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A Crisis Should Not Be Wasted: A Phenomenological Study on How Female Leaders from Military Academic Institutions Find Common Ground During Crisis

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My mother Veronika and my son Alexander were the inspiration behind my research interest in female leadership during crisis.

My mother has been the greatest female role model in my life. She taught me how to be independent, manage challenges with patience and emotional intelligence, and set goals – all that made me the person I am today. I want to thank her for her unconditional love and support.

My son Alexander taught me to live life with enthusiasm, love life, and embrace challenges. Every night, he would ask me to read his favorite book, *What Do You Do With a Problem?* by Kobi Yamada: it said, "Every problem has an opportunity for something good. You just have to look for it." Our nightly joint reflections on the book inspired me to think and write about crisis management and how we approach challenges as humans. These conversations made me look at problems from a different perspective.

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Finally, and most importantly, I want to dedicate this dissertation to my father, Vasile Molodilo, in his loving memory. He was a rare father in a very male-dominated

culture that showed only unwavering support to his daughters and instilled a thirst for knowledge and growth in me and my little sister. He was immensely proud to know that I was on my journey to complete my EdD, even if he is no longer with me to see this process complete. I miss him every day and hope to see my son Alexander reflect his grandfather's faith in women and their abilities to see problems as opportunities to change the world for the better.

ABSTRACT

A Crisis Should Not Be Wasted: A Phenomenological Study on How Female Leaders from Military Academic Institutions Find Common Ground During Crisis

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Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the lived experience of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations.

Methodology: This phenomenological study identified and described how female mid-level leaders from Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center and Naval Postgraduate School found common ground during crisis. The population for this study includes all female leaders from military academic institutions in California, which is estimated at 60 to 100, of which 16 were sampled.

Findings: The findings from this research illustrate that female leaders found common ground when they (a) consistently listen to employees with an open heart; (b) engage in a clear and transparent communication; (c) create a psychological safe space for courageous conversations; (d) encourage employees to take ownership; (e) achieve the unity in efforts among the various stakeholders; (f) constantly invest in building and maintaining social relationships; (g) foster an organizational culture where the employees feel connected to the leader; (h) lead with an opportunity mindset; (i) adapt to crisis.

Conclusions: Based on the literature and findings of this study it is concluded that leaders: (a) intentionally create time and space for perspectives to be shared; (b) build trust when they model vulnerability and admit mistakes; (c) create systems to learn from past crises; (d) consistently encourage diversity of thoughts; (e) communicate broadly,

repeatedly, and through multiple means; (f) show their accessibility and openness; (g) take pre-crisis measures; (h) actively engage with all stakeholders.

Recommendations. Based on the findings and conclusions it is recommended that leaders: (a) prepare and conduct meetings that provide opportunities for all stakeholders to have a voice; (b) model vulnerability and fully embrace sharing challenges; (c) hold regular "design thinking" meetings; (d) regularly engage with their employees to connect; (e) annually conduct "Listening Tours" and learn how previous crises helped the organization to transform; (f) incorporate storytelling as a mean of sharing and learning from current/previous crises.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

When people are asked to name outstanding leaders from the military organization, rarely, if ever, do they name female leaders. Although more women now serve, the military remains a largely male-dominated profession, which colors its command-and-control leadership style. Jennifer is a female service member with over 10 years in the military. As an officer in the Army, an inevitable part Jennifer's military life was getting new leadership assignments every two years. She was first appointed as head of department at a Military Academy and later transferred to the policy department. The higher she climbed in her military career, the more evident became to her the challenges and limits women continue to confront in the military setting. Her story represents the leadership dilemma faced by many female leaders in the military field.

Like many female service members, Jennifer never had many female role models in her career, let alone leaders whose management style differed from the military's prevalent top-down decision-making. Jennifer has spent over 10 years in the military and recognizes the trend toward more balanced gender representation. However, it has also become clear to her that it has very little effect on the balance between men and women in positions of power, nor on the diversity of management styles deemed acceptable within the military structure.

Jennifer's own personal experience suggests that the current and most prevalent leadership style might not be the only effective approach. Very early on, her mother modeled a different way of making decisions and building consensus during crisis situations. She would manage work or family crises and conflict with patience and emotional intelligence. She would consider everyone's input and equity, ultimately

driving alignment to ensure that everyone bought in to the next steps. Her approach to defuse tension made a strong impression on Jennifer. As a result, Jennifer took this approach as her model, and over time it has proven successful in her professional career, including in the military.

Although building alliances and relationships from the ground up at times felt foreign in the military, as a senior leader in her organization, Jennifer continued to experiment and refine her leadership style over the course of her career. She would manage organizational challenges, internal crises and build a team culture where people shared ideas and discussed concerns openly without fear of repercussions. This practice enabled her colleagues to stress-test ideas, speak up and identify gaps so they could be addressed in a timely way to avert crisis. She relied on the idea of reciprocity, which meant that if she received help from someone, she would be inspired to give back, triggering a chain of communal support leading to a more equal and responsible workplace.

Stories like Jennifer's are quite common among female leaders, in that the higher they climb in their military career, the more evident it becomes how different their styles are versus what is expected of a leader. Many women in characteristically male-dominated environments are faced with the question of whether they must adopt the top-down approach, leave the military, or attempt to transform it; it appears that there is very little middle ground when it comes to crisis management in the military.

Jennifer's story represents the leadership dilemma faced by many women in male-dominated environments with traditional leadership approaches. Although the discrepancies in leadership styles between women and men in a still male-dominated

field persist, a trend toward a more gender balanced leadership style is having a noticeable effect; namely, more and more women today are showing determination to overcome these barriers and rise through the ranks. These active, inspiring female leaders remind us that it is possible to claim a seat at the table, create a successful personal image, make a crisis a positive phenomenon for their organizations and build common ground through passion and commitment.

Background

"In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity."

-Sun Tzu

Crisis and crisis management are common and unavoidable incidents in organizations. Recent events, such as the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic recession, highlighted the need for prompt decision-making and effective leadership, which according to some researchers (Brockner & James, 2008; Tibbo, 2016) are crucial during times of crisis. Researchers have indicated that women are preferred as leaders during a crisis (Adams et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2016).

Crises are always difficult to manage, but they also provide opportunities for new forms of cooperation and collaboration (R. R. Ulmer et al., 2007). No organizations are exempt from crises, whether facing external forces such as the current COVID-19 pandemic or internal situations such as employee misconduct or conflict with interest groups (Bailey & Breslin, 2021). Military educational institutions are also affected by a variety of organizational crises, and it is imperative to find positive ways to emerge from these difficult situations.

The background of this study examines and presents the history of crisis and crisis management (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). It also presents the role of leaders in building common ground during the crisis (Bolton, 2016; Tibbo, 2016) and having a crisis as opportunity mindset in dealing with conflicts (Brockner & James, 2008; R. R. Ulmer et al., 2007). This research also explored the role of female leaders in managing crises (Eagly et al., 1995) as well as their self-reported experiences in building common ground and identifying win-win solutions.

Crisis and Crisis Management in Organizations

Crises have been a part of human life from the ancient world to the 21st century. According to Zamoum and Gorpe (2018), modern crises are deeply rooted in history, and the study of crisis management should be a multidimensional analysis. Research from different fields has dedicated significant consideration to crises and crisis resolution, trying to comprehend why and how crises happen (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs & Holladay, 2002), as well as how organizations can manage crises to emerge from them successfully (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007; Hunter et al., 2016). However, despite such continued interest in crisis, the area of crisis management needs further research. According to Coombs (2014), a well-known researcher in crisis communication, crises and crisis management is a developing field that is still in its infancy in terms of research.

Literature on the topic of crisis itself is abundant; several notable authors have gone as far as to define the term organizational crisis. Although multiple definitions of organizational crisis exist, most researchers agree that these are unanticipated and disturbing events that can threaten an organization's effectiveness and interrupt the

normal operation of the organization (James et al., 2011). Coombs (1999) recommends identifying what type of crisis the organization is experiencing when managing a crisis because different crises require different responses. Lerbinger (1997) identified several types of organizational crises, one of them being natural disasters and pandemics. COVID-19 is a global pandemic that has affected not only businesses but organizations as well. Organizational dysfunctions—such as dysfunctional culture, workplace, or behavior—are also considered organizational crises (Seeger et al., 2003). In her article, "Crisis as Usual: Organizational Dysfunction and Public Relations," Astrid Kersten (2005) argued that an organization's behavior and internal culture also can generate crises, emphasizing that leaders must learn how to identify and manage them effectively. As evidenced by the many attempts to explain organizational crisis, there appears to be some general consensus on how organizational crisis is defined in published literature.

Crisis Management in Military Organizations

Military organizations are very specific with a unique culture that distinguishes them from the rest of the society. According to many researchers (i.e., Bucher, 2011; Hill et al., 2016; Soeters & Van Fenema, 2010), military culture is characterized as a masculine and high-stress culture that emphasizes values such as complete compliance, teamwork, and self-sacrifice. Yet, according to Soeters et al. (2006), military organizations are also exposed to different types of organizational crises, such as budget cuts, miscommunication, sexual harassment, etc. and leading them in a crisis can be extremely stressful. In spite of this, Gabrielli et al. (2019) compared military and civil organizations in managing crisis situations and concluded that military organizations have features that let them manage crises more effectively. Despite such a strong

conclusion, little other research has been conducted in this area. To date, just one case study was found of an Indonesian soldier during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami (Hidayat & Susetyo, 2017). Hidayat and Susetyo (2017) found that crisis situations require specific leadership traits that can be acquired through the right training and field experiences.

Crisis Leadership

Interest in crisis leadership has evolved in recent times and continues to gain interest. According to many researchers (Adams et al., 2009; Brockner & James, 2008; House & Shamir, 1993; Sommer et al., 2016; Tibbo, 2016) leaders are essential to the crisis management process. Although authors such as Adams et al. (2009) and Tibbo (2016) have published on the crisis management process, some researchers have extended crisis management process research to other related topics. For example, Brockner and James (2008) highlighted the importance of crisis handlers. The landscape of research on crisis leadership can be explored further in topics such as crisis leadership styles, contextualization of crisis leadership, crisis leadership and crisis management, female crisis leadership, etc.

Leadership and crisis management. Recently, researchers have started to link crisis management with leadership styles. Although a decade ago authors such as Kurt Lewin argued that the democratic leadership is the most effective leadership style (Burnes, 2004), more recently researchers such as Celik et al. (2016) considered that traditional leadership is not enough to manage a crisis effectively; consequently, they promote transformational leadership or adaptive leadership (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). For example, Sommer et al. (2016) conducted a study on 426 public health employees and 52 public health leaders during crisis situations and concluded that transformational

leaders were critical to the organization's success and helping employees dealing with the consequences of the crisis. In their earlier work, House and Shamir (1993) also confirmed that charismatic and transformational leadership are the best models to deal with the organizational crisis.-Researchers such as Bowles et al. (2017) determined that adaptive approaches are the best responses to uncertainty and suggest leaders and institutions to adapt.

Although authors such as Sommer et al. (2016) and House and Shamir (1993) have published on transformational leadership and its effectiveness during crisis, some researchers have extended leadership research and linked it to other dimensions. Bass and Bass (2009) connected leadership to "intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, individualized consideration and inspirational motivation" (p.248). Authors such as Bono and Judge (2004) and Simić (1998) talked about idealized influence in their work, finding a strong correlation between influence and trust.

Finding common ground during crisis. There is research emerging on how finding common ground is critical for leaders during a crisis. For example, Kapucu and Ustun (2018), Oppl and Stary (2019), and Bolton (2016) considered that leaders need to find common ground to enroll followers in processes of change. The common ground literature (Akiri, 2013; Hansen, 2009; Weisbord, 1992) found that the core competencies that leaders have in finding common ground during a crisis situation have a positive relationship with the effectiveness of crisis management.

Among sensemaking, emotional intelligence, problem solving, and ethics of leadership skills, leaders' competences such as communication, trust building, and collaboration skills have been found to be effective in crisis management. Researchers

such as Fernandez and Shaw (2020) found that trust building, collaboration, and shared leadership are the key factors to withstand times of crisis. Reynolds and Quinn (2008) also considered that good communication skills are a prerequisite for a crisis leader. Although the finding common ground key elements are beginning to trend in the literature, much is still unknown about how these elements affect crisis management.

Leadership in times of crisis at academic institutions. No organizations are exempt from crisis, whether caused by external forces such as the current COVID-19 pandemic or internal situations. Academic institutions are places where a variety of crises can take place and from which many lessons can be learned along the way. In the last few years, there has been growing interest among academic leaders in leadership and crisis management. In 2019, Kitamura found that trust building is a key element of leading during a crisis. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many authors have conducted research on academic leadership during the pandemic. Although authors such as Kitamura (2019), Fernandez and Shaw (2020), and Bolton (2016) have published on the academic leadership in a time of crisis, some researchers have extended the subject of leadership to gender and leadership.

Female leadership in crisis. The *female leadership* concept still represents an exception that is distinguished from leaders in general. According to Klenke (2004) context and gender provide the basis for which men and female structure their leadership models. The term female leadership is used in this research as a multifaceted concept including gender, context and culture of female leaders in military environment.

There are different opinions on who makes an effective leader during a crisis. Pearson and Sommer (2011) argued that in a crisis, effective leadership requires critical

thinking, use of creative ideas, and intuition. According to Hausmann and Güntürkün (1999), women demonstrate more of these qualities than men. In 2011, Ryan et al. conducted three studies that examined gender and leadership in successful and less successful companies, finding that women are preferred as leaders during crises and times of uncertainty.

Despite such an evident interest in the field of female leadership, research on female leadership best practices is minimal. In 2016, Leadership Quarterly published a special issue on gender and leadership where authors such as Eagly, Heilma, Callan, Adams, Murphy, and others provided important insights into female's leadership, claiming that gender and leadership effectiveness are still not fully understood, and more research is needed on the subject.

Female leadership in military academic institutions. Although there is a growing interest and trend in research on academic leadership and gender leadership during the crisis, there is little data on effective female leadership styles for responding to and managing crises in military academic institutions. To date, three key studies have been conducted. Godsey (2012) conducted a study on leadership gender differences in a military organization. Her study described several leadership styles of Air National Guard leaders. In 2019, Lewis looked more closely at female leadership identities at West Point and tried to identify leadership differences related to gender. A similar work was done by Castillo (2020) 1 year later; however, Castillo extended the work of Lewis and looked at gender-specific experiences of female leaders in gaining and keeping military leadership positions in a Texas military facility. As a result of the aforementioned gap in the literature, this research sought to understand and describe the lived experience of female

leaders who have succeeded in making a crisis a positive phenomenon for their organizations.

Statement of Research Problem

Despite the overwhelming amount of research on topics such as crisis management (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Hunter et al., 2016), crisis leadership (Celik et al., 2016; House & Shamir, 1993; Reynolds & Quinn, 2008), crisis in education (Arendt, 1954; Bailey & Breslin, 2021; Holcombe & Kezar, 2017), and women in leadership (Alan et al., 2019; Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Vasconcelos, 2018; Wille et al., 2018), little research continues to emerge at the intersection of these four topics. To date, three key studies have been conducted that point to an emerging need for further investigation.

First, Castillo (2020) conducted a study on female lived experiences in obtaining and keeping military leadership positions in a Texas military facility. This study also investigated their strategies for overcoming barriers that they might experience when pursuing a career advancement. She found that even though there are many challenges for female leaders in the military environment, there are also many opportunities that require strong cooperation between female and male colleagues. Castillo's work identified key challenges female leaders face, pointing to a need to investigate how female leaders break through these challenges. Although Castillo shares a few strategies, little is known about how these women find common ground during crisis situations.

Second, Lewis (2019) conducted a study on female leadership at West Point, a military academic institution. She discovered that women "had to develop a tougher skin to operate in this male-dominated environment" (p. 322). Her work on female's

leadership, while significant, does not venture into how these women manage organizational crises. Moreover, by elevating the need for understanding female leadership in the military, Lewis's work is seminal to future work on strategies female leaders may use, especially in crisis situations. Although Lewis highlighted the importance of developing a different mindset, some researchers have argued that women may need to deploy different leadership style in a male-dominated setting.

Third, Godsey (2012) conducted a study on leadership gender differences in the military organization. Her study described male and female leadership styles of Air National Guard leaders, concluding that there were few major stylistic differences between males and females in leadership style and that "mentoring future leaders regardless of gender is the most important aspect of leadership in today's military" (p. 8). It appears that there is growing interest in women leaders and their leadership styles. As this trend gains momentum, key elements of leadership appear to also grow in interest. One key element of leadership focuses on how leaders find common ground during crisis. To date, a few studies have been found on academic leadership in a time of crisis. Most of them research crises that are driven by external forces such as COVID-19 pandemic (Chanmugam, 2021; Claus, 2021; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Kaul, Shah, & El-Serag, 2020) or natural disasters (Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016; Kitamura, 2019; Potter, Pavlakis, & Roberts, 2021) and a few look at the organizational crises caused by internal factors. In 2019, Kitamura found that the social-political environment is a major factor in successful crisis leadership and management and that human safety and well-being were the priority for superintendents during their crisis leadership. Although this appears to be a landmark

study on crisis management, Kitamura's work was not conducted in the context of the military but school superintendents.

Research on topics such as strategies for female leaders for overcoming barriers in a male dominated environment (Castillo, 2020), female leadership identities in military academic institutions (Lewis, 2019), and leadership gender differences in the military organizations (Godsey, 2012) are emerging in the literature. Although there is a growing interest and trend in research on these three topics, what remains unknown is what lies at the intersection of these three topics. As such, the trend in the research, as evidenced by Castillo (2020), Lewis (2019) and Godsey (2012), coupled by Kitamura's work on crisis management, appears to point to a need for further investigation into the lived experience of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crises.

Conceptual Framework

This study does not use a theoretical framework, instead the researcher created a conceptual framework. Using a theoretical framework could have been dangerous for this study because it would have given the false perception that managing each crisis type requires the same leadership attributions. This conceptual framework was set up on specific ideas, such as Power's (2018) suggestion about the need for research on crisis management where competences such as building trust, shared understanding, and effective communication are critical for the leader. Those competencies leaders have utilized to manage effectively crisis are outlined within this study as approaches to find common ground. This study adopted a holistic view of organizational crisis management, exploring the common ground thinking. The following approaches form the structure of

this inquiry: (a) collaboration, (b) communication, and (c) trust building. These leadership competences are viewed within an organizational crisis environment.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the lived experience of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations.

Research Question

What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations?

Research Subquestions

Sub RQ 1: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in using communication to find common ground during crisis situations?

Sub RQ 2: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in using collaboration to find common ground during crisis situations?

Sub RQ 3: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in building trust to find common ground during crisis situations?

Significance of the Study

Although more women now serve, Waldrop (2016) argues that the military remains a largely male-dominated profession, which colors its command-and-control leadership style. Understanding how female leaders operate successfully within this environment is both a theoretical and practical imperative. This study investigates the

lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations and is meaningful in the following four ways.

First, this research contributes to the limited and insufficient literature regarding female leaders in the military environment and their leadership experiences, such as finding common ground during crisis situations. Although Kitamura (2019) conducted a study on academic leadership in a time of crisis in K-12 education, findings from this study will extend Kitamura's work in the context of the military environment. For example, Kitamura discovered that trust building is a key element of leading during crisis. Should this study find that female military leaders are more successful when they build trust with their team during a crisis, that finding will extend Kitamura's findings into the military setting.

The second reason why this study is significant relates to another finding from Kitamura, namely that superintendents prioritized staff well-being during their crisis leadership. Should this study find similar results for military female leadership styles during crises, these findings would extend Kitamura's finding regarding the importance of looking after staff's well-being in the military domain.

Third, this study extends the work of Ryan et al. (2011). Ryan et al. concluded that during periods of uncertainty, women tend to create environments in which people share opinions, communicate, and discuss concerns without fear of consequences. For example, if this study reveals that female leaders build trust with their team through the skills Ryan et al. outlined, such findings will extend the scope of Ryan et al.'s work into the military setting.

Furthermore, findings from this study will help front-line female leaders to learn from the experiences of women who have succeeded in spite of many barriers they confronted. Researchers such as Lewis (2019), Blackmore (2002), and Segal (2006) analyzed the barriers that prevent women from achieving high-level leadership positions. This study intends to shift the focus from the challenges that Lewis, Blackmore, and Segal identified to solutions for female military leaders. For example, should this study find that an emergency meeting that involves everyone on the team to *empty the cup* and check in on a personal level, a front-line female leader can immediately use that solution the next time a crisis occurs. Because these lived experiences are not yet documented, it is important to recover and record these experiences so that future generations of women aspiring to organizational leadership roles can learn from them.

Definitions

In this section, a list of terms is presented that are used throughout the dissertation. These terms are operationally defined according to how the terms are used in this study:

- *Adaptive Leadership:* The type of adjustment that happens when leaders and institutions are required to adapt to a totally changed setting (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). Field Manual (FM) 6-22, defines adaptive leadership (U.S. Army, 2019). It states that "when tasks are difficult, adaptive leaders identify and account for the capabilities of the team, noting that although some tasks are routine, others require leader clarification, and still others present new challenges" (p.8-3).
- *Common Ground:* Common ground is when all stakeholders collaborate and create a shared sense of accountability for the course and action of their

organization (Clark, 2020; Daft, 2012; Jacobsen, 2000; Stuart & Szeszeran, 2020).

- *Common Ground Approaches:* Competences leaders use to manage effectively crisis. The following approaches form the structure of this research: (a) trust building, (b) collaboration, and (c) communication.
- *Communication:* Ability to involve emotionally with the employees and engage the group in meaningful conversation, where members within the group need to feel that they can be heard and, more important, they need to hear one another.
- *Collaboration:* Engage all the parties in negotiation, create a level of mutual understanding between all the actors involved and establish shared meaning during crisis situations.
- *Crisis:* Experts in crises and crisis management agree that crisis characteristics are risk, ambiguity, and a sense of urgency (Boin et al., 2004; Leidner et al., 2009; Mitroff, 2004). It is a danger to the essential structures or the central values and norms of a social system, which requires making serious decisions (Hart et al., 1993).
- *Crisis Management:* Crisis management is the usage of different tactics intended to help an organization to emerge successfully from a negative event and reduce damage (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007a; Hunter et al., 2016; Kahn et al., 2013). Crisis management is one of the main functions of the leader; he or she needs to make immediate decisions in an uncertain environment.

- *Female leadership:* The term female leadership is used in this research as a multi-faced concept including gender, context and culture of female leaders in military environment.
- *Leader:* An individual exhibiting leadership.
- *Military Educational Institutions (MEIs):* MEIs include DoD colleges, universities, institutes, academies, or one of the Centers for Regional Security Studies offering academic instruction or training above the 12th grade (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020).
- *Military Culture:* Military culture is characterized as a masculine and high-stress culture that emphasizes values such as complete compliance, teamwork, and self-sacrifice (i.e., Bucher, 2011; Hill et al., 2016; Soeters & Van Fenema, 2010)
- *Military Leadership:* The U.S. Army (2019) defined military leadership as "the activity of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization. Leadership as an element of combat power, coupled with information, unifies the warfighting functions (movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, protection, and command and control). Leadership focuses and synchronizes organizations. Leaders inspire people to become energized and motivated to achieve desired outcomes" (pp. 1-3).
- *Organizational Crisis:* The term organizational crisis is often defined in the literature as critical, unwanted, and unexpected circumstances that may produce undesirable outcomes and are almost unmanageable (Boin, 2005; Dinkin, 2007). For this study, an organizational crisis is defined as any situation that is

unexpected, critical and asks for an immediate response; demands a non-typical intervention and is considered a threat to the effectiveness of the organization.

- *Professional Military Education (PME):* The term PME is used widely in the academic and military-professional literature (Ball, 1984; Barrett, 2009; Libel, 2020; Muth, 2011). For this research PME is defined as developing the talents and abilities of service members, officers or enlisted personnel, to increase their potential, build operational units, and to enhance their participation to the joint fight (Dempsey, 2013).
- *Sensemaking:* Sensemaking is "the process by which people construct a sense of shared meanings for the society and its key institutions" (Gephart, 1993, p. 1,469).
- *Trust building:* Trust building is to strengthen a climate of psychological safety where team members are allowed to make and correct their mistakes (Brower et al., 2000).

Delimitations

Delimitations are the "boundaries of the study" (Roberts & Hyatt, 2018, p.). This study investigates the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations. With approximately seven military academic schools in California, this study was delimited to 16 female leaders from two schools located in Monterey, California, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) and Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) based on the following criteria:

- Must be a woman;

- Must be a mid-level female leader working in one of the two military academic institutions (DLIFLC or NPS) in Monterey, California;
- Must hold a role with the title of dean or below in the academic functions of the schools, or director or below in the operational functions of the schools;
- Must have at least 3 years of experience serving in a leadership position.

Organization of the Study

This research looks at the role of female leaders in managing crises and describe their experiences in building common ground and identifying win-win solutions. This study is separated into five chapters. Chapter I provides an introduction of the research, background information, problem statement, the significance of the problem, definitions, and delimitations of the study. Chapter II reviewed the research related to background and history of crisis and crisis management, role of the leaders in building common ground during the crisis, and female leadership in crisis. Chapter III introduces the methodology applied to this research by describing the qualitative use of phenomenology to study the phenomenon accounting for female leaders' success in finding common ground during crises. Chapter III also examines the research design, population, sample, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, limitations to the study, and a summary of the chapter's main conclusions. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study, including a comprehensive analysis of the data. Chapter V interprets the received data and presents conclusions based on the examination of the data and proposed implications for actions and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review scholarly literature concerning organizational crisis management. The basis for this review is a widening gap between crisis management theory and crisis management best practices. Studying organizations that have proactively averted crises can assist organizational decision-makers in coping with crises. The core elements of this literature review include the organizational crisis in the military environment, women and crisis leadership, and building common ground within an organizational context.

This chapter begins with a historical overview of military institutions and places a strong emphasis on military education followed by an examination of the relationship between the military profession and professional military education. The next section focuses on leadership through the lenses of theory, contextualization of leadership, various leadership styles, and the role leadership plays in managing crises. The chapter continues with a comprehensive review of the concept of crisis and crisis management, looking at the best practices of crisis management within academic military institutions, along with challenges faced by female leaders in the military environment. The review of the literature includes a few seminal studies that explored the role female leaders play in crisis management.

