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Leaders' adaptiveness in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic

Examiners: Professor H. Hakala
Post-Doctoral Researcher G. O'Shea

ABSTRACT

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Leaders' adaptiveness in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic

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Leadership is one of the key elements in successful business process. There are many kinds of leadership paradigms, more and less successful leadership protocols, and crisis leadership, which is affected by relationships with leaders and their followers.

In the year 2020 many companies and staff faced a massive problem, which affected negatively to their operations and staff. Since the crisis started the modern world has fought with COVID-19 over a year now. And at the same time, there has been enormous losses, lay-offs and restrictions, which is one reason for why research is needed around this phenomenon. In the present study, it was investigated how COVID-19 has impacted on leadership and leader's capability to adapt to the new normal at workplaces. How leaders have changed their behavior, how do they feel about the situation and operate with their followers regarding the situation.

The research is empirical and employs qualitative methodology. The data was collected in the spring 2021 by interviewing four leaders from one company. The interviewees come from restaurant and hospitality industry in Finland. The results from interviews are interpreted through literature and conclusions are driven from there.

The results show that although COVID-19 pandemic has caused enormous losses in the restaurant and hospitality industry the leaders believe that the companies will survive of it along time. The restrictions given, have created challenges and forced the companies to develop innovative solutions in short timeline. For academics, the research provides new findings regarding pandemic effects in crisis leadership. Hence, how to behave in similar situations in the future might be better prepared with good planning and educating staff to manage in crisis situations when needed.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Lappeenrannan-Lahden teknillinen yliopisto LUT
School of Business and Management
Degree Programme in International Business and Entrepreneurship

Heidi Suominen

Johtajien mukautumiskyky koronaviruspandemian aikana

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Johtaminen on yksi yritysten tärkeimmistä avaintekijöistä menestyvään liiketoimintaan. Johtamista on myös monta erilaista, hyvää ja huonoa johtamista, kriisijohtamista ja johtamista, johon vaikuttaa vuorovaikutus alaisten kanssa työpaikalla.

Vuonna 2020 monet yritykset ja niiden henkilöstö kohtasivat massiivisen maailmanlaajuisen ongelman, joka vaikutti negatiivisesti yritysten liiketoimintaan. Moderni maailma on yli vuoden taistellut koronaviruspandemiaa vastaan, kärsien isoista tappioista ja lomautuksista, yhdessä monien rajoitusten kanssa. Tästä syystä tässä tutkimuksessa lähdettiin tutkimaan, miten koronavirus on vaikuttanut johtajiin ja heidän kykynsä sopeutua uuteen tilanteeseen työpaikoilla. Miten johtajat ovat muuttaneet toimintatapojaan? Miten he itse kokevat tilanteen ja kuinka heidän alaisensa ovat reagoineet siihen.

Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisia tutkimusmenetelmiä hyödyntäen. Haastatteluissa tarkasteltiin neljää johtajaa samasta yrityksestä ravintola- ja hotellialalta Suomesta. Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin kevään 2021 aikana. Haastattelujen kautta kerättyä tietoa verrattiin aikaisempaan tutkimukseen ja tieteelliseen kirjallisuuteen ja niiden avulla muodostettiin johtopäätöksiä tuloksista.

Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella koronaviruspandemia on aiheuttanut isoja menetyksiä ravintola- ja hotellialalla, mutta johtajat itse luottavat alansa toipumiseen vähitellen. Yrityksille asetetut rajoitukset ovat myös tuoneet haasteita alalle ja pakottaneet niitä luomaan uusia innovatiivisia käytänteitä ja ratkaisuja lyhyessä ajassa. Akateemisesti tutkimus tarjoaa uusia havaintoja pandemian vaikutuksista kriisijohtamiseen ja siihen, miten kriisitilanteisiin pystyttäisiin vastaamaan paremmin tulevaisuudessa suunnittelun ja henkilöstön koulutuksen keinoin.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1	Background.....	2
1.2	Research gap and objectives.....	3
1.3	Research questions.....	3
1.4	Key concepts.....	4
1.5	Research methodology.....	5
1.6	Theoretical framework.....	6
1.7	Structure of the research.....	8
2	LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
2.1	Leadership.....	9
2.2	Criteria for good leadership.....	9
2.3	Leadership in crisis situations and practices.....	13
2.4	LMX -Theory (Leader-Member-Exchange Theory).....	21
2.5	LMX-theory and criteria for good leadership.....	26
3	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS.....	28
3.1	Research design.....	28
3.2	Introduction of the interviewees.....	29
3.3	Data collection methods.....	32
3.4	Data analysis and methods.....	33
3.5	Reliability and validity.....	34
4	EMPIRICAL FINDINGS.....	37
4.1	Interview questionnaires for the leaders.....	37
5	DISCUSSION.....	48
5.1	Discussion.....	48
5.2	Answering to research questions.....	55

6	CONCLUSIONS.....	59
6.1	Conclusions	59
6.2	Practical implications.....	60
6.3	Limitations and future research	62
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	65
	APPENDICES	69
	Appendix 1. The interview questions for the leaders	69
	Appendix 2. The interview questions for the followers.....	71

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019

LMX-theory – Leader-member-exchange theory

SARS – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

VDL – Vertical Dyadic Linkage

WHO – World Health Organization

1 INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this research is to investigate how leaders react at the crisis situation in their work field. How do they feel about leadership during hard times and what are their actions to the situation. Moreover, how do they adapt to a “new normal” without knowing when the crisis is over. The research is conducted in Finland.

In the present study, the crisis situation equals global COVID-19 pandemic. Since the start of the pandemics, economies got a big hit. Especially some sectors of businesses, such as hospitality and tourism, were located in the middle of the crisis. Most employees in this particular business field were left without their jobs, which causes big challenges for a good leadership.

Firstly, in this research, leadership is defined by elaborating what is meant with good leadership. The theoretical introduction consists of features that associate with leadership in crisis situation and description of Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX-theory), which is also known as a Vertical Dyad Linkage theory (VDL) (Dansereau et al., 1975, 46-47.)

The empirical part, which follows theoretical introduction, is collected through interviews from case company’s leaders, on the field of restaurant and hotels. Hospitality and tourism are one of the most vulnerable industries worldwide, but as well really important from economically aspect (Wang & Ritchie, 2010, 298). Being in the core of the crises makes it interesting from academic research point of view.

Regarding, Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX-theory), its roots go back to the year 1975 when authors Dansereau, Graen and Haga (1975) introduced theory called a Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL). It is based on the study from Dansereau, Cashman and Graen (1973) where they investigated how leaders interact and, especially how they treat each of their followers; are they equal for them or does their behavior differs based on with whom they interact. (Dansereau et al., 1975, 46-47.)

1.1 Background

In the start of the year 2020 COVID-19 pandemic spread globally and took over the economies and countries of various sizes, opening a new phase in the life. The first documented case was in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and after that the virus spread all over the world, being first called Wuhan pneumonia. Later it got named as COVID-19 by the World Health Organizations (WHO). Thus, at its early stages it was unknown, but became later known of its bad influence all round the world. On March 2020 WHO assessed that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic in a similar way than for example 1918 Spanish flu and 2009 Pandemic flu, causing a global threat. (Liu et al., 2020, 328-329.)

After COVID-19 was declared as a transboundary crisis with unprecedented public health, social and economic implications, it needed to be taken seriously, otherwise human lives were lost, and economic problems were too big to handle. Many of the countries have turned inwards to protect their citizens. When doing so, they closed the borders, imposed travel bans to other countries, curfews and lockdowns to varying degrees. (Petridou & Zahariadis, 2021, 1.) In globalized world, the change was big as all the sudden mobility was restricted and it was not possible any more travel like earlier. Instead, various societies tried to figure out how to survive from the situation.

When I was working for the company which operated in the hotel industry, early in the year 2020. I started to feel anxious about leaders' pressure in the situation. That is one reason and motivation for my research. Regarding leadership in crisis situation. I felt inspiration to investigate more how the leaders act in the situation, such as they need to make hard decisions to give lay-off papers to their subordinates or resign them due to the situation. They need to be tough but still most of them may not feel well. They may meet feelings of sadness and worry for the subordinates who lose the jobs and must rearrange their lives.

All the lost jobs, are they coming back? What is the "new normal" after COVID-19? Are we allowed to travel like we used to do before pandemic? How many companies have gone to bankruptcy and entrepreneurs or employees who have lost their jobs?

When finalizing my thesis work, COVID-19 situation is still on, and new aspects rise every day.

There are several reasons why studying crises is useful for science. In a global pandemic, companies and people meet pressure that causes stress and may harm human beings' mental health. It is something where leaders might help and developing leadership in crisis situations is therefore important.

The world has met many different crises in the history and over the past decade's crises have steadily increased (Wang & Ritchie, 2010, 298), which makes it essential to examine crisis in various fields of businesses. New ways of thinking, working and handling crisis leadership, must be developed to meet the next crises in the future.

1.2 Research gap and objectives

Due to the pandemic's new globalized nature in the modern world, there is a gap in studies, which focus on pandemic effects for leadership and leaders' behavior in crisis situation.

Leaders are in the middle of hard decisions as they are expected to help their companies get through the crisis. COVID-19 pandemic has been an example and demonstrated how pressure is laid on governments and leaders in every country.

Without good leaders it is difficult to go on. Leaders are expected to show the way, and they need to show that there is no place for panic and no need for that, because then everything falls apart and chaos is on.

1.3 Research questions

Crisis situations, such as COVID-19 increase uncertainty and challenges for leaders and leadership. The main research question given for the present study is:

How the COVID-19 pandemic has affected decisions and actions, that leaders have taken to support their follower's wellbeing and to be able to lead the company through crisis, in the field of Finnish hotel and restaurant industry?

Along the main research question, some sub questions are set to find out in which way the leaders are coping and adapting to the crisis situation such as pandemic. Therefore, the research sub questions are:

- 1. How the leaders see that behavior among to the followers, is it different than normal situation or same?*
- 2. Do the leaders adapt their leadership style in crisis situations such as pandemic?*

Sub questions are expected to support the main research question and create a coherent study line. Further, along the sub questions the focus is narrowed down. Both sub questions and the main research question are descriptive, and the research is qualitative.

1.4 Key concepts

In this chapter, the most important concepts are defined, and delimitations are given for the research.

Pandemic

When virus turns to be influenza, it is defined as an epidemic, which spreads worldwide, crossing international boundaries and when it affects a large number of people. However, it is not seasonal, like for example yearly influenza. (Heath, 2011.)

COVID-19

COVID-19 is Coronavirus disease, which is defined as a pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO). It is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The coronavirus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose. (WHO, 2021.)

Crisis

In the present study, crisis refer to extremely difficult time or trouble and danger, which needs to be faced and handled. As a part of this hard decisions to solve the situation are often needed. (Lexico, 2021.)

Transboundary crisis

Transboundary crisis refers to a crisis situation, which exceeds geographical, policy, cultural, public-private and legal boundaries that are normally managed by public managers. The transboundary crisis escalates quickly and mutates constantly, which creates confusion about its causes and possible consequences. (Boin, 2018, 94.)

1.5 Research methodology

This research is made by using qualitative methods. Qualitative research focuses on words, meanings and real-life phenomena, not numbers and statistical generalizations. The aim of the research is to develop knowledge, theories and predictions around leading and crisis. (McCombes, 2020.)

Data related to COVID-19 pandemic situation is collected regarding its influence on leadership, to see how crisis affect to work and how leaders are able to manage with their teams and companies through the difficult situation. Hence, for the research, COVID-19 is a well-defined problem and leaders are a relevant target group for the present study. From crisis perspective, there is urgent need to investigate how well the leaders play their role and how the causes of the crisis's situation can be explained to understand the consequences of the situation. These features and aims make the present study as explanatory research. (McCombes, 2020.)

The empirical data have been collected by interviewing the leaders. Due to the situation with COVID-19, there were difficulties to arrange interviews. For example, the participants of the study were not allowed to meet the researcher in face-to-face, because of the restrictions at the workplace. Further, their timely resources were too scarce to allocate time for research purposes as they were busy at work, with their company, dealing and healing from the crisis. Due to these problems and limited time for audio meetings, all interviews, except one, took place via email, which helped the interviewees manage their own time to answer to the questions. One of the interviews could be organized by using phone.

Interviews were carried through in a form of semi-structured questions. All participants got same questions, organized in similar order. The questions were mainly presented in the form of open questions. In this way the participants were expected to elaborate their answers as much as possible. Semi-structured interviews give to the interviewer a possibility to get rich data from the specific subject. This helps to investigate real-life phenomena in qualitative way and, at the same time, to be adaptive regarding the situation with restrictions and resources from the company aspect. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006.) This procedure fits well with descriptive research, as variables do not need to be strictly controlled (McCombes, 2020).

Together with the theory and rich specific empirical data from the real-life, conclusions about leadership in crisis situation with the pandemic can be made. The aim of the study is to find out, what are those elements, which help leaders, when they meet obstacles, and what kind of pieces of advice they might be able to provide for the future purposes regarding possible crisis situations? A more specific introduction about research methods, interviews, data collection methods, analysis of the data are presented in the chapter “research design and methods”.

1.6 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the thesis is built around leadership in general, various leadership actions, crisis leadership, and LMX-theory. It also aims to provide a deeper

understanding how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected to the leaders and their leadership behavior by reviewing the literature about the specific phenomenon.

