‘TOUGH TIMES NEVER LAST,
TOUGH PEOPLE DO’

- ROBERT SCHULLER

Leading during Crisis

'In the face of one of the worst Healthcare and Economic Crisis…'

'Current economic slowdown unprecedented'

'Help school children continue their education during Covid-19'

'How to work from home, the right way' – BBC Worklife

…'schools tackling the crisis brilliantly'

➤ In the last few months, statements like these have been making headlines.

➤ We are in the midst of a crisis that none of us ever imagined!

➤ There are questions to which none of us have any answers, we don't have any resource bank that will tell us how to deal / overcome a crisis of this magnitude.

So, Now what ?
Let's begin by asking ourselves…

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A BOX OF SIMPLE, YET COMPLEX QUESTIONS

- *What do we do now?*

- *What is our biggest anxiety - Personal and Business?*

- *How can we use all our knowledge to manage, in these times?*

- *What have we already started doing – In work life and in our personal life?*

- *What adaptations have we made in all the roles that we play in life?*

- *Where do we stand now – Business status, Personal situations?*

- *What leadership challenges are we facing now?*

As a leader, in this unprecedented crisis, what you are doing now, will have a long standing impact on your Team and your Organization.

There may be things that you find easy and things that you find difficult. History has shown us that there are organizations that succeed during crisis as well.

Lets take a quick look at what kinds of organizations succeed. Organization that…

1. *Exhibit LEADERSHIP*

2. *Focus on CORE VALUES (Known and Shared)*

3. *RECOGNIZE Novel circumstances (Avoid routine thinking)*

4. *Have right STRUCTURES*

5. *Field right TEAMS*

6. *Use the PROBLEM SOLVING process*

7. *Create CONDITIONS for successful problem solving even under stress*

8. *Have the right WORKFLOW management process*

(Courtesy :Harvard Business School – Crisis Management)

➢ Different organizations are having different issues to deal with.

➢ There are competing and conflicting priorities, virtually no data or known facts.

➢ There are calls for decisions, questions are raised and tasks have to be done.

➢ Every one has to figure out in real time, under stress what will work!

➢ The challenge, therefore is to **balance Policy** and **People!**

➢ **Crisis Leadership** is characterised by **Rapid Innovation** whilst under stress – embedded in fear!

➢ Personal and Organization **Resilience** plays an important role in such situations.

➢ We are all confronting a **New Reality** in this **VUCA** environment!

(Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous)

A time to introspect and build for future readiness; Self and Team. Ask yourself...

❖ **What kind of leadership style will really help in these times?**

❖ **What is the impact of diversity in teams ?**

❖ **How can the 'ASK' principle be used to evaluate ?**
(Attitude, Skill and Knowledge)

❖ **What might be keeping your team from doing their best, during this crisis?**

❖ **What happens to speaking up, in the face of High Stakes and High Uncertainty ?**

❖ **How is failure viewed in my team, in my organization?**

We can start with people !

Some thoughts that keep people from doing their best :

- The 'What's in it for Me' question

- How will this lessen my anxiety ?

- What is the REAL challenge with my environment?

- People are not clear and teams may be working on cross purposes

- There could be lack of agreement but nobody raises a question? This is about Psychological safety!

How do we address these thoughts?

There can be many ways of working through these. Some that can be implemented easily are :

- Regular and honest communication
- Asking good questions – those that provide data for the way forward or insights. Somethings can miss our line of sight!
- We go back to the most important attribute of reminding ourselves of the Core Values. These are the most stable entities in these turbulent times.
- Revisiting and reorganizing the Goals and Priorities – Important to communicate the same to the teams as well
- Building and ensuring Psychological safety for the people
- Build Trust
- Three important words – Humility, Curiosity and Empathy can strengthen the team

The next thought – Is our Thinking Changing?

The crisis itself is unstructured! It is impacting the Economy of the whole world. Fixed Costs, Liquidity, Borrowing capability are only some of the issues that most organizations are grappling with.

Most decision makers think incrementally. Is that going to help us in this situation?

