

Handbook of Research on

Activating Middle Executives' Agency to Lead and Manage During Times of Crisis



Ann-Marie Wilmot and Canute Sylvester Thompson



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List of Contributors

Barker, Megel Ricardo / <i>TASIS England, UK</i>	134
Beckford, Wilfred / <i>University of Saskatchewan, Canada</i>	422
Blair-Walcott, Kenisha / <i>University of Saskatchewan, Canada</i>	422
Burke, Olivene / <i>The University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica</i>	303
Colley, Vanessa Ellis / <i>University of Saskatchewan, Canada</i>	422
Corrie, Ian / <i>University of Cumbria, UK</i>	374
Deagle, Tracey / <i>Mercer University, USA</i>	32
Demetrius, Sherian / <i>Barry University, USA</i>	400
Furlong, Denise M. / <i>Georgian Court University, USA</i>	274
Hayes, Catherine / <i>University of Sunderland, UK</i>	374
James, Freddy / <i>The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago</i>	250
Johnson, Beverley Icilda / <i>Mico University College, Jamaica</i>	54
Kafa, Antonios / <i>Frederick University, Cyprus</i>	112
Marshall, Jason Emile / <i>The University of the West Indies, Bridgetown, Barbados</i>	345
McLean-Francis, Novelette / <i>Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information, Jamaica</i>	1
Muschette, Richard Oliver / <i>Coventry University, UK</i>	193
Nelson, Teneisha / <i>University of Saskatchewan, Canada</i>	422
Palmer-Clarke, Yolanda / <i>University of Saskatchewan, Canada</i>	422
Pierre, Lee-ann / <i>The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago</i>	250
Ramaka, Shannon Bruce / <i>VisionaryEd, LLC., USA</i>	134
Ricketts-Duncan, Jennie / <i>Barry University, USA</i>	400
Roache, Darcia Ann Marie / <i>University of Regina, Canada</i>	193
Smith, Dacia M. / <i>Unicaf University, Zambia</i>	161
Spina, Carly M. / <i>Illinois Resource Center, USA</i>	274
Thomas, Oral A. W. / <i>United Theological College of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica</i>	328
Thompson, Canute S. / <i>The University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica</i>	82
Thomson, Stanley Bruce / <i>MacEwan University, Canada</i>	193
Virtue, Ardene Nicole / <i>Church Teachers' College, Mandeville, Jamaica</i>	224
Wilmot, Ann-Marie / <i>The University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica</i>	82

Table of Contents

Foreword	xvii
Preface	xx
Acknowledgment	xxxii

Section 1 **School Leadership and Crisis Management**

Chapter 1

Staying Above the Turbulent Waters: Self-Care and Coping Strategies of Jamaican Middle-Level Curriculum Technocrats in a Time of Crisis.....	1
<i>Novelette McLean-Francis, Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information, Jamaica</i>	

Chapter 2

Crisis Management for School Leaders: The Role of a Resilient School Climate	32
<i>Tracey Deagle, Mercer University, USA</i>	

Chapter 3

Leading and Managing in Times of Crises: Jamaican Educators' Perspectives of and Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis	54
<i>Beverley Icilda Johnson, Mico University College, Jamaica</i>	

Chapter 4

Power Sharing in Times of Crisis: Jamaican Teachers' Reflections on Principals' Leadership Approaches in the COVID-19 Pandemic	82
<i>Canute S. Thompson, The University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica</i>	
<i>Ann-Marie Wilmot, The University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica</i>	

Section 2 **Empowerment**

Chapter 5

Empowering School Leaders as Middle Executives in the Centralized Education System of Cyprus.....	112
<i>Antonios Kafa, Frederick University, Cyprus</i>	

Chapter 6

Understanding Middle-Level Leaders' Empowerment During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Context of International Schools 134

Megel Ricardo Barker, TASIS England, UK

Shannon Bruce Ramaka, VisionaryEd, LLC., USA

Chapter 7

Optimizing Middle Managers' Performance During Crises: Some Practical Transactional and Transformational Leadership Strategies for Schools 161

Dacia M. Smith, Unicaf University, Zambia

Chapter 8

Autonomy and Empowerment for Middle Managers in Jamaican Local (Municipal) Authorities: A Positioning Strategy for Change Leadership/Management..... 193

Darcia Ann Marie Roache, University of Regina, Canada

Stanley Bruce Thomson, MacEwan University, Canada

Richard Oliver Muschette, Coventry University, UK

Section 3

Organizational Learning

Chapter 9

Systemised Collaboration and Empowerment for Crisis Management: What Senior Teachers Can Learn From Supervisees 224

Ardene Nicole Virtue, Church Teachers' College, Mandeville, Jamaica

Chapter 10

A Multi-Tiered Professional Learning Approach to Build Middle Leaders' Capacities to Lead During Times of Crisis and Beyond 250

Freddy James, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

Lee-ann Pierre, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

Chapter 11

Holistic Professional Learning in Times of Crisis 274

Denise M. Furlong, Georgian Court University, USA

Carly M. Spina, Illinois Resource Center, USA

Chapter 12

Transforming NGO Leadership in Marginalised Communities for Times of Crisis: Servant Leaders' Approaches in Response to COVID-19 303

Olivene Burke, The University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica

Chapter 13

Religious Leaders Leading and Managing in Times of Crisis and Change..... 328

Oral A. W. Thomas, United Theological College of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica

Section 4
School Leadership and Crisis Management – Higher Education

Chapter 14

- Caught in the Middle: The Leadership Experiences of a Higher Education Middle Leader During a Crisis 345
Jason Emile Marshall, The University of the West Indies, Bridgetown, Barbados

Chapter 15

- Interdisciplinary Doctoral Education and Strategic Management in Crises: Harnessing Agency With Praxis..... 374
Catherine Hayes, University of Sunderland, UK
Ian Corrie, University of Cumbria, UK

Chapter 16

- Reimagining Higher Education Post Pandemic 400
Sherian Demetrius, Barry University, USA
Jennie Ricketts-Duncan, Barry University, USA

Chapter 17

- Exploring a Hybrid Leadership Model in Higher Education Institutions in Times of Crisis: The Case of Mid-Level Executives 422
Vanessa Ellis Colley, University of Saskatchewan, Canada
Kenisha Blair-Walcott, University of Saskatchewan, Canada
Wilfred Beckford, University of Saskatchewan, Canada
Tenneisha Nelson, University of Saskatchewan, Canada
Yolanda Palmer-Clarke, University of Saskatchewan, Canada

- Compilation of References** 447

- About the Contributors** 496

- Index**..... 505

Detailed Table of Contents

Foreword	xvii
Preface	xx
Acknowledgment	xxxii

Section 1 **School Leadership and Crisis Management**

Chapter 1

Staying Above the Turbulent Waters: Self-Care and Coping Strategies of Jamaican Middle-Level Curriculum Technocrats in a Time of Crisis.....	1
<i>Novelette McLean-Francis, Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information, Jamaica</i>	

This study explores the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on 11 middle-level curriculum technocrats with the responsibility to design, develop, and implement national curricula. It also explores the range of self-care and coping strategies applied by these educators to help them effectively meet their job targets amidst the crisis. The crisis is an unprecedented phenomenon in the experiences of the current generation of Jamaican middle-level educators who have been plummeted into new personal and professional demands. The study finds that although these technocrats benefited from nearly all the strategies they applied, they found the personal leadership resources (PLRs) to be most useful. These soft skills allowed them to adapt to the unpredictable crisis situation in order to meet their job targets while managing their personal lives. The study is useful in underscoring the importance of intentionally addressing the psychosocial and emotional needs of people as countries and institutions plan for crises.

Chapter 2

Crisis Management for School Leaders: The Role of a Resilient School Climate	32
<i>Tracey Deagle, Mercer University, USA</i>	

COVID-19 presented many challenges for school principals in the United States and around the world. Chief among these concerns was teacher turnover. An extensive review of literature, author research, and the author's experience as a school building and district leader was aggregated to report on themes related to fostering a strong P-12 public school climate, aimed at retaining teachers for the benefit of student growth and academic achievement. This information is organized within the Myers four-stage crisis management framework of normal operations, emergency response, interim processing, and restoration in order to explore opportunities for school principals to support teachers before, during, and after a crisis such as COVID-19.

Chapter 3

Leading and Managing in Times of Crises: Jamaican Educators' Perspectives of and Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis	54
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Beverley Icilda Johnson, Mico University College, Jamaica

The purpose of this mixed method parallel/convergent research was to ascertain educators' perspectives of and responses to COVID 19 in the Jamaican education system and assess its state of readiness for online teaching and learning. It further sought to provide critical insights on the lessons learned in crisis management and steps required to propel Jamaica into a future of robust online teaching and learning. The findings revealed that while most educators owned their own devices, had internet connectivity, and could satisfactorily navigate the various online platforms, there were issues with the level and scope of training and support they received. Further, the major drawback was the low number of students that were able to access the online space. This undeniably indicates greater need for effective leadership and management especially in times of crises. So, the major recommendations were for continuous professional development in crisis management and other areas as well as resource support to be offered so that the most vulnerable students can benefit equitably.

Chapter 4

Power Sharing in Times of Crisis: Jamaican Teachers' Reflections on Principals' Leadership Approaches in the COVID-19 Pandemic	82
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Canute S. Thompson, The University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica

Ann-Marie Wilmot, The University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica

The COVID-19 pandemic forced alterations to several facets of organizational life in unprecedented ways. Among them were changes in approaches to leadership and management practices in countries and organizations. This qualitative study explores the perspectives of nine Jamaican teachers (drawn from nine schools) on whether, and if so, the degree to which, their principals shifted their approaches to leading and managing during the pandemic. The study found that there were observable changes in the approaches to leading and managing. These changes were manifested in four main ways, namely adaptation, inclusivity, role delegation, and power sharing. Some of the evidence uncovered showed teachers being given greater scope to respond to peculiar challenges they faced on the front lines. These features were found to be similar to changes in approaches occurring in the management of the pandemic at national levels. The study has implications for how organizations respond to and develop crisis management models.

Section 2 Empowerment

Chapter 5

Empowering School Leaders as Middle Executives in the Centralized Education System of Cyprus	112
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Antonios Kafa, Frederick University, Cyprus

This chapter will provide information on the context of supporting and empowering school leaders in crisis management in the global pandemic crisis. Based on the contextual paradigm of the centralized education system in Cyprus, and in particular on school principals in Cyprus who acted as middle executives, this chapter will provide a guided theoretical perspective on how to lead in school organizations

within a centralized education system during crises by focusing on the developmental framework of school leaders' skills capacity. In particular, through collecting evidence from the context of Cyprus during the pandemic crisis, a conceptual framework of empowering school leaders as middle executives is presented and analyzed. This framework could support policy experts on school leaders' professional training and capacity for handling uncertainty and crisis. Also, further empirical research could validate the proposed framework and examine to what extent this framework could be adopted by school leaders in school organizations both in centralized and decentralized education systems.

Chapter 6

Understanding Middle-Level Leaders' Empowerment During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Context of International Schools 134

Megel Ricardo Barker, TASIS England, UK

Shannon Bruce Ramaka, VisionaryEd, LLC., USA

The term middle leadership is used in education to broadly describe the swathe of administrative roles that connect the classroom teacher with the top-tier management level role of head of school. The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the criticality of this role to school effectiveness and its relevance to crisis response. This chapter presents findings from a qualitative study conducted to understand how middle leaders were empowered during the pandemic in the international school context. Thirteen in-depth interviews with heads of schools, across three continents, were conducted to better understand how middle leaders were activated during the crisis. The findings revealed that while middle leaders were empowered through authentic collaboration, increased communication, and role clarity, due to the experience of the crisis, this was not always intentional. Finally, this chapter shares a conceptual framework that senior leaders may utilise for the sustainable empowerment of their middle leaders.

Chapter 7

Optimizing Middle Managers' Performance During Crises: Some Practical Transactional and Transformational Leadership Strategies for Schools 161

Dacia M. Smith, Unicaf University, Zambia

The chapter presents the results of a qualitative study using Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory design. The problem identifies the need for suitable leadership styles for application during crises in schools for unlocking high performance. Therefore, the study evaluated the viability of the transformational and transactional leadership styles as tools used by middle managers for leading during crises in schools. A sample consisting of five middle managers were used from primary and secondary schools in Jamaica, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and the Bahamas. Subsequently, the data collection process utilized primary research using semi-structured interviews. The results of the study highlighted significant evidence that high performance in schools during crises may be dependent on adaptability, promoting collaboration, and intentional accountability regimes. A limitation of the study also exposed the absence of a model for transmission of the leadership styles by middle managers in schools, and a need for future research.

Chapter 8

Autonomy and Empowerment for Middle Managers in Jamaican Local (Municipal) Authorities:

A Positioning Strategy for Change Leadership/Management..... 193

Darcia Ann Marie Roache, University of Regina, Canada

Stanley Bruce Thomson, MacEwan University, Canada

Richard Oliver Muschette, Coventry University, UK

The chapter explores how chief executive officers' (CEOs) leadership styles in municipal corporations (MCs) in Jamaica affect middle managers' autonomy and empowerment for change leadership in times of crises. The CEOs' leadership styles contribute to the performance of middle managers' fulfilment of their organizational mandate. Fourteen participants (senior and middle managers), with at least 10 years of working experience at the senior and middle management levels, participated in this study to explore human lived experiences using a case study approach. The qualitative case study used NVivo 12 software to analyze data collected using semi-structured interview questions on how CEOs in MCs can empower middle managers with autonomy to effectively perform their jobs. The findings reveal that when CEOs empower and give autonomy to middle managers, such an action could transform local government organizations and encourage best practices for organizational change in times of crises.

Section 3 Organizational Learning

Chapter 9

Systemised Collaboration and Empowerment for Crisis Management: What Senior Teachers Can

Learn From Supervisees 224

Ardene Nicole Virtue, Church Teachers' College, Mandeville, Jamaica

Schools were plunged into emergency situations consequent to the spread of COVID-19. School leaders, educators, and other stakeholders engaged crisis management procedures to resolve the accompanying challenges of meeting students' learning needs via remote learning modalities. The primary aim of the chapter is to provide lessons senior teachers could learn from supervisees' employment of problem-solving approaches. Sixty-seven teachers participated in a survey that revealed most employed collaboration as a method for addressing the encountered difficulties. From the supervisees' experiences, senior teachers could garner insights into the need for them to activate self-empowerment in the process of actively assisting institutions' recovery and success. In addition, they should exercise their agency by involving supervisees, and other stakeholders, in sustainable collaborative practices which potentially function as a crucial element of crisis management. The chapter offers recommendations for systemising collaboration in ensuring that the greatest benefits are attained.

Chapter 10

A Multi-Tiered Professional Learning Approach to Build Middle Leaders' Capacities to Lead

During Times of Crisis and Beyond 250

Freddy James, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

Lee-ann Pierre, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

The COVID-19 pandemic created a need to transform the content and delivery of professional learning for middle leaders. This chapter discusses an innovative multi-tiered professional learning approach to build middle leaders' capacity to lead during times of crisis and beyond. It explores how the approach

works and its impact on middle leaders. Data were collected via online surveys and feedback from live interactive professional learning sessions. The chapter proposes the approach as a model to build collective middle leadership capacity to lead in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as for and in emergencies. The findings from data collected show that the multimodal platforms, such as social media lives, websites, webinars, YouTube, and Zoom that were used to deliver professional learning, fostered collaboration, knowledge, and skill acquisition and built and improved the well-being of middle leaders. Additionally, the multi-tiered professional learning approach built a global professional learning community of middle leaders.

Chapter 11

Holistic Professional Learning in Times of Crisis 274

Denise M. Furlong, Georgian Court University, USA

Carly M. Spina, Illinois Resource Center, USA

Educators' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated the critical necessity for responsiveness to their professional learning beyond academics. This qualitative study explores the perceptions and experiences of different subgroups of educators (teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators) with respect to their professional learning opportunities during this time. The participants completed an anonymous electronic survey that collected information through both closed- and open-ended questions to provide space for educators to share their voice regarding professional learning practices. Accessibility, relevance, consistency, and choice are the main factors that educators reported would make professional learning meaningful and effective; this was more evident than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authentic examination of feedback, consistency of ongoing support and training, and implementation of initiatives with fidelity are critical to educator engagement and growth through professional learning.

Chapter 12

Transforming NGO Leadership in Marginalised Communities for Times of Crisis: Servant Leaders' Approaches in Response to COVID-19 303

Olivene Burke, The University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide services to a country's most vulnerable populations. In response to the COVID-19, NGOs were tasked to provide service to the over 500,000 marginalized people residing in urban/rural low-socio-economic communities in Jamaica. Recognizing that the pandemic is different from anything most NGOs faced since their establishment, and it was an existential challenge for organizational operations. Leadership emerged as a critical component to the success of NGOs delivering services to the needy. Using qualitative exploratory technique, the study explored NGO nurturing of employees/middle managers and non-positional individuals' entry into leadership during a crisis. The researcher solicited the perspectives of organizations' directors. Findings show that NGOs encountered several challenges which hampered their ability to provide services to marginalized communities. Only some leaders spotted and nurtured employee leadership agency. Recommended guidelines and principles for activating middle executive agency to lead during a crisis are given.

Chapter 13

Religious Leaders Leading and Managing in Times of Crisis and Change..... 328

Oral A. W. Thomas, United Theological College of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica

Within the church or other industries, leadership is a draining undertaking even for the strongest of personalities. It involves constant self-giving, and as such, burn out and disillusionment among church middle-tier leaders and managers are not uncommon because they are not invested and empowered with the kind of ownership and responsibility needed to launch the mission of the church in the society, normally, more so in a crisis. This work argues that it is the middle-tier leaders and managers of church organizations who are in crisis, not the organizations of which they are a part. Kenotic and martyrological models of leadership, alongside the use of wilderness as a metaphor for crisis, frames the argument. It emphasizes the necessity of leaders' presence, visibility, and availability during crises and proposes how they can flourish in their leadership roles by utilizing the synergistic capabilities of different leadership models. It also recommends strategies to motivate and empower those not invested with high office for greater leadership crisis efficiency.

Section 4

School Leadership and Crisis Management – Higher Education

Chapter 14

Caught in the Middle: The Leadership Experiences of a Higher Education Middle Leader During a Crisis 345
Jason Emile Marshall, The University of the West Indies, Bridgetown, Barbados

The COVID-19 pandemic sent education into a tailspin. It disrupted traditional modes of learning and wreaked havoc on education stakeholders' wellbeing. Amid this chaos, education middle leaders had to find innovative strategies to ensure that high-quality learning continued. Unfortunately, while there is a growing body of literature on senior leadership and managing crises, less is known about the lived experiences of middle leaders while leading during a crisis. Using a narrative research approach, this chapter aimed to contribute to this conversation by telling the story of a midlevel higher education leader in the Caribbean who 'led from the middle' to ensure that student learning continued during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emphasis was placed on her leadership experiences while navigating the vagaries of the pandemic and the idiosyncrasies of middle leadership. The results revealed the importance of leading with care, leveraging relationships, and having the support of senior leadership to empower middle leaders and provide them with a sense of agency during times of crisis.

Chapter 15

Interdisciplinary Doctoral Education and Strategic Management in Crises: Harnessing Agency With Praxis..... 374
Catherine Hayes, University of Sunderland, UK
Ian Corrie, University of Cumbria, UK

Interdisciplinary working within and between different professions is now commonplace, with the transferability of knowledge across situated contexts of implementation. Education at doctoral level can be one mechanism of ensuring that mid-career professionals are equipped with the skills needed to build the capacity and capability required to deal with crisis situations. Interdisciplinary professional doctoral pathways and their associated learning trajectories are now a recognised mechanism of operationalising translational research from the context of work-based praxis. The longstanding debates of how best to bridge the theory-practice nexus in the field of business remains a challenge, although the progressive development of professional doctorate programmes has seen a rise in the number of clinical and professional practice doctorates across Western educational providers. This theoretical chapter will provide an insight

into the concept of translational research in the context of research-based practice/work-based praxis within organisations across the globe.

Chapter 16

Reimagining Higher Education Post Pandemic 400

Sherian Demetrius, Barry University, USA

Jennie Ricketts-Duncan, Barry University, USA

The disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about opportunities for higher education institutions around the world to rethink the planning and delivery of instruction for all learners during and after a pandemic. Faculty were pushed to reexamine their own practices as they made shifts in their instructional practices to meet students' learning needs. This chapter explores three focus questions using a comparative analysis of the research along with the authors' experience and knowledge of successful innovations employed in higher education institutions globally. The chapter illustrates changes in the landscape of higher education practices, problem-solving mechanisms employed, and the lessons learned by higher education middle executives. The authors conclude that middle executives need to move away from a "solo mindset" to one of continuous collaboration aimed at strengthening existing structures created since the pandemic to minimize disruptions in future crises.

Chapter 17

Exploring a Hybrid Leadership Model in Higher Education Institutions in Times of Crisis: The Case of Mid-Level Executives 422

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This chapter presents a case for the adaptation of a hybrid model of leadership for mid-level executives in higher education institutions (HEIs) during times of crises. The authors propose the ACT framework, which is the hybridization of adaptive, collaborative, and transformative leadership theories, as a suitable model for HEIs' mid-level executives to use during times of crises. First, the authors explore the tenets of the theories and their application. Second, they examine their appropriateness for use by mid-level executives and ultimately propose a hybrid model. To illustrate the merits and potential of the model, the authors analyzed two cases to highlight the benefits of applying this model. The ACT framework benefits these leaders through crisis management training that facilitates capacity building in the formulation of equitable solutions, collaboration, and agility in responding to complex adaptive, wicked problems. The authors present the ACT framework as a suitable option for solving crises in HEIs through case studies.

Compilation of References 447

About the Contributors 496

Index 505

Foreword

Ann-Marie Wilmot and Canute Thompson should be congratulated for pulling together this *Handbook of Research on Activating Middle Executives' Agency to Lead and Manage During Times of Crisis*. This is an important text for four main reasons.

First, there is a paucity of crisis management literature in education which has resulted in teachers, school leaders, college and university academicians, administrators and policy makers, alike, unsure of where to turn or what to do in terms of crisis. This is true, especially its leadership and management. This, of course, does not signify failure on the part of these stakeholders, but rather a failure on the field of educational research to frame the field. In framing the field, researchers not only describe problems and/or offer solution frameworks, they also suggest areas for further work. In so doing they signpost both the research and practice communities to current and future agendas. As the very existence of some educational institutions bespeak crisis, the field has been slow to lead discourses in crisis management and therefore to help education stakeholders locate, scaffold, interpret and apply to their practice in ongoing and/or episodic crises. Through its expansive coverage of contexts, this book offers new knowledge on educational crisis management and also signposts a variety of areas for future work.

Second, educational systems and therefore educational institutions, from nursery to university are faced with crises on a daily basis, albeit in different sizes, shapes and scopes. Notwithstanding, teachers, school leaders, university administrators and policy makers, work instinctively to lead and manage in ways that limit potential impacts and fall out for learners. It is little wonder then, that, within the exception of the Commonwealth Educational Leadership Handbook (in press), no other currently known leadership preparation and development framework, and/or degree programme in educational administration, management and/or leadership —whether in the developed or developing world — includes content on crisis management. This gap in leadership preparation and development is problematic. However, this book is an excellent step forward in bringing crisis management out of the shadows, and making it central to stakeholders at all levels of an educational system.

Third, only few books in education incorporates an integrated approach to its writing and development. Writing with stakeholders, instead of writing about them is a much more effective way to give validity to the claims made about practice and contexts. An integrative approach to knowledge production acknowledges that the university researcher is not the singular authority on educational issues. Further, an integrative approach also acknowledges that equity as a practice has been considered in the design of the book, and is an important value carried by those leading such projects. Leadership in education is an eclectic enterprise, practiced by many, although only formally accorded to a few by institutions. By focusing significant attention on the work of middle leaders, and on the work of Higher Education

Institutions (HEIs), this book not only shows the inclusive nature of knowledge production, but also the inclusive nature of crisis management as a practice – which is both an opportunity and a call to action for the field.

Fourth, global knowledge on crisis management in education is currently limited to research undertaken in the global North or the West. This book presents work from three continents: Asia, Europe and North America. Although drawing a lot from Europe and North America, also presents work and insights from the Caribbean and from several small states, and developing states in the three continents represented. This is an important turning point in the field and in our understanding of educational crisis management and in education in more parts of the world than previously known.

In addition to the foregoing, I wish to note two other observations, relating to the timeliness of this book. Educational leadership, at whatever level, for many years has been seen through the lens “... where knowledge of school management, finance, legal issues, and state mandates... are the primary focus... of school leaders...” (Sidhu & Fook, 2009, pp.106-107). This will likely continue to be the case. Furthermore, I have argued elsewhere that:

Demands placed on principals and their leadership comes at a time when, more and more, school leaders are being called upon to carefully balance intuition against logic; the intrinsic against the external; the legal against the moral; the natural against the supernatural – in order to negotiate and secure best outcomes for all who study and work in their schools (Miller, 2016, p.16).

By combining knowledge of the ‘supernatural’ (e.g., Covid-19, hurricanes, floods, natural disasters) alongside the ‘external’ (economic, political, regulatory and accountability systems) and paying attention to the required socio-emotional dynamics in preparation and development programmes for teachers, school leaders, university administrators and academics, policy makers and other stakeholders will be doing a great service to all who study and work in those educational systems.

I am confident this book will be a helpful start.

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Paul Miller, PhD, professor of educational leadership and social justice, is a globally respected voice in educational leadership and social justice, with over 108 peer reviewed publications and membership and executive roles in several educational organizations and charities. He is Director of the Institute for Educational & Social Equity (an independent tertiary level institute) in UK, and a member of the Caribbean Community’s (CARICOM) Technical Working Group on Educational Leadership and Teaching Innovation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. He also serves as Adviser to the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Queen Margaret University, Scotland, and as a Strategic Adviser on Race, Culture and Leadership at AdvanceHE. Additionally, Professor Miller is the founder and currently the president of the Institute for Educational Administration & Leadership, Jamaica (IEAL-J), and the immediate past president of Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management (CCEAM), where he held that position for 4 years. He is editor of *Power and Education Journal*, and founding editor of *Equity in Education and Society*.

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Preface

This scholarly, edited volume, *Handbook of Research on Activating Middle Executives' Agency to Lead and Manage During Times of Crisis*, at its core, is about stimulating, cultivating, and nurturing energy appropriate for leadership in crisis situations. The notion of “activating” implies that prior to, or without some action, the impetus of middle executives to lead, or involvement in leading during times of crisis, may not occur with the requisite levels of efficiency and effectiveness. In the general conversations which led to the decision to undertake this project, many mid-tier executives / middle leaders in various educational institutions reported feeling a sense of uncertainty and powerlessness, was striking. Specifically, during practical engagement with middle managers in the academy during the COVID-19 pandemic, many also reported feeling “lost,” “uncertain,” “confused,” “helpless.” It was not without concern that they, at the same time, were expected to make decisions and lead in complex and fluid contexts. The reflective position was that while the health and socioeconomic issues of COVID-19 were causing grave concern, the emotions of uncertainty and powerlessness and the desire, among middle executives, for involvement in decision-making were common to all major crises. Resultantly, focus on solutions for how to get mid-tier executives to better lead and manage during crisis situations became increasingly significant.

In discussing the issue of the importance of leadership in times of crisis, Wilmot & Thompson (2021), note that the quality of leadership will determine the efficacy of the organization's response. The implication here is that building leadership capacity at the middle tier of an organization is an essential step for enabling organizations to manage crises effectively. Consequently, the book is the response to what was seen as a major gap in information, knowledge, and practice-reference models, on “how to lead” in times of crisis. Hence, the decision that a book on this subject would be a worthwhile contribution to boost capacity-building for both senior and middle managers in organizations.

Having embarked on the journey, this Handbook of Research is the culmination of little over a year's effort to present the latest research on the subject, hence actualizing the mandate. It commenced in August 2021 and involved a “cast” of over sixty (60) committed and competent professionals – authors, reviewers and members of the Editorial Advisory Board. This length of production time, in the context of a work of such volume, is a relatively short time and reflects the team's commitment and an alertness to responding to a moment of crisis, which the book seeks to address. While the production of this volume has occurred in record time, the chapters have been subjected to the most rigorous double-blind peer review process which is consistent with the traditions of the academy and the book's publishers, IGI Global.

LOCATING THE BOOK IN THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

The immediacy of the book is located in the strong recognition that COVID-19 has disrupted the traditional modes of leading crisis management and resolution; and, that there will be other crises occasioned within the context of this global pandemic. Undoubtedly, administrators/executives will often experience extreme pressure to ensure that the management and leadership of their institutions, during these times, maintain the highest quality standards of learning and service delivery. Hence, they will need influential, capable, motivated, informed and willing mid-level staff who can assist by making informed decisions to use initiative to build on directives or make needs-based decisions within their remit.

However, the nature of crises in terms of impact on organizations, individuals and systems, and how people respond to them, have similar manifestations. Therefore, this book will retain its relevance into the foreseeable future. The certainty of this ambition is grounded in the elevation of the advancement efforts at empowerment it undertakes through an exploration of what principles may, or ought to, guide organizational leadership practices, particularly in times of crisis. What results is a compendium of discussions, authored by practitioners operating out of various contexts, on their experiences leading or being participants in efforts to facilitate the activation of the agency of middle managers.

The book, therefore, represents a valuable addition to the scientific literature for the following reasons:

1. It provides leaders with the theoretical underpinning, practical tools and skills to equip middle leaders to meaningfully participate in crisis management and resolution in institutions for improved outcomes
2. Leaders, now have access to a multi-pronged framework for building their middle leaders' crisis response efficacies, from a wide range of researchers, practitioners and theoreticians
3. It invites top-tier educational and industry practitioners to reflect on how they have led during times of crises and provide scaffolding to re-shape or revolutionize their current practices or adopt new ones, pulling from the cases, theories and application frames.
4. Professors and business leaders can use this book as a reference manual in conducting training exercises in crisis management in the academy and on the shop floor.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SUBJECT MATTER

The business of empowering mid-tier executives to lead and manage, especially during crisis situations is very vital. Empowerment is a limitless resource in its ability to maximize their professional capabilities for successful leadership and management of organizations. This matter needs attention because for mid-tier executives to be successful in their leadership roles, it takes not only self-confidence, a natural corollary of any empowered human being, but also tenacity, and the requisite skills and competencies to simultaneously respond to multiple difficult situations at the workplace. Yet, these difficult situations continue to evolve in the work place, albeit some more drastic than others, but nonetheless requiring leaders to make significant temporary or permanent strategic leaps, for which mid-tier executives are often unprepared. These leaps usually demand greater levels of self-awareness and job knowledge, more flexibility, greater managerial and leadership oversight, the need to reflect more, even while communicating with increased sensitivity and effectiveness, more efficient utilization of available experience to address tasks, a stronger disposition to openness and the ability to make tougher than usual decisions, among others.

Placed on the background of the foregoing, and for other reasons, the issue of empowerment / dis-empowerment of middle managers in organizations has been a subject of extensive study, over several decades, with scholars such as Manley (1975); Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph (1996); Busche, Havlovic, and Coetzer (1996), Drake, Wong, and Salter (2007); Thompson (2015) and Kumar and Kumar (2017); examining the impact on the motivation of middle managers as well as the losses to the organization, when the capacities and talents of middle managers are not adequately activated. While concurring with the basic principles of empowerment of middle executives in ‘normal’ times, providing readers with access to a book which explores its necessity and discusses its modality in times of crisis, is an achievement of this book. In a school setting, middle executives are senior teachers, grade supervisors, head of departments, while in business organizations they include positions between front line supervisors and heads of departments.

THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT FOR THE BOOK

Between March 2020 and early 2022 the COVID-19 pandemic, which raged, represented a major global crisis which affected families, organizations, and countries. A crisis, by definition, is an event or experience in which the demands of the given situations exceed one’s normal coping capacities. Among the emotions which crises bring, and with which mid-tier executives have to wrestle, is uncertainty. This uncertainty means that there is a gap in their knowledge, that there is fluidity, and that the direction in which an organization may go is subject to several variables. A state of fluidity and uncertainty brings with it feelings of powerlessness as these leaders in the middle feel at the mercy of circumstances over which they have little or no control. When external factors impact an organization (or group) and the human instinct to survive kicks in, one of the emotions felt is the desire for some degree of control. The feeling of lack of control, induced by external circumstances can, however, be moderated when factors over which there is some control, are handled in an inclusive and collaborative way. Thus, when external forces’ sense of power, internal organizational dynamics can help to balance people’s sense of self by providing opportunities for involvement in decision-making. In an earlier work, the authors captured the essence of this human reality in the argument that “powerlessness may be deemed as the bane of human existence and thus, whether persons are operating in interpersonal or organizational relationships, the issue of their relative power becomes central”. (Thompson and Wilmot (2022); p.1).

Whether within schools or business organizations, middle executives are among the main leadership casualties of a crisis situation, causing them to experience feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty. The suggestion that unpreparedness for the position, including crisis management and leadership ranks near the top of the list of reasons, if not topping it, is quite plausible. Their precarious perch in the middle between those they supervise and those who supervise them is also a strong factor. Often their ability to make decisions and execute them is stymied because they have to wait on top management to issue directives. Some struggle with a vision for their role and hence, unable to craft an individual mission to execute it satisfactorily in a manner which results in both personal and institutional benefits.

Crisis situations can exponentially exacerbate these already limiting situations, thus necessitating a deepened understanding of how to manage and lead. Therefore, top leadership needs to pay closer attention to how they can enable middle executives’ efficiency in their roles, since promoting them to a position of seniority will not automatically prepare them to lead and manage. This assertion does not absolve middle executives, who need to seek out sources of professional learning to assist them in their

Preface

roles. The book provides a framework for helping these mid-level leaders think through their experiences and inform their approaches to advocacy for their development both in terms of the powers they seek to acquire and the value they seek to deliver to their organizations.

THE INTENDED AUDIENCE

The book is intended to have a wide reach of multi-sectorial interests in the field of educational leadership, among educational researchers and the wider business community. Pulling from the areas of primary, secondary and higher education and businesses, this book serves stakeholders with an interest in supervisory and implementation frames of innovative strategies and activities to effectively empower their supervisees to lead and manage during a crisis.

Among the target audience of the book is:

- School principals, vice principals and schools' board chairmen
- College and university presidents and other executive members
- Department chairs, team leaders
- Industry leaders
- Human resource development personnel
- Educators in leadership, policy and management and students of leadership and management
- Mid-level executives who take a self-directed approach to professional development.

STRUCTURE AND THEMES OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into four thematic sections covering 17 chapters.

Section 1, titled "School Leadership and Crisis Management," examines some "nitty-gritty" operational challenges which schools faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, while exploring how some of those challenges were tackled and proposes various practical and theoretical models of crisis management for current and similar challenges in the future.

Section 2, under the heading "Empowerment," delves into what the book presents as a major philosophical underpinning and practical response to the both crisis-management preparation as well as crisis management execution. The authors contributing to this section are drawn from diverse regions, countries, and contexts and present compelling analyses and personal stories of what empowerment means and how it can be enacted and maintained.

In Section 3, there is an attempt to translate the experience of crisis into insight, thus the section is titled "Organizational Learning." The range of contexts in which the application of insight is done is wide, even though most of the authors located in this section are from the same region of the world.

The final section, Section 4, explores the crisis response in "Higher Education," and from a wide and diverse set of contexts, the authors narrate their experiences with COVID-19 and outline frames for how higher educational institutions may become more agile.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1

School oversight bodies, such as the Ministry of Education in Jamaica, have been playing a significant role in ensuring that the requisite support is available to help school administrations' and teachers' instructional and curriculum support, so that they can continue to provide the highest quality teaching and learning opportunities to students via online modalities. Therefore, using stress management and self-care theories as a frame, this chapter explores the experiences of selected Jamaican middle-level curriculum technocrats (Education Officers) self-care strategies and coping mechanisms employed as they provided this support and simultaneously navigated the complications of increased personal and professional demands, arising out of COVID-19. It also utilizes insights from cases in Australia and Ecuador in a comparative case analysis to demonstrate how effective crisis management draws very heavily on people skills and involves the application of a combination of problem-focused and emotion-focused self-care and coping strategies. It offers some practical ways in which middle managers, as well as other educators and professionals, can continue to apply the strategies and skills learned through the pandemic experience, and possibly beyond.

Chapter 2

School leadership has been long established as integral to a strong, positive, school culture. A positive school culture has an impact on high quality student learning and overall teacher satisfaction. These factors contribute to teachers' motivation to remain at the school, thereby significantly reducing staff turn-over. This chapter discusses the teacher turn-over challenges, occasioned by COVID-19, with which school principals in the United States grapple. It uses Myers (1993) 4-stage crisis management framework of normal operations, emergency response, interim processing, and restoration, in order to explore opportunities for school principals to support teachers before, during, and after a crisis, such as COVID-19. While acknowledging that COVID-19 was not the sole reason for teacher exits, the chapter foregrounds how workplace climate and executive leadership's reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated them, from the workplace. It suggests ways that school principals can empower teachers by keeping a focus on organizational climate that will establish the frame for crisis response and which will in turn improve a school's chances of surviving crisis with minimal staff turnover, which is supportive of student growth and academic achievement.

Chapter 3

Crisis situations always rupture the need for more responsive leadership, whether the crisis is being experienced in schools or other organizations. As a response, one of the ways leaders can empower employees is to lend agency to their voices, by listening to their challenges and ways to possibly address them. This will bolster their sense of belonging and collegiality and pave a clearer path for greater levels of certainty and motivation. This chapter shares insights on educators' perspectives of, and responses to COVID-19 in the Jamaican education system. Particularly, it assesses the state of readiness for online teaching/learning and postulates critical insights on the lessons learned in crisis management and steps required to advance Jamaica into a future of robust online teaching and learning. Having unearthed the

Preface

gaps in physical infrastructure availability, lack of equitable access to the internet, where it exists, and the low level and scope of the training support educators got, the chapter proposes continuous professional development in crisis management and other areas as well as resource support to be offered so that the most vulnerable students can benefit equitably.

Chapter 4

Organizations, schools included, were forced to alter most aspect of their organizational lives in ways which were unparalleled, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This inevitably deepened the strain on leaders' leadership and management efficiency, which in turn creates opportunities to explore other ways of meeting these demands. This chapter draws on the experiences of nine secondary school teachers, from various schools, to explore the concept of power sharing in relation to whether their principals had shifted their approaches to leading and managing during the pandemic and the ways this was manifested. It provides a range of power sharing practices from across the world, discusses some of the challenges and virtues of power sharing, as well as an examination of how other institutions handled crisis, while sharing power.

It demonstrates how principals changed their leadership styles by delegating roles, becoming more inclusive, through their willingness to adapt and by sharing power. Thus, effectively empowering mid-level leaders with greater scope to respond to peculiar challenges they faced on the front lines. Finally, it suggests some policy, practice and research implications and uses the findings and literature to outline the recommended Principals' MPOWERED Reflective Frame for Developing Mid-Tier Leaders' Agency.

Chapter 5

Centralized systems of operations do not always provide their stakeholders with the level of individual flexibility to divert from established operational guides, and this often poses a problem because of the bureaucracy involved in this. This chapter tackles the administrative, leadership and managerial challenges, which were occasioned by COVID-19, of Cyprus' centralized educational system. Citing the locus of the problem as the weak directives from the centralized Ministry overall, and particularly to school leaders, in their capacities as middle managers to lead and manage in their specific school context, it analyzes the travails experienced by those middle managers. It also demonstrates in what ways these middle leaders had insufficient autonomy and provides a guided theoretical perspective on how to lead in school organizations within a centralized education system during crises by focusing on the developmental framework of school leaders' skills capacity. This proposed framework for empowering school leaders could support policymaker experts on school leaders' professional training and capacity for handling uncertainty and crisis.

Chapter 6

Scholarship about International schools is scarce in the literature; and, though some definitions exist which attempt to characterize them, the jury is still out as to whether they fully capture the operational nuances of these schools, across continents. This chapter adds to the field of research on international schools by seeking to shed light on how school leaders perceive the role of their mid-tier leaders and how the middle leadership roles, in some of these schools, changed during the pandemic, while simul-

taneously expanding available work on the administrative and managerial dynamics of these schools. It connects middle leadership empowerment to a flattened leadership structure which expanded their skills, due to increased demand of the crisis on their professional operational capacities. Within this context, it expands its offering through an analysis of how sustained school improvement may be arrived at. It achieves this by using the emerging themes to construct a conceptual application framework model for use in support of middle level leaders as they lead during periods of crisis. With the findings from this study situated in the domain of international schools, researchers are now provided with another context to add to the growing literature base of research on crisis management and middle leadership.

Chapter 7

The opinions on the dynamics between leadership styles and a culture of high performance among staff and students in schools have been hotly debated. What is clear, is that whenever a crisis strikes the leader and leadership styles of organizations come under greater scrutiny. Ironically during this period, the demands of handling the crisis, are likely to diminish leadership capacities, and so require leaders to be more strategic in their application. This chapter locates the need for appropriate leadership styles to navigate the challenges of leading during a crisis, in schools, as a means of unlocking and optimizing high-performance. Therefore, it evaluates the feasibility of the Transformational and Transactional leadership styles as tools for use by middle managers for crises management in schools from the Caribbean, USA and the UK. It also explores the controversies of mid-tier school leadership, outlines some of the major problems schools encounter during crisis and argues the impact of Transactional and Transformational leadership practice on workforce performance. Pulling on the results of the probe, which corroborates existing evidence that high performance in schools during crises may be dependent on adaptability, promoting collaboration, and intentional accountability regimes, it reinforces the viability of these two leadership frames for increased motivation, and consequent high performance of middle managers in schools.

Chapter 8

Though the idea of local government bodies within countries implies strong levels of autonomy, in reality and certainly in the case of Jamaica, this is not always the case as their discretionary powers are limited by central government. However, the fact that local government is a sub-set of the larger government with a mandate to serve communities, it is important that they are sufficiently motivated to execute their roles and functions, even within the limits of their power and especially during times of crisis. This chapter examined how fourteen Chief Executive Officers' (CEOs) leadership styles in municipal corporations (MCs) in Jamaica affect middle managers' autonomy and empowerment for change leadership in times of crises. It demonstrates that the CEOs' leadership styles contribute to the performance of middle managers' fulfilment of their organizational mandate; but, this is usually contingent on trust and the level of professional relations involved. It also highlights that when CEOs empower and give autonomy to middle managers, such an action could transform local government organizations and encourage best practices for organizational change in times of crises.

Chapter 9

During the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions had to forego physical schooling for engaging students via remote teaching. Teachers encountered a range of challenges as a result of the novelty of the

Preface

instructional norms and contexts, and institutions' unpreparedness for online teaching and learning. This chapter explores how teachers collaborated in the sharing of solutions, and provided feedback about the levels of success, as a crisis management strategy. The chapter presents findings for teachers' collaborative activities and perspectives. It argues that these hold valuable insights for how senior teachers may activate their agency, and position themselves as effective leaders in crisis situations. Two key lessons are the need for senior teachers to exercise self-empowerment, and undertake steps to systemize collaboration as a sustainable crisis management approach. The chapter offers recommendations for how senior teachers may use the insights garnered to position themselves as proactive middle leaders and suggest some shifts in policies development as enablers for its systemization.

Chapter 10

The ultimate goal of professional learning for teachers is to increase the personal and academic teaching and learning output of schools; and, given the importance of the role of middle managers in schools, it is crucial that they be empowered. Effective professional activities are usually those that are specific to an identified problem, delivered over a specified timeframe with sufficient time, and also one which provides teachers with the opportunities to implement their new knowledge, with opportunities for consistent improvements. The COVID-19 Pandemic generated a specific need to transform the content and delivery of professional learning opportunities for middle leaders. In response, this chapter discusses an innovative multi-tiered professional learning approach which was devised to develop middle leaders' capacity to lead during times of crisis and beyond and its impact on middle leaders. It delivers an appropriate blend of theoretical grounding, tools, skills and practical application opportunities to advance meaningful leadership from the middle of institutions facing crises. Additionally, it demonstrates how the suite of professional learning tools that was used to deliver professional learning, fostered collaboration, knowledge and skill acquisition, built and improved the well-being of middle leaders, which redound a global professional learning community of middle leaders. To end, it presents a model useful for professional learning for crisis management for middle leaders.

Chapter 11

In order to plan for a professional learning intervention that is meaningful, it is best to hear from the potential objects what their experiences are and how to address them. Educators' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated the critical necessity for responsiveness to their professional learning beyond academics. This chapter recognizes this gap and delves into unearthing the perceptions and experiences of different categories of educators, including teachers, instructional coaches, and school administrators, with the aim of understanding their existing professional learning needs opportunities and whether they align with what they most require at this time. It analyzes the shifts in professional learning that Pre-K-12 educators experienced during COVID-19, the in-district support that was available and what professional learning they thought they needed most. It draws on the findings to suggest a frame to demonstrate how improved school climate and culture, adequate time availability, the relevance of the professional learning activities, innovative opportunities, authentic examination of feedback, consistency of ongoing support and training, and implementation of initiatives and fidelity are critical to educator engagement and growth through professional learning and agency.

Chapter 12

University and community partnerships have remained relevant because of the potential of both partnerships entities to contribute to each other's growth and development. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are often among these partnerships that provide services to a country's most vulnerable populations. Nonetheless, their capacity to act during crisis situations, like some other organizations, would become limited in response to government mandates, among other factors. Leadership, then, becomes a critical component to the success of NGOs delivering services to the needy. This status invites a reflection on the actors during unprecedented times, such as COVID-19. This chapter shares the experiences of NGOs that were tasked to provide service to marginalized people residing in urban/rural low-socio-economic communities in Jamaica. Underpinned by tenets of Servant Leadership theory, and probed from the perspectives of their Directors, it demonstrates how NGOs navigated and nurtured middle managers' entry to establish their leadership during the crisis. Additionally, it discusses the major challenges which impacted their abilities to fully provide services to marginalized communities. A major insight it provides is the duality in approach to middle leadership; as some leaders identified and nurtured employees' agency, while others didn't. Hence, it provides a set of guiding principles to not only activate but also nurture middle executives' agency to lead during a crisis.

Chapter 13

Religious communities have not been spared the disruption and trauma that COVID-19 has caused. Thus, like educational institutions and other industry players, the crisis has provided an avenue for them to consider their responsibility to being more agile in their responsibilities, especially during crisis. This chapter explores how the intricacies of leadership pose a challenge for the church, particularly moving from inherited structures of people-centric power and mission to newer models of human based management, ministry and mission. It shifts the object of crisis from the organization and instead argues that it is the middle-tier leaders and managers of churches who are in crisis. Pulling on the experiences of selected church leaders in the Caribbean and likening crisis experience to a wilderness, it demonstrates how Kenotic and Martyrological models of leadership can assist church leaders to be made more agentic during periods of crises. Additionally, the chapter illustrates how this combination can amplify middle managers' agency because they become more visible, available and present in the lives of their constituents. Hence, concluding that these strategies are at least a beginning point to motivate and empower for greater leadership crisis effectiveness.

Chapter 14

During periods of crises some top administrators automatically become situated as a mid-level administrator. This results because of the operational and administrative uncertainties and the concomitant dependence on centralized decision-making and sharing. With the often-undesirable lack of urgency, this situation becomes a recipe for chaos and burn-out; but these administrators are not relived from their responsibility of finding innovative strategies to ensure that high-quality learning and service continue, as well as attending to their personal and other professional demands. While the body of literature on senior leadership and crisis management in this context is expanding, senior leader's voices have not been consistently privileged and therefore, less is known about their lived experiences while leading

Preface

during a crisis. This chapter contributes to this discourse by telling the story of a midlevel higher education leader in the Caribbean. It emphasizes the leadership experiences while navigating the vagaries of the COVID-19 pandemic, the idiosyncrasies of middle leadership and the type of support required from senior management for middle leaders to lead effectively during this time. It also demonstrates how leading with care, leveraging relationships, and having the support of senior leadership can empower middle leaders and provide them with a sense of agency during times of crisis, and concludes by sharing an application framework towards developing these crisis management and leadership factors.

Chapter 15

Higher education has evolved beyond just being an avenue to secure employment. In developing economies such as in Jamaica and in other parts of the world, designing interdisciplinary tertiary curriculum for the purposes of developing problem-solving abilities and increasing other higher order level workforce skills continues to remain integral for national development. However, the longstanding debates of how best to bridge the theory-practice interconnection in the field of business remains a challenge, despite the number of clinical and professional practice doctorates across Western educational providers. This chapter seeks to address this gap by arguing that educational stakeholders, such as curriculum planners, can utilize doctoral level education as a tool for ensuring that mid-career professionals are equipped with the skills needed to build the capacity and capability required to deal with crisis situations. It emphasizes the efficacy of such an approach by also arguing that interdisciplinary professional doctoral pathways and their associated learning trajectories are now a recognized mechanism of operationalizing translational research from the context of work-based praxis. To this end, it offers a theoretical exposé that provides an insight into the concept of translational research in the context of research-based practice/work-based praxis within organizations across the globe, along with “The Crisis Management Complexity Framework of Transformative Dimensions and Characteristics”.

Chapter 16

One would be hard pressed to argue that COVID-19 has not had a disruptive impact on tertiary educational institutions. Resultantly, it has created prospects for higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world to reconsider how they plan and deliver instructions for all learners during the pandemic and beyond. No doubt faculty, then, were thrust into re-examining their own methods as they made modifications in their instructional practices to meet students’ learning needs. However, the big issue which remains is whether with the steady increase of face-to-face resumption of classes, if HEIs will return to how they formerly conducted the business of educating students, or if they will call on the lessons the pandemic provides to pivot and become more agile. This chapter addresses how HEIs can learn from the crisis, by illustrating challenges in the landscape of higher education practices, problem-solving mechanisms employed, and the lessons learned by higher education middle executives. Guided by the adult learning theory, it also focuses on the reimagination of instructional planning, delivery and assessment, lessons learned from the pandemic, about what works in higher education from the practitioner’s point of view, and from policy development aimed at meeting the changing needs of higher education and mitigating future crises. Additionally, it recommends for middle executives, a dispositional shift from what the authors describe as a “solo mindset” to one of continuous collaboration.

Chapter 17

Like the chapter before it, this chapter also tackles challenges of HEIs in a bid to ensure their adaptability during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis. It acknowledges that mid-level executive academic leaders (deans and department chairs) who are central to strategic decision-making in higher education institutions increasingly confront situations requiring them to make difficult decisions that sometimes influence institutional paradigm shifts or changes at the college and faculty level, and more so in times of crises. However, there exists a capacity gap which impedes the effectiveness of these processes. To address, it argues the case for Adaptive-Collaborative Transformative (ACT) leadership framework, which is a hybridization of adaptive, collaborative, and transformative leadership theories, as a suitable model for HEIs' mid-level executives to use during times of crises. It outlines the tenets of the theories and how they may be applied, and examines the suitability for practice by mid-level executives. Pulling on two cross-national cases, the chapter then demonstrates the merits/potential of this model for the development of mid-level leaders' agency through crisis management training that facilitates capacity building in the formulation of equitable solutions, collaboration, and agility in responding to complex adaptive, wicked problems. It closes by developing a case and poses questions which require the readers to contemplate the core issues of the ACT Framework, as they seek to solve it.

CONCLUSION

It is our belief that this book represents a valuable addition to the body of knowledge on ways in which the empowerment of middle managers may be undertaken. Middle managers represent an important lynchpin in the execution of organizational functions as they both implement the dictates of senior management as well as interface with the realities on the ground in ways that are more intimate than how senior managers routinely operate. By virtue of their proximity to the ground, middle managers have the opportunity to transmit to senior managers, some of whom are located on the central ministry, their experiences in the implementation of policy.

The effectiveness with which middle managers play the role of interpreting realities on the ground and feeding those to senior managers, depends on their sense of empowerment, as well as the organizational structures of power-sharing. In this regard, it must be reckoned that, as our preliminary assessment and information gathering showed, many middle managers see problems on the ground but are either afraid to share them with senior managers or unsure whether they should. Others are willing to act in a bid to resolve these problems but are powerless to do so because of a lack of capacity. The result of this can be that senior managers have a false (that is, insufficiently) informed sense of what is really happening. This can lead to discoveries of problems when an internal organizational crisis arises. The cure for this is empowering middle managers. This is the message and mission of this book.

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Section 1

School Leadership and Crisis Management

Chapter 1

Staying Above the Turbulent Waters: Self-Care and Coping Strategies of Jamaican Middle-Level Curriculum Technocrats in a Time of Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on 11 middle-level curriculum technocrats with the responsibility to design, develop, and implement national curricula. It also explores the range of self-care and coping strategies applied by these educators to help them effectively meet their job targets amidst the crisis. The crisis is an unprecedented phenomenon in the experiences of the current generation of Jamaican middle-level educators who have been plummeted into new personal and professional demands. The study finds that although these technocrats benefited from nearly all the strategies they applied, they found the personal leadership resources (PLRs) to be most useful. These soft skills allowed them to adapt to the unpredictable crisis situation in order to meet their job targets while managing their personal lives. The study is useful in underscoring the importance of intentionally addressing the psychosocial and emotional needs of people as countries and institutions plan for crises.

INTRODUCTION

Exploring Crisis

In some parts of the world, crises are not uncommon. These may not be health-related as in the case of the current COVID-19 pandemic - they may be civil wars, sieges, terrorist attacks, or prolonged severe weather among others. In these countries, therefore, sustaining the education system in periods of crisis is not a new domain for middle-level and other educators. However, for the present generation of Carib-

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bean educators such as Jamaican curriculum technocrats, a major crisis, especially one lasting for over two years is unfamiliar and devastating.

According to Eriksson and McConnell (2011), the world has become more vulnerable to crises of some form or another. Shrivastava et al. (2013) believe that global crises have become the new normal. Education systems should therefore be equipped to face unexpected disasters.

Trainor et al. (2013) note that some critical dimensions of leadership for crisis situations are “flexibility, communication, networking abilities, decision-making, urgency, teambuilding, sensemaking, information seeking, accounting, and planning.” (p. 38). The scholars note that these areas are “often neglected” aspects of leadership but are vital in a crisis. These skills are usually applied as coping strategies to reduce or eliminate stress in difficult periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Ramos Pla et al. (2021) have explored the type and application of leadership skills called Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs), which according to Ramos Pla et al. (2021) and Leithwood et al. (2019) are “problem-solving efficiency, knowledge of effective practices, systems thinking, perceiving emotions, managing emotions, acting in emotionally appropriate ways, and the levels of optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and proactivity.”

Makwana (2019) note that disasters affect both the psychological and psychosocial dimensions of people although they have obvious physical effects. Very often, the mental and social effects of a crisis such as anxiety, depression, alienation, stress (both real and perceived), adjustment issues, fear, shock, helplessness, sadness, and grief are far greater than the physical effects.

Consistent with the position of Makwana (2019), this chapter illustrates the impact of the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis on the varying dimensions of the lives of eleven (11) middle-level curriculum officers. It explores how they applied a range of coping and self-care strategies in order to manage or eliminate the stressors that threatened the normalcy of their personal and professional lives. It also assesses the extent to which these strategies achieved the purpose for which they were applied in each case and how leaders, including technocrats, can learn from these experiences by effectively combining strategies – particularly people skills- to manage a crisis. The chapter demonstrates that effective crisis management draws very heavily on people skills and involves the application of a combination of self-care and coping strategies in order to achieve this end. The recommendations at the end of the chapter provide practical ways in which middle managers, as well as other educators and professionals, can continue to apply the strategies and skills learned through the pandemic experience.

BACKGROUND

Curriculum Officers, in the initial phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, were required to work remotely to support school leaders and their staff in a range of curriculum implementation matters previously executed physically. With a range of new professional demands complicated by personal and other challenges, these officers faced a growing number of stressors. As people face unexpected stressful events like the COVID-19 pandemic, they draw on different coping and self-care strategies (Johal et al., 2014). These strategies and their effectiveness, as applied by these curriculum officers in the pandemic, will therefore be the focus of this study.

A study of this nature is therefore quite useful as it takes an in-depth look at how leaders effectively navigate crises and provides a model for handling specific challenges, which may arise in these situations.

WHO ARE MIDDLE MANAGERS?

Gjerde and Alvesson (2019) define middle managers as a category of professionals who fall between top management and non-managers in a system. In the Jamaican and other education systems around the world, the term “middle management” has multiple interpretations. For example, in a UK study of the impact of middle leaders on change management, Chambers (2009, p. 1) in his study of the role of curriculum managers in colleges of further education, categorizes these leaders as middle managers who manage staff, as well as their classrooms. In terms of school leadership, Gear and Sood (2021) similarly categorize middle managers or “leaders” as a level of school managers having “school wide responsibilities, in addition to their classroom duties.”

Based on the definition of “middle managers” by Gjerde and Alvesson (2019) and the categorizations by Chambers (2009) and Gear and Sood (2021), different levels of educators could be categorized as middle managers in the Jamaican education system. For example, at the school level, Senior Teachers/ Heads of Departments could be classified as middle managers. These individuals fall between the top tier of the Principal and Vice-Principal and regular classroom teachers and assist in managing staff, in addition to their classroom duties. At the level of the Ministry of Education & Youth, several Education Officers could be categorized as middle managers because they assist in managing staff, as well as in executing the functions they supervise. For example, in a department like the Core Curriculum Unit, Senior Education Officers would be the middle managers between the Assistant Chief Education Officer at the top and other Education Officers at the bottom. Still yet, Assistant Chief Education officers, Senior Education Officers, and Education Officers could also be categorized as a middle tier between the Deputy Chief Education Officer and the Chief Education Officer, along with other senior policy representatives. Looking at the broader education system, however, education officers, as a general group, are the middle team between the school team and the Senior Policy level. In this study, it is this latter group of middle managers - Curriculum Education Officers - who are being investigated. It is important in this study to understand this categorization, as different levels of Officers within this middle tier share their varied experiences based on their responsibilities.

A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Conceptual Framework

Overview

The use of self-care and coping styles/strategies to deal with stressful situations such as crises has been addressed extensively in the psychological and broader healthcare literature. Increasingly, however, the areas of stress management through physical and emotional coping strategies have factored in wider studies of business management (Dayour et al., 2020), religious studies (Molen et al. (2020), and educational research (Brooks et al., 2022; Hidalgo-Andrade et al., 2021), particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has impacted to varying degrees, many people globally, including educational leaders. In a study of this nature, a framework of stress and self-care and coping theory is therefore quite relevant as it explores how curriculum officers adapted to the pandemic.

Stress Management Theory

Stress and Stressors

Silverman, et al. (2010) define stress as “a bodily reaction to a change, which needs a response, regulation, and/or physical, psychological, and or emotional adaptation.” Stress is also categorized by the type of stressors involved in the related experience. Paradies (2010, p. 209) has indicated three (3) main types of stressors - life events, chronic and daily hassles/uplifts. The scholar describes some stressors as sudden and acute and notes that they require major adjustments (life events), some as more long-term or recurrent (chronic), and others as very brief day-to-day occurrences requiring small short-term adjustments (daily hassles/uplifts). Based on the suddenness and impact of the pandemic, the present study would best be conceptualized as one caused by a life event stressor.

Coping and Coping Strategies

Stress coping or coping is the process of eliminating, managing, or minimizing stress (Johnston et al., 1998; Paradies, 2012; Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). Khrono (2002) defines coping as an “individuals’ efforts in thought and action to manage specific demands”

There are different coping styles including but not limited to problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is an active and solutions-oriented approach aimed at removing or modifying the stressor in the environment (Schoenmakers et.al, 2015; McLeod, 2015; Herman & Tetrick, 2009; Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). Examples of these are enrolling in a professional learning community or other support groups, exercising, and developing and adhering to a study schedule. Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, addresses stress by reducing the negative emotional impact of the stressor (Herman & Tetrick, 2009, Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). Emotion-focused coping can be both negative and positive. Examples of positive emotion-focused strategies are journaling, physical exercise, playing games, and meditation. Examples of negative emotion-focused coping are withdrawal/self-isolation, drug abuse, distraction through over-eating, and self-injury. Ding et al. (2021) note that emotion-focused coping is more suited for situations that cannot be helped at all. An example of this kind of situation would be poor esteem feelings associated with irreversible aging deficiencies.

There are sometimes overlaps between some of the strategies, which may be categorized under problem-focused and emotion-focused coping styles. What differentiates them is the goal of applying the strategy (Schoenmakers et al., 2015). For example, physical exercise may be used to address overweight issues and its attendant negative emotions. With this targeted approach to achieving weight loss with the long-term goal of eliminating the negative experience and emotions linked to obesity, physical exercise may be categorized as problem-focused coping. However, if exercise is simply a means of distraction aimed at avoiding the negative emotions linked to obesity, then the strategy may be categorized as an emotion-focused coping strategy, specifically avoidance coping.

It is important to note, however, that scholars have categorized coping styles in other ways. For example, Aldwin and Yancura (2004) have also included social support (networking to buffer stress), religious coping (prayer, fasting, extending faith), and meaning-making (reframing stressful experiences to see the positive lessons to be learned) as other coping styles. McLeod (2015) has subsumed religious coping and meaning-making or positive reframing, which he terms as “cognitive reappraisal” under emotion-focused coping. Meaning-making as defined by Aldin & Yancura (2004), is aimed at finding

the positive aspect of a stressful experience or encounter. They note that this coping strategy is mainly linked to chronic stressors. Molen et al. (2020) have linked religious coping to problem-focused coping. I concur with Molen et al. (2020) that this categorization is possible, although religious coping is commonly categorized as a positive emotion-focused strategy. For some individuals, religious coping is a targeted and solution-oriented approach. For others, however, religious coping may only serve as a distraction from the stressor.

Carr and Pudrovska (2007) note that negative emotion-focused strategies are not very effective for dealing with crises. In contrast, the authors demonstrate a preference for problem-focused strategies, which they view as more active /proactive in addressing stress. They, however, make one exception for older adults who do better with emotion-focused strategies when confronted by certain unchangeable life situations.

Other scholars including Blum & Silver (2012), Dubow and Rubinlicht (2011), and Aldwin and Yancura (2004) have indicated the need to take a more flexible and multidimensional approach to coping strategies since individuals are not always fixed in their coping styles and the different styles may serve a useful role to the same individual in different circumstances or different aspects of their stressful experiences. For example, some positive emotion-focused coping strategies such as journaling or talking out a problem with a friend may be very useful to some individuals in certain stressful circumstances. This study, therefore, supports the more broad-based flexible approach, which sees curriculum middle managers adapting their strategies to meet their varied psychological and physical needs in a stressful situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

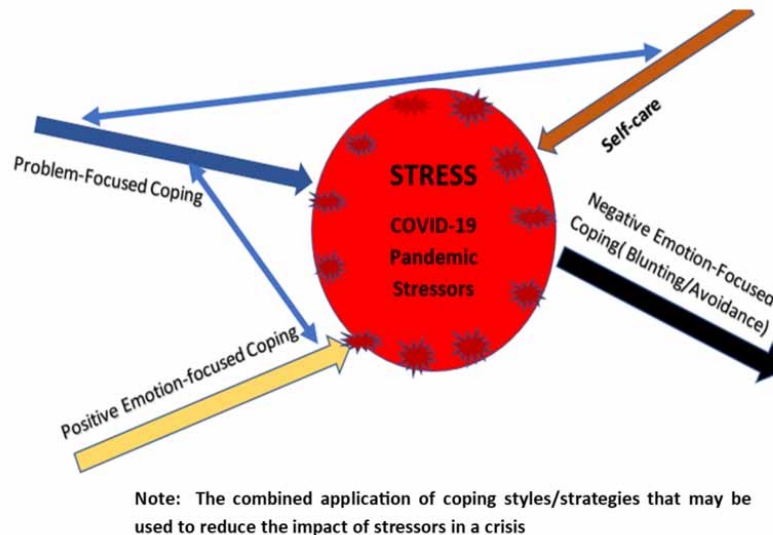
Managing Stress Through Self-Care Strategies

Self-care has often been twinned with coping in the healthcare and psychological literature, as well in those addressing other kinds of stress-related experiences of individuals. Martinez et al. (2021) have noted the difficulty in providing a precise definition for “self-care” because of its growing multidisciplinary use. However, based on the scholars’ literature review, they have indicated a possible definition as, “The ability to care for oneself through awareness, self-control, and self-reliance in order to achieve, maintain, or promote optimal health and well-being.” This definition is supported by Riegel et al. (2021) who associate self-care with concepts such as self-management, self-monitoring, and self-help. Martinez et al. (2021) have linked self-care to stress reduction, indicating the workplace as one context in which self-care may assist the challenged individuals. The job space is one of the main contexts in which this study is located so the focus given to workplace self-care strategies by Martinez et al. (2021) is relevant here. Because of this link between self-care and stress and the fact that self-care requires proactive self-management and self-awareness, I have directly connected self-care with the monitoring and meaning-making coping styles. These two (2) coping strategies involve more targeted conscious approaches on the part of the individual to manage the stress or particular stressor (s) involved. Since “self-care and “coping” are usually specified as a concept pair in stress management theory, despite some overlaps in how these concepts are used, I have kept them together in this study.

Ben-zur et al. (2003) and Fang et al. (2020) have linked crisis leadership skills to both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies in their studies of the efficacy of leadership during crisis. In this study, the same linkages will be made.

Figure 1 attempts to capture the theoretical framework of this study. It illustrates the use of different coping styles to avert or reduce stress.

Figure 1.



STRESS MANAGEMENT IN CRISIS LEADERHSIP

Related Cases From Other Spaces

Australian Case Study of Coping in Crisis

Brooks et al. (2022), in their case study of three (3) primary school teachers in Victoria, Australia, explored the coping strategies used by teachers in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. These teachers, like the rest of the world, faced the impact of “repeated lockdowns,” new health regulations, and increased media scrutiny on their stress levels. Added to their stress were examination cancellation, school logistics issues such as suitable class size vis a vis social distancing isolation from their support systems such as friends and family, and the growing uncertainty of the pandemic itself. Consequently, these teachers faced unsurmountable stress as the threat resurfaced with each new lockdown. The unfamiliar virtual online classroom modality also took its toll on the teachers.

Brooks et al. (2022) in providing this contextual background, show how this situation forced these Australian teachers to find coping strategies to manage their stress levels. The aim of the study was to determine the significant stressors and how the teachers managed or reduced these stressors as they navigated their personal and professional lives.

The authors applied the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1984) as their conceptual framework. Within this framework, they examined how the teachers managed the stressors of the pandemic by applying both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. The authors specifically explored how the teachers addressed the perceived threat to their personal and professional goals, given their available resources. In this study, teacher appraisal of their situation in the crisis was a major factor. In organizing the study, Brooks et al. (2022) addressed the different notions of

change, coping, job efficacy, teacher resilience, teacher burnout, and the support of teacher wellbeing and coping in the midst of change.

The researchers collected data via the diaries of the participants and interviews and analyzed the data using the thematic labels of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies of Folkman and Lazarus (1984) to categorize the data. These coping styles and their related strategies have already been explored under the thematic framework of this study.

The study found that the combined application of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies helped teachers to navigate the stressful work environment of the COVID-19 pandemic. These strategies included the use of social support systems, professional development to upgrade online teaching/learning skills, efficient allocation to tasks to prevent burn-out, reframing or reappraisal of their situation, and physical exercise. However, ineffective school leadership (slow response to requests, autocracy, lack of collaboration, and communication) during this period emerged as a major stressor for these educators. The researchers found that as outlined in the Transactional Model of Stress proposed by Folkman and Lazarus (1984), the teachers were stressed by having limited strategies and the personal skills to manage the unfamiliar environment. The reliance of these teachers on leadership support should therefore have been one of the coping strategies to assist them with their limitations during the pandemic. The expectation was not realized, and their stress levels therefore increased. The researchers concluded that as expected, the leadership required in times of crisis is significantly different from the leadership necessary in regular circumstances.

This study supports the broad-based approach to the use of coping strategies – not showing a preference for either but using both to manage different kinds of stressors. Although the researchers did not differentiate between positive and negative emotion-focused stressors as expected in their stress model, the study reflected the use of positive emotion-focused strategies including walking a dog, exercising, and chatting with friends. These strategies were used as distractions rather than to target or eliminate specific stressors.

Stress Management in Ecuador

Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021) in their survey of 394 Ecuadorian teachers found that the teachers were impacted by a number of stress-related factors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the stressors was that of the online instructional mode. However, teachers who had completed previous online training (63.3%) reported far less stress than those who had not. The survey also captured several other stress factors such as illness and death of loved ones resulting from the pandemic, economic challenges coupled with homecare responsibilities related to young children and elderly relatives. The researchers found that age was associated with higher levels of stress and that females had higher levels of psychological stress and that teachers who had special homecare responsibilities (53% of the sample) presented with more psychological and perceived stress (measured on the Perceived Stress Scale – PSS-10) than their counterparts.

Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021) also found that there were higher levels of overall stress - both real and perceived stress in women when compared to men. Several of these women were caregivers to children and adults and had to combine their attendant responsibilities with their online teaching activities. As will be shared later, this was not a finding of this study despite the similarity in the responsibilities of the female curriculum officers.

The self-care and coping strategies used by the informants included seeking social support, participating in leisure activities, work and study activities, spiritual activities, avoidance activities, mental health promotion, and healthy living. The strategies of finding social support among family members and friends and maintaining a healthy lifestyle (e.g., exercising and having a healthy diet) were the most popular among participants.

The researchers have indicated the need to conduct future studies in the new normal of educators as a means of determining the support systems required and to plan more effectively, where possible, for future pandemics. However, Eriksson & McConnel (2017) note that crisis or contingency planning, as they have branded it, is often more meaningful in the “pre-crisis stage.” The unpredictability of crisis often leads to unforeseen challenges, which may require modification or overhauling of the plans that had been previously put in place. This is why the crisis management model described by Shrivastava et al. (2013) is so critical. The crisis must be quickly analyzed, strategies implemented to minimize the disaster as far as possible, and every effort made to return the situation to normalcy or at least to approximate it.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Jamaican Curriculum Officers and Crisis – The COVID-19 Pandemic

Design and Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and explores the data on crisis experiences and strategies gathered from eleven (11) middle-tier Curriculum Officers using a common interview schedule of open-ended questions. The aim was to ascertain their experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic and the coping mechanisms they have used to address their challenges. For each interview, based on the flow of the narrative, questions were either added or modified to probe or clarify the information shared. The permission of interviewees was sought to record each virtual interview and each person was apprised of the background of the study and the requirement to have their informed consent to use the data following the transcription of the interview.

The recorded interviews were then transcribed using TEMI, a paid online software transcription service. These interviews were further edited to ensure accuracy and sent to each interview for member-checking (Birt et al., 2016). That is, interviewees were asked to read the transcripts and modify, if necessary, what was indicated and then sign an Informed Consent Form (View in Appendix) giving the researcher permission to use the data in the study and chapter. Each interview transcript was then read and coded against the research questions. Emergent coding was also conducted on the transcripts to ascertain big ideas not directly linked to the research questions but still useful to the study. Cross-coding of the transcripts was also done to determine the common big ideas – both a priori and emergent. Both the recurring codes relating to the research questions (reconfigured as “themes”) and the emergent themes were identified across the transcripts.

A thematic analysis of the data was then conducted, and a discussion was done within a framework of coping and self-care stress-management theory. The findings were also examined against relevant aspects of crisis leadership theory.

Research Questions

The following are the questions that guided the overall study:

- What are the personal and professional challenges faced by middle-level curriculum technocrats during a time of crisis?
- How are specific self-care and coping strategies applied by curriculum technocrats in a crisis to achieve job targets and overcome personal challenges?
- How effective are the strategies used by technocrats in times of crisis?

Description of Sample

The sample consists of eleven (11) Curriculum Education Officers who are engaged in the review, design, development, implementation, and monitoring of curricula for the secondary and primary system, the development and sourcing of resources to support curriculum implementation, and the training of different stakeholders in the effective use of different curricula, among a range of other duties.

Table 1.

<i>Personal Data on Interviewees</i>				
#	Interviewee code	Age group	Gender	Substantive job status
1.	Off101	36-41	Male	Regular Responsibility
2.	Off102	36-41	Female	Regular Responsibility
3.	Sen201	42-47	Male	Supervisory
4.	Sen202	42-47	Male	Supervisory
5.	Off103	42-47	Female	Regular Responsibility
6.	Sen203	48-52	Female	Supervisory
7.	Off104	48-52	Female	Regular Responsibility
8	Off105	48-52	Female	Regular Responsibility
9.	Sen204	53- 58	Male	Supervisory
10.	Sen205	53-58	Female	Supervisory
11.	Sen206	59-64	Female	Supervisory

Note. Specific job titles have not been shared to ensure some measure of anonymity and the categories “Senior Education Officer” and “Assistant Chief Education Officer” have been subsumed under one category “Senior – “Sen” for short. Education Officers are categorized as “Officers” – “Off” for short.

Curriculum Officers form a mid-tier group within the education system; they operate between the school system and the senior directorate. While they participate in some policy functions, the main task of these middle-level professionals is to work directly with teachers and other stakeholders to ensure that the curriculum is effectively implemented to achieve quality education for all students.

Table 1 sets out personal data on the interviews – their code names, age ranges, gender, and general work status. For Education Officers, their job status is attributed as “Regular Responsibility” while for Senior Education Officers and Assistant Chief Education Officers, the status is attributed as “Supervisory”. Regular during the pandemic simply means non-supervisory.

Sampling Method

Non-probability sampling was used to select informants based on their roles as middle-level technocrats. This is a highly specialized closed group of educators that has to be directly targeted. Specifically, convenience sampling as a subset of this method was used – that is, selection based on the availability of the officers and their willingness to participate in the activity.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Overview

This section outlines the anticipated themes branded “main themes” as well as some relevant unanticipated themes. These will be addressed separately.

Main Themes

In this segment, the data will be presented under the main aspects of the research questions reconfigured as themes. These are as follows:

- Theme 1- Personal and professional challenges faced during the pandemic
- Theme 2- Self-care and coping strategies applied by curriculum technocrats applied in pandemic
- Theme 3 - Effectiveness of the strategies used by technocrats in times of crisis

Most interviewees noted in their responses that their experiences in the pandemic could be categorized into three (3) phases - the initial phase of the pandemic (Year one – 2020), the follow-up phase or Phase 2 (2021), and the current phase or Phase 3 (2022). Overall, Phase 1 – the period characterized by extended lockdowns of the education system and other sectors - was described by interviewees as the most unfamiliar domain. They also reported that it resulted in most of the personal and professional challenges. It was a phase of experimentation in a territory that none had ever traveled before. Phase 2 (2021) was the evolution of the pandemic experience with growing familiarity and learning to navigate the challenges. Like Phase 1, it is still experimental but not as stressful and frightening as Phase 1. Phase 3 (2022) is the current phase in which structures and strategies are firmly in place and persons are living with the pandemic.

Theme 1 - Personal and Professional Challenges Faced During the Pandemic

Personal Challenges

Most of the personal challenges listed by participants were concentrated in Phase 1 of the pandemic and were similar among the group of middle-level technocrats. Interviewees noted that these challenges lessened over Phases 2 and 3. The stressors included loneliness, family issues and losses, uncertainties, and conspiracies.

One common stressor or difficulty was the feeling of isolation/alienation from family members and colleagues during the pandemic, particularly in periods of lockdown. Interviewees noted that the isolation often resulted in demotivation, which ultimately affected their work performance. Participants found solace in communicating with family members, colleagues, and friends locally and internationally via social media platforms. One interviewee shared how colleagues provided support by sharing resources, noting, "I spend most of my own time exploring these resources. They really help me execute my duty in this new environment which they call the "new normal." (Off104)

Another officer noted that based on the online teaching mode, his family became isolated by the very technology that was creating the new normal for work and school environments. The members operated in silos, with their tablets and other devices forming barriers to communication and connectedness compared to the period before the pandemic. This situation had a very negative effect on the officer who strongly values the bond of the family as is indicated in this excerpt:

I felt like I was just the person who paid for the internet, the electricity, and the devices. However, outside of that, my family did not necessarily need to interact with me because they had their devices. (Off101)

The threat resulting from uncertainties and the fear resulting from the unfolding pandemic, conspiracy theories, and the conflicting narratives about the pandemic constituted another personal challenge. An officer recounted an experience that reflected his fear:

I was a little terrified of the thought of me being exposed to a COVID situation, given that I would have been out during the pandemic on certain occasions. I was particularly concerned about the possibility of passing on the virus to my family. (Sen202)

Financial difficulties created another kind of challenge for interviewees due to lessened income resulting from reduced traveling, inflation, and new costs from pandemic-related items such as masks and hand sanitizers.

Other personal challenges included depression, having to simultaneously meet home and work commitments (parents of school-age children), and dealing with the loss of family members during an already stressful pandemic. Participants generally indicated that as the pandemic became more familiar over Phases 2 and 3, most of the challenges either completely disappeared or became more manageable.

Work Stressors

Several work-related challenges were indicated by the officers. These were related to changing job norms, the uncertainty of the crisis, as well as some of the personal challenges previously indicated.

Like personal challenges, the work-related stressors were found to be far more stressful and difficult in Phase 1 of the pandemic compared to Phases 2 and 3 where these challenges became more manageable.

In Phase 1 of the pandemic, the officers reported a huge amount of uncertainty and experimentation, despite the guidelines of the Education in Emergencies Framework, which had been developed on the cusp of the pandemic. This framework was developed to meet the specific needs of the education system in a context that no one in this present time had ever experienced before as seen from this excerpt from the Education in Emergencies (EII) Framework:

There is uncertainty about the rate at which there will be a decline in the impact and reach of the COVID 19 crisis. As such, this situation calls for policy guidelines that will enable the provision of quality education that is consistent with the goals of the EiE plan that relate to recovery, reintegration, and reform. (MOEYI, 2021, pp. 1-2)

In Phase 1 of the pandemic, the performance of job functions of monitoring and supporting school systems –the main aspect of the curriculum implementation process - was severely challenged by the new and unfamiliar normal that confronted the middle-level curriculum officers. One main challenge was that face-to-face instruction as they knew it was no longer possible during periods of growing numbers of COVID-19 infections and extended periods of lockdown. This is captured by Interviewee Sen202:

We were unable to access the school plant to conduct monitoring and evaluations. We had to transition to the online modality, which meant that some visits were online. We had to pivot; we had to change how we operated, and we were concerned about this.

The unfamiliarity with the virtual model of operations resulted in little or no confidence on the part of officers as they pondered how to proceed with some tasks. This response by Interviewee Off105 illustrated the severity of the experience:

I don't think we had anything in place in preparation for this pandemic. We had heard about it and saw it come in, but I don't think we were fully equipped to handle it in terms of human resources, human interaction, or in how we treated each other in situations like these. Because of our lack of preparation, the stress level of everyone increased.

Unpredictable job schedules were a feature of Phase 1 of the pandemic period as indicated by officers. Consequently, most reported being stressed by a situation that forced them to take on certain tasks for which they felt they did not have the expertise and working long hours to cover competing activities. Interviewee Off 102 shares, “Yeah, I crashed suddenly, and I was overwhelmed. I was tired, beat-up, frustrated, and ineffective in every way.” Interviewee Off 104 noted that the unpredictable work schedule was a major stressor and that officers had to be jumping from one target to the other. There was really no time to savor the success of achieving any. Another interviewee, Interviewee Sen 204 explained how officers had to be learning even as they were implementing. This was felt to be a new domain of operation.

So, it was really challenging in terms of deciding the route to go, but with the best of hindsight and you know, enthusiasm, we addressed the situation as it presented itself. The decisions had to be made and we did what we needed to do, making do as time evolved. We were building the plane while flying it.

Staying Above the Turbulent Waters

As indicated under “Personal Challenges with the Pandemic,” officers shared that they experienced a lot of isolation and disconnect from their colleagues as they worked in the virtual space. They noted that this alienation negatively affected their motivation and consequently their outputs. Interviewee Off102 tried to describe her challenging experience that extended from Phase 1 to 3:

It's a struggle to keep doing it, to get up every day, and to motivate yourself to go on. The other day I was saying I didn't understand how I was getting so lazy. That's not it; it's not laziness at all. It's more of apathy.

Interviewees also indicated that the target group of one of their main job functions shifted during the pandemic. They indicated that prior to the pandemic a curriculum officer worked mainly through teachers to improve student performance, with the occasional student activities done on request. This job function was to increase teacher capacity through professional development activities, as well as via direct monitoring and supporting the curriculum implementation process. However, they noted that in Phase 1 of the pandemic, this focus suddenly shifted to a direct interface with students. The new approach required the development of student resources such as radio and television lessons and learning kits. While there were a small number of resource persons to assist with the development/facilitation of radio and television lessons, as the impact of COVID-19 became greater, the limited corps of resource persons decreased leaving the officers to directly complete the tasks in several instances. In some subject areas, the only option was the officers from the outset. One interviewee shared the experience below:

So, whereas we had developed the curriculum for teachers and supported them in teaching students, now we had to be creating materials to directly impact students. We had to be providing student materials via radio, television, and print media. All this was not something that was a part of our job description before. (Off102)

In Phase 2 of the pandemic, the direct interface with students continued but it became less demanding since officers had some student resources in place to assist the education system. The focus was now to fill the need gaps rather than generating everything from scratch. By Phase 3, the pressure had diminished even more. The waning impact of the pandemic is described by Interviewee Off103:

We did a lot in those early stages of the pandemic and the pressure is not as great now because we have completed some resources. The system has some radio lessons, as well as some other lessons.

With the growing understanding of the real risks of the pandemic and the development of several strategies, approaches, and resources, officers reported some semblance of near normalcy in their operations. Their growing familiarity with the new systems over Phases 2 and 3 greatly minimized the stress factor experienced in Phase 1.

As the demands and pressure lessened in the engagement of students, the attention of curriculum officers turned fully again to teachers. However, the requirements for these original stakeholders changed dramatically. Educators had become so immersed in the use of technology for student engagement on social media platforms such as Google Classrooms, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams, for several meetings and general professional development activities, that officers were now required to bring fresh creative

ideas to the virtual space. Failing this provision, they would be unable to reach and hold their prime target audience. Interviewee Off102 shared her perspective on the situation:

Workshops have become extremely difficult. The truth is that people are zoomed out; they are tired of virtual meetings. They are tired of the regular type of activities that happen in these spaces. I must exercise far more creativity to keep them engaged.

Interviewees also feel that the protracted pandemic experience has killed the collegiality in the workplace. According to these officers, the workspace has moved from a warm family-oriented space to one in which people are isolated and just trying to fulfill their mandates. This has been a feature of all phases of the pandemic. Interviewee Sen201 illustrates the new environment by indicating, "The jovial spirit that you would normally have when you're having your meetings with your colleagues is no longer evident. The pandemic has built up a lot of tension."

Interviewee Sen204 explained the difficulty of motivating other officers in the pandemic during Phase 1 to embrace the new crisis management framework. He noted that while people did what they were required to do, the need to suddenly switch to a host of new roles was a difficult task. This challenge was coupled with several personal challenges these officers were experiencing. The officer noted that "A lot of energies had to be placed in actually mobilizing persons and dealing with the frame of mind of others and getting them engaged."

Interviewees also indicated that their work virtually doubled since the pandemic caused them to now take on the work that would have been normally done by the support staff. Particularly in Phase 1 of the pandemic where lockdowns were prevalent and support staff did not have the requisite tools to complete many of the tasks at home, curriculum officers had to assume these administrative responsibilities in addition to their technical duties. However, the provisions of Phases 2 and 3, which allowed for the use of flexible work-from-home schedules, facilitated support staff in the workspace on specified days. This approach helped to lessen the burden somewhat. Interviewee Off102 indicated that "And most of it, we had to be doing on our own because the administrators that we had to support us were not even equipped and able to assist us."

Another challenge indicated was that of supporting practical areas online. This problem was therefore specific to the Sciences, as well as to the Technical and Vocational, and Performing Arts disciplines. The relevant officers indicated that despite their attempts at using simulations in some cases, these could not achieve the effect of real hands-on experiences. For the Performing Arts, officers reported being extremely stretched to come up with creative ways to keep teachers and students meaningfully engaged. One officer weighed in on this issue:

The online learning that we have grown to adopt, puts those practical subjects at a disadvantage because these subjects really require teachers to have face-to-face contact with the students. Therefore, this modality creates a gap. (Sen101)

As indicated by Interviewee Sen104, the challenge was trying to create the kinds of experiences that they would have had face-to-face. While there was some degree of success with the use of simulations to achieve the objectives at the lower end of the learning taxonomies, for higher-order objectives, this alternative was not enough.

Self-Care and Coping Strategies

Overview

Interviewees employed several self-care and coping strategies to deal with the stresses and challenges of the pandemic. Some of the mechanisms used to counter personal challenges directly and indirectly affected their work performance. These are set out in this segment.

Personal Strategies

Among the personal strategies indicated by interviews were exercise, spiritual activities, beauty care, connecting with family members, paying special attention to health such as the preparing healthy meals, ensuring adequate sleep, drinking adequate water, gardening, and performing handy jobs around the house such as cutting the lawn and fixing things and going out on non-lock-down days. Some participants shared that prior to the pandemic, they paid no attention to self-care. However, when they personally succumbed to the pressure, they were forced to pay attention to themselves. One interviewee shared why self-care had to become a priority:

At home, at work, in my relationship with the Lord, I just crashed, and I suppose you know what crashing looks like. If I may try to help you understand, what I experienced was that I was sad all the time, I was very teary, for me being teary is a huge thing because I don't cry, I couldn't get my head together, I couldn't finish my tasks. (Off102)

The said interviewee shared the transformation which was also a lesson to her family that she had to make herself a priority:

I had to start letting my family know that I was going to do it and not receive the guilt. In the beginning, there was a lot of guilt because they were sending it and I was receiving it. The approach was making me feel bad at first but the more time I spent doing it and the more consistent I was in this approach, the more they started to understand. (Off102)

One interviewee described how the support of her family and her spiritual base supported her throughout the pandemic:

Well, I belong to a family that is very supportive, and I depend on them a whole lot. They always ensure that things are okay. My spiritual base takes away the feeling of being stressed about having to do the activities; I start seeing myself achieving. When I get worried about things that I think are not going to work out, I get them done through divine inspiration. (Sen206)

Work-Related Self-Care and Personal Strategies

Nearly all interviewees reported being overwhelmed by the extra work demands of the pandemic. Some also shared that the work challenges were complicated by personal challenges. Consequently, they had to find ways to address the undue stress they were experiencing.

The coping/self-care strategies shared included taking time off from work, keeping in touch with colleagues locally and abroad - sharing resources, sharing insecurities (emotional support), relying on their spiritual faith, motivating colleagues by being light-hearted to help their frame of mind which contributes to greater outputs. Interviewee Off103 recounted how she addressed the personal stress of the pandemic:

Well, initially I was burnt out, so I, I remember I reached a point where I had to just say, "I'm taking some days" and I just took some days, and I told people not to get in contact with me. However, that didn't prevent them of course.

One interviewee admits that she did not apply any self-care or coping strategies during the pandemic. She shares this below:

To be honest, I don't think that I used any self-care methods that could have averted some of the stress. My stress level got high enough for me to have to take medication to cope with what was happening. (Off105)

These interviewees described how they applied their spiritual base to deal with work challenges during the pandemic. They also indicated that they applied the said strategy to their personal lives to cope with the challenges of the crisis:

I have a strong spiritual base on which I depend a whole lot to help me go through a situation or like in terms of trying to get the job done. I depend a whole lot on God to give me the creative ideas that I need. (Sen206)

I went to the Lord because I was tired, and I didn't have any ideas. I opened my laptop and I literally said, "Holy Spirit, come." And I started to type, and I did not look up until two hours later. And at the end of the two hours, it was perfect. I knew it was perfect because I felt it. (Off 102)

Interviewee Sen203 shared how she coped with the rising work pressure during the pandemic period.

As it relates to the job, frequent breaks, and then removing from the computer, going for a walk to the other offices, to check in on other staff members. I try to make light moments to have a good rap or, a light moment with just about every category of staff.

The moments with staff also helped to build stronger relationships and motivated them to perform better. The interviewee also shared that this experience was a valuable lesson coming out of the pandemic that should be extended beyond it.

Another interviewee explained how the same strategy of taking time out to bond with staff really helped people to cope better with the pressures of the pandemic:

So, you realize that it was not just about the work but also what I was going to say to them today to cheer them up because the pandemic might have been affecting their frame of mind. What I said to them was to put them in a better frame of mind in order to lighten the work, so there could be greater outputs. (Sen201)

Staying Above the Turbulent Waters

Interviewee Off101 shared that he had to set realistic goals for work in order to cope. He notes that Phase 1, with its additional stress of family challenges, had been terrible for him. Therefore, he had to strategize in order to survive. This is his coping strategy:

Where work is concerned, I have recognized that I really and truly cannot do more than I realistically can do. I have to accept that I'm not going to beat up myself. I am not going to feel bad if you asked me to move the mountain and it was unrealistic for me to move the mountain.

Another officer indicated that he had to use problem-focused coping to address the increasing demands of work:

There were lots of expectations in terms of meetings and deliverables and so on and it meant regulating my time because I would end up working from home much longer or I was doing a lot more than I would normally do. So, it meant ensuring that my workday and work hours were adjusted to meet my needs of adequate sleep and rest, and downtime.

(Sen204)

Effectiveness of Self-Care and Coping Strategies

Interviewees indicated different ways in which their self-care and coping strategies helped them to reduce or eliminate stressors brought on by the pandemic. Generally, their strategies appeared to help them to address personal challenges and to meet and even surpass the expected job targets.

Impact of Self-Care and Coping Strategies on Personal Challenges

Interviewee accounts of applying self-care and coping strategies suggest that for the most part, these strategies worked. They indicated that the strategies allowed them to achieve a balance between family and work, remain physically healthy, find some degree of emotional stability, reframe their identity, revalue relationships, and affirm their faith. Interviewee SenOff201 endorsed the use of the reflective approach as a technique for evaluating and applying the best strategies to meet different needs. These excerpts illustrate two (2) of the accounts shared regarding strategy effectiveness:

Our family exercise routine worked well. I believe that setting aside time for exercise blessed us in reclaiming some of the human interaction that I personally cherish and value a whole lot. I am the needy one in the family. (Off101)

I always believe that people should control the things that they can control. I can't control everything, but I manage the things that I can and one such thing is to ensure that I take care of myself. I am therefore able to maintain some balance. (Off104)

Meeting the Job Targets

Overall, interviewees indicated that they were able to meet their job targets despite the many challenges they experienced over the pandemic period. This was achieved by working longer hours, multi-tasking, modifying their work plans, and applying self-care and coping strategies to avert stress. Several noted, however, that the targets achieved were not the ones that had been projected prior to the pandemic. New and modified targets had to be put in place to meet the predominantly virtual education environment.

Interviewee Off105 shared how working extra hours and being goal-oriented helped her to meet her job targets:

I was able to achieve my targets, probably because I put the hours in before and after the regular work setting to try to meet deadlines. I wouldn't say that anything changed per se from the regular setting into the pandemic. I'm target-oriented and so I will achieve the goals.

For Interviewee Sen201, multitasking worked to his advantage over the pandemic as indicated in this account:

The virtual space gives me more time to devote to my work in terms of getting more work done. In addition to that, you get a chance to multi-task. In essence, it has not affected my output. As a matter of fact, it has worked to my advantage.

Interviewee Sen206 explained how extra hours and collaboration allowed curriculum officers to meet several of their job objectives:

I think there are several goals that have been achieved. People were forced to get on board and were working for longer hours to put things together. There was greater collaboration, which was a little bit different from before. And I think the collaboration was happening because what we had to do would be affecting a wider cross-section of persons in other units. (Sen206)

Interviewees shared how work plans and expectations had to be modified to fit the new virtual context of the curriculum implementation process. This means that although the targets were met, they were not the same targets that had been agreed on prior to the pandemic. One interview shared his experience:

The changes were such that some job objectives were no longer relevant. So, there were a number of activities that were planned for a face-to-face mode, and there was no face-to-face. So, those activities would have been shelved and a new dimension would have been looked at. (Sen204)

OTHER THEMES

Overview

This segment outlines the unanticipated themes; that is, those not directly aligned to the research questions, but which arose in the data and are still useful to the research. These are the themes:

Staying Above the Turbulent Waters

- Benefits of the Pandemic
- Skills developed during the Pandemic
- Addressing Another Crisis

Benefits of the Pandemic

Personal Benefits of the Pandemic

Officers indicated that the pandemic allowed them more time to connect with their families and friends. It also allowed them the opportunity to carry out activities they would not have been able to do due to extended travel time to and from work such as gardening, walks around their communities, and carpentry.

Work-Related Benefits of the Pandemic

Although rare and unexpected, a few officers indicated that they have in fact benefitted from the pandemic. They felt that the flexibility of the work-from-home schedule allowed them less stressful travel time, more opportunities to collaborate with a wider cross-section of stakeholders in the virtual space, and more stable internet access for those who had bandwidth challenges at the workplace. Other benefits indicated were the opportunity to multi-task and more time on tasks.

Interviewee Sen201 credited the pandemic for allowing him to save travel time and achieve more of his targets:

I still do think that I'm able to achieve more and get more done as a result of the pandemic and the reason is that I'm working most of the time from home and that gives me an opportunity to get more done than at a time that I would have been traveling and getting ready to go to work.

Interviewee Sen205 shares how the use of the virtual space provided her with the opportunity to interface with more international stakeholders:

Even the other day when I did a presentation, people from as far as Dubai and England were there. Normally, you don't have those types of persons in a physical-based conference. Now you're able to talk with a wider base of people and you feel more empowered because you are not just touching persons locally but also internationally.

Skills Developed During the Pandemic

Because the pandemic forced nearly all stakeholders into the virtual space, curriculum officers had no option but to sharpen their technological skills. These skills were needed to conduct meetings, develop student resources, monitor online classes, and host meetings. To prepare themselves, officers indicated that they signed up for webinars or practiced using free online tutorials.

Interviewee Sen201 indicated that he has learned to create some graphs and a wider variety of PowerPoint presentations over the pandemic period. Interviewee Off103 notes that learning to use the technology and applying the skills was a non-negotiable requirement. In the words of the officer, "You

had to continue your work; you had to continue some of these workshops with teachers.” Interviewee Sen 202) conceded that several curriculum officers lacked the technological skills when the pandemic started but improved their skills by utilizing several platforms.

Several of the interviewees noted that they have developed their soft skills over the period of the pandemic. They also indicated that they had moved away from being just managers to become leaders who were now better at motivating people to take on new challenges and realize their goals during the pandemic. Interviewee Off105 noted that in Phase 1, the aim was more to get the work done and people lost sight of how to treat others. She indicated that people’s stress levels were very high, while their behaviors were being relegated to “personality.”

By Phases 2 and 3, when everyone got settled a bit and understood the pandemic more, managers understood their roles a bit better and discovered that to get the maximum results, the people skills had to be effectively applied. The interviewees noted that leadership, as opposed to management, was what was needed. One interviewee noted, “This whole situation gives you an opportunity to reflect, and in reflecting, it gives you an opportunity to focus more on the people whom you are dealing with, their thoughts, their feelings, their emotions.” Another noted that “In a crisis, you can’t operate like a manager or an island. We really need each other.” This interview excerpt detailed some of what officers required by way of the soft skills:

I think that I have developed some skills, like learning to lead in a crisis. I would say that I am now able to read between the lives of people. I know when people are not paying attention to what is happening, and I am able to reach out to them. I can now exercise greater patience, even in that space, and just step back when I need to while trusting that they are okay. (Sen206)

Interviewee Sen206 also indicated how allowing people to be themselves in the professional space has helped to build stronger relationships. She also noted that the crisis has taken a toll on people, therefore, there is a need to adjust the communication strategies.

While they were just trying to be strong, upfront, you could sense their vulnerability. They felt like they could not cry in the professional space, and I have been able to sense that need for them to just express their emotions and I’ve seen where there’s the opening up. I’ve been able to encourage and consequently, relationships have become stronger.

Interviewee Sen203 reflected on how the pandemic helped her to get to know her staff better. The demands of the pandemic to adapt in the shortest time possible necessitated negotiations. The process required the apt use of people skills to get the job done and she now has a deeper understanding of different personalities and their skill sets.

The skill of adaptability was also named as one of those skills that have been sharpened over the course of the pandemic. The interviewees shared that based on the sudden and pressing requirements of the crisis to adjust to the situation and to still produce the services necessary, curriculum officers were forced to adapt. What was more, as indicated by the officers, the situation kept evolving and this dynamic required a skill set that would allow them to work within the limits of the pandemic and arrive at workable solutions in the shortest time possible. An interviewee shared his ideas about the dimensions of the skill of adaptability, which he developed during the pandemic.

Staying Above the Turbulent Waters

I think that the skill of adaptability has many facets. I might not be able to describe it clearly at this point, but the many facets, dimensions, and frame of mind are no longer in a situation that is set and precise. Rather, we are operating in a more divergent situation, and we are looking, in a broader way to find solutions. (Sen204)

Addressing Another Crisis

When asked how they would address another crisis should one occur in the future, most interviewees hesitated in order to ponder the question. The responses included applying the same people skills learned in the current pandemic, applying the adaptability skillset, keeping abreast of policy changes, and ensuring that adequate human and nonhuman resources are available.

Interviewee Sen206 shared how she would approach another crisis by combining two strategies learned from the pandemic:

Continue with those strategies that you see working with people in the workspace, keeping yourself abreast of policies, policy changes, and directives, continuing to collaborate with people, and facilitating certain collaborations as the kind of community approach applicable to a crisis. (Sen 206)

However, as the interviewee put it, “There are situations over which we have absolutely no control,” such as those in which the online skills and resources cannot be used.

Interviewee Sen205 summed up the challenge posed by the unpredictability of crises by positing a common-sense approach:

So, I cannot tell you that I would do X, Y, and Z. It all depends on the situation. You have to analyze it to the best of your ability and try to work with it. What can be done, do it and what cannot be done, just move ahead.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

In this segment, the data which was presented in the preceding section will be discussed within the theoretical framework of stress management with reference to coping and self-care strategies. It will also draw on aspects of crisis leadership skills, which leaders unconsciously converted into problem-focused coping strategies. Most of the discussion is organized under the main themes but the findings from other themes will also be discussed.

Theme 1- Personal and Professional Challenges Faced During the Pandemic

The curriculum officers in the study generally indicated that they experienced different levels of stress during the different phases of the pandemic. As indicated under “Presentation of Data,” Phase 1, which marked the sudden emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, was by far the most stressful. As the education system tried to stay afloat, many new responsibilities fell to the curriculum officers. One responsibility

was presenting to students and developing their resources directly. The officers described the situation as an unpredictable and evolving one with the nuances of its different phases. The new work environment with its related stressors required that the officers adapt to their situation very quickly and with an appropriate level of efficiency.

The personal and professional challenges shared by interviewees were not unlike those found in the studies explored in the literature review. For example, several of the stress factors found by Brooks et al. (2022) in their study of Australian teachers and by Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021) in their survey of Ecuadorian teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic were also uncovered in this study. Personal stress factors such as the death of a loved one, economic factors, and homecare responsibilities identified by Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021) were shared by curriculum officers. The impact of extended lockdowns and the sheer uncertainty of the pandemic environment as shared by Brooks et al. (2022) were stressors that affected the curriculum officers. These stressors presented themselves in different forms such as the difficulty of balancing the needs of work and family, financial challenges, conflicting pandemic narratives and conspiracies, and new and evolving job expectations.

Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021) also highlight the impact of the online learning mode as one of the stressors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, they note that persons who had been trained in online learning prior to the COVID-19 pandemic were less stressed. In contrast, despite their training in technology, prior to the pandemic, most curriculum officers did not regularly use online platforms and other applications for meetings, training of teachers, and the development of student resources such as radio and television lessons. Added to their stress level was the fact that these officers had to learn quickly and become efficient so that they could support and lead the teaching staff. There was little to no turn-around time for this learning and therefore, officers found themselves pressured to meet the new targets. Officers tried to meet the demands of the new virtual environment by applying problem-focused coping strategies such as enrolling in online courses, participating in webinars, and even trying out applications on their own.

Compared to the teachers in the Ecuadorian study who were implementers in a crisis, curriculum officers are required to provide leadership in the crisis. Because the officers were learning as they worked through the new environment, this requirement made their tasks even more difficult. Assistant Chief Education Officers and Senior Education Officers had the added responsibility of coordinating tasks, motivating people, and participating in the activities even as they tried to navigate the foreign environment. The personal challenges, chiefly family-related ones, complicated how officers were able to operate in the virtual work environment. It, therefore, became extremely necessary for these officers to rely on self-care and coping strategies in order to continue to achieve their job targets.

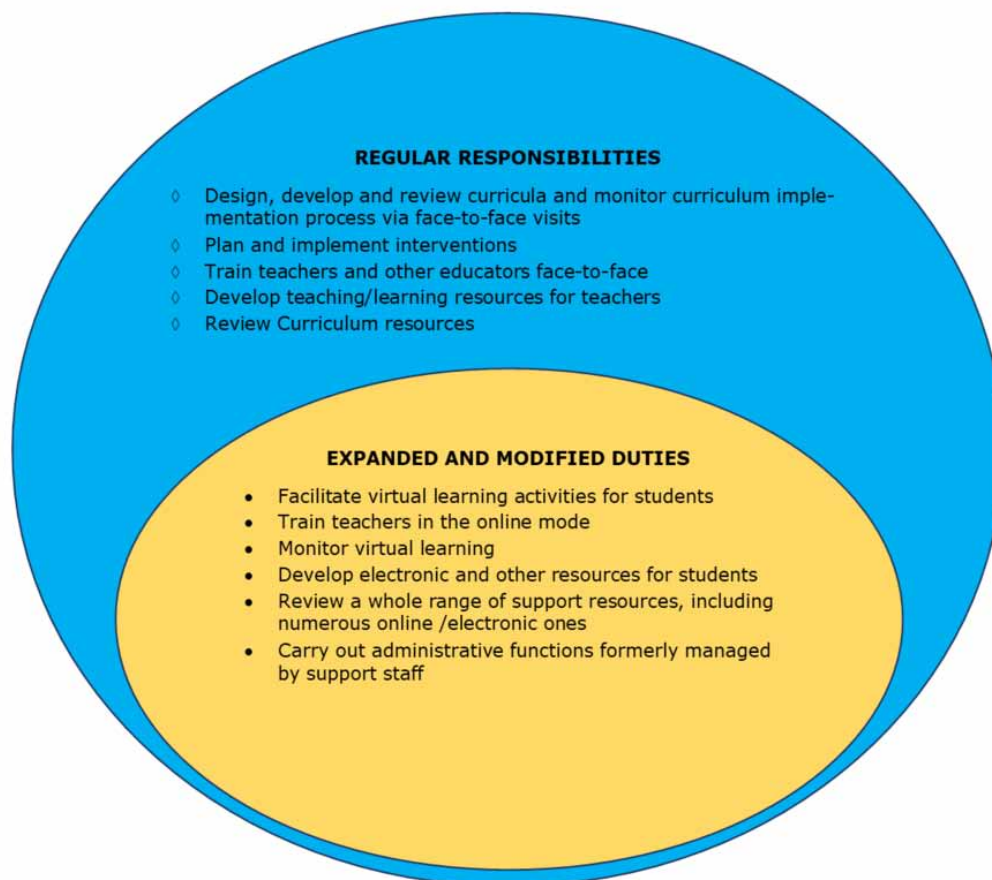
The unavailability of support staff in Phase 1 of the pandemic was another major work-related challenge. During this lockdown phase, many of these staff members were themselves challenged by several factors, including limited or no online equipment to carry out their duties. Consequently, officers had to assume administrative roles in addition to their duties since these tasks were critical to the virtual learning mode. Some of these administrative tasks included contacting a number of stakeholders including resource persons, data entry, and report writing. This is another way in which the roles of curriculum officers differed from teachers during the pandemic. Whereas teachers focused on tasks related to the teaching and learning of their specific students, curriculum officers had to focus on the wider education system. The situation gradually improved, however, over Phases 2 and 3 as more problem-focused coping strategies were applied by the curriculum officer and the wider education system, such as providing

sustainable resources that would fit the new normal for the education system and working out realistic work schedules. This allowed the system to begin shifting into a new normal.

Another challenge that was specific to curriculum officers as opposed to teachers in the studies explored was the engagement of resource teachers to facilitate virtual lessons. As reported by interviewees, the task fell to officers partially in some disciplines and completely in others. Where resource persons were unavailable or limited in numbers due to constraints of the pandemic, officers were left with the task of developing and presenting live and recorded television and radio lessons. One interviewee noted that radio lessons were particularly challenging since oral communication as opposed to images and texts had to be used to help people see what was being described or explained.

Although officers shared that a national disaster plan had been in place before the pandemic and an Education in Emergencies (EIIE) Framework had been drafted from this plan on the cusp of the pandemic, the education system was still in a strange space when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Generally, for curriculum officers and the school staff alike, the EII framework was a very broad guide that had to be customized to meet each unique aspect of the curriculum implementation process during the crisis. Consequently, the specifics of navigating the challenges of the pandemic had to be worked out by departments and officers. The uncertainty of the new environment posed new challenges as the system

Figure 2.



ranged from lockdowns to partial reopening and then to the blended approach. Each dimension brought new levels of requirements in an effort to meet the needs of students and teachers.

Gender was not found to be significant in the stress experienced by interviewees. In contrast to the finding of the study of Ecuadorian teachers conducted by Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021), males and females alike in this study experienced stress in about the same way. However, this is a small-scale qualitative study whereas the Ecuadorian study was a survey of 394 teachers. Therefore, this finding is very limited.

Figure 2 outlines some of the changing roles of Curriculum Officers, particularly over Phase 1 of the pandemic:

Theme 2- Self-care and Coping Strategies Applied by Curriculum Technocrats in the Pandemic

Interviewees indicated their use of several positive emotion-focused coping and self-care strategies to address personal and work-related challenges. In the area of their personal challenges, they applied healthy eating, exercise, reading, relaxation through music, spiritual support, gardening, carpentry, and other tasks around the house, getting adequate rest, going out on non-lockdown days, and connecting with friends and family members. The latter was the most common among interviewees. Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021) listed several of the strategies shared by these interviewees as coping and self-care strategies used by Ecuadorian teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Exercise and connecting with friends were also indicated by Brooks et al. (2022) as emotion-focused strategies used by teachers during the 2020 phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of work, there was an overlap in some of the strategies applied to address personal challenges, but some were specific to the job. For example, two interviewees indicated that they relied on the spiritual dimension to provide creative solutions for their work during the pandemic. These interviewees also relied on the spiritual for addressing their personal challenges. For these interviewees, religious support could be classified as a problem-focused coping strategy since these individuals, based on their faith, actively sought out this option to address their stressors. Religious support for them was not a distraction or a passive way of coping with stress but a source of guidance and creative solutions. One interviewee indicated that she relied on her family to moderate the time spent on work tasks done in the home environment. Another indicated that he tried to get enough rest so that he could perform optimally at work. These are also examples of problem-focused coping.

Specific work-related problem-focused strategies included taking frequent breaks from the work tasks so as not to be overwhelmed, taking time off from work, and multi-tasking in an effort to meet the targets. Interviewees reported that the latter strategy was greatly aided by the virtual mode which allowed officers to complete multiple tasks simultaneously. This is one opportunity that may not have been possible in the face-to-face mode under ordinary circumstances. However, with closed cameras during online sessions and non-video telephone meetings, this was possible. This is one area that could be explored in further studies – the impact of multi-tasking in the online mode.

The growing awareness of the importance of soft skills was repeated throughout the different interviews. Curriculum officers, particularly Senior Officers and Assistant Chief Education Officers who supervise other curriculum officers, noted that they had to learn how to lead rather than manage their staff members. They emphasized in this regard, the value of soft skills in a time of crisis. As indicated by several interviewees, people needed psychological and emotional support during this period, a point

that is also made by Makwana (2019). They also indicated that they had not been prepared to apply these skills in a crisis; they just discovered over time that these were necessary to help them cope with the challenges they were facing. Phases 2 and 3 required less application of these skills to motivate staff and achieve the set targets. However, the officers indicated that they would continue to use these people skills learned over the pandemic in their work life. The application of these skills could also be seen as applying problem-focused strategies to cope with the crisis.

Some interviewees without the responsibility for supervising staff, also indicated that just being more mindful of some of these soft skills also helped them to support their colleagues in a difficult time. Overall, there was no significant link between age and experience in the application of the different coping strategies by the curriculum officers during the pandemic. Everyone was learning as they navigated the crisis. This finding is supported by that of Ramos Pla et al. (2021) in their study of the application of school principals' PLRs during the COVID-19 crisis. However, officers with special supervisory responsibilities had more opportunities to practice the application of these skills compared to their colleagues without these responsibilities.

Theme 3 - Effectiveness of the Strategies Used by Technocrats in Times of Crisis

Generally, interviewees indicated that their self-care and coping strategies worked effectively to address their personal and work-related challenges. They noted that they had met their targets because the original targets had to be reconfigured to meet the demands of the virtual modality.

The emotion-focused strategies such as leaning on the support of family and tapping into the spiritual dimension were found to be very effective. The application of the soft skills through a problem-focused approach was effective in leading and motivating staff. Officers combined emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies to combat their professional and work-related challenges.

The least effective strategy appeared to be taking time off from work as one officer indicated that she was still contacted by colleagues. It is possible that this happened since most persons were operating on a work-from-home schedule and therefore, there was no clear distinction between those who were on leave and those who were working from home. The setting up of an automatic electronic leave notice in the email system could have prevented or minimized contact from colleagues while the officer was on leave. Taking time off from work may resemble avoidance coping since the officer was attempting to leave the stressful work environment. However, it may also be considered a problem-focused approach that was aimed at getting physical rest and retooling and reenergizing. Crying, which is listed in the literature (Stanisławski, 2019; Dubow, & Rubinlicht, 2011) as a negative emotion-focused coping strategy, was encouraged by one supervisory officer to help other officers heal from the pain of their stressors. She helped them using a problem-focused approach, to understand that their vulnerability was not necessarily a negative state but one that could help them to understand themselves better. One finding of Vingerhoets & Bylsma (2007) in their study of "Crying and Health," is that crying may actually "unite" the emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies, as in this case.

In general, the strategies worked because all the interviewees reported that they either met or surpassed their work targets despite the pandemic. The application of self-care and coping strategies allowed officers to deal with the stress of the longer than normal work hours, the shifting schedules, and the expanding responsibilities. It is important to note, however, that curriculum officers did not approach the pandemic with an arsenal of these strategies; they learned them out of necessity.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study illustrates that in a crisis, curriculum middle managers, are inclined to apply a mix of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies to address their work-related challenges. This proactive approach ensures that they adapt to their new working environment in a time-sensitive manner so that they can provide leadership to school leaders and teachers in a crisis situation. To ensure that they effectively balance the stresses of their personal and professional lives, they also apply positive emotion-focused coping strategies. There was little to no evidence of the application of negative emotion-focused coping strategies. Two (2) cases of apparent avoidance were analyzed to be more solutions-oriented.

The study also confirms that crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, are fraught with unpredictability. Consequently, planning operational procedures and even having physical resources in place may have limited to no impact on the crisis situation. The Crisis Framework for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information helped in a broad way to look at some general activities and these helped to guide the system in developing resources and facilitating student programs. It also looked at possible phases of the pandemic and the type of response that would be needed. However, there were still major challenges because the pandemic situation was constantly evolving. As it evolved from lockdowns to a partial reopening of school and the wider society and as infection figures skyrocketed at points, people were being impacted in major ways.

The experiences of the curriculum officers in this study clearly reveal the impact of a crisis such as a pandemic on people even if they are leaders in an education system. Curriculum officers and other people were experiencing challenges such as increasing stress levels, ill-health, lack of motivation, and even fear. Consequently, these emotional and psychosocial needs superseded any physical plan to successfully navigate a pandemic.

The curriculum middle managers in this study learned that their success in the crisis could only be achieved by their determination, resilience, adaptability, empathy, flexibility, and care for themselves and others. The application of these coping skills allowed them to quickly assess the crisis, strategize, coordinate their efforts, and motivate others. They also reframed or reappraised their situation by reflecting on what had been learned. These lessons can be meaningfully applied, where relevant, should another crisis arise.

These middle managers have also developed a range of technical skills, particularly technological skills, over the course of the pandemic. These skills are extremely useful but cannot be taken in a blanket way into another crisis. Each crisis comes with its unique challenges, which could be no electricity or internet and hence no technology. Then again, a new crisis could be similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the skills could be readily applied.