Different types of leadership are presented to study leadership behavior in crisis situation. Overall leadership is important part of the work of teams and, especially, in business context, according to Haddon, Loughlin and McNally (2015). Leadership skills must be utilized in business environment even when it turns to be crisis time.

Regarding leadership, it is important to go deeper in specific leadership styles, where one style can be nominated as crisis leadership. Crisis leadership is related to pandemic situation and it may be linked to necessary skills in leadership.

Crisis times are abnormal situations, which disrupt organizations and their businesses in the way that can lead enormous losses and where the situation is overall too complex to handle (Alvintzi & Eder, 2010). For the purpose, Alvintzi and Eder (2010) have created three phase model for crisis management, which helps the company to survive from the crisis with a low negative impact to its operations. This model is introduced in the section of crisis leadership.

Risks are related to the crisis times and this is also a big part of the crisis leadership theory. Leaders need to focus on their risk leadership and how to prepare for the situations similar to COVID-19. Do leaders need to take a risk while they are leading and if they do so, where do they end along the decisions?

When leaders lead other human beings, they need different ethical guidelines. Earlier studies indicate that some leaders give more opportunities to some followers and, thus, treat their followers in various ways. Crisis times might affect leaders' behavior in this regard and therefore the present study focuses on LMX-theory, which explains interaction between leaders and their followers. (Emerald Works, 2021.)

To sum, various approaches toward leadership are studied in the theoretical introduction. The theoretical framework is presented in the figure below (see Figure 1).

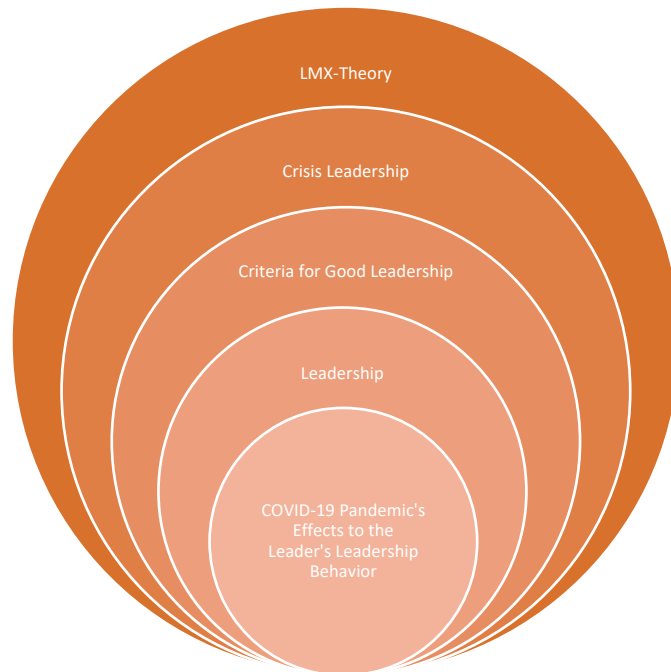


Figure 1. The theoretical framework.

1.7 Structure of the research

This master's thesis includes six chapters, which are further divided under sub-titles. These six chapters are: introduction, literature review, research design and methods, empirical findings, discussion and conclusions. The structure of this research is introduced in the figure below (see Figure 2).

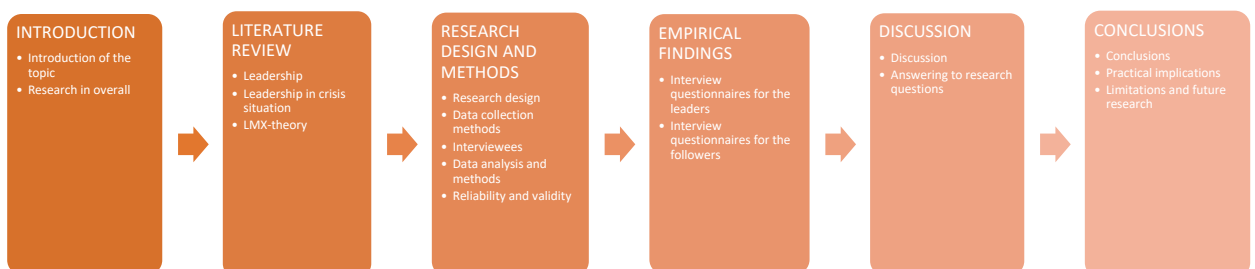


Figure 2. Structure of this master's thesis.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Leadership

Leadership can be defined in many ways and there is no precise definition for the term of leadership. There are almost as many definitions for leadership as there are authors who have attempted to define the concept. (Harrison, 2018, 2.)

Leader is a person who has one or more followers under his or her responsibility, and a leader needs to guide and direct them to achieve a goal which is set by leader and followers. Leaders need to see and know what strengths and weaknesses of their followers are and how to improve them. Due to that, good and effective leaders are able to change their leadership style to fit in the situation and focus on supporting each follower in best possible way. Thus, they can build trust and respect between leader and follower. (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014, 165.)

2.2 Criteria for good leadership

Being effective “good leader” does not refer to any specific prototype which might be defined. To understand leadership and be good in that, one must understand the context. This is really important, then when business environment steps into the game. (Haddon, Loughlin & McNally, 2015, 613.)

Good leaders may have ambitious mind but not too much and they need to have humble mindset. Leadership is continuous learning experience and process, and this is how the leaders should see it. Good leaders are open for new information and without humility they cannot success and learn. Overall, the best leaders are those who respect others. (Kerfoot, 1997, 276.)

There is a lot of competition between different companies and each country wants to be as good as possible. Both for internationally and locally competitive company, one key element that is needed is high performance team with a good leader. (DiGirolamo, 2010.) Under un-normal circumstances, such as crisis, effective leader might

contribute significantly better compared to normal situation. (Haddon, Loughlin & McNally, 2015, 613.)

What comes to the leadership, it is a process which serves the five functions defined by DiGirolamo (2010), i.e.: 1) creating a vision and continually focusing the group energy, 2) building a high-performance team, 3) motivating team members, 4) maintaining satisfaction, and 5) ensuring alignment with superiors and the environment and gathering necessary resources.

Vision is something to aim for, seeing the vision means for example what a product or service can do, and going forward to it (Heathfield, 2020). Vision always refers what leaders have idealized for a goal, what they want the organization to aim for and achieve. (Linjuan, Cen & Yonghong, 2020, 4). Vision is like a dream, dream what one wants to follow, and share with the followers. Leaders write their vision for the companies. (Heathfield, 2020.) One key for success and well working concept, is the team. Leaders are behind their team, because they create it. Thus, a leader, should choose wisely those people with whom to work together. Further, it is important that a leader recognizes the good work and rewards the followers of that; this creates engaged workforce (Nelson, 2017, 57). The leaders are expected to motivate the team members. All people need motivation in the field where they are operating, no matter what the concept is, healthy lifestyle or workplace, but motivation is behind every action. Hence, leaders need to focus on motivating to focus on their goal. Responsibility goes together with motivation. (Lauby, 2005, 3.)

Maintaining the satisfaction of all members in order to minimize dropouts (DiGirolamo, 2010). To keep the team and having its engagement to the company, one needs to be sure that the team is satisfied in work. Otherwise, the team members might go and find another workplace. Motivation is one key element for satisfaction; it can be a salary or passion to the work, what does not cost a money is to get feedback from well done work. Early studies indicate that the factors which motivate followers in their job is autonomy, authority, and flexibility of working hours. These create responsibility in work and lead to satisfied work environment. (Nelson, 2017, 56.) Leaders need to trust to their followers.

The leaders need to gain authority but still they are part of the team. Best leaders fit in the team and its environment. Acting equally is also important for leaders. Being fresh, full of joy, happy to learn new, and ready to talk with the followers if they have hard times prevents dropouts. Leaders play tremendous role in their workplace being one of the key elements behind the successful and engaged team. They are those who set the stage for their employees where they can perform as a professional. (Nelson, 2017, 58.)

Hence, according to DiGirolamo (2010), if the leader wants to be a high-performance leader and help the team to perform at superior level, the above mentioned activities are necessary. It requires creating an environment which encourages and rewards team members for open and honest communication. Increasing employees' autonomy and flexibility helps them to be involved into decision making. The leaders need constantly to focus on developing their team and one part is to recognize and reward high performance. (Nelson, 2017, 58.) Still a question remains; what makes the high-performance leader? This question has studied for one and half century by academics. We do not have simple answer, but at least we know something, and we will know more. (DiGirolamo, 2010.)

DiGirolamo (2010) argued in his own article that maybe a high-performance team does not even need a leader, but good leadership. Every member in team could join the leading process without a particular leader who leads projects, companies and so on.

With a good leader, company as a whole and a team's there could reach more productive and happier place to work. Being a good leader, one might improve team's engagement and success. Further, a good leader has a major overall impact to the company. (Schooley, 2019.)

Would it similarly be possible to define what one should not do? If a leader motivates others in a way, which frightens his or her followers, or uses power in a questionable way, negative and authoritarian leadership may rise up. If the leader manipulates

employees just to get what he or she wants, leadership does not work as expected. (Juuti, 2018, 28.)

Good leaders are the ones on charge and ready to adapt their leadership according to the situation, maybe following their vision. Along vision, they are connected to strategic leadership, the success of organization, and change management. (Miettinen, 1998, 90.) Leader without vision may fail.

During crisis, such as COVID-19, leaders should be adaptive in their leading style and behavior, the sooner the better, to be able to see the situation and how it changes and maybe still having their vision, toward which they are focused. In spite of the crisis customers define the need of products and services and the leaders must listen to their customers, if they want to grow. (Myatt, 2012.)

Fernandez and Shaw (2020) investigated how academic leaders do their work in the middle of pandemic and how they adapt themselves in the situation. Some leaders see also opportunities in crisis situations, challenging status quo. (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020, 41.) In Chinese, a word of 'crisis' has been written with two characters. The first one represents danger and the other one opportunity. Both of these might give turning points for organizations. (Wang & Ritchie, 2010, 299.) Negative scenario may predict that their operations fail, while positive one indicates new ways of working or situation which provides new opportunities, ideas and answers.

Putting emphasis on leadership, can guide leaders out of their comfort zones, toward situations where they are not crossing a fence where it is lowest. If they do not work as they have promised, it has influence to ethical questions. (Juuti, 2018, 29.) These kind of situations when ethical considerations occur may take place especially at crisis times. Leaders need to have calmness, courage and humility for strengthening their precious relationships with others and creating trust. Fernandez and Shaw (2020.) Building those relationships which already exist and the new ones, is fruitful for after-crisis-time. Having good relationships supports and facilitates coping in crisis, such as COVID-19 pandemic. Following criteria for good leadership, the leaders have better opportunities to save their companies and operations, as well to help their followers

get through. Recovering from crisis can lead to the situation, where followers are even more engaged to the company. (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020, 42.)

2.3 Leadership in crisis situations and practices

Crises are unpredictable and major events, which cause threats and harm for business corporations and their stakeholders. Crisis is an abnormal situation when effective leadership is needed, and which creates fear and uncertainty. If the top leaders support their competent staff in business corporations, the crisis is easier to manage. (Alvintzi & Eder, 2010.)

Crisis situations make challenges both at individual level and organizational level, and particularly for leaders (Haddon, Loughlin & McNally, 2015, 614). Emotions are one influencing factor. Negative emotions are more related and natural reactions and consequences in crisis situations than positive emotions. Followers of their leaders may notice how they react in crises situations, which can have influence to their work and how they feel. (Madera, 2005, 1-2.)

In crisis situations, more strategical and future way thinking is needed. Therefore, leaders must take risks and just to see what happens. Every crisis is unique in its own way. Usually, most crises come suddenly and there is not time to prepare for them. (Engagedly, 2020.) For the reason, leaders should focus on the hypothetical situations and threats beforehand, which is actually part of strategical leadership. Further, crisis leadership skills are required, and, similarly, working under pressure, in order to adapt to new challenging situations; communication skills and simply good leadership skills are wanted. (Seeck, 2009, 5.)

Crisis leadership is an interesting part of leadership. It is a long and strategical process, which requires planning beforehand, during the crisis and after it. Crisis leadership includes professional skills; time, information and other resources are needed for the purpose. (Seeck, 2009, 5.)

Three phases of handling crisis situations

In the introduction, model of three phases to handle crisis situation was introduced from authors Alvintzi and Eder (2010). The model is divided in to the three phases which are introduced in the figure below (see Figure 3).