It is therefore important for us, to look at how is our thinking changing!

The call of the hour is to move from a **'Crisis Mode'** of thinking to a **'Plan Ahead'** mode of thinking, as no one knows when the crisis will end!

Many organizations are using Agile practices. The Agile Teams to navigate through the **Uncertainty (VUCA)** can be of immense help as we work on three important aspects :

1. Distributed Leadership

2. Being Directive about Process

3. Building Psychological Safety
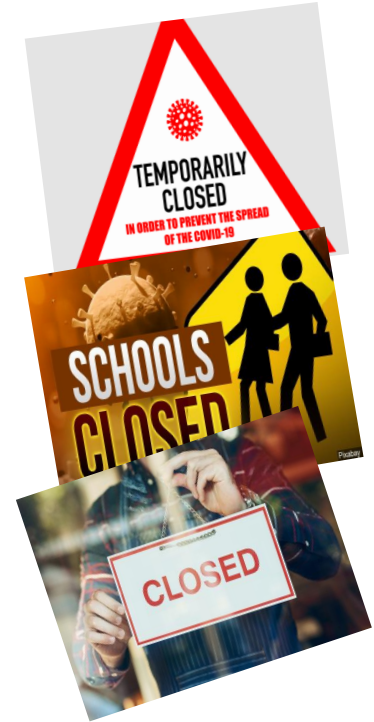
The Leadership style needs to be **Directive** – but about the **Process** not on the content; not until you have clear and correct information.

"How should we work?" , **"How should we progress?"** are questions that need to replace the "What exactly should we do?" . Offer questions and help teams.

The tool is to shift into an **EXPLORATORY** mode and not get caught in **Routine Thinking**!

- Being explicit,

- Assigning a Devil's Advocate - Wearing the Black Hat of the 6 Thinking Hats,

- Adopting a Joint Problem Solving Attitude,

- Create New Knowledge ,

- Seeking to understand…

       may give us way forwards in this VUCA environment!

Success in a Crisis depends on Innovation Logic. When compared with the Management Logic; which is used when all natural conditions prevail, we find that a lot has to do with the environment
In the organization. Lets take a look at both
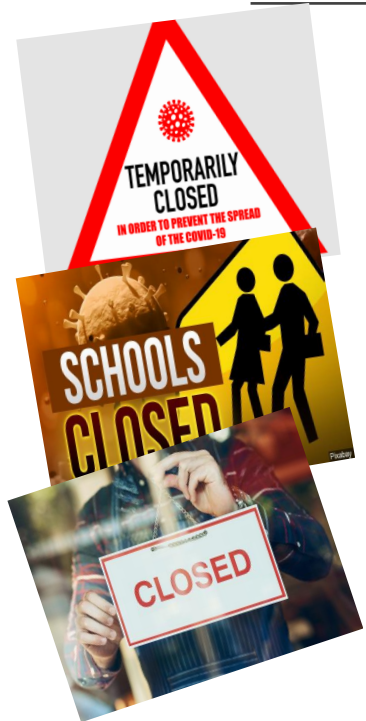
MANAGEMENT LOGIC

