



## Self-sacrificial behavior in crisis situations: The competing roles of behavioral and situational factors

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Stephanie M. Kazama<sup>a</sup>, Miguel A. Quiñones<sup>b</sup>

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### Abstract

As charismatic and transformational leadership theories have broadened their perspective to include situational factors (i.e., crisis), it is important to understand how specific leader behaviors might interact with such situations. Recently, Choi and Mai-Dalton [Leadersh. Q. 10 (1999) 397; Leadersh. Q. 9 (1998) 475] have given both empirical and theoretical attention to the behavior of self-sacrifice, which is an important facet of both Transformational [Organ. Dyn. 13 (1985) 26] and Charismatic Leadership Theories [Acad. Manage. Rev. 12 (1987) 637; House, R. J. (1977). A 1976 theory of charismatic leadership. In J. G. Hunt & L. L. Larson (Eds.), *Leadership: The cutting edge* (pp. 189–207). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press]. The present experimental study investigates the effects of self-sacrificial behavior, along with the effects of situational crisis on followers' perceptions of their leader's charisma and organizational commitment. Leaders are perceived particularly well when exhibiting self-sacrificial behavior in times of crisis.

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### 1. Introduction

Historically, leaders, such as Lee Iacocca, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr., engaged in self-sacrificial behavior during times of crisis. More recently, during the economic crisis facing the airline industry following the September 11th terrorist attacks, several leaders made personal sacrifices for their organizations. Top corporate leaders of Atlantic Coast, Air Tran, Frontier, and Mesa Airlines all took pay

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cuts in an attempt to help their companies weather financial hardships. For the president and the CEO of Mesa Airlines, these cuts amounted to 50% of their salaries (Donnelly, 2001).

While previous research has recognized self-sacrificial behavior as an important component of charismatic and transformational leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), evidence of self-sacrificial behavior in applied settings suggests that the boundaries of this theoretical construct need to be examined more fully. In particular, previous research has neglected to fully explore the situational characteristics that may heighten or mitigate the impact of these behaviors (i.e., crisis). The current research investigates how the existence of a crisis influences perceptions of leader self-sacrificial behavior. Through understanding how future workers perceive sacrificial behavior, we promote a contingency model of leadership, which integrates previous research on situational crisis and self-sacrificial behavior.

## 2. Crisis in charismatic leadership

Weber's (1947) development of the charismatic leadership paradigm was one of the first scholarly writings to discuss how charismatic leaders emerge and how they respond to crisis. Since then, researchers have demonstrated that situational variables, such as crisis, may make the emergence of charismatic leadership more or less likely (e.g., Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Crisis in these studies has typically been defined as a situation where the necessary resources are in short supply, threatening organizational standing (Boal & Bryson, 1988). In one of the earliest empirical studies examining leadership and crisis, Hamblin (1958) showed that groups in a crisis situation were more likely to be influenced by their leaders and were more likely to replace unsuccessful leaders than groups that were not in a crisis situation. Moreover, the mere presence of a crisis has caused followers to choose leaders based on their charisma (Pillai & Meindl, 1998) and, furthermore, to attribute charisma to their leader (Pillai, 1996). That is, a leader's effectiveness is more likely to be attributed to his or her charisma in a crisis situation than in a noncrisis situation.

These findings from laboratory studies have been corroborated with findings from field studies. For example, House, Spangler, and Woycke (1991) found that the number of crises faced by U.S. Presidents, on both domestic and international fronts, was significantly correlated with ratings of charisma. In a case study, Roberts and Bradley (1988) found that a charismatic school superintendent, who was involved in a crisis situation, was no longer perceived as charismatic when she became the commissioner of education during a stable time. Charisma was measured by observations, interactions, and interviews with the superintendent/commissioner in both roles. Taken together, the research in laboratory and field settings suggests that the existence of crisis heightens the extent to which followers attribute positive attributes to their leader. We therefore predict:

**Hypothesis 1.** Subordinates will attribute greater levels of charisma toward their leader and report greater levels of organizational commitment in a crisis situation than in a noncrisis situation.

