



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Burgemeesters in crisistijd : de invloed van context en persoonlijkheid op het leiderschap van de opperbevelhebber

Vries, B. de

Citation

Vries, B. de. (2016, December 15). *Burgemeesters in crisistijd : de invloed van context en persoonlijkheid op het leiderschap van de opperbevelhebber*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/45220>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/45220>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/45220> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

Author: Vries, Bart de

Title: Burgemeesters in crisistijd : de invloed van context en persoonlijkheid op het leiderschap van de opperbevelhebber

Issue Date: 2016-12-15

Summary in English

Mayors in Times of Crisis: The influence of context and personality on the leadership of the commander-in-chief

To an increasingly greater degree, incidents and crises are dominating daily life. In this context, mayors are seen as the guardian of local society. As commander-in-chief of the municipal crisis authority, with increasing frequency they are confronted with the extremely difficult task to manage crises effectively. Mayors are expected by many to display more leadership during crises than during normal day-to-day practice. This thesis describes research into antecedents, moderators, outcomes and contingencies of effective leadership behaviour during times of crisis, paying particular attention to the performance of mayors, as heads of local authority, in the Netherlands in their role of crisis manager. What determines the success of the leadership of mayors during crises; their personality, the leadership context (its possible variations), or both?

After a general introduction in Chapter 1 and an overview of the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, the subsequent chapters describe three different studies. These are based on two large research projects, in which a series of theoretically anchored predictions were tested on the basis of a number of different sources (Mayors, Deputy Mayors and City Clerks (i.e. primary advisors to the mayor) and data collection methods (experiment, interviews and questionnaires). In

Chapter 3 an answer is sought to the following question: what are the behavioural intentions of a mayor as leader in a crisis and what is the influence of the leadership context on this? Chapter 4 seeks to find the relationship between personality, leadership context and the effectiveness of the leadership behaviour of mayors. Chapter 5, finally, emphasises the relationship between leadership behaviours of the mayor with a number of team processes and the effectiveness of the crisis team. Here, too, attention is paid to the influence of the leadership context as possible moderator. The last chapter of this thesis contains a general summary and an integrated discussion. The key results and conclusions of this research are summarised below.

Leadership behaviour en the influence of the crisis context

The first study, reported in Chapter 3, focused on the behavioural intentions of mayors as leader in the municipal crisis organisation, i.e. autocratic, participative, transformational and ethical leadership behaviour. Building on Vroom and Jago's (1988; 2007) normative model of decision-making model, an experiment investigated to what extent situational characteristics - variations in time pressure, ambiguity and consensus in the crisis team - influenced the mayors' choice for certain leadership behaviour during crises. In total, 190 mayors (from a total of 430 mayors in the Netherlands at that time) participated in this experiment.

Contrary to expectation, it emerged that none of these three situational characteristics influenced the intention to exhibit either autocratic or participative leadership behaviour during crises. In contrast with previous research (for example Bass & Avolio, 1993; De Hoogh et al., 2004) it emerged that lower levels of time pressure, as well as lower consensus in the crisis team, strengthened the tendency to opt for transformational leadership behaviour. A high level of time pressure, on the other hand, lessened (in line with expectations, for example Kouchaki & Desai, 2014) the tendency for ethical leadership behaviour, possibly under the banner of *necessity knows no law*.

A possible explanation for the findings on transformational leadership is that, when choosing to either exhibit or not exhibit transformational leadership behaviour, mayors assess whether there is enough time to formulate a vision and strategy and to inspire and mobilise the members of the crisis team. When faced with a high level of time pressure, the room to exhibit transformational leadership behaviour is more limited and mayors will opt for this less often. A similar reason may underlie the finding that mayors, when faced with little consensus in the crisis team, more often opt for transformational leadership behaviour. In such a situation, the necessity to have to mobilise others and to have to give them the feeling to be working on an important common task, is possibly felt more acutely by the mayor.

In all, it can be concluded that this study did not find any support for the idea that during crises mayors behave according to the normative model of decision-making. In deviation from the model's prescription, the choice for either autocratic or participative leadership behaviour by mayors is not influenced by the various situational characteristics as described in the model. Possibly the normative model is also too unidimensional, and the notion that when time pressure is high, an autocratic leadership style at senior management level is the only correct way, is too simple.