➢ Prescribe and Control

➢ Assume Predictability

➢ Simple Interdependency

➢ Emphasis on Efficiency

➢ Clear Shared criteria

➢ Hierarchical Monitoring and Support

INNOVATION LOGIC

➢ Enable and Learn

➢ Assume Uncertainty

➢ Complex Interdependency

➢ Emphasis on Experimentation

➢ Multiple Competing Criteria
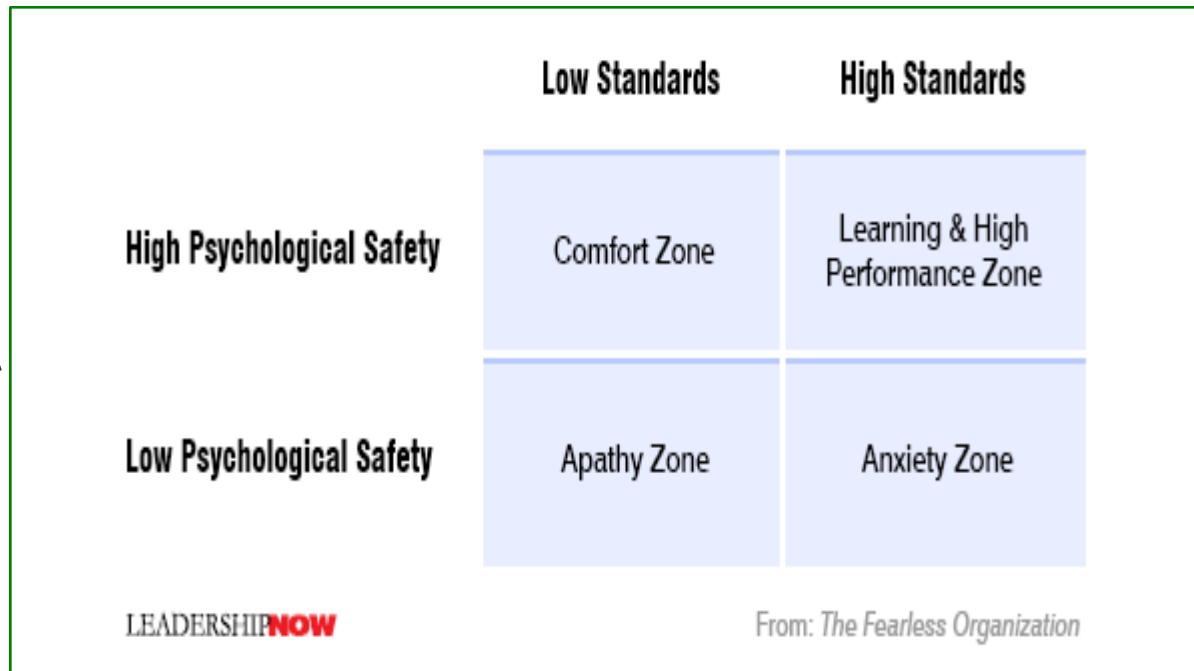
➢ Peer Monitoring and Support

(Courtesy :Harvard Business School – Crisis Management)

Psychological Safety – an Important element in Organization Culture Building

'Psychological safety enables candor and openness and, as such, thrives in an environment of mutual respect. It means that people believe they can—and must—be forthcoming at work.

In fact, psychological safety is conducive to setting ambitious goals and working toward them together. Psychological safety sets the stage for a more honest, more challenging, more collaborative, and thus also more effective work environment.'

(Source : the Fearless Organization by Amy Edmondson,HBS)

	Low Standards	High Standards
High Psychological Safety	Comfort Zone	Learning & High Performance Zone
Low Psychological Safety	Apathy Zone	Anxiety Zone

LEADERSHIP**NOW**

From: *The Fearless Organization*

In times of crisis, Leadership is needed in the **ANXIETY ZONE**.

A check point for you as a leader is to plot which quadrant is your Team in ?

How will you ensure that your teams move up to the Learning and High Performance zone

The Leader's Tool Kit for Building Psychological Safety

	1 Setting the Stage	2 Inviting Participation	3 Responding Productively
Leadership Tasks:	**Frame the Work** • Set expectations about failure, uncertainty, and interdependence to clarify the need for voice • Framing is ongoing process **Emphasize Purpose** • Identify what's at stake, why it matters, and for whom it matters	**Demonstrate Situational Humility** • Acknowledge gaps • Be inclusive **Practice Inquiry** • Ask good questions • Model intense listening **Set Up Structures and Processes** • Create forums for input • Provide guidelines for discussion	**Express Appreciation** • Listen • Acknowledge and thank **Destigmatize Failure** • Look forward • Offer help • Discuss, consider, and brainstorm next steps **Punish Clear Boundary Violations**
To Accomplish:	Shared expectations and meaning	Confidence that voice is welcome	Orientation toward continuous learning

LEADERSHIP**NOW**

From: *The Fearless Organization*

'Tough times never last, Tough people do' - Robert Schuller

A time for reflection will help as we believe that people will help themselves, others and businesses to sail through these tough time.
As a Human race we have had many forms of crisis and it is people who made the difference!