### 2.1. *Self-sacrificial leadership*

Self-sacrificial behavior has been considered an important component of several prominent leadership theories, including Transformational and Charismatic Leadership Theories. Gardner and

Cleavenger (1998) suggest that a transformational leader, “gains respect, trust, and confidence, instills pride in being associated with him or her, goes beyond his or her self-interest for the good of others” (p. 7). Self-sacrificial leadership, however, goes beyond an individual’s motivation to help others, or selflessness (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997), and can be defined as “the total/partial abandonment, and/or temporary postponement of personal interests, privileges, or welfare in the a.) division of labor, b.) distribution of rewards, and/or c.) exercise of power” (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998, p. 479). For instance, many political leaders have given up their freedom by spending time in prison to demonstrate the severity of their causes (House & Shamir, 1993).

Self-sacrifice is also demonstrated by a leader giving up his or her rewards or abstaining from using power for personal benefit (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998). According to Charismatic Leadership Theory, self-sacrificial behavior acts to instill follower trust in the leader because the leader is willing to make a sacrifice by, “incurring great personal risk and cost” (Conger & Kanungo, 1987, p. 641). Furthermore, the concept of servant leadership suggests leaders should focus on meeting the needs of their employees (Graham, 1991). In field studies, Conger (1989) found that subordinates were often attracted to a leader’s strong belief in the organization’s mission and willingness to sustain personal risks as a result of that belief.

Beyond an attraction or liking for the leader, the leader’s self-sacrificial behavior may serve as an important tool for spreading a norm of self-sacrifice throughout an organization. In followers, such behavior may take the form of individuals being willing to place themselves in a position of risk in order to obtain organizational goals. Theorists from both leadership camps have suggested that leaders influence followers by acting as role models (Decker, 1986; Gardner & Cleavenger, 1998; Sims & Manz, 1981; Weiss, 1977) and by utilizing the leadership technique of exemplification (Gardner & Avolio, 1995, 1998). In the case of self-sacrificial behavior, the influence could result from a leader’s self-sacrifice demonstrating his or her belief in the mission of the organization and providing followers with an effective role model (Shamir et al., 1993).

Despite the theoretical importance of self-sacrificial behavior, we are aware of only two empirical studies that have investigated its effects on followers. In one study, Yorges, Weiss, and Strickland (1999) designed scenarios in which a leader publicly expressed a controversial opinion about his company. Self-sacrifice was manipulated by describing the outcomes of this public announcement as resulting in personal loss, personal gain, or neither. They found that leaders who were described as gaining from the situation were perceived as less charismatic and as exerting less influence than those who were described as suffering from the situation.

In addition, the relationship between sacrifice and influence was mediated by the followers’ ideas about the leader’s intentions for making his public announcement. Specifically, followers were more likely to attribute the leader’s behavior to internal causes (belief in the vision) when the leader experienced a loss, and more likely to attribute the leader’s behavior to external causes (corporate pressure) when the leader benefited from his behavior. Finally, the relationship between sacrifice and influence was mediated by attributions of charisma. In other words, sacrificial leaders were seen as more charismatic, and as a consequence, they demonstrated greater influence on their followers.

Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998) developed a theoretical model of self-sacrificial leadership. Building on previous notions of self-sacrifice, their model describes self-sacrificial leadership as a complex constellation of behaviors, rather than any one single behavior. In addition, their model proposes

specific outcomes related to self-sacrificial behavior (attributions of charisma and legitimacy and intentions for reciprocity) and considers the potential moderating variables of organizational uncertainty and perceptions of leader competence. Choi and Mai-Dalton tested their model by designing vignettes in which they manipulated organizational uncertainty, leader competence, and self-sacrificial behavior. Their findings showed that leaders described as more competent and as having engaged in self-sacrifice were seen as more charismatic and legitimate and elicited greater intentions of reciprocity. We therefore propose:

**Hypothesis 2.** Self-sacrifice by the leader will result in increased attributions of charisma and organizational commitment by subordinates.