Although there is a lot of research focused on crisis management, as presented in this chapter, it is primarily directed toward civilian organizations with a small percentage addressing military organizations, especially military academic institutions. Additionally, no studies on female leadership and crisis management in these institutions could be

identified; therefore, it is both essential and important to better comprehend female leadership in this environment.

Military Organizations

This study of crisis management and building common ground is situated in the context of military institutions. To better understand crisis management and leadership's role in building common ground in this sector, it is important to have better knowledge of this field. For this reason, this section addresses the culture of military organizations, which distinguishes them from the rest of the society. According to many researchers (i.e., Bucher, 2011; Hill et al., 2016; Soeters & Van Fenema, 2010), military culture is characterized as a masculine and high-stress culture that emphasizes values such as complete compliance, teamwork, and self-sacrifice. Lang (1965), for example, distinguished three main characteristics of military organizations. The first one is its communal life, meaning that in the military, personal life and army life are interconnected, work interconnects with every aspect of everyday life. Second, the military is hierarchal and bureaucratic. It is a top-down institution where everything is determined among military senior leadership. Third, military organizations emphasize discipline, obedience, the acceptance of authority and orders, and overt punishment in cases of disobedience.

When compared to their civilian counterparts, military organizations show a more rigid form of collective thinking than civilian organizations (Hasselbladh & Ydén, 2020). Their operating is based on the fixed modes that come from the military tendency to enforce order in uncertain situations. Yet, as mentioned by Soeters and Van Fenema (2010), a military organization has two faces: one that operates during crisis, conflict, and

war situations, and the other one that operates during peacetime. The authors argue that during peacetime these organizations operate more like a regular civilian organization. However, during the hot times militaries operate differently.

United States Armed Forces

Like any other organization, military organizations vary among nations. The armed forces in the United States of America have their own culture, language, and ways of operating. Military researchers such as Demchak (2018), Halvorson (2010), and Mansoor and Murray (2019) argue in order that to understand and work with military institutions, is imperative to have a general understanding of the institution and its priorities. First, it is imperative to know that the United States military is civilian controlled, and one of its main priorities is to make US military and the US federal government work more closely to prevent or reduce crisis and conflicts, build the capacities of government, and strengthen national security (V. K. Brooks et al., 1999; Cohen, 2001; Donnelly & Kagan, 2010; Kohn, 2002).

The literature on civil-military relations is abundant. Much of the literature on this subject (Desch, 2008; Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 2017) claims that disputes between civilian and military leaders are inevitable due to different experiences, interests, and viewpoints of the two sides. Until now, most discussions on civil-military relations were expressed based on the statements of Huntington (1957) and Janowitz's (2017) classical theories on the civil-military relations, which was re-explained after the end of the Cold War by presenting other aspects into the analysis, such as the results of reduction and professionalizing the military institution, the development of new risks and threats, and the reevaluation of armed forces' missions. More recently there has been a change in the

discourse, with military leadership talking about building unity and ensuring meaningful civil-military cooperation across all levels. As the Secretary of Defense stated in the Memorandum for all Department of Defense Employees (Austin, 2021), "working collaboratively together will ensure the greatest success in protecting and defending our Nation" (p. 3). In his paper "Building Trust: Civil-Military Behaviors for Effective National Security," Richard Kohn (2009) talks about the importance of building trust and enhancing civil-military relation for the state security. In order to do that, Owens (2012) suggested that both parties, civilians and the military, should reexamine their relationship; the military must present their views when it comes to strategy making and civilians need to accept the military instrument in the decision making and implementation process.

Another priority mentioned by the Secretary of Defense in his message to the US Armed Forces is to care for the people (Austin, 2021). According to him, the most critical resource the military has is people and the department needs to continue "to invest in training and education and create new opportunities for advancement for the total workforce—civilian and military" (p. 2). Researchers such as Guttieri (2006), R. Brooks (2007), and Fletcher (2009) argue that military training and education is crucial for U.S. military efficiency and effectiveness by promoting the defense transformation, and improving multi-service and multinational warfighting. According to the Professional Military Education Policy, Enclosure A (Joint Force 2030 OPT),

> the services, National Defense University and National Intelligence University provide professional military education (PME) to members of the US Armed Forces, international officers, eligible Government civilians, and other approved

> students. The goal is to develop expertise and knowledge appropriate to their grade, branch and occupational specialty. (Donnelly & Kagan, 2010, p. 1)

Military Education

The U.S. military has a well-established practice to rely on education in times of uncertainty to advance understanding of upcoming security threats, lead adaptation, and ensure readiness to face unknown challenges. As such, education is essential to the development of military capabilities (Abbe & Halpin, 2010; Kennedy, 2010; Kime & Anderson, 1997; Tipton, 2006; Veljovski & Dojchinovski, 2020). A definition of professional military education (PME) is important for this research. While the term PME is used extensively in the academic and military literature (Ball, 1984; Barrett, 2009; Libel, 2020; Muth, 2011), it has major flaws. First, the relationship between the PME and military profession has never been either distinctly stated or defined. Second, the term PME is often used inaccurately for example according to Nesbit's (2013) definition, military education is everything, from very specific job training to officer training, to traditional academic training within military academies. This researcher applied Dempsey's (2012) definition, which describes PME as "developing the talents and abilities of service members, officers or enlisted personnel, to maximize their potential, build effective units, and to optimize their contribution to the joint fight" (p. 4).

In the military, the ability and functioning of the group, rather than the individuals, is the final goal of military education. In this perspective, according to Tobias and Fletcher (2000), almost every training is intended to generate "successful—competent and proficient—collectives" (pp. iv-1). When discussing military education, it is important to differentiate between different levels of training. For example, General

Paul Gorman (as cited in Tobias & Fletcher, 2000) suggested a robust breakdown of military training. As shown in Table 1, Gorman's matrix separates military training into who benefits from the training (individual versus collective training) and the location of the training (in residences or in operational units). In particular, this research investigated the individual/residence type of training, a type of training "conducted by training organizations to develop individual skills and knowledge in formally convened centralized settings" (Tobias & Fletcher, 2000, pp. iv-1).

Table 1: Gorman's Matrix

Who Is Trained	Where Training Takes Place	
	Residence	Operational Units
Individuals	Training conducted by training organizations to develop individual skills and knowledge in formally convened centralized settings.	Training conducted by operational units to develop individual skills and knowledge in distributed settings
Collectives	Training to achieve crew, team, and unit performance standards in formally convened, centralized settings	Training to achieve crew, team, and unit performance standards in operational units and other distributed settings

Another typology is provided by Kümmel (2006), who identified four levels of training: higher-level PME, Command and Staff Courses, initial military training, and Officer Cadet Schools. Higher-level PME aims to develop strategic leaders and commanders, and soldiers. Command and Staff Courses offer superior education and training for mid-career personnel. Initial military training and Officer Cadet Schools are planned for civilians. Another typology identified in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Joint Professional Military Education Framework relates to the U.S. military. According to CJCS, the United States military education system includes five

levels associated to five stages of a military service member's career. The first stage is the precomissioning stage. Precommissioning education prepares officer candidates to become commissioned officers. The curriculum is oriented to provide candidates with a basic foundation in the U.S. defense organization and their selected Military Service, as well as a basis in leadership, civil-military relations, management, history, international relations, ethics, culture, and other subjects necessary to prepare them to serve as commissioned officers. The next stage helps the service member to become a commissioned officer. This training is conducted most of the time at the service member branch or staff specialty schools. Intermediate-level education trains the service members at the operational and tactical levels. The senior program offers studies at the strategic level, they also study diplomacy and strategic communication. The final phase is the CAPSTONE course for all General Officers and Field Officers.

Although research has been published on military education at different levels, civil military relations in the professional educational environment was another topic extensively discussed by the military scholars. Researchers such as Bruneau and Tollefson (2009), Samaan (2018), Snider et al. (2001), and Hart (2013) conducted in-depth discussions of civil military dysfunctions and challenges, opting for a renegotiation of a civil-military relations in PME. Despite the ineffective civil-military discourse pointed out by these researchers, academics such as Mukherjee (2018) consider that military education mainly benefits from a civil-military partnership and both civilians and military should continue to engage in more civil-military exchanges, especially when it comes to PME. Nowadays most of the U.S. military academic institutions are staffed mainly by civilians and have both civilian and military leadership. According to Keller et

al. (2013), who looked in depth at the civil-military relations at the United States Air Force Academy, the civilian leadership at the military academic institutions makes these institutions more successful. A good example of effective civil-military relations in the academic military environment can be found in two institutions that are located in California, Monterey: the NPS and DLIFLC.

Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey (NPS)[1] is a model of civilian-military leadership in a military academic institution, operated mainly by civilians. Guttieri (2006) considers that now, with the level of education that NPS or other U.S. military academic institutions offer, "the typical officer has progressed from combat leader to managerial technician, and now to 'the soldier-scholar'" (p. 342).

The DLIFLC[2] is another example of an effective civilian-military interaction. According to the DLIFLC website (https://www.dliflc.edu/), this institution is a "multi-service school for active and reserve components, foreign military students, and civilian personnel working in the federal government and various law enforcement agencies." DLIFLC is the main Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) foreign language school. DLIFLC delivers linguistic education to approximately 2,500 students annually in eight language schools and 16 dialects. DLIFLC is also staffed largely by civilian academics. Academic instruction is overseen by the Deans and Associate Deans

[1] NPS is a graduate university offering master's and doctoral degrees in more than 70 fields of study to the U.S. Armed Forces, DOD civilians and international partners. NPS has been the nation's premier provider of Homeland Security graduate and executive level education since 2002.

[2] The DLIFLC has a total of eight undergraduate education schools, some of which teach multiple languages. Additionally, there are half a dozen organizations and divisions which support the ongoing undergraduate and continuing education programs. The present facilities at the Presidio of Monterey accommodate approximately 2,500 Soldiers, Marines, Sailors and Airmen, as well as select Department of Defense and State members. DLIFLC is a federal government institution whose vision and mission statements indicate a vibrant academic environment that blends many different cultures, including the military culture, where innovation and progress are held in high regard. It is also an environment with a bureaucratic infrastructure with multiple guidelines, rules and procedures that support its functioning.

and an academic faculty of close to 300. Deans and Associate Deans, with the support of Language Chairpersons, oversee the academic and administrative parts of foreign language training.

Such examples of effective civil-military relationships, like NPS and DLIFLC, confuse the conventional hypothesis of a strong distinction between the military and civilian domains that Samuel Huntington considered fundamental to secure civil military relations previously but may be desirable today. These two examples show that current PME paradigms and related understandings of leadership are critical for an effective and efficient military academic organization.

Leadership

Whether in peace or war, a leader's role is crucial. Leaders are instrumental in shaping the destiny of their institutions through their actions, tactics, decisions, and impact on others. This approach has been shared by many scholars across multiple disciplinary fields (Johnson, 1998; Van Vugt et al., 2008; Worline & Dutton, 2017). Literature on leadership has observed a huge expansion over the last decade, advancing the leadership field.

Leadership models. The subject of leadership and leadership management is complex and multidimensional. Dinh et al. (2014) analyzed leadership theory across main publications such as *Journal of Management*, *Organizational Behavior*, *The Leadership Quarterly*, *Human Decision Processes*, etc., concluding that about 66 different leadership theory domains exist now. These researchers tried to determine the characteristics and styles of leadership that have led to different theories and leadership models. According to the participants, transformational leadership and charismatic leadership are the most

researched by the scholars in the new millennium (see Barling et al., 2000; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Farahnak et al., 2020).

Transformational leadership. The concept of transformational leadership is one of the most popular approaches to comprehend leader effectiveness. According to Bass (1985) it focuses on social values and help followers to attain unexpected goals (Antonakis et al., 2003). Despite a great interest in the topic of transformational leadership, there are also researchers (Asbari et al., 2020; Hay, 2006; Stone et al., 2004) who offer criticism on transformational leadership style. According to the participants, this style is not relevant to the increasing complexity of today's organizational environment. As Stone et al. (2004) observed, transformational leaders can influence followers, who offer them respect and trust. As a result, Hall et al. (2002) argued that transformational leadership "has potential for the abuse of power" (p. 2). In contrast, scholars such as Judge et al. (2006) still consider this style to be the most relevant one; however, it is recommended that more rigorous research be conducted on transformational leadership.

Adaptive leadership. Some researchers suggest adaptive leadership as the middle ground model. For example, Heifetz and Laurie (2001) consider that today's organizations face "adaptive challenges" (p. 38) such as changes in technology, societies, markets, customers, etc. We see adaptive challenges everywhere – when organizations restructure, when there is a need to implement different operations or strategies, even when functional teams suddenly become dysfunctional. According to Heifetz and Laurie, adaptive challenges are "systemic problems with no ready answers" (p.124). For example, more recently the COVID-19 pandemic considerably increased the complexity

organizations are facing. Pandemic circumstances have led to substantial uncertainty about what solutions might be successful. For example, Mumford et al. (2000) considered that due to the complexity, the challenges may be difficult to solve with the expertise and abilities that now exist within an organization. As such, compound issues do not offer easy solutions. It is necessary to reflect how to find new methods and approaches. Researchers such as Bowles et al. (2017) and Taylor (2019) have promoted adaptive approaches as a reaction to crisis. The adaptive leadership concept was introduced in 1997 by Ronald Heifetz and Donald Laurie. The authors introduced the breakthrough concept of adaptive change—"the sort of change that occurs when people and organizations are forced to adjust to a radically altered environment" (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997, p.124).

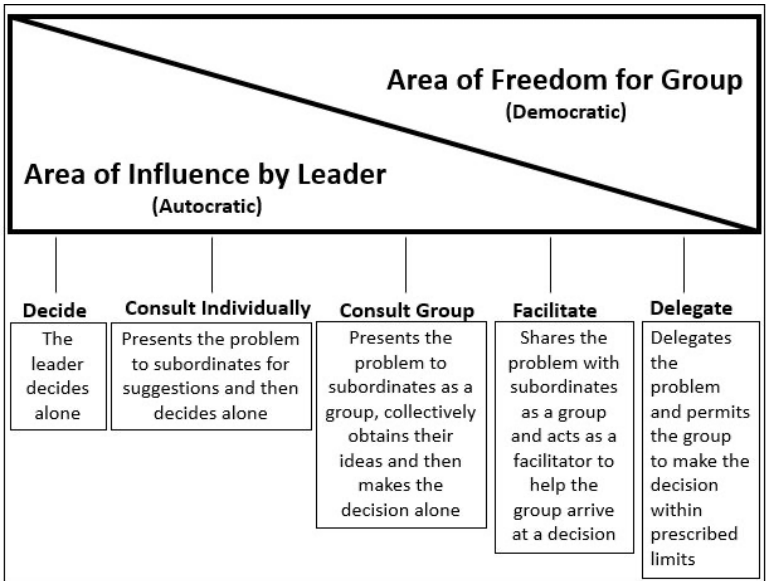
For example, the military in the U.S. has systematically developed more adaptive ways of operating. Most of the time, armed forces are associated with a very rigid organization; however, when on the frontline they immediately recognize when they must move outside of the procedures and rules and adapt to the context-specific situation. The U.S. Army, in the Field Manual (FM) 6-22, provides a definition for adaptive leadership (U.S. Army, 2019). It states that "when tasks are difficult, adaptive leaders identify and account for the capabilities of the team, noting that although some tasks are routine, others require leader clarification, and still others present new challenges" (p.6-22). So, although the military environment may not seem to be a place where leaders from other fields could learn, it may be productive to learn for the complexity and adaptability the military organizations are experiencing.

Modern organizations experience new challenges that demand far more complex strategies than traditional leadership models can provide. Back in 1958, Tannenbaum and Schmidt argued that many leadership classifications exist; however, leadership practices in reality are somewhere between autocratic and democratic. The authors propose the leadership continuum theory that looks at different leadership models, arguing that the actual leadership styles practiced in most organizations lie somewhere between those models. Decision-makers need to choose to most appropriate style based on all the factors and context. This research explored different leadership styles that academic leaders in the military context could consider during times of organizational crisis. It investigated best practices academic leaders could adopt when leading an organization during times of uncertainty.

Leadership Traits and Decision Making

The second most researched leadership category according to Dinh et al. (2014) is leadership decision making and leaders' traits. For example, Vroom and Yetton (1973) explored differences in leadership styles and argued that the best way to decide on a style is to base the decision on the current context and not the personal skills and style of the leader. Vroom went even further in his research and wrote an article in 2003 about educating managers for decision making and leadership. In that article he suggests the contingency model, a model that he developed with Phillip Yetton in 2000 and that involves five levels of participation (Vroom, 2003). Yetton's contingency model helps leaders to understand which styles will be most effective in different situations. This model serves as a guide for leaders in decision making process, using the table leaders can decide how participative they should be given decision environment characteristics.

Figure 1: Vroom-Yetton-Jago model: Five Leader Decision Styles



Note. Adapted from "Leadership and the Decision Making Process," by V. H. Vroom, 2000, Organizational Dynamics, 28(4), 82-94. Copyright 2000 by the author.

Other scholars such as Briggs and Little (2008), Bass (1990), Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), Germain (2012), and Hogan et al. (1994) do consider that the leaders' traits and personal skills play a big role in the decision-making process. The studies of these scholars shared a common feature; namely, they found that collaboration and communication skills are critical in the decision-making process. Researchers such as Beers et al. (2006) argued that finding or building common ground is another skill that a leader needs to have when dealing with complex organizational problems. By negotiating common ground, the leader facilitates knowledge sharing across perspectives, allowing team members to share experience and create new knowledge that clearly influences decision making.

Despite such a huge interest in this area, some researchers argue that there are clear weaknesses in the trait-based theory. This can be explained by the fact that leadership skills only occur when a chance for leadership occurs, such as a crisis, or

uncertainty. For example, Cohen (2019) argued that it is also setting-dependent; in some contexts, men and women can be similarly successful in leadership positions, but there are also contexts in which women seem to be better leaders than men.

Understanding Leadership in the Military Context

As suggested by Cohen (2019) and Vroom (2000), understanding the context is critical for effective leadership. Although many aspects of management and leadership are common to most organizations, corporate, military, and academic institutions face different challenges and obstacles. This research looked at leadership only from military and academic perspectives. Leadership is considered extremely important in the military sector. According to several researchers (Price, 1996; Reiter & Wagstaff, 2018; Taylor, 2015), leadership is the key to success both in peace and war and critical to victory.

Military Context. In its 2019 publication *ADP 6-22: Army: Leadership and the Profession*, the U.S. Army defined leadership as:

> the activity of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization. Leadership as an element of combat power, coupled with information, unifies the warfighting functions (movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, protection, and command and control). Leadership focuses and synchronizes organizations. Leaders inspire people to become energized and motivated to achieve desired outcomes. (pp. 1-3)

This definition promotes the traditional leadership model in the military. Although this approach was used for centuries and is considered to be effective, some researchers in the field argue that this approach to leadership needs to be expanded. Kowtha et al. (2001)

consider that a continuing relationship based on authority exacerbates the uncertainty and makes it more difficult to lead during the uncertain times. Stănciulescu and Beldiman (2019) opt for *charismatic leadership*; according to them this type of leadership is key for an effective and efficient military organization. According to the participants, charismatic leaders prioritize shared identity, common goals, and lead by example, inspiring others to follow them. A group of researchers from Spain (Moreno et al., 2021) conducted an empirical study based on a sample of 384 military personnel on new leadership styles in the Spanish military and found that servant leadership style is the most efficient style in the military. According to the results of the study, new leadership styles such as servant leadership can increase engagement in the military context. The Army Research Institute (Hinds & Steele, 2012) also conducted a study on different leadership styles and concluded that the transformational leadership style is more effective than styles that rely heavily on transactional or management-by-exception qualities.

Researchers also discuss the personal skills of military leaders. For example, W. F. Ulmer (2005) argued that the culture of the military continues to place even more emphasis on the personal character of the leader rather than on personal expertise, which is why trustworthiness remains the main skill of an effective leader. According to W. F. Ulmer (2010), a good military leader is one who cultivates trust and commitment to institutional values, builds and motivates teams, sets the example, explains objectives, inspires confidence, and justifies the sacrifice.

Another skill that the military needs to have is the ability to face new challenges and adapt easily to new circumstances. Today's leaders are challenged to find solutions during times of uncertainty; their main goal is to find the best positive outcomes. The

diversity of problems faced by 21st century U.S. military leadership charged with shaping organizational culture and climate affect military and civilian personnel across all ranks and at all levels. The military expects that they will need to innovate quickly in uncertain and complex environments. According to military experts, militaries soon will need to address a diverse set of challenges, such as destructive workplace behaviors (Anderson, 2019; Stuart & Szeszeran, 2020; Warner & Armstrong, 2020), mental health issues (Langston et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2015), and changing force demographics, such as generation and gender (Hill et al., 2016; Leuprecht, 2020; Pinch et al., 2004; Ziff & Garland-Jackson, 2020).

According to Dunn et al. (2019), adaptive practices are best suited for today's challenges. The new adaptive approach is efficient in dealing with complexity, unpredictability, and change. Adaptive leaders pursue to activate information rapidly, are reactive, and want to empower their team members to act. As a result, an adaptive organization can respond swiftly to rapidly changing opportunities and difficulties whenever changes happen.

Gender and Leadership

Another trend in leadership research is gender and leadership. It should be mentioned that when it comes to gender differences in leadership styles, conclusions are ambiguous. Some researchers do support the argument that there are major differences among genders in leadership styles. For example, some of the studies (Amponsah & Asamani, 2015; Dastane, 2020; Lee & Park, 2020) have investigated the relationship between leaders' gender and their desired leadership styles. Although neither leadership styles are gendered, some scholars have claimed that transformational leadership can be

associated with female leadership, while transactional leadership has more masculine approach (Amponsah & Asamani, 2015; Bodla & Hussain, 2009). For example, Burke and Collins conducted a study in 2001 and looked at female accountants' leadership styles, it was found that leadership styles of female accountants are different from the leadership styles conveyed by male accountants, with women being more likely to use a transformational leadership style.

In contrast, other researchers have found that differences between male and female leaders are relatively small. For example, Hasan and Othman (2012) and Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that female leaders react differently only when they must respond to unpredictable situations or when, according to Vinnicombe and Cames (1998), it comes to self-perception. According to the participants, context provide the basis for which women structure their leadership style and discourse during uncertainty. Eagly et al. (1995) consider that women tend to be more effective in roles that are considered more feminine. On the other spectrum, researchers such as Andersen and Hansson (2011), Powell (1990), and Bartol et al. (2003) argue that there are no major distinctions in performance between female and male executives. Regardless of gender of managers, no consequence on leadership performance arises.

As mentioned previously, the study of leadership is advancing. However, there are still areas that are neglected, remain under-researched, or have shortcomings, for example, there is little data on effective female leadership styles in male-dominated environments. Also, insufficient research has been done on the glass ceiling effect, i.e., the obstacles that prevent women from reaching top management positions in military organizations. Another area that has just started to advance in recent years due to the

many crises that have happened around the world is female crisis leadership (Post, Latu, & Belkin, 2019; Cunningham, Hazel & Hayes, 2020; Offermann & Foley, 2020; Coscieme et al., 2020).

There are different opinions on who makes an effective leader during a crisis. Pearson and Sommer (2011) argued that in a crisis, effective leadership requires critical thinking, use of creative ideas, and intuition. According to Hausmann and Güntürkün (1999), women demonstrate more of these qualities than men. In 2011, Ryan et al. conducted three studies that examined gender and leadership in successful and less successful companies, finding found that women are preferred as leaders during crises and times of uncertainty.

The field is still vague and the misunderstanding that there is a single acceptable way to be a leader during times of peace or war. As mentioned by Kolzow (2014), there is no single prescription for leadership and no predetermined style for success in leading; it is all contextual. Little is known about how such leadership functions and what creates effective leadership in different settings and contexts. To address these issues, this research expands the existing literature and looks at the characteristics of effective leadership in military organizations during uncertain times.

Crisis

Organizational research for a long time studied crises and crisis management. Whether concentrated on causes, typology, management, or leadership, scholars came to an important conclusion; crises have become an integral part of 21st century, they "are built into the fabric and fiber of modern societies" (Mitroff, 2000, p. 5), and leaders are responsible for managing them effectively.

Crisis definition and typology. Literature on the topic of crisis is abundant. Most researchers agree that all crises are described by "threat, uncertainty, and a sense of urgency" (2004; Leidner et al., 2009; Boin et al., Mitroff, 2004). Hart et al. (1993) give crisis a more comprehensive definition, defining it as "a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a social system, which—under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances—necessitates making critical decisions" (p. 279). The military defines a crisis as an:

> incident or situation involving a threat to the United States, its citizens, military forces, or vital interests that develops rapidly and creates a condition of such diplomatic, economic, or military importance that commitment of military forces and resources is contemplated to achieve national objectives. (Gortney, 2012, p. 54)

These definitions, both from civilians and militaries, point out the fact that crises happen rapidly. These incidents are detrimental to an organization's goals, forcing the organization to take immediate actions to alleviate the potential results.

According to Coombs (1999), different crises require different responses, and the leader needs to be able to identify the type of crisis to respond effectively. In his study on crisis typology, Björck (2016) mentioned two perspectives: the time perspective and context perspective. The time perspective is what Coombs (2018) identified as three phases of the crisis: "pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis" (p.10-11). The main challenge of this typology is that it is difficult to classify exactly when a phase starts and when it ends (Björck, 2016). Crisis can also be classified depending on the context; they can be "socio-

political, crises after disasters, economic crises, organizational crises, and others" (Hart et al., 1993). This research looks at the organizational crisis literature.

Organizational crises. Organizational research has devoted significant attention to crisis definition and crisis management (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Weick, 1993). The term organizational crisis is often defined in the literature as critical, unwanted, and unexpected circumstances that may produce undesirable outcomes and are almost unmanageable (Boin, 2005; Dinkin, 2007). Bundy et al. (2017) framed organizational crisis as a significant, highly unpredictable, and possibly disruptive event that can threaten an organization's function and goals. Pearson and Clair (1998) take the definition of crisis even further and discuss the impact felt by the entire organization in terms of uncertainty and tension and the role of the leader in managing the process. According to Boin (2005), organizational leaders sense a crisis when there is an urgent danger to an organization's basic arrangements or values. Military organizations face many situations with these characteristics, for example, the budget cuts crisis when the militaries are asked to do more with less (Snider & Carlton-Carew, 1995). According to militaries a decline in resources impacts personnel numbers, planning processes, exercises, trainings, and general military readiness.

