing crisis. Again, participants indicated that they personally felt overwhelmed by the crashing situation characterized by emotions such as frustration, anger, and, or empathy that seemed predominant in their responses. Nonetheless, they found it worth taking a step back and consciously confront the situation with a more reasonable stand. Participants revealed that these practices took time to be built by ADRA Rwanda in its staffs and required

discipline of staff to shift from personal impulse emotion to balanced decision making.

Participants confirmed that the emotional challenges that faced during crisis management boost and shaped their professional experiences in crisis management. The hard time spent by staff of ADRA Rwanda with the affected people (rescued) during crisis management developed their empathy. However, participants noted that emotions not well controlled can harm and destroy the whole interventions which gives the importance of balancing the emotional responses and local thoughts that enlighten the fundamental of the crisis management.

Response to the specific questions on how leaders showed empathy to the staff working in emergency as frontline staff, participants stated and underlined a typical example that rooted in their mind of the Naji Karil, the former Country Director who spent hard and enough time with them the during crisis time that happened in Eastern province of Rwanda. During a crisis intervention, he visited the field to observe the ongoing operations. As part of the visit, they began arranging hotel accommodation for him, but he overheard their plans and immediately insisted, "Don't worry about a hotel for me. After seeing what you all are going through, I will stay where you stay and eat what you eat."

True to his word, he joined them in the modest house where they were staying. That day, it was raining heavily, and they were cooking with firewood, as the situation left them with no other options. As they were seated in the house, he asked them: "Where do you cook your meals?" They responded: "Let us take you to a simple setup kitchen stove made up of firewood", and this was full of damp wood. Suddenly, that Country Director pulled up a piece of wood and sat down by the fire and started warming himself closer to the staff.

The above example left a good memory and a lasting impression from this leader. And that was a good example of a servant leader, who was led by example. In fact, this practice was a powerful example to demonstrate empathy to frontline workers facing hardship times. Participants confirmed that his eagerness to experience the same conditions boosted their motivation and commitment to serve humanity. His empathy showed that he understood and valued the challenges faced by ADRA Rwanda Staff in difficult moments.

Emotional Resilience in Leadership

Emotional resilience was emphasized by respondents, and they said that emotional resilience requires deliberate effort, self-awareness, and great experience. During crisis moments, ADRA Rwanda leaders and staff often face intense emotional pressures namely frustration, empathy, and or anger which can seriously affect initial response.

Developed emotional resilience involves rationally balancing emotional reactions with logical thinking, a skill that requires working on it in practice, discipline, and reflection. Therefore, the above-mentioned findings align with the research findings by Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) who found that emotional resilience is the ability to maintain adaptability on adverse circumstances. Further, they suggested that resilience is not innate but a skill to develop by thinking practice. Likewise, Bonanno (2004) noted that resilience implies flexible adaptation whereby individuals shift from emotional engagement and logical analysis to fit the demands of imposing situations.

Moreover, the feedback from respondents also reflects the necessity of building resilience to sustain long run performance. Practices on burning out emotions were found by respondents because of an overreliance on emotional response. This outcome features the findings of the study by Maslach and Leiter (2016), who argued that emotional detachment This perspective is consistent with the findings of the research by Maslach and Leiter (2016), who argued that when emotional detachment is balanced appropriately with empathy, it reduces burnout in high-pressure moments.

Empathy in Leadership

ADRA Rwanda knew earlier before the effective leadership by empathizing, and a typical example was demonstrated by his former country director, Naji Karil, when he chose to get closer to the staff on site and opted to live with them in the same conditions as they were faced with in crisis. Acting in that way, the former Country Director proved the good qualities of servant leadership that increased the morale and consideration of ADRA workers.

The above example of leadership of Naji Karil corresponded to the study conducted by Greenleaf (1977) in which he developed a theory of servant leadership that depicts empathetic actions like shared experiences and accurate listening that tie bonds for collective team spirit to respond to challenges. Again, Naji Karil's action embodies transformational leadership traits that focus on inspiring and empowering subordinates through personal example and emotional connection (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

In addition, leading with empathy in crisis times correlated with the study of Goleman (1995) in his concepts of emotional intelligence, in which he emphasized the elements of self-awareness and social awareness. He found that leaders who deploy empathy foster trust and morale among staff.

