

Leading Through Crisis; A Practitioner's Guide

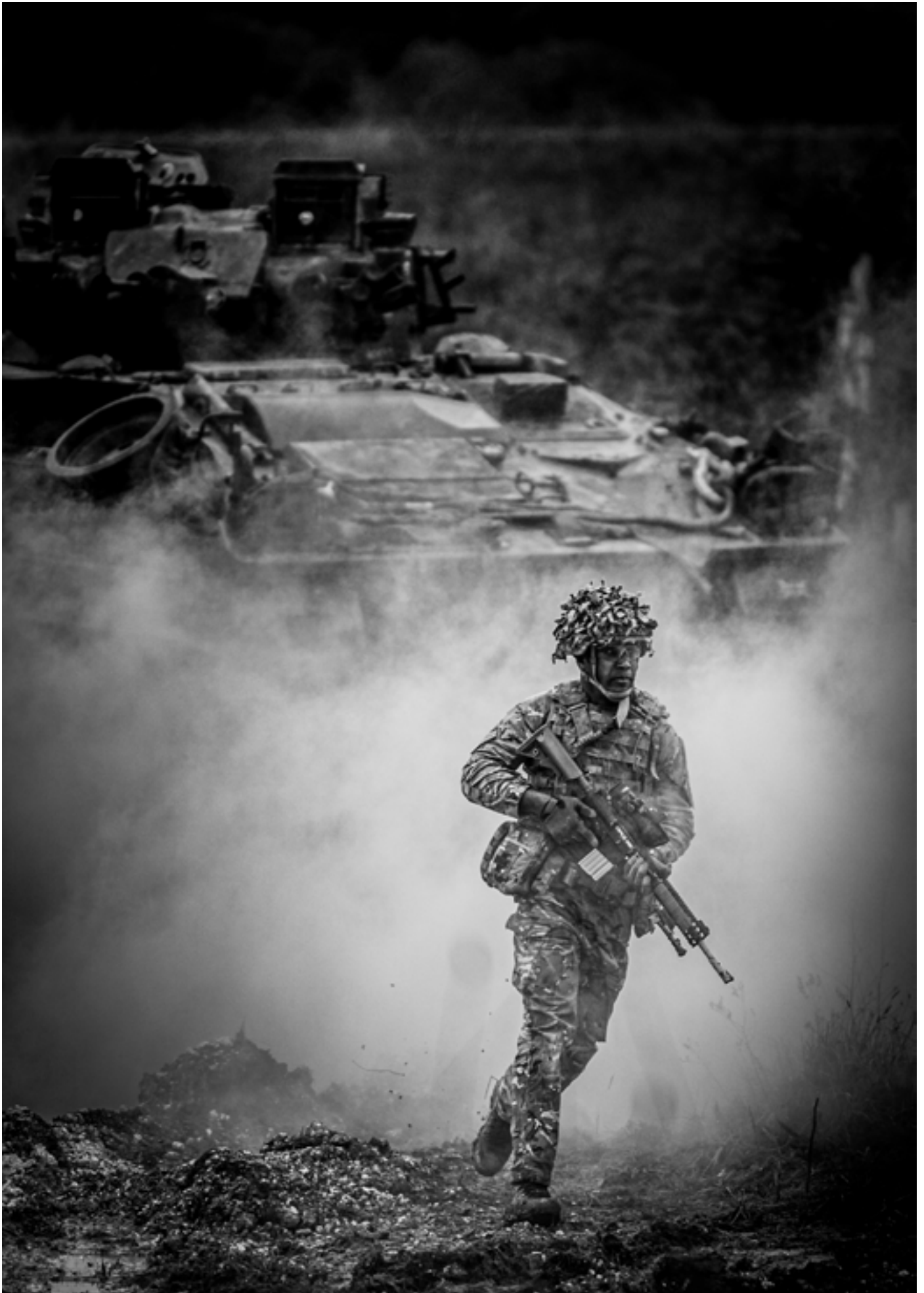


THE CENTRE
FOR ARMY
LEADERSHIP



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BRITISH ARMY LEADERSHIP LEADING THROUGH CRISIS; A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE

Context

The British Army exists to defend our nation and her interests. The Army of today has evolved through a rich history of wars, campaigns and operations. We thrive in conflict, the nature of which is enduring; 'a violent contest between humans, marked by friction, uncertainty, chaos, violence, danger and stress'.¹ Our successes are underpinned by exceptional leadership; leadership of, and by, our people. It is in our DNA. It is further shaped by our Oath of Allegiance to a contract of Unlimited Liability, a liability to both risk and take life, that places the most demanding pressures on leadership. As such, we demand the highest standards of leadership in everything we do, on and off the field of battle. It is this context that has shaped our leadership philosophy, one that endures both in peace and war, is values-based, and is motivated not by self-interest but in the service of others.

The world is currently in crisis. Our health, economy, politics, industry, employment markets and indeed our social fabric are facing challenges unseen in our lifetime. It has created an environment characterised by fear, uncertainty, unpredictability, and across many sectors, an extraordinary pace of change. People are living and working under intense and sustained pressure. The world is uncharacteristically united in an effort to save both lives and livelihoods. Whilst this context is unprecedented,² the characteristics of fear, ambiguity, prolonged pressure and exponential change are familiar to many in the Armed Forces experienced in high intensity operations. Whilst we do not pretend to have all the answers for the current environment, our foundations are built on operating in familiar 'crisis' situations. It is in this context that this paper offers a British Army perspective on *Leading Through Crisis; A Practitioner's Guide*.