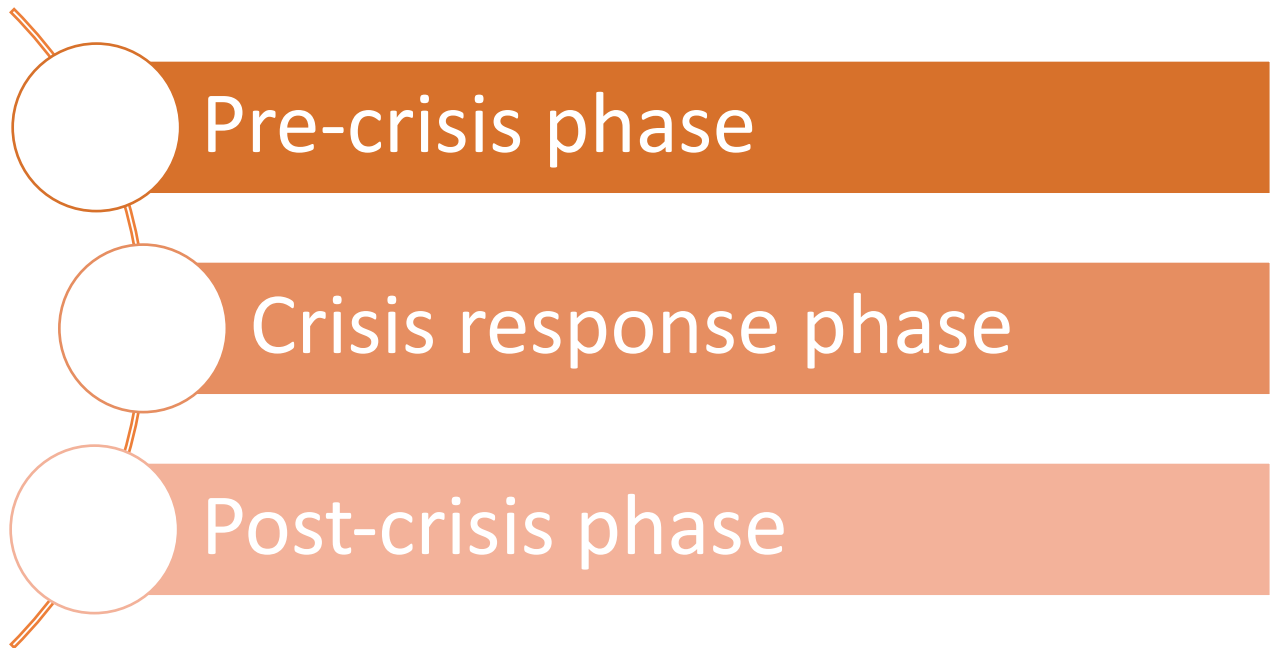


Figure 3. Three phases of handling crisis situation (Alvintzi & Eder, 2010).

Alvintzi and Eder (2010) argued that when a crisis occurs, there is no other option to handle the situation than to do it as good as possible. This includes the purpose of reducing the impact of negative causes to the business corporation activities. The authors listed some strategical guidelines dividing the crisis situation into different phases.

First phase is called 'pre-crisis phase' where corporation needs to focus on prevention and preparation activities. These include a well thought plan and education for the situation. For a business corporation, it is best to be prepared with a plan, which is updated periodically. If something unexpected happens, good beforehand planning gives opportunities to manage major problems well. Next step is the 'crisis response phase', which includes leaders' responds and their actions during the crisis situation. This means that corporation notes two parts with special care, namely, detection and mitigation. When they detect early enough what the situation is and take quick, precise

and clear actions towards it and then help their operations and also staff to survive from the situation to mitigate the situation by their actions taken. Last phase is the 'post-crisis phase', which is important for the corporations in order to heal from the crisis times. That period when crisis is over, proves that actually the crisis does not end to the point where crisis is not active anymore. Companies need to learn from crisis and prepare their operations to face next crises which come later on. There is need to heal the operations, back to the normal level as soon as possible and go back to the infrastructure systems, which existed before the crisis. (Alvintzi & Eder, 2010.)

Crisis handling in the hospitality, restaurant and tourism industry

Hospitality and tourism industry are important part from economic point of view. They are also vulnerable in crisis situations, not immune to it. There have been many crises affecting to the tourism and hotel sector, like terrorist attacks and epidemics. This might be partly due to that hotels and tourism handle lot of human lives and human contacts. When many people are in the same place at the same time, viruses and bacteria spread easily. (Wang & Ritchie, 2010, 298.)

Early studies indicate that hotel management capability and ability to deal with different crises are limited. Staff members have limited knowledge and too little formal education what comes to the crisis management. Thus, they are not prepared for crises, and they have not taken any precautions against unexpected situations. What comes to the crisis leadership and planning, it is a long process which must be strategically monitored. The same is true with sustainable development in the hospitality and tourism industry. (Wang & Ritchie, 2010, 298.) After Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in the Korea, hospitality industry did notice the importance of crisis management. Close attention must be laid on the importance of crisis management to be prepared for situations like SARS and COVID-19. (Seongseop Kim, Chun & Lee, 2005, 377.) To conclude, we must ask whether the world is prepared to the situations, such as where we are right now?

Global crisis, global problem

In global world, different kinds of crises occur regularly and therefore support over the borders and collaboration is needed. The crises have grown bigger, like COVID-19

pandemic, which has spread all over the world and turned to a global pandemic. (Boin et al., 2017, 1.) We are globally closer than earlier, and so are our problems.

In Boin's interesting article, it was argued that we face crises and are prepared for them, and that is a fact. But even though a lot has been done for being prepared for crises, we are still unprepared to transboundary crisis. (Boin, 2018, 94.) Reading the article now, one might argue that we should have seen the present crisis coming, and thus, been better prepared for it.

The transboundary crisis is a nightmare for leaders. If leaders fail in crisis leadership, they might get criticism from that, which could also lead to changes in their reputation (Boin, 2018, 94-95) and how their followers see them.

The price of being unsuccessful in crisis handling might be high. The worst-case scenario is that lives are lost in natural disasters or accidents but there may be other consequences as well, such as spreading rumors, fear or panic, and along these, lost reputation or trust. A company can lose its customers, potential customers, co-operation partners and market due to failed crisis management acts. (Seeck, 2009, 7.)

In all, there are many reasons, why crisis leadership should not be too uploaded with expectations. Many factors may affect to the crisis, for example the size or suddenness of the crisis, and how much there were knowledge regarding it from earlier cases. There is plenty of evidence, which indicates that crisis management and crisis leadership matters. It may be of help on the outcome of the crisis. (Boin et al., 2013, 81.)

For the crisis situation or before that, there should be guidelines regarding how to survive from it and from the time after the crisis is over. In a figure below (see Figure 4), a division for guidelines are given (Boin, Overdijk & Kuipers, 2013).

1	Early Recognition
2	Sensemaking
3	Making Critical Decisions
4	Orchestrating Vertical and Horizontal Coordination
5	Coupling and Decoupling
6	Meaning Making
7	Communication
8	Rendering Accountability
9	Learning
10	Enhancing Resilience

Figure 4. Guidelines for the crisis management (Boin, Overdijk & Kuipers, 2013).

Phases to survive from crisis situation are divided to three phases in Alvintzi and Eder model (2010). The guidelines given in Figure 4 come, in turn, from article *Leadership in Times of Crisis: A Framework for Assessment* (2013) by Boin, Overdijk and Kuipers. According to them, these instructions should be given to a committee that evaluates public organizations in how they handle a crisis. With a help of this instruction, leaders might see how their leading processes work and whether they manage well enough in there. (Boin et al., 2013, 82.)

Firstly, most important is that leaders are able to recognize the immediately attention needed in crisis situation. According to Boin et al., (2013), many crises could be recognized beforehand, based on earlier reports, if these had been read. Usually it is difficult, because warning signals are fragmented. Then next step, which is similarly hard for most people, is that under conditions of stress and deep uncertainty it is difficult to share information and make decisions. Therefore, the leaders should rehearse the situations and see how to react and what to do. Further, as the leaders make critical decisions, who are expected to do them, they must be aware of the

strategical decisions and do not entangle to operational decision making. (Boin et al., 2013, 82-83.)

Cooperation and communication

If a crisis or disaster happens, operational work made afterwards needs intense cooperation between different organizations. This requires understanding between the participating organizations because they may not ever worked together earlier and difficult circumstances cause extra problems and challenges. In crisis situation, decision-making is complex. Yet, when society is hit by a crisis, its' members look at their own leaders and how they react to the situation. Regarding crisis leadership, a plan is needed with different kind of hypothetical situations, i.e., what might happen, and how the leaders get their company out of the situation. (Boin et al., 2013, 83-85.)

Hence, communication and cooperation between organizations is important. There leaders and their followers must act together. This is one conclusion made by Haddon, Loughlin and McNally (2015). In their study, respondents suggested that in the middle of the crisis leaders should be good listeners, present and aware of the situation. They should avoid overreaction and panic situations; communication must happen frequently, with factual, open, transparent and honest mind, together with their followers. Two-way communication is essential. (Haddon, Loughlin & McNally, 2015, 620-621.)

In the crisis management plan, one of the most important and crucial elements is related to communication. Sometimes crisis happens so that top leaders face the problems by themselves and deal with it, but crises may as well turn to the phase where media and public interests get involved. Clear, prompt and transparent communication is then needed to minimize the negative impacts for the corporation. (Alvintzi & Eder, 2010.)

Similarly, communication between citizens and organizations is essential. Citizens require information of the crisis and what is going on. COVID-19 pandemic has been a good example for that. Pieces of advice is asked to find out how to get help, in which way the crisis affect in which factors, whether situation is getting worse or better;

immediate information is wanted. Further, transparency is key in crisis management. It is important how leaders tell about crisis, during and after when everything happens, what happens why something does not work. (Boin et al., 2013, 85-86.)

How decision-making has went, must be reflected during and after crisis. Leaders are expected to learn about it and whether decisions made were optimal. Effective leadership requires continuous learning. Disasters and crises happen but the most important part of the strategical plan is to find out what can be done beforehand, i.e., risk and crisis management work. It leads to the last point of the list in Figure 4. Organizations that are well prepared, can adapt to difficult situations better and faster than organizations, which are not prepared for that. Are the leaders preparing themselves and their teams well enough for unexpected situations? (Boin et al., 2013, 86-87.)

To conclude, when leaders prepare themselves and their staff to the crisis situations it means planning. For strategic thinking and leading, leaders must have a crisis management plan, which helps them to deal in proper way in the future crisis situations. Overall, crisis management plan should be a standard part of a safety and emergency preparedness plan procedures. Regarding business corporations, it has been indicated that too often companies wait until the crisis happen before they react, which is a mistake. If companies are in time, they have better chance to survive from the crisis unharmed. (Alvintzi & Eder, 2010.)

The crisis management plan should consist of the hypothetical scenarios about the real crisis, i.e., what could happen and how the company should response to the situation at hand. Having these scenarios in the plan, the corporations can reduce the influence of negative impacts of the crisis to their operations. The plan ensures that the main activities and operations of the company continue even though during the crisis, in as effective way as possible. (Alvintzi & Eder, 2010.)

In the present COVID-19 crisis, some signs of leading are discussed. In the past postwar era, people in the Western world have met many kinds of crises, such as two world wars, and the 1918 flu epidemic. Recently, problems have become more

complex and wicked, and the number of actors involved has increased. What would be means for surviving? One development is that crisis leadership has become more professional in the past few decades. Still, there are problems, e.g., when dealing with big transboundary crises. Crisis leadership focuses on ordinary or routine crises, not on bigger transboundary crises, like COVID-19 pandemic, where new ways to act are presupposed. (Boin, 2018, 98.)

Feminine leading versus masculine leading in the crisis

There are differences how crises are treated in different countries. In The New York Times magazine, there was an article about those nations where women have been employed in leading roles. A question was presented, why women-led nations are doing better with COVID-19? Examples from women-led nations were for example New Zealand, Germany and Finland. Obviously, final conclusions cannot be given in the middle of the pandemic, but it can be seen that some nations seem to cope better. According to Taub, experts have stated that women's success in crisis leading may provide valuable lessons about crisis handling but as well regarding other situations. (Taub, 2020.)

The women-led nations and their success in pandemic have been in focus also in Cherneski's (2020) study regarding Canada. Attention was paid to the international women leaders, similarly than Taub (2020) did, showing that Germany's (lead by Chancellor Angel Merkel) and New Zealand's (lead by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern) effectiveness with the virus have been amazing and the statistical figures since their early stages have indicated only low death rates. (Cherneski, 2020, 902.)

Professionals do their best if leaders have ability to listen to them, showing good leadership skills and good crisis management. Further, it was argued in Taub's article that it does not only concern that women do best, but also political aspect need to be considered. For example, in USA, where for Republican governors – no matter if they were male or female – it took longer to impose stay-at-home orders than for Democrats. (Taub, 2020.)

Male leaders are maybe expected to be masculine ones but for women such expectations do not exist. This is because, the history of women leaders is so short. Thus, in future the situation can be different. It seems that there will be more disasters and crises coming, because of the climate change and consequences of climate change to be escalated. Therefore, those leaders who are caring, thoughtful and who learn to recognize and value risk averse are needed. (Taub, 2020.) Consequently, regarding crises, it seems better to utilize feminine signs. (Haddon, Loughlin & McNally, 2015, 615.)

2.4 LMX -Theory (Leader-Member-Exchange Theory)

LMX-theory (Leader-Member-Exchange Theory) is also known as Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory (VDL). The theory is based on the idea that leaders should not treat their followers similarly. Instead, one may have team members with whom to have close relationship and at the same time have team members who are not that close. Thus, LMX-theory analyzes the relationship between leaders and team members. (Emerald Works, 2021.) Basic idea behind the LMX-theory is that leaders form two groups of followers and treat them differently (Lunenburg, 2010, 4.). These groups are introduced later on, in this chapter. Anyhow, LMX-theory have defined also to be a trust-building process (Erdogan & Bauer, 2013, 2).