## 2.2. Crisis and self-sacrificial leadership

It is important that we begin to integrate situational factors, such as crisis, with specific leader behaviors. As noted by Conger (1999), “context is not the key determinant, but rather the leader and context influence one another—the relative weight of each influence varying from situation to situation” (p. 166). However, few studies have investigated the interplay between situational factors and specific leader behaviors (cf. Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999). The model proposed by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998) integrates self-sacrificial behavior and the situational factor of *organizational uncertainty*, which is of particular relevance to the present study. They describe organizational uncertainty as a situation where followers are unsure of the organization’s survival, and they equate this variable with crisis situations, such as the financial crisis at Chrysler in the early 1980s. They found no evidence of an interaction between organizational uncertainty and self-sacrificial behavior. In this case, the president was described as being new to the company, which may have served as enough *reason* for the sacrificial behavior, even in the absence of crisis. Just as Yorges et al. (1999) found that participants’ impressions of *why* the leader exhibited self-sacrificial behavior impacted their perceptions, Choi and Mai-Dalton suggest that followers may try to deduce the reasons why a leader has exhibited self-sacrificial behavior.

If a leader exhibits self-sacrificial behavior in a time of crisis, the reason behind the sacrifice should be obvious. However, Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998, p. 494) suggest that if, “self-sacrificial leadership is exhibited when there is no uncertainty, such behavior would be perceived as irrelevant and unnecessary, and the leader could be judged as irrational rather than admired.” We would therefore suspect that followers would negatively evaluate a leader who exhibits self-sacrificial leadership when ambiguity is low (i.e., no crisis, the president is not new to the company, etcetera). We propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3.** Self-sacrifice by the leader will result in increased attributions of charisma and organizational commitment by subordinates in a crisis situation as compared with a noncrisis situation.

Therefore, the current study extends past research and explores more fully the intricacies of self-sacrificial leadership. Specifically, we seek to replicate and extend this area of research by exploring how the existence of a crisis influences perceptions of self-sacrificial behavior. In line with Choi and Mai-Dalton’s (1999) study, we look at the outcomes of attributed charisma and the self-sacrifice component of organizational commitment.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 90 (34 men, 56 women) undergraduate students from a small private university and 57 (20 men, 37 women) MBA students from a large public university, resulting in a total of 147 participants. All participants received extra credit for their participation. Although age and racial information were not collected in the undergraduate sample, the MBA sample ranged in age from 21 to 52 ( $M=30.07$ ) and included 27 White, three Black, four Hispanic, 15 Asian, and five other participants (three failed to indicate their race). Prior to graduate school, the MBA participants occupied a wide variety of occupations across several industries. Some examples of the occupations are as follows: programmer, teacher, manager, engineer, nurse, consultant, market analyst, chemist, and sales. Industries included government, banking, healthcare, accounting, aerospace, insurance, and education.

#### 3.2. Design and procedure

A  $2 \times 2$  between-subjects design was used, with self-sacrificial behavior (self-sacrifice, no self-sacrifice) as the first factor and situational crisis (crisis, no crisis) as the second factor. Self-sacrificial behavior was operationalized as the leader giving up his legitimate privileges for the good of the company. Crisis was manipulated by either including or excluding a sentence in which we described the crisis, “the company’s main supplier went out of business forcing Cedar Grove Frozen Foods to switch to a more expensive supplier.” This approach fulfilled the working definition of a crisis where resources are in jeopardy. To minimize any effects that the existence of crisis may have had on perceptions of the leader’s competence, we created a crisis that could not have been controlled by the leader.

The above manipulations resulted in four experimental conditions, and accordingly, four different scenarios, which were adapted from those used by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999). Participants were randomly assigned to one of these conditions and asked to read the respective scenario about the company and president for that condition (see Appendix A for the scenario presenting self-sacrificial behavior during a crisis). Although vignettes raise concern for the generalizability of the findings (addressed more thoroughly in the discussion), they do allow for the controlled manipulation of variables.

Each scenario consisted of three paragraphs. The first paragraph was identical for all of the scenarios and provided background information about the company. The second paragraph described the qualifications of the president, in which he was depicted as highly competent. The third paragraph contained the sacrifice manipulation (self-sacrifice, no self-sacrifice) and the crisis manipulation (crisis, no crisis) embedded in a description of the president’s current actions. Immediately after reading the scenario, each participant was asked to fill out a questionnaire.