These are exceptional times, requiring exceptional leadership; everyone has a role to play.



¹ *Army Doctrine Publication Land Operations*, Jan 17, p.1-2.

² Standfast the similarities that may be drawn with the 1918 influenza pandemic (H1N1).

Leadership Philosophy

The Army follows a philosophy of values-based leadership. Values drive behaviour. The Army's core Values and Standards distil what it is to be a British soldier.³ Leaders are expected to fully embody these Values and Standards and set a consistent and strong example, both on and off duty. Teams are at their most cohesive, and therefore most effective, when values are shared, and trust is implicit. For effective leadership to prevail in the most demanding of circumstances it must be moral, just and authentic, and applied by all. Never are our core values more vulnerable yet more pivotal to success, than in crisis.

Our warfighting doctrine is based on Mission Command, the command philosophy of the British Army. Its guiding principle requires commanders to operate to achieve the higher commander's intent. This is an approach which promotes decentralised command, freedom and speed of action, initiative, and focuses on achievement of intent. This is particularly applicable in a context of friction, uncertainty and chaos. It requires higher commanders to clearly articulate their intent, and then empower subordinates with the freedom of action and resources to act on their own initiative to achieve success. Timely and precise communication up and down the chain of command is critical to this success. Mission command relies on trust, mutual understanding and initiative at all levels, all nurtured by good leadership.

In sum, British Army leadership is defined by our values, our morals and our ethical foundations. It is shaped by shared purpose, mutual trust and empowerment at all levels. It is leadership by example. Never is this truer or more relevant than in crisis.

Army Leadership Model

Leadership is fundamentally about doing. It is an action. The Army utilises a simple yet highly effective framework for exercising leadership, adopted from the Action Centred Leadership Model™.⁴ It identifies three needs common to any leadership situation: Task, Team and Individual (see Fig.1 below). The Army Leadership Doctrine has adapted this model to include 'understanding the context'. A leader must first establish the context, understanding not only the political, operational and cross-cultural issues at play but also those factors influencing individual and team dynamics.

The Three Circles illustrate that the needs of the individual, team, and task are interdependent, and continuously interact. The circles overlap, suggesting that there will always be some degree of tension between them. The role of the leader is to address this tension and ensure that the three groups of needs

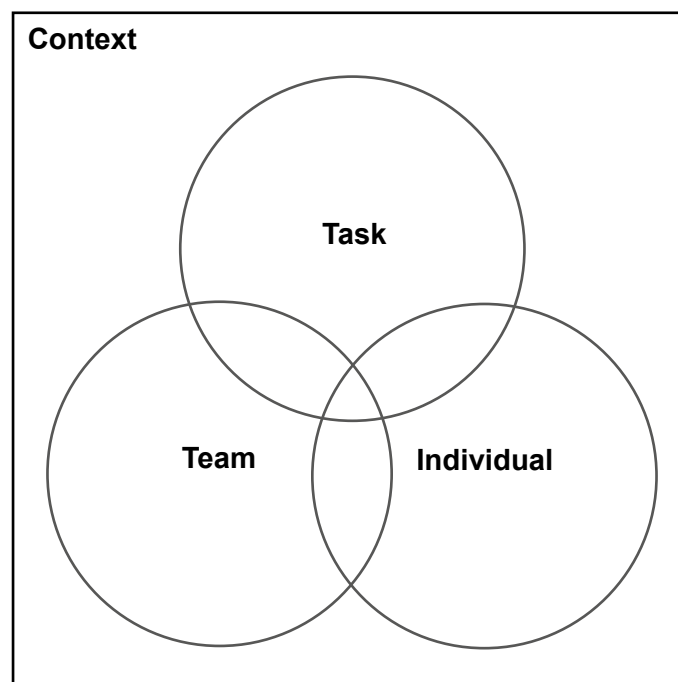


Fig 1. Action Centred Leadership™ - The Army Leadership Model.

³ Values: Courage (moral and physical), Discipline, Respect for Others, Integrity, Loyalty, Selfless Commitment. Standards: Acceptable Behaviour, Lawful, Totally Professional.

⁴ A model developed by Professor John Adair while serving as an academic at RMAS.

remain balanced as a lack of attention, or indeed an over emphasis paid to any one circle, will have a negative impact on the others. The model recognises that it is impossible to balance the three circles all of the time, and that for short periods one or two of the circles will demand more attention. In the Army, this is often the task (in the form of a mission) and is not necessarily an issue as long as the leader recognises that there is an imbalance, takes steps to address the situation and re-establishes equilibrium as soon as possible.⁵

Leading in Crisis

British Army leadership is enduring. Our doctrine, the codification of our leadership philosophy, does not differentiate between peace and war. The fundamental principles are nurtured in peace and successfully executed in war. How these fundamentals are executed are evidently context dependent. This paper seeks to identify the key tenets of Army Leadership that are of paramount importance when operating in crisis (see Fig. 2). The context of the current global crisis is outlined above and is familiar across every nation and every sector of society. That said, context is inherently complex, multi-layered, situation dependent and consistently in flux; never more so than in crisis. It is incumbent on leaders to understand this complexity, to make sense of it and to contextualise for their environment.

