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## Crisis leadership during COVID-19: the response of ASEAN and EU regional leaders

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### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the leadership in organizations of all sizes, industries, and geographic areas. Although substantive literature exists on leadership during a crisis, less attention has been paid to regional leadership and leaders' response during a crisis. The critical roles that regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) play in a crisis call for a better understanding of how these organizations and their leaders respond to regional crises. This paper provides a comparative insight into regional leaders' crisis leadership and communication approaches in ASEAN and the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. We describe the response timelines of the two regional organizations and highlight the significant roles of regional leaders in coordinating and implementing regional responses during a crisis, including providing consistent communication and collective leadership to facilitate cooperation, solidarity, and efforts towards recovery. We provide implications for HRD research and practice, specifically around the role of regional leaders in creating and implementing Regional HRD mechanisms in response to crises.

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Crisis leadership; regional leadership; leadership communication; COVID-19; Association of Southeast Asian Nations; European Union

Practically no individual, organization, or country has been spared from the broad and multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent health and economic crises that have ensued. The pandemic has created leadership and learning challenges for individuals, organizations, nations, regions, and the world as a whole (Li, Ghosh, and Nachmias 2020; McLean and Jiantreerangkoo 2020). When crises occur, they often trigger confusion and distrust (Verma and Gustafsson 2020), leaving people to look to leaders for assurance and guidance. The crisis management literature has traditionally emphasized internally induced crises, such as bankruptcy or corruption (Drennan, McConnell, and Stark 2014), and only recently has it begun exploring externally induced crises like global pandemics.