#### 3.3. Measures

Two of the dependent measures (attributed charisma and organizational commitment) were adapted from the study by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999). We changed the response anchors from the original 1 to 5 to a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) Likert-type scale. Attributions of charisma involved the extent to which one perceived a leader as being motivating, visionary, and deserving of respect, while

organizational commitment was operationalized as the extent to which one would be willing to make sacrifices for the organization. All items for each construct were grouped together in their corresponding scale in the questionnaire.

### 3.3.1. Attributed charisma

The scale for attributed charisma consisted of six items and was initially adapted by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999) from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire ( $\alpha=.83$ ; MLQ: Bass, 1985). Three items were intended to denote the attributions of charisma (“his behavior shows vision for the company,” “he is charismatic,” and “he is not honorable” [R]); the other three items were intended to measure the effects of charisma (“I respect him,” “he motivates me to be loyal to the company,” and “he makes me proud to be associated with him”).

### 3.3.2. Organizational commitment

Items for organizational commitment were taken from Choi and Mai-Dalton’s (1999) measure of reciprocity. We renamed this measure *organizational commitment*, as the items capture one aspect (i.e., a willingness to make sacrifices) of the already identified construct. This scale included five items ( $\alpha=.77$ ; “if he asks me to do something to help the company, I will do it even if it might involve extra responsibility,” “if he asks me to do something to help the company, I will do it even if it might involve some risk,” “if he asks me to do something to help the company, I will do it even if it might bring me some discomfort,” “if he proposes a temporary pay-cut or benefit reduction from all employees to help the company, I would agree to it,” and “his behavior inspires me to carefully exercise my authority and power, and sacrifice my privileges, if the situation in the company requires it”).

## 3.4. Manipulation checks

### 3.4.1. Self-sacrificial behavior

There were three items for this manipulation check (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999), which were rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) on a Likert scale ( $\alpha=.93$ ; “Bill Stuart has given up his benefits and bonuses,” “. . . voluntarily gave up his legitimate privileges,” and “. . . set an example of sacrifice”). As expected, the effect for self-sacrificial behavior was significant,  $F(1,145)=246.31$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.63$ . Participants in the control condition ( $M=3.00$ ,  $SD=1.21$ ) viewed sacrificial behavior as occurring at a much lower level than participants in the sacrifice condition ( $M=5.93$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ).

Table 1  
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for all study variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
(1) Crisis <sup>a</sup>	0.56	0.50	–			
(2) Sacrifice <sup>b</sup>	0.58	0.50	0.09	–		
(3) Attributed charisma	5.35	0.88	0.26**	0.25**	–	
(4) Organizational commitment	4.52	0.95	0.32***	0.22**	0.48***	–

Note.  $N=147$ . <sup>a</sup>Coded 0=no crisis, 1=crisis. <sup>b</sup>Coded 0=no sacrifice, 1=sacrifice.

\*\* $p<.01$ .

\*\*\* $p<.001$ .

Table 2  
Univariate ANOVA analyses for crisis and sacrifice

Effect	Dependent measures	<i>F</i> value	$\eta^2$
Crisis	Attributed charisma	8.94**	.06
	Organizational commitment	14.66***	.09
Sacrifice	Attributed charisma	6.85**	.05
	Organizational commitment	6.03*	.04
Crisis $\times$ Sacrifice	Attributed charisma	6.46**	.04
	Organizational commitment	0.05	.00

Note.  $N=147$ .

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### 3.4.2. Crisis

The manipulation check for crisis consisted of three questions ( $\alpha=.71$ ; “The company has undergone a crisis,” “There is no evidence that the company has undergone a crisis,” [R] and “The company’s main supplier has recently gone out of business”). Only the MBA sample completed this manipulation check. A univariate ANOVA with crisis as the independent variable revealed significant differences in participants’ perceptions of crisis,  $F(1,53)=26.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2=.33$ ), where participants in the crisis condition perceived more crisis ( $M=5.29$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ) than those in the noncrisis condition ( $M=3.68$ ,  $SD=1.12$ ).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Analyses