Fear that is shared is lessened!

Hence, the role that leaders play is to ensure authentic and clear **Communication,**
ask **Good Questions**, help build **Resilience**, build **Trust** and ensure **Psychological safety.**
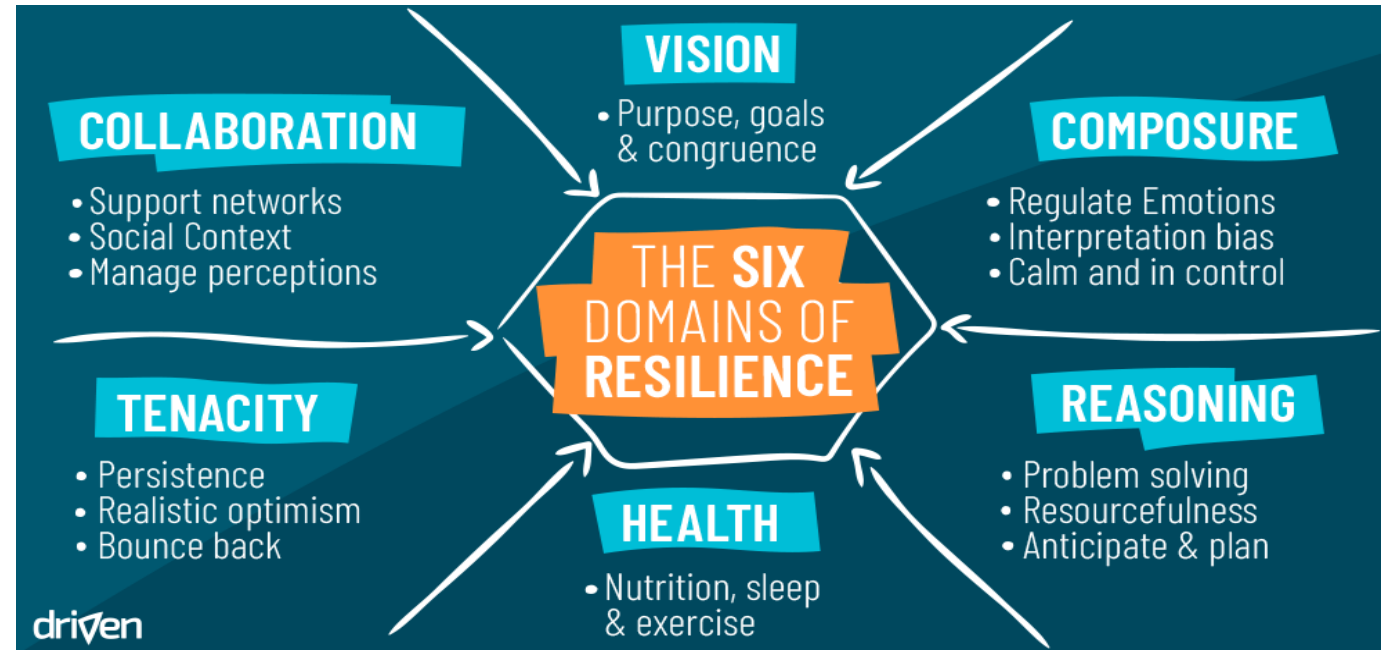
(Courtesy :DRIVEN)

"It's your reaction to adversity, not adversity itself that determines how your life's story will develop."
— Dieter F. Uchtdorf

I have used pointers from the Harvard Business School sessions I attended during this period. My insights from interactions with various groups from different client organizations, have been of great help in designing this article.

I look forward to your thoughts and suggestions.

Please write to me at Sanghamitra@i-expert.biz

Clocking over 23 years of work experience in the areas of IT, Sales and Operations, I chose to be in People development as a Coach and Facilitator. My interests are in Leadership coaching and Facilitating customised trainings.

I believe in and practice continuous learning. I am an avid reader and an amateur photographer.