LMX-theory is a relationship-based theory, which focuses on dyads, i.e., links between a leader and a follower or team member. The leadership, according to this theory is based on the quality of the exchange relationship developed between leaders and their followers. How to create and have high-quality exchange in these dyads, is characterized by trust, liking and mutual respect. If a leader and a follower gain relationship, which is characterized by trust and reciprocal liking, it is expected to have an implication for job-related well-being and effectiveness of followers. (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015, 641.)

To see the difference between behavioral leadership theories, which focus on what leaders do, LMX-theory is based on the assumption that leaders influence is gained through the quality of the relationships. The relationships develop little by little through

communication between a leader and each team member, in dyad. (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015, 641.) LMX-theory states that every relationship between leaders and followers goes through three stages (Emerald Works, 2021). This is shown in the figure below (see Figure 5).

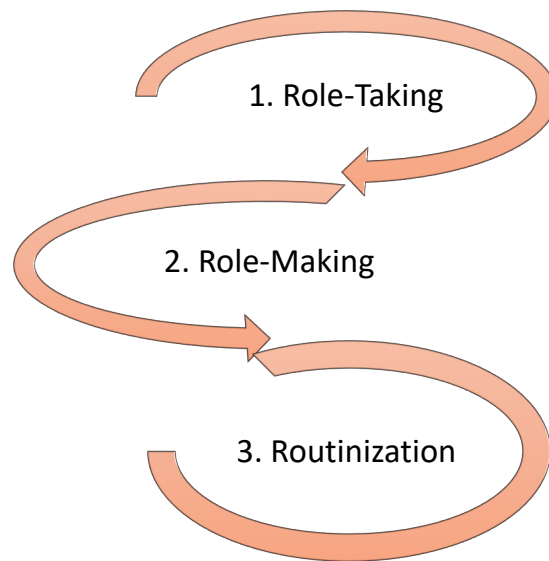


Figure 5. Three stages creating relationships between leaders and followers according LMX-theory (Emerald Works, 2021).

Role-taking

First step occurs when a new member joins to the team and the leader takes time to see what kind of skills and abilities the follower has. Noticing these, the leader really gets familiar with the team members, how they work, and what they are capable to do. It is some kind of first expression. (Emerald Works, 2021.)

Leaders see thus possible abilities and motivations of the members by giving 'testing' tasks. At the same it is possible to monitor how followers react to the tasks given, which limits the members have and so on. In this way the leader learns much in short time. It is possible to see abilities and potential, i.e., where the followers are good and where they might be better in future. At this phase action is still based on economic transactions, when followers get paid for services regarding what he or she and the company have signed up. Therefore, it is said that the leader acts and follower react;

when the leader asks, the follower does what is asked to do. (Graen & Scandura, 1987, 180-181.)

Role-making

After the first step, the next step is to continue the work. Working with the projects and tasks as part of the team belongs to that. In this stage the leaders expects that the new follower works hard, is loyal and trustworthy when getting used to one's new role. This is also the stage where the leader sorts the new team member or members into the two groups, which are introduced in the figure 6 end explained here. (Emerald Works, 2021.) The followers are sorted to the groups (OUT-team and IN-team) based how they act and achieve their goals, e.g., how they act with the leaders in the problematic situations. This naturally has influence on their mutual relationship. (Graen & Scandura, 1987, 181.) But is that situation unchangeable? It seems that LMX-theory is problematic due to the fact that people change, and their dyadic relationships vary along time; people grow in their work roles and collaboration with colleagues. This is crucial part to consider regarding the present study.

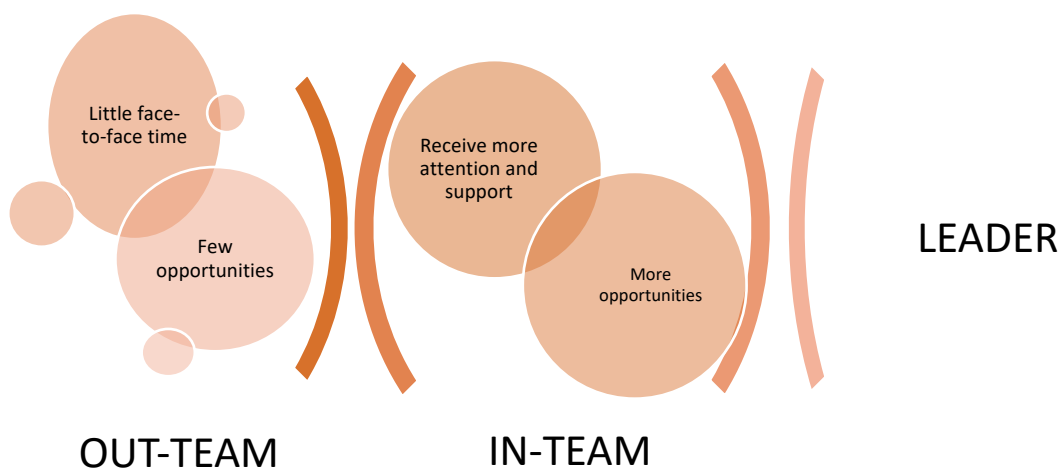


Figure 6. Leader and its team at the work according to LMX-theory (Emerald Works, 2021).

Role making is based and built by mutual contribution of valued resources. Each party that is involved to the role making process, is expected to give something to the other party. (Graen & Scandura, 1987, 182.) For example, being IN-team means sharing some features and work-ethic as the leader; getting more attention, support, opportunities, and team members that are trusted by the leader. At role-making process, followers need to prove their loyalty, trustworthy and being skilled. (Emerald Works, 2021.) When working in leader's inner circle, it follows the members are expected to be motivated, engaged, satisfied and productive, more than in OUT-team. Even though, leaders have to develop high-quality relationships with all of their followers. As a result, IN-team should be of same size than OUT-team. (Lunenburg, 2010, 4.)

Then, who ends up to the OUT-team? Are they followers who have betrayed the trust of the leader some time, unmotivated or incompetent followers? (Emerald Works, 2021.) IN-team members may see that people who are irresponsible, silent and introvert are sent to OUT-team. Does dividing followers to two groups make any sense, if some people are just different than other? At least, they should gain still the same treat what comes to the working area. (Singh, 2018, 49.)

OUT-team may be that group of people who gets less time to access leader's one-to-one time, not opportunities for growth or advancement and so on; their work can turn out to be time restricted and unchallenging. (Emerald Works, 2021.) While IN-team members get a lot of attention and respect, which creates high level relationships, OUT-team members have totally different relationships with leaders. This creates a problem with LMX-theory; when IN-team followers are near to the leader and get better resources than OUT-team followers, it may be considered nepotistic. (Singh, 2018, 49.) If the followers do not get challenging work tasks and feel that they are not welcomed to the company, they may quit or continue their work as unmotivated.

Routinization

Last step in relationship development is routinization. Followers who are in the IN-team are expected to work hard, show trust, respect, empathy, patience and persistence to maintain their reputation in their leaders' eyes., whereas OUT-team members have

problems to get out of the group. When followers are for any reason been thrown out of leaders 'inner team' it may be hard to get back on track, if their leaders do not give them opportunities to prove again that they are 'coming back'. This can make the followers to give up and quit, change departments or organizations to 'start over'. (Emerald Works, 2021.) OUT-team members may, further, feel not to get promotions or success, which can make them leave and re-start their career elsewhere

Fair or unfair treat?

In this research, LMX-theory is used to investigate whether LMX-theory fits in crisis situations, where leader-follower relationships are tested. Do leaders treat their followers similarly than in normal state? If they have groups like IN- and OUT-teams, are the followers on the same line what comes to lay-offs and resigns due to economic pressure? In the case when a follower neglects his or her work, resign is more understandable than for other reasons. OUT-team members may still be good at their work but do not have a personal level relationship with their leader. Are lay-off or resign papers given equally to members in UT-team and IN-team? Treating followers differently may cause envy and ostracism among co-workers (Wang & Li, 2018, 9), which were harmful for the company in the middle of pandemic, causing that the staff members do not work together with a good spirit.

Even though LMX-theory has been indicated to be a method to effective leadership it can also be criticized. LMX-theory got originally its base on 1970s, when companies were more hierarchical than today. At that time usually, every employee had one leader to whom to report. Since that time, business culture has changed. One follower can have several leaders to report, which already makes the difference to LMX-theory that is based on follower-leader relationship. (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015, 645)

It is also criticized, that LMX-theory does not explain well enough how high-quality relationships are created. Further, it may not be considered fair to all followers, as everyone does not get equal attention from leaders. Further, followers in the IN-team may be treated well even after mistakes or poor performance in the work task. In this respect the method is unfair to the followers in OUT-team. (Juneja, 2021.)

2.5 LMX-theory and criteria for good leadership

Regarding, LMX theory and leadership and based on earlier research evidence, we can conclude that it can be used as an effective working theory by leaders in their daily work with some limitations. In following, criteria for good leadership and LMX-theory are taken into consideration.

If leaders utilize principles given in LMX-theory, they support IN-team followers, give them opportunities and credits. If the method works as expected, the followers gradually turn to be productive and do extra work because they want to stay members of IN-team. However, we need to ask, how is the case with members in OUT-team? Do they get a chance to prove their performance, no matter what has happened in history?

According to Graen and Scandura (1984) leaders make an intervention with the OUT-team members who have performed poorly earlier to give them an opportunity to do it better and to indicate that they are needed in the company.

OUT-team indicated more positive effects than earlier, after intervention, and compared to IN-team. OUT-team members also felt more satisfaction from work (Graen & Scandura, 1984, 434). This fits with the hypothesis according to which OUT-team members do anything for their leader, if the leader is wise and lets them try. Giving a chance to a follower who has earlier made a mistake, may change them and make them show their best. Many people learn through their failures, depending on their work task, failures are small and can be fixed.

Hence, which features may define good leadership in LMX-theory? Even though a leader followed LMX-theory with IN-team and OUT-team structure, it was important to treat everyone as professionals, and not to forget the OUT-team. Regarding signed contracts and similar matters, good leadership includes some equality toward all followers, such as with lay-off papers and resigns. Following Graen's and Scandura's (1984) study, we can expect that intervention might change OUT-team followers as productive and satisfied employees. They just need the information that they are worth

an effort. Many of the followers in the OUT-team are potential higher performance followers who can bring their work effort for the company. (Graen & Scandura, 1984, 343.)

OUT-team members may have betrayed their leader and therefore ended up to the worse team. Nomination to OUT-team can turn out to end their career in the company. Good leadership criteria presumable would fit in LMX- theory, diminishing some obvious problems in there. If leader see potential in all followers and if they are able to understand that some of their followers have struggled to earn their place in the company, their intervention was welcome.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The next chapter reports research design and methodology that has utilized in the present study and which already are shortly explained in the introduction.

First, research design is introduced and reasons behind methodological solutions are explained. Later in the text, data collection procedure is reported in detail. To follow ethical guidelines, principles regarding anonymity are applied. This is done also in order to gain true opinions concerning COVID-19 pandemic situation in the work field. Thus, the leaders are not introduced by name. After that, data analysis and methods are elaborated and reported. Reliability and validity of the research is discussed.

3.1 Research design

The present study was conducted as a qualitative interview research during the spring 2021, as COVID-19 pandemic was still active. The research was to focus on leadership approach in a business area.

The basis of the qualitative research is that it investigates real-life phenomena, in this case the research also situated in a real and authentic context, i.e., on a company environment. Qualitative research focuses on words and meanings. A typical context for qualitative study is that there is a specific situation, case or couple of cases to investigate, still rather limited in number of cases. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006.) The design then focuses on one particular phenomenon to be better and deeper understood. The study thus proceeds from details toward understanding wholeness, being inductive in nature. (Grönfors & Vilkkä, 2011, 15.) One case, i.e., a company is chosen in order to understand the specific phenomenon more deeply and to study context around it. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). These principles influenced on the decision to end up to qualitative study case-study.

Article from Baxter and Jack (2008) elaborates qualitative case study methodology. In the article, they pointed out that this approach fits to a novice researcher. According to

them, in a case study, it is necessary to focus in answering questions “why” and “how”. A researcher should not manipulate participants’ behavior in the study. (Baxter & Jack, 2008, 545.)

Usually when a researcher starts his or her research, one question pops up; how much data needs to be collected? In case studies not too, much data is necessary. The aim of qualitative research approach is in understanding a phenomenon, not to make statistical generalizations regarding the results like quantitative research aims to do. In qualitative research, most important is to understand different actions, offering theoretically reasonable explanation the phenomenon, under investigation. Quality of the data is more important, not the quantity. Therefore, interviews are good tools collect data, and interviewees should be professionals, having knowledge or experience from the phenomenon. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006.)

One common mistake for every researcher in the field of science – both for novices and professionals – is that they try to answer to too many questions in their study. In this way their study might spread too much, and then the red line of the study is not followed. (Baxter & Jack, 2008, 546-547.) In the present study, the aim has been to keep the research problems narrow enough, like it has been defined in Introduction.