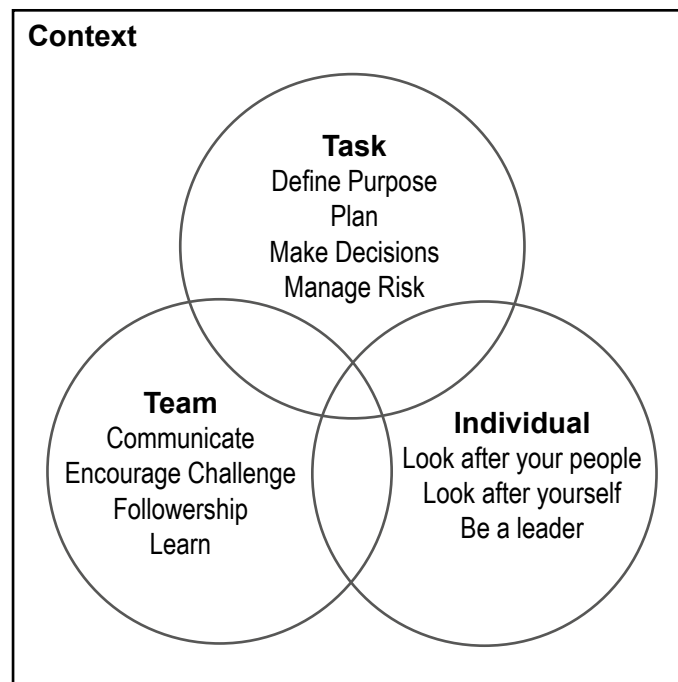


Fig 2. The Army Leadership Model - Key Themes for Leading Through Crisis.

In crisis the task becomes paramount. Leaders must define and communicate clear purpose, the glue that binds through adversity. A simple, robust, yet agile plan, developed collaboratively, underpins successful execution, aided by clear, decisive and informed decision making and calculated risk management. Crisis demands teamwork. Empowered, trusted teams, bound by a common purpose. Timely, candid and simple communication ensures shared understanding, rapid information flow and sustains tempo. A challenge culture aids ethical decision making. Effective leadership creates effective followership without which teams will fail. In crisis, both success and failure are inevitable. What matters most is that we learn, harnessing the good, adapting from the bad and sharing best practice. Above all, it is about people. It is about you and the people you lead. Crisis invokes extremes of experiences, emotions and behaviours. Failure will rapidly envelop without looking after your people and looking after yourself. Above all, crisis requires leadership, at every level, at all times. That means you. Be a leader.

‘Either lead, follow or get out of the way.’

Traditional military aphorism, variously attributed

⁵ Army Leadership Doctrine, Sep 16, p.42.

Task

Define a Purpose. It is the responsibility of every leader to define a purpose. Purpose transcends task, team and individual. Purpose defines the 'why'. It sets out what is to be achieved, collectively. It does not dictate 'how'. This is for the team, and the individuals within the team to do, encouraging imagination and initiative and bringing collective strengths to bear. Moreover, purpose builds cohesion. In crisis, individual and collective cohesiveness is tested. An ethically grounded purpose creates a cause for people to unite, to stand together through adversity.

- **Inspire.** Communicate your purpose. And then keep communicating it; consistently. Your purpose must prevail in all your messaging, both verbal and non-verbal, up and down. It must be unambiguous and understood by all, right down to the lowest level. Connect your purpose through emotion. Inspire. Martin Luther King did not say 'I have a plan' he said, 'I have a dream'.
- **Encourage Shared Ownership.** The power of purpose is harnessed when it is owned by everyone in the team. Where the situation allows, encourage others to contribute to its creation. Ensure it is supported by the culture and shared values of the organisation. A purpose must be intuitive and achievable.
- **Read-back.** Ensure your purpose, your intent, is clearly understood. Only teams that fully understand the leader's intent will be able to fully contribute, both to the development of any plan and to its execution. Teams buy into a purpose that they believe in; they will remember how it made them feel when you set out your intent. Once your team understands your intent, you must allow them time and space to do their job; mission command.

Plan. Successful navigation through a crisis is almost impossible without a plan. To a military audience, planning is intuitive. The nature of the environments in which we operate and the potential costs to an ill-fated mission, amplify the importance of planning. A plan is defined by four logical steps: define the problem (What is the context? What have you been told to do and why?); gather and consider information (the 'understand'); identify possible solutions (courses of action); select the best solution (commander's direction).