A clear definition of organizational crisis is important to comprehend the focus of this research. For this study, an organizational crisis is defined as any situation that is unexpected, critical, asks for an immediate response, demands a non-typical intervention and impacts the effectiveness of the organization. These five key features help to differentiate organizational crises from other organizational challenges.

To manage crises effectively, it is imperative to understand what causes them. In their article "Effective Crisis Management," Mitroff et al. (1987) looked at the following factors that cause crises: technical-economic or people-organizational-social factors and those that can be driven by internal or external forces (see Table 2).

Table 2: Classification of Causes That Provoke Crisis

	Technical-Economic Factors	People-Organizational-Social Factors
Internal Forces	Product/service defects Plant defects/industrial accidents Computer breakdown Defective, undisclosed information Bankruptcy	Failure to adapt/ change Organizational breakdown Miscommunication Sabotage, On site product tampering Counterfeiting Rumors, sick jokes, malicious slander Illegal activities, sexual harassment Occupational health diseases
External Forces	Widespread environmental destruction/industrial accidents Large scale systems failure Natural disasters Hostile takeovers Governmental crises International crises	Symbolic projection Sabotage Terrorism Executive kidnapping Off-site product tampering Counterfeiting False rumors, sick jokes, malicious slander Labor strikes, Boycotts

Note. Adapted from "Effective Crisis Management," I. I. Mitroff, P. Shrivastava, & F. E. Udwadia, 1987, Academy of Management Perspectives, 1(4), 287. Copyright 1987 by the authors.

Some examples of external forces include environmental destruction, natural disasters, governmental crises, or international crises that damage an organization's status and affect its function. Mitroff et al. (1987) considered that internal crises are caused within the organization; examples include "failure to adapt or change, sabotage, organizational breakdown, miscommunication, sexual harassment, and others" (p. 287). According to Pearson and Mitroff (1993), unlike external crises, an internal crisis can be prevented or managed more efficiently because these types of crises are not unavoidable.

Wooten and James (2008) described them as employee-centered crises, the ones that progress over time and are the consequence of poor management. Similarly, Pearson and Clair (1998) defined employee-centered crises as crises that are caused by a disturbance of formal principles, procedures, and policies. Examples of these types of crises include unethical or illegal employee behavior. For example, employees sometimes leave the organization with confidential information and distribute it to an interested party for personal benefit (James & Wooten, 2005; Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001).

While some researchers describe internal crises as employee-centered crises, other studies (Berger et al, 2016; Palvia et al., 2015; Soltani, 2014) look at the ethical leadership perspective and highlight leaders' role in generating a crisis. These studies found that internal crises can be also triggered by a leader's failure to institute a proper "tone at the top" (Soltani, 2014, p. 255). Tourish and Hargie (2012) for example discuss the leader's failure to take responsibility for the crisis that results in undesirable organizational outcome. Soltani (2014) looks at the certain leader personality traits that are detrimental for the organization and conduct to crisis escalation.

According to the aforementioned researchers, the organization can handle these types of crises by enforcing strict rules and protocols. Therefore, these authors believe that readiness is fundamental to manage such types of crises. Due to the unpredictability of the crises, especially external ones, many organizations, including military ones, try to identify potential crises before they happen in order to manage them more effectively.

Crisis Management

Organizational research has also dedicated significant attention to crisis management, trying to comprehend how organizations can manage crises to emerge from

them successfully and reduce damage (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007b; Hunter et al., 2016; Kahn et al., 2013). However, despite such a continued interest in crises, the area of crisis management needs further research (Coombs, 2013).

There are many definitions of what constitutes effective crisis management; for example, Pearson and Clair (1998) considered that effective crisis management needs to happen during all three stages of the conflict. During the pre-crisis stage, the leader needs to look at how to decrease the possible risk before a crisis happens. During the crisis, effective crisis management entails leaders designing and cooperating so that organizational roles are rebuilt. Post-crisis management involves individual and collective behavioral and emotional rearrangement.

Additionally, good crisis management looks at the context of the crisis. For example, internal and external crises share commonalities and differences on how leadership approaches crisis management. For example, a key commonality is that in crisis, management is reliant on leadership conduct and performance that supports members to involve enthusiastically in sense-making, information sharing, and the designing of instruments to manage crisis (Dutton & Jackson, 1987; Wooten & James, 2008). An important difference between these approaches, is that the internal crises are managed by the managers who are trying to promote organizational sensemaking to manage the crisis, and the external crises are managed by different stakeholders who try to instill their sensemaking and perceptions (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Kahn et al., 2013).

Crisis management is one of the main functions of the leader; he or she needs to make immediate decisions in an uncertain environment. This requires the leader to possess certain personality traits, skills, and management styles.

Crisis Leadership

Crisis leadership is a critical part of leading in 21st century. The study of leadership is a comparatively new field compared to others; the study of crisis leadership is also somewhat new. Crisis leadership is an important element of crisis management process (Schoenberg, 2005), involving the behavior of leaders and their favored leadership style. Crisis management is process-driven and tactical according to Wrooten and James (2008), it is about how to get ready for a crisis and what to do when it happens, crisis leadership is more strategic driven and looks at the leadership role during crisis situation, it looks at the knowledge, skills and abilities leaders need to have to efficiently deal with the crises.

Research around crisis leadership has flourished in recent years due to the many crises happening around the world (Gill, 2011; Iordanoglou, 2018; Ngayo Fotso, 2021). Research in crisis leadership remains divided, making it challenging for researchers to comprehend the main findings in this field, identify key issues, and propose solutions.

Authors such as Brockner and James (2008), Mitroff (2005), and Vaaler and McNamara (2004) highlight the significance of "crisis handlers," looking not just on the "how to manage" during a crisis but also on leaders' skills and competencies (p.). According to Al Thani and Obeidat (2020,) being a good crisis leader is more than just being a good leader. Crisis leaders confront challenges that are on the other spectrum of

daily operations. Crisis leaders need to apply expertise and skills beyond those required for everyday tasks.

Many studies that focus on crisis management and crisis leadership indicate that effective communication and collaboration (Bolton, 2016; Buama, 2019; Coombs, 2013; Johansen et al., 2012; Seeger & Sellnow, 2016), flexibility in decision making (Baron et al., 2018; Denison et al., 1995), effective sense making (Boin et al., 2016), and mutual understanding and trust building (Jacobsen, 2000; Pearce et al., 2020) are important skills a leader needs to have for effective crisis management. All of these skills and traits need to be applied by the crisis leaders in crisis situations when people learn how to function together, despite their differences. Researchers such as Jacobsen (2000), Clark (2020), Bolton (2016), and Kecskes and Zhang (2009) consider that common ground approach is crucial during times of crisis because it proposes answers by allowing stakeholders to deal with the issues and resolve them effectively. To successfully manage crises and conflicts, leaders must offer all the parties involved a framework from which to work.

Different settings require different management styles; however, building a common ground approach is essential in any setting. The need for a common ground approach has been largely acknowledged by military and civilian actors alike, particularly during crises. In the academic setting, Kecskes and Zhang (2009) considered that *common ground* practices are essential given the challenges that the educational field is experiencing. Educational leaders need to work with numerous stakeholders, all of them have different and sometimes opposing aims (Thomas & Beckel, 2007). The military environment also characteristically experiences civil-military dialogue challenges.

Common Ground Leadership Thinking

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how critical it is to find common ground in today's world. Unfortunately, many governments were incapable of overcoming their internal differences to find common ground. Some countries in Europe were unable to resolve their internal differences and implement rapid measures, which resulted in thousands of lives being lost (Jones, 2020). Today's leaders in different settings face great pressure to meet their immediate goals and overcome challenges. Finding common ground is one of the approaches that today's leaders need to master. The goal of this part of the literature review is to discover how a common ground thinking affects the effectiveness of crisis management.

Common ground definition. Clark (2006) defined a team's common ground as the "sum of what everyone knows that the others know too" (p. 85). Jacobsen (2000) described common ground as a way for people with differences to work together. Johnson (2014) stated that finding common ground does not mean finding absolute agreement, or a perfect win-win solution; rather, common ground is finding a way to communicate and interact despite the differences. In their paper "Activating, Seeking, and Creating Common Ground: A Socio-Cognitive Approach," Kecskes and Zhang (2009) claimed that the current theories do not analyze common ground sufficiently and suggest a larger definition. According to the participants, common ground is "shared knowledge, rapport, as well as the knowledge that we can create in the communicative process" (p. 346). Common ground has been defined here as when "all stakeholders communicate, collaborate and build trust for the course and performance of their organization" (Clark, 2020; Daft, 2012; Jacobsen, 2000; Stuart & Szeszeran, 2020).

In support of these definitions, Zander (1982) demonstrates that the results of an effective team usually surpass the amount of the individual inputs of its members. As such, building a strong team alignment can be a critical first step in crisis management. Most of the researchers (Bundy et al., 2017; Jacobsen, 2000; Hamm, 2006; Yue et al., 2019) agree that effective organizational crisis management involves making employees feel safe and secure while fostering openness and allowing all voices to be heard and expressed. According to Klann (2003), effective leadership can reveal opportunities where before there were only challenges. Leaders must find such opportunities for the organizational effectiveness and individual achievement. In their search, it is imperative to look to find common ground and mutual understanding. Kapucu and Ustun (2018), Oppl and Stary (2019), Buckler and Zien (1996), and Bolton (2016) considered that leaders need to find common ground to enroll followers in processes of change.

Common Ground Approaches

The common ground literature (Akiri, 2013; Hansen, 2009; Weisbord, 1992) found that the core competencies that leaders have in finding common ground during a crisis situation have a positive relationship with the effectiveness of crisis management. Among sensemaking, emotional intelligence, problem solving, and ethics of leadership skills, leaders' competences such as communication, trust building and collaboration skills have been found to be effective in crisis management. Researchers who have focused on these skills were Coombs (1995), James and Wooten (2006), Hertzum (2008), Kitamura (2019), and others. These competences are the foundation of common ground thinking.

According to Schwarz (2008), it might be dangerous to believe that managing each crisis type requires the same leadership skills or the same attributions of organizational responsibility. Because there are many types of crises, it might be more useful to look at some leadership competencies. Power (2018) discussed the need for research on crisis management (disaster response) where competences such as building trust, shared understanding, and effective communication are critical for the leader. Those competencies leaders have utilized to manage effectively crisis are outlined within this study as approaches to find common ground. This study adopted a holistic view of organizational crisis management, exploring the common ground thinking. The following approaches form the structure of this inquiry: (a) communication, (b) collaboration, and (c) trust building. These leadership competences are viewed within an organizational crisis environment.

Communication. Crisis management authors identify crisis leadership with the ability to communicate effectively (Coombs, 1995, 2010; Dance & Larson, 1976; James & Wooten, 2006). At various stages of crisis management, leaders must communicate with different stakeholders to find common ground. It is important to engage the group in meaningful communication, where members within the group need to feel that they can be heard and, more important, they need to hear one another. For example, Mazzei et al. (2012) discussed the positive effects of engaging employees during a crisis and the negative effects of poor internal crisis communication. Bundy et al. (2017) stated that employees should perceive leadership communication as honest, sincere, and trustworthy; moreover, it should be transparent and open. Clear and transparent

communication is crucial for building common ground (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2010; Sellnow & Seeger, 2021).

According to Bundy et al. (2017), communication does more than inform. Depending on crisis, leaders need to be convincing, assertive, and empathic in their communication. Sturges (1994) considered that what promotes a leader's crisis communication skill is leader's ability to involve emotionally with the employee and create a safety net for communication. Wooten and James (2008) considered that what often damages an organization in crisis is inefficient communication and lack of transparency.

Additionally, many studies focused on military and crisis management (David & Chiciudean, 2013; Klann, 2003; Teeter-Baker, 2008; Woodyard, 1998) found that communication is vital for efficient crisis management within the military. According to these researchers, straight communication from the leader can support the organization manage efficiently a crisis. A leader's good communication skills can build trust and support within the organization. One of the key principles in crisis management, according to the military, is that over-communication is better than under-communication (Dale Benson, 2016). For example, military commanders consider highly important during a crisis to establish a common operating picture (COP). A COP ensures that all members of the team are well informed and have situational awareness. The COP is constantly updated, with team providing briefings for leaders. A great example of an efficient crisis communicator is Winston Churchill. According to Longstaffe (2005), he was able to keep people following him through communication; much can be learned from him as today's society faces new crises and challenges. Through his powerful

speeches, Churchill made people believe they could fight on and withstand difficult times.

Collaboration. Engaging the group in the collaborative process in times of crisis or conflict is also a key component of establishing common ground. In building common ground, leaders must sustain collaboration, engage all the parties in negotiation, ignite employees' motivation to take ownership of the problem and create a level of mutual understanding among between all the actors involved. They should act as *integrators* (Adizes, 2009; Savage & Sales, 2008; Vostanis, 2018) and challenge all the parties to voice their opinions. According to several researchers (Bowman, 2008; Hertzum, 2008), collaboration is pivotal to establishing common ground. Collaboration is essential to share information and establish shared meaning during crisis situations.

In the armed forces, effective collaboration or teamwork is a matter of life and death, and leaders are taught to collaborate first. According to Brigadier General Lance Talmage (2018), collaborating is one of the core skills of any good service member. Seymour and Cowen (2007) argued that today's U.S. military needs to use new collaborative tools to respond efficiently to modern crises. In their report, the authors looked at 64 collaboration technologies and tools, 37 used by the United States Military and Government. They suggested web-based tools to support small team interaction during crisis response. They also argued that the inability to collaborate will ultimately lead to failure to manage the crisis.

Trust building. Trust has played a major role in crisis leadership effectiveness, as former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, asserted, "Trust is the essence of leadership" (as cited in Harari & Brewer, 2004, p. 38). Trust and deepening relationships are at the

center of building common ground during a crisis (McKee, 2005; Seijts & Crim, 2006; Spade, 2020). In 2019, Kitamura conducted a study and found that trust building is a key element of leading during a crisis. A leader's capacity to respond to the crisis directly relates to the level of trust he or she can instill within the group. Study by Lencioni (2002) determined that in an environment where there is no trust, employee may hide their flaws, do not ask, and do not offer help, and as consequence create dysfunctional teams. Studies show that, when employees work in teams and have the trust and cooperation of their team members, it paves the path for finding common ground and moves the team on successful crisis resolution (Jiang, 2010; Lawford, 2003; Geneviève, Sébastien, Simon, & Vincent, 2010).

Researchers also agree that trust has to be mutual between the leader and employee. Trust sets the foundation for honesty, transparency, and openness to question what is incorrect. A leader's responsibility in this context is to strengthen a climate of psychological safety where team members are allowed to make and correct their mistakes and where the leaders themselves demonstrate vulnerability and admit their mistakes (Brower et al., 2000). According to many researchers (Bharanitharan et al., 2019; Meyer, Le Fevre & Robinson, 2017; Oc et al., 2020) this type of reciprocal admission of mistakes and vulnerabilities help employees set the insecurities aside, start trust each other and find resolution of the crisis.

In his book, *Leaders: Myth and Reality*, Stanley McChrystal (McChrystal et al., 2018), a former commander of U.S. and International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan discusses the differences between effective and ineffective leaders. He presents three ways to lead through a crisis, one of which is building trust. He talks about

how important is to create a platform for building trust and share consciousness within the military, asserting that building trust is about "making sure that everyone has access to the same information and reinforce trust again despite the stress and fog of war" (p. 381). According to McChrystal, "In a crisis, the worst thing you can do is have a perception of inaccurate information. We all lose confidence if we think that what we're hearing isn't true" (p. 136). In conclusion, as stated by General Gary Luck (2013), in the military, building trust is a commander's most important action and must be maintained continuously: before, during, and after crises.

Female Leadership in Military Institutions During Crisis

There are different opinions on who makes an effective leader during a crisis. In the numerous crises of 2019-2021, a shared narrative emerged about the effectiveness of female leaders during uncertain times. For example, in 2019, Post et al. conducted a study that looked at the distinctions in trust for female and male leaders during organizational crisis and concluded that female leaders possess more qualities, like interpersonal and social leadership qualities, that assist in building trust during crises. Tevis et al. (2021) also conducted a phenomenological study and found that women are effective leaders who can adapt and lead effectively during difficult times.

Even though Tevis et al.'s (2021) findings on the ability to adapt is crucial for organizational success during the time of uncertainty, it is unknown whether women who work in a male-dominated environment take an adaptive approach during crises. Throughout the literature review, it was identified that there is little data on effective female leadership styles for responding to and managing crises in military institutions. To date, three key studies have been conducted on this subject. Godsey (2012) conducted a

study on leadership gender differences in military organizations. Her study described several leadership styles of Air National Guard leaders. In 2019, Lewis looked more closely at female leadership identities at West Point and tried to identify leadership gender differences. Similar work was done by Castillo (2020) 1 year later; however, Castillo extended the work of Lewis (2019) and looked at military female experiences in gaining and keeping military leadership positions in a Texas military facility. These studies identify key challenges female leaders face in the military setting, and they point to a need to investigate how female leaders break through these challenges. Although these studies appear to be a research landmark on female leadership in the military, they were not conducted in the context of crisis management. Moreover, although all of them share a few strategies, little is known about how these women find common ground during crisis situations.

As a result of the aforementioned gap in the literature, this research sought to understand and describe the lived experience of female leaders who succeeded in making a crisis a positive phenomenon for their organizations. It also contributed to the literature on gender and leadership in the crisis context by attempting to present gender differences in leader skills and behaviors.

Summary

This review of literature examined crisis management and building common ground in the context of military institutions. Research indicated that the military has one of the longest histories of dealing with crisis response; they also have well-rehearsed techniques and strategies. The literature also highlighted the importance of looking at the

military principles and processes in crisis management and attempting to apply them to other fields.

The review of literature demonstrated the important role a common ground approach plays in crisis management. According to Kapucu and Ustun (2018), Oppl and Stary (2019), and Bolton (2016), building common ground is a critical first step in crisis management. Leaders must examine profoundly crisis and create opportunities, common ground, and mutual understanding to resolve crises effectively. This review of literature additionally identified that the leadership skills a leaders possess (such as sense making, emotional intelligence, problem solving, communication, trust building and collaboration skills) have a positive relationship with effective crisis management. This literature review concluded that leaders' skills and competencies are the foundation stones in common ground thinking.

Throughout the literature review, it was identified that crisis management best practices are not researched enough, and most scholars focus on crisis fiascos. This research expands the crisis literature by analyzing military organizations that have managed crises by concentrating on building common ground approach. Additionally, this research builds on features such as organizational learning so that organizations may transform crisis in organizational opportunities. As Pearson and colleagues (2007) stated, "Over time, many organizations have learned that optimally managed crises can bring positive recognition and enhanced stakeholder value, while poorly managed crises can short-circuit organizational viability" (p. vii).

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Crisis and crisis management are common and unavoidable incidences in organizations. The latest events, such as the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic recession, highlighted the need for prompt decision-making and effective leadership. There are different opinions on who makes an effective leader during a crisis. In 2011, Ryan et al. found that women are preferred as leaders during a crisis and times of uncertainty. No organizations are exempt from crisis, whether facing external forces such as the current COVID-19 pandemic or internal situations. Military educational institutions are also affected by a variety of crises, and it is imperative to look together at positive ways to emerge from these difficult situations.

This research looked at the role of female leaders in managing crises and describe their experiences in building common ground and identifying win-win solutions. Chapter I presented an overview of the research. Chapter II examined the literature related to background and history of crisis and crisis management, role of the leaders in building common ground during the crisis, *opportunity mindset* in dealing with conflicts, and female leadership in crisis. Chapter III introduced the methodology of the study and explained the research design, population, sample, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, limitations to the study, and a summary of the chapter's main conclusions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the lived experience of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations.

Research Question

What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations?

Research Subquestions

Sub RQ 1: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in using communication to find common ground during crisis situations?

Sub RQ 2: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in using collaboration to find common ground during crisis situations?

Sub RQ 3: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in building trust to find common ground during crisis situations?

Research Design

This phenomenological study identifies and describes how female leaders from military academic institutions found common ground during crisis situations. A qualitative research design was identified for this study because this research seeks to describe the life experiences of female leaders in the military through interviews and examination of artifacts. According to Patten and Newhart (2018), qualitative research enables the researcher to "explain how people interpret their environment and experiences and what meaning they place on those experiences" (p. 22). Through this qualitative study female leaders from military academic environments expressed their views on finding common ground during crisis situations.

To get a better understanding of female leaders in finding common ground during crisis situations, it was necessary to collect data from the field. For this research, the primary source was semi structured interviews and artifacts. As mentioned by Patton (2015), using interviews allows the researcher to collect data "out in the real world rather than in the laboratory or the academy" (p. 61). The qualitative inquiry framework used for this study is the phenomenological approach (Patton, 2015) since the characteristics of this qualitative study concentrated on the phenomenon of human experience by exploring female leaders' experiences during crises.

Phenomenology

After deciding the qualitative methods were most suitable for this study, the researcher looked at various qualitative approaches and identified the best one for a study of this nature. First, the researcher analyzed the relevance of an ethnographic study. According to Patton (2015), ethnographic research is used to understand the culture of a group. The researcher looked at the possibility of gaining a deeper understanding of female leaders' shared culture and their social dynamic. However, after a closer look at this approach, the researcher understood that this approach would not fully address the phenomenon identified among these female leaders from military academic institutions and might be too time-consuming. To immerse in the group setting and get a complete picture, the researcher needed to conduct many observations, which would have been challenging during the pandemic.

Next, the researcher looked at the appropriateness of a phenomenological study. According to Patton (2015), the phenomenological approach emphasizes "exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness,

both individually and as shared meaning" (p. 115). The researcher determined that the main reason to conduct this study is to look at the phenomena that exist amongst female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crises and identify their experiences, so that future generations of women aspiring to organizational leadership roles can learn from them. The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to analyze the phenomenon of female leaders' success in finding common ground during crises. Therefore, by using a qualitative approach about the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding coming ground during crisis situations, a conclusion may be reached about female leaders' experiences.

Population

According to Patten and Newhart (2018), the population is "a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific research" (p. 89). This study investigates how female leaders from military academic institutions found common ground during crisis situations. The population for this study is all female leaders from military academic institutions in California. These women must hold a role with the title of dean or bellow in the academic functions of the school, or director and below in the operational functions of the schools.

Of the top leaders in these military academic institutions, it is estimated that there are approximately 30-50 mid-level female leaders in each institution (Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, 2021). In California there are seven military academic schools. Based on seven schools with a range of 30-50 mid-level female leaders each, it is estimated that in total, there are approximately 210-350 mid-level female leaders from

military academic institutions in California, which is the estimated population for this study.

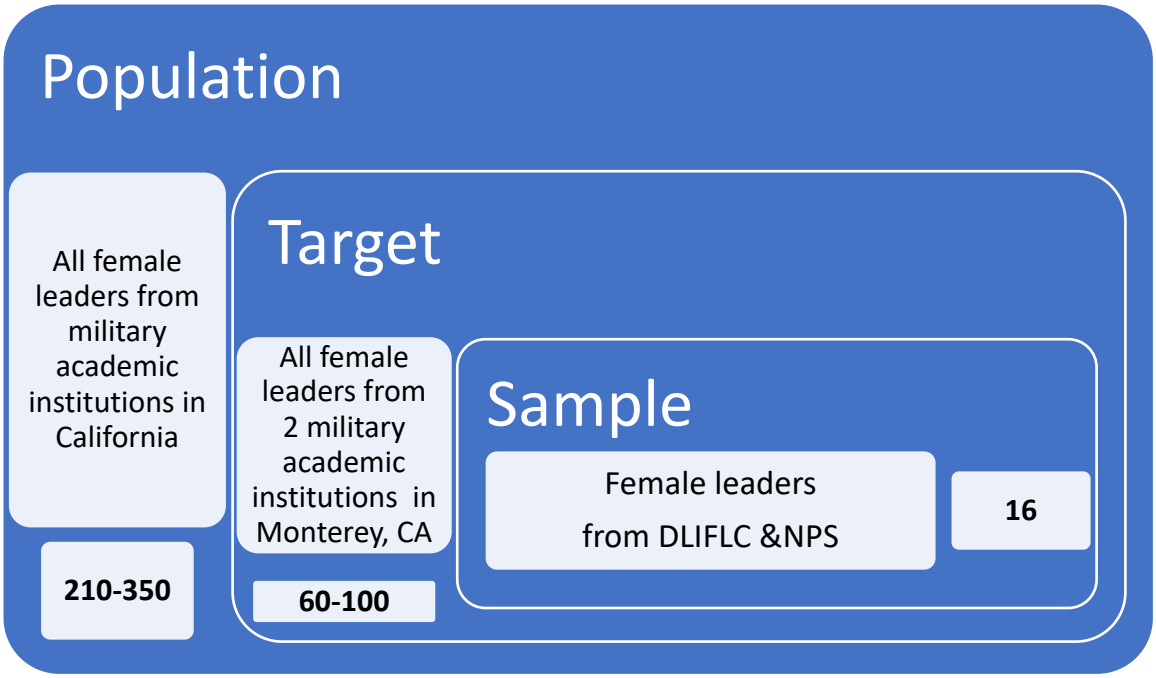
Target Population

According to Patten and Newhart (2018), the target population is "the population to which the researcher wants to be able to generalize the results" (p. 71). Based on the population of this study, the target population is narrowed to two schools located in Monterey, California, which are the DLIFLC and NPS. To ensure that participants in this study had critical experience in their positions, they also must have been in a leadership position for a minimum of three years. Based on the approximation that there are 30-50 female leaders at each institution, it is estimated that the target population for this study is 60-100 (Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, 2021).

Sample

Patten and Newhart (2018) defined sample as "a subset of the population of interest that allows the researcher to make inferences about the population" (p. 89). Based on the target population of 60-100, which represents the female leaders from the DLIFLC and NPS, this study aims at sampling the experiences of 16 female leaders (eight from each institution).

