

Chapter 3

The Rise of the Stress Arc: Managing Rapid Onset of Change (ROC) and VUCA Phenomena Through Efficacious Strategy

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ABSTRACT

To date, in the United States, and across the world, business leaders and their respective employees continue to struggle against the scope of pernicious disaster phenomena and invasive “black swan” events that have not only impacted their physical lives, but also their psychological health. This chapter looks at efficacious practices borrowed from the discipline of psychology and preventative programming measures from the world of healthcare which continuously practices for a variety of crisis-scale situations. As well, research herein will help deepen the understanding of VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) environments and the torrential onslaught of rapid onset of change (ROC) circumstances that often accompany crisis situations. The primary focus regards the Stress Arc as a tool with tremendous prospects for helping reorient leaders and employees during crises. And finally, a look at PPEs (psychological performance enhancement) and how they may shape the future when it comes to a crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Anatomy of a Crisis: VUCA, ROC and the Preeminence of COVID 19

According to research by Sun-Ju Kim (2021), a crisis or disaster is considered an impacting event that can have serious ramifications on the physical, social, and economic contextuality of a region. Discourses on disaster events often embody noted psychological and manifested behavioral reactions within the general public that additionally accompany such phenomena. The magnitude of peripheral effects can be felt in all margins of society, which notably include business and industry who must maintain operations during

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such extremes for vital items that may be needed by consumers (Morrish & Jones, 2020). Case in point, COVID-19 evidenced itself as a massively complex issue and phenomenon which produced the power to rapidly destabilize an entire array of economic infrastructure and social systems. Moreover, what has been shown true is that within all cases of crises events, there exist some strikingly similar universal cognitive and affective reactions witnessed in the “response behaviors” of leaders and employees, as well as the general public (Ahmadi et al., 2022).

Using COVID-19 and the pandemic as a motif throughout this chapter, the author seeks to deepen the reader’s understanding of the negative contributors to crisis-level situations such as those emerging from “VUCA inspired” events where *volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous* environments can become the harshest operational agitators for leaders and employees to work within. In addition, addressing the velocity of issues, or what is termed Rapid Onset of Change (ROC) circumstances, in which crisis-level events arise quickly, derailing employees and leaders, is yet another priority herein. As well, we will briefly lend to this picture, healthcare as an industry that proactively manages and dutifully prepares for impacts by adopting strong preventative programming measures relative to potential crisis-level situations. With a deepened understanding of such environmental agitators and a proactive example from industry, this chapter then shifts to a primary focus of examining the author’s suggested tool for leaders and their employees termed the “Stress Arc,” which is based on a survey of pivotal psychological strengths to help depict important psychological assets that can be positively modified and capitalized upon in any crisis event. And finally, the research herein will provide insights for leaders and their employees on how they can better operationalize core preventative measures that will help bolster resilience for future crisis-level issues that will most inevitably come.

BACKGROUND

The Emergence of ROC and VUCA Situations

The frequency and effect of crisis situations in the past few decades in fact, seems to have become ubiquitous. In research from Hajipour et al. (2021), they extend the term “crisis” that arises within organizations” as an anomaly with a low probability frequency of occurrence but with a powerful enough impact to threaten the stability of any organization. Additionally, they add that crisis within organizations is typically characterized by *ambiguity*, where decisions must be made quickly in the absence of details (Hajipour et al., 2021). This predominant *lack of preparedness* aspect for anomalous emergency events has, according to researchers Morrish and Jones (2020), compelled many agencies and business industries around the world to explore further global research on preparedness measures as a result of the recent comprehensive hazards experienced due to COVID-19 in an effort to mitigate risk, hasten recovery, and collectively create more resilient communities.

In fact, most of the prevalent studies to date have only truly considered what are termed “slow-onset” crisis events that have heretofore impacted business (Cole et al., 2021). Slow-onset crisis events refer to those situations where employees were, to an extent, forewarned of the impending circumstances before actual impact, allowing for measures to be enacted to help mitigate potential negative outcomes. Additionally, while there is a proliferation of studies on the effect of disasters with respect to property, life, communities, and the environment, much still remains unknown about business and industry practices with regard to effects on employee psychology and behaviors during “hard-change” encounters. This is

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