What is important, overall, is that valuable skills have been learned and can be applied outside of a crisis; that is both soft skills and technical skills. The application of PLRs such as perceiving emotions, managing emotions, adaptability, resilience, and proactivity was quite evident in the discourses. These are tangible benefits coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the problem-focused coping approach allowed the curriculum officers to upgrade their technical skills, the combined problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies allowed them to connect more with themselves and by extension, with others. Overall, the latter approach was seen to be particularly beneficial to officers.

Staying Above the Turbulent Waters

The hope is that should another crisis occur in the lifetime of the present generations, the education system would be better equipped than it was for the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the experiences shared by the middle-level technocrats in this study, there would be several effective PLRs coupled with effective coping strategies in place to avert at least some of the possible confusion and stress.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this study are several opportunities for the application of the strategies learned and/or applied by the curriculum officers. Consistent with these findings are the following recommendations for other middle managers in the education industry and other sectors:

- Develop reflective spaces for middle managers and other leaders to share the self-care and coping strategies that were useful in the pandemic. This activity may be supported by counselors and

Table 2.

Instructions:

Indicate your stressors, if any, and the self-care and coping strategies in this tool provided, and rate the outcomes of applying strategies using the 5-point Likert scale indicated:

Extremely effective 2. Effective 3. Average 4. Very minimal 5. Ineffective

Follow-up by indicating your plan for the following month if needed – strategies to be maintained, adjusted, or eliminated.

Stressor	Self-care Strategy	Problem-Focused Strategy	Positive Emotion-focused Strategy	Negative Emotion-focused Strategy	Outcome				
					1	2	3	4	5
Competing tasks	Avoid missing lunch and water intake	Prioritize tasks				√			
Limited Resources				Ignore related job targets					√
Increasing family demands coupled with new job expectations		Address only a few family concerns and marginally address new job expectations	Read novels to escape the stress.					√	
Poor performance of supervisees	Avoid overwork (completing the duties of others)	Research tips on how to work with under-performing supervisees Organize consultation sessions with supervisees to discuss their performance in relation to the Operational Plan and to set short-term targets			√				

Next Steps

Maintain the current self-care strategies and add some more, where relevant. Use problem-based strategies to comprehensively address issues. Eliminate the distraction strategies that only delay the impact of the stressors or that have the potential to later exacerbate the negative effect of these stressors.; for example, ignoring a job target will eventually lead to problems with supervisors and could also threaten job security.

other professionals specifically trained in this area such as Health and Family Life Officers/practitioners. Extend the activity beyond the pandemic experience to facilitate the sharing of self-care and coping strategies in the regular work environment and provide peer support.

- Use a personal monthly tracker to log the application of self-care and coping strategies in order to determine the extent to which these are useful in helping them to meet their needs. This activity will help to reinforce the intentional element in applying strategies as opposed to the pandemic experience of simply grasping for strategies out of grave necessity. Based on the evaluations, maintain, add and/or substitute self-care and coping strategies each month as needed.
- Provide professional development training for middle-level and other leaders in education and other service industries in the area of applying self-care and coping strategies. Some should be directly configured to address Professional Learning Resources as a means of directly applying critical soft or people skills in the work environment.
- Review or develop crisis management frameworks to explicitly include guidelines for supporting the psychological and psychosocial dimensions of people and not just the physical environment and resources. These frameworks should also outline effective problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies, clearly indicating how these may be combined to meet varying needs, which may arise in crisis situations.

Further Studies

Further studies that examine the post-pandemic experience would be quite useful. This was also suggested by Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021). Specifically, studies on how the middle managers studied are applying the self-care and coping strategies learned, alongside PLRs, in the new normal environment would provide insights into the change processes, if any.

The area of multi-tasking in the online environment as a coping strategy and its implications was also raised under “Discussion and Analysis of Findings.” This area could also be explored in future studies.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Coping Strategies: Activities or techniques of effectively handling difficult personal and/or work-related challenges.

Crisis Leadership: This concept addresses the meaningful application of people skills such as adaptability, innovation, motivation during a crisis to minimize serious challenges and to ensure that institutions and systems continue to function as effectively as possible.

Emotion-Focused Coping: A coping style that aims at targeting/reducing the impact of the negative emotion caused by the stressor.

Middle-Level Technocrats: The experts responsible for the technical aspects of designing, coordinating, and assisting in the management of teaching/learning structures and processes. They operate between the senior policy level personnel and the education practitioners comprising principals, other school leaders and teachers.

Personal Leadership Resources: Leadership skills that allow managers to solve (PLRs) problems and effectively manage a range of emotions and provide inspiration and motivation to others in the institutional work environment.

Problem-Focused Coping: A solutions-oriented coping style that targets the stressor, with a view to eliminating it or reducing its impact.

Self-Care Strategies: Activities routinely geared at ensuring physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being.

Chapter 2

Crisis Management for School Leaders: The Role of a Resilient School Climate

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 presented many challenges for school principals in the United States and around the world. Chief among these concerns was teacher turnover. An extensive review of literature, author research, and the author's experience as a school building and district leader was aggregated to report on themes related to fostering a strong P-12 public school climate, aimed at retaining teachers for the benefit of student growth and academic achievement. This information is organized within the Myers four-stage crisis management framework of normal operations, emergency response, interim processing, and restoration in order to explore opportunities for school principals to support teachers before, during, and after a crisis such as COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, schools are influenced by current societal events; this concept is nothing new. Yet, in recent years, public pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (P-12) schools in the United States have experienced significant disruptors. Beginning in 2020, the students, teachers, parents, and leaders of schools in America met a range of external pressures and events that tested their normal mode of school. If not tended to, a carefully cultivated school climate may begin to suffer (Mousena & Raptis, 2021) under such pressures. Particularly, teacher turnover and shortages projected a decade prior to 2020 (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2018) are becoming a reality. In pre-school through grade 12 schools across the United States, the school staff pressures that once derived from a strong emphasis on teacher accountability for student achievement as shown using a one time a year high stakes assessment (Smith, Escobedo & Kearney, 2020) has now shifted to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, culture wars, and increased incidents of stakeholder aggression and violence (Landrum, Sweigart, &

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Collins, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic not only shifted P-12 learning temporarily online, bringing with it significant changes in teaching methods; it also exacerbated the differences between school districts and families in regards to access to technology. Additionally, decisions regarding the use of face coverings or masks for students and staff made by states or local school districts were publicly contested by parents and often at odds with public health officials. After several high-profile murders of African-American men and women by police officers, calls for social justice reform carried into the classrooms. These calls for more inclusive educational practice and conversations on race in classrooms were strongly combatted by others who did not want their children exposed to anti-racist ideals. This push/pull of social and pandemic issues in America have exacerbated concerns for teachers as school staff report feeling attacked, called out on social media, unappreciated, vilified (Bartlett, August 2021) and fearing for their personal safety, even as national polling shows local support for teachers is holding steady (Will, January 2021). In the absence of a supportive school principal and a crisis management framework, these stressors have the potential to accelerate teachers' exit from the profession- bringing with it a loss of knowledge and teaching expertise; each factor with the potential to negatively impact student achievement (Kaiser & Thompson, 2021).

Using Myers (1993) four-stage framework (Myers, 1993) for crisis management, and an extensive review of literature as well as the author's primary research and experience as a school district leader during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, this chapter seeks to explore the role of the school principal in supporting teachers in order to retain those teachers with experience and strong pedagogy during the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice conflicts in the United States. While both external stressors are of serious concern for American educators in this generation; the themes outlined herein are applicable and useful to supporting schools and teachers facing significant external disruptors yet unknown.

BACKGROUND

The School Principal as a Crucial Middle Manager in Crisis

School principals are at the intersection of all important relationships in a school; that is between school and community, school and parents, teachers and their students, school and school district administration. School principals must also defend their practice and the schools' performance to multiple stakeholders: the district office, board of education, students, parents, community members, and elected officials

In the United States, a school principal is the leader of faculty and staff while also supervised by a governing board, centralized county or district office. They answer not only to the government entity above them, but also to the parents and students they serve, as well as the teachers and staff they manage. These groups become known as key stakeholders for anyone serving in a school principal role. The school principal, as a middle manager, can have the effect of stabilizing or destabilizing a relationship with stakeholder groups. As such, it makes sense that a school principal would be the best individual in a building to set and affect climate because they "see and understand the entire (school) and are responsible for everything that goes on" (Bredson, 1985, p. 45). School principals are also site-based managers, therefore have the latitude to employ certain actions within a crisis management framework to improve the teacher experience.

Traditionally, an effective school principal has been viewed as the master teacher, or instructional leader who sets goals, evaluates teaching, and offers suggestions for improvement while at the same time managing the day-to-day routines of a building (Griffith, 1999). As a result of the 1983 report, “A Nation at Risk” which identified American public education as failing students, the management role of the school principal was de-emphasized to make room for instructional leadership, coaching, and professional development (Kamenetz, 2018). Particularly beginning in the 1980s and extending to today, the managerial functions of a school principal in the United States were discredited or dismissed because they were seen as less important than instructional leadership. In the face of external pressures seeping into the schoolhouse, the idea of management must be re-introduced back to the fore; as these are functions necessary to maintaining healthy and safe environments for students and staff, particularly during a crisis.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

The Great Resignation Crisis

Movement of workforce labor is naturally occurring and expected. In the United States, the rate of national unemployment fluctuates as labor force structures shift or economic woes strike. Ideally, those seeking jobs and those hiring would strike a balance as economies strive for an equilibrium in workforce. Occasionally, domestic disturbance, international conflicts, or a market crash will disrupt such equilibrium. In 2020, the international economy sustained disruption with the emergence of COVID-19. As many aspects of daily life -- restaurants, stores, schools, office buildings, travel -- shuttered, the economy sputtered. In the United States, when people were asked to shelter in place by their state or local government, some could continue working from home yet those with location specific employment did not work and were not being paid. For many, the COVID-19 closures began a time for personal reflection and introspection with many selecting to not return to work when able to do so, and some seeking other careers altogether.

What became referred to as “The Great Resignation” by Texas A & M Professor Anthony Klotz (Ducharme, 2021), symbolized the sharp number of ‘quits’ in the United States, and the drastic impact of a significant movement of the workforce to other positions or even out of the workforce entirely. During April, May, and June, 2021, the U.S. Department of Labor reported 11.5 million workers quit their jobs; a trend that continued beyond this three-month period. In August, 2021 an additional 4.3 million left their current positions, contributing to the highest rates on record (Kane, 2021). When surveyed, 74% of those separating from their positions cited a desire for an improved work situation; one with less stress leading to burnout and with the opportunity for greater work-life balance. Further employee dissatisfaction with work was rooted in a sense of unfairness as salaries were frozen and bonuses delayed for employees *except* those in top level management (Kane, 2021). While COVID-19 itself was not the cause for a large number of employees quits, workplace climate and executive leadership’s reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a significant exit from the workplace. The leisure and hospitality industries were most impacted, yet the education sector was not immune from greater numbers of employees exiting the profession.

In April 2020, during the early months of the pandemic, 9.7% of those in education had left their jobs, a number leveled out to around 2.5% each month thereafter yet is expected to increase dramatically

again at the completion of each academic year post-COVID-19 pandemic (Bureau of Labor & Statistics, April 2020).

In polling completed in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic, 33% of surveyed teachers said they are more likely to retire early, either during or soon after the pandemic, including 45% of teachers who are over the age of 50 and 44% with over 20 years of experience (Hart Research, 2020). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages are more likely to impact high-poverty schools where achievement and opportunity gaps most exist (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Nationally, teacher shortages have grown from an estimated 20,000 in 2012-13 to over 110,000 in 2017-18 (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Factors contributing to the teaching profession being seen as less attractive as a career include: pay, workload, safety issues, lack of staff cohesion, student discipline, and working conditions (Chambers Mack, Johnson, Jones-Rincon, Tsatenawa, Howard, 2019; Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021; Sutchter, et al., 2016).

For those who have stayed in their classrooms, teacher stress from their work environment has meant that their own physical and mental health and social relationships have suffered. When asked whether administrators were appropriately supporting their teachers, 42% of respondents said 'no' (Will, 2021). The shifting of instructional modes and COVID safety measures, and mounting responsibilities with little to no additional training have resulted in more teachers feeling disrespected, scrutinized, and micromanaged (Will, 2021). Public conversations on race and the calls by some stakeholders to facilitate crucial conversations on equity and racism, and demands by others for teachers to not use their lessons to discuss America's deep racial divide and inequalities have placed additional external pressures on classroom teachers. These pressures of COVID and social justice issues have contributed to a feeling of isolation for teachers as parents often go around their principal and communicate their displeasure directly to their child's teacher, resulting in a crisis of teacher/staff fear and turnover.

Crisis Framework: Myers 4-Stage

A crisis framework, particularly when anticipating or reacting to a crisis, can be important to organizations for many reasons. First, the use of a crisis framework aides in classifying a crisis. Naming a crisis, and classifying it into a group; such as financial, educational, business, public, criminal, health, etc, assists those managing a crisis in that one can find solution exemplars within that grouping. Second, a framework develops stages of a crisis so that an event's life cycle can be identified and anticipated. Crises do not tend to be a single point in time, but rather a cycle; most basically before event, during event, and after event (Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2013).

Although written using a business lens, Myers (1993) crisis management framework provides a structure for leaders in public P-12 education to use in managing crisis such as COVID-19, social justice conflicts, or other significant external disruptors.

Table 1 illustrates the components of Myers' (1993) four-step process.

In his four-stage process, Myers (1993) outlines the movement of an organization from crisis to resolution by underscoring the importance of planning for a low occurrence, potentially high impact event. During normal operations, preparation should be made for a wide range of acute disruptors. While the emergency response is a relatively short window of time, immediately after a crisis onset, the work of the organization to respond and communicate effectively are highly important. It is important in both stages during a crisis: emergency response and interim processing, for the organization to respond in a way that allows the organization to continue its core business while also caring for the personal needs of employees.

Table 1. Myers' (1993) four-stage approach to crisis management

	Crisis Stage	Characteristics
Before Crisis	Normal operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No crisis, yet preparedness training occurs
During Crisis	Emergency response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediately after the onset of the crisis • Organization response/communication • Damage containment
	Interim Processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternate temporary procedures in place
After Crisis	Restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal operations resume • Reflection

For the purposes of this chapter, a review of literature, and the author's experience as a school building and district leader was used to report on themes related to fostering a strong P-12 public school climate. This information is organized within the Myers (1993) 4-stage crisis management framework, in order to explore opportunities for school principals to support teachers during a crisis, such as COVID-19 and social justice conflicts, and potentially limit teacher turnover in schools or exiting from the profession.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Myers' (1983) 4-stage crisis management framework can be used by P-12 school leaders in America as a paradigm for crisis management. The following recommendations are put forth to assist school principals in utilization of this framework.

Before the Crisis: Normal Operations Stage

When a school is also a workplace, as is always the case, school principals are wise to commit to fostering a positive work climate, identifying a clear vision for their school, and building relationships to foster trust. During non-crisis times, focusing on climate, vision, relationships and trust, lay an important foundation that strengthens staff relationships and workplace cohesion. These 'deposits' of goodwill are important when a crisis strikes and a principal must make challenging decisions that could impact staff workplace experience or happiness.

Focus on Climate

Climate refers to the entire quality and character of an organization's environment, including employee perceptions of their roles (Kowalski, 2010; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009) and experiences in the school (Mousena & Raptis, 2021). It is exhibited in behaviors that are praised and linked to quality work environments (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989; Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). Leaders of organizations must understand the relevance and importance of climate and culture to be successful, particularly during a crisis (Kowalski, 2010; Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989; Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). Researchers in educational leadership have identified four pillars to further define climate as a way to make the concept relevant to schools. They are:

- **Ecology:** defined as the physical items of a school building, such as classroom, technology, furniture, etc.
- **Milieu:** The social interactions that occur within a school, between administration, teachers, and/or students.
- **System organization:** Defined as the structure of the school in terms of the chain of command, curriculum, influence of central office administration on the building, arrangement of subject or grade level departments, etc.
- **Culture:** The value, beliefs, and norms shared by all involved in the school. (Kowalski, 2010)

The climate of a school building is the product of a principal's leadership. Studies in the early 1980's were the first to begin a deeper discussion of the impact of a school principal on student achievement, and while findings varied, these studies laid the groundwork for more recent empirical investigations (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

Climate and leadership are directly tied to the effectiveness of organizations in achieving their goals (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). Employees rely on expectations coming out of an organizational climate in decision making when it is otherwise unclear, or an edict from management has not been given (Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). Therefore, it is important for leaders to set an expectation, linked to the school's vision, of what are right, important, and necessary actions for the staff to consider while working individually or collectively. MacNeil, et al. (2009) noted when goals that are accepted by teachers, and found to be clear and achievable, are accepted and promoted by the school principal, a school building's climate is positively influenced. Kozlowski and Doherty (1989) found that strong, positive, high-quality leadership is more likely to be linked to a more positive cultural perception by group members than in instances of poor leadership. Their rationale was that strong leaders reduce uncertainty in an organization, setting forth a strong edict and mission for the organization, providing a direction for staff. In its synthesis of 219 studies on the principalship, Grissom, et al. (2021) acknowledge establishing a productive climate as one of the 4 key behaviors of effective principals.

The assumptions and actions of school principals are the most impactful indicators of a school building's climate and its effect on member behavior (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). School climate accounts for about 25% of direct and indirect effects on learning (Leithwood, et al., 2004). School principal's actions known to influence school climate include: providing a clear vision of success, communication of expectations for success, providing meaningful professional development, modeling collaboration, and fostering trust and pride in students and staff (Clifford, & Ross, 2012). Organizational climate is tied to member performance (in this case teachers and students), and for that reason, principals of a school with strong climate also report activities that promote social ties and friendships.

Zohar and Tenne-Gazit (2008), in knowing the effect of climate on organizational performance objectives, espouse: "activities that promote social ties and friendships ought to be considered highly instrumental" as a way of fostering a positive climate of strong community. Additionally, strong leaders are consistent across settings, create a sense of safety and concern for member welfare (Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008) and are invested in knowing their staff in both personality and pedagogy (Hollingworth, et al., 2018).

Being mindful of, and taking steps to foster a strong, positive school climate is an effective way to strengthen the operation of a school and to ease the potential impact of a crisis, should it occur (Hoy, et al., 1990; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021; Mac Neil, et al., 2009). A common vision, building relationships

and fostering trust are the cornerstone of a school's strong organizational climate and vital to limiting negative outcomes to a crisis.

Vision Setting

A framework for success is imperative for any healthy climate; and a school vision statement provides such a framework. Rallying around a building specific set of values, collective goals, and teamwork further identifies the culture of a building and improves organizational health (Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). Leaders who create a vision, must do so in concert with those for whom they are entrusted to lead. Those most transformational to an organization have the ability to scan an environment, analyze data, seek input, and create a vision from which an avenue for change and long-term commitment can develop (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2017). Transformational leadership can affect climate and student achievement when visions of what work needs to be done is provided to work members.

When a school principal is transparent with an adopted vision, goals, and action steps, teachers have access to "better information for assessing what is prioritized, valued, and supported" (Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008, p. 745) and are motivated to do the work. Motivation, in turn, leads to individualized empowerment that aligns to a common goal of student achievement. A strong, democratically derived vision should foster development of employees, with a leader who encourages free thinking and activities that complement the shared vision; contributing to not only motivation but autonomy, efficacy, and overall shared ownership in the outcomes of the organization. Principals encourage a strong collective climate by showing teachers what can be achieved (set a goal), what needs to be done to reach the goal, and by pointing out individual and group characteristics or actions that drive towards the desired goal (Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008).

A central, unified vision contributes to cultural homogeneity: the extent to which all members accept the same assumptions, values, and norms, increases in strength by the number of members who subscribe to the values and norms, and can be referred to as within-unit agreement and contributes to workplace climate. Acceptance of processes or cohesions between levels of management, as well as cultural agreement between individuals, as observed in social interactions are important components of homogeneity (Dumey, 2009). One key outcome of homogeneity is the pressure indirectly felt by members to act or interact one way instead of another. When a crisis strikes, cultural homogeneity is influential in a school's ability to pivot quickly and adjust to a rapidly changing environment. As an example, in March 2020 state and local governments and health departments mandated American schools to close their buildings and shift to online instruction. Within a matter of 24-48 hours, school leaders in America were tasked with designing and communicating to teachers and parents, their plan for an all-online method of delivery. For this challenging task, and short window of time, school leaders referenced their common vision, values, and norms to create a plan for instruction with confidence and provided a sense of consistency which could prove to be comforting to some during an otherwise unprecedented situation.

Put another way, not only can a school with a unified vision and culture adjust to crisis-initiated changes, it can empower a school principal to respond rapidly and exercise full autonomy in decision making (if done within the scope of the vision). This agility provides the principal leader with the benefit of responding to external pressures before they reach the classroom.

Building Relationships and Fostering Trust

During normal operations, priority should be given to building a relationship of trust between school principals and staff. “Although teaching has historically been a rather individualistic enterprise, greater cooperation and trust emerge when situational conditions emphasize communication and collaboration” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 574). Trust is a multi-dimensional construct that includes leadership traits and competencies of character and job-expertise. Character speaks to a leader’s honesty, openness, fairness, and benevolence; each of which have been found to be of notable importance when studying school leaders and trust in response to a crisis (Aguilar, 2016; Sutherland, 2017; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). When elements of competency are displayed, a staff is likely to trust that a leader knows what to do, how to do it, and will perform a task with honesty and transparency (Aguilar, 2016), all critical traits to maintaining cohesion during a crisis.

In a trusting school environment that values relationships with stakeholders, one is more likely to experience: an absence of blame, honesty, a willingness for leaders and employees to show vulnerability, and shared decision-making. A trusting environment is rather cyclical in that members further promote future trusting behavior by supporting one another during an adversarial or threatening situation (Sutherland, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Maintaining professional boundaries has also been shown to build trust within a work team. In a school environment for which there is a strong model of and expectation for professional and ethical behavior, employees are less likely to act in their own self-interest and more likely to focus on organizational structure and vision (Fraher, A.L.; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Conversely, an absence of trust among school stakeholders erodes an organization’s communication and vision.

Low levels of trust in schools between staff and a school principal or a school principal and community members has been shown to undermine any potential gains that may be made from strong communication implementation and the members of that school may experience increased difficulty with collaborative decision-making (Sutherland, 2017). Further, without the presence of trusting relationships between individuals in a school, a school staff is much less likely to subscribe to a common vision (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, a series of top-down decisions eroded the foundation of trusting, professional relationships between school leaders and school staff (Sutherland, 2017). In those schools without a foundation of trust prior to March 2020, staff, student or parent discontent almost immediately followed and was publicized by broadcasted attacks from staff and parents to school superintendents and board of education members. Instead of shared decision-making that may have existed during normal operations, the COVID-19 crisis required centralized, top-down decision-making for school districts. In the United States, individual state governors directed school closure (and in some cases mask mandates) to local school districts boards of education who passed these mandates to principals for implementation. As an outcome of eliminating shared decision-making, some school organizations were unable to respond collectively to criticisms and therefore perhaps unable to focus on learning and problem-solving, instead focusing on self-preservation and protection (Sutherland, 2017). It is in this way that a pre-crisis environment becomes a predictor of possible outcomes during a crisis.

Relationships and trust have significant impacts on building climate when it is mutual and reciprocated to the school principals by the teachers (Smith-Deagle, 2013). In the course of a year, school principals many times will have access to detailed and often privileged staff and student information that very few others in an organization are privy to. Holding this information in confidence is one way

to lay a foundation for building trust with a staff. Trust can also be fostered by the principal who is true to their commitments to a staff, following through on what they communicate will be an action step or a priority. Overall, trust is manifested in an inherent sense in a building that teachers are not micromanaged by their school leader, and instead left alone to focus on instruction and the growth opportunities they can provide to students (Smith-Deagle, 2013).

In order to build trust, one must keep commitments, be authentic and transparent in their actions and communication, regularly listen and reflect, and provide opportunities to celebrate individual as well as team successes (Anguilar, 2016; Erickson, 2021; Tibbo, 2016). A staff might look for evidence of character by scanning for a leader's integrity, honesty, and an alignment of words matching actions. A principal is more likely to believe that their leader acts "fairly, justly, ethically, and respectfully" (Kowalski, 2010, p. 89) and leads with core integrity. In an environment of trust, individuals know what to expect, eliminating unneeded emotional strain and preserving teacher energy to better serve students (Hanford & Leithwood, 2013). These solutions lay a foundation crucial for mitigating employee turnover during a crisis.

During the Crisis: Emergency Response

During the course of an academic year, schools in the United States engage in all types of crises planning: hurricane, tornado, fire, active shooter, medical emergency, bomb threat, etc. Each crisis plan carries with it an assumption that no plan will adequately meet the unique needs of a given crisis, yet, the Coronavirus global pandemic was not an event any school had anticipated. In situations such as these, crisis interventions and aspects central to a positive climate, those of communication and temperament, are useful to leaders in navigating an unforeseen calamity.

Communication

In close relationship to vision, the ability of a school principal to accurately communicate a message that is timely and most meets the needs of staff has a significant impact on the climate of a school building. Ideally, a school principal will have already been focused on their communication skills and cadence during normal operations, knowing of the tremendous influence communication can have on a school's overall workplace climate. Communication serves as a way to inform and strengthen associations. In a positive climate, a leader will foster positive relationships with his/her members by knowing and utilizing each person's strengths and by engaging in two-way communication (Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008), in which both the principal and his/her teachers have a voice in decision making and comments or concerns are heard (Kowalski, 2010). Teachers are more likely to trust leaders who communicate effectively; creating a positive climate of confidence (Boies & Fiset, 2018; Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989).

Several studies support the relationship between open, two-way communication between principal and teachers and organizational health. (Smith-Deagle, 2013; Kowalski, 2010; Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989; Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). In order to positively influence the climate of a school building, principals must commit themselves to routine, open, two-way dialogue with their staff, students, and community. Communication must occur often enough that the pulse of the building is always known, and the principal may make an educated, timely adjustment to policy implementation if need be. Varying communication approaches, between in person, whole group, email, newsletter, etc., provides more opportunity for building leaders to gauge the feelings of stakeholders, and build a sense of community among all members.

Communication is a key precursor to having an open and positive climate. Kowalski (2010) writes, “open climates are characterized by cooperation and respect within the faculty and between the faculty and principal” (p. 40). Indeed, a strong open communication style fosters staff cohesion in that teachers know and are more likely to buy into the collective focus and direction of the school (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989; Zohar & Tenne-Gazit 2008). When school principals promote open lines of communication, teachers are not insulated from information that can be gained by conversations with each other and the community, and collaboration is heightened. A collaborative environment strengthens the milieu (a dimension of school climate) of a building, further improves the school’s organizational health, and impacts student achievement (Kowalski, 2010).

While school principals, especially those who are the lone administrator in a building, often rely on teachers to provide peer support, this practice should not lead to the isolation of others. Kozlowski and Doherty (1989) caution against the creation of what they call “out-group” members. Their findings indicate that out-group members are less likely to be included in building consensus, and their perceptions do not match that of their supervisors as closely as the perceptions of in-group members with the supervisor (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). Members of the in-group are more likely to see their environment as positive, contributing to the organizational health of a school. A communication network that is largely centralized around a principal and few others has a negative influence on climate strength (Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). Therefore, principals must not show favoritism or exclusivity in their selection of critical friends or confidants in the workplace.

Open communication, that is honest and intentional, builds and solidifies relationships between staff and the building leader. Leaders who foster a positive climate do so by modeling, welcoming feedback, and engaging in conversations around equity, democracy, and social justice (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Often these conversations begin with moral and ethical discussions, but should also include utilizing all staff and community to perform an equity audit of the school building in order “to analyze, challenge, and change power relations; advocate for equitable access of people of color to power and resources; and ensure their full participation in really diverse societies” (Solomon, 2002, p. 176). Overall, a school principal’s routine, and clear communication establishes that person as a leader; someone to look to for certainty during a crisis or difficult situations (Fraher, 2011).

Typically, school principals can scan their environment, analyze student data, and use their building leadership teams or parent organizations to make decisions. During COVID-19, these normal systems for decision making were set aside. The consequence for many school leaders in the United States during this time was an erosion of trust between teachers and school leadership, as well as communities and school districts. Two-way communication tenets identified above could have worked to combat this issue. During a crisis, communication that is directed internal for staff as well as external to students and families, is the most immediate and important tool to mitigating potential negative impact. At a crisis’s earliest stages, and while still acute, communication is what most every stakeholder seeks for understanding a situation, and its ramifications as well as potential next steps, and general, overall reassurance. Initial communication at the onset of a crisis can be reactive rather than well-planned. During a volatile, emotion prone situation, flaws in communication approaches will be magnified during a crisis, as was certainly the case during the multi-year COVID-19 pandemic (Erickson, 2021). During a pandemic, information changes rapidly, answers are demanded quickly, leading to decisions made hurriedly and often with limited input. This approach is counter to communication styles in high functioning buildings with a positive climate, leading principals to spend more time focusing on communication repair. To remedy the dissonance between what is ideal messaging and what is actually done, school principals should

focus on communicating frequently, in multiple forms, and with a cadence that can be expected by staff. Early in a crisis, priority should be given to communicating messages that meets staff and student needs as well as provides answers as to why decisions were made and what information was used in making that decision (Tibbo, 2016). Acknowledging staff impact in a message is often what is most appreciated in communication from managers to staff, as well as transparency and opportunities for open dialogue when appropriate (Smith-Deagle, 2013).

When teachers feel as if they have the ear and full attention of their school principal, they believe that they are valued in their environment, as a worker and as a person (Smith-Deagle, 2013). It is during a crisis that it becomes necessary for a school principal to rely on relationships and trust that, with hope, has been nurtured and tended to during normal, non-crisis operations. They must slow down and prioritize every interaction, treating it carefully and realizing that every message has the potential of influencing already heightened emotion and response (Tibbo, 2016). It is by being relational communicators (Kowalski, 2010), school principals foster positive relationships, can better identify and address unmet needs in their buildings, and ensure that policies chosen to execute do good for the most people.

Temperament

The function of leadership is precisely for providing guidance and solving problems (Schoofs, et al., 2019). Temperament, defined here as an individual's personality or nature, is a crucial factor in successfully navigating a crisis and determining whether a workplace climate is positive. During tumultuous times exacerbated by negative external pressures, a school principal is keenly aware that decisions made can be unpopular. Yet, a school principal's greatest influence can be as a confident and calming presence; one who acts with consistency and whose actions can be anticipated because of a clearly articulated core belief about education. Sometimes referred to as 'self-management' (Tibbo, 2016; Ubben, et al., 2017), principals as middle management leaders must be able to evenly manage emotional responses from the district office, staff, students, and community members, particularly in the face of personal attacks (Schoofs, et al., 2019; Smith-Deagle, 2013). This requires leaders to exhibit self-awareness, vulnerability, routine reflection, and to not be afraid to show feelings in a measured way (Schoofs, et al., 2019).

A school principal who does not waiver, and whose priorities do not shift fosters an environment that is consistent for students and staff even in times of disruption. Teachers in schools deemed to have a strong, positive climate note that their principal manages with limited emotion, is not reactive/hasty, and does not show favoritism in the staff ranks (Smith-Deagle, 2013). They describe a principal who noticeably takes time to think before acting, explores all options, and asks for feedback to factor into decision making. Those who defend teachers against attacks yet later coach the teacher on better ways to do something after the issue subsides were reported by staff in organizationally healthy schools. A principal who never raises their voice save for when the wellbeing of a child was compromised are reported attributes of a principal who has the right temperament to lead a building and earn the support of their staff (Smith-Deagle, 2013) even through the course of a crisis, because they place the health, emotional well-being, and education of the children in their building at the heart of their everyday operations. Not only does the paradigm of placing children at the heart of all focus and decision making earn the support of staff but when leaders focus on the big picture and are steadfast in their vision, levels of anxiety over small details that can oftentimes cripple a leader is lessened. A school principal's sense of control, and command for the entire operation of the building could translate to calmness and consistency in their treatment of staff and students.

The tenure or length of time a school principal has served their school has contributed to the overall confidence with which they lead. Even more impactful to the overall climate of the school is evidence of a cool yet caring temperament. Specifically, teachers point to the wise, experience tested decisions that these school principals make (Smith-Deagle, 2013). Teachers trust seasoned, calm school principals because they know they have experienced almost every situation to have occurred in a school and know which events to react to, and which to not react. As a result of experience, teachers reported being less likely to question a decision, further improving the relationship of the school principal with staff and likelihood that staff will trust and support a school principal's leadership during adversity. Tenured principals who know themselves as leaders are also more likely to pair confidence with vulnerability (Yan, 2020). When a leader models and allows for the sharing of grief, anxiety, and fear they provide an opportunity for compassion and empathy among staff and students. These displays of concern for others will further unify a staff in the face of external pressure.

Caring school principals are more likely to observe a person's emotion and provide empathetic support where needed (Schoofs et al., 2019) as well as positivity. School principals demonstrating charisma and enthusiasm for the work particularly challenges others in the environment to subscribe to a similar outlook. Positivity breeds positivity and commitment to the vision (Ubben et al., 2017) potentially providing a counterforce to negativity and burnout among employees while reconnecting people to shared values and their purpose will make a positive influence on staff resilience.

While the theme of temperament has been identified by practicing administrators, little research has been done to support principal personality as a precursor for a positive school climate (Smith-Deagle, 2013). Decades ago, those attributes of perceiving employee concerns and having the ability to adequately support the emotional needs of staff were identified as keys to a successful principal (Baltzell & Dentler, 1984). Particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic has created an increased need for social and emotional support for staff, it has become even more vital for school building leaders to ask, listen, and provide the individualized, personal support requested by staff to perform their daily work supporting students. Public school systems in the United States have many rigidities, such as regulations on public funds spending, the school year calendar, and work hours. Attempting to find flexibility for staff within the mandated school hours is a start yet much of what school leaders can do to support teachers most simply could be acknowledging the difficulties teachers face specifically at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Seeking to understand the perspectives of others is a powerful tool in de-escalating emotions (Siler, 2020). When faced with mounting external pressures, those that place a heavy burden on employees, it is even more important for leaders to show authentic understanding and empathy; acknowledging that they face the same difficulties many staff do, while at the same time offering a supportive push by modeling and asking for resilience. Like many professionals whose work is in service, leaders in education have the responsibility to support the human side of an employee in a way that inspires a staff to continue to show up every day and stay focused on their obligations to student success.

During the Crisis: Interim Processing

While clear, purposeful, thoughtful communication and an empathetic yet confident temperament are necessary traits for a school leader during the acute phase of a crisis; advocating for students and staff and providing necessary support is vital to successfully navigating a school through a long-term emergency, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders are vital to inspiring teams when facing challenges brought about by crisis.

Advocacy

Advocacy, for the purposes of this chapter, relates to the protection of teachers from undue professional or emotional stresses and for promoting their schools to all community stakeholders and district administrators as well as being connected to resources necessary to be successful (Smith-Deagle, 2013). As a crisis wanes on, it becomes vital for a leader to help their staff see life after a crisis, create hope, then show a path to move forward and ask what those in the organization may need to be able to successfully move down the path; through the crisis and life after (Siler, 2020). School principals must offer resource support and use their influence to help teachers and staff. Resource support refers to making needed materials accessible and extra materials available. Influence refers to the ability of the school principal to lobby superiors to obtain added consideration for his/her building, and in so doing, school principal's gain the respect of their teachers. Overall, a principal in a climate healthy school is seen as an ally, a person who can deliver on promises, and can protect teachers from negative outside influences. It is the intended leader's role to allow enough external pressure to be helpful and motivating to teachers, and limit that which interferes with a teacher's professional autonomy (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). The key to meaningful advocacy is ensuring that energy is spent on those efforts that are the most necessary to move through a crisis. In order to do this effectively is for school principals to look for facts and data, hearing many people representing various perspectives as possible given the amount of time to make a decision.

A principal who cares for others, demonstrates what is valued in the work culture. Conversely, a leader who fails to seek input and ignores the contributions of staff will negatively influence teacher commitment to the organization (Ubben, et al., 2017). Not only does a supportive environment provide for a more positive climate, school principals can even influence teacher motivation in the ways in which they support the staff by recognizing the importance of teachers and seeking opportunities to enhance their jobs, not get in the way; as well as in showing teachers that they are interested in their goals and well-being (Fullan & Edwards, 2017).

This form of advocacy means that a school principal, as a middle manager, is keenly aware of the needs of building staff and students and can articulate the unique environment of their building to higher level management while also securing resources that would most meet teacher needs. The modeling of advocacy by a principal is one reported reason for teachers feeling empowered to advocate for themselves in the face of external pressures. In teachers' opinions, this level of advocacy has been crucial for keeping their successful programs alive and for protecting the students from assessments, curriculum, or expectations that are not appropriate or that do not support the vision and mission of the buildings (Smith-Deagle, 2013).

Advocacy is reported to be present in several different ways, yet most notably it manifests in a principal's understanding a teacher's need to be supported so that a work day can be student centered. Particularly during the COVID-19 crisis, students in the United States exhibited a wider range of needs; for example, those with internet access and those without. The same was true for teachers. Staff members with pre-existing health conditions or in a certain age band were, in some cases, eligible for a leave of absence or disability status and exempt from working. Regardless of the situation, those leaders who successfully navigated the uncharted waters of the COVID-19 pandemic did so, in part, because they took care of the needs of their staff, students, and parents. Research on educational leadership validates the importance of providing support.

Teachers view their instruction to be supported by the principals when those principals provide instructional leadership and put experts in contact with teachers to support them; then get out of the way

and allow teachers to use their own judgement on which pedagogy will best connect with each student in their care. School principals who are student centered and accept that it is the teacher who has the direct connection to the students in a building, are most likely to build a positive climate (Smith-Deagle, 2013).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, after educational delivery was shifted to an online format in the United States, school principals sought ways to continue to have impact on instruction and student learning. Even though a school principal's influence on instruction is mostly indirect, it can be quite impactful (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990; Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). It is finding ways for leadership to directly connect to classroom activities that is most important if a principal wishes to influence building climate in their leadership decisions (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). One way this connection to the classroom occurs is in a principal's ability to use what they know about success in instruction, and tailor it to what they know about their faculty's learning style, making professional development relevant, and improving a teacher's response to that information (Roney, et al., 2007). Yet, during the pandemic, school principals could no longer walk into a classroom and watch discussion; rather they needed to access instruction using the same Zoom or GoogleMeet format students were using. Teachers expressed concern at being evaluated in their teaching during this shift in educational delivery; many taught online for the first time in their careers. For school principals, this meant they could no longer observe, and support teachers and students in their lessons.

To move around such a barrier, administrators who could or already had positioned themselves as a committed colleague or lead teacher rather than as a boss were successful in observing these new online-classroom spaces and offering support to teachers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, needed support came by way of tangible materials such as: additional cameras, improved audio equipment, or software purchases with the goal of helping students access their education.

As a middle manager, the reputation of a school principal can be influential in securing resources and should not be discounted. The principal must be trusted by and responsive to both the district administration and building staff. During a crisis situation, resources can be quite limited. Therefore, a school principal will be successful in securing allocations when showing a reason for the resource request, a measured outcome the allocation will bring, and ask for only what is necessary to carry out the work of the school building (Smith-Deagle, 2013).

Authenticity

Education is a people business; therefore, people must be prioritized with attention to differentiated treatment based on an individual's needs, especially during a crisis. By definition, an authentic leader is one who is supportive, transparent, and advocates for an individual or group and includes offering varying levels of assistance.

In some form, transparency is a communication strategy in that a leader identifies staff needs, expresses those needs to decision makers and resources allocators, then communicates their advocacy efforts done on behalf of the staff, to the staff. Not only does staff show appreciation and trust for the leaders, but the communication of advocacy maintains positivity, resilience, and focus on the central work of educating students during a crisis (Fraher, 2011; Siler, 2020; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Evidence clearly points to the power that comes from the staff being routinely communicated with, in the sense that it increases the overall belief that their school principal has the staffs' best intentions in mind; yet the key to transparent communication is for leaders to know what degree of transparency is

helpful in empowering others, rather than weighing down the team with too much information (Erickson, 2021; Siller, 2020; Smith-Deagle, 2013).

The results of supporting teachers can be significant. A steady commitment to the students and staff- one that can be counted on and anticipated each day- creates a sense of confidence in the building. This confidence manifests into staff feeling safer in their professional roles, and valued personally (Smith-Deagle, 2013). Teacher confidence also acts as a motivator, causing a richer, deeper, more intense instruction with higher expectations for students. The 'I am one of you' model of leadership can do much to distance a school building from dysfunctional central office administration and is an insulator from political disruptions that have been occurring more frequently at local board of education meetings. School buildings with the principal as a lead teacher, are successful because the principal sees themselves in the supporting role of facilitator to their teachers, and understands the obstacles and resistance teachers face as well as the sacrifices made (time, their own money) to achieving student success. Teachers respond favorably to principals who respect classroom teachers as not only a profession but as a craft and maintain this view even when a crisis adds additional challenges (Chambers Mack, et al., 2019).

School principals have a real opportunity to not only mitigate a crisis but strengthen teacher satisfaction by continuing to show a greater concern for members' welfare under the stressful conditions that are unique to their school building, or a part of a global pandemic, while also being a reliable member of the larger context district team of administrators. Leaders who consider the needs of their staff and provide for those needs, strengthen their climate and increase staff resilience during a crisis or significant disruption.

After the Crisis: Restoration

Meaningful learning occurs if an organization's members and leaders take time to reflect on their actions and outcomes from a crisis (Rinehart & Alcorn, 2019). While the focus of this chapter has been on the important work of preparing for, and navigating through a crisis, repairing and rebuilding staff morale is equally important; particularly after a long-term disruption to normal operations. Being appreciative of those who contributed to the success of a team, and reflecting on the work accomplished during a crisis are two meaningful ways to successfully process and rebuild from a significant disruption.

Gratitude

Showing gratitude is an appropriate way for leaders to signal the end of a crisis. There are simple, yet meaningful, actions leaders can take to celebrate and appreciate the accomplishments of a team, post-crisis. The following are ideas for showing gratitude to a staff. These can and should be done both collectively and individually:

- Acknowledge all achievements that made a positive impact during the crisis, no matter the size of impact and especially if the action was connected to the vision of the school.
- Recognize every individual on the team for their contribution towards the vision during the crisis.
- Check-in on employee wellness and provide opportunities for rest and reset whenever possible.
- Replenish any resources that were depleted during the crisis (Erickson, 2021).

Reflection and Feedback

As American philosopher and education reformer John Dewey once noted, “we do not learn from experience. We learn from reflection on experience”.

Individuality is important when considering a method, time, or space for reflection. The most meaningful reflection occurs when it meets the needs of the person. Remembering this when designing tools to seek reflection is important as some team members may wish for written reflection while others prefer spoken word. Appropriate reflection prompts might change based on the nature of the crisis, and length of the disruption. The following are possible prompts to begin the reflection process with a staff:

- Did our vision serve as an appropriate compass during the crisis?
- What could have been done differently as an organization?
- What contributions to students or the organization elicited the most impact?

CONCLUSION

The Myers (1993) four-stage approach to crisis management, designed for business, can be a useful tool to organizing crisis response in schools as well. In this chapter, key components of educational leadership were aligned to each of the Myers’ four-stages.

School principal leadership matters. As middle managers, principals have the unique ability to assess an environment from a different level, seeing the bigger picture and making decisions that can do the most amount of good for the most people. Leadership in a crisis, such as the coronavirus pandemic, makes the role of a school principal even more important to teachers, many of whom report feeling levels of distress unlike any other time in their career and are considering leaving the teaching profession. During an era of intense external pressures, the principal of a school has the unique ability to maintain organizational health by focusing on school climate. If left without attention from the leader, external situations such as a pandemic can be disruptive to the typical school routines that create parent confidence and foster student learning. Furthermore, employee satisfaction and a positive school climate is paramount to limiting teacher turnover (Grissom, et al., 2021). To prepare for a post pandemic environment, leaders should work now to put measures in place that will positively contribute to teacher job satisfaction.

Table 2. Myers’ (1993) four-stage approach to crisis management with leadership implications

	Crisis Stage	Leadership Focus
Before Crisis	Normal operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on Climate• Vision Setting• Building Relationships & Fostering Trust
During Crisis	Emergency response	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication• Temperament
	Interim Processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocacy• Authenticity
After Crisis	Restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gratitude• Reflecting & Feedback

Crisis can be overwhelming; by focusing on climate, articulating a clear vision, building and maintaining relationships and trust before a pandemic or crisis, then focusing on communication, remaining calm, and advocating with authenticity for students and employees; school leaders can make a difference in the lives of their teachers and students. School principals who properly insulate their staff from external forces, model positivity in the face of adversity, and represent themselves as being on the same team as the staff, and are seen as credible leaders holding the trust of the community are most likely to influence climate and teacher retention (Grissom, et al., 2021; Goldring, et al., 2003; Smith, Escobedo & Kearney, 2020).

Teachers are more likely to have a collective and positive view of their work environment if the leader is strong in their vision and communication style (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989; Mousena & Raptis, 2021) and engages in open communication and perception checking with members (Zohar and Tenne-Gazit, 2008). Welcoming open dialogue and allowing staff to share their feelings and perspectives during a crisis is foundational to making sense of the current environment while making plans for moving forward. Both vision and clear communication serve to further explain to a staff *why* an organizational decision was made and increase buy-in, diminishing employee dissatisfaction. Strong relationships and a stakeholder feeling of trust emphasized before a crisis will help allay internal concerns, allowing for a leader's full attention to be paid to the demands of a crisis. The personality, support, and advocacy of a principal directed towards their staff matters and all efforts should be made by a leader to take care of people, use compassion and reinforce a collective empathy. Once a crisis has subsided, a leader should turn their attention to giving thanks to their team, engaging in reflection, and seeking feedback. Keeping a focus on organizational climate will improve a school's chances of surviving crisis with minimal staff turnover.

FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Leading a school building can be lonely. Particularly in small schools with one administrator, a principal can feel isolated from other professionals in their position, and this feeling can be magnified during a pandemic. Research to study ways in which a school district office can create structures of support is vitally important as we recover from a long global pandemic and prepare for potential future crises. Particularly research on the importance of district-level administrators to create professional learning communities (PLCs)-- as a way of providing principals with opportunities to connect, learn, process events and share strategies for leading and managing stakeholders -- would be meaningful for school principals who are intent on creating or preserving their organization's climate and retain teachers.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Advocacy: Support for an individual or group of individuals. Some common displays of advocacy include requesting or providing resources necessary to perform work, defending against an external force, or influencing others on behalf of an individual or group.

Climate: The entire quality and character of an organization's environment, including employee perceptions of their roles and experiences in the organization. In a school building, climate is composed of physical items, social interactions, organizational structure, and culture.

Culture: The shared values, beliefs, and norms contributing to the climate of an organization; including underlying assumptions held by members of an organization, and values.

Pedagogy: The instructional knowledge of an educator put into practice in the classroom for the benefit and educational achievement of students.

Support: Occurs when a leader allows for teacher autonomy while also providing requisite tools and training.

Temperament: An individual's personality, disposition, or nature that affects their personality and behaviors towards other individuals.

Trust: A confidence that is placed on an individual; based on reliability, competence, integrity, and action follow-through of that individual.

Vision: A shared focus, image, or goal for an ideal future. Typically, a vision includes ways in which an organization will meet its articulated mission.

Chapter 3

Leading and Managing in Times of Crises: Jamaican Educators' Perspectives of and Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this mixed method parallel/convergent research was to ascertain educators' perspectives of and responses to COVID 19 in the Jamaican education system and assess its state of readiness for online teaching and learning. It further sought to provide critical insights on the lessons learned in crisis management and steps required to propel Jamaica into a future of robust online teaching and learning. The findings revealed that while most educators owned their own devices, had internet connectivity, and could satisfactorily navigate the various online platforms, there were issues with the level and scope of training and support they received. Further, the major drawback was the low number of students that were able to access the online space. This undeniably indicates greater need for effective leadership and management especially in times of crises. So, the major recommendations were for continuous professional development in crisis management and other areas as well as resource support to be offered so that the most vulnerable students can benefit equitably.

INTRODUCTION

Education is undeniably the driving force for economic, and social development. In the Caribbean education is perceived as the route to social mobility (Cooke & Jennings 2016). Further, “education has been the bedrock of development of every nation; hence, its sustainability is paramount to the growth and development of all nations” (Owusu-Fordjour et. al, 2020, para. 3). These statements suggest that any threat to a country’s developments must be taken seriously. According to United Nation Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2020), the impact of COVID-19 on education

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is unprecedented. They indicated that 194 countries worldwide were affected. According to them, one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, close to half the world's students were still affected by partial or full school closures. Further, 1.3 billion students are affected (73.8% of total learners) and over 100 million additional children will fall below the minimum proficiency level in reading because of the health crisis. Undeniably, the challenges education now faces, among other things, include further threat to access, meaningful learning, and equity. Moreover, there is the potential for higher school drop-out rates, and the widening of inequality gaps (UNESCO, 2020, World Bank 2020); and the digital divide has been exposed (World Bank 2020). Consequently, educators worldwide struggle to respond to the many challenges facing the education arena. This would indicate that many education systems worldwide were not adequately prepared for the crisis. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to present a deeper understanding of the Jamaica education system context in terms of its readiness and response to the Covid 19 crisis. It also reviews literature to provide a better theoretical understanding of crisis management as well as to present the findings on the research and make recommendations based on the findings.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented educational disruption in the Caribbean. This is because nearly 7 million learners across 23 countries (including Jamaica), have been affected by the COVID-19 (UNESCO, 2020) where approximately 31, 656 teachers and 627,000 students were involved (Waugh 2020, para. 1). Thus, educators and learners in Jamaica had to adjust their teaching and learning strategies using online modalities. However, many educators and students were not prepared for this shift due to lack of resources and training. Moreover, this pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerable conditions of many of students. In response to the increased vulnerability of students, the government of Jamaica has provided training for educators, resources for students and greater access to technology and internet access. Despite these efforts though, many educators and students still face a variety of challenges with online teaching and learning. Naturally, the digital transformation of education has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in the primary mode of learning switching from face-to-face, to an online format. Furthermore, the emergency switch to remote learning has brought about its own challenges that were not yet explored, which include but are not limited to, the need for psychosocial support for teachers, students, and parents.

Leacock & Warrican (2020, p.4) and Waugh (2020, para. 4) added to the mounting lists of challenges which emerged and have impacted the teaching-learning process online. They explained that the curriculum available was not configured with online or blended delivery in mind, instructional resources for online delivery of classes were not readily available in formats relevant to the Caribbean. Furthermore, neither teachers nor students were sufficiently skilled to engage in online teaching and learning transactions, and teachers and students were digitally disadvantaged, resulting in the 2019-2020 school year climaxing without thousands of students taking examinations or receiving grades necessary for enrolment in schools in Jamaica.

This striking reality has highlighted the fact that Jamaica, like many developing countries had not planned or prepared for crises. In fact, it is believed that Jamaica's education system was already in a crisis based on the results from the national and regional examinations.

THEORIZING THE FIELD

Bass and Bass (2008) asserted that effective schools require principals to effectively demonstrate both leadership and management skills where management is manifested through “concern for tasks” while leadership is manifested through “concern for people.” While some theorists have challenged the belief that management and leadership cannot occur in the same person, other researchers like Hutton and Johnson (2017) intimated that, effective leaders can also be effective managers since many leaders have effectively steered their organizations toward the realization of set goals. Very often though, middle managers are overlooked in the loop of things, but are critical to the success of schools. Undoubtedly, leading and managing in times of crises herald the need for countries to plan for and be prepared for times of crises. Naturally, Covid 19 has heralded the need for countries to retool to respond to crisis to minimize the threat to learners, given the challenges that were earlier indicated by UNESCO (2020) and World Bank (2020). While countries grapple with the challenges, it is the responses to them that will make a difference, hence the need for the training of educators [teachers, managers, and middle managers]; financial, physical, and psycho-social support (Hunter, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; World Bank 2020). Further, to mobilize and support learning continuity, UNESCO established the Global Education Coalition which up to 2022 counts 160 members working around three central themes: gender, connectivity, and teachers (UNESCO, 2020). The implication of this is that if countries move quickly to support continued learning, they can mitigate the damage and accelerate recovery. These responses provide an opportunity for education systems to not only recover but avoid the mistakes of the past (World Bank 2020). To place the study in theoretical and conceptual contexts as the current state of Jamaica’s readiness for online teaching/learning is examined and explored, and in keeping with the research questions, it is important to understand a few theories or models that underpin crisis management, as well as the different perspectives and practices in managing online infrastructure and teacher preparation. Further, the role of school managers in managing transition and support, and the valuable lessons to be learnt to support online teaching and learning during a crisis will add to the discourse.

Theories and Models of Crisis Management

There are many theories and models that have been developed to “build organizational capacity and skill to anticipate, avoid, and mitigate crises” (Marker 2020, para. 5). Among them are crisis management maturity model which ranges from reactive to proactive- or even pre-emptive action, ‘Fink’s Model and Mitroff’s Five-Stage Crisis Management Model.

Proactive vs. Reactive Crisis Management Model

There is an age-old maxim that states that “an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure”, hence the pre-emptive crisis management model is an approach that seeks to prevent or resolve a crisis at its earliest sign (Marker, 2020). Additionally, the proactive crisis management is where organizations take initiative early in the crisis and seek to shape how events unfold (Marker, 2020). Marker (2020) also mentioned the responsive crisis management which occurs when there is little warning of a crisis but suggested that thoughtful and quick analysis can lead to effective action that accounts for long and short-term results. Unfortunately, it is the reactive crisis management to which many managers resort. This according to Marker (2020), “is often a panic-driven or knee-jerk reaction [where] emotions like fear play a leading role, and objective thinking is largely absent from the crisis response” (para. 7).

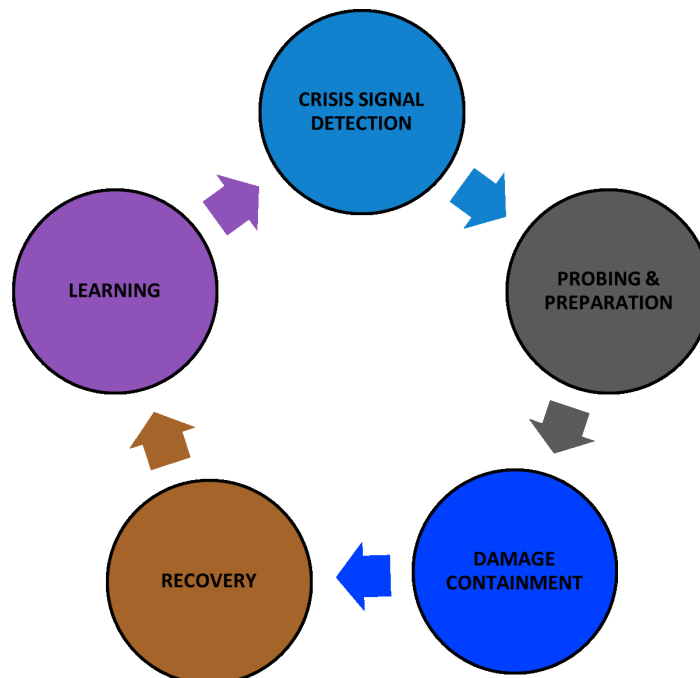
The Fink's Model

Fink, (1986) outlined a four-stage crisis model consisting of the prodromal, acute, chronic, and resolution stages. The prodromal stage covers the period between first signs and crisis eruption. During this period, Fink stated that crisis managers should be proactively monitoring, seeking to identify signs of a brewing crisis, and trying to prevent it or limit its scope. In the acute stage a trigger is unleashed to indicate the crisis event. This is when the crisis breaks out and requires managers to activate their plans. This would suggest that planning was done. The chronic stage entails the lasting and lingering effects of the crisis. The final stage is the resolution stage which indicates the end of the crisis and a time for “internalizing what went wrong through a root-cause analysis and implementing changes to ensure there is no repetition” (Marker 2020, para. 16). However, implementing changes to prevent occurrence is easier said than done, for that is dependent on the magnitude of the crisis. That is why Mitroff (1994) indicated that planning and preparation for every conceivable crisis are impossible.

Mitroff's Five-Stage Crisis Management Model

Mitroff (1994) proposed five crisis stages, which follows a cyclical process like Fink's. These include crisis signal detection, probing and prevention (probing refers to looking for risk factors), containment, recovery and learning as evidenced in figure 1. However, according to Marker (2020), Mitroff was one of the first researchers to recognize that, due to resource limits, preparing for every conceivable kind of crisis is impossible. He noted that crises tend to fall into certain categories, which Mitroff called clusters,

Figure 1. Mitroff's Five-Stage Crisis Management Model



such as breaks or defects in equipment, external actions, and threats (i.e., product recalls). Similarly, prevention actions cluster together, too. (para. 21).

Firstly, during the signal detection stage, sign of impending crisis appears. This indicates that managers must seek to identify warning signs and take preventative measures. The preventative measures here do not indicate that the crisis can be prevented, but the effects of the crisis can be minimized through preventative measures. Secondly, in the probing and preparation stage, managers prepare the organization for the impending crisis. The active search and reduction of risk factors are considered at this stage. So, this is where a crisis management team is engaged to offer training, guidance, and support to staff. Thirdly, in the damage containment stage, crisis occurs, and actions are taken to limit its spread. In the fourth stage recovery begins with efforts to return to normal operations. But the question maybe asked: Is it possible for things to return to normal given the magnitude of the crisis? The final stage of Mitroff's model is 'learning'. This happens when people review the crisis management effort and learn from it. Notwithstanding, later crisis management models such as Smits and Ally (2003) identified crisis planning as the first stage of creating behavioural readiness for crisis management (Hutchins, et. al, 2008, p. 31).

The three models presented bring to the fore the relevance of this chapter in situating Jamaica's readiness for online teaching and response to the Covid crisis and heralds the need for robust crisis planning and management.

Readiness for Online Teaching/Learning

Online learning is not new to many countries especially at the tertiary level. However, for many primary and secondary school educators and students, this is a new phenomenon. Certainly, there are many benefits of online learning. Notwithstanding, it is more favourable for the self-regulated learners (You & Kang, 2014), hence its use at the tertiary level. However, its use at the primary and secondary level, [even before the pandemic], where learners are not normally self-regulated, poses many challenges such as communication, motivation, and engagement, (Howland & Moore 2002; Cull, et.al., 2010), and psychological disorders (Kuban and Steele, 2011; Sprang & Silman 2013) which will affect academic achievement. Besides, successful online learning requires the availability of online devices, good internet connectivity, and initial and online training for all users. According to the OECD, a quarter of school principals across the OECD countries said that shortages or inadequacies of digital technology hindered learning quite a bit or a lot... (OECD 2019). Further, Ferri et al. (2020) explained that technological challenges are primarily related to a lack of internet connectivity and electronic devices. Additionally, Leacock & Warrican (2020, p.4) shared that the students did not have access to devices that would facilitate online teaching and learning as many homes do not have internet connectivity. In fact, in some communities, access is unstable, making access to online classes uncertain for some students even if they have devices. This was reiterated by Di Pierto (2020) when he explained that in the implementation of online learning that is carried out at home, one of the limitations in this implementation is the supporting facilities and infrastructure such as laptops, computers, cell phones, internet, etc. (p. 14). Many teachers also complained about lack of participation when online learning takes place. Concomitantly, OECD (2020) explained that further concerns relate to the fact that the effectiveness of online learning might have been hindered, in some cases, by the lack of basic digital skills among students and teachers, making them unprepared to adapt to the new situation so abruptly.

Overall, the afore mentioned challenges were exacerbated by COVID 19. As posited by OECD (2020), technology is only as good as its use, consequently, educators and students with ineffective in-

ternet connections are liable to be denied access to online education. Without a doubt, this scramble for technological devices that our students must have for virtual learning has only further disengaged our children from the learning process. These afore mentioned challenges signal that while online learning can provide broad benefits, with the unplanned transition, there were several obstacles faced.

Educators' Preparation for Online Teaching

Unquestionably, teachers are central to the whole scheme of education as they are the ones nearest to the students and on whom the school system depends to impart knowledge to the students, hence, preparation and training of teachers are paramount to student success. Indisputably, the pandemic has affected teachers as much as students. Worldwide, school closures affected at least 63 million primary and secondary school teachers (TTF, 2020). Due to the suddenness of changes in teaching and instruction, teachers were often tasked with implementing distance learning without sufficient training, resources, and guidance (UNESCO, 2019). In contexts where technology-enabled distance learning was possible, quality hinged on the skills of teachers in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and internet access. This sudden shift has left many educators worried and concerned. Notably, Coman et al. (2020) have suggested the concerns might happen due to the lack of teachers' experience in using e-learning and the short time they had to adapt their teaching style to the new conditions. They noted too that they "...were concerned about the lack of balance between assigned tasks and the time teachers give [to students] to solve them..., the lack of interaction with their teachers, the lack of focus and concentration in the online environment" (p.7).

Strikingly, the closure of educational institutions due to the pandemic led to numerous changes in the education sector to meet the demands of the different stakeholders. The transformation in teaching from face-to-face classes to virtual classrooms disrupted traditional approaches to teaching and learning. The move to the online space presented considerable hardship as teachers struggled to adapt to what might well be the "new normal" for quite a period while navigating the adversities and stress in their own lives. Purwanto et al. (2020) and Rees & Seaton (2011) shared some of the challenges for some teachers, including restrictions in the choice of teaching methods, less curriculum material covered, lack of technological skills, digital inequality among students, inadequate and unsuitable content and instructional materials, the absence of support and training, and teaching quality. Indeed, COVID-19 emerged to be an obstacle and raised fear for many teachers who have been resistant to technology as a tool for teaching and learning.

Notably and unfortunately, the education system in Jamaica is built on a teacher-centred approach. This approach according to Campbell (2016) invariably has turned off many students. Furthermore, such approaches are no longer meeting the needs of present-day learners labelled Generation X. Despite the efforts from the Ministry of Education in Jamaica to implement a more student-centred approach with the introduction of a New Standard Curriculum (NSC) with emphasis on the use of information and communication technology (ICT), many teachers did not embrace this change and continued with their traditional methods of delivering content. Consequently, with the untimely pandemic, many teachers had to face their apprehension and venture into this unfamiliar space to enhance the teaching-learning process to meet the needs of learners. This sudden change of teaching has driven teachers to use different tools and platforms that they were neither prepared nor trained to use. That is why Coman et al. (2020) poignantly outlined the significance of training teachers.

Middle Managers' Roles

Unquestionably, the preparation of educators should involve the training of middle managers. Very often much of the training is geared towards managers (principals) and there is no deliberate attempt to train the middle managers (vice-principals, heads of departments and senior teachers). According to Hancock & Schaninger (2021), “middle management has been under a decades-long assault—and in the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis-driven need for speed has turned “flatter, faster, leaner” into a mantra (para. 1). As Hogan Assessments (2020) noted, during times of crisis at work, middle managers are who most employees approach for leadership and answers. Further, they continued, “since change is distressing for many and too much change too soon can result in employee burnout or attrition, middle managers need skills to help employees cope” (para. 5). These statements suggest that deliberate attempts must be made to harness the skills and experiences that middle managers bring to the tables of leadership and management.

CRISIS PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

Many countries, including Jamaica, have been undertaking education transformation. The Task Force Report (2004) made many recommendations for the reform of the education system and some of these reforms have been enacted. However, the extent to which they have been successful in reaping the rewards envisaged by the Task Force is debatable. For seventeen (17) years later, the Jamaican Education Transformation Commission (JETC) Report (2021) claimed that while there were some levels of success in access, Jamaica was facing what they termed a ‘learning crisis’. When compared to the Task Force Report (2004), little has changed. In 2004, the Task Force Report showed that some 30% of primary age students were leaving school illiterate, while about 20% of secondary graduates had “requisite qualification for meaningful employment and/entry to post-secondary programmes” (p.21). Fast forward fifteen years later, only 28% of CSEC students passed Language Arts and Mathematics, the two most basic subjects. This indicates that there is something drastically wrong with Jamaica’s system of education which begs the question: Are students being given the right kind of education? No doubt, any significant planning for change and transformation must factor crisis management in its planning process and middle managers must not be left out of the picture. Furthermore, risk assessment must be done, and in doing so, imaginations must be stretched to consider the worst-case scenario. According to Saleh (2016):

research reveals that there is a close association between a crisis and a risk that is manifested through risk management. A prudent risk management strategy attempts to trace, forecast, and control individual, business, and ownership risks. It then follows that a crisis is an anomalous condition that results from the occurrence of a risk. (p.15)

Hence, if proper risk management is done, it minimises the trauma experienced during crises. Certainly, crises are not new, neither are pandemics. The last major pandemic which occurred in 1918 and which killed 500 million people (1/3 of the world’s population) is a striking example. Sadly, people have very short memories or have not sufficiently learnt from history. Noticeably though, this Covid 19 is rather unique as it presented not only a creeping crisis, but a solidarity crisis as well as a transboundary crisis which manifested themselves in other multiple crises: economic, social, and political (Boin, et. al., 2021).

Further, this pandemic is compounded and problematic as “the root causes of a crisis that originated in another country or sector are difficult to comprehend. Causes are unclear, possible consequences seem uncertain, and escalation is unpredictable” (Boin, et. al., 2021, p. 10). Notwithstanding, human beings possess incapacities and imperfections in managing crises effectively.

What Is Crisis Planning and Management?

Crisis planning is simply planning for times of difficulty and danger. However, it may be easy to plan as planning occupies the first position in management, but it is the management of this crisis that will prove the mettle of countries and institutions. This management includes organizing, controlling, coordinating, and commanding the process that are crucial to the success of any plan. Notwithstanding, crisis planning is critical because “through crisis management planning, firms are in a better position to handle unforeseen events that may potentially cause serious or irreparable damage” (Saleh, 2016, p. 27). Further, Saleh cited The Society for Human Resource Management (2005) as saying: “a crisis management plan that is successful incorporates the firm’s programs, such as disaster recovery, emergency response, risk management, business continuity, and communications” (p. 37). Additionally, crisis management according to Saleh (2016) “is defined broadly as a firm’s pre-established guidelines and activities for preparation and response to critical catastrophic incidents or events” (p.37). For Boin et. al (2021) it requires professional as well as political expertise. They suggested that as a professional craft, countries and institutions practise scenario modelling, contingency planning, mobilizing response capacity, making tough decisions, and coordinating as they move away from response mode to recovery mode. Further, as a political craft they must engage in “strategic framing of the nature and causes of threats, the social distribution of risk and harm across groups and interests” (p. 6). Notwithstanding, there is the lack of clarity, uncertainty, and unpredictability of crises such as the Covid 19 pandemic. Concomitantly, according to Martin (2021), the real purpose of crisis management is to implement strategies to help institutions to return to normal. However, this statement lends itself to some provocative questions. What is normal? Was the normal, normal? Was the normal as we know it effective? Is return to the normal pragmatic or necessary? Is a ‘new normal’ the way to go? Nevertheless, according to Saleh (2016):

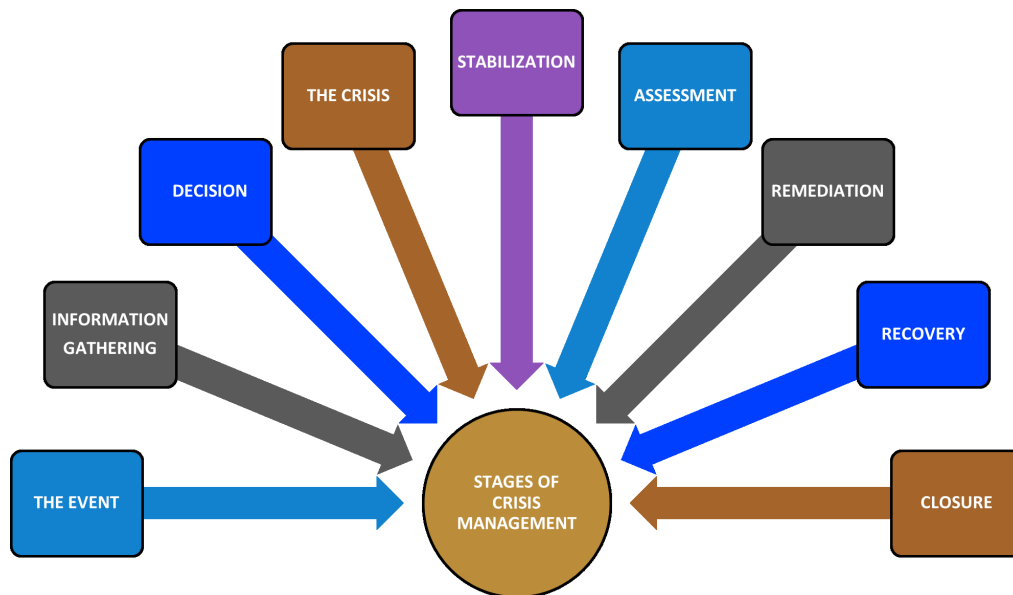
the main goal of a crisis management plan is to protect employees, customers, consumers, corporate image, firm assets, and corporate brands. By having a crisis management plan in place, a firm is in a better position to take the necessary actions to minimize disruptions in business, as well as potential liabilities. (p. 15)

Marchesani (2014), outlined nine (9) stages to crisis management evidenced in figure 2, which he believed are critical in appropriating the correct response.

Stage 1: The Event

The event, according to Marchesani (2014) can take many forms and severity and usually result in fear, awe, shock, confusion and even frustration. When Covid 19 emerged in China, no doubt the Chinese experienced those emotions, but some people thought it was just confined to China. However, when it took on a global focus, the world too experienced those emotions.

Figure 2. The Stages of Crisis Management



Stage 2: The Rapid Gathering of Information to Determine the Seriousness of the Event

“With post-event confusion and the setting in of reality as to what occurred, there is a need to gather factual information concerning the event” (Marchesani 2014, p. 72). This rapid gathering of information was a stage that the whole world went through during the Covid 19 pandemic. But there was so much conflicting information that left people more confused in separating facts from fiction.

Stage 3: The Decision Regarding the Existence of a Crisis

According to Marchesani (2014), at this stage decisions must be taken whether to declare a company or organization in a crisis mode. These decisions according to him, must be made by senior management in consultation with staff members. As the Covid 19 virus spread and the hospitalization and deaths increased, decisions had to be rapidly made by the World Health Organization (WHO) in consultation with various heads of government and experts whether a pandemic should be declared to get in a response mode.

Stage 4: A Crisis Is Declared, and the Effort Begins to Minimize Its Impact and Bring About Stability

At this stage according to Marchesani (2014), the crisis management team must respond with alacrity to save lives and to bring about stability. This was what was done during the Covid 19 crisis, but despite the many efforts the proliferation of conspiracy theories prevented many lives from being saved as many refused to take the vaccines.

Stage 5: Stabilization of the Event

Fortunately, the world is at the stabilizing stage as the pandemic has subsided somewhat and many schools have returned to face-to-face classes. During this stage, Marchesani (2014) warned that the crisis management team must not think because they have reached some semblance of stability, they must think that the crisis is over. He suggested that “these sub-teams should address employee needs, emotional stress, legal issues, regulatory issues, remediation, recovery, and closure of the operation impacted, to name only a few” (p. 75). Advisedly, the education system in Jamaica and worldwide must be still on the alert and do whatever is necessary to maintain the stability.

Stage 6: Assessment of the Damage and Community Impact Post Stabilization

Assessment of the impact is not only pragmatic but extremely necessary if countries are to recover effectively. The impact of a crisis according to Marchesani (2014) can be many and varied, so management at all levels must understand that the recovery or rehabilitation will take time to be achieved. No doubt, the recovery of rehabilitation in the education will take a lot of time as many students have lost almost two years of schooling which have not only denied them acquiring new knowledge but may have well eroded much of what was previously learnt.

Stage 7: Remediation and Clean-up

Marchesani (2014) advised that the remediation and clean will not be easy and as said before, it will also take time as much salvaging will have to be done. This will be a fact for the education system. Salvaging connotes rescue, restoration, and reinstatement from a wreck. Certainly, the Covid 19 pandemic has created havoc in the education system, therefore remediation will be challenging, complex and critical.

Stage 8: Recovery, the Returning to Normal or as Close to Normal as Possible

For Marchesani (2014), at this stage, recovery to the normal speaks to the condition before the crisis which he said may not be possible. However, the idea of returning to normal or close to normal as possible raises some critical questions especially for Jamaica’s education system. Was the normal working well? Is it pragmatic or necessary to go back to normal? At best, Marchesani (2014) suggested that learning from the crisis is critical stage of the recovery and can serve as a catalyst for better crisis management.

Stage 9: Closure, to Bring the Matter to a Close

Closure is indeed a difficult stage for the loss and damage will serve as constant reminders. As Marchesani (2014) purported, it will be difficult and almost impossible. However, he suggested that what was learnt and how it is addressed in bringing it to stability, recovery, and remediation will serve as a part of the closure. Notwithstanding, the far-reaching impact of Covid 19 on the education sector will long be remembered and felt.

The Role of Managers and Middle Managers in Crisis Management

Indubitably, leadership and management at all levels in countries and institutions are critical to the crisis management, and the role of middle managers must not be overlooked. According to Hogan Assessment (2020),

“Middle managers are usually experts who have been promoted from within. In most cases, they have been with their organizations for many years. This tenure and subject-matter expertise afford these leaders valuable knowledge that can help stabilize the business when times are rocky” (para. 7).

This statement strongly demonstrates that they must be trained in crisis planning and management. Yet, according to Hancock and Schaninger (2021), the role of middle management is vanishing as organizations have “allowed the environment to cloud the purpose of a well-performing individual in a well-structured middle-management role” (para. 8).

For Kuipers (2016), crises are the greatest test for leaders, whether they are managers or middle managers. Further, according to Martin (2021), the true litmus test for success is their mastery of crisis management which is a key strategy that academic leaders can practise to navigate and respond the Covid 19 pandemic. So, Boin et.al (2005) prescribed 5 critical tasks for crisis leadership as revealed in figure 3.

Sense making is done to diagnose the situation and according to Kuipers (2016), it “pertains to assessing what is going on, when the first signals arise... [and] requires proactive detection and assessment of situations but also risk awareness and responsiveness” (p.43). Sadly, many leaders are reactive rather than being proactive. Moreover, many middle managers fail to assume their leadership roles in many organizations. As a result, they are not able to make informed decisions to deal with crises before they are full blown. This is because many leaders are myopic in their vision and as such are not able to diagnose the situation properly and successfully.

Decision making permeates every organization and pervades all managerial functions. It is the process of choosing a course of action for dealing with a problem or opportunity and “the process of choosing from among alternatives” (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2014, p. 155). For Boin et. al (2005), it is where critical choices for implementation are made. However, in times of crises, decisions must be made expeditiously and prudently. The popular adage- ‘time is of the essence’ becomes critical in times for crises, so, while decisions under normal circumstances must be carefully, thoughtfully, and timely contemplated, in times of crises, leaders cannot take too much time to make decisions. Quick decisions are “far from ideal for

Figure 3. Five Critical Tasks for Crisis Leadership



high quality decision making, yet decisions in crises are critical and their consequences are far-reaching” (Kuipers, 2016, p. 44). Ideally, participative decision-making is the way to go, however, crisis leadership necessitates some quick decisions that cannot be facilitated through participative leadership. Undoubtedly, crisis management calls for leaders who are critical and creative thinkers who can think on their feet and who would have learnt valuable lessons from previous experiences and knowledge. Moreover, “the ability of managers [leaders] to detect and manage challenges depends on their commitment and cognitive abilities” (Saleh, 2016, p.23.).

Clearly, how the crisis is treated, tackled, and terminated will depend on the accountability structures in place. This dictates that people must take responsibilities for, and ownership of their actions. They must be held accountable for the choices they make. As was positioned earlier, one of the challenges with planning and management is the weak accountability structures in many countries and many institutions. Moreover, the ‘blame game’ and the heavy reliance on democracy do not work in times of crises. Leaders must take charge and lead from the front.

Additionally, meaning making is done to motivate others to move beyond the situation (Boin, et. al (2005). Notably, meaning making and decision making are linked, and “choice processes play an important role in motivation, leadership, communication, and organizational change” (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2014, p. 155). So, it is important that consideration be given, and attention paid to the individual system. This individual system has to do with individual cognition and motivation of the people especially during crises and that is why the middle managers must be motivated and encouraged to assume leadership roles so that they can in turn motivate and encourage others.

Obviously, communication is a valuable component in times of crises. Through this channel leaders can motivate others to move beyond the situation. This calls for communication that is clear, open, honest, respectful, and regular. This will undoubtedly enable everyone to make meaning of the situation. This meaning making “brings together all other leadership tasks in crisis: sense making of the situation at hand, crisis communication, decision making on the way forward, learning from previous mistakes. Through meaning making, leaders connect an undesirable situation to a desired future” (Kuipers, 2016, p. 44).

Kuiper’s observations underscore the idea that learning from crises is a powerful tool. However, too often leaders are slow and forgetful learners. As was mentioned before, people have failed to learn from the past. Importantly, change cannot occur without learning and crises present opportunities for reform (Boin, et. al, 2005). By not learning and seizing the opportunities to learn, countries, institutions and people oscillate from “crisis-induced reforms to reform-induced crises” (Boin, et. al, 2005, p. 132).

Certainly, the recipes for the kinds of leaders needed for crisis management are not new. However, they must be approached with a newness responsive to the times and contexts. These recipes include but not limited to change leadership, transformational leadership, distributive leadership, servant leadership and resilient leadership. Notably, change leadership can be envisaged as the intersection between crisis management, distributive leadership, and servant leadership (Azorin (2020), Harris and Jones, 2020).

SUMMARY

From the various perspectives and positions, leading and managing in times of crises, require proper infrastructure and preparation. Further, countries, institutions, and individuals (managers and middle managers) must keep abreast with changes in the educational landscape to respond with the requisite strategies and support to manage the changes and challenges that arise from crises. Importantly, they

must know how to manage crises through leadership and management that are reimagined, and embraces change leadership, transformational leadership, distributive leadership, servant leadership and resilient leadership to they can remain relevant and responsive to change and transformation even in difficult and dangerous times. Finally, there are many lessons to be learnt from crises. However, the lessons will depend on countries, institutions, and managers and middle managers' capacities and willingness to learn from the past-past crises, past mistakes, past successes, and past experiences. But human beings tend to favour short cuts and easy fixes and so many times do not do 'due diligence'. Moreover, there is a clarion call for better utilization of middle managers. Amy Wilkinson, CEO and founder of innovation firm Ingenuity, a lecturer at Stanford Graduate School of Business offered three (3) key recommendations for middle managers and their employers (Lee, 2020). She suggested that they should 'find the gap' (see what is needed) since they are the ones on the front line of management. Secondly, they should 'repurpose existing ideas', that is to see things differently. Thirdly, they should 'make an offer'. This is where the middle managers must suggest solutions and ideas instead of waiting on managers to do so. Of course, this is going to be depended on managers' ability and willingness to distribute leadership.

Importantly, leaders and managers must embrace a creative change management strategy. This according to Saleh (2016), will allow individuals to work hard to recover control, instead of "battling to cope with the changes" (p. 396). Further, preparedness or better planning need to be learnt from times of crises or from survivors. Moreover, managers and middle managers must avoid complacency. This often occurs when people go through smooth times and forget the lessons learnt in times of crises. That is why Tanner (2018) prescribed six tips for middle managers in times of crisis. He suggested that since middle managers are nearest to those on the ground, they must be policy gurus. That is, they must know the processes and how to use them. Further, they must have a contingency plan and not leave everything to top management. Also, they must be constant in their communication, have good rapport with subordinates, identify resisters of change, and be confident. This means that they must move out of the shadow of top management and take their rightful place as managers and leaders. Tanner (2018) indicated that if these tips are considered, middle managers will become more credible and will build the resilience of their teams.

The Research Design

The research design employed was a mixed method parallel/convergent one. This was necessary as the design utilizes both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and data were collected concurrently. According to Creswell (2014) employing mixed approaches is beneficial because it provides diverse views or more comprehensive understandings. Further, according to Caruth (2013), mixed methods research provides richer insights into the phenomenon being examined and facilitates the acquisition of information that would otherwise be missing if only one study methodology was used. Moreover, this design was necessary as the quantitative data were collected via an online survey would exclude those persons without internet access, especially those in remote areas. Some participants were therefore purposively selected and interviewed via telephone calls to ascertain information about their online experiences.

The initial selection of the respondents for the survey was done via stratified random sampling to account for all the regions, however, given the challenges with the Covid 19 restrictions, the researcher resorted to an online survey and respondents were selected through voluntary participation and therefore exposed the study to a sample bias. However, the respondents possessed a wide range of individual characteristics (age, gender, qualification, and years of service); and came from various schools (loca-

tion, size, and type) and as such the biases were minimized. Additionally, eight (8) teachers and four (4) principals from rural communities were selected to be interviewed using stratified random and purposive sampling techniques.

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and means, while the qualitative data utilized emerging themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demography

Four hundred and nineteen (419) educators responded to the online survey. The results revealed that a wide range of educators from different locations and school types responded. This augurs well for the reliability and generalizability of the results. Interestingly, all the age ranges except those in the 18-25 age group were reasonably represented. Further, the spread of the gender reflects the ratio of males to females in the primary and secondary levels. Additionally, the results revealed that 75% of the educators had at least a first degree with 50% having a bachelor's in education, while 20% had master's degrees. Interestingly, 49% of the educators were young teachers who had 1-10 years' experience, 33% had 11-20 years' experience, while 18% had more than 20 years' experience. Moreover, 60% of the educators were classroom teachers, 28% were heads of departments or senior teachers, 6% were principals and vice principals and 5% fell in other categories such as guidance counsellors, APSE coaches, master teachers and deans of discipline.

Notably, there was a good spread of school characteristics. There was an equitable distribution of primary and secondary (traditional and upgraded) schools. Only the all-age schools had a low showing of 5% because only a few of these exist. Additionally, 54% of the respondents came from urban schools and 46% from rural and deep rural schools. Moreover, all regions and parishes were accounted for with regions with region 1 (Kingston and St. Andrew) and region 4 (St. James, Westmoreland, and Hanover) showing over 20% representation. Lastly, all the various school sizes were represented with large schools (over 1000) had the greatest representation of 45%.

The findings for the research questions are presented quantitatively via tables, and qualitatively via themes.

Research Question 1

What Is the Jamaica's Current State of Readiness for Management of the Online Space During the Covid 19 Crisis?

As evidenced in table 1.1, 91% of teachers owned some sort of device, but only 41% had stable internet. Further, only 40% of the educators found the online resources adequate. Moreover, while only 41% had reliable internet connectivity, they were able to manage satisfactorily. Notwithstanding, the students in the rural areas were greatly disadvantaged and the findings highlighted the disparity and inequity in the system in terms of school location, socio-economic status, and school type. Notedly, only 11% of the educators responded that 80-100% of their students attended classes at any given time, while 47% claimed that less than 50% of their classes were on at any one time, notwithstanding the attempts made

Table 1. State of Readiness

Areas	Responses					Tot.
Sources of Devices	Own 378 =91%	School 15=3.6%	Borrowed 15=3.6%	MOEYI 5 =1.2%	Other 2 =.6%	415
Internet Connectivity	Reliable 170 =41%	N/Reliabl 187=45%	Phon Card 49=12%	None 9 =2%		415
Online Resources	Adequate 163 =40%	S/what 148 =36%	Not Adq. 35=9%	None 57=14%		403
Exposure to Teaching Online Student at Risk	S/Agree 57=14% 156=39%	Agree 139=34% 108=27%	Neutral 102=25% 86=22%	Disagree 72=18% 37=9%	S/Dis 37=9% 18=5%	407 400
Student Engagement	80-100% 43=10.5%	60-79% 98=23%	50-59% 78=19%	<50% 194=47%		413

to reach those who have no access. Moreover, 66% of the educators indicated that the students are at risk. Undoubtedly, students' lack of access to online classes and tools will definitely affect their learning. That is why OECD (2020) expressed concerns related to the fact that the effectiveness of online learning might have been hindered, in some cases, by the lack of basic digital skills among students and teachers, making them unprepared to adapt to the new situation so abruptly. Hence the need for MOEYI and administrators to practice equity to bridge the digital divide. Those who need it most should get the most.

Research Question 2

To What Extent Were Educators Adequately Prepared/Trained to Manage Online Teaching/Learning During the Covid 19 Crisis?

The data in table 2 indicate that only 48% of educators agreed that they were prepared for online teaching. This in in terms of their familiarity with online teaching, the formal training they received, the adequacy of the training, and their proficiency in online teaching. These findings cohere with Coman et al. (2020) who suggested the concerns about the lack of teachers' experience in using e-learning and the short time they had to adapt their teaching style to the new conditions. This lack of preparedness

Table 2. Educators' Preparedness

Areas	Responses					Tot.
Preparedness for online teaching	S/Agree 57=14%	Agree 139=34%	Neutral 102=25%	Disagree 72=18%	S/Dis 37=9%	415
Need more Training	124 =30%	174=42%	64=16%	32 =8%	16=4%	410
Challenges	45=11%	106=26%	120=29%	106=26%	31=8%	408
Managing Online teaching/ learning	87=22%	162=41%	94=24%	32=8%	25=6%	400
Leadership of Administrators	108=27%	138=35%	119=30%	17=4%	25=6%	400
Online Experience	Excellent 55 =14%	Good 164 =39%	Average 129=32%	N. Imp. 47=12%	Poor 11=3%	406
On Track with Syllabus	57=14%	84=21%	157=38%	65=16%	46=11%	409

Table 3. Level of Support

Areas	Responses					Tot.
Support was Limited	S/Agree 21=5%	Agree 86=21%	Neutral 137=34%	Disagree 114=28%	S/Dis 49=12%	407
Regular Meetings	102 =25%	162=39%	87=21%	43 =10%	18=4%	412
Community Informed	97=24%	150=37%	112=28%	25=6%	20=5%	404
Revised Schedule	76=19%	170=42%	96=23%	47=11%	20=5%	409
Training Provided	64=16%	160=39%	102=25%	46=11%	34=8%	406
Support Received	Excellent 58=14%	Good 107=26%	Average 169=41%	N. Imp. 49=12%	Poor 28=7%	411

clearly has implications for teaching and learning. Further, the middle managers who are supposed to be gurus, and involved in contingency planning to make them more credible (Tanner, 2018) were among those who were not prepared. Notedly too, while the educators utilized various platforms, only 42% agreed that they received adequate training that is necessary to navigate the online space effectively. So, it can be deduced that most of the educators did not receive the necessary training to operate effectively in the online space, consequently, 72% indicated that they need further training. As Hogan Assessment (2020) indicated “since change is distressing for many and too much change too soon can result in employee burnout or attrition, middle managers need skills to help employees cope” (para. 5).

Interestingly, 53% of the teachers rated their overall online experience as excellent or good, while 32% rated it as average. The online experience involved maintaining online schedule; and managing student behaviour, participation, and engagement. However, 37% agreed that they had challenges and 34% did not indicate any challenges, while 29% were neutral. Additionally, it must be noted that only 35% of the teachers were on track to complete the syllabus, 38% were halfway and 27% were behind. Being halfway and behind in the syllabus have serious implications for summative assessments at the national level.

Relating to the ratings of the school management of the online transition 249 or 63% of the educators indicated overall agreement, 94 or 24% were neutral and 57 or 14% disagreed and strongly disagreed. This indicated that the school planned for the online teaching, planned for those without internet, trained the staff, revised the teaching schedule, and tracked the class activities. However, only 122 or 31% of the respondents agreed that the online plan was inadequate, 40% were neutral, and 30% disagreed. So, while majority agreed that there was a plan in place, 71% were uncertain or disagreed that the plan was adequate. Notwithstanding, 246 educators or 62% agreed that the leadership was effective and only 42 or 10% disagreed. As was noted by Saleh (2016) and Boin, et.al (2021), a crisis management plan and leadership are critical components of crisis management.

Research Question 3

What Was the Level of Support Provided to Educators as They Faced the Education Crisis Caused by the Pandemic?

Relating to the items about the support (table 1.3), 40% of the educators agreed that the support was not limited. This was supported as 81% rated the support received from administrations and the board

favourably. Fifty-eight (58) or 14% of the educators rated the support as ‘excellent’, 107 or 26% rated it as ‘good’, 169 or 41% rated it as ‘average’, 49 or 12% rated it as needing improvement, and 28 or 7% rated it as ‘poor’. However, lower ratings were provided for the support received from the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information (MOEYI) as only 68% rated it favourably. The support they received from both the micro and the macro levels include data plan, training, materials, information, emotional and psychosocial, and some indicated that they received no support. One educator who was interviewed had this to say: “The principal organized training sessions; acknowledges that it was difficult; shows encouragement and support; advocates for financial assistance for increased electricity; communicates clearly and often, tries to get or borrow devices for students and staff needing [them]”. Among the most popular support they proffered as needed are more resources, technical support, and access to better devices.

In terms of financial support received, one teacher who was interviewed noted that she did not receive any but was told by other teachers that the school was reimbursing those who bought data. One principal noted that while they were not able to provide financial support for students, they supported them with food and clothing. Another principal, who expanded the perspective on their collective responses, recalled that she and her vice-principal even drove to some remote areas to find students and provided food and education packages. She noted however, that her other middle managers (senior teachers) did not step up to their roles as middle managers and left everything to her and the vice principal. This indicates that they need to more visible and active. According to Lee (2020), middle managers are on the front lines. They see what’s happening on the ground with customers, suppliers, and partners and are often better equipped to spot opportunities.

In terms of the support received from their boards, most principals said the boards would offer moral support, but one principal said her board was “as dead as nail”. So, essentially, most educators went beyond the call of duty to ensure that both the online and offline students were catered to in relation to available resources, time, and commitment.

Other forms of support came in the form of regular meetings, revised teaching schedule and training sessions as 54-66% of the educators agreed that these were done. This is in keeping with researchers who indicated the need for financial, physical, and psycho-social support to respond to the fall out in the education system due to Covid 19 (Hunter, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; World Bank 2020); however, more could be done.

Research Question 4

What Lessons Can Be Learnt From Covid 19 to Assist Manager and Middle Managers in Better Crisis Management?

According to Boin, et. al, (2005), countries, institutions and people oscillate from “crisis-induced reforms to reform-induced crises” when they do not learn and seize the opportunities to learn from crises (p. 132). Consequently, the research yielded many lessons that can be learnt from the encounter with Covid 19 for better crisis management. Two hundred and ninety-nine (299) of the respondents and the 12 interviewees expressed varying views about the lessons learnt. From this question seven major themes emerged. Figure 4 outlines the emerging themes.

Figure 4. Major Emerging Themes



BE AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF TECHNOLOGY

Many of the educators expressed the need for all educators to be at the cutting edge of technology because in times of crises, technology must be seen as one of the responses to better crisis management. Technology can be easily seen as a critical way to communicate and acquire knowledge. As Saleh (2016) poignantly suggested crisis management must be tackled with rigour which must be manifested through the placement of the right controls, teamwork, good communication, and impartial strategies. Also, “it is necessary for organizational leaders to be constantly adapting to the ever-changing organizational landscape, shifting the focus from being a market-centered one to a more sustainable one” (Saleh, 2016, p. 396). As one educator noted, “technological proficiency is elementary in this new norm and that knowledge must be accessible to everyone”. Another educator had this to say:

I have learnt that things may look difficult at first but with much determination and practice, the platforms can be very useful tools for now and the future. Students will be able to work at their own pace. I have also found out that the internet has a wealth of information that [is] easily accessible with these platforms. It has also shown that it is never late to learn about new and emerging technological opportunities.

Another educator proffered two lessons:

Lesson 1: Buy a better smartphone that has a better camera quality and has bigger storage, that will allow me to store my students’ work so that they are accessible. Lesson 2: The importance of having parents’ workshop so that they can be trained to use technological devices and software.

Finally, one educator suggested:

It is important to combine online learning with classroom instructions from day one. Students need to be guided through the process so that if the need arises for online classes only, both students and teachers are au fait with the process. This is something I will start doing with all my classes.

These comments indicate that all educators, especially middle managers should keep abreast with technology. As Hogan Assessments (2020) noted, during times of crisis at work, middle managers are who most employees approach for leadership and answers, hence the need for them to be skilled and equipped in ICT.

NEED TO DEVELOP PERSONAL QUALITIES

Many educators felt the need for them to develop or have developed personal qualities such as patience, tolerance, flexibility, adaptability, appreciation, industriousness, optimism, and consistency. Indeed, personal qualities play a major role in how educators generally, and leaders and managers specifically, behave and respond to crises. According to Kuipers (2016), crises are the greatest test for leaders.

In responding to the lessons learned about personal qualities, some educators highlighted the need for them to be consistent with the materials/ resources they give to students. One educator said: “Patience and tolerance are underrated but necessary skills. [I need to] be flexible as a teacher to meet the changing demands of teaching”. Notwithstanding, patience, tolerance and flexibility are not the only qualities educators identified as necessary for crisis management and response, as evidenced by some other viewpoints:

1. *I have to be patient, be creative the resources that I have.*
2. A[I must] always be resourceful and appreciative of what I have because the tables can turn in the blink of an eye.
3. I have learnt to be very flexible and open-minded to situations that may rise and also[be] a quick thinker
4. [I] must be flexible and be ready to adjust to diverse situations.
5. [I learnt that] being creative, industrious, and optimistic [are] good habits] to have as well as good communication and interpersonal skills.
6. [I have learnt] to be more self-directed and move away from the waiting on the board or admin to move forward as this will sometimes hamper the method of lesson delivery.

The sentiments expressed in the last statement should reflect the commitment of all middle managers to be proactive, self-directed, and confident, so that they become credible and build resilience among their teams (Tanner, 2018). Additionally, they should not allow their roles to be “vanishing”, or their purpose be clouded by the environment (Hancock and Schaninger, 2021).

NEED FOR RESEARCH

As the education landscape changes, research becomes even more necessary than before as educators must research to keep abreast, add to existing knowledge and solve problems evident in the education system. Indeed, the pandemic has highlighted even more the need to do so. It was therefore heartening to note that a few educators recognized the need to research. Notwithstanding, research should be a normal part of a teacher’s professional life. However, I believe that the pandemic exposed a great lack in pedagogy of basic preparatory research and highlighted the educators’ recognition about the types of research necessary to elevate their practice and for them to be more responsive to stakeholder

needs. They need research which will help them to acquire new methodologies or build on them, and those that will build their personal and professional selves. One of educators remarked that she learnt to “research for relevant content for students”. Others noted the need to do some personal research for online teaching.

RESPOND POSITIVELY TO CHANGE

It is a general belief that change is the only constant, hence educators must respond positively to the changes that are inevitable in education, hence many educators recorded that among the lessons they learnt during the Covid 19 crisis was the need to be adaptive, be open and expect change. The following list presents a few lessons educators claimed that they have learnt:

1. I learnt that I can adapt to changes
2. It [is] never too late to learn or try something new
3. [I learnt] to be open to change
4. [I learnt to] adjust to changes and make it work for the better
5. [I learnt to] be ready to change and evolve.
6. [I learnt] to know where the world is at and keep up
7. I learnt that I can adopt to changes as they come along.

BE PREPARED FOR THE UNEXPECTED

Preparation is a critical component to meet and face any crisis, hence many educators noted this as a valuable lesson they learnt. Expecting the unexpected is akin to ‘thinking the unthinkable’ that Saleh (2016) said was a ‘super-normal’ ingredient necessary for crisis management. So contingency planning is crucial. As one educator poignantly noted:

[It does not] matter how good the internet coverage is some students will not have access. Contingency plan must be in place for them. Not all students will be accessing the materials at the same time, allowance must be made to accommodate them when they make contact.

Other participants who agreed and shared their stances were able to say:

- *Life is unpredictable*
- *Always be prepared for the unexpected, not to take things for granted and not to be afraid to take risks*
- *Be prepared. Also, plan for online lessons/ distance learning at the beginning of the school year. To be prepared for anything. To be better prepared to teach using online platform.*
- *Prepare and continue to engage your students even if not all students are willing to be engaged, none the less the information will get to all eventually.*

BE INVOLVED IN CONTINUOUS EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Continuous training and education are imperatives of any system. However, Rees & Seaton (2011) identified the absence of support and training, and teaching quality among the significant challenges teachers have faced while implementing online learning. Certainly, the Covid crisis has exacerbated the situation. Hence it was no surprise that this emerged as one of the major themes among the lessons learnt.

One educator indicated:

I needed training in using the [online] systems. My children [students] require more of me physically. [Moreover,] parents support is necessary. Children needed to know how to use the systems better. [Also,] I not sure if my students are ready for this system and some were unable to get any teaching.

Another educator noted the challenges she faced initially but was alleviated via staff development. This underscores the need for and the importance of continuous training via staff development. She noted:

It was challenging as classes were transition to online learning. It took some time to adapt. However, the online Professional Development courses provided by the Jamaica Teaching Council helped in manipulating the online environment and I became more comfortable and was able to manipulate different tools.

Similarly, another educator said:

I have a Masters in Instructional Design. It is clear many leaders have no idea about this field and have completely overlooked that each school, or at least region needs at least one of us to help the hard-working subject matter specialist teachers plan and implement learning solutions and design Caribbean style learning materials. The teachers are stressed and generally do not have the skills to produce the quality of engaging materials needed.

These statements also highlight the necessity of training in online education, given the technological age, but more so for managers and middle managers who must lead the charge and the change.

RESOURCES AND OTHER SUPPORT

No one can deny the importance of resources and support in normal occurrences, however, during crises these become even more critical. Most of the educators indicated the need for more resources and support, not only financial and material but emotional and psychosocial. Some very insightful comments were made by educators. One educator recommended “training in using the online platforms, provisions for students who were without access, strengthening school internet connectivity so others can use it (if they choose to)”. Another remarked: “All teachers despite the positions held within the schools should be given a tablet to teach the students as the temporarily employed teachers are still expected to carry out their teaching duties”.

Leading and Managing in Times of Crises

Clearly, the need for partnership is critical in providing support and resources. As two educators recommended firstly, “partnership between Jamaica Public Service (JPS), internet providers and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information (MOEYI) to [assist in overcoming] several glitches that occur often times than not that impeded the efficiency of the implementation of the teaching learning experiences”. Secondly, [the] “MOEYI should try to engage more private organizations to invest in wireless devices/modems in the rural areas, to aid those of us who are unable to access the internet in our areas”.

There were those who also believed that the MOEYI can/could do more to give more targeted assistance and to a wider pool of applicable issues arising from the experiences with the crisis. As one educator suggested:

The Ministry can assist in giving a stipend to offset the cost on our internet bills. They can also give us an increase on our salary as teachers because it is expensive to be preparing for this online space in terms of setting up our homes ergonomically friendly and as classrooms while delivering our contents for hours and to get the devices required for this online learning. [The educator added], Also knowing that there are lots of hours invested in the online preparation and for our classes, our bodies need the necessary vitamins, iron, and other supplements to help boost our energy to deliver more effectively. I strongly believe that more can be done to assist the teachers in this regard. Additionally, we also have our children who we have to be monitoring and supporting also.

Another educator suggested that moral support and consideration by administrators were also needed. He/she noted:

[We need] devices to conduct online/remote teaching. Teachers are being bullied into using their own devices. [Further,] adequate free time is needed to rejuvenate. The timetables received are face to face timetables with teachers conducting classes all day, most days. The administrators need a conscience. They provide us with timetable which facilitate neglecting our own children and family members.

This statement heralds the need for managers and middle managers to evaluate their roles in crisis management which calls for the embracing of creative change management instead of “battling to cope with the changes” (Saleh, 2016, p. 396).

Similarly, one educator noted the need for something to be done about the curriculum to match times of crises and indicated that administrators (managers and middle managers) must lead the way. The educator said:

MOEYI needs to develop a curriculum logical to meet the crisis. The current thrust of completing existing syllabi using a modality that is new for the age-group is hypocritical to the ethos of education. School admin[istrators] need to be on the ground with the teacher: take on a class to teach and empathize with subject matter experts so that they can then build-out a more effective educational experience for both staff and clients.

This suggestion also underscored the challenge that Leacock & Warrican (2020) outlined as they explained that the curriculum available was not configured with online or blended delivery in mind.

CONCLUSION

From the various perspectives, positions and experiences discovered from the quantitative as well as qualitative data, it can be concluded that the educators (teachers, middle managers and managers) as well as the Jamaican education system on the whole, were not adequately prepared for the Covid 19 crisis. Further, the training that was critical to the responses made were inadequate. Besides, support and resources that are essential for educators to respond positively to the crisis were lacking in many instances. These findings imply that proper crisis management was either not done or even contemplated. Importantly, effective leadership and management at all levels are paramount in ensuring that preparation, continuous education and training, and provision of resources and support are provided in times of crisis. Above and beyond that, institutions must value and utilize their middle managers more effectively. Additionally, middle managers must step up to their roles and be counted as leaders. It is hoped that the lessons learnt will serve as great points of references for managers and middle managers in remediation and future plans

RECOMMENDATIONS

Emanating from the findings, based on conclusions drawn, and the implications, there are some recommendations that should assist in cushioning the impact of Covid 19 on online teaching and learning and assist managers and middle managers in better preparation for crises.

Firstly, The MOEYI should lead from the front and mandate all educational institutions (managers and middle managers) to develop a crisis management plan. This is necessary as it is “through crisis management planning, firms are in a better position to handle unforeseen events that may potentially cause serious or irreparable damage” (Saleh, 2016, p. 27).

Secondly, The MOEYI and administrators must provide more resources for educators and students. This is because it became overwhelmingly clear by the educators that the resources provided were inadequate. The lack of resources will definitely affect the quality of teaching and learning. As Waugh (2020, para. 4) outlined, teachers could not connect with their students or at least provide assignments via online platforms. She also posited that teachers and students were digitally disadvantaged, resulting in the 2019-2020 school year climaxing without thousands of students taking examinations or receiving grades necessary for enrolment.

Thirdly, the Ministry of Education/School Administrators should invest in continuous, focused professional development of teachers via training and re-training in online teaching and learning, and crisis management. Importantly, managers and middle managers should ensure that they lead from the front by accessing these training opportunities. This is needed not only because the educators indicated so, but because Rees & Seaton (2011) and Waugh (2020) identified the absence of support and training, and teaching quality among the significant challenges teachers have faced while implementing online learning.

Fourthly, the MOEYI should forge greater partnership with the private sector to cushion the education system especially in times of crises. This is because Jamaica as a developing country does not have all the resources to provide an effective education system.

Fifthly, MOEYI and school administrators must practice equity-those who need the most should get the most. Indeed, the study revealed the inequity in the system, and countries need to retool to respond to crisis to minimize the threat to learners, given the ongoing challenges with access, quality of learn-

ing, equity, potential for higher school drop-out rates, and the widening of inequality gap (UNESCO, 2020; World Bank 2020).

Finally, educators are to be involved in research to stay abreast with current trends, step up to their roles in management and leadership. Middle managers especially, should be more credible, consistent, and confident in their roles.

Recommendations for Further Research

Given the limitations of this research in terms of the roles of middle managers in crisis management and the dearth of information from a Caribbean perspective, more research is encouraged in looking at the roles of middle managers in Jamaica/Caribbean in leading and managing in times of crises.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (WHO, 2020).

Crisis: Times of extreme difficulty and/danger.

Crisis-Induced Reforms: Reforms caused by crisis.

Leading: Showing the way.

Managing: Planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling.

Middle Managers: Those in the middle tier of management in schools-vice principals, heads of department, senior teachers, subject specialists.

Perspectives: Views or opinions.

Readiness: Preparedness.

Reform-Induced Crises: Crises caused by reforms.

Chapter 4

Power Sharing in Times of Crisis: Jamaican Teachers' Reflections on Principals' Leadership Approaches in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic forced alterations to several facets of organizational life in unprecedented ways. Among them were changes in approaches to leadership and management practices in countries and organizations. This qualitative study explores the perspectives of nine Jamaican teachers (drawn from nine schools) on whether, and if so, the degree to which, their principals shifted their approaches to leading and managing during the pandemic. The study found that there were observable changes in the approaches to leading and managing. These changes were manifested in four main ways, namely adaptation, inclusivity, role delegation, and power sharing. Some of the evidence uncovered showed teachers being given greater scope to respond to peculiar challenges they faced on the front lines. These features were found to be similar to changes in approaches occurring in the management of the pandemic at national levels. The study has implications for how organizations respond to and develop crisis management models.

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INTRODUCTION

A crisis is a time of great danger, difficulty, or doubt when problems must be solved or important decisions must be made (The Oxford Dictionary 2022). This difficulty means that the normal response and coping mechanisms are insufficient to handle the scale of demand placed on them. A crisis involves disruption to the normal pattern of life's functions, and requires, for effective management, the application of extra-ordinary problem-solving skills and emergency responses.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted normal life, precipitated uncertainty, and required extra-ordinary resources to cope. This reality affected all sectors of society including schools. UNESCO (2020), in a report on children and young peoples' internet access at home during COVID-19 describes the reality thus:

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the largest mass disruption of education in history and worsened the global learning crisis. In April 2020, more than 190 countries instituted national school closures, putting up to 1.6 billion students at risk of falling behind at great cost to their education and futures. (p. 4)

This chapter seeks to examine how selected school leaders in Jamaica responded to the COVID-19 crisis through the adoption of power sharing practices as teachers in their schools perceive. The examination of these power sharing practices will focus mainly on in-school issues. The chapter will seek to answer the questions:

1. What are teachers' views of the issue of whether the COVID-19 pandemic has created the need for different approaches to power sharing in schools?
2. What are teachers' assessments of their principals' adoption of a different approach to power sharing because of the COVID-19 pandemic and if so, what are the manifestations of that different approach?
3. How do teachers assess their principals' power sharing in the pandemic?

In addition to answering these questions, it also provides a description of power sharing practices in selected countries, and discusses some of the challenges and virtues of power sharing. This analysis includes an examination of how other institutions handled the crisis, while sharing power. The chapter also outlines how principals changed their leadership styles by delegating roles and became more inclusive in their leadership approaches. The findings of the study show that the changes in leadership approaches resulted in the empowerment of mid-level leaders by giving them greater scope to respond to peculiar challenges they faced on the front lines. The paper concludes by suggesting some policy, practice and research implications and uses the findings and literature to outline a model of leadership engagement describes as MPOWERED. This model constitutes a frame for developing middle leaders' agency.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is broad consensus among education stakeholders, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank (WB), on a global level, the Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CaPRI), and the Ministry of Education and Youth (MOE&Y) in Jamaica, as well as several private sector inter-

ests, about the variety of issues affecting the educational sector, in light of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNESCO (2021), in a report on the challenges attendant on the re-opening of schools in Latin America and the Caribbean, highlights the need for greater consultation with parents and teachers in deciding on the best ways to do so. Television Jamaica, reported on December 7, 2020, that the main teachers' union, the Jamaica Teachers' Association (JTA), was displeased with the fact that the Government of Jamaica had not consulted the Association on its plans for the reopening of schools. A similar call was made by the Teachers' Union in Ontario, Canada. This sample of stories highlights the fact that the issue of participation in decision-making in the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis was a widely held expectation.

Central to the call from the JTA and the Teachers' Union in Ontario is that of leadership. School leadership has been tested especially in light of the forced alternative modalities of schooling, and this test has both exposed weaknesses in the traditional approaches to leadership and by extension created opportunities for new approaches to leadership. The traditional approach to leadership which, has been tested, is that of centralization of decision-making and the maldistribution of power. On the other hand, among the opportunities which have been created is the choice among school leadership to adopt new modes of power sharing and to begin to power share, where this is not currently the practice. Essentially, new modes of engagement are required between those who traditionally hold power in schools, particularly principals, and those over whom such power is exercised, namely teachers and students, but primarily teachers. These new demands challenge spaces to discover or invent alternatives because organizations must now evaluate their processes and practices. For example, with enforced remote teaching and work-from-home arrangements, the degree to which management's trust in the capacity of staff members to self-supervise (to some extent) was placed under the microscope by educational leaders and other stakeholders.

In this context, an exploration of the influence of leadership styles in schools and the impact on their operational functions become urgent imperatives for Jamaica and elsewhere. Harris et al. (2021) reinforced this assertion. They argue that scholars have noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has required new methods of leadership and leadership practices that are rooted in networking and technology, giving rise to the 'network school leader', which invites questions about the methods of leadership practices that are being utilized and how they are being manifested.

To the extent that Harris et al.'s (2021) postulation is a recognition of leadership within schools as a plural enactment, the core of this paper finds some congruence, specifically related to an exploration of shared leadership, a power sharing concept. It is in this vein, that it is deemed timely to explore whether the approaches to leadership adopted by school leaders have taken what the literature on leadership and the perspectives of key stakeholders regard as being responsive to the challenges educational institutions face, arising from these disruptions, because they serve multiple roles (World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF, 2021).

Middle Leadership and School Realities

Middle leaders in schools refer to senior academic staff below the level of the principal and vice-principal, who are entrusted with additional work beyond their teaching. At the primary and secondary level of the education system, middle leaders (or managers) refer to heads of departments and grade supervisors, while at the tertiary level it refers to deans, heads of departments, unit heads.

Upon examination, some examples of how the pandemic impacted educational institutions in Jamaica can illuminate the implications for middle leaders. For example, UNICEF (2020), in a study done in collaboration with Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI), reported that COVID-19 had deleterious impact on the social protection, health, education and child protection functioning of Jamaican families. Additional research done by CAPRI in 2020, reported similar sentiments. It described the impact of COVID-19 as expansive and described the educational sector as the forerunner in receiving the far-reaching brunt of its impact. To validate, it cited that “The [Jamaican] government rushed to close all educational institutions and implemented an Education in Emergencies Strategy, thereby inconveniencing close to 600,000 students, over 25,000 teachers and thousands of parents and other stakeholders” (para.2). Burke, Ellis-Colley and Nelson, (2021), arguing in support of the UNICEF and CAPRI studies, assert that “The rapid move to online learning posed a challenge of inclusivity for students with limited or no access to online platforms, smart devices or television through which scheduled educational programmes were delivered” (p. 6).

The challenges of moving online were not limited to students. Cooke (2021) pointed out that “Teachers have [had] to redouble their efforts and adjust to new pedagogical concepts and techniques of planning for curriculum execution which their teacher education training did not prepare them for” (para.3). What the foregoing situations illustrate is that the circumstances of teaching and learning reflect a multi-tiered impact of the pandemic on education, specifically at the primary and secondary levels.

The realities described above are amplified considering that Jamaican school stakeholders have normally operated under a hierarchical leadership paradigm that is unsuited for the current set of crises-invoked circumstances, as Cooke (2021) explained. This has direct bearing on the middle leaders’ roles and responsibilities because of their placement in the leadership hierarchy, where they function as a go between, amidst their supervisors and supervisees, supervising curriculum planning and execution, assessment and evaluations, among others. Therefore, given the background of these challenges, not only principals but those persons with responsibility to execute the directives of upper administration of schools, middle level and lower-level leaders, would similarly be impacted as they manoeuvre their daily obligations to schools, especially if they do not possess a strong level of autonomy in their roles.

Therefore, the need to examine principals’ power sharing practices invites reflections to determine the suitability of the pre-COVID-19 leadership frames administrators normally utilize. Thompson (2017) found evidence suggesting that many principals in Jamaica employ a top-down leadership style. Top-down leadership occurs “when goals, projects, and tasks are determined among company’s senior leaders – usually independently of their teams. These goals, projects, and tasks are then communicated to the rest of the organization” (Lee, 2021, para. 4). Lee’s definition summons us to wrestle with the idea that, within these limited boundaries, teacher agency is bound to suffer, if not already prioritized, developed and nurtured.

Though some scholars have argued that the top-down leadership style is advantageous, on the converse, Harris and Jones (2019), pulling on the works of Hargreaves and Ainscow (2015), Harris et al. (2017), and Datnow and Park (2018), concluded that “the vast literature on educational change reinforces, again and again, the centrality of teacher agency, collaboration and leadership as a core influence upon improved learner outcomes” (para. 3). Evidently, Harris and Jones’ conclusion was not contextualized in a crisis. However, if the literature repeatedly calls on the powers to give regular teachers more agency during periods of normalcy, an even stronger case can be made for middle leaders in schools, because of the multiplicity of their roles. Further, Gurr and Drysdale (2013) concede that senior officials are usually tasked with shaping the ethos of the schools, setting policies and establishing guidelines. Critically,

they also note that middle leaders are the ones who work to make them realizable. The positions they list among the constituents of middle leaders are similar to those existing in Jamaica: year head, head of subject departments, programme coordinators, and instructional coordinators.