Data were examined for outliers. All outliers (seven in total, which were more than three standard deviations from the mean) were removed from the three dependent measures and replaced with the Grand Mean (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The data were also examined with the outliers included, and the results were consistent. Furthermore, because we used two separate samples (undergraduates and MBAs), analyses were conducted to ensure that there were no differences between the two samples. There was a main effect for the sample where undergraduates provided somewhat higher ratings than the

Table 3  
Means and standard deviations of dependent variables for the main effects of crisis and self-sacrifice

Condition	Dependent measures			
	Attributed charisma		Organizational commitment	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
No crisis	5.12	0.86	4.17	0.96
Crisis	5.58	0.84	4.77	0.85
No sacrifice	5.15	0.72	4.23	0.89
Sacrifice	5.59	0.94	4.71	0.95

Note.  $N=147$ .

Table 4

Means and standard deviations of dependent variables for the interaction between crisis and self-sacrifice

Condition		Dependent measures			
		Attributed charisma		Organizational commitment	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
No crisis	No sacrifice	5.12	0.71	4.01	0.87
No crisis	Sacrifice	5.13	1.01	4.34	1.05
Crisis	No sacrifice	5.18	0.74	4.54	0.85
Crisis	Sacrifice	5.88	0.78	4.92	0.82

Note.  $N = 147$ .

MBA students, across conditions. However, the sample did not interact with the manipulated variables, thus, the data were combined for the two samples. To test the hypotheses, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with attributed charisma and organizational commitment as the dependent measures and crisis and sacrifice as the independent measures was conducted (see Table 1 for the intercorrelations among the study variables).

#### 4.2. Tests of hypotheses

Our first hypothesis predicted that the existence of a crisis would lead to more positive follower reactions toward leadership behaviors. The MANOVA revealed a significant main effect for crisis, Wilks'  $\lambda = .89$ ,  $F(2,142) = 8.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ . Follow-up univariate tests revealed significant effects for crisis on both charisma and organizational commitment (see Table 2) and the means were in the expected direction (see Table 3). Thus, the results from the MANOVA and univariate tests supported Hypothesis 1 that during a time of crisis, the leader was perceived more favorably. Our second hypothesis predicted that leaders who exhibited self-sacrificial behaviors would receive more positive follower reactions than nonself-sacrificial leaders. The MANOVA revealed an effect for sacrifice, Wilks'  $\lambda = .94$ ,  $F(2,142) = 4.53$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ . Subsequent univariate tests showed significant effects for both of the dependent variables (see Table 2) and the means were in the expected direction (see Table 3), supporting Hypothesis 2.

Our third hypothesis predicted that self-sacrificial behavior would interact with crisis, such that self-sacrificial leaders in a crisis situation would be perceived particularly well, while self-sacrificial leaders in the noncrisis situation would be perceived poorly. The interaction was statistically significant, Wilks'  $\lambda = .95$ ,  $F(2,142) = 3.63$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ . However, a test of the univariate effects revealed that the interaction was only significant for attributed charisma (see Table 2). The means revealed that in the noncrisis situation, ratings of attributed charisma were similar regardless of leader self-sacrifice. In the crisis situation, however, leaders who sacrificed were rated much higher than leaders who did not sacrifice (see Table 4). These results lend support to Hypothesis 3.

## 5. Discussion

The current research demonstrates that, together, self-sacrificial behavior and situational crisis influence followers' perceptions of their leader. We extended past research by demonstrating the

existence of an interaction between situational crisis and self-sacrificial leadership. We found that leaders who exhibited self-sacrifice during a crisis situation were attributed greater levels of charisma, while leaders who sacrificed in the absence of crisis were not.

These findings can be explained in light of past research. Yorges et al. (1999) found that the outcome of a self-sacrifice led to different attributions as to the reasons behind the leader's behavior. When leaders benefited from the sacrifice, they were seen as having made the sacrifice for personal gain. These findings suggest that observers seek to understand the reason behind an individual's decision to engage in self-sacrificial behavior, and their conclusions affect their perceptions of the sacrificer. For leaders who demonstrate sacrifice during a crisis, the reason for the sacrifice is clear. Without the presence of a crisis, however, the reason is ambiguous, which may cause followers to arrive at a negative conclusion as to why the leader engaged in self-sacrifice (e.g., the leader made the sacrifice for personal gain).