Figure 2: Population, Target, and Sample



Sampling Procedure

Qualitative research provides many sampling procedures. For this study, convenience sampling and purposeful sampling were considered. Convenience sampling was considered because it is based on selecting people who are easy to reach, while purposeful sampling is focused on selecting information-rich cases (Patton, 2015) whose study will elucidate the question under research. According to Patton (2015), "the primary focus of data collection will be on what is happening to individuals in a setting and how individuals are affected by the setting" (p. 395). For the purpose of this research, purposeful sampling was selected since the researcher chooses participants according to the needs of the study. The researcher predetermined the criteria of the study, and the selection of the participants was based on the following criteria:

- Must be a woman;
- Must be a female leader working in one of the two military academic institutions (DLIFLC or NPS) in Monterey, California;

- Must hold a role with the title of dean or bellow in the academic functions of the schools, or director or below in the operational functions of the schools;
- Must have at least 3 years of experience serving in a leadership position.

The following procedures were followed to recruit for the interviews:

1. The researcher found a sponsor at DLI and NPS who helped to identify and reach out to the female leaders who meet the research criteria (Appendices D & E);
2. After receiving their names, the researcher contacted the individuals via email and invited them to participate in the study (Appendix F). The researcher introduced the potential respondents to the purpose of the study and research question;
3. The researcher identified a list of interested participants who met the stated criteria and took the first 16 who expressed an interest and met the criteria;
4. Interested participants were contacted via email by the researcher to decide on time and location for the interview. The participants were given the choice to choose how the interview was conducted: in person or virtual (via MS Teams);
5. The participants were also informed (via email) about the procedural elements: about confidentiality; duration of session, and results;
6. The participants were given the participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix G) and the informed consent (Appendix H).

Instrumentation

This part presents the instruments that were used to conduct the research. In designing the data collection, first, the researcher considered what types of data would help to answer the research question and make the study strong. The researcher decided to triangulate qualitative data sources: semi structured interviews were conducted and leaders' artifacts were analyzed. According to Patton (2015), "any single source of data has strengths and weaknesses. Consistency of findings across types of data increases confidence in the confirmed patterns and themes."

Researcher as an instrument. According to Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012) since the researcher is the main instrument of the study, unique researcher features might influence the data collection. That means that the study is open to possible researcher biases during data gathering. In this case, the researcher would need to carefully select the research design and take some additional steps to mitigate the researcher as instrument effects. For example, Patten and Newhart (2018) advise the researcher to be mindful about biases and do not overemphasize the value of some information and undervalue other evidence. According to these authors researchers pay less attention to data that do not fit with what they already believe is true. To mitigate this limitation the researcher needs to be aware of its own biases.

The researcher of this study brings some personal biases. The researcher previously served in a military as a female leader. As Patten and Newhart (2018) mentioned, to avoid biases is important to keep in mind why the researcher wants to conduct the interviews, how it will be conducted, and who will be the respondents. Researcher needs to be aware of these biases and not misinterpret interviews.

Interview questions. Since this study consists of semi-structured interviews, the actual interview questions are considered an instrument for the study. According to Patton (2015) to collect data, the researcher "must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest" (p. 116). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Interviews permitted respondents to elaborate on their experiences in their own words. The semi-structured interviews helped the researcher to learn more about female leaders' experiences from military academic institutions in building common ground during crisis situations. The participants were asked to talk about their leadership experience in building common ground and their feelings about crisis situations. A table of research interview questions has been developed (Appendix A).

Validity

Patton (2002) defines validity as "one way to increase the credibility and legitimacy of qualitative inquiry among those who place priority on traditional scientific research criteria is to emphasize those criteria that have priority within that tradition" (p. 544). The researcher paid close attention to the measuring instrument. According to Patten and Newhart (2018) "validity reflects the extent to which a measure captures the information it is meant to measure or accurately performs the function it claims to perform" (p. 126). For this research validity was assessed in two ways, one is content validity and the second is pilot test.

Content validity. Content validity according to Patten and Newhart (2018), is "an assessment of a measure based on the appropriateness of its content" (p.). Content validity was determined by having an expert panel analyze the interview questions. Their

task was to determine whether the interview questions reflect the concept that they were attempting to describe.

Expert panel. An expert panel was formed to validate the interview questions. The researcher asked input from the expert panel members on the interview protocol. They examined the protocol structure, length, writing style and ease of understanding. The experts also looked at how the researcher wrote the interview questions and made sure the right questions are asked. They also considered different aspects, such as: Are some terms, in the interview questions, ambiguous in their meanings? Will the interview respondents find some concepts too difficult to understand (example: finding common ground)? For example, the researcher asked a question: "As a female leader how do you manage a team in crisis?" the expert panel pointed out to the researcher that "crisis" is a very large concept and should be defined.

The expert panel also checked if the interview questions does not cause tension to respondents and confidentiality is kept and that the interview pose no risk. As a result of experts' feedback, the researcher checked the instrument for validity and made some refinements and modification in the research tool. The expert panel help was also used during the coding stage. A response appeared to be potentially in both themes and the researcher contacted one of the experts and asked for content expertise.

An expert panel of three members was formed. The criteria for the expert panel members' selection were as follows:

1. Served in a supervisory position for more than 5 years;
2. Has taught in a military academic setting;

3. Has a master's degree in an educational related field or leadership related field;
4. Has a doctoral degree in an educational related field or leadership related field;
5. Served in a leadership position in a military setting.

Pilot interview. To determine the validity of the qualitative data a pilot interview was conducted. According to Dikko (2016), a pilot test helps the researcher to identify any errors in the research tool and fix them at the early stage. The pilot test team members included the researcher, a Department Chair from one of the academic military institutions, in Monterey, California and an observer with an expertise in the interview protocol. The semi-structured interview questions were drafted and tested on a female Department Chair. This Department Chair was not a participant in the study.

The observer was present during the interview, took notes and completed a checklist regarding interviewing techniques of the researcher. Based on the result of the pilot test, the observer and the Department Chair provided feedback on the researcher interview skills and techniques. The researcher also reflected on the interview experience and asked the interviewee to reflect on it as well. The researcher took the feedback from all three and made some minor revisions, such as clarifying some terms (e.g., organizational crises).

Reliability

Creswell (2014) considers that reliability "refers to whether scores to items on an instrument are internally consistent, stable over time, and whether there was consistency

in test administration and scoring" (p. 247). As such, reliability denotes the ability of the research to generate consistent results.

Internal reliability. To ensure the accuracy and credibility of findings the researcher included triangulation of data sources. According to Patton (2002) "triangulation within a qualitative inquiry strategy can be attained by combining both interviewing and observations, mixing different types of purposeful samples, or examining how competing theoretical perspectives inform a particular analysis" (p. 479). The researcher gathered the information using a qualitative method (interviews) and artifacts. An example of triangulation is collecting an artifact, such as an award received by the female leader to triangulate the interview responses.

External reliability. According to Davis (1992), external reliability "addresses the issue of whether independent research would discover the same themes or generate the same results in the same or similar settings" (p. 356). The results of this study cannot be generalizable and cannot be applied to other situations. Since the findings of this study is exclusive to a certain population and context, it is impossible to prove that the conclusions are valid to other circumstances and populations. However, the findings of this study would be of value for similar research and projects.

Intercoder reliability. Intercoder reliability is when peer examination takes place after data collection to check the credibility of data analysis (Creswell, 2014). This procedure is important since it permits to cross-check data codes using several researchers. 10% percent of the data collected from interviews were given to an outside researcher who has a PhD in history and serves as a leader in military academic institution. A 95% agreement was obtained. He confirmed the trends, themes, and

frequency counts of the collected data. A goal of 90% agreement in coded data is considered the best while 80% is acceptable to ensure accuracy of themes from coding (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2004).

Data Collection

According to the Patten and Newhart (2018) "when data collected in different ways points to the same conclusion, it strengthens the researcher's argument and mitigates the weakness of any one method" (p. 157). In designing the data collection, first, the researcher considered what types of data will best help to answer the research question and make the study strong. The researcher decided to triangulate qualitative data sources, such as: semi structured interviews were conducted, and artifacts were analyzed. According to Patton (2015), "any single source of data has strengths and weaknesses. Consistency of findings across types of data increases confidence in the confirmed patterns and themes."

Types of data.

Interviews. According to Patton (2015) "to gather such data, one must undertake interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest" (p. 116). Qualitative data for this research was collected through semi-structured interviews. These interviews allowed respondents to discuss their experiences, which aligns with the purpose of this research. Therefore, conducting semi-structured interviews permitted female leaders to openly discuss their opinions on building common ground during crisis situations.

The researcher was the main instrument for data collection and analysis. Before interviewing the participants, the researcher developed the interview protocol with open-

ended questions to collect data form the respondents. The open-ended questions were framed to be nonthreatening to the participants and to allow them to express their opinions and viewpoints in their own words (Patton, 2015). The questions were designed in a such manner that they helped the researcher to guide the conversation with the respondents. An introductory prompt was also developed for the beginning of the interview:

> Thank you for spending some time with me today. You have some very valuable experience related to my research in female leadership during times of uncertainty. I am sure you have a lot to say about woman leadership during crisis time and I encourage you to share openly. Your experience will help me gain a deeper understanding of the research question.

The interviews helped the researcher to learn about the female leaders' perceptions in military academic institutions on building common ground during crisis situations. The participants were asked to elaborate on their crisis leadership experience and their experiences on building common ground. All the interviews remained and will remain confidential and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes.

Artifacts. This study investigates the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations. In order to genuinely understand these experiences, it is important to view artifacts that support the experiences of female leaders. During the interview, the researcher asked the participants to provide any artifacts that may add more knowledge and understanding on how female leaders found common ground during crises. These artifacts included agendas, meeting minutes, awards and emails from the subordinates indicating how the

leader found common ground during crisis. An example of an artifact is a newspaper article about one of the participants in the study or award that she received during the time of uncertainty, etc. Artifacts that contain personal information of the respondent is protected through getting the permission to view them as well as the redaction of the participants names and other personal identifying data not relevant to this research.

Interview Procedures

This section explains the details of the interview procedure that was followed by the researcher. The first step was to select the target population and the site for the research. Researcher's decision on selecting the site largely was influenced by the research questions and purpose of study, which was to describe the lived experiences of female leaders at military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations. Defense Language Institute and Naval Postgraduate School, both located in Monterey, California, were selected for this study.

The second step in conducting the research was to select and recruit the participants for the interviews. The recruiting procedures for the interviews was described in detail in the Sampling Procedure section.

The third step was to conduct the interview. During the interview:

1. The researcher started the interview by quickly defining the topic for discussion and goal setting, followed by open-ended questions, intended to make the respondent comfortable and to share openly their thoughts;
2. The participants moved on asking semi-structured interview questions (Appendix A) and a few follow-up questions or probes to understand better participants' perspective;

3. The interview lasted between 45-60 minutes;
4. During the interview, the researcher took notes and recorded the interview;
5. At the end of the interview, the researcher thanked the respondent and asked if the respondent can provide any artifacts that may help understand better how female leaders find common ground during crises;
6. The audio recordings were saved and kept confidential to protect the participants and were transcribed and coded,
7. The transcript was shared with the interviewees to confirm accuracy.

Data collection for this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, intentional measures were taken place to protect participants. These steps were aligned with OSHA and CDC guidelines. The steps are as follows:

1. Interviews were conducted through an online software such MS Teams;
2. Should participants prefer in-person interviews, CDC and OSHA guidelines were followed. These include masking and social distancing.

Data Analysis

This part presents the approach the researcher took to analyze the qualitative data gathered through participant interviews, observations and artifacts. The data analysis started with an initial scan of the data, gathered from the interviews. The researcher transcribed manually the data and upload it into NIVIVO software. The software allowed the researcher to code the data and identify the most common themes. After the scanning of all data the researcher came up with a list of codes that were meaningful phrases that appeared in the data and helped to answer the research question. Patton (2002) describes

coding as “the process of recognizing patterns in qualitative data and then turning patterns into meaningful categories and themes” (p. 463).

Limitations

According to Creswell (2014), a limitation is a potential weakness of the study. For the researcher it is imperative to be clear about study’s limitations and find ways to address those limitations. According to Patton (2002) to understand fully the complexities of a situation and avoid study limitations, the research data needs to be triangulated, besides interviews, observation of the phenomenon of interest needs to happen and artifact analysis need to be conducted.

Three limitations were considered during this research study.

1. The study is limited by a small sample size, which means that the findings were limited based on selectivity of the population who were sampled for interviews. According to Patton (2002) limitations involve “possibly distorted responses due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, politics, and simple lack of awareness since interviews can be greatly affected by the emotional state of the interviewee at the time of the interview” (p. 580). To ensure the accuracy and credibility of findings the researcher included triangulation of data sources. The researcher gathered information using a qualitative method (interviews) and artifacts.
2. Lack of data on those females’ leaders who didn’t make it to the top, because of limits women continue to confront. The limitation is that this study did not consider the experiences of those women: women who were in the running to get to the top but didn’t make it.

3. Researcher bias is a potential limitation when the researcher serves as the primary instrument, collecting data and conducting interviews (Patton, 2015). When the researcher is an instrument of a study, inevitably bias exists in the interpretation of data. To minimize bias, content validity was determined by having experts analyze the interview questions. Their task was to determine whether the interview questions reflect the concept that they were attempting to describe. The experts looked at how the researcher wrote the interview questions and ensured the right questions were asked. Researcher bias was also mitigated by the intercoder reliability, where the data was double checked by another coder.
4. The interview data was self-reported. Someone who says is a good leader might not be a good leader according to the people she leads. The respondent may lack insight into her own situation. Thus, data received from the respondent might be biased. To ensure the accuracy and credibility of findings the researcher included triangulation of data sources.
5. Observation opportunities were limited due to COVID restrictions. Certain safety limited the researcher's opportunities to do observations.
6. Some of the artifacts were not for public release or were confidential, due to the nature of the organization, limiting the opportunity to obtain data.

Summary

This study allowed the researcher to better understand and describe the lived experiences of female leaders in managing crises and analyze their experiences in building common ground during times of uncertainty. Chapter III presented the purpose

of the study, the research question, the research design using phenomenology as a methodology, the population, and sample for the research, the research tools, the validity and reliably of the study, the data collection and analysis process, and the possible limitations of the research. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study, including a comprehensive analysis of the data. Chapter V interprets the received data and presents conclusions based on the examination of the data and proposed implications for actions and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter I provided an introduction to the research study, background information, problem statement, the significance of the problem, definitions, and delimitations of the study. Chapter II reviewed the research related to the background and history of crises and crisis management, the role of leaders in building common ground during crises, and female leadership in crisis. Chapter III introduced the methodology applied to this research by describing the qualitative use of phenomenology to study female leaders' success in finding common ground during crises. Chapter III also presented the research design, the population, the sample, the instrumentation, the data collection and data analysis procedures, the limitations of the study, and a summary of the chapter's main conclusions. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study, including a comprehensive analysis of the data. It describes the findings by examining data collected from 16 female leaders from two military academic institutions located in Monterey, California: the DLIFLC and the NPS. In this chapter, the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations are described and a summary of the findings is presented.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the lived experience of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations.

Research Question

What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations?

Research Subquestions

Sub RQ 1: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in using communication to find common ground during crisis situations?

Sub RQ 2: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in using collaboration to find common ground during crisis situations?

Sub RQ 3: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in building trust to find common ground during crisis situations?

Methodology

This phenomenological study identified and described how female leaders from military academic institutions found common ground during crisis situations. A qualitative research design was identified for this study because this research sought to describe the life experiences of female leaders in the military through interviews and examination of artifacts. According to Patten and Newhart (2018), qualitative research enables the researcher to "explain how people interpret their environment and experiences and what meaning they place on those experiences" (p. 22). Through this qualitative study, female leaders from military academic environments expressed their views on finding common ground during crisis situations.

To get a better understanding of female leaders finding common ground during crisis situations, it was necessary to collect data from the field. For this research, the primary source was semi structured interviews and artifacts. As mentioned by Patton (2015), using interviews allows the researcher to collect data "out in the real world rather than in the laboratory or the academy" (p. 61). The qualitative inquire framework used for this study was the phenomenological approach (Patton, 2015) because the characteristics of this qualitative study concentrated on the phenomenon of human experience, namely female leaders' experiences during crises.

Phenomenology

After deciding that qualitative methods were most suitable for this study, the researcher looked at various qualitative approaches and identified the best one for a study of this nature. First, the researcher analyzed the relevance of an ethnographic study. According to Patton (2015), ethnographic research is used to understand the culture of a group. The researcher looked at the possibility of gaining a deeper understanding of female leaders' shared culture and their social dynamic. However, after a closer look at this approach, the researcher understood that this approach would not fully address the phenomenon identified among these female leaders from military academic institutions and would have been too time-consuming. To immerse in the group setting and get a complete picture, the researcher needed to conduct many observations, which would have been challenging during the pandemic.

Next, the researcher looked at the appropriateness of a phenomenological study. According to Patton (2015), the phenomenological approach emphasizes "exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness,

both individually and as shared meaning" (p. 115). The researcher determined that the main reason for conducting this study was to explore at the phenomenon of female leaders from military academic institutions finding common ground during crises and identify their experiences, so that future generations of women aspiring to organizational leadership roles can learn from them. The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to analyze the phenomenon of female leaders' success in finding common ground during crises. Therefore, a qualitative approach regarding the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions finding coming ground during crisis situations was used to derive conclusions about female leaders' experiences.

Population

According to Patten and Newhart (2018), the population is "a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific research" (p. 89). This study investigated how female leaders from military academic institutions found common ground during crisis situations. The population for this study was all female leaders from military academic institutions in California. These women had to hold a role with the title of dean or bellow in the academic functions of the school, or director and below in the operational functions of the schools.

Of the top leaders in these military academic institutions, it was estimated that there were approximately 30-50 mid-level female leaders in each institution. In California there are seven military academic schools. Based on seven schools with a range of 30-50 mid-level female leaders per institution, it was estimated that in total, there are approximately 210-350 mid-level female leaders from military academic institutions in California, which is the estimated population for this study.

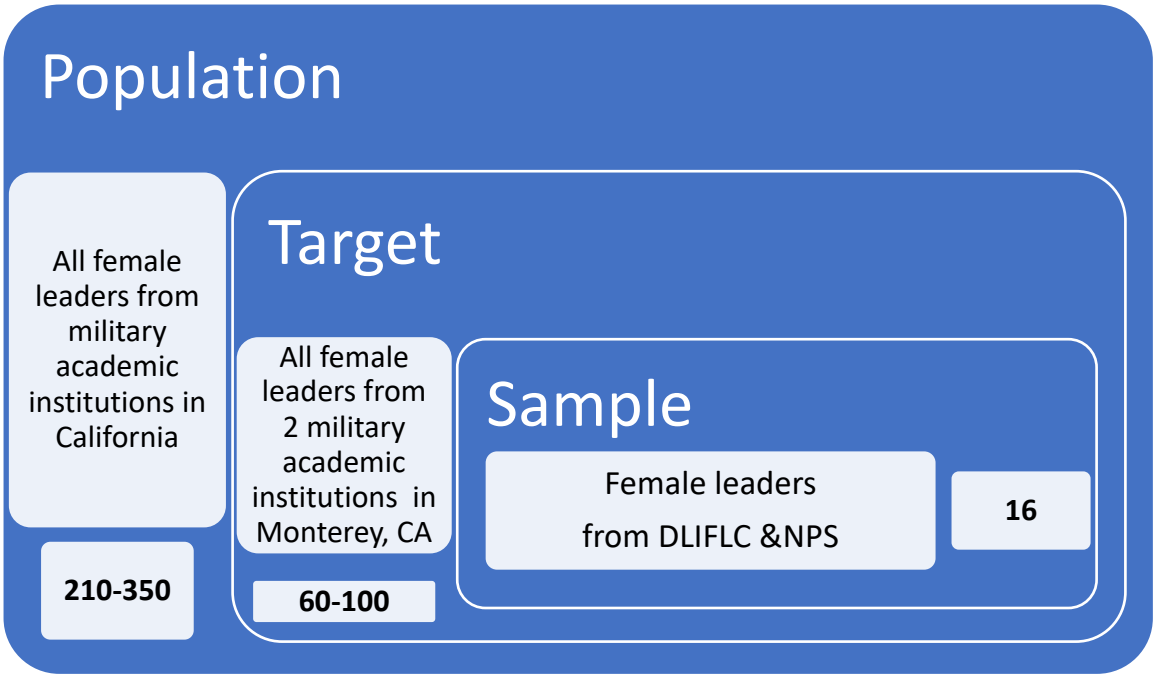
Target Population

According to Patten and Newhart (2018), the target population is "the population to which the researcher wants to be able to generalize the results" (p. 71). Based on the population of this study, the target population was narrowed to two schools located in Monterey, California: the DLIFLC and NPS. To ensure that participants in this study had critical experience in their positions, they also must have been in a mid-level management position for a minimum of 3 years. Based on the approximation that there are 30-50 female leaders at each institution, it was estimated that the target population for this study was 60-100.

Sample

Patten and Newhart (2018) defined a sample as "a subset of the population of interest that allows the researcher to make inferences about the population" (p. 89). Based on the target population of 60-100, which represents the female leaders from the DLIFLC and NPS, this study aimed to sample the experiences of 16 female leaders (eight from each institution).

Figure 3: Population, Target, and Sample



Sampling Procedure

Qualitative research encompasses many sampling procedures. For this study, convenience sampling and purposeful sampling were considered. Convenience sampling was considered because it is based on selecting people who are easy to reach, whereas purposeful sampling is focused on selecting information-rich cases whose study will elucidate the question under research. According to Patton (2015), "the primary focus of data collection will be on what is happening to individuals in a setting and how individuals are affected by the setting" (p. 395). For the purpose of this research, purposeful sampling was selected because the researcher can choose participants according to the needs of the study. The researcher predetermined the criteria of the study, and the selection of the participants was based on the following criteria:

- Must be a woman;
- Must be a female leader working in one of the two military academic institutions (DLIFLC or NPS) in Monterey, California;

- Must hold a role with the title of dean or bellow in the academic functions of the schools, or director or below in the operational functions of the schools;
- Must have at least 3 years of experience serving in a leadership position.

Demographic Data

The study included 16 participants who met eligibility criteria to participate; they signed UMass Global Informed Consent forms and were given the UMass Global Participant Bill of Rights. Demographic data was collected to look at the phenomenon of female leaders from military academic institutions finding common ground during crises and identify their experiences, so that future generations of women aspiring to organizational leadership roles can learn from them. Table 3 represents demographic data that described each participant, identified with numbers from 1-16.

Table 3. Participant Demographics

Participant #	Years a of experience serving in a leadership position	Academic Institution
Participant 1	5	NPS
Participant 2	4	NPS
Participant 3	6+	NPS
Participant 4	6+	NPS
Participant 5	6+	NPS
Participant 6	3	NPS
Participant 7	3	NPS
Participant 8	6+	NPS
Participant 9	6+	DLIFLC
Participant 10	6+	DLIFLC
Participant 11	6+	DLIFLC
Participant 12	5	DLIFLC
Participant 13	4	DLIFLC
Participant 14	6+	DLIFLC
Participant 15	6+	DLIFLC
Participant 16	5	DLIFLC

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The findings presented in this chapter reflect the results of 16 interviews that lasted between 45-60 minutes each. After scanning all the data, 11 themes emerged from meaningful phrases that helped to answer the research question, What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations? These themes were arranged by core competences that leaders must have in finding common ground during a crisis situation according to the conceptual framework used for this study. This conceptual framework was based on specific ideas, such as Power's (2018) suggestion about the need for research on crisis management where competences such as building trust, shared understanding, and effective communication are critical for the leader. Those competencies that leaders have utilized to manage crisis effectively are outlined within this study as competences to find common ground.

- Competence 1: Collaboration
- Competence 2: Communication
- Competence 3: Trust Building
- Competence 4: Others

The following emergent themes are presented in the order of highest to lowest frequency and aligned with the core competences that leaders must have in finding common ground during a crisis (Table 4).

Table 4: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Highest to Lowest Frequency

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Engaging in a clear and transparent communication to reduce anxiety about the unknown;	13	45
Consistently listening to employees with an open heart and open mind, willing to be influenced by what you hear;	13	42
Achieving unity in efforts among the various stakeholders by being the integrator in the organization;	12	39
Guiding and inspiring people through behaviors and performance;	13	39
Fostering an organizational culture where employees feel connected to the leader both physically and emotionally;	13	38
Creating a psychological safe space for open, honest, and courageous conversations;	14	36
Adapting to crisis with flexibility and thinking outside the box;	14	36
Encouraging employees to take ownership of the problem during the time of crisis;	12	36
Creating and nourishing an organizational culture where everyone has a voice;	13	27
Constantly investing in building and maintaining social relationships throughout the organization;	9	26
Leading with a mindset of turning crisis into opportunities: never let a good crisis go to waste;	9	23

The findings of the research are presented in alignment with 11 themes and core competences that a leader must have to be successful in finding common ground during crisis in academic military institutions.

Table 5: Competences and Major Themes

Competence	Major themes
Competence I: Communication	Competence I Theme: Engaging in a clear and transparent communication to reduce anxiety about the unknown Competence I Theme: Consistently listening to employees with an open heart and open mind, being willing to be influenced by what you hear Competence I Theme: Creating a psychological safe space for open, honest, and courageous conversations
Competence II: Collaboration	Competence II Theme: Achieving unity in efforts among the various stakeholders by being the integrator in the organization

Competence	Major themes
	Competence II Theme: Encouraging employees to take ownership of the problem during the time of crisis
	Competence II Theme: Constantly investing in building and maintaining social relationships throughout the organization
Competence III: Trust Building	Competence III Theme: Guiding and inspiring people through behaviors and performance.
	Competence III Theme: Fostering an organizational culture where employees feel connected to the leader both physically and emotionally
	Competence III Theme: Creating and nourishing an organizational culture where everyone has a voice
Competence IV: Others	Competence IV Theme: Adapting to crisis with flexibility and turning crisis into opportunities
	Competence IV Theme: Leading with a mindset of turning crisis into opportunities: never let a good crisis go to waste

Competence I: How female leaders from military academic institutions use communication to find common ground during crisis situations. In Competence I, Communication, female leaders from military academic institutions elaborated on how communication helped them find common ground during a crisis, sharing key examples of how they did so. Communication, as defined in this study, is the leader's ability to involve emotionally with employees, create a safety net for communication and engage the group in meaningful conversation, where members within the group need to feel that they can be heard and, more important, they need to hear one another. Clear and transparent communication is crucial for finding common ground and managing the crisis (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). Specifically, female leaders who participated in this study noted that when they engage in clear and transparent communication, listen constantly with an open heart, open their minds, and create psychological safe space for open, honest and courageous conversations, common ground is found and crisis is managed.