In the framework of a reality where classroom teachers and middle managers were forced to make decisions on the fly and to respond to a wide pool of new and emerging problems where they are required to alter their own instructional practices while supervising their charges, without any clear path, top-down leadership can be disenabling and compound an already complicated situation. The solution could lie in investing more decision-making autonomy in mid-level school leadership to increase their supervisory and leadership effectiveness.

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers in the middle leadership level within selected primary and high schools have perceived their principals' power sharing practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three main considerations guided the probe to understand this phenomenon: 1) if teacher level school leaders felt the pandemic should dictate, or have dictated the need for principals to alter their power sharing methods/strategies 2) if they felt the principals adjusted, how was it evidenced and 3) if the principals changed their power sharing strategies, the impact it had on the schools.

This chapter seeks to inquire into the experiences of Jamaican teachers with the power sharing practices of their school leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. The philosophical assumption underlying this paper is that power sharing in schools is necessary for teachers' effectiveness (Thompson, 2017) and as such, one related consideration of this exploration is whether the strategies employed by leaders in the pandemic (in the schools represented by the teachers in the study), have been effective. A further related consideration is, therefore, whether leaders' approaches to power sharing during the pandemic showed shifts when compared to their practices, pre-pandemic and the lesson which may be learned about possibilities for empowerment of middle leaders.

Therefore, this work contributes to the emerging field of critical scholarly work dealing with power sharing practices of principals, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as is understood and experienced by their middle leaders. As the main source of authority, principals need to understand if their power sharing practices have helped their schools and how, hence, widening the pool of available sources addressing this issue.

This research is also important because the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed educational institutions to rethink and reframe the management of school operations, including instructional management. An understanding of midlevel leaders' perspectives of their principals' power sharing practices and their impact on their schools, serves as a springboard from which to reconfigure existing policy directives or consider new ones. This could influence optimization of leadership and identifying and addressing instructional imperatives, within schools. At the level of decision-making in schools, principals could glean valuable insights about the impact of their dispositions on their institutions and how these may inform shared vision and commitment for institutional growth and inclusivity.

Furthermore, one important aspect of power sharing in schools would be giving teachers more say in decision-making on more aspects of the schools' operations. According to Thompson and Samuels-Lee (2020), empowerment of teachers remains a major issue for members of the teaching profession in the Caribbean. Almost a century ago Allport (1934) suggested that human beings have a distinct need

for participating in the making of decisions that affect them. In contexts of uncertainty, such as those created by a pandemic, the desire for participation in decision-making is intensified. Kumar and Kumar (2017) suggest that power sharing involves giving a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility to employees for making decision regarding organizational goals. The importance of power sharing is, therefore, central to how schools will function efficiently and in a manner which respects the needs and desires of a key set of stakeholders, particularly in a pandemic. The exploration of this issue is therefore of great significance for improving the performance of schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Power Defined

Perspectives on power vary, but the most highly recognized authorities on the issue are French and Raven (1959); Raven (1965), Galbraith (1983), and Handy (1993). French and Raven (1959) posit that there are five bases of power, namely: reward power, reference power, legitimate power, expert power, and coercion. They contend that with any one, or any combination of any number of these, a leader or manager has the capacity or ability to direct or control the behaviour of others or the direction of decision-making in an organization. Raven (1965) adds a sixth power resource called informational power.

Galbraith (1983), whose perspectives reflect the underlying elements of French and Raven, categorizes power into three groupings which he calls condign, compensatory, and conditioned power. Condign power is the power to punish for non-compliance, thus similar to the punishment element in French and Ravens' notion of reward power. Compensatory power is the other side of the coin of condign and again also similar to reward power. Conditioned power is the capacity to reorientate or influence others' thoughts and behaviour through education and persuasion, which beg the argument of Biggs (2005), Thompson (2015) and Thompson and Wilmot (2022), in which power constitutes influence.

The concepts of power and leadership have been and will continue to be interconnected. While an individual may exert power without being a leader, an individual cannot be a leader without having power (Bal et al., 2008; p. 4). The literature which addresses power sharing practices in schools, generally and during times of crises, is fairly well developed. Though this is the case, however, the search did not yield any results dealing with the power sharing practices of school principals during crisis situations. Nonetheless, "In the educational context, principals are among the key authorities that dispose power" (Elmazi, 2018, p. 3). This strengthens the case made about the importance of understanding how, and if, principals leverage power sharing in the leadership and management of schools, especially in times of crises.

Defining Power Sharing

The issue of power sharing in organizations has been the subject extensive study over the last century. Following departure from approaches to organizational management as espoused by the scientific thinkers (1914 – 1920s), the human relations thinkers of the 1930s to the 1970s advanced the view that employees should be given greater involvement in decisions which affect them. Among the proponents of the human relations perspective were Allport (1934), Maslow (1943), Mayo (1949), McClelland (1967), and Manley (1975).

The fundamental elements of the human relations perspective are employee involvement in decision-making, empowerment of employees through the creation of opportunities for consultation to make decisions, and a willingness on the part of management to give a fair hearing to the perspectives of workers. The elements have been expanded by Thompson (2017; 2018; 2019), and Thompson and Samuels-Lee (2020). Thompson (2017) presents one model he describes as Paradigm RePaDO (Recognition of the capacities of team members, (which leads to the willingness of the leader to facilitate their) Participation in decision-making, while embracing the Diversity of the gifts and abilities they possess, which also involves an appreciation of their Otherness. Thompson (2019) frames another model of power sharing as Proposition MRM (Modeling, Respect, and Motivation), and in this model proposes that leaders should model the behaviours they expect from followers, while showing respect (which involves creating mechanisms for their voices to be heard) and motivating them by providing them with relevant information of the vision, strategy, and operational activities of the organization.

The value of this approach to leadership pre-COVID, becomes even more urgent in a climate of uncertainty and anxiety when the situations in which persons operate are fluid and the risk of making decisions without having the benefit of vital information, is heightened. Consequently, spurring the desire for playing a role in directing and controlling the processes in and decisions related to oneself. Therefore, the extent to which middle managers in schools felt that during the pandemic they were given the capacity to direct and control processes in their schools as may have been needed and recognized as having the power, or the authority, to make decisions to address challenges they faced which affected their students or persons who reported to them, remains important.

Power Sharing: The Construct

In a broad context, proponents of power sharing argue that it is a type of governance structure which can facilitate the delivery of democracy, stability, and inclusion in societies that are deeply divided (Agarin & McCollough, 2020). Agarin and McCollough (2020) also reason that an appropriate tactic for achieving these societal attributes is to distribute political power to the leaderships of both majority and minority groups; alongside this shared rule, each group should also have a degree of self-rule in areas of its primary concern.

In the field of education, an apt description of power sharing is one which describes the construct as all theories which emphasize the importance of sharing power and decision-making among selected or all members within organizations (Bush, 2020). Bush (2020) also notes power sharing approaches vary from “restricted collegiality, where the leader shares power with a limited number of senior colleagues to ‘pure’ collegiality where all members have a voice” (p. 59). The issues explored in this paper resonate with the former description, since the focus is on how middle leaders perceive the level of constancy or flexibility of power sharing practices among their principals. Whether in the wider society or in schools, “power sharing requires honest recognition and valuation of the assets that each party brings to the table. Then, the entities consciously and intentionally co-create their vision. The mutually beneficial outcomes of the co-created vision are [received as] our outcomes” (Hill, 2011, p. 4).

Though power sharing is desirable and widely touted among practitioners, its essence invites an acknowledgement of its possible controversies and challenges. A case in point is how a leader achieves giving all or a selected few a voice as Bush (2020) articulates it, or sharing power between minority and majority groups, according to Agarin and McCollough (2020), all within the context of Hill’s (2011) emphasis on honesty, consciousness, and intentionality in decision-making. One possible explanation

for the challenges, especially in schools with their hierarchical structures, is that power sharing requires leaders to engage drastic mental shifts. Wallace (2020) supports this view explaining that “changing the organizational climate, reducing tensions among staff, easing feelings of uncertainty, developing trust, and aligning the mission, vision, goals and objectives of an organization is daunting for any leader” (p. 4). Nonetheless, there are theories about how power is shared.

Power Sharing and Crisis Response in Non-Educational Contexts

The literature on power sharing practices during the COVID-19 pandemic is steadily emerging; and, what exists covers both political power sharing among and between segments of nation states as well as within organizations. An example of the former is the work of Hartzell (2020) who examines new power sharing arrangements in Northern Ireland, South Sudan, and Israel. The scholar notes that the new arrangements in Ireland and South Sudan, while occurring during the early days of the pandemic, were not necessarily informed by the pandemic, having been signed in January and February of 2020. By contrast, the arrangements in Israel, which were driven by the health emergency, were a direct response to the pandemic. Under the power sharing arrangement in Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz would alternate the office of prime minister and split a number of senior government ministries between their parties for a period of three years. Hartzell notes that Gantz had previously declared that he had no interest in being a part of any government in which Netanyahu was involved, but later relented after opinion polls showed that Israelis, who were worried about the coronavirus, wanted a unified government.

Bromfield and McConnell (2020) examine the coronavirus crisis management experience of Australia (which has a population of 25 million) and New Zealand (population of 5 million). They note that the Australian system of government is a centralized federal system, enshrined in a written constitution. However, in response to the coronavirus crisis, there were substantial shifts in the concentration of power which, among other things, allowed for state-level variations in the adoption of measures such as schools staying open, internal border control, and lockdowns. By contrast, New Zealand, which also has a centralized system of government, maintained this system and managed the crisis through the National Crisis Management Centre (NCMC).

Power Sharing in Schools

The power sharing approaches highlighted in the foregoing non-educational contexts have been similarly applied in educational contexts. For example, Beauchamp et al. (2021), who conducted a study on school leadership and management in the four nations which comprise the United Kingdom, found, among other things, that “effective leadership in times of crisis should focus on developing a sense of shared identity, with leaders binding people together” (p. 378). This binding together enables shared understanding of goals and thus of how to move forward together.

Sharp et al. (2020) also add to the narrative of power sharing in schools. They discuss the challenges facing schools and principals in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the impact of learning losses, and identify a variety of ways in which school leaders were sharing power. These power sharing approaches included teachers being allowed to take the initiative to determine the forms of emotional support to offer students, defining modes of engagement with families, as well as making curriculum adjustments.

The argument on power sharing in schools posed by Beauchamp et al. (2021) and Sharp et al (2020) finds some similarities with the Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL). In a 2008 study on power sharing in schools, the CCL found that power sharing elements consisted of the use of power to influence instructional processes, to optimize human resources in responding to challenges in the environment, to build faculty and support staff capacities, to motivate staff, and to create an overall positively impactful teaching and learning environment.

Given these emerging paradigms of power sharing, triggered by the pandemic, it is thus timely that an exploration be undertaken across various contexts to determine practice and patterns and to assess their implications for improved efficacy of leaders, particularly middle leaders. It is in this background that the research questions find their relevance. Research which explores how leaders understand power, how they exert it, and how organizations and individuals can improve their leadership through use of power unearth eight powerful findings, one of which resonates with this project: “Leaders suggest that the power of relationships can be better leveraged by identifying desired relationships, investing in those relationships, and repairing damaged relationships” (Center for Creative Leadership, 2008, p. 4). An understanding of these dynamics could influence school leaders to more readily use power sharing practices for school improvement, particularly during times of crisis. Thus, this chapter is a timely contribution to a globally critical conversation.

Power Sharing: The Practice

Several models of school leadership exist and are well documented along with the pros and cons of their practices, including those grounded in power sharing or shared leadership. “Shared leadership is defined as moving away from the leader/follower binary; capitalizing on the importance of leaders throughout the organization, not just those in positions of authority; and creating an infrastructure so that organizations can benefit from the leadership of multiple people” (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017, p. 5). Some shared leadership models include, but are not limited to, team leadership, distributed leadership, and participative leadership, which have their core, sharing power and authority. Within shared leadership models, there are several ways in which leaders practice power sharing. Great Schools Partnership (2013) offers some of these ways:

In practice, shared leadership may be defined differently from school to school, and it may take a wide variety of forms. One of the most common forms of shared leadership is a leadership team—i.e., a group of administrators, teachers, staff members, and others who meet regularly to make important school decisions and/or coordinate a school improvement initiative. (para. 2)

DiPaola and Hoy (2012) in their book, *Principals Improving Instruction*, complement the description of practice above by providing a frame which suggests that for distributed leadership – a power sharing theory – to work, it requires principals to locate and execute the right mandate and empowerment. Additionally, school leaders must communicate to staff the non-negotiable status of changes and that this leadership arrangement requires relinquishing much of their individual preferences. Distributed models and others like it are characterized by 5 pillars: 1) They are strongly normative in orientation; 2) they are seen as particularly appropriate for organizations such as schools with significant number of staff; 3) they assume a more common set of values held by members of the organization; 4) the size of decision-making groups is an important element in collegial

management; and 5) collegiate models assume that decisions are reached by consensus rather than division of conflict (Bush, 2020). Distributed leadership gained prominence in school management discussions as a means to achieve teacher involvement and enablement and to produce democratic schools (Hatcher, 2005). “Conditions that promote and sustain shared leadership include team empowerment, supportive vertical or hierarchical leaders, autonomy, shared purpose or goal, external coaching, accountability structures, interdependence, fairness of rewards, and shared cognition” (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017, p. 5).

School Crisis Realities: Pre-COVID-19 Survival Strategies

Reflecting on actions of the past can be a resourceful activity to shape the future and this is true also of leadership empowerment pursuits. Leading an academic institution in a crisis is stressful, given that the role and the influence of the leader are magnified in times of change (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). The volatility, unpredictability, and highly contagious nature of COVID-19 situate it as one of the most demanding pandemics educational institutions have had to manage because it presents new and evolving challenges and has affected every aspect of society. This reemphasizes the importance of exploring ways that educational institutions can best manage this crisis to achieve optimum educational experiences for students.

Additionally, since educational institutions are a pivotal pillar of community infrastructures, which provide not only safe but supportive learning environments for students that support socio-emotional development, provide access to critical services, and improve life outcomes (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022), crises are significant disrupters in need of mitigation or management. Power sharing both as a construct and practice provides an avenue for greater collaborative efforts that could mitigate the demand on the top leadership of schools.

Field (2020) shared how some higher educational institutions have managed and suggested managing strategies during times of crises, which also find relevance at the pre-university levels. Donald Guckert, Associate Vice President for facilities management of the University of Iowa, named among the most important management strategy arising out of the 2008 flood, which impacted the university over 10 days, planning for the worst and adjusting quickly to changes on the ground. Field also noted the former president of Tulane, suggested that scenario planning, starting with the worst-case scenario an institution can think of and planning for the immediate impact and long-term fallouts, are suitable considerations for crisis management.

President of California State University at Chico, Gayle E. Hutchinson, reflected on the crisis of the 2018 Camp Fire which forced the university to close for 18 days, and said that it is impossible that colleges can sufficiently practice for emergencies. However, the wildfire experiences increased “tabletop exercises” where members of staff met collaboratively to deepen their understandings of their roles during emergencies and how to respond to specific [crisis] situations. In the same vein, Fernandez and Shaw (2020) offer two pieces of advice: a) improve the quality of the decisions made in crisis resolution which can be realized when academic leadership of schools allocate leadership responsibilities through a system of teams throughout the organization, and b) increase the clarity and frequency of communication to all stakeholders, utilizing several methods of communication. Edmondson (2020) adds to Fernandez and Shaw (2020) focus on clarity and frequency when she advises that, as an imperative, speaking up early and truthfully is a crucial strategy that thoughtful leaders will utilize in a fast-paced crisis to experience the “better before worse effect” (para. 4).

Values of Power Sharing in Schools

In this segment an examination of some benefits of shared leadership, in crisis situations, are examined. Understanding the usefulness of power sharing provides an avenue for educational leaders to scrutinize the possibilities of how to use it as a tool of empowering those they lead, especially to act in crisis. Pulling on the insights from Kezar and Holcombe (2017), Fernandez and Shaw (2020) noted the administrative, operational, and collegial benefits of shared leadership. They iterate that those educational institutions which embrace this model, have experienced an enhanced level of agility, innovation, and collaboration and now are advantaged with more superior peer-support in a crisis than is possible in institutions clinging to an outmoded and inflexible hierarchical leadership structure. Wu and Cormican (2021) cited Day, et al. (2004), in adding that the virtues of shared leadership are enhanced, in that shared leadership develops the social capital of the team because it utilizes the assets of team members such as their understandings and aptitudes, which resultantly nurtures their collective team performances. Additionally, Wu and Cormican also utilized the seminal work of Katz and Kahn (1978) who suggest that when group members offer leadership to others and to the mission or purpose of their group, it results in greater investment of personal and organizational resources to the task, sharing of information, and they experience deeper commitment. According to Wood (2005):

another distinction of shared leadership is the autonomy exhibited by team members (Kennerly, 1996). Porter-O'Grady and Wilson (1995) noted that members engaged in sharing leadership used this enhanced sense of autonomy to address issues that directly affected their specific role within the team. Team members experiencing leadership characteristics may feel an implied permission to resolve problems they encounter without the guidance of an immediate supervisor. Thus, rather than relying on a supervisor to offer insight and lend support, team members sharing in leadership personally address issues that affect their work. (p. 66).

Given the general multi-dimensional demands on school leadership, increased autonomy in problem solving, sharing of resources and information, innovations, skills, aptitude, and competencies seems a compelling asset to have at school leadership's exposure. Moreover, "applying shared leadership principles enables schools to draw on a larger pool of talent, wisdom, expertise, and experience beyond a single principal or relatively small group of administrators" (Great Schools Partnership, 2013; para. 10). This is especially applicable and beneficial to students during crisis situations, when the demands become more than what a single leader can handle.

Challenges to Power Sharing in Schools

Our claim is that power sharing could lead to improved leadership results; so, it is important to understand what challenges may arise as school leaders power share as a means of empowerment of those they lead. There are several influences that could impede a principal's attempt to implement any leadership approach, especially during crisis situations. Three such instances of disadvantages are explored. To start, "horizontal team structure had limited effects on shared leadership" according to Wood (2005, p .2). Eighteen years after, the idea that conventional traditional power architecture of many organizations is unsupportive of decision-making at lower levels, and can potentially cause team failure (Bush, 2020;

Dampson et al., 2018; Kogler Hill, 2016) remains a deficit critique of shared leadership approaches. Dampson et al. (2018) research explored distributed leadership as a tool for school development.

Along with the findings of inflexible school structures which corroborates Wood's (2005) and Kogler Hill's, (2016) observations, their findings further revealed that the absence of shared duties amongst teachers and the leaders' fear of involving teachers were the dominant challenges of distributed leadership, in the study. These perspectives align favourably with Bush's (2020) notion that power sharing/a shared leadership approach "underestimates the official authority of the head and presents bland assumptions of consensus which often cannot be substantiated" (p. 80).

Another obstacle to consider is that teachers can become overstressed by shared decision-making and their participation does not necessarily accrue to better teaching practice or to the benefit of the school, as a whole, especially if teachers and organizational goals are not well aligned" (Mayrowetz, 2008, as cited in Dampson et al., 2018).

A crisis situation would naturally exacerbate such occurrence. Moreover, power sharing among every member of an organization does not always redound in enhanced drive among members to initiate or increase their freedom for independent decision making. Contrarily, when large amounts of power are invested in groups, their impact at influencing and constraining their members features more prominently than that of individual leaders (Bass, 2008). Given the values of power sharing and the challenges that it poses, a deeper understanding of how it is done and the results of it could produce interesting insight on how to empower stakeholders, especially middle leaders, to effectively lead and manage during times of crisis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative design and the method of focus group discussion. According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1990 as cited in Dilshad & Latif, 2013), focus group discussions provide richness and details about perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and impressions of people in their own words. The research approach was considered ideal as it created the opportunity for interviewees to share their knowledge and experiences in a manner that would also help them think and develop professionally (Creswell, 2008). This latter objective was important as the research was intended not merely to extract information but to build leadership capacity.

Sampling and Summary of Interviewee Particulars

The participants were purposively selected. Hendrick, et al. (1993) affirm that this strategy is useful because it provides an opportunity for qualitative researchers to study an appropriate subset of the units of interest. The subset of interest to this study was teachers and lower-level administrators from primary and secondary schools in Jamaica. The sample consisted of four males and five females, who possess graduate degrees in disciplines including educational leadership, educational policy and planning, guidance and counselling, among others, and served in roles such as heads of department and grade supervisors.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data was collected via a focus group discussion which was conducted via Zoom. The session was taped using Zoom and AudioNote voice recorder. The recording was then transcribed and analysed focusing on the responses of participants to the questions raised in the discussion. The responses were then reduced into content units to produce richer, more specific descriptions of the broad categories of themes, (Smith & Strickland, 2001).

Reliability and Validity

The strategies employed to ensure that the data was reliable and valid include assigning a pseudonym to each participant before the interview and instructing its use as their display names for the interview. This sense of anonymity facilitated participants speaking freely and comprehensively about their experiences. The transcribed data was then sent to the participants for member-checking (Sagor, 2000). Participants commented on the transcript and returned same and verified that sections attributed to them were accurate. Validity is aided by distance. Thus, in order to reduce the intrusion of personal biases (closeness) to the data, a panel of external reviewers was asked to review the transcript and share themes they saw emerging. These themes identified by the panel were then compared with those identified by the researchers. There was very close similarity between the themes identified by the panel and those identified by the researchers.

FINDINGS: PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES OF POWER SHARING IN THEIR SCHOOLS

The primary goal of this study was to investigate school principals' power sharing practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to understand whether principals' power sharing practices remained static/unchanged or shifted to suit the demands of the pandemic, it was crucial to understand the following: 1) whether teachers felt the pandemic has necessitated or should necessitate the need for their principals embracing different power sharing strategies in schools; 2) their assessment of whether their principals have adjusted power sharing practices since the pandemic and how were they evident; and 3) if the power sharing in the pandemic assisted the operations of their schools. This segment of the paper will present what was found and verbatim support from participants' responses, categorized according to research questions.

The first research question was: **"What are your views of the issue of whether the COVID-19 pandemic should or has created the need for different approaches to power sharing in schools?"** All participants felt that the pandemic created the need for a different set of power sharing approaches, albeit for varying reasons. The lack of, or limited digital competencies of principals and staff, the demand for increased responsibility and commensurate accountability, and the fact that the pandemic ushered in much uncertainty were some reasons the participants felt occasioned the need for the shift in power sharing approaches.

Adaptation

In response to the question, **Carlton** reflected that the pandemic gave principals no choice, but to adopt new power sharing approaches, especially in light of their limited computer related skills. These defi-

Power Sharing in Times of Crisis

cits required adaptation, to some degree forced upon school leaders with limited digital skills. Carlton shared that,

the pandemic forced power sharing because different technical skill sets were necessary and because of that, persons who were not into decision making had to be brought into it and teams established in order to accomplish tasks that one person would normally do. There was more of a dependence on others than direct dictates from the principals.

Sharon also agreed.

Yes, the pandemic has actually called for greater power sharing responsibility. Other persons [academic or admin staff] who had power but not authority had to now be given authority because the principals might not be able complete a task, because he does not have the requisite technical skills.

John was emphatic in expressing that COVID-19 pandemic ushered in the need for a shift to power sharing by principals from a position where no power sharing took place:

So, I realize that in terms of power sharing, the situations begged for it when that was not necessarily how it has been always. Even ancillary workers were now involved in the entire process. Everybody was more involved because of the COVID-19 situation.

Increased Responsibility and Accountability

Apart from the technical deficit, teachers felt that accountability increased as a result of the pandemic, beyond academic staff. Here, Elroy shared his general perspective:

There is need for greater power sharing and that is due to how COVID-19 has effected a change in the education system. At my school, we were working from home for quite a while so much more responsibility was on us which means much more accountability. We had to basically monitor ourselves to ensure that we were functioning at the level that we were being asked to.

In support, Carlton recounts that: “The technical group that was not normally involved in the decision had to be brought in to determine what can be done and how it was to be done.” He also noted that: “HODs [Heads of Departments] were given more power in the sense of decision-making. So, the principal being the usual main decision maker [was shifted to] more the group now.”

For **Jaime**, not only did power sharing in the form of increased responsibility and accountability have to be initiated, when it did, it had a domino effect on their reporting processes.

I think the pandemic has created the need for power sharing. I have seen where my teachers have had to provide critical data from home because they had to now do this monitoring from there. They had to provide that data to me, who then had to provide it to the principal, who then had to provide it to the Ministry of Education. It enabled everybody to have an input in terms of power and doing their bit just to make the institution operate.

Two participants noted that in their schools, power sharing was not only a new experience for academic staff, but was extended to the administrative staff as well. Carlton shared his experiences:

One example at my school is that different levels of staff such as ancillary, academic, and administrative were now sitting on the same committee and the decision-making had to now be more a collaborative effort and not just instructions handed down.

John also supports how power had shifted: “Even ancillary workers were now involved in the entire process. There was a dynamic twist in power relations because nobody knew what the answers were” which ushered in periods of uncertainties.

Research question number two asked, **“In your assessment, has your principal adopted a different approach to power sharing since the COVID-19 pandemic and if so, what are the manifestations of that different approach?”** In relation to this question, the participants unanimously stated that their principals adopted a different approach to power sharing, manifested mainly through delegation of responsibilities across the various levels of stakeholders.

Role Delegation

Mid-level managers felt that the power sharing approaches that their principals adopted were manifested in delegation of responsibility among the whole school.

Sandra explained that at her school, “adjustments were made, and more delegation was taking place among middle management as well as classroom teachers,” and that “everybody had a role to play throughout the school year because otherwise, it would have been very overwhelming for any one person to actually get the task done.” She concluded: “It was a more cohesive administrative, professional and social atmosphere.”-

Citing examples from their school context, Sharon and Maxine agreed that, like Sandra’s school, delegation was the medium through which the principal’s adoption of power sharing was observed. Sharon recounted:

I have seen more power sharing by my principal because he had to delegate our duties to grade supervisors. Some of the tasks that the Vice Principals (VPs) would have taken on, he has delegated to us [Head of Departments (HODs)]. For example, critical communication that was normally done by the VPs was now delegated to HODs and also grade supervisors.

Maxine also shared her observations, which introduced an additional layer of delegation apart from the level of mid-level administration. “For my school, I see where principals and other administrators are placing more value on the junior teachers especially in light of the onset of the many teaching-learning platforms.” She elaborated:

Most older teachers in senior positions were not tech savvy and did not understand how to set up the Google classroom. It was a big transition for them. Our principal now had to rely on junior teachers to conduct workshops, to meet with them, download and set up their devices orientate them on how to use the device to teach.

Power Sharing in Times of Crisis

Though at this point participants were responding to whether their principals effected a shift in their power sharing approaches and how this was evident, it is interesting to note that Maxine not only recognized the shift but also lauded its impact:

That [the fact that they were given charge of training senior staff] for us, made us feel a little bit more valued, useful and appreciated because this was something that we had a good command of, and our help was needed in various areas. So, the pandemic forced the principal to include us.

Like the other participants, **Elroy** also corroborated his colleagues' assertions, agreeing that his strongest sense of his principal's power sharing approaches was evident in the delegation of roles and responsibilities at the levels of grade supervisors and HODs. To validate his claims, he explained that, "the number of grade supervisors increased because they now have assistant grade supervisors." He continued by rationalizing the other level at which principal's delegation was evident:

Normally, the HOD would oversee all the activities, but since the pandemic, the departments are further broken down. So, there is a head for chemistry, one for biology, physics, etc. These colleagues now have more supervisory and administrative responsibilities. For example, the HOD would collect the assessment grades for CSEC; however, that was now delegated to the person in charge of each subject, [along with] the collection of teachers' action plans and setting evaluation dates.

Question three asked participants to respond to the following. "**How do you assess your principal's power sharing practice during the pandemic?**" Every participant who responded to this question affirmed that the principal's power sharing approaches had positive impact on the operations of the school, with only one, while noting the positive, acknowledged a gap.

Power Sharing

Increased involvement, in the areas of decision-making, task execution was among the upticks of principals adopting new power sharing strategies. **Maxine** felt the impact was significant and without such a response, some tasks would be left undone. Therefore, her response to question three was a resounding "yes." She elaborated:

There are some things that were required by the Ministry that the principal or senior teacher could not do on their own. As a matter of fact, for this term, we had a meeting where each teacher was involved in the planning of the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Before now, it would have been done through a meeting of the senior teachers and passed down to us.

She also emphasized that with the principal's power sharing approaches, "individual contributions were invited and included." This, she claimed, had "a significant impact not only on our delivery of the curriculum, but also on relationships between the middle management and junior staff. There is a significant improvement in our relationships."

Making his contribution to the effectiveness of the power sharing by principals, **Jaime**, registered that it was "positive" and evident in several areas. To qualify, he further advanced:

For us, the staff members became more synchronized, from the gate man right up the middle and top management.” Monitoring of students was stepped up. It was no longer only the duty of the dean of discipline or the grade supervisors. Everybody was now involved.-

Jaime’s observation about administrative efficiency, found support in Carlton’s, contribution: “I, too, think that the middle management has stepped up and acting more like the middle management should.” However, he also noted that “there were still feelings of disenfranchisement because not all [teachers] were a part of the process as they could have been. So, while there have been improvements there were still a set of staff members who are still demotivated.”

Inclusivity

Power sharing approaches that principals took on account of COVID-19 were not only impactful as it relates to getting the task done, but also in promoting inclusivity as **Sharon** explained: “I think power sharing has helped the overall staff to become involved and unite to complete tasks that would have otherwise been done by senior staff.” **Sandra** agreed with her noting that at her school those strategies “also allowed for inclusivity because everyone had a role to play and it really worked this time around.” “For principals who were more inclined to dominate decision-making processes, they realized that COVID-19 demanded greater collaboration; and so, I saw where that was evident on account of the approach that the principal of my school took” **Janice** noted in agreement with Sandra and Sharon. “I think the power sharing initiative was very effective especially for the junior teachers because, certain decisions were no longer sitting in the lap of the senior teachers” affirmed, **Carlton**.

Unexplored Abilities of Staff

Latent talents were spotlighted resulting from principals’ power sharing strategies. In support, Sharon recounted: “Power sharing has also helped in pooling creative ideas by colleagues during this time, which would have otherwise not been evident. So indeed, they feel a sense of belonging and usefulness in contributing to some aspects of the school’s running.” John concluded: “I think power sharing gave the junior teachers a chance to show up their potential.” Sandra agreed with her colleagues: “I saw where in the institution on a whole, as mentioned earlier, communication is now on point and I saw where there are improved levels of empowerment among some staff members.” She substantiated:

You would have had persons who are older members of staff and they were not able to participate in things other than classroom teaching. But when they were forced to be in virtual classrooms where they developed the skill of using technology, among other skills, to address the tasks management assigned, they felt more competent and comfortable completing tasks, so it was value added for them.

As it relates to interaction, “relationships between the middle management and junior staff, saw significant improvement. With that came capacity building, and networking and the need for improved monitoring. This reflected positively on schools’ operations,” Janice asserted.

In sum, participants were unanimous in their view that the pandemic created the need for a shift in their principals’ power sharing and that their principals responded affirmatively for various reasons. This shift resulted in greater inclusivity of different stakeholders in the operations of the school, exposure of

latent talents and abilities of all categories of staff, the development of some technological and online teaching skills, and improved synergy among teams and leadership. There was one instance where a participant felt that though some power sharing took place, some members felt excluded. That the school was deeply fractured before, might account for this.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In analysing the findings, five major themes or factors were identified which have characterized the response of schools to the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. These elements represent a clear shift in the leadership approach of principals. These elements / themes are: adaptation, increased responsibility and accountability, role delegation, power sharing, unearthed latent talents and abilities, and to a lesser extent inclusivity and improved relationships. These emerging leadership themes are remarkably in sync with the themes of the literature on how organizations and countries have responded to the pandemic. This analysis shows the elements of adaptation, increased responsibility and accountability, role delegation, power sharing, inclusivity in decision making and unexplored abilities of teachers, pellucidly.

The element of power sharing, the fourth theme identified in the analysis, was perhaps the most pervasive across the literature. Hartzell (2020) found that Israel implemented structured power sharing mechanisms as a direct response to the pandemic. On the issues of increased responsibility and accountability and role delegation, application identified by Sharp et al. (2020) were similar to what has been uncovered by this study. Respondents reported practices in power sharing and inclusivity, manifested in, for example, ancillary staff members being part of the decision-making process.

The central element of the findings is about power sharing. A disposition on the part of leaders to engage in power sharing informs all of the other behaviours. Thus, these findings therefore suggest that power sharing is useful for improved efficiency during times of crises, since it feeds on the idea that the leader does not have all the requisite competencies and skills to unilaterally lead and manage a school.

The importance of power sharing is further underscored by Hill (2011), who argues that the idea of power sharing requires that school leaders recognize and value the asset that each member brings to the table. Fernandez and Shaw (2020) found that there are administrative, operational, and collegial benefits to power sharing practices, which this study confirms. Though participants felt responsibilities and pressure increased, they also felt power sharing as a leadership strategy allowed for more ease of navigating the challenges of the pandemic. In a sense, the strategy served as a type of professional learning for both staff and principals. The increased pool of competencies, skills, knowledge, and participation can redound in very direct and impactful outcomes for student learning.

That the school principals became more inclusive in their decision-making and enactment of consequent decisions is essential, particularly in light of Thompson's (2017) claim that school governance in Jamaica is mostly top-down. Evidently, incorporating the input of their stakeholders, teachers, administrative, and ancillary staffs allowed them to feel more valued because the schools were functioning less hierarchically. This is in sync with the position of Kezar and Holcombe (2017) who place value on the fact that leadership can be utilized at multiple levels throughout organizations. When this happens, improved teaching learning outcomes are heightened. This finding adds another layer of reinforcement to the importance of teachers becoming more agentic through collaboration and leadership, as Harris and Jones (2019) proports.

The high value participants place on collegiality intimates that power sharing ushered in a sense of control over their abilities to accomplish their daily tasks, when compared to pre-COVID times. Though roles, responsibility, and accountability increased significantly, and though Cooke (2021) noted teachers were required to redouble their scholastic efforts for online delivery for which they were not trained, the new division of labour seemed to make this reality less stressful, and might be a signal to other principals, not involved, to reflect on how they practise. What can ultimately result from this improved educational productivity on account of role definition, is more people working on tasks at a rate of greater investment of time.

Power sharing practices of principals also catalysed emergence of skills development, evident through their expanded online competencies. This means schools have become more skills ready, technology wise, which is advanced preparation should a similar crisis occur or if the current one is prolonged. More immediate were the positive gains on curriculum delivery, especially relating to junior teachers. Of note also is the improved relationship among different categories of staff which will advance networking efforts of the schools to improve monitoring. Again, this insight aligns well with the postulation of Fernandez and Shaw (2020) requiring leaders to distil leadership responsibilities to networks of teams in organization to improve decision-making during crisis situations.

A minority of participants mentioned their colleagues or themselves as being demotivated with leadership. This suggests that this style of leadership did not appeal to them and invites any leader willing to contemplate this leadership style to reckon with giving all, or a selected few, power, as Bush (2020) ruminates. Another element this study brings to the fore and which Wallace (2020) identified a year earlier, is the difficulty in altering school culture, tension reduction among staff, and softening feelings of uncertainty.

The foregoing analysis of the findings has led the authors to an interpretation of power sharing in times of crisis described as MPOWERED.

DEFINITION, ORIGINS AND RATIONALE OF THE MPOWERED FRAME

This term was coined to describe a suggested framework of activities, for use by school principals, which demonstrates how they can prepare themselves to more efficiently develop their mid-tier leaders for crisis response effectiveness. It requires school principals to first work on their personal and professional development before considering how they will assist already existing middle leaders, or prepare others to assume the role.

The concept of the MPOWERED frame emanated from what was extrapolated from findings in this study - themes and sub-themes, what the literature offers, and our professional experiences working with educational leaders and administrators locally and regionally.

To decide what the frame elements of MPOWERED mean, attention was given to the following:

1. the findings of the study, to generate what each letter in the name of the frame would be
2. our collective knowledge of, and experiences with educational leadership and management

What resulted from the foregoing process is a set of guiding principles that principals can use for themselves and their middle leaders as professional learning aimed at empowerment for crisis situations. Hence, each letter in the acronym is linked to an aspect of the findings that influences its definition as demonstrated in Table 1.

Power Sharing in Times of Crisis

Table 1. Elements of the MPOWERED Frame, with Research Findings from the Study

Frame Elements		Relevant Findings
M	Manage and Monitor	Power sharing with middle leaders increased.
P	Purpose	There was increased responsibility and accountability
O	Openness	Adaptability
W	Wisdom	Inclusivity
E	Empathy	Demotivation - of some leaders
R	Reflection	Adaptation
E	Experience	Unearthing of unexplored skills and abilities of members
D	Decision-making	Role delegation

Across the themes, it was deduced that middle leaders experienced several administrative, psychological, academic and social benefits from principals sharing power with them. Hence, they had more agency during the crisis, than under the normal circumstances. Though the findings are analogous to other scholars, this model makes a case for their importance to our local parameters because power sharing in Jamaican schools is not a dominant leadership style. Another point in seeking to cement the importance of this framework is the fact that almost all middle leaders held the view that their principals were forced to adopt power sharing because they faced extreme pressure caused by the teaching and learning circumstances of Covid-19. This raises several points for consideration:

1. Some may argue that the principals are being smart and are responsive to the time and that is a positive, but it is also to be noted that such agreement would imply accepting that this would account for a certain level of sameness in leadership style, in principle, though practical manifestations demonstrate the contrary.
2. Resulting from point 1, would be the inference that principals were being more collaborative or strategic in their delegation rather than engaging power sharing leadership styles/strategies.
3. If principals were forced to adopt power sharing leadership strategies, attributable to the Covid-19 pandemic, how will they respond when the stimulus of the pandemic is removed?

These variations in possibilities indicate that despite what was found, there is still some way to go as it relates to power sharing practices in Jamaica. Within the boundaries of this study, principals could:

1. Decide to revert to pre-pandemic styles
2. Maintain the shift in power sharing they made since the COVID-19 pandemic
3. Decide to make the shift to power sharing from other hierarchical styles.

Therefore, for any of these considerations, above, principals would need to be strategic in their use of human resources. Table 2, below, explains the tenets of MPOWERED as a frame for developing mid-tier leaders' agency for leadership through crisis. It is intended for principals to utilize at any stage of the continuum of power sharing as a stimulus to accommodate maintaining or actively shifting to this leadership style.

Table 2. MPOWERED Frame: A Principal's Tool for Developing Mid-Tier Leaders' Agency for Leadership Through Crisis

MPOWERED Frame: A Principal's Tool for Developing Mid-Tier Leaders' Agency for Leadership Through Crisis	
What Principals Could Consider for Building themselves to build their school leaders	What Principals Could Consider doing for their mid-tier Executives to build their crisis response effectiveness
Manage and Monitor	
What skills and competencies do they recognise as their strengths or that they may need to develop to monitor and manage the teaching, learning and administrative processes of schools with the view to determine how they could give mid-tier executives more predictive agency in crisis situations.	Manage and monitor the training and development of the appropriate skills and competencies that mid-tier executives may need to ensure appropriate responses to the elevated scope for learning in crisis situations.
Purpose	
How to purposefully seek out professional communities or principals' leagues with colleagues who have had some measures of success in power sharing during crisis situations, to get mentoring to develop these skills and competencies identified as lacking.	Purposefully select the potential or actual mid-level leaders in whom they would want the human resource capital, such as the ability to process complex information, navigating ambiguities and conflict of situations, to be cultivated towards being more agentic in crisis response.
Openness	
How to develop the willingness and curiosity about how to be more adaptable to divest power without losing authority, to plan pre-emptively for the inevitable and to be agile in dealing with shifting and evolving complexities.	Create a safe social and psychological space, which demonstrates principals' openness to trusting that mid-tier executives can handle the power invested in them, and in their abilities to identify the appropriate professional learning activities they feel are relevant to nurture their growth and development to efficiently handle the crisis mandate.
Wisdom	
Using wisdom in negotiating or creating a power sharing school culture that is accommodating to productive teaching learning conditions, that will eliminate feelings of disempowerment among staff members and that will encourage buy-in in the new paradigm, to assure more willing responsiveness during crisis period.	Be wise in selecting the appropriate staff to assign to the role that is most suited to their skills, or to those with the disposition to quickly learn. Engage trust building exercises to facilitate power sharing school culture.
Empathy and Encouragement	
Their empathy lever's capacity to demonstrate genuine awareness and sensitivity in dealing with stakeholders' roles in the crisis response and their own reaction to the impact of the crisis on them. How empathy will guide investment of trust, more keen listening to treat with personal and or professional apprehensions.	Encourage mid-tier executives to believe that they have or can develop the responsiveness needed to succeed during times of crisis. Facilitate their abilities to persevere, problem-solve, build social connections, develop decision-making capabilities, communicate clearly and use obstacles as learning rungs.
Reflection	
Reflect on self-building activities arriving from navigating the demands of the Covid-19 Pandemic and draw lessons from them as is useful to the context of the school's unique crisis response situation. The proceeds should be useful as they utilize pre-crisis leadership activities during crisis activities to prepare for future crisis situations.	Invite them to engage in collaborative reflection sessions and share the experiences gained as they navigated the crisis. Establish a context of sharing that will help identify real lessons and to scaffold old and new and emerging to address present crisis circumstances.
Experience	
Harness the experiences of all mid-level leaders, to scaffold crisis response, even while acknowledging that all mid-level leaders are not at the same point of professional development and reconcile how this knowledge will influence the choices they make, relative to their experiences.	Mitigate the impact of the range of personal and professional experiences, such as uncertainty, hopelessness, fear and ineptitude, they are likely to encounter as they deal with crisis by providing pre-crisis training.
Decision-making	
Decide which set of activities may require collaboration with relevant stakeholders and which they can decide independently, and whether each player has the requisite decision-making skills to support power sharing.	Be intentional in assisting to build or bolster their decision-making skills by providing opportunities for them to practice how to respond clearly, timely and decisively, even while simultaneously seeking buy-in from those they will lead through crisis.

The MPOWERED frame indicates that with increased power sharing, the need for more management and monitoring oversight for the distributed responsibilities and the capacity to respond to them will increase. As a natural consequence, where there is increased distribution of roles, the levels of accountability and responsibility will also be elevated. This will require both principals and their middle leaders to be purposeful in ensuring an impactful mechanism of human and physical resources are available to support the increased demand in the event of a crisis. A significant influence in advancing such an agenda is the ability to adapt. Having such a disposition will allow leaders to be open to pivoting, scenario planning, prioritizing communicating tough decisions to stakeholders and performing other required task suited for a crisis situation. In such a situation, a leader needs to apply wisdom in selecting the appropriate set of workers to execute these tasks, even while extending empathy and encouragement to those driving the process, while dealing with their personal demands, and for those who might have to remain on the margins by virtue of not yet being up to the task, though willing.

Reflection becomes a constant space of existence for school leaders and those under their tutelage while preparing for a crisis or while responding to it. The constant shuffle between how past lessons can inform the present or aid in anticipating how future crisis could unfold can yield much insight which can serve as an invaluable repository. The ability of the current experiences of the school leaders to point them to more sources of personal and professional development so that they can determine the set of skills and abilities that best exhibit the type of experience their staff needs is a critical factor to consider. In addition, it is quite clear how important decision-making skills are in crisis management's success or failure.

This frame is useful not only for the Jamaican context, where a pre-dominant top-down school leadership style exists, but is one which school principals anywhere can apply because outside of the nature of the frame, which is for use for crisis preparation, it is not restricted.

CONCLUSION

Power sharing practices within educational institutions are not new. What is new, however, is the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the upheaval it has precipitated to the established modus operandi of all matters concerning teaching and learning engagements, in Jamaica and other parts of the world. Resultantly, this ruptured several spaces for the search for contextually relevant solutions to the different multi-layered challenges facing the education sector. Being cognisant that leadership drives schools, this paper is anchored in one such quest – to explore principals' power sharing practices from the view point of their middle leaders and how they may present opportunities for improvement in their leadership approaches. Though participants opined that their leaders were forced by the COVID crisis to adopt power sharing strategies, the findings, corroborated by the literature, underscore that power sharing has some significant benefits. This has led us to the following conclusions.

The fact that majority of the participants felt their principals started sharing power because the pandemic necessitated it, especially in exposing their technical ineptitude, suggests that power sharing was not widely practiced in this locale. However, as demonstrated, power sharing allowed for a more seamless navigation of the leadership, operational and administrative challenges that arose as a result of the pandemic and, it also contributed to the improvement of the physical, social, and psychological well-being of school administration and staff. Because power sharing inspires an increased sense of belonging, employees are more likely to become vulnerable in trying new tasks, hence developing and also revealing unknown talents, which widens the repertoire of available resources on which leaders can pull for school development.

FURTHER RESEARCH

What are the insights about power sharing which emanate from this paper that can guide further research work? First, as further research contribution to the literature, an investigation into the power sharing positions of principals who are more technologically adept, and on power sharing practices on students' learning outcomes, in Jamaica and the Caribbean, would be useful. Second, policy makers could consider how to reshape policies to deconstruct the dominant hierarchical leadership structures so that shared leadership becomes engrained in Jamaica's school leadership, rather than as a back-up plan. Additionally, they could incentivise school leaders whose success in school leadership is attributable and traceable to power sharing, during and post pandemic. Third, for improved leadership practice, training in different strands of shared leadership should be revamped and infused at the level of teacher training colleges, universities and any other institutions invested in principalship development.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Agency: Agency refers to a professional's sense of intellectual independence and capacity to engage superiors, peers, and organizational processes in ways which reflect self-confidence, a willingness to interrogate, and an ability to take action to effect change or influence the taking of action effecting of change. Moore (2016) describes agency as having a feeling of control over one's actions and their consequences, and involves consciousness, free will, and responsibility.

Crisis: Crisis is a time of great danger, difficulty, or doubt when problems must be solved or important decisions must be made (The Oxford Dictionary 2022). This difficulty means that the normal response and coping mechanisms are insufficient to handle the scale of demand placed on them. An organizational crisis involves destabilization and disruption of the normal pattern of the organization functions, and an escalation of one or more issues, errors, or procedures are expected in this period (Zamoum, K., & Gorpe, T. S.; 2018), thus requiring the application of extra-ordinary problem-solving skills and emergency responses.

Empowerment: Kumar and Kumar (2017) define empowerment as giving a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility to employees for taking decision regarding organizational goals. Thus, Empowerment is a process that fosters employee's creativity, quality of work-life, spirit of teamwork and to motivate employees to crave for superior performance for organisational effectiveness (Hieu, 2020).

Leadership: Thompson (2019), argues that leadership involves actions which enable an organization to achieve the goals it sets itself, thus leadership is process of influencing subordinates, peers, and supervisors work towards the attainment of an organization's goals (Yukl, n.d.).

Middle Leaders: Middle leaders in schools refer to senior academic staff below the level of the principal and vice-principal, who are entrusted with additional work beyond their teaching. At the primary and secondary level of the education system, middle leaders (or managers) refer to heads of departments and grade supervisors, while at the tertiary level it refers to deans, heads of departments, unit heads.

MPOWERED Frame: This term was coined to describe a suggested framework of activities, for use by school principals, which demonstrates how they can prepare themselves to more efficiently develop their mid-tier leaders for crisis response effectiveness.

Power Sharing: Power sharing refers to the practice of a school principal (and others in positions of authority) in delegating responsibility and authority and allowing members of staff under their supervision to make decisions or participate in the making of decisions related to the functioning of the organization and its mission critical activities. Thompson and Wilmot (2022), assert that power-sharing is a mode of leadership which involves a recognition that there are multiple leaders and therefore multiple roles in an organization and thus wise decision-making will often involve engagement of the collective wisdom and the distribution of the duties of leadership (Thompson, 2018; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Harris, 2007; Spillane et al., 2004).

Principal: The term principal refers to the head teacher in a school.


Section 2

Empowerment

Chapter 5

Empowering School Leaders as Middle Executives in the Centralized Education System of Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will provide information on the context of supporting and empowering school leaders in crisis management in the global pandemic crisis. Based on the contextual paradigm of the centralized education system in Cyprus, and in particular on school principals in Cyprus who acted as middle executives, this chapter will provide a guided theoretical perspective on how to lead in school organizations within a centralized education system during crises by focusing on the developmental framework of school leaders' skills capacity. In particular, through collecting evidence from the context of Cyprus during the pandemic crisis, a conceptual framework of empowering school leaders as middle executives is presented and analyzed. This framework could support policy experts on school leaders' professional training and capacity for handling uncertainty and crisis. Also, further empirical research could validate the proposed framework and examine to what extent this framework could be adopted by school leaders in school organizations both in centralized and decentralized education systems.

INTRODUCTION

Millions of individuals around the world have been distracted by the COVID-19 virus, which has caused disruption in their lives. The travel sector, enterprises, and economies have all suffered serious consequences as a result of the worldwide lockdown restrictions (Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020). In general, modern societies are in the midst of a “perfect storm”, which includes issues such as the global financial crisis, the worldwide climate crisis, and the global poverty crisis, all of which have an impact on people's lives

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when they are confronted with these “unknown unknowns” (Shrivastava et al., 2013; Ansell & Boin, 2019). As a result, the unprecedented arrival of the “invisible” enemy, known as COVID-19, once again brought the concept of crisis to the forefront, affecting all sectors and societies of humanity.

In particular, concerning the organizational aspect, the pandemic crisis brought various problems to organizations, such as financial problems, management problems, as well as insecurity for the employees. Furthermore, this crisis disrupted the normal operation of organizations since an immediate response is required in such cases (Fener & Cevik, 2015). Specifically, the COVID-19 crisis, besides the health crisis, also affected the economic and social aspects of organizations (Bartsch et al., 2021). Calogero and Yasin (2011) argued that due a crisis the overall operating level within an organization is changing since it affects everyone inside the organization. Therefore, during a crisis, specific initiatives and measures must be considered even if organizations are lacking time to prepare in advance (Bhaduri, 2019). In general, any crisis, including COVID-19, triggers a period of uncertainty in organizations. As a consequence, the need to redesign and redefine processes and procedures is more visible than ever, since everything changes.

Having said that, the crisis of COVID-19 triggered uncertainty in all educational organizations, including school organizations (both in primary and secondary education) and higher educational organizations that were not prepared in advance to address the crisis, and overall change the educational landscape across the various contexts. Specifically, in school organizations, this crisis affected more than one billion students and learners in more than 200 countries (Pokhler & Chhetri, 2021; UNESCO, 2020) and disrupted the way in which these learners were educated, since the concepts of teaching and learning were re-designed and dramatically altered (Harris, 2020). In particular, the learning process was redesigned since online and distance learning were imposed and brought changes in the educational processes. This particular change affected all school teachers who undertook the difficult task of transforming their conventional teaching into a distance teaching, through an online environment, and at the same time revealed how unprepared all the education systems were in terms of infrastructure and staff training. Research studies, indicated that teachers faced many challenges and pressure (Walls & Seashore, 2021), such as various complexities of meeting students’ needs remotely and the overall adjustment to these new circumstances, while maintaining high academic expectations (Burgin, Daniel & Wasonga, 2021).

At the other end of the scale, school leaders who manage and lead school organizations emerged as a significant source of influence (Harris, 2020; Netolicky, 2020; Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020; Kafa, 2021) and were asked to maintain a leadership dynamic and provide guidance in order to navigate school organizations through this particular crisis. In general, school leadership is considered a demanding and complex task. Therefore, school leaders need to maintain a leadership dynamic during a crisis, since this unpredictable event disrupts the normal operations of school organizations and an immediate response is required (Bahduri, 2019; Fener & Cevik, 2015). In particular, based on the crisis of COVID-19, school leaders’ roles were altered and redefined (Harris, 2020; Netolicky, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020; Ärlestig et al., 2021) and school leaders were constantly asked to review their leadership status (Drysdales & Gurr, 2017) and adjust their role to this new situation.

Having said that, school leaders and school organizations in Cyprus have certainly been no exception to the consequences of this pandemic crisis. In fact, both school teachers and school leaders were brought into the spotlight, and they were expected to adjust their educational practices from the conventional learning environment into this new distance/online learning environment with insufficient and/or minimum training and preparation. In particular, school leaders’ roles are critical in promoting and

sustaining school improvement during any crisis. Therefore, in this particular chapter, I will provide a holistic perspective of the school leadership aspect in the island of Cyprus during the crisis of COVID-19 and highlight the important aspect of school leaders' lack of partial autonomy, within the centralized education system in Cyprus, who acted as middle executives between their school organizations and the Ministry of Education.

Before moving on to the case of Cyprus and school leadership during the pandemic crisis, I present the Cyprus educational system, together with some general contextual information. This was deemed appropriate in order to become familiar with the context of the Cyprus case and the education system. Cyprus is an island situated in the Mediterranean Sea. The island of Cyprus is considered to be the third largest island in this particular territory, and it is situated in the north-eastern part, 380 kilometers north of Egypt, 105 kilometers west of Syria, 75 kilometers south of Turkey, and 380 kilometers east of the nearest Greek island, Rhodes. The constitution of Cyprus recognizes Greek and Turkish as the two official languages. In 1960, Cyprus gained its independence and became an independent state. Furthermore, since May 1st, 2004, Cyprus has become a full member of the European Union and, from 2008, a member of the Euro zone, replacing the Cyprus pound with the Euro currency. The majority of the people are Greek Cypriots, and overall, an estimated population of 1,2 million is the estimate. Overall, Cyprus is classified as a middle-income country, depending mainly on its tourism industry as the major economic activity.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports is responsible for the implementation of educational policy and administrative issues relating to the governance of education in Cyprus. In particular, the minister of Education has the highest authority, while various departments support the overall functioning of the system, which is presented in three main stages: primary, secondary, and higher/tertiary which includes public and private universities, colleges, or institutes (Pashiardis & Tsiakiros, 2015). On the whole, power within the education system of Cyprus emanates mainly from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports. In addition, the Ministry supervises all the educational organizations under its jurisdiction and is also responsible for the implementation of educational laws and the preparation of any new educational legislation (Pashiardis & Tsiakiros, 2015). Moreover, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the school curriculum, the money allocation process, and the teaching personnel and administrative management. In addition, at the school level, each school organization's education policy, which includes administering, monitoring, and evaluating the quality of education as well as shaping the school curriculum, is the responsibility of the Ministry. Also, all school organizations (primary and secondary education) are financed by state funds based on governmental decisions. Overall, the state provides the local school boards with funds and then the school boards provide the funds to schools under their jurisdiction (Pashiardis & Tsiakiros, 2015).

Based on the aforementioned, Cyprus exhibits a very strict centralized education system in which every school organization has to follow all the guidelines and directives provided by the Ministry. In general, the Ministry of Education supervises all school organizations and they are under its jurisdiction. In fact, as part of the centralization aspect, school organizations in Cyprus are treated as identical organizations with identical needs and characteristics by ignoring the local school culture and contextual factors that affect the school organization itself. Having said that, little autonomy is given to school organizations as a result of the centralization of education governance (Eurydice, 2019). According to Pashiardis (2004), in a number of countries, individual school organizations are considered an important factor for the implementation of local educational policies. Yet, this is not the case for schools in Cyprus since educational policy is the responsibility of the government's Ministerial Council, which sets out school

curriculum, textbooks, practices, teachers' allocation in schools, money allocation (a small amount) and different innovations implemented in public schools. Despite that, it is important to acknowledge that school leaders' roles are critical in promoting and sustaining school improvement.

In conjunction with the crisis of COVID-19 that hit the island of Cyprus, school leaders acted as middle executives between the decisions of the Ministry of Education and their school organizations. Numerous circulars were sent on a daily basis when the pandemic hit the island, and school leaders were forced to follow the announcements and information provided in these circulars. Despite this situation, school leaders in Cyprus during the crisis of COVID-19, and any other crisis, could in fact act as key factors in shaping their own "internal" educational policy within their school organization and address the specific challenges and needs of the school, by taking into consideration the local community and the students' socio-economic status (Pashiardis & Kafa, 2021).

Therefore, the intended book chapter will provide a guided theoretical perspective on how to lead in school organizations within a centralized education system during crises by focusing on the developmental framework of school leaders' skills capacity. Specifically, through this attempt, conceptual information on the important aspect of school leaders' empowerment will be presented, who acted as middle executives during the pandemic crisis in the context of Cyprus. In closing, the general purpose of this chapter is to provide information on the important context of supporting and empowering school leaders in crisis management topics and to provide a theoretical background and support through the paradigm of Cyprus.

INSIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE

Leadership Approaches in Crisis

The organizational field provided a wealth of information on leadership approaches and strategies for dealing with a crisis in an organization during times of uncertainty. Therefore, the focus here is on the role of leadership. In particular, the most significant approaches that leaders should advocate in a time of crisis and uncertainty, as found in the literature, are described here. In general, it is critical for leaders to distinguish actual crises from business challenges or problems as a first step in responding to both sorts of events (James et al., 2011). When an organization is confronted with a crisis, it is widely assumed that leadership is essential to shepherd the organization through this moment of uncertainty while also ensuring its survival. As a result, the necessity for leaders and managers to be crisis-ready is apparent (James et al., 2011). However, Bartsch et al. (2021) stated that there is a research void in the area of successful crisis leadership/management. In general, it is critical to remember that in crisis incidents, leaders cannot simply duplicate earlier leadership techniques that were considered excellent or successful leadership, as these behaviors may result in a failure to respond properly to the crisis (Probert & Turnbull James, 2011). According to Halverson et al. (2004), the presence of a crisis allows the leader to diverge from the status quo and be creative in order to address the crisis. From the preceding sources, we can deduce that leaders are the most significant factor in dealing with a crisis. In general, in a broader sense, crisis incidents increase the ability of leaders to be charismatic (Yulk, 1999). In fact, Hunt et al. (1999) found that two distinct types of charismatic leaders can be identified in handling and addressing any crisis: (1) visionary leaders and (2) crisis-responsive leaders. The visionary leader is the one who provides action plans through theories and moves on to practically apply these plans and finally to address the

crisis (Hunt et al., 1999). On the other hand, a crisis-responsive leader is the one who has the charisma to address the crisis faster rather than a visionary leader through a particular response plan.

Based on Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer's (2014) work, a form of learning during crises was established entitled "learning in crisis" (LiC), which may be adopted by the organizational leader. This notion presents a new way of thinking about learning in order to address a crisis. In particular, Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer (2014) suggest that this form of leadership presents new ways of perceiving learning, crisis, and their relationship as a dynamic process of practicing and coping with any crisis. In order to establish a larger repertoire of learning methods during any crisis, the proposed "learning in crisis" involves experimentation and improvisation (Antonacopoulou & Sheaffer, 2014). In addition to that, two leadership theories that are somewhat opposite to each other seem to concern the organizational context during crisis incidents. These two leadership theories are the "transformational leadership theory" and the "destructive leadership theory." On the one hand, according to Shadraonis (2014), during crisis incidents, transformational leaders guide the organization, clarify the roles, and provide guidance to followers. On the other hand, Fors Brandebo (2020) argued about the appearance of a destructive leadership behavior that could actually affect the overall crisis. Specifically, Fors Brandebo (2020) argued that perceptions of leadership behaviors are related to contextual conditions and could in fact lead to a destructive leadership approach during a crisis. In general, specific leadership approaches that address a crisis include the decision-making process, the communication and trust parts, and in general, the sustaining of an effective organizational culture (Wooten & James, 2008). Based on Wooten and James (2008), different leadership approaches are needed to manage crisis incidents. Yet, the aforementioned covers the leadership role in any organization. Therefore, the leadership aspect connected to crisis incidents in school organizations is presented and discussed below.

School Leadership and Crisis

School organizations deal with complex and demanding challenges where the notion of uncertainty has become the norm (Sutherland, 2017). From the very beginning, leaders in general were considered the most influential factor during a crisis (Hamblin, 1958), and followers were more easily influenced by them. Adding to that, leaders in organizations have the opportunity to deviate from the status quo and be innovative in order to address any crisis incidence (Halverson et al., 2004). Therefore, a crisis incident could actually enable organizations to be more creative and even, sometimes, to provide an opportunity to change themselves into a better one. In that particular setting, leaders have an important role to play, including minimizing harm to the staff and ensuring the overall recovery and survival of the organization (Smith & Riley, 2012). Yet, a substantial observation in school organizations in relation to the outbreak of a crisis is the fact that most of the literature presents crisis incidents and school problems as equal. According to Smith and Riley (2012), "problem incidents" in literature are connected to well-known, predictable events and challenges in school organizations and do not fit the generally accepted definition of a crisis. In other words, crises in school organizations mostly refer to problems occurring in the organizations rather than actual urgent situations, such as the pandemic crisis of COVID-19. By saying this, it is important to acknowledge the important role of the professional efficacies of school leaders in advancing the "crisis management" concept, or in other words, successfully addressing the crisis incident within their school organization.

The aforementioned information is associated with the pandemic crisis that affected the educational landscape and brought a new dimension to leading school organizations. In general, this particular cri-

sis, with distinct health, social and other characteristics, forced school leaders to further enhance their capacities and step up to support their school organizations, as well as their school members in order to address the various obstacles derived from the pandemic crisis. In other words, school leaders as “crisis managers” needed to provide a clear meaning to the crisis and at the same time frame a responsive plan. More precisely, specific approaches are key components of the “crisis management” concept. Yet, school leaders need to be provided with all the necessary qualifications and techniques in order to manage crisis situations (Lu, 2017). This particular aspect is even more crucial for school leaders within a centralized education system, as in the case of school leaders in Cyprus, who acted as middle executives between the Ministry of Education and their school organizations. In general, Bartsch and his colleagues (2021) argued that there is a research gap concerning effective leadership in crisis situations. During crisis incidents, school leaders are expected to organize an effective, timely, and legitimate response in times of deep uncertainty (Ansell & Boin, 2019). Moreover, school leaders need to promote adequate practices to address the crisis rather than simply repeating leadership practices considered “good leadership,” as these practices may result in a failure to respond adequately to the crisis (Probert & Turnbull James, 2011).

As a consequence, school leaders need to collect all the necessary information, collaborate with internal and external stakeholders, promote emotional stability, create a communication and trust-building culture, and promote a concrete decision-making process. In addition, school leaders need to move beyond any emotional responses that could include fear, denial, anxiety, and stress and act in extraordinary ways (James et al., 2011) such as by promoting a concrete communication system and create a culture of trust in order to tackle the crisis. In particular, trust between teachers and school leaders is a necessity, as presented in a study by Twyford and Le Fevre (2019), since all stakeholders had to share their vulnerability and take risks when uncertainty was high. Also, Lockwood (2005) argued that effective communication and building trust determine the success or failure of crisis management efforts. In addition, any crisis influences heavily on the organization’s functioning, and this kind of situation requires a fast-decision-making process from the leader (Calogero & Yasin, 2011). Therefore, a concrete decision-making plan is required and includes the important aspect of strategic decisions that are legitimate and effective and could in fact address a crisis both in the short and long run. Boin and Lagadec (2000) supported that during crisis handling, the decision-making process is considered a fundamental aspect. Therefore, any leader’s ability to address the crisis effectively based on his/her decision process and system is of paramount importance.

In general, the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the surface the concept of an actual crisis affecting all sectors and societies of mankind. Especially in educational systems, this pandemic affected school organizations worldwide and disrupted the way in which students are educated around the globe. Specifically, students around the world were called upon to manage the inflow of new knowledge through the use of their own computers (those, of course, who had all the necessary equipment) and were introduced to a new way of learning in their own home environment. (For Cyprus, see more info in Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020; Kafa, 2021). As a consequence, the role of leadership constitutes an important factor during a crisis and in times of uncertainty.

School Leadership and the External Dimension

An important aspect of the school leadership dimension is the school leaders’ external leadership. Researchers (e.g., Harris and Jones, 2020; Sutherland, 2017) demonstrated the important aspect of collaboration with external school stakeholders during a crisis, in particular, referring to the community as a key resource with capacity, knowledge, and additional expertise during the pandemic crisis. This external

dimension, as defined by Yemini, Addi-Raccah and Katarivas (2014) through the “entrepreneurship” aspect, could act as a driving force of innovation and change through the introduction of opportunities so that efficient and effective performance is applied in both public and private sectors. The importance of school leaders’ entrepreneurship feature, which encompasses the various external stakeholders, is considered an essential part of school leadership during crisis. Pashiardis (2014) claimed that this trend towards entrepreneurship might be interpreted as a school leader’s effort in creating a “privately organized” system, so that he/she could create other support systems of his/her school organization. Moreover, Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz and Pashiardis (2020) supported that an educational entrepreneur is the one who achieves collaboration with a range of potential school stakeholders and acquires different resources so that the school organization operates and runs smoothly. Therefore, one could argue the importance of the engagement aspect of the external school stakeholders as an indicator of the improvement of any crisis incident within school organizations. Specifically, Harris and Jones (2020) argued for the important connection between school leadership and the external environment by referring mostly to the local community and students’ parents as a key resource with capacity, knowledge, and additional expertise.

Therefore, school leaders during a crisis must provide certainty and support. Yet, it is important to consider that the empowerment of school leaders in order to address a crisis is different from those aspects required during daily school leadership practice (Smith & Riley, 2012). Through this external leadership dimension which includes the creation of strategic alliances with other schools and organizational systems, the community, society in general, business, and government (Pashiardis & Kafa, 2021; Pashiardis, 2014; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011), school leaders act as entrepreneurial school leaders, through the entrepreneurial leadership style (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011; Pashiardis, 2014). In addition, this aspect includes particular actions, practices, and behaviors that aim to increase parental involvement, creatively acquire more resources, strategically build coalitions, and finally, to create a market orientation for their schools (Brauckmann, Pashiardis, & Kafa, 2020). This entrepreneurial leadership dimension came to the surface during the COVID-19 crisis. Harris and Jones (2020) argued about the important role of school leadership in the external environment by referring to the community as a key resource with capacity, knowledge, and additional expertise for supporting school organizations during the pandemic crisis. Also, Azorín (2020) argued for the important role of communities and networking during a crisis. In general, in any crisis, the important aspect of collaboration with external school stakeholders is deemed appropriate and would support the school organization (Sutherland, 2017).

Furthermore, research studies have demonstrated the important aspect of the external leadership dimension during the pandemic crisis. In fact, initial empirical studies that explored aspects of the pandemic crisis argued about the important role of school leaders’ external dimension. Specifically, in Singapore, Ho and Yong Tray (2020) argued that collaboration with the community acted as an important element during the pandemic crisis and that school leaders needed to form community partnerships. Furthermore, in Australia, Angelico (2020) mentioned that school leaders had an opportunity to shift the educational paradigm and create alliances with parents and communities to ensure that all students have access to digital learning. Therefore, school leaders during a crisis could promote an entrepreneurial leadership role that enables them to achieve collaboration with a range of potential school stakeholders and acquire different resources so that the school organization operates and runs smoothly (Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz & Pashiardis, 2020). These entrepreneurial leadership skills or, as it is mentioned in the literature, promoting an entrepreneurial leadership style (see Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011; Pashiardis, 2014) are very important for school leaders, especially school leaders within a centralized education system, such as that of Cyprus, since they can acquire more support and assistance for their school organizations during crises.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DURING THE PANDEMIC CRISIS IN CYPRUS

School organizations in Cyprus faced a lot of challenges during the first wave of the pandemic crisis. In fact, school leaders and teachers were called upon to deal with this sudden change with minimum training, capacity and preparation. In addition, the centralized education system that is embedded in school organizations acted as a further obstacle that school leaders had to face. With the school closures in the first pandemic wave, teachers were requested to transfer their teaching and learning processes from the well-known conventional context to the distance/online context. The Ministry of Education, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Research, Innovation, and Digital Policy, collaborated closely in order to implement the e-learning education process across schools. Yet, at the same time, this unexpected shift from conventional teaching to the new distance/online teaching and learning reality brought various problems in school organizations and led the Ministry into partial confusion.

As mentioned above, Cyprus has a centralized education system, and the coordinated efforts and guidelines in a country that applies such a system means that it provides structure and guidance, as schools are not used to operating on their own. Yet, the lack of immediate direction that the Ministry should have provided in a centralized education system, has been observed. Specifically, as a counterpoint to the centralized education system in Cyprus, local factors were not taken into consideration. For instance, school organizations with students with low socio-economic status (SES), faced a number of problems as part of the crisis of COVID-19, including students' lack of technological equipment to participate in these online lessons. All the above, point out the important role that school leaders had to play during the crisis in Cyprus in order to address the individual problems and obstacles that emerged in their school organizations. In general, this role included: (1) controlling and coordinating the new distance learning process; (2) being aware of the ongoing developments that took place during the online/distance teaching and learning process; (3) coordinating the school staff, as well as contributing to the development of school staff; and (4) evaluating in general the ongoing situation within the school organization (Kafa, 2021; Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020).

Another important obstacle was the large number of circulars in school organizations, again as part of a centralized education system. This particular aspect affected school leaders' ability to address the crisis successfully, since they were seen as middle executives between the Ministry of Education and their school organizations by implementing all the decisions in their school organizations. Specifically, school leaders needed to address the daily circulars, which included circulars with various instructions and announcements directed towards teachers, something that led to confusion because it seemed as if a "straight-jacket" was imposed on everybody, irrespective of local circumstances (Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020a). In addition, school leaders in Cyprus, as middle executives, had to deal with the cancellation or differentiation of previous circulars that had already been provided and were supposedly implemented by teachers in their school organizations. As a consequence, this particular aspect made the situation problematic for most school leaders and teachers. An example of the aforementioned, are the following two circulars that were disseminated to school leaders and demonstrate the confusion that prevailed within the Ministry of Education:

- "to inform the teachers that the main goal of the online teaching was the repetition / consolidation of the teaching material that was taught until March 10, 2020" (March 23, 2020).
- "to inform the teachers that in the online teaching they should proceed to the teaching of their course based on the curriculum" (March 24, 2020).

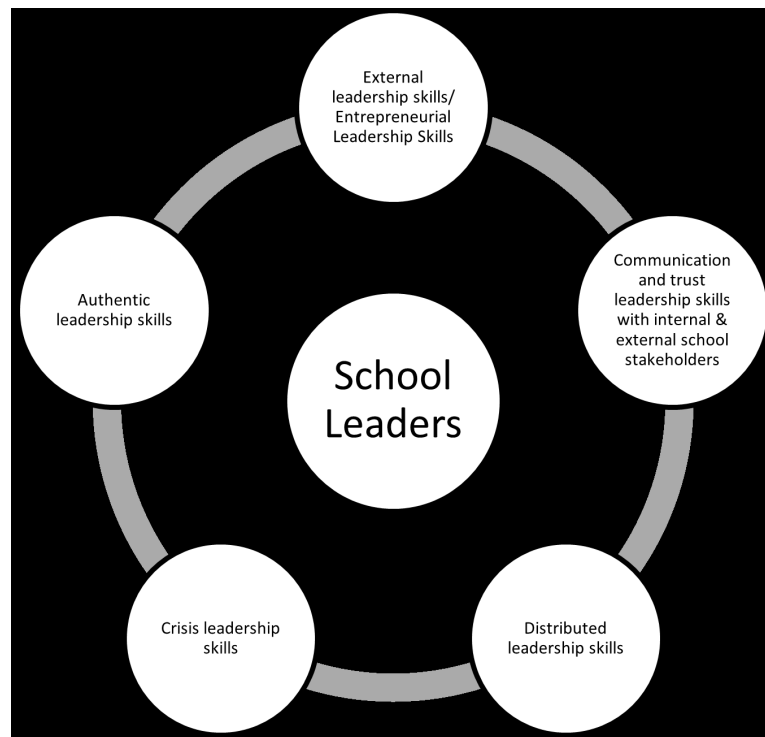
Furthermore, the contextual aspects of strong trade unionism and conservatism seemed to affect school leaders' and teachers' work performance. In particular, most of the time, the trade unions called upon their members, referring to teachers, not to implement the circulars provided by the Ministry of Education. Thus, in reality, school leaders and teachers were operating in a "dual world" of confusion between circulars from the Ministry and directives opposing these circulars by the teachers' unions (Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020a). Another important obstacle was students' lack of equipment and the lack of school leaders' support from the Ministry of Education in order to address this particular obstacle. Based on the situation, shortages of students' equipment or lack of internet connectivity were addressed mostly by private initiatives. However, school leaders' ability to address this particular situation was restricted once again due to the centralized education system. Yet, students' problems were mainly addressed by private initiatives in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in Cyprus (Kafa, 2021).

In general, school leaders during the crisis had an important role to play by addressing the situation in their own school organizations and had a critical role in promoting and sustaining school improvement, even if within a centralized education system they acted as middle executives. In fact, school leaders were required to successfully lead, coordinate, and facilitate in this new era of leading and managing school organizations. Even if the Ministry of Education held some online meetings for school leaders in order to provide them with information to address the crisis, in a larger context, the important role of the school leader in this current situation was omitted or rather was presented through the role of a middle executive between the Ministry and the school organization. In general, the frustration and isolation that most teachers were facing during these challenging times in Cyprus, together with the contextual factors in each school organization required the school leader's presence, guidance and leadership (Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020a). As a consequence, it is important for school leaders, both in Cyprus and in other contexts, to be well prepared to address any particular crisis (including the crisis of COVID-19). Thus, following I present and discuss a conceptual perspective on how to lead in school organizations within a centralized education system during crises by focusing on the developmental framework of school leaders' skills capacity.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF EMPOWERING SCHOOL LEADERS AS MIDDLE EXECUTIVES

As mentioned above, the centralized education system in Cyprus led school leaders to act as middle executives between the decisions of the Ministry of Education and their school organizations. This particular aspect led to the need to support school leaders' skills capacity within this centralized education system. At the same time, it revealed the important aspect of the external leadership dimension that school leaders within the centralized education system could promote, referring to the utilization of the entrepreneurial leadership style (Pashiardis, 2014; Bracukmann & Pashiardis, 2011). Based on that, the following conceptual framework presents school leaders' developmental skills and capacity as an aftermath of the pandemic crisis. Especially in centralized education systems such as that of Cyprus, school leaders' professional development should be promoted and contributed to the successful leadership of school organizations during crises. Yet, before moving on to the conceptual framework, it is important to mention that in any centralized education system Ministries, education policy and any other relevant stakeholder need to take into consideration a school organization's local context, which in turn shapes the school leadership practice (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2020; Pashiardis, Brauckmann & Kafa,

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Empowering school leaders as middle executives



2018a; Pashiardis, Brauckmann & Kafa, 2018b). At the same time, school leaders need to acknowledge contextual aspects of their school's organizations and be familiar with what their school stands for (e.g., students' SES, area of the school, school infrastructure). Having said that, Figure 1. presents the proposed conceptual framework of school leaders' skills empowerment, based on the centralized education system in Cyprus, by taking into consideration various leadership competencies.

In general, as shown in Figure 1, school leaders' conceptual empowering framework includes the important attributes and skills of crisis management, distributed leadership, communication and trust skills with internal and external school stakeholders, the authentic leadership skills, as well as the important aspect of external dimension. In particular, the 1st aspect, referring to school leaders' **external leadership and entrepreneurial leadership skills**. This particular external dimension covers the leadership skills of networking and creating strong alliances with external stakeholders that can support students' needs during crises. According to Gurr (2015), successful school leaders are people-centered who are concerned about fostering collaboration and who, obviously, get enormous satisfaction from seeing students develop. At the same time, are also concerned about developing an entrepreneurial leadership approach by building the capacity of non-teaching staff. School leaders are now considered institutional entrepreneurs because they meet school demands, such as improving students' academic achievement, as well as play an active role in advancing various initiatives and changes that respond to the school's needs and reflect their own interests (Yemini, Addi-Raccah, & Katarivas, 2014). Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz and Pashiardis (2020) supported that an educational entrepreneur is the one who achieves collaboration with a range of potential school stakeholders and acquires different resources so that the school organization operates and runs smoothly. In fact, school leaders during a crisis could promote an entrepreneurial leadership

skill or, as it is presented in the literature, an entrepreneurial leadership style (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011; Pashiardis, 2014). This is deemed more important than ever during a crisis or times of uncertainty. Harris and Jones (2020) argued for the important role of school leadership in the external environment by referring to the community as a key resource with capacity, knowledge, and additional expertise during the pandemic crisis. In Australia, during the first pandemic wave, school leaders had an opportunity to shift the educational paradigm and create alliances with parents and communities to ensure that all students had access to digital learning (Angelico, 2020). Also, in Singapore, school leaders collaborated with the community and formed community partnerships (Ho & Yong Tray, 2020). Therefore, communities are a key resource for school leaders, as they host a wealth of additional expertise, knowledge, and local capacity (Harris & Jones, 2020). On that account, school leaders act as entrepreneurs in a variety of different ways according to the level of autonomy and accountability. Therefore, one could argue that there is a general assumption that the external leadership dimension is considered a vital ingredient, contributing to school success and improvement during a crisis. In fact, the involvement of several external stakeholders could provide substantive benefits. Based on the aforementioned, school leaders in Cyprus, could in fact, create external alliances with various external school stakeholders in order to acquire financial and infrastructure support for their school organizations during crises.

The 2nd aspect refers to the **communication and trust leadership skills** with internal and external school stakeholders. Overall, these particular attributes could in fact determine the success or failure of crisis management. Smith and Riley (2012) support that communication is the most important aspect for ensuring that all school stakeholders are involved in a crisis. In fact, ensuring credible and open communication to all affected members of the school community (Smith & Riley, 2012) is essential. In particular, during communication with the school community, a school leader can provide certainty (as opposed to uncertainty), direction, and optimism, as well as limit rumors, misinformation, and confusion (Smith & Riley, 2012). In research conducted in Canada during the first pandemic wave, Hauseman et al. (2020) argued that successful school leaders maintain a consistent and transparent communication system with all members of the school community in order to address the various challenges and obstacles. Furthermore, a clear and effective communication system is a priority for all times of uncertainty. In fact, the important aspect of communication and connections with the people of the organization was supported by Arturo Fernandez and Paul Shaw (2020) as the most important practices that a leader must promote during the COVID-19 crisis. Specifically, the authors argued that a number of leaders may use a crisis as a catalyst to establish and re-establish relationships, while the communication channel with employees can take various forms (Arturo Fernandez & Paul Shaw, 2020). Also, Lee et al. (2020) found that internal communication practice during a crisis gives rise to an autonomy-supportive work environment and can thus increase employees' intrinsic needs satisfaction. In general, Castrogiovanni et al. (2011) found that trust and confidence are an important aspect in relation to attracting other stakeholders. By nurturing trust and confidence, a school leader could act as an entrepreneur and involve all the important external stakeholders. At the same time, the concept of trust is important to embed in school leadership. Lockwood (2005) argued that leadership competencies that include effective communication and building trust determine the success or failure of crisis management efforts. Also, Ahlström et al. (2020) suggest that one of the most important factors that school leaders have to deal with is trust. In fact, they have argued that school organizations that have a high level of trust could indeed create a culture that can be resilient in times of crisis and uncertainty. Trust during a crisis is successful when there is decentralized decision-making, when there is strong communication between the leader and stakeholder groups as well as individuals, and finally, when there is strong collaboration and interaction between organizations and

other individuals (Mishra, 1996). In addition to that, Castrogiovanni et al. (2011) found that trust and confidence, embedded into an organization's culture, could assist as one of the most important motivators by stimulating all the relevant stakeholders to take risks with confidence and not fear.

The 3rd aspect refers to the **distributed leadership skills** that school leaders need to acquire. Distributed leadership involves the collaboration and distribution of leadership and other tasks to all the internal actors of a school organization. In particular, in school organizations, the importance of distributed leadership emerges from the need to distribute tasks and responsibilities in order to more effectively and collectively address a crisis. Holcombe and Kezar (2017) argued that a straight-forward response to a crisis may be successfully addressed through the implementation of a distributed leadership model in which different individuals in an organization can exert creative influence in times of change. In addition, Arturo Fernandez and Paul Shaw (2020) argued that through the support of distributed and decentralized leadership, faculty could in fact build a better quality of teaching and overcome all the teaching and learning challenges as they were observed during the pandemic crisis. In addition, Azorin et al. (2020) argued that in this current crisis, distributed leadership has become the default leadership by requiring more school leaders to share, learn, network, and connect. Moreover, Harris and Jones (2020) argued that due to the myriad of challenges that this pandemic crisis has created, distributed leadership is a necessity to survive. Overall, during a crisis and times of uncertainty, it is possible that a school leader can promote aspects of distributed leadership to ease the burden and address the crisis in a more collective way.

The 4th leadership aspect refers to **crisis leadership skills**. According to James et al. (2011), crises are considered to be divergent events in any organization that are also highly unusual. As mentioned previously, crisis is not compared with daily organization problems. According to Can (1992), the "crisis leadership/management" concept is considered an important process where the organization tries to apply all the necessary steps and precautions to overcome the crisis with minimum loss. School leaders are responsible through the "crisis leadership/management" concept to address the crisis and include several key components such as the analysis of causes, an understanding of consequences, crisis prevention strategies, and an adjustment to the point of normalization (Shrivastava et al., 2013). In school organizations, school leaders must engage in promoting "crisis management," which will require strong collaboration and support from all staff and external school stakeholders. During a crisis, school leaders could not clearly acknowledge the causes of a crisis and neither could they predict who would be involved in a crisis (Lu, 2017). Therefore, a responsive 'crisis leadership/management' plan needs to be implemented. According to Cener (2007), during a crisis, the "crisis leadership/management" objectives should be as follows:

1. to identify the types of crisis and be informed about the process of crisis.
2. to enable the managers to evaluate and clearly identify a crisis.
3. to provide managers with techniques and all the necessary qualifications in order to manage crises and create crisis escape plans.

Also, Cener (2007) supported that a "crisis leader/manager" must possess the following qualifications:

1. to clearly understand the crisis's signals.
2. to be ready for a crisis and to protect the organization from one.
3. to promote effective and efficient decisions.

4. to use power throughout the crisis management process.
5. to plan and organize the crisis management process.
6. to ensure communication and coordination throughout the crisis management process.
7. to supervise the crisis management process.
8. to learn and assess throughout the crisis management process.

Finally, the 5th aspect refers to school leaders' **authentic leadership skills**. Based on the literature on the business sector (e.g., Wang et al., 2017) employees' positive affective behavior through intensity and authenticity could actually contribute to the enhancement of customers relations and reactions. In fact, it is important to understand the valuable aspect on employees' training programs on positive affective behavior which might support the interpersonal relationship between employees and customers, or otherwise the relationship between a business and stakeholders during crises and times of uncertainty. Therefore, adjusting the aforementioned tactic at the school setting, it is important to provide training to school leaders. More precisely, it is important to provide training and professional development on positive affective behavior (true and authentic self-knowledge and leadership) in order to assist to the overall positive communication and connection, resulting in positive effects such as funding etc. during a crisis. These training institutes and preparation centers should focus their attention to the leaders' values systems, beyond the common management and leadership courses, by providing specified training programs on the basis of the experiential and holistic approach of the true and authentic self-knowledge. Overall, this will support them during particular crises and during times of uncertainty. The aforementioned information in the educational leadership field is connected to leadership theories such as the Value-added leadership (Sergiovanni, 2001), the Values-led leadership (Day, 2000) and the Authentic leadership (Begley, 2006) which have theoretically demonstrated the strong impact of values on school principalship as well as connected principals' values with their leadership practices. In a study conducted in Cyprus concerning the school leader's personal values and authentic leadership (Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020b), the findings revealed that school leaders' authentic leadership may be filtered, to some extent, by particular factors which are affecting school principals. Such factors may be associated with (1) the conservative Cypriot society, (2) the centralized educational system, (3) the public image that each principal must preserve to all the external stakeholders (e.g. parents, educational institutions, Ministry of Education, local community) and (4) the authority/ power which they think they possess during their leadership practice. Overall, this finding indicated that practicing authentic leadership might be, in fact, impeded by specific factors connected to the broader context in which school principals operate (Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020b).

Based on the presented conceptual framework, it is very important to acknowledge that coordination and decision- making skills are deemed necessary under all forms of the leadership aspect during crises and times of uncertainty. In particular, coordination and decision-making skills, could in fact address this particular crisis and others both in the short and long run. School leaders in Cyprus and within their school organizations need to continuously monitor and evaluate the situation in order to promote a concrete decision-making process through the structuring or coordinating leadership aspect. In fact, one of the most important required attributes of a school leader during a crisis is the ability to make clear and decisive decisions (Smith & Riley, 2012). The critical decision-making process refers to a particular choice among other courses of action, and first and foremost, making the appropriate choice during a crisis requires appropriate quality and depth of information about the alternative choices (Smith and Riley, 2012). Also, these critical strategic decisions are legitimate and effective and could in fact

address a crisis both in the short and long run. At the same time, school leaders need to be empowered in a fast-decision-making process since Calogero and Yasin (2011) supported that a crisis influences heavily on the organization's functioning, and that this kind of situation requires immediate action from the school leader. Added to that, Boin and Lagadec (2000) mentioned that during a crisis, handling the decision-making process is considered a fundamental aspect. Therefore, a leader's ability to address the crisis effectively based on his/her decision process and system is of paramount importance. Fener and Cevik (2015) argued that crisis management must provide systematic decisions and lead a team who can apply these decisions. However, even if a crisis cannot be predicted beforehand, a leader must take and apply strong decisions that ensure cooperation when facing a time of uncertainty. In addition, the coordination aspect refers to a school's structural organization, which includes the proper use of space and time, together with how tasks are performed and assigned (Pashiardis & Johansson, 2020). In particular, school leaders in Cyprus during a crisis need to connect elements of proper organization and structure in order to organize and coordinate the school, staff development, etc. (Kafa & Pashiardis, 2020). Research (e.g., Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011; Pashiardis, 2014) presents this particular aspect through the structuring leadership style concept. Therefore, school leaders with training in organizational and coordination skills, through the promotion of strategies that include collecting more information, asking for advice, etc. (Pasquini, Steynor & Waagsaether, 2019), could support the school organization.

Overall, the centralized education system could in fact act as a barrier when school leaders promote these aspects, as presented in this conceptual framework. Yet, school leaders within their school organizations could create and shape their own "internal" educational policies in order to address any challenges together with the school's needs. In fact, school leaders who create their own "internal" policies take into consideration the local context in which the school is situated, and in particular, the local community and the students' socio-economic status. In particular, school leaders in Cyprus could in fact promote an internal education policy in which they can actually coordinate their school organization and take specific decisions based on a number of pillars. The two pillars that provide a partial autonomy for school leaders based on their decisions include the following: (1) "School leaders' fund": a specific amount of money is provided to school leaders at the beginning of the school year; (2) "Vocation learning plan": an optional plan to support the professional development of teachers. The implementation or rejection of this action is obviously the sole decision of the respective school leader in public school in Cyprus. The school principal, who decides to take advantage of this training opportunity, obviously acts more autonomously, since his/ her school organization collaborates with the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute for the training of his/her school staff. Therefore, school leaders in Cyprus have the opportunity to use these pillars by shaping their own internal educational policy within a framework of partial autonomy. In general, the education system in Cyprus, referring mostly to the primary and secondary education sectors, needs to move toward more decentralization and empowerment at the school level.

IMPLICATIONS

This conceptual framework provided the important aspects of empowering school leaders in Cyprus, who during the pandemic crisis acted as middle executives between their school organizations and the Ministry of Education. It is generally asserted that school leaders' roles during the pandemic crisis change. Especially in education systems such as that of Cyprus, in which school leaders during the crisis acted as middle executives between their school organizations and the Ministry of education. Therefore, first

and foremost, the training and professional development of school leaders needs to be rearranged so that updated training and development programs are launched in relation to a context-based leadership aspect, which is considered especially important to the organization and function of successful, flexible school organizations. Furthermore, it has been widely assumed that educational policy in all contexts prioritizes supporting school leaders in continuing opportunities for professional development and successfully leading a school organization in any educational context, even during a crisis.

In particular, during crisis, the establishment of effective processes for supporting school leaders is crucial. Harris and Jones (2020) mentioned that the existing preparation of school leaders is likely to be out of step with the challenges that school leaders are facing today. Therefore, the support from policy-makers' experts on school leaders' professional training and capacity for handling uncertainty and crisis is a necessity. In fact, Huber and Helm (2020) specifically mentioned that "professional development promotes quality in practice, leading to differences in short-and long-term action" (p. 16), and the need to provide professional support and guidance to school leaders is crucial.

Having said that, educational policy, stakeholders and governments must accept the necessity of developing the capacities of school leaders in the post-pandemic era and support school leaders by promoting and developing a specific training framework that could include the aforementioned skills. By doing so, educational policy, stakeholders and governments could have the opportunity to create autonomous school leaders who, based on their school organization's context, could lead successfully and effectively. This means increasing training, seminars, professional development, and general empowerment of school leaders. The aforementioned could be done by creating seminars or training with the engagement of other government and private stakeholders with expertise in crisis management, entrepreneurial leadership, etc. (e.g., universities, private companies, other governmental bodies). Having said that, during a crisis, the establishment of effective processes for supporting school leaders is crucial. At the same time, school leaders need to move forward effectively and productively, and they need to have the capacity and training to establish effective autonomous procedures in order to lead their school organizations successfully.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This particular chapter presented a developmental framework of school leaders' skills capacity and empowerment based on the centralized educational context in Cyprus. This particular effort relies on a conceptual perspective rather than an empirical perception. In general, it is important to acknowledge that it is difficult for researchers to capture data from leaders in the midst of a crisis (James et al., 2011). In the same spirit, James and his colleagues (2011) also argue that conducting research on organizational crisis has many challenges. Yet, scholars around the world have found mechanisms and numerous opportunities to study the topic. For instance, during a crisis, researchers could obtain data through surveys from their staff and customers (James et al., 2011). However, for them, the most suitable research method for studying crises is the qualitative research approach, specifically through the case study example. This particular research tool can provide researchers with the opportunity to capture significant detail and insight into a crisis phenomenon either as it is unfolding or even retrospectively. Based on the provided conceptual framework that was presented in this particular chapter, the aspects included in this model could in fact be validated in Cyprus through empirical research and, in particular, to examine to what

extent these aspects could in fact be promoted and support school leaders' work in school organizations. This, also, could be validated in other countries both with centralized and decentralized education systems.

In general, Huber and Helm (2020), in the school setting during the pandemic period, argued that research could and should contribute to the current debate about schooling by providing relevant information from its knowledge base and generating new knowledge where needed and when possible, whilst everyone agrees that some of this new research information is needed fast. In fact, during the first wave of the pandemic crisis, limited empirical research has been done. From the very beginning of the crisis, the literature included a conceptual perspective on the topic rather than an empirical one. As researchers mentioned (e.g., Harris, 2020; Huber & Helm, 2020), at the beginning of 2020, the research field in this context was in its early stages, as the pandemic went through a second wave and the challenges continued to exist. Following that, at the end of 2020 and the year 2021, empirical research came to the surface, and empirical data presented a holistic approach on school leaders' role and challenges during this particular crisis. Based on the aforementioned, the combination of both conceptual and empirical data presents the future directions of school principalship in a post-pandemic era. Yet, it is argued that this empirical research must incorporate the important differentiation between centralized and decentralized education systems in order to identify the important role of a school leader and, at the same time, take into consideration the important aspect of contextual factors.

CONCLUSION

Currently, the scientific field of educational leadership is moving forward from the conceptualization of the pandemic crisis to empirical results by providing information on how school leaders reacted during this pandemic crisis. Yet, through a conceptual perspective, a lot can be learned and in particular about how school leadership in certain contexts is enacted together with the respective educational authorities. In some cases, such as that of Cyprus, with a strict centralized education system, school leaders acted as middle executives who implemented all the decisions and guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education without taking into consideration the important aspect of contextual elements. In general, contextual factors (Sutherland, 2017; Pashiardis & Johansson, 2020) are important and affect the overall performance and leadership of a school leader during a crisis and uncertainty. For Schwarz and Brauckmann (2015), the area close to school (ACTS) acts as an intermediate context level of school leadership, whilst Pashiardis and Johansson (2020) supported that context shapes the leadership practice of school leaders and vice versa. Therefore, as a counterpoint to the centralised education system in Cyprus and the case of school leadership in this particular context, during this crisis, local school factors were not taken into consideration. The importance of contextual factors that affect school organisations is supported by research conducted in Cyprus (see Pashiardis, 2014; Pashiardis, Brauckmann & Kafa, 2018a; Pashiardis, Brauckmann & Kafa, 2018b). During this particular crisis, school leaders had to address all the problems that occurred within their school organizations and find solutions based on their own contextual perspective. For instance, in school organizations, students with low socio-economic status (SES) are called upon to manage the inflow of new knowledge and information through the use of their computers (those, of course, who have the necessary equipment) in their own homes. In order to support school leaders within Cyprus and school leaders in other centralized and decentralized education systems, this chapter presented a conceptual framework that supports school leaders' capacity building and could promote the school leadership aspect in school organizations. This conceptual framework includes the

capacity building of skills related to the coordination and decision-making within the school organizations, the important aspect of promoting a culture of trust and a concrete communication system with all the internal and external school stakeholders, the important aspect of distributing leadership, skills related to the “crisis management” capacity, and finally, the acquisition of skills related to the external leadership aspect or the entrepreneurial leadership aspect. In general, educational authorities need to take into consideration the important role that school leaders have in a school organization and proceed with essential changes that could contribute to improving the role of school leaders during this time of crisis.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Centralized Education System: School organizations adhere to the Ministry of Education's guidelines and regulations. Overall school decisions are made from the top to the bottom by a single governing body.

Context: The background, setting, framework, and environment of a particular country, area, etc.

Crisis Management: Highlights the important role of the leader in organizations during a period of uncertainty as a consequence of a crisis that arises.

Distributed Leadership: A form of shared leadership in which the leader promotes collaborative decision-making and distributes leadership duties to all the staff.

Entrepreneurial Leadership: A leader who achieves collaboration with a range of potential school stakeholders and acquires different resources so that the school organization operates and runs smoothly.

Middle Executives: School leaders in Cyprus are obliged to follow all the rules and regulations. On that account, school education in Cyprus is overseen by the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as by the Educational Service Commission. In Cyprus, school leaders serve as liaisons between their school organization and the Ministry of Education, and it is integrated into both primary (ages 6–12) and secondary (ages 12–18) education.

Organizational Crisis: An unpredictable event that disrupts the normal operations of the organization that requires an immediate response.

Chapter 6


Understanding Middle-Level Leaders' Empowerment During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Context of International Schools

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ABSTRACT

The term middle leadership is used in education to broadly describe the swathe of administrative roles that connect the classroom teacher with the top-tier management level role of head of school. The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the criticality of this role to school effectiveness and its relevance to crisis response. This chapter presents findings from a qualitative study conducted to understand how middle leaders were empowered during the pandemic in the international school context. Thirteen in-depth interviews with heads of schools, across three continents, were conducted to better understand how middle leaders were activated during the crisis. The findings revealed that while middle leaders were empowered through authentic collaboration, increased communication, and role clarity, due to the experience of the crisis, this was not always intentional. Finally, this chapter shares a conceptual framework that senior leaders may utilise for the sustainable empowerment of their middle leaders.

INTRODUCTION

In retrospect, there is little debate that COVID-19 has had far-reaching consequences in education and on educational leadership. By the end of March 2020, school buildings were closed immediately and indefinitely, creating an unprecedented operational crisis for educational leaders globally (OECD, 2021a,

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2021b, 2021c; Parker & Alfaro, 2021; Toquero, 2021). As schools were closed, educational leaders were required to respond urgently as they activated their teams and provided remote learning for students. Set within this context there is a subset of educational leaders who led international schools. These educational leaders experienced similar challenges, but their unique and agile environments allowed them to adapt quickly in innovative ways.

During the pandemic, Dr. Barker was serving as the Middle School principal at ABA Oman International School in Muscat, Oman and Dr. Ramaka was serving as the Head of School at the American School of Kosova in Prishtina, Kosovo. Their reflective conversations triggered their desire to learn what other leaders in international schools had experienced, how they navigated through the pandemic, and how middle level leaders were activated during the crisis. They also believed that other leaders in international schools would be eager to hear and learn from these stories as well.

Thus, the authors' primary objective was to fully capture the international leaders' experience of leading during the pandemic and tease out any pearls of wisdom to add to the growing literature trove on middle leader empowerment. Therefore, the authors designed a study based on data collected from thirteen (13) in depth interviews with international school Heads of School (aka school Directors) located on four continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America). The results of their study revealed how middle level leaders were utilized during the COVID-19 crisis, leading to the creation of the application framework for senior leaders provided at the end of the chapter.

BACKGROUND

The global context during the pandemic forced Heads of Schools in international schools to be focused on policy, health, and politics while middle level leaders became the drivers of their schools (Harris & Jones, 2021). The roles of Heads of Schools changed overnight, and so did the expectations for other administrators working within their institution. This change was necessary and immediate and—in many cases—not intentional. As school leaders grappled with the new reality of COVID-19, they began to rely more on their administrative staff who ran the school. Educational leaders were compelled to include and collaborate with middle level leaders in new and different ways. Given the context of international schools and their nuances, this pivot was necessary. Without the support of large government agencies and direct access to health data, the role of the Head of School inevitably shifted to executive-type roles, as daily operations of the school were delegated to middle leadership roles. However, the authors note that even prior to the pandemic, school leaders found effective infusion of middle leadership roles in institutional practice, complex (Fleming, 2014; Hansen & Davidson, 2022; Harris & Jones, 2017; Spillane, 2006).

According to ISC Research (2022), currently 12,373 international schools with a total of 550,846 staff are educating 5.68 million students across the world. The data demonstrates that the international school education sector is significant in size. And yet, there is very little research available about this field (Bunnell et al., 2016; ISC Research, 2022; Machin, 2017). Nevertheless, international school education is growing at a rapid pace, amid the constantly looming question of institutional legitimacy (Bunnell et al., 2016; Hayden & Thompson, 2013; Machin, 2017). Without a doubt, there is a need to define the term 'international school' so that research can be properly situated; however, the authors found the process of classifying and describing a typical international school to be universally challenging. Firstly, there is great diversity in the types of international schools (Bunnell et al., 2016; Hayden & Thompson, 2013; James & Sheppard, 2016). Secondly, there is no regulatory agency that can exclude

a school from self-classifying as an international school (ISC Research, 2022), and finally, due to the potential for profit, the international school market is evolving quickly and continually (James & Sheppard, 2016; Machin, 2017).

The international educational field is changing rapidly, so it is increasingly challenging to define or provide a set of universally accepted criteria (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013; Bunnell et al., 2016; Hayden 2011; Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Machin, 2019). Thus, there is some ambiguity in defining this diverse educational space (Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Mancuso et al., 2010). With an ever-changing dynamic, and the lack of an overarching governance structure there is an understudied breadth of schools that self-identify as international (ISC Research, 2022; Walker, 2015). Hence, there is a resigned agreement among current international education researchers that a single, universally accepted definition for international schools is still debatable (Bunnell et al., 2016; Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Walker, 2015).

Each of the approximate 12,000 schools that are classified as international schools, have a different governance structure, mission, vision, culture, and profile of stakeholders (ISC Research, 2021). Unlike national school systems, where homogeneity in governance structure, curriculum, mission, and vision is pursued as a political imperative; schools in the international scene can vary greatly according to their unique context or their benefactor's goal. This difference manifests itself in factors such as school size, staff, curriculum offering, purpose, salary scales, and leadership structure. Hence, to better understand what middle level leaders in international schools were navigating during the pandemic, it is necessary to first understand what an international school is.

For this chapter, the authors relied on this published definition by ISC Research shared within its research reports:

[The international] school delivers a curriculum to any combination of pre-school, primary or secondary students, wholly or partly in English outside an English-speaking country, or in a country where English is one of the official languages, or it offers an English-medium curriculum other than the country's national curriculum and the school is international in its orientation (ISC Research, 2021).

Institutional Legitimacy

As previously discussed, international schools are idiosyncratic by nature due to the eclectic range of contexts which they operate (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013; ISC Research, 2022; Machin, 2017; 2019). Thus, it is the lived experiences of leaders within international schools that provide authentic insights of this environment to other educational leaders and researchers. With no ideal or model international school to identify as the benchmark, each school within its uniqueness, provides a context rich in human interactions, systems, leadership relationships, customs, cultural exchange, and governmental requirements (ISC, 2022).

The issue of legitimacy looms large within the international school system (Brummitt & Keeling, 2013; Hayden 2011, Machin, 2017). With so many schools in an unregulated space, parents requiring clarity on the best schools in a new country for their children or even teachers choosing a place to work, the risks are high. In order to mitigate against these risks experienced international educators and savvy parents have become reliant on organizations such as the Council of International Schools and the International Baccalaureate Organization. The Council of International School (CIS), a leader in school evaluation and accreditation assesses schools' international-ness through their own published standards. To date, just over five hundred schools bear the CIS' seal of approval, with expected evaluation visits every five

years led by peers from other CIS-accredited schools (CIS, 2022). Within the confusing noises of the international scene, parents, teachers and researchers can further rely on this stamp (CIS) to determine the legitimacy of an institution. Additionally, the International Baccalaureate Organization or IB represents a promise of an international curriculum that acknowledges the transience of life as an expatriate family with a commitment to the advancement of international education. These two main organizations work in tandem with other US-based accrediting bodies such as Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and Middle States Association (MSA-CESS), allowing parity for qualifications when students return to the USA for continuance of learning (MSA-CESS, 2021; NEASC, 2022; WASC, 2022). As parents and teachers research schools in foreign lands, both the CIS and the IB badges provide solace.

Mary Hayden (2011) describes international schools as “transnational spaces of learning.” Her intentional reference to “transnational” and “spaces” reveals an attempt to capture the essence of international schools while avoiding the traditional framing of school systems in general. Indeed, international schools are transnational in nature, as schools offer learning that transcend borders or more precisely governmental control. Staff at an international school likely will include teachers from a range of countries, with a bias to Western and English-speaking populations. Hayden (2011) observed the growing internationalization of education and suggested it was an offshoot of globalization, with reference to the growing numbers of schools seeking this marketing moniker.

International School Leadership Structure

Understanding “who” is the middle level leader in an international school may be confusing for the reader who has never worked in this environment. Yet even a seasoned international school educator may not be able to immediately understand a person’s role in another school simply by learning about the leader’s title. For example, a ‘Principal’ may be the principal of a division, principal of the school, or even function in the role of a school superintendent. This challenge was one factor that determined the participants in our study. The authors knew that the role of middle leader in an international school was not easily discernible based on positional titles. Since the deployment of mid-level leaders was so disparate and any attempt to discuss leadership functioning in international schools across borders and school types would be additionally challenging to study themes, the authors decided to conduct their research with international school directors (e.g., Directors, Executive Directors, Director General, and Heads of School), whose authority in the school’s leadership hierarchy was more commonly defined. By inviting participants from the Association of International School Heads (AISH) network, the authors knew that they were interviewing leaders who were responsible for in fact leading their school.

International School Governance

The governance structure of an international school influences the nature of a school’s mission, vision, curriculum, management, and—in many cases—the overall climate of a school (James & Sheppard, 2014). James and Sheppard (2014) defined types of international schools by their governance structures as visualized in Figure 1.

As shown, James and Sheppard (2014) juxtaposed the proprietary status of international schools with the financial profit impetus. The ownership model observed ranged from community ownership to private

Figure 1. International school types by government structure (James & Sheppard, 2014)



ownership and the financial proceeds ranged from not-for-profit (NFP) to for-profit (FP) schools. With different motivations, financial and otherwise at play, the impact on schools, their structure, and their climate cannot be easily dismissed. From the authors' experience, an NFP school approaches challenges markedly different from an FP school.

International School Student Demographics

Demographic diversity is a distinguishing feature of international schools (ISC Research, 2022; Machin, 2017). Along with this comes the range of cultures, mother tongues, and the transient nature of international spaces (Hayden & Thompson, 2016). This range is not easily discernible, not even from published marketing material. For example, two international schools in the same country may describe their student diversity as consisting of over fifty different nationalities. This paints a picture of a diverse school environment but from our collective experience it is not reflective of the reality. Closer inspection may reveal that one school has over 60% of the population of a single nationality with single students representing the range of other nationalities, while the other school may have no more than 15% of its population of any one nationality. Which school is more diverse or how different is the learning environment? The latter will have more diversity than the former, but this is difficult to determine due to the nature of the regulation of international schools.

International School Curriculum

The curriculum offered in each of these schools is determined by the board (whether for-profit or non-profit) and the perceived demand of the parent community. It must also be approved of by the local government, and the degree to which the local government enforces their national expectation varies. In places with rigid national curriculum guidelines and supervision of implementation, the social studies curriculum or the library resources may be impacted. However, at the same time, one country may have more freedom to teach politically controversial themes that are not permitted to be taught in another country.

Thus, there is a great variety in how an adopted curriculum (e.g., IB-International Baccalaureate, AP-Advanced Placement, CC-Common Core, IGCSE-International General Certificate of Secondary Education, QSI-Quality Schools International approach) is implemented due to the degree of pressure from local government degree of involvement by the individual school board. In addition, there are a variety of accrediting agencies that approve and monitor international schools, including the International Baccalaureate (IB), the Council of International School (CIS), and Middle States Association (MSA).

Teaching in International Schools

The teachers that are hired in international schools may come from all over the world, and the percentage of national diversity within the staff can also vary. For example, some schools may have a teaching staff with a majority being expatriate while another may only have one out of ten teachers who are hired from overseas. In addition, there is typically a high degree of staff turnover in international schools (CIS, 2022; Fong, 2018; Mancuso et al., 2010; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). For example, a school with a teaching staff may have thirty-three new teachers to replace annually as teachers complete a two, or a three-year contract and move on to a new assignment in a new country.

In summary, leading in an international school is highly context specific. The great variety in governance structure and their corresponding mission and vision, national influence in the implementation of curriculum, and variety in the demographics, staffing, and student population make leading in a specific school context very valuable. In fact, the authors have found that many recruiting organizations seek out senior leaders who – in addition to leadership skills – also have experience leading in similar regions of the world and in similar types of schools. Understanding the unique international context is helpful for newly recruited middle level leaders, although many middle level leaders rise through their school because of this environment.

Leading From the Middle During a Crisis

In 2014, the Chief Inspector for Ofsted, the UK's independent quality assurance body for standards in education, described middle leaders as “the engine of schools” (Wilshaw, 2014). Sir Mike Wilshaw addressed a group of middle leaders in Manchester schools with this statement: “In many ways, you are the most important leadership group in the school. The most important.” This maxim was an interesting departure from the rabid results-focused approach that Ofsted had previously championed. In this speech, he was highlighting the criticality of middle leadership in determining outcomes in school. asserts that all sustainable school improvement involves the deep collaboration of middle level leaders. Yet, there is a paucity of literature on middle leadership (Baars et al., 2015; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; Gear & Sood, 2021; Pavlopoulos, 2020).

There are obvious reasons for this since middle leadership is a term generally associated with schools but with very little application in other spheres. Middle leaders survive by delicately navigating the challenge of role ambiguity and prescribed authority (Fleming, 2014; Harris & Jones, 2017; Harris et al., 2019; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Pavlopoulos, 2020). Their lived experience, in normal times and within the complex world of international schools is a cultural cocktail, flavoured by distinctive personality traits, school profile, local customs, leadership behaviours, and organizational culture. With a pandemic presenting problems driven by unexpected turns, role clarity within schools was now sharply in focus, as middle leaders were now expected to execute more complex leadership actions to address increasing

uncertainty in their workplace. With some school leaders working remotely during the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, some middle leaders were working on the ground while communicating with their superiors online. This distinct dynamic birthed new relationships between school leaders and middle leaders, culminating in new ways of working. As leaders trusted the competency and commitment of their mid-level leaders, their work became more inclusive, collaborative, and focused, as evident by the comments of the leaders in this study. As we collected data through thirteen in-depth semi-structured interviews from leaders in Asia, Europe, and North America, the term that emerged in a variety of phrases with similar meaning was that of an “expanded role”.

So how might international school leaders cultivate an organizational culture that fosters middle leaders' agency in international schools? The term middle leader is quite commonly used in education to describe administrative roles that connect the work of the traditional teacher with the top-tier management cadre (Baars et al., 2015; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017). Typically, middle leaders have specific functions such as head of a subject department, or assistant principal with specific roles, yet the international schools have middle leaders in roles such as section principal. This reality colours the accepted definition suggesting that the terminology is applied broadly depending on the context. Baars et al. (2015) connected the work of middle leaders to student achievement by considering their functioning through the lens of reducing variances in teacher performances. Given that student attainment is the goal of the education provided at a school, it is quite understandable that the professionals that play a vital role in establishing high standards of education across departments, year level or key stage need to be effective leaders themselves.

James Stroop (in Baars et al., 2015) described the purpose of Baars and colleagues' study as getting into the “black box” of middle leadership; he further asserted that “you cannot have a great school without a great middle leadership” (p. 4). The key findings of the report, based on a study of secondary schools in the United Kingdom, were centred on two factors that were deemed to influence middle leader effectiveness: (1) Effective middle leaders are particularly good at managing their team, and (2) effective middle leaders attach importance to planning and resource management. However, the report highlighted a difference in perception of the roles filled by teachers and senior leaders. Unsurprisingly, teachers viewed effective middle leadership through the lens of their lifeworld while senior leaders expected it to function as part of a line management function leading to school-wide goals. Thus, teachers assessed middle leaders by their ability to delegate and school leaders were focused on results. Baars et al. (2015) provided further evidence from the field that middle leaders operated in a world where the clarity of their functioning, even in normal (pre-COVID-19) times was not universally understood by their colleagues. Further, in a tightly run education system such as the United Kingdom, this disconnect was worryingly present. Given this disparity in expectations, their effective empowerment would require some amount of intentionality, or a crisis as was revealed in our interviews.

Middle leader empowerment is largely dependent on the extent to which their direct line managers provide the conditions for them to grow (Bush & Glover, 2014; Harris & Jones, 2017; Lipscombe et al., 2020; Somech & Naamneh, 2019; Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Camburn, 2006). Spillane (2006) has long championed more research in understanding distributed leadership models as a vehicle to activate middle leadership. The author's work on distributed leadership praxis shifts the focus of leadership from the heroism of one to the synergy of a team. As such, Spillane (2006) describes distributed leadership as “the product of joint interactions of school leaders, followers and aspects of their situation” (p. 3). This interaction, according to the author, is not simply shared leadership, but authentically more profound and focuses on collective interactions and their situations.

During times of high uncertainty, researchers agree that leadership is most effective when communication is strategic and management of the crisis is transparent (DeRue, 2011; Hersey & Blanchard, 1997; Kotter, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). How may leaders foster the necessary self-confidence in their middle leaders so they may actualize their skills during a crisis? Is it different for international school leaders leading diverse, multicultural staff members? The authors found that these essential questions prompted a focus on role clarity, collaboration, communication. One successful approach is to embrace the tenets of distributive leadership.

Distributive Leadership

The terms shared leadership, team autonomy, and situational leadership are sometimes erroneously used as synonyms for distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Camburn, 2006). According to Spillane (2006), distributed leadership transcends these leadership modalities to intentionally invest in the relationships between leaders and their followers as well as being driven by the conditions in the prevailing context. Additionally, Hargreaves (2007) describes this as a flattening of the leadership hierarchy to include organizational elasticity thus facilitating adaptive behaviours.

In the authors' combined experience, they have found that the sphere of influence in leadership within a school can be mutable and changeable. The current trend of considering environments of sharing the leadership load, is observed ubiquitously in business environments but is not always understood or widely manifested in schools. The concept of distributed leadership is emerging and becoming more prevalent as a leadership structure that can withstand tensions, crisis and shocks as well as delivers organizational wins in efficiency and effectiveness. Leithwood et al. (2007) in a study of the patterns of leadership distribution concluded that formal positions such as school leaders were critical to the success of distributed leadership structures. Therefore, the integrity of the institution's structure is tested when a global crisis such as COVID-19, is its operational context.

Organizational effectiveness is improved when distributed leadership is practiced (Bennett et al., 2007; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Hansen & Davidson, 2022; Harris & Jones, 2017; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Leithwood and Mascall (2008) explored patterns of leadership distribution and leadership roles in a large school district in Ontario, Canada, and found that schools were inevitably more effective when distributed leadership was systemic. Similarly, Heck and Hallinger (2008) in a multi-dimensional study of 200 elementary schools explored the relationships between school contexts and leadership and found that where there was a clarity in roles. In such an environment it was also found that student performance was positive. If the goal of school structures is to achieve high quality outcomes for students, then a distributed leadership model is an ideal pursuit. When schools implement a distributed leadership approach to leadership, it is inevitable that the middle leadership group is activated. Thus, when a crisis emerges, it is through the already established structures that distributive leadership provides that heads of schools can then trust their mid-level leaders to step up and lead.