It is important to note that Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999) also manipulated crisis (which they termed organizational uncertainty) and self-sacrificial behavior. They did not, however, find the expected interaction between crisis and self-sacrificial behavior on attributions of charisma. There are several possible reasons for the differences between our findings and their findings. The discrepancy might be attributed to differences in our samples, or differences in the timing of our research, which was conducted during a period when several organizations were experiencing crises.

An alternative explanation rests in our manipulation of crisis. Choi and Mai-Dalton's (1999) manipulation of crisis may have been too strong. They describe the company as having "unprecedented financial hardship which could lead to bankruptcy if left unmanaged," and, "employees are pessimistic about their future and the company" (p. 421). Participants may not have felt that the self-sacrifice by the president could impact the company's financial state, considering the company's bleak position. Our manipulation of crisis described the company as recently switching to a more expensive supplier, "threatening the company's market position." This manipulation conveys that the company is *threatened* financially, but not hopeless. Participants may have seen the president's sacrifices as being more likely to impact the company's financial future.

Furthermore, the difference may have been due to a perception of choice. That is, in Choi and Mai-Dalton's manipulation, the leader's self-sacrifice may have been perceived as forced, whereas in the present study, the leader was presented with a choice of whether or not to engage in the sacrificial behavior. Taken together, the possibility that the leader's behavior could have an impact and the choice to engage in the sacrificial behavior could have led to the current interaction between crisis and self-sacrifice.

An alternative explanation for the difference in findings is that the president in Choi and Mai-Dalton's (1999) study had only been employed at the company for one month. A new president should invoke perceptions of organizational uncertainty, regardless of the crisis situation. Therefore, participants in the no-crisis situation may have felt some level of organizational uncertainty, weakening the actual crisis manipulation. The president in our scenario was described as working for the company for 10 years, implying stability.

Contrary to our findings with attributions of charisma, our other dependent variable, organizational commitment, was not influenced by the interaction between self-sacrificial behavior and crisis. These results could be due to a weakness of the measure, or the fact that it is more difficult to elicit behavioral changes in a low-fidelity situation, such as this one. However, there were main effects for both self-sacrificial behavior and crisis on organizational commitment. Participants reported greater levels of organizational commitment in the sacrifice and crisis conditions. Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999) also found

main effects for self-sacrifice and crisis on reciprocity, but no interaction. It is possible that the interaction between these variables does not influence willingness to sacrifice for the organization, or that neither of these studies adequately captured the reality of how employees would react to these situations, in terms of their decision to engage in self-sacrifice. Field research should more closely explore this relationship.

Most importantly, the present study places the phenomenon of leaders making personal sacrifices into a broader theoretical model of leadership. That is to say, these results give further evidence for a contingency model of leadership. The findings are important not only from a theoretical standpoint, but also from a practical one. Waldman, Ramirez, House, and Puranam (2001) contend that when leaders demonstrate assuredness and confidence, as they do when performing self-sacrificial behavior, it may act as a “source of psychological comfort for the followers” (p. 136). By showing that they are willing to place themselves at risk for the good of the group, leaders are going beyond selflessness and demonstrating a behavioral commitment to the group.

### *5.1. Future research*

Future studies are needed to more fully explore contingency models of leadership. As shown in the present study, moderating factors (i.e., organizational uncertainty) can influence followers’ perceptions of their leader. Although we tapped into one such situational factor, this is only an initial attempt at understanding the moderating effect of situational factors on the influence of self-sacrificial behavior. Moreover, research is needed to more fully explore the impact of leader self-sacrifice on followers’ perceptions. There are several directions such research could take. For instance, research could investigate manipulations of specific sacrifices, leader attributes, and actual manifestations of self-sacrificial behavior in the workforce. That is, leader qualities, such as race, gender, age, or tenure with the company, could all be explored. Finally, field studies are needed to enhance the external validity of the present findings. A study using current executives would greatly add to the literature, as would a study looking at differences between follower intentions to engage in self-sacrifice and actual behavioral reciprocities.