- **Enduring Truths.** The following guiding tenets, tried and tested in crisis, remain true:
 - A plan that is 80% complete but delivered on time is preferable to one that is 100% complete but late. Tempo is decisive.
 - The planning process is a means to an end. The plan is more important than the process (albeit the process creates shared understanding of the problem).
 - Planning is continuous. It is a dynamic process of interrelated activities rather than a single linear process.
 - To enable mission command, commanders must provide clear and timely direction, particularly regarding their intent. Direct one down, but think and resource two down.
- **Mission Command.** As illustrated above, mission command requires a leader to clearly articulate intent and enable subordinates the freedom of action to act within that intent. To ensure success, leaders should ask the following 4 questions:
 - Have I produced a simple plan?
 - Have I given clear, unambiguous direction?
 - Have I made my intent clear?
 - Have I thought to the finish?
- **Plan Collaboratively.** Use the talent, experience and knowledge that surrounds you. Rarely in crisis is there not enough time to draw on the insights of your team. Exploit the subject matter experts. Breakdown the hierarchy – it is the value of the input that counts, not the rank. A step removed from making the key decisions, your subordinates should also have the headspace to think openly and creatively. Exploit this. Collaborative planning also invests others into your plan, creating shared ownership.
- **Communicate.** ‘Even the best laid plan is of little value if it cannot be communicated to the team in a way in which they understand, buys their commitment and inspires them to perform’.⁶ Plans must be communicated in such a way that all stakeholders understand.
- **Keep an eye on the long term.** Crisis has a tendency to focus people on the ‘here and now’, the immediate task in hand. This is inevitable and, to an extent, justified. But as a leader, you must find time to step back and assess how your near-term objectives fit into your long-term vision. Failure to do so creates a reactive organisation, running the risk of the problem owning you, rather than you owning the problem. What can you affect now that will de-risk your future? What lessons are you learning now that will enable you to adapt downstream? Great leadership not only deals with the current crisis but has one eye on the crisis around the corner and prepares accordingly.
- **Prepare to Adapt.** ‘No plan survives contact with the enemy’. Things will go wrong. Events will not turn out as you predicted. Expect this. The very nature of crisis is that it is ambiguous, confusing and volatile. You cannot control all the factors at play and the situation will consistently change around you. A key skill of any leader is to be mindful of these changes, to sense them, to understand them and critically, to adapt the plan as it unfolds. This does not mean that you made the wrong call, simply that the situation has changed, and you need to adapt. Reassess, take stock and decide the next move.

⁶ *Army Leadership Doctrine*, Sep 16, p.43.

- **Empower.** Crisis is dynamic. You cannot be in the right place, at the right time, every time, to control the execution of your plan. This is where mission command comes into its own. Trust your subordinates to make the right decision, using their judgement, framed by your clear intent, to adapt accordingly.

Make Decisions. A core function of every leader is to make decisions. Decision making is essentially about understanding the situation, knowing what needs to be done, assessing available options and directing which one to take. Crisis invariably involves pressure. A pressure of resources, time, information (too much or not enough), as well as physical and psychological pressures. Decision making in such an environment is not easy. Judgements are impaired; by fatigue, hunger and fear. The environment is chaotic, confusing and occasionally, ethically ambiguous. It is in this environment that great leaders step forward.



- **Do the right thing.** Above all else, stick to your values – do what you know is right! Prolonged exposure to stress can adversely affect one's moral character; moral fatigue, regression and disengagement. As a leader you need to recognise this in yourself and others. When under pressure you will be faced with multiple options. The easy option or the most instinctive, may not always be the most ethical. Stop. Ask yourself, 'Is this morally right? Is this in line with my core values? Is the decision I am about to make the right thing to do?'. As a leader you must live with every decision you make. Decisions have consequences, consequences that you may not have predicted nor intended. Such consequences may not be pleasant; in the extreme, people may die. The reality is that you do not own all the levers to deliver a perfect solution. There is rarely a clear black and white answer. What is critical is that you make decisions based on the best information you have available at the time and you do so in good faith – in line with your morals and your values. Do the right thing and you will live well regardless of the consequences.
- **Step back from the fog.** Pressure induces clouded judgement. Information overload, intensified by self-doubt, stifles clear, logical thinking, leading to poor decision making or worse, in-decision. As a leader you need to seize back control of the moment. Stop – Breathe – Assess – Act. Focus on the present. Focus on the task in hand. Be positive. Be decisive.

- **Harness the power of your team.** As a leader the decisions rest with you but that does not mean you have to make them alone. Use your team. Empower them. Empowerment is not a temporary fix – it is an enduring requirement, thriving in crisis. Create the conditions that allow every individual in your team the space and confidence to have a voice. Let them inform you, advise you, support you and create the solutions you need. Do not assume that the most senior, most experienced individual in the room has the best plan; invariably this is not the case. Listen to your people. This will build trust, shared understanding and shared ownership of the decisions that you will make.
- **Speed versus Time.** Ask yourself, ‘what is the importance of the decision I am about to make and how much time do I have to decide?’. As a leader you will be faced with multiple decisions, consistently. Not everyone needs answering now. You need to prioritise. If time is on your side, use it to gather more information, bring in the experts and harness the power of your team. If time is constrained, ask yourself, ‘what are the consequences of not making a decision?’. You may not have time to seek advice and a decision is required now. That is why you are a leader. You have the skills, knowledge and experience. Be rational. Use your intuition. Do the right thing.
- **Selection and maintenance of the aim.** An old adage, this remains the ‘master principle of war’ for a reason.⁷ Above all else, in crisis it provides focus and clarity, both for your team but also for you as a leader. When you feel overwhelmed by pressure, step back and remind yourself, what is the aim? What are we seeking to achieve?
- **Own it.** Once the decision is made, own it! Have confidence in your decision. You made it in good faith, with the best information you had available, harnessed from the power of your team who back you. Ensure it is clearly articulated - do not allow a good decision to be lost in translation. Exude confidence, wrapped in humility. If you have confidence in your decision, so will your team and they will deliver.