Table 6: Competence I and Major Themes

Competence	Major themes	Number of sources	Frequency
Competence I: Communication	Theme 1: Engaging in a clear and transparent communication to reduce anxiety about the unknown	13	45
	Theme 2: Consistently listening to employees with an open heart and open mind, being willing to be influenced by what you hear	13	42
	Theme 3: Creating a psychological safe space for open, honest, and courageous conversations	14	36

Theme 1: Engaging in a clear and transparent communication to reduce anxiety about the unknown. The main research question for this study asked, What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations? Analysis of the data collected resulted in the emergence of the first theme under the Competence I: Communication. According to the data, female leaders from military academic institutions engage in a clear and transparent communication to find common ground during crisis. This theme was noted in 13 of 16 interviews with a frequency of 44 (Table 7).

Table 7: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Engaging in a Clear and Transparent Communication to Reduce Anxiety About the Unknown

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Engaging in a clear and transparent communication to reduce anxiety about the unknown	13	45

At all times, but particularly during crises, transparent and clear communication from leaders is crucial. Thirteen of 16 respondents mentioned that clear and transparent communication was vital for finding common ground and efficient crisis management.

According to the participants, for leaders it is essential to communicate with all stakeholders and provide specific guidance on what to do and how to do, which can reduce anxiety and maintain order. Several participants mentioned that they were successful in finding common ground during a crisis when they clearly communicated the goals and key messages to support them. According to the participants, informing people about the problem and goals and providing guidance on appropriate responses is especially important in a crisis. Participant 8 believes that people are more willing to follow a leader if they understand the rationale behind their actions and how some decisions are being made,

> I work hard to communicate *why* we have to do it and *where* we are trying to go… I will say it 30 times for 5, 10, or even 20 minutes each time…I think for leaders is important to understand that they need to say it with different mediums and different formats, and at different times, and over, and over again.

Participant 16 considered that in order to avoid confusion and reduce the stress of unknown, leaders must clearly communicate what is the goal and vision of dealing with the crisis. This participant emphasized that in order "for it not to be a complete mess and have everyone on the same page you need to have everyone informed on what is happening."

Transparently providing factual and accurate information is also crucial in finding common ground, according to the study participants. Participants 1 and 3 consider that transparent communication helps people build proper expectations, establish a common understanding of the problem, and render people more willing to accept the solution or propose an alternative solution. According to Participant 1:

> You need to let them know every step of the process…they need to have a stake in what is going on…and if they have a stake during solution process, they are more likely to be proactive, and at the end they are more likely to be very accepting of the end results.

According to Participant 3, the aim of being transparent should not be to scare people, but to provide enough information to reduce anxiety about the unknown. Participant 4 also supported this sentiment, stating, "We should tell people both the good and the bad news." According to these participants, if the leader is not transparent, he/she can create organizational insecurity. The researcher asked a follow-up question whether the participants thinks that information needs to be released early in the crisis or wait for the right moment to reduce the stress on unknown. Participant 3 responded that according to her personal experience:

> All crises go through three stages: 1. Put out the fire; 2. Do damage control; and 3. Do the restoration. During the first stage, "fire," the communication need[s] to be more frequent… As a leader you need to acknowledge the risks and give people reasons why they shouldn't panic.

In response to a follow up question, Participant 7 answered that leaders should communicate early, even if the information is incomplete. She believes that though people don't like ambiguity, noting that a perception of mystification is worse because it impacts trust. This respondent believes that "sugar-coating" should be avoided; however, "that doesn't necessarily mean that everything crosses your desk is something to pass on…you need to use discretion."

According to Participant 16, lack of transparency and timely information can challenge people to look for information elsewhere, encouraging rumors and speculations. As a result, "it's very important to timely release it and share this information with everyone, otherwise the information leaks and then they are gossips." The best way to address this challenge, according to several participants, is to hold regular briefings and to keep the information accurate and up to date. For example, Participant 10 emphasized, "Regularly informing my employees about the evolution of the crisis helped to keep uncertainty low throughout the school…knowing what is going calmed down everyone." For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Participant 12 gathered every manager in the institution on a daily MS Teams call to solicit feedback. Her strategy was to allow her employees to get direct answers from leadership. Participant 12's strategy parallels the sentiment that can be found in Artifact 13 (retrieved from an online portal that provides feedback on language teaching): a comment from Participant 12's colleagues, who consider her "the best leader we have…she is very attentive to our needs and always answer[s] all the questions we have" (Artifact 13). Participant 15 reported dedicating as much time as needed every day to answering every dean's questions directly. According to the study's participants, common ground can be found during a crisis only if communication is:

1. Tailored for diverse audiences, "You have to tailor your language to the audience, you have to show that your truly care" (Participant 11).
2. Delivered via appropriate platforms. According to the study participants, leaders have to communicate using various platforms: Town Hall meetings, group meetings, team meetings, emails, texts, recorded messages, etc.

Participants in this study repeatedly emphasized the need for leaders to be direct and also compassionate in their communication during a crisis. According to the participants, a lack of transparency and clarity in communication will inevitably lead to a "breeding ground of insecurity" (Participant 14) within the institution, rendering the goal of finding common ground unattainable.

Theme 2: Consistently listening to employees with an open heart and open mind, being willing to be influenced by what you hear. Further analysis of the data collected resulted in the emergency of a second theme under Competence I: Communication. One of the major findings of the study revealed that listening to one's employees with an open heart and open mind will make them want to cooperate rather than compete, enabling the team to reach common ground during a crisis situation. This theme was noted in 13 sources with a frequency of 42 (Table 8).

Table 8: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Consistently Listening to Employees With an Open Heart and Open Mind, Being Willing To Be Influenced by What You Hear

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Consistently listening to employees with an open heart and open mind, being willing to be influenced by what you hear	13	42

According to most of the interview participants, polarization of ideas, positions, and views poses a serious challenge for leaders while trying to manage crisis effectively, and the chances that tensions will escalate are high. Whether it is a dispute on the best course of action to resolve the crisis or a bigger issue like the struggling with a new way of operating, finding common ground can be challenging. In these situations, it may be more difficult for leaders to find shared values and agreement among all stakeholders. In

this case, according to the participants in the study, listening is the golden key that opens the door to finding common ground. According to Participant 13, listening seems to make people more willing to communicate in a non-defensive manner and find common ground.

Thirteen of 16 respondents mentioned that a "two-way" process that involves clear messages is important in finding common ground. According to the participants, it is imperative to allow a feedback loop or institutionalizing a mechanism for hearing concerns from all the parties impacted by the crisis. According to Participant 7, leaders need to constantly remind themselves that although communication *to* employees is vital for finding common ground during crisis, hearing *from* the employees is just as important if not more. To be successful in this attempt, she makes sure that during "all-hands" meetings she lets people talk and encourages them to find a shared solution to the problem; "I fail as a leader if I am doing all the talking there. I let people ask questions and let them shape the agenda." As noted by Participant 14, employees need to feel heard, and they want to be able to share their perspectives. For Participant 5, a common practice in finding common ground during crisis is to allow each person to voice his/her own perspective on the situation; "at the end of my meetings I go around the room and everybody has 2 minutes to share their viewpoints on the issue and that gives everybody a chance to speak." Hearing from one's employees is crucial; however, a leader also needs to make sure that people are given enough opportunities to ask questions. In the same vein, Participant 4 suggests leaving plenty of time for employees to ask questions and also expecting to get some really "ugly" questions. According to Participant 11, this can be also done during "pulse check" meetings. She used this strategy during the

pandemic to check on every one of her employees in order to stay connected to them and get an understanding of their main concerns during that uncertain time. She said that this was one of the ways to show that she cared about her people, and she was there to support them. She used these meetings also to bring a shared understanding of the problem between conflicting parties.

In responding to the interview questions and in addressing the research question, participants in the study noted that listening with an open heart and open mind also means asking questions, being curious, and being ready to be influenced by what you hear and change your perceptions. Participant 15 believes that asking one's employees questions and getting to know them on a personal level can help creating a stronger relationship and open the door for finding common ground, noting that "the return of this investment is so high, because these people are forever grateful for you working around their personal situations…it always pays off if you consider personal situation of everyone" For Participant 2, listening with an open heart and open mind means "listen[ing] quickly and react[ing] with patience, with empathy and with trust." She mentioned that when she got "cries for help," she was quick to listen, noticing how important is for her people to know that somebody was there for them to support them.

Participants in the study also believe in the importance of listening to employees with an open heart and asking them questions might make them want to cooperate (instead of compete) and reach an agreement. For example, Participant 10 said, "I ask them questions and let them fly." Employees become more interested in sharing their points of view and more open to considering other positions. Participant 8 considers that

asking questions helps opposing parties to see both sides of an argument and appreciate that their leader is not one-sided.

Another important phenomenon mentioned by several participants was that predetermined solutions can be the enemy when leaders are attempting to find common ground. Participant 5 suggested being curious about other people's opinions and views. According to her, when we are engaging in a discussion with a predetermined answer regarding the crisis, we often forget to ask questions or get curious about why others think in a different way; doing so represents a missed opportunity for finding common ground. Participant 5 cautioned, "don't presume you know everything, be curious, ask many questions, because what you are going to find out is not only what your people know but also how they know it." Participant 13 strongly believes that in order to find common ground during a crisis, a leader needs to help disagreeing parties draw up a solution himself/herself. When listening to his/her employees, it is imperative for the leader to refrain from suggesting solutions. As Participant 6 suggested, it is critical to let employees to present the solution to their disagreement because "at the end of the day, whoever is there brings a lot of experience and it is really worth listening." The participant shared the following example of employees' input in finding common ground during a crisis situation:

> We went department by department and I said, "We are here to listen, we are not here to tell you wrong or right, we are not here to tell you we have a solution, we are here just to listen" and we will take extensive notes, we went through every single department, we put all the data together and then we started making decisions, based on that data.

Although every participant acknowledged the importance of listening to employees with an open heart and mind, some participants mentioned a few barriers that stand in the way of this powerful process. According to Participant 15, listening consumes time and effort; unfortunately, a crisis does not allow this luxury. Sometimes leaders must listen under time pressure, and as such, leaders need to listen in order to benefit fully from this process. According to Participant 10, when leaders are planning a time to discuss an issue, they need to do their best to stay focused and listen, allowing enough time so that the meeting is not rushed.

> My time is limited, however I give enough time, because people must vent and express what they think and why they are not happy, and why they act in a such way. I must spend time and listen to them. If one meeting is not enough, then I have to meet another time. I have to invest my time to listen and show that I am honestly open to listen.

Another barrier mentioned by Participants 12 and 9 is that the listening process could possibly change the leader's perceptions and attitudes. Sometimes a leader may obtain crucial insights that completely change the way he/she manages the crisis. Participant 3 stated:

> I deliberately make myself listen to the people around me that have more experience and expertise than I do, and my job is to try to absorb and make decisions fact based, even if initially I had a different perspective on the issue. I try to get deeper inside the organization and listen to all parties and then bring those questions to the heads of the departments so that they have a chance to tell me why that my point of view might not be accurate or might not be relevant.

Almost all participants agreed that listening is a skill all leaders must possess, but sadly, not all of them have it. Some participants recognized that they had to learn how to listen, noting that listening to their employees did not feel good at the beginning, and it took some time for them to master the skill. For example, Participant 4 stated, "I've learned to just sit back and let my employees speak, I had to remind myself constantly that all I just need to do is just listen, I don't have to take actions, they just need to know that I am hearing them."

The data collected from the interviews supports the existing evidence in the literature that leaders who listen well generate more trust and as result they are more effective in finding common ground and more successful in managing crisis. According to Participant 13, when the crisis is over, people will remember how the leader responded to their opinions and how they found common ground using their voices.

Theme 3: Creating a psychological safe space for open, honest, and courageous conversations. Analysis of the data collected led to the emergence of the third theme under Competence I: Communication. During the interviews, participants were asked a followed-up question on how they manage obstacles to communication and achieve common ground during crisis situations. Responses to this question led to another major finding that during crises, communication can be difficult, and leaders need to focus on the development of "safe spaces" for open, brave, and honest conversations. This theme was mentioned by 14 sources with a frequency of 36 (Table 9).

Table 9: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Creating a Psychological Safe Space for Open, Honest, and Courageous Conversations

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Creating a psychological safe space for open, honest, and courageous conversations	14	36

Fourteen of the 16 interview participants highlighted that communicating and finding common ground during organizational crises can be extremely difficult because of opposing ideas, negative emotions (e.g., fear and anger to lose the job), hurt feelings, misinterpretations, etc. According to the participants, if not carefully managed, communication can become highly destructive and lead to negative outcomes. A leader's job in this situation is to foster the type of conversation that will make all parties find common understanding of the problem and shared values. This means setting the stage for discussing issues that are difficult and that ask for deep, honest, meaningful conversations.

> Communication is impossible while emotions are high and anxiety may be on the way, the judgment is clouded because of the perception of danger and I would say in crisis situation people are run by overreacting amygdala and leader's role is to calm down emptions and ground people, helping them accept their feelings and move on.

According to Participant 14, when leaders encourage employees to address these hard conversations, they create a "safe environment" for finding common ground and positive resolution of the crisis. The participants defined a safe environment as one where employees feel relaxed, equal, and free from fear of repercussion; can speak their minds; and can be themselves.

Each of the participants also reflected on what they do to create a safe environment for open, honest, and courageous conversations. Participants 5, 6, and 15 mentioned the supportive atmosphere that they instill through empathic listening, a practice that helped these female leaders open the door for open and honest communication and as result find common ground. For example, Participant 6 said, "You don't want to be defensive; you don't want to give the solutions; you just want to listen." Listening to employees in a non-judgmental way is another way to create safe environment. According to Participant 13,

> My employees know that they can express their opinion and I am not penalizing them or judging them, even if sometimes I disagree with them…. I think it is [a] very healthy environment and relationship when my people are not afraid of speaking their own mind.

Several participants emphasized the importance of setting the ground rules for safe and sustainable communication. One of the ground rules that several participants mentioned is giving every participant equal opportunity to speak. Participant 11 talked about involving every participant in discussion, yet not pressuring them to speak when they are uncomfortable doing so.

> I found that during town hall meetings were cultural dynamics at play in the communication, and there were schools that were very interactive and there were schools that were very silent. For example, more hierarchical societies felt less comfortable providing their input about the problem we discussed, and we had to think about how we take that into account and provide opportunities for those schools to express their opinion.

To tackle this problem, Participants 5 and 6 introduced a new practice in their organization, ending meetings with a round in which each participant in the conversation is asked to make some comments about the issue that is discussed. Participant 6 stated,

> At the beginning of the meeting, I tell people to write down as they listen to our conversation three main ideas on how to deal with the situation and at the end of the meeting I go around, and I ask to give me one of their top idea.

According to Participant 14, it is important to establish, agree upon, and remind others of rules such as not interrupting and not judging at every meeting.

Participants 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, and 16 noted that it is also important to not only establish ground rules but also constantly remind employees about the organization's mission and vision, reiterate them, and reinforce them from time to time in subsequent meetings. Participant 16 said, "To avoid complete chaos and at the same time to create room for open and honest discussions you need to establish ground rules and remind people of what is our vision and mission. Participant 7 shared, "It is really important to keep everyone aligned because things move and change very quickly."

Several participants mentioned asymmetry in power relations as an impediment to establishing a safe environment and finding common ground. For example, Participant 1 noted that unequal power relations between the leader and employees often cause strain in open and honest dialogue, stating, "If employees are in a meeting with their higher leadership and they are asked if there is a problem, they are not likely to raise their hand." According to Participant 1, this is a major issue in finding common ground during a crisis, because according to her, "A conversation is a dialogue, not a monologue."

If a safe place for communication is created, it is also important to sustain that environment, said Participant 2. To find common ground and establish a safe environment for communication, a leader needs to be flexible and set the tone, for example, Participant 2 mentioned how she would adjust the agenda of the meetings to accommodate the employees' needs, especially for those who might experience difficulties speaking in a group. Participant 12 shared her experience of how being human helped her to create a safe environment for open and courageous conversations and consequently find common ground during a crisis. She shared,

> The crisis happened, and the lady was not afraid to come to me and report on it. She said, "Look, I know you are my boss and I know it doesn't look good, but here is the situation, we are going to experience serious consequences and I want to give you heads up before the problem hits us."

Participant 12 believes that nothing establishes a safe environment more effectively than an emotional connection to the people established through shared humanity with their leader. Another interviewee, Participant 10, said she is not afraid to admit she made a mistake and appear vulnerable to her people, stating, "I am a human being…I try not to make mistakes, but mistakes happen." Also, according to Participant 7, by admitting your mistakes, employees are not afraid to come and discuss their challenges freely. She shared, "My team knows that it is not going to be the end of the world if they make a mistake. They know that aren't repercussions from making mistakes if they put forth their best effort." Another interviewee, Participant 11, went even further and stated that although being honest and venerable is important, leaders must be careful not to give

anyone false hope and recognize that in an organizational crisis there are some who win and some who lose (jobs, positions, status, etc.). She stated,

> If you get difficult questions like "Am I going to lose my job?" as a credible leader you have to say what you know is true at that moment and restating the importance of working together to find common ground.

On the same note, Participant 3 commented that leaders e need to recognize that during organizational crisis people will be, at minimum, outside their comfort zone and it is up to the leaders to build their confidence. As a result, leaders must "work as much as [they] can for [employees'] soft landing."

All the participants believe that crisis communication does not have necessarily to take place in defensive environments. Rather, leaders who must stress the importance of achieving common ground and finding mutual solutions to the crisis. It is up to the leaders to create supportive conditions that include qualities such as respect for other's opinion, equality, open debate, encouragement of new ideas, empathy for others' feelings, etc., so that everyone can participate and find common ground.

Competence II: Collaboration, how female leaders from military academic institutions use collaboration to find common ground during crisis situations. This competence revealed actions taken by female leaders from military academic institutions to find common ground during crisis through collaboration. Study participants expressed that engaging employees in the collaborative process in times of crisis is an important component of establishing common ground. According to the participants, in order to find common ground, leaders need foster collaboration through the following actions: be the integrator in the organization, encourage employees to take ownership of the problem,

and constantly invest in building and maintaining social relationships throughout the organization. Through these actions, leaders find common ground and manage crisis effectively (Table 10).

Table 10: Competences and Major Themes

Competence	Major themes	Number of sources	Frequency
Competence II: Collaboration	Theme 4: Achieving unity in efforts among the various stakeholders by being the integrator in the organization	12	40
	Theme 5: Encouraging employees to take ownership of the problem during the time of crisis	12	36
	Theme 6: Constantly investing in building and maintaining social relationships throughout the organization	10	27

Theme 4: Achieving unity in efforts among the various stakeholders by being the integrator in the organization. Several study participants remarked that due to the increasingly dynamic nature of organizational crisis, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find common ground. According to participant 5, the problem most of the time is that when leaders say that there is a need to find common ground, others hear: "Here is the crisis, we are going to solve it my way." According to study participants, in order to resolve this problem, leader need to address crisis from a true common ground perspective and engage sincerely in collaborative processes. In response to the second sub-research question—What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in using collaboration to find common ground during crisis situations? —12 female leaders from both organizations mentioned 39 times that a key collaboration practice in finding common ground is to act as an integrator during crisis

(Table 11). According to the participants, this function presumes achievement of unity of effort among all the stakeholders when handling organizational crisis.

Table 11: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Achieving Unity in Efforts Among the Various Stakeholders by Being the Integrator in the Organization

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Achieving unity in efforts among the various stakeholders by being the integrator in the organization	12	40

The female leaders in this study described the integrator role as: "bringing all the parties inside the tent and create all the conditions for them to work as a team," "orchestrat[ing] difficult conversations;" "navigat[ing] the ship, not driving the ship;" "being able to translate, interpret, filter and communicate so that you are the integrator;" and "acting from behind the curtain." Study participants were asked also to give some examples of what these behaviors might look like in practice and share about times when performing the role of integrator helped them find common ground during a crisis. Participant 6 shared her experience in creating a collaboration space for sharing ideas, describing the formation of "an umbrella unit" that helped her find common ground during several organizational crises. She recalled, "after creating this collaboration space, all of a sudden, we got increased support from all the parties, because they had something to say..., and actually worked really well, people were not pulling in different directions anymore." Participant 15 explained that, in order to find that "golden" common ground, she would run frequent all hands and action review meetings until consensus was reached among all the parties. She stated, "I try to have people arrive at a consensus and it might take several meetings and a little bit of time." In a similar vein, Participant 16 shared,

> I tell them [employees] to figure out since I am not going to give them [employees] an answer. So, most of the time thy will come to something, cause you kind of force them [employees] into the same room…and you back off in order to let them find that shared understanding and even if they don't like each other, even then they will find common ground.

According to Participant 5, people are looking at their leader and wait for directions; however, "people want directions that gives them maneuver space and if you give them direction, they will not own the answer." When asked how she helps her team to navigate the problem and not just tell them what to do, she answered,

> I back off… and I tell them that we are going to form either committees, task forces or levels of effort and they are going to examine the issue and give me thoughts and let them own it [the issue/crisis/problem].

Participant 5's comment parallels what was written about her in Artifact 14, an online publication talking about effective leadership in which she was described as a leader who "is valued for her ability to effect organizational change and collaboratively lead teams through various challenges" (Artifact 14).

Participant 11 shared about the importance of placing all relevant facts before all the people involved in the crisis and then discussing the difficult situation/problem was another experience. She will call several meetings until some alternative is found that provides the best solution for the entire organization. During these meetings, confrontation is unavoidable; "In the beginning of the crisis meetings feel like a war room, later everybody starts sailing through the problem as a team." Another interviewee, Participant 5, said that she will not make any decisions "until the parties start talking to

each other;" according to her, the leader is no longer in the lead position. Instead, she becomes the navigator of the conversation.

Participant 1 also supports the idea that confrontation of sides must be the primary basis for finding common ground, noting, "fostering healthy confrontations is really important for effective crisis management." According to her the leader's role is to ensure that the issue will at least be discussed and addressed, and not avoided. Participant 3 also supports this notion and believes that the leader's role is to bring to the discussion table people who are most influential and most opposed to the issue and give them voice:

> People get tired of meeting, but there is a certain value to sitting around and understanding your colleagues and what they are doing and what is happening. As tedious as they are, they do serve a very important role. They are not a forum for me or for somebody else to tell us what to do, they really are a forum for everybody to collaborate and find common understanding.

Participants 3, 9, and 12 see themselves as integrators who build and create networks that help them find common ground and capitalize on new opportunities that crises can bring. According to the participants, an important factor in successfully finding common ground and managing a crisis is the knowledge and expertise that one can obtain from working through networks. According to Participant 6, "As integrators in our organizations, we should not be afraid to reach out to whoever has the experience and the knowledge, there is nothing wrong or intimidating about that." Participant 8 recommends that future female leaders seek advice and look for experience and expertise in key crises and learn from the experts. Several female leaders shared their experience in bringing a third party into discussion when opposing parties have trouble finding common ground

and need help to navigate the situation, or when the parties are suspicious of the leader's expertise. According to Participant 9, having an impartial party in the meeting can help defuse tension, get people's points across, and identify areas of agreement. She stated, "What I did [was] I invited people from outside who helped us to sort things out and prioritize things." Participant 12 expanded on that notion, sharing her experience of inviting people from other departments:

> who have the same jobs and who might have the same problems and discuss[ing] the problems that we were experiencing because a lot of them have been already addressed in a very skillful manner and you don't have to always reinvent the wheel, there are people who have great experience managing crisis and finding common ground.

Participant 3 expended on the purpose of inviting third parties, stating:

> When the crisis occurs, there are people who are naturally suspicious of my qualifications, because I am not a specialist in the field and there are people who will try to undermine my authority, then I would try to identify the influential subject matter experts and make sure that they were the ones who spoke on the topics for which their expertise was most important, I would orchestrate those conversations, I would not be the lead speaker.

When asked, What makes an integrator successful? respondents described an effective integrator as "good listener" and someone "who will work back and forth for the team and others." According to Participant 3, listening is an important skill that integrators need to have:

> I try to make myself listen to others and then add value by integrating things which by the nature of the organization were in separate stovepipes or bring perspectives from different stovepipes to the to the question. As the leader I had an opportunity to see those stovepipes differently from the people living in them and so try to bring that kind of added value.

Participants also noted that integrators are very good at prioritizing the well-being of others, fostering agreement, avoiding direct confrontation through collaboration, and placing the right people in the right roles. The path to cohesion, according to respondents, can be very challenging, but when everyone understands the why something needs to be done and respects each other's opinion, the foundation for finding common ground can be established.

Theme 5: Encouraging employees to take ownership of the problem during the time of crisis. Further analysis of the data collected resulted in the second theme under Competence II: Collaboration. This part of the study identified how encouraging employees to take ownership of the problem can help the leader find common ground during a time of crisis. This theme was noted among 12 sources with a frequency of 36 (Table 12).

Table 12: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Encouraging Employees To Take Ownership of the Problem During the Time of Crisis

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Encouraging employees to take ownership of the problem during the time of crisis	12	36

When asked to share some examples of how to help people in the organization become proactive about finding common ground and resolving crises, Participant 2

explained what motivated her to encourage employees to take ownership. She shared the following story:

> I consider myself a very energetic person and love to take initiatives. Before I became a supervisor, I often felt unappreciated or coerced to do something, as result I had zero motivation or desire to speak up or engage in problem solving. When I became a supervisor, I decided to change that. I don't take my employees job as granted. I try to highlight their contributions and achievements and I think that leads them doing a better job and them being more proactive about finding and solving problems.

Twelve respondents in this study discussed the idea of taking ownership of the problem, sharing how they used this approach to keep teams going in times of organizational crisis. According to the participants, taking ownership of the problem is critical during organizational crisis. They believe that when employees take ownership of the problem, they are more likely to look for compromise and be more determined and motivated to find common ground. For example, Participant 15 stated, "I noticed that my employees were more committed to find common ground when they had a stake in the discussion." Participant 1 also noted that when they are encouraged to take ownership, employees are more likely to be proactive and ultimately "they are more likely to be very accepting of the end results."