Standards for Middle Leadership

Given the loosely defined term 'middle leadership,' it is not surprising that different national education systems were compelled to qualify what this term meant in their system. It was self-evident that there had to be a definition and some delineation of standards to support career progression in schools. Hence, in 2021, the General Teaching Council of Scotland released a document, titled *The Standards for Middle*

Leadership, to provide a roadmap for teachers. This detailed explicit criteria for aspiring leaders to understand the necessary competencies that would be the standard for consideration for middle leadership moving forward. This document has also facilitated performance management in schools since it provided a shared language and removed ambiguity from the professional discourse:

The Standards for Middle Leadership recognizes that effective leadership depends on the principles of collegiality and that all teachers should have opportunities to be leaders, who lead learning for, and with, all learners. Middle leaders work with, and support the development of, colleagues and other partners. The Standard for Middle Leadership includes a focus on leadership of and for learning, teacher leadership, and working collegially to build leadership capacity in others. (GTC Scotland, 2021)

The National College for School Leadership (NCSL), an arm of the Department of Education in England, launched several programs to develop new leaders in 2013. One of the programs, the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leaders (NPQML), was specifically designed for teachers who aspired to middle leadership (NCSL, 2013). The allure of this program was the achievement of a certification and the opportunity to take on a leadership function in their present school, effectively placing the teacher in the spotlight. The NPQML was not an explicit requirement for career advancement, but teachers who gained the support of their schools to join the program were deemed to be of high potential. Recently, the NPQML has been redesigned as a result of the wide range of teachers and pathways that manifested from the early version of the program. Responding to the need to acknowledge the plethora of roles that middle leaders face, the NCSL relaunched the middle leadership certification, effectively splitting the certification into three contiguous pathways, NPQ for Leading Teaching, NPQ for Leading Behaviour and Culture, and NPQ for Leading Teacher Development (NPQ-UK, 2021).

Presently, the redesign of the National Professional Qualifications for Middle Leaders Program offers three distinct pathways and was an acknowledgement of the diversity of roles that was under the umbrella of middle leaders (NPQ-UK, 2021). Aspiring teachers within this new conception of middle leadership will be given the opportunity to further specialize. The UK qualification is well regarded in the international scene, but one family of schools has created its own training program: While the standards that are required for certification had not changed completely, the content areas were more focused on the individual teachers' area of interest. Internationally, the Council of British International Schools (COBIS, 2022) offers a mirrored certification system, providing training for Middle Leaders and aspiring Heads of Schools. It is left to see if these programs will be modified accordingly to align with the UK's changes.

Given the complexity of middle leadership and the breadth of expectation dependent on school contexts, it is acknowledged that the role is complex, and many educational leaders are striving to understand it. With standards being itemized and explained, in numerous published documents, there is an intentional move by some school systems to empower new leaders (GTC-Scotland, 2021; NPQ-UK, 2021). These standards have helped focus the conversation and provide a shared understanding in national school systems. Yet, the international school system does not have an overarching government to lead policies, so each school has the responsibility to develop systems to grow and develop their own leaders. In the shadow of the pandemic, it became increasingly apparent that when international school heads established clarity for middle leadership they fared well during the crisis.

Understanding Middle Leader Empowerment During the COVID-19 Crisis

Prior to COVID-19, middle leaders were already beginning to contend with a demand from their institutions to change their functioning (Bryant et al., 2019; Harris & Jones, 2017; Hansen & Davidson, 2022; Spillane, 2006). In one study, funded by IB Research and conducted in International Baccalaureate (IB) Schools, school leaders in four IB schools were interviewed on the nature of middle leadership in international contexts. Even at that time, the authors were unearthing evidence that middle leaders were being given responsibilities that fell outside of their traditional axis of functioning. Traditionally, middle leaders were easily dispatched as curriculum leaders or nominal pastoral leaders, but the role had started to expand to include instructional leadership, leading professional development, and sometimes broadening to functioning at the strategic level (Barker, 2020; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2020, 2009; Robertson, 2011).

This study focused on the school leaders' actions to respond appropriately to the challenge of effectively operating international schools during the pandemic by unlocking the potential of their middle leader cadre. The authors investigated how international school heads saw the role of middle leaders in their schools evolve during the pandemic and categorized the responses into the following:

- response strategy,
- the quality and frequency of communication between the leadership levels,
- the degree of empowerment that middle leaders were afforded through intentional actions of the school leaders, and the school leaders' reflection on the impact of their deliberate distributive actions.

The authors selected a semi-structured interview approach as it provided an opportunity for two-way communication through a flexible discussion protocol. This method allowed the authors to explore how participants reflected on their actions during the crisis, and to delve into personal and sometimes sensitive issues (Edwards & Holland 2013). The study was primarily concerned with the intentional involvement of middle leaders (e.g., assistant principals, principals in small schools without assistant principals, school counsellors, curriculum coordinators, and heads of departments), in the strategic response to the COVID-19 crisis by their heads of schools. The central questions that were explored in this study were:

1. What was the experience of top tier leaders in international schools during the COVID-19 crisis?
2. Reflecting on the experience during the COVID-19 crisis, what have top tier leaders learned about crisis management? Relationships? Community? Communication?
3. How important was the role of middle level leaders in the management of the crisis?

These probing questions were asked during the interview if participants had not explicitly mentioned middle leaders in their responses:

1. How did you communicate with middle leaders during the crisis?
2. How integral was the role of your middle leaders to your strategy?
3. How important is middle leader agency when confronting a crisis based on your experience?
4. How did you integrate teacher-leaders into the response plan?

Significance of the Study

This study explores two elements in the educational space that are similarly under-researched, middle leadership and the international school system within the context of a pandemic. The authors expect the findings to further shed light on the world of international schools and provide insights into how school leaders perceive the role of mid-tier leaders as they design strategy. Based on the emerging themes, the authors constructed a conceptual application framework that may support school leaders as they lead during a crisis. With the findings from this study situated in the domain of international schools, researchers are now provided with another context to add to the growing literature base of research on crisis management and middle leadership.

Ethical Considerations

Considering the comparatively small number of international schools in the world, the authors decided to protect the identity of the participants in this study, so the name of the school and the country of location was anonymized. In addition, participants were assigned numbers for identification instead of using pseudonyms.

Selection Process

The authors aimed to limit relationship bias by not interviewing any colleagues within their personal or professional networks. Instead, they approached the members of the Association of International School Heads (AISH), a professional network of over five hundred (500) Heads of Schools, for volunteers through one email invitation. The invitation was posted to the AISH email group on Sunday, November 28, 2021, at 11:01 (EST). Within 24 hours, 17 Heads of School volunteered to be interviewed. A follow-up email was sent to each respondent to schedule a one-hour recorded Zoom video call. Participants also received the focus questions and an informed consent form. A total of 13 Heads of School completed the interview process.

The criteria for selecting the participants were as follows:

1. Was an educational leader with the title and role of Head of School, School Director, or Principal during the onset of COVID-19
2. Lead an administrative team as part of the organizational structure of the school

All interviews were completed between December 1, 2021, and January 28, 2022, and transcribed. The cleaned data and transcriptions were stored in a password-protected Google Drive folder only accessible by the authors. The interviews were conducted by only one of the authors to control for variations in questioning style or personality influences between researcher and participants.

Data Analysis

Tables 1-3 provide an overview of the participants in this study. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants by the continent their school of reference was located in. Table 2 shows that the distribution

Table 1. Distribution of Participants by Continent

Continent	Number of Participants
Europe	3
North America	4
Asia	5
Africa	1

Table 2. Distribution of Participants by Gender

Gender of Participants	Number of Participants
Female	7
Male	6

Table 3. Distribution of Participants by Nationality

Nationality of Participants	Number of Participants
USA*	6
UK*	3
Canada	3
New Zealand	1

Note: * Includes participants holding dual citizenship.

of genders was almost equal amongst the participants and Table 3 demonstrated a characteristic of international schools towards hiring English-speaking Heads of School.

The transcripts from the semi-structured interviews were first saved separately in a coded format linked to each of the participants' names in order to document the full conversation. The next stage in the process required the authors to listen to the full interview and extract relevant sections from the full interview that addressed the research questions. A single document was created with hyperlinks to the spoken words of the participants and in a sequential order based on when the response was first observed. Finally, the authors established the themes using NVivo software (version 12) based on an analysis of the responses.

It became apparent to the authors that the COVID-19 crisis was perceived as demanding by everyone within the schools involved in the study. As the numbers of meetings escalated, channels of communication expanded, and learning in technology intensified for all stakeholders, the professional development between teachers and between middle level leaders and teachers became the bedrock of daily functioning. When seen through the lens of these activities, it is evident that even though this was a time of crisis within schools, it was also an opportunity for learning for everyone. The dominant theme that emerged from the interviews was the idea of an "expanded role." This conception of how middle leaders were deployed was endorsed by all the participants. The way the role of middle leaders was expanded was different based on schools but in general it was evidently clear that each school leader relied on middle leaders in order to effectively navigate the crisis.

Table 4. Distribution of the Endorsement of Pre-existing Themes by Participants

Collaboration	Communication	Role Clarity
13	10	11

The authors felt it was important to emphasise that the approach to the interviews was to observe how the participants explicitly empowered the middle leadership in their school. In order to reduce any interviewer disturbance or influence in participant response, the authors introduced the open-ended questions first and followed with the detailed questions only when necessary. Thus, the interview strategy was open in nature, responsively guided by their response to the broad question: What did top-tier leaders learn about crisis management? The interviewer had agency to guide the conversation to challenge the participants to reflect on how they communicated, collaborated or led during the crisis.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest twelve approaches to generating meaning from transcribed data, these include counting frequencies of occurrence, noting patterns and themes, seeing plausibility, and clustering. The tactics shared by Miles and Huberman (1994) signal the importance of coding the data to reduce data overload through tabular presentation of the findings. As each interview was about an hour in length on average, large quantities of text were generated, therefore a systematic approach was needed to analyse the content in order to extract meaning. The authors decided to analyze the data employing pre-existing themes that emerged from the extant literature on empowering middle leaders. These were collaboration, communication and role clarity. The coding procedure assigned an endorsement when the participant mentioned middle leaders and alluded to any of the themes in the response. Table 4 shows the endorsements of these themes by the different participants in the study.

As seen in Table 4, there were numerically significant endorsements for the pre-existing themes: Collaboration, Communication and Role Clarity. The details are shown below in the different subsections that follow, showing how the participants incorporated the role of middle leaders in their crisis response.

Collaboration

A climate of professional collaboration is strongly supported in the literature as a key factor in successful middle leader empowerment. Spillane (2006) in tandem with Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) have observed that successful outcomes become more likely in environments where professional collaboration is promoted and celebrated. The participants in the study endorsed the collaborative nature of their crisis response in numerous ways. For example, Participant #13 stated that, "... you can't do that without a middle leadership team who knows what they're looking for and had some say in building the program". The same participant emphasised how the crisis experience can build leadership readiness, "...and, and so, I was very intentional about telling my middle level leaders, you know, this is the stuff that turns you into senior level leaders". Participant #12 revealed how the collaboration worked through being flexible, "...everybody having to be agile and flexible, was really important having a really good team around you, you know, and utilizing that team and giving them the trust, ...we'll try to do our best and we're all gonna step up at some stage." Participant #6 explained attempts to ensure each member had a voice, "...as much as possible, involve everyone. Like, there's a time in crisis where you can't. Or you have to make fast decisions. But once you know, you can't make a fast decision, then open it up

and let people have a voice.” This agency in collaborative action was supported by Participant #10, who conceded that, “...So a lot of the difficult decisions were actually not my decisions, they were a bigger body (meaning the extended leadership team)”.

The authors observed numerous references to the team and how the team worked. Multiple participants used the collective “we” to describe actions but did not explicitly outline who was included in this collective pronoun. Nevertheless, there were endorsements for the formation of collaborative groups. For example, Participant #11 shared, “we had to make sure that we were all on the same page in terms of the majority of the main big decisions.” Participant #5 agreed, “...both senior leaders and middle managers working together in different ways and building their own personal skills...”, offering the perspective that the pandemic created new ways of working. This reflection was supported by Participant #4 in the following comment, “...where you’d have a lot of decisions being talked about by a group of 12 to 18 people in a room really, really sustained crazy, it’s what you would expect if you were in a crisis.”. These references and others underlined the reality that middle leaders were an integral part of the collaborative response as they were included in planning meetings and expected to contribute equally to the school’s approach to the crisis. As outlined, the participants were not explicitly identifying this increased collaboration as a means for empowerment, but the researchers observed that the immersion experience might have impacted how the middle leaders grew during the pandemic. In that sense, while not intentional, the collaborative experience was sustained.

Communication

The literature on crisis management identifies communication as critical to a success response. Within the pandemic, communication with stakeholders was integral to maintaining calmness within a community but also to establish rules and procedures as government edicts were issues. In an international school, the role of the Heads of Schools became more “external facing”, as they engaged with embassies, government agencies and global organisations to understand how to lead their schools and to determine what information was important to share with parents and the expatriate teachers (who had family). During this communication, middle leaders were required to provide information to their teams. Yet how were they included in a streamlined process that empowered them? Participant #1 explained his concerns in this way, “...there was so much communication going on from senior leaders to middle level leaders and middle level leaders to teachers and parents that it might have needed to be more streamlined,” and continued with, “We were communicating individually, indirectly, and the principals were communicating with their divisions about education”. Participant #2 described his middle leadership team as benefiting from the communication he shared, “People on the ground are getting most of the impact of my formal communications” and Participant #3 shared the tools that were used, “And then on a group chat on WhatsApp, I was communicating to the three heads of the school section”. Participant #3 also shared how systems were put in place to ensure communication was streamlined, “...and so I have seven standing meetings each week with different middle leaders to some degree or different titled positions”, this approach was mirrored by Participant #4, “A once-weekly meeting with the department chairs, and the way the high school was structured, as there are department rooms, so department chairs sat with their teachers on an ongoing basis”, though not with the same level of intensity. These vignettes highlight the nature of the communication and how involved the middle leadership team was in the response to the crisis but as we observed, the participants described their approach in process driven language and even when prompted did not provide explicit reflection on how middle leaders were empowered.

Role Clarity

The pandemic confronted the challenge of role clarity and provided an opportunity for the participants to empower their middle leaders in a sustained manner. The responses from the participants indicated that tasks were shared with middle leaders. Participant #1 was very direct to his middle leaders, "I told my middle level leaders to **focus on the main thing** of teaching and learning". The main thing for many of the participants was sharing the workload, "...so that's been for the mid-level leadership role for the crisis, to **focus on the education** part." (Participant #7), and that **(running the school) has devolved a lot more** to the leadership, principals and the coordinators" (Participant #8) or Participant #11, "... we **divvied up the tasks** and I think that was crucial because they're the ones that have the truly close relationships".

The participants' responses show how different leaders responded to the crisis and how they included their middle leaders in the response. The bolded text indicates where the researchers acknowledged an explicit attempt to distribute tasks among the leadership team. These responses indicated that role clarity was integral to a successful crisis strategy and the participants were clear on the role that middle leaders had to play. In this specific theme, the empowerment of middle leaders was observed with intentionality. With the levels of accountability associated with role clarity, especially in the context of the pandemic, middle leaders assumed a greater level of importance to the school's functioning and not only being consigned to invisible functions. Participant #3 summed it perfectly, "...it may have made them (middle leaders) more visible to the board." One practical and impacting empowerment practice was the inclusion of middle leaders into "COVID Committees".

The COVID-19 Committee

Perhaps the strongest evidence of professional collaboration was the establishment of the COVID-19 Crisis Committee of which middle leaders were integral members. Normally, strategic planning was the sole domain of senior leaders, yet as COVID-19 stretched resources and will in school communities there was increased awareness that a team of professionals committed to success was needed. All participants endorsed the concept of a committee inclusive of middle leaders, in some ways putting them at the table. Participant 3 stated:

"And so, I have seven standing meetings each week with different middle leaders to some degree or different titled positions. And so, then every other week, we do an admin team meeting for things that we need to speak about as, as a group of four."

Participant 9 supported with:

"And I think at the beginning, we decided that we would, we would form the kind of COVID-19 committee where we want to discuss specifically, every week, practically, I mean, it turns out to be every day, informally, but we have a weekly meeting, and COVID-19 is on that meeting agenda every single week."

Participant 2 was adamant that the committee was not intended to be a representative group but more an action-oriented group:

"And so, it's a system that's a crisis team thing that is a standard group, there was some pressure at some points in time to have some representation of staff or others. And I said, no, this is not a representative group. This is a group that is empowered to take action."

Participant 2 continued using the term "cabinet" to describe the team that managed the crisis in their school:

"My cabinet is my principals, my vice principals, my Director of Finance, my Director of Teaching and Learning, my chief administrative officer, who also serves as administrative officer for the Board."

Participant 4 also outlined his team:

"[...] sophisticated leadership infrastructure, in terms of, principals and associate principals at all levels, but then really directors [...] Director of Learning, Director of Human Resources, Director of Maintenance and Facilities it was, and I found that this really served us well, it was really, everybody was in this crisis team mode, where you'd have a lot of decisions being talked about by a group of 12 to 18 people in a room."

Participant 10 explained the frequency for his team to meet:

"We met every single day for an hour 8:30 Every single day throughout the crisis, Monday to Friday, just the four of us in the there's nobody else there."

Participant 4 acknowledged the importance of the team in successfully emerging from the crisis:

"And it certainly wasn't I mean, there were certainly things I was bringing to it. But it couldn't have worked if we weren't already a strong team."

The participants, despite their different experience levels and the diversity of schools they led, still were acting in unison, at least in their response to the challenge. The authors observed this practice of flattening the school leadership structure in a vast majority of the participants responses. The committees were introduced to address the crisis, but will they remain after the crisis is in the past?

A Temporal Lens for Middle Leader Empowerment

The authors were keenly aware of the complex context of international schools with their global dynamic and unique inner school culture. Thus, before trying to replicate any successes or generalize from one context to another, it is prudent to be mindful of this reality within education sectors. For example, a school in Norway who implements a new intervention to help new students at recess make new friends may be a huge success, while the same idea in the U.S. can become a bullying exercise (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013, 2015).

Hargreaves and O'Connor (2019) offered a temporal lens as a motif for analysis may prompt deeper understanding of how change is embedded systemically. They identified the 4Bs: Before, Beside, Be-

yond, and Betwixt. With a focus on the establishment of trust, they offered a time-oriented approach that embraced the contextual situation. With the pandemic as the context of the study and the empowerment of middle leaders during this crisis, the 4Bs offered an opportunity to describe the changed functioning of middle leaders as revealed by the participants as well as through the literature review.

Before the Crisis

Before the pandemic, middle leaders were mainly seen as bridges between the senior level team and the teachers in the school. With some middle leaders being teachers as well as administrators this dynamic had its identity challenge. Along with role clarity, middle leaders had to contend with communication and collaboration issues (Hansen & Davidson, 2021; Harris & Jones, 2017; Harris et al, 2019; Spillane 2006). Within international schools, as noted earlier, the challenge was even more profound since middle leaders had a far wider range of responsibilities and roles than in traditional national systems. The main reason for this disparity was because no two international schools were the same due to location, size, curriculum, or even benefactors. Naturally, within such complexity, middle leaders were unsure of their space and place and so acted upon direction rather than with autonomy.

Beside the Crisis

While each participant was addressing issues of importance in their school, other school leaders generally were experiencing the same challenges in other continents. While the schools were patently different in structure, the role of middle leaders was central to the plans. School leaders were now confidently reaching out to other colleagues and using their professional networks to understand how to approach daily challenges. In these sharing spaces, the participants shared how they configured their COVID-19 committees, bringing more people to the table beside them. In other parts of the world, a more flattened leadership structure became the norm. The “besidedness” of the crisis enabled leaders to create more space for middle leader empowerment and agency through the extension of their role. Thus, changing them from decision takers to collaborative decision makers. Everyone was experiencing this crisis and the challenges and pivots were the same. The winners in this new paradigm were the middle leaders as their hierarchical leaders shared power and responsibilities with them, that would otherwise be the domain of the senior leadership. This was not always intentional, rather it was situational as the participants had to be more outward facing engaging with external partners to address the crisis, reducing the time they could share with running the school. Participant 9 commented:

“[...] and that (running the school) has devolved a lot more to the leadership, principals and the coordinators.”

The “external-facing leader” was also acknowledged by Participant 13:

“[...] then I became front facing, dealing with the parents, when I’m dealing with the board, when I’m dealing with the media, when I’m dealing with the embassy. At that point, I can say with fidelity that I know what’s happening in my school, and that good people are working on things.”

And participant 5:

"[...] senior leaders have had to be much more engaged in that sort of horizon scanning government relations that piece of the continuity planning, which can be quite demanding when the regulatory environment, the compliance piece is changing all the time."

Between the Crisis

The functioning of middle leaders did not occur in a vacuum amidst the crisis. Given the eclectic nature of the international school system, factors such as the cultural mix, the response to crisis, the transient nature of students and staffing, the nature of school boards, location, and school size were intertwined. Between the challenge of continuing school and activating leaders at all levels, school leaders had to contend with all other daily operational issues in the international school. The reality, according to Participant 13, was that some people needed to be told to get on with things as they were not used to autonomous functioning:

"I can't do all the work if I'm one guy, I can't have my team waiting for permission from me to execute their work. So, we need to be clear on what everybody's roles are."

Alluding to the cultural dynamic:

"[It] was very hierarchical, so people were afraid to do anything unless the Head of School said it was okay. So, people were asking for permission to do their job."

Participants indicated a tension existing between the managing the day-to-day challenges of the crisis and the enabling (i.e., empowering) of middle leaders to adequately respond to novel challenges. Acknowledging the need to overcome this frictional force, leaders utilized the COVID-19 committees, direct communication channels, and line management meetings to explain the step-up that was needed. The collaborative advantage was highlighted with middle level leaders being the nexus of a proactive crisis response with a clearer distribution of responsibilities.

Beyond the Crisis

At the time of this writing, the world had just emerged from yet another COVID-19 variant (Omicron) that threatened to return schools to the dark days of lockdowns and remote learning. Given the sensitivity of the world to variants and seemingly endless uncertainty, it is difficult to predict what the role of middle leaders will be beyond the crisis. Yet, the authors suggest that some of the flexibility in school structures and adaptations will remain in place as they leverage the collaborative advantage inherent in efficient teams. The authors believe it's a good time for senior leaders to reflect with their teams and middle level leaders so empowerment can be more intentional.

Empowerment addresses a potent human need. Once educational leaders become empowered, they will unlikely settle for anything less. Thus, it would be wise for senior leadership to be more mindful of empowering their middle leaders intentionally. This may be challenging, as schools are now fully emerging from pandemic programming and attempting to return to regular routines. The establishment

of COVID-19 committees brought more members of the leadership team to the table. By being at this table, schools were able to empower their middle leaders to their benefit through the onset of a crisis. These committees opened the floodgates to the potential of middle leaders as extended members of a strategic team and even after the crisis, they may remain in this role. Inevitably, it quickly became apparent that working together as a leadership team led to a school's success.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION

Examining these themes for the “smallest common denominator,” the authors found professional collaboration to be the key to unlocking Middle Level Leaders during the crisis. For the purpose of this study, they relied on the following definition:

Professional collaboration is the process that takes place when members of a learning community work together as equals toward a common goal irrespective of positions of authority. (Powell, 2013)

The authors found that when organizational structures were flattened, because of the crisis, there were more opportunities for middle level leaders to be empowered. For example, the development of COVID Committees and its flattened structure gave a well-defined authority to the middle level leader. Their authority was also expanded from a primarily academic role to genuine involvement in strategic decisions. Thus, the authors propose that it is this high degree of professional collaboration that propels middle level leaders into full empowerment, and that when they are fully activated, the learning community will inevitably benefit (as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic) and sustainably thrive.

Noting the frequency and quality of professional collaboration that took place, the authors utilized the 10 Tenets of Collaborative Professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) as a magnifying lens to understand the data. For example, Tenet 9: Collaborating with Students, is explained as a high level of professional collaboration in which students and teachers “construct change together” (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018, p. 7). Similarly, Tenet 8: Common Meaning and Purpose, “addresses goals of education that enable and encourage young people to grow and flourish as whole human beings” (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018, p. 7), which goes beyond just supporting students in their academic learning.

Further analysis of the data revealed alignments with the tenets (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) and the lived experiences of the Heads of Schools. The participants described the collaboration using words and phrases that centred on a collaborative atmosphere built on trust. This trust was established between the senior leadership team (COVID Committees involvement), parents (communicating information directly) and the teams they lead (direction of curriculum and strategic response to changing rules). With Heads of Schools, becoming more “outward facing” mid-level leaders were intentionally granted autonomy to independently lead their teams enabling them to manage the inner workings of their section without need for constant approvals. The participants simply had no time to focus on the operational aspects of the school. During the COVID-19 crisis, the climate of schools unified around the need to “survive.” There may have been some confusion and disagreements about health protocols and/or teacher equity because of expat staff who returned to their home country (Participants 5, 7, and 10). Notably, none of the participants mentioned any of their middle level leaders leaving the country of their schools. In fact, it was the middle level leaders that were “on the ground” in schools while senior leadership members were away during the recruiting season (Participant 2). Additionally, middle lead-

ers were found to be involved in a continual and dynamic process of how to make learning work in their school within COVID-19 guidelines.

Middle level leaders along with their teachers took responsibility for all students' success as they enforced new safety protocols and altered exam schedules. Collective responsibility was also demonstrated by parents as they became teachers at home during the COVID-19 crisis and had to increase their communication with teachers as they partnered for their children in new ways. Participant 8 explained that it was principals supporting teachers, while the Head of School became the "Chief Empathy Officer" of the entire school community. These experiences underlined the cultivation of the triangle of trust that connected the various members of the community and surrounded the new functioning of the middle leader.

Examining whole school activity through the 10 Tenets of Collaboration (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018), one can see evidence of trust building actions that cultivated credibility for middle leaders from their senior leadership team, the parent community and the teachers they lead. Thus, in many ways the global context of the COVID-19 pandemic stimulated a long overdue examination of the middle leader role. It galvanized entire learning communities towards a common vision of survival by leveraging technology and partnering parents and teachers in the education of children. In essence, it flattened the entire organizational structure of the school community. Within schools, there was also a flattening of structures as the flood of needs was too big for individual Heads of School to manage on their own. School leaders that said they already worked within a flattened organizational structure, described how their mid-level leaders and teams were immediately activated and deployed during COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

Many educational researchers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013, 2015; Hord, 1997; Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008) have previously documented the power of professional collaboration to create sustainable improvements in school systems. However, building educational systems with a high degree of collaboration requires a sharing of power. Models of distributed leadership aim to spread power and responsibility throughout the school; however, becoming a school community where distributed leadership is embedded authentically may be rare (Hansen & Davidson, 2022; Harris et al., 2019; Spillane, 2006). Within a crisis, longstanding issues facing middle leaders become truly experienced realities. Spillane (2006) and others outlined that unclear roles, inadequate communication and superficial cooperation are the bane of middle leaders and espouse the enactment of distributive leadership practices as the panacea. The authors note that the participants in the study explicitly and implicitly endorsed these ideas during their interview. Moreover, it may be inferred that their success was linked directly to high performing middle leadership teams.

Additionally, researchers of professional collaboration have tried to understand what style of leadership may best empower teacher leaders (DuFour & Fullan 2013; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Hord & Sommers, 2008). However, these intentional efforts to empower middle leaders pale in comparison to the unintentional effect that the pandemic had on exposing the full potential that middle leaders have in schools. In fact, the authors found from this study, that the pandemic served as a tool which pried open school environments and in the process everyone within the school saw just how important middle leaders are. By examining the situation more closely under this exposed lens and

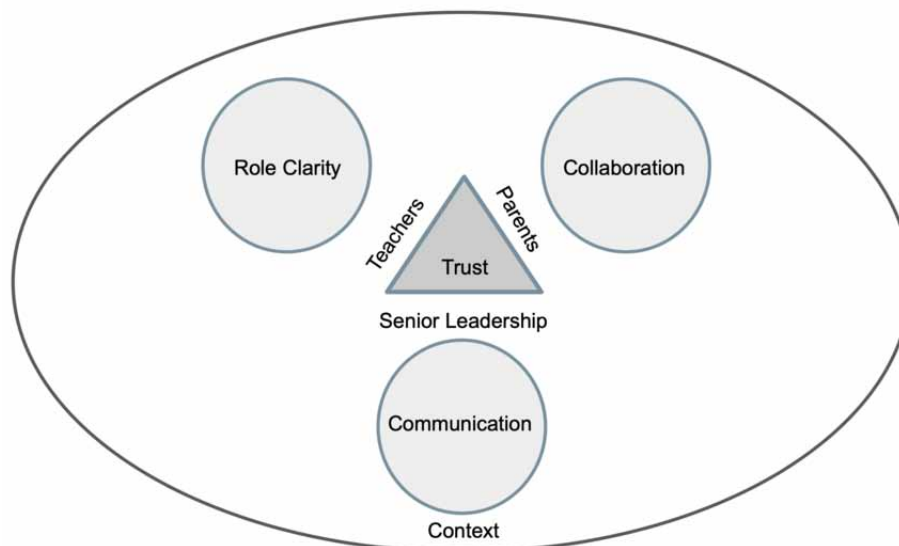
listening to a broad range of senior leadership testimonies, the authors were able to explore what factors might have stimulated this empowering response. This is what the authors' observed:

1. The pandemic caused an increase in communication as middle level leaders joined in regular crisis meetings and daily meetings.
2. There was an additional workflow that middle leaders assumed naturally, even if they were not directed to do so.
3. As Heads of Schools observed their middle level leaders to be competent and caring in their work, higher levels of trust were built, and they were able to focus on their own work. Thus, the roles between senior leadership and middle level leadership became clearer but also more collaborative.

When Heads of Schools invest in the relationship with their middle level leaders through coaching, bring them to the decision-making table and listen to their suggestions, and discuss their communication capacity and effectiveness with all stakeholders, a strong foundation of trust can be built. With this high degree of trust, they may be empowered to do “their thing” as Participant #1 shared. Building this foundational relationship may take time but it is essential and worth it. The framework below is a guide which may serve school directors in this process. COVID-19 became the power breaker. It accelerated sharing of power when it was already in place and broke open new channels when they were not there prior. As a possible consequence, many school communities have expanded rapidly.

Each of the thirteen (13) school directors praised the work of their middle level leaders and their teams and expressed gratitude for the work they had done during the pandemic. However, the authors also note that there was no evidence of an explicit and strategic plan to direct or empower them in this way. Each of the school directors relied on their middle level leaders to “do their thing”. Thus, the pressure from COVID freed middle leaders from supervisory constraints and their sphere of influence expanded. To quote Participant 9, “Covid-19 allowed my team to become more visible to the board.” In fact, the

Figure 2. Empowering Middle Level Leaders Through Professional Collaboration



authors believe, "Covid-19 allowed all middle level leaders to become more visible." The question now remains, "How can middle level leaders continue to serve in expanded ways now that the pressure from the pandemic has lessened?" What now? Will Heads of Schools continue to empower their middle level leaders and leverage the learning from the pandemic?

The authors believe that Heads of Schools may hold the key to this question and will reap great rewards if they use it. Figure 2 may serve as a visual planning tool for intentionally empowering middle level leaders. Within the larger circle of their unique cultural and school context, three main domains for the development of their middle level leaders emerge: role clarity, collaboration, and communication. Connecting all three domains at their centre is the triangle of trust that denotes relationships between three stakeholders: senior leadership, teachers, and parents. Senior leaders may design action steps to foster professional skills and secure trust with their middle level leaders, so that they may fully activate their potential and maximize their impact within the three spheres of their role, communication, and collaboration.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter focused on the empowerment of middle leaders during the COVID-19 crisis and explored how their agency to lead was activated. All participants in our study were international school leaders where a textual analysis was initiated to determine middle leaders who were deployed as members of the crisis response committee during the COVID-19 pandemic. To further investigate this topic, future research might explore:

1. How middle leaders viewed their experience based on how they were led during the crisis,
2. How school culture influenced the empowerment of middle leaders, and
3. The relationship between perceptions of empowerment by senior leaders and the experiences of empowerment between top-tier school leaders and middle leaders.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Head of School: The titled leader of an international school that is hired by the school board to lead and operate the school. Their title may also be described as “director” or “principal” in some instances.

Middle Level Leaders: The titled leaders in an international school which report directly to the Head of School.

International Schools: Independent private schools that provide an international curriculum that is offered in the English language and that strives to meet the needs of its diverse student and parent community as well as any national standards and requirements.

Chapter 7

Optimizing Middle Managers' Performance During Crises: Some Practical Transactional and Transformational Leadership Strategies for Schools

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ABSTRACT

The chapter presents the results of a qualitative study using Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory design. The problem identifies the need for suitable leadership styles for application during crises in schools for unlocking high performance. Therefore, the study evaluated the viability of the transformational and transactional leadership styles as tools used by middle managers for leading during crises in schools. A sample consisting of five middle managers were used from primary and secondary schools in Jamaica, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and the Bahamas. Subsequently, the data collection process utilized primary research using semi-structured interviews. The results of the study highlighted significant evidence that high performance in schools during crises may be dependent on adaptability, promoting collaboration, and intentional accountability regimes. A limitation of the study also exposed the absence of a model for transmission of the leadership styles by middle managers in schools, and a need for future research.

INTRODUCTION

The driving force behind any society is change. Kalkan et al. (2020) and Gordon et al. (2021) emphasized the necessity of individuals and organizations in employing effective leadership styles that may influence people to change and grow with the demands necessary to achieve organization-wide goals. Equally important, Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2014) asserted that a leadership style is a representation of the method adopted, to guide subordinate's support in driving the achievement of the

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organization's goals. Undoubtedly, the style itself must be carefully considered before its adaptation in practice. Subramaniam (2022) warned that the monotonous traditional autocratic leadership styles in use within some schools and organizations are no longer effective styles of leadership, especially in a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. In such instances, the organization is forced to reinvent itself due to unforeseen developments. Therefore, the versatility of the leadership style adopted in schools by middle managers must be effective.

This chapter proposes the possibility of the transformational and transactional leadership styles as solutions to the challenges many middle managers encounter in crises. As recent research such as Gigliotti (2020) and Ayyildiz and Baltaci (2020) revealed that a crisis can be portrayed as an event or occurrence that interferes or restricts the normal mode of operations within any group, micro or macro. Therefore, a crisis usually demands immediate alternative measures of operation or leadership to drive performance. On the other hand, Wisittigars and Siengthai (2019) define a crisis as any situation that is deemed unforeseen, perilous, and exudes great uncertainty that disrupts normalcy within any group. Similarly, Brinkmann et al. (2021) further add to the debate explaining a crisis as being related to happenings characterized by big data impacting leadership channels coupled with great uncertainty. Consequently, within schools, crises may impact leadership from internal occurrences and management failures: or externally resulting from uncertainties arising from the effects. Hence, the leadership and leadership styles used to charter and guide an organization's success are crucial in alleviating the impact of crises and the achievement of targeted performance goals.

The literature has evidenced that middle managers operating within schools are faced with several difficulties in driving high performance when there is a crisis. An illustration of this can be seen in the way crises impact the personal and professional duties and responsibilities of both the middle managers and subordinates. Consequently, many challenges are brought to bear on the practice of middle managers. For example, Hulme et al. (2021) identified issues in middle management in some United Kingdom (UK) schools, such as lack of collaboration, creativity, proper support systems, and problems adapting to the fluid changes for operation to deal with the demands of a crisis situation. Similarly, a case study done in Italy by Ferri et al. (2020) also emphasized the impact of social difficulties, teaching practice challenges, and technological inadequacies compounding complications in the role of middle managers. Martinez and Broemmelmeyer (2021) further report the same challenges besetting middle managers in the United States of America (USA). Bent-Cunningham and Mauzad (2021) likewise, corroborated that middle manager, in Jamaica, were equally affected by the same difficulties identified in the UK and the USA. Finally, in the Bahamas, middle managers serving in schools have battled similar obstacles in influencing subordinates in achieving high performance targets (Miah, 2009).

Therefore, selecting the appropriate leadership styles suitable for driving high-performance in crises is essential to schoolwide success. Given this, it is evident that the provision of useful and applicable best practices in leadership strategies is necessary. Considering the problems outlined, the purpose of this study is to examine the viability of the use of the transformational and transactional leadership styles as a tool used by middle managers for leading within schools especially during crises. An illustration of this is revealed in, Supraidi et al. (2020), where the transformational leadership style coupled with the transactional leadership style within workspaces was shown to be effective in influencing targeted performance goals. Bass et al. (2003) offered an examination of transformational leadership practices reflecting that this style combines idealized influence with inspirational motivation to inspire achievement of high-performance targets. Supraidi et al. (2020) further aligns the qualities of the transformational

leadership style as essential in influencing and inspiring innovation among teachers when coupled with the transactional leadership style, which supports task-oriented leadership. Are these leadership styles more suited to achieve high-performance rates in situations of uncertainty? To respond to this question the following research questions related to the issue were examined:

- To what extent can transformational and transactional leadership styles be suited for the practice of middle managers in schools during crises?
- How can middle managers use transformational and transactional leadership styles to drive high performance from subordinates in schools if a crisis situation is occurring?

Subsequently, a purposive sampling was used to recruit several participants; (1) Jamaica, principal (primary school); (2) the United States of America, a principal supervisor and a vice-principal (secondary school); (3) United Kingdom, head of department (secondary school); and The Bahamas, head of department (secondary school).

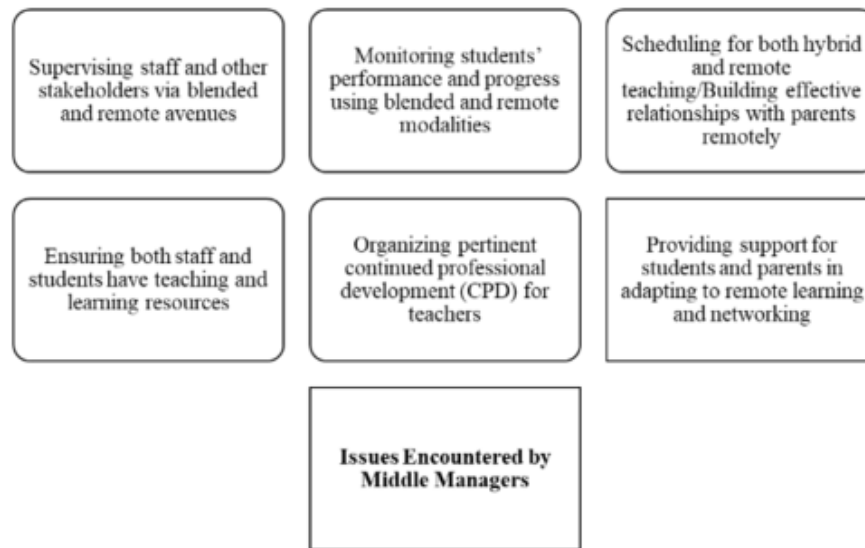
Furthermore, the qualitative methodology guided by the interpretative paradigm ideology directed the study's activities. Subsequently, the Grounded Theory (GT) research design was adopted to administer the traditional GT technique for the data collection and analysis of the datasets sought. The data collection instrument used was an interview guide and the tools used were the Zoom meeting software application and recorder to capture participants' responses individually. NVIVO data analysis software application was used first for transcribing the audio files and then for the constant comparative analysis of the transcript for each dataset. The GT traditional technique was applied to the transcripts to extract codes, and categorize codes until data saturation, and overall theory development was reached.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Issues Related to the Challenges Faced by Middle Managers in Schools

Studies conducted by Brammer and Clark (2020) and Harris and Jones (2020) have revealed that middle managers within schools were overwhelmed with many challenges during the COVID-19 crisis. Many disruptions in the schools' workflow brought on by the crisis eroded the foundation of their leadership styles in practice. Incidentally, these were dependent on reliance on sound interactions among all stakeholders within the education sector. However, this disappeared and was replaced with a rapidly changing uncontrollable environment, which further restricted the choice of operation, and exacted more endless workdays. Fotheringham et al. (2021) further corroborated with (Harris & Jones, 2020) on the point that middle managers in education leadership, across the UK, experienced many additional challenges in school management related to the emergent crises relative to the pandemic. Consequently, about 71% of middle managers and 77% of top leaders in education attributed a core problem during the crisis, due to information overload. Interviewee 2 (USA) corroborated the fluidity of information and the constant changes that administrators and teachers had to transmit and continuously adapt as circumstances changed during the pandemic crisis. Brammer and Clark (2020) also identified some issues middle managers have encountered during crises (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.



Controversies Surrounding Management by Middle Managers

Brammer and Clark (2020) and Fotheringham et al. (2021) identified some controversies in the decision-making process of middle managers in education. This was evident in determining teaching modalities suited for their schools while navigating daily routine tasks at various points in the crisis. There was uncertainty which led to reactionary as well as proactive responses to the educational needs of learners, and the selection of leadership styles, for the crisis. Correspondingly, Storey and Slavin (2020) highlighted that in the USA there was uncertainty concerning the validity of distance or remote education, as it relates to the equitable distribution of learning. Gordon et al. (2021) identified some of the main controversies in Jamaica which include the competing mandates from the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information (MOEYI). Other recurring controversies include (1) the required social distancing in classrooms, (2) the ratio of students to teachers, (3) changes in class schedules, (4) protocol for external examinations, and (5) new protocols for staff and student evaluations.

Although the crisis presented many challenges, (Brammer & Clark, 2020) agreed that it provided opportunities for stakeholders to grow and develop professionally. The findings of the current study also identified with these controversies, as Interviewee 2 (USA) shared that "...turn around, it's always changing...dynamic shifts all the time the data comes up, you have to adjust". Additionally, Interviewee 1 (Jamaica) reported that "... Students got lovely grades...there were parents helping them and ... not having natural reflection of who the students really are... the minister said they are going to give them laptops... it is not forthcoming... Ministry always said that we should self-care, but at the same time, they are pressuring you". Furthermore, Interviewee 4 (UK) reported that "face-to-face instruction had resumed while most of the schools worldwide were using remote or blended learning". Also, Interviewee 5 (Bahamas) asserts that, "as a leader, you have to understand people situation... empathetic... a lot of pressures, loss of jobs" (see Table 3).

Problems Encountered by Middle Managers While Managing in Crises

Fotheringham et al. (2021) cited poor communication channels during the crisis, becoming adaptable enough to respond effectively to the everchanging guidelines from established protocols nationally. In the US, Storey and Slavin (2020) report issues such as the socio-economic standing, funding, and racial disparities made remote teaching and learning very difficult, as about 25% of students lacked access to devices, and 15% lacked high-speed connectivity as many parents lost their jobs. Several districts in the USA education system report that 40% of learners from the lower class can access remote classes weekly, in comparison to upper to middle-class learners with about over 80%. Additionally, some instructors found it challenging to effectively teach remotely due to a lack of technological skills and large workloads. Additionally, the learning for younger students during remote learning was difficult as most of the responsibility fell to the parents and caregivers. Subsequently, the high-risk students were the most affected during the crisis.

Similarly, in Jamaica, Gordon et al. (2021) revealed that MOEYI's standing operations for schools lack a national standard, inclusive of an e-learning platform for all levels of the education system. Middle managers at many schools in Jamaica had to improvise or experiment with competing learning modalities such as social media platforms and other ad hoc learning platforms. This presented challenges for all stakeholders of education in Jamaica. Approximately, 61% of learners reported connectivity problems and power outages. Many problems were presented in the form of:

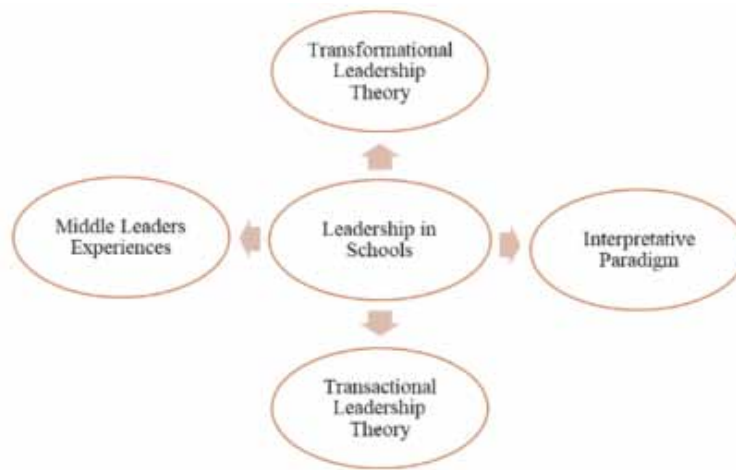
1. Lack of control over the learning environment residing in the virtual space
2. Ensuring access to resources and devices to enrich performance for both staff and students
3. Managing COVID-19 protocols during face-to-face schoolwide operations
4. Ensuring that both the staff and students are safe and creating opportunities for efficient use of the learning spaces
5. Staff and classroom space shortage
6. Lack of funding to provide proper adherence to the COVID-19 protocols, for safe classroom and school environment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research process was steered by the transformational leadership theory which is explicated in Kouzes and Posner's (1993) framework. The model contends that the call to leadership should not be regarded as only a status, but rather a system for the operation which includes disciplined habits directed towards prescribed goals, that challenge, and empower people to want to achieve (Abu-Tineh et al., 2009). Additionally, the social exchange theory will direct the transactional leadership point of view to determine its influence on driving peoples' behaviours based on the rewards linked to desired responses (Cortez & Johnston, 2020).

These theories combined with the interpretative ideology will be used to discover how leadership styles influence different group environments affected by situational factors. It will direct the research activities in gathering data from top and middle managers' perceptions residing in their experiences and networks. Consequently, the findings from the study aimed at providing guidelines for application by middle managers in schools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Maxwell, 1996) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.



Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership investigates and explores different ways of meeting the organization's objectives despite environmental changes. Moreover, there has been the adoption of pilot programmes to support innovation in different fields with lifelong learners who grow and reinvent their skills to meet the demands of organizations. Equally important, Ghasabeh et al. (2015) added to the conversation by emphasizing that transformational leadership theory provides a reservoir of strategies that may be vital in driving employees to achieve an organization's goals when operating in an unpredictable environment or in a crisis. These techniques may be used to empower subordinates to be innovative and adaptable in responding to constant changes. Correspondingly, Jovanovic and Ciric (2016) underscore transformational leadership as resonating with the reorganization of workflows to affect improvements in changing environments. It further promotes organizational learning norms for ease of operation should conditions demand the need to change and grow, as is the case in crises.

The Social Exchange Theory

Bass et al., (2003) cited the ability of leaders to affect any change in organizations, reflecting in the wider society, which have been hinged on influencing subordinates to change and grow to meet the expected target goals of the organization (schools). The social exchange theory in the conceptual framework examines the transactional relationship between high performance correlated with incentives and ensuring all stakeholders' needs are met in fostering compliance in achieving prescribed organizational tasks (Sahin, 1994). For example, in the event of a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions within the education sector were forced to adopt new modalities of teaching and learning in a very short time. Therefore, leadership in crisis is essential, especially within schools at the various levels, administration in leading staff and other stakeholders, and teachers in leading students to affect high-performance.

The findings in Brymer and Gray (2006) corroborate that the transactional leadership theory may be valuable as a motivation tool in implementing social change using incentives. For example, within

schools to mobilize people to respond effectively to switches from the traditional modalities of operations to newer technologically assisted operations based on situational changes. However, Jangsiriwattana (2019) and Khan (2017) postulate that the transactional leadership theory techniques do not anticipate environmental changes or empower subordinates beyond stated objectives. Therefore, transformational leadership theory within the conceptual framework complements the shortcomings of transactional leadership for use in crises.

Paradigm Approach Guiding the Conceptual Framework

The focus of the research methodology is centered around the qualitative school of thought employing the interpretive philosophy of examining the human perception relating to the effectiveness of the transformational and transactional leadership styles in the application within schools. It was used to help determine the value of its use in the practice of middle managers for extracting high performance, even in crises. Consequently, Anttila et al. (2018) and Rhodes (2019) affirmed that the interpretive premise delves into the different ways people in the organization can be mobilized toward goal attainment, through their ability to develop and implement useful leadership skillsets.

Galvez et al. (2020) also assert that the interpretive ideology produces rich data about the competency of each leadership theory and its effectiveness, in the conceptual framework, in accomplishing high-performance when implemented by middle managers. The affective paradigm allows practitioners to extract from networks of cultural norms and past systems to confront methods that worked while reforming and activating innovative solutions geared toward better practices. The interpretive ideology gives credibility to the practicability of using these leadership styles for directing the overall organization's success.

Significance of the Chapter

The chapter seeks to present an argument for the concurrent use of both the transformational and transactional leadership theories combined as a framework to guide middle managers, within schools, in times of crises. Therefore, the conceptual framework urges those managers to carefully implement techniques from both leadership theories in different areas of leading stakeholders such as teachers, other staff, students, and parents. Lalla (2013) contends that the transformational leadership theory sets the foundation for schools to become adaptable to reforms or changes relative to crises. The theory further is hinged on affecting constructive and practical changes in organizations and for team members.

In schools it cultivates direction for the goals through a practice of collaborative decision-making coupled with creative ways to inspire productive students and a successful school. Though Berkovich (2016) admonishes that despite the usefulness of the transformational leadership style to education it has shortcomings that should be explored with other leadership methods to discern the practicability of influencing improvement in school leadership. Kasim et al. (2017) on the other hand, advise middle managers to experiment with a combination of transformational and transactional leadership styles along with other forms of leadership, such as, instructional leadership. Additionally, the primary research conducted may be used as confirmation of the theoretical framework's authenticity in combining both the transformational and transactional theories to drive high performance within the organization.

Specifically, the qualitative data collection utilizing semi-structured interviews provides real-life experiences as evidence with themes extract from the datasets such as becoming adaptable to adjustments

and strategies, group support with training, coaching in technology, collaboration through meetings and community partnerships, accountability via rewards and consequences (see Table 3). This has identified with these leadership styles' effectiveness and the best application methods for schools to unlock high-performance in all stakeholders. The affective approach was used in giving a voice to participants to share their experiences and reveal legitimate techniques that are practical and suitable within the practitioner's scope of leading. Subsequently, the recommendations presented in the chapter arising from significant themes in the findings of the current study related to data to drive access to resources, partnerships for support, accountability through goal setting, reinforcements, training and technology, and teamwork yet flexibility (see Table 4). These can be used as a roadmap to middle managers or a point of reference in selecting effective leadership styles and the application which produces achievement of performance targets set by the organization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Arguments are presented in this section via a review of literature highlighting the benefits and drawbacks related to the use of the transformational and transactional leadership styles in crises. Additionally, there is an examination of the possibility for the successful use of these leadership styles within schools, for use by middle managers in crises. Further, arguments are presented relative to the influence of the transformational and transactional leadership skills on high-performance for crises in schools. Bhaduri (2019) emphasized that human resources, especially leadership skills for influencing efficient and energized teamwork, are paramount in minimizing any organizational failure. Therefore, the relationship between the organization's leadership and leadership styles adapted is important for goal attainment.

Leadership and Leadership Styles

Shava and Tiou (2018) in a recent study postulated that the emergence of rapidly advancing technological usage in schools and other organizations has influenced the need to revise leadership practices in schools. Bhaduri (2019) also deemed this a paradox essential for the alignment of leadership within the organization, as several leadership skills are necessary to manage crises. Closed systems are predominantly utilized for traditional leadership styles according to Applebaum et al., (1998), which may lead to unfavorable returns on investments in companies and efficiencies within other entities.

Consequently, there is a need to reinvent the way groups or organizations lead, Kasapoglu (2018) suggests that leadership and leadership styles employed account for a significant portion of an organization's success. The different competencies of the leaders account for about 15% of the organization's productivity. Schramm and Peter (2005) further charged that the emergence of the open system's approach has emphasized the importance of understanding the value of internal and external culture, organizational learning, and its influence on group leadership and performance. Subsequently, to respond to the changing demands of organizations, especially during crisis situations, various leadership styles and skills must be considered as a countermeasure.

Accordingly, the literature review explains leadership style as a technique used by leaders to motivate group members (Oxford Dictionary, 2021; Shaffer, 2008; Usher, 2012)), in directing them toward achieving the organization's objectives (Khajeh, 2018). Leadership, on the other hand, represents major elements connected to the efficiency of entities, and leaders are individuals selected to oversee that expected goals

Figure 3.



are achieved (Jones, 2007). Prior research, such as Gyang (2020), suggested, that competent leadership during crisis situations is incumbent on the leadership styles adopted and whether the quality of leadership embodies adaptability, in response to emerging situational changes. Consequently, it encompasses many dimensions such as achieving control, empowering all stakeholders to become problem solvers, and embracing change. This is further corroborated by Ayyildiz and Baltaci (2020), affirming that crisis necessitates practical and applicable governance and supervising which is undoubtedly not indicative of any one leadership style but resides in the combination of several geared towards organization or group success. Equally important, Brinkmann et al. (2021) opined that leadership spans managing, applying evaluation, reflecting, and coordinating plans directed towards goal achievement. Though conversely, leadership in crisis, as highlighted by Wisittigars and Siengthai (2019) underscored the organization's ability to respond effectively through leadership strategies in enacting and continuously applying leadership skills, including managing oneself, the organization, and employees.

In schools the position of middle management plays a key role in crises and the overall leadership strategy of schools. Ainsworth et al. (2022), Grice (2019), and Nobile (2018) described middle management in schools as comprising administrators, subject coordinators, year heads, and teachers. Therefore, this type of leadership resides in formal and informal posts. Some functions middle managers perform are directing departments, coordinating reporting channels, organizing schedules, select and ensure good communication, and oversee theirs and other staff functions. Edwards-Groves and Ronnerman (2019) emphasized that middle managers are expected to inspire reforms in education, professional, and student training.

Comparably, the importance of leadership during a crisis have been deemed crucial to high-performance in organizations. Englefield et al. (2019) described it as the blueprint for decision-making, and Aponso (2021) viewed it as adept at applying practical and relevant program or strategies that drive performance across the organization. Tewari et al. (2019) corroborated that the leadership style any organization elects to employ as the guide towards the organization's success should be suited to the specific circumstance. Wen et al. (2019) added to the discussion by underlining some seminal contributions made to the practice of leadership within the workplace using transformational and transactional leadership, and their influence of leadership (see Figure 3).

Leadership Style's Influence on Group Dynamics in Crisis Situations

Gencer (2019) defined group dynamics as diversity within groups which may result in certain behaviours and intercommunication among group representatives. A further examination of group dynamics by Toseland et al. (2004) revealed that it can display several variables. Firstly, the leadership style adopted

for a group will determine how it responds to sensitive issues such as a crisis, and the culture, and ethnicity present within the group. The skill of the leaders in responding accordingly and ensuring group congruence, despite the cultural or ethnic differences, is paramount. Heiskanen (2012) discerned the cultural norms within groups to be based on ethnicity and the beliefs or perceptions of common codes of conduct, acceptable by group members.

A typical example of this issue would be the religion of the subordinates, which could affect work scheduling and requires empathy from leaders and group members to create good social interactions within the group. Guerin (2020) further expanded on other areas such as attire and physical appearance to make available room for religious purposes that the leader may need to address relative to culture. Applebaum et al. (1998), supported that doing so may reduce the occurrence of disagreements, which may distort subordinates' focus on productivity targets for the organization. At the same time, the sensitivity of the leader to employees' well-being could go a long way in motivating them to attain the organization's goals, especially in times of crisis. Gurr and Drysdale (2020) supported the notion that the skill of leaders can influence the effectiveness of the leadership styles in practice. Additionally, it underpins the leader's capability to direct subordinates towards developing excellent group cohesiveness among all stakeholders which is essential in a crisis. In the long run, striving for student success, developing people and the organization while at the same time innovating instruction and schooling modalities (see Figure 4).

Fournier et al. (2020) cited crises requiring techniques of inclusive leadership and comprehensive attainment of the school's goals, irrespective of impeding environmental elements. Some of the features of inclusive leadership include (1) every child's learning needs should be met, (2) expertise in educational strategies, (3) being open to new ways of achieving prescribed organizational goals, and (4) effective communication channels for all stakeholders. Gurr and Drysdale (2020) further added that it is also necessary for leaders to examine what defines the organization to the public, the perceptions of the leadership team about the organization, and the perception of the organization to various groups

Figure 4.



residing in it. Once an understanding is established, an alliance should be sought with each work team to support the vision of the organization. Although Toseland, et. al. (2004), revealed that there can be unfavourable effects on the group's performance if other group members are prevented from sharing their innovative abilities. The implication for practice is that leaders should enforce preventive measures.

Marlow et al. (2018) confirmed that the way a group interacts with each member is vital if leadership is to be effective in driving an organization's objectives towards efficiency. The leader would need to ascertain what methods (person-to-person, digital, print) of communications will work best within the group by applying best practices for control and management. Recent research, such as Fernandez and Shaw (2020) and Lacerenza et al. (2018), corroborated that the channels of communication that prove effective are usually dependent on the types and quality of the interrelationships. Additionally, it was noted that proper methods of communication can improve relationships in the organization.

The Transactional Leadership Style's Influence on Workforce Performance

The transactional leadership style evolved out of the need to move away from leaders simply exercising the power their authority gave them. Instead, the transactional leadership style has been used to negotiate with subordinates, in such a way, that there are clear guidelines about goals and how they are to be accomplished in return for incentives or consequences (Bass, 1990; Duggan, 2020; Kabeyi, 2018). Regarding transactional leadership methods in schools, MacNeil (2018) revealed that school leadership involves a twofold strategy for success. Leadership should combine individual and school benefits, as there is a need to balance rewards and collaborative goal attainment school wide. Therefore, the use of transformational leadership strategies for smooth operations and as prudence suggests incentives (transactional techniques) for developing commitment to school goals. Lan et al. (2019) corroborated that the transformational leadership style by itself does not provide personal benefits that school staff need and by extension in times of crises may lead to burnout. However, the study claims transactional leadership would create more satisfied staff which can be channeled into high performers

Another illustration of the transformational and transactional leadership styles in use in schools is discussed in Ebrahimi et al. (2017) and Heminingsih and Supardi (2017), where the findings revealed that the transformational leading methods were essential in driving professional learning in schools which undergirds high-performance. On the contrary, the transactional leadership techniques were successful also in achieving stated goals through the rewards systems in place. Therefore, for a successful school the current study's outcome point to the integration of the two leadership styles. Yet there is a gap in research about how to apply these leadership styles effectively in concert for the realization of high-performance in schools. Jensen et al. (2019) has identified some of the limitations that can arise in the application of transformational and transactional leadership style, such as these styles do not categorically state how to measure the various features and the established impact of different reward systems. Although, Longmuir (2017) supported the Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) transformational leadership design as relevant for use in schools to promote success in ensuring high-performance.

Consequently, if the transactional leader is too complacent, that is, only responding to problems when they affect the primary goals of the company, then the leadership technique becomes a failure in driving employee performance. However, if the transactional leadership style is used as a carefully deployed programme to drive high-performance then it can be very effective. Okindo et al. (2020) confirmed this as the result revealed that schools that provide incentives and recognition and conversely consequences for goal attainment may become successful.

The Impact of Transformational Leadership Style on Workforce Performance

Recent research, such as Abu-Tineh et al. (2009) and Berkovich (2016), champion transformational leadership as the most viable leadership style revered among many sectors globally. It has been extensively employed as a blueprint or framework that has successfully guided educational management as evidence suggests that there has been a 30% to 45% notation of archived documents published since the 2000s crediting transformational leadership linked to school leadership, which speaks to the authenticity of the theory. Additionally, the emphasis of this theory on revitalizing an organization's systems, empowering subordinates to achieve, leading by example, and being empathic culminates into the transformational leader's attributes. Correspondingly, Simsek (2013) asserted that transformational leadership could develop changing culture and behaviors within schools. Especially, in the midst of extreme circumstances, as in a crisis. Similarly, Sparks (2021) argued that the function of middle managers in schools during a crisis necessitates dealing with difficulties through innovative strategies and reflection on lessons learned from the experience.

One way of achieving this is the use of persuasive techniques indicative of the transformational leadership model developed by Kouzes and Posner (2017) design. Hay (2006) also associated the transformational leadership with the capacity to help schools concentrate on resilience in crises. This is accomplished by way of encouraging subordinates to move beyond personal gain towards common goals. Mamza et al. (2019) postulated that a transformational leader provides a system where every subordinate is given an opportunity to take on challenging tasks with available support, the permission to make mistakes, and learn from them. In contrast, a transactional leader negotiates with employees using their skill set as a 'measuring stick' and outlines the reward or punishment, (see Table 1). Which of these leaders would command high performance in the achievement of a work team or organizational goals? Research has shown that the transformational leader ranks in driving performance. This is in comparison to the routine and precise systems of operations required from transactional leadership.

Table 1.

Transactional Versus Transformational	
Transactional Technique of Leadership Characteristics	Transformational Method for Leadership Qualities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Privileged leaders who aim to preserve current successes ■ Emphasis on routine procedures in increasing subordinates work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advocates for work teams to be ingenious ■ Provide inventiveness as tools to address difficulties in tasks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The authority of a leader dictates the level of incentives given to taskforce ■ Motivation given to attain high performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Encourage intellectual improvement culture ■ Freedom to explore problem solving by all team members.

Kabeyi (2018) argued that a transformational leader encourages employees to refine their skills, and every subordinate is allowed an opportunity to take on challenging tasks available. Therefore, organizations where work environments are constantly changing, as is imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, should enlist the services of transformational leadership. The leadership characteristics indicative of this management technique can tap into the subordinates' inherently driven ambitions and mobilize them. Zhang et al. (2021), set in China, found that the prescribed objectives of a school are indicative of a merging of various styles of leadership which makes it paramount that checks and balances are applied to ascertain which integration of styles is most effective in a particular setting. This suggests that the use of both styles could be an asset when applied concurrently in schools and has been proven to be highly valuable in the achievement of success in various industries.

For practical application in schools, some of the lessons learned are the choice of leadership during a crisis in finding and applying effective solutions that will drive high performance. The examples of transformational leaders shared above are evidence that these models are effective in exciting creativity through personal development and empathy for team members, translating this into high performances.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Method

One of the problems faced by middle managers in practice within education systems in Jamaica, The Bahamas, The UK, and the USA is motivating subordinates during a crisis to achieve high-performance ratings (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2019; Kaul et al., 2022; Shaffer et al., 2005). This is especially challenging as a crisis not only disrupts the workplace task flow but impacts each subordinate's personal and professional activities. Several challenges become apparent which demand the identification of suitable leadership styles geared towards effective application in crises. These leadership styles are essential to the success of each school and must be used as a guide employed for influencing high performance, which is imperative. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the usefulness of transformational and transactional leadership styles in schools as a method for practice with middle management.

Consequently, a qualitative study was conducted to uncover significant findings that can indicate effective leadership styles for use by middle managers. A GT research design was administered to collect and analyze the data. Specifically, the Glaser and Strauss GT using the constant comparative method for the extraction of theory development from the datasets. This was used as a foundation for formulating a theory that can guide middle managers. The subsequent intention is the application of effective leadership strategies to be employed during times of crises in schools.

Sample

The sample consisted of five middle managers: one principal, one vice principal, two subject coordinators, and one principal supervisor. These middle managers were purposively selected from the primary and secondary levels of education. Additionally, the participants are currently serving as middle managers across schools located in (1) Jamaica, (2) The Bahamas, (3) The USA, and (4) The UK, see (Figure 5); to examine their experiences managing in crises. Informed consent letters were sent out to each respondent explaining the purpose of the study and the ethical obligations of the researcher in relation to the

expectations of each participant. The informed consents were sent via an electronic signing software application PDFiler as the host and returned via the same.

Data Collection

The data collection process utilized primary research using unstructured interviews administered through the Zoom video and audio-conferencing platform. Each participant was interviewed separately utilizing an interview guide. The audio interviews were saved using an audio recorder. These were later transcribed in preparation for the data analysis using the NVIVO software application.

Data Analysis

The data analysis convened with the transcription of the audio files which were then uploaded for extraction of codes and recurring themes using the data analysis tool NVIVO software application. A text query was applied initially to identify notable patterns from the data collected. An inductive technique was administered adopting Glaser and Strauss's Grounded Theory (GT) ideology to identify the initial codes. Further, the traditional method of GT was employed using opening coding initially by organizing, classifying, and extracting meaning from the codes in identifying themes for theory writing.

Most importantly, the data was mined to uncover clues linked to leadership styles used during a crisis. Several themes emerged to highlight some similarities and differences in the strategies used by each middle manager as it relates to the difficulties that were presented within their respective workspaces. Equally important, selective coding followed where the initial codes were grouped based on relatedness to generate patterns. These codes were then categorized into broader themes until data saturation was reached. Additionally, memo writing was used to discern occurring storylines and the development of theories residing in the data, in arriving at an overall theory.

Shava and Tiou (2018) emphasized this when they contend that the objective of the Glaser and Strauss GT method was to develop a theory defined enough, to reflect behaviour trends that are valuable in responding to the issue being investigated. Moreover, the determination of the usefulness of the transformational and transactional leadership styles as guidelines in the practical leadership strategies for adaptation for middle practitioners in education may be useful.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Results

The demography for the unstructured interviews consists of five participants aged 34 to 50 years old. The participants were purposively selected and invited for the interviews through emails and WhatsApp messages. Each participant holds leadership positions at the primary and secondary levels of education. Specifically, their roles include principal, vice-principal, education officer, and subject coordinators. Their roles span managing teachers, support staff, parents, and students. They hold master's and specialist degrees in education administration and are located across four countries namely Jamaica, the Bahamas, the USA, and the UK, (see Table 2).

Figure 5.

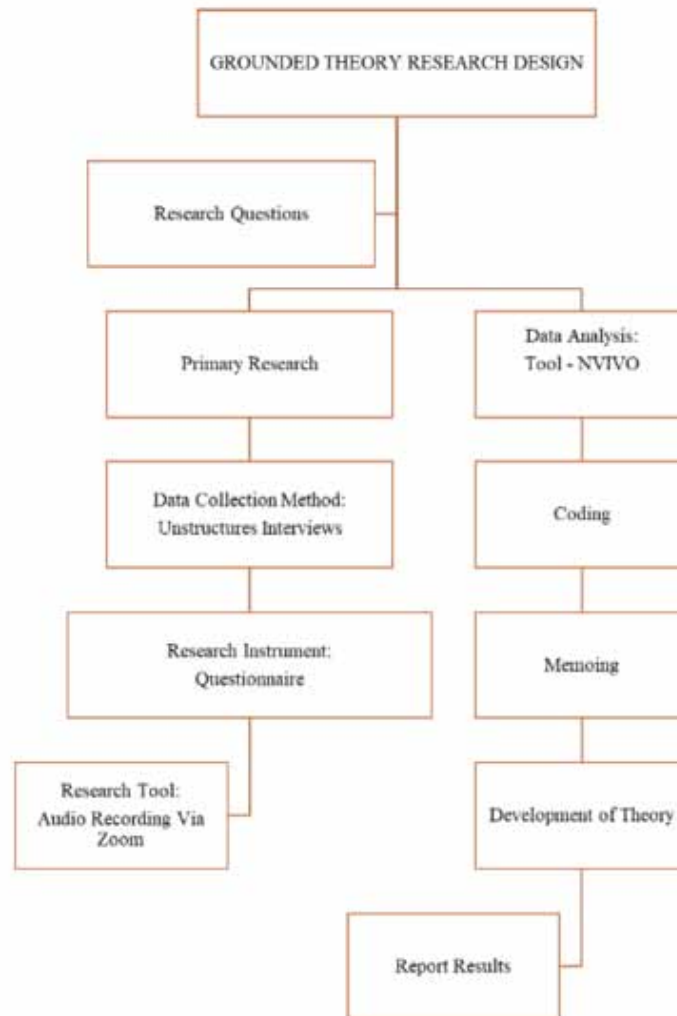


Table 2.

Occupation	Education	Age	Location	Gender
Principal	Master's Degree	50	Jamaica	Female
Vice Principal	Master's Degree	34	USA	Female
Education Officer	Specialist Degree	40+	USA	Female
Subject Coordinator	Master's degree	34	The Bahamas	Female
Subject Coordinator	Master's degree	40	United Kingdom	Female

Likewise, a briefing about the purpose of the study and participants' expectations was done using telephone calls individually, per participant. Additionally, the consent forms were sent and signed electronically employing the software application PDFfiler. Afterward, the interviews were conducted via the Zoom meeting conference software application utilizing the audio-conferencing feature for the data collection.

Research Question 1: Grounded Theory's Constant Comparative Method

The data analysis of the datasets produced significant clues linked to the use of the transformational and the transactional leadership styles during in use during a crisis, and in schools. Accordingly, notable codes and themes were identified from the datasets that responded to research question 1 "To what extent are the transformational and the transactional leadership styles suited for the practice of middle managers in schools?" Notably, several similarities and differences were highlighted among the leadership strategies used by each middle manager in the sample, as it relates to transformational and transactional leadership strategies (see table 3).

The selective coding revealed and emphasized leadership strategies resonating in collaborative systems, coaching, good communication channels, adaptability, teamwork, partnerships, communicate performance targets, information, training through CPD, and staying current, to name a few. These characteristics are indicative of the transformational leadership style which mobilizes people towards success but at the same time considers their well-being and the contribution of each member of the team, (see Table 3).

The transactional leadership style qualities were also highlighted in the findings, which include rewards for effort, communicating consequences and accountability, setting stated goals, and providing the

Table 3.

Codes	Themes	Theory	Analysis of interviewee's transcript Evidence in Detroit		Participant
To what extent can a transformational and transactional leadership styles be used for the practice of middle leaders during crisis in schools?					
Stress Challenges Pandemic protocols	Stress related to challenges in pandemic crisis	Crisis situations within schools may result in stressful and challenging leadership roles	Primary Level Transactional Attributes Interviewee 1... we had a meeting where persons were assigned tasks ... ensure documentation is ready... have meetings regularly with teachers... I reward them with staff socials and Friday off... we use guidelines from the Ministry of Education and forward reports to the same...	Primary Level Transformational Attributes Interviewee 1... collaborate in order for persons to do whatever you want them to achieve... ... we have consultation with teachers... had parents come in on different days for report consultation... I communicate with them... asking which evening... prefer meetings... using Google meeting... we have parent and class groups on WhatsApp... I have checking sessions...	Principal (Detroit)
Adjustment Changes Strategies	Becoming adaptable to adjustments and strategies		Secondary Level Transactional Attributes Interviewee 2... we have accountability... something we are pursuing... we send emails out to principals to communicate with teachers... adherence to protocols... give updates... more teachers...	Secondary level Transformational Attributes Interviewee 2... we went into one device... every child received a tablet... partnered with community partners to give free Wi-Fi to needy families... students were able to log on to any school within the district for instruction... provide intentional support for teachers... use of welcome rituals... role rotation to support students... school transformation... regular reports... shared flexibility... more use of technology for communicating... Checking in on teachers... sharing grace	Education Office (USA)
Training Technology Coaching Supporting Engaging Best practices	Group support with training, coaching in technology	Schools must become adaptable through the application of leadership techniques via training, coaching, support, collaboration, forming community partnerships, and increased technological strategies	Interviewee 3... I will hold my students and staff accountable... for students number one is focusing positive reinforcement... use of professional learning communities... reflecting on SMART goals Interviewee 4... encourage delivery of the curriculum... adhere to procedures... support students in technology... reward for doing the right thing...	Interviewee 3... I am more empathetic... more supportive approach... leadership is 100% people... Interviewee 4... foster positive mental health in the team and students... team members were given options... flexible... considering all external influences... provision of access to resources... no fixed long- term plan... weekly updates... we are using platforms... more communication	Interviewee 3 Vice Principal (USA)
Collaboration Partnerships Communities Meetings Software Selfless Small group	Collaboration through meetings and community parent days		Interviewee 5... teach how to meet goals... put in extra work... give deadlines with grace to complete work		Interviewee 5 Subject Coordinator (United Kingdom)
Rewards Consequences Accountability Time off Socials transformation	Accountability via rewards and consequences	Accountability is achieved through rewards and consequences through activating intentional support and tradeoffs			Interviewee 5 Subject Coordinator (The Bahamas)

Optimizing Middle Managers' Performance During Crises

Table 4.

Codes	Themes	Theory	Analysis of interviewee's transcripts Evidence in Datasets	Participants
<i>How can middle leaders use transformational and transactional leadership styles to drive high performance from subordinates in schools?</i>				
Data Access Communication Resource	Data to drive access to resources	Crisis situations within schools use data to drive decision making and intentional support for objectives attainment.	Primary Level High Performance Attributes Interviewee 1... they really put on all extra effort. So, I really must reward them... sessions.....	Principal (Jamaica)
Community Partnerships Supporting	Partnerships for support			
Coaching Accountability Reinforcements Training Technology Goal setting	Accountability through goal setting, reinforcements, training and technology.	Schools mandate accountability via goal setting and training, coupled with technology and constant reinforcements.	Secondary level High Performance Attributes Interviewee 2... he data that we used... we made the prediction based on that they might not have access to the Wi-Fi... partner with those cities to make sure they got the Wi-Fi... data in terms of supporting the teachers... adults and students that I adhere to the policies... the teachers then met in their first 30s to create their SMART goal.	Education Officer (USA)
Teamwork Flexibility Self-care Giving grace	Teamwork yet flexibility and promote self-care	High performance during a crisis may be influenced by teamwork yet providing flexibility, fostering self-care...	Interviewee 3... I will hold my students and staff accountable... for students number one is focusing positive reinforcements... use of professional learning communities... reflecting on SMART goals. Interviewee 4... improvements in technology... need to reinforce learning... you monitor to see whether or not these are updated... regular check in. Interviewee 5... teach how to meet goals... put in extra work... give deadlines with grace to complete work.	Interviewee 3 Vice Principal (USA) Interviewee 4 Subject Coordinator (United Kingdom) Interviewee 5 Subject Coordinator (The Bahamas)

resources to attain prescribed goals, (see Table 3). The theory developed after data saturation revealed that a combination of the attributes from both the transformational and transactional leadership techniques would be ideal for middle managers in schools to adopt in crises as it relates to effective leadership.

Research Question 2: Grounded Theory's Constant Comparative Method

The findings related to research question 2 “-How can middle managers use transformational and transactional leadership styles to drive high performance from subordinates in schools?” has illustrated that use of data-driven decision-making is essential for goal setting. The significant codes that were identified with the achievement of high-performance during crises were data, access, communication, resources, community, partnerships, supporting, coaching, accountability, reinforcements, training, technology, goal setting, teamwork, flexibility, self-care, and giving grace (see Table 4).

Discussion

The chapter aimed to determine the suitability of the usefulness of the transformational and transactional leadership styles as a tool used by middle managers in the operation of schools in crises. Additionally, the goal was to discover whether these leadership styles could be effective for application by middle managers during times of crises in activating high performance from subordinates, despite internal and external. The achievement of the study's objectives was illustrated in the utilization of the theoretical approach pairing the social exchange and transformational leadership theories, cast within the interpretivism paradigm philosophy for the application of a qualitative inquiry methodology. Resultantly, the findings from the study's response to research question 1, “To what extent are transformational and

transactional leadership styles suited for the practice by middle managers in schools during crises?” highlighted that these leadership styles are effective in practice by middle managers at the primary and secondary level of education. This is illustrated in the significant themes and theory development extracted from the datasets (see Tables 3 and 4). The findings of the study emphasized themes such as becoming adaptable to adjustments and changing strategies, group support with training and coaching in technology, collaboration through meetings and community partners, and accountability via rewards and consequences which are qualities of the transformational and transactional leadership styles. These leadership skills were administered by each participant in the sample, successfully in their leadership roles during the COVID-19 crisis. This is also prominent in the literature evidenced by (Abu-Tineh et al., 2009; Berkovich, 2016) supporting that the transformational leadership style is very valuable for use by middle managers in school operations. On the other hand, (Brymer & Gray, 2006; Okindo, 2020) also defend the premise that transactional leadership can be used to reinforce and drive high-performance. Zhang et al. (2021) further advocated that the combination of the transformational and transactional leadership styles has shown some success in schools.

Correspondingly, the findings relative to research question 2, “How can middle managers use transformational and transactional leadership styles to drive high performance from subordinates in schools if a crisis situation is occurring?” has underscored in the study’s outcome that these leadership styles can be invaluable in crisis circumstances. Unreservedly, the findings have indicated that if these leadership styles are employed amidst crisis circumstances occurring within the school’s operations at the primary and secondary level, performance targets may be successfully achieved. Evidence of this is presented in the discovery of themes such as data to drive decision-making, access to resources, partnerships for supporting, accountability through goal setting, reinforcements, training and technology, teamwork yet flexibility, and the promotion of self-care, (see Table 4) which are characteristics linked to the transformational and transactional leadership techniques in application. Further evidence is also disclosed by Lan et al. (2019) and MacNeil (2018) which revealed that a merger of the transformational and the transactional leadership styles as a strategic leadership design for achieving high-performance in crises.

Application for Practice by Middle Managers

Accordingly, middle managers at the primary and secondary levels of education have acknowledged the challenges experienced in motivating subordinates effectively towards high performance during crises within schools. Therefore, the implications for practice related to research question 1 emphasized based on the overall theory development from the findings that schools must become adaptable through the application of leadership techniques that combine leadership skills such as collaboration to form partnerships, training, coaching, and intentional accountability regimes (see Table 3). Most importantly, these are characteristics of the transformational and transactional leadership styles, and the findings are suggesting that these leadership skills when applied can drive efficiency in schools.

Furthermore, the implications of the results in connection to research question 2 affirmed that the transformational and transactional leadership styles may be used in driving high-performance within schools. This has manifested in the findings established through the overall theory resulting from the data saturation of the occurring themes which underscored that high performance in school operations during crises is dependent on teamwork, intentional support, and mandating accountability parameters (see Table 4). Finally, the solutions and strategies used by the middle managers in the sample across the four countries, suggest that the transformational and transactional leadership styles, if used in concert

within schools, at the primary and secondary level, may be valuable leadership techniques in practice, in influencing high performance, irrespective of location during crises.

The Transformational and the Transactional Leadership Styles for Application Towards Achieving High-Performance.

Bass (1990) and Bass et al., (2003) postulated in their studies that employees have rated the transformational leadership style higher than the transactional leadership approach in improving subordinates' performance. In addition, the studies revealed that transformational leaders empower subordinates to improve their skills which in turn improves their performance, exceeding the organization's goals. This is also asserted by Nazim's (2016) study which exposed compelling evidence that the practice of transformational leadership is paramount to drive high-performance in schools than transactional. As it provides the foundation for inspiring adjustments to leadership and workflows instead of simply arbitrarily responding to it. The conclusion can be drawn that a combination of the two leadership styles could be the best choice to produce high-performance in schools during crises.

The findings of the current study point to the significance of adopting a merger of these two leadership styles by middle managers. The evidence is disclosed from the overall theory developed from the salient themes extracted from the qualitative datasets which upheld that schools must become adaptable through the application of leadership techniques that combine leadership skills such as collaboration to ignite partnerships, training, coaching, and intentional accountability regimes.

Based on these findings, in a crisis within the education industry, both the transformational and transactional leadership styles may be most effective in ensuring high-performance from stakeholders in middle management positions. Fotheringham et al. (2021) and Harris and Jones (2020) affirmed that this may be achieved through the shared leadership strategy offered via the transformational leadership style. On the other hand, arguably, the transactional leadership style, may be effective to direct prescribed task protocols to affect efficiency, like the protocols necessary in school management with the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Most importantly, if the situation has been constantly bombarded with uncertainty, then transformational and transactional leadership could prove valuable when combined (Bass, 1990; Nazim, 2016).

Furthermore, Lan et al.'s (2019) study results have shown that the transactional leadership style provides job satisfaction for the school's staff through reward systems in leveraging high-performance. On the other hand, the transformational leadership style can be used to inspire teachers and students in schools to accept and respond positively to the changes brought on by the crisis. Similarly, in the telecommunication industry further evidence is presented to show the versatility of the transformational and transactional leadership style. For example, Nokia and Samsung were fierce competitors in smartphone production. Gadalla (2020) and Lamberg et al. (2019) gave an account of the notable loss of market share of the Nokia company in 2012 to the new entrant Samsung Company relative to the choice of leadership styles during uncertain situations. Nokia's used the transactional leadership in a rapidly changing market situation against the aggressive new entrant, Samsung, using the transformational leadership style.

This resulted in Samsung being able to push Nokia out of its number one position in the market because of their over-dependence on a transactional leadership technique. This downfall of the Nokia company shows clearly that the transactional leadership style is inadequate by itself for use with difficult situations and is not sufficient to the promote high-performance of workers. On the other hand, according to Jovanovic and Ciric (2016) and Korejan and Shahbazi's (2016) studies, the transformational leadership

style tends to thrive amid uncertainty and difficult times, driving employees to surpass expectations. Although Lan (2019) and Nazim (2016) affirms that the use of the two leadership styles in concert may produce a better situation for achieving high-performance during crises. Though the Nokia saga is a reflection on the telecommunications sector middle managers in schools could learn from their successes and failures then tailor these to fit school environments.

Furthermore, Bean (2014) and Murari and Mukherjee (2021) asserted that the transformational leadership style as shown by the Samsung company, was better at increasing employee performance, as it emphasizes adaptability and resilience irrespective of impeding situational factors. Evidence of this quality has been illustrated in the findings of the current study in themes related to research question 1 such as *collaboration through meetings* and research question 2, *community partnerships* and *teamwork yet flexibility*.

In juxtaposition to this, Gales and Gallon (2019) and Hosgorur (2016) assert that the educational sectors globally are slow in providing newer and better modalities for the provision of education and are hampered by inadequate funding and other impediment factors. A crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic has propelled reorganization and improvements to the education sector to influence better performance achievement across schools (Brammer & Clark, 2020; Fotheringham et al., 2021). Confirmation of these changes to the schools was evident in the findings for research question 2 which discovered from the datasets that schools mandated accountability via goal setting, training, coupled with technology and constant reinforcements to intentionally encourage high performance during a crisis may be influenced by teamwork yet providing flexibility, fostering selfcare (see Table 4).

A crisis in learning environments then, demand school leaders to implement fluid change management techniques coupled with a collaborative alliance with all stakeholders (Gordon et al., 2021; Harris & Jones, 2020). Fotheringham et al. (2021) further emphasized the importance of middle management teams in a crisis to make informed decisions to drive performance. The outcome from research question 1 revealed proof of this as the significant themes in the findings indicated that crisis situations within schools may results in stressful and challenging leadership roles, but schools must become adaptable to adjustments with the help of group support through activating intentional support and tradeoffs (see Table 3).

Implications of the Leadership Styles' Transmission Within Teams Operating in Schools

Lin and Huang (2020) and Shahid and Din's (2021) studies emphasized that a group's effectiveness will be dependent on the proper discerning of the elements in existence within the group. For example, the communication channels may complement or dictate the type of leadership style for operation, within some groups, for success. To illustrate the impact of communication channels relative to the type of leadership style in practice within groups, the transformational leadership style is an example. Therefore, in ascertaining the elements operating in groups, this may be valuable in responding to research question 1. With regards to the transformational leadership style which employs person-to-person interactions as a benchmark technique to gain group followers' commitment to the achievement of high-performance rates (Simsek, 2013; Sparks, 2021). Moreover, Men (2014) describes this type of leadership style as emphasizing direct interaction with subordinates to ensure timely assessment and reaction to problems, as is necessary during crises.

Further, studies by Ahmed et al. (2010) and Gaille (2018) revealed that to motivate subordinates, the leadership style in practice must establish precise and straightforward communication channels. Equally important, is the impact that leadership styles have on the cohesiveness of relationships within groups in creating harmony in the execution of organizational aims. In contrast, Chen et al. (2011) admonished that a lack of trust may lead to low morale, low-performance rates, and conflicts.

Crosby (2017) asserts that transformational leaders understand the value of providing an open-door policy to subordinates to foster collaboration toward goal attainment. These qualities of the transformational leadership style have been portrayed in this study's findings. Some evidence reported by Interviewee 1 (Jamaica), include "...we have consultation with teachers...had parents come in on different days for report consultation... we have parent and class groups on WhatsApp...I have checkup sessions...". Comparably, Interviewee 3 (USA) reported that "...partnered with community partners to give free Wi-Fi to needy families... provide intentional support for teachers...use of welcome rituals...rule rotation to support students... more empathetic...more supportive approach...". Interviewee 4 (UK) revealed strategies like "...foster positive mental health in the team and students...team members were given...options...flexible...considering all external influences...". Similarly, Interviewee 5 (Bahamas) shared techniques comprised "...creating WhatsApp groups for student, parents, teachers...the use of one-on-one communication...flexible deadlines..." (see Table 3).

Furthermore, in addressing research question 2, it is also necessary to examine the effects of culture on the effectiveness of leadership styles selected by middle managers in crisis circumstances. Most importantly, Martin et al. (2019) support that a harmonized workspace specifically, can be beneficial in achieving high performance within groups relative to norms such as routines, beliefs, and attitudes of followers. Therefore, the leadership style adapted for success may be based on group environment (crises) or national culture (Kwantes & Boglarsky, 2007).

Comparably, research such as Chaudhry and Javed (2012) and Shaffer (2008) showed that the transactional and transformational leadership styles have achieved high-performance using motivational techniques with subordinates. Likewise, there are useful guidelines shared in the expectancy theory ideology, that may be useful in providing answers to research question 2. Specifically, where motivation can be used to increase productivity within groups if it is linked to intrinsic benefits for group members. Alston et al. (2017) and Heystek and Emekako (2020) corroborate the expectancy theory premise that incentives can provide encouragement and underpinned high-performance associated with school leadership. This was a significant strategy used by the middle managers recruited for this current study, as in Jamaica, The UK, and The USA the respondents shared using a reward system in stimulating high performance. For example, Interviewee 1 (Jamaica) used incentives such as "... I reward them with staff socials and Fridays off ... " and "... they really put on all extra effort. So, I really must reward them...". Interviewee 3 (USA) employed stimulus which were in the form of "...reward for doing the right thing..." and "...free and reduced lunch...free Wi-Fi ...free tablets...monthly treats...thank you cards". Additionally, in the UK staff members were given time off to facilitate high performance in the voice of Interviewee 4 (UK) where provisions were made to "...organize with HR to give a few mornings off or time off..." (see Table 4).

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Unreservedly, if the transformational and transactional leadership styles employed are to be effective, further research is needed to determine what techniques of motivation can be used to complement the different group dynamics that are represented in schools. Furthermore, depending on the group environ-

ment, the right combination of transformational and transactional leadership styles and the motivation techniques that encourage team harmony, irrespective of the group dynamics, is essential. Transformational and transactional leaders, as evidenced in the literature review and the findings, can inspire collaborative efforts and task-focused successfully within teams to propel high-performance. Yet, the implementation and support for the ever-changing decisions vital in crises, begs improvement for smoother operation and is still need more research. Much work is needed as it relates to the concurrent use by middle managers of the transformational and transactional leadership techniques (Fotheringham et al., 2021). Equally important, is the need for the reengineering of the right combinations of the elements of each leadership style in the school environments for mitigating impending crises.

Consequently, it may be viable to find harmony between both the use of transformational and transactional leadership styles as a solution to the phenomenon. These two leadership styles may bring creativity and the capacity to inspire ambition, as well as to attain task-oriented goals. As studies such as Kabeyi (2018) and Kuhnert (1987) deemed these leadership strategies a requirement for surviving in prolonged crises and keeping employees as high performers. The findings support the transformational leadership style as a viable complement to the transactional leadership style in practice by middle managers, in schools at the primary and secondary levels.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future researchers should conduct a mixed methods research in hopes of developing a framework that middle managers could use as a guide for the transmission of the transformational and the transactional leadership styles in schools at all levels. Especially, regarding the best practices middle managers can use in responding effectively to crises. Additionally, discover techniques and best practice applications for middle management practitioners in maintaining goal attainment through high-performance rates. Moreover, the primary focus of future studies should uncover the best practices for leading remotely, as well as, in traditional operations during crises in schools.

CONCLUSION

In summary, arguments have been presented to show the impact of the employment of the transformational and transactional leadership style in practice for middle managers in schools, during crises. Accordingly, a qualitative research approach applying the GT research design was used to direct primary research, with middle managers in several educational institutions. The qualitative methodology was used to delve into the problem of interest utilizing the interpretative ideology. Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) asserted that it gives participants a voice to share their experiences to uncover pertinent trends and patterns that resonate with the issue at hand. Bratianu (2020) attributed the utilization of the GT research design in its application as valuable in collecting rich data to respond to the research questions. Also, it was used as a guide for the extraction of relevant findings through data analysis, in developing assumptions from the datasets for application by middle managers in selecting effective leadership styles in practice.

Furthermore, the literature has indicated that good leadership exists where there is effective communication and rapport in the relationships within the group setting (Caldwell et al., 2010). Consequently, leadership style refers to the combination of methods and strategies a leader uses consistently in getting

subordinates within a group to complete tasks assigned to meet organizational objectives (Lester, 1975). Therefore, leaders should recognize which leadership styles motivate a set of group members as these vary depending on the group congruence and the environment (Shonhiwa, 2016). The fundamental aim of the study was to determine the value of the transformational and transactional leadership styles for use by middle managers in crises. The findings from the study have highlighted the possibility for success within schools if the two leadership styles are combined. Both the transformational and the transactional leadership styles based on the literature and the study's findings may be the solutions for middle managers in unlocking high-performance in school operations during a crisis. Finally, all leadership styles have their strengths and weaknesses. However, the literature and findings suggest that the transactional and the transformational leadership styles may merit some value for application by middle managers in leading and driving high-performance in schools.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

COVID-19 Pandemic: A novel respiratory virus with the capability to infect human cells and is highly contagious (Ciotti et al., 2020).

CPD: Relates to continuous upgrading sessions conducted to provide skills and knowledge acquisition for professionals in keeping with the current trends and practices (Maciejowska et al., 2015).

GT: Grounded Theory which refers to the research methodology that uses data collected to develop theories through the employment of comparative evaluation (Tie et al., 2019).

Incentives: Reward for desirable behaviours.

Interpretative Paradigm: Information gain from the perceptions of people residing in their experiences and cultural norms.

Leaders: Manage groups and use persuasion to drive accomplishment of assigned tasks (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2021).

Leadership: Describes the potential of an individual to leverage other group members, and effect change relevant to goal attainment (Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015).

Middle Managers: Intermediate management level of authority with duties of both administrative and teaching roles. (Fitzgerald, 2000).

Social Exchange Theory: The idea that the interactions and formation of valuable connections between people is dependent on a cost-benefit judgement.

Theoretical Framework: Theoretical models used to guide new research.

Chapter 8

Autonomy and Empowerment for Middle Managers in Jamaican Local (Municipal) Authorities: A Positioning Strategy for Change Leadership/Management

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ABSTRACT

The chapter explores how chief executive officers' (CEOs) leadership styles in municipal corporations (MCs) in Jamaica affect middle managers' autonomy and empowerment for change leadership in times of crises. The CEOs' leadership styles contribute to the performance of middle managers' fulfilment of their organizational mandate. Fourteen participants (senior and middle managers), with at least 10 years of working experience at the senior and middle management levels, participated in this study to explore human lived experiences using a case study approach. The qualitative case study used NVivo 12 software to analyze data collected using semi-structured interview questions on how CEOs in MCs can empower middle managers with autonomy to effectively perform their jobs. The findings reveal that when CEOs empower and give autonomy to middle managers, such an action could transform local government organizations and encourage best practices for organizational change in times of crises.

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INTRODUCTION

In times of crisis decisions need to be made quickly. Yet, too often, decisions in municipal corporations that could have been made by middle managers are stalled for a seemingly exorbitant amount of time waiting for review and the final decision of senior managers. Decisions can sometimes be made by junior leaders when given the latitude by their senior managers to be autonomous. Autonomy given to middle managers brings about change, freedom to make effective decisions on the manager's behalf in accordance with the operating procedures, ethical principles, and effectiveness of the organization. Thus, the need for autonomy and empowerment to bring about change in the organization. According to Buchanan (2013) "middle managers in general hold a wide range of responsibilities, from 'keeping the show on the road' to contributing to strategy, innovation and change, with a profile that sharply contradicts the 'pen-pushing bureaucrats' imagery" (p.1). Such a view places middle managers' highly on a change management continuum, whereby autonomy and employment are solutions for organizational effectiveness, and efficiency to deal with any crises that may arise in the organization.

The reality is, organizations cannot function without change, and middle managers based on their roles and functions have to influence others to support the change. Within the wider context of the change management/leadership, this can be quite challenging because the pace of change is constantly evolving and requires quick action regarding decisions. The paradigm shift requires extremely flexible schedules and programs, as well as efficient human resource capacity. There is no greater need for this shift in management processes than in times of crisis such as natural disasters (hurricanes and the pandemic are prime examples).

Autonomy and empowerment of employees in organizations result in a motivated workforce, effective performance, job satisfaction and commitment (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978; Deci & Ryan, 2017; Northouse, 2013). Research has indicated that leaders in organizations have encountered challenges with middle managers (subordinates) failure to be informed about policy decisions as they are not empowered with authority to act (Gilbert, 2009; Kolzow, 2014; Steinmann et al., 2018; Stoker, 2006). The general problem is change is needed within local government authorities and senior managers have to initiate that change by empowering their junior managers. Within the literature of organizational transformation, managers' capacity to influence, manage, and plan change for the strategic direction of the administration is instrumental (Abramson & Lawrence 2001; Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Kotter 1995). Change is inevitable in organizations and senior managers are critical in bringing about such change (Burke 2002, Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Yukl, 2002).

The specific problem is that middle managers need empowerment and autonomy from their chief executive managers to make certain decisions in their absence without relying too much on the control and command approach. This has stifled the growth and productivity of employees. Hence, the study explores how autonomy and empowerment of middle managers in Jamaican municipalities, acting as local government authorities, as a positioning strategy for change leadership/management in times of crises.

Leaders in municipal corporations should empower middle managers by delegating more authority and responsibilities in decision making, and information sharing. Crisis in the municipal corporations could be avoid if senior managers levied some of their decision making authority to junior managers without constant monitoring.

The chapter discusses how leaders/CEOs in Jamaican municipal corporations can add value to the corporations by giving autonomy and empowerment to middle managers in municipalities/local government as a positioning strategy for change in times of crises. Empowerment and autonomy to middle managers could foster effective and efficient service delivery that is maintained and desired.

OBJECTIVE OF CHAPTER

Autonomy and empowerment for managers in organizations should be aligned with the strategic vision and objectives of any organization. Autonomy is characterized with dimensions of effective performance, learning, and development to determine the altitude or growth of employees in organization. Ownings and Kaplan (2012) reinforce the notion that autonomous individuals have choice, act independently, and perform at the highest standard to accomplish the organizational goals. Having explicit expectations of managers, autonomy is associated with empowerment, which significance complements followers' experience of autonomy from their capacity, dignity, and belief, sometimes from their managers or supervisors. According to Liu et al. (2011) "autonomy support differentiation as a main effect may exert either positive or negative effects on psychological empowerment" (p. 3). Research on autonomy given to individuals from supervisors who are regarded as "high status person" are more extensive than autonomy from other sources (Deci et al., 1989; Deci et al., 2001; Pearce & Sims, 2002). Autonomy endows managers and followers with accountability through positive relationship and teamwork.

The chapter's objective is to create an awareness of how middle managers in Jamaican municipalities/ local government authorities can use turnaround strategies, accountability, and teamwork as change management approach to restructure municipalities. This can bring about effective management practices/ functions which sometimes proven to be weak or lacking.

MAIN AND SUB RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main question that guides the chapter:

How can autonomy and empowerment by senior managers (CEOs) to middle managers positively effect change leadership/management in the organization?

Three sub-questions for the research:

RQ1: What level of empowerment and/or autonomy do you have in the organization?

RQ 2: How can leadership styles, relationship, and trust assist autonomy and performance in the organization?

RQ 3: What level of crises do you encounter in the organization and how are they dealt with?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study contributes to how leaders in organizations can provide solutions to enhance the empowerment and autonomy of middle managers in Municipal Corporations. Empowered employees are more productive, motivated, and have increased job satisfaction and leaders have the responsibility to create this environment. According to Udod et al. (2020) creating empowered work environments in today's workplace has been an ongoing challenge for leaders and managers. Therefore, with autonomy and empowerment of middle managers in the Jamaican municipalities/ local government authorities, CEOs by equipping middle managers with strategies can aid them to alleviate crises that may arise in

the organizations. The study significance adds to the body of knowledge on how empowerment and autonomy of junior managers create collaboration for both employee motivation, development, and organization sustainability.

The study provides insight for leaders in not only municipal corporations, but leaders in various fraternities that empowerment that organizational missions and visions can be fulfilled or accomplished when middle managers are given the latitude. The study contributes to the need for change management/ leadership of CEOs' leadership styles in municipal corporations (MCs) in Jamaica. It also underlines how autonomy and empowerment of middle managers by CEOs can alleviate work pressure in times of crises. This then equips and motivates employees' performance, increasing job satisfaction and achieving organizational goals or fulfilment of the organizational mandate.

The chapter allows or assists leaders in municipalities with strategies to encourage, empower, and support employees to improve organizational effectiveness. Leaders of other business entities can benefit from the importance of fostering autonomous organizations, hence empowerment of others is calculated in how they "model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart" (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 24). Leadership is everyone in the organisation's business, however, empowerment, and autonomy guides the success and or profitability expectations of everyone in the organisation.

BACKGROUND

The municipal corporation is characterized as the local authorities at the local level through which the department of local government carries out its functions within communities. The Jamaican entities are the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation (KSAC), the Portmore Municipal Council and the 12 Parish Councils (*Ministry of Local Government & Rural Development, Roles and Functions, 2022*). The Local Authorities, officially known as Municipal Corporation are empowered to make by-laws, regulations, and rules for the good governance of the parishes which they have jurisdiction (*Ministry of Local Government & Rural Development, Roles and Functions, 2022*). The local authority has two arms, the political and the administration. Emphasis on this study focuses on the administrative arm, headed by a manager/chief executive officer or called the Secretary/Manager. He or she advises and implements policies of the corporation and supervises all the department heads at the corporation, such as Finance, Administration, Physical Planning, Community Programmes, Internal Auditor, Roads and Works, Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management, etc. (*The Local Government Laws and Governance, 2016; Local Authorities Strategic Plan, 2016*).

The local authorities resulted from the task dimensions of the Secretary/Managers or CEOs in effectively administering the rules for good governance of the parishes, such as,

...developing, managing, and maintaining the infrastructure and public facilities; support the national policies/development programmes at the local level; regulation powers in respect to building and planning approvals and development control, and spearhead plans and initiatives for the orderly, balanced, and sustainable development of the parish... (Ministry of Local Government & Rural Development, Roles and Functions, 2022; The Local Government Laws and Governance, 2016; Local Authorities Strategic Plan, 2016).

Autonomy and Empowerment for Middle Managers in Jamaican Local (Municipal) Authorities

The job is characterized by a huge responsibility and to work would need the support of junior managers by making effective and ethical decisions in the absence of a senior manager, or even at times when the senior manager is encumbered with other administrative duties. Hence, the need for autonomy and empowerment of middle managers to share in navigate challenges, know to share good practices, increase efficiency, and make strategic decisions that would prevent crises situations in the corporations. Autonomy and empowerment for middle managers in Jamaican municipalities are needed as a positioning strategy for change leadership/management in times of crises.

Crises impact the job sometimes due to limited human resources or the lack of the required authorizing bodies to make certain critical decisions urgently needed by internal and external customers which would extend waiting time in the delivery of local services and impact local development. As a result, the corporation sometimes are seen as lacking effectiveness and efficiency in its operations to the wider stakeholders, thus tarnishing its image. With change in technology and operational procedures, the corporation requires a new set of competencies for job performance, job satisfaction, and change leadership. The actions need to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and increased transparency and accountability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature brings together research on the way autonomy and empowerment for middle managers in a Jamaican municipality/ local government authority can position the organization for change leadership/management in times of crises. The review of the literature is an exploration of data from past research, empirical research on overview and definitions of autonomy and empowerment, leadership and management, professional relationships in organizations and how usefulness on autonomy and empowerment, empowerment and autonomy in organization, and change leadership/management in times of crises. In addition, a discussion on crises in municipalities and how senior leaders or chief executive officers (CEOs) can empower their middle managers or leaders with autonomy to effectively make decisions in such times for organizational effectiveness is included.

OVERVIEW: AUTONOMY, EMPOWERMENT, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES

Fullan (2001) posited that as society becomes complex, leaders have to change their paradigm to appreciate and meet change to operate within an environment filled with paradox, dilemmas, and interconnected and fast-moving complexities. Crises and turbulence are drivers of change in organizations. Leading in the 21st century has never been more challenging. With the dynamic environment from changes in technology, economy, social upheavals, and a world-wide pandemic there is more challenges resulting in the need for leadership in change management initiatives to deal with these issues. Empowerment and autonomy in times of crises are paramount as a leadership tool.

Belasco and Stayer (1993) defined leadership as “making it possible for others to follow by thinking strategically and focusing on the right directions, removing obstacles, developing ownership, and taking self-directed actions” (p. 49). Rost (1997) further claimed leadership as an “influence relationship among leaders and their collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p. 99). This then introduces not only the idea that leaders influence others to achieve organizational objec-

tives, but they do so by creating an environment in which employees share the vision of the leader and are empowered to do so.

When leaders make the right decision and give employees empowerment and autonomy, organizational goals will be accomplished and relationship with their subordinates will be influenced. Middle managers or middle leaders in organizations when empowered can deal with any crises in organizations. They are risk-takers, invested with people skills, team initiative, and efficiency and effectiveness which, in turn, are perceived as factors of organizational productivity (Dopson & Stewart 2001, Stokers, 2006, Zemke, 1994). Thus, giving middle managers empowerment and autonomy to make and be involved in critical decision-making fosters a smoother transition and know-how when crisis arises.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES

Leadership as a concept has evolved over the last few decades, both in how it is defined and how it is practised (Roache & Marshall, 2022, p.1). Leadership is guiding others to effectiveness and efficiency. Northouse (2013) states that leadership influences others, and is a process whereby an individual influences other individuals to achieve common goals. Leadership is associated with change, influence, and loyalty (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Seeman, 1960). A plethora of information exists on the definition of leadership. It has been defined by scholars for decades in various ways and influenced by several factors and challenges, such as politics, organizational behaviour, and business (Antonakis, et al. 2004; Bass, 1990, Burns, 1978). The word “lead” in leadership means “take with one” to “show the way” (Hoad, 1998). Leadership is a trait, behaviour, situation, skills, relationship, and an ability (Brookhiser, 1996; Blake & Moulton, 1964; Northouse, 2012; Rost, 1997). Leadership has evolved throughout decades in keeping with change management and sets the direction of the organization. For leadership to influence the individual to achieve organizational goals, effectiveness, and efficiency, the need for autonomy and empowerment should be a guiding principle. Leadership is transformational (Bass, 1990; Bryman, 1992). Leadership transforms, empowers, motivates, and influence others.

If leadership approaches encompass such transformational characteristics, then autonomy and empowerment is situated in the administration of organizational goals. According to Kim and Beehr (2020), empowering leadership promotes subordinates (p.1). When employees are empowered and have autonomy in the organization, the less likely that crises situation will occur. Through their experience they would know how to deal with or minimise the situation and/or challenges they face.

Leadership takes others into management with the various activities, stabilities, and gives orders to organizational operations. Northouse (2013) postulated that management seeks order and stability while leadership seeks “adaptive and constructive change” (p. 13) for the consistent of the organization. Organizations need strong management, leadership, and change. According to Northouse (2007),

If an organization has strong management without leadership, the outcome can be stifling and bureaucratic. Conversely, if an organization has strong leadership without management, the outcome can be meaningless or misdirected change for change’s sake. (p. 11).

Management functions have been intertwined into the leadership processes and development. Management reduces chaos in organization with its functions of planning, organizing, staffing, controlling (Kotter, 1990). The distinction between leadership and management, managers are people who do things

right and leaders are people who do the right thing (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 222). Both leaders and followers in organizations are responsible for setting the paradigm to create change, autonomy, and empowerment for the better good of the organization. Autonomy and empowerment of middle managers bring competence, job satisfaction, and motivation. Autonomous forms extrinsic motivation and the more autonomous persons are within the organization, the effective the organization as their value will be congruent with that of the organization (Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, the directional approach should be created by the leader who has first mover advantage for the professional relationship of the organization.

Professional Relationships in Organizations

Relationships with employees in organizations is critically important for the effective performance of employees and teamwork in organizations. Relationships are formed between the employees and employers through means of exchange. The employer exchanges compensation package, to include salary and wages at the recruitment and selection process and the employee accepts the exchange for satisfactorily completion of job performance and quality service. A relationship in organizations is maintained through job evaluation, where employees' skills, efforts, and responsibilities are continuously evaluated to see their valued added initiative. The employee-organization relationship thus becomes an examination of how much value employees' attributes/contributes to the organization (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). Thus, the organizational interest becomes the employees' interest via the professional relationship forged between them. Thus, leadership becomes a relationship for followers/subordinators through collaboration building.

A leader's introduction of subordinates to the organization comes through relationships, teamwork, effective communication, the mission, vision, objectives, and organizational support. Thus, "an understanding of leadership as a relationship brings attention to followers and their essential role in leadership effectiveness" (Owings & Kaplan, 2012, p. 28). Relationships then become an exchange where trust and integrity are reciprocated. Professional relationships with organizational stakeholders such as the principal (leader/manager) and the agent (employees/middle managers) constitutes a timely process. The end result is organizational goal achievement, and the satisfaction of internal and external customers. When middle managers are given autonomy and empowerment by their chief executive officers in Jamaican municipalities/local government authorities, chances are, both internal and external customers will be satisfied. Offered and shared autonomy motivate employees and offer workplace creativity and proactivity (Coun et al., 2021). Professional relationship creates a culture of trust, professional autonomy, and allow employee to have access to knowledge (Coun et al., 2021) thereby managers trust employees to make decisions on behalf of the organization. Such autonomy positions the organization for change and minimise the possible event/occurrence of a crises because of lack of human resource. Employees are dynamic, have the ability, can take self-directed action, and respond to change possibilities for the future of the organization (Coun et al., 2021).

Professional relationships in organizations involve an involvement of mutual understanding and interaction with others to transform/change obsolete organizational culture. Thereby granting empowerment and autonomy to others to develop self-regulation, self-determination, and competence through positive feedback and assistance in the decision-making process where applicable (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This argument supports that relationships should build on collaborative and noncoercive means that foster the "persuasive strategies and the desire to achieve mutually important goals" (Owings & Kaplan, 2012, p.

29) built on the affordance of choice, job satisfaction initiatives, engagement of employees' performance and experience.

A professional relationship is relationship leadership where leaders allow employees to feel autonomous and display competence in their performance. When middle leaders are empowered within the organization, it encourages proactivity and productivity within the workplace as employee competence and self-determination not only impact their work, but also how employees experience their work (Parker et al., 2010; Parker & Wu, 2014; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). This positive approach is a clear indication that employees will learn to manage change and deal with crises within the organization having been exposed from the managerial practices shared and empowered by their senior managers. Empowerment and autonomy in organization contributes to job satisfaction, increase employee engagement, and transfer of knowledge for the realization of the organization mission, vision, and values.

Autonomy contributes to employee desire and satisfaction. Autonomy is associated with positive performance and well-being outcomes. However performance can be impaired when the employees' basic needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are not met (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017). To be autonomous, leaders must be cognizant of situations, needs, processes, feelings, and relationships that fosters such physiological needs. Studies have shown that when individuals feel like they have autonomy in their work environment, it elevated their self-esteem, competence, and performance (deCharms, 1976; Owings & Kaplan, 2012). When employees are autonomous, they are able to choose meaningful work activities and tasks (McGregory & Little, 1998; Ryff, 1989). When lacking autonomy, they feel ineffective, incompetent, and unable to complete tasks - they feel meaningless (Baumeister, 1991, Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Steger et al., 2008).

Middle managers are integrally involved in the administrative and operational functions of the organizations and "since at least the start of the 21st century, have seen their jobs enlarged, their responsibilities widened, the pace and intensity of their work increased, their working hours lengthened and their performance monitored more closely" (Buchanan et al., 2013, p.1). Regarding their job enlargement, some lack autonomy to make effective decisions on behalf on the organization as the culture of the organization fails to promote such practices. This prevents efficiency in the organization during times of crises as the senior managers are absence for various reasons, such as work assignments. Middle managers are important assets in the strategic building and implementation of change within organizations (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011) and once they have the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities should be authorised, empowered and be given autonomy to make decisions that would have seen to prevent crises in the organizations. In contrasting, autonomy and empowerment for organizational effectiveness, Ryan and Deci (2017) state that autonomy is derived from individual behaviour, value, and how individual integrates those values into their behaviour. Autonomy is closely linked with empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995; Seibert et al. 2011). Autonomy gives individual the initiative and feelings that influence self-determination. Autonomy is compliance and conformity of needs and motives coupled with experiences based on direction and opinion to move people into action and allows for the fulfilment of their psychological need of desires, to strive (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Empowerment channels autonomy to produce optimum results with motivated employees and reduces turnover in organizations. When middle managers feel empowered, they appreciate "the intrinsic meaning, personal choice, and impact of their work (Liu et al., 2011, p.4; See also Spreitzer, 1995). Middle managers in organization need autonomy and empowerment from their senior managers to build the image of the organization, to be involved in strategic decision making, and to position the strategic direction for change in the organization.

There are various terms used by researchers to describe autonomous decision-making. Causal responsibility for a person's action (Thomas & Velthouse 1990; Yang & Choi, 2008), self-determination associated with experience of choice that necessitates "psychological theory built on conceptions such as volition, intentionality, or will" (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Yang & Choi, 2008, p. 2). Maslow (1954) stated that when employees are self-actualized, they hierarchically place 'choice' as an importance dimension. Self-determination reflects employees' autonomy associated with initiation and continuation of their work behaviours and process (Spreitzer, 1995; Yang & Choi, 2008). Employees can be autonomous in making organizational decisions, which is a critical component of empowerment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995; Petter et al., 2002). Employees in an organization can be autonomous, however, only in accordance with the level of trust/responsibility assigned by superior or supervisor.

Kouzes and Posner postulate that without trust there is no leadership (2017). The same can be said for empowerment. Without trust it becomes micromanagement. Research has shown that a climate of trust allows employees to freely contribute, to innovate through an exchange of ideas and motivates people to enact organizational citizenship behaviours (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Lee et al., 2018). Lee and co-authors meta-analysis states that empowerment has positive effects on performance at all levels and this echoes Kouzes and Posner's findings that trust impacts all levels of performance. Thus, there is a clear connection between trust, empowerment, and performance. This statement is backed up by the field of educational leadership. Raub and Robert (2010) found that empowerment had a positive relationship influence on in-role and extra-role behaviors. Bogler and Somech (2004) found that leadership empowerment had a significantly impacted job satisfaction. Atik and Celik (2020) added trust as a factor and reported that not only did empowerment impact the levels of job satisfaction but it also elevated the level of trust. Therefore, trust is a key element in the empowerment leadership relationship.

When human resources are empowered within any organization they are committed, confident, and autonomous (Atik, & Celik, 2020; Bogler, & Somech, 2004; Raub, & Robert, 2010). When employees are empowered in organization, they feel confident in their job tasks/functions. This argument was supported by Zaraket et al. (2018) that

...human resources maximize the resource itself and generates organizational commitment among them which is perceived as a way of differentiating one organization from another. Moreover, empowered workers feel more confident and self-reliant to influence their work environment by being more proactive and innovative. Allowing individuals to have both independence and feedback within their company makes the empowerment process successful. (p.1)

A leader's engagement with their team members allows employees to grow and be involved in decision making of the organization. Empowerment and autonomy of employees in an organization aids the organization to achieve its goals and objectives while influencing the relationship between employees and management (Zaraket et al., 2018).

Empowering employees means that managers work with them by giving them the resources and tools they need to effectively perform their duties. Those resources include financial, training and development, mentorship and coaching, and support (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Employee empowerment by their manager does not mean that leaders isolate themselves from their responsibilities. The role of the leader now shifts to creating the necessary environment for their employees to share their opinion in the decision-making process given the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities (Emerson, 2012, Yang & Choi, 2008). Thus, employee empowerment adds value to the organization.

However, some organizational leaders often misunderstand the concept. Zaraket and co-authors state, “few managers put into practice [empowerment] because they believe that this process will reduce their authority” (2018, p. 2). Research shows that their fears are unfounded as employee empowerment has been shown to positively impact employee organizational commitment (Emerson, 2012). Committed employees are more motivated, have higher levels of job satisfaction and use their competence and autonomy to achieve organizational objectives (Demir, 2020; Kreitner & Kinichi, 2009). Autonomy and empowerment for middle managers in a Jamaican municipality/ local government authorities can position the corporation for change as middle managers mediate teamwork, contributes to organizational change, and is between the core operations and the apex of the organization (Mintzberg, 1989). Middle managers are both controllers and controlled, resisted and resisters, and greatly constitutes the organizational hierarchy (Harding et al., 2014). Thus, they can be empowered and given autonomy to make any decision in times of crises in the organization.