3.2 Introduction of the interviewees

Protecting interviewees’ privacy to get open and honest replies has been a goal for data gathering. Reporting names might have been problematic in this kind of research. In final report, if interviewees have given their honest opinion regarding leadership in the middle of crisis situation, their co-workers could read results, which in turn, might affect to their relationships and opinions at workplace later on, had the names been reported. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 6.) Therefore, anonymity is followed by researcher. Researcher got the names of possible interviewees from the company, but it is not reported or told to anyone to whom the questions were finally sent. In this way anonymity was applied.

Even though interviewees are anonymous, there is not any reason to keep the field of the business secret. The case company is operating in the restaurant and hotel field, grocery and specialty goods trade, convenience store and department store trade in Finland. All leaders that participate in the study, come from restaurant, hospitality and tourism industry, which has been vulnerable regarding the crisis situation, and got a big hit during COVID-19 pandemic (Wang & Ritchie, 2010, 298). Thus, the leaders that have participated in the study still struggle with pandemic in their companies, while their leadership behaviors are under investigation in the present study. How are they surviving from it and how they handle their operations in their company?

Table 1. Information about the interviews of the leaders

LEADERS	FIELD OF THE WORKPLACE	DATE	CODE FOR THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS	PLACE
Male	Hospitality, restaurant, tourism	2.3.2021	A1	Phone call, duration of phone call 1 hour 13 minutes.
Female	Hospitality	Results received: 6.3.2021	B2	Email questionnaire
Male	Hospitality, restaurant, tourism	Results received: 14.3.2021	C3	Email questionnaire
Female	Hospitality	Results not received	D4	Email questionnaire
Male	Hospitality	Results received: 14.3.2021	E5	Email questionnaire

Table 1 (see above) presents information about the interviews, including some details which are relevant for the research. When empirical findings are introduced in the chapter four, all the answers have been coded in the way that is introduced in the table 1.

Leader A1 with a long work history as a leader, has been in different positions in the company under study. At the moment he leads and develops the operations that are part of his projects. He said in the interview that his position during the crisis is easier compared to colleagues. It is because he does not have followers to lead, at the moment, which makes his situation better, without too many emotions associated to followers to be leaded.

Similarly, B2 leader has a rather long history in the hospitality sector, though somewhat less than leader A1. She has followers to lead and she works at two locations, for which she is responsible. During the crisis, she has been under a big pressure, around her followers. But like she said, she wants to work so that she is doing a business. Still, she tries to do everything for her followers, gaining their trust in that way.

Leader C3 and has a couple of fields to take care of. He is a strong leader who said that in the present situation he needs to be more human leader versus to normal situation. When leaders have many strings in their hands, they need to have authority, and still be on charge what comes to leading other humans. Experienced leaders notice this, and therefore leader C3 has done all his best and what pandemic situation demands, in the field and he has gained a lot of positive feedback from it.

D4 leader did not answered to the questionnaire. Leader E5 has also long history in the company. At the moment he leads one location and its operations. He said that best way to lead in these times is to be present and listen. All these adjectives and signs what the leaders reported are related to their previous work experience. They all have long history in the leadership. It is good to notice that they have been in the same company for years. They have gained their knowledge there, and their leading takes place with experienced mind. Still, they all are in the middle of the moment that is unforeseeable.

3.3 Data collection methods

The empirical part of the study was done along semi-structured interviews and email questionnaires. Interviews are one of the most used methods to collect data (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). With interviews, real-life data is targeted, as the interviewees tell their story and experiences from their point of view. This is narrative way to get data, when interviewees tell stories about themselves. When these information are collected by researcher, using interviews and questionnaires, it is called primary data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 2). In this research data collection methods might be also called mixed methods, when researcher has collected data as a combination of interviews and questionnaires. Both of them are good way to collect data. Interviews are flexible and more personal, email questionnaires may also catch dialogue between two people, not as personal way when people do not see each other. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2008.)

Interviews and questionnaires have conducted in the spring 2021, between the 25th of February and the 14th of March. At that same time, COVID-19 pandemic was still active, and it still is. It has lasted already more than one year, and the data for the study has been collected during that time.

It was rather complex to arrange the interviews as there were many restrictions going on due to the pandemic, which made challenges to handle with meetings in the workplace, and as well at university. Many of the people worked remotely. Therefore, it was quite difficult to arrange time for the meetings via Microsoft Teams. Further, the company people had only little time to do anything extra, outside their own work. All the resources were handed to survive from COVID-19 pandemic. This was as well the reason, why interview questions had to be sent via email. The number of the interviewees was 5 altogether, one of them was done via phone and one of the leaders did not answered to the questionnaire at all. The interviews were done in Finnish and afterwards questions (see Appendix 1 & 2) and the results were translated into English for the master's thesis.

The course of interviews

Firstly, a contact person from the company collected together contact information of the interviewees and sent it to the researcher. Then ready-made questionnaire was sent to the interviewees to their emails beforehand. In this way they had a chance to go it through firstly and if interview was done in the phone or in Microsoft Teams, they could give answers straightly based on how they had thought beforehand. If they just answered to the questionnaire via email, they still got a time to go it through first and answer in their own time so that the answers were wide enough. In this way, the research achieved valuable and important data. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018.)

The ready-made questionnaire was conducted with open-ended questions, which were expected to increase honest opinions, wide and real thoughts of the interviewees, and in this way, to get comprehensive views regarding the topic. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006.)

3.4 Data analysis and methods

Qualitative research is expected to explain meaningful actions. The purpose of researching real-life phenomena is done by collecting empirical data from real-life people. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006.) What comes to the qualitative research and how it explains real-life phenomena, it makes descriptive approach as it tells about a certain phenomenon and its characteristics. In this research, the goal is like that, the aim is to explain real-life phenomena with real people and their feelings and actions in the middle of the crisis. (Nassaji, 2015, 129.)

When doing qualitative research, it is important to find suitable methods to do the analysis. For this research, inductive approach is applied. It aims to proceed from details and tiny parts toward more general theory (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). In this case, the aim is to find out how different individuals from leadership aspect are dealing this situation with COVID-19 pandemic. Scaling up to wider perspective takes place when more and more leaders explain how they struggle and cope with the crisis. Making a synthesis of theory and empirical findings, lets us see what to expect in the future.

For this, open questions contribute well. Open-ended questions make wide answers and participants' own control possible. These also produce detailed and rich information responses, which creates more communication between interviewer and interviewee. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 8.) The lack of communication and good interview was the researchers fear in the virtual meetings and as well doing interviews only via email. Because the challenges due the COVID-19 restrictions to have a meeting with the interviewees. As well from the leader's aspect to find time for the meetings via virtual ways, email questionnaires needed to make and get interviews done in that way. Otherwise, interviews could not be done at all. Even though, questionnaires were good tool to apply, still these needed to be made with extra care. Choosing a right way to use words like for example 'how' and 'what', was important, because usually interviewees cannot answer to those questions only in words 'yes' and 'no', which do not produce enough material for research. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 6-7).

For this research and its analysis, it is used grounded theory method. According to earlier research, many qualitative studies analyze empirical part and then create theory from that data, its comparisons and classifications. In grounded theory, everything starts from the material, which is collected through different theoretical sources and is then combined with the empirical data. Other ways research remains detached from previous research. Even though using inductive approach here, also some features from abduction approach can be seen, while inductive and deductive approaches are mixed. In abductive approach, researcher has a main role but still it is acceptable that conclusions are drawn by utilizing theoretical elements. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006.)

3.5 Reliability and validity

Reliability assessment is a central part of the science and research works. There are some norms and values what research need to aim for, for example credibility of the research, honesty, accuracy and care of the researcher. These are part of the ethics

in the research. As for qualitative research and reliability and validity, some differences must be noticed, compare to quantitative research. In qualitative research, it is to be taken into consideration whether reliability and validity fit in the qualitative approach, and if they do, then how? (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018.) This must be reported as a part of the study.

Most of the time validity gets more attention in the qualitative research than reliability. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). It is because many researchers and methods books discuss how validity is adequate, for example as a part of evaluation criteria in qualitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2018, 4). Regarding validity, it concerns whether the study is made professionally and if the results and conclusions are drawn from data and theory in practice. Further, it defines tools for measuring, and whether the study and its instrument measure what these are supposed to measure. In the present study, validity can be evaluated by looking how well interviewees understand the interviewer's questions, do they do it in the similar way as interviewer had intended. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006.) During data gathering phase, researcher gave questionnaires to the interviewees beforehand. Interviewees had thus time to get familiar with the questions before interview. During the interviews, interviewer gave possibility to the interviewees to ask more questions about the questionnaire, if they needed, also as a part of email procedure. Further, after the answers were sent, they were asked, if something was still unclear or under consideration.

Considering reliability, not any specific way to evaluate reliability in the qualitative research exist but the research needs to be seen as a whole and must be evaluated in that way (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). The purpose of evaluating reliability, is to confirm that any other researcher can get similar results by repeating the study. The results should not be random, and it can be replicated with same results. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2018, 3-4.) In this research reliability is covered by transparency of the research. This is done for example by sharing all information regarding research process, like how interviews are done, and which reasons are behind how these have been carried out. Being as open as possible, ensures reliability of the research. One

factor is related to anonymity of the interviewees; they may answer to the questions with honesty.

COVID-19 pandemic brought some limitations to this study, for example prohibiting the researcher to see interviewees physically, in face-to-face interviews. Therefore, it was urgent to use online platforms, which made some challenges in interviewing situations. Only one of the interviewees had time for phone interview. It is understandable that using online platforms, giving trustworthy answers is more demanding. Online platforms and email questionnaires may produce different kind of data compared to face-to-face meeting. This creates challenges to an interviewer to create good questions, along which answers are rich enough and valid. Moreover, confidential aspect must be taken into consideration with online platforms. Interviewees need to feel safe to give and share confidential, real and honest information. For the case, the researcher informed interviewees many times regarding confidential matters, and that the data is treated with anonymity, for examples all emails were sent to individuals only, group email was not utilized.

The time allocated for interviews was quite short due to busy schedules but at the same it might have been long because all interviewees were allowed to take as much time as they wanted. In total, the time for answering to interview question was almost three weeks. Deeper analysis of the results, were then started straight away, moving toward analysis phase, when the replies had been got from the interviewees. As interview material was saved as online file, it was possible to go back to data whenever needed.

Unfortunately, one of the leaders did not answered to the questions, though much time was allocated to send the answers. One big problem was that the followers that were supposed to answer to their email questionnaire, did not answer at all. Therefore, the focus of the research had to be changed and followers' approach was left away from the study

4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This chapter introduces the results of the study.

Interview questionnaire consists of nineteen questions, which include topics around leadership, how the interviewees see themselves as leaders, information regarding the company, and how crisis situation is managed there. Finally, there are questions related to interaction between leaders and followers.

The questions were given in the same order to all interviewees. After the replies were sent back, all unnecessary parts were removed, and if same answers were given many times, they were analyzed only once. All of the answers are discussed in the same order here, as in the interview, but if there are questions, which belong to the same theme, these are discussed together.

4.1 Interview questionnaires for the leaders

Some questions were particularly drawn from theory base, the purpose of which was to link leadership theories with empirical findings. First five questions were general questions, related to leadership. How leaders see themselves and how they lead their followers? Further, there were some questions about changes in leadership and regarding leaders' behavior in COVID-19 pandemic, and whether these possible changes are negative or positive.

The questions from six to fourteen were focused on follower aspects, how they are leaded and if the leaders have been forced to give their followers lay-off papers or resigned them during the crisis? How do they have controlled their company and operations in the situation at hand? Have they changed something in their business processes, i.e., how do they work in the middle of pandemic?

Lastly, there were questions (from fifteen to nineteen) about the future. How do they have planned the future with COVID-19 pandemic and how do they see future in the

field where their company is operating, and how do they see their leadership in the future.

Leadership

The interviews started with the question regarding how leaders see themselves from leadership point of view. How do they describe their leadership behavior? These questions were expected to explain their reactions and action in the crisis situations.

It was interesting to find out that they had similarities regarding how they described themselves. They used for example adjectives such as “open”, “fair” and “clear” (leader) frequently. This might be interpreted so that leaders were same kind of people from their mindset. Those adjectives may also be seen as criteria for good leadership. Good leaders are seen as fair, open, leading with their own example, clear with their messages and as well comradely with an authority. One interviewee pointed out that he is a fair leader but that it is not the same than unbiased.

One of the interviewees has long work history as a leader, over thirty years, so he is very experienced. He explained that by himself in following way:

“You cannot be too satisfied to the situation that you are experienced leader. You need to develop yourself all the time, by reading, like for example books and different research literature. Developing yourself is the key to the successful leadership.” (A1)

He also thought that when seeing concepts as a wholeness it helps one to understand everything, and this was a common answer from other leaders, too. Almost all interviewees told that being clear and able to see wholeness is important for understanding. When a leader is clear, things become clear-minded to followers and to the whole company. Part of that is consistency in leading, organizing everything, making lists, and doing things task by tasks. This helps when things turn out to be in chaos and regarding crisis times. The key to success is rationally mindset.

“When you lead with rationally mindset, there is no need for stress and panicking when everything is done task by tasks.” (B2)

When leaders justified that one needs rational mindset for success in crisis time that might refer to decision-making when one should be able to see consequences for solutions taken. For these situations one needs to listen to professional followers and their opinions. Together with these professionals, who are hired to the company, one must make the decisions needed and to justify their goodness by using information received. One can work as an individual leader but being part of the team, which helps in decision-making is essential from the company point of view, and crucial part of crisis leadership.