Participant 9 emphasized that listening is another great tool to encourage teams to take ownership of the problem. According to her, it is important for a leader to listen to the problems but not provide the answer. Instead, the leader needs to ask more questions

and provide space and resources that will empower employees to look for the right answer and find common ground. She stated,

> I ask them what they think about the problem, and I let them fly, I don't impose my way. They are the ones who propose different solutions and I listen. I think that how you make them own the problem and find common ground.

When they succeed, Participant 13 stated that it is important to compliment them and tell them that you had absolute faith in them finding common ground: in other words, "trust their judgment."

According to all 12 respondents, a sense of ownership is the most powerful tool an organization can have during the time of crisis, and the leaders' responsibility is to create an environment where employees feel free to express themselves openly and honestly and share their ideas to find common ground. Participants in the study outlined three tactics that helped them ignite employees' motivation to engage, take ownership of the problem, and find common ground.

Acknowledgment. The first one tactic that almost all respondents highlighted was that in order to fully engage employees in the process, leaders need to constantly emphasize that people's contributions are unique and necessary. Doing so develops a sense of belonging, which helps employees stay engaged and motivated to find common ground. According to Participant 12, acknowledging good work in a timely manner also helps engage all employees in the resolving the crisis. When participants in the study did so, their employees felt that appreciated and cared for.

> It is essential to identify your employees' strengths and weaknesses before the crisis even happens, it is critical for your success and crisis resolution to capitalize

> on people strengths to give everyone the role that he/she is good at and to make sure that nobody gets an assignment that is in the area of his weakness...

Asking for help. The second tactic mentioned by seven participants is asking one's employees for suggestions to solve the crisis or optimize a process. This tactic helped the participants maximize the sense of empowerment and ownership. One of the respondents, Participants 6, shared a comment from one of her employees. When asked she felt being part of the crisis team, the employee commented that "she felt like she was part of this huge thing that was happening and she was also part of the solution, that built tremendously her confidence and her desire to find consensus."

Autonomy. Encouraging autonomy was another tactic used by six female leaders in this study to foster employees' motivation to take ownership of the problem. Participant 7 shared, "Collaboration frankly often shouldn't happen at my level…I am better served staying away from it…I deliberately remove myself from those collaboration meetings to give my team space to own the problem." Participant 12 noticed that her employees will go the extra mile if they are in charge and feel trusted to do the job. According to her, "you are setting yourself for success and prevent a lot of crises" if you encourage autonomy in the workplace. In contrast, Participant 2 noted that she always gives her employees several options and they have the power to make choices that are aligned with their own values and goals as well as their team's:

> I give them [employees] options, like a Chinese menu, option A, option B, and option C. You want your people to be able to make impactful decisions and to be able to be analytical and to actually think through what really works best for them.

Encouraging and providing positive feedback also motivates the team to take ownership of the problem. Participant 4 reported using feedback phrases like: “Having your expertise on this problem will be so helpful in finding common ground.”

A critical factor in encouraging employees to take ownership is establishing expectations, and defining what success looks like, and leaving them to find the solution. Participant 7 will usually set the goals and explain what success looks like, then remove herself from the collaboration space, asking the team to go out, work, and come back with “a 75%-80% baked solution or product.” Participant 9 will also communicate “what” is changing and “why” some changes are necessary in the organization, then create space for peer sharing and let people “figure it out.” Reiterating the ideas expressed by 12 other respondents, Participant 9 concluded:

> There is more trust if a peer is talking about this case instead of me preaching into them. It is kind of a peer exchange and peer sharing which is the most powerful tool in the organization, especially in our organization, which is so talented and multinational, and you can bring talent from all around the world.

Theme 6: Constantly investing in building and maintaining social relationships throughout the organization. Several participants correlated the second competence, Collaboration, with investing in building and maintaining relationships. These respondents quickly pointed out the importance of building teams to ease the process of finding common ground during organizational crises. This theme was expressed by nine sources with a frequency of 26 (Table 13).

Table 13: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Constantly Investing in Building and Maintaining Social Relationships Throughout the Organization

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Constantly investing in building and maintaining social relationships throughout the organization	10	27

Participants in the study truly reflected on what it takes to successfully find common ground during a crisis. Nine participants believe that in order to be effective, leaders need to invest constantly in the backbone of the organization: people. When asked how to establish successful platforms for collaboration to find common ground during crisis, all the respondents agreed that the driving factor behind successful collaboration is building and maintaining effective teams. This notion was expressed clearly by Participant 14, who considers that "all it takes is to invest some time to get to know your people and build connections through authentic involvement." Participant 2 also feels that relationships are the "building blocks" of all successful activities in the organization, including crisis management.

Several participants (12, 16, and 5) mentioned that as leaders in their organizations, especially during crisis situations, they were often under enormous pressure that distracted them from paying attention to relationships. They felt the urgency of resolving the crisis and mistakenly thought that spending time on relationships would not help them manage the crisis. However, based on their experiences, they found that relationships were the key to resolving the crisis, paving the way for finding common ground. Based on this finding, Participant 12 believes that building relationships must be the "groundwork" before the crisis even develops; "when you are proactive with building relationship you set yourself for success…I believe that one of the biggest keys for

success is building relationships timely." If people don't know each other, they will tend to have a difficult time functioning collaboratively. According to Participant 2, disagreement will erupt, making it impossible to find common ground.

Two more participants supported the need to build social relationships before a crisis arises. Participant 16 shared her experience when well-established relationships helped her to find common ground and move on during crisis management; "When that [crisis] happened I had relationships established and they [opposing parties] were willing to respond positively to our crisis scenario." Even though almost all respondents talked about how important it is to build social relationships before a crisis arises, some respondents (3 and 9) asserted that it is not impossible to establish relationships during a crisis, and that "those crises might even help bring people together" (Participant 3).

When asked whose responsibility it is to build relationships in the organization, most of the respondents answered that it is the leader's responsibility to invite people to get involved. According to the participants, people want to become part of something bigger than themselves, and many people are looking for an opportunity to meet other people who share same ideas, goals, and visions. Most of the respondents also pointed the need to continue investing in relationships after they were built, since, "like any other living thing," (Participant 9) teams/relationships need care to keep them strong. Participant 10 clearly shared this view, stating, "Building relationships takes time and can go away quickly if you don't invest in maintaining them." To accomplish this goal, study participants recommended that leaders:

- Check in with people on a constant basis (Participants 2, 4, 6, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16);

- Create open spaces for open communication where people can talk about important issues and set aside some time for communication (Participant 14);
- Celebrate "small wins" (Participant 10: "I practice celebrating little things to show my appreciation for what they do, for example I take them for lunch or bring food;" Participant 12: "They know that you are watching them, that you celebrate their success, that you recognize their achievements and expertise.");
- Appreciate each other's work (Participant 12: "Building a positive atmosphere by recognizing each other work, achievements and contributions. Being very careful with no undermining or missing anybody's contributions;" Participant 4: "Capitalizing on every member of the team contributions is also a key in building relationships.");
- Challenge others to do better (Participant 13);
- Be there for your employees (Participant 2); and
- Help them grow (Participant 15: "I think it is leaders' responsibility to know who needs what and try to provide those resources.").

Participant 15's comment parallels the sentiment that can be found in Artifact 5, an email from a subordinate thanking their supervisor (Participant 15) for her support and guidance, mentioning that the team's success would not be possible without "your sincere desire to see all of us succeed with an immeasurable investment you put into our work" (Artifact 5).

Participants' experiences showed that consciously and actively establishing and maintaining healthy relationships is central for successful crisis resolution and finding common ground. For example, Participant 15 stated, "teams are the foundation of an

organized effort to find common ground and solve crises successfully." Reiterating the ideas expressed by nine other respondents, Participant 12 concluded that "building and maintaining relationships needs to be the main priority of any leader and only with strong teams we have the power to successfully manage any crisis and find common ground."

Competence III: Trust building, how female leaders from military academic institutions use trust to find common ground during crisis situations. In the competence of Trust Building, key themes in finding common ground during crises expressed by female leaders from both institutions included guiding and inspiring people through behaviors and performance, fostering an organizational culture where employees feel connected to the leader both physically and emotionally, and creating and nourishing an organizational culture where everyone has a voice. Trust building, as defined in this study, means strengthening a climate of psychological safety where team members are allowed to make and correct their mistakes (Brower et al., 2000). Specifically, participants in this study noted that when leaders nurture a healthy work environment where everyone feels they belong, have a voice, and feel connected to the leader, common ground can be found and crisis can be successfully managed (Table 14).

Table 14: Competence III and Major Themes

Competence	Major themes	Number of sources	Frequency
Competence III: Trust Building	Theme 7: Guiding and inspiring people through behaviors and performance.	13	41
	Theme 8: Fostering an organizational culture where employees feel connected to the leader both physically and emotionally	13	39

Theme 7: Guiding and inspiring people through behaviors and performance.

Semi-structured interview questions focused on the female leaders' experience of how

building trust helped them find common ground during crisis. Data collected resulted in the first theme under Competence III: Trust Building, guiding and inspiring people through behaviors and performance. The study revealed the importance of female leaders leading by example and setting a good example. This theme was expressed by 13 sources with a frequency of 39 (Table 15).

Table 15: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Guiding and Inspiring People Through Behaviors and Performance

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Guiding and inspiring people through behaviors and performance	13	41

During a crisis, information is incomplete, interests and priorities clash, and emotions and anxieties run high; as a result, finding common ground is a serious challenge for leaders. As such, participants in the study shared their experiences and views on what helped them to find common ground during times of crisis. According to 13 respondents, leaders built trust with their teams so that employees could work autonomously and find common ground while still knowing they could seek guidance when stakes were high, such as during a crisis. Study participants all agreed that in times of crisis, in order to find common ground, leaders need to make intelligent decisions, "do the right thing" (Participant 11) and send the right examples as role models (Participant 5).

Through the data analysis, the researcher identified additional skills/behaviors mentioned by respondents that allowed female leaders to think strategically, navigate the crisis, and find common ground. Those were: vigilance, decisiveness, knowledge and humility.

Vigilance. Anticipation is an important quality that leaders must possess in order to find common ground during crisis. According to Participant 9, "leaders need to be able to scan the environment constantly and look for those signals of crisis." Participant 12 shared her experience setting the stage for trust, noting that even before the crisis happens, she considers various scenarios and gathers information from different parties to anticipate the upcoming crisis that helps build trust within the team.

Decisiveness. Being decisive in uncertain times and having courage is another skill that leaders need to have in order to build trust. According to Participant 3, these skills allow the leader to accept and support employees who see the world differently. According to the study participants, leaders must open themselves up to challenging conversations in order to understand others and their diverse views. For example, Participant 9 stated, "You shouldn't be intimidated by people who sees things differently, you have to be brave and motivated to find common ground. And if there is resistance you have to take care of your people anyway." Crises require quick decisions, according to participants' experiences, and reflected times when respondents had to make the best decision, they could with the information they had available. The team will trust them because, as mentioned by Participant 2 "if you can keep your conviction of who you are and you keep true to yourself and to your people, you just build that trust in people."

Knowledge. The participants also all agreed that if a leader wants to be trusted, they need to be a source of professional inspiration and knowledge. According to Participant 15, this means "conducting yourself in a caring, ethical and driven way." Participant 15's comment parallels a sentiment that can be found in Artifact 11, an email from a subordinate who thanks the supervisor (Participant 15) for her support and

guidance and considers the participant "the most caring supervisor I have ever met in my life" (Artifact 11). Ultimately, Participant 2 emphasized that "you will be judged by your actions, not by your words. So, prepare yourself to show up every day with the commitment to achieve great outcomes." Participants 2, 5, and 6 discussed the importance of being knowledgeable and quickly processing the available information, rapidly determining what matters most, and making decisions with conviction. Participant 5 shared, "Performance matters, competence and performance matters, it is really important. Remember! On one hand people are watching, on the other hand people are *watching*." She also recommended that future female leaders form military academic institutions:

> Whatever they give you [higher command], do it really well, and study and be curious again, study, be diligent and do it well. Performance matters. And if you're not allowed to perform it is a different problem. So, if you're not allowed to perform now you have a different phenomenon, that's when it gets very scratchy and can be become very hostile.

Study participants also expressed that knowledge is power when dealing with crisis, "knowing your stuff will make your credible" (Participant 5). According to respondents' experiences, in times of uncertainty, people will come to them for information and advice and they will need their expertise to work autonomously and find common ground. Participant 6 shared,

> They [employees] knew I was in the classroom [teaching before the leadership position] and I had amazing records as an instructor, that helped to instill trust…a lot of that trust came from experience. I could relate to their questions versus

someone that never did this job before, they knew that I am not speaking from nowhere.

Participants in this study also shared that during a crisis, the level of disagreement is high and leaders need to be the first ones who are intellectually versatile and open to discuss other perspectives. For example, Participant 11 stated,

> It is easy to focus just on the crisis and not listen to other perspectives, but I had to take a minute and discuss issues that sometimes transcend even my personal views. For example, when I faced a downsizing crisis, first thing I did, I invited different people to challenge my own thinking. This was very uncomfortable for me the first time, but then I realized this is the only way I could address the issue.

Humility. Another leadership trait that was mentioned by all 12 respondents was humility, a leader's ability to be self-critical, recognize his/her own mistakes, and understand his/her weaknesses and limitations. Participant 8 shared,

> In my case I am very self-critical, I would say I am ruthlessly self-critical because I consider this is a critical component to self-development and institutional and organizational development. Self-critique and self-reflection and acceptance of criticism are, I believe, critical aspects of a learning leader in a learning organization as opposed to a static leader in a static organization.

Participant 5 recognizes that she doesn't always have the answer or know how to proceed, and because of that she is open to learning. According to her, "learning requires humility." Humble leaders are not afraid to show vulnerability, Participants 8, 11, and 15 affirmed. Participant 10 said that for her it is extremely important to make that visible and model it for her team; she will often say to them, "I don't know this particular issue and I

don't understand how to deal with it. Can you help me?" According to her, doing so does not reflect a lack of confidence. Rather, it reflects her knowing what are her "blind spots" and where she needs more assistance. Several female leaders admitted that they don't just create space for their teams to make mistakes, they also don't have a problem admitting when they have done so themselves. Participant 15 shared the following experience of dealing with mistakes:

> I am not afraid of admitting that I was wrong, because I cannot be right all the time, sometimes when I realize that I was wrong then I immediately admit it publicly: "Oh my bad or my mistake, or I misunderstood… I'm so sorry… I'm learning every day."

Mistakes should be met with encouragement, not punishment, said study participants. A leader who fails to recognize failure as an opportunity for growth will not inspire the people around them, explained Participant 11. Participant 8 described this phenomenon by stating, "I think there is one tool that builds trust, admitting a mistake. And that builds trust because I see the world the same as my team."

Data from this study indicated that at the core of building trust, especially during a time of crisis, is leaders' willingness to admit that they are not invincible, and that, like every employee in the team, they have areas where they can develop, grow, and transform.

Theme 8: Fostering an organizational culture where employees feel connected to the leader both physically and emotionally. Further analysis of the data collected resulted in the second theme under the competence of Trust Building. This part of the

study identified that participants believe connecting to their people, both physically and emotionally, is critical for building trust and managing organizational crises.

Table 16: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Fostering an Organizational Culture Where Employees Feel Connected to the Leader Both Physically and Emotionally

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Fostering an organizational culture where employees feel connected to the leader both physically and emotionally	13	39

Participant 3 shared,

> Several years ago, I worked in an organization who had a very weak leadership, our supervisor didn't like in person meetings, our conversation was mainly through emails. I felt like we all were lacking purpose. I was motivated only by my pay…And eventually I quitted [sic].

Now that she is a leader in her organization she adopted a different model of leadership, "presence leadership." She believes that she is more effective when she engages with her team, physically and emotionally. This type of leadership was described by 12 other respondents, who believe that trust can be built by connecting to one's employees both physically and emotionally. Without personal connection to one's employees, no crisis can be solved, and no common ground can be found. Participants in the study believe that "presence leadership" is critical to managing crises successfully. They defined leadership presence as a combination of how the leader "shows up," how the leader "communicate[s], verbally and nonverbally," and "what impression the leader leaves on others;" "it is the impression you make when you step into a room, it is your voice, posture, body language, mood, it is everything your project," according to Participant 12.

Participant 12's comment parallels the sentiment that can be found in Artifact 12, a military publication that talks about leaders who make history. In this article, one of Participant 12's employees describe her as being passionate about caring for people, stating, "with her command, she brings positivity and hope."

According to the study participants, one of the best ways to show presence and build trust is to focus on one's people. It is about knowing when to speak and when to listen actively and ask questions. For example, Participant 5 said,

> You walk around, you ask people questions: What are you doing? What do you think about all of these? etc., you ask them to tell you about them, about the organization…You show your presence, your physical presence is key for any kind of crisis.

According to the study participants, when crisis happens in the organization, a leader's physical presence will add great value in finding common ground. The leader is considered to possess the knowledge and the expertise and consequently will provide direction and instill clarity among conflicting parties. By listening to different parties, the study's female leaders were able to gather everyone's insight and concerns and find common ground during the crisis. All of them shared personal experiences of how being present and engaging with the team helped them manage crises successfully. For example, Participant 12 shared her experience of "managing on the floor," which means that as a leader

> You go walk along that floor and stop by people's offices, especially those who are currently experiencing crisis and you show them your presence. Sometimes by just dropping by, they can feel your support. When you stop by, they can talk

about little moments that they would never mention in a formal meeting. By managing on the floor, you show your support, you show your presence, and you show your availability, to listen to them and that will motivate them to find that golden shared understanding with the rest of the stakeholders.

Study participants asserted that leadership presence is also about the leader's accessibility, openness, and having an "open-door policy." Especially during a crisis, employees need to hear from their leaders as often as possible; this was challenging particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. According to study participants, it was much harder to establish and maintain physical and emotional connection with their teams during the pandemic. It was not always possible to walk around and talk in person with their employees; instead, they had to become more creative and find ways to connect with her employees so that they could manage successfully all the challenges brought by the pandemic. Participant 10 shared her experience dealing with this challenge:

> I was no longer able to check in one on one with my employees over a coffee, schedule a team lunch or even to have those intimate conversations, I had to adapt and find ways to connect virtually, which was extremely difficult.

Another respondent, Participant 11, shared that she would start every online meeting with a "pulse check" activity, in which she would ask her employee to share what is new in their lives and if anything is needed from her side. "5-10 minutes [sic] nonwork conversation" is on the agenda of Participant 16, who explained that these kinds of conversations are crucial to emotional connection and they help to calm employees' spirits about the upcoming conversation. According to Participant 7, short conversations

about food, hobbies, etc., allow for common experience. After allowing everyone to share some personal information, she found that people are more open to conversing with each other. By doing this she builds connectivity and trust:

> I start every staff meeting with the so-called sharing something in our lives. Because we're not only coworkers were also people. As leaders we need to recognize that they are not only coworkers, but these are also people with a whole world behind.

Participants in the study also believe that physical presence and genuine connections are more important than ever in times of crisis. Asking your employee how you can help them is a powerful way to connect and build trust. When asked to elaborate on how building trust helped her to find common ground during crisis, Participant 13 shared that she practices a participatory leadership style:

> When finding common ground is required, my personal style is to go to each team and be there with them. It is like a physical way of saying I am a member of this team…I hope to achieve trust and collaboration by being present and presenting myself as a member of the team. I tell them to consider me a team member…I try to give them a different perspective on the issue, like saying: "You know, it will not always be like this, let's look at this crisis as an opportunity, we will learn from this, we will become more efficient, because being understaffed also teaches people to be very efficient, very smart."

Emotional connection is another important aspect of building trust and finding common ground during crisis. According to Participant 15, it is well known that people will not remember what you say, but they will never forget how you made them feel. She

shared, “we are not working with robots, we are working with real people and real people means real life situations.” Participant 2 considers that the emotional component of presence is crucial, especially during the time of crisis. She shared the following experience when she had to deal with a downsizing crisis in her organization:

> You want to love people on the way out as much as you love them on the way in, and that means that when you are delivering bad news you also trying to take care of those people: being as generous as you possibly can be with benefits, with transition services, with other things.

Leadership presence also encompasses how leaders communicate with their employees, both verbally and nonverbally. Participants 6 and 14 consider that body language is critical to building trust. Participant 6 noticed that when people agree with her, they tend to mirror her body language:

> When I am dealing with people that like me or agree with me, they will automatically begin to match my arm positions and my facial expressions. I know at that moment that they are truly connected and engaged in the conversation.

Calmness of the leader is also important; Participant 16 shared, “People will look at you during stressful times and you need to stay calm when people around you are losing control.” As such, once the leader connects to his/her employees both physically and emotionally, they can empower them to work autonomously and find common ground no matter how dispersed everyone is.

Theme 9: Creating and nourishing an organizational culture where everyone has a voice. In response to the third research sub-question (What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in building trust to find

common ground during crisis situations?), 13 female leaders from two military academic institutions from Monterey, California articulated 27 times that a key practice to building trust and being successful in finding common ground during crises is creating and nourishing an organizational culture where everyone has a voice (Table 17).

Table 17: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Creating and Nourishing an Organizational Culture Where Everyone Has a Voice

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Creating and nourishing an organizational culture where everyone has a voice	13	32

Creating and nourishing an organizational culture where everyone has a voice was greatly valued by participants in this study; however they all mentioned that because both organizations are military, cultivating an open environment is sometimes difficult because people in these organizations have a set of defense mechanisms that makes them careful around people in authority positions. When sharing their experiences, many of them talked about how employees sometimes do not feel comfortable sharing their views or are worried to speak up about a problem for different reasons. To encourage openness, study participants came up with several strategies for creating a safe and comfortable space for successful conversations. To decompress the atmosphere and help find common ground, Participant 13 will opt for an informal environment for discussions versus more formal meetings:

> I will go myself to the team and I will not necessarily have an agenda, I will just initiate the discussion and then people will get involved, they will get interested and start talking aloud and brainstorming… and suddenly you feel like they all are on the same page and that is how we establish the common ground. The moment

> we start the conversation, we are already solving the problem…During the talk they [the employees] are allowed to complain, and emotions are allowed, as we say, "Let the steam out," but 2 minutes later the same person who was very emotional about the conversation will be very positive and enthusiastic about the ways to overcome the disagreement, because his or her outlook is totally different now.

In contrast, Participant 15 will initiate casual one-on-one conversations so her employees can share their views privately; "they can come to me at any time and not be afraid of speaking their own mind and I think this is a very healthy relationship." Participant 15's comment parallels the sentiment found in Artifact 7, an email from a subordinate thanking the supervisor (Participant 15) for the support she offered. The subordinate said that leader's words and encouragement:

> were exactly what I needed when I felt devalued and demotivated. I sincerely thank you for not only being a great supervisor but a very compassionate person as well. Past two years of Pandemic and online teaching were challenge for all of us and we were lucky to have you as a dean to guide us through such distinguishing personal and professional qualities. (Artifact 7)

Participant 12 opts for a "open door policy" when it comes to finding common ground in the team. According to her, this policy is instilled "when people feel comfortable coming to you and talking to you and knowing that you will listen." An open-door policy is important to Participant 13 too, but it is not enough; she would prefer not to wait for her people to come to her. Instead, she will go and speak to them herself, cautioning, "It might be too late if you wait for them to come to you."

Employees' voice is also about giving employees the space and opportunity to communicate; this can be done through active listening, according to study participants. Listening is the critical skill in finding common ground. As Participant 2 stated, "when in meetings I try first to understand all the parties, then to be understood by all of them." Respondent 6 commented that during meetings, she tries to listen more than speak; "a good part is not me talking, I failed if I am doing all the talking there."

Supporting employee voice means also building employees' trust in themselves and their capabilities. Participant 6 shared,

> I also build trust in themselves by flying with their ideas…and as we implement it, I can suggest things and then improve it, but in the beginning, it was their idea. So, what I give them is the belief that they can take something from the scratch and move forward with that.

According to the participants in the study, in addition of involving employees in the process and giving them a voice, they also practiced recognition as a way to motivate and engage in collaborative processes. Participant 6 shared, "I try to let everyone know whose idea it was. I would never take credit for their ideas." Participant 2 observed that when employees start to appreciate each other, they are willing to compromise and find common ground.

Participants in the study were asked to give examples of what creating and nourishing an organizational culture where everyone has a voice might look like in practice. Participant 16 shared a success story of how providing voice to employees helped to find common ground during the COVID-19 pandemic.

> It has been 2 years already since our school reopened after [the] COVID-19 crisis, in using combinations on in person, hybrid and remote learning models. This adaptation was only possible because our organization has been taking the steps necessary for creating an organizational culture where everyone has a voice. Our employee felt comfortable speaking up during the Town Halls meetings or department meetings and proposing different solutions.

Participant 16 shared how her practice for involving employees in the process and letting them introduce the solution helped her manage a crisis successfully and find common ground:

> When we return from virtual training to one of the phases, we had the so-called "Block Schedule" where there was Group One and Group Two. After we tried it out some of the people said: "Well, we are OK with a little more traffic in the hallway at the same time rather than just having the second schedule because it is not really working." I listened and said: "OK, so we're going to try [it] for 2 weeks and if that is your preference and if there is no negative impact then that's what we're going to do." Listening to people throughout the process, taking their input, taking their feedback and adjusting based on that is the key in building trust.

There are several benefits to creating a culture where employees can speak their mind, according to study participants. One of them is that the employee will feel valued and included, and as such they feel comfortable sharing their opinions and views without the fear of repercussion. Leaders who promote "speak-up culture" will foster

collaboration and consequently set the stage for finding common ground and effective crisis management.

Competence IV: Others. With respect to the competence of Others, female leaders discussed what else they have done as leaders to find common ground during a crisis situation. Many participants in the study talked about the importance of adapting to crisis with flexibility, thinking outside the box, and leading with a mindset of turning crises into opportunities. Through these actions, female leaders from two military academic institutions found common ground during organizational crises (Table 18).

Table 18: Competence IV and Major Themes

Competence	Major themes	Number of sources	Frequency
Competence IV: Others	Theme 10: Adapting to crisis with flexibility and thinking outside the box	14	37
	Theme 11: Leading with a mindset of turning crisis into opportunities: never let a good crisis go to waste	9	24

Theme 10: Adapting to crisis with flexibility and thinking outside the box. In response to the question, Is there anything else you have done as a leader to find common ground during a crisis situation? nearly all respondents (14 of 16 sources) noted that adapting to crises with flexibility mindset was crucial to their finding common ground during uncertain times. Fourteen sources mentioned this theme a total of 36 times (Table 19).