Manage Risk. Inherent in the execution of military operations, much like operating in crisis, is risk. In the military, risk is understood as ‘potentially damaging; made up of cause, effect and consequence; explained in terms of likelihood or probability and impact; and something that has to be accepted on the route to success’.⁸ Leaders are paid to calculate and manage risk. A calculated risk is one which is examined, and the likelihood and anticipated impact assessed as worth taking. It is not a gamble, undertaken on a wing and a prayer.

***‘A risk is a chance you take; if it fails you can recover.
A gamble is a chance taken; if it fails, recovery is impossible.’***

Field Marshal Rommel

- **Understand and anticipate risk.** First and foremost, a leader must understand the risks faced, the uncertain interplay between cause and effect. Secondly, what are the consequences of the effect? Third, what is the risk appetite of your leaders? What tolerances have they allowed you to operate under? This understanding will shape the freedoms you have to manage risk. Remember, risk is contextual. As the situation changes, so too must your understanding. You must consistently anticipate in line with an evolving risk calculus.

⁷ Army Doctrine Publication Land Operations, Jan 17, p.1A-1.

⁸ Army Doctrine Publication Land Operations, Jan 17, p.9A-1.

- **Managing risk.** Once a risk is anticipated and understood it must be managed. The causes, the potential for the risk to emerge in the first place, must be mitigated where possible. Beyond the leader's ability to mitigate, risk must be tolerated and, where possible, contingency plans developed to manage the consequences. Thereafter, it must be understood where the risk is held; treated/ tolerated, delegated down or transferred up to senior leaders.
- **Balancing risk versus reward.** The very nature of a crisis is that people are working at their extremes, the situation is dynamic, information is incoherent, resources constrained and there is no single, clear path forward. There is rarely a 'right call'. There are multiple options with varying degrees of risk and reward. As a leader it is your judgement that counts. You must balance risk versus reward to achieve the outcome that you intend, to achieve the task. Whilst there may not be a 'right call', your job as a leader is to make the best call possible in the given circumstances. Understand the risk, balance the reward and make a decision.



- **Risk Aversion.** The very nature of a crisis situation often dictates an increase in risk. A natural tendency is to revert to a defensive, cautionary mindset. In some instances, this might be the right approach to take but it must be taken knowingly. Do not let it be the default. Do not retreat into risk aversion. As a leader you must take calculated risk to exploit opportunities.
- **Empower calculated risk.** Create the climate in which your subordinates are empowered to take the same calculated risks as you.⁹ This is part of the mission command philosophy. It will realise creativity in your team and will generate speed of action. Support and encourage calculated risks but monitor in order to avoid transgression towards gambles. If you are operating as part of a new team, delegate risk management with caution at first; as trust develops, so too will your ability to empower.

⁹ This paper distinguishes between: 'culture', which is experienced across an organisation, is relatively stable, resistant to change and is established over time, and; 'climate', the environment experienced in specific parts of an organisation, which can change at pace and is situation and people dependent.

Team

Communicate. One of the foundation skills for a leader is the ability to communicate. Effective communication is critical to any team as it will ensure enhanced performance and is particularly important in times when there is uncertainty, chaos and fear. In a crisis, it is essential that communication is planned, timely and necessary.



- **Overcommunicate.** Crisis is defined by change; more specifically, the speed of change. It is your job as a leader to understand this environment and to keep pace with change. To do so you need to ensure speed of information. Information feeds shared understanding, decision making, prioritisation and allocation of resources. Communication is key. Up, down and across. Your battle rhythm must enable you to communicate at a pace that suits the environment. This will inevitably feel like you are overcommunicating. In crisis, over-communication is better than under-communication.

‘At the right time, in the right place and in the right way.’

Winston Churchill

- **Tell the Truth.** Crisis is a time of heightened confusion and uncertainty. People crave certainty. A leader must tell the truth, conveying the best information available at that time. Be honest with your people. Stick to facts. Admit where you have knowledge gaps. Do not hide hard truths. A lack of information will create a void, one which people will fill with their worst fears. Build confidence and trust in your team. Be candid.
- **Keep it simple.** In crisis, time is of the essence. Keep it simple. Choose language that is easy to understand. Don't use long sentences and complicated words and avoid jargon unless you know everyone in your audience is familiar with it. Filter out irrelevant and unnecessary details. Keep it brief, be accurate, be honest and be authentic to yourself and your delivery style.

- **Active Listening.** It is important to make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, more importantly, the complete message being communicated. When under pressure, the temptation is to think about what you need to do/ say next and this can prevent you from really listening to what is being said. Give the speaker your full attention. This not only ensures that you are engaged with the interaction, but also sends an implicit message to the speaker that their thoughts and opinions are valued.

Encourage Challenge. Challenge can be a difficult behaviour to establish in a hierarchical organisation such as the Army, however, the benefits are significant and in some crisis situations, challenge is critical. Challenge empowers every member of the team with a voice and with the confidence to speak out when they can see something is not right. It does not permit every decision a leader makes to be dissected and it does not give team members a licence to consistently question a leader. Challenge reinforces effective decision making and trust. In crisis, there is clearly a balance to be struck. The heat of battle is not a time for debate. Decision making is time-sensitive. Leaders and followers alike need to adjust challenge appropriately.