Researchers define empowerment using two approaches, situational and psychological (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Yang & Choi, 2008). The situational approach or the relational or management practice is where managers assigned some of their power and authority to employees thereby involvement in the decision-making process of the organization. The psychological approach deals less with delegation of decision-making process to employees but more on employee need for motivation to be empowered. Empowerment of employee psychologically contributes to enhancement of intrinsic motivation (Yang & Choi, 2008).

The psychological approach of empowerment proponents criticizes the situational approach as an underestimation of employee psychological empowerment value. Contrasting, the situational approach is a “dilemma for managers as its success depends on their ability to reconcile the loss of control with the need for goal congruence” Kay et al. (2008, cited by Yang & Choi, 2008, p. 2) and failed to recognize employees’ cognitive state. The researcher and co-authors’ perspectives were that sharing and/or delating power to employee does not guarantee that employees “state of mind will allow them to be industrious and increase organizational as “delegating or resource sharing is only one set of conditions that may (but not necessarily) enable or empower subordinates” (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p. 474) and failed to adequately address empowerment as experienced by subordinates at their level (Yang & Choi, 2008). The situational approach, however associated with the delegation of powers and resources and is better focused on the enhancement of employees’ feelings. Empowered employees are motivated, involve in decision-making process of organizations, are efficacious, and have the capability to deal with any situations that may arise in the organization.

CHANGE LEADERSHIP/MANAGEMENT IN TIMES OF CRISES

Organizational change is inevitable and calls for skilled leaders to navigate the directional path for others. Change happens as a result of competitiveness, effectiveness, changes in structures, new management, and processes. Crises leadership is critical in organizations and leaders are vulnerable to crises as it changes their modus operandi, however, highlights successful factors for future operational effectiveness. Crises can be successfully managed with team-work, efficiency, and effectiveness leadership. When successfully managed, the lessons learned form best practices for the future. Leadership has a role to play in a crisis as it requires them to communicate change and the empowerment of employees to deal with any given situation. “The role of organizational leaders and the impact of their decisions and actions are

magnified during times of crisis, especially during its initial phases, wherein organization experiences shock, as the crisis could threaten their very existence” (Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022, p. 2; Fink et al., 1971). Change is a continuous process in organizations and requires leaders to communicate the need for change, reason for change, and how organizations could improve and create relationship to change by refreezing and unfreezing (Lewin, 1947). Improving organizational productivity level hinges on change leaders’ encouragement of their organizations and employees to learn, innovate, experiment, and question change perspectives (Cawsey et al., 2012; Dumas, & Beinecke, 2018). Crises leadership is leading others within and through the crisis, yet, remaining effective.

Change leadership cannot be possible without a dedicated team of employees, teamwork, and collaboration on change initiatives. This requires scanning the environment for current trends and crises to create an adaptive and resilience appreciation of change. Leaders who are considered transformational and transformative cannot be exclusive of the organizational change as they are needed to guide the process positively to maximise productivity. According to Burke (2002) “without leadership, planned organizational change will never be realized” (p. 247). Thus, organizational change proves difficult in its achievement, but possible with change leadership, and management who has the ability to exercise the functions of management (planning, organizing, controlling, leading, and staffing) in the most cost-effective way and time. For organizations to change, people must change, and change leaders are needed to communicate the when, what, where, why, and how of change. If change leadership lacks the vision of change or how to communicate the dimensions of change, then a leadership change is needed.

Crisis leadership comprising of seven constructs (compassion and care, openness and communication, resilience and courage, decisiveness, consultation and collaboration, and empowerment (Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022), therefore leadership in crisis have to empower others, give them the autonomy they need effect the change, and be successful. Research has shown that change management and leadership is shifting to how people are affected by change and integrated in the change process (Gill, 2003, Moran & Brightman, 2001). This requires a change in leadership integration of employees in the change process to overcome resistance and increase ability to adapt to managing change. Gill’s (2003) model of change leadership called for a focus of leader vision, values, strategy, empowerment, motivation, and inspiration practices for effectiveness in the process change. “Effective emotional and behavioral leadership without valid vision and strategic thinking can be misguided, even dangerous” (Gill, 2003, p. 312). Organizations’ effectiveness lies in how leadership handles crisis across at the beginning, current, and future phase thus involves employee empowerment and autonomy to assist in the progress (Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022).

The importance of an effective vision, plan, and implementation is exemplified by the response of the University of Tulane School of Medicine in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The new Dean of the School put forth a new vision for the School that called upon the faculty and staff to think in terms of being an agent to heal the community (Kahn & Sachs, 2018). The lessons that were taken from the rebuilding were that the vision, as strong as it was, needed to be followed by action. However, a key component was empowerment. This was achieved through building a strong leadership team and delegating responsibility by encouraging an entrepreneurial attitude and empowering people to act (Kahn & Sachs, 2018). This required effective communication between all levels of the management team including senior and middle managers. The Dean advocated action and an open-door policy to leadership and communication (Kahn & Sachs, 2018).

The daily behaviours of junior managers in organization would have to depict a culture of organizational effectiveness to sustain the change to benefit the organization and its employees (Alimo-Metcalfe

& Alban-Metcalf, 2005). Change is feasible when organization responsive or proactive to internal and external customers' needs, however change can mean downsize, cutback or re-development (Nutt, 2004). According to Higgs and Rowland (2011) effective leaders need to demonstrate competences in the six areas, (1) create the need for change, (2) engage others to recognize the need for change; (3) create the structure for change; (4) engage others in the change process to their build commitment; (5) implement and sustain organizational change by planning, monitoring, and review process and actions; and (6) facilitate and develop the capability of others in order for them to find solutions for problems encountered. If leaders are not transformed in their behaviour and leadership style, the possibilities of them to motivate, facilitate, and develop others for and in the process might be futile.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a qualitative approach to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a social problem (Creswell, 2013). This allowed us to interpret the experiences of the participants and how they construct meaning to those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2015). The case study approach was used for this study.

Criteria for Research Participant Selection

The researchers used purposive sample and recruited middle managers with at least two six years of working experience in their field. According to Cohen et al (2011) purposive sample has been chosen for a "specific purpose to access 'knowledgeable people' (i.e., those who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues, maybe by virtue of their professional role, power, access to networks, expertise or experience" (Ball, 1990 as cited by Cohen et al., 2011, p. 157). The researchers chose purposive sampling for the study because of their need to obtain in-depth information from experts who are knowledgeable in the field of the specific sample for a specific purpose (Cohen et al., 2011). All the middle managers who participated in the study reported to the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the municipalities as illustrated on the organizational chart in Table 1. Their professional roles provided greater depth to the research and added to the validity and credibility of the study. The sample size of fourteen was deemed adequate for the qualitative research as postulated by Creswell (1998) and Thomson (2010).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative case study explored how autonomy and empowerment for middle managers in a Jamaican municipality/ local government authority can be used as a positioning strategy for change leadership/ management in times of crises. A purposive sample of 12 participants was used to unearth meanings from their lived experiences. Data were collected using NVivo software. NVivo qualitative data analysis software package produced by QSR International assisted in maintaining, organizing, and coding the data. This was done by coding the responses from interviews data. NVivo code manager feature provided a code directory to maintain linkages between the code and passage of text.

According to Licqurish and Seibold (2011), NVivo 'code manager' feature provided quick means to correct, display words, phrases, and code data for examination. The researchers divided the categories

into subcategories to create perspectives. The open coding phase supported examination of text for information categories and was used for data saturation. This process continued until data saturation for the category was formed. The data emerged from the coding categories and with constant comparative, the themes were selected. NVivo provided the trustworthiness and credibility of participants understanding and provided transferability.

Case studies provide a unique situation that enable real people in real situations provide the researcher with a deep understanding of how the participants thoughts, actions, and principles fit together (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) defined a case study as an “empirical enquiry that investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clear evident” (p.16). Since a case provides an in-depth description and analysis of a phenomenon that occurs within a bounded system (Yin, 2014) it helped to create a rapport with participants. That allowed us to obtain rich data and in-depth insight that can be transferred to similar situations (Merriam, 2015).

To conduct the interviews, we used semi-structured interviews using WebEx technology. This approach allowed us to gather more data based on the responses from participants regarding their lived experiences. Using WebEx we were able to view the participant which allowed us to gather data as well. In regard to the use of a semi-structured interview approach, Briggs, et al. (2012) said while structured interviews questions are predetermined, semi-structured interviews allow research participants to “respond in their own way” (p.79) which allows the interviewee to shape the conversation. Briggs et al. (2012) said ensuring reliability is difficult with unstructured and semi-structure interviews, as it requires a deliberate strategy for treating every participant response as potential unique. However, we felt it was necessary to allow the freedom of the participant to shape the interview and allow us to probe deeper on some responses.

Table 1. Background Data for Participants

Participants	Positions	Yrs. In Organization	Qualification
Participant 1	CEO	26	MBA
Participant 2	CEO	30	MBA
Participant 3	DoF	35	BSc
Participant 4	DoA	25	MBA
Participant 5	DoA	18	MBA
Participant 6	DoA	20	BSc
Participant 7	Chief Eng.O	29	Diploma
Participant 8	Chief Eng. O.	30	BA
Participant 9	DoP	36	BSc
Participant 10	II	30	BSc
Participant 11	MCSM	10	MBA
Participant 12	DPC	20	BSc

KEY: CEO- Chief Executive Office; DoF- Director of Finance, DoA- Director of Administration, DoP, Director of Finance. DPC- Disaster Preparedness Coordinator

C Eng.O – Chief Engineering Officer; II – Internal Auditor, MM- Municipal and Commercial Services Manager.

Table 1 illustrates the research participants, positions, years in organization, and qualifications. They are all senior and middle managers of the local authorities and have responsibility for various decision-making portfolios and are supervised by the chief executive officer (CEO). The sample size of 12 is small, but since all the participants are key informants, they provide sufficient data for analysis.

The CEO headed the executive administration with various decision-making authorities within the rules/laws/regulations governing local authorities. Examples of authority are (i) authorising expenditure within the approved budget; (ii) take disciplinary action against certain level of staff; (iii) approve the granting of leave to employees.

The DoF, middle manager, has responsibility for the financial decisions making of the local authority. As a middle manager, the DoF is authorised to make programmed and non-programmed decisions. Programmed decisions relate to issues that are expected and often occur, such as guiding a client through the details of applying for places of amusement or authorizing an expenditure. The non-programmed decisions are more complex and rarely occur, such as resolving issues with residents whose neighbor's tree overhangs on their property and is deemed as encroaching.

The DoA, middle manager, is authorized to make strategic and operational decisions relative to human resource matters including recruitment and management decisions on hiring, promotions, and staffing of temporary and casual employees. The Parish Councils Services Commission is the authorized body to make final decisions regarding permanent officers who are in the unified position/service. The Chief Engineering Officer is a middle manager with responsibility for technical issues, such as roads and works, and reports to the CEO.

The interviews with participants lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Their data were then transcribed and NVivo 12 software was used to analyse the data. After collecting and analysing the data several themes emerged from the research questions. These themes will be presented in the following section.

FINDINGS

The results from the participants' responses to various questions provided the main themes from the discussed below on data.

Theme: Work Delegation, Job Functions, and Decision-Making Authority

In responding to question, "How was work delegated to middle managers and whether or not delegation of work to middle managers includes decision-making? The response from the two CEOs varied. Participant 1 explained that "delegation of duties was leverage to the middle managers based on their skills, talent, training, and experiences" (p. 1). Middle managers in the organization are very competent and their knowledge can greatly impact the organizational growth and service delivery. Participant 2 explained that "the Local Authorities function on a departmental basis with a senior officers/middle manager appointed to head each department." For example, the Finance Department has operational responsibility for all finance matters of the authority.

The findings reveal that although the CEOs are head of the executive administration, they have final responsibility and are accountable for all financial matters of the authority. However, the operational functions of the accounts department are delegated to the head of the Finance Department. The same

is true for other departments. The functions of the various departments are therefore delegated to the respective department heads. This delegation comes with some amount of decision making within the terms of reference of functions laid out for the department.

The participants shared their lived experience and perspectives on the responsibility their manager/CEO delegates to them and whether or not it includes decision-making. The participants' perspectives were that the CEOs delegate responsibilities within their job functions and core competencies, and duties as outlined in their job descriptions. Other participants shared that the exigency of the service at times have seen their CEOs assign additional responsibilities. The perspectives shared were that while they might be outside of their core functions, 'any other duties' listed on their job description would have allowed for such assignment. Others shared that these duties while sometimes are outside of their core competences aid their growth and development in the organization.

In responding to the question, "What responsibility CEOs delegate and whether or not it involves decision-making? Participant 10 stated that,

My area is the management of the internal audit function, which involves planning, coordinating, and executing audit activities. The extent of decision making was limited to determining what risks to prioritize, function/activity/process/entity to include in the audit plan for review, the scope of the audits, resources needed to effectively execute the activities of the audit function, formulating an opinion of the effectiveness and efficiency of the internal control system in meeting set objectives. (p. 20)

The participant further shared that outside of the aforementioned, the work supports management in decision-making as recommendations and advice/input sought on matters are considered in their decision-making process. The core function of the internal audit activity is providing assurance on the effectiveness and efficiency of the system of internal control in achieving the business and strategic goals of the organisation, making recommendations for improving the controls and follow-up to ensure corrective action.

Participant 4 shared that "the CEO delegates or assigns responsibilities associated with the job functions, areas of competence, the ability, and awareness of nature of the job, depending on the assignment, it could involve decision making" (p. 10). Participant 5 shared the perspective that duties and responsibilities were awarded based on the job description, abilities, skills, and experience.

All the participants have some level of responsibilities whether given to them by their CEOs in keeping with their job functions, their experience or job knowledge. They are supportive relative to their list of duties on a general level.

Theme: Supervisory Responsibility Through Management Functions

In response to the question, "what level of authority for decision making do you have? The participants' responses varied. Some felt that it depends on the risk and or function of the activities and entity. Others shared that their senior managers (CEOs) gave them authority to manage the day-to-day tasks in the department and organisation especially when the matter is within their areas of expertise. Some participants shared that their managers (CEOs) allowed them to act as CEO, whenever he or she proceeded on vacation leave. In such instances they have had the existing knowledge of the operations of the municipalities and how decisions are made.

The participants shared while some decisions have to be made at the political directorate level, and others at the relevant committee meetings, there are still some that are authorised at the CEOs level and where necessary ratified at the appropriate monthly meetings of the Corporation.

In responding to the question, Participant 3 shared she/he “has responsibility to manage through planning, organizing, leading, and controlling and it does include decision-making, however the financial decision making is the responsible of the CEO who the accountable officer is” (p.6). The participant further stated that “some financial decisions are approved at the finance and planning committee meeting”. Participant 4 stated that,

As the Director of Finance in charge of the account’s department which consist of ten (10) staff under my supervision, I have to decide as far as the department is concern but outside of that I can make recommendation or suggestion to CEO then seek approval by the general corporation.

In support of her colleagues, Participant 6 shared that

As the Chief Engineering Officer, I have autonomy to do certain things [among them which include] HR and administrative matters including supervision of employees within my department, and strategic plan for the department. However, with change management, approval would have to be sought from the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development regarding approval for special grant repairs (to carry out emergency works), deal with all the technical matters relate to the parochial infrastructures (Building and Roads, Cemetery, Abattoirs, Pounds, transportation Center, Sporting Infrastructure) of the parish. (p. 15)

Participants 5 and 6, Directors of Administration, shared that they have responsibilities for the human resources of the local authorities to include, recruitment and selection, recommendation for training and development, talent management, employment contracts, and performance and/or competency.

All the participants stated that the CEOs supervised all the middle managers at the local authorities. While they might be empowered or authorized to make certain decisions within the purview of their departments, the CEO is the accountable officer and has responsibility for final decisions regarding the effective functioning of the corporation. Some decisions, however, have to be made at the relevant corporation’s monthly meetings.

Theme: Leadership Styles Contributory to Subordinate Performance

Responses from the participants varied when asked the question, “Do you think your CEO’s leadership styles contribute your performance in the organization, explain? There are various leadership styles that participants mentioned that CEO used in the performance of their functions, such as transformational, transactional, charismatic, instructional, and participative. These styles are needed for the effective operation of the local authorities/municipal corporations in Jamaica and shows the use of situational leadership.

The participants stated that depending on the situation at the local authorities, the CEO style dominates. For example, they stated, the CEO transformational leadership style is applicable when in a motivational aspect of the job where employees need that level of motivation, autonomy, and the need for encouragement to fulfilment of a particular assignment. Other styles such as transactional the CEO used when job assignments are not done in accordance with the required standard and that would affect negative feedback from the external customers.

Autonomy and Empowerment for Middle Managers in Jamaican Local (Municipal) Authorities

Participant 7, in regarding his senior manager's leadership style, stated, "my CEO's leadership style is inclusive; however, I have worked with other CEOs who demonstrated different leadership styles" (p. 8). Participant 10 shared that her/his CEO's leadership styles contributed to middle managers' performance in the organization.

...the level of independence and autonomy allowed me to apply and develop my skillset, for example, my problem solving, analytical skills, communication, and people skills, which were critical to my role. The fact that I was not inhibited or micro-managed allowed me to exercise and develop my confidence level. I feel valued and that inspires me continuously strive to give my best. (p. 18).

Participant 4 perspective was that the CEO has an accommodating leadership style, However, at times they have disagreements, and shared that

...we agree to disagree at times but after consultation and debate at the end of the day we arrive at a consensus. For example, he is always sticking to the biweekly payment schedule but based on the circumstances at times, I have to facilitate payments outside of the regular payments' schedule. (p. 10)

All the participants agreed that CEOs leadership styles are different depending on situation at the corporation, however the style(s) demonstrated are supportive and add value to their work performance and job satisfaction.

Theme: Crises in Organization

The participants reported that from time to time there are various crises in the organization that hinders the progress and the smooth operations of the municipalities. They shared, crises resulted from lack of manpower to effectively perform certain functions and operations, lack of financial resource to procure goods and services in a timely manner, and meeting timely deadlines for planning and building approval. These can be viewed negatively by internal and external customers. These crises affect the goodwill and the efficient and effective mobilities of the municipalities.

The corporation, as monopolistic in some of its functions, for example, planning regulations (approval of residential and commercial applications) impact the timeliness /when these approvals are not done in a timely manner.

In response to the question, "What level of crisis do you deal with in your position? Some of the responses from participants were,

As the director of finance, a number of times there are financial crisis especially due to covid at this time. I have to decide what project should be given financial priority. (Participant 3)

Participant 13 shared,

In my capacity as Parish Coordinator for Disaster Preparedness, I deal with crisis on different levels, supporting/coordinating community response due to disasters as a result of natural/man-made hazards in the parish as well as in my organisation.

Participant 6 shared human resource crises, for example conflict on the job, resolving conflicts, stress management, unfair treatment, wages negotiation, and others. Participant 7 shared crises with enforcement, collections, and operations. Participant 9 shared that some level of crisis within the department involve processing and approval of building and subdivision applications, change of use applications, applications for billboards, and advertisement signs, alterations to buildings. At times compliance of external customers within the regulations is challenging and enforcement is relevant.

The participants shared that within their departments were crises that required urgent attention, specific strategies, and quick responses, but the bureaucratic processes and approval from senior management and power imbalance impacted autonomous judgement instead of collective collaboration and meetings of the minds.

Theme: Empowerment of Middle Managers

The participants when asked, *what does empowerment mean to you [them] and*

How do [you] feel that your boss/es empower you? (Examples?) stated that In responding to the question, participant 3 said empowerment means flexibility, and authority to make certain decision, latitude with trust. She stated that her CEO empowers her by allowing her to attend training, and leadership workshop to be more equipped/knowledgeable about the job. Participant 4 stated that

Empowerment means be given a level of authority and trust for example in the accounts department where I have total responsibility as head of the department I am empowered to lead, motivate, encourage, and to ensure that given tasks are successfully completed to achieve maximum performance. Basically, whatever task is assigned, my opinion is given and I am not under any daily supervision by CEO, everything is to my discretion as to what to do.

Participant 10 shared,

Empowerment means allowing me to leverage my knowledge and skillset in accomplishing the responsibilities of my position by providing the necessary resources and tools I need to be effective and efficient; being part of a culture/environment that engages me, demonstrates respect for my opinion and values my input; and allow for some amount of autonomy/decision-making as reasonably appropriate with the level of the position. I feel valued and encouraged to strive to achieve more in order to be more impactful and to feel a greater sense of fulfillment.

Participant 8 shared that empowerment meant to be “flexible to make certain decisions and to be in a position where you can make a difference”. In responding to the question, do you feel that your boss empowers you? (Please provide examples?). Participant 8 stated,

Yes, sometimes, but politics/political biases impacted the empowerment. Once things are not going in favour of the political directorate, the empowerment I am given is impacted. For example, at times the CEO will said, the municipality do not have fund for priority works, however, if the political directorate or others identified areas to focus attention, instead of the prior works or critical infrastructure works, funding is allocated by the CEO.

Autonomy and Empowerment for Middle Managers in Jamaican Local (Municipal) Authorities

The participants shared that empowerment assisted them to develop personally and professional. They shared that empowerment is achieved through delegation, coaching, and mentoring. When employees are developed through empowerment they gain and develop self-confidence which leads to improved job satisfaction and performance. Participant 9 stated that when employees are empowered their job performance improves and that positively impacted the overall organisation, for example, better deliver of service to customers.

Participant 13 stated that

...empowerment means a lot to me as I feel motivated and productive to accomplish assigned tasks. I feel that my CEO empowers me based on the level of trust he has in me in carrying out my functions. I don't get the feeling of being micro-managed.

Participants, as middle managers, shared that empowerment for them from their CEO comes when they are asked to represent the CEO at meetings internally and externally and a decision has to be taken at these meetings on behalf of the local organization. That level of empowerment enhanced their self-esteem and they were motivated.

Theme: CEOs' Trust in Middle Managers

The CEO in answering the question, regarding the level of trust that has in middle managers/subordinates to complete assigned tasks, shared the perspective that

"...trust in this regard has to be on an individual basis. The organisation consists of subordinates who are always professional and ethical in the performance of their functions. Overtime you will develop trust in these individuals. On the other hand, there are those employees or middle managers whose performance and actions do not match up to this standard. Trust level in these individuals will therefore be low and they have to be closely and constantly monitored."

The middle managers were asked, *what is the level of trust that they feel their CEO have in them completing their tasks and why?* The participants' perspectives were based on knowledge, being thorough in the job and integrity displayed, and belief the CEO has a high level of trust in them completing a task. One participant stated, "If a team is involved to get the task done. I will go above and beyond the call of duty to ensure the completion of the task." Participant 2 perspectives were that the level of trust was good as based on her job knowledge and years of experience in the organization, she has performed her duties with minimal supervision from the CEO and work assignments are completed in a timely manner. Participant 3 noted "I am not cognizant of whether or not the CEO trust me, however, I perform my duties in keeping with the standards and regulations of the local authorities". Trust is a personal matter, and a CEO can show a lack of trust in employees for various reasons. For example, when others have given negative comments about an employee which has nothing to do with their job function or performance.

Participant 10 said the level of trust she/he feels that your manager/CEO have in her/him to complete assigned tasks

A high level of trust. Demonstrated by being consulted on matters of the organisation, with the goal of identifying the best possible solution to support achieving the organisation's objectives and overall

goal; the autonomy given to plan and undertake the responsibilities of the role; and willingness of the manager/CEO to consider and implement value-added recommendations made for improvement of the internal control system.

Other participants shared the opinion that the CEO has high level of trust and confidence in the work and they will always work with diligence and fairness while completing all tasks in a timely time. The middle managers' perspectives were that they have earned their CEO trust based on their ethical and professional behavioural conduct on the job and feel confident that the CEO entrusted them with authority to oversight certain duties and responsibilities with his full support. Participants shared that they always try to be efficient and effective in carrying out their duties.

Theme: Professional Relationship With CEO

A professional relationship takes time to build in any organization with any leader. The CEO is the head for the administration and the need for professional relationships is paramount. All the participants shared that they have a professional relationship with the CEO as they all reported to her/him in their capacity as middle managers and of such understanding and supportive working relationship. Participant 1 shared that "overall, we maintain a professional relationship, however, we sometimes talk on a social basis to create a better work-life balance".

The perspective of participant 10 was that "it is a good working relationship, where the expectations are clear, there is mutual respect and an atmosphere where I can openly and freely discuss relevant matters, give and receive feedback". Participant 8 said professional relationship with senior managers demonstrate a professional climate, trust, confidence, and collegiality climate in the organization.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Employee empowerment fosters a work environment where employee participates in decision making, problem solving and goal setting process and were managers delegate some of autonomy and decision making to employees (Tanjeen, 2013). The findings revealed that when a CEO empowered middle managers, they are motivated and it increased their performance. CEOs stated that she/he empowered her/his employees by ensuring that they are informed on all aspects of the organisation. For example, having regular general staff meetings where information is shared and staff members are given opportunity to share their ideas. The literature supports the finding that when employees are empowered the process enables and authorizes them to think critically, behavioural changes wherein they make decisions, take control, and action of work autonomously (Heathfield, 2012).

Autonomy and empowerment for middle managers in the municipalities consisted of adapting strategic approaches, delegation of additional duties, and change management approaches for organizational directions. The findings revealed that delegation of functions by CEOs to middle managers aided their job enlargement. This was done for example when the CEO is granted vacation leave, middle managers are assigned the administrative functions for the period. Monitoring, coaching, and guiding subordinates, for example allowing them to act as CEO when on vacation leave or extended work assignment are other methods of empowerment used.

The literature revealed that empowerment interconnects with organizational factors that values the working and managing leaders' styles and systems in organizations (Lawler, 1986; Tanjeen, 2013). Empowering employees called for an implementation of actionable practices of innovative approach in engaging and working with employees, shifting of power from the senior/top management to the middle or lower management levels (Lawler, 1986; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1991; Tanjeen, 2013).

Departmental cross training to allow employees to be exposed to the various functions/departments of the organisation is also utilised was the perspective shared by CEOs. The middle managers stated that their CEOs empowered them by allowing them to supervise other employees and assisted in the decisions making process regarding conflict resolution, recruitment and selection, training and development needs, decision which include contributing to the budget for the department, and human resource needs. Nonaka and co-author, Takeuchi (1991) posited when managers delegate power to employees it reduces the direct supervision and provide an overall vision for the employees, and the organization as employee empowerment creates better business outcomes, autonomous, and more motivated workforce.

The implications of the findings for senior managers generated evidence that to better empower employees, the need to maintain professional relationship, self-confidence, and organizational identity and brand emulated by not only internal but external customers.

Implications for Further Research

Autonomy and empowerment are vital for managers or CEOs to give their employees, or by extension, middle managers in any organization, whether in business or education. When workers are empowered and have the autonomy to make certain decisions, they will be motivated, practice self-awareness, and give of their best to the organization when crisis situations arise.

The research has implications for leadership effectiveness in other organizations. Without effective leadership to manage, and coordinate the management functions, of planning, organizing, controlling, leading, and staffing, organizations will experience failure in crisis situations that will tarnish their operations. While the study is important for policy, practice, or organizational theory in organizations, further research should be conducted in the education industry. This will provide the opportunity to refine and validate concepts and constructs used with a more in-depth sampling strategy to focus on explore autonomy and empowerment and how it impacts educational leadership and educators' (teachers) level of empowerment.

DISCUSSION

Autonomy and empowerment for middle managers in Jamaican municipalities/ local government authorities requires change leadership as a positioning strategy in times of crises. Organizations whether private or public sector are learning and growing, and in the process undergoing change. The process of which significance relies on visionary leadership influence and involvement of others in the decision-making initiatives explained in the six themes: 1) Work delegation, job function, and decision-making authority, 2) supervisory responsibility through management functions, 3) leadership styles contributory to subordinate performance, 4) empowerment of middle managers, 5) crises in organization, 6) empowerment of middle managers, 7) professional relationship and trust. Figure 1 illustrates the dimensions of autonomy and empowerment for middle managers in Jamaican municipalities.

Figure 1. Dimensions of Autonomy and Empowerment for Middle Managers



Decision making at municipal corporations are made by the CEO who is the head of administration and at monthly meetings of the corporations depending on the nature of the matter. Some decisions in keeping with twenty-first century management initiatives and beyond lack forward thinking and are dealt with using laissez-faire approach. Systems are needed to fast forward the organizational efficiency and effectiveness of the corporations, along with transformational leadership styles to change the modus operandi. As stated in the literature, leadership is an ability, a skill, a behaviour, a relationship, and an influence process (Northouse, 2012) and involves positive leadership attributes of trustworthiness in self and subordinates.

In answering the main research question: *How can autonomy and empowerment by senior managers (CEOs) to middle managers positively effect change leadership/management in the organization?*

The findings revealed that CEOs to some extent give middle managers autonomy and empowerment based on their job descriptions, job experience, and relatedness, and efficiency. While this practice is improving job knowledge and productivity, it is essential that a holistic approach to management training, coaching, and mentoring for empowerment be looked at. Human resource planning, to include job enlargement should be encouraged. Buchanan and co-authors' state that middle managers in organizations are equally involved in the administration and operational functions, their jobs have been enlarged, and responsibilities widened, and the work intensified. Again, they should be even more autonomy and empowerment by their managers to make decisions regarding the organization policies and procedures. Their performance will mitigate any crisis in the organization especially in the absence of the senior managers as they would have benefited from tried and true experiences regarding strategic formulations. Ashkanasy and Humphrey's (2011) supported the argument that middle managers are important to the strategic building and implementation of change with the organization, as Middle managers are invested with the knowledge, skills, and abilities and be autonomy to make decision to prevent crisis in the organization.

The findings regarding "leadership styles as contributory to subordinate performance" reveal that all senior managers have their different leadership approaches. However different, they are applicable to aspects of the job. They are times when employees need some level of motivation, autonomy, and encouragement to fulfilment particular assignments, and the managers are accommodating.

Literature on leadership styles reveals that leadership influences others to achieve common goals and is associated with change, influence, and loyalty (Roache & Marshall, 2022; Seeman, 1960). The findings from this study reveal that the senior managers motivate middle managers in the performance of their duties by assigning them additional responsibilities depending on competence and job knowledge.

The findings reveal that various crises are encountered with municipal corporations in Jamaica, as a result of human and financial resources, disaster management, and crises with dissatisfied customers not receiving their building applications within the stipulated timeframe. When these happen, the municipal corporation is seen negatively as they fail to meet the demand and delivery service satisfactorily.

Literature reveals that organizational leaders' roles, decisions and actions are magnified during times of crisis (Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022; Fink et al., 1971), however, crisis can be successfully managed. While CEOs are the accountable officer of the Corporations, and give autonomy and empowerment to middle managers, much more is needed. As the findings revealed professional relationships, some level of trust, and more autonomy and empowerment for middle managers in Jamaican municipalities/local government authorities as a positioning strategy for change leadership/management in times of crises are needed. The change has to start with the CEOs as the senior manager, communication for support and buy-in with other departmental heads/middle managers.

CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that delegation of work and decision-making authority to middle managers in the local authorities are made by the CEOs who are the head of administration and at monthly meetings of the corporation depending on the nature of the matter. In today's twenty-first century organizational operations, it is imperative that middle managers become more integral in strategic decision-making. Based on the qualifications and years of experience of the middle managers in the study (see Table 1), these managers should be very efficient in making certain decisions on behalf of the corporation. This would alleviate some of the dealing with daily administrative matters for the CEOs.

Strategic leadership in any organization requires effective delegation and trust of subordinates. Organizations and employees cannot learn and grow when leaders lack trust in their middle managers and micromanage. According to Sostrin (2017) one of the most difficult transitions for leaders to make is the shift from doing to leading. To be a great leader, managers have to learn how to delegate tactical assignments or project responsibilities to their middle managers, this will inspire their commitment, competence, and autonomy in exchange for their empowerment. Based on the findings, CEOs trust middle managers, however not on a wide scale. The CEO needs to engage middle managers more with challenging assignments that define their work, clarify their scope and contributions that are aligned with their capacity, and effectively communicate expectations of the work.

It was revealed from the findings, based on the middle managers' perspectives, that CEOs empowered them to assist in making financial decisions, human resource matters, by attending to their cross training and acting arrangements needs. This empowerment increased their confidence, enhanced self-esteem, and built a professional relationship with their CEO. Against such, there is a need for greater involvement of middle managers in more strategic assignments on behalf of the local authorities to alleviate some of the daily administrative activities of the CEO. This is possible with the amendment of some laws and regulations. Strategic organizational decision-making involves CEO involvement not too much

in administrative matters but matters of upper-level management, such as scanning the external environment to determine the long-term strategic goals and objectives of the corporations.

The CEOs shared that empowerment of middle managers are undertaken in various ways. Such as, ensuring that they are informed on all aspects of the organisation at regular monthly senior staff meetings where freedom of expression of ideas are welcomed and appreciated. The initiatives are testaments to their autonomy and competence. Thus, delegating additional assignments reflect an effort to expose middle managers to higher levels of job satisfaction, job enlargement, and alleviate some of the workload of the CEOs.

Our research has shown that in the case of a municipal corporation in Jamaica that although the CEOs do empower employees, more could be given. There is a great deal of trust between the CEOs and the middle managers. As discussed above trust is essential in the leader follower relationship. This bodes well for crisis management should the need arise. Our findings are limited to this single case study but reinforce the research on empowerment.

We recommend that the research be expanded to areas that are frequented by natural disasters such as India and Bangladesh to test the generalizability of our findings. In times of crisis communities look to the government and its agencies to provide relief. Governments provide their agencies with direction in the form of plans to provide that relief. It is the leaders that provide the guidance to implement those plans and it is the middle managers that implement them. Therefore, it is paramount that middle managers be given the resources, support, and latitude to implement those plans. Empowerment is one key aspect of latitude that results in higher levels of trust and as one participant said, increased willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty. It is that attitude that leaders need to inspire in times of crisis.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Autonomy: concerns the regulation of behavior by the self, and, indeed, etymological it refers to self-regulation” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 97).

Change management: An approach to deal with change in two different areas - the organization and the individual, with individuals and the overall organization adapting to change at their own pace and style (Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015, p. 2).

Empowerment: A multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important (Page & Czuba, 1999, p. 1).

Leadership: The process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2013, p. 5).

Local Government Authority: Local Authorities are those entities at the local level through which the Ministry of Local Government carries out its functions within communities. These entities are, the Kingston and St. Andrew Municipal Corporation (KSAMC), the 13 Municipal Corporations (The Local Government Laws and Governance, 2016 & Local Government Entities: Roles and Functions, 2022).

Section 3

Organizational Learning

Chapter 9

Systemised Collaboration and Empowerment for Crisis Management: What Senior Teachers Can Learn From Supervisees

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ABSTRACT

Schools were plunged into emergency situations consequent to the spread of COVID-19. School leaders, educators, and other stakeholders engaged crisis management procedures to resolve the accompanying challenges of meeting students' learning needs via remote learning modalities. The primary aim of the chapter is to provide lessons senior teachers could learn from supervisees' employment of problem-solving approaches. Sixty-seven teachers participated in a survey that revealed most employed collaboration as a method for addressing the encountered difficulties. From the supervisees' experiences, senior teachers could garner insights into the need for them to activate self-empowerment in the process of actively assisting institutions' recovery and success. In addition, they should exercise their agency by involving supervisees, and other stakeholders, in sustainable collaborative practices which potentially function as a crucial element of crisis management. The chapter offers recommendations for systemising collaboration in ensuring that the greatest benefits are attained.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated social distancing as a component of public health practice aimed at lessening transmission of the virus. Consequently, educational institutions had to engage emergency response measures while altering teaching and learning methodologies to suit online, distance and hybridised modalities. For many teachers and students across the globe, such contexts for teaching and

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learning were absolutely new which caused educators and learners to encounter challenges with transitioning from the familiarity and comfort of face-to-face (F2F) operations. Researchers such as Ramirez et al. (2021), Adedoyin and Soykan (2020), Besser et al. (2020), and Kaur and Bhatt (2020) informed of some of the difficulties which included lack of adequate time and knowledge to transform courses taught F2F to benefit online modalities, inadequate access to technology and challenges with use, learner isolation and disinterest, struggles with regulating supervision and assessment, physical and mental fatigue. Hence, problem-solving became a demanding imperative because teachers and students grappled to resolve the multifaceted impediments while seeking to satisfy the requirement for optimal teaching and learning experiences.

One solution was involving teachers in training sessions geared at increasing their competences for the use of technology in teaching and learning methodologies. In Jamaica, for example, training sessions were facilitated by school administrators and the Ministry of Education (UNESCO, 2020; Caribbean Policy Research Institute, 2021; Blackman, 2021). In addition, some teachers sought to fill some of the competence gaps through self-teaching, experimental use of technologies and practice. As students and teachers sought to adapt to what was dubbed as the 'new norm', the alleviating of challenges was characterised by a cycle of learning, implementations, and modifications.

Significantly, instead of passively awaiting top-down instructions, some teachers undertook agentic action by employing collaboration as an additional problem-solving approach. Collaboration typically involves teachers working together to share information, plans and resources, discuss students' learning, and exchange solutions (Eschler, 2016; Kalra, 2020). The outbreak of the global health crisis resulted in traditional teaching rules being jettisoned, and teachers having the primary responsibility of adapting their methods to suit the new instructional contexts which reinforced the necessity of collaboration (Kalra, 2020). Varied educational landscapes maintained a unifying agenda which was to provide students with access to quality learning opportunities, and the challenges caused an extension of collaboration. Teachers did not only partner with other educators who belonged to the same institutions, but engaged teachers and other educational stakeholders from national and international spaces.

As a result of schools' struggles to satisfy their fundamental purposes, the need for overcoming difficulties to increase the probability of success brought into focus the role of leaders in crisis management. Boin et al. (2013) define crisis management as "the sum of activities aimed at minimizing the impact of a crisis" (p. 81). Primarily, the definition conveys that in order for crisis management to be effective, there has to be an interconnectivity of the ideas and actions aimed at accomplishing calculated undertakings. Thus, school managers, in their leadership strategies, should prioritise collaborative efforts that guard against the execution of disconnected and arbitrary solutions.

In schools, though the persons with primary responsibility for navigating schools through crisis circumstances are the top-tier leaders such as principals, middle leaders should also contemplate how they can execute their roles effectively to assist crisis management plans. Grootenboer et al. (2020) state that middle leaders in schools refer to teachers who both teach and have leadership roles allowing them to bridge the gap between instructional practice and school management (para. 1). Hence, during crises, middle leaders such as senior teachers who function as heads of departments and subject leaders should consider how they can support and initiate implementations for their institutions' survival and success.

Conscious thought about how they can lead their supervisees (other teachers) to take crisis management actions should be embedded in their considerations. While leaders are typically depended on for solutions, Balasubramanian and Fernandes (2022) recommend that leaders engage in consultation and collaboration to gain input from subordinates who may offer insights that may inform decision-making

processes (p.8). Additionally, Hao and Yazdanifard (2015) acknowledge that leaders can learn from those who fall at the bottom of the organisation's hierarchy instead of withdrawing inwardly to decipher how to address challenges (p.3). This recommendation and insight may also guide middle leaders who are expected to have some knowledge and direction needed for leading crisis management implementations.

Therefore, the chapter posits that one way in which senior teachers could determine where the needs lie is to take cues from their supervisees' approach to problem-solving and create inclusive opportunities for collective problem-solving. Thus, instead of being influenced by the typical top-down approach which expects senior teachers to have answers and provide directives to supervisees, I investigated the challenges teachers experienced, and how they sought to resolve them. My research took this angle because I believe teachers' experiences and approaches can be instructive to how senior teachers position themselves as leaders in shaping and guiding processes aimed at overcoming periods of crisis. During the pandemic, some teachers used collaboration as a strategy for solving the challenges met during remote teaching and learning. The teachers' collaborative efforts, however, lacked systemisation and this created a need for leadership.

The chapter will answer the following questions:

1. To what extent did teachers collaborate to resolve challenges encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. How many teachers view collaboration as an effective crisis management strategy?

Following the introduction, is a literature review which examines key perspectives on crisis and change management, middle leaders' agency activation, and teacher collaboration. Also, the insights senior teachers could garner from supervisees' employment of collaboration as a crisis management tactic will be examined. Finally, recommendations will be offered about how senior teachers could activate their agency, and spearhead collaborative endeavours to ensure they are structured and systematic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Crisis Management

There is a convergence in crisis management literature which offers that a crisis is viewed as an occurrence that overwhelms and threatens the functionality of an organisation. A crisis may be unpredictable and causes uncertainty while disrupting systems and necessitating relevant change (Bundy et al., 2017; Harwati, 2013; Wart and Kapucu, 2011). Crisis management, therefore, focuses on bolstering an organisation's capability to survive (John-eke and Eke, 2020). A crisis incites the need for transformation in enhancing an organisation's ability to overcome the threatening circumstances, and the process of reformation may yield benefits for both the organisation itself and the stakeholders. Therefore, while a crisis may be perceived as potentially destructive, it is also seen as an opportunity for organisations to develop as they identify improved ways of operating. The organisation's flexibility, ability to adjust and take initiatives are tested during times of crises; hence, context-informed change is an imperative. Thus, the modus operandi that drives the required change would require strategic planning that provides the organisation with some level of preparedness and effective crisis management solutions to help ensure success (John-eke and Eke, 2020; Harwati, 2013). A meticulous examination of what makes the organi-

sation vulnerable, its capabilities, and its needs should guide the undertaking of strategies intended for building the organisation's resilience, recovery and preparedness.

Importantly, crisis management involves a systematic application of decision-making skills to mitigate the unfavourable circumstances that impede the success of the organisation. Fener and Cevik (2015) and Wooten and James (2008) have posited different stages of crisis management to include:

- **Identification of the problem** – The factors that render the organisation vulnerable and cause system failures are identified for the purpose of designing targeted solutions.
- **Team and capacity building** – The shortfalls in individuals' competences should be addressed to ensure each person possesses the relevant knowledge, skills and abilities required for them to participate in crisis management interventions.
- **Implementation of solutions** – Individuals execute the relevant actions geared at resolving the problems being experienced. Also, plans aimed at sustaining the organisation after the crisis and making it less vulnerable to threats are executed.
- **Monitoring and evaluation of the implementations** – There is an on-going process of monitoring and evaluation to determine whether or not the implementations are successfully resolving the challenges. Feasible and realistic timelines are given to implement, and make decisions about which solutions should be preserved, and the ones that require revisions.
- **Modifications of solutions** – Proactive steps are taken to reform the solutions that have proven ineffective. Modifications are done until implementations prove successful.
- **Recovery and learning** – Effective implementations result in overcoming the crisis, and a return to a successful operation of the organisation. The lessons garnered from the experiences should be used to inform strategic planning to further enhance the organisation's ability to succeed in current and future circumstances.

Kapucu and Ustun (2017) highlight that an application of the right leadership skills is necessary for adequate crisis management, and leaders' competences are proven in the actions undertaken to lessen the impact of the challenges encountered. Crisis management "demands inter-organizational collaboration and collaborative leadership skills" (p.1). Gobillot (2009) concurs that collaboration is central, and may call for changes in leadership styles to favour cooperation and participation. Thus, the effective execution of crisis management plans is dependent on a leader who is not only able to recognise threats and have a vision, but possesses capabilities in mobilising teams to participate in recovery interventions.

Change Management

A component of crisis management is change management which Wang and Sun (2012) define as "a systematic and structured process of developing and implementing strategies and interventions for organizations transitioning from current state to a desired state". They offer that change management may necessitate incremental changes in "policies and procedures, individual needs, task and skill requirements". Otherwise, a transformational change may be required which "involves changes in fundamental assumptions about reality coupled with a shift and realigning of vision, values, culture, beliefs and attitudes, and core processes" (para. 1). Wart and Kapucu (2011) state that one aspect of change management is the "human reactions to the requirements to plan for, respond to, and learn from change" (p.493). Thus, individuals' perception of the necessity and benefit of the plans, contribution of their

support as well as attention given to the lessons are germane to the success of change, and by extension crisis management. It is quite essential that the stakeholders of an organisation recognise the critical roles they should play, and actively participate in the interventions constructed for lessening or eradicating the factors that cause dysfunction.

Wang and Sun (2012) note that change management is not supported by everyone because some perceive it as unnecessary. Reasons include a belief that there is no need for a process because people change if they are forced to do so. As well, change is constant; hence, no specific effort is required to manage it. Another criticism is that change is for management, and once such individuals effect change, employees will follow. Contrary to these perspectives, change management should be an intentional approach that serves the survival of the company. The possibility of employees' resistance to change, the need for crafting and strategizing implementations, and analysing operations to determine success justify the importance of change management in helping to ensure the endurance and effective functioning of the organisation. Change management should not only prioritise modifications for current survival, but also shape operations for future functioning. Notably, a crisis has the potential to destroy the viability of an organisation. Therefore, change management has to be a conscious and planned process, and implementation should not be left to typical everyday happenings because it requires a directed variation in the culture of operations.

The lack of support for change poses a barrier to success; hence, it is necessary to undertake steps that will guide the promotion and management of the requisite operational modifications. Kotter (2007) posits eight steps that may be taken to transform an organisation.

1. **Create an urgency** by identifying crises, potential threats, and opportunities. Also, seek to gain stakeholders' support.
2. **Form a powerful guiding coalition** by assembling the individuals capable of leading the change effort, and encourage the group to operate as a team.
3. **Create a vision** that is necessary to direct the change effort, and clearly explain the vision for others to understand. The relevant strategies for achieving the vision should be developed.
4. **Communicate the vision** via multiple channels to ensure awareness and convince team members and other stakeholders of its applicability. Issues and concerns should be addressed to cater to best interests.
5. **Empower others to act on the vision** by removing obstacles such as reforming systems and structures that prevent goal attainment. Identify individuals who resist change and motivate them to support.
6. **Plan for and create short-term wins** so that success is experienced early in the change process. In addition, reward those who contribute to achieving the targets.
7. **Consolidate improvements and produce still more change** by analysing success stories, and changing systems, structures and policies that do not suit the vision.
8. **Institutionalise new approaches** by focussing attention on how the new behaviours contribute to success. Change should become a part of the organisation's culture, and there should be continuity of support from existing and new leaders.

Kotter's model emphasises the need to gain employees' involvement and support. Thus, a great focus is placed on achieving acceptability for the vision. Hussain et al. (2016) also highlights the importance of employee involvement as a critical strategy in planning for and implementing change. They note four

elements of employee involvement, “power, information, knowledge and skill, and rewards” (p.124), and these align with the approaches Kotter identifies as being necessary in the change management process. Also, the significance of collaboration among team members and other stakeholders is conveyed since employee involvement should be aimed at achieving consistent and effective partnership vital for the accomplishment of the vision.

Important to note is that the success of crisis and change management is partly dependent on the leadership style that is used to engage employees and others in executing implementation strategies. Balasubramanian and Fernandes (2022) said one lesson garnered from the Covid-19 pandemic is that an adaptation of one leadership style may prove ineffective in managing processes for overcoming the challenges. The selection of leadership styles should be guided by the needs of the crisis circumstances which may require a combination of leadership approaches (such as identity, charismatic, supervisory, decisive, authentic, transformational, ideological and pragmatic leadership). Therefore, the evolving nature of some crises and the uncertainty they cause may warrant an application of situational leadership which adapts approaches as required. The leadership strategies may change to suit the demands of the different stages of change management, goal achievement, circumstances, team members’ needs and other variables.

Sustainability of Crisis Management Processes

The seventh and eighth steps in Kotter’s model which require leaders to consolidate improvements and institutionalise change bring into focus the need for sustainable practices. Kuhlman and Farrington (2010) define sustainability as “maintaining well-being over a long, perhaps even an indefinite period” (p. 3441). Hence, in the context of an organisation, its management team should endeavour to implement the most suited solutions for the recovery and sustenance of the organisation. Importantly, such solutions should be guided by the best interests of all stakeholders. An organisation should not only be concerned with ensuring sustainability, but extend its focus to sustainable development. The 1987 Brundtland Report states that sustainable development is concerned with satisfying present needs while not preventing future generations from meeting theirs. In addition, UNESCO (2012) differentiates sustainability as a long-term goal while sustainable development is the processes and pathways to attain the goal. Hence, as the organisation adopts a new vision, behaviour and culture for overcoming present crisis situations, it should give thought to how such reformations also help to ensure the organisation is able to survive, develop and be strategically positioned in the future. As far as possible, current practices should be shaped with the thought of not compromising the organisations success in the future. The present decisions taken should serve to strengthen operations, and form the foundation for a more formidable system that is able to sufficiently withstand future crises.

Wang and Sun (2012) identify tenets of sustainable development that should guide organisations’ endeavour to institutionalise the necessary changes. Such include establishing processes for on-going improvement, formulating policies and procedures to institutionalise the changes, involving employees during the processes, and using analysis and feedback to inform corrective actions. These suggestions carry ideas synonymous to some of the steps in Kotter’s change management model, and are indeed relevant to facilitate team participation, culture modification and increase the probability of continuous and improved change outcomes.

Middle Leaders' Roles in Crisis Management

Middle leaders form a bridge between senior leaders and employees who operate at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy. While crisis management literature does not typically focus on middle leaders' roles in crisis management, their central positioning may prove advantageous to how they function in crisis environments. Harris and Jones (2017) note that middle leaders have important roles to play in assisting the achievement of positive change and improvement. Such attainment is one of the core goals of crisis management. Therefore, top-tier leaders should give consideration to how middle leaders may contribute to creating a vision and implementing the strategies necessary for crisis management. Johnson (2020) states that no leader is able to provide employees with complete certainty, neither does any leader have full knowledge of a situation (para. 2). Hence, one of the roles middle leaders may play is to fill knowledge gaps as they help to maintain a top-down and bottom-up flow of communication. During times of crisis, effective communication is important to ensure employees are aware of change tactics, the roles everyone should play, feedback about the successes and failures of implementations, and modification approaches.

Middle leaders may also prove useful in leading initiatives because top-tier leaders may be unable to spearhead all implementations while making the most efficient use of time. Johnson highlights, however, that in some instances, middle leaders may have a difficulty leading because they do not have the authority to make decisions (para. 3). Thus, middle leaders should be empowered to participate in decision-making processes, and be given opportunities to exercise their autonomies. This becomes more possible if top-tier leaders recognise the importance of middle leaders, and Fullan (2015) states that one value middle leaders have is their ability to help achieve system coherence (p.24). Such is crucial in crisis management because discordance among people and systems is a threat to organisational recovery and success.

Teacher Collaboration

Tichenor and Tichenor (2019) postulate that it is an ineffective practice to view teaching as "an isolated profession in which individual teachers work behind closed doors independently from other teachers" (p.54). Ostovar-Nameghi and Sheikahmadi (2016) suggest that the physical demarcations for F2F instruction influence the lack of collaboration because teachers work in discrete classroom environments to teach their students (p.199). Contrary to the traditional practice of isolation, teachers should partner in sharing information and knowledge, developing plans, and problem-solving to achieve a common goal (p.54). Morrel (2014) agrees that collaboration among teachers is necessary since it "leverages diverse perspectives and skills, and can promote creativity and productivity" (p.36). Likewise, Ostovar-Nameghi and Sheikahmadi (2016) offer that collaboration among teachers is advantageous because it may result in the advancement of teachers' professional knowledge and experience. Additionally, the improvement of students' learning and achievement is another advantage (p.199). Significantly, collaboration facilitates teachers' self-dependence. Guoyuan (2020) labels an attribute of their empowered action as "practical habitus" which involves teachers enacting their roles to achieve desired outcomes. Their actions include information collection, confirmation of the effectiveness of strategies, and behaviour adjustments to satisfy the needs of contexts (p.3).

Tichenor and Tichenor (2019) inform that some teachers identified the lack of structure, inadequate time and opportunities, and lack of prioritisation as deterrents to collaboration. In addition, some teachers' preferences to operate in isolation may become an impediment to collaborative efforts. Therefore, in a

bid for collaboration to reap effectiveness, teachers need to be interested and leaders should implement the necessary structures and systems that promote and facilitate collaboration. While thought should be given to how collaboration is facilitated under typical circumstances, consideration should also be given to how teachers may engage in collaborative endeavours during times of crisis. Kalra (2020) noted the threat of Covid-19 to teacher collaboration, and posited that the challenges created an even greater need for collegial support. Crises present novelties and uncertainties, and professional communities of educators may offer ideas for necessary innovations, and increase self-efficacies vital to addressing the difficulties (para. 7).

METHODOLOGY

The research design is quantitative which Goertzen (2017) explains as a method concerned with collecting and analysing data that is presented numerically (p.12). Watson (2015) adds that quantitative research is deductive in nature because measurements are made, analysed and conclusions are drawn (p. 44). Therefore, this design method suited my aim to discover the extent to which teachers collaborated, and the number of teachers who viewed collaboration as an effective crisis management strategy.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling which is a deliberate choice based on the qualities they possessed (Etikan et al., 2016). The criteria for selection was participants should be teachers, at any level of education, and do not have leadership responsibilities in schools. The participants comprised of sixty-seven teachers who taught at the four levels of education in Jamaica – early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. There were five early childhood, eleven primary, forty-five secondary, and six tertiary teachers. The teachers taught different subject areas, had varying years of teaching experiences, and taught in both private and public-school systems.

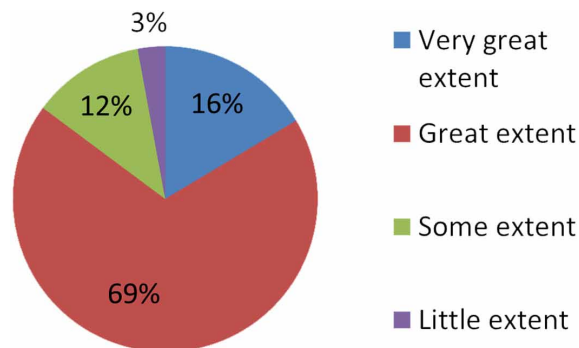
A questionnaire was created with the use of Google Forms to collect the data from participants. The questionnaire consisted of mostly closed-ended questions. Swanson and Holton (2005) said a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions have the power of producing comprehensive results (p.30). Hence, I included four open-ended questions for the purpose of gaining added contexts for participants' responses to some of the closed-ended questions. I sent the document link to thirty-five teachers via WhatsApp, and they were asked to share the link with their colleagues for completion of the form. I waited for three weeks after the initial sharing of the link to examine the data collected. Google forms automatically generated graphic representations of the responses, so I viewed the percentages for the results and responses for the open-ended questions. I then noted the results that responded to each research question and determined how the results converge with existing literature and offer new insights.

The questionnaire did not require respondents to provide their names nor institutions. The privacy of the questionnaire increased the trustworthiness of the data since, according to Roopa and Rani (2012), respondents are most likely to respond honestly if there is anonymity and confidentiality (p.273).

FINDINGS

The findings that directly respond to each primary research question will be given along with the findings for complementary questions that provide further context and insight for each main question.

Figure 1. Extent of Collaboration



To What Extent Did Teachers Collaborate to Resolve Challenges Encountered During the Covid-19 Pandemic?

The majority of respondents (98.4%) experienced challenges with online teaching and learning and 96.8% said the difficulties were similar among their colleagues. Students' disinterest, absences and tardiness, teachers' struggles to manipulate technology, loss of internet connection, and challenges with class control were some of the difficulties for which the teachers sought solutions.

Figure 1 shows that most of the respondents (69%) said they collaborated to a great extent. 16% collaborated to a very large extent, 12% engaged in some collaboration while 3% were involved in little collaboration. In response to a supplementary open-ended question (*With whom did you collaborate?*), the participants informed that they collaborated with colleagues internal and external to their institutions, educators from other countries, and other stakeholders such as parents, community members, and members from the private sector.

73.5% of the respondents said their collaborative seeking and sharing of information, resources and solutions increased during the pandemic, 18.6% said their level of involvement remained the same while 7.9% said their collaborative efforts decreased. 60.3% informed their colleagues about the success of solutions, and of this group, 9 respondents always informed, 23 frequently and 8 sometimes gave feedback about whether or not the solutions proved effective.

How Many Teachers View Collaboration as an Effective Crisis Management Strategy?

91.8% of the respondents thought collaboration proved effective in helping them to resolve the teaching and learning challenges they encountered during the pandemic. In response to an open-ended question (*How did you benefit from collaboration?*), they identified benefits to include learning from best practices to solve individual and collective difficulties, saving time and effort through team work, reducing stress levels, achieving greater success in teaching and learning, gaining solutions that may also benefit future experiences, being exposed to a wealth of ideas, and being provided with pre-emptive measures for the difficulties not yet encountered.

78.3% of the respondents said ideas, information, and solutions were mostly shared during unplanned conversations with their colleagues, while departmental meetings, and training sessions provided ad-

ditional avenues for sharing. 96.4% said they engaged in collaborative efforts as a result of taking their own initiatives. Notably, 85% of the respondents had a preference for implementing intentional systems to facilitate collaboration to allow for greater effectiveness. On the other hand, 15% preferred that staff has the flexibility and autonomy to choose when they participate in collaborative activities.

DISCUSSION

Most of the difficulties the respondents encountered are similar to what other researchers (Ramirez et al., 2021; Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020; Besser et al., 2020; Kaur and Bhatt, 2020) identified as challenges with which educators wrestled while teaching during the pandemic. The struggles posed threats to the core purpose of schools which is to provide students with access to education, and ensure the instructional experiences sufficiently cater to their range of needs. The majority of respondents collaborated to a great extent and increased their collaborative efforts during the pandemic. This conveys the teachers' consciousness of the critical needs and active participation in problem-solving which corroborates Guoyuan's (2020) postulation that teachers activate their agency in order to meet contextual demands. The similarities of teachers' experiences across the globe created a greater opportunity for their information collection which Guoyuan identifies as an element of teachers' "practical habitus" (p.3).

In an effort to address the challenges of the crisis, the participants not only collaborated with their colleagues, but also partnered with other educators and stakeholders. This is an extension of the traditional idea of collaboration which Eschler (2016) and Kalra (2020) explain as cooperation that exists between two or more teachers. The participants noted benefits of collaboration such as exposure to varied ideas, and the exchange of experiences and solutions. These are similar to what researchers have stated as being advantageous to teachers' development of professional knowledge, experiences and skills, and improvement of students' learning (Morrel, 2014; Ostovar-Nameghi and Sheikahmadi, 2016). Additional to these benefits, the respondents identified saving time and minimising stress levels as other advantages. During a crisis, efficient use of time is important in addressing challenges to reduce the threats. Also, the difficulties may cause emotional and physical strains. Hence, during threatening circumstances, it is not only important to engage solutions that benefit the institutions' general goals for success, but attention should be given to how solutions cater to the personal impact of the crisis on individuals. The overall benefits of the teachers' cooperative engagements account for the majority's view that collaboration is an effective crisis management approach.

Tichenor and Tichenor (2019) reported that some teachers indicated the lack of structure as a hindrance to collaboration. The majority of respondents stated their sharing of ideas was mostly done through unplanned conversations. Despite the lack of structure, the respondents said collaboration proved beneficial; however, the majority had a preference for an organised and systemised approach that they believe would enable collaboration to be more effective. Their preference aligns with the teachers' recommendations offered in Tichenor's and Tichenor's research for collaboration to be prioritised, systemised by being built into teachers' schedules, and structured opportunities to collaborate are available (p.59). Additionally, the respondents' preferences align with Gideon's (2002) perspective that collaboration will not automatically happen because individuals are aware of its benefits. Hence, collaboration should be "purposeful, planned and structured" (p.30).

While the majority of respondents prefer organised and systemised collaboration, there were some who prefer to exercise their autonomy in deciding when and how they engage in partnerships. Tichenor

and Tichenor also found that despite teachers' knowledge of the benefits of collaboration, there are some who opt to operate in isolation, and consideration should be given to enabling their professional autonomy (p.34). Therefore, as plans are made to involve teachers in collaborative efforts, they should be permitted to express their preferences and challenges. Teachers should also be involved in a democratic negotiation and participation in making decisions about how collaborative activities are structured and systemised.

Most of the participants said collaboration happened as a result of them taking their own initiatives which did not adhere to any structure or system. The respondents individually reaped benefits for addressing the teaching and learning challenges. However, the lack of a procedural and collective institutional approach to the application of collaboration is an antithesis to systematicity which researchers argue as being crucial to any crisis management strategy (Kapucu and Ustun, 2017; Fener and Cevik, 2015; Wooten and James, 2008; Kotter, 2007). Two of the key stages of crisis management are the evaluation of implementations and modification. Connected to these stages is the role of giving feedback which not all the participants were involved in, and there were some who gave feedback infrequently. Constructive reflection on strategies is necessary for individuals to inform about the strategies' effectiveness, and the exchange of ideas for improvements and other critical considerations. In addition, the lack of structure and systematisation is a hindrance to effective collaboration being a sustainable practice. Importantly, there is a need for leadership in order to achieve systematicity in approach. This necessity creates an opportunity for middle leaders who have an important role to play in crisis management. They can lead initiatives, and fill knowledge gaps because top-tier leaders do not always have full knowledge of situations and are unable to spearhead all implementations (Johnson, 2020). The leading of initiatives may sometimes require middle leaders to be self-directed as they investigate the crisis circumstances to determine the needs.

INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The teachers' self-driven participation in beneficial collaborative efforts, and the lack of structure and systemisation for cooperative engagements form the contexts for insights. Senior teachers can take cues from their supervisees' experiences in their aim to support and initiate crisis management implementations. As the insights are discussed, recommendations will be given for how senior teachers could activate their agency and assist the employment of collaboration as a crisis management tactic.

Middle Leaders' Self-Activated Agency

The teachers' proactivity in discovering solutions for the hindrances to quality teaching and learning relays their consciousness of what Fener and Cevik (2015) state as the need for immediate decision and implementation in crisis environments (p. 699). The teachers' solution-oriented approach and self-sufficiency hold a lesson for senior teachers regarding the necessity of activating their agency in times of crisis in order to play an active role in the process of problem-solving.

Priestly et al. (2015) inform that there is not a singular definition for agency because it may focus on individuals' capacities to act with autonomy or it is explained as the quality of individuals' actions enabled by their environments. Another perspective sees agency as the interplay of factors such as individuals' capabilities and efforts, context and resources (pp.2-3). This final definition is an encapsulation of the first two which is most plausible because it would be difficult for persons to exercise agency, despite

their having drive and competences, if they operate in a system that lacks resources, and does not value nor encourage persons' autonomy.

Therefore, while the insight is for senior teachers to exercise agency, it may not be easy for all to accomplish. The success of middle leaders exercising their autonomy to manage and lead in times of crisis is greatly influenced by the traditional philosophies and cultures that guide schools' operations (Gear and Sood, 2021; Harris and Jones, 2017). If a top-tier leader such as a principal, for example, is one who empowers senior teachers by inviting them to participate in decision-making processes and encouraging them to take initiatives, the probability of their exercising agency becomes greater. In contexts where leadership power is distributed and plural voices are facilitated, it is also quite essential for middle leaders to achieve self-empowerment to guard against their passivity in moments when their active leadership is a requisite for problem-solving. In circumstances in which top-tier leaders do not encourage middle leaders' autonomy, senior teachers would need to have confidence, a great level of motivation, and value the taking of initiatives in order to propose measures for crisis management. It therefore becomes a question about whether or not senior teachers will remain passive implementers of top-down instructions, or the urgency created by a crisis will incite their self-driven participation in suggesting resolutions and interventions. Senior teachers' vantage points and greater intimacies with the issues experienced by their supervisees should become instrumental in senior teachers offering credible insights and possible solutions that top-tier leaders may miss from their positions of leadership.

The importance of self-sufficiency in realising solutions was a need highlighted when the pandemic thrust schools into a crisis. The experience provided worthwhile opportunities for senior teachers to become proactive in crisis management instead of solely waiting for top-down instructions and mobilisation to transform instructional experiences, and resolve the accompanying challenges. Quick thinking, efficient capitalisation of time, and effective action are germane to crisis management. Therefore, if senior teachers remain inert, the loss of time, late responses to challenges and non-realisation of the most suitable solutions may be the result which in turn delays the achievement of success.

Since senior teachers' central positioning typically make them more knowledgeable of their supervisees experiences, one way they may exercise agency is to initiate "issue selling" which Wooten and James (2008) highlight as being a component of crisis management. It involves middle leaders taking necessary actions to draw management's attention to important issues that may not have been in focus, but are relevant to the steps being taken to overcome a crisis. Notably, issue selling is usually seen as a preparatory and preventative crisis measure. However, the concept may be applied in the context of senior teachers undertaking steps to become assertively engaged in helping to tackle threats at different stages of the crisis situation.

In order for senior teachers to prove the worth of their issue selling and justify the relevance of strategies, they would need to determine and soundly present the following:

- How the proposed strategies align with general institutional goals for recovery
- How the strategies may be integrated in the school's strategic plan
- How the strategies provide benefits for current and future operations of the school
- The ability of the school's system to accommodate the strategies
- Human and other resources needed to support strategy implementation

The possibility of proposals being accepted is increased if senior teachers offer feasible suggestions and show how they would serve the achievement of strategic priorities to resolve the crisis circumstance.

The movement of instruction from F2F modalities necessitated reformed thinking, approaches and a vision to enable schools' sustained provision of effective teaching and learning experiences. Senior teachers, even without the influence and motivation of principals, could have reflected on how they may change their mindsets and modus operandi in order to make substantial contributions to the crisis management plans. As aforementioned, middle leaders who operate in school environments that do not typically motivate their agency, would need to take bold steps to prove their value as autonomous problem-solvers. Fener and Cevik (2015) state that in times of crisis, leadership emerges when individuals have self-confidence and initiate actions (p. 698). Thus, if senior teachers who usually operate as passive implementers make a primary bold step by suggesting problem-solving approaches, they begin to create the possibility for them to experience a birthing of leadership. In addition, Anwar (2017) acknowledges that leadership and crisis are intertwined because both complement each other (p.326). Hence, crisis situations are opportunities for senior teachers to validate their positions as middle leaders while benefitting from the opportunity for self-development. Senior teachers whose autonomy is not encouraged may need to negotiate confining expectations and school culture to allow their active participation in crisis management. Such senior teachers would be those who have genuine interests in the ultimate well-being of students and institutions because this interest would be the motivating factor for their efforts in overcoming preventions caused by school structure, culture and policy.

Importantly, the approaches senior teachers formulate should also take into consideration how they would involve their team members in implementation. However, before they mobilise their supervisees to play their collaborative roles in crisis management, senior teachers ought to have a clear understanding of their readiness to lead and engage self-transformations where necessary. Notably, the pandemic taught a crucial lesson about the worth of flexibility, and individuals' willingness to undergo transformations themselves as a precursor to transforming other individuals and systems. This thought is supported by Pillai et al. (2015) who emphasises the importance of self-management leadership which involves reflection and self-reformation done before attempts are made to change the external environment. Thus, a crisis may necessitate middle leaders to first reposition themselves while being cognizant that the "future of an organization rests on [their] autonomy, maturity and confidence" (p.17). Senior teachers' reflection, repositioning and self-transformation are elements of their activation of agency.

Mazurkiewicz (2021) offers that "leadership is built from many elements, starting with personal matters like self-understanding, identity, self-esteem, and relationships with the self" (np.). Hence, senior teachers should not only seek to make suggestions about how challenges may be resolved, but also be self-attuned in the process of realising how they will use their position of leadership to help implement their suggested approaches. In senior teachers' endeavour to become aligned with the requirements for crisis management, they need to engage self-examination to realise what aspects of themselves, leadership styles and modes of operation they need to modify. The following are some crucial questions senior teachers could contemplate as they apply their agency in the process of self-transformation.

- How does the crisis threaten my leadership?
- What types of leadership skills/ abilities do I have to meet the challenges?
- What types of leadership skills/ abilities do I lack?
- What resources/ opportunities do I need to develop the lacking leadership skills?
- Do I have leadership approaches that may hinder success in crisis management?
- What goals, visions, intentions and perceptions should be changed for me to successfully participate in crisis management?

A vital benefit to be garnered from middle leaders' self-transformation is building confidence in their supervisees who would note their leaders' interest in achieving development that is critical to the ultimate success of students, and by extension the institutions. Senior teachers would not be seen as inactive individuals who merely await directives in order to act. Therefore, team members who experience their mid-tier leaders' self-sufficiency may develop trust and feel more secure in being guided in the crisis management processes.

As senior teachers contemplate the needs for self-transformation, they should select the most suited leadership style necessitated by the crisis circumstances. The work from home context brings into focus the requirement for supervisees to exercise self-independence and self-monitoring, and engage continuous reflection on implementation strategies to determine effectiveness and need for modifications. One type of middle leader the pandemic challenged is the helicopter leader who hovers over subordinates through micromanagement which Mishra et al. (2019) explains as a leadership style that does not appreciate subordinates' independent thinking and self-dependence. The micromanager is similar to an autocratic leader who is the only one who makes decisions and wants to be aware of the simplest details (p.2949). The autocratic and stifling leadership styles were definitely challenged because as teachers dispersed to teach remotely, middle leaders' levels of control were lessened; thus, they had to invest greater trust in subordinates, or deal with the angst of having less control.

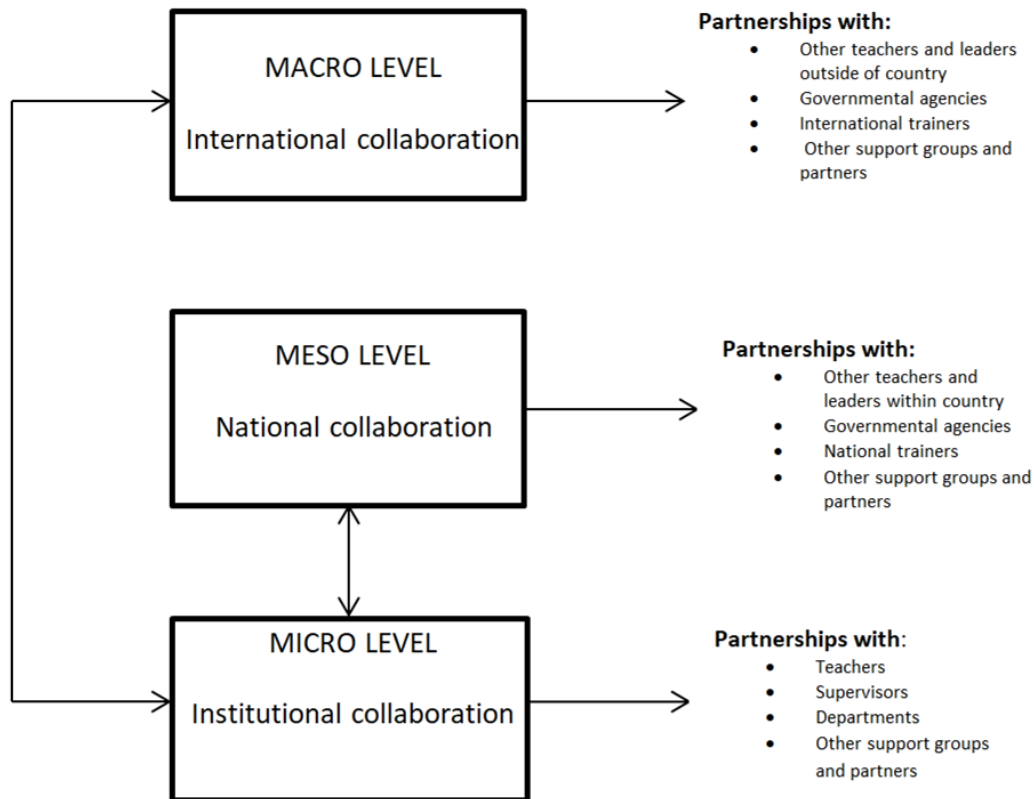
Opposite to autocratic middle leaders are those who aim to be transformational. Celik and Akyazi (2016) give the characteristics of transformational leaders to include their functioning as change agents who motivate people, and lead them to accomplish a vision. A transformational leadership style may prove suitable for crisis management as middle leaders ensure they understand the change that is necessary, and actively participate in achieving the school's vision. Also, engrained in this leadership style is being people-oriented and the value of working with a team (p.187). This approach permits plural voices for the offering of solutions through communication channels that are multi-directional – top-down, bottom-up and horizontal. Though in crisis situations teachers may be self-driven to individually or collectively realise solutions, it does not guarantee that all operate with the consciousness of being solution-oriented. Therefore, senior teachers should seek to empower their supervisees and facilitate their purposeful involvement in crisis management decision-making processes and implementations. This may be done through discussions and other organised sessions that allow for the sharing of experiences, ideas and the constructing of implementation plans. In seeking to exercise agency, senior teachers can capitalise on their supervisees' inclination to collaborate in order to assist with the execution of a more structured and guided initiative.

Collaboration in Crisis Management

One insight garnered from the crisis schools faced is the value of partnership in resolving encountered challenges. Collaboration was extended beyond teachers who taught at the same school to include educators from national and international spaces partnering to resolve the teaching and learning challenges. Significantly, instead of being inert recipients of other people's conceptualisations, the teachers actively undertook roles as researchers, experimenters, theorists and evaluators in the process of constructing solutions for the real challenges they faced.

Apart from educators relying on each other, however, crisis situations may necessitate their partnerships with other stakeholders, and schools should decide how they could involve additional key players in their strategic preparation, resolution and prevention of crises. Extending partnerships is important

Figure 2. Levels of Collaboration



because schools' resources, employees' competences and experiences may prove inadequate in dealing with the circumstances that threaten the institutions' success. The culture of educators and school leaders operating in isolation is definitely changing, and collaboration is made increasingly possible as a result of the advantage of technology that provides easy access to information, people and resources. School personnel may engage each other in social and professional groups, or otherwise form networks by initiating and sustaining pertinent conversations. Importantly, collaboration allows for a relevant deprivitisation of practice and leadership, and has the potential to offer more rewards if partnership is done on different levels to involve persons within the same institution/ country, and stakeholders who operate across the globe.

The chapter advocates for structured and strategically planned collaboration which is deemed an essential factor of crisis management approaches. Recommendations are offered for how senior teachers may promote an extended form of partnership among their supervisees to engage educators, and other inter and intra-organisational stakeholders. As middle leaders embark on leading their teams to collaborate, I propose they give consideration to different levels of collaboration.

The above figure presents three levels on which collaboration may happen. They are labelled as micro, meso and macro levels. The micro level is collaboration among teachers and leaders within the same institution, and community partners who are closely aligned to the school. Partnerships may exist among

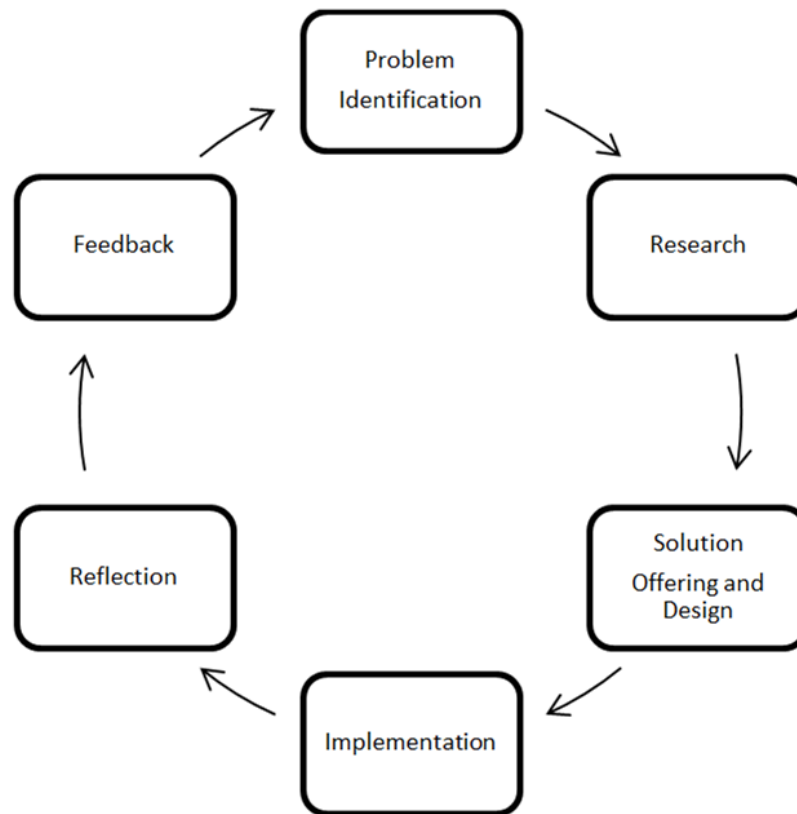
pairs or groups of teachers, grade supervisors, departments, coaches, mentors, and others. On the meso level, different institutions and other stakeholders such as governmental agencies and trainers partner on a national level. The macro level expands the sphere of collaboration as schools engage individuals including teachers, leaders, trainers, and others from international spaces. For an institution, the primary point of collaboration is at the micro level, and partnering at the meso and macro levels would serve to resolve the challenges being experienced at the micro level. The nature of challenges experienced during a crisis should help senior teachers and their supervisees decide who should be involved in the collaborative efforts.

It is important that senior teachers consider collaboration from a global standpoint. This is necessary if they want to expose themselves and other teachers to a wealth of experiences, perspectives, resources and best practices. Ostovar-Nameghi and Sheikahmadi (2016) state that collaboration does not only improve teachers' instructional proficiencies, but it also improves students' learning and achievement (p.199). Therefore, during crisis situations, stakeholders need to determine how best they can resolve threats, and employ collaborative measures to prevent or lessen the loss of quality teaching and learning. Professional communities should be formed to create frameworks for constructive conversations so that resources, ideas and solutions may be exchanged and adapted. Educators may realise commonalities among the challenges despite unique circumstances and learners. Also, though environments and experiences may differ, the solutions shared may still prove useful because there are benefits in being cognizant of divergent experiences to expand awareness, thinking and methodologies. Consideration should be given to how strategies may be appropriated to suit unique contexts.

Significantly, collaboration should not be left to chance and inconsistencies because an ad hoc attempt at engaging team members and other stakeholders in collaborative activities is an ingredient for disinterest, mediocre support, frustration and failures. Therefore, senior teachers, along with their supervisees, should consciously construct collaboration plans with the aim of developing a systemised process that best suits the crisis-related challenges and contexts. The following is an example of a proposed six-step collaboration process that senior teachers may employ to engage team members in cooperative efforts as part of problem-solving endeavours. Diligent thought should be given to implementation structure, and factors that would help ensure sustainability. The steps are guided by the aforementioned stages of crisis management offered by Fener and Cevik (2015), and Wooten and James (2008). Embedded in the stages are ideas about how to formulate, implement, monitor, evaluate and modify solutions.

- **Problem Identification:** At the first step, senior teachers and supervisees within the same institution would identify and share the challenges they are encountering with teaching and learning. The problems should not only be identified and labelled, but purposeful conversation should allow for a deep examination of the far-reaching impact of the difficulties being encountered. This is necessary for ensuring the solutions are designed with a comprehensive or multileveled approach in mind.
- **Research:** Research may take different forms and enough time should be given for team members to conduct their inquiries.
 - One form of research is team members' examination of their own experiences to identify ways in which they have been resolving challenges that are similar to the ones their colleagues encounter. The approaches should be shared to not only reveal the successes, but also the challenges and limitations so that others may prepare for possible hindering eventualities.

Figure 3. Collaboration Process



- Another form of research involves teachers' collaboration at the different proposed levels. For example, the team would seek to gain assistance from educators and other stakeholders at the meso and macro levels. Middle leaders and other team members should ensure they create reciprocity as they engage educators, additional stakeholders, and support partners from other local and international spaces.
- Teachers may also consult available research material and other forms of publications to discover additional solutions.
- **Solution Offering and Design:** At this stage, the team would share the ideas they found through research. Team members would decide which solutions best suit their collective and individual contexts. After selection, some solutions may require tailoring to ensure appropriacy. The team would then create an action plan that identifies key factors for implementation such as goals, resources needed, timeframe, main participants, performance indicators, and possible threats.
- **Implementation:** Team members implement plans to address the challenges they encounter. Teachers should consciously observe and make note of the effectiveness and limitations of the plans.
- **Reflection:** Individual team members engage in a critical evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the implementations. Factors that posed challenges to the plan application should also be identified. Individuals should formulate ideas about how to proceed; for example, decide if plans

need to be modified, completely discontinued or more research needs to be done to gain more information, guidance and support.

- **Feedback:** Team members meet and share the results of their implementations. They highlight the approaches that proved effective, the ones that require modification and those that proved unsuitable. At this stage, individuals should also share how the challenges encountered with implementation may be resolved. The insights attained from the evaluative dialogue should inform the improvement of implementations.

Leadership Practices for Sustainability

While senior teachers guide team members to craft a process-driven approach to collaboration, they should deliberate the practices that would help ensure the plans and approaches designed to address crisis matters are sustainable. In addition, careful consideration should be given to how collaborative systems for problem-solving not only benefit present circumstances, but also position institutions for future successes. At all times, the core of any implementation should be geared at ensuring students are engaged in school experiences that prioritise their holistic welfare.

As aforementioned, Ostovar-Nameghi and Sheikahmadi (2016) and Tichenor and Tichenor (2019) noted that lack of time is a barrier to collaboration among teachers. Other factors include the lack of willingness and trust, miscommunication, and the fact that collaboration is not placed as part of the teachers' schedules. Additionally, though teachers are aware of the benefits of collaboration, some still choose to operate in isolation (Tichenor and Tichenor, 2019, pp.54, 59). Thus, in an effort to ensure collaboration among teachers and other stakeholders benefits all and is sustained, middle leaders would need to develop effectual approaches that promote, facilitate and implement partnerships. With the goal of ensuring the system of collaboration is sustainable, the following are examples of crucial practices that should be contemplated.

Strategic Alignment

One of the first priorities senior teachers should have is to ensure they are able to justify the need and advantage of collaboration. This recommendation is supported by John-oke and Eke (2020) who pinpoint the importance of having a strategic approach to crisis management. Middle leaders may have to rationalise for top-tier leaders the need to make allowances for collaborative efforts. One allowance, for example, is principals giving teams the time to engage each other in relevant conversations and planning. Senior teachers would need to clearly outline how collaboration may help to achieve the strategic objectives identified for overcoming crisis circumstances. Articulating clearly the benefit of collaboration processes and implementations to achieving institutions' vision and mission is necessary to gain top-tier leaders' support for initiatives.

Promotion of Collaboration

Lack of interest is a threat to the sustainability of collaboration, and Wang and Sun (2012) state that in the context of managing change implementation, resistance needs to be identified, understood and managed. While collaboration is beneficial, some persons may prefer to work individually to resolve

the challenges they face in teaching and learning processes. Their preference may be influenced by a belief that they can resolve struggles on their own, and they may find it less demanding to work within their own time. In addition, Ostovar-Nameghi and Sheikahmadi (2016) cautions against forcing colleagues to collaborate because it may infringe on their right to exercise professional autonomy. Therefore, middle leaders would have to promote the benefits of partnerships, and structure collaboration plans in a way that appeals to team members. If there is a rejection from team members, ensuring viability and continuity is at risk.

One way to promote partnership is to employ the democratic approach which allows everyone to contribute their ideas about how collaboration should be designed. This increases the possibility of enabling the team to feel empowered, and cause supervisees to feel valued. Additionally, team members may be more agreeable to the idea of collaboration if at all stages of implementation, they feel free to express how collaboration may no longer be serving their interests or may be a threat to their autonomy. At this point, everyone should bind forces to redress approaches to ensure no one is left on the periphery of the advantages to be gained from partnering.

Determine Specific Roles/Responsibilities

Harwati (2013) states that determining roles of organisational members is one of the steps in effective crisis management (p.174). Therefore, all team members should have a clear idea of their tasks, and expectations of how they should play their roles in helping to achieve the objectives of collaboration. Such include making decisions about who will conduct different aspects of research, take charge of meetings (senior teachers do not have to be the ones leading at every stage of the implementation process), spearhead conversations about best practices, find and share resources, engage other stakeholders and partners, along with other activities. Team members should engage in a democratic process of deciding how to assign responsibilities and the roles they want to play. It should be a process that encourages willingness while at the same time facilitate negotiation. Responsibilities may be rotated so that team members vary and expand their contributions to the collaborative effort. Importantly, team members should see how their role benefits the overall success of the team and in effect, students' success. Therefore, middle leaders have to ensure that the roles are directly aligned to removing the barriers to students' success. Additionally, team members should be clear about how having access to each other and their completion of tasks is advantageous to their individual experiences.

Encourage Commitment to Team

The idea of employee engagement as being key to the effective implementation of crisis and change management plans (Hussain et al., 2016; Saji, 2014) conveys the importance of senior teachers making efforts to encourage team commitment. The success of collaboration plans is indeed dependent on team members' interest and sustained input. Teachers would need to invest commitment to the team through task completion, sharing of ideas, and reciprocating efforts. One way in which senior teachers could motivate commitment is through conversation that allows supervisees to realise how their participation not only benefits others, but also their own professional growth and expertise as they seek to engage solutions for the benefit of students' learning.

Importantly, team members' active participation in collaborative plans is important because if the efforts are lopsided, those who invest the greatest energies may become discouraged. Imbalance in interest and action may breed conflicts among team members; thus, middle leaders would need to intervene quite early if some team members are failing to fulfill their roles. Senior teachers could allocate some of the meeting times for reflections that invite supervisees to examine their levels of commitment, and identify how the lack prevents success. Thereafter, the team could work together to decide how they can support members who may be struggling. Also, a system of accountability could be established by forming sub-groups and leaders to help with task management.

Schedule Dialogues/Meetings

In an effort to guard against the barriers of lack of time and schedule for collaboration as identified by Ostovar-Nameghi and Sheikahmadi (2016) and Tichenor and Tichenor (2019), a system for engaging team members in dialogues about challenges and solutions should be created. The team needs to know, for example, when and how often meetings would take place, purpose of meetings, and contexts for the conversations. Contexts may include departmental meetings, planning meetings, workshops, and capacity building training sessions. The challenges teachers and students encounter during the crisis should guide the agenda for such sessions as constructive approaches are taken to identify possible solutions and give feedback for implementations. The objectives for the meetings should be decided and communicated to the team for them to have a clear idea of what should be accomplished during the sessions. Consistent meetings, conversations, training initiatives, and other measures would guard against team members getting the impression that collaboration is unnecessary. Hence, constancy in approach increases the value of partnership. Additionally, when middle leaders take an intentional and organised approach, it communicates to the team the need for everyone to have a serious and professional approach to participating and addressing the issues.

Notably, the scheduling of meetings and other collaborative activities may have implications for schools' policy reform. Meyer et al. (2022) reiterate the value of teacher collaboration in improving their schools by identifying needs, and developing and implementing innovations. The researchers state that one of the key roles principals should play in facilitating collaboration is making certain teachers have sufficient time and resources. Hence, principals would need to include, for example, planning sessions in timetables to help ensure time is dedicated to collaborative efforts. Allocated time would communicate the priority and importance of collaboration, and serve as a motivating factor for those who may not have appreciated the idea of partnerships. Also, scheduling time would aid consistency and guard against teachers' struggle to find additional time to dedicate to collaborative activities which lessens the threat to sustainability.

The same principle that applies for eradicating isolation among teachers should be encouraged among middle leaders. Therefore, allotted time for collaboration should also be given to senior teachers to meet and share their challenges, successes and suggestions for further improvement of departmental processes and implementations. When top-tier leaders create school structures that facilitate senior teachers' leading of collaboration, it provides what Ainsworth et al. (2022) cite as meaningful opportunities, space and flexibility that allow middle leaders to "engage with agentic and creative responses to policy and practice" (p.1).

Address Team-related Challenges

The factors that threaten the sustainability of the team should always be immediately addressed to guard against their negative impacts on collaborative efforts. Collaboration may not be convenient and preferred at all times; hence, it is important to identify the challenges and work to resolve them. Team members should feel comfortable with sharing the challenges they may be experiencing with being part of the partnerships. Also, in cases where challenges are not shared, but are detected, efforts should be made to address them. Solutions that benefit all involved should be undertaken while aiming to ensure that such benefits translate into advantages for the students. At all times, the prerogative should be to improve collaborative undertakings to increase the probability of success. Changes in contexts, experiences, challenges, objectives, and students' requirements should inform how partnerships will be modified to suit differing and changing critical needs.

CONCLUSION

In crisis situations, mid-tier leaders can play crucial roles in implementing crisis management plans. From their central position, they can assist the process of identifying institutional needs, offer suggestions for strategic executions and actively participate in implementation processes. The typical expectation is that the offering of solutions will be communicated via a top-down channel because leaders are expected to know how to resolve the challenges experienced during a crisis. While middle leaders' cognizance of how to contribute to crisis management plans is important, an absolute dependence on them does not give consideration to the possibility of gaining insights from those at the bottom of organisational hierarchies. Teachers' engagement of collaborative efforts to resolve teaching and learning challenges communicated the idea that the decisions and responsive behaviours of those without leadership responsibilities may be instrumental in guiding senior teachers to enact their roles in crisis management.

One insight garnered is that in times of crisis, senior teachers may need to activate their agency in leading initiatives, and negotiate their roles if they operate in school systems that do not facilitate their exercising of autonomy. Another is the benefit of employing collaboration as a strategy for crisis management. Senior teachers, therefore, have the opportunity to examine initiatives undertaken by their supervisees then determine how they may apply their leadership roles to increase the success and rewards of such initiatives. One crucial recommendation is that senior teachers could activate their agency to enhance supervisees' collaborative efforts. This can be achieved by taking the necessary steps to engage other key players and stakeholders in planning, executing, modifying and systemising collaboration. In order for senior teachers to achieve self-empowerment, it is necessary for top-tier leaders to realise that people dormancy, diffidence, lack of self-sufficiency and stifled agencies are unprofitable to the process of crisis management. Therefore, top-tier school leaders should create and maintain cultures and procedures that encourage individuals' autonomy. One of the primary goals for schools' crisis management plans is to yield effective resolutions for addressing threats to providing students with overall optimal school experiences. The formation of strong school communities in which everyone is encouraged to play understood and relevant roles increases the probability of schools' survival, long-term success, and sustainability.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Agency: An individual's ability to act autonomously which may be influenced by environmental factors such as school policy and culture (Priestly et al., 2015).

Crisis: An occurrence that threatens the functionality and success of an institution. For schools, a crisis may be a happening that prevents leaders and educators from providing students with quality teaching and learning experiences.

Crisis Management: The execution of implementations for the purpose of preventing and lessening the threats to an institution's survival and recovery.

Empowerment: An individual's power and confidence that enable their active undertaking of steps to become engaged in problem-solving.

Middle Leaders: Senior teachers such as heads of departments and subject leaders who both teach and have leadership roles allowing them to bridge the gap between instructional practice and school management (Grootenboer et al., 2020).

Supervisees: Subject teachers in schools who do not hold positions of leadership.

Sustainability: The process of implementing measures that maintain well-being over an extended period of time (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). The implementations formulated for collaboration should prioritise stakeholders' best interests, and procedures should be undertaken to ensure consolidation of improvements and continuity.

Systemised Collaboration: A planned and structured process that engages teachers and middle leaders in cooperative actions that are facilitated by school culture and policy.

Teaching and Learning: Classroom engagements that involve teachers' employment of instructional approaches which primarily cater to students' range of academic needs.

Chapter 10

A Multi-Tiered Professional Learning Approach to Build Middle Leaders' Capacities to Lead During Times of Crisis and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic created a need to transform the content and delivery of professional learning for middle leaders. This chapter discusses an innovative multi-tiered professional learning approach to build middle leaders' capacity to lead during times of crisis and beyond. It explores how the approach works and its impact on middle leaders. Data were collected via online surveys and feedback from live interactive professional learning sessions. The chapter proposes the approach as a model to build collective middle leadership capacity to lead in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as for and in emergencies. The findings from data collected show that the multimodal platforms, such as social media lives, websites, webinars, YouTube, and Zoom that were used to deliver professional learning, fostered collaboration, knowledge, and skill acquisition and built and improved the well-being of middle leaders. Additionally, the multi-tiered professional learning approach built a global professional learning community of middle leaders.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, middle leaders were forced to reimagine and reconfigure their leadership practices to function for and in crisis, when the COVID-19 Pandemic hit and schooling as we knew it changed (Dirani et al., 2020; Netolicky, 2020; Stoller, 2020; Zhao, 2020). The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on schooling amplified the importance of middle leaders, particularly their role as crisis managers. Many middle leaders sought online professional learning from communities to help them quickly transition to fulfil their roles as crisis managers effectively. During this time, the Caribbean Visionary Educators and 21st Century Educators, online professional learning communities saw increased participation from middle leaders who sought to develop skills and strategies to manage the crisis in teaching and learning taking place at their schools. The 21st Century Caribbean Educators, and the Caribbean Visionary Educators created professional learning communities separately and in partnership to realise the mutual goal of building leadership capacity through a multi-tiered professional learning approach and with a focus on indigenous Caribbean content. Members can post and share practices in these spaces and access multiple educational resources.

This chapter reports on an on-going innovative multi-tiered professional learning approach that continues to build collective leadership capacity among middle leaders in schools to directly impact learning for and in emergencies. Specifically, the chapter reports on how this multi-tiered approach to professional learning works and its impact on participants, particularly in mitigating the crisis in education that the COVID-19 Pandemic presented. The virtual modality delivery used in the professional learning approach by Caribbean Visionary Educators and 21st Century Educators proved advantageous in leveraging middle leadership capacity particularly during the COVID-19 Pandemic, when physical schooling halted, and middle leaders were required to enhance their performance and upskill. The professional learning work of these organisations filled the gaps through a range of targeted innovative professional learning activities. The overall objective of this chapter is to show how this innovative multi-tiered approach to professional learning provided and continues to provide middle leaders with the theoretical underpinnings, practical applications, tools and skills to meaningfully lead from the middle for and in crisis in their institutions.

BACKGROUND

This background provides definitions of key conceptual terms, such as: what it means to lead from the middle; middle leadership; who are middle leaders and what they do; crisis management; what is professional learning and how it engenders capacity building. This background also provides deeper discussions of theoretical perspectives that relate to these definitional and conceptual issues about middle leaders in education, professional learning approaches and strategies that build middle leadership capacity.

Literature Review

Unpacking the Leading From the Middle vs. Middle Leadership Dichotomy

The authors begin by clarifying the distinction between the terms leading from the middle and middle leaders, since the authors appreciate the clear difference between the two concepts. Fullan (2015, p. 1) explains:

Leadership from the Middle can be briefly defined as: a deliberate strategy that increases the capacity and internal coherence of the middle as it becomes a more effective partner upward to the state and downward to its schools and communities, in pursuit of greater system performance. The goal of LftM is to develop greater overall system coherence by strengthening the focus of the middle in relation to system goals and local needs. Thus, it is not a standalone, but rather a connected strategy. This approach is powerful because it mobilizes the middle (districts and/or networks of schools), thus developing widespread capacity, while at the same time the middle works with its schools more effectively and becomes a better and more influential partner upward to the center.

According to Fullan's definition, leading from the middle refers to education systems. Hargreaves and Ainscow (2015), however situate leading from the middle at the district level and describe it as:

one way to reduce bad variation among school districts is to promote collaboration among them so they share resources, ideas, and expertise and exercise collective responsibility for student success. In this leading from the middle approach, districts don't just mediate and manage other people's reforms individually; they become the collective drivers of change and improvement together (Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015, p. 44).

Whether described as leading at the district level or system level, the authors acknowledge that the concept of leading from the middle refers to a type of leadership that occurs outside of the schools, whereas middle leadership refers more specifically to leadership within the school. Still, the definition of middle leadership is not as straightforward as that of leading from the middle. Some writers in the field (Carter, 2016; De Nobile, 2017; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2006; Grice, 2019; Grootenboer et al., 2015; Gurr & David, 2018; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Kiat et al., 2016; Li et al., 2018; Ng, 2015; Supovitz, 2014; Tay et al., 2019; Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014; Thorpe & Melnikova, 2014) define middle leadership in terms of positionality, meaning the roles and positions that middle leaders hold. Others, for example, Hargreaves and Shirley (2019), while acknowledging that middle leadership refers to the roles and positions of middle leaders go a step further to define middle leadership: "as a solution to systems where local control has been diminished" (p. 96). The authors of this chapter use the positionality definition of middle leadership at the school level, but more importantly define middle leadership in terms of what middle leaders do and their impact, similar to Hargreaves and Shirley (2019), who state that: "middle level or middle tier leadership is a role or function that creates coherence, increased efficiency and enhanced performance in a complex system" (p. 96).

Who Are Middle Leaders and What Do They Do?

According to Grootenboer, et al. (2017, p. 243), in the educational context, "Middle leaders are those who have an acknowledged leadership position, but are also involved in teaching in the classroom". Those who hold middle leadership positions are generally categorised as subject leaders, heads of year, pastoral heads, heads of departments, subject or key stage coordinators (Grootenboer et al., 2020; Harris, 1999; Harris et al., 1995; Lipscombe et al., 2020). Lipscombe, et al. (2021, p. 14) describe school middle leaders as:

formally appointed leaders who operate between senior leaders and teachers, are accountable for their responsibilities, and lead in order to positively impact (directly and indirectly) teaching and student learning. They are impacted by, and benefit from, senior leadership support. They lead best within positive and trusting relationships. These relationships include those with students, parents, teachers, and senior leaders. As such they have a wide range of people that they influence and are influenced by. Middle leaders work to contribute to the professional agency of those they work with to influence them and to make choices that positively impact on teaching and learning.

Lipscombe, et al. (2021, p. 2) further explain that: “Middle leaders (MLs) operate at the interface between different sources of influence and change within the school”. Bryant and Walker (2022, p. 1) in defining the roles of middle leaders, state:

Whereas MLs are positioned as curriculum administrators who serve as conduits between senior leaders, that is, principals and vice principals (VPs), and teachers, the research emphasises their potential as pedagogical leaders, innovators, and facilitators of teachers' professional development (PD).

Middle leaders are the ones tasked with the responsibility to interpret the school's vision and mission and implement the same through the teaching and learning practices in the school. Thus, middle leaders are responsible for the development of both students and teachers. They are positioned at the intersection between senior leadership and the teaching and learning machinery in a school. Middle leaders ensure that an institution's vision is implemented by bridging the gap between senior leadership and learning. Put differently, middle leaders bridge the gap between the articulation of an institution's vision and the realisation of it, by transforming that vision into teaching and learning practises in ways that will achieve the institutions' educational outcomes, particularly those related to maintaining teacher and student quality (Bennett et al., 2007). Thus, middle leaders are required to lead upwards, across and downwards (Maxwell, 2005), which by its nature is turbulent, contentious and indicative of managing crises to maintain balance within institutions. The nature and importance of leadership in these middle zones can create more efficient systems for implementing top-down priorities on the one hand or build collective capacity to address and activate the democratic and professional aspirations of local groups and communities on the other (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2019, p. 93). In order to fully understand the critical role that middle leaders play, just imagine removing the metaphorical bridge and see what can happen to teaching and learning, or let something like the COVID-19 Pandemic hit and force schools and education systems into crisis. Deeper expositions on middle leaders as crisis managers ensue.

Middle Leaders and Crisis Management

Crisis management is a term that educationalists have borrowed from their management counterparts. Management theorists tend to define the term crisis separately and explain what it means to lead or manage during a crisis. For purposes of this chapter, the authors will do the same. While there are numerous definitions of crisis, the authors subscribe to the definition by Bundy et al., (2017, p. 1661), which defines organisational crisis as: “an event perceived by managers and stakeholders as highly salient, unexpected, and potentially disruptive—can threaten an organization's goals and have profound implications for its relationships with stakeholders”.

By virtue of their positionality within schools and having to interface with a variety of constituents above, across and below, middle leaders engage in crisis management as a natural part of their work. Nevertheless, since as far back as 2012 and before, writers in the field have acknowledged that school leaders at every level are faced with specific, non-routine crises, which they have to manage. Smith and Riley (2012, p. 57) provide a useful explanation of what the authors term non-routine crises as follows:

The leadership attributes and skills required of school leaders in times of crisis are fundamentally different from those generally required as part of the 'normal' school environment. Strong school leadership generally is about positioning the school for the future, and about supporting and empowering staff and students in the pursuit of teaching and learning excellence. Leadership in times of crisis is about dealing with events, emotions and consequences in the immediate present in ways that minimise personal and organisational harm to the school and school community.

Harris and Jones (2020, p. 246) provide a similar explanation after the COVID-19 Pandemic hit education systems globally, bringing face to face schooling to a halt for periods of time. They state:

Crisis and change management are now essential skills of a school leader. Running an effective school in disruptive times will require more than routine problem solving or occasional firefighting. Instead all school leaders will need to be engaged in constant crisis and change management which will require support and collaboration from all staff.

The authors go one step further than Harris and Jones (2020) to say that school leaders, and middle leaders in particular require continuing professional learning not only for themselves to be prepared to successfully address crises, but also because they are responsible for the professional learning of teachers. Not only are they required to be proactive, but also predictive. Canyon (2020) defines crisis leadership as:

The capacity of an individual to recognize uncertain situations that possess latent risks and opportunities to ensure systematic preparedness, to discern necessary direction, to make critical decisions, to influence followers and to successfully eliminate or reduce the negative impact while taking full advantage of positive aspects within a given timeframe.

Notwithstanding the fact that middle leaders are required to be proactive and predictive, the authors acknowledge that no leader at any level of the education system or school could have been prepared for the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The COVID-19 Pandemic highlighted globally, the gaps in crisis management leadership capacity in schools and the need for innovative professional learning strategies to build this capacity, individually and collectively. Deeper expositions of responses to filling these gaps are in the ensuing sections.

Professional Learning and Capacity Building

The researchers made a deliberate choice to describe their activities as professional learning as opposed to professional development and use Timperley (2011) differentiation of the two terms as justification for their decision. According to Timperley (2011) "... the term 'professional development' has taken on connotations of delivery of some kind of information to teachers ... whereas 'professional learning' ...

challenges previous assumptions and creates new meanings. ... Solving entrenched educational problems requires transformative rather than additive change to teaching practice” (p. 4-5).

Lipscombe, et al. (2021, p. 12) in their systematic review of middle leadership, draw on the work of (Koh et al., 2011; Ng, 2015; Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014) and “suggests that MLs’ professional development should include a focus on: leading teaching, learning and curriculum, management (e.g. crisis management, legalities, resource management) and capacity building in the individual, professional, organisational and community domains”. Professional learning is not only necessary for the middle leaders themselves, but they are required to support professional learning for teachers as they seek to build capacity within their schools through strategies such as collaboration, targeting specific skills development and learning communities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Goodwin C, 2015; Schleicher, 2012). Middle leaders also require professional learning to drive innovation and create learning environments that engender school improvement (Schleicher, 2015).

The theoretical strands that undergird the multi-tiered professional learning approach discussed in this chapter, are the ubiquitous nature of social media platforms and communities such as Twitter and Facebook which allow learners to take charge of their own learning (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). These social media platforms also permit continual interaction among educators (Hur & Brush, 2009) and form part of everyday life, therefore requiring a low learning curve for most (Bexheti, et al., 2014). Watson (2020) points out that the connectivity that social media facilitates, helps to boost educators’ confidence. Workshops on their own, are insufficient to promote this desired change (Cole et al., 2002).

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

“Ninety-nine percent of all leadership occurs not from the top but from the middle of an organization” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 1). The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic proved this statement to be true, as globally, education systems and schools had to leverage middle leadership capacity to reconfigure and drive teaching and learning when schooling as we knew it in the face-to-face modality halted in 2020. The authors submit that this reality presented particular challenges such as the following for middle leaders to meander to ensure continued teaching and learning:

1. Using technology to transition from face-to-face learning to remote teaching and learning
2. Using technology to communicate with teachers
3. Upskilling themselves, teachers, students and parents in using and integrating technology in education and digital pedagogies
4. Connecting and communicating with stakeholders, particularly students and parents
5. Managing the well-being, safety and security of stakeholders and digital infrastructure

All of the above required middle leaders to lead up, across and down, to make decisions and implement them. As Lipscombe, et al. (2021, p. 13) rightly state, “To enable MLs to lead rather than merely manage, and to enable them to impact teacher and student learning, the conditions in which MLs work need to be optimised in reference to the contextual factors...”, and “professional development should include a focus on: leading teaching, learning and curriculum, management (e.g. crisis management, legalities, resource management) and capacity building in the individual, professional, organisational and community domains” (p. 12). Additionally, according to (Garet, et al., 2001) professional learning should also be culturally relevant.

The main focus of this chapter emerged from the authors' constant interrogation of the question: how could middle leaders get the necessary professional learning to effectively manage the crisis presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic? It was clear that traditional face-to-face modalities for professional learning were not available. Additionally, the traditional professional learning strategies such as a one-day didactic experience focused mainly on theoretical rather than practical and implementable experiences were not going to work. During the pandemic, several online educator workshops and webinars emerged via Zoom and social media platforms, many of which did not provide replays or follow-ups for the participants. These types of workshops and webinars were ineffective because they mainly provided information as opposed to interaction and practical applications that middle leaders could incorporate into their crisis management strategies within their contexts.

Before the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the authors had recognised the gaps in the traditional professional learning strategies in use and drawing on the work of (James & Figaro-Henry, 2017), had created and implemented a multi-tier professional learning approach using digital tools to build collective leadership capacity. Unlike traditional methods, this professional learning approach started with the educator's goals and needs. The next section outlines this multi-tiered approach as a solution to fulfilling the professional learning needs of middle leaders who were faced with specific crisis management issues as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Through data collected and analysed from the middle leaders themselves, the chapter also elucidates on the impact of the multi-tiered approach in building middle leaders' crisis management capacity during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

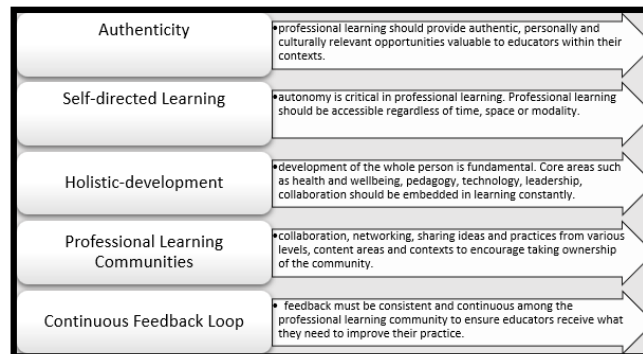
The Multi-Tiered Professional Learning Approach

The authors developed the professional learning approach based on research, needs analyses of participants and relevant theoretical underpinnings related to leadership, pedagogy, learning, impact and innovation. It is implemented using multi-modal digital platforms and strategies to build collective leadership capacity, namely: webinars, online workshops, social media, symposia, zoom, websites, online panel discussions, digital repositories and professional learning communities. These activities are executed using the online platforms of Caribbean Visionary Educators and 21st Century Educators, namely: websites, Facebook, and YouTube channels (See links to platforms before the references below). Middle leaders were able to voluntarily access the professional learning opportunities provided by these organisations via their various online platforms. The professional learning focused on creating and curating indigenous content, retooling, connecting leaders across different contexts, collaboration, innovation, particularly in the use of digital tools to facilitate the work of middle leaders, the holistic development of middle leaders and their identified areas of needs. After researching via direct questioning, feedback on social media and conversations with educators, it was clear that educators needed support in the following four main areas during the pandemic. These four areas, which we refer to as professional learning themes are:

1. Pedagogy
2. Health and Wellbeing
3. Technology
4. Leadership

A Multi-Tiered Professional Learning Approach to Build Middle Leaders' Capacities to Lead

Figure 1. Five Core Guiding Principles



A core element of the approach was to make the learning contextually and culturally relevant to the participants' work environments. Thus, the activities middle leaders did in the sessions were to devise solutions to solve problems within their specific contexts. This allowed middle leaders to transfer their learnings to the practice space in real-time, thus reducing the response time to find and implement solutions. As such, middle leaders were able to simultaneously access professional learning and lead the crisis management within their educational contexts. Additionally, there is an embedded research component in the learning approach via constant feedback, monitoring, and evaluation.

The five core guiding principles, represented in figure 1 below, framed the design of the multi-tiered, multimodal professional learning approach.

The following section further explains the practical application of these principles in developing and delivering the professional learning process for middle leaders.

The Multi-tiered Professional Learning Approach at Work

The professional learning approach is multi-tiered, the tiers being the four themes (leadership, health and well-being, pedagogy and technology). The approach is also multimodal, with a range of modalities used to deliver under the four themes. Additionally, no one modality is intended to work independently. Instead, the strength of the approach lies in the application of multiple modalities and platforms as part of the learning process.

Alignment of Core Principles Within the Professional Learning Approach

The approach aligns with the core principles, for example, in terms of authenticity and self-directed learning, each middle leader could choose how to learn, when to learn, and which modality he/she felt suited his/her needs. Additionally, the shared curated resources via websites and YouTube channels included indigenous and culturally relevant content, suited to the context of the middle leaders, who are primarily from the Caribbean. Further, the facilitators, panellists and the feature speakers for workshops, webinars and symposia were usually experts in the field with ties to the Caribbean, who had done research in relevant areas and also middle leaders who were still working in the education system in their various countries and/or had done research in the field. In this way, not only was the core principle of authen-

Table 1. Snapshot of multimodal format for professional learning

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING THEMES	TIER	MODALITY					
		Webinars via Zoom	Social Media Posts and Lives	Online Workshops	Symposia	Websites & Online Repository	Panel Discussions
	Leadership	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Technology	✓	✓	✓		✓	
	Pedagogy	✓		✓			
	Well-being	✓	✓				

ticity achieved, but the core principle of professional learning communities was also achieved. Where there were external experts, they had to acquaint themselves with the contexts before they presented to ensure alignment with the core principles.

The feedback loop is another feature of this approach, whereby middle leaders have a voice in shaping their professional learning. Via social media questions, emails, polls, surveys and direct conversations, middle leaders submit feedback on which sessions they needed, when the sessions should occur and what type of resources they would like created and posted. Feedback is also collected from participants on the impact of each professional learning session, to ensure that the sessions remain relevant and appropriate for the participants, as well as to indicate to the providers how to improve them. In terms of the core principle of holistic development of the whole person, the approach not only takes into consideration professional learning in terms of instructional content, such as leadership, pedagogy and technology, but also health and well-being as one of the tiered themes. Deeper expositions of how this multi-tiered and multimodal approach works follow.

Table 1 provides a snapshot of how the multimodal, multi-tiered format functions across the four professional learning themes.

Leadership Tier

From March 2020 to February 2022, 21st Century Educators and Caribbean Visionary educators focused on creating professional learning to support leaders at all levels of the school: senior leaders, middle leaders and teacher leaders during the crisis. One of the main objectives was to build leadership capacity for managing and leading in a crisis and providing access via webinars on Zoom, online workshops, symposia, panel discussions and social media. This chapter focuses on the work done with middle leaders, explaining both how it was done and its impact.

Webinars via Zoom

Zoom is the primary video conferencing tool for conducting closed-session webinars as it is familiar to most educators following the shift to online remote teaching and learning. This medium offers great

flexibility as presenters and attendees could facilitate or learn from anywhere in the world. The Zoom webinars also create a safe space where middle leaders could interact anonymously if they wish to ask a question or make a comment as cameras are not mandatory. Additionally, some middle leaders do not have a social media presence and therefore appreciate this mode of learning. There were several webinars held via Facebook and YouTube Lives to provide support for middle leaders at the start of the pandemic, and we continue to use these platforms to support middle leaders to manage the crisis in their specific cultural and contextual learning environments. The Lives have greater reach, primarily because of the ubiquitous nature of social media, as well as the fact that the Facebook or YouTube Lives are curated on social media thereby allowing middle leaders to access and review them asynchronously long after the actual event occurred.

From the onset of the pandemic, there was a webinar led by two educators that outlined a suggested remote learning plan for the Caribbean context. This Live was viewed by over 5400 persons in the Caribbean and beyond. During this session, a step-by-step guide was provided for middle leaders to pivot their schools during this emergency teaching and learning period, including an editable data capture form. Middle leaders who attended the session such as heads of departments, senior teachers and deans indicated that they had shared the documents and information with their senior leaders. A secondary school head of department commenting on Facebook Live stated: "Great point in creating a sensible timeline. Teachers will need to be trained and teachers & students will need to acclimatise to these new experiences. Understanding context is also key to planning wisely." This is an example of how professional learning enabled middle leaders to begin their pivot, as they grappled with crisis management at the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic. One primary school middle leader indicated that the content was useful and that he shared the video because of the content: "I just shared your video with my colleagues. Some really good content. Thank you". His school is among several others that adapted the data capture form as the starting point of their pivot to emergency remote learning.