Table 19: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Adapting to Crisis With Flexibility and Thinking Outside the Box

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Adapting to crisis with flexibility and thinking outside the box	14	37

Many organizational crises, and COVID-19 in particular, created a changing reality that required the study participants from both organizations to adapt to new and changing circumstances. All participants mentioned that often they faced situations that were out of their control, such as sudden budget cuts, downsizing, layoffs, etc. For example, Participant 4 stated, "we had to cut the budget while still delivering a quality instruction," and Participant 11 shared, "our organization, when quarantine [COVID-19] began we needed, students and staff, to quickly switch to virtual learning and remote work, keeping the production rate and quality of instruction at a high level." When these organizational crises occurred, participants had to be able to respond and adapt to these changes quickly. According to Participant 16, flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity are at the forefront during challenging times and adaptive leadership is the most appropriate leadership style during times of crisis. According to her, this type of leadership "is not like one size fits all." Instead, leaders need to deal with each situation separately, react to environmental changes, adapt to the situation, learn from their experience and mistakes, and move on.

With different parties and conflicting positions, study participants realized that in order to successfully manage crises, they needed to adapt because the actions that previously drove results were no longer relevant. According to Participant 8, "We need to be flexible and accept solutions, that are contrary to the norms that we were accustomed to." As Participant 1 noted, "It is not doing the same thing differently, it is doing different things." Participant 14 shared, "We need to think outside the box." Similar responses were also given by four more participants (Participants 2, 4, 9, and 14) who said that they had to adjust quickly and develop new plans of action to find common ground and

manage crises successfully. According to them, successful adaptation to the new circumstance would happen only through employee engagement and commitment. In contrast, employee resistance to new circumstance will lead to further damage, according to Participant 14. Therefore, leaders need to embrace such changes and adapt to difficult situation "without hesitation" (Participant 2).

The researcher asked Participant 6 about her role in adapting to the new circumstances and how she found common ground among all the parties. She responded that her role was to make sure that all parties were "on the same page" and ensure that "everybody stays in the loop." This was not an easy task since when the crisis hit and employees felt worried, alarmed, and unprepared to deal with unforeseen circumstances. She had to demonstrate flexibility firs, so that her employees could adopt the same behavior and seek shared understanding of the new situation.

Participants also emphasized the importance of creating a culture of adaptability and flexibility in the organization, even before the crisis. This can be done by:

- Encouraging creative thinking (Participant 15);
- Supporting new initiatives (Participant 13: "I also try to praise people for bringing alternative solutions.");
- Using supportive language (Participant 6: "Let's try that;" "I am not sure, but let's try it;" "Go for it, I trust you," etc.); and
- Promoting participation (Participant 10; "Whenever we are debating a situation, I try to bring more perspective in the room, the diversity of perspectives will benefit the final decision and force the rest of the parties to adapt to each other working styles.").

Through interviews with study participants, the data clearly indicated that in order to manage organizational crises successfully and find common ground, leaders need to adapt to new circumstances and new realities. Leaders need to be ready to meet new challenges, and the one tool that can help leaders do that above all is adaptability.

Theme 11: Leading with a mindset of turning crisis into opportunities: never let a good crisis go to waste. Continued analysis of the data resulted in the second theme under Competence IV: Other. The study revealed that study participants who led a crisis with a mindset of turning crises into opportunities are more effective in finding common ground during times of uncertainty. This theme was discussed by nine sources with a frequency of 24 (Table 20).

Table 20: Theme, Sources, and Frequency–Leading With a Mindset of Turning Crisis Into Opportunities: Never Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste

Theme	Number of sources	Frequency
Leading with a mindset of turning crisis into opportunities: never let a good crisis go to waste	9	24

Participants in the study managed crises and found common ground using different approaches and tools, but nine of them shared one factor in common: an attitude that led them to look for the opportunities within the crisis they faced. As nine female leaders suggested, great opportunities can develop out of crisis, mainly if established procedures are challenged. As Participant 5 noted, “necessity is the mother of invention.” Participant 5’s comment parallels the general perception that can be found in Artifact 14, an online publication about the female leader, which describes Participant 5 as a leader who “possesses unique experience in leading learning opportunities during the challenging times for millennials, adults and faculty” (Artifact 11).

When Participant 7 faced a problem related to sudden budget cuts for an important project, she could simply have said that project needs to be canceled, fire the people, and return to the previous way of doing things. Instead, she looked closer and came to a shared understanding with all the stakeholders about the importance of the project and found a solution for how to run the project with fewer resources.

To manage a crisis successfully, study participants believe that leaders always have to look for new opportunities in a time of uncertainty. For them, leading with an opportunity mindset means looking for a way to work through crisis with a positive and optimistic approach while creating peaceful, collaborative relationships among all the stakeholders. This positive, optimistic approach emphasizes the leader's deep understanding that crisis is happening to help the organization transform and evolve According to Participant 5, "Challenges are nothing else than opportunities to learn and develop." As noted by Participant 3, "If I had not had the crisis, I would not have known that I could do this." It is all about finding solutions that everyone can accept rather than proving one side right; according to Participant 13, "It is not about win or lose, it is about win-win solution." Crisis is neither negative nor positive, said Participant 6:

> We are not in the win or lose position, and this is not a fight or no fight situation, it is about getting to a good position, staying in a good position and then doing whatever it is to stay in that good position.

It is about bringing different perspectives that can help take a different view on the same problem and manage the crisis successfully, according to the female leader 6.

When the researcher asked the participants, what should be done to transform a crisis into an opportunity? respondents gave several suggestions: leaders need to take

initiatives, “bring an open mind” (Participant 6), think creatively, accept risks, and use the crisis to transform the organization. Participant 11 said that when experiencing a crisis, she usually tries to take actions and push through challenge, standing up for what she thinks is right and working collaboratively through the issue,

> It is not like I am sitting, and the opportunities will come, I seize the opportunities… As one of the congresswomen recently said:” If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring the folding chair.” This is my approach.”

In response to the same questions, Participants 3 and 12 consider that it is important for both leaders and employees to accept that sacrifices may need to be made and “by taking the risks better things might come” (Participant 13). When reflecting on the impact of the crisis on an organization, Participant 5 said that “crisis is kind of interesting, crisis is an environment for destruction, conflicting ideas, even crimes, but it can also be and extraordinary place for creativity.” Five out of nine participants used COVID-19 as an example of how a crisis helped them transform their organization and come up with creative solutions to new challenges. They said that the pandemic paved the way for new processes within the organization, and without such devastation to existing procedures and norms, employees from both military organizations would generally be very resistant to major changes. Participant 4 shared the following story that best summarizes participants’ experiences with the COVID-19 crisis:

> The pandemic posed a lot of challenges to organizations and their leaders. I would say that the good leaders have tried to observe the effectiveness of the new ways of doing things like teleworking, working remotely, online teaching and its impact on organization’s ability to do the mission. The good leaders took advantage of

> teleworking and later merge that with face-to-face interaction as needed to maintain institutional cohesion, organizational cohesion and effectiveness. So, I think that is an example of how leaders can transform the crisis into an opportunity. I am positive many organizations will keep this format online and remote way of doing things because, let's say if you have a sick student who cannot report to class, but still want[s] to attend the class, you know the intensity of the course here you cannot afford someone to be sick for two weeks, or to expose that person to the rest of the class, like when you have just the flu, so that is a great way to have this student connected to the class having a hybrid way of teaching-learning. I think it is a competence that leaders need to look more at and develop because new challenges require leaders to be more flexible and adaptable and look.

When dealing with crises, leaders are also responsible for defining how that crisis is going to affect the organization. Participant 3 posed the following questions:

> Is it a timely crisis that lets me transform the organization? Am I going to use it as a catalyst to transform it? or it is going to destroy the value that I have as an organization, and I have to find a way to avoid the destruction.

According to Participant 3, leaders' main role in a time of crisis is to keep scanning the horizon and understand the risks and opportunities for both employees and organization. Participant 5 shared similar thinking in that every crisis needs to be used for a certain reason and should never be allowed to go to waste; "If you don't learn from the crisis and you don't make it a useful tool for the organization, then crisis hasn't served on purpose, except to raise your blood pressure."

According to the participants in the study, when the crisis is perceived as an opportunity within the organization, leaders can easily find common ground because it is no longer about different positions and views, but rather people discovering a common interest and working cooperatively toward a shared understanding. As such, to manage a crisis successfully, study participants believe that leaders have to always look for new opportunities and never let a good crisis go to waste.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the purpose statement, research question, and methodology. It presents the findings of the study, including a comprehensive analysis of the data. It describes the findings by examining data collected from 16 female leaders from two military academic institutions located in Monterey, California, which are the DLIFLC and NPS.

This chapter described the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations. Eleven themes emerged from the data and were aligned with each of the three main competences leaders must possess in order to manage an organizational crisis successfully and find common ground.

Chapter V presents a final summary of the findings, both anticipated and unexpected, and conclusions drawn as a result of the study. The findings and conclusions are followed by implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations. The common ground literature (Akiri, 2013; Hansen, 2009; Weisbord, 1992) identified three core competences that leaders have in finding common ground during a crisis and are effective in crisis management: (a) communication, (b) collaboration, and (c) trust. The research question at the center of this study was: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations?

The estimated population for this study was 210-350 mid-level female leaders from military academic institutions in California. The target population for this study was estimated at 60-100. Participant selection was based on the following criteria:

- Must be a woman;
- Must be a female leader working in one of the two military academic institutions (DLIFLC or NPS) in Monterey, California;
- Must hold a role with the title of dean or bellow in the academic functions of the schools, or director or below in the operational functions of the schools;
- Must have at least 3 years of experience serving in a leadership position.

The study included 16 participants who met eligibility criteria to participate. The interviews and examination of artifacts occurred between January 18 and April 22, 2022.

Major Findings

Following the data collection and using the core competences approach identified by the common ground literature, the researcher made the following eight key findings, which were based on frequency count of identified themes.

Key finding #1: Consistently listen to employees with an open heart and open mind. This study found that, when in crisis, female leaders from two military academic institutions used various listening techniques that made their employees want to cooperate instead of compete and reach common ground. Each participant in this study recognized the importance of listening with an open heart and open mind, which according to them was the golden key that opened the door to finding common ground during the crisis situation. At various stages of crisis management, it is important to engage the group in meaningful communication, where members of the group feel they can be heard and, more importantly, they can hear one another (Coombs, 1995; James & Wooten, 2006).

Key finding #2: Create a psychological safe space for open, honest, and courageous conversations. Fourteen of the 16 female leaders who participated in this study acknowledged that communicating and finding common ground during organizational crisis can be extremely difficult because of opposing ideas, negative emotions (e.g., fear and anger upon losing one's job), hurt feelings, misinterpretations, etc. A leader's responsibility in this context is to strengthen a climate of psychological safety where team members can have an open and honest conversation (Brower et al., 2000). This study found that several participants in the study believe that, during organizational crisis, a leader's job is to foster the type of conversation that will help all

parties find shared understanding of the problem. According to the participants, this means creating supportive conditions, such as respect for other's opinion, equality, open debate, encouragement of new ideas, empathy for the feelings of others, etc., so that everyone can participate and find common ground.

Key finding #3: Engage in a clear and transparent communication to reduce anxiety about the unknown. At all times, but particularly during crisis, transparent and clear communication from leaders is crucial. Wooten and James (2008) considered that what often damages an organization in crisis is inefficient communication and lack of transparency. Thirteen of the 16 female leaders who participated in this study admitted they were successful in finding common ground during a crisis when they clearly communicated their goals and provided guidance on appropriate responses to their employees. This study found that for the participants in the study, during times of uncertainty, it was essential to communicate with all the stakeholders and do so early, even if the information was incomplete, to avoid rumors and speculations and provide specific guidance on what to do and how to do it, which reduced anxiety and maintained order.

Key finding #4: Constantly invest in building and maintaining social relationships throughout the organization. This study found that for nine participants in the study, the driving factor behind successful collaboration and finding common ground during crisis was their teams. Each of them recognized that during the times of uncertainty, relationships were the key to resolving the crisis, paving the way for finding common ground (Spade, 2020). When asked how to establish successful platforms for collaboration to find common ground during crises, all the respondents agreed that the

driving factor behind successful collaboration is building and maintaining effective teams. Several female leaders emphasized how pre-established, strong, and united teams helped them to find common ground and move on during crises, whereas others stressed the importance of constantly establishing relationships even during a crisis, because those crises might help bring people together and find common ground.

Key finding #5: Achieve unity in efforts among the various stakeholders by being the integrator in the organization. This study found that a key collaboration practice in finding common ground for 12 participants in this study is to act as an integrator during crises: an integrator of ideas, beliefs, and emotions who engages continuously with all stakeholders, identifying opportunities and aligning resources toward finding common ground (Savage & Sales, 2008). All of the female leaders exhibited integrator skills while finding common ground and managing organizational crises, such as: building and creating networks, fostering agreement, avoiding direct confrontation through collaboration, and placing the right people in the right roles.

Key finding #6: Encourage employees to take ownership of the problem. An important finding of this study, participants strongly indicated that when employees were encouraged to take ownership of the problem, they were more prone to look for compromise and became more determined and motivated to find common ground. The study revealed that organizations where leaders taught their employees how to overcome challenges and instilled a desire to accept ownership of the problem were successful in managing crisis and finding common ground (Bowman, 2008). Female leaders noted that they would apply several tactics that helped them ignite employees' motivation to engage, take ownership of the problem, and find common ground, such as: emphasizing

people's contributions, asking them for suggestions to solve the crisis or optimize a process, encouraging autonomy, and providing positive feedback.

Key finding #7: Create and nourish an organizational culture where everyone has a voice. Cultivating an open environment is not always an easy task in military organizations, according to the study participants, because people in these organizations have a set of defense mechanisms that makes them careful around people in authority positions. A continuing relationship based on authority exacerbates the uncertainty and makes it more difficult to find common ground (Kowtha et al., 2001). This study found that female leaders who promoted "speak-up" culture in their organization were able to make their employees feel valued, included, and comfortable sharing their opinions without fear of repercussion. Doing so set the stage for finding common ground and managing crises effectively.

Key finding #8: Foster an organizational culture where employees feel connected to the leader both physically and emotionally. What promotes a leader's crisis communication skill is his/her ability to involve emotionally and physically with employees and create a safety net for finding common ground (Bundy et al., 2017; David & Chiciudean, 2013; Sturges, 1994). This study revealed that female leaders from two military academic institutions recognized that connecting to their people, both physically and emotionally, was critical for building trust, finding common ground, and managing organizational crises. Several participants in the study recognized that by "walking the floor," listening, being accessible and open, and communicating verbally and nonverbally, they were able to gather everyone's insights and concerns and find common ground during the crisis.

Summary of key findings. Using the three core competences identified by the common ground literature, the researcher isolated eight findings.

1. Competence I: Communication
    a. Consistently listen to employees with an open heart and open mind;
    b. Create a psychological safe space for open, honest, and courageous conversations;
    c. Engage in a clear and transparent communication to reduce anxiety about the unknown.
2. Competence II: Collaboration
    a. Constantly invest in building and maintaining social relationships throughout the organization;
    b. Achieve unity in efforts among the various stakeholders by being the integrator in the organization;
    c. Encourage employees to take ownership of the problem.
3. Competence III: Trust Building
    a. Create and nourish an organizational culture where everyone has a voice;
    b. Foster an organizational culture where employees feel connected to the leader both physically and emotionally.

Unexpected Findings

This study revealed two unexpected findings. These findings were discovered in response to the question, is there anything else you have done as a leader to find common ground during a crisis situation? Specifically, female leaders from two military academic institutions in California find common ground during crisis situations by leading with a

mindset of turning crisis into opportunities and adapting to crisis with flexibility and a "think outside the box" mentality.

Key finding #9: Lead with a mindset of turning crisis into opportunities: never let a good crisis go to waste. Participants in the study managed crises and found common ground using different approaches and tools, but nine of them shared one thing in common: an attitude that led them to look for the opportunities within the crisis they faced (Brockner & James, 2008; R. R. Ulmer et al., 2007). This study found that nine female leaders of the 16 participants from military academic institutions embraced and acknowledged uncertainty by displaying a positive and optimistic approach and creating peaceful, collaborative relationships among all the stakeholders, which helped their organizations find common ground and transform.

Key finding #10: Adapt to crisis with flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity. Heifetz and Laurie (2001) emphasized that today's organizations face "adaptive challenges" (p.124), and leaders need to employ skills and knowledge beyond those required for day-to-day work. Fourteen of the 16 female leader participants noted that when organizational crises occurred, it was critical to be able to respond to changes quickly and adapt to new circumstances and realities. A key finding of this study indicated that female leaders exhibited flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity during crisis, embracing changes and adapting to difficult situations without hesitation. They had to demonstrate flexibility first so that their employees could adopt the same behavior and seek common ground and shared understanding of the new circumstances.

Conclusions

The researcher drew nine conclusions that are based on the research findings of this study and connected to the literature that give deeper insight into how female leaders from two military academic institutions in California found common ground during organizational crises.

Conclusion 1: Common ground is found when leaders intentionally create time and space for perspectives or concerns to be shared. Based on the finding that female leaders who consistently listen to employees with an open heart and open mind find common ground during crisis situations, the researcher concluded that common ground can be found when female leaders intentionally create time and space for perspectives or concerns to be shared. The literature identified the importance of providing a simple and accessible way for employees to provide their input; otherwise, if team members do not speak to each other and their leader, they work ineffectively and at cross-purposes (Hamm, 2006).

Conclusion 2: Female leaders build trust and find common ground when they model behaviors such as showing their vulnerabilities and admitting mistakes. Based on the finding that female leaders who create a psychological safe space for open, honest, and courageous conversations find common ground during the time of uncertainty, it can be concluded that successful female leaders can create a climate of psychological safety where team members can have an open and honest conversation when they themselves demonstrate vulnerability and admit mistakes. This type of disclosure, as suggested in the literature (Bharanitharan et al., 2019; Meyer et al., 2017), will prompt reciprocal admission of mistakes and vulnerabilities and help employees set

their insecurities aside, initiate trust-building, and lead to resolution of the crisis. Data from this study concur with the philosophy articulated by Oc et al. (2020) that followers feel less vulnerable and more ready to look for compromises when their leader express humility.

Conclusion 3: Female leaders build trust and find common ground when they communicate broadly, repeatedly, and through multiple means. Participants in this study mentioned that they were successful in finding common ground during a crisis when they clearly communicated their goals and key messages to their employees. Thirteen of 16 female leaders articulated the importance of informing people about the problem and goals and providing guidance on appropriate responses when in a crisis. These data led to the conclusion that in order to find common ground during the crisis, female leaders must communicate broadly, repeatedly, and through multiple means. They need to practice the three Rs of communication: review, repeat, and reinforce. Leaders need to take extra time to review information with their teams, repeat the information to help it digest well, and reinforce the key points with additional context or guidance. Over-communication in a time of crisis is better than under-communication and running the risk of people not getting or understanding the message. The literature confirmed the need to communicate broadly and also identified the importance of ongoing communication, which allows the leader to create a shared meaning among all the stakeholders and also allows all parties find common ground, even within the uncertain and threatening context of crisis (Coombs, 2010; Coombs & Holliday, 2010; Dance & Larson, 1976). Sellnow and Seeger (2021) believe that understanding crisis

communication empowers leaders and equips them to navigate “troubled waters and steer their organizations towards a stronger tomorrow” (p. xi).

Conclusion 4: To find common ground and manage a crisis successfully leaders must consistently build high performance teams by establishing and practicing habits that catalyze progress and nourish team spirit. Studies show that, when employees work in teams and have the trust and cooperation of their team members, it paves the way for finding common ground and moves the team toward successful crisis resolution (Geneviève et al., 2010; Jiang, 2010; Lawford, 2003). Based on the finding that female leaders find common ground during crisis by constantly investing in building and maintaining social relationships throughout the organization, it can be concluded that great leaders are team builders who cultivate high performance teams by establishing and practicing habits that catalyze progress and nourish team spirit. As stated by Gostick and Elton (2009) in their renowned book, *The Carrot Principle: How the Best Managers Use Recognition To Engage Their People, Retain Talent, and Accelerate Performance*, especially in times of uncertainty, leaders must use the powerful tool of recognition to build common ground and shared understanding of the problem.

Conclusion 5: To find common ground and manage a crisis successfully leader must constantly build networks of diverse stakeholders aligned around shared values and shared purpose. In order to achieve unity in efforts among the various participants and find common ground during uncertain times, female leaders from military academic institutions must act as integrators and engage actively with different stakeholders who hold various points of view and challenge their points of view to be voiced. As suggested by Adizes (2009), the role of integrators is especially valuable

during the crisis because they provide a synergetic effect in the team and contribute to finding common ground. Being able to support all the stakeholders working in an integrated way toward the common good is next evolutionary step in leadership, according to Vostanis (2018). Research from this study indicated that female leaders who acted as integrators in their organizations during uncertain times successfully handled organizational crises.

Conclusion 6: Common ground is found when leaders consistently encourage diversity of thoughts and foster the concept that no idea is a bad idea. Based on the finding that female leaders find common ground during crisis by creating and nourishing an organizational culture where everyone has a voice, it was concluded that female leaders are more successful in finding common ground when they foster the concept that no idea is a bad idea and encourage diversity of thoughts. Diversity of thought and performance permits the team to see all the sides of the situation, potentially developing a new understanding and new perspectives and finding common ground during a crisis. Although it may take a little longer to find common ground, the result is an aligned team that moves in the same direction and shares the same understanding of the problem. The leader's key responsibility is to foster an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their views and being their authentic selves (Kouzes & Posner, 2006).

Conclusion 7: To find common ground and manage a crisis successfully leaders must regularly engage physically and emotionally with the team and show their accessibility and openness. Based on the finding that female leaders find common ground during crisis by fostering an organizational culture where employees feel connected to the leader both physically and emotionally, it can be concluded that leaders

must regularly engage with the team physically and emotionally and show their accessibility and openness. According to research participants, leaders' presence comes from connection on many different levels; two of the most common the physical and emotional level. At a physical level, according to the study participants, a leader's physical presence, such as in a team meeting, will add great value for a team, because the leader is considered to have essential knowledge and can provide clarity to the project. However, physical presence, when combined with emotional presence (ability to acknowledge people's emotions), can take the team to a whole new level of development. The literature also supports this conclusion. In a ground-breaking research study by Seijts and Crim (2006), the authors concluded that employees' commitment to finding common ground is directly correlated to how employees feel about their relationship with the supervisor. According to these authors, leaders who have physical and emotional presence nourish meaningful relationships. As such, employees look at whether their leader "walk[s] the talk" when they declare that people are the most treasured resource of any organizations (p. 3). When it comes to emotional presence, ass presented in Boyatzis and McKee's (2005) book *Resonant Leadership*, when employees sense that their leader is excited about a project, is hopeful about a challenging situation, and has a genuine concern for people, even in times of uncertainty, the team feels invigorated, motivated, and ready to find common ground.

Conclusion 8: Leaders must proactively develop an "opportunity mindset" to see through the ambiguity and find previously unseen opportunities. Based on the finding that female leaders find common ground during crisis by leading with a mindset of turning crisis into opportunity, it can be concluded that leaders must proactively

develop an opportunity mindset to see through the ambiguity and find previously unseen opportunities. Taylor (2019) suggested that all crises offer powerful lessons about the right and wrong ways to respond to crises. According to Taylor, leaders cannot allow an unproductive mentality to overwhelm employees; instead, "leaders need to embrace a positive and constructive psychology to help their people when a crisis arises and also prepare organizations for future crisis" (p. xi). Data from this study concur with the philosophy articulated by this researcher that leaders in today's world need to develop an opportunity mindset, as Rahm Emanuel, President Obama's former chief of staff, stated, "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste" (p. xviii). Notably, this new approach is in line with what female leaders in this study also believe.

Conclusion 9: To find common ground and manage a crisis successfully, organizations need to have systems in place to learn from past crises and use this information to manage future crises. Participants in the study emphasized the importance of creating a culture of adaptability and flexibility in the organization. According to the participants, leaders need to deal with each situation separately, react to environmental changes, adapt to the situation, learn from their experience, and from their mistakes and move on. Based on the finding that female leaders who adapt to crisis with flexibility and thinking outside the box find common ground during times of uncertainty, it can be concluded that organizations need to use past crises as a guide to manage future crisis. They need to incorporate learning management systems to share and learn from crises.

One of the most important features of a crisis is that it can create the need for institutional change, adaptation, and evolution, and the literature widely acknowledges

the importance of learning from crisis narratives (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Crises and stories told about them carry meaning, encode lessons, and frame institutional understanding of risks and potential opportunities as well. Buckler and Zien (as cited in Herkevall, 2021) considered that:

> a key leadership role is to offer a compelling context and robust vision and that this can be accomplished through stories that emphasize the more empowering aspects of an organization's past and place them in context for the future, thus facilitating the identification of future opportunities. (p. 3)

Implications for Action

In light of this phenomenological study and the critical need for finding common ground during organizational crises, the researcher offers the following implications for action. These implications are directed toward military academic institutions and both female and male leaders, including deans, provosts, training agencies leaders, and institute commandants and presidents. These implications for action should be considered seriously as essential for developing the next generation of courageous female leaders who will act as integrators in their military organizations and find common ground during uncertain times.

Implication for action 1: Leaders need to prepare and conduct meetings that provide opportunities for all stakeholders to have a voice. Based on the conclusion that common ground is found when leaders consistently encourage diversity of thoughts and foster the concept that no idea is a bad idea, it is recommended that leaders take a holistic approach in preparing for and conducting regular meetings. First, before a meeting, leaders must collaborate with all the meeting attendees to identify questions that

truly matter. The attendees should be asked for input as the agenda is being created, allowing all stakeholders to openly share their ideas. It is important that female leaders are mindful that some issues that will be proposed for the agenda will not be presented from the women perspective, as such they need to make sure that everyone, despite the gender, age or race has a voice and all perspectives are heard and considered. This can be done using online platforms, such as Google Docs, KUDO, Monday, Zoho Writer, Dropbox Paper, etc., so that participants can begin brainstorming before the meeting starts. Co-creating the agenda will offer all the stakeholders a strong sense of inclusion and shared ownership of the problem, paving the route for finding common ground.