- **Lead by example, not by fear.** Teams led through fear are far less likely to challenge a wrong decision. They are more likely to remain silent awaiting inevitable failure, succumbing to 'wilful blindness'. Leading by example, encouraging thinking and striving for team goals will assist the team in creating a challenge climate where team members respect the capability of the leader but are themselves trusted and empowered to voice concerns in pursuit of achieving the task.
- **Diversity of thought.** A team's strength comes from its diversity of thought and experience. To silence team members or build a team of 'sheep' will negatively impact the team's effectiveness. Every member needs to know that their opinion is valued but must understand the correct manner in which to challenge. This will differ from team to team, largely based on the levels of competency and trust that exist.
- **Build trust.** A team's ability to challenge will directly relate to the level of trust that exists. Trust needs to be reciprocal between the team members and the leader. This will allow team members to be honest, to question what is wrong, offer their experience and expertise where required and not fear retribution for doing so. As a leader you must reinforce a climate of psychological safety for people to admit mistakes and challenge bad behaviour.
- **Accept intelligent disobedience.** This is not free reign for team members to do as they please. Intelligent disobedience is enacted when a team member understands the mission, the team or organisation's values, and the commander's intent, yet is given an order that undermines this and has the moral courage to object. Where a decision is considered unlawful or unethical, individuals have the moral duty to disobey an order. Intelligent disobedience also allows individuals with the advantage of more information to support a better, more informed decision to be made. In an environment that encourages others to contribute at the right time, in the right place and in the right way, intelligent disobedience may not just be enacting moral courage, but enforcing a timely and necessary contribution for the betterment of the mission.
- **Directive Leadership.** Whilst the challenge function must be intuitive, certain circumstances demand rapid, unquestioning action. The leader gives decisive direction and people do as they are told. This is particularly important in life and death situations or at the culminating point of a mission or task. Such circumstances, however, must be the exception rather than the rule.

Followership. The role of the leader is much publicised and understood, however, a leader needs someone to lead; a follower. Leaders are also followers and the most effective are those that can seamlessly transition between these two roles. Leaders need to create an environment where their followers fully contribute to the success of the team. There are four types of follower; 'sheep, yes-men, alienated and effective.'¹⁰ In crisis it is essential to develop a team of effective followers. Those that intelligently, morally and efficiently work to achieve the task. As a follower you must support your leader to ensure the team achieves the task, whilst upholding organisational values and standards.



- **Understand the context.** To effectively support the leader, followers must understand the context they are operating in. In crisis this includes the constraints and limiting factors that may impact a leader's decision. Followers must read the context and understand why a leader has made the decision they have, and unless morally unjust, support them. Alternative ways of working can be discussed during a lull in the task. When followers understand mission and intent, mission command is enabled, allowing followers to decide and act accordingly. Effective followers are those that think independently and critically, with a clear understanding of what is to be achieved.
- **Engage and contribute to the team.** Much like leaders, followers must be selfless, prioritising the needs of the team in a time of crisis. They need to respect their leader and fellow team members, supporting them where needed. A team based on mutual respect will perform to a higher standard. Followers need to collaborate with other team members to improve the efficiency of the team. Credit should be shared; only a toxic follower will take praise for the work of others.
- **Remain loyal.** Deep-rooted commitment to the organisation, its vision and to upholding its reputation is essential. A follower also needs to be loyal to their leader. Disagree agreeably and challenge the leader, but once a decision has been made a follower must adhere to the direction given.

¹⁰ *In Praise of Followers*, Robert Kelley, 1988.

- **Transition from leader to follower.** Many of the traits of a good leader are mirrored in the effective follower, however, in times of crisis it is essential that everyone understands who is in which role and when. A follower needs to support the leader in developing and enacting the plan. A leader must use the knowledge of the team to assist in the development of the plan, but once finalised the leader must own it and give direction accordingly.
- **Assist in achieving the task.** Teams are constructed to achieve a specific task. A follower must contribute towards this, remaining agile and adaptable as the situation changes. Always focused on achieving the mission, whilst doing the right thing. Bringing their full attention and skillset to bare whilst ensuring the leader gives ethical and morally correct instructions.

Learn. High performance teams are built on a desire to continuously improve through learning. An honest, open mind is required where every situation is viewed as a learning opportunity; capturing good practice and changing bad. In crisis, this is particularly acute. Crisis demands creativity and innovation and therefore presents a unique opportunity for teams and organisations to learn and adapt, at pace. The very nature of crisis dictates that things will go wrong. As a leader it is imperative that errors are identified, and faults corrected. A learning climate must prevail through crisis.