When interpreting the results in Chapter 3, it has to be taken into account that a scenario experiment was used, in which mayors indicated their behavioural intentions in a hypothetical crisis situation by way of *self-reports*. The mayors' behavioural choices in this experiment were possibly arrived at on more rational grounds than would have been the case under the pressure of a *real* crisis. Nor can socially desirable answers be excluded – respondents indicated to opt for autocratic leadership considerably less frequently than for the three other types of leadership behaviour. It is possible that for mayors, in their day-to-day practice where they preside over the municipal council and the municipal executive board, an autocratic '*I'm the boss and I give all the orders*' approach is less appropriate and desirable

(Korsten & Aardema, 2006, p.49) and this affects the choice of behaviour by mayors when managing crises. However, according to this line of reasoning, another outcome would then have been that, regardless of the situation, mayors would opt for ethical leadership behaviour. This, clearly, was not the case: under high time pressure they refrained from this choosing this option.

An advantage of the approach in Chapter 3 is that it offered some insight into the causal relationships between characteristics of the crisis and mayors' leadership behaviour. Not only did a considerable number of mayors participate (190 of the 430 mayors in post in the Netherlands at that time), but I was also able to systematically study to what extent the characteristics of time pressure, consensus and ambiguity, each in their own right and through their interconnections, had certain effects, by using three manipulations in the eight scenarios.

Given this experimental design and the relatively large sample, it can logically be concluded that, with regard to participative and autocratic leadership at any rate, situational characteristics have little to no direct, directive relationship. This does not alter the fact that these situational characteristics can indeed have a big impact on the extent to which participative and/or autocratic leadership behaviour play a role and prove to be effective when leading a crisis team and managing a crisis. These possibilities are focused on in Chapters 4 and 5.

Personality, crisis context and leadership effectiveness of mayors

The personality trait "agreeableness" is the central theme of the second study, reported in Chapter 4. Building on Vroom and Jago's (1988; 2007) normative model of decision making and Tett and Burnett's (2003) trait activation theory, this study investigated the extent to which the importance of agreeableness for autocratic and participative leadership behaviour varies with the crisis context within which the mayor exerts his or her leadership. The leadership behaviour of 68 mayors during a previous crisis was assessed. In total, 51 city clerks and 17 deputy mayors were interviewed for this

assessment; they each assessed the leadership behaviour of their mayor in this crisis by means of a standardised questionnaire.

In this study, it was not possible to demonstrate that autocratic (participative) leadership in particular would be effective in crises in the event of high (low) time pressure and low (high) situational ambiguity. Different from what was predicted, autocratic leadership behaviour by mayors was shown to be effective especially under a high level of situational ambiguity. Possibly, in crisis circumstances of such ambiguity, autocratic leadership is perceived as inspirational (transformational) and effective (Bass, 1985; Conger, 1999; De Hoogh et al., 2005; Shamir & Howell, 1999).

In line with expectations, the study showed that agreeable mayors exhibit less autocratic leadership behaviour and, partly because of this, are seen as less effective leaders during crises. Agreeableness appeared to be negatively related to the effectiveness of the crisis leadership of the mayor, via the negative relationship with autocratic leadership behaviour. Incidentally, a direct relationship between agreeableness and leadership effectiveness was not found. Contrary to what was expected on the basis of trait activation theory, it was clear that time pressure did not influence this relationship. Mayors that opt for an autocratic approach are not aiming at involving others and maintaining relationships. The agreeable characteristics – such as altruism, sensitivity, engagement and cooperation – can make it difficult for a mayor to deviate from the vision or dominant opinion held in the crisis team. Maintaining a certain direction during a crisis can bring with it that a mayor must accept that he can render himself less liked amongst the member of the crisis team. Clearly, whether time pressure either be high or low does not make a difference to this fact. Previous research demonstrated that the need for affiliation – a facet of agreeableness (Judge et al., 2002) – is negatively related to leadership behaviour (Yukl, 2006). When people feel threatened, they are more inclined to accept an assertive and autocratic form of leadership (Madsen & Snow, 1991; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007) and have less

need for a relationship-oriented leader who often seeks to consensus with his environment (Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2004). Amongst public leaders, a certain hardness and discipline is called for and these are even characteristics that garner follower trust, because these public leaders are perceived as our guardians in times of crisis (Cronin, 2008).

