

The Mitigating Factors in K-12 School Leaders Adopting Crisis Prevention Competency Models

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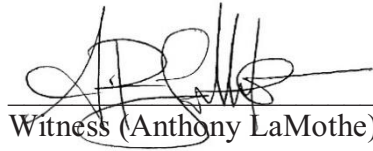
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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the perceptions, experiences, and crisis prevention competency levels of leaders in handling crises. More specifically, this study aimed to investigate the factors mitigating K-12 school leaders' from adopting and executing competencies associated with preventing crises. Not all previous research is consistent nor specific in addressing the perceptions of K-12 school leaders on their adoption and execution of crisis prevention competency models. Little is known from the perspective of organization leaders of K-12 level schools in the state of Louisiana about adopting a crisis prevention competency model. We do know that school leaders, whether they possess transformational or crisis management leadership skills or not, still seem to have challenges in facilitating aspects of a crisis prevention competency model. To answer the research questions, this study solicited a representative expert sample of a population of K-12 school leaders in the state of Louisiana who may have experienced crises. The electronic interviews collected from participants yielded descriptive data. Four themes emerged from data analysis: 1. Crisis prevention competency models are initiated by school district level personnel to prepare or practice for specific crises; 2. Factors affecting decisions to adopt a crisis prevention competency model are lack of time to devote to training; 3. School leaders self-identify as transformational or crisis management leaders, being proactive and having an internal locus of control; and 4. Challenges in implementing a crisis prevention model included budget, lack of formal training and not enough time to devote to train a crisis response team.

Keywords: crisis prevention competency model, school leaders, K-12, phenomenological study

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PREVIEW

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother, Melva Jean Boyd Davis who passed away in January of 2020. A woman that God formed to be the nurturer, strength, and companion that a child, such as I, needed. I will never forget the example of the life you have led before me. Not only did you introduce me to and help me cultivate the bond that I have with my Lord and savior Jesus Christ, you became my aspiration to never quench my thirst for knowledge. Predominantly because I was amazed by your intellectual ability to store, retrieve, and share what you have learned. You were a formidable scholar of any subject from world capitals to bible trivia. You are markedly the reason I wanted to initiate, endure, and complete academic research. Thank you for encouraging me to seek knowledge and to never stop seeking knowledge. You were a wonder to me and always will be. I love you and may God bless your soul forever more.

Table of Contents

Copyright Acknowledgement Form	iii
St. Thomas University Library Release Form.....	iv
Dissertation Manual Acknowledgement Form	v
Abstract	vii
Acknowledgments	viii
Dedication	x
Table of Contents	xi
List of Tables.....	xix
List of Figures	xx
CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction to the Problem	1
Background, Context, and Theoretical Framework.....	2
History of School Crises	2
Adopting a Competency Model.....	3
A Leaders Role in Managing Crisis.....	4
Leadership Styles in Crisis.....	5
Charismatic Leadership.....	5
Transformational Leadership.....	6
Transactional Leadership	6
Crisis Management Leadership	6
Quality Staff Development.....	7
Theoretical Framework	7

Fritz Heider's Attribution Theory	7
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Purpose of the Study.....	8
Research Questions.....	9
Rationale and Significance.....	10
Rationale of the Study.....	10
Significance of the Study	11
Nature of the Study.....	12
Method of Data Collection.....	13
Method of Data Analysis	14
Definition of Terms	14
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations	15
Assumptions	15
Delimitations and Limitations	16
Chapter One Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study.....	17
CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW	19
Introduction to the Literature Review.....	19
Articles, Books, Research Papers, Peer-Reviewed Journals and Keyword Search...	20
Theoretical Framework.....	20
Fritz Heider's Attribution Theory and locus of control.....	21
Internal Locus of Control	21
External Locus of Control	22
Limitations of Fritz Heider's Attribution Theory	22

Review of Research Literature	23
Background and Historical Impact of School Crises	24
History from the 1800's to the 1960's	24
History from the 1960's to the Present	25
Cause of Violent Crises	25
Impact of Violent Crises	26
Identification of the Gap	27
Factors Associated with the Research Themes	28
Crisis Leadership Theories	28
Charismatic Leadership	29
Transformational Leadership	30
Transactional Leadership	32
Crisis Management Leadership	33
Decision Making in Crises	35
Crisis Prevention Competency Models	36
Specific Competency Models	37
Quality Staff Development in Crisis Prevention	40
Teacher and Staff Development	40
Personnel Meaningfulness in Crisis Training	40
Organization Design Affecting Crisis	42
Organizational Culture in Crisis	42
Principal and Administrator Development	42
Crisis Team Development	43

Action Learning in Crisis Prevention.....	44
The Advantages of Action Learning in Crisis Prevention	44
The Disadvantages Action Learning in Crisis Prevention	45
Competency Modeling and Job Analysis.....	45
Crisis Prevention Training Model.....	46
Parental Expectations of Leaders in Crisis.....	47
Trust in School Administration	47
Leader Motivation to Act	48
Student Expectations of Leaders in Crisis	49
Community Expectations of Leaders	50
Qualitative Methodologies of Previous Studies	51
Qualitative Methodology and Instrumentation.....	51
Chapter Two Summary	52
CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY	54
Introduction to the Methodology.....	54
Purpose of the Study	54
Electronic Interviews	55
Research Questions.....	57
Research Methodology	57
Research Design	58
Method of Data Collection	58
Method of Data Analysis	58
Research Site, Target Population, Sampling Method, and Related Procedures.....	59