- **Observation.** The leader must constantly observe; task, team and individual. What is working well? Where do we need to reinforce? What are our areas for development and improvement? Encourage others to do the same. Draw in a breadth of perspectives.
- **Learn from mistakes.** In kinetic or dynamic environments the margin for error can be small. It is important that mistakes are vocalised and learnt from. The leader must create a climate where team members have the confidence to do this and do not hide mistakes through fear. Every individual must have the moral courage to speak up. Lives may depend on it.
- **Meaningful Feedback.** Feedback is an essential component of a learning climate. Fast-paced environments demand a higher frequency of feedback; both positive and constructive to highlight the strengths and areas of development of the team and its individual members. A leader must establish a safe learning environment, where people are encouraged to contribute, innovate, take risks and experiment without micromanagement or fear of failure. In times of crisis, there may be less time to allow for this full feedback process. Do not use lack of time as an excuse for failing to deliver feedback and letting your team think they are doing everything right when they are not; or for giving unkind, criticising feedback; or for giving insincere praise to someone's face whilst criticising them behind their back. Regardless of the pressures, deliver honest and timely feedback that challenges behaviour (not the person) in order to make improvements. The leader should be comfortable in giving and receiving honest feedback.
- **Debrief.** On completion of any task, the team must conduct a debrief and an after action review. A thorough appraisal of how the task was achieved (what when well, what went wrong, what could be done differently). This provides a space for all to reflect on their own performance, give feedback to others and allows the team to evaluate their working practices.
- **Share good practice.** In crisis, not every scenario will have been considered and rehearsed beforehand. Success will be an iterative process, learning through doing. It is essential that when good practice is identified it is captured and shared, both internally and externally. The Army is built on a team of teams philosophy; knowledge should be shared as widely as possible, hence the importance of communication. Build a network to ensure timely passage of lessons identified.
- **Make Change.** The leader must use all information available to make informed changes. A lesson is not learnt until action is taken to rectify a wrong or to reinforce success. Without change the team will stagnate, errors will be repeated, and opportunities lost. Crisis is characterised by rapidly changing environments. It is a leader's responsibility to stay ahead of the change curve. To maximise opportunities offered in crisis, leaders must pay consideration to both short-term tactical, and long-term institutional changes.

Individual

Look After Your People. As a leader, your role is to guide and support the individuals in your team. In a crisis situation, this is likely to become significantly more challenging. Normal communication is disrupted and the time pressure to deliver is particularly acute. Furthermore, individuals do not always react in the manner expected and they do not necessarily ask for help when they need it.

Effective leadership requires you to be aware of your own triggers and patterns of behaviour, but also to understand those of the people around you. This is easier when you are leading people you know well, but much more difficult when they are new to the team, or your team has been formed as a result of the current situation. What can you do to support your people?



- **Value individuals as well as the mission.** There is a tendency in crisis for all communication to become about the issues at hand. Individual concerns can feel like a lower priority and team members may feel that their own struggles are insignificant given the bigger picture. Checking in daily with each member of your team is critical to monitoring their wellbeing. The more you know about the members of your team outside of their work role, the better you are able to monitor how they are managing and coping. Understanding what matters to people – be that family, sport or other activities – creates the conditions to build rapport and enables more difficult subjects to be discussed.
- **Look out for ‘weak signals’.** It is not always obvious when people are struggling mentally and/or physically, and they won’t always raise their hand to let you know. Small signs such as changes in behaviour, withdrawal or a deterioration in the quality of work can all be indicators. When you are under pressure as a leader, such signs are easy to miss, misinterpret or even to ignore. If you can pick up on these early and address immediately, larger issues can be avoided downstream. Look out for the absence of the normal and the presence of the abnormal; to do this, you need to know your people.

- **Prioritise self-care and lead by example.** Self-care in times of crisis is often the first thing to fall by the wayside, but it is critical to your own wellbeing and that of your team. Be aware that if you are depleted, your reactions, behaviours and mood will impact the rest of your team. Taking regular breaks, eating properly and exercise are not ‘nice to haves’, but they are often treated as such. Your team are more likely to follow what you do rather than what you say, and words can quickly become meaningless if not backed up with action. Always prioritise the time for people to recover, including yourself.
- **Give regular feedback and focus on the positive.** Under stress, retaining a positive outlook can become harder, yet it may well be the deciding factor in achieving team goals. Some of your team will thrive in this environment. Collective and public recognition of, and appreciation for, good outcomes helps to retain purpose and energy while focusing entirely on what went wrong is demotivating. There is a time and a place for reflection and review, but in the heat of the moment, demonstrating an optimistic, yet realistic perspective can be a significant motivator. Finally – and critically - always remember that a simple ‘thank you’ can go a very long way.

Look After Yourself. As a leader, the temptation can be to focus all your energy and efforts on those you serve. However, to be truly effective, a leader needs to be aware of their own physical and emotional state. If you are unable to sustain your own energy, the effectiveness of your leadership will quickly diminish. For this reason, taking care of your own needs is a critical function of leadership, and even more so in a crisis situation. There is no “one size fits all” solution and the key to looking after yourself is self-awareness – knowing when you are depleted and practicing the strategies that work best for you. The Mental Resilience Training (MRT) approach outlined below can help.¹¹



‘A broken leader – physically or mentally – is no leader at all.’

**Major General (later Field Marshal)
Bernard Montgomery**

¹¹ *Mental Resilience Training; Psychological Skills Handbook, Version 3: Nov 19. Army Op SMART.*