Early into the COVID-19 Pandemic a webinar specifically geared towards crisis management titled: "Leading in the disorder of a pandemic" was held for members. This was led by an experienced leadership expert who has operated at various levels within the education system. During this webinar, practical steps that middle leaders need to consider during a crisis period, including how the operations and logistics team would be formed and operated were explored. The facilitator advised middle leaders to model the behaviours they expect of their colleagues. He also advised them that attending to social-emotional wellness is critical in crisis management for both staff and students. Additionally, the facilitator also told middle leaders that what they communicate and how they do so is critical. In terms of the impact of this session, one middle leader shared: "I have learned to be more mindful of the impact of what we say to colleagues and students. Our words can inspire or break spirits and threaten the success of students and schools". Another middle leader stated: "This highlights the impact of the social and emotional connection to shared experiences on middle leaders".

In response to the community members' requests, a webinar titled, "Building Bridges: Recognising the importance of Middle Leaders," was constructed and streamed Live on YouTube. During this session, the feature speaker addressed the differences between management and leadership, how to situate the middle leader, the importance of middle leaders, what they do and how they respond. This webinar drew lively discussions in the YouTube chat from middle leaders, which related to having cultural confidence as a middle leader and being able to value people. A panel discussion led by middle leaders at primary,

secondary, and tertiary levels of the education system was part of this webinar. Particulars about this panel discussion will be explored in the section on panel discussions below.

Social Media Posts and Lives

Social media is another modality that is used in the professional learning approach to facilitate sharing content and crisis management strategies for middle leaders, both synchronously and asynchronously. Facebook posts are used to provide articles on middle leadership, encouragement for leaders, curated videos and links to help middle leaders with strategies for crisis management. 90.7% of the middle leaders shared that they found the Facebook posts impactful. Social media permits easier and broader dissemination of knowledge, skills and practices that aid middle leaders in managing crises in a timely manner. One middle leader commented: "This is a great resource for crowdsourcing and sharing ideas. I have been a part of many Professional Learning Communities/Networks (PLC's)/(PLN's) but this is so much more fruitful. It's like a Google search for educators. Hats off to the organisers and participants. My greatest resource since (GAFE)/G-Suite." Another middle leader spoke to the impact of the social media platform in terms of encouraging the sharing of information and stated: "My colleagues are reading and sharing the posts on my Facebook page."

Undoubtedly the feedback from middle leaders who participated in the various webinars indicated that they were benefiting from the professional learning approach which facilitated the creation of networked communities across levels of leadership internally within schools, as well as externally across schools. Our social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube continue to evolve as repositories to build middle leaders' capacity-building.

Online Workshops

An expert in the field conducted an online workshop for senior and middle leaders, entitled "Navigating Shifting Sands: A toolkit for leading within and post Covid-19 Pandemic." The workshop focused on building a toolkit to create an innovative learning environment. The workshop format encouraged middle leaders to share and consider their leadership strategies during the crisis and beyond. The facilitator used Zoom breakout rooms whereby middle leaders were able to share and contribute to the creation of a toolkit for leading within and post-pandemic. One middle leader commented, "What an amazing workshop. I was able to converse with other educators and I soon realised that while I am on the right track with my leadership style, I do have a few things still to learn. ...I feel ready to tackle any issues that may arise. Can't wait for more sessions like this!" This type of workshop created a space for middle leaders to collaborate with each other as well as with senior leaders. They problem-solved and created a toolkit that could help them, and their institutions pivot towards a flexible learning environment in the crisis.

Symposia

The symposium was another synchronous medium used to build middle leaders' capacity. The title of the two-day event was "Innovative leadership: Building for the future" and focused on discussions on how middle leaders needed to transform to prepare for the post-pandemic education system. The symposia addressed various pertinent elements of schooling for middle leaders as follows:

Day One

- Leadership for Equity and Inclusion
- School Leadership in the digital age
- 90 vs. 360 Leadership

Day Two

- Education for and in Emergencies
- Differentiating learning in a synchronous and asynchronous lesson
- Creating an innovative learning environment

The topics for the symposia were determined from an online survey that was sent to members asking about the areas in which they wanted professional learning. These symposia were led by six experts, from the Caribbean, who posited research-based strategies which middle leaders could adapt during and beyond the pandemic. Feedback from a survey sent to participants after the symposia to determine their impact, indicated that 100% of middle leaders felt that: the symposia was well organised, that there was sufficient time for questions and answers and that the symposia were very beneficial (which was the highest range in the Likert scale question). Additionally, the feedback given by participants on what they liked most about the symposia fell into four main categories: content, quality of speakers, relevance and adaptability.

In terms of content participants stated: “The theories shared and how they can be applied in a practical way”, “The wealth of knowledge that was presented”, and “The content that was shared was relevant and addressed and highlighted ways to improve leadership practice in any school context”.

In terms of relevance, participants stated: “The detail provided and the direct relevance to our education leaders, “The topics chosen were relevant and extremely important”; “all sessions were relevant to today’s educational issues”, “The wealth of information provided that was related to our Caribbean context” and “Very relevant motivating and empowering”.

In terms of the quality of the speakers, participants shared: “very educated and well verse presenters”, “I love all the speakers that were chosen, they were clear, precise and relevant” and “My first exposure to CVE. Presenters were excellent”.

In terms of adaptability participants stated that they liked the: “Practicality of the Approaches - Social Justice, Digital Leadership, Concept of 360 degrees leadership” and “I like that we were given tips on how to become good and better leaders”.

Website and Online Repository

The website was another asynchronous learning modality used as a delivery platform in the professional learning approach. The Caribbean Visionary Educators’ website includes a school leadership section, divided into sub-themes: deans, heads of departments and principals and vice-principals. This repository houses a range of indigenous and other materials and resources that middle leaders can access at their convenience to bolster their capacity and crisis management skills where necessary. The section on Deans and Heads of Departments houses sample clinical supervision videos, including job descriptions and other relevant resources. Since middle leaders could access how much information they needed, it permitted

learning at the middle leader's pace and convenience. 83.3% of the middle leaders felt that the website was effective. One middle leader further highlighted the impact of the curated indigenous resources and materials by stating: "The CVE website has provided invaluable information for me to offer to them (teachers) as need be. CVE website is my go to source for information, and it has proven very useful and helpful". Another middle leader shared: "CVE has strengthened my input in middle management because of how my colleagues approach me for assistance and that came about by me having updated knowledge and resources to share via CVE". Other middle leaders echoed similar sentiments: "The sample works for HODs and teachers provided clear examples of the content and quality of work that should be produced. Thus I was able to share with colleagues as they worked to improve their practice."

These statements suggest that having readily available resources encourages middle leaders to engage in professional learning. Furthermore, they are more empowered to conduct the necessary crisis management within their schools.

Panel Discussions

Panel discussions were used in the professional learning approach, because they permit middle leaders and other education stakeholders to make meaningful contributions, share their experiences and perspectives. The panel discussion that was a part of the "Building Bridges: Recognising the importance of middle leaders" webinar that was streamed on YouTube, focused on how middle leaders can impact their institutions when they see their value. Five middle leaders from three Caribbean countries, namely Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and St. Lucia shared their expectations of the roles versus the reality, what facilitated and inhibited them from performing their role and what could be done to raise the profile of middle leaders. This format encouraged rich discussions among other middle leaders who were viewing the webinar, who asked questions, shared experiences and learned from each other. One participant stated: "...as a former Dean what the speaker is saying was my experience as well. However, what worked was the Deans working as a team, understanding your role, establishing relationships with the Form Teachers". Another participant stated: "... to call Heads of Departments and Deans middle leaders is really changing the top-down structure of authority". The middle leaders seemed comfortable sharing and receiving from fellow middle leaders. 100% of the participants welcomed future sessions on middle leadership, as indicated by the 100% positive responses. One middle leader for example, stated:

The session was informative and timely. Due to panellists' presentations, I was able to re-evaluate my role within my department and those of my colleagues. I appreciate that knowledge of self, emotional intelligence and the culture of the school impact process and outcomes. It was useful to have thought provoking guides to assist with my development as a middle manager.

The panel discussion format not only provides a collaborative learning space whereby middle leaders could share experiences, learn from each other and craft new visions for the future, but, based on the rich, deep discussions, it also provides a safe space that inspires this sharing to occur.

Technology Tier

A significant part of crisis management was learning how to use online platforms to teach remotely and integrate technology in teaching in an online environment. Middle leaders who lead curriculum groups

or are responsible for students were looked to for solutions to counter the disruption that the Covid-19 Pandemic brought to teaching and learning. Pre-Covid, 21st Century Educators had already started webinars and workshops on technology and therefore during this period, the focus shifted specifically to the use of technology in an online environment.

Webinars via Zoom

There were three closed Zoom sessions on “Gamifying your classroom,” and another on “Microsoft teams.” These sessions were completed as an outreach programme. The sessions were one hour and really served as an introduction to how to create engagement in the classroom through games and how to use the MS Teams platform. A middle leader speaking about his/her department, indicated that they felt there was an improvement in student scores because of their ability to pivot to the online setting after engaging in professional learning: “We were all able to deliver the curriculum at a high standard using an entirely new platform. It may not have been ideal for some teachers and students alike but it became a viable alternative. Students performed well at the external exams, perhaps better, having been taught online.”

Online Workshops

The workshops on technology were longer than the webinars and provided a space for practice. The educators were able to share their creations and go step-by-step in learning how to use the tools. The workshops included: Creating E-books, E-testing with Goformative and Blended learning. There were also workshops on setting up and using Google classroom and MS teams for teaching and learning. Middle leaders who attended these sessions benefited by building their capacity in integrating technology into their own teaching as well as sharing what they learned with their colleagues. The crisis disrupted face-to-face teaching and therefore technology integration in the school played a huge role in managing the crisis, including assessing if learning was taking place. According to one participant, “Workshops on virtual assessments provided HODs with information and resources to better guide teachers in this area”.

Social Media Posts and Lives

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, there were sixteen Facebook Lives, presented by local and international ed-tech companies on the use of different technological tools in education. These sessions gave insight into learning management systems, tools for social learning, lesson planning, assessing, playing games and collaboration. The feedback from these, indicated that they helped middle leaders not only to develop as teachers, but also as leaders in professional learning at the school. According to one middle leader: “It helped to make me better prepared to guide teachers through the online learning environment.” This shows how the professional learning approach had a direct impact on the middle leader’s capacity to lead professional learning as a crisis management strategy for teachers. This point was reinforced by another middle leader who stated, “It assisted my institution to learn about and adapt to technology as a teaching and learning resource”. In terms of the impact on middle leaders’ own teaching, one posted: “As a leader, I also have classes to teach, so the new strategies helped with my classes. So in that way the various courses I chose to participate in helped me”.

A Multi-Tiered Professional Learning Approach to Build Middle Leaders' Capacities to Lead

In the professional learning approach, Facebook posts were utilised to generate discussion, collaboration and networking among middle leaders. There were also posts which focussed specifically on the role of the middle leader and crisis management strategies. A middle leader posted the following in Facebook which started a discussion thread:

“As a reflective practitioner I often find myself using adverse scenarios to ascertain What can I do to make things better for my students and staff? Covid-19 has exposed numerous shortcomings in our system as it brings to the fore the following concerns amongst many others-

1. Are we doing enough to ensure there is true equity in education given the significant digital divide?
2. Are our educators truly equipped the 21st Century Digital Skills to meet the demands of this period and beyond and do our teachers feel empowered?
3. Have we prepared our students with the necessary skills; time management, critical thinking, etc. to cope with online learning?
4. Is the nature of our feedback relevant to students? Have we adapted?
5. Is there a need for significant curriculum changes moving forward?

These are just a few of my thoughts that lie close to my heart”.

There were also opportunities whereby middle leaders were asked to give their responses to questions, for example: “If you could change one thing about the education system, what would it be?” One middle leader replied: “Only education specialists should be classroom teachers. Passion and goodwill are not enough. In the same way a surgeon is highly trained because life is at stake, likewise those undertaking the most noble profession of all should be as well”. Another replied:

The way that school leaders (principals, vice-principals, school supervisors and curriculum officers) are selected and hired needs to be overhauled. We need to invest in and develop effective school leadership for our contexts. Without effective leadership, all of the above will stay exactly as-is or remain in isolated pockets. We also need to collectively re-examine our national vision for education. Every group can't have different ideas about what is important because it perpetuates inequality and inequity.

Websites and Online Repository

The websites provided an online space where resources for technology were shared. The information was curated so that middle leaders could search for items on the website.

Pedagogy Tier

Pedagogy is the cornerstone of education and when schools had to pivot to emergency remote teaching, it was necessary to use an approach that provides professional learning in specific pedagogy for teaching for and in emergencies, as well as pedagogy for online teaching and learning.

Webinars via Zoom

Early into the pandemic, there was a webinar specifically on how to create an effective asynchronous lesson. This webinar explained how to create an interactive asynchronous lesson and also how to track their students' progress asynchronously. Education technologists shared on blended learning, and how to conduct assessment in the online environment. There were also two webinars demonstrating how to conduct remote teaching in both primary and secondary school settings respectively. One middle leader who attended stated that: "asynchronous teaching and learning was planted in my head since I attended that session which dealt with that area. Teachers were retooled in terms of what a session of that nature resembles". Another middle leader indicated that: "The professional learning helped the teachers in my institution to comfortably transition from the face-to-face classroom to the remote classroom. It helped the teachers to modify their traditional lessons and adopt a new approach to teaching and learning that will better cater to the new needs of students."

Online Workshops

At the start of the pandemic, teachers needed to pivot to online teaching. Google classroom was one of the main learning management systems used by educators. To help facilitate this, there were four workshops offered titled: "Creating a successful online class using Google Classroom". The facilitator shared how to create a google classroom, how to create synchronous and asynchronous lessons in a google classroom and technology tools which can be integrated into google classrooms. There were several Heads of Departments from secondary schools and senior teachers from primary schools who initially participated to improve their own skills as teachers.

As an unintended outcome, these middle leaders led professional learning within their departments and their schools. One middle leader shared that from the onset of the pandemic, she created a google classroom for her department as a repository to share schemes of work, assessments and tips which she learned during the course. She also shared that the impact on the Visual and Performing Arts' teachers was particularly noticeable, as those teachers found it difficult to teach online: "The music teacher was really grateful for what I shared with her to get her students online. The teachers got quite comfortable with the platform". Another secondary school head of department shared that even upon returning to school after remote learning, her department continues to share notes with the students via the platform as it saves time when they are in the face-to-face setting.

Health and Well-being

21st Century Educators and Caribbean Visionary Educators subscribe to the belief that middle leaders who do not look after themselves or their well-being cannot effectively execute crisis management at their schools. For this reason, 21st Century Educators and Caribbean Visionary Educators have a tier in its professional learning approach that specifically targets health and well-being.

Webinars via Zoom

During the pandemic, there were three closed webinars via Zoom, led by mental health specialists, specifically targeting well-being in educators:

1. Managing it all
2. The Healthy Educator
3. How to cope with Pandemic Exhaustion

There were also fitness sessions via Zoom, encouraging educators to maintain a fitness routine during the pandemic. Middle leaders appreciated the focus on well-being not only for themselves but for colleagues at their school. Some of them were moved to consider the well-being of other stakeholders with whom they interacted during this crisis period as expressed by the following middle leaders: "I got a much broader understanding of inclusion. Because of this, I have been able to set up talks for parents and staff with professionals e.g., counsellors, mental health personnel. A more accommodating atmosphere exists now". Another stated: "I have learned to be more mindful of the impact of what we say to colleagues and students. Our words can inspire or break spirits and threaten the success of students and schools".

Social Media Posts and Lives

There was a deliberate focus on health and well-being for educators via Facebook and YouTube. There were lives including a session delivered by a yoga expert, entitled "Stress relief techniques for Teachers." There were also blog posts such as: "Don't neglect SEL during Covid-19". Middle leaders expressed their appreciation of the sessions and commented that they would implement the stress relief techniques within their classrooms. Feedback from the middle leaders from a survey, indicated that the health and well-being sessions encouraged them to consider not only their well-being but other stakeholders also. One post stated: "I was calmer and more positive when engaging with students".

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Towards a Model of Professional Learning for Crisis Management for Middle Leaders

The authors offered an approach to professional learning, which for the future they recommend should be used to leverage collective and individual middle leadership capacity to manage crises in education. The authors go further to propose a model, which they submit can be used not just for crisis management, but also outside of crisis. The feedback on the impact of the approach in building middle leaders' capacity to do the necessary crisis management during the COVID-19 Pandemic, verifies the value and utility of the approach, not singularly because it is working in the current crisis which education and educators face, but because it bodes well for use in the future as it is aligned with the emerging trends in the field of education. These trends include a continued prominence of the use of technology in education, whether as integration or for delivery of instruction. Middle leaders have been an underrepresented group in school leadership literature, without many targeted strategies for building their capacity and even acknowledging their importance as bridging the gap between the articulation of a school's vision, and its implementation. The COVID-19 Pandemic exposed this gap and attempts such as the one discussed in this chapter have sought to fill this gap. The authors also recommend that specific professional learning be a continuing practice and offer the model proposed below as an approach to do it.

A Multi-Tiered Professional Learning Approach to Build Middle Leaders' Capacities to Lead

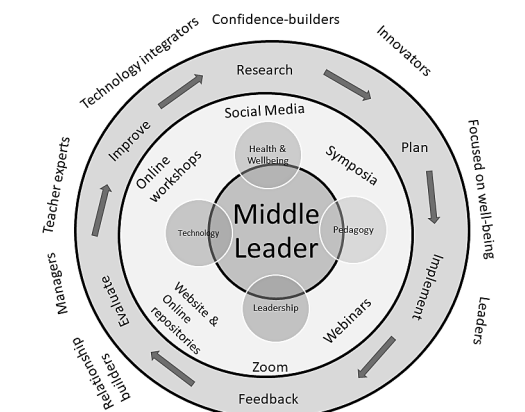
The model as indicated in figure 2 begins with the focus on the educator and their needs, based on feedback and observations. Considerations are then given to which multi-tiered modalities and tools should be used to reach the middle leader. In this context, the modalities needed to be completely online due to the nature of the pandemic. Nevertheless, there is the option to do blended modalities as circumstances permit. Still, the authors recommend using the online modalities since they allow for a broader reach of participants and thus better facilitates capacity building through collaboration, sharing, differentiation, innovation and professional learning communities.

The model as indicated in figure 2 begins with the focus on the middle leaders and their needs, based on direct conversations, feedback and observations. Professional learning should always put the learner and his/her needs at the centre. As such, the innermost circle in the model focuses on the middle leader, which is also indicative of a bottom-up rather than top-down approach. The four circles that are on each point of this circle represent the key areas of learning to position the middle leader to manage educational crises.

The second circle is where the professional learning facilitators will determine the most appropriate modalities to deliver the professional learning session. These would be aligned to the identified needs of the middle leaders. This can include face-to-face, blended learning, online or a hybrid solution, depending on the middle leaders' access to technology, and proximity to physical locations. The main idea is to maintain flexibility and accessibility. Still, the authors recommend using the online modalities because they allow for a broader reach of participants and therefore better facilitates capacity building through collaboration, sharing, differentiation, innovation and professional learning communities.

The third circle highlights the iterative process to operationalise the professional learning. It involves planning, research, implementation, feedback, evaluation and improvement. During the planning stage, consideration is given to the content, format and modalities which will best suit the needs of the middle leaders and allow for practical and immediate application within their contexts. The professional learning is implemented using selected modalities and then middle leaders share feedback via surveys, posts, blogs and conversations. Analytics from social media and the websites also provide information based on comments and shares which they receive. The feedback is used to reconfigure as required, any aspects of the professional learning going forward to ensure that there are positive impacts on the middle leaders. The cycle then begins again.

Figure 2. Professional learning approach for building middle leadership capacity



The outer layer of the model shows some of the possible outcomes of professional learning. These of course can change depending on the goals of the professional learning exercise.

The success of professional learning is seen when middle leaders indicate growth in the four areas: leadership, pedagogy, well-being and technology. This growth is not for the middle leader alone but also for the institution they belong to.

CONCLUSION

The chapter sought to outline an innovative professional learning approach to build leadership capacity for crisis management. It also sought to provide evidence of the impact of the approach in building middle leaders' capacity to manage the crisis that was caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic when it disrupted schooling in 2020. Further, the chapter ended by proposing a model for building middle leadership capacity, individually and collectively.

Overall, the feedback from middle leaders indicates that as a result of their involvement in the professional learning approach, that they have improved and within their learning environments collective leadership capacity has grown through the sharing, collaboration and discussions that the professional learning approach facilitates. Participants were also able to transfer their learning from the professional learning space into their practice spaces in real time.

Finally, the multi-tiered professional learning approach also provides the option of a flexible, needs-based, personalised approach to professional learning and facilitates the necessary collegial dialogue for sustainable improvement. In particular, via the social media tier of the design, middle leaders could ask questions, post comments and receive feedback from multiple colleagues worldwide. Collaboration between local and international teachers enabled a regional/international professional learning community to be successfully established.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Crisis Management: The course of action taken by a school when an emergency occurs which threatens to disrupt the institution's goal with the intent of implementing an effective response.

Leading From the Middle: Refers to persons who are in the mid-leadership roles at different tiers of the education system such as at the district or Ministry level and how they take control of the leadership from the middle by working cohesively with the top-tier leadership and lower-tier colleagues to accomplish a goal.

Middle Leadership: Refers to educators who have a formal leadership role such as responsibility for a department or team of colleagues, while they simultaneously teach at the institution.

Modality: The way in which the professional learning is delivered such as face-to-face, online, blended or hybrid.

Multi-Tier: A deliberate holistic layered system designed for middle leaders to access high-quality professional learning.

Multimodal: Having or using several methods or ways to deliver professional learning.

Professional Learning: An interactive on-going cycle which is customised to suit the educators' needs with the intent of improving teaching and learning outcomes.

APPENDIX: LINKS TO ONLINE PLATFORMS

Caribbean Visionary Educators:

- Website: <https://cariveducators.com/>
- Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/CaribbeanVisionaryEducators>
- YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJJ8gm84KpDeCx5rckN36A>

21st Century Educators:

- Website: <https://21stcenturyeducators.net/>
- Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/21stcenturyeduc>
- YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/c/21stCenturyEducatorsLtd>

Chapter 11

Holistic Professional Learning in Times of Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Educators' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated the critical necessity for responsiveness to their professional learning beyond academics. This qualitative study explores the perceptions and experiences of different subgroups of educators (teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators) with respect to their professional learning opportunities during this time. The participants completed an anonymous electronic survey that collected information through both closed- and open-ended questions to provide space for educators to share their voice regarding professional learning practices. Accessibility, relevance, consistency, and choice are the main factors that educators reported would make professional learning meaningful and effective; this was more evident than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authentic examination of feedback, consistency of ongoing support and training, and implementation of initiatives with fidelity are critical to educator engagement and growth through professional learning.

INTRODUCTION

This study explored the variety of platforms through which educators are now seeking professional learning opportunities and how those affect their feelings of efficacy and well-being in the classroom. This research also informs how school districts may adjust their protocol for professional learning opportunities to better engage their educators.

The objectives of this chapter included (a) exploring the shifts in professional learning that PreK-12 educators experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and the mid-COVID era, (b) understanding the

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perspectives that educators have of in-district support systems for professional learning, and (c) determining the types of professional learning that educators report as appropriate during these times of crisis. According to Gotian (2021), “COVID-19 put an acute and unexpected halt to professional meetings, but the need for professional development and growth has never been greater” (para.1). While professional learning at this time was still necessary for educators, it is clear that the focus and facilitation of this learning had changed immediately upon the pivot to online and blended learning in March 2020 (Zimmer & Matthews, 2022; Lockee, 2020).

It must be noted that many teachers, coaches, and administrators required support for academic and technological instruction as they shifted to different modalities of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockee (2020) argued that the sudden pivot to OBL (online and blended learning) for educators resulted in a shift in which even veteran educators were working on the novice level in this new framework. This presented a need for support to help educators navigate through uncertainties of their abilities to meet the diverse needs of their students virtually or through a hybrid model. In a survey commissioned by D2L in 2021, it was reported that “94% of US K-12 educators agree that ongoing professional learning is important to a teacher’s effectiveness” and 91% indicated that this professional learning must be targeted to teachers’ specific needs (Kyukendall, 2022). The researchers maintain that when this professional learning is targeted, intentional, and includes follow-up sessions, it builds the educators’ confidence in teaching the content through different modalities and will positively influence other factors affecting teacher efficacy.

The roles of instructional coaches, team leaders, and middle executives, as well as higher-level administration, were examined as they affect the perception of efficacy among classroom teachers. This study explored the role of educators and professional learning providers in respect to what benefits the teachers and their students. We also explored the various types of facilitations they provide for teachers and students. For example, we identify who provides professional learning opportunities and what they include. Additionally, we explored how their roles have changed as their schools have changed during the pandemic. Furthermore, we inquire about the perspectives teachers have of the support that they receive from people who fill these roles. We explored how the increased use of technology offered learning opportunities that otherwise may not have been available to educators. We also acknowledged the impacts and challenges of these positions. These areas of research, exploration, and reflection guided this analysis of the data collected.

The objectives of this chapter included (a) exploring the shifts in professional learning that PreK-12 educators experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and the mid-COVID era, (b) understanding the perspectives that educators have of in-district support systems for professional learning, and (c) determining the types of professional learning that educators report as appropriate during these times of crisis.

BACKGROUND

We define professional learning as a variety of ways that educators access knowledge and experiences that further their understanding of pedagogy, their understanding of their students’ learning needs, and themselves as educators and professionals. Sometimes this happens within school districts (referred to as “professional development”) and other times educators participate in these experiences outside of their schools or cohorts. According to Zimmer & Matthews (2022), “PD [professional development], in any form, is a pragmatic endeavor aimed at enhancing teachers’ education and practice” (p.5). Borko

asserted that professional development is essential to changing classroom practice and therefore improving schools and boosting students' learning (2004, as cited in Postholm, 2018). A community of learning must be evident in the space. Sanfellipo (2022) notes, "If the only people in the space who are learning are under eighteen, then we are doing it wrong" (p. 7). Prior to the pandemic, these experiences were provided in-person throughout the school year during team meetings, staff meetings, and school or district Institute Days when students were not in attendance. Typically, a facilitator (either from within the district or an external facilitator) would arrive on site and speak to and lead teams in workshops throughout the course of the school year. However, during the COVID-19 era, the researchers maintain that educators in different roles experienced a shift in their professional learning experiences, and within these experiences they had different expectations and engaged in varied formats.

According to Toppel, Huynh, and Salva (2021), the pandemic required educators to collaborate with other educators and leaders in their field in order to best serve their students and families in these times of crises. They argued that professional learning must be individualized, interpretive, and interactive. It is imperative that educators feel empowered in their practices, and the very act of professional learning shouldn't feel as though it is "one more thing" on an already full plate. Educators and leaders must become more innovative in their understanding of the scope and range of professional learning outside of workshops alone. This study explored the variety of platforms through which educators are now seeking professional learning opportunities and how those affect their feelings of efficacy and well-being in the classroom. This research also informs how school districts may adjust their protocol for professional learning opportunities to better engage their educators.

"Adult learning also requires that we acknowledge teachers as the heart of decision-making around change—a key principle in understanding, engaging, and developing ownership in adult learning" (Knowles, et al., 2005, as cited by Postholm, 2018). As Czyz (2021) asserted in *The Four O'Clock Faculty: A Rogue Guide to Revolutionizing Professional Development*, professional learning should be meaningful. It is imperative that when districts plan for professional learning experiences, educators understand the relevancy of these experiences to their work, which will help avoid feelings of disconnectivity and educator disengagement. However, when examining opportunities for professional learning for educators, there are sometimes conflicting agendas to consider (Beni, 2021). School districts are given directives from the state that specify requirements (time, hours, topics) that educators must meet in terms of professional development. However, doing this removes the choice and relevancy for many educators. The disparity between state or national requirements and what educators truly feel are valuable and relevant professional learning opportunities is often the cause of the disconnect and lack of engagement in these sessions. It is evident that educators want to be active and engaged while they are participating in professional learning and the purpose and benefit of these activities must be clear to them.

Gibboney (2020) shared that quality—and interesting—professional learning could benefit the overall culture and climate of a school. In *The Tiebreaker: A Scouting Report on Building a Culture of Gamification in Professional Learning*, she discussed how important it is to incorporate elements of fun into professional learning experiences so that educators could feel more joy during their workday. With this being said, Beni (2021) contested that "teachers sometimes also expected a more direct approach to the facilitation" of professional learning as well as a structured environment (p. 283). Educators are very mindful of when they feel that their time is not valued, and this is especially true during professional development. Simmie (2021) also asserted that effective professional learning for educators should balance these types of measurable results after trainings and the "need to include spaces for the beautiful risk of teacher learning and development" (p.13). The term "beautiful risk" is powerful and refers to the

vulnerability that some teachers may feel as they admit their students would benefit if they were learning new and different things. Working to improve one's craft is effective only in a place where one is honest about one's strengths and weaknesses.

Professional learning experiences must create change in a system. Aguilar (2022) states that "professional development is defined by its impact." The professional learning experience must transform the practices of participants to truly have purpose. For this reason, the level of intentionality is critical across every point in the development of the professional learning experience (including the purpose, design, activities, and evaluation).

Time must be devoted to develop, nurture, and sustain a feeling of collective teacher efficacy. Bandura (1977, as cited by Orange, 2018) defined efficacy as "one's perceived ability to perform in a certain situation or activity." Additionally, Orange (2018) cited Barnes (2000) when describing the concept of teacher efficacy: "One's belief in being able to influence their environment is strongly connected to one's belief in their ability to bring about change" (p.12). If educators in a school demonstrate feelings of high efficacy, they believe that they can make a positive difference or change in the lives of the students they serve. However, if members of a school community demonstrate low feelings of efficacy, educators may believe that despite their best efforts, they likely won't have an influence on students they serve. "By strengthening collective teacher efficacy, teachers will develop the resolve to persist against challenges and realize increased student results" (Donohoo, 2020, p. 34). Beni (2021) also discussed perceptions that affect educators' feelings of adequacy in terms of sharing their expertise with their colleagues and those implications of self-identity within educators who are empowered into this role. According to Bowman et al. (2020), educators' values and beliefs must be considered for professional development initiatives to be successful. Educators in all positions must feel confident, invested, supported, and be given the opportunity to share their expertise.

Couros and Novak (2019) described three types of learning that are crucial for educators: "learning *about* our students, learning *for* our students, and learning *from* our students." They added, "If you want to be a master educator, you need to be a master learner" (p.81). Educators cannot simply skip to the "teaching" skills without first trying to do the "learning" skills for ourselves. Embracing the mindset that one is always a learner is crucial as effective educators learn in all aspects of their work daily.

As the culture for lifelong learning is established, it is important that educators are more innovative in their approaches to professional learning. Educator, principal, and author Michael Earnshaw shared plans for professional learning for his staff: "As principals, our staff meetings are our classrooms; it is our time to engage, inspire, and motivate our staff. It is a time to get our staff collaborating and problem-solving to bring the best, life-changing education to our students. That will not happen by them listening to me drone on through a PowerPoint" (2021, p. 50). The involvement of middle executives in facilitating professional learning with their colleagues is an effective way to engage educators in learning from professionals who are knowledgeable of the unique needs of their school. When administrators acknowledge the talents and expertise of their staff, they empower leaders among their staff and increase buy-in within these professional learning opportunities.

Educators have taken a more analytical look at how they have historically categorized professionals into their work expectations based on job titles (Corbett, 2020). Every educator, leader, administrator, and coach—truly, every role in the school system—has unique experiences and areas of expertise that could benefit the system. When educators are able to empower all members of the system, it helps to build a more positive culture and climate for everyone, but it also helps to grow better educators: "Set aside time at teacher, team, and department meetings to discuss organic leadership opportunities, evolving

from the daily work they do with students and colleagues” (Robb & Robb, 2019, p 51). Postholm (2018) agreed and stated, “Research shows that teachers can be development leaders in their own schools” (p.3). When everyone feels empowered to share their skills and talents, professional learning is maximized and powerful. Sweeney (2022) added that “including a variety of voices in this conversation helps us avoid delegating professional learning to the coach, a move that doesn’t acknowledge the voices, ideas, or strengths of the teachers in the school” (p. 13).

Furlong (2022) asserted that working together to learn about the experiences of diverse students and their families will create more stakeholders in all students’ success. Professional learning experiences that focus on cultural competency support these efforts. Snyder & Staehr Fenner (2021) define cultural competency as “the ability to successfully and effectively interact with individuals from cultures other than your own in cross-cultural situations” (p. 38). Schools that devote time to building up these efforts in their schools help to create more inclusive learning environments for students but also professional learning experiences of the educators who serve them.

The more time spent in collaborative professional learning experiences, the more it unifies and strengthens a school staff as a community of learners. “Typically, there are only a handful of EL [English language] specialists in each school building. It is so easy for us to feel like an island (Spina, 2021, p. 219).” It’s important that we acknowledge the feeling of isolation that many educators are feeling, as this can and does impact the overall culture and climate of a school. Sweeney (2011) affirmed that “we often focus on creating systems and structures, overlook the underlying culture, and are then surprised when things fall apart” (2011, p. 43). It is essential that districts are proactive instead of reactive when facilitating the feelings of professional belonging among educators.

The role of middle executives and administrators in the effectiveness of professional development cannot be underestimated. “The importance of building trust and establishing productive learning environments (communities) seems to be a premise for teachers’ professional development in school” (Postholm, 2018, p.17). Takahashi and McDougal (2016, as cited by Hauge, 2019) asserted that when middle executives and administration express their own enthusiasm for professional growth and learning, this communicates positively to their colleagues and teachers and builds relationships of trust. King argued that it is important that districts provide time and opportunity for professional development for teachers, but if there is not a “culture for learning” where teachers can collaborate in a “trusted atmosphere,” the development will not be effective (2016, as cited by Postholm, 2018, p.17). Hallam, et al. (2015, as cited by Hauge, 2019) maintained that trust among teachers in PLCs [Professional Learning Communities] or collaborative groups is critical for “strong supportive resources” and “reflective dialogues” that support professional growth (p.7). It is through these middle executives that these collaborative communities through learning are effective.

Educators must have that sense of trust extended beyond the professional learning experience as they seek to implement changes in their instructional practice. Hammond (2015) shares that “our teacher support and evaluation processes have to create allowances for innovation and not penalize teachers for those brief periods of chaos that come with innovation” (p. 153).

As the literature shows, educator efficacy could be improved through professional learning if the culture is supportive and positive. Educators must be empowered to make change, acknowledged for their expertise, and supported in their needs through professional learning and connections among colleagues. The educators who participated in this study reflected upon their experiences over the past two years with respect to professional learning practices in their districts and outside their school communities.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Prior to the pandemic, professional learning experiences were provided to educators that focused on pedagogy, instructional strategies, and other topics that were based on in-person instruction. Many educators had little to no experience in OBL (online and blended learning) prior to the closing of schools and classrooms (Zimmer & Matthews, 2022; Bowman et al, 2020). Lockee maintained that changes in professional learning facilitation had to be instantaneous (2020). Instantaneous changes are often difficult to implement well, even without consideration of the availability of resources and support (Carpenter, et al., 2022). Still, the need for support for educators to make these necessary shifts in mindset and for varying pathways in which educators themselves participated in professional learning also became apparent (Cleary, et al., 2022; Beni, 2021;). While these changes were taking place, the researchers feel that it is crucial to understand the experiences and perspectives of educators during this time.

The researchers propose that there are different challenges and gaps regarding content of professional learning that are now critical for educators in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Academic/pedagogical/technological development for teaching diverse populations are critical to empower teachers with strategies and knowledge that will allow them to meet the needs of all their students, but often educators' perceived challenges and needs for specific support make growth in this area difficult (Cleary, et al., 2022; Camacho, et al., 2018).
- Learning opportunities about the cultures, languages, religions, and other ways that their communities are diverse are essential for educators, yet many do not feel prepared to adequately meet the needs of students with cultures or languages other than their own (Romijn, et al., 2021; Spina, 2021; Simmie, 2021; Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021). Understanding the cultural assets and lives of their students and their families is integral to developing pedagogy to mindfully meet their needs.
- Trauma-informed support protocol for students and teachers has not historically been leveraged to create safe spaces in which learning will be accessible. There is a lack of standardization of content for professional development for educators in this area, nor is there specific protocol for how it is delivered (Wells et al., 2022; McIntyre et al., 2019; Gotian, 2021). Following the COVID-19 crisis, there is a crucial need for trauma-informed pedagogy, both for students and educators; the effects of this pandemic will not end as the health crisis subsides.
- The lack of SEMH (Social Emotional Mental Health) support for teachers themselves has increased teacher burnout as they do not have the support necessary to meet their students' needs (Camacho et al., 2018). Acknowledging that all stakeholders have needs outside the academics of the classroom and designing plans to authentically and consistently support them will change the culture to one that builds up students and teachers from the inside out. Students and teachers will be treated as more than just a number (or a test score) and as whole human beings with different challenges.

With respect to these different challenges, the participants in this research study reflected upon their own beliefs and experiences with professional learning since March 2020.

METHODOLOGY

How Was the Data Collected?

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the professional learning experiences of three separate groups of educators during the COVID-19 pandemic era: teachers, coaches/lead teachers, and administrators. Participants were provided with surveys via Google Forms that addressed these categories of professional learning, and their reflections and experiences were recorded. Some of the data in the Google Forms were collected in the form of dichotomous questions (yes/no) and Likert-scale surveys with optional space for participants to elaborate on their answers. Other questions were voluntary open-ended questions in which participants shared their own experiences and specific perspectives. Rodman (2019) connected the importance of providing educators a place to share their voices and experiences regarding professional learning as a crucial way to improve the opportunities provided to them. This type of rich data through the recollections of the participants gives the reader a more complete picture of the perspectives of the participants. According to Cardullo, et al. (2021), providing teachers with a space to express their “unbiased views” in their own words is critical to understanding the full picture of their experiences (p.32).

Participants were advised to consider their professional learning experiences over the past two years to coincide with the COVID-19 pandemic with respect to training provided for them by their district and opportunities that they pursued on their own. The roles of middle executives in the professional learning of teachers were examined, as well as their own professional learning during this time. Participants were also given space to share their perspectives on what types of professional learning opportunities would be beneficial for themselves and their students.

The main questions that guided our research were presented to all three subgroups of educators.

- What are the perceptions of the professional learning opportunities that the participants have had since March 2020 and how are they different from what they have experienced before?
- What is the role of feedback in effective professional learning?
- How do the participants view the roles of teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches with respect to providing professional learning?
- What are challenges associated with professional learning?
- What are areas of professional learning that are specific to the participants’ needs as an educator, and do they have access to topics/training like this?
- What are the necessary requirements of professional learning that would make it more effective from the perspective of the participants?

Who Were the Participants?

Participants were recruited through social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook) with a digital flyer and QR code. Their participation in all parts of the survey was voluntary and anonymous. While the invitation to participate was designed to include a large variety of participants and data from everyone who participated was included in the analysis, the researchers acknowledge that the selection of the participants was influenced by their respective social media “reach” within the three platforms.

The 57 participants in this study were from thirteen states of the United States and two participants from countries outside the United States. The length of service in education ranged from first-year educators to those with thirty years of experience. Of the educators who participated in the voluntary surveys, 62% indicated they work in a suburban district, 35% in an urban district, and 2% in a rural district. When asked if their district received Title I [additional United States federal funding for students from low-income families] or Title III [additional United States federal funding for English learners] funding, 72% said yes, 18% said no, and 10% reported that they did not know. All educators in this study indicated that they worked in education in both in-person sessions and the virtual instruction [synchronous or asynchronous] model at the time of their completion of this survey.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

After the data had been collected, the researchers spent time individually and collaboratively reviewing the information. Time was spent both individually and collaboratively organizing the data by role of participants, teaching experience of participants, experiences of participants, and reflections of participants. The researchers also spent time collaboratively discussing the experiences and reflections and worked those, along with professional resources, into major findings and implications.

FINDINGS

The main goal of this research was to find out how educators and administrators experienced professional learning in their schools and districts during the COVID-19 pandemic as they shifted to remote/hybrid instruction. Our major findings included reports on the types of professional learning in which participants engaged during this time, challenges the participants associated with professional learning opportunities, and the perceptions of these educators of the professional learning they have received. Below, we organize these findings into the following themes that emerged from the data collected from the participants and relate back to the questions that guided this research.

- What are participants' perceptions of professional learning experiences?
- How do participants view the roles of all educators in professional learning?
- What are some challenges concerning professional learning?
- What is the role of feedback in ensuring that professional learning is effective?

What Are Participants' Perceptions of Professional Learning Experiences?

Data from the surveys from the three subgroups of educators indicated that every participant experienced some type of professional learning during this time. Many reported that they participated in in-district opportunities, while others sought learning outside their district. Much of the participation with outside sources was reported to be voluntary or to fulfill a specific need or support that was identified to fill a "gap" in their knowledge base. The data also included descriptions of participants' perceptions of their experiences with professional learning inside their district and from other sources.

Participants reported that their in-district professional learning is provided in different ways. There may be outside consultants who are considered experts in their field who either come in person to their district for a presentation or engage with the educators via Zoom or another form of a virtual connection. Other times, educators reported that they are learning within their PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) or at faculty meetings through interactions with colleagues. Book clubs among colleagues was listed as a way educators indicated that they participate in professional learning practices. Job-embedded professional learning via an instructional coach was also a large piece of reported professional learning experiences. Finally, professional learning had also included educators watching modules to satisfy requirements for certifications or state mandates.

Professional Learning Associated With Virtual Instruction

The vast majority of educators across the three categories (79%) indicated that they received professional development on technology, virtual instruction, and assessment within the first several weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ninety percent of instructional coaches reported providing much of this training within their districts for the teachers whom they support. This type of professional learning was provided through district PLCs, after-school staff meetings, small-group trainings, instructional videos, and virtual meetings within the districts. The findings revealed that while much of this training was done when schools first switched to an all-virtual model of instruction and many educators needed to know how to communicate with their students and provide instruction virtually, there was an on-going need for continued support as educators' and students' needs evolved. One teacher participant indicated, "a teacher on our team met with us for both group virtual sessions and individually to help us navigate these new programs" while on virtual instruction. She continued to include that "she was very helpful because she knew our curriculum, students and us as teachers." Similarly, another participant reported that his district technology coach "supported the teachers over the entire time that we were teaching virtually" and this was "important for many teachers who had a difficult time with this transition."

As educators' technology skills improved, this type of professional learning shifted from the basic "emergency" knowledge that educators needed to more nuanced ways to engage their students from a distance or within a hybrid/concurrent format of instruction. An instructional coach stated that "the ways that our tech staff adjusted our support as we continued on virtual instruction helped us improve our teaching beyond the basics." The educators gained more confidence in using different types of technology, and professional learning changed from survival knowledge to providing more flexibility and choice to allow the educators to meet the needs of their individual classes. One administrator reported that she learned so much in terms of technology during this time that her "practice will be forever changed."

Other participants felt that they were not supported adequately as they navigated virtual instruction. "Our admin did not understand well the ways we can engage our students virtually, so they basically told us to figure it out for ourselves—yet was quick to state that we weren't doing a good job." Another teacher agreed and noted, "the teachers who were already using these platforms before the pandemic were in a much better situation than those of us who had to learn it just to stay afloat." Other participants suggested that the lack of time for preparation prevented them from taking advantage of additional support that may have been available to them.

Along with professional learning that was specific to technology, several participants reported that they found it challenging to provide consistent and equitable access to the curriculum to their students. One teacher participant, a science teacher, shared that she had no idea of how to engage her students

virtually in activities that normally would be completed together in class. “Our instructional coach was still finding her way as well and did not have any concrete suggestions for me. I eventually spent much of my own time and found ways to do it myself.” A participant who serves as a content-area supervisor recalled that her teachers “stressed very much that they are concerned they are not finishing their units or teaching as much content as other years” because of the lapse in time while teachers and students were learning the platforms and resources available to them.

Professional Learning With Attention to SEMH

From educators that participated in this study, it was noted that more educators received training on mitigating “learning loss” (close to 50% of educators in all three surveys) than on their own mental health (37%). Also important to note was that very few educators (21%) reported having professional learning related to setting personal and professional boundaries to nurture their own SEMH (Social Emotional Mental Health) needs. When asked if educators are given professional learning in their districts to support their own SEMH and that of their colleagues, 27% of teachers and instructional coaches and 50% of administrators reported that they had this training. Teachers were much less likely (23%) to have opportunities to guide them in supporting their colleagues’ SEMH (and receiving that same support), while 40% of instructional coaches and 60% of administrators disclosed having those opportunities. One instructional coach described that the teachers she serviced were experiencing “burnout and had little support in the district to help them stay afloat.” While this may come as no surprise to those who are currently serving in education, it is of great importance to acknowledge where the professional learning focus is.

Across all three subgroups of educators who participated in this study (teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators), more educators communicated that they received professional learning around serving the SEMH needs of students rather than their own SEMH needs. Sixty-five percent of teachers, 30% of instructional coaches, and 100% of administrators shared that they learned actionable steps to support the SEMH of the students in their districts. However, many teachers and instructional coaches indicated that they saw little follow-through with these SEL (Social Emotional Learning) initiatives, or they found that the steps were not applicable to their grade level or student population. A participant who identifies as a teacher explains: “My district hired outside experts to present to us about SEL for our students via a Zoom call. They did not have knowledge about our district and it was not personal or specific to our students.” It is not just teachers who have had this experience. An instructional coach recalled similar experiences, saying that her district had paid outside speakers (“edu-celebrities”) to provide professional development, but they “missed the mark because they don’t know our district and its diversity.”

Other than SEL activities, participants documented little professional learning regarding trauma-informed teaching, although three teachers contended that it would have been beneficial for them to understand their students’ needs more fully. One instructional coach added that they were welcoming many newcomers into their districts from other countries, while the teachers, counselors, and administrators were ill-equipped to understand the experiences that these students had endured or how to best support them.

Participants noted in cases like this an overall lack of alignment between professional learning opportunities offered by the district and current policies and practices. One participant recalled that immediately following many hours of professional development on restorative practices, school administrators were in the hallways “doing hallway sweeps with a zero-tolerance policy for hats, hoods, earbuds, cell phones,

and being late to class.” Educators in the study also shared that the decision-makers of their professional learning (who decided topics, content, timelines, etc.) rarely understood the full implementation of the learning experiences that they were providing. Many educators from all three surveys indicated that the implementation of these initiatives must be understood and consistent across the board.

Providing Access to All Learners

Another professional learning topic upon which educators reflected that they categorized as “very important” is how they can best meet the needs of diverse learners. These learners included English learners, learners with eligibility for special education services, and learners who are classified as gifted. However, many teachers identified this as an area in which their in-district professional learning is not provided. General education teachers expressed frustration that they did not know how to provide true inclusive practices for diverse students. One participant stated, “There should be guidance on how to service both gifted learners and learners who are extremely struggling. Teachers are often faced with these challenges and often they don’t have assistance.” English language teachers explained that their needs were rarely met during district professional development sessions and one teacher indicated that “professional development about teaching English learners had not been provided in her district since 2013.” One instructional coach identified herself as an EL coach, yet her teaching responsibilities allowed for little time to actually support her colleagues; she claimed “my coach title was in name only to satisfy a requirement.”

Only 30% of all educators received training in their districts that has empowered them to view their diverse students from an asset-based perspective. Two participants reported that they felt that the most critical resource they needed to be effective educators was anti-racist training and materials. Additionally, when asked if they had been trained in their districts about culturally responsive ways to make connections with their students’ families, 25% of teachers, 40% of instructional coaches, and 75% of administrators indicated that they had. Two teachers responded that the educators in their school have much difficulty when attempting to connect with students’ families, citing language differences and a lack of resources as being obstacles.

Beyond the Basics

When asked about what makes great professional learning that benefits them as “whole educators,” there were clear themes across answers from all participants: Choice, time, and relevance to current assignment were indicated to be very important to all educators. Several participants argued that professional development in their districts was treated more as a way to meet a requirement for hours than an authentic way to improve practice and school community. These required professional development sessions did not provide choice for educators, nor did they acknowledge the varied needs of educators serving in different positions. According to one participant, “to develop as a professional, one must have the drive and witness the reward.”

When considering their needs as “whole educators,” the responses across all groups indicated that educators would benefit by learning how to more effectively address the needs of their students as “whole” people, rather than SEMH support for themselves. Several mentioned learning opportunities to meet the needs of English learners or students with disabilities, while others discussed learning more about the SEL initiatives for their classes. Even though they were reflecting on how to benefit themselves as

“whole educators,” the participants immediately related this to how they would feel if they were better equipped to support their students.

Educators from all three subgroups detailed ways that they engaged in in-district professional learning opportunities. These experiences included working with colleagues in PLCs, after-school sessions, watching modules for compliance purposes, and more informal ways to learn from colleagues. While much of what was considered to be in-district professional learning was mandated or fulfilled requirements, participants reported other ways that they engaged with their colleagues as resources to improve practice or learn more about their communities.

How Do the Participants View the Roles of Teachers, Instructional Coaches, and Administrators With Respect to Professional Learning?

When considering professional learning that occurs in-district, participants reported that there are sometimes opportunities for them to learn from their colleagues or administrators. Many participants shared that they feel this is often more valuable to them, as their colleagues have the ability to make the learning “more personal or specific to our students” than an outside professional development provider can. One participant noted that in-district professional learning “is more likely to have an ongoing component than when they pay someone from the outside to come for one day.” The perceptions of professional learning that is facilitated by different members of the school district were recorded by all participants in this study.

Roles of Instructional Coaches

Sixty percent of teachers who participated in this study reported having an instructional coach or lead teacher in their school or district from whom they receive some type of professional learning guidance. However, teachers had different perspectives of the roles and effectiveness of these instructional coaches within their experiences. One teacher reported that she felt “very positive” about her instructional coach and that they were the “cream of the crop” and that they were also “leaders in the building who noted what types of PD would be helpful in the moment.” Another teacher responded that instructional coaches “have the responsibility of keeping teachers abreast of current trends and keeping collaborative relationships open and productive,” which can help guide professional learning goals and outcomes. One EL teacher shared that her current instructional coach was the best one she has had in her career, but this coach knew little about educating English learners. “It falls on me to provide [professional development] to the staff. I am never the one who *receives* the PD to advance my own skill set.”

While many participants in this study maintained that they value and respect the instructional coaches who support them, others reported to have a different perspective of the role of these educators. One participant shared that “good coaches are rare... and bad coaches are useless.” One participant argued that instructional coaches may have the role of being supportive of teachers, but these positions “often turn into oppressive places for bullying.” Other participants maintained that coaches often focused on activities that were less important to teacher and student success in their perspective, such as gathering books or sending newsletters. “They have said they would demonstrate various techniques [literacy strategies, math centers, collaborative learning] but never have done it.” Another instructional coach expressed frustration that little to no professional training was offered to the instructional coach specifically on *how to be a coach*. “Often, there is a highly competitive interview and selection process for roles like

these, but once the role is granted to an individual, they are left without proper professional learning experiences related to how to be a strong instructional coach. Coaches may be thrown into schools with little to no direction or training.” One participant shared that:

Coaches were hired before the school even adopted an understanding of what a coach is or does - there was no established culture of coaching prior to the hiring of our coaches. It didn't set them up for success and it didn't help us understand their role at all.

Instructional coaches also expressed a similar frustration by stating that their administration didn't utilize their roles appropriately. Many times, their responsibilities seemed more administrative or task-centered, such as organizing bus duty schedules or creating state testing schedules, which didn't align with the original intention of their role. There was also a participant who shared that while they constantly monitored the professional needs of the teachers they supported, they were often prescribed by administrators what type of content to deliver during professional development workshops. They had little to no autonomy to be responsive to the needs of the teachers in their school, but rather had to deliver professional learning that aligned with current curricular programs and were “forced to monitor fidelity of the current box program.” Another instructional coach recalled that she often was the first person who was pulled from her duties to cover a teacher or administrator who was out; these experiences gave her a very negative feeling about her effectiveness in her position.

Teachers as Professional Learning Guides

One of the most effective means of professional learning, as contended by all three educational groups in this study, was the notion of leveraging the talents of educators from inside the school district. This could happen in a variety of ways. Instructional coaches reported that they often modeled lessons and supported teachers inside their classrooms, which teachers reported was a very effective way of learning new strategies or ways to engage their students. This may have also included mentors or lead teachers supporting novice teachers as they improved their craft. Teachers and coaches creating presentations for faculty meetings and after-school professional development were also very highly valued, as they clearly understood the unique needs of the students and staff of the district. One participant mentioned providing professional development for her administrators to help them better understand the needs of families in their community: “We are given opportunities to share our expertise [about the community and families of our students] and are encouraged to do so.” These experiences in being acknowledged and valued for one's professional expertise were described as positive by all three groups of educators.

Sixty percent of teachers reported having opportunities to share their expertise with their colleagues in a formal way, while all of instructional coaches considered this a typical part of their job responsibilities. One teacher participant indicated that she used to be able to advocate for her space to share her expertise, but opportunities to share with her colleagues ceased since the beginning of the pandemic. Another teacher recalled that she had opportunities to share her knowledge with colleagues in the past, but “only after convincing the new admin to let it happen.” Although teachers may not all have formal platforms on which to share their expertise, many participants reported sharing techniques, tricks, and insights with their colleagues in the hallways and faculty room. It is through these informal and generous interactions that teachers contended that they maintained connections with and supported one another as they shared their love of their craft.

It is worth noting that while many school districts speak openly about the practice of “passing the mic” to teachers who were doing the work each day, they often did not provide teachers with the opportunity to share their expertise in a formalized way. According to one participant, this practice has a strong effect on the overall impact of the culture and climate of a school. “When our colleagues share information with us, we are engaged, interested, and willing to learn. They know us and they know our district.” If districts typically only give administrators or instructional coaches “the stage” to deliver professional learning, this may make an unintentional statement that teachers do not have the same types of expertise as those in these other positions. This practice is described to be “a source of frustration” for teachers specifically in the areas of job satisfaction, demoralization, disengagement, or lack of educator empowerment. One participant shared an experience in which an instructional coach who didn’t have the teaching background of the topic was presenting a workshop to all staff. The participant reported that she felt:

dismissed, overlooked, and frustrated that I wasn’t even asked to collaborate on this [helping to develop and present] with them. Half of the content wasn’t in alignment with today’s best practices on serving this student group. I would have loved to share my thoughts, ideas, and resources.

In a different district, while encouraging in-district educators to share their various areas of expertise with their colleagues is often viewed as very positive, there were some challenges. One teacher disclosed that she was asked to present at a faculty meeting about a topic in which she did not feel she had expertise, and she was not offered any compensation for this extra work or additional stress this caused her.

More formal time to meet and plan with colleagues was also something that several participants responded was helpful. Some educators, such as EL teachers or related service professionals, may be the only ones in their schools or grades who work with students in their content area, which may create feelings of isolation and a lack of support. Participants indicated that time with their same-content colleagues is beneficial to them and would be a top choice for professional learning. “I learn and gain the most (and my students do, too) when I am able to spend time with my World Language colleagues. We talk about what does and doesn’t work and we share new ideas.” Job-alike professional learning communities are powerful spaces when supported by administration. Participants also expressed frustration about not having time to plan or collaborate, nor to be inside their teammates’ classrooms to see their practice in action. One participant shared:

I always want to see what my colleagues are doing, especially when they’re really excited about their work. However, I don’t have the ability to get in there [in their classrooms] to watch the magic unfold. I wish I could be there as it happens to observe it firsthand. I think it would make a powerful difference for me.

Normalizing the practice of observing colleagues to learn from their best practices is critical for educators to embrace professional learning that is relevant, current, and accessible.

Administrators Facilitating Professional Learning

The administrators in this study reported that they typically provide professional learning opportunities in faculty meetings or district professional development days, but 80% describe this facilitation as finding quality opportunities and providing the space and time for their staff to engage in them. The remaining 20% noted that the professional learning sessions that they provide themselves involved new curriculum

initiatives or assessments that were introduced to staff. One administrator reflected that she would like her admin team to provide “follow-up” training on district initiatives in classrooms, but there is “little time and few resources” for this type of continuation.

Professional learning within districts varies greatly in each setting, but many include a variety of workshops (either in-person or virtual), book studies, observations, instructional coaching support, and job-embedded collaboration time (amongst other formats). The professional learning experience overall (including time, format, implementation, follow up support, and evaluation) also varies from district to district. Stakeholders, including educators, coaches, and administrators, who participated in this study at all levels, felt that this is an area for growth in their organization. Connecting planning and implementation of professional learning opportunities with specific feedback from educators in all subgroups can foster feelings of investment in the initiatives or learning.

What Are the Challenges Associated With Professional Learning?

While all educators who participated in this study stressed the importance of professional learning in their practice, there were many challenges that were shared in regards to both receiving and delivering professional learning experiences. The researchers acknowledge that many participants were very passionate about bringing about change to improve the quality and accessibility of professional learning for all educators. Choice and relevance were topics that surfaced in the responses from educators from all subgroups. One participant called the professional learning in her district “nonsense” and another asserted, “I want to walk away from a PD with information I can use immediately.” Ever-changing district initiatives and compliance with required professional development have left educators feeling disengaged with professional learning. An instructional coach shared that, despite these sessions, “many teachers close their doors and do what they want.” A theme within the answers of many participants included that meaningful and authentic follow-through on the part of all stakeholders is essential. A teacher participant noted that they “have received some PD, but nothing that we were able to bring into our classrooms with true fidelity.” Providing access to different forms of professional learning was also very important to their educators.

As one of the primary concerns for professional learning was determined to be access, educators had very strong opinions on how and when they would have these opportunities. Providing the time for professional learning within the school day has both its benefits and its challenges. From participants who self-identified as coaches and/or leaders and also administrators/coordinators, several common struggles were mentioned, including the substitute teacher shortage, time, and budget. Administrators also shared that honoring and respecting the teachers’ contracts could sometimes pose a challenge in order to not extend learning opportunities outside of contractual hours and obligations. Teachers also maintained that these professional opportunities that removed them from the classroom for the day often caused more disruption than benefit. Some of this disruption comes in the form of teachers worried about lost time with their students, as well as related service teachers being pulled from their assignments to substitute for them. These related service teachers are then also missing time with their students, thus creating a domino-effect of students not receiving services that they were identified and targeted to receive.

Educator burnout also presented a unique level of difficulty to administrators and coaches as they planned for accessible professional learning experiences and opportunities. Many educators indicated that there were in-district professional learning opportunities that were offered outside of their contractual time, but they felt too overwhelmed and exhausted to participate, even if they felt the topic was worth-

while. “The lack of time and the mountain of stress and exhaustion keep anyone from wanting to stay after [school] for optional PD.” Participants also were very reluctant to attend professional development sessions that they felt were a “waste of time.” Another participant asserted that “teachers are stretched too thin these days and many don’t even have the stamina to consider PD.”

Teacher demoralization has also led to many teachers leaving the profession, which exacerbates the ongoing problem of staff shortages. When teachers do not feel valued, respected, or supported in their workplace, it is physically, emotionally, and spiritually draining. Educators and leaders have watched and listened as their neighbors and communities bash them either directly to their face or in online posts or digital community forums. Participants shared that the abusive treatment of educators—both inside their districts and in their communities—can make them feel as though there is no escape. Teacher demoralization impacts educators who remain in the profession as well. Demoralization impacts educator’s ability to mentally attend to professional learning experiences and opportunities.

Budget was described to be a concern that affected professional learning in many different ways. An administrator participant stated:

School budgets are stretched thin already, which is actually creating a need for more PD because teachers are trying to combat the effects of larger class sizes, larger groups with varied skill levels, while trying to deal with emotional issues and learning loss from the pandemic.

Educators need support in dealing with the after-effects of what budget cuts cause. These budget cuts may cause disastrous changes in districts that may include less access to related services, overcrowded classes, fewer opportunities for professional learning, decreases in academic support, or shortages of materials. Several participants expressed similar thoughts that the diverse academic, social, and emotional needs of students have changed with the pandemic, and educators must be provided with opportunities to give them the support they need.

Presentations from experts in the fields of education may bring fresh insight or new information to school districts, but often at a steep price. Attending professional conventions can help energize educators and teach them new strategies, but the costs of admission or travel may not be in the budget. Materials and training for new academic, social, or behavioral initiatives may be crucial for educators to provide the consistent and accurate support for their students, but budgets may preclude the follow-through that is necessary for fidelity in implementation. Even purchasing books for professional book clubs may be an additional cost to the district that may not be approved. Additionally, when outside speakers come in to provide a singular workshop, there is often little to no follow-through at the school building level for continuous, ongoing thought and reflection on the new content, strategies, or ideas shared in the workshop.

One aspect of professional learning within a district that was discussed within this study was accountability, specifically in terms of expectations after receiving a professional learning experience (a workshop, attendance at a conference, etc.). One participant indicated that administrators must hold teachers more accountable for professional learning by following through with these concepts and including them in observations and other means of measurement. She stated that many teachers have a “close-the-door” mentality in which they felt they did not have to change their practice to follow new initiatives. Participants reported a lack of follow-through or similar actions that could help educators reflect on what they learned, how they could apply it in their contexts, and access ongoing support that extends beyond the one-day workshop they’ve received. Similarly, participants expressed that little to no time had been devoted to taking the new learning and using it to analyze current practices in the school

or school system. Some districts required that attendees “turnkey” the knowledge they acquire from these events at future faculty meetings or PLCs, but many did not illustrate that type of follow-through.

One participant in the study expressed a concern about an over-emphasis on “quick-fix strategies” that teachers could implement in their classrooms without truly understanding larger, pedagogical shifts that must occur to ensure lasting change. “When we focus on just strategies alone, we are missing the opportunity to address our biases and shift our mindsets and understandings, especially as we serve students with life experiences and cultures different from our own.” Another educator argued that “everything is late, last minute, poorly timed, poorly implemented, and most of the time, not understood by the people who are in charge of the implementation.”

Another participant argued that the administration must be held accountable for providing professional learning opportunities that are specific, actionable, and meaningful for all educators in the district—including related service professionals and educators who work outside the classroom. Many teachers in particular in this study were frustrated at the lack of professional learning that was applicable to their assignments. Accountability at this level also included ensuring that professional development sessions were scheduled to support each other and all maintained the mission of the school or district in order to avoid an “endless cycle of nonsensical workshops and practices that are unaligned.” Other participants maintained that instructional coaches should have a minimum protocol that they follow to ensure they are doing work beyond emails and newsletters.

Administrators and coaches also expressed the challenge of satisfying diverse needs and professional desires of the staff they serve. Educators who serve in a specialized role (who are many times often the only one or one of a unique few in their schools or districts) also communicated the difficulty in finding professional learning experiences that were specific to their unique roles. “ESOL [English to Speakers of Other Languages] teachers are the bottom of the barrel,” one participant argued, and added that they were never considered when professional development was being planned.

An additional challenge described by all participant groups was a high turnover rate. When new educators or leaders entered the school or school district, it was difficult to “catch them up” on current initiatives and practices while maintaining the original professional development scope and sequence, which was, in some cases, mapped out several years in advance. It is often costly or difficult to arrange repeated professional development sessions for small groups or individuals with an outside source, so the consistency of training is a casualty of high turnover.

Forty-eight percent of teachers reported that they do not feel supported by their administration as more than someone who “fills an empty space” as a teacher. Frustrations with losing prep periods or instructional time with students to fill in as substitutes, lack of SEMH support, increasing responsibilities, and ever-changing initiatives contribute to these feelings of insignificance for teachers. As one participant reflected, “The changing landscape of education is making it very difficult to remain an educator.”

One participant expressed concern about the topic of adult-centered SEMH (Social Emotional Mental Health) workshops and professional learning offerings in their district.

It was as if they were making list after list of everything on our plates and saying that they understood that our lives were hard, but then told us to meditate or suggested that we try yoga. They didn’t make any effort to remove things from our plate. It left a lot of us feeling frustrated. It felt fake and disingenuous.

Another participant recalled a time in which an administrator conducted an after-school faculty meeting the week before standardized testing to facilitate educator social-emotional connections. She argued:

This was absolutely tone deaf; we were all exhausted and stressed and so wanting to get home to our families. Instead, we had to remain after school for almost an hour to do 'get-to-know-you' games with colleagues we've worked with for years.

While educators do want SEMH support from their districts and administrators, they feel it must be genuinely aimed at providing them space to care for themselves and their colleagues.

Challenges associated with professional learning can at times overcome the needs of the educators to improve their practice or increase their knowledge base. Some of these have included budget, time, high turnover rate, substitute teacher shortages, and limitations due to professional contracts. Other challenges included follow-up with implementation, teacher and administrator burnout, feelings of demoralization amongst educators, and overall culture and climate of the school district or organization. These “road-blocks” may create a culture in which professional learning does not foster within educators feelings of efficacy, motivation, and accomplishment.

What Are Areas of Professional Learning That Are Specific to the Participants' Needs as an Educator?

One hundred percent of administrators, 90% of instructional coaches, and 70% of teachers reported actively seeking professional learning opportunities on their own outside of their district. For example, some turned to offerings provided virtually by professional organizations either locally, nationally, or internationally. Teachers who participated in the study shared that even while seeking outside professional learning experiences for themselves, they still have to receive administrator approval for the time and/or funding. One teacher who is serving multilingual learners specifically asserted that she had to “research their own professional learning opportunities, pitch the idea to administrators to approve it, and remain hopeful that there is time and money to support the effort, once approved.”

All groups of educators who participated in this study shared that their usage of social media also served as a conduit to providing resources and ideas for professional learning opportunities. Some participants described their connections on social media as ways they could learn from others within their field when they were the only ones who teach their material in their building or district. Others utilized social media as a means to keep on top of the latest research and practice in education, as well as participated in “chats” in which they learned about other educators’ experiences and perspectives. Virtual book clubs and ways to connect with educational authors were also ways that participants indicated that they leveraged social media.

Educators also conveyed that continued coursework, either for endorsements or certificates, was another satisfying source of professional learning. Self-paced webinars or online collaborations were an overwhelming favorite among all participant groups. The notions of choice in topic and flexibility in time/place were important to their participation in these professional learning opportunities. Two participants revealed that their continuing education at the university level was the best and most empowering professional learning they have experienced.

Conferences or professional conventions were a noted preference of teachers, but they received few mentions by administrators and coaches. Several educators mentioned that they missed in-person conferences in which they could network with other professionals in their field, but others preferred the convenience of conferences that were available virtually. With many conferences and professional organizations switching to virtual offerings, participants expressed appreciation for the added convenience

of not having to budget for travel expenses and time. Several educators also mentioned an overall sense of contentment with having recorded sessions that they could view at their convenience, alleviating them from the worries of finding coverage for their classes or their students missing critical instruction.

Professional book clubs were another popular venue for professional learning for teachers, while several coaches and administrators indicated a preference for book studies. These book clubs sometimes were reported to take place in person during PLCs, while others met on Zoom or through discussions on Google Classroom. Participants reported enjoying the social aspect of reading a book that will enhance their knowledge of teaching or their students' communities and cultures. One participant reflected that she was able to connect with colleagues in her book club in a way that she never had the opportunity before. Another participant enjoyed reading a Young Adult book about an immigrant family with her fellow teachers that she was later able to share with her students, saying that this was a chance for her to share literature that may be "mirrors" to her students' experiences in a more authentic way.

Administrators were the only group who indicated that local networking with colleagues outside of their districts is a major source of their own professional learning. They often have opportunities to meet with administrators from surrounding districts during the work day and use this time to learn from one another. Slightly fewer than half of the administrators in this study reported that they serve on a local leadership council with colleagues from surrounding districts. It is at these meetings that they often network and learn how different districts are meeting the needs of their staff and students.

Service within their field was another way that some of the participants in all three surveys indicated that they learn from their colleagues outside their districts. This may include working with professional organizations associated with their content area (TESOL, ILA), through their local unions or faculty assemblies, and volunteering within their communities. One participant recalled her times volunteering at the local cultural festival in her school's community and shared that she learned much about her students' families and cultures which had a positive impact on her relationships with her students. Another participant shared that she teaches an adult ESL class for the families of the students in her school and has learned much about the community through this service.

Educators from all three subgroups reported actively seeking out professional learning outside of their school district. When sharing their experiences with this trend, participants reported that "choice and flexibility made PD accessible" and that "this allowed me to learn from others in my field." There are a large number of participants who indicated that they have utilized their professional learning networks online to learn of professional learning opportunities and conferences, or they have participated in online book clubs or other collaborative conversations where they are able to share thoughts, ideas, and resources with other educators who share a similar role in their school or district. Participants in small districts in particular valued the opportunity to collaborate with other educators in similar positions. Educators who seek professional learning outside the confines of their districts are able to expand their networks and professional conversations beyond their localities.

How Can Districts Effectively Leverage Feedback of Professional Learning Opportunities to Keep Them Meaningful and Relevant to Educators?

State education agencies often require that professional learning opportunities that are assigning "credits" or "hours" to participants have an evaluation at the end of the professional learning experience. This evaluation usually looks like a survey or questionnaire for participants to indicate their overall satisfaction

with the learning experience. This information is then collected and participants receive their evidence of completion for the experience (a certificate or a state, district, or agency-approved letter indicating the number of credits or hours the participant has earned). Participants are then able to add these into their state agency's educator profile to demonstrate that they are receiving ongoing professional learning. This type of post-professional development feedback is often used as a way to complete requirements for the data collection needed for the agency.

Additionally, there are experiences where the professional development provider seeks out their own data from participants to improve their practice. Schools or districts may also opt to query participants for their own data sets with questions or survey items that are customized to their setting and may be based on their own local professional learning goals.

Data is being collected at most of these professional learning experiences, but what schools or districts do with the information is often inconsistent. Some administrators will collect and compile the overall scores and anecdotal comments provided by the participants and give these to the facilitator who delivered the professional learning experience. The data may also be discussed as administrative teams of leaders who can reflect on if the experience was positive or negative for their staff and can also lead to conversations about the effectiveness of the session compared to its intended outcomes. It is not a common practice for leaders to share out the overall experience data with all participants, but perhaps doing so could provide a greater sense of transparency from administration and leaders who make decisions about professional learning opportunities in their schools or districts. If the feedback at the district level is considered formative in nature, this would be shared with the stakeholders and inform future professional development based on the results.

Instructional coaches asserted that they maintained a consistent level of communications with the teachers whom they serve to determine exactly what type of professional support they need. They used surveys, weekly check-ins, emails, and PLCs to help them determine how teachers' needs have changed or in which direction to shift their supports. Administrators reported utilizing the same ways in which they communicate with teachers about their professional learning needs, but they additionally included more formal interactions such as pre- or post-observation conferences and summative meetings.

One potential solution is to create structures that collect ongoing feedback from educators, coaches, and leaders to what professional learning needs (and interests) are in a school or district, and then share that collective data so that all stakeholders are aware of greater themes, needs, and wants that may arise across their organization. Additionally, establishing more frequent check-in points throughout the school year may be beneficial in monitoring the needs and wants compared to the current professional learning experiences and offerings. A formative outlook on these assessments would empower educators to share their goals and feedback with the knowledge that their voices will impact future learning opportunities. This will allow leaders and administrators the responsiveness to make decisions based on the changing needs of its system.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The educators who participated in this study indicated that from their perspectives there are five key areas of effective professional learning opportunities.

- **Climate and culture:** The feelings of trust, empowerment, and willingness to take risks are essential to providing the environment in which educators “buy in” to new initiatives or learning about providing those same environments for their students.
 - SEMH support and SEL are critical parts of the holistic learning that all educators must embrace—for themselves, their students, and their students’ families. School districts must have proactive programs in place to support SEMH needs for all of these groups.
 - Administrators must provide the space for instructional coaches and teachers to share their expertise in a safe and supportive environment. Acknowledging that talent, knowledge, and experience could be found within the district—in people who know the specific cultures and climate of the schools—is empowering and respectful to the professionals who work there. Administrators must also participate in this type of learning and teaching, as it demonstrates shared values in improving one’s craft, no matter one’s position.
 - Educators, coaches, and administrators should have a platform to share their expertise, if they so desire, with their colleagues. When everyone is treated as the experts they are, it elevates and nurtures a culture of mutual respect. We shouldn’t rely merely on titles alone when designing a professional learning plan.
 - Educators who participate in professional learning about the cultures of the community become more confident in meeting the needs of their students. Providing tours of the community, classes for educators in the languages of the community, authentic experiences experiencing the cultures guided by the students’ families are all ways to engage in the lives of the students in a way that fosters understanding and respect.
 - School administrators and leaders must establish and nurture a culture of professional learning, understanding that there are multiple modalities of how adults prefer to learn. The role of the instructional coach must be utilized with intentionality, and coaches must be supported and nurtured through specific professional learning on the art and science of coaching within their system.
 - Instructional coaches should be treated as the teachers’ teammate, rather than their leader - however, coaches could utilize their position to advocate for the needs of the teachers they serve.
 - If instructional coaches are within a school or district, they must be utilized appropriately so that they could provide ongoing, quality coaching experiences in order to provide meaningful support beyond the training. Administrators must be respectful of the critical need to honor teacher-coach confidentiality. Coaches should never be used to “report back” behaviors of teachers - rather they must be utilized as teammates that they can trust and in whom they can confide.
- **Time:** Time is reported to be an issue in terms of both professional learning and SEMH support in all groups of educators who participated in this study.
 - If administrators are going to use a data collection tool to collect information about professional learning needs, styles, or preferences, then they must be sure that they actually use the data to inform decision making. If schools do not use this information, it is wasteful of teachers’ time and it feels like a hollow attempt to demonstrate that their voices are heard.
 - The conflict of needing time for professional learning during contractual versus time with one’s students is a true obstacle for many educators.

- Districts may incorporate district-wide professional learning days in which students have scheduled time off (half day or full day). This may be done in conjunction with local community organizations who can provide childcare or learning opportunities for the students outside the classroom (sports, crafts, gardening). This will allow students opportunities to make connections with community members and utilize language that is specific to other situations with one another.
- Instructional coaches could embed coaching or professional learning into classrooms during the instructional day. Students could participate in the strategies, witness continual learning/teaching by educators, and create connections with the coaches. These connections with educators beyond their teachers will foster a stronger sense of community and provide more stakeholders in the students' success.
- The use of assemblies or other engaging experiences outside of the classrooms during the school day could free some teachers to meet in small groups while others are monitoring the students.
- Administrators could "tag out" teachers so they could go to other classrooms to observe their colleagues. This will also foster relationships and feelings of connectedness between administrators and students, as well as provide administrators opportunities to keep their skill sets sharp in the classrooms.
- Professional learning that is provided outside of contractual time is often inaccessible to many educators.
 - These could be done during faculty meetings or PLCs during contractual time.
 - These may also be recorded so educators could access them at a time and space that meets their needs. Also, asynchronous opportunities (like book clubs through chats, short videos, or blog posts) could provide flexibility to educators and still allow engagement with colleagues.
 - If professional learning is taking place outside of contractual hours, administrators should consider how to provide compensation to the educators who decide to participate. If professional learning is expected at the school, district, or state level, it is imperative that teachers are compensated so that they are able to afford and make arrangements for considerations such as childcare, etc.
- **Budget:** As with most things in education, professional learning is often limited by budget.
 - Utilize the talent of educators in the district or partner with local universities, agencies, or neighboring districts before hiring outside experts.
 - Arrange a book club and reach out to the author via social media to see if they provide follow-ups or Twitter chats with book clubs. Provide teachers with the physical book, an e-book, or an audiobook based on their preference. Many times, an e-book is cheaper and many educators and leaders prefer to read with a Kindle or similar device.
 - Open the district to student teachers and provide them with space to share what they are learning. Some universities also engage their professors in providing professional learning opportunities at the host districts.
 - Participate in free webinars offered online (or watch the recordings). These could be springboards for discussions in PLCs or for faculty meetings.

- Leverage connections within the community. Local museums or governmental officials may be able to connect with social studies teachers and possibly local environmental agencies may provide learning opportunities for science teachers.
- Ensure that leaders are connected to local nonprofit educational agencies in their area to find out about free or low-cost offerings that are relevant to their goals, their student populations, and their districts' needs. Be sure to peruse offerings provided by state and regional offices of education.
- Encourage educators to look into free or budget-friendly professional learning opportunities that are provided by their local, state, or federal teacher union.
- Partner with neighboring school districts to split the cost of larger, more costly professional learning experiences for staff.
- **Relevance:** Educators do not want to waste time. Professional learning must be targeted to their needs and their students' needs.
 - Autonomy, choice, and voice must be honored for all educators within their professional learning.
 - There must be actionable outcomes and strategies/knowledge they can use immediately. Educators leave these types of professional learning sessions energized and empowered. Many do not want to listen to theory or abstract ideas; they want ways to improve and enhance their instruction.
 - All content-areas educators must have professional learning opportunities that are relevant to their assignments. Related service providers, media specialists, EL teachers, and physical education teachers (among many others!) should have experiences tailored to their needs. Speakers (either from inside or outside of a school or district) should have expertise and credibility while providing professional learning experiences to specialized groups of educators.
 - There must be a feedback system that could serve not only as an initial data collection, but also a source that could drive decision-making on professional learning needs. Post-experience data could help decision-makers understand if they achieved their goals on educator relevance and guide them to making shifts, changes, or adjustments on the next learning experiences. There should be an ongoing goal to constantly improve and enhance professional learning.
 - Outside speakers should be given appropriate information regarding the school or district culture and climate (including educator morale), current initiatives, student population, and other current realities so that they are better able to customize relevant learning experiences to participants.
 - If outside presenters are brought in, book a second, shorter session with them to provide some sort of follow-up experience, like a guided planning session, feedback session, or question & answer session. This allows teachers the time to explore and apply their new learning and then have the chance to follow up, or go deeper with their learning.
 - Professional learning sessions must also be relevant in terms of timing in the school year. Do not require educators to sit in sessions at the end of the school year for initiatives beginning in September.

Holistic Professional Learning in Times of Crisis

- Follow-through is critical to buy-in. One-time seminars or presentations without meaningful support and follow-up training will not create change or improvement. For initiatives to be implemented with fidelity, every educator (including administrators!) must be knowledgeable of all aspects of the initiatives.
- **Innovative opportunities:** The options and formats of professional learning have evolved over the COVID-19 pandemic, making events and workshops accessible like never before.
 - Leverage social media opportunities as professional learning experiences: Twitter chats, book clubs, Instagram Live programs, Facebook groups, connections with educators in the same field. Professional learning around how to do this would be beneficial to the entire school system as a responsive way to support educators and leaders in this effort. If a current “social media ban” exists within a district, it may be worth revising in an effort to be responsive to today’s educators and their unique professional learning needs.
 - Many degree and certification programs are offered in a hybrid format or completely online, making them more accessible to working educators than ever. Contact local universities and community colleges and secure a discounted tuition rate, or see if they would be willing to host class sessions on campus in an effort to be more accessible to teachers.
 - Become a mentor and participate in the learning and progress of mentees. Invest in a high-quality, ongoing mentorship program that provides support to not only the mentee but also the mentor.
 - Webinars, author chats, workshops, summits, and online conferences make professional learning available from one’s own zip code that previously would have required travel. Curate these and update listings often as new offerings and opportunities become available. Share offerings often.
 - Audiobooks are great ways to learn while educators are working out, commuting, or relaxing. Educational podcasts are another great tool that are gaining popularity amongst educators and leaders.
 - Start writing support clubs (alongside your book clubs!). Writing could be helpful to support one’s SEMH and journal writing with support opens up paths for communication and connection. Educators may also choose to participate in a “gratitude journal” collaboratively to focus writing on things that support positive SEMH together.
 - Celebrate innovation in professional learning. Maintain a public space (either a staff newsletter or social media page) where folks could share what exciting things they are trying as a means to enhance their professional skills. This will continue to open up more and more opportunities for innovation - as well as providing praise to those who are being innovative.
 - Coffee and connections: Administrators or instructional coaches may designate a certain morning each week to just be available for questions and support (much like professors have “office hours” for student availability). Even if they feel that they are accessible all the time, having specific times in which teachers know they are open for support may encourage them to engage in conversation. The same can be said about educators being available for families and community members. Creating spaces for educators to be themselves, seek and offer support, and build community is a powerful way to uplift morale.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Additional research may include:

- Following focus groups who could share their own experiences and suggestions for how to provide timely, relevant, and individual professional learning within districts
- Beginning this type of reflection with pre-service teachers in university programs and determining their interests and biggest concerns
- Professional learning perspectives and experiences of paraprofessionals and staff
- Effects of community engagement in schools when educators are trained in culturally relevant practices in the cultures of the families of their students

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has highlighted pre-existing inequities in terms of the ways in which we serve students and families. Through analysis of the data collected in this study, the researchers argue that the pandemic has brought to the forefront many historical inequities with the ways in which professional learning opportunities have been provided to educators, coaches, and administrators. While educators collectively have a large amount of content (consultants, professional organizations, professional resources) that is available, many educators, coaches, and administrators have expressed ongoing frustration to their school or district's professional learning experiences.

While the pandemic has brought a challenge to every role within the school system, educators have demonstrated a lot of creativity, flexibility, and responsiveness in many ways. While at times, it can feel insensitive to attempt to find any “silver linings” in crisis situations, educators must acknowledge the fact that they have been able to come together in ways to support one another and make incredible strides in spite of the challenges they faced. Still, educators continuously seek ways to improve and enhance their systems to be supported in the best ways possible. While this field faces many seemingly uphill battles, there are action steps that educators can all utilize to improve their professional learning opportunities and outcomes in educational systems, despite these challenges. It will take reflection, action, and intentionality to do so.

Reflection is a key piece in this work for all stakeholders, including educators, coaches, administrators, and leaders. Intentional time is needed to be spent reflecting on practices that are meeting professional learning needs and responsiveness is crucial. It is imperative that leaders and professional learning facilitators are flexible in making changes and adjustments to original plans based on authentic educator feedback, which could come in various forms such as survey data, anecdotal data, culture and climate checks, among others.

As educators often seek to inspire innovation in the students they serve, they must simultaneously encourage innovative thinking of how they envision, develop, and deliver professional learning. They must also continue to build responsive practices within leadership and recognize that adults have varying preferences for how they grow. Professional learning does not have to resemble what has been offered in the past; it can be individualized, powerful, targeted learning with consistent follow up in a variety of ways.

Within this study, trends were evident across state and country borders regarding educator perspectives on professional learning opportunities during the COVID-19 and mid-COVID eras. The manner

in which districts provided those opportunities shifted, as well as the ways in which educators pursued their own professional learning outside of their schools. While their experiences may be varied, all educators want quality, on-going professional learning opportunities that are accessible and relevant to their current assignment. Even all participants noted that there are some obstacles, they feel the rewards of having access to continual education are worth it.

Providing educators with opportunities to share their voice with regard to their needs, interests, and goals for professional learning is critical to their growth. It is important to note that collecting data from educators is a separate action from using their data to drive decision-making. Demonstrating that districts value their teachers' voices should be evident in professional learning plans. As evidenced in the results of this study, educators at all levels and positions value refining their craft and learning ways to more effectively meet the needs of their learners. It is through these types of mindful professional learning opportunities that educators feel empowered and ready to make a difference.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Efficacy in Teachers: Feelings of empowerment and ability to perform one's job healthfully and effectively that are essential for student success and progress.

ESOL: English to speakers of other languages.

Holistic: This philosophy considers the different facets of professional learning that influence feelings of teacher efficacy and effectiveness.

Innovation in Professional Learning for Teachers: Changes in the way educators improve their craft and meet their evolving needs.

Responsive Professional Learning: Opportunities for teachers to learn on a variety of platforms about ways that they can improve their feelings of efficacy as educators.

SEMH: Social and emotional mental health.

Teacher Empowerment: Feelings that manifest by choice and voice for educators in what they learn and how they learn it and translates into buy-in and feelings of efficacy.

Teacher Voice: Teachers' perspectives, opinions, and experiences are worthwhile and deserve a platform.

Chapter 12

Transforming NGO Leadership in Marginalised Communities for Times of Crisis: Servant Leaders' Approaches in Response to COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide services to a country's most vulnerable populations. In response to the COVID-19, NGOs were tasked to provide service to the over 500,000 marginalized people residing in urban/rural low-socio-economic communities in Jamaica. Recognizing that the pandemic is different from anything most NGOs faced since their establishment, and it was an existential challenge for organizational operations. Leadership emerged as a critical component to the success of NGOs delivering services to the needy. Using qualitative exploratory technique, the study explored NGO nurturing of employees/middle managers and non-positional individuals' entry into leadership during a crisis. The researcher solicited the perspectives of organizations' directors. Findings show that NGOs encountered several challenges which hampered their ability to provide services to marginalized communities. Only some leaders spotted and nurtured employee leadership agency. Recommended guidelines and principles for activating middle executive agency to lead during a crisis are given.

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing global pandemic, SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19), triggered restrictive international measures to contain the spread of the virus. In the country of Jamaica, the first COVID-19 case was recorded in March 2020, after which the government instituted restrictive measures via the Disaster Risk Management Act (DRMA). These measures included school closures, social distancing, stay-at-home orders,

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and closure of the state borders, which impacted the continuation of education and the economic sector—particularly informal workers (Alleyne et al., 2020). Economic inequalities were highlighted by the crisis and this often disproportionately impacted individuals from marginalized backgrounds and communities (Kantamneni, 2020). The pandemic and the associated national restrictions showcased a myriad of inequalities within the labour market, access to work, and education. It also highlighted experiences of vulnerability, increased poverty, and lack of access to basic necessities in many vulnerable communities and populations (World Bank, 2020).

Globally, 3.3 billion of the world's workforce were at risk of losing their livelihoods. Informal workers were even more vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, considering that most lacked social protection and lost access to productive resources (WHO, 2020). In countries in the Caribbean specifically, an unintended consequence of the restrictive measures – especially the closure of business- was the unemployment of millions of workers (Mera, 2020). Notably, the unemployment rate was concentrated among the population of country who transacted in the informal economy (London, 2021). Of significance the pandemic disproportionately impacted the lower socio-economic strata in Jamaica and affected over 150 marginalized communities. As a result, many families lost their income and means to provide during the pandemic. Like the rest of the world, Jamaica and its citizenry continue to experience the debilitating impact of COVID-19.

In its efforts to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the government of Jamaica imposed strict social distancing regulations and curfews which hindered the ability of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to conduct their daily operations with their clients face-to-face. Restrictions included nationwide lockdowns, curfews and the prohibition of group gatherings in public spaces. The unprecedented scale and pace of the changes brought on by the pandemic coupled with the restrictive national measures such as no movement days/lockdowns gave rise to the need for emergency response and assistance to the island's most vulnerable. The majority of these persons with special needs were unemployed and resided in war-torn rural and urban inner-city communities. Supplemental to State-led initiatives, public sector stakeholders such as NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) were called upon to serve the nation's most vulnerable and marginalized.

In the case of natural disasters in the past, NGOs have not been a frontline responder. As such their operations during the Covid-19 pandemic was a new frontier. Consequently, a need to reflect and examine the actors in such an unprecedented time became important. Therefore, this study sought to explore the major issues that impacted NGOs conducting their work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the study examined how NGOs have nurtured employees' agency to lead and manage during times of crisis.

BACKGROUND

NGOs are a diverse group of institutions that are largely or completely unrelated to the government and pursue cooperative or humanitarian objectives as opposed to profit-making ones. Internationally, there is evidence to support the position that organized and harmonized activities of NGOs may result in a more effective response to a crisis (Sayarifard et al., 2022). NGOs are more closely connected to communities, benefit from more flexible procedures, and need less paperwork to respond to disasters faster than state agencies. Rahma's (2010) study on the activities of the NGOs during the bird flu outbreak in Indonesia in 2006 stated that the government alone was unable to spread the vast amount of information to individuals living on various islands. As a result, it made use of the NGOs' abilities and support

Transforming NGO Leadership in Marginalised Communities for Times of Crisis

in this area, particularly in the area of staff and network development (Sayarifard et al., 2022). In order to address the needs of the community during times of crisis, the report advised that these groups be prepared and supported, as NGOs can mediate between the levels of government and the general populace. The experience of various nations in reaction to COVID-19 also demonstrated the critical role that NGOs play when national governments are unable to adequately meet the needs of the populace (Sayarifard et al., 2022).

Historically, NGOs' and CBOs' roles in humanitarian crises or emergencies have been essential to emergency preparedness, response, and management. Jamaica has a long history of civil society organizations' (CSOs') activism. Generally, the strengths of CSOs is embedded in their commitment, passion, broad knowledge base, community connections, and on the ground social services provision and com-

Table 1. Example of CSO in Jamaica

CSO Name	Service Provided
Office of the Children's Advocate	Provides short term counselling (Refers to CISOCA or CPFSA for long term support); Investigates reports; Provides legal representation to children
Woman Inc	GBV counselling and referral; Emergency temporary shelter (Women only). Legal aid (clinic); Hotline
Women's Resource and Outreach Centre	Psychological and counselling services; community capacity building; training; advocacy and communications; health and wellness
Rise Life Management Services	Counselling, GBV Referrals; Core counselling in gambling and substance abuse. Life Skills Education; GBV
Children's Coalition of Jamaica	Psychological Support, Crisis Services, Prevention/Advice/Safety Planning, Advocacy, Training
Bureau of Gender Affairs	Psychosocial interventions; Basic counselling; Referrals; Public sensitization; Temporary shelter (through PPP arrangement with Woman Inc)
Child Protection & Family Services Agency Corporate Office	Investigates allegations of child abuse; Protection services; Monitoring of Police Lock-ups, Residential Care
National Aids Committee	Provide services in public education on HIV/AIDS/STI.; Care and Counselling individuals infected and affected by HIV/AIDS; Legal and Ethical advise on issues surrounding HIV/AIDS and legal transactions of the NAC; harness local financial resources to assist children affected and infected by HIV/AIDS; GBV Counselling and referral
Combined Disabilities Association	Limited GBV: Referrals; Provides access through advocacy to mobility, housing, training/ education, recreation/rehabilitation, employment and health care
Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities	Rehabilitation grants for income generating projects and employment; Identifying and registering persons with disabilities; Public Education campaigns educating the society on disability issues.
Open Arms Drop-In Centre	Homeless shelter, Day room, Emergency shelter (extenuating circumstances), Long-term recovery/ rehab program (rural), Transitional housing, Case management, Specialized day care/drop-in center
Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation	GBV Counselling as a part of its educational programme for adolescent mothers. Continuing education for teen mothers 17yrs and under, skills training for males & females (17-25), daycare facilities, nutritional education and support, screening for HIV, counselling and referral services.
Mustard Seed Community	Facilitate treatment, education, counselling, care and support, accommodation
Children First	Provide services for at-risk youth including, Educational and Counselling; Employment and Entrepreneurial training; Youth Wellness and Mobile Health Clinic; HIV/AIDS care sessions,
Mona Social Service	Community intervention, capacity building, life skills, education and skills training, small business development, sports and film and violence reduction tools and other social development programs
Food for the Poor	Provides emergency relief aid and programmes in housing, food, medical, water, sanitation, education, agriculture, outreach and micro-enterprise.

munity engagement (James, 2014). Similar to many other nations, Jamaica's NGOs play an important role in civil society, administering a wide range of intricate activities. Uncertainty surrounds the precise number of NGOs in Jamaica. The table below outlines some of the more popular organizations.

Moreover, CBOs are perfectly positioned to assist people negatively impacted by the pandemic directly. The COVID-19 pandemic is different from anything most CBOs have faced since their establishment. CBOs have all had to work in communities plagued with crime and violence, hurricane and storm crises among others, but never in a global pandemic with major health risks. Although they were called to respond in the face of a crisis, the pandemic had already lasted longer than expected. This posed an existential challenge for organizational operations, especially those with restricted resources. Under these conditions, leadership is poised to emerge as a critical component to the success and effectiveness of the CBOs. Therefore, effective leadership is essential for an organization and its human resources – particularly employees and middle managers.

The impact of the pandemic could have many short-term and long-term effects on marginalized and vulnerable groups. Consequently, NGOs must be strengthened for timely response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and future crisis. However, it is unclear how NGOs were optimized and utilized in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Jamaica. Also, NGOs are not immune to pandemic-induced constraints, which may hamper the continuity of their activities and affect their capacity to provide services to vulnerable communities. Hence, the need for this study to assess the response of the NGOs during COVID-19, identify the challenges and how they circumnavigate them. Moreover, the study seeks to impart lessons learnt by NGOs to effectively improve performance in a crisis. Since NGOs are among the institutions that work closely with the public in a society, empowering them to take part in crisis response can transform these organizations into a support function for the government in crisis management. This study aimed to identify the activities of NGOs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as how these organizations nurtured employees' agency to lead during the pandemic.

RELATED LITERATURE AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The Link Between Agency and Leadership

The researcher posits there is a connection between agency and leadership. Furthermore, within a Servant Leadership model, an individual's agency – employee's or middle manager's – is more likely to be identified and nurtured. The term agency simply means the capacity to make a difference (Frost, 2019). The concept of agency is central to the role of effective leadership. Thus, employee agency can be understood as the capacity of employees to affect change in the social world (Chingara, 2019) – or make a difference.

On the other hand, leadership is defined as “the capacity of an individual to perceive important issues, to construct a vision or mission, to discern the necessary means to make critical decisions, to influence followers and to complete the mission” (Canyon, 2020, p.3). The distinction between agency and leadership is that the former speaks to an employee's potential to become a leader while the latter conveys the influential and inspirational ability to impact, nurture, or transform an employee's agency into social change and leadership. Important to the clarification of the distinction is to point out that while there are many leadership styles; the perceived leadership style exercised by some Jamaican NGOs is that of servant leadership.

Servant Leadership: Defining Feature of NGOs

NGOs are known to perform acts and works of service to provide access to basic human needs and create justice and an equitable society for all. Additionally, NGOs are seen as leaders in their field through their service, support, and advocacy. Perhaps the most crucial feature of any NGO is their recognition by the public based on their work—being servant leaders. The term servant-leadership was first coined in 1970 by Robert K. Greenleaf. He argues that servant leaders, first and foremost, need to be servants themselves. A true servant leader is identified by those they serve and whether or not they grow as an individual. Greenleaf's (1977) seminal work on servant leaders conveys that the best test of a servant leader is to ask the following questions:

Do those served grow as persons: do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (as cited in Northouse, 2021, p.228)

This type of leader considers the life trajectories of those they lead, and beneficiaries served within marginalized communities. Eva et al. (2019), reinforces this idea.

Servant leadership focuses on followers' growth in multiple areas, such as psychological well-being, emotional maturity, and ethical wisdom. This focus is aligned with the notion of stewardship, in that servant leaders act as stewards, treating followers as individuals entrusted to them to be elevated to their better selves. Followers, in turn, consider them to be trustworthy as a leader (p.114).

Therefore, a servant leader's qualities and characteristics are essential in creating a vision for their employees and guiding them through the rapidly changing environment or one in crisis, utilizing motivation and inspiration. Barth-Farakas and Vera (2018) argue that servant leaders galvanize followers' self-efficacy, allowing followers to believe they can go beyond expectations. As such, a servant leader should possess the qualities of individualized consideration and inspirational motivation. Towler (2019) asserts that individualized consideration is the degree to which a leader recognizes and addresses each follower's unique and individual needs. In this regard, the leader listens to each employee's concerns as well as provides feedback and support. They are also empathetic to the situation and experience of each employee and thereby provide necessary inspirational motivation.

Inspirational motivation is the extent to which a leader conveys their vision and inspires and motivates employees to perform above expectations (Towler, 2019). Servant leaders who possess this ability can motivate their employees to have a strong sense of purpose, which drives the staff forward and encourages them to invest more effort and time in their duties. Servant leaders should also motivate and inspire employees to invest in their abilities and development. Furthermore, Ying (2021) identified specific traits such as emotional intelligence are critical to servant leadership. Emotional intelligence refers to a leader's ability to monitor and gauge the internal states of both followers and self (Northouse, 2021). Nurturing the agency of a potential leader requires a servant leader to place the self-interest of the potential leader above their own. This may be achieved by i) valuing people, ii) developing people, iii) building community, iv) displaying authenticity, v) providing leadership, and vi) sharing leadership (Laub, 2002 as cited in Horne-Barnes, 2019).

Conversely, the disadvantages with this type of leadership include the lengthy process associated with decision processes, especially in fast-paced environments, such as a crisis. Also, this leadership style can drain leaders as the well-being of others and the organization is placed above their own (Kohntopp & McCann, 2020). It is evident in this context that at a servant leader's core is their ability to nurture agency – empower and transform individuals to contribute to radical and social change. This transformative process is vital to the organization's success and efficiency. Therefore, how this transformative process occurred or manifested during any form of crisis will assume importance on the leadership of NGOs within Jamaica and their operation during times of crisis.

The Rise of Leadership in a Crisis

One of the most challenging events or periods for any organization is a crisis. A crisis is “a damaging event or series of events that displays emergent properties which exceed an organization's abilities to cope. It also has implications that can affect a considerable proportion of the organization” (Smith and Elliot as cited in Canyon, 2020, p.6). Often, a crisis is triggered by an incident – external or internal – highlighting the inherent vulnerability embedded within the organization and its systems (Storey, 2016). Succinctly, an organizational crisis is any event that is salient, unexpected, and perceived by stakeholders and members to be a disruptive threat to the organization's core mandate and its stakeholders (Bundy et al., 2017; König et al., 2020) as well as the beneficiaries they serve. Considering its unexpected and disruptive nature, the COVID-19 pandemic is indeed an external crisis that impacts global organizational operations and systems.

Pearson and Mitroff (2019) noted the need for action in response to the crisis event. Notably, in a crisis leaders in particular, play a critical role. They generally influence the organization, its operational environment, and ultimately its culture. Moreover, the characteristics of an organization's leader are more likely to be influential during a crisis. Pearson and Mitroff (2019) explained that crisis events demand that the leadership manage the crisis, which entails executing strategic leadership and critical decision making. Schaedler, Graf-Vlachy, and König (2021) outline that strategic leadership is characterized by “signal detection, resource allocation under high levels of uncertainty and time pressure, and communication with internal and external stakeholders.” Unique to any crisis are the following features - low probability of occurrence, threatening matters of high priority, occurring with limited time to respond, and characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution (Hannah & Parry, 2014; Mutch, 2020). All these features were present with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and require leaders to be cognizant of these features and draw on specific attributes and skillsets to overcome the challenges. The researcher, therefore, presents the argument that within a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic middle management's leadership agency should be nurtured and developed to assist in the process of guiding others to be a part of a shared vision to achieve a common goal.

Nurturing middle managers places great emphasis on the leader's ability to affect behavioural change, commitment, and conviction in others and rally followers or staff to achieve a particular goal. Consequently, organizational leaders are called upon to inspire, create unity among diverse staff groups, and provide the necessary resources and environment to nurture the leader in others. Moreover, the overarching tasks associated with being an organizational leader are “to lead the organization into unity through a shared vision, goal setting and direction giving activities; unlock the leadership potential of the organization's members by tapping into the diversity among them and ensure that individual diversity and organizational unity are nurtured by the organization and rewarded within its culture” (Klagge, 1997, p.45). The func-

tions of organizational leaders, as outlined by Klagge, are integral before, during, and after a crisis. To this end Firestone (2020) notes, “crisis leadership looks at the enduring role of a leader before, during, and after the crisis” (p.19). Furthermore, Balasubramanian, Fernandes, and Tan (2022) posit that crisis leadership should include compassion and care, openness and communication, resilience and courage, decisiveness, consultation and collaboration, and empowerment.

Daft (2017) asserts that a leader practices agency and inspires it in others while looking at its past, present, and future. Notably, scholars differentiate a leader from a manager, with the primary difference being that a leader conceptually outlines the visions and ideas. At the same time, a manager converts or implements the concept into practical processes and systems. However, Fener and Cevik (2015) argue that some managers can become leaders as leadership is defined by character and mindset. They further explain that leadership is the ability to see a vision of the future with a particular outcome from a goal and influence and convince those involved to work towards achieving it (Fener & Cevik, 2015).

Analytical Framework

The theoretical perspectives are influenced by crisis management and the importance of leadership and people-centric development approaches to fostering leadership agency among employees, especially in a crisis. Leadership and leadership styles are fundamental, especially in response to a crisis. In representing the importance of leadership styles, attention will be paid to the servant leader. Adapting the principles of a servant leader also allows an organizational leader to identify and develop leadership agency among administrative staff, particularly in crisis events. This process gives rise to what Northouse (2017) describes as situational leaders and team leaders. However, in the emergence of a situational leader, servant leaders must focus on delegating or coaching them, to foster the development and agency of the possible new emerging leaders. The Servant leader has a deep understanding of the level of commitment middle managers possess and inclination of how these competencies will influence their emergence as future leaders.

Kohntopp and McCann (2020) postulated that in today’s organizations, both private and non-profit organizations operate in a global environment and face a myriad of issues that require leadership development to play a significant role in the sustainability of organizations. They also highlight the importance of technical understanding, but future leaders must also possess personality traits that allow them to accept their leadership readily. Gomez-Leal et al. (2021) indicated that emerging middle management leaders need emotional intelligence. However, not all leaders or potential leaders may possess these characteristics. In recognition of this, Kramer and Viera (2020) express that the world has become more complex and dynamic and requires adaptive and flexible leaders. They noted that leaders today need to possess the following skills: adaptability, self-awareness, and the ability and will to be boundary spanners, collaborators, and network thinkers. Also, Kramer and Viera (2020) suggest that middle management agency and ascension into leadership requires a new approach, not traditional methods such as training, job assignments, action learning, executive coaching, mentoring, and 360-degree feedback.

Furthermore, Kramer and Viera (2020) advised that leadership development should move away from horizontal development, which is expert-taught, to vertical where the onus is on the individual. This, they assert, will prepare leaders for the complexities and dynamism of leadership and the world. Finally, the authors suggest a paradigm shift from looking at leadership roles as one individual to one where leadership is shared among a collective (Kramer & Viera, 2020). Considering this, the executives representing the NGO were expected to pivot expeditiously, develop a clear vision of how they would operate as well

as spot, and activate the skills and talents of middle management employees to implement the vision. The NGO's executives' ability to activate middle management agency, directly impacted the continuity of services to vulnerable communities, despite the COVID-19 and DRMA challenges.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher utilized a qualitative exploratory technique to collect and analyze NGOs' experiences in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the leadership management used to develop a middle executive agency to lead during a crisis. The qualitative phenomenological perspective was used as it allowed the researcher to focus on the lived experiences of the leaders in the NGOs as they shared their challenges and opportunities in leading during the crisis. The method was also flexible and provided rich meaning during data interpretation (Miles et al., 2018). The research locates itself in what Yin (2011) identifies as "a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 2011, p.1). The researcher, therefore, used the NGO as the unit of analysis to determine their contribution to the development and activation of a middle executive agency to lead and manage during a crisis. This method allowed the data to be collected from the executive directors of seven NGOs and compared in the analysis. Two research questions guided the data collection method:

1. What issues impacted the NGOs conducting their work during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis?
2. How have NGOs built capacity and nurtured employees' agency to lead during the pandemic?

The main data collection tool used was semi-structured interviews. Eighteen questions guided the data collection. Additional probing questions were asked by the interviewer based on some responses provided by responders.

Interviews were conducted with executive directors and senior management members of NGOs that focused on offering services to vulnerable groups and marginalized communities in the urban and rural parts of the country of Jamaica. During the data collection, the research conducted seven elite interviews of ten interviews originally targeted. Saturation was observed by the researcher at the seventh interview, resulting in the culmination of the data collection from the participants.

The participants were selected using the purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique was chosen because of its appropriateness considering the availability, location, and access to participants (Mertens, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The final sample comprised three males and four females. None of the samples was identified by names in the research, rather, all names were replaced with pseudonyms and/or synonyms.

Prior to the interview, each participant was emailed a consent form by the researcher; each participant returned a signed consent form before their interview. Upon receipt of the forms interview dates were agreed between participants and interviewer, following which each interview was conducted. The interviews were done via telephone and recorded on same instrument upon the consent of the participants. Each session lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, after which the sessions were transcribed verbatim. Notes taken during the interviews and playback of recordings provided textual data. The researcher coded the interview transcripts using inductive techniques. This process further allowed the researcher to read and re-read the data, identify similar phrases and themes, and then form clusters (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Therefore, the researcher utilized the open, axial, and selective coding process. Emergent concepts were

identified from the interview transcripts and were refined through the multi-stage coding process. The qualitative software NVIVO was used to manage and analyze the qualitative data.

Limitations that delayed data collection included the executive director's availability, resulting in the rescheduling of interviews. There were also incidents of interruptions during interviews due to situations that needed urgent attention.

Findings

From the data analysis the researcher identified four major themes from the key informant interviews conducted. The themes were: (i) *Organizational and programmatic challenges in a crisis*; (ii) *Context-specific decision making in a crisis*; (iii) *Forging leaders in a crisis*; and (iv) *Supporting emerging leaders*.

Organizational and Programmatic Challenges in a Crisis

A Shift in Operational Functions

Many leaders expressed that they had to re-evaluate how the organization mandate would be accomplished considering COVID-19 and its associated restrictions. All the NGOs that participated in this study provided client-facing services to their beneficiaries, hence the implementation of restrictions on movement and gathering policies prevented them from delivering services in a face-to-face approach. Therefore, during the pandemic, they could no longer operate as business as usual, their operational functions needed to be re-imagined.

Adapting to COVID-19 Challenges

Organizations faced numerous challenges during the pandemic. The challenges experienced by organizations were two-fold – organizational and programmatic. Many of the organizational or administrative issues centered around facilitating work from home and human resources. Programmatically, the primary problems were related to executing social interventions and re-envisioning how activities initially conceptualized to be delivered in a face-to-face format could still be implemented and completed, with maximum reach among the beneficiaries. Andrea Brown outlined that “with the shift to online service delivery, her organization had to coach participants on how to use the platform, provide credit to facilitate internet access to ensure that they reached a sizeable audience”.

In response to the organizational challenges, particularly the work from home, NGOs had to create an environment to allow staff to perform their functions remotely at times. This meant they had to acquire the necessary hardware and software and provide staff with resources to function efficiently. Regarding human resources, organizations had to evaluate, with staff involvement as required, whether they could afford to retain all their staff at full salary or institute a salary reduction to ensure the continued employment of the whole staff complement.

All participants shared that to some extent their programmatic functions experienced some changes. The primary responses to the disruption to face to face delivery of services was that they had to shift programme delivery for their beneficiaries online. There were associated issues with this transition, chief among them was the lack of access to devices among their beneficiaries. Additionally, in some cases, the beneficiaries had no access to the internet; those who had access to devices and the internet were unfamiliar with the platforms, making navigating and utilizing the platform less than seamless in

delivering services. Ms. Sandy Alvarez expressed that “the shift to the online platform for service delivery was expensive. Organizations had to procure the relevant hardware and software to facilitate the sessions and the experts to deliver the content”. Moreover, Ms. Alvarez explained that “the shift to an online platform resulted in a loss of time – it took more effort and time to institute the online platform for the delivery of training compared to when the activities are executed face-to-face”. However, three leaders expressed some staff involvement in finding solutions to internal and external issues. For example, some staff expressed strategies to employ that the organization’s leader did not think about. The suggestions were implemented and staff members at other levels in respective organizations complied with the strategies and willingly assisted without having to be being overly encouraged by the leader.

A common truth shared by six of the seven NGOs that implemented client-facing services was that training shifted to an online modality. The reach or the number of people who benefited from the services was reduced compared to the sessions conducted in-person. Many of the NGOs offered a variety of capacity building training in continuing education and skills training in small business development, life skills training, effective parenting and managing mental stress in crisis. All executive directors/senior managers spoke of the integral nature of the digital platforms to the continuation of their programmatic activities in their organizations. One leader expressed that while the online platform was used, his beneficiaries were from a disabled population. For the senior manager, the virtual platform had its limitations in assisting students with their educational and communication needs.

Context-specific Decision Making in a Crisis

Top-down Decision Making

Many leaders conveyed that decisions regarding the organization’s operations were made in a top-down hierarchical manner and communicated to their staff. Of note, this approach was used predominantly to establish work from home policies and decisions around finances and revenue implications considering the implementation of COVID-19 national protocols. These types of decision-making rarely involved the input of staff. Ms. Alvarez shared the approach she used to navigate this deficit. “I would reach out to the board of directors, the chairman or the deputy chair. There were times when I had to reach out to the board about things like governance and work from home protocols...” Sandy Alvarez

Bottom-up Decision Making

All NGO leaders expressed that the inclusion of staff in the decision-making process was evident and integral to continuing the organization’s programmatic functions in particular. They expressed that the national restrictions hindered the implementation and execution of in-person services. To circumvent this barrier, participants revealed their staff’s critical and invaluable role in re-imagining and re-designing how programs formatted for in-person delivery were adapted for the online platforms. They alluded to this decision-making model as a means by which staff demonstrated their creativity, ingenuity, and leadership capabilities. Executive Director Andrea expressed

people had to think outside of the box...there was a lot of brainstorming, working together to find solutions and people coming up with other ways for their projects to still be successful outside of having face-to-face interaction. So, creativity, using their ability to think outside of the box and plan ahead was critical.

Additionally, the bottom-up decision-making process allowed staff to demonstrate their experiences, skill sets, and areas in which they are versed.

Emerging Leaders in a Crisis

Forging Leaders in a Pandemic

Some NGO leaders acknowledged that the pandemic facilitated the activation of leadership agency among middle managers within their organizations.

There was heavy reliance on middle managers (teachers) at the implementation level... in terms of implementing online platforms like google classrooms and facilitating learning exchanges via this forum. So, there were several meetings with all respective managers and staff...to look at ways and means of making virtual learning more accessible and available to the student and the content that should enhance the virtual learning.... (NGO leader)

These leaders all described the individuals who emerged as someone they could rely on to assign specific tasks.

The respective campus managers were heavily relied upon to ensure that they were gathering information about the pro and cons regarding COVID-19, each campus was asked to develop a COVID-19 campus protocol and policy...and then from head office we would have taken those respective protocols and look at them and merged the different suggestions to develop an organizational COVID-19 protocol... (John Alexander)

The participants attributed the activation of middle management agency to the pandemic and the associated conditions which required emerging leaders to supplement top-management and their implementation of new and innovative responses. This meant that middle managers had to take on roles and functions outside of their pre-pandemic role. Moreover, middle managers who emerged as leaders now had to undertake functions closely related to ensuring the delivery of a social intervention or program via an online platform.

Notably, emerging leaders' functions included beneficiary management and engagement, adherence to Covid protocols, provision of services (care packages and other benefits provided by the government), and coordination with the relevant agencies to ensure that their community and beneficiaries have access to the appropriate services. These individuals serve as a contact point for credible information and a source to verify information among their community members. From the data, it was also gleaned that, in most respects, executives relied only on those with whom they had a close working relationship before the pandemic.

Absence of Emerging Leaders

Notably, two participants could not identify any employees who emerged as leaders during the pandemic. While one indicated that her employee undertook additional work, she did not associate this as an indication of emerging into leadership. This leader conveyed that her employees and middle management staff

were competent and experienced individuals, yet no one stood out for her. She felt that her organization and, by extension, her team was doing their jobs – assigned tasks. The occurrence of the pandemic or delegation of additional duties provided no reason or indication of emerging leaders.

Identifying and Facilitating Leadership in an Employee(s)

In the instances where leaders expressed the emergence of leaders within their organization during the crisis, they indicated how these persons were identified. From their experiences, staff identified for leadership positions were based on their experience, knowledge, and ability to interact with state and non-state agencies. One leader reiterated this by expressing, “It was a matter of the person’s knowledge, ability to interface and interact with state and non-state agencies to bring required services or assistance to the respective beneficiaries” (John Alexander).

In some instances, leaders were identified based on their work ethic and ability to contribute positively to work tasks and solutions to organizational challenges. Nevertheless, there were instances in which leaders were also identified and selected because of their proximity to the issue that needed to be resolved or the area experiencing a roadblock. The NGOs’ leaders noted that it was important for these individuals to demonstrate their competency before being empowered to undertake a new role or function or even additional responsibilities with the crisis. To this point one leader shared, “I would look for individuals with a particular competency and skillset to take charge of particular areas in terms of coordinating with state and non-state agencies” to provide access to services for beneficiaries.