The personality trait “agreeableness” was shown not to be directly related to participative leadership behaviour and the leadership effectiveness of mayors. In line with trait activation theory, the relationship between agreeableness and the leadership behaviour of the mayor appeared to be partly dependent on the level of time pressure during a crisis. In the case low of time pressure, agreeableness appeared to be positively related to participative leadership behaviour of the mayor, and, subsequently, participative leadership behaviour appeared to be positively related the effectiveness of the crisis leadership of the mayor. In the case of high time pressure, agreeableness was indirectly negatively related to leadership effectiveness through the negative relationship with participative leadership behaviour. Possibly, in cases of high time pressure there is little room for consultation, rapid and decisive action is required and a mayor will, in particular, respond in a task-oriented, functional and directive manner. A personality that is (too) agreeable could thus only serve to hamper a mayor in switching to a more dominant and directive approach.

However, not all of the hypotheses derived from the trait activation principle were supported. Against expectations, ambiguity of the crisis situation did not impact the relationship between agreeableness and leadership behaviour.

As expected, both autocratic and participative leadership behaviour were found to be positively related to the effectiveness of the crisis leadership of mayors. Both leadership behaviours were observed amongst mayors, with nearly equal frequencies ($M=5.36$ for autocratic versus $M=5.43$ participative). At one moment, quick action is needed,

discussions are cut short and instructions are given, and in a split second decisions must be made to allow the crisis team to move forward. At another moment, the team will need to consider various different scenarios, the course of events must be discussed in detail and room must be created to generate and explore new ideas and possibilities. It seems that an effective mayor alternates between autocratic and participative leadership behaviour.

Leadership behaviour, team processes and team effectiveness

The last study in this thesis, reported in Chapter 5, examined how autocratic and participative leadership behaviour predicted the effectiveness of a crisis team, via different team processes and independent of time pressure and ambiguity. Autocratic and participative leadership behaviour of 68 mayors was related to information sharing, information processing, task-related conflict, coordination, team adaptation and team-psychological safety within the crisis team. A total of 51 city clerks and 17 deputy mayors were interviewed and these participants assessed the leadership behaviour of their respective mayors and the performance of the crisis team by way of a standardised questionnaire.

Consistent with previous research (for example Amason, 1996; De Dreu & West, 2001), a strong relationship was found between, on the one hand, information sharing, task-related conflict, coordination and team-psychological safety, and, on the other hand, the effectiveness of the crisis team. When team members are given the space to engage in 'cognitive debate', not only can groupthink be avoided, but team members are also given the opportunity to exchange information and obtain a thorough understanding of the underlying causes of a problem (De Dreu & West, 2001; Jehn, 1997). For information processing and team adaptation, the predicted relationship with team effectiveness was not significant.

Both autocratic as well as participative leadership behaviour were related to the effectiveness of the crisis team. Participative leadership behaviour of the mayor was, in contrast to autocratic leadership

behaviour, positive related to *all* team processes examined. Moreover, participative leadership behaviour by the mayor was shown to impact crisis-team effectiveness in a positive sense, via information sharing, task-related conflict, coordination and team-psychological safety, as such demonstrating indirect mediation. Mayors who adopt a participative approach value the contributions made by team members, act with restraint in terms of expressing their own opinion and wait to do so until team members have expressed their ideas (Janis 1972; Larson, Foster-Fishman, & Franz, 1998). By being open to the suggestions of team members and emphasising the importance of good quality of decisions, a (safe) atmosphere is created that can encourage team members to participate, engage in a 'cognitive debate', be alert to information and carefully weigh up different alternatives against each other (Bottger & Yetton, 1987; Flowers, 1977; Janis, 1972). Mayors' participative leadership behaviour that is responsible for this was strongly appreciated.