Population and Sample Selection	59
Participant Recruiting Method	59
Risk, Incentives and Benefits	60
Qualitative Research Using Phenomenology	60
Sources of Data.....	61
Field Study	62
Field Study Protocol	62
The Field Study Process.....	63
Data Collection and Management	64
Data Collection Procedures	64
Data Analysis Procedures.....	65
Coding.....	66
Low Inference Descriptors.....	67
Delimitations, Limitations, Validity and Reliability	67
Delimitations and Limitations	67
Validity.....	68
Types of Validity	68
Threats to Internal and External Validity	69
External Validity of Qualitative Research	70
Generalization for Validity.....	70
Reliability	70
Expected Findings, Ethical Issues and Summary.....	71
Expected Findings	71

Ethical Issues	72
Chapter Three Summary	72
CHAPTER FOUR. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS.....	74
Introduction to Data Analysis and Results.....	74
Research Questions.....	74
Statement of the Problem	74
Purpose of the Study	75
Methodology.....	75
Description of the Sample	76
School Administrator Titles	76
Participants Years of Experience.....	77
Administrator Type of School.....	78
Past Positions in Any School District	79
Summary of the Results	80
Field Study Results	80
Participant Solicitation.....	81
Emerging Themes	81
Research Q1.....	82
Research Q2.....	87
Research Q3.....	93
Research Q4.....	99
Detailed Analysis.....	105
Validity of the Data.....	105

Credibility.....	106
Raw Data Relationship to Research Questions	106
Sources of Error and Their Impact on the Data.....	107
Chapter Four Summary	107
CHAPTER FIVE. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION	109
Introduction to the Conclusions and Discussion	109
Method of Data Collection.....	111
Method of Data Analysis	111
Discussion of the Results	112
Findings Summary.....	113
Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature	114
Crisis Prevention Competency Models.....	114
Leader Motivation to Act.....	115
Decision Making in Crises.....	116
Fritz Heider's Attribution Theory and Locus of Control.....	117
Crisis Leadership Theories.....	118
Quality Staff Development in Crisis Prevention	118
Limitations	119
Implications of the Results for Practice	120
Leaders Adopting Models at the School Level	121
Budget More Money for Training	121
More Time for Staff Development	123
Recommendations for Further Research.....	124

Expanding Research Beyond Louisiana	124
Training a Crisis Response Team with Restricted Time and Budget	125
Assigning Crisis Response Team Roles.....	125
Strategies to Compensate for Lack of Resources	126
Digitalizing Crisis Prevention Training	126
Conclusion.....	127
Appendix A. Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Form.....	129
Appendix B. Informed Consent Form	130
Appendix C. Electronic Interview Survey Form.....	134
REFERENCES.....	141

List of Tables

Table 1. Research Questions and Emerging Themes	82
-------------------------------------------------------	----

PREVIEW

List of Figures

Figure 1. Current Title of School Administration	77
Figure 2. Years on Current Position	78
Figure 3. Administrator for Type of School	79
Figure 4. Past Positions in Any School District	80
Figure 5. Established Crisis Prevention Competency Model or Strategy	83
Figure 6. Drills or Actions Practiced by The Staff and Students	84
Figure 7. Prevention, Intervention or Post Event Strategy	85
Figure 8. Amount of Information Received Before a Crisis Occurred	86
Figure 9. Amount of Information to Intervene in the Crisis	86
Figure 10. Reason for Choosing Model.....	88
Figure 11. Motivation to Adopt a Crisis Prevention Competency Model	89
Figure 12. Crisis Events Impacting the School Environment	90
Figure 13. Factors Affecting Decisions to Adopt Crisis Prevention Competency Models	91
Figure 14. Factors That Affect Adopting A Specific Crisis Prevention Competency Model.....	92
Figure 15. Leadership Style	93
Figure 16. Participants' Own Perception of Leadership Skills.....	95
Figure 17. Necessary Crisis Prevention Competency Model Skills.....	96
Figure 18. Why Are Skills Needed.....	97
Figure 19. Locus of Control.....	98
Figure 20. Most Important to Least Important Crisis Prevention Activities	99

Figure 21. Challenges in Implementing a Crisis Prevention Competency Model.....	100
Figure 22. Why are These Challenges?	101
Figure 23. Issues with Executing a Crisis Prevention Competency Model.....	102
Figure 24. School/District(s) Currently Prepared to Handle Crises	103
Figure 25. Perception of Handling of Past Crises	104
Figure 26. Evaluate the Crisis Team Response/Skills	105

PREVIEW

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

Crises such as mass school shootings are on the rise (Shultz, Cohen, Muschert, & Flores de Apodaca, 2013) and increasing by 16% each year between the years of 2000 and 2013 based on a study conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) (Blair & Schweit, 2014). Recently, schools experienced an increase in “shootings, suicides, gang activity, violence, disasters, abuse and many other tragedies” (Alsubie, Elbedour, Augusto, Reed, & Merrick, 2017, p. 358). A shooting spree at a middle school located in the southern part of the United States added to the rise in school gun violence where, “two students murdered a teacher, four students, and injured 10 others” (Brown, 2018, p. 5). Around 30% of parents surveyed agreed that the “perceived causes of firearm violence in schools” is specifically the absence of school planning for gun violence (Payton et al., 2017, p. 1120).