Supporting Emerging Leaders

For those employees demonstrating leadership qualities and potential during the pandemic, the participants indicated that several avenues of support were provided to aid their transition into this new-found role. These include skills training and training geared towards mastery of online platforms and COVID-19 protocol and response training. Also, information sessions facilitated open and coordinated communication between emerging leaders and other organizational leaders. Mr. John Alexander captured the sentiments of how his organization embraced the rise of middle managers noting “we had a series of training, information sessions – both conducted internal and external facilitators...on how to use Zoom and protocols using Zoom.”

DISCUSSION

This study on the services provided by NGOs was done within the context of a global pandemic and the implementation of national social restriction measures to reduce the spread of the virus. Recognizing that most CBOs, since their establishment, have never experienced operating in prolonged pandemic conditions and that the pandemic posed an existential challenge for organizational operations, servant leadership coupled with situational leadership emerged as a critical component to the success and effectiveness of NGOs.

The pandemic as well as NGOs’ operation and response to vulnerable and marginalized communities shows an intersecting relationship between servant leadership, situational leadership, collaboration, and employee agency. Typical among all the participants interviewed is the action of collaborative effort and

response as the situation warranted. They conveyed that collaboration was achieved through inspiring and motivating their employees to address the needs of their clients. For all the executive directors and senior management interviewed, collaboration involved working together to accomplish goals and objectives, whether organizational or as a response to the situational needs of their communities. According to Northouse (2021), “the ability of a team to collaborate is essential to team effectiveness and to create a climate that appreciates others’ opinions. A collaborative climate is one in which members can stay problem-focused, listen to and understand one another, feel free to take risks” (p. 301). The executive directors’ and senior management representatives’ ability to inspire and engender a collaborative effort among their employees in a time of crisis demonstrates that all possess remarkable and critical qualities characteristic of a servant leader. It also shows that these leaders were able to inspire their staff and motivate them to go beyond expectations and the call of duty while in a pandemic and contending with their personal experiences and challenges caused by the pandemic.

NGO leaders sought to nurture the leadership agency of employees during the crisis by encouraging a collaborative approach and environment. While this activity may have been an adaptive or situational response due to the pandemic and the increasing needs of the vulnerable communities served, employees were provided the opportunity to exercise their leadership skills and abilities. On the other hand, NGO leaders were now called to demonstrate another essential quality of a servant leader – as referenced by Greenleaf, “do those served grow as persons, do they become more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (as cited in Northouse, 2021, p.228). Simply put, the pandemic created the environment to assess whether NGOs leaders have the capabilities and qualities to transform agency, thereby nurturing employees into leaders. Some NGO leaders responded to this call by creating an enabling environment for employees perceived to have leadership agency.

In responding to the rapid changes of the pandemic, an unintended outcome was providing an environment in which employees were able to demonstrate their agency creativity and help shape the continuity of service delivery. This resulted in NGO leaders seeking the input and ideas of employees at the initial stages of the pandemic. Most leaders expressed that the input and ideas of their employees were critical to the continued operations of the organization and the support of the marginalized communities. Consequently, the crisis fostered an enabling environment for employees to contribute, design, and shape the service delivery to beneficiaries. All leaders shared that employees were included in the re-imagination of organizational activities to ensure continuity of services provided by each organization - these services, in particular, were training sessions, educational and sensitization of marginalized groups, some financial assistance and gifting of care packages.

Moreover, the bottom-up decision-making process was more common during the crisis as the organizations relied on employees to help them re-design, communicate, and deliver content to communities and beneficiaries. One leader expressed, “my staff had to come up with creative ways to get the work done despite the pandemic and the restrictions.” Generally, this sentiment was shared by most of the leaders interviewed. Another participant said the pandemic provided an environment for the various staff to show their leadership qualities and creativity by allowing staff to be a part of the decision-making, providing them with the necessary practical application to rise to the occasion and display qualities and characteristics of leaders. In light of this finding, early research suggests that crisis events create opportunities for employees to emerge as leaders and increase or hone leadership qualities (Klagge, 1997). The research also indicates that staff with adaptive personalities are more likely to demonstrate increased self-efficacy to lead during a crisis event. Increased self-efficacy translates into increased motivation to lead (Bajaba et al., 2021). His argument is consistent with participants who were able to identify staff members who

emerged as leaders as a result of the pandemic. These participants indicated that the emerging leaders displayed enthusiasm and initiative to undertake new tasks in an effort to serve marginalized communities who were experiencing several abject conditions including loss of livelihood. The responsive traits were identified as predictors of staff members selected for leadership roles.

The researcher's findings suggest that the enabling environment during the pandemic significantly contributed to some employees being identified to undertake situational functions and leadership. The NGO leaders who identified the emerging leadership competencies that were demonstrated through their employees and encouraged them would be seen as effective leaders who are significant in crisis situations- the pandemic being one such. Similarly, Canyon (2020) and Bajaba (2021) outline the importance of an effective leader. They indicated that an action-oriented, adaptive, and effective leader is crucial in situations that result in loss of resources and increased demand. Most of the NGO leadership demonstrated their responsiveness and action-oriented abilities through the implementation of work from home measures, recognizing the changing environment and therefore reimagining how current services are delivered as well as the delivery of new services. Thus, being flexible and ready to change plans and focus is essential as crisis events are characterized by ambiguity, as Hannah and Parry (2014) expressed. In the delivery of services during the crisis, the servant leaders would be deemed effective as they pivoted quickly and adapted somehow seamlessly in response to the challenges brought on by the pandemic. The adaptive leader strategy plays an integral role in influencing their environment and employees with the necessary inspiration and resources to foster leadership agency which would allow them to undertake and overcome the demands of the crisis event.

The research findings indicate that fostering leadership agency among employees, for some organizations and their leaders, created a sense of community and camaraderie. It also conveyed the sentiment that many hands make light work. All leaders expressed that each organization's new functions and roles, especially roles assigned to emerging leaders, were closely associated with responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The executive directors and senior management felt a shift in organizational focus due to COVID-19.

Furthermore, the study found that despite the shift in organizational operations and the associated COVID-19 challenges, NGO leaders demonstrated responsiveness. To commend those in organizational leadership who used the crisis as a training ground and allowed it to propel and develop employee agency, these leaders fostered an enabling environment for their staff by providing opportunities for emerging leaders to undertake new roles as well as leadership positions such as spearheading a team or acting as point person in devising new strategies to serve the beneficiaries in response to the restrictions imposed by the government. With the provision of a supportive environment, there was clear interaction and interrelationship between servant leadership and the development of employees' leadership agency. These NGO leaders described actions taken by the organization to ensure support of employees' leadership agency. Actions included training, information sessions, and mobile as well as online support groups for the new leaders. The leaders interviewed reported that open and frequent communication, training, and verifiable information positively impacted the emerging leaders.

According to the servant leadership theory, a servant leader is judged and determined by their impact on others and whether they inspire or foster others to become leaders and better individuals (Daft, 2017). Therefore, the leadership agency of an employee is a trait that can be nurtured instead of an innate capacity. Thus, employees with adaptive capacity tend to emerge as leaders during a crisis if their environment possesses the resources needed to embrace change and uncertainty confidently. Additionally, the presence of a transformational servant leader is integral to the development and emergence of employees

into leadership roles. Further, it was perceived that emerging leaders viewed the support provided as an instrument during the pandemic, bolstering their ability to undertake new and additional organizational functions and providing practical support through this period of uncharted territory.

In contrast, the crisis did not provide the impetus for new leaders for a few organizations. Therefore, it can be deduced that these NGO leaders did not possess the quality to transform their employee's agency into practical leadership that would impact social change in the society.

Of note, the pandemic contributed to fostering an enabling environment in which employee leadership agency could be nurtured. The majority of the NGO leaders conveyed that their participation in the development of said agency did not benefit from foresight, planning, or intentionality. The researcher deduced that the lack of planning and properly seizing the opportunity to nurture leadership agency during a crisis could be attributed to the myopic view of NGO leaders. This means most leaders were laser-focused on responding to the pandemic and serving the needs of their marginalized communities. In doing so, employees' development, mentoring, and coaching – the individualized consideration required to activate employees' agency- was deficient. The main priority for NGOs organizational structure and, by extension, their leaders was designing and re-imagining ways to continue servicing the over 150 marginalized communities across the island. Although some leaders did not consider the crisis a platform for employees to transition into leadership roles, several organizations endorsed that their employees rose to the occasion while serving in the communities.

All leaders of the NGOs interviewed reported initial difficulties adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationally imposed restrictions on gathering and movement. As a result, the sudden shift to online service delivery, in the attempt to honour donor obligations and the organizational mandate, was one of the primary responses by executive directors to the crisis and its implications. NGOs, particularly those who serve marginalized groups and communities through education and training, described feeling ill-prepared and caught off guard, given the isolation of their target population and their inability to interface with them in person, coupled with the strict national lockdown mandate. This posed a significant challenge to the NGOs ability to operate within the originally designed manner. The executive directors and senior management staff interviewed explained that diminished opportunity to deliver their services in person meant they had to reformulate the operational function of the organization as well as the number of beneficiaries that could access the services that were being delivered virtually. Inevitably, they also had to contemplate reducing the number of persons within these marginalized communities that would be impacted by the vital training services provided during the pandemic.

Notably, the impact of providing various services online to marginalized groups within the pandemic should not be overlooked or undervalued. The findings revealed that relationships with and provision of services to marginalized communities most affected by COVID-19 and associated restrictions significantly impacted their social, psychological, and educational needs within the pandemic (Gopalan & Misra, 2020). Due to the national restrictions, NGO leaders noted that they were concerned about the implications of isolation on the marginalized populations' economic and psychological well-being and the general education outcomes of children who belonged to the demographic population in the research.

The findings demonstrate that NGOs and, by extension, their leaders were particularly challenged to serve or continue to serve their marginalized communities. They were impacted by this experience of isolation and lockdown and had to demonstrate creativity and ingenuity to foster the feeling of community and belonging among their beneficiaries. While this proved challenging during the pandemic, all the leaders indicated that they persevered. The NGO leaders felt that children within marginalized

communities experienced increased disadvantages due to the pandemic and the training and teaching modality shift.

A response utilized by most organizations to reduce the barriers associated with access to education and the provision of training and other skill-based services is the integration of information communication technologies (ICTs). The integration of ICTs was viewed as an immediate necessity for the operation and sustainability of all NGOs. The need for devices and online platforms to facilitate interaction and continuity of services was not only from an organizational standpoint. Instead, some organizations required it, or their beneficiaries needed access to ICTs, which translated into the NGO assisting with providing access to devices and the internet where possible. In instances where organizations provided their communities with access to devices, Mr. Alexander explained:

We have partnered with, and we have gotten assistance from private and public sectors in receiving a number of tablets and laptops for some of our students, of course not all. We have also engaged individual families and individual situations where we can. We have asked a lot of those persons overseas who are involved in our child sponsorship [for assistance] because a particular family or individual would identify a particular child and would provide the funding needed to school that child from whatever age until they are finished within the primary to a secondary system. And so, we ask those persons as best as possible to provide funding to procure tablets for those students.

From an organizational standpoint, there was an exodus to the digital platforms and online environment to facilitate the continuation of some aspects of the organizational activities and mandate, especially those associated with donor funding and obligations. In light of this, executive directors had to be responsive to the new environment and the requirements needed for employees to flourish and continue their work tasks. Also, employees needed to be flexible and adaptive in the crisis, given that they were asked to conduct or implement work activities within an entirely new domain – one that was unfamiliar to most. Mr. Alexander noted that his organization's response and adaptability to the COVID-19 crisis was geared towards the continuity of serving their beneficiaries required "that our teachers as best as possible within the shortest possible time were trained in the newest virtual classroom platforms that would allow them to be as effective and as efficient as possible to reach out to our students."

In contrast, some senior management expressed that digital integration did not occur depending on the served beneficiaries. However, what entailed was the organizations' readiness and willingness to assess the needs of their communities and respond even if it was outside of their original mandate. Ms. Donna Beach expressed "we then had to step up immediately... everybody became unemployed in the community. We had to seek donations from large organizations to help our beneficiaries and community and provide a stipend to get them through."

In addition to being responsive, executive directors and senior management found that the current demand during the pandemic often outweighed the organization's original blueprint. Therefore, several organizations had to increase services they undertook before COVID-19 to meet the growing demand within their communities. Responsiveness to the ever-increasing needs of the community meant for one organization that "we now had to extend the services provided under our food package program" (Shelly Gomes). In contrast, the organization would provide 30 packages monthly for in-need community members before the pandemic. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, this number tripled. Ms. Gomes further explained "we distributed over 92 packages per month to facilitate the high rate of persons losing their job."

Nevertheless, the research findings show that NGO leaders' strength lies in being a servant first - particularly to the needs of the vulnerable communities. In this regard, the organizations took all the necessary actions and steps to ensure that these people had access to services to whether the pandemic. Leadership geared towards the provision of services was streamlined, strategic and responsive. In responding to the needs of vulnerable populations, executive directors and senior management representatives conveyed that they utilized situational awareness of the realities that those most impacted were experiencing. They also related to their beneficiaries and empathized with them in light of the impact of the pandemic on economic loss or reduction, which was affecting the group. Moreover, it was evident that leaders went beyond expectations and even their organization's mandate in providing needed resources to the communities or instituting new services to cater to an emerging need in light of the pandemic.

Overall, it can be deduced that only a few executive directors and senior management representatives transformed employees' agency and allowed employees to undertake leadership roles during the pandemic. For the others, they seemingly lacked the foresight, planning, and adaptive capacity to recognize the agency of their employees, to view the pandemic as an arena for development. They ultimately failed to grow their employees into leaders when the situation demanded it. The inability of these leaders to transform agency in crisis situations signals there is a need for development at all levels within the NGO landscape. This will serve to inform servant leaders who are currently at the helm of the organization of the skills, tools, and qualities needed to transform others and tap into their optimal potential. The aim here is to equip servant leaders with the necessary tools and skillsets to nurture agency, especially in a future crisis.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the organizational operations of NGOs in Jamaica, who were required to make rapid adjustments to continue serving marginalized groups. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on organizational functions, how organizations responded had the ability to create or foster the emergence of employees into leadership roles. Although all the organizations managed to pivot and continue delivering services to marginalized groups despite the challenges associated with the national restriction measure. Nevertheless, several organizations were unable to provide a supportive and enabling environment for employees to emerge and shine as leaders during the prolonged crisis. Ensuring adequate social, practical, and emotional support for employees during a crisis event is paramount to moving forward. The leaders of these organizations did not initially recognize how a crisis can be utilized to bring out leadership qualities in mid management team members.

The researcher concluded that nurturing employees' leadership agency demands that top management understands and recognizes the value of a crisis in forging leaders. The presence of this quality – foresight and awareness in a leader is even more critical for the future response of NGOs, particularly in a crisis event. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how dynamic and unpredictable the world is and leaders that possess dynamic attributes will be able to see changes within the environment and make the necessary steps to ensure that their organization and team members are able to cope during crisis events.

Going forward, leaders must consider the sustainability of emerging leaders beyond a crisis. When the pandemic ends, much of the functions and leadership roles that new leaders undertook will become obsolete, making it unclear whether emerging leaders will have the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership qualities and agency beyond the crisis event. Additionally, NGOs need to institute better

mechanisms and systems to identify and foster emerging leaders and provide more significant support during the transitional periods by monitoring emerging leaders' progress during a crisis.

Based on the research findings, the researcher put forward some guidelines and guiding principles for Building NGO leadership agency during times of crisis.

Seven Guidelines for Leaders (Executives) to Strengthen Their Leadership During Times of Crisis

1. **Communicate:** Executive directors and senior management of NGOs should create an open communication line. This will provide emerging leaders the opportunity to share messages – concerns, interests, and challenges. A culture of open communication will also provide the opportunity for servant leaders to listen to their followers and understand their followers' experiences. Lastly, communication will facilitate the initial understanding of how servant leaders can plan and design developmental plans for each staff member to activate their leadership agency and aid in their transition to leadership roles.
 - a. **Practical tip:** servant leaders need to find ways to distill employees' questions. This can be done before weekly meetings in which employees would be allowed to voice their questions.
2. **Lead with empathy:** Life during a crisis for employees has changed drastically, with a significant majority working from home while providing childcare and supervision to other family members and children who continue their education via online platforms. With this setup, they may feel overwhelmed, frustrated and concerned about the future. Also, this new setup may increase stress related to the uncertainty of the pandemic and its impact on the longevity of their employment and other aspects of their life. As such, servant leaders leading with empathy will be aware of employees' emotions and experiences. Leading with empathy will allow servant leaders to check in with each team member.
 - a. **Practical tip:** Servant leaders can begin meetings with a temperature check-in; this can follow a prompted pattern where servant leaders enquire and ask simple, yet profound, questions such as "How are you feeling?", "What is particularly hard for you during this period?" and "What's one thing that would make your day/week better?"
3. **Build a community and resilience:** Nurturing leaders under chaotic conditions as those that prevail in crisis can be taxing. Given the unpredictability of crisis situations, these conditions may last for a prolonged period. As such, servant leaders must ensure their emerging leaders take care of themselves holistically – mind, body, heart, and soul. It is critical for emerging leaders who are undertaking additional and new tasks to prioritize safeguarding their well-being. This will enable emerging leaders to function optimally and retain their effectiveness throughout the crisis despite its longevity.
 - a. **Practical tip:** Servant leaders can develop activities or interactive sessions, weekly, where employees bond and form a community within the workplace. In these sessions or through these activities, emerging leaders can connect and aid in the improvement of the coping mechanisms used to get through times of crisis. Forging a community and building resilience is one component servant leaders need to foster towards an enabling environment for nurturing emerging leaders' agency.

4. **Be a visionary:** During times of crisis, servant leaders must be a visionary for their organization, providing a clear sense of direction towards its goals. More importantly, servant leaders must convey their vision to their followers and garner their enthusiasm and support in achieving it. Being a visionary allows servant leaders to respond and pivot to the complex and unexpected challenges of a crisis.
5. **Be committed to a growth mindset and people:** There is a demand for new skills and abilities during a crisis. Thus, a crisis is a unique opportunity for servant leaders to nurture emerging leaders and encourage them to embrace their leadership agency. The current crisis has seen many employees adapting to the changing landscape and a new way of working, such as working from home and integrating online platforms for service delivery.

Fostering a mindset and an attitude in people that makes them comfortable expanding their skillset and capabilities – especially in a crisis is crucial to creating an enabling environment in which employees are willing and motivated to activate their leadership agency and undertake new leadership roles and functions. Organizations that embrace growth allow employees to feel empowered, inspired, and invested in the vision and purpose of the organization. They feel supported, and this will enable their collaboration and creativity, which is integral for crisis events.

 - a. **Practical tip:** Schedule routine individual check-ups with team members; this will encourage them to reflect on their progress and areas with which they think they need help. Discuss collaboratively and design targeted learning experiences to strengthen areas of concern and strengthen areas of interest. Importantly, praise emerging leaders for enduring and showing up even in a difficult situation.
6. **Monitor and evaluate:** Servant leaders are required to pivot to the changes of the crisis and have a 360 view of the organization's future and its human resource. In a crisis – more than ever- servant leaders need to monitor and evaluate their organizations' operational functions, the capabilities of their employees, and how they are operating in assigned roles. Evaluation is necessary to make strategic changes among personnel to optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization. Also, evaluation allows servant leaders to assess how emerging leaders perform and whether there needs to be re-assignment of tasks and roles.
7. **Implement systems and measures:** Ensure essential systems and measures are in place to nurture employees' leadership agency: Leaders should be flexible in assessing and making decisions quickly regarding the systems and procedures crucial to the development of their employees to respond in a timely and unexpected manner. Nurturing the leadership agency of staff should be a priority area akin to achieving donor obligations.
 - a. **Practical tip:** Embrace experimentation even outside of a crisis: Leaders are in uncharted territory during a crisis. As such, they must have a deep understanding of the technical capacities of the staff to try different developmental and agency-building methods to provide personnel with the necessary enabling environment to thrive. This involves spotting talents and providing the environment that will trigger the display of the skill.

Three Guiding Principles for Activating Middle Managers' Agency During Times of Crisis

The researcher has also adapted three guiding principles from Ying (2021) that are very useful for shaping and activating middle executives' agency to lead, prior, during, and beyond a crisis. The three principles

are relevant to NGOs, which are indeed servant leaders both to its internal organization- its staff and its external constituents- the community and other stakeholders. The three guiding principles are

1. **Relate:** Spend time building relationships with the persons you serve to create a portal through which you are allowed to enter and be received into their personal space, thereby enabling you to serve them effectively.
In building staff relationship and agency throughout, and not only during a crisis, makes it easier for persons to go beyond the call of duty and despite the situation, to continue to serve.
2. **Care:** Provide spiritual and psychological support to persons you serve, especially when they have fears and concerns and are experiencing hardships and difficulties.
Showing caring for both internal and external staff, especially given the circumstances under which they were serving during the pandemic, was crucial.
3. **Share:** Use the talents with which God has blessed you to empower those you serve to improve the quality of their lives. (Ying, 2021)

Postscript

The researcher uses the following case study as an aftermath of the study to provide a practical illustration of how an NGO leader operates in a crisis. Through the case study is depicted the application of servant leadership approach to capacitate and empower several marginalized community persons to counteract issues and overcome crisis. The case study also depicts the servant leader developing and activating middle executive agency to lead and manage during times of crisis. Additionally, the case is followed by some thought-provoking questions designed to help a variety of audiences in the analysis and interpretation of the case.

Case MESLA01

University Township: Reaching Out From Within

Aside from the recent crisis the University's servant leader Dr. Vannes has experienced previous crisis events which shaped community engagement and servant leadership among stakeholders and the current symbiotic relationship shared among servant leaders and community beneficiaries.

In 2008, the most alarming university- community crisis experienced by the university was a shootout between gunmen on the campus. In this encounter or event, gun men from neighbouring community gangs traded bullets on the campus of the university during a high-level stakeholder conference, which left 3 persons wounded and numerous, staff, faculty and stakeholders traumatized. Despite gun violence in the communities, such incident spilling over on the campus had never happened before. Senior managers scurried to arrest the issue as expeditiously as they could. The unfortunate series of events gave rise to Dr. Vannes's vision of transforming marginalized and under-resourced communities by providing a holistic approach to community development and building a university-community relationship.

Dr. Vannes believed that it was important to uplift the community members – and this he thought could be done through access to education at its centre. Confronted with the insurmountable task of political divisiveness and community factions/gangs at war among each other, Dr. Vannes was left to

decide how, as a leader, he would use the unfortunate crisis situation to help bridge the divide within the communities.

Coincidentally, through serving the community as mentor and coach and sharing the history of the people both locally and internationally on prior occasions, Dr. Vannes found that international students were excited about the culture and history of the community, despite the over 40 years of gang and political violence. The violence within the community was reduced as this cultural exchange facilitated economic opportunities for the community, combined with the access to education through community initiatives spearheaded by the university and Dr. Vannes. As the fortune of the community turned, Dr. Vannes continued to advocate on behalf of the community and its most vulnerable, encouraging external stakeholders to partner and provide well needed resources and funding. As a result of Dr. Vannes's servant leadership, a wide range of capacity-building programs and initiatives were implemented to develop community leadership and a governance system. Furthermore, many at-risk youths who were often idle "on the corners" or displayed maladaptive behaviours, were targetted for skills and workplace training aimed at employment placements. Dr. Vannes later forged an alliance with another University in Jamaica - to provide more opportunities and training for the community youths.

Through his efforts some 10,000 residents were impacted directly and other members of their households and the community indirectly. Over 150 residents were placed in employment within the University and various places across the Urban areas. Moreover, 34 community clubs, including a police youth club, were formed, and friendly sporting competitions were played across communities. All these responses to the unfortunate gang incident on the campus triggered the move towards integrating the community and transforming lives. He also started a tertiary scholarship programme to increase access to higher education at the University. This was done jointly with community leaders. From the tertiary scholarship programme, 150 youth were provided the opportunity to build the leadership cadre of the community and be models for a more promising future. The ultimate aim was improvement in the socio-economic status of the residents and the creation of safe and peaceful communities within the GRTC.

Year 2008 was a memorable year in the life of the community and the University. Under the watchful eyes of the servant leader, and the new young President of the University, a peace treaty was signed between the warring factions in the communities. This initiative began a gradual reduction in homicides in GRTC, and a resultant zero murder rate eight years following. After the untimely passing of Dr. Vannes two years after the signing, the legacy of his vision to integrate a divided community utilizing a Six-Pillar approach, was implemented by his mentee and middle executive servant leader, whose agency was activated. Thus began another phase of a leader's vision to transform lives and expand university-community engagement through continuing display of servant leadership.

1. How would you characterize the type of leadership that Dr. Vannes portrayed?
2. Outline the Community intervention model of the servant leader and say how to use the model to build middle managers in similar communities.
3. One characteristic of a servant leader is inspiring followers to grow and serve. Explain how followers become servants to the vision?
4. Discuss how community members and partners fit the characteristics of the servant leader?

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Chapter 13

Religious Leaders Leading and Managing in Times of Crisis and Change

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ABSTRACT

Within the church or other industries, leadership is a draining undertaking even for the strongest of personalities. It involves constant self-giving, and as such, burn out and disillusionment among church middle-tier leaders and managers are not uncommon because they are not invested and empowered with the kind of ownership and responsibility needed to launch the mission of the church in the society, normally, more so in a crisis. This work argues that it is the middle-tier leaders and managers of church organizations who are in crisis, not the organizations of which they are a part. Kenotic and martyrological models of leadership, alongside the use of wilderness as a metaphor for crisis, frames the argument. It emphasizes the necessity of leaders' presence, visibility, and availability during crises and proposes how they can flourish in their leadership roles by utilizing the synergistic capabilities of different leadership models. It also recommends strategies to motivate and empower those not invested with high office for greater leadership crisis efficiency.

INTRODUCTION

When the corona virus pandemic struck worldwide in March 2020, it was unexpected and unanticipated. Many organizations' goals or objectives, not to mention bottom line or viability, were imperilled. Quick steps had to be taken to diminish possible consequences of closure and foreclosure of business enterprises, mass lay-offs of employees, and loss of livelihoods of ordinary people with its concomitant factors of depression and anxiety that resulted from such losses, called for urgent attention. Besides, issues of "ambiguity of cause, effect and means of resolution and necessity to act swiftly" (Pearson & Clair, 1998) had to be attended to with haste. Communities such as churches were not spared these consequences. As

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centres of community life, their leadership needed to be nimble, creative, strategic and compassionate in responding to the effects of the pandemic.

What is being described here is a crisis. According to Harvard Business Essentials, “A crisis is change – either sudden or evolving – that results in an urgent problem that must be addressed immediately” (Harvard Business Essentials, 2004, p. xvi). It goes on to point out that “for a business, a crisis is anything with the potential to cause sudden and serious damage to its employees, reputation, or bottom line” (Harvard Business Essentials, 2004, p. xvi).

For the Harvard Business Essentials, it means that the prevalence of the corona virus has thrown many organizations and people into a crisis. Very few organizations and people were prepared for its coming. Even so, whenever a crisis happens, it must neither be ignored nor avoided. On the contrary, it must be confronted head on and used to initiate change.

In confronting the opportunities and challenges that a crisis presents, it ought to be realised, though, that leadership is a draining undertaking even for the strongest of personalities. It involves constant self-giving. Burnout and disillusionment among middle-tier leaders and managers are not uncommon as they are not invested and empowered with the kind of ownership and responsibility needed to effect change in the organization. In the case of the church, we find that it is the middle tier leaders who face the greatest challenges.

Therefore, this work will argue that it is the middle-tier leaders and managers of organizations who are in crisis and not the organizations of which they are a part of. In addition, the work will suggest ways of motivating and empowering those not invested with high office. Middle tier leaders and managers in the churches in the Caribbean, mainly in the mainline churches, are the deputy general secretaries, chairs of council and provincial boards, presbyters and deacons. In the administrative structure of the churches, these middle tier leaders and managers are the ones charged with the responsibility to implement strategies for sustainability and manage change.

By examining the crisis of leadership facing the church in the Caribbean and discussing concepts of leadership, namely the kenotic and martyrological models of leadership, wilderness as a metaphor for crisis and the necessity for leaders to be present, visible and available in times of crisis, this work will also show and describe how leaders can survive, thrive, and grow in circumstances of crisis by drawing on synergistic capabilities of different leadership models.

BACKGROUND

Leadership as a Problem for the Churches in the Caribbean

Kortright Davis, (1990) Anglican priest in the Caribbean and a Caribbean theologian, offers that there are four phases of the church in the Caribbean in its relationship with Caribbean people. First, “*the church and the people*”; that is, church as complicit, an institution of the power structure to maintain the status quo. Second, “*the church for the people*” – church as instrument of socialization in the processes of education and social welfare; even so, the masses did not “run things” in the power structures of the church. Third, “*the church of the people*” – church as emerging from the cocoon of foreign domination to give birth to local leadership and indigenization. And fourth, “*the people’s church*” – church in transition, moving from inherited structures of power and mission to new models of management, ministry and mission.

Davis, at the same time, concludes, “the church in the Caribbean has received respect but has yet to gain the moral authority it should in the lives of the people, primarily because it has never been the ‘The People’s Church’; that phase of its history is yet to begin” (Davis, 1990, 76). That is so primarily because these globalized times in which the church exists and serves, are characterized by dependence on foreign investments. Besides, the context of people’s lived realities is not setting the missions’ agenda and determining the content of the strategic direction of missions on the basis of a partnership with the values of mutuality, respect and equality.

Within the long-established Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations in the Caribbean, however, there is seemingly not only a paucity of leaders, but also of effective leadership that is driving the mission agenda of the church. Seemingly, the church is structured for dependency and not transformation (Watty, 1999, p. 8). Those in the middle tiers of the church’s power structure are not invested and empowered with the kind of ownership and responsibility they need to launch the mission of the church in the society. For example, in the long-established Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations in the Caribbean, power is so carefully constitutionalized that the search is on for models and practices that may best serve to fulfil the mission of the church (Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas, 2006, p. ix). If decision-making of all kinds continues to be monopolized such that middle tier leaders are not invested with ownership and responsibility, the baton of leadership is not passed on. The powers that be in the long-established denominations must know how and when to let go of power. Holding on to power when it is firmly in the grip of the next generation of leaders will not win the denominations the race.

With so few leaders being handed the baton of leadership and the seemingly ineffective leadership in the upper echelons of power, considerations as to whether the religious denominations in the Caribbean are in a predicament are not without merit. I am aware that some ordained leaders are back in secular employment, others are suffering from symptoms of burnout and disillusionment and those who are carrying on do so with enthusiasm, but not always feeling empowered. Perhaps, it is not the ministry of these religious denominations that is in crisis. It is a number of individual clergies whose ministry is in crisis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature of Leadership

Notwithstanding, one may not want to conclude easily that it is the organization that is in crisis and not the people who lead. Even so, it is the case that it is the leadership and management of the organization that are in crisis. Now admittedly, leadership and management cannot be divorced from an organization. An organization does not grant leadership. Leadership does not come by appointment from an organization. The criterion for leadership is not achievement but servanthood. Leadership is about how much service one can give.

“Leadership”, contends Jacqueline Coke Lloyd, a leadership and people development consultant, “can be general or it can be situational and applied to specific communities. Although the fundamentals are the same, they are applied differently based on the environment” (*Jamaica Gleaner*, February 23, 2020, para. 1). Her main principle and focus are that “leadership must influence others to pursue a goal that is common among the followers – they must feel that they have something invested in it” (*Jamaica Gleaner* February 23, 2020, para. 1). Coke Lloyd holds that the way in which leadership principles are applied differs from context to context because culture and the nature of the problem shape the kind of

leadership that is exercised. Leadership has to be demonstrative as the leader must lead by example. It has to be based on integrity and the leader must demonstrate that what the leader says, he/she means, and what he/she means, he/she does. Here, then, the focus is squarely on the leader, not the organisation. It is the leader who is shaping and influencing the environment so that goals can be accomplished. Institutions do not intrinsically shape and influence themselves all by themselves.

While the contention of this work is that leadership comes from service, it will also be argued that leadership is by example and witness. The criterion of leadership is not primarily based in achievement. Here, the leader's job description is what is important. This inevitably leads to a quantitative evaluation process, the basis of which is the bottom line. In this process and from this perspective, self-worth matters little. What is being achieved is far more important and necessary than what one is becoming. Leadership is not just about power, control and achievement. Leadership is about service.

For Nathan Laufer, a Rabbi and teacher on issues of leadership, leadership is "envisioning and initiating change, by persuading others to alter the status quo, in response to an urgent challenge and/or compelling opportunity" (Laufer, 2006, p. 6). Laufer posits that management utilizes authority and control to maintain the status quo (Laufer, 2006). Slingerland (2007) argues that leadership is bringing about long-term change power and inspiration of example and management about maintaining the status quo through leveraging authority and control. In either case, it is people who seek to effect change and leverage power. In so doing, they can and do become disillusioned, dispirited and in need of regeneration and revision.

By arguing that it is the nature of leadership and management of organizations that is in crisis, I am pointing to the fact that it is people who lead and manage in times of crisis. While organizations change, it is the people who have the experiences. Organizations do not lead and manage themselves. People do. It takes a person with the requisite skills and awareness to lead and manage in times of crisis and change.

Leadership and management involve constant self-giving to others, helping and encouraging them to share the burden, to contribute what they are able. Servant leadership and management serve and work in the interest of others, not self. They are without interest in pay-back or get-back or pay-offs. Though they live in a transactional society, the little they have come from exchange or deal or bargain. Transaction seeks personal advantage, puts self before others and is about what is in it for me. In effect, leadership and management are about transformation, not transaction; giving, not taking; the yielding of power, not the wielding of power. In giving oneself to the transformation of chaos, one is being transformed, not just the chaos. In fact, and deed, to change the world, the leader must first change himself or herself.

Concepts of Leadership

Theologians call the style of leadership and management an act of self-emptying that frees a person from selfish concerns, *kenosis*. It is a love that is focused outward and, more important, embodies solidarity. As such, as explained by Bekker (2011), kenotic leadership is the notion of an individual emptying themselves in the form of humility and altruism for the sake of their mission, their followers, or both. The leader seeks nothing but the highest good of the other, a self-emptying which is a strong, other-centred service orientation.

The Kenotic Model of Leadership

Gyertson's kenotic model provides the understanding of the elements of the basic rule of a crisis – one does not come out of the crisis the same, if and when one comes through a crisis, one comes out better or worse, but never the same.

There are four dimensions to the kenotic model of leadership: (i) elements of leadership; (ii) belief that character counts as an essential to leadership whereby privileges and perks are set aside, and focus is not on the needs, preferences, predispositions or agendas of the leader; (iii) means and ends are the foci of leadership practices and strategies; and (iv) mastery of the essential disciplines that guide thinking and guard hearts for leadership challenges.

For Gyertson, *kenosis* is the idea that leaders willingly limit personal privileges, perks, preferences, power, and predispositions as required to ensure that the highest purposes of their leadership calling are achieved" (Gyertson, 2019). They willingly serve the purposes of those who appointed them while doing the best for those they lead, even at significant personal cost (Gyertson, 2019).

Gyertson advances that there are four main dimensions: the what, who and why, the how, when and where of a kenotic model for leadership. First, kenotic leaders think deeply about the implications of leading, stay current with and evaluate major perspectives to inform their decision to lead. Though leadership is a practical undertaking, the learning from the experiences of others is paramount. Second, Kenotic leaders examine the character and motivations at the heart of leadership. Third, for kenotic leaders, character counts. Foundational beliefs that will inform actions and direct vision must constitute what the leader is made of. Leaders must be principled. Fourth, master the essential disciplines that guide their thinking, guard their hearts, and continuously equip them to exercise the tasks of leadership.

In effect, these dimensions constitute the HEAD – the theories and theologies that guide effective leadership; HEART – the character and motivations that guard effective leadership; HANDS – the skills and techniques that equip effective leadership; and HABITS – the disciplines that guide, guard, and equip for leadership (Gyertson, 2019). In other words, leadership is not a mindless, unprincipled undertaking. Rather, it is that which involves clarity of thought as to what is involved, being driven by a vision of what is possible, an awareness of the abilities that one brings to the task, the need to be nimble, agile, creative, and humble in dynamic circumstances, and the strength to be uncompromising on integrity.

In sum, the kenotic model of leadership for Gyertson gives a deeper context for what has come to be called "servant leadership", that is the emptying of privilege not one's fundamental nature. It is about the ultimate sacrifices of true humility that the leader makes. Moreover, the kenotic model requires focus on the needs of the led more than on the needs of the leader. In addition, the kenotic model concentrates on the "who" and "why" (character and motivation) of leadership rather than just the "what, when, where and how".

Gyertson's kenotic theory carries with it a biblical grounding in Paul's self-emptying exposition to the church at Philippi in Philippians 2:5-11. Paul does not explain the cause for the self-centredness that has arisen in the ranks of the church membership. Rather, Paul offers a solution of an example of an emptied Christ in the form of an encouragement. Paul no longer lives for himself. He is not serving the church in his own interest. For Paul, to live is for others. Paul offers this solution of an example of an emptied Christ because the church at Philippi had turned in on itself. Conceit, contention and divisions based on class are in the ranks of the membership of the church. Paul's plea is for all to have the mind of Christ by developing a pattern in explaining what is involved in having the mind of Christ that has others, not self, at the centre of the pattern. For those with the mind of Christ, pay-back or get-back or pay-off

is neither motivation nor reward. Besides, that mind yields power as opposed to wield power. As such, Paul's self-emptying exposition is intolerant of selfishness. Like Gyertson's kenotic model of leadership, Paul's exposition put self before others and does not entertain any consideration of what is in it for me.

A key lens applied to Gyertson's kenotic model of leadership is that leaders empty themselves in humility. In so doing, they set aside their power, authority, recognition, and trappings of a high position. Notwithstanding, they may yet need to use the authority of office to influence others to achieve the vision and mission they have articulated (Peltz and Wilson, 2020). To this end, leaders operating from a kenotic frame do not focus on fortifying and expanding their power. Rather, they transfer their power to followers in a way that empowers rather than directs. The fact is that position does not make a person a leader. The title of one's position may give a person authority, but not influence.

Transformational and Authentic Models of Leadership

Emerging out of this key lens of the theory of *kenosis* are two contingent models of leadership: transformational and authentic. According to Burns *et al.*, transformational leadership involves the act of influencing followers in a way that produces intrinsic motivation, not merely to behave in a certain way but to complete the work that the leader desires (Peltz and Wilson, 2020). A leader influences transformation of followers' hearts and minds more so than just their behaviours. In transformational leadership, it is not only those who are led that are influenced and changed. Transformational leadership transforms both the leader and those who are led. Leadership is not just something you do. Leadership is something you are. Being precedes doing. Effective leaders set up and promote standards and principles that they, themselves, are prepared to live by. Palmer (2007, pp. 154–155) correctly points to the principle of reciprocity in Immanuel Kant's statement of the categorical imperative.

Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.

The other model that is helpful in this analysis is that of 'authentic leadership'. The authentic leadership construct deals with a leader's self-awareness. For Gardner *et al.*, this awareness concerns behaviours that reflect personal values, and the degree to which their theories-in-use resemble their theories-in-practice (Peltz and Wilson, 2020). Gardner *et al.* further explain that within this leadership construct, there is opportunity to consider the character of a leader, their beliefs, their views related to ethics and morality, and the degree that their actions are consistent with their espoused beliefs. While leadership must be based on respect, it must come with a degree of boldness. It cannot be timid and weak. Leadership ought to be respectful, yet direct and honest. Leadership ought to be believable, credible and trustworthy (Peltz and Wilson, 2020).

Gyertson's dimensions of leadership help to underline the significance of the hypothesis of this work with its focus on the leader and not primarily on the organization. The emphases in the kenotic model of leadership are on the sacrifices the leader makes and on his/her character and motivation for leadership. Organizations tend to take on the *persona* of the leader. Organizations are not going to shape themselves. Religious denominations are not going to shape themselves all by themselves. While it is true that the religious denomination is bigger than any bishop, priest, presbyter, deaconess or deacon, that the organization was there before them and will be there long after they are gone, and that leaders come and go, it is also the case that there was never a time that the religious denomination was without leadership. It is leaders that burn out, resign, take a break, turn back, not the organization.

Constructivist Model of Leadership

Another group of theorists called constructivists have developed, also, a kenotic model or theory of leadership. For constructivist theorists, leaders and managers serve those whom they lead, even at great personal cost.

One such constructivist theorist is Antonio Gramsci. For Gramsci, being a leader is not about eloquence. Eloquence is exterior and momentary. It has to do with feelings and passions. It is not that communicating clearly and cogently is unimportant. Eloquence must not be reduced to “giving out” information. Communicating clearly and cogently is about “getting through”, not only that the message is heard but also understood. What is needed, however, is active participation in practical ways as constructor, organizer, permanent persuader, not only being an orator, talking about what has happened. One needs to become directional in a crisis (Gramsci, 1971, p. 6).

In other words, the leader works in organizing and constructing an alternative vision, using an approach which is problem, meaning and dialogically based. So, meaning is constructed out of the crisis and aims to transform the chaos. The role of the leader is to be a reflective practitioner. With the leader and those in the crisis, there is reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, so for both parties, knowing what is happening and what needs to be done is “in action” or praxis knowing. Here, the leader does not only empathise with those in the crisis but is in solidarity with them, growing together with them as they desperately seek to transform their reality of chaos. In all of this, the leader is not only collecting data about the crisis but is constructing an alternative consciousness or vision of the circumstances that is leading to the transformation of crisis, building back better. Vision leads the leader. A leader without a vision is going nowhere. People will make way for you if you know where you are going.

Martyrological Model of Leadership

A neglected side of the kenotic models of leadership is what Niewold calls ‘martyrological’ leadership. In Gyertson’s kenotic model, for example, the emphasis is on service to others. Gyertson’s model of leadership is built on the view that “since Christian leadership according to the common argument must of necessity be servant like, and since Christian leadership is based on what Christ was like, Christ must have been above all else a servant” (Gyertson, 2019, n.p.). This paradigm, argues Niewold, leaves other leadership paradigms behind or completely out of the picture (Niewold, 2009). Besides, Niewold contends further that it is a “mistake to see the life and work of Jesus merely as a progressive march to the cross accompanied by a number of signs and wonders and humble acts of mercy calculated to bring Christ glory only in hindsight” (Niewold, 2009, p. 125). From this mistaken view of the life and work of Jesus, Niewold draws the conclusion that the kenotic model of leadership is about surrendering of prerogatives and, is, largely, a matter of communication, self-fulfilment and empowerment (Niewold, 2009).

For Niewold, however, the emphasis is on what he calls witness. ‘Martyria’ is a biblical concept having to do with “witness” or “testimony” or the integrity of one’s word. It is self-referential in nature and is an activity exercised by those who speak publicly (Niewold, 2009). As such, it means that with Niewold’s martyrological model of leadership the emphasis is on speech, one’s word is one’s bond. What one says, though, one’s public witness, can bring with it harm to the speaker. It is not true that sticks and stones will break bones, but words do no harm. Words cause war. Oral proclamations can bring about a crisis. Niewold points out, though, that not everyone who suffers for what they say or believe is referred

to as a martyr. It is those who speak or express their beliefs as an act of public testimony. Martyria has at its centre the genius of oral, public witness (Niewold, 2009).

The context relative to Niewold's martyrological model of leadership is not one in which one is picking up the pieces after a hurricane, flood, fire, oil spill, health disaster or even a financial fiasco. Rather, Niewold is speaking of cultural currents within the society. In this context, what one says is as important as what one does. In a context where political, sociological, psychological, and emotional factors are shaping and influencing the landscape, servant leadership is not the most effective form of leadership. Niewold's context is one of secularism whose centre is dominated and occupied by relativism and subjectivism. In this context, those who espouse a public faith or bear public testimony tend to be marginalised. For Niewold, those who bear public witness can find their "commitment relegated to the margins of life, while the processes of modernity that 'really matter,' such as work, business, entertainment, and social exchanges, seem to occur according to their own secular mandates" (Niewold, 2009) enough to silence but the most determined leader.

The martyrological model of leadership, therefore, will have to encourage a countercultural posture toward secularism as it trains the mind for perseverance in the face of persecution. This posture, as opposed to culture, will be drawn from its grounding in confessional witness.

Furthermore, the martyrological model of leadership will, doubtless, embrace the servant model and cannot exist apart from it, but will not be defined by it (Niewold, 2009). Niewold notes that witness and service are not exclusive of one another but are, in fact, complementary. Leader is devitalized when service is understood to be witness by its very nature. Witness-based leadership will retain servanthood near its centre, but it will not confuse acts of kindness or interpersonal competencies as public witness. The point is not that the servant role is inferior to that of the witness. It is not. They correspond. Paul was appointed to be a servant when he was called to be a witness (Acts 26:16–18).

Niewold's martyrological model of leadership is not without significance for the hypothesis of this work, which is that it is not the organization that is in crisis but the people who lead them. It is the leader who will bear witness and shape the organization as a witness to good governance, a service organization, and a symbol of counter-cultural values. The organization cannot, *per se*, shape its reputation. Reputation will come about by the building out of the public posture arising from the realisation of the vision, mission and mandate of the organization, worked out by the leader in partnership with those whom he or she leads.

Perhaps, in the end, Seneca, a Roman Stoic Philosopher, is right, "you must live for others if you wish to live for yourself". To lose oneself is to find oneself in the good one does with and for others.

Wilderness as a Metaphor for Crisis in Leadership

'Wilderness' as a metaphor for crisis in leadership draws out the implications for leadership and management in religious denominations. By utilizing 'wilderness' as representative of a crisis, I am acknowledging that wilderness is an anxiety-generating environment, a scary place that often creates fear and dysfunction (Olson, 2004). Whenever an organization is in transition and, thereby, in the wilderness, it can become a threatening place of chaos (Olson, 2004). Complaints and murmurings arise, people yearn for the good old days and resist change. These murmurings and complaints are not attacks against the leaders of the organizations. Admittedly, sometimes complaints express legitimate needs that require resolution and remedy. And, while at other times, murmurings may not be legitimate, the leader-manager must be wise to the real differences between legitimate gripes and complaints masking an illegitimate

agenda. When organizations are in chaos or crisis, people will act out all kinds of anxiety, try to triangulate, engage in the blame game, and set up loyalties of one against the other. In such circumstances, the people leader-manager should be able to discern the differences between legitimate complaints and illegitimate murmurings.

Moreover, 'wilderness' means that people are in peculiarly dependent circumstances and without resources of their own. In the 'wilderness', the problem is not adequacy but despair, need, hopelessness and anxiety. In an anxiety-creating environment that can become a threatening place of disorder with murmurings and complaints, harking back to the good old days will not be most helpful. It requires leadership that is kenotic in style, that is, servant-like, transformational, and authentic, a practice of need and hope. The leader will need to be sensitive, unselfish, definitive, honest, and motivated to distinguish contrasts between hidden and legitimate agenda. In circumstances where people are failing and failures are being experienced, the leader needs to ask why he/ she failed and is failing, not who is at fault. Fault finding does not help in situations of chaos and disorder. Leadership rule number one is important here: affirmation comes before confrontation. Always look for the good in people and then address the problem.

The martyrological model of leadership, with its emphasis on witness-based leadership, is not without relevance in circumstances of chaos and disorder which breathes with despair. People can easily throw up their hands in times of despair. On the one hand, people who are experiencing despair might be reluctant to talk of or advocate for freedom from their suffocating circumstances. At the same time, the paralysis that comes with despair may also come from a mentality of a broken spirit, where people have lost the ability to think, believe, hope or imagine outside of the present conditions. Despair that comes from situations of chaos and disorder is no more powerful than it is among those who are mentally dulled. In these circumstances, to bring order out of the chaos, and hope out of despair, depends on the capability and willingness of the leader.

Religious denominations in the Caribbean are coming out of historical circumstances where the political and economic systems depended on fear, abuse, anxiety, and exploitation for production. These circumstances demand the building of institutions and systems that are totally devoid of threat and anxiety. Besides, it calls for a leadership that is not limited to self-emptying or unselfishness (the kenotic model) but one that is willing to be broken and shared on the altar of advocacy and integrity (martyrological model). Martyrological leadership has, within its practice, the power for life, transformation of that which is oppressive and despairing. Religious leaders in the Caribbean are not just to be service providers (prayers, visitation of the sick, solemnisation of marriages, leading of worship, proclaiming salvation) but are to be "life-savers" and "life-givers", to move life from despair to hope, anxiety to calm. Martyrological leadership is revolutionary in intent and revelatory of purposes beyond the transformation of despair.

Leadership as Solution in the Churches in the Caribbean

Consequently, circumstances of chaos, change, dysfunction, and anxiety require a leader-manager that is present, visible and available, with the humility and discernment to share authority and distribute responsibilities. Read the people then lead them; discernment precedes decision; analysis precedes action. Indeed, a crisis is always an opportunity to be accountable to self and the organization, embrace challenges and do better, and all the time survive, thrive, and grow. A leader can delegate anything but responsibility. In every crisis the options are to give up, back up or stand up.

A principle that leaders ought to be aware of is to know that people do what people see. Modelling is the basis for true leadership. Leaders must incarnate the life they desire in their followers. Leadership is not about position or skill but about attitude. The extent of the leader's influence depends on the depth of concern for others. People do not automatically buy into a good cause. People buy into the leader first, then the leader's vision. As such, the leader must know the score, not just the game plan. That is, the game plan tells you what you want to happen, but the score tells you what is happening.

Besides, the leader must go where people are in their crisis. Being present provides a sense of hope that they are cared for, a sense of empathy. Being present builds trust. Building relationships is the key to followership. As Slingerland (2007) points out, "if followers do not feel a sense of trust, nurture and empathy from their leaders, followers will not have faith in their leaders and may resist their attempts at leadership altogether" (Slingerland, 2007, p. 150).

A leader must be optimistic and must have the ability to see beyond the crisis and vision what opportunities there are in a crisis, not just patch up the situation but to enable forward movement. It is not about steering the ship. It is about charting the course. Even so, one cannot steer a ship that is not moving forward. Leaders understand that to change direction, one must first create forward movement.

What we are seeing here is that leadership is more than a science. The principles of leadership are constant but the application changes with every leader and situation. The leader must give those who led the authority to get things done, carry out responsibilities, empower. Making sure that people are growing is more important than acquiring new equipment and buildings.

METHODOLOGY

To demonstrate that leadership and management are more than a science, I analyze below the responses to a survey undertaken with middle-tier leaders and managers, three each from eight mainline Caribbean denominational institutions. The middle-tier leaders and managers were drawn from the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas, The Roman Catholic Church (Jamaica), The Anglican Church (Jamaica Diocese), The Moravian Church (East West Indies Province), The Moravian Church (Jamaica Province), The United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, The Jamaica Baptist Union and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana. From these Caribbean denominational institutions, middle-tier managers from Jamaica, Antigua, Suriname, Guyana, St. Croix, Barbados, Haiti and Trinidad responded to the questionnaire. None of the middle-tier managers who participated in the survey was older than 45 years of age and all are in the service of the church from between 10 to 25.

The survey was intended to investigate the models and practices of leadership in some Caribbean denominational institutions. The survey sample was somewhat small as it was not all the middle managers of all ecclesial institutions in the Caribbean that were surveyed. One may, therefore, want to treat the results with some amount of caution. Notwithstanding, the findings can be quantified and can bear out the conclusions drawn.

Participants in the survey were asked to complete the six sentences below:

1. What is your understanding of leadership?
2. Could you describe the level of leadership that drives the mission of the church in which you currently serve?
3. How does the level of leadership in the church you serve inspire and empower you?
4. What are your views on whether leadership is a challenge in your church? Provide justification for your response.

Responses to the questions posed to the middle managers of eight mainline Caribbean denominations in the Caribbean show that the managers understand leadership to be the ability to aspire and achieve commitment towards the fulfilment of desired outcomes, see leadership as taking a stand and staying connected to everyone in the group or organization. Also, leadership is about involving the led in participating in achieving goals and objectives of an organization as well as standing with the led in solidarity, not apart from them. The leader must know and feel the pain, suffering and joy of those being led. Leadership is as much about leading as being led. As Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin, a French lawyer, politician and one of the leaders of the French Revolution of 1848 is reputed to have said, “there go the people, I must follow them for I am their leader; I must find out where they are going so that I might lead them”. The point is, followers need leaders to chart a course. At the same time, a leader must have followers and help them, enthusiastically and freely, to follow the leader’s cause or direction, always seeking to maintain momentum.

Regarding the model of leadership that should drive the mission of the ecclesial community, lay leadership emerged a strong model. Here, it is believed that the leadership of the ecclesial community should be democratized. This view is derived from the fact that there is a shortage of pastoral leadership in many ecclesial communities. At the UTCWI, an institution in the Caribbean that forms and trains persons for ministry in the church in the Caribbean, the report to the Board of Governors show that registration numbers range from some 80 plus in the 1980s to 26 in the 2020s, a drop of some 54 in about 40 years. (President’s Report to Board of Governors, April 2022, 5) With democratization, it is not that there is no leader of whatever model. Where everyone is equally the leader, no one is really the leader. A strong voice to give direction to and influence the mission is still a necessity.

Other responses suggest the transformational model of leadership. While it is true that the ecclesiastical structures, systems and practices are in need of transformation, there is always better that can be done. It is not so much the organization that is in crisis but the ministry the clergy exercises. Organizations do not run themselves. In my view, it is the ecclesials, the leaders and managers of the organization who, with their lack of vision and passion, burn-out and indiscipline, plunge the organization into chaos and crisis. It is not because the ecclesial community is short of pastoral leadership that there is a problem. Shortage is not the problem. Leadership is. It does not follow, on the one hand, that because an ecclesiastical community is well-staffed it will be well run. And it does not follow, on the other hand, that because the ecclesial community is under-staffed it will be poorly run. It could well be the case that too many cooks spoil the broth. However, many or few in the ecclesiastical community has in its management and leadership, it is the who and the what, character and motivation, of leadership that count.

Here, though, the martyrological model of leadership suggests itself as what is needed is a witness-based leadership style that can give voice to hurt and pain, guide and direct struggle and channel energies for human flourishing. The leader must work according to standards, not moods.

With regard to the model of leadership that inspires and empowers ecclesials, the servant model, with Jesus emptying himself of equality with God and becoming an obedient servant to the point of death, the kenotic model in effect, as well as Jesus as Shepherd, the caring model, materialized as the most prevalent. Again, it is not accidental or even fortuitous that these are models of leadership emerging in a context, such as the Caribbean, long accustomed to subjugation and “downpression”. The oppressed will always resist and look for one to serve as liberator.

As to whether leadership is an issue or not in Caribbean ecclesial communities, views are quite mixed. While some believe that the shortage in pastoral leadership in the ecclesial communities is indicative of a crisis, others hold that this shortage has forced a democratization of the leadership. Democratization of leadership is not necessarily redundant as gifts, graces and calling of leadership are not the preserve of the ordained.

From these responses to the survey regarding what leadership is, it can be seen that it is the kenotic model of leadership with its servant orientation that dominates Caribbean ecclesial institution's understanding of leadership. This might be due to the fact that the Caribbean, as an uprooted and created community, is a suffering community, suffering from the economic problem of poverty, the political problems of domination and dependence, and the cultural problem of alienation and imposition (Watty, 1981). Davis (1990) observes that after some 500 hundred years of poverty, dependence, alienation and divisiveness in the Caribbean, emancipation is still comin' that is, emancipation is still the Caribbean's historic mission and social project. In a context, then, of a people whose lived realities are domination, exploitation, dehumanization, degradation, humiliation and extraction, those persons need compassion, empathy and liberation. In this context, the servant model of leadership is most appealing and demanding as what is needed is suffering love. Here, the leader takes risks, cares for the other in a way that causes the other's fate to affect his/ her own. In other words, the leader gives at the real cost of himself/herself, even chancing rejection.

It is not that the martyrological model of leadership is irrelevant. Witness-based leadership is, indeed, necessary as there will be need for a leader to communicate the suffering of the community, protest and advocate against the oppressive practices and systems as well as express and bear the integrity of public witness.

Emerging Leadership Models

A leadership model emerging from the foregoing is one that is people-centric and human-based. This leadership model offers ways to empower and motivate the disempowered. The intention of this model is to make people buy into a vision. To do so, it engages a situational and strategic approach with a concept of uniting around a common objective to achieve goals and influence people. Also, it is designed to get the most out of people while allowing them the freedom and flexibility to do the work that brings maximum benefits. In addition, it combines the kenotic and martyrological models of leadership. It demands of the leader and the led, not only to go the extra mile, but to realize that the whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts. Everyone must be committed to the goal of the organization. To empower others comes with disempowerment of self. It is this disempowerment of self that is not happening in religious denominations in the Caribbean among the top-tier leadership. Top-tier leadership tends to have a penchant to hold on to power in the face of advanced age, stagnation within the organization and howls and howling criticisms. When they do, the middle-tier leadership of the religious denomination are frustrated as they are not invested and empowered with the kind of ownership and responsibility to advance the work and ministry of the religious organization and build its reputation. Trust is the foundation of leadership. The idea of team should never be a whole lot of people doing what the leader tells them to do.

On the face of it, a case can be made here regarding the issue of empowerment of others that comes with the disempowerment of self for a charismatic model of leadership. According to Echols (2009) charismatic leadership depends more on attributes than theoretical basis or stance as well as concentration on the agenda of the leaders, rather than the development of their followers (Echols, 2009). The fact that charismatic leadership centres more on the leader than the led means that it will not find synergy with a people-centric and human-based approach to leadership.

A case, too, may be made for a transactional model of leadership that centres on "exchanging one thing for another". Transactional leadership, though, is "less of a substantive leadership stance than a

pragmatic managerial technique” (Echols, 2009, p. 115). It has no focus on personal development and considers the needs of individuals. While it aids followers to get what they need, there are challenges motivating a creative passion to bring out the best in them (Echols, 2009).

A stronger case can be made for a transformational model of leadership as it is more people-centred and seeks to engage the full person. Moreover, it inspires followers who might outperform their leaders and become leaders themselves which makes it participatory and democratic. Unlike the transactional and transformational models of leadership, the kenotic/servant model of leadership aligns their own and others’ interests with the good of the group.

The kenotic/servant model of leadership has empathy for and an unqualified acceptance of those they serve, and care deeply about what others think (Echols, 2009). It does not rely on charisma but rather, “servant leaders rely upon service and maximises empowerment participation as it values each person” (Echols, 2009, p. 87). As Echols notes, “servant leadership is the antithesis of marginalization” (Echols, 2009, p. 87). With a focus on followers and serving their needs, there is no pursuit of the leader’s vision.

Notwithstanding, kenotic/servant leadership does not always flow strictly from the top-tier leadership (Palmer, 2007). Admittedly, kenotic/servant leadership does “help other people to bring to full expression the gifts and abilities that their Creator has entrusted to them” (Palmer, 2007). Empowerment is central to kenotic/servant leadership. However, leadership within organizations, such as religious denominations, ought also to be exercised from the middle-tier, perhaps a dangerous tier. Leaders of whatever tier must know their place in the organization. A critical question here for middle-tier leaders is: where is the locus of power in the organization? Who has power and who does not? Discerning the answers to these questions will provide middle-tier leaders with indications as not to only where they fall in the depth chart of the organization, but also the extent as well as the limit of their power. To survive and thrive, middle-tier leaders must be conversant with the “politics” of their organization. Being political is not to reduce the matter of leadership to theatrics and politics. Rather, it is to be astute in positioning the organisation for transformation. At all costs, middle-tier leaders must avoid a situation where change is but exchange, more of the same, the middle-tier leaders are as the top-tier leadership. There is no growth in an organization where the more things change, the more they remain the same. Middle-tier leaders should be striving to become better leaders, affecting and effecting long-term transformation change through encouragement and inspiration, not managers, exercising power to maintain the status quo.

The kenotic/servant model, though, strikes an unfavourable chord in suffering communities like the Caribbean that have a history of colonial conditionedness. The word servant prompts connotation of servility and oppression that persons with a colonial history have had to endure for hundreds of years. Even so, it has found acceptance in religious denominations if for nothing more than the fact that it is identified with Jesus, the supreme and ultimate example of a leader, who calls his followers servants. For Jesus to be first, is to put others ahead of you and, therefore, to be last of all. Service is putting yourself last. There is no intention to downpress the other. Love and service ought to break down barriers, not build fences.

A potential shortcoming of the kenotic/servant model of leadership is that while needs are met, the organization may be in slow decline because of lack of leadership. The lay person must not be blamed, though, for the decline, as it would have been worse were it not for him/her. Even so, they miss the mark by forgetting the value of transforming leadership. Transformational leaders motivate and challenge people to get involved, participate. Servant leaders are more indirect as they rely upon example and accountability.

More than good example and accountability, however, might be needed to motivate and empower others. All effective leaders have cracked the whip at some time. Moral courage, standing up and confronting challenges and obstacles are also required at times to motivate and empower. As such, a witness-based model of leadership is required. It does not contradict the kenotic/servant model but realizes that some situations take more than good example.

CONCLUSION

The point is that no one leadership model is likely to fit neatly into one particular type of leadership theory or stance. With transformational leadership being about mission and servant leadership about mode, no reason exists why there should not be synergies between them for the common good. Synergistic capabilities have significant value and application for leadership in ecclesiastical communities.

It ought to be remembered, however, that ecclesiastical communities exist to serve others, not themselves. The ecclesiastical communities do not serve others; others serve the ecclesiastical communities. It is not that people left the church but that the church has left them. To arrest decline and inspire regeneration, its servants will need to recharge and re-vision every so often if they are not to burn out and rust out.

As Echols has pointed out, transformational leadership that neglects the servant mode is in danger of losing its soul. Equally precarious, servant leadership without a transforming purpose becomes somewhat devoid of transcendent meaning and ultimately may be enacted as merely dutiful actions without passion (Echols, 2009).

The crisis of leadership faced by ecclesiastical communities demands that they draw on the synergistic capabilities of different leadership models. Among a people whose lived realities are domination, exploitation, dehumanization, degradation, humiliation and extraction, a combination of self-emptying, example and accountability, and moral courage leadership models are needed as resources to enable ecclesiastical communities to survive, thrive and grow.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Discernment: knowing one's place and where power lies in an organization.

Kenosis: Freeing a person or oneself from selfish ambitions.

Management: Minimising the impact of a crisis; doing things right.

Martyr: Willingness to suffer for what one says or believes.

Transaction: Seeking personal advantage; concern with what is in it for me; putting self before others.

Transformation: Influencing persons/followers to perform beyond their perceived capabilities, achieving unexpected or remarkable results with the end goal of followers emerging as leaders.

Wilderness: An anxiety generating environment that creates fear and dysfunction.

Section 4

School Leadership and Crisis Management – Higher Education

Chapter 14

Caught in the Middle: The Leadership Experiences of a Higher Education Middle Leader During a Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic sent education into a tailspin. It disrupted traditional modes of learning and wreaked havoc on education stakeholders' wellbeing. Amid this chaos, education middle leaders had to find innovative strategies to ensure that high-quality learning continued. Unfortunately, while there is a growing body of literature on senior leadership and managing crises, less is known about the lived experiences of middle leaders while leading during a crisis. Using a narrative research approach, this chapter aimed to contribute to this conversation by telling the story of a midlevel higher education leader in the Caribbean who 'led from the middle' to ensure that student learning continued during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emphasis was placed on her leadership experiences while navigating the vagaries of the pandemic and the idiosyncrasies of middle leadership. The results revealed the importance of leading with care, leveraging relationships, and having the support of senior leadership to empower middle leaders and provide them with a sense of agency during times of crisis.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic shook the very fabric of higher education (Gurukkal, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020; Rashid & Yadav, 2020). Higher education leaders all over the world had to realign and reposition the way they viewed and delivered education as the coronavirus supernova uprooted traditional modalities of learning (Kalloo et al., 2020; Leacock & Warrican, 2020; Marshall et al., 2020; Rashid & Yadav, 2020; Thornton, 2020;). As the pandemic became more widespread, and health protocols began to take prominence, millions of tertiary level students across the world were unable to access in-person learning. Emergency remote learning became ubiquitous and somewhat of a panacea for education stakeholders.

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The health calamities experienced during the pandemic exacerbated many of the challenges that academic leaders faced. In addition to concerns about health and psychological wellbeing, education leaders also had to tackle issues of inequity, learning loss, and online instructional quality. As such, how educational leaders lead during the pandemic will be used to determine the extent of their success as leaders and, to a large extent, the success of the institution in managing the crisis. There is consensus in the literature that crises disrupt traditional educational practices and threaten individual and institutional reputations (Bagwell, 2020; Fortunato et al., 2018; Gigliotti, 2020; Leacock & Warrican, 2020; Marshall et al., 2020; Thornton, 2020; Wilmot & Thompson, 2021). A crisis can be identified by four characteristics: a threat to a system, time pressure, an ill-structured situation, and the lack of adequate resources for response (Sutherland, 2017, as cited in Longmuir, 2021, p. 2).

Due to the far-reaching educational implications that can stem from a crisis, the leadership response by educational leaders has important ramifications for all stakeholders (e.g., administrative staff, students, and faculty) involved. The leadership of post-secondary institutions becomes even more significant when faced with a crisis. Therefore, crisis leadership in education requires education leaders to be adaptive, flexible, and transformative when they lead during times of uncertainty.

As Fortunato et al. (2018) note:

When crises do arise, it is also expected that leaders demonstrate the competencies necessary to manage multiple dimensions simultaneously, including the ability to analyze the situation, mobilize appropriate resources, respond in an appropriate and timely manner, and communicate any decisions and their rationale to all relevant internal and external stakeholder groups (p. 1).

However, being an academic leader during a crisis may be even more complex and nuanced than Fortunato explains. The ability to be adaptive, flexible, and transformative may be contingent on the leadership position that the individual holds at the institution. Senior education leaders, for example, have more flexibility and autonomy to make critical decisions within a short space of time (Harris & Jones, 2020; Nobile, 2018; Zhou & Deneen, 2020). Contrastingly, for middle leaders, the process may be a bit more bureaucratic and nuanced. Because of their limited autonomy, decisions made by middle leaders that are deemed to be critical, must go through the relevant communication channels before they are approved.

In higher education contexts, due to their unique positionality (i.e., middle leaders function as the layer between senior leadership and faculty), middle leaders often experience the ‘best’ and ‘worst’ of both worlds – the world of senior leadership, and the worlds of faculty and students. As Zhou and Deneen (2020) explain, “senior leadership focuses on top-down accountability while faculty and students prefer distributed decision-making and bottom-up processing. Middle leaders are manager academics who must negotiate these tensions” (p. 333). In times of crisis, these tensions can be exacerbated. Consequently, the role of middle leaders can become muddled as they try to navigate the dichotomy of taking directives from senior leadership while giving these directives and offering support to those individuals that they lead.

Sometimes directives from the top do not align with the expectations of the implementers (e.g., faculty) of the directives. However, middle leaders are expected to find a way to appease both factions. In times of crisis, these schisms can create a significant hurdle for middle leaders. For example, with the sudden and unanticipated arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of middle leaders became more important and complex. As Harris and Jones (2020) note, “for school leaders working in these demanding and chaotic circumstances, the pressure is relentless, the options are limited, the sleepless night[s]

are frequent” (para. 7). While the pandemic brought forth these new realities, it also underscored the challenges that middle leaders face when presented with the opportunity to engage in crisis leadership.

The sense of urgency that swept across the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic, placed middle leaders in higher education in a position where they were expected to lead from the front to ensure that student learning continued. They had to address the issues and concerns (e.g., teaching online, workload, and health-related concerns) of faculty and students, while communicating the expectations and directives of senior leadership in terms of how teaching and learning would continue. Middle leaders also had the additional responsibility of grappling with the uncertainty and unpredictability that the pandemic brought (Lemoine et al., 2020). This increased responsibility may not have always translated into increased autonomy (a necessary ingredient for middle leaders to feel empowered to make decisions during times of crisis).

Delayed decisions in a crisis because of ‘approval waiting’ can serve to undermine the agility and adaptiveness that is required of middle leaders during times of catastrophe. As Netolicky (2020) puts it, “in a time of crisis, leaders must act swiftly and with foresight but also with careful consideration of options, consequences and side effects of actions taken” (p. 392). When middle leaders in education are unable to act quickly and decisively, it can create an internal conflict and doubtful inner dialogue as they grapple with the complexity of appeasing top management *while* ensuring that the concerns of their main constituents (i.e., faculty and students) are addressed. As such, if middle leaders are not supported, feelings of disempowerment, anxiety, and fear can undermine their ability to lead from the front during a crisis. That is, their ability to be adaptive, agile, and transformative can be compromised as they become ‘caught in the middle’.

Given the complexity and uniqueness of leading from the middle during a crisis, it is important to unpack the challenges that middle-level educational leaders confront in these situations. Equally as useful, is establishing a framework for how they can be supported and empowered to lead from the front when faced with a crisis. Unfortunately, while there is a plethora of literature on senior leadership and managing crises (Bagwell, 2020; Marshall et al., 2020; Netolicky, 2020), less is known about the lived experiences of middle leaders in higher education and their leadership challenges and successes when leading during a crisis. Furthermore, there is a paucity of research in this area as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Caribbean context.

This chapter aims to contribute to closing these gaps in the literature by telling the story of a mid-level higher education leader in the Caribbean who ‘led from the middle’ to ensure that student learning continued during the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion will be situated in the context of a teacher training programme, and the challenges associated with continuing teacher training while navigating the vagaries of the pandemic, and the idiosyncrasies of middle leadership. Using a narrative inquiry research design, the researcher examines the lived experiences of a senior academic middle leader from a Caribbean tertiary level teacher training institution. The chapter will address two primary research questions:

1. What were the lived experiences of a midlevel educational leader while leading during a crisis?
2. What are the perceptions of a midlevel higher education leader about the type of support that is required from senior management for middle leaders to lead effectively during a crisis?

It is hoped that by having this middle leader share her story that an application framework can be developed and used as a model to guide middle leaders and senior leadership in understanding the critical needs and supporting structures that are required to empower middle leaders during times of crisis.

BACKGROUND

Leading in Caribbean Higher Education Contexts

A key focus of this research study is examining the intersectionality of three important contexts in educational leadership – higher education, teacher training, and continuing Caribbean education during the crisis. It is important to understand how these elements shaped the experiences of middle leaders at teacher training institutions while they led during the pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, many tertiary institutions in the Caribbean region were already facing fiscal and infrastructural challenges that threatened their ability to deliver high-quality education and ensure that education was accessible for all (Hutton, 2013). The pandemic exacerbated these challenges and made them more visible (Kalloo et al., 2020; Marshall et al., 2020). As Abdul-Majied et al. (2022) note, in the Caribbean, it has become abundantly clear that perhaps only next to the region's economic and health care systems, no other facet of society has suffered more deleterious effects from the pandemic than [the] education systems.

In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, an estimated 60,000 tertiary education students did not have the necessary hardware and social support to access online education (Kalloo et al., 2020). Many other Caribbean countries also faced similar challenges (Leacock & Warrican, 2020). For example, in Jamaica, Agu et al. (2020) reported that during the pandemic, inadequate resources made it challenging to continue to offer high-quality education, especially online. Similar concerns were reported by Leacock and Warrican (2020) who carefully documented the challenges faced by the Eastern Caribbean colleges.

Given these struggles, many Caribbean higher education institutions had to find new and innovative ways to deliver education with limited financial and infrastructural resources. The type of leadership required during this difficult time, and with severe resource constraints will indeed shape the trajectory of higher education in the Caribbean.

Caribbean leaders in higher education have an important responsibility to not only ensure that learning is accessible, but that it is also of high-quality (Jones et al., 2012). They play a critical role in shaping the current and future generations of world-leaders. A particularly important aspect of higher education in the Caribbean is teacher training. Teacher training colleges across the region help to ensure that students at the primary and secondary levels receive high-quality instruction (Kalloo et al., 2020; Leacock & Warrican, 2020). They do this by providing teachers with the requisite skills and knowledge to enable them to deliver meaningful instruction while creating enriching learning experiences for their students.

With the arrival of the pandemic, teacher education became even more crucial. Given that, prior to the pandemic, many teacher training institutions in the Caribbean were already operating with limited resources (Abdul-Majied et al., 2022; Kalloo et al., 2020; Leacock & Warrican, 2020), it was important for these institutions to establish a framework to aid student-teachers in being able to continue their own education while finding ways to effectively teach their students during this difficult time of change. As Thompson (2019) notes, how leaders of educational institutions manage change, is critical to the success of the institution.

One of the most critical mandates of teacher training institutions is to provide student-teachers with necessary skills and competencies to empower their learners. This is aligned with the mission of the teacher training institution at which the interviewee for this study works. The mission reflects the institution's aim to empower teachers to empower their students. During the height of the pandemic, the interviewee,

a senior middle leader of this institution, and one of its most important middle leaders, had to find a way to ensure that the institution continued to fulfil this mandate during the shockwave of the pandemic.

Important Elements of Leadership During a Crisis

Leading during a crisis encompasses a lot of nuances that all education leaders must pay attention to if they are to lead effectively during times of change. Although the literature is replete with leadership approaches and styles (e.g., transformational leadership, adaptive leadership, servant leadership, etc.) that are effective during challenging times, more attention needs to be paid to the fundamental elements that should guide leadership approaches regardless of individual leadership styles. These elements of leadership are critical to all leaders in all positions. Nevertheless, the extent to which each leader can fully embrace these elements during a crisis may be contingent on his or her seniority at the institution.

What follows therefore is a discussion on the importance of these elements during a crisis. The discussion will then be situated within the context of middle level leadership, with the aim of exploring any challenges middle leaders may have in fully embracing these elements during times of emergency.

Decision-making

With the emergence of the novel coronavirus pandemic, crisis leadership has become a central theme in academic discussions. The pandemic highlighted the importance of navigating crises through strong, evidence-based, and adaptive leadership that guides decision-making. Furthermore, it emphasized the fact that during a crisis most people look to their leaders for a sense of direction on how to deal with the unpredictability and uncertainty that often accompanies catastrophes. More importantly, they look to their leaders for a roadmap on how to do so safely. During the pandemic, higher education leaders were not spared of these expectations. They had to make swift and ‘decisive’ decisions while being flexible enough to modify these decisions when presented with new data.

Therefore, the pandemic created unique and unprecedented challenges to leaders in the education sector. They had to find a way to continue delivering education amid a pandemic that was causing havoc in all corners of the globe. While many businesses ceased their operations, higher education leaders were opening their doors virtually. Two key questions that they had to address were (1) how could they continue the education of their students safely? and (2) how could they ensure that the quality of education was not compromised when they decided to move from in-person to emergency remote learning? As simple as these questions may appear, there were layers of complexity associated with each question and the decisions that had to be made. Issues of inequity, readiness, and care (Leacock & Warrican, 2020) had to be considered along with a variety of other concerns (e.g., technology access, teacher training, employees’ psychological and physical wellbeing).

While many people may have initially perceived emergency remote learning as the panacea for continuing education during the pandemic, the reality was far from this. For higher education leaders, many variables had to be taken into consideration prior to making decisions on how education would be continued (Netolicky, 2020; Thornton, 2020; Tourish, 2020). For example, in terms of inequity, consideration had to be given to the fact that some students did not have equal access to technology which, in many instances, prevented them from easily accessing learning materials and resources. Furthermore, many faculty members were unfamiliar with delivering online instruction, and the quality checks and processes involved in doing so; as such, the issue of faculty readiness became central (Bagwell, 2020;

Leacock & Warrican, 2020). Added to this, some schools did not have the necessary infrastructure in place to effectively facilitate the full-scale delivery of courses online. Another unique consideration for education leaders was the continuation of some in-person classes in subject areas (e.g., the Natural Sciences) where in-person learning was a necessity. The central question became, how would they do so safely? The issue of care became critical. These were all important points of consideration that shaped the decisions that were made by these leaders. This reflects the complexity of the decision-making process during a crisis, especially a health crisis.

Sensemaking

Leaders are expected to make tough decisions. However, during a crisis, decision-making becomes a lot more complex (Oroszi, 2018; Thornton, 2020). Crises (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) often occur in a non-linear fashion. They are accompanied by unpredictability, uncertainty, and fluidity. Despite this non-linearity, leaders must take time to unravel the dynamics of the situation before embarking on *final* decisions; they must engage in sensemaking.

Sensemaking should occur when leaders are faced with circumstances that are surprising, confusing, or that are in sharp contrast to what would be considered as a normal situation (Christianson & Barton, 2021). According to Stephens et al. (2020), crises can trigger occasions for sensemaking in which old interpretations or responses suddenly become obsolete and [leaders] must reinterpret their surroundings and craft new interpretations and solutions to new and complex problems.

The pandemic took educational leaders for a tailspin. They had to make sense of a situation that even the health officials were struggling to comprehend. The ambiguity surrounding the pandemic was reflected in the inconsistency of protective protocols; the misunderstandings and misgivings about the severity of the disease all added additional layers of complication to educational leaders' sensemaking process. Yet, despite all the uncertainties amid this global crisis, these leaders were expected to find ways to ensure that high-quality learning continued while managing a sensitive situation in which each person's physical and mental wellbeing was under threat. Due to the idiosyncrasies that the pandemic presented, educational leaders could not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach.

Education could not continue in the traditional way that we had become so accustomed to in the pre-pandemic era. Leaders had to assess the situation, re-evaluate the way in which education was offered, and propose innovative solutions in response to a situation that was largely beyond their control. Change was necessary. Those at the top had to make sense of what was happening. In many instances, schools became home, and home became school as universities shifted to emergency remote learning to ensure that there was an opportunity for students to continue their pursuit of higher education.

Collaboration

It is often said that it is 'lonely at the top'. This sentiment conveys the misleading impression that the practice of leadership is an isolated activity based on decisions being made by a single individual (Seyama, 2021; Wright, 2013; Zumaeta, 2019). As history (and an abundance of leadership theories) has taught us, good leadership is collaborative in nature (Groeschel, 2019; Jones et al., 2012; Wright, 2013). This is especially so in times of crisis, where leaders need access to resources and expertise to help guide their decision-making. An approach like this can serve to enhance the quality of decisions in high-pressure situations (Jones et al., 2012) such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, in higher education institutions,

during the pandemic, decisions could not solely be made by members of the senior leadership team. Strong collaboration was needed with health experts, technical experts, and online instruction experts. This viewpoint is supported by Fernandez and Shaw (2020) who state that “academic leaders should distribute leadership responsibilities to a network of teams throughout the organization to improve the quality of the decisions made in crisis resolution” (p. 1).

Crisis Communication

Even though sensemaking, decision-making, and collaboration are critical elements of crisis leadership, how decisions are communicated during a crisis is equally as important (Marshall et al., 2020). As Agaard and Earnest (2020) put it, “never is it more important for a leadership team to communicate effectively and efficiently than in a crisis” (p. 183). Given the ambiguity that stems from a crisis, people often look to their leaders to make sense of this ambiguity. They look to them for direction and clarity on the situation. They want their leaders to reduce the uncertainty. During these times, leaders (especially in a world of disinformation and misinformation) are often seen as one of the few reputable sources of information that can provide clarity amid the chaos. Consequently, people look to them for a sense of hope and direction, and perhaps, more importantly, as a gauge for how they should respond to the crisis. They want their leaders to ease their concerns (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2022). In these circumstances, it is not only important for leaders to communicate but the message and the delivery of the message are also critical.

Poor and ineffective communication strategies can create additional layers of ambiguity and emotional frustration. However, effective communication during a crisis is not a default approach. Leaders must be intentional in how they communicate during times of uncertainty. Indeed, this is not a straightforward process. Leaders need to recognize that during a crisis, emotions are heightened as the individuals that they lead seek to come to terms with what they are experiencing. Leading during a crisis creates real and imagined pressures that can impact the quality of communication (Jong, 2020; Malecki et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important that leaders are strategic in the way they communicate when faced with unprecedented circumstances. Leaders must not only be accurate and timely in their communication, but they must also consider the psychological struggles that people may be experiencing during the crisis.

Seeger (2006) identified ten (10) best practices for communicating during a crisis, we will discuss four (4) of these which the researcher deemed to be most important in terms of communication during a health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Listening to People’s Concerns

People’s lives are impacted by crises. As such, they become emotionally invested in the decisions that are made by their leaders, given that these decisions can significantly influence how they function both personally and professionally. For example, during different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a lot of anxiety about when, if, or how faculty and students should return to the physical classroom. The fear of contracting the disease while teaching was a major concern by many (Kamran & Naeim, 2021; Wakui et al., 2021). Leaders had to demonstrate that they heard and understood these fears and would put measures (health protocols, including the flexibility to work from home) in place to reduce the likelihood of transmission.

In a crisis, at the very least, individuals need to feel as though their views are being taken into consideration, especially when their lives and livelihoods are under threat. Seeger (2006) notes that leaders who are managing a crisis need to listen to the concerns of their constituents, take these concerns into account, and respond accordingly. This helps to build trust. Of course, that trust may be predicated on the relationship that leaders had with their team prior to the crisis. If this relationship was strong (typified by an approach where the leader(s) took his or her constituents' views into consideration when making decisions), these leaders are more likely to have greater credibility and support for decisions that they make during a crisis. A large part of leaders' ability to gain or maintain credibility during a crisis are honesty and transparency.

Honesty, Candor, and Openness

In a crisis, some leaders may opt to provide parts of the story rather than the whole story. The aim of this approach is often to avoid mass panic and to give the impression that those in charge have the situation fully under control (Wardman, 2020). As well-intentioned as some leaders may be in adopting this approach, it can erode their credibility. As Seeger (2006) notes, effective crisis communicators are honest, candid, and open in their communication. This approach to communication is critical during a crisis, especially in this information-age where 'fake news' is readily accessible via the various social media platforms and other alternative sources. Leaders can lose credibility if their constituents discover that they are not sharing the full details of the events as they unfold. An example of transparency and credibility in the education context during the pandemic, would be leaders' acknowledgement that despite the stringent protocols, there was still the very real possibility that the disease could be contracted if they returned to the classroom. It was also important for leaders to share as much information as possible in the event of an outbreak.

Communicate With Passion, Care, Concern, and Empathy

Much of human behaviour is regulated by emotions – how we feel and how people's behaviors impact our feelings. As mentioned previously, during crises, emotions are heightened as individuals seek to navigate the layers of uncertainty in terms of the threat. The pandemic heightened emotions. Unlike other major crises (e.g., the Economic Recession), it has intensified anxiety because it is a direct threat to human life; it has caused millions of deaths. In the early waves of the pandemic, the fears were raw and widespread as the number of cases and deaths continued to climb worldwide. In circumstances like these where life is threatened, leaders must be mindful of the fears that people have; they must demonstrate concern and understanding. They must understand that how they communicate their messages during a crisis will evoke emotional responses from all individuals affected. How decisions are communicated cannot be void of the expression of concern for the realities faced by individuals and their families. As Seeger (2006) and Fernandez and Shaw (2020) point out, constituents respond more favourably to leaders who acknowledge their concerns about any potential harm that may result from a crisis. They suggest that leaders need to lead with emotional intelligence. This view is supported by the research findings from the work of Kruse et al. (2020). The authors interviewed academic leaders at three higher education institutions who were tasked with the responsibility of leading during the pandemic. One of the important elements that these leaders shared about their experience is that they felt a sense of responsibility to manage everyone's emotions. As one participant explained:

Caught in the Middle

I feel like I've been forced to pay a compassion tax of sorts where since I'm an administrator it has been my job to address people's fear, irrationality, grief, uncertainty, disappointment, and anger (and that's the short list). I also think that this is entirely gendered.

The reality is that the pandemic has been frustrating for everyone. In the early stages, some people assumed that education had it a bit easier than most other sectors as employees (mainly faculty) were afforded the 'luxury' of working online. But the pivot to online learning was not that simple. On a professional level, faculty and students had to familiarise themselves with learning the various technologies used to deliver instruction. On a personal level, they had to manage the drastic differences (more persistent interruptions during the teaching process, e.g., family members, managing their children's online learning) that came with working online. These were added layers to the already growing concern about the pervasive health crisis, which caused a significant increase in mental fatigue and emotional burnout (Kim et al., 2022; Pressley, 2021). The last thing that people wanted to deal with was a leader who appeared to be uncaring or inconsiderate about their realities when communicating or making decisions (Seyama, 2021; Yancey & Krome, 2021).

Some leaders may be hesitant to include expressions of empathy in their statements for fear of appearing 'unprofessional'. However, according to Seeger (2006), "these efforts to maintain professionalism are often perceived by people as cold and uncaring and may undermine the credibility of the leader" (p. 241). Furthermore, research has shown that leading with care became the number one priority of academic leaders during the pandemic. In a study conducted by McLeod and Dulskey (2021), it was found that, among the 55 interviewees, many of them pointed to showing care as a key leadership approach they used. One participant expressed this as asking their staff: What can we do for you? Another participant pointed to grace and flexibility as his primary approach to leadership during this time.

Accepting Uncertainty and Ambiguity

The most common characteristics of a crisis are volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. These elements may stem from the lack of knowledge about the origin of the crisis, the absence of immediate short-term or long-term solutions, and unpredictability in terms of how the crisis will unfold. Many authors describe this as the VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) environment (Hadar et al., 2020; Korsakova, 2020; Worley & Jules, 2020). When leaders communicate during a crisis, they need to acknowledge that they do not have all the answers, nor can they precisely predict what the outcome will be. Taking an approach like this can create some degree of unease as leaders know that people look to them for guidance and certainty. To avoid this, some leaders may delay communicating certain elements about the crisis until they are 'sure' and have all the facts. The reality is that waiting until all uncertainty is reduced may mean waiting until it is too late (Oroszi, 2018; Tourish, 2020).

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Leading From the Middle in the Middle of a Crisis

Before delving into any discussion on middle leadership during a crisis, it is important to understand the psychological and organizational dynamics of this role. These dynamics create various idiosyncrasies

that may not be experienced by persons in other leadership positions. Hence, during a crisis, these elements can serve to either undermine or enhance a middle leader's response to the crisis as it unfolds. It is therefore critical to unpack the role of middle leaders, especially in higher education contexts.

The Role of Middle Leaders

Middle leaders in higher education institutions occupy a unique space in the leadership hierarchy. On the one hand, they are front and center in terms of engaging with senior leadership whose policies they are expected to oversee as they are implemented. As Groeschel (2019) notes, effective middle leaders are good *translators*. They translate the institution's vision into achievable steps and systems that accomplish the desired results. On the other hand, middle leaders are expected to look out for the interests of faculty and staff – their immediate colleagues. Unlike, their subordinates, middle leaders are often privy to the big picture of senior management's intentions for the institution, and their strategies for improving learning quality. As such, a large part of their role is to convey this information to faculty and their staff and get them to buy into this vision. Oftentimes, there will be pushback. Consequently, middle leaders are responsible for developing effective strategies that help individuals to understand the importance of senior management's decisions. If the pushback is strong enough, middle leaders will have to perform the role of *negotiators* to get senior management and faculty to understand each other's perspectives on the decision along with the idiosyncrasies and potential challenges involved in implementation.

Middle leaders simultaneously function as subordinates, equals, and superiors (Franken et al., 2015). Therefore, it is not surprising that some authors metaphorically refer to the middle leader's position as one where they experience dual tensions based on the expectations from above versus the expectations of those within their teams (Harris et al., 2019). As subordinates, equals, and superiors, it is important that middle leaders help stakeholders to engage in perspective-taking. Because senior management and faculty are not privy to the nuances of each other's experiences and interpretations of directives, it is the middle leader's role to help them to see things that they otherwise would not see or understand. For example, senior management is often results-oriented. They want to see tangible outcomes from their decisions. Due to this focus, they may not fully understand the challenges involved in achieving these results. On the other hand, faculty may be concerned about what it will take to achieve these results. They may see themselves as being overworked and may draw the conclusion that senior management does not care about the difficulties, they may have in working to achieve the goals that are articulated. This tension can become challenging, especially if the decision affects revenue generation or the financial sustainability of the institution. As translators, middle leaders must translate the information *up* to senior management and *down* to their team. Therefore, the success of implementing directives from senior leadership is heavily contingent on the middle leader's ability to effectively translate the information that they are receiving from above and below. This type of communication becomes even more critical in times of crisis when decisions need to be implemented with urgency.

Middle leaders are always at the forefront of institutional change. They work on the frontline. They are not only expected to deliver messages of change, as directed by senior leadership, but they are also expected to ensure that this change is well-implemented. A large part of this process requires them to engage with faculty and staff and address any questions or concerns that these stakeholders may have about senior management's decisions. They carry the 'burden' of conveying information about change that faculty and students may be unwilling to accept.

Human beings tend to be change resistant. We are creatures of habit. We like familiarity, predictability, and comfort. Change can disrupt each of these elements. Perhaps the most important aspect of communicating messages of change is the *how*. Many of the issues that arise in organizations when change is pending or implemented do not merely stem from the change itself, but how the change is communicated. Those who are charged with making the adjustments to their routines to accommodate these changes, often complain that the decisions are top down. In contrast, senior management is more likely to be concerned about getting the change directive implemented as quickly and as efficiently as possible. The role of middle leaders is to bridge this gap. How they communicate messages of change is critical. The message must be timely (shared as early as possible), communicated with compassion, and with the intention of receiving feedback (engagement). Including these elements can make change more palatable, especially if faculty and staff are given the opportunity to share their thoughts about the changes *before*, they are implemented.

Given the unique role and position of middle leaders, decision-making, sensemaking, collaboration, and communication become even more important, especially given their roles of translators, negotiators, and change agents (Groeschel, 2019; Nobile, 2018; Skerritt et al., 2021). Being a middle leader adds additional layers to leadership as, quite often, because of organizational dynamics, middle leaders do not have full agency to make critical decisions without the approval of senior management. It is therefore critical to get insight into the experiences and perspectives of middle leaders in terms of the challenges they experience leading from this position. Even more importantly, it is useful to explore their experiences as middle leaders during a crisis. What follows therefore is a story of a Caribbean higher education middle leader who led during the COVID-19 pandemic. A pseudonym (Dr. J.) has been used to protect the identity of the middle leader.

METHODS

Research Design

The researcher used a narrative research design to guide the research process for this study. Given the intent of the researcher to tell the unique story of a higher education middle leader who was thrust into an expanded leadership role during the pandemic, it was important to adopt an approach that would allow the voice of this middle leader to be ‘heard’. This view is supported by Gay et al. (2006) who posit that “narrative research provides educational researchers with an opportunity to validate the practitioner’s voice . . .” (p.429).

Participant

One participant was included in this study. The participant is a female middle leader with over 10 years of experience in her position as a senior academic middle leader at a Teachers’ Training College in the Caribbean. As a middle leader at this training college, the participant holds a senior administrative position where she has oversight for staff and faculty. Her substantive duty involves ensuring academic quality. This requires her to work closely with faculty, students, and senior leadership to fulfil the mission of the College. Therefore, among her primary responsibilities, is offering support for the strategic directives of senior management while working with faculty and students as these directives are implemented.

Data Collection Processes

Prior to conducting the interview, the researcher contacted the interviewee to inform her about the nature and purpose of the study. After this focus was explained, and she agreed to participate in the study, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given in writing via email and verbally during the interview process.

The data was collected using a one-on-one interview. The interview was conducted via Zoom and lasted for approximately 40 minutes. Before the interview commenced, permission was sought to record the session. Having obtained this permission, the researcher proceeded to ask the participant a series of open-ended questions pertaining to her experience as a middle leader in Higher Education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Instrument

To facilitate the data collection process, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview protocol which comprised 12 open-ended questions designed to elicit information about the participant's experiences while leading at her institution during the early stages of the pandemic. Examples of some of the questions on the protocol include:

What was it like leading from the middle during the pandemic? How do you think your position as a middle leader contributed to your leadership experiences during the pandemic? What type of support did you need to execute your role?

The use of this type of tool to determine participants' perspectives on a particular phenomenon is supported by McIntosh and Morse (2015) who note that the purpose of the semi-structured interview protocol is to assist the researcher with gaining the participants' perspectives regarding an experience and insights pertaining to the research topic.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher listened to the recording and reread the transcripts to assist with the identification of the main themes that captured the experience of the participant. To minimise researcher bias, and in keeping with the narrative research design, whenever possible verbatim quotations were used to aid in telling the story of the interviewee. The researcher also used member checking to validate the themes that emerged from the interview. Creswell and Miller (2000) posit that "member checking involves taking the data and interpretations back to the participants so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and the narrative account" (p. 127). Therefore, employing this process was critical to ensuring the accurate portrayal of the participant's voice.

Key Findings: A Middle Leader's Perspective on Leading During a Crisis

The focus of this study was twofold. It aimed to: (1) explore the leadership experiences of a higher education middle leader during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, and (2) to determine the

Caught in the Middle

type of support that middle leaders need from senior management to empower them to lead effectively during a crisis. This study was guided by two primary research questions.

1. What were the lived experiences of a midlevel educational leader while leading during a crisis?
2. What are the perceptions of a midlevel higher education leader about the type of support that is required from senior management for middle leaders to lead effectively during a crisis?

The findings from this study corroborate previous literature that highlights the complexity of middle leadership (Groeschel, 2019; Nobile, 2018; Skerritt et al., 2021). More specifically, the results substantiate the viewpoint that middle leaders occupy a unique position in many organizations. Some authors have described them as being sandwiched between senior leadership and their team members (Ghamrawi, 2013; Zhou & Deneen, 2020). This was evident from the information shared by Dr. J. There were seven major themes that emerged which captured her experiences as a higher education middle leader during the height of the pandemic. The list of themes is provided below.

- Practicing Adaptive Leadership
- Appeasing Senior Management, Faculty, and Students: Seeing the Bigger Picture
- Leading with Care
- Leveraging Strong Connections with Staff
- Bringing Awareness to Stakeholder Concerns
- Keeping Stakeholders Motivated
- Having the Agency to Act with Urgency

Before delving into any discussion on the themes that emerged, it is important to situate Dr.J.'s role as a middle leader with her institution.

Dr. J.'s Middle Leadership Role

Dr. J. plays a critical role at her institution. Her substantive duty involves ensuring academic quality. This role not only requires her to be fully engaged in activities directly related to the education life cycle of students, but she also manages staff (lecturers and administrative staff) and works closely with senior leadership. The vast and all-encompassing nature of her role is somewhat typical for middle leaders in higher education. This point is supported by Nobile (2018) who identified six (6) role categories of middle leaders, which include (1) a student focused role, (2) an administrative role, (3) an organizational role, (4) a supervisory role, (5) a staff development role, and (6) a strategic role. This is not surprising as middle leaders are often heavily involved in many and varied elements of academia (Harris et al., 2018). Dr. J's involvement in the various aspects of the academic process, reflects this viewpoint. It also highlights the value of the middle leader to the organization. However, when asked about the primary responsibilities of her position, she emphasized her student focussed role, notwithstanding the other important roles she plays. She expressed that:

the students being interviewed for entry, the delivery of the program [and students'] success and progression and their final award, [all] fall under my leadership.

Given these thoughts, it was not surprising that the leadership approaches she embraced during the onset of the pandemic, reflected her desire to ensure that students continued to have access to high-quality learning experiences.

Practicing Adaptive Leadership

Even though the pandemic required substantive shifts in how education was delivered at her institution, Dr. J. believed that her role remained the same. However, she indicated that the activities associated with her role shifted in terms of how they were executed. By this, she meant that most, if not all, activities that were under her portfolio, were shifted online. She provided an example of how the admissions process changed:

Whereas our prospective students would be required to come into the institution for face-to-face interviews and assessment for acceptance, all of this had to be moved online, so it meant that in terms of the coordination of that aspect of the task, it required significantly more.

In addition to identifying the changes in her core administrative activities, she also noted that as a middle leader, the pandemic caused her to change her approach in terms of how she engaged with her staff. For Dr. J., she immediately recognized the need to be more flexible in her approach to addressing the needs of her staff. She understood that it was not business as usual. She shared that:

One of the significant things is that [the pandemic] required a greater level of flexibility on my part as a leader, and a greater consideration for ... the psychosocial needs of all the stakeholders with whom I interact. Although that was always a part of what already existed, I think the fact that the pandemic was ongoing, made the need to consider the individuals, and some of the challenges they were experiencing to a greater extent.

She goes on to give examples of the types of challenges that stakeholders were experiencing that required her to demonstrate a greater degree of flexibility in her leadership:

... I had students who were living in communities where they had no access to the Internet ... Courses had to be moved online, programmes had to be moved online. When those things happened, students became genuinely fearful, some of them had to come to the plant [the school] in order to access the facilities there.

Dr. J. also pointed out that addressing the challenges her staff faced with navigating this new virtual environment was a major focus of her role during this time:

Teaching online, for our staff, was entirely new because, prior to that, all of our programme delivery was ... face to face; so, we had to deal with the whole mindset change. We had to deal with preparation in terms of organizing extensive training ... to meet the demands of the new requirements.

Caught in the Middle

Even though she acknowledged the need for flexibility in terms of addressing the needs of staff and students, Dr. J. pointed to the challenges that this brought as well, especially regarding the fluidity of the pandemic and her consultations with senior management:

It's almost as though the goal posts kept changing . . . because once you have established what you needed to do in terms of the protocols, something else may happen; the government may put some kind of new requirement in. The Health Department may ask for something different. It meant that in order to ensure that [I was] meeting all of these expectations, whilst meeting all the expectations of students and staff, I had to be in constant consultation and decision-making with senior management.

Dr. J.'s approach reflects the practice of adaptive leadership. Leading during times of uncertainty requires an adaptive style of leadership; leaders are expected to be flexible, especially when there is a threat to individuals' wellbeing. This view is supported by Bagwell (2020) who emphasized the need for adaptive leadership during the height of the pandemic. He suggests that this type of adaptive leadership required leaders to consider what needed to change in order for their organizations to adapt and thrive in the COVID-19 environment. Dr. J.'s approach to leadership during the pandemic highlights the importance of being flexible and accommodative, especially during times of crisis where the VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) environment comes into play. This type of environment not only requires leaders who appropriately adjust to the environment as the crisis unfolds, but it also necessitates leadership approaches that enable the leader to navigate the expectations of different stakeholders.

Appeasing Senior Management, Faculty, and Students: Seeing the Bigger Picture

The role of the middle leader is one that requires the individual to navigate tensions that may arise when decisions are made by senior management with which line staff may not agree (Branson et al., 2015). In fact, Nobile (2018) notes that "looking after the interests of the team may lead to tensions and require communication that is sensitive to feelings of staff members on the one hand or facilitative of gaining support from senior leadership on the other" (p. 406). As Dr. J. recounted her experience, she highlighted the tension that arose when senior management made the decision to recommence in-person learning, despite the rising numbers of cases, and the fact that other higher education institutions were still delivering their courses online. She noted that:

When we [returned to] face-to-face, my staff were not happy, many people were not happy at all because COVID was still at its peak . . . and so that was a decision that I had to convey to my colleague staff members. . . and many people were not happy, and protested, but they came along the line as they understood more and more why it was necessary.

Quite interestingly, Dr. J. initially had her own concerns and reservations about senior management's decision for staff to return to the physical plant. Her reservations reflect a challenge that many middle leaders have – communicating decisions from senior management. When asked how it made her feel having to convey this message, knowing that a lot of people would be upset by the decision, she elaborates:

If I am going to be honest, at some point I had my own trepidations about what was required to be done, but I was able to see why [it] was necessary, and so [in that] way I was able to . . . encourage persons [and] assure them of the many steps that were taken as far as possible to ensure their safety because that was what persons were most afraid of. Persons were afraid of contracting the virus whilst they are in the face-to-face environment. Because I was able to point to the well-established protocols that were put in place, I think I was able to convince persons that their welfare is significant to leadership, and as far as possible the steps that we were taking, were in their best interests. Eventually persons came to a level of acceptance, and they improved the level of support that they were prepared to give.

In addition to emphasizing the safety protocols, Dr. J. also highlighted the importance of being vulnerable with staff. She indicated that she was always willing to share her own fears and apprehensions about in-person learning during the pandemic. She wanted her staff and faculty to recognize that she saw their fears and apprehensions as legitimate, and that she too had these concerns, but would do her best in light of the circumstances.

Balancing the Message: Leading With Care

During times of crisis, it is critical that leaders demonstrate emotional intelligence and empathy; they must lead with care. Based on Dr. J.'s responses, it was evident that this was the leadership approach she took during the height of the pandemic. She highlighted the importance of communicating with compassion and care, but she also had to juxtapose this with the need to fulfil the institution's mission and vision by returning to in-person learning:

You know, we are never happy to convey messages that others do not want to hear. Personally . . . although I felt the fear and the anxiety about the whole situation, I had no choice but to get to the place in terms of a mindset change, and to get to a place where I was able to convey the message and I had to find ways to convey it [to staff]. Sometimes top leaders can just throw it out, but in conveying it, I couldn't say it the way top management would say it, I had to find ways to soften the tone of the message. [I had to find] ways to share the message with the care . . . that is required and that persons are expecting. And to package it in a way that it was able to give a clear sense that the welfare, the wellbeing of the staff was still a priority. And even though we have these priorities, these are the hard things that need to be done, that under other circumstances, one would rather not do, but tough decisions had to be made.

Dr. J. also emphasized the importance of addressing stakeholders' psychosocial needs in times of crisis:

Sometimes we want the academic [aspect] to go on; we want to maintain our mission; we want to maintain all of those things. But if we are not careful in the busyness of that, we may miss the needs of individuals in terms of the psychosocial support that is necessary to [enable] them to function. . . It's almost like a parent. You may have a challenge as a parent, but you pretty much have to put your own feelings and needs aside. As middle leaders, you have to be prepared to address the needs of the persons you serve. And in some instances, your own feelings, your own desires and so on, have to kind of take a backseat so that you can keep those other persons motivated and achieving.

Caught in the Middle

Dr. J.'s perspective is supported by the literature. For example, Tran et al. (2020) posits:

In education, while student outcomes are the critical driver motivating decision making, a problem arises when there are increasing expectations for teachers and other school staff to attend to student needs when their own needs are often not prioritised or are ignored altogether (p.39).

This philosophy seemed to connect with her leadership style, which she identified as servant leadership. According to Jeyaraj and Gandolfi (2019), “a servant leader’s primary purpose is to serve others by investing in their development and well-being for the benefit of accomplishing tasks and goals for the common good” (p.3). This style of leadership was reflected in Dr. J.’s actions and decisions. She recounted that many staff members had several personal challenges that they had to navigate during the pandemic. Their family members were becoming ill, and they also had to take care of their children. This made it more difficult for them to function professionally. When Dr. J. realized this, she understood that it was important for her to show care beyond the academics:

You know much of [staff members’ personal struggles] came to my ear. And I think that my ability to just serve in terms of just listening or making some recommendations, pulling back a task here or there from someone, I think was what helped. . . They understood to a large extent that there was care, there was concern, there was empathy. I think that helped, and so persons were prepared to even go the extra mile when the time came, because they felt that their welfare is of concern to leadership.

Even though gender was not a main feature in Dr. J.’s responses, some scholars may argue that her empathetic and communal approach to leadership during a time of crisis, is one of the core strengths of female leaders (Eichenauer et al., 2022; Moodli & Toni, 2017)

Leveraging Strong Connections With Staff

Dr. J. acknowledged that one of the keys to her success as a leader during the pandemic was her strong relationship with her staff prior to the pandemic. This connective history allowed her to leverage those relationships and personal connections which, in turn, enabled her to be more flexible with her staff. She also made a concerted effort to understand everyone’s experiences during the pandemic beyond teaching and learning. Even though her knowledge of these experiences made it more difficult for her to convey decisions from senior management, individual circumstances were always at the forefront of how she chose to deliver the messages. This is captured in the narrative.

Because I am very conscious of how some individuals react, and very often I know some of [their] realities . . . I may be closer to the realities of members of Faculty [than senior leadership]. So, some faculty members [during the pandemic] will tell me about situations with their family and even their personal situations. So, in coming to those decisions, whereas those may be clear in my head, and . . . sometimes I’m not at liberty to share all of this with senior management, so I am coming to a decision [from a] slightly different place than a senior manager, who does not necessarily have all of that information and sometimes it’s information that you’re not able to share. So, sometimes taking these personal realities into consideration may make it difficult for the conveying of a decision.

Keeping Stakeholders Motivated

During times of crisis, employee morale can be dented, and staff can become demotivated. As she shared her experiences with her stakeholders during the pandemic, Dr. J. indicated that. . . *I think one of my biggest challenges was keeping my stakeholders motivated and just helping them to overcome . . . the daily challenges.*

She mentioned the myriad frustrations that students had with internet connectivity and how some of them did not even have access to devices. In cases like this, Dr. J. seemed to go beyond the call of duty to offer the help that students needed. *There was a point where I actually began to source [devices], through various local organizations or even various individuals to identify resources that could help individual students.*

While she did not necessarily have to locate similar resources for faculty, she had to make a concerted effort to keep their morale up. Dr. J. understood the challenges and apprehensions that her staff and faculty faced. Her main aim was to keep them motivated. This is captured in the account below.

On the other side of it then [for the] faculty, [I] had to continue to motivate [them] and just remind persons of why we do what we do as educators. In some instances, they were dealing with their own issues of learning to teach online, which was new for most of my staff. [They had to juggle] the realities of, in some instances, of having their own children in a space they had to teach; their children are also online.

Dr. J. seemed to understand that the issues that her staff was facing involved far more than just teaching and learning. As such, she increased her frequency of communication and encouragement by sending them motivational messages to keep them going despite the challenging circumstances. She recalled having several phone calls and online meetings with her staff. This aided her in making any necessary adjustments to make them a bit more comfortable. She expressed that:

Hearing from them [staff] helped me to make whatever modifications were necessary. The aim was to keep persons motivated by providing them with a level communication that made them know that as much support was there as possible.

Managing Stakeholder Emotions

When asked if being a middle leader made it more difficult or easier to communicate with staff during the crisis, Dr. J. indicated that it made it a bit more challenging:

As a middle leader, you become the bridge between senior administrators, staff, and students. You could have understood the challenges of a member of staff who is faced with a difficult situation, and you become aware that a decision that has to be made, may exacerbate this challenge for this person, and yet you are in the place where you must convey this requirement. I think what it comes down to is dealing with the emotions at that level where you become intimate with the realities of the persons you serve – your stakeholders. Where you are intimate with their personal or professional challenges, [and the need arises] to convey decisions to them that may create further difficulty or hardship, makes it difficult. Maybe it's not in a professional way, but as a leader, your personal sense of care and concern [is important].

Caught in the Middle

Dr. J.'s responses reflect the fact that unplanned change disrupts comfort and creates anxiety (Bagwell, 2020; Isaah, 2018). Therefore, middle leaders must demonstrate a great degree of emotional intelligence when communicating decisions amid chaos (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Seeger, 2006). The display of emotional intelligence featured strongly in Dr. J.'s responses, especially as she sought to bring awareness to senior leadership about stakeholders' concerns.

Bringing Awareness to Stakeholder Concerns

Senior leadership may not always be aware of what is happening on the ground. It is therefore critical that middle leaders help them to be more cognisant of the impact of their decisions, particularly how it affects key stakeholders (Franken et al., 2015; Nobile, 2018). Representing the interests of these stakeholders (staff and students) was an important aspect of Dr. J.'s leadership during the pandemic. For example, there were instances where decisions were made by senior management that her staff were not fully comfortable with. This meant that she had to bring these concerns to the attention of senior management to consider making modifications to directives that were given. She recalled one major situation where this representation was required:

One of the significant requirements during COVID-19 is the need for physical distancing. . . Your plant is already established . . .so you can't really change the size of your plant to respond. So I found that among my administrative staff in [one of the Units]. . . when [senior management made] the decision . . . that they should return to their desks, we had made arrangements for some of those members to be relocated to a classroom, because at that time students were not back in the classroom. . . Coming out of the implementation of that, the staff now had to be moving over a much longer distance to get to, for example, to a filing cabinet. So, you are sitting at this new place with your desktop well in place and everything, but every time you need to pull a file for a student, you then had to get up, you then had to walk [a significant distance to get a file].

When [the staff] reported what challenges they were having, then I had to take that back to [senior management] and say, is it possible that rather than have all the members coming in everyday for the week, could we have a more staggered approach?. . . That was an easy acceptance [for senior management].

This experience was indicative of the type of support that Dr. J. reported that she got from senior management. She also shared that she also felt empowered to make critical decisions.

Having the Agency to Act With Urgency

Dr. J. reported that when urgent decisions had to be made, she felt empowered to make those decisions without having to consult with senior management first. This was particularly the case when there were COVID-19 cases among staff:

There were few instances where we discovered, having come back face-to-face, that there were, among our numbers, persons who had contracted the virus. And who, very likely would have come in contact with others. So, there was the need to take immediate action to either send a whole hall of students away or a whole class of students away [without] creating the type of panic that would disrupt the operations.

Dr. J. also noted that even though she was empowered to make decisions, there were still a few parameters. However, she believed that her experience in the position provided a greater degree of comfort in terms of her efficacy and agency in decision-making:

I could make decisions outside of my [authority], but I still had to operate within particular guidelines. Having been a senior person, and being in this position for [over 10 years], already gave me a good sense of what it is to manage a process at this institution . . . COVID did not significantly change that. . . Those decisions that I had to make were not difficult because I had a clear sense of what it means to function in this capacity, at this institution. I felt empowered. I felt that I could make a decision, and then if I needed to advise senior management [after; it would be okay].

She also shared the experience of having to send home several staff members at one time because there was a report of someone displaying COVID-related symptoms:

Maybe under normal circumstances, I would consult with my boss to say, can I send home the staff? But I had a situation where I had to say that everybody needs to go, and everybody needs to go now and be out for X number of days, and then [I would] inform management. . . Because of the nature of COVID, you couldn't wait [to make a decision] . . . It required quick action, and I felt as though, I had that authority and flexibility.

Support From Senior Management

Dr. J. praised senior management for the type of support they provided to her during the pandemic. She indicated that she felt comfortable approaching them with her ideas and concerns that were shared by staff and students:

What existed was an open-door policy . . .there was the opportunity for ongoing discussions, ongoing lobbying, ongoing listening, and understanding, I think that this provided [the] much [needed] support. We had established protocols, but if there was a need for modification, I always felt that I could go to senior management [and recommend changes]. I always felt that there was a willingness to listen . . . It may not necessarily mean that a change would be made, but I could always feel that I had the support. If I had to make a decision, I had the support from senior management.

In addition to being able to share her ideas and obtain support in her decision-making. Dr. J. also felt that senior management was always willing to provide guidance if she was unsure about how to handle a situation:

There were times when I might have been unsure of how to address a particular issue . . . I always felt that I could speak to senior management to get some guidance on how to manage a particular instance.

Even though Dr. J. appreciated the support and guidance provided by senior management, she noted that greater access to human and financial resources would have aided her in addressing the variety of issues that arose. Yet, she understood the resource limitations of her institution.

Caught in the Middle

You saw some needs that you could not address because it was outside the resource capabilities of your institution . . . We are government funded. And you know, when you get a subvention, and you get an allowance for COVID, this is what it is, and this is what you use it for.

Nevertheless, given that many students were severely impacted by the pandemic, and had a variety of needs, she believed that this provided a window for senior management to lobby government for greater financial support to address these needs.

Solutions and Recommendations: The Application Framework

Dr. J.'s story provides some useful insights into the nuances and idiosyncrasies of leading from the middle in a higher education context during a crisis. There are many lessons that senior leaders and middle leaders can learn from her experiences and approach to leadership. However, there are perhaps four (4) key recommendations for leadership practice that can be gleaned from Dr. J.'s experience, that may be useful for middle leaders and senior management to consider when leading during a crisis; each of these are presented below.

1. Lead with Care and Compassion
2. Empower Middle Leaders to Make Swift Decisions
3. Inform Senior Management about Stakeholders' Concerns
4. Communicate Frequently and with Clarity

Lead With Care and Compassion

During times of crisis, employees may feel that senior leaders do not fully understand their concerns. It is therefore important for middle leaders to demonstrate care and compassion for their staff and students during a crisis (Evans, 2020; Tran et al., 2020). A common theme that emerged throughout Dr. J.'s story was her desire to lead with care. Middle leaders are often closer to their staff than senior management. As such, they are more likely to be knowledgeable about the personal struggles and realities of the staff, especially during a crisis. With this knowledge, middle leaders are duty-bound to consider how crises impact their staff physically, emotionally, and psychologically.

They should lead with compassion. This may not come naturally to some leaders, particularly those who are more results-oriented and goal-focused. Therefore, it requires intentional effort on the part of the middle leader to make leading with care an intrinsic element of their leadership practice. At the same time, the middle leader, as a translator, also has the responsibility of making senior management aware of the concerns of staff and students. Demonstrating this compassion and care can serve to enhance employee wellbeing and help them to function better in challenging circumstances. As Seeger (2006) and Fernandez and Shaw (2020) point out, constituents respond more favourably to leaders who acknowledge their concerns about any potential harm that may result from a crisis.