Between autocratic leadership behaviour and team effectiveness, none of the team processes examined were shown to play a mediating role. Autocratic leadership behaviour could only be related to coordination and information processing in the crisis team. According to DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman and Humphrey (2011), within leadership behaviour a distinction is often made between behaviour that is focused on (1) influencing task processes, (2) the relational dynamics within the organisation of the team and (3) achieving change. Perhaps autocratic leadership behaviour is more task-oriented behaviour and participative leadership behaviour more relational-oriented (Gastil, 1994; Kahai, Sosik, & Avolio, 1997). Seen in these terms, it is not surprising that autocratic leadership behaviour was shown to be related to information processing and coordination (the 'harder', task-related aspects of team processes) and that participative leadership behaviour was also related to information sharing, substantive conflict, team adaptation and team-psychological safety (team processes that may be more interaction of relational-oriented). Following on from this, leadership effectiveness could be linked to

the more task-related performance-elements of leadership and team effectiveness logically to the more interpersonal attributes of leadership. Teamwork as performance measure is intuitively more strongly associated met collaboration and together creating added value. In research literature, relational-oriented leadership behaviours are described as empowering (Conger, 1989; Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006) and participative (Kahai, Sosik, & Avolio, 1997) and democratic (Gastil, 1994) leadership behaviour. A common theme among these relational-oriented leadership behaviours is that the leader acts in ways that commands follower respect, gives team members opportunity to contribute and gives due consideration for the welfare of the group. This could be an explanation for the strong relationship of participative leadership behaviour with the effectiveness of the crisis team and the stronger relationship of autocratic leadership behaviour with effectiveness of leadership of the mayor in Chapter 4.

Time pressure was also shown to have an important moderating impact in the study reported in Chapter 5. Autocratic leadership behaviour of the mayor correlated with increased effectiveness of the crisis team, especially under conditions of time pressure. The moderating role of ambiguity on the relationship between participative leadership behaviour and team effectiveness could not be demonstrated.

All in all, it can be concluded that both autocratic as well participative leadership behaviour of the mayor have their roles to play during crises, but it is participative leadership behaviour especially that has the greatest impact on team processes and team effectiveness. Although the Input-Process-Output-model is causal, whereas the current research is correlational, it appears to have found strong corroboration for this model. Participative leadership behaviour of the mayor (*input*) is related, via information sharing, coordination, task-related conflict and team-psychological safety (*process*), to team effectiveness (*output*).

When interpreting the results in Chapters 4 and 5, a number of limitations of these field studies have to be taken into account. Firstly,

leadership behaviour and leadership effectiveness were studied by questioning the same source (City Clerk or Deputy Mayor) and both were measured through close questions. This means that the relations between leadership behaviour and effectiveness may have been influenced also by *common source* and *common method bias*. For example, it could be that a City Clerk, because of his positive mood, responded to all close questions with relatively high scores, and that a Deputy Mayor in another city, due to his excessively high work pressure tended to score all questions relatively lowly. This influences the observed relationships between the variables, but unfortunately says little about the actual relationship between leadership behaviour and leadership effectiveness. In response to this criticism it can be argued that common source bias or method bias can hardly 'explain away' theoretically predicted moderation effects. In fact, both sources of bias *decrease* the chance of detecting such effects, which means that the effects found here can indeed be taken seriously (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

A strong point of the research described here is that, in order to analyse the relationship between the agreeable personality of the mayor and the leadership behaviour and the effectiveness of leadership behaviour, two independent methods were used at two different points in time. Hence, the results with regard to the relationship between agreeableness and leadership behaviour and the relationship between agreeableness and leadership effectiveness are not hampered by common source bias or common method bias.

In addition, in practice it proves to be quite difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish effective crisis management from ineffective crisis management in terms of 'hard', objective output variables and performance indicators (Pearson & Clair, 1998). In this study, the performance and the effectiveness of the mayors was assessed by quite a homogenous group of respondents and on each occasion there was one assessor per mayor. By involving multiple respondents from the crisis team in the assessment of leadership behaviour and the

effectiveness of the mayor (for example, representatives from the fire service, police and community health service) in follow-up research, a less subjective indication of these constructs can be obtained.