- **Set Goals.** As a leader you will be communicating with a variety of stakeholders and it is easy to feel as if you have spent all your time firefighting. Creating your own daily routine and adhering to it, including time to decompress and exercise, allows you to take control of your time and prioritise that which is most important, including time to think. Stay connected even when physically isolated and ask for help/ support from those around you if you need it.
- **Think Positive.** There will be many aspects of the situation that are outside of your control and that can generate stress and anxiety for you and your people. Negative or unhelpful thoughts are inevitable. Prevent them from becoming overwhelming by focusing your attention on those aspects you do have control over and find ways to ground yourself in the present to gain perspective. Re-framing the situation as an opportunity rather than a threat (e.g. a chance to put into practice your skills and help others) can add to this sense of control and help you to feel more positive.
- **Emotional Control.** Leading in high-intensity crisis situations can increase stress levels due to the time pressures and heightened sense of responsibility. This will affect people in different ways, but as a leader it is critical that you recognise the impact your own behaviour has on both others and your own psychological wellbeing. Identify your triggers and recognise when you start to feel a strong emotional response. You can then step back and seek to separate yourself from the emotion. Low energy and lack of sleep/ recovery time will mean you are more vulnerable to volatile emotional responses. Recognise that you may feel low at times and that this is ok. Build in time for activities that help you to regulate and recover on a daily basis, e.g. a walk, mindfulness or creative activities.
- **Anxiety Regulation.** Anxiety is a normal emotion in crisis, but it can interfere with the ability to think clearly and make rational decisions. As a leader, you will need to find a balance between staying informed without becoming overwhelmed. Maintain discipline by limiting your information to sources you trust and only check in at fixed times. If you do start to feel overwhelmed, breathing exercises/ mindfulness techniques can help you to re-focus on the present. Distraction such as switching tasks or moving around can also help.
- **Mental Rehearsal.** Crisis can feel acute and increase the pressure for immediate action. However, as a leader your responsibility is to continue to plan for the outcomes you want to achieve, rather than simply being reactive to every demand. Mental rehearsal can help by visualising these successful outcomes and the path to achieving these, including the behaviours and skills that are required. It also provides a greater sense of control and the opportunity to reframe, thereby contributing to your psychological resilience.

Be a Leader. Arguably the core component of effective leadership is the leader. The individual that sets the vision, makes difficult decisions, owns the risk, binds the team, cares for their people and, most importantly, inspires. This is you. To lead is personal. There is no fixed formula for success. How you project yourself, unite your people towards a common goal and how you lead through crisis, is very much down to you as an individual. As such, you must first and foremost know yourself. You must be constantly self-aware, particularly in crisis. Your physical and psychological extremes are likely to be tested, affecting your personality, your mood, your demeanour and, critically, your behaviours. In crisis your people need your leadership more than ever. They need you more than ever. Lead by example.

- **Balance your focus.** As a leader you must consistently balance your focus between the task in hand, the team you lead and the individuals you care for. All the while, you must continue to reassess the context in which you are operating; what has changed, what is coming next? Finding this balance is not easy and you cannot apply yourself equally, all the time. Nor must you try. Sometimes the task demands your absolute focus – lives may depend on it. Thereafter, you must repay the debt to both the team and the individual. Is the team functioning effectively? How is the new soldier coping? In crisis, the tendency is to become consistently tunnel-visioned on the task, to the detriment of all else. This has its moment, but balance to your team, your people and the wider context must be restored.



- **Be courageous.** The very nature of crisis and the extremes it inflicts on the human body and mind, tests our moral courage to the limit. When time is short and pressure intense, our moral boundaries come under scrutiny. Stay true to what you know is right. Show moral courage. Moral courage is a habit, a daily choice between right and wrong. Be consistent. Failure to do so erodes your integrity. As a leader you are not only responsible for your own moral integrity but for those that you lead. Have the courage to discipline others who transgress. Be respectful and kind but be direct and honest. Do not cut corners. Enforce standards. Have the courage to protect what you know is right.

'No man fails who sets an example of high courage, of unbroken resolution, of unshrinking endurance.'

Roald Amundsen, Explorer

- **Be calm.** The very nature of crisis is that it induces a heightened state of emotions; fear, anxiety, panic and stress. This is natural. It will happen to you as the leader. How you deal with these emotions is key. It is important that you remain calm. Own your negative thoughts (CALLM – Curious, Accept, Label, Let go, Move on).¹² As a leader, your team look to you. You are the example. If you are losing control of yourself, you will lose control of your team and the situation. Stop – Breathe – Assess – Act.
- **Show vulnerability.** You will not have all the answers, nor will you be expected to. Not every decision you make will be the right one. Things will go wrong. Have humility and show vulnerability. Admit when you have been wrong but be confident and learn from your mistakes. Leading by example in this regard will encourage others to air their vulnerabilities, building trust and respect amongst the team and encouraging open dialogue – critical in a crisis when open, honest and timely communication can be the difference between success and failure, life and death. Vulnerability is not a weakness, it is a strength.

¹² *Mental Resilience Training; Psychological Skills Handbook, Version 3: Nov 19. Army Op SMART.*

- **Exude confidence. Exude humility.** Confidence inspires confidence. In crisis, your people need reassurance. When the pressure is on and things are not going to plan, they need to be able to look to their leader knowing that you are in control. Think, talk and act positively. Inspire success. But do not let confidence tip over into arrogance. Arrogance is the antipathy of an effective leader. In a crisis, arrogance will be your defeat. Confidence with humility, matched with empathy, is the recipe for success.
- **Lead by example.** To lead is a verb. It is about action. Literature is awash with clichés – ‘inclusive leadership’, ‘coach and mentor’, ‘doing the hard right versus the easier wrong’. All very valid but they must be lived. Be a role model. Do not ask of your people what you would not be willing to do yourself. Live the values you expect others to uphold. Communicate your values consistently, most effectively by demonstrating. This generates integrity, trust, assurance and loyalty. Lead by example.

Remember, leadership is not about you, it is about the people you serve. Serve them well and they will serve you. Together you will *lead through crisis*.

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