Interviewees told that a leader must be a good listener; to be present and value other employees and their opinions. The same is true with communication for customers.

“Listening professionals who are working for you and in the organization is important, you can make the decisions individually on the basis of the information received.”

(C3)

Interviewees said that it is important to be friendly, but still have the authority in order to demand the followers to be solution-oriented and result-oriented in their work. Seeing the same goal and vision what leaders have set up is crucial. Thus, this is part of the leadership, i.e., to have goal-oriented mindset and capacity to work, goes hand-in-hand with strategical action.

Leaders also needed to think about their leadership behavior when the environment is under change. When they were asked if they have changed their leadership behavior during the crisis, and whether these possible changes have been good for their leadership or did any negative turned out, they reported some changes in their behavior.

Two interviewees' statements were rather similar. They told that during the crisis situation they had turned toward human leadership.

“I have not changed my leadership behavior that much. Still, I have tried to find out more how people arrange their life as a whole and understand that much more than before. Thus, I have aimed to be more human leader at this point.” (C3)

It is understandable and natural that people worry about the future in crisis situations, along COVID-19 pandemic and this has had an impact to the interviewees' behavior. So, they have felt empathy and showed attention and seen that people get fair and equal treatment. One of the interviewees said that to gain the calm atmosphere in the situation such as the crisis is, one as a leader needs to be more present, real, calm and coherent than earlier. The most important is to secure that the restrictions are followed at the workplace and to invest in security, like for example hygiene, reported one interviewee.

The interviewees told that they had gained positive feedback from their followers and other staff members and stakeholders during the pandemic; they are seen calm and coherent in their work field, which shows being model to other people. To conclude, calmness, caring and humanity are seen valuable. Still the work must be done successfully.

Times of crisis have challenged many people and given an opportunity to create new working habits and routines. Big part of that has been related to online tools, such as Microsoft Teams, and remote work in general. This was pointed out by all interviewees. They saw that remote work with online tools have become a routine and according to them, these new habits shall not disappear after COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, they reported also positive consequences of the pandemic. It seems that many new working tools and adopted practices are actually good and cost less than the practices and tools that were used before pandemic. So, both positive and negative effects were listed in the interviews. Lack of face-to-face meetings is example of the negative effects, as expected.

“I think when we do not meet each other, this makes us more emotionally poor. When we do not see each other, it is much harder to understand each other, because our face motions tell us more than words. Thus, overall interaction and

communication is harder at the moment. This also affect to the leadership, leading humans is harder, but leading things it is much easier.” (A1)

Further, one interviewee said that it is a pity not to see people’s reactions, even if these would-be negative ones. He thought that it is because of the pressure from COVID-19. Negative things that have popped up in the workplace and similarly those situations where manager level employees forget how to do a business and focus more on the people and how to protect them. Same effect regards when people have tried to get more freedom for themselves; one more problem for leaders to be solved.

Company operations and leading followers

Next questions in the interview focused on company’s operations and how the interviewees felt that they adapt leadership behavior with their followers. Part of the communication with followers is some kind of basic communication. Therefore, it is important to find out how interaction between leaders and followers has been during the crisis and whether it has changed somehow.

“Fun fact, even though we are divided to the different places and do not see each other that much as before this crisis, we actually communicate more at the moment.”

(E5)

The interviewees reported that they communicate with their followers as usual, but they use online tools for this. Thus, the situation has changed but still communication flows and is seen important. One of the most used online tools has been Microsoft Teams, which has been a tool for arranging meetings. Moreover, when they hire people, they do interviews with that tool. All of the interviewees said that they have used more Teams than other means. Therefore, screen time have grown a lot since pandemic and restrictions started. Phone calls and email have also been popular tools for keeping connection between leaders and followers. One of the interviewees said that leading has become as “email leading”, but she added that she tries to see her followers as much as she can.

“With masks on and keeping distance between, I tried to see my followers as much as I can.” (B2)

Masks and distances are also important when they try to have one-to-one meetings, almost all interviewees said that all situations are handled with care. Important way to keep connection are videos where information regarding company is mediated. Staff can reach this way their leaders, through intra network, although daily meetings are not possible.

For the question regarding, changes in their company operations, the interviewees told that no one of their staff members has been resigned or got an order of lay-off time. They have resolved economic problems by transferring people to other places and positions inside their organization.

“We have managed our operations to be like that every employee from the company get a job to do. Even the times are like this what we have now.” (B2)

The changes have mostly concerned restrictions and security, such as that one must keep distances between people and have masks on. These rules regard both staff members and customers. By these means they want to ensure that safety is ensured at work and from customer aspect. One important concern is hygiene, already in the normal circumstances what comes to the restaurant and hotel industry, but especially during pandemic.

Changes for the operations in the company level are those, which are unquestionable, and which must be done, like when to keeping restaurants open how to gain revenue; “take away” -culture has become more popular and important in a similar way than other restaurants in the industry have experienced pandemic. Further, work circulation between different industries in the big organization has become important, especially to avoid lay-offs and resigning staff. Having workplace somewhere in the organization even when one’s own workplace may be closed or have at least some work opportunities for all followers.

“Work cycles between different industries in organization level have become important. Different work for every follower, transferring them to different location and positions when we avoid lay-offs and resign situations.” (C3)

Still, even though the situation has been good from followers’ aspect, the losses have been enormous, and the industry suffers from pandemic. The interviewees reported that they must save money everywhere they can, and they try to find ways how to save money even more.

Leaders said that minimizing costs is the key in this situation where they do not get money that much from the sales, they try to minimize costs for example in marketing, purchases and HR. Biggest savings go to HR where there is a must to optimize right amount people at each shift; on right time and right place is the key to that. Big relief in the situation has been rent negotiations, which have saved money. For a company, which operates on many places, it is a big relief.

“Shift timetables have been organized more carefully in this moment. Trying to minimize costs and get to rent reliefs are important too.” (E5)

The interviewees also listed some positive acts. Circulating employees between various locations and positions inside the organization, has made some followers notice that they might work there later as well. Without COVID-19 these experiences had maybe not showed up. One interviewee said that they have earlier evidence, according to which their image got better due these chances. One interviewee looked forward to seeing their focus on staff and their well-being in this crisis handling to get attention also later and be awarded as commitment to the company. In the long run it might bring value for the company as a good employer.

The interviewees wanted to point out that crisis times unite people, at all levels. This has been seen in team spirit in the organization and its locations in the whole company, having spirit from war times when people are united, no matter what is their political or any other opinion. They wanted to emphasize that together people are stronger; it brings understanding toward others.

Positive effects are shown when people must learn to work in different locations in the company, which gives opportunities to the followers to earn money along extra hours from different locations. As knowledge and experience is gained, they can continue working like that. This provides different career paths as well and helps also management level employees to have more followers to do the same job if needed. At the same it means that leading will be easier from that aspect, when leaders have more opportunities to have people in the shift, for example if someone is sick.

Well-being of the leaders is under pressure during crisis; still the interviewees told they feel good. One interviewee told that working effectively is challenging but otherwise she has been satisfied. The fear whether work can continue causes worries and also brings new aspects to leading. Another interviewee told that the situation has given more work to do for everyone, which is stressful and makes workload enormous.

“I feel surprisingly professional and calm even though my responsibility is restaurant and hospitality industry in our whole company, and it has got a big hit from COVID-19. It has been dramatic times. I think also that why I feel so calm it is because this is not my fault or anyone else’s. That is the reason why I do not take this too personally and it does not go under to my skin.” (C3)

Citation above tells how one of the interviewees sees his leadership and how he still feels calmness and is stable. Almost all interviewees emphasized that the time has taught them in many ways and how to lead through the hard times, meeting many difficulties, such as high workload, worries of their job and regarding their followers, revenue and the lack of customers. Still, they have felt calmness in their work because it is the key to survive from the crisis. Panic and chaos would get this situation much harder, they said.

One thing what they have also noticed is the “COVID-19 tiredness” when people forget to act like they are expected to act, like following the rules and restrictions. They mentioned that it is good to be united and communicate a lot, do cooperation as a team; by these means one can survive. The interviewees themselves were also tired

for doing everything they could. They had adapted their leadership to the situation and for what is needed, they said.

Future of their business and leadership

Crisis times have made the leaders see the future of their operations as a part of their strategical leadership. One question in the interview handled future and the company's operations in the future. There exist many questions open for the future, like what comes to the work traveling, or to big and large meetings, conferences, and events, which employ us, noted one leader. She wants to believe that in future traveling will be possible although it will take time.

Another leader agreed with that statement. According to him, the company will survive from the crisis and get over it; the time what it takes is unknown but better times are ahead. Their plans are postponed but still, they aim to develop their services when these times are in the history, said one leader. Customers' needs will change due to COVID-19, which is the reason to develop their services and products, to meet the demands. People learn new habits, like buying online, and remote work becomes more important in future. One interviewee said that we are social "animals". We need to meet each other to fulfill that need. Maybe in Finland we go toward after-work culture in the future, similarly than American people do, noted one leader.

"When I see our company in this time, I believe in it. If I think other companies in the same industry, we are dealing this situation well." (E5)

What comes to their future, interviewees believed in that. They hope that when vaccinations are received and there is mass immunity toward the virus, their industry can arise from the big black hole, where they are now.

According to the interviewees, vaccination and mass immunity do not alone bring back old times but some sort of "new normal", which was one part of the research questions in the present study. For the interviewees, "new normal" means leading more carefully. The future will bring new challenges for them and their colleagues to get good results in their work. When companies are forced to ensure safe customer experiences, it is

expected to stay in the future too. Customers have become aware about it and they value even more cleaning and hygiene, says one interviewee, regarding the new normal. Other interviewees agreed with this statement.

“New normal means to me that hospitality industry does not go back to the same situation what it was before. For this reason, we need to focus more on the costs level because demand do not go back straight away. It takes time or it does not go back at the same level at all.” (C3)

Working in the situation where new normal has landed to the workplaces, means plenty remote work. Hybrid model will become more important, as the work is divided between the office and home. The companies need to take into consideration how large office spaces they are going to need, if people are doing much remote work, said one interviewee.

This is related to the next question, whether leading will be valid in same way as it is now. Interviewees were asked regarding leadership in the future; will it be changed or not. They agreed that they need to think more about their leading behavior in the future, to focus more to calmness and be coherent in their leadership. New ways are welcomed, but they still use those what they have aim to use the habits which they have learned earlier. New ways need to be adapted to the situation, where money-making is important after the crisis. It is therefore good not to take too big and many risks.

“To get good results from our operations we need to lead more carefully and tight. I do not see that it is wise to take many risks at the same time, but still as a leader I need to be brave enough and not to scare. I need to find out new chances now and later on.” (C3)

This time has been also learning time to the leaders and they have learned about themselves and their company. The interviewees have a long history in the leadership, and therefore they were asked to list the lessons learned and what kind of advices they could give to the future and future leaders.

For the future, one key element is planning. When everything is planned it is halfway there, also the crisis leadership. Seeing the risks, and making scenarios for crisis, one must they have a plan so that they are strong enough to handle those challenges, one interviewee said. Part of that crisis leadership is communication, communication between staff, customers, and stakeholders outside the company. Information about the situation needs to come regularly and if nothing is in the paper, then that is also communication, when you just say, “nothing to inform about at the moment”, one of the leaders listed.

For being a successful leader both in the normal times and during crisis times, basic element is calmness. With calm mentality, one can lead in a coherent way and organization keeps itself in working condition, even when the time is hard. If one plans everything well enough, it is easier to keep the calm mindset. Part of the planning is to share crisis responsibilities be clear enough to the other; to have clear notes and documentation, to demand this from one’s followers as well. Leadership needs to be well planned. If one needs to tighten the leadership rhythm with other leaders that should be fit to the situation. It is important to have trust between other leaders and followers. These examples were given by the interviewees for the future and for those leaders who might face crisis and who are forced therefore to adapt their leadership quickly to the abnormal situation.

“Remember to plan everything and go forward with strategic mindset too. For that planning, you need to make different scenarios and how to react to those immediately during crisis times. You need to remember that too, when sometimes decisions are forced to be done without good research beforehand, then take risks which have best fit with the strategy.” (E5)

5 DISCUSSION

Chapter five introduces discussion of the research and synthesizes theory and empirical findings. As qualitative approach study, the theoretical framework in the chapter 2, literature review, has already contributed to results. The empirical part was collected along four interviews, from leaders coming from the same company. The discussion is organized here according to research questions.

5.1 Discussion

The concept of leadership is complex to understand and explain. Like in the beginning of this master's thesis has been mentioned, for explaining what leadership actually is, there is not only one way to define it. Why is it like this? According to Harrison (2018) there are as many definitions as there are people who have tried to define it. This came out from the interviews too. Even though the research was small, comprising of four leaders with different kind of profiles in one company, the interviewees emphasized partly different attributes concerning leadership. Leaders seem yet to have similarities, although they are different kind of individuals who have adopted the leadership behavior in their work. It seems plausible that their backgrounds affect to their behavior.