### *5.2. Limitations*

A potential limitation in the present study is the use of vignettes to investigate the impact of self-sacrifice on followers’ perceptions. Although this method did raise concerns for external validity, priority was given to examining executive leadership under high experimental control. Gaining such experimental control to isolate followers’ perceptions of leader self-sacrifice would be difficult in an organization. Additionally, obtaining access to a sample of executive leaders who demonstrate self-sacrificial behavior would be problematic. We do believe, however, that due to highly publicized economic downturns, many individuals have been familiarized with the concepts of business crises and executive self-sacrifice. Thus, while we employed simulated situations to measure complex behaviors, we do not believe that these behaviors are novel to individuals or beyond a realistic job situation.

Furthermore, the lack of interaction between leader and follower brought some concern. However, the leader in the study was the president of an organization, who often does not have contact with his/her employees. In fact, this might be a more valid representation of the actual relationship between a company president and lower-level employees, who often read or receive email updates on their president. As such, this methodology becomes less of a concern than it would be if the leader under

investigation was a lower-level manager with whom followers have more frequent interactions (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999). Thus, the use of vignettes remains an important limitation of the current study and past studies in this area, although they remain a practical method for studying this topic.

Although we tested our hypotheses in two samples, another potential limitation could be the use of undergraduate and MBA students in the current study. However, Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999) used both an undergraduate and industry sample in a similar study and found few differences between the two populations. Specifically, they did not find differences between the two samples in the perceptions of self-sacrificial leadership on attributions of charisma or legitimacy. The one difference they did find was in an interaction between self-sacrificial behavior and competence, which was a variable that we did not explore. Although our graduate business students were not a working sample, they comprise a sample of adults that had been previously employed prior to attending graduate school.

As we are trying to gain an understanding of the perceptions of working individuals who have little daily contact with an executive leader, we believe that our sample simulates the responses of employed individuals. We assume that the key knowledge that is needed to respond realistically to the questionnaire is knowledge of how organizations function. We believe that as previously working adults, MBA students tend to have this knowledge. As with the results of Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999), we found no differences in the patterns of results across the two samples. Thus, because of both previous and current findings, we believe that our results can be generalized to working adult populations.

### 5.3. Conclusion

This study tests the influence of self-sacrificial behavior and crisis on follower perceptions. We demonstrated that self-sacrificial leaders are perceived particularly well in crisis situations. Self-sacrificial leadership is an important phenomenon that is evident in both the theoretical and practical domains, especially in relation to situational crisis. The present study contributes to this body of empirical literature, and has implications for industry leaders.

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### Appendix A. Cedar grove frozen foods

Cedar Grove Frozen Foods is a medium-sized company that manufactures and distributes frozen foods across the country. The company currently has 200 employees and is regarded as one of the leading companies in the industry. In the past 20 years, the company enjoyed steady growth due to the continuing expansion of the market.

Bill Stuart has been the president of the company for many years. He has worked in the industry for 25 years, the last 10 years at Cedar Grove Frozen Foods. He holds master's degrees in business administration and in food science and technology from a prestigious university. Both insiders and

outsiders of the company feel that Bill's background fits well with the needs of the current job. He understands the frozen food market and the industry very well, and possesses outstanding technical expertise.

Recently, the company's main supplier went out of business forcing Cedar Grove Frozen Foods to switch to a more expensive supplier. This change has reduced profit margins threatening the company's market position. Due to the crisis, Bill, the president, initiated following actions: he cut his salary to the base pay and gave up all of his bonuses and benefits. In addition, he ordered the special dining section, reserved for the president and senior executives, closed and he gave up the company car, which formerly had been reserved for his personal and official use. It is now available for business-related use by employees. Furthermore, he has given up vacation time and time off for weekends and has increased the number of hours he works per day. He expanded the present research unit, formerly headed by a middle manager, to the Department of Research and Development, now headed by a Vice President, and he downsized the units that had unreasonably grown over the years. Finally, he decided to tightly control all expenditures. Through a presidential memo, he requested that all employees share in the responsibility of performing these types of behaviors.

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