General conclusions

In Chapter 3 we found that the mayors' choice for certain leadership behaviour is not directly influenced by the characteristics of the situation. Although the normative model of decision-making prescribes in precise terms what a mayor must actually do, it seems that mayors themselves make their own different, personal assessment in this process. As shown by the results described in Chapter 4, the choice for certain leadership behaviour is partly determined by the personality of the mayor. It was demonstrated, for example, that agreeableness differs in relevance for autocratic and participative leadership behaviour of the mayor. Agreeable mayors are shown to exhibit less autocratic leadership behaviour and partly due to this are perceived as less effective leader during crises. The extent to which the leadership behaviour in question is effective, was subsequently shown to also be determined by the situation. An agreeable mayor who adopts a participative approach is perceived as an effective leader, but only when the crisis situation is characterised by a low level of time pressure. In the case of high time pressure, this is shown to be a negative relationship. In a certain sense, this is also postulated by the model by Vroom and Jago (1988; 2007): one chooses a certain type of leadership behaviour, given the characteristics of the situation. Chapter 3 more or less shows that mayors are not aware of this. A possible explanation for this, then, we find in Chapter 4. The choice for certain leadership behaviour seems to be arrived at much less unidimensionally and influenced by the interaction between personality characteristics and attributes of the crisis context. This is an observation that Vroom appears to have come to concur with (Sternberg & Vroom, 2002, p.315): *"the persons, the situation, and the interaction of the person with the situation...all matter for leadership effectiveness."* The relationship between personality and leadership behaviour is partly dependent on the relevance of personality characteristics for the

crisis situation in which the mayor operates as leader (Tett & Burnett, 2003). It possibly explains why in Chapter 3 we see that mayors do not realise this. Apart from a mayor's strong self-awareness, it requires an acute insight into the demands of the crisis situation. The last study (Chapter 5) demonstrates that the ability to be competent at 'reading' crisis situations is desirable and that, in day-to-day practice, mayors make choices that seem more congruent with the normative model of decision-making (in comparison with the experiment of Chapter 3). It is clear that there is not one best style of leadership, but that leadership behaviour needs to be adapted to the characteristics of the crisis situation the mayor is faced with. Both autocratic as well as participative leadership behaviour were shown to be important for the effectiveness of the crisis team. In instances where an autocratic line of action is sometimes inevitable—when there is high time pressure, for example—, it was clear that the effectiveness of participative leadership behaviour can especially be connected to different team processes, especially when the crisis situation is characterised by a high level of ambiguity. Autocratic leadership behaviour also is shown to increase team effectiveness, via coordination, particularly so when a great deal of ambiguity exists. In summary, it can be concluded that the ultimate crisis manager alternates between autocratic and participative leadership behaviour. How precisely this is to be done, and who is able to do so, is an interesting challenge for new research. The current research only lifts a corner of the veil, for only one of the five dominant personality traits with regard to crisis leadership. Further research is needed to relate the other Big Five personality traits to leadership behaviour and determine their relevance for crises, where it will be interesting to examine the relationship with objective performance indicators for crisis management.

The results of this thesis suggest that elements of the leadership context must be integrated into the selection of mayors and training procedures for mayors and crisis teams. Agreeableness appears to play an important role in predicting autocratic and participative leadership behaviour. However, the match between agreeableness and specific

situationally-bound leadership demands seems to influence this prediction. Moreover, both autocratic as well as participative leadership behaviour make a difference to the perceptual outcomes for members of the crisis team. In instances where an autocratic approach is sometimes unavoidable – when there is high time pressure, for example – applying participative leadership to a crisis team – in ambiguous situations, for example – is an effective strategy to bring a crises in public order and safety to a good end. By carefully analysing the situational demands and possibilities of congruence between personality and environment, it can be expected that the accuracy with which mayors can be advised, selected and trained for their autocratic and participative leadership behaviour can be enhanced. Moreover, the results indicate that is advisable, during the education, training and deployment of crisis teams, to pay explicit attention to the six team processes studied here.