It is also recommended that leaders dedicate some time before a meeting to thinking about the meeting attendees and what approach should be used to involve everyone in discussion. Leaders must create gender- equitable environment and be conscious of unconscious biases. For example, if women are in minority group, make sure they get enough opportunity to speak in meetings and get credit for their ideas. Also, if the team composition is mixed with both strong extroverts and introverts, it is suggested that the leaders start the meeting by asking the main questions from the agenda and letting the employees respond to the questions in silence using a meeting app, then having the attendees vote on the most interesting solution to the problem. From here, the leader facilitates an open discussion. If the discussion has the potential to be influenced by the leader's presence in the meeting, it is further recommended that leaders step out of the room or invite an outside facilitator when the open sharing happens, creating a safe environment for employees to discuss challenges and problems freely. Even with silence-based techniques, some employees may still feel uncomfortable speaking up about

problems in a group setting; for this reason, is it further recommended that female leaders initiate informal one-on-one meetings so they have more ways to express their views and feel safe discussing uncomfortable topics.

It is further recommended that, at the end of the meeting, leader, dedicate 10 minutes to verify common ground, test assumptions, and assess accuracy by asking each participant to describe in their own words what they think they heard and what they think was accomplished during the meeting, as well as to ask for clarification. After each meeting, female leaders are also encouraged to seek ongoing communication mechanisms, such as exit polls, emails, group chats, etc., to avoid misunderstandings and a winner/loser or all/nothing mentality and foster middle ground. It is further recommended that leaders receive professional development opportunities (formal and informal) to build their skills in facilitating challenging conversations and finding common ground.

Implication for action 2: Leaders must model vulnerability, fully embrace sharing challenges, and solicit other's ideas whenever and wherever is appropriate. Based on the finding that female leaders who create a psychological safe space for open, honest, and courageous conversations find common ground during times of uncertainty, and the conclusion that successful female leaders create a climate of psychological safety where team members can have open and honest conversation when they themselves demonstrate vulnerability and admit mistakes, it is recommended that female leaders recast behaviors that are considered weaknesses and make them strengths. For example, female leaders, due to internal barriers, often struggle with confidence and the fear that they lack experience-"imposter syndrome". Good leaders are often assumed to not make

mistakes. When the organization can not have open conversations about mistakes, interactions begin to not be authentic and ideas are not challenged. To overcome this organizational obstacle, female leaders must model and demonstrate vulnerability by sharing openly their faults and weaknesses, in an attempt to encourage all members of the organization to also use mistakes as opportunities to grow. For example, they can schedule meetings with the main goal of modeling vulnerability by sharing one to two mistakes or challenges. It is important for leaders to allow everyone to laugh about the mistake, admit that they do not have all the answers, and then solicit input from everyone. Leaders also must change behaviors that might be considered weaknesses.

Implication for action 3: Leadership at different levels needs to be in constant communication with their employees to help them adjust to the constantly changing conditions crises bring and reduce fear of uncertainty. In order to reduce anxiety and maintain order during crises, leaders communicate broadly, repeatedly, and through multiple means. Therefore, it is recommended that leadership at different level consistently practice the three Rs of communication: review, repeat, and reinforce. It is suggested that school leaders (provost, deans, chairs) regularly conduct at least one touch point with the team members to understand their most pressing issues. For example, they can create a central clearinghouse mechanism where employees can pose questions. Further, it is recommended that on a monthly basis, school leadership or the faculty senate must survey their employees to show that they are there and listening.

It is further recommended that once a month, the commandant or/president of the institution conduct town halls with all employees, where they can share their concerns and ask questions that have not been answered. In their communication, leaders need to

be humble, be responsible, and admit what they don't know. They can use phrases like during these meeting to reduce anxiety about the unknown: "I wish I could tell you exactly what is going to happen. We are giving you updates as soon as we know them;" or "All of us wish we were not in this situation, but we are, and we must work together to do our best amidst the uncertainty, challenge and chaos that this crisis brought."

It is further recommended, that leaders include both men and women in their communication team. Before any message is sent out, the team needs to intentionally consider the impact of the message on diverse audiences; all perspectives must be incorporated. Having male and female perspectives represented, the communication will be more inclusive and have a greater impact.

Implication for action 4: Organizations create a task force that plans and implements ongoing and meaningful recognition programs designed to acknowledge and thank teams for a variety of achievements. Based on the finding that female leaders find common ground during crises when they invest in social relationships and the conclusion that in order to create collaborative environments organizations create a multi-level recognition system to acknowledge both large and small accomplishments of teams, it is recommended that organizations create a "task force" that plans and implements ongoing recognition programs such as public recognition, team appreciation events, monetary awards, etc., designed to acknowledge and thank teams for a variety of achievements. This agency will be responsible for creating multiple pathways for highlighting exceptional teamwork. Here are some ways that organizations at different levels of leadership can highlight accomplishments among their teams:

- Each month during the all-hands meeting, leaders (provost, deans, chairs) recognize one team and get a shout-out for doing exemplary work;
- Each month, Human Resource (HR) departments create a digital platform for highlighting exceptional teamwork and provide them a space to share stories of excellent service;
- Each quarter, the commandant or/president of the military institution publicly acknowledges (on the institution web page or during the Town Hall meeting) a team's milestone or accomplishment;
- Each quarter, students nominate and select "the team of the quarter."

It is further recommended that female leaders spotlight successes of women within the organization in an attempt to highlight equality. For example, showcasing the successful promotion of a female employee to a position that is traditionally dominated by males models for younger women in the organization that what may first seem impossible is possible.

Additionally, spotlighting incidences where gender diverse teams thrived is also important. The quest for equity is not exclusive to women; rather, equity is a natural and organic synthesis of ideas from both men and women. When gender diverse teams work well together, the organization benefits.

Implication for action 5: Leaders should hold regular "design thinking" meetings, to brainstorm creative ideas for addressing current/future problems and challenges. Based on the conclusion that female leaders are more successful in finding common ground when they foster the concept that no idea is a bad idea and encourage diversity of thought, it is recommended that leaders hold regularly "design thinking"

meetings, such as: “worst possible idea” meetings or “problem solving” meetings, with the main goal of relaxing the team members and boosting their confidence and creativity so they can examine different ideas, challenge them, gain insights toward great ideas, and find common ground. For example, during the “problem solving” meeting, leaders can ask employees to discuss what did not go well or the main challenges they experience with a situation, then build consensus by asking, How can we deal with this situation together?

An organization can be perceived as an ecosystem where a variety of organisms must interact and live together. Within ecosystems, there is a natural tendency for organisms to co-exist and benefit from each other. In an organization, employees must find ways to interact and work together. However, many organizations have power dynamics where marginalized populations have lesser opportunities to thrive. As such, the collective creativity is hindered, which results in a lack of diversity in thought. Leaders must be mindful of such power dynamics and champion opportunities for marginalized populations to have equal voices and opportunities. Like an ecosystem thrives in nature, the end result of female leaders championing opportunities for marginalized populations will result in unimaginable breakthroughs.

Implication for action 6: Leaders must regularly engage with their employees to connect and better understand the dynamic of the organization and internal relationships. Based on the finding that women leaders find common ground during crises by fostering an organizational culture where employees feel connected to the leader both physically and emotionally and the conclusion that leaders find common ground by engaging physically and emotionally with the team regularly and showing accessibility

and openness, it is recommended that leaders regularly engage with their employees by "walking the floor," "engaging on the ground," or "taking a balcony perspective" to better understand the dynamic of the organization and internal relationships. For example, the "balcony perspective" will allow the leader to step back and see the big picture. When sitting in a meeting, it is recommended that leaders practice watching what is happening, people's body language, relationships, etc. While "walking the floor" and "engaging on the ground," leaders need to keep in mind that they set out to learn and ask questions, not to micromanage. Walking the floor will give the leaders the opportunity to engage, share ideas, and connect with their employees, which sets the stage for finding common ground.

Implication for action 7: Organizations need to annually conduct "listening tours" and learn how previous crises helped the organization to transform and how current crisis can serve as the engine progress. Based on the finding that female leaders find common ground during crises by leading with a mindset of turning crises into opportunities, it can be concluded that leaders must proactively develop an "opportunity mindset" to see through ambiguity and find previously unseen opportunities. It is recommended that organizations annually conduct "listening tours" and learn how previous crises helped the organization to transform, as well as how current crisis can serve as the engine of progress. During these tours, data on crisis management practices will be collected as well as tales from the field. In collaboration with the Training Division offices, annual "lessons learned sessions" for *all* decision makers should be held. It is further recommended that they invite employees to these

sessions to share how they contributed to successful management of some challenges and incorporate their stories in regular touch points.

Implication for action 8: Organizations need to incorporate storytelling as a mean of sharing and learning from current/previous crises. Based on the finding that female leaders who adapt to crises with flexibility and thinking outside the box find common ground during the time of uncertainty and the conclusion that organizations that managed crises successfully and found common ground used past crises and lessons learned as a guide to manage future crises successfully, it is recommended that organizations incorporate storytelling as a mean of sharing about and learning from current/previous crises. Organizations should budget and implement a repository of stories such as publish a book/journal; create a YouTube channel; have an annual conference, create their own version of TED Talks and host their own video channels, where success and failure stories regarding crisis and crisis management can be captured, categorized, and shared across the organization.

While acknowledging the success of female leaders in the military sector is improving, there are still many challenges. Men are highlighted more, compared to their female counterparts. In many cases, women who actually are acknowledged for their success carry with them an uncomfortable stigma where often times, they feel like they do not belong. By creating repositories to highlight female leaders and their success, women will feel more comfortable, and the stigma will be lessened; they can be proud of their accomplishments in such spaces.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends further research in the following areas in order to expand the understanding and knowledge of female leaders' practices and strategies used during organizational crises to find common ground.

1. Undertake a comparative study on civilian and military female leadership practices in finding common ground during crisis situations. There is a gap in understanding if the military crisis leadership style and practices differ from the civilian crisis leadership style.
2. Extend the study to explore the lived experiences of male leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during the crises. This is a gap in understanding that needs to be addressed.
3. Conduct a mixed methods study that will understand and compare the styles and strategies used by women and men and also compare the overall leadership effectiveness ratings of men versus women during organizational crises.
4. Using a mixed methods study, explore the trust relationship between female leaders and male employees to understand the dynamics when the gender of the leader is different from that of the employees versus when it is the same.
5. Conduct a study that will compare military academic institutions to other academic organizations in managing crises and finding common ground. There might be lessons to learn from other contexts as well.

6. Develop a case study focused on the role of mentoring programs for female leaders in managing organizational crises successfully. This study could focus on current female leaders, aspiring female leaders, coaching, or peer coaching for women, where leaders from a wide range of diverse background learn from each other.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

On my military leadership journey and in doing the research for this EdD, I was inspired to see more women in leadership positions across the military. Many were gracious with their time and shared their challenges in becoming effective organizational leaders. They all faced different obstacles — barriers to promotion, discrimination, retention, and rules that historically favored men. However, what these women leaders had in common was an unstoppable will to succeed and persist against the odds.

In their interviews, they shared stories of their journeys. They recalled barriers they had to overcome, the need to remind others that they have a seat at the table, and, finally, after getting a seat at the table, they still had to lean in to make their voices heard. What struck me about these women leaders in the military is that they all seemed to possess "superpowers." Each had the ability to observe, empathize, listen and learn, try and fail, and seek creative solutions to hard problems. With these powers they could transform lessons learned into action and organizational change.

In doing my research and interviews, I kept coming back to the same conclusion: "The time is now!" Their stories *must* be shared because they can help young women realize that they, too, already have many of these "superpowers," and should not be afraid to use them. My interactions with these women motivated me to conduct research that

explored the experiences of female leaders and drew from their wealth of knowledge in dealing with crises. Documenting these experiences is crucial, especially now in this time of global tension and uncertainty about how to manage it. This is a time in history when women are frequently called upon to resolve crises for which we, as a society, often appear unprepared. Reflecting on my research on leadership, I am optimistic that we can equally leverage the talent of men and women to transform the uncertainty that comes with crises and manage them as opportunities for change rather than problems. My many hours of interviews have showed that these women are prepared to lead and know exactly what it takes to transform organizations and even societies. Together, we can create a world that is diverse, with inclusive leadership that is recognized as a central pillar in crisis management. This research was designed to reflect the important role that female leaders, particularly in the military, played in paving the way for my generation and the next generation of women. Their investments, struggles, and successes have allowed us to do the work we do and build the foundation for future generations of female leaders.

To young women aspiring to be in leadership positions, here is what I learned from my research; push beyond your comfort zone, overcome the barriers in front of you, take on the challenging tasks that others might shy away from, and deliver on your ideas and strategies with confidence. Become an advocate for you and other women to have a voice at the table and, once you get there, collaborate with others so that collective solutions can be achieved. Remember, we *can* make change happen, and we *are* making change happen.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Thank you for making the time to meet with me and share about your leadership experiences. You are one of a few female leaders from military academic institutions who have had extensive experience working with different stakeholders and teams, and more specifically helping them find common ground during organizational crisis. As you probably know, crisis situations are difficult to lead and your stories will help me gain better insight into how female leaders in military academic institutions, like yourself, have been successful. I encourage you to share openly today, as stories about your experience will help shape the results of my study tremendously.

During the interview, I will ask a few demographic questions and as we move through this interview, I will begin with some general questions about crisis and finding common ground. These questions set the stage for the next series of questions which focus on 1) collaboration, 2) communication and 3) trust building. According to research literature, these three skills have been key in how leaders like yourself help find common ground during crisis. Again, I encourage you to share openly about your experiences today.

With your permission, I would like to record this call. Only me and the professional transcriptionist will have access to the audio file. Is that, ok?

Finally, I want to confirm that you have received the Participant Bill of Rights and the Informed Consent – is that correct? Have you had a chance to review it? Did you have any questions?

Great. Do you have any questions for me at this time?

1.Today organizations face many situations that are unexpected, critical and asks for an immediate response. As such, in times of crisis, the leader must act swiftly and appropriately.

a. As a leader in your organization, you are faced with managing organizational crisis on a regular basis. What are some types of crises you have experience managing?

b. Can you share with me the extent in which you have had to manage organizational crisis as a female leader? How much experience do you have in this area?

c. What are some examples?

2. The COVID-19 pandemic and other 21st century crises have revealed how critical it is to find common ground in today's world. Finding common ground is one of the approaches that today's leaders are using to effectively manage crisis. According to Jacobsen (2000), common ground is defined as "a way for people with differences to work together, collaborate and create a collective sense of responsibility for the effective performance of the organization." In fact, Bolton (2016) states finding common ground is an essential step in managing crisis.

a. Can you share some examples of crises when you used common ground approach and helped the team to solve the crisis?

3. Crisis leadership is a critical part of leading in today's world. Being a good crisis leader is more than just being a good leader. Crisis leaders confront challenges that are on the other spectrum of daily operations. Crisis leaders need to apply expertise and skills beyond those required for everyday tasks. The common ground literature (Akiri, 2013; Hansen, 2009; Weisbord, 1992) found that the core competencies that leaders have in finding common ground during a crisis situation, among others, are: collaboration, communication and trust building.

a. Which of the following leadership skills do you think you use to find common ground during organizational crisis?

b. Can you share some examples?

4. During crisis, one key responsibility for a leader is to engage with all stakeholders and find ways to collaborate. I am interested in how you help stakeholders collaborate and engage all the parties in negotiation during the crisis that you have led.

a. Can you share some examples of how you fostered collaboration during crisis?
b. Can you also elaborate on how fostering collaboration during crisis helped you and the stakeholders find common ground?
c. Do you feel that fostering collaboration was easier or more difficult to accomplish as a woman?

Potential follow up questions:

d. Are there other examples you can think of?
e. What are some challenges you faced when attempting to foster collaboration?
f. Have there been times when fostering collaboration was difficult? Were you successful at the end?

5. Crisis management authors identify crisis leadership with the ability to communicate effectively. At various stages of crisis management, leaders must communicate with different stakeholders to find common ground. It is important to engage the group in meaningful communication, where members within the group need to feel that they can be heard and, more important, they need to hear one another.

a. Can you share some examples of how you used "communication" to find common ground and manage a crisis?
b. Can you also elaborate on how engaging in meaningful communication during crisis helped you and the stakeholders find common ground?

c. Do you feel that engaging in meaningful communication was easier or more difficult to accomplish as a woman?

d. An ancient military strategist, Sun Tzu, once said that "In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity." How did you use communication to transform the crisis into an opportunity?

Potential follow up questions:

e. Are there other examples you can think of?

f. What are some challenges you faced when attempting to engage in meaningful communication?

g. Have there been times when crisis communication was difficult? Were you successful at the end?

6. Trust and deepening relationships are at the center of finding common ground during a crisis. A leader's ability to respond to the crisis directly relates to the level of trust he or she can instill within the group.

a. Can you share a story about a time when you used "trust building" as the leader of your organization to make sure that everyone has access to the same information and reinforce trust despite the stress of crisis?

b. Can you also elaborate on how building trust during crisis helped you and the stakeholders find common ground?

c. Do you feel that building trust during a crisis was easier or more difficult to accomplish as a woman?

Potential follow up questions:

d. Are there other examples you can think of?

e. What are some challenges you faced when attempting to build trust?

f. Have there been times when building trust was difficult? Were you successful at the end?

Demographic and General Questions

1. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
2. What is your employment status?
3. How many years have you served as an administrator?
4. How many years have you served as an administrator at DLI/NPS?

Research Central Question

What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations?

Research Subquestions

Sub RQ 1: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in using communication to find common ground during crisis situations?

Sub RQ 2: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in using collaboration to find common ground during crisis situations?

Sub RQ 3: What were the lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in building trust to find common ground during crisis situations?

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval

Diana Molodilo <dmolodil@mail.umassglobal.edu>

IRB Application Approved: Diana Molodilo

2 messages

Institutional Review Board <my@umassglobal.edu> Wed, Feb 23, 2022 at 5:10 PM
Reply-To: webmaster@umassglobal.edu
To: dmolodil@mail.umassglobal.edu
Cc: ddevore@umassglobal.edu, jlee1@umassglobal.edu, irb@umassglobal.edu

Dear Diana Molodilo,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.umassglobal.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

IRB
Academic Affairs
UMass Global
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
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This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at irb@umassglobal.edu.

APPENDIX C

DLIFLC Site Approval

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER
PRESIDIO OF MONTEREY
MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA 93944-5000

February 22, 2022

Office of the Commandant

Institutional Review Board
Office of Academic Affairs
UMass Global
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, California 92618

To Whom it May Concern:

This letter is to express our willingness to grant permission to Ms. Diana Molodilo, a doctoral student at UMass Global, to conduct her dissertation research titled, *"The Lived Experiences of Female Leaders from Military Academic Institutions in Finding Common Ground during Crisis Situations"* at Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC).

The site permission is contingent upon UMass Global's Institutional Review Board (IRB) review and approval of this research and DLIFLC's administrative review and concurrence. It is our understanding that UMass Global IRB will conduct the institutional review and will maintain oversight over this research. Following the IRB approval at UMass Global, DLIFLC's Office of Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) will conduct an administrative review in accordance with the requirements for DoD-supported research regardless of its exempt status. The administrative review ensures compliance with DoDI 3216.02, "Protection of Human Subjects and Adherence to Ethical Standards in DoD-Conducted and -Supported Research," in addition to "the Common Rule" (32 CFR 219).

Once UMass Global IRB has completed the review of this study or determined its exempt status, please advise the principal investigator to send a copy of the IRB decision documents and the approved research protocol packet to Dr. Hye-Yeon Lim, Human Protections Director (HPD) at hyeyeon.lim@dliflc.edu for the administrative review. Data collection cannot begin before DLIFLC completes the administrative review.

If you have any questions, please contact DLIFLC's Office of Human Research Protections Program at research@dliflc.edu.

Sincerely,

James A. Kievit
Colonel, U.S. Army
Commandant

APPENDIX D

E-Mail Requesting the Names of Female Leaders From the Dean of the Russian School

From: Diana Molodilo
Subject: Dissertation Research on the Role of Female Leaders from Military Academic Institutions in Finding Common Ground during Crisis Situations
To: DLIFLC Dean of the Russian School (TBD)
Date: TBD

Dear Dean,

My name is Diana Molodilo and I am a doctoral candidate from the Ed.D. Program in Organizational Leadership at University of Massachusetts Global (UMASS GLOBAL). I am conducting a study on the role of female leaders from military academic institutions, such as Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) in finding common ground during crisis situations.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in identifying female leaders at DLIFLC whom you consider exemplary based on the following criteria:

Crisis Leadership— is a good crisis leader and apply expertise and skills beyond those required for everyday tasks;
Collaboration — has extensive experience working with different stakeholders and teams, and more specifically helping them find common ground during organizational crisis;
Communication—strength in both personal and organizational communication. Engage the team in meaningful communication;
Trustworthy—is approachable, accepts responsibility and is mutually supportive for everyone.

I would love to discuss my topic further and encourage you to ask any questions you may have that may help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it may affect you. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study you are encouraged to contact Diana Molodilo at or by phone at; or Dr. Jeffery Lee, Dissertation Chairperson, at. (email address and phone number removed for privacy)

Sincerely,

Diana Molodilo

APPENDIX E

E-Mail Requesting the Names of Female Leaders From Naval Postgraduate School

From: Diana Molodilo
Subject: Dissertation Research on the Role of Female Leaders from Military Academic Institutions in Finding Common Ground during Crisis Situations
To: Naval Postgraduate School (TBD)
Date: TBD

Dear _____(TBD),

My name is Diana Molodilo and I am a doctoral candidate from the Ed.D. Program in Organizational Leadership at University of Massachusetts Global (UMASS GLOBAL). I am conducting a study on the role of female leaders from military academic institutions, such as Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) in finding common ground during crisis situations.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in identifying female leaders at DLIFLC whom you consider exemplary based on the following criteria:

Crisis Leadership— is a good crisis leader and apply expertise and skills beyond those required for everyday tasks;
Collaboration — has extensive experience working with different stakeholders and teams, and more specifically helping them find common ground during organizational crisis;
Communication—strength in both personal and organizational communication. Engage the team in meaningful communication;
Trustworthy—is approachable, accepts responsibility and is mutually supportive for everyone.

I would love to discuss my topic further and encourage you to ask any questions you may have that may help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it may affect you. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study you are encouraged to contact Diana Molodilo at or by phone at; or Dr. Jeffery Lee, Dissertation Chairperson, at. (email address and phone number removed for privacy)

Sincerely,

Diana Molodilo

APPENDIX F

E-Mail to Female Leader Requesting Participation in the Study

Dear _____(TBD),

My name is Diana Molodilo and I am a doctoral candidate in Organizational Leadership at University of Massachusetts. I have more than 20 years of experience in the military leadership field. The professional development and networking opportunities with different female leaders I gained form that experience contributed to my decision to pursue a Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership. I am studying the role of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations.

As one of a few female leaders from military academic institutions who have had extensive experience working with different stakeholders and teams, your UNIQUE leadership experience MUST be shared with others, so that future generations of women aspiring to organizational leadership roles can learn from female leaders like YOU!

I am writing a dissertation that will contribute to the limited and insufficient body of literature regarding female leaders in the military environment and their leadership experiences, such as finding common ground during crisis situations. Findings from this study will help front-line female leaders to learn from the experiences of women who have succeeded in spite of many barriers they confronted.

I am seeking female leaders from military academic institutions to participate in my study. If selected, you will participate in a 45-to 60-minute interview via MS Teams or Zoom.

Your participation in this study will be a confidential process. You will not be personally identified in the study and your anonymity will be protected.

Qualifying participants must meet the following criteria:

- Must be a female leader;
- Must be a mid-level female leader working in one of the two military academic institutions (DLIFLC or NPS) in Monterey, California;
- Must hold a role with the title of dean or bellow in the academic functions of the schools, or director or below in the operational functions of the schools;
- Must have at least three years of experience serving in an administrative position.

If you agree to participate in this study, or if you have questions about what participant means, please contact me at [redacted] or [redacted] or by phone at [redacted]. Interviews will be scheduled during the month of December and early January at a time that is convenient for you.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my request and thank you for the tremendous impact you make through your leadership and service to your organization.

APPENDIX G

UMass Global University Institutional Review Board Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment,or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures,drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that mayhappen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worsethan being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing tobe involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without anyadverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree tobe in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

APPENDIX H

Informed Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: The lived experiences of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Diana Molodilo, Ed.D Candidate

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Diana Molodilo, Ed.D Candidate, a doctoral student from UMASS GLOBAL. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify and describe the lived experience of female leaders from military academic institutions in finding common ground during crisis situations. The study will strive to discover and explore the phenomenon accounting for female leader's success in finding common ground during crises, so that future generations of women aspiring to organizational leadership roles can learn from them.

This study will fill in the gap in the research regarding female leaders in the military environment and their leadership experiences, such as finding common ground during crisis situations. The results of this study may help front-line female leaders to learn from the experiences of women who have succeeded in spite of many barriers they confronted. This study may also shift the focus from the challenges women experience in leadership positions to solutions and ready-to-use strategies for female leaders in military environments. For example, should this study find that an emergency meeting that involves everyone on the team to "empty the cup" and check in on a personal level, a front-line female leader can immediately use that strategy the next time a crisis occurs. Because these best practices are not yet documented, it is important to recover and record these experiences so that future generations of women aspiring to organizational leadership roles can learn from them.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in an individual interview and artifact gathering. The interview will last approximately 45 – 60 minutes and will be conducted in person or electronically using MS Teams. Completion of the individual interview will take place December 2021 through January,2022.

I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.
b) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon

completion of the study all recordings will be destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.

c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding female leaders in the military environment and their leadership experiences, such as finding common ground during crisis situations. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about the finding common ground during crisis situations experience in which I participated. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Jeffrey Lee, Ed.D at (email address and phone number removed for privacy)

e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study, and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed, and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the "Research Participant's Bill of Rights." I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

APPENDIX I

CITI Certification

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 20-May-2020
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 36701824

This is to certify that:

Diana Molodilo

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Human Subjects Research (Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Brandman University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wddb912b5-ab60-4ad5-a5df-7a625b98524b-36701824