The same notions were present in Sethuraman's and Suresh's study (2014) where they put it in simple way saying that a leader is a person who has one or more followers under his or her responsibility. Leaders need to guide those followers to achieve a goal, which is set by leaders and followers. They also noted that good and effective leaders are able to change their leadership behavior to fit in the situation what is ongoing in the moment. Supporting those followers in the way, which is needed is thus important and this is what was agreed in the interviews too. The interviewees listed what has been changed in their leadership, to fit their behavior in crisis circumstances. By doing so, they have seen it necessary to be friendly, calm and understandable to other, more during the crisis than under normal conditions, and give empathy to their followers, in the current situation.

It seems that a good leader mostly does not talk about him or herself in arrogant way, but a leader is expected to lead and guide followers by trusting that they do their jobs like they are supposed to do. Good leaders have emotions; they are not robots or any kind of machines, but they have feelings. A good leader should have knowledge gained through working career or education, how to lead other humans and how to be capable to achieve good results along that. This is what the interviewees told. Leaders are expected to lead their staff through difficulties and problems with knowledge, which is based on experience, they listen to their followers, and provide guidance by following principles of humanity.

The results in the present study follow the theoretical framework, given in the study, and are thus in line with the literature review. One question to be answered, was whether those leaders who had adopted 'good leadership' criteria, doing better in their work than other leaders behave during crises. One of the interviewees said that he is a strong leader in normal situation, and he is that in crisis situation, too. Still, he felt that there is a must to change one's way to lead, toward more human direction. The similar results and questions can be found both in theoretical introduction and empirical findings. Leaders need to change their leadership to adapt themselves into a new situation, which is hard for everyone. Good and effective leader sees leadership as a concept. Crisis leadership is another concept to be understand, otherwise leader might fail as a crisis leader. Even though the interviewees told that they have adapted new and different behavior as leaders, they still see themselves as solution-oriented and result-oriented leaders. They demand similar orientation from their followers as well, even in crisis situations. They try to be clear in what they do and say to their followers and see the goals toward which they aim to go, even when crises test them.

According to Haddon, Loughlin and McNally (2015), effective leader is a person who understands leadership as a concept. When business steps into the game, it is even more important to understand that. According to them, effective leaders themselves adapt to the situation, because crisis times differ from normal circumstances. Thus, in the time of troubles, effective and good leaders see their vision all the time, even if the situation is challenging. Miettinen (1998) and Myatt (2012) took a similar approach, according to them, adapting quickly to the change helps leaders to understand crisis

leadership and become effective crisis leaders. All interviewees answered to the question related to this, in a similar way. They said that being effective leader in the middle of crisis, means that one still sees the main goal, which concerns doing business. Being solution-oriented minded leader and doing everything in a coherent way, presupposes that one adapts to the situation. One must find ways to survive, such as selling food products from restaurants in “take away” –format. Giving quick tasks to the followers with clear message is part of being adapted in the situation.

Alvintzi and Eder (2010) have created a three-phase model for crisis leadership. When the crisis is still ongoing, leaders need to remember that they do business and be focused on that, in spite of the challenging times. For that, they recommended corporations to make a plan, which helps in crisis situations. Following the plan, corporations can better focus on their main activities, around their products or services, at the same time, when they try to manage the crisis in their operations.

So, a lot of adaptation is needed to be able to change and understand that money must come from the operations, and to try to avoid possible losses. All leaders must still be leaders for their followers. Kerfoot (1997) went through important features for good leadership. Leaders need to respect others and value them; humility is one part of that. The interviewees also noticed this in their answers. They told having changed their behavior toward more human leadership, like showing empathy and treating everyone in fair way. Still, one of the interviewees noted that fairness is necessary but that does not mean the same thing than unbiased. He argued that one may value others and treat them in fair way but if there is someone who is not doing his or her share, same treatment should not either be given to him or her. This supports also the theory what is written in the literature review, regarding IN- and OUT -teams in the context of LMX-theory.

In LMX-theory, IN- and OUT -teams relate to a situation, where leaders divide their followers to smaller groups, based on their behavior at the workplace and how they are oriented toward their work. Graen and Scandura (1987) discussed about this in their own research. When leaders sort their followers to these groups, sometimes they have not even noticed that they do so. This is understandable if followers act in the

way which makes them to fit in one of the groups, inner or outer. Thus, for a leader who thinks that all followers need to have fair treat, it is still may be understood that treatment is not similar. This principle is part of LMX-theory. If leaders sort their followers as a member of an inner or an outer group, they still need to treat them like they are expected to do and how it is defined according to principles of ethics, for example. In the theoretical framework, it was questioned, whether leaders should sort their followers to these groups according to their behavior, and what follows if they do so. None of the interviewees in the present study, did describe that they treated their followers differently; rather in opposite, that they had turned in their leadership toward more gentle direction; that they do not want to treat them badly but, to find compensatory work for everyone, no matter what their relationship is for them.

As a researcher, I see that it is not fair to treat followers differently, although it presumable is normal and common that leaders have followers who are closer to them than their co-workers. Further, COVID-19 pandemic is difficult to anyone, to the leaders, their followers and all employees, being in the new situation where many of us have never been. Hence, it is important to get to know how leaders treat their followers in the normal situation and during crises.

There is reason to consider whether LMX-theory includes a complex and unfair way to lead work organizations. Strengths related to LMX theory have been indicated, which show effectiveness in leadership, but criticisms need to be noted as well. LMX-theory is a robust explanatory theory, which has contributed to practical approach in leadership. What makes it effective? Probably it is caused by the role of communication in leadership, emphasized in LMX theory. By utilizing communication, leaders and their followers are able to develop their mutual relationships, and in this way, strengthen their interaction. (Juneja, 2021.)

According to Wang and Li (2018), leaders treat their followers differently and place them to the inner and outer groups, which may cause feelings between the followers and create bad spirit at the workplace that also might be harmful for the business operations. In the interviews of the present study, the leaders told that they want to have a good spirit in their workplaces and that they wanted to contribute to that with

their own actions, too. Hence, they did not see added value of LMX-theory in their own work, maybe with the exception of one interviewee who told that he wants to lead in fair way but that it does not mean similar treatment for everyone.

Along crisis, leaders may face challenges also for themselves as they must operate out of their own comfort zones. Juuti's (2018) notions regarding this are cited in the theory part. Leaders may feel anxious when being outside of their comfort zones; when work is not similar as it used to be, but good leaders deal with that. They cannot avoid or act toward ethical questions and norms, when leading other humans. For example, Fernandez and Shaw (2020) argued in their research that acting with calmness, courage and humility, leaders strengthen their existing relationships at the workplace, which in turn creates trust. By this means, they may gain engaged followers for themselves, if the followers feel that they have been treated well. In the interviews, similar observations were told. The interviewees listed several times that they try to act with a calm mindset, taking risks and making hard decisions, which proves their courage. Still, they felt that they lead their followers with empathy. In the theoretical framework, it was asked, whether good leaders survive better from crisis than any other leader does.

It is, further, important to remember that when leaders act equally towards their followers, they may gain engaged workforce. Accordingly, if leaders use LMX-theory principles in their leading behavior that might be harmful for their overall operations. When employees in outer teams are not satisfied at work, they still may be good employees; company loses them if they want to leave. When companies put their focus on hiring new workforce for the company, they want to have employees who will stay and grow in their skills. To achieve this, they need to be engaged to their work. DiGirolamo (2010) discussed about this, in his own article. It was argued that when people are satisfied at their work, they get engaged to their company; they do not drop out from there but stay in the company. For the engagement, they expect to be equally treated compared to other employees, to have motivation to stay there, which in turn creates satisfaction for them.

The interviewees wanted to point out that they have done a lot for their staff. They have avoided lay-offs and resigns to transfer followers to different location in their company operations. Trying to have work for everyone in the company was a goal, and they even have awarded the employees with bonus money. The interviewees hoped that these deeds indicate that they value their followers, which is expected to further to engage these followers to be part of the company in the future too. Nelson (2017) in his own article wanted to discuss about this, i.e., when one rewards the followers, trust is created between them, getting the followers engaged to the company, in long term afterwards. To conclude, investing to one's team and appreciating the followers is important. Supporting the team, creates effectiveness, and taking care of them and not blaming them. In this way, good leadership is showed, also as regards negative feedback and capability to grow with that criticism.

Regarding, company's image, it is important how stakeholders see companies. Interviewees told that they do all what they can for their followers and their actions and that this has been noticed; they have got good feedback regarding this. They hope that after the crisis is over, every stakeholder sees how leadership has taken place and credits it. Positive circumstances in their company come from the fact that it is large and operates in many locations and industries, which gives them opportunities to do their work well also during crises.

Crises are sometimes hard to go through. Part of the leadership, therefore, regards to planning and strategic thinking. Seeck (2009) argued that one of the most important parts in crisis leadership is planning that takes place beforehand when trying to figure out how to operate and at the same time follow the strategy. Similarly, Boin, Kuipers and Overdijk (2013) agreed that planning is big part of the risk and crisis leadership; it is almost most important part of it. According to the interviewees, one must learn from the crisis and prepare a plan for the upcoming times, for the case that something similar happens. Specific planning procedure for the worst-case scenarios is important. By utilizing these scenarios, the company is ready to meet crisis and capable to act in the way, which is best possible for the operations.

Following the same line, Alvintzi and Eder (2010) nominated crisis management handling phases as a part of the crisis management plan. They argued that most important part of the crisis management is to make a good strategical plan for the crisis situation. With a well-working plan many corporations can keep possible losses in minimum. The plan will help companies to survive from the crisis in every aspect and regarding all units and departments.

Boin, Kuipers and Overdijk (2013) found out that if leaders show stress and panic in the middle of crisis, it may cause harm for their image and also to their leadership. The leaders need to be calm to avoid that other stakeholders or followers do not get into panic. To have a stable atmosphere at the workplace, information can be shared in clear way while making decisions. Sometimes decisions need to be made without being able to prepare it beforehand. Then the leaders need to look decision-making, from strategy approach. This was indicated during the interviews. With rational mindset they can proceed task by task. Further, transparency is a key to clear leading. In the interviews, it was told that sending videos to the staff members, the leaders may tell where they stand at the moment, when crisis is still active. This also helps the leaders to create group energy between followers and the leaders. When people make a united team, they are stronger, which also motivates them. DiGirolamo (2010) emphasized this in his article as well.

In the interviews, it was told that leaders must communicate, especially in the middle of pandemic. During COVID-19 pandemic, people have not seen each other that much; then it is even more important to communicate. Communication made in clear way is part of the cooperation. The interviewees reported that they have done a lot of cooperation between various units of the company. In these situations, they communicate even more than under normal circumstances. Sometimes they are forced to do decisions within a short timeline. In these cases, they need to communicate with experts, regarding who is responsible in giving information. They decide this together and try to follow the strategy.

One essential example relating to communication and new ways of working regards to online environments and digitalization. By using digital tools, there is a chance to create

a “new normal”, also for the future work. The companies whose employees are traveling around the world, operate now in digital way. Many of them have realized how much it saves money, not to travel. It is more sustainable way to work and it also saves time. Being globally closer, such consequences coming from the digital tools, may create many opportunities.

Taub (2020) and Cherneski (2020) studied leadership during COVID-19 pandemic, from gender point of view. They argued that women led countries have done better during pandemics compared to other countries. They ended up to the conclusion that crisis leadership with feminine signs predicts better results versus to the leadership with masculinity signs. In the interviews, it was told that human leaders, who lead with empathy, humility and friendliness are needed during crises. These features are often associated more as feminine signs than masculine ones. One of the interviewees is a female. She pointed out that even though doing business in the middle of the pandemic, she still tries to focus on her followers and see them face-to-face as much as she can. This is because she wants to be present, listen to them and discuss with her followers. These are feminine signs in the leadership, showing their strengths, in the middle of crisis times.

As regarding criteria for good leadership and which attributes a leader needs to be successful in crisis situations, some features were nominated. Times of crisis show which leaders’ properties are generally valuable. Leaders should have ability to listen, his or her followers, other professionals, and based on that to make decisions needed, how to go forward from the situation and so. Listening and discussing is part of the overall communication, which is important as such. Leader’s gender is not too important if a leader is willing to learn. Still, for female leaders some advantages have been found regarding COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2 Answering to research questions

This master’s thesis aimed to study leadership in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic; how leaders adapt their behavior to the challenges met. Along the study process, the main research question was formed and two sub-questions to support the main

question were created. These help to gain deeper understanding for the topic and to build a line through the thesis work. Next, it is discussed how answers were found for these questions.

To answer to the main research question: How the COVID-19 pandemic has affected decisions and actions, that leaders have taken to support their follower's wellbeing and to be able to lead the company through crisis, in the field of Finnish hotel and restaurant industry?

There were not previous studies that had exactly focused on this specific question. Some studies regarding COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts in the world, had already been published similarly than studies from other pandemic situations, in the history, and leadership studies overall.

The challenge of the present study was to understand leadership, as a phenomenon and describe it because there is not coherent view in this. One challenge was to understand how COVID-19 pandemic has had impact to the economy and companies' operations around the world. Many kinds of leaders are responsible in the pandemic, and therefore, there are extra challenges to understand the phenomenon at hand. When crises occur, these are all unique processes and create different atmosphere to operate and work with. For example, pandemic differs in many ways from natural disasters, although both of these are some sort of crises.