Balancing Emotion and Logic

Participants in this study highlighted the necessity of balancing emotional impulses with rational analysis to take sound decisions in times of crisis. This practice provides

effective responses both for leaders and the supporting team. This approach aligned with the study of Klein (1998) in his model of recognition-primed decision-making to elicit the integration of intuition shaped by emotional experiences with rational assessment in high-pressure circumstances. From this perspective, leaders who employ emotional empathy and logical reasoning are good for addressing complex crises, and this aligns with the study of Cherniss (2001), who found emotional intelligence training as a major way of boosting resilience, motivation, and effective decision-making in high-pressure situations.

Theme Four: Reflective Practices and Lessons Learned from Crises

During the interview, participants confirmed that at the end of each crisis, ADRA Rwanda showed a vivid will and great commitment to reflection, learning, and the well-being of staff. The recognition of these three elements is essential for continuous improvement and preparation for the next intrusive crises. In the aftermath of every crisis, the organization conducts a coordinated debriefing session, bringing all involved actors together in the response processes. In addition to that, the debrief serves as a platform for the team to concomitantly review the whole intervention process that offers a safe space to exchange experiences and encourages one another and assesses the intervention.

During the debrief session conducted at the end of crisis management, an evaluation process took place. At this level leaders, workers, and partners met to discuss the way the intervention was conducted. Questions like ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘why’, ‘how’, appropriate answers to these questions are provided.

This synchronized approach permits the team to pinpoint what worked effectively versus the identification of related gaps and the establishment of actionable lessons that referred to in potential future crisis response. It is worth stressing that detailed notes and recommendations are meticulously documented, making a repository of knowledge to refer to for future interventions.

It is to be understood that structured debriefing sessions conducted by ADRA Rwanda align study of Olson and Simerson (2015), who found that effective leaders actively engaged in reflection to assess performance, fostering collaboration and identifying actionable insights. Similarly, ADRA Rwanda’s culture regathering all members involved in crisis response for the debriefing session serves as a platform for collective and collaborative learning.

The practice of having the debrief session for reflection that was conducted by ADRA Rwanda leaders aligned with the findings from the study conducted by Weick and Sutcliffe (2007), who claimed that reliable organizations learnt from

past experiences through reflection and strategic meetings to boost staff resilience, motivation, and operational performance of the organization.

Conclusion

The present research found the necessity of leadership role, effective communication, the importance of teamwork, rationale of emotional intelligence and resilience, and reflective practices in crisis management within ADRA Rwanda. The research pointed out the crucial role of leadership as a cornerstone of effective leadership in crisis intervention through effective and adaptative decision making, the need of proactive risk management, and the value added of the strategic resource’s allocation in crisis times. Meeting these qualities facilitates the organization to navigate complex crises swiftly and efficiently by rationalizing immediate response needs with long-term operational sustainability.

The research underlined the importance of teamwork and collaboration that are equally vital and deeply rooted in an inclusive custom of shared leadership during crisis management. ADRA Rwanda boosted team cohesion, morale, and adaptability by breakdown structural and hierarchical barriers to embrace a servant leadership style.

The research revealed the usefulness of proactive communication that played a central role in ensuring clarity, alignment, and performance across all structural levels during crisis management. Clear communication during crisis times found trust to minimize operational disruption and avoid misalignment risks during crisis times.

The research revealed the prime role of emotional resilience and empathy during crisis times. ADRA Rwanda leaders efficiently balance emotional implications with rational thinking that help them handle high-pressure situations as they give priority to the well-being of concerned teams. The example of empathy demonstrated by the former country director (ADRA Rwanda leadership) proves a nurturing workplace environment that boosts morale among teams and ensures that employees’ self-esteem is assured, thus feel appreciated and understood.

The research confirmed that the practice of debrief, reflective and lessons learnt are systematically incorporated into ADRA Rwanda crisis management framework to be more efficient in next interventions of crises management.

Recommendations

ADRA Rwanda as a relief agency working in the humanitarian field, should standardize a framework that gives autonomy in decision-making to the frontline teams during crisis management.

Otherwise, ADRA Rwanda should initiate a dedicated contingency fund for emergencies to support financial flexibility and enable a faster response to crises.

Finally, ADRA Rwanda should encourage cross-departmental collaboration through joint training exercises and simulations.

Limitations of the study

The research was conducted on 3 workers. In the future, other researchers will increase the sample to gain more insights.

This research was conducted qualitatively. Other quantitative research would be important to compare the findings

The following are suggestions for topics that can be studied:

- (a) Effect of Technology on Crisis Management in Humanitarian Organizations
- (b) Qualitative analysis of coordination mechanisms between Partners in crisis management

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