

# How is personality linked to performance in crisis management?

Laura Parrack

In a changing world the threat of a crisis is ever present. This means that organisations need to equip themselves to ensure they can respond effectively if the worst happens. Throughout the public and private sectors, organisations have set up crisis management teams to deal with possible emergencies.



## What defines a crisis?

A crisis event could be anything from a natural disaster, such as an earthquake, to a technological crisis or a man-made event such as a terrorist attack. There are three

common elements to a crisis (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer 1998):

A threat to the organisation  
The element of surprise

A short decision time.

Crisis management is the process by which an organisation deals with a major event that threatens to harm the organisation, its employees, stakeholders, or the general public.

Prompt action, communication and allocation of resources are critical elements in minimising the negative impacts of a crisis.

Crisis management training

Crisis management teams are usually selected from individuals within an organisation. In order to respond to different types of events, employers often use a

range of simulations to prepare the crisis management team. Feedback is provided to the team after a simulation event to help improve performance, but is often limited to whether the procedural tasks listed on the crisis management plan were performed or not.

### **Does personality play a role in effective crisis management?**

The Cubiks R&D team wanted to examine the part that individual personality plays in effective crisis management. Using personality questionnaires, including PAPI, we assessed the personalities of 82 crisis management team members from the construction, energy, transport and political sectors. Our team then examined the performance of these individuals during crisis simulation events. This enabled us to identify key characteristics that could impact performance.

The results suggested that those willing to take the lead, with a calm disposition, a preference for variety and working together are most likely to perform well in a crisis.

The results from this study indicate that personality assessment can make a useful contribution to identifying and selecting the individuals most suited to crisis management roles. It can also help to provide individuals with a more detailed level of feedback in order to understand their own reactions and behaviours under challenging circumstances, and to inform future training programmes.

The key areas to assess are:

Extraversion Leadership

Group orientation Emotional stability.

Those who are socially confident, influential and comfortable taking the lead are most likely to perform well in crisis situations. Being able to communicate and work well in a team is critical to managing crisis situations, as well as remaining calm under stressful circumstances.

Other important areas to assess:

Ease in decision making Work pace.

In a crisis, the situation can change at a very rapid pace. New information can arrive at any time, which may change the course of action that needs to be taken and shift the workforce allocation. Individuals need to be able to assimilate this information and make decisions that could have far reaching consequences in a short space of time.

Some unexpected results:

Variety seeking

Conscientiousness (low).

During a crisis, the situation may be changeable and ambiguous. Therefore individuals who are able to cope with ambiguity and change may be more effective during a crisis. Individuals who have a high need to follow rules and be supervised, may find managing a crisis more challenging. Those who are too analytical may also find emergency situations challenging. Overall too much conscientiousness could get in the way – certainly in emergency situations.

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