Hence, some operations are different in various crises, but regarding crisis leadership behavior, there are similarities as well. When crisis happens, good leaders adapt quickly their leadership behavior to changing circumstances and fit their actions in the situation. Interviewees of this study have had long career in various leading roles in hospitality industry. During the crisis they have utilized these experiences on best way they can. Based on their expertise, they listed various signs on crisis and how they see their leadership in there. According to them, one must change behavior and see how things turn out, one should be prepared for crisis by education and planning procedures, which are the most important part of crisis leadership. Being prepared,

one is ready if something happens and it is easier to adapt to the situation then. Leadership is a continual learning process.

During crisis, leaders need to lead as they are used to do but also be prepared for changes, i.e., to fit themselves to the situation. When crises are in horizon, leaders need to act in calm manner, and no-show stress and panic, other way everything might could turn to be chaos and leading in the situation like that, were even more challenging. Therefore, it is important to work with rational mindset and do tasks one by one. Seeing wholeness, helps one to adapt behavior in the situation.

Along changes, leaders must stay in the same rhythm, maybe moving toward tighter direction. To succeed with that, leaders need to trust to their followers and professional experts and to other leaders with whom they cooperate. To be present, listen to others, and value their opinions, is what is needed but still leaders must make their own decisions based on professionals' information.

In crisis, leaders need also focus on new opportunities and find new ideas to develop with. In this way, they might adapt their leadership to be more innovative, when difficulties challenge them. At the moment, many of the leaders and companies have seen the opportunities of remote work, to be developed for future.

To answer the first sub research question: How the leaders see that behavior among to the followers, is it different than normal situation or same?

When this research started, the first idea was to interview also followers to get deeper understanding of leaders' behavior and leader-follower relationships. Unfortunately, data was not available for this. Therefore, the research has had its focus only at leaders' side.

Interviewees said that they try to keep their behavior as normal as possible, but still they have been forced to make it in some respects. One change made was to turn to be more human to see how staff members arrange their life. Therefore, they tried to show empathy and attention, to see that followers are fairly and equal treated in this

situation. There was still an option regarding followers who do not do their job as they are expected to. These followers could be treated differently, what is understandable.

Overall, they see their leading to be same kind of as it was earlier, but if they listen to their followers more and are present, they might lead following more human way, fitting better to the crisis situations. They try to keep their one-to-one meetings under secure protocols, having masks on and keeping distances, using often online tools and so on, to keep communication level up.

To answer the second sub research question: Do the leaders adapt their leadership style in crisis situations such as pandemic?

The interviewees have not changed too much their leadership ways. Yet, one interviewee said that he is a strong leader in normal times and now he tries to be more human leader, being present, realistic, calm and coherent. Most of the leaders said that they are normally coherent and real, but in these circumstances even more. Further, they added that now they have adopted “email leading” practice as a part of their leadership, due to circumstances.

Along pandemic, hygiene has become even more important in every part of their businesses as it used to be. Leaders need to ensure together with their followers that customers get safe experiences and service, and hygiene is part of that. This is also valid regarding followers’ own safety. Safe workplaces are wanted under the restrictions given and leaders have more work to be done to manage that with COVID-19 pandemic.

When leaders manage with crisis, they need to make hard decisions quicker, when crisis situation presupposes so. Usually, crisis escalate quickly to some point and therefore, leaders need to follow the same fast flow. This requires more courage from them than normal operations do. Making decisions quickly, they still need to think how the decisions affect in long-term timeline. Crisis leadership ends at some point. During when the crisis is still active, leaders and their staff should learn from the crisis and make plans for the future, for the case that something similar happens again.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter of this master's thesis concludes the whole research and presents practical implications. Then limitations of the results are pointed out and suggestions for the future research is introduced as well.

6.1 Conclusions

As the concept of leadership is a hard to define, one reason for this is that the context of environment must be connected to that. Good leaders presumable show some same features everywhere, and there are attributes that make them as good leaders, but still, education is necessary, and contexts may differ as well optional attributes for leaders. There are bad practices for those leaders who do not follow guidelines and cross ethical rules and norms. Sometimes leaders need to step outside of their own comfort zones, to be successful, but some criteria should be followed in all situations.

Crises make such situations when leaders are easily outside of their own comfort zones, but it is possible to be prepared for those situations. Crises are hard times for everybody, and crises challenge people. There are small crises and big crises, and transboundary crises which challenge the whole world at the same time. For those situations, the focus must be put on united forces, to be able to fight together. This is valid for every companies too, if their staff is unified, they are stronger. Leaders are key actors to manage those situations, because people look up to them; their orders are followed, and help is asked from them. This is the reason, why leaders need to lead with their own example.

As crises are different by their nature, there is need to be prepared for many kinds of situations. It has been argued that it had been possible to foresee COVID-19 pandemic. A good plan regarding how to get out of this situation might have been done beforehand. Planning is a key to everything. When people have a good plan and strategy what practices and principles to follow, the solutions are "half done". Thus, most important is to prepare any company or nation for crises by making a plan for this. Making scenarios and creating solutions for those is what one should have done.

Some industries are more vulnerable to the crises than others. This is the reason why especially some industries must focus on crisis management. For example, in this case, it is restaurant and hotel industry. It is vulnerable, because on the area there are many people working and acting together, and usually crises happen there where people gather together.

When crises occur, leaders need to act fast. Adapting quickly to the situation is important. Helping out one's followers with human leading mindset and making immediate decisions relating to company's operations are circumstances that often are present in crisis situations. When leaders stay calm and consistent in their work, they can survive from any crises together with their followers. With a good plan on hand and rational action procedure, even hard decisions can be made.

6.2 Practical implications

Even though the results of this study are quite limited and the whole research is small, the industry of hospitality is one of the biggest business areas around the world. Further, it is the branch that is most vulnerable what comes to the crises. The present study is therefore important.

Hospitality industries need to focus more on risk and crisis management and leadership. This is done along planning, which includes scenarios about crisis situations. As a part of that, roles need to be divided between leaders; how they act, and vice versa, if possible, crisis take place. These acts need to be rehearsed and modified, if there are needs for changes. It is also important to update the plans regularly. It seems that in the forthcoming times, we are even more vulnerable as we are now, what comes to the climate change and crisis related to that. Sustainable business becomes more and more important and along that, keeping crisis leadership plans updated. It is part of the sustainable work, at the same.

What comes to the leadership, overall leaders need to educate themselves continuously by reading and taking courses for good leadership practices. When times change, the leadership must change. Remote work has brought evidence, how work

can suddenly change during a crisis. At the same it shows to which direction work must be modified, to follow that trend, created by COVID-19 pandemic. Remote work is our future and that is also one thing that hospitality industry needs to take into consideration. It might mean that people do not travel any more as much as they did earlier because of their work. However, there might be more opportunities to develop leisure traveling. If people work from home, they presumably travel more at their free time.

Practical implications coming from this research indicate that risk management should be crucial part of every country's and company's processes. It seems that many countries and companies struggle, maybe it is because they did not have enough risk leadership and management in their operations. Further, one should take under consideration, how well staff members are educated for crises, which might affect companies' operations. Therefore, in the future, it would be really important to focus on education related to risks and crises. For this, planning is a key as well. To conclude, companies and countries need to focus on their risk and crisis management, which includes planning and planning includes education for the staff to be prepared for crises.

COVID-19 pandemic has changed consumers' way to act for example in buying habits. Under limited mobility and lockdowns, buying online has increased its volume. This is one example that needs to be taken under consideration in the companies when new businesses are developed. They must be developed in the way how consumers define it; their demands define needs for products and services. Thus, for the future studies, it was important to study how people act after COVID-19 pandemic regarding their consumption habits. Customer experience is valuable for any company. After crisis, companies need money to handle their losses. Therefore, it is crucial part of the business operations, and when developing their products and services. When "new normal" is here, people have changed and so are their needs. Consequently, leaders must notice what is in front of them and target their product development toward the future. Companies need university level students to help them to make visions regarding new ways to act and future research can make a good fit to these situations, when examining their operations.

Regarding societal implications, importance related to hygiene has grown through COVID-19 pandemic times. Is it something that stays? If it is, then companies must focus more on practices and knowledge around hygiene. Even though in the hospitality and restaurant industry that has already been important earlier, it might grow in its importance in future. Thus, there are many questions to be studied later. For the future studies it would be interesting to know to which direction changes go. In Finland, for example, food safety is well controlled by authorities and people who work around food. It is interesting to see which influences this pandemic has caused to food industry and whether there is something that must be changed in hospitality and restaurant industry. How do they need to change their instructions and educate their staff? To sum up, the leaders must see how things change. Along changes, their knowledge and experience improve that is already case regarding hygiene at pandemic times.

6.3 Limitations and future research

This master's thesis is just a scratch about leadership and leadership in crisis times. The study has some further limitations that should be taken into consideration while reading it. In total, there were only four participants in the study, though they were experts of the field and very competent persons to act as informants. Other replies were missing, as leaders and employees of the company did not answer to the interview questions in spite of requests. In qualitative approach, few informants can, yet provide rich information for a study.

With bigger amount of data, this research might have given somewhat different results, and these had probably been more elaborated with examples. It is also important to remember that all leaders come from hospitality and restaurant industry and this makes one more limitation for this research. When the interviewed leaders came from same company, being one of the biggest companies which operates in hospitality and restaurant industry in Finland, their position has to be seen suitable and relevant for the study. They also have many followers to lead, and a complex organization structure to take care of.

There are also limitations concerning the cultural context of the study. The participants come from Finland where cultural circumstances differ from other countries. The cultural explanations may have influence in how people react in crisis situations.

Further, as the aim of the study is complex and the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing and evolving daily, this may influence on how interpretations can be made on the base of the study. The crisis situation is still active, and the leaders continuously work with the problem. The real consequences of the crises can be reflected only after the situation is settled down and it is possible to see causes and results of it. Considering later studies after COVID-19, this research might provide some information and help the following researchers to understand leadership in the crisis situation.

As an interviewer and researcher, I am novice to do these kinds of projects and I am not experienced yet and that could have some impact to the research. Something important could be missing because I might not notice those things versus to the experienced researcher.

For future research, it would be interesting to study a similar topic but with more participants and wider research design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods in research. If possible, it was fruitful to have several participating countries in the same study. As the hospitality sector is big, and even bigger in some other countries than in Finland, economical variation that is dependent on tourism and hospitality would vary more, and therefore be an interesting factor.

For the future research, it was good to take followers' approach as a part of the research. That would make the research go deeper in the topic. Further, studying leaders coming from different industries, might draw a bigger picture how leaders adapt their leadership to the crisis times. Relating to timing, research might give more information regarding the time when COVID-19 pandemic is stable enough to let people "start normal life again"; to move how they want and allow companies some time for healing. That would be also the time where similar questions as here were repeated to see whether there are changes in these.

More research regarding crisis leadership is needed as well. There will be new crises coming in the future, because for example of climate change, which will also be a transboundary crisis, and it is already now and will be global threat and problem. For crisis leadership, crisis leaders and other development is needed, which need to be further researched. This topic is complex, and it is therefore hard to get specific and simple answers. Also, therefore, future research is important.

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APPENDICES

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Appendix 1. The interview questions for the leaders

1. What kind of leader you see yourself?
2. How about your leadership and leadership behavior, can you describe it?
3. Have you changed your leadership behavior now when it is COVID-19?
4. Have you felt that these differences in your leadership behavior in this situation have been positive ones?
5. How about negative differences then?
6. How you keep connected with your followers? Have that changed some way due to COVID-19?
7. What changes you and other management have done to the operations in this situation?
8. How you have minimized potential losses? Or have your operations got bigger in this situation?
9. How you and other management have resolved possible resigns and lay-offs? Have those been in normal level or maybe more than usual?
10. Do you see that situation with COVID-19 have done something good in your workplace?
11. If you answered “yes” or “no”, tell what are those things?
12. How about you as a leader, how you have felt your work in the middle of this situation with COVID-19?
13. Continue for the question number 12. How you have felt this situation as a personal and mentally?
14. Have you changed your way to do your work in individual and as well in the workplace? How?
15. How you see your company and its operations be in the future with COVID-19?
16. How about future in overall after COVID-19? Is the ‘new normal’ real and what that means to you?

17. When situation become to normal, are you continuing your leading behavior like it is now, or changing back to normal?
18. If you can give advices and lessons learned from this situation to the leaders, which could help them leading in the middle of crisis situation?
19. How about yourself, have you learned something crucial when thinking about future and what could be done different?

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Appendix 2. The interview questions for the followers

1. Have you been laid-off in the last year?
2. How would you describe the last year in mentally? Have you got help with your thoughts and help from your supervisor?
3. How you see your supervisor's leadership before COVID-19 and now in the middle of it? Whether it has changed or not?
4. Has your supervisor behaved differently towards you? If so, what is the difference?
5. Have you seen any difference in that how your supervisor treat you and your colleagues?
6. Have you got simple and clear guidance, information and answers in this situation from your supervisor/other management? Can you describe what kind of instructions those have been and if you see that there is something to fix, tell more.
7. Have you seen any positive changes in your work? Maybe in the way to do your work or something else? Tell more what changes.
8. Has your supervisor's leadership been better now or before the COVID-19?
9. How you see the future in your company, is there some permanent changes in the work behavior?
10. What else you would like to say about leadership and your work and employer during COVID-19 crisis?