School leaders need to find a way to solve this problem because this is an unruly issue that hinders safe delivery of productive education for K-12 level school children. In addition, this is a problem for society because, in several K-12 schools like Columbine, Sandy Hook and Marysville-Pilchuck, blameless and promising lives are being consumed by frivolous assaults of gun violence (Paolini, 2015, p. 1). School leaders need to increase their understanding and competencies in preventing crises because school violence provokes fear in school children and their parents, which defeats the social benefits of public education (Hymel et al., 2018).

It is crucial that educators receive “quality staff development ... in the same model or framework” in order to be consistent with their training and execution of crisis

prevention competency models in crisis situations (Kennedy-Paine et al., 2013, p. 83). This phenomenological study discovered themes in the crisis prevention competency levels, the knowledge of crisis prevention competency models and active adoption of crisis prevention competency models of education leaders in the state of Louisiana. This chapter communicates the background, context and theoretical framework; statement of the problem; purpose of the study; research questions; rationale, and relevance of the study. This chapter also communicates the significance; nature of the study; definition of terms; assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; and subsequently the chapter summary.

Background, Context, and Theoretical Framework

History of School Crises

Historically in crisis scenarios, the key complications are: major a) “inadequate preparation of responders, b) psychological impact and c) exigent decision-making” (McCarty, 2012, p. 17). This is true of school violence currently and historically (Modzeleski & Randazzo, 2018). In the United States of America, school violence has a history that can be traced back to the 1800’s (Fuentes, 2018). In 1848, a school in Stokes County, North Carolina, created a list of 47 rules where one prohibited violence like fighting (Fuentes, 2018, p. 5).

Currently, in the United States of America, the frequency and context in which the problem is occurring has expanded from fighting to gun violence and other crises (López-Castedo et al., 2018). Every school has, will or is currently experiencing a crisis situation “such as suicide, violence and gang activity, earthquake, fire, and other natural disasters, rape” (Adelman & Taylor, 2016, p. 13). However, what is known about

leadership competencies and adoption of crisis competency models in handling crises is limited (Mau, 2017).

Adopting a Competency Model

Well planned management in an organization embraces handling both persisting daily procedures “as well as unexpected situations such as organizational crises” (Preble, 1997, p. 770). Leaders should err on the side of extreme preparation rather than not being prepared at all (Sullivan, 1996). However, Roux-Dufort (2007) asserted that crisis prevention should be limited to analysis of special conditions. Van Wart, Kapucu (2011) and Khodarahmi (2009) discussed the importance of crisis management and prevention of crisis in organizations, and the consequences for not executing a crisis prevention competency model accordingly.

Admitting to and informing stakeholders that a crisis is occurring or has happened is just as significant as preparing for the anticipation, analysis and solution to correct the crisis situations (Kash & Darling, 1998). Thus, adopting a crisis prevention model can help K-12 school leaders with: First, identify triggering events as areas for current and future improvement; second, the crisis should not be viewed as just temporary, but urgent and long-term effects should be considered; third, see a crisis as a catalyst for organizational change (Roux-Dufort, 2007).

A crisis prevention competency model can help K-12 school leaders because it is designed to effectively improve environments for teachers and learners and uses “the fit or link between research-validated practices” for crisis prevention (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports [PBIS], 2018, para 3). Campion et al. (2011) stated that there are four truths about crisis prevention competency models. The four truths are:

1. Competency modeling is poignant in getting organizations to notice and be vigilant about information pertaining to employee job skills in the supervision of personnel.
2. Competency modeling is proposed to differentiate top achievers from mediocre employees.
3. Competency modeling includes depictions of how competencies evolve or improve as the employee's level of skill increases.
4. Competency modeling is affiliated with the employee's knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) and the business objectives and strategies.

Even though some “cases of targeted school violence are not spontaneous”, others are planned and executed with some warning that the threat will occur (Leuschner et al., 2017, p. 68). Roux-Dufort (2007)'s assertions about crisis prevention models, the purpose of the tier 3 level prevention model, and Champion et.al. (2011) four truths about crisis prevention models are important to address spontaneous and premeditated crisis. This substantiates the purpose of this research study because; it supports the imperative nature for leaders to adopt and execute a crisis prevention competency model.

A Leaders Role in Managing Crisis

Griffin (2014) stated that the crisis in the internal environment of an organization can trigger crisis in the organization's external environment. According to James and Wooten (2005), leaders are responsible for preventing crisis and should scan the organization's internal and external environments perpetually to identify signs of crisis. Therefore, before a crisis has been identified, the leader or manager should begin the