Evans (2020) highlights three critical elements that are instructive for leadership practice during a crisis.

1. **Listening:** check in with faculty to find out how they are doing
2. **Be present:** a conscious effort must be made to be fully present during conversations with faculty
3. **Create bonds:** it is important to show faculty that you see them as more than just employees

Each of these practices are reflected in Dr. J.'s story. They highlight the importance of leading with care during a crisis. This is particularly important for middle leaders who, more often than not, are more in tune (compared to senior leaders) with the everyday realities of faculty and students.

Empower Middle Leaders to Make Swift Decisions

Middle leaders have limited autonomy. Their ability to make quick decisions during a crisis may be contingent on their relationship with senior management and the organizational structures that are in place to support agile decision-making. If decision-making is centralized, these organizational structures can stifle the agency that middle leaders require during a crisis (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Dr. J. recounted that she was comfortable making decisions because she always felt as though she had the support of senior management, and that she could go to them for guidance when she was uncertain. Added to this, her years of experience in the organization put her in a position where she felt empowered to make decisions without fear of backlash from senior management. Senior management in her organization created an environment enabling her to lead.

Dr. J.'s experience provides insight into the importance of removing bureaucratic structures that can delay decision-making for middle leaders during a crisis. This view is supported by Jones et al. (2012). The authors note that "for universities to build sustainable leadership, a new, more participative and collaborative approach to leadership is needed that acknowledges the individual autonomy that underpins creative and innovative thinking".

Leading during a crisis, is not business as usual. Just like there are shifts in operations, in terms of chaos, senior management must consider modifying or adjusting bureaucratic processes/policies that may create feelings of disempowerment among middle leaders. In fact, it is critical that leadership during a crisis is distributed. There should be a shared power and delegation of roles and responsibilities that empower the middle leader as well as other leaders.

Being a middle leader is a demanding job. In crises, the demands of the role are significantly heightened. Therefore, using a distributed leadership model can lessen the burden that leaders at all levels may experience during a crisis (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Holcombe & Kezar, 2017; Jones et al., 2012).

Inform Senior Management About Stakeholder Concerns

Crises compel us to find solutions to problems as they emerge. Sometimes, because we are driven to find quick solutions, we can often overlook how we may be impeding the interests of others who are expected to help us execute those solutions. During the pandemic, many senior education leaders took the decision to shift instruction online. This was seen as a quick fix solution to ensure that learning continued. While online instruction served its purpose, the reality is that it was not the panacea that many had anticipated. Students and faculty alike struggled with balancing home and work responsibilities. There were also issues with access to technology. Many people also contracted the virus, which inhibited their ability to be fully engaged online.

What this teaches us, is that, in terms of decision-making, senior management should not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. For some senior leaders, this may be difficult to achieve as they may not be privy to the realities of the individuals affected by the decisions that they make. Therefore, it is critical for middle leaders in their roles as negotiators and translators and enactors of policy to carry these messages to senior leadership (Skerritt et al., 2021). It is also important for them to be in tune with the

Caught in the Middle

realities of their staff and faculty. Dr. J. made a concerted effort to be cognisant of the struggles her staff and students were experiencing, and in some cases, she took this information back to senior leadership, and they made the necessary adjustments to make these stakeholders a bit more comfortable. The result, she indicated, was that her colleagues and students were willing to put forward more effort because they believed that their interests were being represented.

Communicate Frequently and With Clarity

Perhaps the most important element of navigating a crisis is communication (Seeger, 2006). How messages are communicated shapes the response and the extent to which people have a clear sense of direction about what is expected of them. Both senior management and middle leaders need to ensure that their messaging is clear, and that individuals fully understand the leadership response. Communication should be done through a variety of mediums and forms (i.e., writing, synchronous meetings, e-mails, etc.). This view is supported by Fernandez and Shaw (2020). The authors note that during a crisis more than one form of communication should be used. Perhaps the most important of these is synchronous meetings where individuals get the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on decisions that have been made. However, in selecting communication tools, leadership should also consider stakeholder preferences (Fernandez & Shaw). During the interview, Dr. J. recalled having multiple online meetings, phone calls, and WhatsApp chats with her stakeholders. Her primary aim was not only to let them know that she could be reached, but to communicate frequently and with clarity.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Most of the research on education leadership seems to focus on either leadership in general or senior leadership's management of higher education institutions. Less attention has been paid to the important role of middle leaders, especially during times of crisis. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges it presented to leadership at all levels, there is room and scope for further research which examines the skills required by middle leaders in education to successfully lead during challenging times.

Furthermore, given the intricacies of the role of the middle leader, this position can create significant psychological pressure that may be exacerbated during a crisis. Consequently, future research could consider examining the supporting structures that middle leaders require to build their resiliency while leading during a crisis.

As stated earlier in this chapter, middle leaders in education, experience the best and worst of both worlds – the world of senior leadership and the worlds of faculty, students, and staff. This unique position provides opportunities for effective crisis response that may be overlooked. Considering this, it is important to reflect on how the position of middle leader can be leveraged to enhance the quality of responses to crises in education.

Given that this research only included one participant, the researcher made a concerted effort to ensure that the recommendations put forward for the application framework were also grounded in established leadership literature. However, future research should also consider exploring the experiences of additional middle leaders to enhance the generalizability and transferability of the findings.

This research, because of the emphasis placed on sharing the participant's voice, did not strictly abide by the restorying elements that are often associated with narrative research designs. However, this is an approach that can be considered for other studies.

CONCLUSION

The unique role of middle leaders in educational organizations is vital to ensuring that students have high-quality learning experiences. Nonetheless, this role can become a bit muddled given the relationships that middle leaders have to maintain with senior management, staff, faculty, and students. This dynamic amplifies the importance of their role during times of crisis. It can either enhance or compromise the quality of an institution's crisis response.

This chapter focused on the importance of middle leadership during a crisis. Specific emphasis was placed on the COVID-19 pandemic, and the critical role that middle leaders played during this health emergency. The discussion on key elements of leadership was contextualized using the experiences shared by a Caribbean middle-level higher education leader – Dr. J. – who led during the pandemic.

Based on Dr. J.'s experiences and the extant literature, four critical recommendations were put forward for consideration in terms of crisis leadership.

- Leading with Care and Compassion
- Empower Middle Leaders to make Swift Decisions
- Informing Senior Management about Stakeholder Concerns
- Communicating Frequently and with Clarity

These are all critical leadership practices for middle leaders, especially during times of uncertainty and change. However, the ability of education middle leaders to utilize these leadership approaches will also depend on the level of agency they are given from senior management to help them avoid being 'caught in the middle'.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Coronavirus: A deadly disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (WHO, 2022).

Crisis: An event or set of events usually characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, and forced change.

Crisis Leadership: Crisis leadership refers to critical leadership practices and processes that leaders are expected to execute and implement during times of crisis to help their organizations continue to fulfil their Mission and Vision in difficult circumstances.

Educational Leader: Any individual that holds a senior leadership position at an educational institution.

Higher Education Institution: An organization that offers formal post-secondary educational programmes.

Middle Leader: An individual who holds a leadership position at an educational institution where he or she is expected to manage faculty and staff while supporting senior leadership by leading the implementation of strategic directives and policies to ensure the effective operation of the institution.

Pandemic: A deadly disease that has spread across the world that significantly affects various populations in different geographic locations.

Chapter 15

Interdisciplinary Doctoral Education and Strategic Management in Crises: Harnessing Agency With Praxis

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ABSTRACT

Interdisciplinary working within and between different professions is now commonplace, with the transferability of knowledge across situated contexts of implementation. Education at doctoral level can be one mechanism of ensuring that mid-career professionals are equipped with the skills needed to build the capacity and capability required to deal with crisis situations. Interdisciplinary professional doctoral pathways and their associated learning trajectories are now a recognised mechanism of operationalising translational research from the context of work-based praxis. The longstanding debates of how best to bridge the theory-practice nexus in the field of business remains a challenge, although the progressive development of professional doctorate programmes has seen a rise in the number of clinical and professional practice doctorates across Western educational providers. This theoretical chapter will provide an insight into the concept of translational research in the context of research-based practice/work-based praxis within organisations across the globe.

INTRODUCTION

Business in the context of the 21st Century knowledge economy is driven by the dynamics of policy, practice and the institutions and organisations which drive their capacity to function and develop professionally and in the context of applied research (Bogoviz, 2019). It is within these contexts that the emergence of

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Professional Doctorate programmes, the Doctorate of Business Administration, in particular, which has forged a landscape of the need to address the professionalisation of knowledge, to acknowledge the agency that applied knowledge equips personnel with and how more traditional mechanisms of doctoral education are less suited to the application of theory to practice and more suited to theoretical emergence and academic contexts such as education (Cardoso et al, 2020). The gap between perceptions of usefulness and purposefulness of the two though, has narrowed in recent years (Aarnikoivu, 2021). The prospect of responding reflexively and adaptively to new events and key epiphanies such as crisis has ensured the visible and tangible impact of professional doctorate programmes in practice, reflecting a shift to greater respect for a different type of knowledge creation and replacing the contexts of validity and reliability in empirical research with those of trustworthiness and authenticity in applied praxis environments such as the workplace (Dirks and de Jong, 2021). The objectives of this chapter are fourfold in a) providing a theoretical basis for the facilitation of knowledge creation in work based settings and its translation into practice via optimal leadership b) Framing the translation of doctoral knowledge in crisis by mid-career professionals; c) The consideration of the complex ambiguity surrounding knowledge creation from a methodological perspective and d) Introducing transformative learning theory as a lens through which the need for cognitive, metacognitive and epistemic perspectives can be acknowledged and used to drive positive action in workplace crisis.

BACKGROUND

Reliance on transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary and the multiple perspective they bring to a civic society is also significant. In positioning the professional doctorate as a key indicator of change both situational and axiological in the latter parts of the 20th and early parts of the 21st Century, there ought also to be a consideration of how flexible these programmes are in equipping middle management to deal with the complex ambiguity of crisis scenarios, skills of reflexive responsiveness and the capacity to engage with reflection on key aspects of crises and how most importantly how lessons might best be learned for the future of industries and sectors where knowledge is the harness and staff are the key drivers of responsiveness in practice (Hancock, 2020). Alongside these contextual considerations, there is also the need to consider the situated nature in terms of the context and setting of the academic delivery of Professional Doctorate programmes in Continuing Professional Development practice (Karas et al, 2020). The vast array of professional doctorates now available to mid-career professionals in Western education, is demonstrative of the established need for professionals to move beyond just the context of advanced scholarship and knowledge acquisition that characterises doctoral programmes. In attuning educational delivery to needs led provision, rather than the creation of new knowledge for creation's sake, as is often the case in traditional PhD's, there has been a whole raft of debates on the concept of fitness for purpose in relation to 'real life' application in the world. One mechanism by which this has been evaluated is the way mid-career professional have influenced key aspects of economic generation, social change or influenced spheres of practice within or beyond their own disciplinary professional identities. Consequently, interdisciplinary professional doctorate programmes have afforded a generation of mid-career professionals the opportunity to challenge assumptions and key presuppositions which frame their current disciplinary and interdisciplinary praxis and to legitimise how their negotiation of complex ambiguity is credible and rooted in systematic and responsive change to the dynamic landscapes of research-based practice. Defining exactly what a knowledge economy is, is challenging for several

reasons, especially pertaining to doctoral level education. (Bolisani and Bratianu, 2018). Therefore, there are as many different versions as there are national and global economies. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the term knowledge economy will refer to an economy via which in the creation, harnessing and exploitation of knowledge is a significant indicator of consequent wealth, creativity, and innovation. Since the term now largely characterises most of organisational culture in the West, the term transcends the strategic and influences every aspect of operational practice in contemporary societies, with a new and focused culture on the accumulation of wealth and the expected norm of competition.

The impact of this definition on Higher Education over the last two decades is also reflective of the neoliberalist approaches to business organisational infrastructure and human capital which enables and facilitates them. The public are now an integral part of curriculum design and justification in the development of academic curricula in UK HEIs. This is undertaken by ensuring their representation at all stages of curriculum design, justification, and management. As a direct consequence of this the relevance of doctoral education and training has been hauled to account and has seen a shift in perception of professional doctorate candidates in comparison to their counterparts undertaking traditional Doctor of Philosophy programmes. This shift is reflective of the additional mechanisms of knowledge production and creation in praxis and their facilitation within the context of these programmes. The term 'real world' has also become a key differentiator between the type of knowledge creation when comparing the two doctoral pathway outcomes, with the work-based research focus of professional doctorates reflecting the shift away from theoretical hypothesising to interventional approaches within now more commonly executed research methodologies such as participatory action research, case study, theory of change, and ethnography. Within academic institutions delivering doctoral programmes the progression of knowledge-based economies has also driven the far clearer differentiation between academic impact and research impact. Alongside this the exponential increase in digital technologies have fuelled the progressive application of knowledge to practice and the necessary re-shaping and refining of workforce skills and development (de Araujo et al, 2021). Because of this, professional doctorates have become progressively intersectional, embracing, and incorporating interprofessional practice as an integral part of multi and interprofessional delivery mechanisms, where signature pedagogies and disciplines can be embraced at an epistemological level.

INTEGRATING ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

It has been argued that the intersectionality between academic disciplines and signature pedagogies in the creation and application of knowledge characterises its major strengths. A historical overview of the emergence of professional doctorate pathways provides an insight into how this has become operationalized in practice across disciplines which predominantly surround education, business, medicine, and allied healthcare alongside contemporary additions in engineering and computing. Stemming from the need to extend boundaries within and between professional disciplines and the emergence of more student, person, patient, and client centred approaches in the context of multi-disciplinary teamwork across all professions, accounts for the rise in popularity of programmes with a specific focus on knowledge creation and implementation in practice. At a macro level, onus on the requirement for needs led knowledge creation was introduced by governments whose work with educational agencies and employers had examined the concept of fitness to practice, upon completion of academic education and training programmes throughout Western education. Consequently, emphasis was placed on bridging the theory

practice gap and how academic institutions could directly contribute towards providing students with the skills to work in competitive, productive organisations, where knowledge translation into practice at the front line of international workforces could have tangible impact and evidence of contribution to changing ‘real world’ policy and practice.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING IN CRISES LEADERSHIP

The concept of transformative learning as metatheory has direct relevance to time, context and culture, all of which are relevant and influence contribution to the knowledge at the front line of work-based praxis. All concepts of transformative learning can be aligned with the complex ambiguity of the workplace, since they begin with the recognition of disorienting dilemmas that characterise the ‘real world’. Since being able to challenge presupposition and longstanding assumptions that are directly associated with having worked within the same professional context as a mid-career professional entails leads to the opportunity for a new perspective or reference frame, this also provides an opportunity to contemplate and negotiate the need for change. Reconciling meaning from lived experience enables new frames of reference to be established of direct relevance to multifaceted variables that frame human interaction, dialogue, and communication alongside additional complexities of the workplace. Within the context of a cycle of ongoing monitoring and evaluation, when applied this leads to the further identification of disorienting dilemmas and the opportunity to reframe multiple perspectives. In the context of acute times of crises where all these things can be temporally exacerbated and the speed of decision making is crucial to optimal outcomes, then transformative learning becomes a tool in the armory of professional leaders and managers.

In the clear delineation between the concept of transformation and transformative learning as a process it is critical introspection as part of reflective practice which can lead to profound change on both an individual and collective contribution to professional practice. Critical introspection engages both conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche and frames ontological positioning of worldview and consequent ways of knowing and making meaning of experience in practice-based settings. From the pedagogic perspective of teaching and facilitating generic skills of transformative learning, it is imperative that educators delineate between the perspective transformation described seminally by Mezirow and transformative learning as a metatheory, within which several different approaches can be subsumed. The contextual significance of education and training for mid-career professional often engages them in being proactive learners, via various teaching methodologies such as problem-based learning approaches, which are essentially transformative in that they permit the introduction of complex ambiguity and encourage higher order critical thinking and, consequently, incorporate higher order learning outcomes as part of discernment in processes of decision making.

Transformative learning as a metatheory provides educators with a lens through which they can view student learning and ascertain the need for both functional and emotional change. Central to this is the role of reflection which consequently develops into a capacity for critical reflexivity.

Transformative learning is desirable on several counts within the context of management and leadership in practice, particularly in relation to the domain specificity and conscientisation of education for applied practice. Learning that has the capacity to transform frames of reference and assumptions to make them more discriminating, open, reflexive and emotionally able to change. This offers a deeper structural or paradigmatic shift that alters capacity for negotiating the world and forever altering perceptions of it. In this sense it is important to consider the structural and agentic properties of teaching and learning as a process.

INTEGRATING REFLEXIVITY

How core concepts of performativity, transformative learning, and the potential to measure the impact of knowledge translation at the front line of person-centred care can all influence crisis management continues to be of particular significance throughout the Global Covid-19 Pandemic. The potential to educate staff capable of leading through the complex ambiguity and series of unknown outcomes that need to be negotiated in such circumstances is the central focus of how best crises can and ought to be managed in practice-based settings such as the workplace and across wider society. Indeed, it is this complex ambiguity of the world, which ensures work-based research undertaken inside professions by those with culturally and temporally marked identities of their own professionalism, ought always to be acknowledged in relation to the concepts of both truth and verisimilitude.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The relatively expedited process of relationship building in the needs led knowledge base of the Nineteen Nineties ensured a lasting and dynamic change was imposed on institutional relationship development between stakeholders, academic institutions, and the need to equip personnel with the skills of systematic research were identified as paramount to definitions of success (Peters, 2020a). With prevailing politics and the consequent polemic change which occurred as a direct consequence, Neoliberalism prevailed across Higher Education where existing criticism of ‘ivory tower’ teaching, learning and research was highlighted and shunned. The PhD was posited as having little relevance to the ‘real world’ identification of gaps in research and the ability to bridge the theory-practice gap was high on the agenda for progressive change. Being able to critically evaluate the current and extant literature in the process of informed clinical decision making and deliberative policy analysis became a core skill in the armoury of all professionals and within contexts such as the UK National Health Service also served as a means of being able to prioritise resources, with the face of healthcare management being totally modernised so that management versus leadership came to the fore in terms of how progression, development and sustainability of the NHS might best be achieved. Of course, this has specific relevance to how the same culture can continue to be shaped in times of crises.

Emphasis focused on the new genesis of professionals who could actively recognise the need for different modes of learning and consequently gave credence to the ever-increasing number of curriculum designers who embraced the concept of stakeholder input in the initial justification of formal academic curricula at doctoral level. As a means of addressing the ‘real-world’ issues faced within the context of crisis this has ensured a very specific focus on the situational contexts of doctoral level learning, the need for critical reflexivity in relation to epistemic bias and cognition and a direct contribution to the emergent knowledge economy of the 21st Century. The liminal shift between what has historically constituted education versus training developed into widespread debate, with knowledge translation from academic learning to applied praxis, featuring heavily within it. Consequently, definitions of knowledge and in particular the knowledge underpinning applied practice at the front line of professions across society became a new agenda, at a point when traditional hierarchies of business were themselves being challenged in practice, as a means of ensuring that interprofessional working could be optimally delivered. Alongside optimal delivery, the polemic impact of these considerations also raised a whole array of accompanying political and feminist debates in relation to women in business environments and

professions across modern society. Whilst it is not the purpose of this chapter to explore this facet of the knowledge economy emergence, it remains an important legacy of the time and it is now that these issues are being addressed directly through equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives across Western society.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN CRISIS

In terms of strategic management in crises situations and being reflective of the modern economic demands exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic, the emergence of digital technology and technology enhanced learning has shaped the face of HEI educational delivery and commitment to progressive change. (Herbst et al, 2021). This has seen an accompanying series of investments in equipment which has served to further separate and create systemic inequalities in the knowledge production capacity and capability on a global level, making the gap between developing countries and their Western counterparts even wider. In congruence with this HEIs have taken advantage of this somewhat enforced paradigmatic shift in the creation of knowledge and in keeping with neoliberalist perspectives have designed, developed, and sustained a competitive stance in the process of developing and brokering knowledge across an array of crisis stricken Covid economies.

Empowerment Application for Crises in Action

See Table 1.

Table 1. Empowerment for crisis in action: doctoral learning pathways

	Doctoral Learning Pathways
Generic Skill Sets for Crisis Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develops the ability to address complex management problems and to present advanced work-based solutions• Develops the ability to develop effective leadership capacity in the context of professional management fields• Ability to develop a critical perspective in fields of professional management practice
Situational Specificity and Contextual Relevance in Crisis Situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to make ethically sound judgements within social, professional and legal frameworks• Ability to personally manage reflective practice within ethical and moral standards frameworks• Ability to frame decisions and make judgements in ways which recognise and respond to concerns for social and environmental sustainability• Negotiating complex ambiguity and navigating uncertainty• Implementation and management of responsive change
Higher Level Learning Outcomes in Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to apply knowledge and diagnose complex and paradoxical situations• Ability to address and solve problems using well developed skills, competencies, capabilities, and knowledge• Ability to formulate and communicate complex solutions in simple practical ways• Ability to address strategic and operational implications of proposed solutions
Bridging the Theory and Practice Nexus in Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to select, analyse and synthesise data at an advanced conceptual level• Ability to establish new ideas. Build conceptual models, clarify understandings, and determine new arenas of thought of an intrinsically practical nature• Ability to demonstrate critical, imaginative, integrative, and analytical thinking
Communities of Practice and Collective Intersectionality in Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to work efficiently and co-operatively as a member of a community of scholars to contribute to the growth of knowledge of others and to develop group learning skills• Ability to foster a learning environment that motivates research progress, stimulates thinking and helps to create new and responsive ideas
Critical Reflexivity and Challenging of Presupposition and Assumption in Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conceptual frameworks to practice and research processes and to inform and develop enhanced 'deep' management knowledge• Ability to reflect on lived experience

The History of Knowledge Economies in Crisis Management

The relatively expedited process of relationship building in the needs led knowledge that came from the late nineties, had an impact on the overall dynamic between stakeholders, academic institutions, and the need to equip personnel with the skills of systematic research (Peters, 2020a). Amidst this polemic change and the emergence of a neoliberalist system of Higher Education, there had been longstanding criticism of the relevance of traditional, theoretical doctoral programmes such as the PhD, which bore little relevance to the bridging of the theory-practice nexus. Next, the emphasis on developing the concept of the ‘researching professional’ versus the ‘professional researcher’ was compounded in the context of the allied health professions as a legacy of the 1980’s preliminary introduction of ‘evidence-based practice’, arguably the forefather of the rationale for all degree professionals across the sector. This need to be able to critically evaluate the current and extant literature in the process of informed clinical decision making and deliberative policy analysis became a core skill in the armoury of healthcare providers and was also arguably used as a means of rationing resources and eliminating the anecdotal evidence base of several allied health professions in the UK. As a direct consequence of these cultural changes Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have responded with the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) pathways, aimed specifically at mid-career professionals for whom knowledge and skills enhancement became the norm (Nancarrow and Borthwick, 2021). The new genesis of practitioners who could actively recognise the need for different modes of learning, gave credence to the ever-increasing number of curriculum designers who embraced the concept of stakeholder input in the initial justification of formal academic curricula at doctoral level (Singe et al, 2021). As a means of addressing the ‘real-world’ issues faced within the context of mid-career professionals this brought a specific focus to the situational contexts of doctoral level learning, the need for critical reflexivity in relation to epistemic bias and cognition and a direct contribution to the emergent knowledge economy. The liminal shift between what constituted education versus training became a widespread debate, with knowledge translation from academic learning to applied praxis, featuring heavily within it. As a consequence, definitions of knowledge and in particular the knowledge underpinning applied practice at the front line of patient centred care became a new agenda, at a point when traditional hierarchies of care were themselves being challenged in practice, as a means of ensuring that multi-disciplinary team approaches could be optimally delivered and the concept of ‘patient centred care’ became less tokenistic and as a consequence the need to move away from traditional pyramidal knowledge relationships within and between allied health professions and medical staff became apparent. Indeed, it was from this stage of knowledge economy emergence that allied health professions became titled as such instead of the old moniker, the professions allied to medicine, where the pyramidal organisational structures within which healthcare was delivered, largely determined the capacity of allied health professionals to have an input into clinical decision making or discussion when a member of medical staff was present. This raised a whole array of accompanying political and feminist debates in relation to female dominated professions such as nursing and allied health, versus medicine, which was then, largely male dominated. Whilst it is not the purpose of this chapter to explore this facet of the knowledge economy emergence, it remains an important legacy of the time and it is now that these issues are being addressed directly through equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives across both allied health and medical care professions.

The Credible Acquisition of Crisis Management Skills

In terms of strategic development and reflective of the modern economic demands exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic, the emergence of digital technology and technology enhanced learning is shaping the educational delivery mechanisms of HEIs (Herbst et al, 2021). This has seen an accompanying series of investments in equipment which has served to further separate and create systemic inequalities in the knowledge production capacity and capability on a global level, making the gap between developing countries and their Western counterparts even wider. In congruence with this HEIs have taken advantage of this paradigmatic shift in the creation of knowledge and in keeping with neoliberalist perspectives have designed, developed, and sustained a competitive stance in the process of developing and brokering knowledge across an array of economies (Bielak et al, 2008). In relation to doctoral level learning, this has ensured that the specialised nature of doctoral learning pathways for the individuals partaking in them has impacted too, on the need to create communities of practice and a broadscale acknowledgement of learning ‘in situ’. Historically, research undertaken about mid-career professionals was about elevating the status of the academic institutions from where the research came, rather than impacting on person centred care at the front line of healthcare (Pols, 2014). The changing perspectives and accompanying narratives surrounding doctoral level learning, have changed this dynamic and correspondingly doctorates have become a mechanism of equipping organisational learning, rather than paving a way out for the most academically capable and often the most clinically capable mid-career professionals (Thomas et al, 2014).

Knowledge Translation for Crisis Management

Recent adaptations to Higher Education doctoral provision now recognise the need to reframe a society’s dominant methodological position in terms of their paradigmatic insufficiency and their potential for the breakdown of barriers. Seminal delineations of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge still serves as a useful point of departure in terms of the distinction between theoretical and situated research (Rigolot et al, 2021). They posited that Mode 1 knowledge provided discipline specificity and explanatory methodological approaches which aimed to address the development of knowledge without specific stakeholder need – rather as an approach of doing research for research’s sake. The alternative, Mode 2 knowledge, was context specific, designed specifically to solve a problem linked to the workplace and characterised by critical reflexivity and an awareness of the knowledge economy within which it is produced (Gibbons & Nowotny, 2001). This work served to underpin the whole basis of design for Western professional doctorate programmes in the latter part of the 20th Century and still pervades in the new emergent peripandemic world we currently exist within. It is more an issue of strategic relevance than resonance which pervades the academic debates surrounding which is ‘better’, a traditional PhD or a Prof Doc in practice. Contemporary lenses now frame the two as being equal but different and having an inherent degree of overlap, which before now was largely ignored or overlooked. This is usually linked to misconceived perceptions of relative quality of the two programmes with the Prof Doc often being denigrated as a poor runner up (Becton et al, 2020). This originally stemmed from the difficulty HEIs had in establishing the metric evaluation of systematised knowledge and the academic rigour underpinning it. The legitimacy of knowledge has also been contested in relation to situation and context with a longstanding tradition that knowledge had to emanate from universities to have any degree of credibility. Often though, the so termed knowledge produced in the ‘ivory towers’ of academic was not transferable into practice since

its legitimacy lacks the degree of authenticity and trustworthiness that can only be reconciled from purposive experiential evidence (Chapman, Colvin &, & Cosentino, 2020). Professional Doctorates and interdisciplinary professional doctorates have afforded the difference between purist knowledge and scholarship to be legitimised within the context of clinical and professional practice (Coates et al, 2020).

Performativity in Crisis

The term performativity has particular significance to the overall execution and delivery of Professional Doctorate education and how the programme is perceived, relative to its traditional counterpart, the Doctor of Philosophy. Performative research is that which integrates the need for address of issues in practice, with the process of undertaking that change as an integral part of the process (Aguilar & Guénette, 2021; Østern et al, 2021). It is here that the greatest potential confusion for professional doctorate candidates occurs, since the complex ambiguity of research context, research question or issue and the researcher are blurred by the lens of professional practice they are examined through. The integration of knowledge production and applied praxis also has implications for the concept of tacit knowledge, which is historically challenging to metrify or make tangible, yet has a profound impact on clinical mastery and the notion of proficiency in clinical and professional practice (Ding, Aoyama & Choi, 2020). Whilst traditional narratives highlighting this have been subsumed into the Neoliberalist knowledge economies of European and Western universities, there still remains a tension between how the quality and rigor of AHP professional doctorates, where knowledge is produced at the front line of person-centred care and integrated back into practice as a process, reflexively and often intuitively, rather than just as a posited emergent theoretical outcome (Peters, 2020b). Within this degree and level of performativity, the concept of transdisciplinarity also comes to the fore. It is here where so many aspects of disciplinary praxis merge into one at an epistemological level that the gradual silos of education and training are pragmatically redundant and the transcendence of disciplinarity ensures that knowledge produced in action, from all manner of academic signature pedagogies and academic disciplines becomes one at the centre of person-centred care (Hayes & Smith, 2020). The scope of the interdisciplinary doctorate acts as a catalyst for optimal and intuitive clinical decision making at the heart of patient centred care but is heavily reliant on the experiential learning of practitioners within their everyday role and the critical reflexivity they apply to these lived experiences, critical epiphanies and everyday interactions (Graff & Von Wehrden, 2021).

Responsive Disciplinarity in Crisis

It is institutionalised attitudes towards investigation and analysis that is modernist in nature. The inaccessible lexicon of the fields of disciplines and studies has ensured they have remained largely inaccessible to researcher with a broader perspective on positionality. Signature pedagogies and academic disciplines, rather than contexts of interprofessional working are often seen as the point of departure in doctoral education pathways (Shulman, 2005). The emphasis placed on interdisciplinary professional doctorate study focuses around research which contributes to a community of practice, is methodologically systematic and which is theoretically underpinned. In the context of the workplaces within which mid-career professionals work, it also affords doctoral candidates to move beyond reductionist approaches to binary answers or the testability of knowledge to the unpicking of the complex ambiguity with people, which is often a basis of contention. An embed-

ded part of this complex ambiguity is the disciplinary tradition that frames cultural contexts and practice and therefore can often overshadow the potential for epistemological congruence. Hayes and Smith (2020) highlighted the reconnection of academic disciplines and signature pedagogies at an epistemological level. This has implications for both clinical and professional practice within mid-career professionals since their practice has a fundamentally uniquely applied origin and consequently so do DProfs originating in this field. This contrasts with traditional PhD study and has become as source of contention for those stalwarts of PhD delivery for whom a clear operational definition of rigour is paramount within the context of practice (work-based) research initiatives. It is the values, attitudes, and behavioural responses that professionals of different disciplinary career trajectories project, which can unduly frame collective and individual professional identity. Whereas a contingent framework or lens through which professional practice can be regarded is important, the analysis of individual disciplines is something which has temporal resonance alongside cultural longevity. It is here that disciplinary expertise serves to delineate and provide liminal shifts within and between professional disciplines, but which also frames the challenges of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary education. The notion of performativity is central to the capacity of being able to bridge disciplines via work-based praxis (Macfarlane, 2021). Alongside functional tasks, AHP candidates are also afforded the opportunity to use creativity as a bridge to innovation in patient centred care in providing solution focused responses to key areas of research in their respective disciplinary fields of healthcare. Moving away from the taught element of Professional Doctorate programmes through to the supervisory phase, necessitates educationalists moving away from operationalising practice as facilitators but move to the role of supervisor, which changes the dynamic of the learning relationship between doctoral candidate and educationalist to one of project manager and critical friend.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH IN THE WORKPLACE

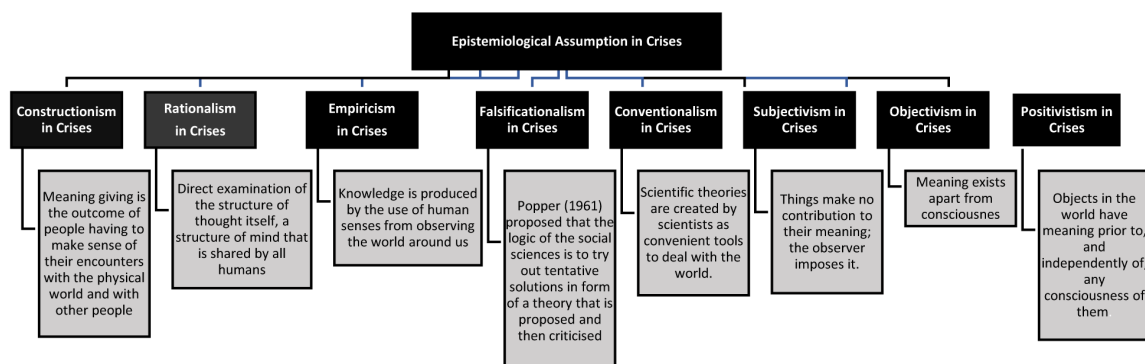
Characterised by postmodernism facets of hermeneutics, deconstruction and social constructivist and constructionist perspectives now frame translational research. This enables epistemic standpoints or perspectives in the world of the workplace to be considered, whilst at the same time acknowledging epistemic bias and researcher positionality. Translational research in terms of operational definition, focuses on the way research findings can be applied to practice. It has a direct impact on the phases of research design and methodological approaches that are integrated into the process of implementation science (Lundgren-Resenterra & Kahn, 2019). The actual research-based innovations that emanate because of translational research, stem from the successful connectivity of these differing elements of the research process and ultimately, within the professionalism context, how these either directly or indirectly contribute to research for patient benefit. Usually within the context of professional settings, these are collaborative projects with an interdisciplinary focus, led by people from within the representative professions and managed formally via steering groups and committees who monitor the quality and progress of research funded by the public purse or charitable donations. As part of the process of inclusion and an ethos of patient centred care, there has been an increase in the incorporation of the 'patient voice' into the earliest stages of research design and methodology. This has been an attempt to ensure that beyond tokenism, patient experience and the critical reflexivity that occur because of being

a patient can be integrated into areas for illumination and responsive action. This has also been echoed across strategic curriculum development within HEIs where tripartite relationships in curriculum design and justification the processual norm are now. this is a clear and fundamental acknowledgement that alongside systematic scientific knowledge of processes in allied healthcare provision, that the experience of patients, too has a value in terms of need and focus of what people have lived through in their healthcare trajectories.

FRAMING HUMAN KNOWLEDGE IN CRISIS

The transdisciplinary reach of Professional Doctorate study crosses philosophy, social science, medical science, education, and includes and incorporates performativity, memory, language, imagination, emotion, intuition, reasoning, perception and experience. Aristotle, (350 BCE) posited, ‘knowledge is an achievement that involves reaching the truth through cognitive ability’, (Greco, 2020; Sosa, 2007). Defining knowledge beyond the context of abstract philosophy for applied praxis remains challenging, even. At a philosophical level, the nature of man’s search for ‘what is knowledge’ is the epistemological debate has endured if human curiosity, from which all rationality for research emanates. The complexity of knowledge is one which transcends disciplinary perspectives, and which is contextualised within experiential learning and work-based praxis. Perspectives from the Chicago School of functionalism and instrumentalism on the logic and theory of knowledge was developed by the pragmatist philosopher and psychologist Dewey, whose work was at the time in complete contrast to traditional forms of understanding truth and knowledge. (Hook 2008). Within practice-based settings, the concept of epistemology and epistemic cognition is the basis upon which the disruptive transformative learning can best be implemented (Hayes & Smith, 2020). In challenging assumptions about the situated nature of work-based practice, this begins with the proposition of two questions, firstly, ‘What is knowledge?’ and secondly, ‘What is it possible to know?’ in the context of making meaning and sense making in the world. On an individualised basis and in the construction of areas for address via practice-based research, facilitation and discourse enable engagement with higher order thinking. This develops and facilitates skills of reflection and an accompanying capacity for reflexive practice (Frick, 2021). This then leads to recognition of and claim to a fundamentally unique contribution to the existing knowledge base.

Figure 1. Constructive Alignment in Epistemological Stance



THE HISTORICAL INFLUENCES OF OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

Operational research emanated from the military after the Second World War (WW2) as an outcome of the union of modernist scientific thinking and the ancient military arts. It was originally termed Operational Analysis – which was largely positivist in approach and theoretically justified via the need to make effective executive actions based on certified metric evidence. Operational Analysis then entered and merged into the civilian world and became the fundamental basis of management science, most of which is still largely recognisable as such. Originally rooted in mathematical conjecture the process of making meaning and understanding perceived and actual reality has progressed to the more postmodern perspectives and the paradigmatic sufficiency that interpretivism offers.

POSTMODERNISM AND REFLEXIVITY

It would be unfair to badge and label Operational Analysis purely under a quantitative banner since it also facilitated and enabled the application of unbiased reasoning and rational problem structuring to complement the wisdom and intuition of the military. Postmodernism as opposed to purist modernism is overly sensitive to the subtle ambiguities of a complex world and diffusion into the civilian community has been painfully slow. The notion of Researcher Positionality within work-based research transcends the aggregation of two distinct perspectives, the first of which is derived from insider knowledge and the perspectives of those at the front line of work-based research. Secondly the research may be driven or motivated by active response to policy, guidelines, or changes in practice. It is here that historically issues about the potential for generalisability are usually brought into question, when designing research that is taking place somewhere so contextually specific. What the postmodern turn permits, however, is the change to illuminative studies, whose focus is placed more on the potential of transferability of findings to other situations and contexts that are identifiable with the original in terms of these given situations and contexts. Cultures are shaped by human assumption, whereas formalised research agendas are rarely aligned to multi-agency motivations and preconceived notions of the need-to-know certain aspects of professional or clinical praxis (Reed et al, 2021). The sense of critical reflexivity underpinning the work in these contexts is rooted in the pragmatism of the need to undertake optimal professional practice in accordance with the expected norms of person-centred care and the raft of Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies governing them. The complex ambiguity that frames AHP practice, is shaped by capacity for active reflexivity and the challenge of everyday assumption, which in turn can lead to the unlocking of complexity laden solutions to practical work-based research questions. In positing mid-career professionals as researchers as opposed to clinicians, there lies another area of contention. The temporal nature of practice-based research means it provides a ‘slice of time’ illumination into the ‘real world’, however it does little to justify what improvement is and how it can be benchmarked and normalised from everyday norms. It is post-structuralism, which offers the opportunity to avoid rigidly systematising knowledge in the sense of reductionist approach and accompanying it with a degree of reflexivity, which sometimes serves merely to cheerlead a noble but subjective cause or axe grind against objective realities (Boud et al, 2021). It is here that it then becomes a possibility to reveal truth, rather than simply disseminate what people ought to believe about the world as it appears through the lens of the epistemically biased.

REFLECTION AND REFLEXIVE PRAXIS

Understanding reflection (and the multitude of definitions appertaining to it) is a core threshold concept in transformative learning, many researching professionals have minimal experience of sustainable reflective practice, and in my experience do not place value on the process and the valuable impact of reflection. The starting point for this learning with mid-career professional students is them cognising introspection, how they reflect on their innermost thoughts' feelings and memories, sometimes characterised as informal reflection. Once this threshold concept is understood the disruptive facilitation moves along the continuum to more advanced forms of reflection, such as that of Schön's (1983) work linking reflection to the context of them as mid-career professionals in the workplace with 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action'. Dewey's (1939) reflective thought, the bridge of meaning that connects one experience to the next, gives direction and impetus to growth, moving the learner from a disturbing state of perplexity (referred to as disequilibrium) to a harmonious state of settledness (equilibrium), this links to Piaget's (1977) theory of cognitive development discussed above. Rogers (2002) provided a contemporary interpretation on Dewey's phases of reflection in relation to the process of 'intellectualisation' or 'locating the problem'. Positing that this stage is of fundamental significance in facilitating the reflector's move from their impressionistic formulation of the problem to the articulation of an idea which can provide a sense of relief. This relief stems from the process of reflection and hence processes of sense making and meaning making beginning. Even so, this has been laid open to critique in relation to the complex ambiguity of terminology surrounding the two constructs, particularly the degree of insecurity that lies within the construction of reflection-in-action (Moon, 1999). More recently geopolitics and the stage of Neoliberalism have largely addressed some of these issues but Schön's work remains a vital threshold concept to enable the professional development of mid-career professionals from a diverse array of healthcare backgrounds (Rasi et al, 2014).

A Transformative Reflection and Reflexive Model proposed by Lawson et al (2014) was derived from Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, itself founded on, (1) concrete experience; (2) reflective observations; (3) abstract conceptualisation; (4) active experimentation, and which forms a conceptual self-reflective process for use in the facilitation of transformative learning in professional practice. The process was designed to focus in on the reflection stage and extend it into a liminal space within which critical experiences can be critically reflected on from alternative perspectives. This provides greater insight and an increased understanding of the underlying assumptions held in relation to how sense and meaning from experience is made.

Mid-career professional students' cognisance of their uncritically acquired tacit knowledge performs an important role in the professional workplace, it is the instantly accessed often relied on repository of knowledge of others that is liable to be biased (discussed above) and self-confirming. Smith (2001) posits that tacit knowledge is created through two opposing processes, the first is routinisation, where explicit procedural knowledge is converted to tacit knowledge through repetition. The second is in Kolb's model of reflection, deriving explicit knowledge through reflection that would have otherwise remained in episodic memory to be used tacitly. Cognition of tacit knowledge is a key threshold concept in working with mid-career professional students engaged in disruptive transformative learning, it is the automatic innate ability for facilitators to draw on critically assimilated experience, Smith (2001), which suggests this is an unconscious skill. The disruptive pedagogical framework focusses on developing and elaborating this unconscious skill that mid-career professional students already possess, this is the same pool of untapped self-knowledge that the transformative coaching model elicits with mid-career professional

students. The ‘reflective judgement model’ posited by King and Kitchener (2004a) is applied within teaching and facilitation to support student’s intellectual development through questioning their beliefs regarding the nature and certainty of knowledge, through leveraging their fluid intelligence. King and Kitchener’s (2004a, 2004b) work on reflective judgement has extended the body of evidence in cognitive psychology, and the understanding of Mezirow’s epistemic assumptions about knowledge and knowing, it is what they describe as ‘*complex reasoning*’, King and Kitchener (2004b). Their reflective judgement model is grounded in the seminal work of John Dewey (1933), and the cognitive-development tradition from Piaget’s (1965) schema theory, previously discussed above.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RELEVANCE TO TRANSFORMATION IN CRISIS

The integration of work in the brain, and its capacity for transformative impact, is largely dependent on bringing together the fields of psychology and neuropsychology. Operationally defining this is challenging, with an array of published literature framing this subtly but significantly differently—for example MacLean (1990) described anxious and curious brain states and Taylor and Marienau (2016) reflective and reflexive practice. Sims (2017), Etherington (2004), and Pollner (1991) underpinned the concept of reflective judgement, King and Kitchener (2004) critical self-reflection. Cattell (1963) posited meta-cognitive processes, performance, and self-monitoring whereas Stankov (2000, 2003; Stankov et al, 2006) provided key insights into curriculum justification and design. These can be clearly constructively aligned to the seminal work of Mezirow’s on transformation through the ‘ten phases of transformative learning’ and epistemic questioning (Mezirow, 1990, 2000, Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

It is during the intellectual processes of thinking about what is known, that critical judgement, Connolly (2000), can be identified as one of the mental processes used to decision make, this may involve thoughts and emotions, (either or both), depending on philosophical beliefs. This links to the work of Hogarth (1987) who offered a conceptual model of judgement occurring within a system composed of three elements: (1) the person; (2) the task and the environment; and (3) the action that results from the judgements and which can subsequently affect both the person and the task environment, and by definition this was normally the starting point for the persons learning journey as they were sitting in front of me having volunteered or been volunteered for an education program with me. The judgement occurs in the so-called task environment, the operations that lead to the judgement are acquisition of information with; the processing of information; and the output which feeds back into the schema and then the action, and outcome. The question of how equilibration, heuristics and bias can have an effect in operation the acquisition, is an important element, and may be the point at which transformation could occur.

In relation to the disciplinary context of teaching and learning, as Mezirow and Taylor (2009) indicate, this transformation can be epochal with a sudden and dramatic reorienting insight or incremental, involving a progressive series of transformations and related points of view that culminate in a transformation in habit of mind (Carvalho & Cardoso, 2020). This provides an explanatory basis to the process of acquisition, processing and outputs of decision making. Overall, this provides a foundational metaphorical platform for the application of Mezirow’s theory in the support of critical reflective thinking and consequently change.

Mezirow challenged traditional established psychologists who regarded adult learning through the lens of predominantly behavioural or psychoanalytical perspectives and the whole notion of experientialism. Modern criticism of Mezirow posits that that his theory ought to incorporate far more social

context and be fundamentally aligned to the needs of the individual. Mezirow may have tacitly taken for granted that this was at the core of his purpose by referring to himself as a social action educator. This is also supported by his early life experiences as an adult educator, where his early fostering of democratic social action through community development and adult literacy programs in the USA and abroad in developing countries, became a core characteristic of his contribution to professional practice. Merriam and Brockett (2011) debated whether one must already be at a mature level of cognitive functioning to engage in any transformational learning process, which had not been questioned previously. As they posited, for transformational learning to occur, one must be able to critically reflect and engage in rational discourse; and both activities are characteristic of higher levels of cognitive functioning.

MEASURING IMPACT IN TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The Doctoral Impact Translational Research Assessor Framework has been developed to support a tripartite evaluation of research impact with institutional adopters of research, academic institutions, and researchers. The framework focuses around eight key areas of research activity undertaken within the context of Professional Doctoral study, incorporating, and embedding core principles of equality, diversity and inclusion for all representative mid-career professionals and their professional members.

The eight areas of designated research activity focused on within the framework are:

1. Interdisciplinary leadership, governance, and accountability.
2. Membership and professional registration of the UK Health and Care Professions Council and their global equivalents.
3. Capacity for wider dissemination, capacity building and uptake of knowledge creation in multidisciplinary and interprofessional knowledge sharing.
4. Impact on processes, mechanisms and methodologies, initial education, training and teaching of mid-career professionals in professional and clinical practice.
5. External, peer reviewed recognition for contribution to professional or clinical practice attributable to the research contribution in work-based praxis.
6. Potential for accreditation of education and training, either as Continuing Professional Development or as an addition or enhancement to student learning at recognised AHP provider institutions.
7. Evidence of influence on AHP outreach and formal engagement initiatives.
8. Tangible Contribution to opportunities for employment, the career development, and trajectories of existing mid-career professionals and positive influence on the attraction, recruitment, and retention capability of future mid-career professionals.

The five accompanying levels of overarching good practice are:

- Level 1: Transfer and Adoption of Principles of Work Based Practice.
- Level 2: Development and Integration of Initiative into Work Based Practice.
- Level 3: Societal Engagement
- Level 4: Transformation Potential
- Level 5: Sustainability Potential

To complete the impact evaluation framework, those organisations where the research has been implemented in practice are asked to self-assess their ongoing progress across each of the eight designated categories on a straightforward Excel database. The range of self-assessment scores are an opportunity to grade the level of impact within the organisation from 0 – 10 where 0 is least impactful and 10 is of maximal impact. This makes it possible for all the outcomes from participating organisations and the mid-career professions represented to be combined in establishing shared perspectives or differences in experience of the implementation in practice (Laver-Fawcett & Cox, 2021).

Appleby and Pilkington's (2014) conceptual framework is utilised with mid-career professional students to examine their own critical professionalism within their work environment, communities of professional practice, and identity. The disruptive pedagogical facilitation supports mid-career professional students to understand how their meaning perspectives, frames of reference and habits of mind are constructed and de-constructed, during the critical-reflection process.

CRITICAL PROFESSIONAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Appleby and Pilkington identified reflection as being one of the fundamental components of professional learning, drawing on the work of Dewey's (1938) sense making, and Habermas' (1974), insight into knowledge generation through reflection. They explicate the work of Brookfield (1985) who posited that professionals need to move 'beyond self-referential approaches' to reflection and widen their view to include the perspectives of others and the external environment. They make an important distinction in the role of a dialogic approach to reflection in communities a professional practice, where there is a role for 'the peer', 'the facilitator', 'the mentor', and 'the critical friend'. This aligns with my praxis and Mezirow's discourse, which links to the development of dialectical and critically reflective thinking. The facilitator and critical friend enable a critical approach to the co-construction of knowledge and understanding with the mid-career professional students. In praxis, mid-career professional students are challenged to recognise and examine the precursors of critical professionalism and demonstrate the required thinking and knowledge to demonstrate their own praxis. This is followed by them determining how they identify and then share their assumptions about their own critically professional behaviours. In the disruptive pedagogical facilitation, this framework aligns the theoretical concepts from the first four sections of this chapter and integrates them visually and verbally, illuminating to the mid-career professional students the challenges of perspective transformation when viewed through the lens of their professional behaviours. Critical self-awareness of a mid-career professional student's own cognitive performance and emotional intelligence can impact on their ability to engage in the affective aspect of perspective transformation and is a key threshold concept for mid-career professional students to engage with (Tyndall et al, 2021).

Practice-Based Research Action Research

One of the most popular methodological approaches rationalized by Professional Doctorate students is Action Research. The whole ethos of the approach is to make a functional and pragmatic difference to the challenges of work-based praxis, which can consequently be studied through the lens of experiential learning and the resultant outcomes of experience in practice. It has been posited as a liminal boundary between theory and practice in terms of its academic rigour.

Insider Research and Epistemic Positionality

Action Research, for most work-based practitioners affords them the chance to build and iteratively develop their practice, whilst still working at the front line of patient centred care in the mid-career professionals. This may pertain to the progressive development of their role or form a fundamental part of their progressive development. Action Research has been implemented in the context of social justice as a mechanism of addressing systemic inequalities in organisations and the agency they afford their employees, whether deliberately or subconsciously. The duality of Action Research as being a valuable source of organisational improvement and a mechanism of ensuring that the concept of epistemic positionality is not of detriment to the research process but acknowledged as an embedded part of it. The overall sense of operational analysis and address that action research facilitates is one of the factors which provides a means of acknowledging and addressing power imbalances both on a personal and a professional level.

Complexity Theory in Translational Action Research

Pluralist stances towards situated methodological development are actively encouraged. Organisations currently are encouraged to wholly reject the long held prevailing paradigm of mechanistic efficiency driven hierarchical command and control organisations. It also ought to be noted that recent philosophy defines the natural world as being definitively different to the social world. Consequently, complexity theories were designed to fit the natural world rather than the social world although language and discourse have triggered)0relevant insights into the behaviour of the social world (Brister, Frodeman, & Briggles, 2020). We are far less complex than the complexity of the universe and therefore can only ever view or experience reality through categorical man-made frameworks that allow us to make sense and meaning of the world humanity occupies and experiences. Complexity theories do see boundaries that divide the hard from the soft and the natural from the social in terms of what they really are – artificial and arbitrary.

Complexity based thinking is not a one size fix all and the importance of question led research rather than methods driven approaches remain paramount if research is to remain authentic and trustworthy in the context of the workplace – nor does it denigrate the perspectives of empirical methodologies, which ought to be characterised by validity and reliability.

What the professional doctorate offers allied health professionals is the opportunity to undertake and develop context-specific challenges to core questions of issue from their practice and the overlapping disciplinary contexts of their colleagues from interprofessional working and multidisciplinary teamwork.

Complexity theory is one lens through which the emergence of the knowledge economy within the context of mid-career professionals can be regarded. Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors impinging on the effectiveness of organisational hierarchies to share common goals within patient centred care can be examined in terms of their parameters and scope of individual professional and clinical practice. By definition the organisations within AHP practice is undertaken are subject to the need for complicated adaptation in unpredictable and ambiguous contexts. The interrelationships of professional working within healthcare settings necessitate that each individual clinical discipline and hence collective rather than individual professional identity of each worker, is such that it can be largely self-organised and responsive to need as and when required in person centred care (Mavri, Ioannou & Loizides, 2021).

Within the context of practice based doctoral research, there is a need to consider models of research utilisation and their overlapping relationship with complex ambiguity in professional practice. Translational research is an operational necessity to achieve a substantive level of impact with research interventions or investigations which have occurred, often at a local level. There are fundamental challenges and barriers to the effective identification and introduction of evaluative frameworks which can evaluate the effectiveness or impact of translational research in practice-based settings.

An integrative framework capturing the effective implementation and translation of research into practice for allied healthcare professional doctorate candidates can be achieved by the adaptation of the Ottawa Model of Research Utilisation (OMRU). The model affords context specific adaptation and recognition of the situated nature of practice-based research. This specifically adapted doctoral knowledge translation model also ensures that processes of knowledge translation can be actively guided so that evidence from the extant literature can become an embedded part of the process alongside the acknowledgement, consolidation or refuting of the potential for implementation of research findings evaluated to date. The following suggested framework makes two additions to the six current recommended outcomes of the formal OMRU framework. These have been added to accommodate the individualised situational specificity and signature disciplines or pedagogies of professional identities represented in the context of workplace professional practice (Shulman, 2005).

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Some of the barriers outlined across this chapter may be common across all contexts doctoral study. Unlike empirically based research, work-based research is situated in the complex ambiguity of non- controlled environments where the unpredictability of unfolding events in cultures, contexts and is subject to political turbulence and change at macro, meso and micro levels. This can correspondingly impact on the processes of research, design, iterative developmental progression, implementation and consequently the outcomes of research and its impact in practice. Whereas practice-based research is stringently methodologically designed, it cannot be framed on the premises of linear causation, eliminate epistemic bias or function purely in a reductionist sense. In this respect this provides an ideal insight into potential future areas of research, which seek to address dynamic elements of crisis management. Attributing causality is therefore not something that falls within the remit of professional doctorate research in the context of education since the complexity and multifaceted basis of embedded research issues are such that they cannot be split into causal variables, since they are so interdependent and meaning making would be lost in an attempt to extract and singularly study or account for them.

As the systematic framework (Table 1: The Crisis Management Complexity Framework - Transformative Dimensions & Characteristics) emphasises translation of knowledge to academic and clinical communities within the context of client centred care, it has been straightforwardly titled 'The Crisis Management Framework', since implementation is largely dependent on the collation of complex ambiguity, multi levels of causation, and characterised by spontaneous change. The framework emphasises an incremental, capacity building approach which integrates numerous qualitative and mixed methods approaches in the context of mid-career professional research (Berreta, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Mid-career professional doctorate research is often characterised by a strong emphasis on participatory access and engagement with multiple stakeholders, with whom the candidate often works in the context of their mid-career professional practice (Armsby, Costley, & Weller, 2021). The broad capacity that this context provides for progressive evaluation and feedback, makes it an ideal means of achieving strategic and operational practice. Workplace environments are often influenced by local, regional, and national politics at macro, meso and micro levels where polemic and cultural impacts are most tangible in practice. Tailoring evidence-based practice alongside the demographic profiling of the area is central to participatory implementation across local, regional and national workforce providers (Kelly et al, 2021). This facilitates organisational capability and capacity building as a central by-product and the development of a contextualised, authentic, and trustworthy evidence base. In a world where the only constant is change, doctoral education provides a means of addressing the need for dynamic responsiveness that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated and highlighted a strategic need for.

Table 2. The crisis management complexity framework - transformative dimensions and characteristics

Transformative Dimensions	Characteristics
Adopter, Public and Private Stakeholder Dimensions	These complementary dimensions incorporate those organisations and organisational staff, i.e., the human capital, who will adopt and implement research-based practice at the front line of societal and civic contribution.
Adoption Related Dimensions	These dimensions frame the potential use and transferability of research-based practice and practice-based research 'in situ' and the modifications that may need to be made as a consequence, which in turn may impact on both the intended and unintended integration of research.
Contextual, Ergonomic, Ecological and Environmental Dimensions	These dimensions actively incorporate core facets of societal service provision, including the impact of structure and agency within organisational environments where transformative knowledge can be translated into practice.
Implementation Dimensions	Linking directly to the process of implementation, these dimensions account for mechanisms of operational knowledge transfer, which can ensure transformative knowledge from research-based practice can be effectively implemented beyond the point of theorising.
Situationally Specific Dimensions	These extends beyond context and environmental dimensions to the individual and context based individual experiences of the workers involved. These are impacted upon by the level of assumption and epistemic bias with which people operate and frame transformational knowledge in practice.
Signature Disciplinary Identity Dimensions	Linking to Shulman's (2005) seminal recognition of signature pedagogies and disciplinary boundaries, this dimension considers the active delineation of collective and individual professional identities.
Research Implementation or Intervention Dimensions	This set of dimensions links directly to the nature and design of the research intervention and implementation process. Functional by design, this dimension incorporates quality management, functional operationalisation of the research project and the mechanisms and impact of engagement this has with the rest of the organisational dimensions (Reynolds, 2021).
Outcome Related Dimensions	In terms of an outcomes-based approach to the integration and translation of transformation in practice, outcome related dimensions are aligned with those resulting directly from implementation of the research project intervention or implementation process (Sin, Soares & Tavares, 2020).

In considering the challenges faced by HEIs across the globe in providing doctoral research pathways that are both fit for purpose, and which address the longstanding capacity for the knowledge they generate to be applied at the forefront of crisis, lack of capacity to evaluate impact has been a distinct issue. This chapter has considered the various factors impacting on these processes and made some preliminary suggestions as to how both transformative learning and impact evaluation might be managed and implemented in practice. Interdisciplinary learning opportunities extend both the pragmatic and academic reach of mid-career professionals within clinical and professional praxis, building further their capacity and capability and their perception as credible and dependable researchers, ‘in situ’. The chapter has emphasised the challenges of working in cultures and contexts with longstanding issues stemming largely from misplaced assumption and pre-supposition, which when aligned with the published extant evidence based shows the liminal tension between theory, praxis and illuminates the potential to address anecdotal experience and to provide a degree of credibility for a systematic and analytical insight. Optimal crisis responses and their consequent outcomes are undoubtedly dependent upon it.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Action Research: Also, often, and interchangeably termed Participatory Action Research (PAR), co-operative enquiry and action learning is a research approach focused on the systematic improvement and positive change of the structure and agency afforded to people within context specific settings.

Disruptive Innovation: Refers to the innovation that transforms previously inaccessible products and ensures their availability to wider more generalised populations.

Impact: Something that has a marked effect or influence.

Knowledge Transfer: Is a diverse range of activities used in the support of mutually beneficial collaborations within and between universities, businesses, and the public sector for the civic benefit of society.

Performativity: A philosophical means of describing the power of language to effect change in the world.

Transformative Learning: A process of individually or collectively changing perspectives, which has three distinguishable dimensions of psychological response, convictional attitude, and behavioural change.

Chapter 16

Reimagining Higher Education Post Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about opportunities for higher education institutions around the world to rethink the planning and delivery of instruction for all learners during and after a pandemic. Faculty were pushed to reexamine their own practices as they made shifts in their instructional practices to meet students' learning needs. This chapter explores three focus questions using a comparative analysis of the research along with the authors' experience and knowledge of successful innovations employed in higher education institutions globally. The chapter illustrates changes in the landscape of higher education practices, problem-solving mechanisms employed, and the lessons learned by higher education middle executives. The authors conclude that middle executives need to move away from a "solo mindset" to one of continuous collaboration aimed at strengthening existing structures created since the pandemic to minimize disruptions in future crises.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic drove educational institutions around the world into a new normal. Regardless of the educational institution's levels of preparedness, virtual teaching and learning became the norm. This surprisingly intense pandemic affected every aspect of the existing educational structures as it waned and resurfaced around the world (Ricketts-Duncan et al., 2021). In the United States, during the periods 2019–2020 and 2020–2021, schools, including higher education institutions, experienced months of experimentation with multiple forms of virtual and in-person instruction. According to Ricketts-Duncan et al. (2021), "teachers and students had the opportunity to experience moving from a state of questionable preparation to a new normal, which afforded varied learning opportunities" (p. 7).

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This new normal has changed the trajectories of higher education institutions' structures, policies, and instructional methods as these institutions continue to explore and increase sundry formats of virtual teaching that include hybrid, blended learning, or fully online.

While these alternatives to teaching and learning enabled varying formats of academic offerings, researchers across the globe alluded to numerous challenges that higher education students faced while using these online formats to continue their education during the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes triggered a spike in mental health issues among students and faculty as they struggled to adjust to the rapid transformation of their educational environment (de Carvalho et al., 2021; Laranjeira et al., 2022; Son et al., 2020; Tianhua & Lucock, 2022). One of the challenges identified was with revamping the program for pre-service teachers who were no longer able to participate in a face-to-face learning environment. Concerns about the element of teacher training include what the assessment of competencies should entail, since the field experience component of teacher training was grossly impeded due to the closure of schools.

Based on these promulgations, it can be concluded that higher education institutions encountered significant challenges that had implications for reimagining and transforming their structural and academic goals. Further, the myriad mental health issues experienced by students and faculty were significant throughout the pandemic and may be evident beyond the post-pandemic stage. This chapter aims to synthesize the existing literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education institutions, illustrate ways in which the pandemic changed the landscape of higher education practices, describe and discuss what problem-solving mechanisms were employed, and highlight lessons learned.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

With the entry of COVID-19 pandemic, numerous educational institutions around the world closed their doors to face-face instruction, and online learning became the new norm. The pandemic occurred at an unprecedented time and forced "governments around the world to impose social distancing measures, lockdowns, and cessation of personal contact outside immediate households" (Garcia-Morales et al., 2021, p.1). According to Garcia-Morales et al. (2021), the International Association of Universities, under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, reported that more than 100 million learners in higher education institutions were displaced due to the complete closure of higher education institutions in 185 countries around the globe (Garcia-Morales et al., 2021, p.1). The International Association of Universities Global Survey data on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education institutions garnered international global perspectives on the impact of the pandemic on higher education institutions. Further, data from the World Health Organization showed that by April 1, 2020, the COVID-19 virus affected 205 countries around the world. This fast-paced virus forced 3.4 billion or 43% of people around the world, including higher education institutions, into lockdown and social distancing modes (Marinoni et al., 2020). Because of this, mid-level executives of higher education institutions had to activate their best crisis management and decision-making skills by asking many national and international students to leave their institutions and return home or hang out in campus dormitories where this was an option.

This globalized closure of educational institutions created a shift in practice that dramatically reshaped the way higher education institutions planned and delivered education. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic unveiled similarities in the vulnerabilities that existed within educational systems at all levels

prior to and during the pandemic, regardless of geographical locations. The pandemic caused unprecedented recalibrations among higher education institutions that forced administrators, faculty, and other stakeholders to rethink instructional delivery methods, it and tested the institutions' readiness to transform the overall systematic functions and processes well into the future.

In the rush to ensure that face-to-face courses were switched to virtual teaching, faculty were caught in the frenzy of the process to ensure that the changes occur within the specified timeframe. Institutional board and college departments had to contemplate how the contents and delivery methods of these new online courses would maintain the required rigor, excellence, and equity comparable to other online courses. The challenges faced involved identifying and designing online instruction, which include the identification of appropriate platforms for teaching synchronously or asynchronously and navigating a different pedagogy other than the onsite ones with which they were familiar (Heriyanto & Rukiyah, 2022). The introduction and navigation of new forms of technological platforms and applications suitable for academic discussion and other social interaction became a learning curve for some faculty members. The new norms in practice, also required that instructors ensured adequate and appropriate students' interaction, via a wide selection of web tools used for sharing academic information such as images, audio, videos, and texts.

Despite the challenges noted, a positive outcome of the impact of the pandemic was that the extant literature on higher education institutions grew instantaneously between 2019 and 2020, and the trend indicates a voluminous collection over the coming years. The influx of literature on how institutions were strategizing during the pandemic enabled the sharing of ideas that benefitted higher education stakeholders to cope better with the unprecedented catastrophe. This means that faculty had the opportunity to explore and select best practices on online instruction and course development tips from a wider body of information. Therefore, the successes and challenges that higher education institutions experienced across the globe required concerted efforts to maximize human resources both nationally and internationally, irrespective of the faculty's expertise in online teaching and accessibility to technological resources. In essence, the preponderance of literature on how higher education institutions problem-solved during the crisis illuminates and confirms the dynamism of mid-level management and decision-making practices across the globe.

The chapter seeks to advance the practical leadership efforts pursued by mid-level executives during the pandemic. The key focus will be on three key questions:

- How did higher education mid-level executives navigate the crisis spiraled in by the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What were the problem-solving mechanisms initiated, and how did these change the trajectories of higher education institutions' structures, policies, and instructional methods?
- How can these mid-level executive management practices inform best practices beyond the post pandemic era?

The authors anticipate that this chapter will offer answers to these questions and will motivate mid-level executives to rise above unprecedented management crisis and lead with docility and confidence, knowing that the experience will yield outcomes that constitute the dynamism of the leadership process.

In developing this chapter to answer the key questions that are highlighted above, the authors conducted a comparative analysis of peer-reviewed articles that describe and discuss empirical studies

and scholarly activities from various geographical locations, including the United States of America and some European countries. Equipped with the findings of this comparative analysis, the authors considered these findings along with our lived experience of the impact of the pandemic in our private higher education institution in southeastern United States. This was mainly to provide broad perspectives on the extensiveness of the efforts enacted by higher education institutions during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods. The empirical studies were selected based on the rigor of the research methods, methodologies, and findings, the recommendations, or implications for practice. The opinionated peer-reviewed articles offer many perspectives on the impact of the pandemic on higher institutions' infrastructure, financial status, and budgetary challenges; consequences of low student enrollment; teacher training efforts; and assessment of competencies; and students and faculty mental health issues.

An integral aspect of the chapter focuses on the adult learning theory as related to the reimagination of instructional planning, delivery, and assessment; lessons learned from the pandemic; what works in higher education from the practitioner's point of view; and policy development to meet the changing needs of higher education. We anticipate that lessons learned might provide insights into how higher education institutions can continue the transformation process, even as different variants emerge as of May 2022, when the variant of concern was Omicron, which was first detected in Africa (CDC-COVID-19, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/understanding-variants.htm>).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn (Henschke, 2011), has its roots in Germany, where in 1833, a German high school teacher Alexander Kapp first introduced the term. In 1925, another German, Rosenstock-Huessy, resurrected the term as he developed a method, and later he used the term in his pedagogical practice with the German people (Henschke, 2011). Andragogy is an adult learning theory that explains four to six assumptions of adult education depending on which scholar's work is being perused. In 1966 and 1970, Malcolm Knowles connected the term with his field of study in adult education and defined the "attributes of his theory as acknowledging the learners as self-directed and autonomous and that the teacher is a facilitator of learning rather than the presenter of content" (Henschke, 2011, p. 34).

According to St. Clair and K  pplinger (2021, p. 279), the andragogical approach to practice is centered on four initial assumptions about adults and their learning, which are:

- **Self-concept:** Adults are used to being self-determining, and adult education must recognize this in its approach.
- **Experience:** Adults bring experience to education, and this should be acknowledged as a valuable resource.
- **Readiness to learn:** Adults have a greater or lesser readiness to learn based on their individual and social context.
- **Orientation to learning:** For adults, learning is about problem solving, and education needs to demonstrate the application in a way that it is seen as a good use of time.

Later, Knowles's final version of andragogy included two more assumptions:

- **The need to know:** It is necessary for adults to be aware of why they need to know something. What is the benefit of learning?
- **Motivation:** Internal motivators are the strongest for adult learners, even though their intrinsic drive to learn may have been dampened by life experience.

Merriam (2001) also outlines five assumptions underlying andragogy that describe the adult learner as someone with the following characteristics:

- Has an independent self-concept and can direct his or her own learning
- Has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning
- Has learning needs closely related to changing social roles
- Is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge
- Is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors

Merriam (2001) contends that these assumptions form the basis for program planning models, especially in designing, implementing, and evaluating educational experiences with adults. For example, regarding the first assumption that as adults mature, they become more independent and self-directing, Knowles suggested that the classroom climate should be one of “adulthood,” both physically and psychologically. In an “adult” classroom, adults “feel accepted, respected, and supported.” Further, there exists “a spirit of mutuality between teachers and students as joint inquirers” (Merriam, 2001, p. 5). Since adults manage other aspects of their lives, they can direct, or at least assist in planning, their own learning” (Merriam, 2001, p. 3). The forthcoming section will discuss the application of Knowles’ theory of adult learning within these eLearning innovations that were initiated by mid-level executives in higher education institutions during the pandemic. The authors hope to provide some insights and clarity to the focus questions, which are meant to unveil the kind of decision-making skills that mid-level executives used within those moments of crisis to enable their students, the adult learners, to continue their education. The authors will integrate the theory of andragogy where applicable as the key focus questions are discussed.

METHODOLOGY

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), in qualitative research, qualitative data may be collected by observation of participants or sites of research, gathering documents from a private or public meeting source, or from a collection of audiovisual materials such as videotapes or artifacts. For this chapter, a comparative analysis of research studies and peer-reviewed articles was employed along with personal experience and knowledge of problem-solving models employed at a higher education institution in southeastern United States. A comparative analysis involves examining pieces of data for commonalities and differences which can be further analyzed to generate themes (i.e., thematic analysis) that are used to explain the phenomenon (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007).

The data was analyzed to answer the three guiding questions to illustrate the changes in the landscape of higher education practices, the problem-solving mechanisms employed, and the lessons learned by higher education middle executives. This analysis supports Creswell and Plano Clark’s thought process that indicates that the analysis of the qualitative data typically follows the path of aggregating the words

and images into categories of information and presenting the diverse ideas gathered. The major themes derived from the data analysis were *lessons learned* and *what worked*. These are discussed in the next sections along with policy development recommendations and future considerations for mid-level leadership crisis management.

LESSONS LEARNED

Transitioning to Virtual Platforms

- **Focus Question 1:** How did higher education mid-level executives navigate the crisis spiraled in by the COVID-19 pandemic?

The authors' research revealed that as the COVID-19 pandemic gripped geographical territories around the world and closed most if not all higher education institutions, mid-level executives learned how to navigate the crisis by initiating problem-solving techniques that eventually became the practice of the day. Institutions transitioned from in-person instruction to online instruction and utilized various virtual platforms. These virtual platforms yielded significant implications for the teaching and learning process. The literature reveals that this transition required modification to instructional delivery, methodology for assessing students learning outcomes, and reconsideration of skills and competencies for students to succeed in their new settings (Jensen, 2019). These decisions were the outcomes of prompt and proactive thoughtfulness of mid-level executives in these higher education institutions as they respond to the crisis caused by the pandemic. In other words, Knowles' (1968) assumption about adults' orientation to learn chipped in as these mid-level executives applied problem-solving techniques, to demonstrate application of crisis management techniques considered as a good use of time.

Blankenberger and Williams (2020) remarked that change catalysts can result in better structures and procedures of program offerings. Catastrophic events play a great role in reshaping public administration and policy systems and in the implications of market oversight structures on higher education marketing strategies. They concurred that policymakers and higher education institutions need to have plans in place for future catastrophes, especially for those that are related to the health field. Cementing their perspectives in an ecological lens, based on John Gaus' (1947) book, *Reflections on Public Administration*, Blankenberger and Williams concluded, "higher education ecological system is composed of a number of interconnected elements; people, place, physical technology, social technology, wishes and ideas, catastrophe, and personality" (p. 417). Any change on the system, like what COVID-19 did, can disrupt the elements and may result in a "series of interconnected reactions by the other elements until the system achieves a new equilibrium" (p. 417). In other words, the pandemic disrupted the normalcy that existed within the higher education system, resulting in numerous sudden maneuverings by mid-level executives to identify ways to continue education by switching from in-person to various online modalities. The process took a while for stakeholders to figure out what were their best options and how to implement them from various virtual platforms to achieve maximum results. This means that mid-level executives had to activate what they know about leading in a crisis and acquire an attitude of learning new ways to deal with the crisis. Learning new ways to deal with the crisis also includes faculty collaboration, transparent communication, and soliciting cooperation from subordinates to achieve the institutions' goals. Higher education institutions are held to high integrity and accountability standards

and are expected to meet and maintain them, seeing that these institutions influence government policies and sometimes act as consultants for other entities. Therefore, higher education institutions had to learn from these catastrophic experiences and plan how to react, by using them as catalysts for change of traditional policies and institutional structures (pp. 404-405).

The changes described above mirror what Garcia-Morales et al. (2021) called *disruptions*. A disruption involves a break from traditional, established educational models of knowledge transmission. Innovations that change the direction of education replace or displace existing models and interrupt the functioning of established educational models in unexpected ways, first improving the model and then affording new ways of understanding its ongoing development (p. 2).

Based on Gracia-Morales' et al. thinking, these disruptive educational innovations may result in significant changes to the existing methodologies and modes of knowledge transmission that necessitate transformation of existing structures and services. The authors' knowledge and experience working in a U.S. higher education institution helps to document faculty having to pivot into action by shifting from face-to-face classes to virtual options across all programs and degree levels. While access to technology was not the main challenge, the problem was that this was the first time that some faculty members were designing online courses. Online course development created a huge learning curve in which specific protocols and knowledge about module development using the selected platforms had to be learned, mastered, and effectively applied. Therefore, to equip faculty with the tools needed to develop their online courses with optimal urgency, mid-level executives had to initiate multiple relevant professional development sessions to ensure that faculty got the necessary information, guidance, practice, and tips to design their courses to meet the university's timeline and expectations. In the context of andragogy, both the mid-level executives, faculty, and staff, as adults, had to develop a greater or lesser readiness to learn based on the individual and social context evident at the time. Therefore, the professional development opportunities were two-fold, as all stakeholders involved benefitted in those stressful moments.

Depending on the virtual platform selected, a major aspect for faculty development was creating individual instructional models within each course and determining the number and frequency of synchronous and asynchronous sessions and at the same time ensuring that there are opportunities for the adult learner to participate in discussion board activities and to complete selected assignments. The onus was on faculty members to make extra efforts in ensuring that students received optimal quality in coursework, lectures, and consultation time. This means adapting new pedagogical styles to complement lectures and keeping students engaged during online instructional sessions became a priority. One advantage of many of these teaching platforms is the opportunities for timed breakout rooms that allowed students to discuss key points in small groups as initiated by faculty and or receive guided support from faculty. In general, breakout rooms enhanced the pedagogical principles of online learning, as they sufficed for small group instruction; however, the integration of breakout rooms has not always been smooth and productively utilized. Faculty had to ensure that meaningful interaction occurred by checking into multiple rooms throughout the allotted time. Generally, the back-and-forth movement and disruptions forced faculty and students outside of their comfort zones. Students, faculty, and staff had to quickly learn how to cope with their new realities and were afforded new ways of understanding how to transform an existing education system and at the same time support the institution's goals and commitments.

Drawing from multiple studies, Kumar et al. (2021) alluded to the advantages and disadvantages of students in underdeveloped countries adaptations to online learning. While the students attested to positive online learning outcomes, accessibility to reliable high-speed Internet facilities impeded students and faculty interactions. Some students were unable to access the Internet due to unstable networks and

monetary constraints. Literature in the field continues to grow and highlights the digital divide in institutions that must be addressed. Carolan et al. (2020) suggested that to mitigate this barrier, institutions should mobilize resources to ensure that all students have access to proper information technology (IT) infrastructure and bandwidth connection, as specific support to solve technical problems. The Internet accessibility was not an imminent deterrent in the authors' case. However, the fact that some students needed more upgraded devices and learning how to balance their personal lives while studying may have affected their adaptation to the restructured instructional deliveries. Based on mid-level decision-making, the authors' institution enabled students' access to laptops and offered flexibility in completing and submitting assignments. All mid-level executives and staff moved their offices to their homes. While this presented some challenges at first, it was the best decision in those moments of crisis. With time, these challenges gradually receded as everyone embraced the realities of adapting to the new norms accordingly. As these change catalysts (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020) continued well into 2021, the adaptations resulted in better structures and procedures as leaders evaluated the program offerings and resources to determine what needed improvement. Additionally, there was an emphasis on professional development in each school and college. Although some of our programs had joined the online platform prior to the pandemic, some programs were still in the face-to-face modality. To activate an action plan during the pandemic, senior and mid-level executives at the authors' educational institution instituted flexible options that allowed students who had lab sessions to accomplish those while remaining distant with other courses. The emphasis on virtual professional development with faculty mentors, or "flexperts," as we called them, proved valuable as they shared their technological best practices and tips about online course development and student engagement, using a train-the-trainer model. The goal was to help all stakeholders perform at their ultimate best to achieve the institutions' policies and marketing oversight.

Ideally, much of what is described above highlights the importance of communication, collaboration, and decision-making to enable mid-level executives to lead change during moments of crisis. Edds (2021) discussed the kinds of tools that leaders need during moments of crisis. She suggested that maximizing trust, transparency, and communication reduces barriers to change. Building a common language and applying management skills based on trust, transparency, and communication provides a structure for decision-making and problem solving. When applied effectively, these attributes and skills can allow mid-level executives to collaborate using transparent and cohesive communication. In the higher education context, faculty collaboration may yield new insights and teamwork that are essential to effect change, bearing in mind the myriad professional knowledge and expertise incorporated towards the common good.

Teacher Training

During the pandemic, teaching and learning underwent changes at all levels of the education system. The process of transformation in terms of students' learning loss and closing the achievement gap became the focus of many scholarly discussions. United under this common theme, educators within the elementary to high schools sought various avenues in which to support their students' learning in terms of engagement and assessing learning. The mid-level executives in higher education institutions began the process of redesigning what teacher training should look like to meet the changing needs of the classroom. Pre-service educators enrolled in college education courses sought their solutions from the professors in whose courses they were enrolled, professional development opportunities offered at their school sites, and best practices evidence in their colleagues' classrooms. This search and desire to pivot to appropriate instruction among pre-service educators heightened the need for higher education mid-

level executives in educational intuitions to reimagine teacher training. Mid-level executives explored various solutions among themselves in their respective institutions, as well as from incidental problem-solving initiatives globally, which flooded the Internet and other professional publications during the 2019–2021 period. The attempts to manage the crisis led to use of numerous pre-recorded classroom demonstration video lessons, peer teaching, and reaching out to private schools and homeschool entities. The reactivity helped with achieving programmatic goals and ensured that pre-service teachers matriculate in a timely manner.

In support of the need for these changes at the college level, Khan et al. (2021), contend that 21st-century education demands that policy makers, administration, teachers, parents, and students search new trends to continue education activities during the pandemic. This speaks to the opportunity of mid-level executives to become involved in the change process to build strong instructional programs for teacher training.

Saurugger (2016) suggested that a crisis marks a phase of disorder, a sense of ambiguity, and complexity. During a crisis in higher education comparable to the COVID-19 pandemic, mid-level executives in high education institutions must be able to collaborate and bring order to the crisis by reimagining teaching and learning. One area in which this formula should be applied is teacher preparation programs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, pre-service teachers were impacted as they grappled with the completion of their student teaching or clinical practice course requirements. The clinical practice requirement varies per state. For example, Texas Administrative Code §228.2 defines clinical practice as practice teaching supervised by educator preparation programs. Educator preparation programs work with partner school districts to place student teachers in a classroom assignment, which matches the grade level(s) and subject area(s) of the certificate sought. In a standard placement, the student teacher begins as a shadow of the cooperating/mentor teacher and gradually assumes complete responsibility of teaching the class (Varela and Desiderio, 2021). According to Boivin and Welby (2021), in terms of field-based requirements, Massachusetts Regulations for Licensure and Educator Preparation Program Approval defines pre-practicum as “the field-based experiences with diverse student learners that take place during the early part of a candidate’s preparation” (603 CMR 7.02). Pre-practicum includes all field-based experiences integrated into courses or seminars that address the Massachusetts Professional Standards for Teachers and the Massachusetts Subject Matter Knowledge requirements” (p. 31). In a small private university in Florida, an education internship program requirement provides the intern/pre-service with one semester of full-time school site teaching experience under the supervision of a certified teacher and university supervisor. The intern is required to synthesize and apply theories acquired in coursework to realistic classroom situations, demonstrate the 12 Florida Accomplished Practices, and integrate program-related curricular outcomes.

At the start of the global pandemic, pre-service teachers who had been placed in classroom to complete their student teaching requirement or required teaching practice hours as a part of their education courses were greatly impacted as schools were forced to close, and the delivery of instruction changed in an instant. This change in service to students created additional challenges for the pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers, and faculty supervisors (Holt, 2021). Faculty supervisors were challenged with meeting with the pre-service teachers for observation, feedback, and lesson demonstration. Cooperating teachers were challenged to find time to fully support the pre-service teachers in terms of lesson development, demonstration, and student monitoring. What occurred during these crisis moments were frequent collaborations between schools and school districts to figure out ways in which these pre-service teachers could effectively join their cooperating teachers in the virtual classrooms. This solu-

tion worked to some extent, but it limited the kind of instructional interactions the pre-service teachers could do when compared to the actual physical or face-to-face instructional mode. In fact, in the United States, once schools shifted to remote learning, the amount of time pre-service teachers got to spend in their cooperating teachers' classrooms varied from district to district (Choate et al., 2022). As Holt (2021) indicated, in reference to pre-service teachers' perceptions of virtual reading fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic, additional time required to work with pre-service teacher fieldwork projects was limited, which made the partnerships difficult to continue.

Meeting the demands of the teacher education program during the pandemic provided opportunities for mid-level executives to rethink and develop strategies to address the teacher education program's changing needs. These demands created a desire and a willingness to formulate methods of ensuring that the length and quality of clinical supervision is comparative to pre-pandemic. Choate et al. (2020) reported that in 2020, results from a survey conducted among 29 teachers' colleges in the Washington D.C. area, indicates that more than 80% of the teacher education programs waived or reduced the length of time required for student clinical practice at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. As a direct result of shortening the length of for clinical practice, it became evident there is a need to identify specific methods and or programs to support these pre-service teachers who did not have regular student teaching/clinical experience.

The authors of this chapter contend that as these new teachers move into the schoolhouses, the schools' leadership must create a culture of collaboration and support so that the beginning teachers can be supported in their development as educators. Despite the many challenges faced, lessons learned from these challenging experiences have helped to shape and redesign teacher preparation programs, as mid-level executives had to learn incidentally by doing what their best professional judgment or instincts propelled them to do. Through collective professional collaboration and sometimes one-to-one communication, they were able to figure out temporary solutions in a bid to accomplish organizational goals. The hierarchical structure that existed through a formal leadership lens may have fractured to some extent as senior and mid-level leaders crisscrossed these structures to solve the pre-service teacher placement issues. In other words, the need to place the pre-service teachers might mean going directly to the cooperating teachers rather than administrators to initiate such placements. It was a matter of who could help with the process. It is now 2022, and with three years of the pandemic still dominating our focus, although now less impactful, the reimagining of teacher training is still not perfect. However, with schools back into the brick-and-mortar mode, with less restrictive stipulations, mid-level executives have carved out workable solutions from what they have learned that have brought back some amount of normalcy to teacher preparation programs.

Student and Faculty's Mental Health and Wellbeing

Teaching is a demanding job that can induce high stress levels for both teachers and students. Stress-related challenges can result in mental health issues that affect one's overall wellbeing, making it difficult to focus on or engage in tasks that require concentration and problem-solving skills. For students, mental health issues affect their ability to successfully complete academic-related tasks, which subsequently decreases their expected academic performance (Laranjeira et al., 2022; Son et al., 2020; Tianhua & Lucock, 2022). Faculty may experience similar mental health issues that affect their instructional competence and other job-related demands (de Carvalho et al., 2021). The literature on the effect of the pandemic on students' and faculty's wellbeing is voluminous and expands the existing field on mental

health and psychology. The difference in this situation is that there seems to be a steady uptick among students at all levels, backgrounds, and geographical locations around the world where the findings are connected with the three major waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the upcoming sections, we seek to introduce some of the research findings and emerging literature on the effect of the pandemic on both higher education students' and faculty's mental health across geographical spheres and the types of interventions that were enacted to offset some of the challenges.

Students' Mental Health and Academic Performance

Laranjeira et al. (2022) investigated how the pandemic impacted the mental and psychological health of Portuguese higher education students. They concurred that "although isolation, quarantine, and social distancing were vital to prevent the spread of the virus, protect peoples' physical health, and manage medical resources, they may have also led to long-lasting negative consequences, particularly on mental health and wellbeing" (p. 1). They felt that these preventive measures may have increased the levels of depression and/or anxiety because of separation from significant relatives and the increase in the perception of isolation and loneliness (p. 1). As such, their academic performance suffered to some extent due to their mental state of mind. Similarly, Son et al. (2020) documented multiple challenges with the transition to online classes. Findings from their study revealed concerns among university students regarding their academic performance due to sudden changes in the syllabus, the quality of the classes, technical issues with online applications, and the difficulty of learning online. The participants in the study also worried about completing research and class-related projects due to COVID-19 restrictions that were put in place to maintain mandatory social distancing and limited physical interactions with others. Some students had concerns about their grades and considered the online learning environment a major stressor.

In the literature review for their study, Tianhua and Lucock (2022) cited several studies that were conducted in the United States on mental health issues among higher education students. They outlined data from one study where interviews were conducted with 195 undergraduate students from one university and reported negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Tianhua and Lucock, 2022). Negative impacts include "fear and worry for oneself or loved ones, constraints on physical movement and social activities due to quarantine and sudden and radical lifestyle changes" (Son et al., 2020). These researchers suggested an urgent need to develop interventions and preventive strategies to alleviate the problem. They also reported another U.S. survey of 162 undergraduates that "found high levels of mental health distress, with depression being associated with difficulties focusing on academic work and loss of employment and higher levels of anxiety more likely in students who spent more than an hour per day looking for information on COVID-19" (p. 2). Similar findings were identified in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom.

Regarding their study, Tianhua and Lucock (2022) explored the impact of COVID-19 on the United Kingdom's university students, levels of mental health, and quality of life during the pandemic and predictors of mental health and quality of life. The findings were consistent with the existing literature where there were high levels of depression and anxiety, with scores above the clinical cut off for over half the students. Evidently, factors that may have contributed to the high levels of common mental health problems or stressors (in addition to gender), were cancellation of an important event, worsened personal relations, and worsened financial situation. Moreover, students with higher levels of depression tended to exercise less, communicated less with friends/family, and experienced greater impacts on

their relationships, as well as having more history of accessing a talking therapy (p. 13). These stressors and changes in behavior patterns are consistent with other studies of higher education students and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a systematic review of the prevalence of mental health, Rogowska et al. offered a meta-analysis that captured global data that included 32 different countries and 398, 771 participants that showed a “pooled prevalence of anxiety in 26.9% of people, 36.5% for perceived stress, 50.0% for psychological distress, 30.7% for somatic symptoms, and 28.6% for low wellbeing” (p. 12). Further meta-analysis of the literature showed that “anxiety symptoms were higher among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic when compared to pre-pandemic prevalence among similar populations” (p. 12). Differences were evident in geographic locations and according to gender and ethnicity. Rogowska et al. admitted that the prevalence of mental health problems may be different by country, hence the need to conduct their study, which examined the prevalence of anxiety, perceived stress, physical health, and life satisfaction in a Polish sample of university students. They compared the prevalence of mental health problems across three waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings revealed that although anxiety slightly decreased during the second wave (W2) of the pandemic compared to wave one (W1), anxiety increased significantly during wave 3 (W3). Additionally, perceived stress was higher at W1 and significantly decreased in W2 and W3 of the COVID-19 pandemic. High stress and a moderate level of anxiety at W1 seemed to be consistent with a previous study conducted at the beginning of the pandemic (p. 12).

Based on the data projected in Rogowska et al.’s study, the assumption can be made that during W1, which was the height of the first COVID-19 impact, students’ stress levels were elevated. This could be considered expected, because they were bombarded with having to deal with the changes of higher education instructional delivery and balancing their own personal lives. However, one would expect that by W3, the situation would have stabilized somewhat, as they become more acquainted with the new normal. This was not as projected. It appears that students became overwhelmed with the emergence of the multiple variants, which resulted in significant increase in anxiety during W3.

The significance of highlighting these studies is to illustrate the health-related drawbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education across geographical locations. Noticeable is the fact that these students have similar concerns and diagnoses. As in the case of students’ mental health across all three waves of the pandemic, it was obvious that the students did not get used to the idea of lingering variants, so mental health issues continued. Due to this assumption, the conclusion can be made that if students are not healthy or in the frame of mind to complete academic tasks, then there is the likelihood that they will not be able to demonstrate their best academic performance. We do not have data to support any of these similarities; however, in our situation, we encountered situations where students asked for extended time to complete assignments. Our mid-level executives also asked us to assist them in any way we can, using our flexible approach model. We understood the students’ motivation to continue their studies despite the impact COVID-19 was having on them or their families. It seemed like there was an internal motivator to persevere and a strong desire to learn.

The flexible approach we adapted worked well for the students, even though it elevated some faculty’s level of anxiety to submit grades within the grading periods. Nevertheless, the authors believe there was a concerted effort to extend this courtesy to our students as we sympathize with their situations. Like the authors, our mid-level executives were most concerned about ensuring the students remained as healthy as possible while they completed their program of study. In the long run, this problem-solving technique yielded successful outcomes, as the students were able to remain enrolled and completed their courses despite the challenges they encountered.

Faculty Mental Health and Job Performance

Higher education institutions thrive on positive faculty instructional performance, which is a significant factor in the success of the institution's academic and strategic development. Faculty members are instrumental in working collaboratively with other university personnel to ensure that policies and procedures that glue student retention and the overall institution governance are successfully enacted. Drawing from several scholarly inputs, de Carvalho et al. (2021) alluded to the decades of research that confirmed teaching is a demanding job that may have worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused teacher burnout. de Carvalho et al. suggested that when teachers feel increasingly stressed and burned out, their stress and burnout can affect their health, wellbeing, and professional performance, which in turn affect students' learning and engagement negatively.

Teachers were not the only ones facing stressed-related symptoms. According to publications in Inside Higher Ed (<https://www.insidehighered.com/>), faculty in mid-level leadership roles lamented the struggles they had with similar stressful situations due to elevated leadership demands that brought on feelings of burnout, uncertainties about the kinds of decision they made, and whether they should resign from a job they enjoyed. These stories were not unique to any one institution or geographical location. They were similar stories that required interventions to alleviate extensive faculty turnover and long absences from the job. In the authors' context, conversations of being tired, feeling overworked, or simply frustrated were evident. Dealing with the pandemic that affected faculty and their family members was added to the already overloaded responsibilities of mid-level executives. Interventions that were instituted to alleviate stress and burnout included professional development webinars hosted by the human resources department, flexible work hours and schedules, flexibility of working from home if desired, flexible meetings with virtual and in-person options, and access to teaching resources including technology and teaching assistants.

WHAT WORKED

- **Focus Question 2:** What were the problem-solving mechanisms initiated, and how did these change the trajectories of higher education institutions' structures, policies, and instructional methods?

Time has moved rapidly since the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on educational institutions around the world. There has been a considerable amount of literature on the impact of the pandemic on higher education institutions. The significant impacts were mainly in budgetary constraints, students' enrollment, and technological demands to meet the expansion of the eLearning environment created by the pandemic to facilitate student engagement (Garcia-Morales et al., 2021). The shifts in higher education institutions created more responsiveness to continuing educational offerings where there are currently "numerous eLearning platforms and protocols to bridge the gaps created by the rapid transition from face-to-face classes to online learning systems" (Rashid & Yadav, 2020). As these new online models emerge, scholars believe there is the likelihood of a digital divide and new shifts in instructional approaches (Garcia-Morales et al., 2021). However, as we explored the literature, it was noted that the key focus was examining the challenges within the ambit of possibilities or ways that these challenges might have hidden opportunities for improving future instruction in higher education institutions. For

example, Garcia-Morales et al. discussed some of the positive possibilities that educational disruptions can yield. They proposed the following:

.... replace existing methodologies and modes of knowledge transmission by opening new alternatives for learning...introduce new advances in education systems through information and communication technologies... consider both the student and the professor as engines of learning to promote an open curriculum enabled by new digital education...teach methods; such as the development of new learning materials, mechanisms, and spaces; and transform of the role of students and the way they absorb and use educational knowledge, and meet the needs of existing customers as well as the needs of currently available services (p. 2).

This section highlights some of the educational innovations that worked during the pandemic, and most of these are still being explored as possible successful outcomes that emerged from the selected best practices the authors explored. Garcia-Morales et al. (2021) opined that to engage students in virtual instruction, universities must evolve from lecture-based systems to problem-based system methodologies. This means there may be a need to modify methods that are aligned with the assessment of learning outcomes and reconsideration of skills and competencies within these new learning modalities. Based on the foregoing thoughts, the section includes insights that higher education institutions can use in developing new organizational policies and/or revising existing ones to provide support for the students in the programs they offer. In discussing these outcomes, the authors frame them within Knowles' (1968) adult learning theory, andragogy.

As previously mentioned, the pandemic ushered in various forms of virtual instructional eLearning platforms, depending on the financial affordability of the higher education institutions. In some instances, a plethora of platforms and instructional tools were available for instructors and students' usability. These include "web-based learning platforms, video-conferencing tools, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), streaming conferences, instant messaging tools, and educational apps, among others, to support new methodologies to enable learning processes" (Garcia-Morales et al., 2021). The technology that works mostly for higher education institutions include Canvas Learning System, Moodle, Blackboard, and Google Classroom; video-conferencing apps like Cisco WebEx, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom, Google Meet, and GoToMeeting; instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp and Telegram; combined with email and telephone conversations, to maintain individualized contact with students. In addition, during the latter part of 2021 and into 2022, Microsoft introduced many new tools in their SWAY app to enhance online instruction. SWAY is a new app from Microsoft Office that makes it easy to create and share interactive reports, personal stories, presentations, and other scholarly activities.

Instructional modes that worked best were a blend of synchronous and asynchronous lectures using audio-visual lectures, instructional content-related videos, discussion board forums, web-based literature, webinars, and PowerPoint presentations. Assumedly as the pandemic continued endlessly, it seemed as though adult learners were able to capitalize on the learning opportunities available to them and balance personal lives despite the challenges that were eminent. This thought is supported by Knowles' (1968) first assumption of *self-concept*, meaning that the adult learners had independent self-concept that enabled them to direct their own learning given the access they had to the available learning platforms. In the same vein, the fact that the higher education institutions ensured the best learning environment they could offer, highlights the second assumption, *adult learner experience*, which includes a wide variety of instructional design models and theories to appeal to varied experience levels and backgrounds (Pappas, 2014).

Instructional Resources Including Collaboration Among Departments

Kumar et al. (2021) investigated university students' likes and dislikes about the lockdown during the pandemic. The findings revealed that the students were in favor of in-person instruction when compared to online. The greatest issue the students had was lack of practicality, no demonstrations, and Internet connectivity, among others. Kumar et al. concluded that the quality of online education is a critical issue that needs to be addressed properly and timely, to make improvements and increase its acceptability amongst students.

The fact that the authors' higher education institution had been converting some of its educational programs to an online format prior to the pandemic was a plus, as the needed technological resources and experts who offered valuable time as volunteers and conducted professional development in technological assistance and course development tips were readily accessible. Therefore, the authors concur with these authors about providing quality online instruction for the students.

Garcia-Morales et al. (2021) recommended having solid Internet servers that can sustain the virtual workload, along with methodological training of professors and students for online delivery, using all the technical and educational resources available. In the authors' experience, it is evident that technology-related professional development for skill training and Internet ethics, through varying interdisciplinary and departmental models like the train-the-trainer, a one-time session, or a series of sessions, are workable. Also, an increase in flexibility of office hours was beneficial in enabling instructors' online presence and to sustain ongoing support to students. Having these instructional resources and collaboration in place help to support Knowles' (1968) third and fourth assumptions, *readiness to learn* and *orientation to learn*, by applying problem-solving techniques to demonstrate how the information learned, can be utilized for the greater good of humanity.

According to Pappas (2014), the third assumption, *readiness to learn*, emphasizes *how the subject matter is going to solve problems that an adult learner regularly encounters*. He further explains that adult learners need to know the why and when before they actively engage in the eLearning process. For example, they will not only want to know why they need to acquire specific information but when the learning should take place. Through carefully selected course content in the different modules, instructors design these courses with the learner in mind. Therefore, the incorporation of various discussion board prompts, videos, blogs, webinars, and lectures are geared towards the adult learners' interests, problem-solving skills, and application of knowledge (Merriam, 2001; St. Clair and Käpplinger, 2021). Currently, there is a wide variety of online communication platforms and solutions available globally to help digitalize the entire teaching-learning process in the COVID-19 scenario (Garcia-Morales et al., 2021).

For field-based teacher training practicums, Boivin and Welby (2021) recommended alternative field-based assignments for students. They pointed to student teachers conducting Zoom lessons rather than actual face-to-face interaction with the students and for simulated teaching experience with partial-artificial intelligence avatar students. They utilized an online tool called *Murson*, which yielded some behavior management skills for the student teachers. Other forms of assignments recommended were video recordings of classroom teaching with reflective discussions, reflective observation, and structure observation protocols, as well as discussion prompt questions.

Mindfulness Interventions

In an effort to contribute to the existing interventions for promoting faculty wellbeing, de Carvalho et al. (2021) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) Prosocial Class-

room model, a social and emotional competencies (SEC) model (i.e., self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision making) (p. 1719). Specifically, they investigated:

the proximal and distal effects of a mindfulness-based SEC program (stress reduction, SEC promotion, mindfulness/compassion practices) specifically developed for teachers. an intervention program's effects on teachers' self-report proximal results (emotional regulation, mindfulness, self-compassion) and distal results (job burnout, personal wellbeing, self-efficacy); teachers' classroom behaviors (emotional support, classroom organization, instructional support); students' report of teachers' behaviors (involvement); students' self-report (positive/negative affect, emotional regulation, wellbeing); and parental report on children (peer relationships, self-management) results (p. 1720).

de Carvalho et al. (2022) concurred that “interventions for teachers are mostly based on the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1990) model, with some adaptations to educational settings” (p. 1719). They used Roeser et al.'s. (2012) theory of change for conceptualizing mindfulness training, which “contributes to teachers' occupational health, personal wellbeing, and positive emotional experiences by increasing their self-regulatory and coping resources and pro-social dispositions” (p. 1719). de Carvalho et al. stated these outcomes are manifested in teachers' classroom behaviors, namely those geared toward building a positive classroom climate for instruction and learning, effective classroom management, and supportive relationships with students (p. 1719). Their findings revealed a positive increase in classroom engagement for both teachers and students. The data pointed to a consistency with other studies where there was a:

...decrease in exhaustion and depersonalization and to an increase in mindfulness (observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judgmental, non-reactive and total mindfulness), self-compassion and emotional regulation competencies (enhancing cognitive appraisal and diminishing the use of suppression), and also to an uplift in wellbeing and self-efficacy (p. 1727).

These positive findings seem to suggest that the SEC models may be useful in future studies, as using mindfulness intervention programs help alleviate some of the stress and teacher burnout issues that may be evident during unprecedented or unforeseen eventualities. According to de Carvalho et al. (2022), future studies may also help to explore the impacts of such changes on student learning outcomes.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Focus Question 3:** How can these mid-level executive/leadership practices inform best practices beyond the post pandemic era?

Technological Support

COVID-19 has brought about a heightened awareness of the need for changes at higher education institutions as they strive to remain competitive and to provide high quality education for all learners. Connected to this awareness are unanimous calls for higher education institutions to invest in adequate and

accessible resources to ensure that all students have access to proper IT infrastructure and bandwidth connection, enlarge the capacity of data centers program and purchasing of eLearning tools, and provide specific support to solve technical problems (Garcia-Morales et al., 2021; El Said, 2020). Further, for portal developers, El Said (2020) opined that learning management portals incorporate higher interactivity level with instructors and peers through synchronous and asynchronous forms, blogs, message boards, and chat rooms. These interactivity levels will enhance students' retention rate and other students' needs. Furthermore, university portals should capitalize on the integrative nature of the web by integrating course materials with relevant academic and professional resources available online. The institutions should also develop codes of conduct to ensure transparency and create a safe, trustworthy environment for online learning for students' success (Jensen, 2019). Investments in these digital technology infrastructures should consider what other global entities are using and include different stakeholders in the decision-making process. Strong leadership support is needed for effective transformation and initiating changes in shaping the transformation. These represent some areas in which mid-level executives can help to design and align resources in the higher education institutions' programs.

Student Support

Lessons learned from the pandemic point to the need to support students during any pandemic and to keep campuses open safely. In some contexts, it is wise to consider accessibility to free mental health services and students' financial crises, especially for students from low socio-economic background. El Said (2020) proposed effective and responsive IT technical support and troubleshooting services 24/7 for students, especially during quizzes and exams. Support can be offered through phone calls, e-mail, online live chat, and video guides.

Faculty Support

Faculty training and continuous IT support are necessary to the success of online or eLearning environments, especially for creating interactive course modules, developing, and maintaining ongoing communication with the students, other faculty, and staff. Boivin and Welby (2021) recommended the use of video-conferencing platforms more frequently, for convenient scheduling and conducting of meetings for both faculty and students. Videoconferencing can also be used for teacher preparation programs where practicum supervision for program supervisors can be done via video-recorded lessons, rather than the program supervisor visiting the school in person. El Said (2020) stated that faculty support and communication within institutions of higher education may envision more long-term sustainable investments to integrate face-to-face with online distance learning in all future higher education plans, to cut costs, reduce student density, and make a gradual transformation of students to lifelong learners.

Teacher Training

As higher education institutions make shifts in the development of teacher education programs post-pandemic, careful consideration must be made to align pre-service teachers' needs to the demands of the classroom in which they will become a part of. Drawing from a qualitative study conducted by Karagoz and Savas (2021) to determine pre-service teachers' perspectives of distance education during COVID-19 pandemic, the authors concur that teacher training should include the following elements:

easy accessibility online to weekly materials including videos after the lecture concludes. Classes should take place at the same time as usual with the attendance of whole class for efficiency. Students should receive more support in terms of Internet and equipment to close the digital divide. Student must have access to required technology, and training should be provided for professors who do not have enough knowledge and experience on how to utilize distance education effectively, as inexperience leads to inefficient lectures. Finally, the placement, requirements, and support for pre-service teachers during clinical supervision should be reimagined to include flexibility in placement, length of the teaching experience, and how the cooperating teacher is supported. The hope here is that effective practices that the pre-service teachers experienced and/or utilized will become a part of their toolkit of effective instruction that can be implemented seamlessly into their own classrooms.

Mental Health Issues

Regarding mental health issues, Son et al.'s (2020) findings revealed that there were barriers to students seeking professional support provided by the university. According to Son et al., tele-counseling services via widespread promotion were done, but still a vast majority of the students (93%) did not utilize the services. Reasons were attributed to low perceptions of the serenity of the pandemic, discomfort with unfamiliar people, discomfort with talking about mental health issues over the phone, and lack of trust in the counseling services. With these in mind, it would be worthwhile for higher education institutions to contemplate ways in which they can educate their student population on the importance of utilizing counseling services in the case of any other unprecedented circumstances. The same is applicable in faculty situations.

In a recent publication, an article entitled *Guarding the Minds*, Arnett (2021) recommended that campus administrators should revamp their policies to combat racial biases, racial microaggressions, and racial profiling of students of color in educational settings. This demographic of students may be impacted by racism and racial discrimination that result in mental health issues where students of color might be at risk of increased psychological distress, anxiety, and depression (p. 14). Added to these problems is the fact that mental health counseling services are sometimes unattractive to minority groups, like people of color, because of feelings of inferiority or other subtle systemic discrimination practices.

In discussion of their research with Ireland's higher education students, O'Brien et al. (2020) opined, "mental fitness is associated with mental resilience. Resilience can be described as one's 'ability to bounce back from stress, while mental fitness can be defined as the modifiable capacity to utilize resources and skills to flexibly adapt to challenges or advantages, enabling thriving'" (p. 2). In this vein, mental fitness has its root in neuroplasticity, a term used to describe the brain's capacity to reshape and create new neural connections and growing neurons in response to experience (p. 2). Physical fitness is connected to our ability to increase our "brain's fitness in strength, endurance, and flexibility through using valuable psychological resources and intentional activities that increase growth and development of the brain" (p. 2). Therefore, mental fitness is considered an integral form of current intervention research, which promotes positive mental wellbeing. In essence, higher education institutions that promote engagement in regular physical fitness activities are likely to see higher perceived wellbeing among their adult population. This goal can be accomplished by rethinking how physical activities are integrated within curricular content and across programmatic strategic planning and can be advantageous in building resilience in students and faculty.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As the uncertainties of the pandemic continue, educational institutions will need to periodically assess how they are meeting students' changing needs. These continuous assessments and points of reflection will provide opportunities to add to the existing literature in the field by documenting changes in higher education structures in terms of instructional delivery and technological and human resources, and their outcomes, assessment, teacher training models, and inclusion of intervention measures to offset mental health issues. Further, a broader reference and documentation from the students' perspectives about their experience in the virtual classrooms, the use of innovative techniques, and how instructors can better support student learning are pivotal to the success of higher education institutions' post-pandemic strategic planning. Finally, the voice that cannot be ignored in this conversation is that of the beginning teachers whose experience in the learning environment will add insight into the shifts that are needed instructionally as steps are taken to prepare teachers for the demands of the post-pandemic classroom.

CONCLUSION

The quality of online education is a critical issue that needs to be addressed properly and timely, to make improvements and increase its acceptability amongst students (Kumar et al., 2021). To make this happen, there is a need for collaboration and sharing of best practices among colleges and universities. Higher education institutions must move away from a "solo-mindset" to one of collaboration aimed at building structures and practices to ensure equal educational opportunity for all students. The call to reimagine higher education post-pandemic provides the opportunity for the adult learner to experience learning in new and exciting ways.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Digital Divide: The difference between those who have or have access to digital devices and Internet and those who do not.

Higher Education: A college or university that provide post-secondary education.

Internship: A period of time that a pre-service teacher spends in a classroom teaching while supported by the classroom teacher and a college professor (intern supervisor).

Pre-Service Teachers: An individual who is enrolled in a teacher education program before meeting the requirements for teacher certification.

Synchronous Instruction: Providing instruction in person and online at the same time.

Chapter 17

Exploring a Hybrid Leadership Model in Higher Education Institutions in Times of Crisis: The Case of Mid-Level Executives

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a case for the adaptation of a hybrid model of leadership for mid-level executives in higher education institutions (HEIs) during times of crises. The authors propose the ACT framework, which is the hybridization of adaptive, collaborative, and transformative leadership theories, as a suitable model for HEIs' mid-level executives to use during times of crises. First, the authors explore the tenets of the theories and their application. Second, they examine their appropriateness for use by mid-level executives and ultimately propose a hybrid model. To illustrate the merits and potential of the model, the authors analyzed two cases to highlight the benefits of applying this model. The ACT framework benefits these leaders through crisis management training that facilitates capacity building in the formulation of equitable solutions, collaboration, and agility in responding to complex adaptive, wicked problems. The authors present the ACT framework as a suitable option for solving crises in HEIs through case studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, higher education institutions have always experienced varying degrees of disruptions and crises. Many have survived catastrophes such as world wars, economic depressions and recessions, mass shootings, austerity measures and most recently the CoVid-19 pandemic. In fact, this recent crisis according to the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] (2021) has resulted in the “education disruption of more than 220 million tertiary-level students” (para. 1) worldwide. As HEIs’ leadership grapples with finding suitable solutions to ensure students continue their education, they are being further challenged to respond in ways that support their sustainability post-pandemic. Weber and Duderstadt (2004) agreed that “there is no lack of evidence that universities are capable of adaptation in the face of emerging national needs and are [generally] responsive” (p. 12). However, such agility and responsiveness require leadership practices that are adaptive, collaborative and transformative.

Undoubtedly, the challenges faced by universities as a direct result of global crises may be considered complex adaptive problems which “require innovation and learning among the interested parties and even when a solution is discovered, no single entity has the authority to impose it on the others” (Heifetz et al., 2004, p. 25). The evolving and unpredictable nature of crises such as the CoVid-19 pandemic brings challenges that have no clear-cut answers. Such issues require mid-level executive academic leaders to utilize leadership strategies, which would enable them to be flexible and demonstrate the ability to pivot amidst constantly changing conditions and competing demands from multiple stakeholders.

Additionally, in crisis situations, an approach to leadership that supports the notion that everyone has the ability to lead and facilitates the co-creation of meanings and understandings of social environments is important. This leadership approach is considered transformative and is crucial to leading in times of crisis as it promotes collaborative engagement. For transformative leadership (TL) to be successful, it is imperative that leaders engage in collaborative leadership practices. The need for collaborative leadership practices is especially critical given the turbulent and uncertain environments in which these institutions operate. The uncertainties in these environments create adaptive complex challenges with no clear-cut solutions. Adaptive challenges require a mindset change for problems to be addressed. These challenges also require changes across the institutions with the solutions usually needing the input of cross-functional teams as well as new ways of doing things.

This chapter will focus on mid-level executive academic leaders (deans and department chairs) who are central to strategic decision-making in higher education institutions. In particular, academic deans and department chairs (sometimes referred to as mid-level executives or middle managers) increasingly confront situations requiring them to make difficult decisions that sometimes influence institutional paradigm shifts or changes at the college and faculty level, and more so in times of crises.

Leadership in times of crisis demands that middle managers exhibit specific competencies and qualities to be effective. Some of these competencies include adaptive, resilient, reflective, flexible and agile behavioural skills. For this reason, this chapter proposes a framework, which incorporates principles of adaptive, collaborative, and transformative (ACT) leadership as a suitable framework to augment middle executives’ agency to respond to and maximize “the achievement of institutional goals and reduce pressure” when leading in times of uncertainty (Wilmot & Thompson, 2021, para. 4). This framework known as ACT provides a practical approach for managing crises and is applicable to mid-level executives and other stakeholders who lead. The ACT model represents tenets of adaptive-collaborative-transformative

leadership approaches. To illustrate the merits and potential of the ACT model, we analyzed two cases to highlight the benefits of applying this model in responding to crises in HEIs. The two cases were selected based on the following criteria:

- Post-secondary mid-level executives faced with crises in their institutions
- HEIs requiring adaptive-collaborative-transformative crisis interventions
- Universities across multiple jurisdictions (the United States & the United Kingdom)

BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION ON LITERATURE

Post-secondary institutions have been grappling with many changes and crises over the past decades, including recessions, dwindling government funding, corporatization or marketization of the academy, and more recently the CoVid-19 pandemic. These changes have had implications for the financial, technological, and competitive landscape of higher education (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Casiello, 2019). For example, in Canada public funding of tertiary institutions has not grown in over 10 years, while over the same period enrolment figures have steadily grown by more than 20%; however, dependence on student fees to solve the higher education funding crisis is unsustainable at best (Austin-Smith, 2020).

Consequently, through the thrust for public universities (institutions that have historically relied heavily on public funds for their survival) to become “quasi-autonomous entities” (Cummings et al., 2011, p. 12), institutions of higher learning worldwide have been experiencing significant challenges. These issues primarily stem from the reduction in public funding (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007) and a gap in the capacity of academic middle managers to respond to these challenges. Such issues are likely to result in a management crisis for HEIs and the need for adaptive-collaborative-transformative leadership practices.

Leadership in Times of Crises

The crises faced by higher education institutions are multifaceted and impact the functioning of these organisations at multiple levels. These crises are often viewed as having adverse effects on institutions. They also have the potential to evolve into positive outcomes for institutional growth and development. In examining crises in higher education institutions, Gigliotti (2019) emphatically stated that

Crises are disorienting and unwieldy events for an organization and its leaders. These often senseless and complicated moments become crucible experiences for those with leadership responsibility. It is in the darkness and chaos of crisis where leadership becomes most critical, most visible, most desired. (p. 2)

A response to a crisis that changes the status quo in an institution does not necessarily have a negative effect. Rather than engaging in normalized leadership behaviours, operating in a crisis may require a change in the status quo. As such, leaders of higher education institutions have the responsibility to ensure that they are equipped with leadership competencies to manage crises through the development of various strategies endemic to their institutions and the crises being experienced.

Imperative to the strategies for managing crises are institutions' leadership practices and communication strategies (Stephens et al. 2005; Ulmer, 2001). The communication strategies engaged must be

“transparent and communicated honestly to all organizational members” (Harwati, 2013, p. 171). Furthermore, Harwati (2013) argued that “building effective communication between stakeholders, and sharing authority are vital components in the effective management of crises within organizations” (p. 171).

Through their communication strategies and leadership practices, higher education institutions’ mid-level executives, while expected to maintain control, must recognise the importance of getting ‘all hands on deck.’ Bass (1996) posited that during “times of crisis, informal leadership is likely to emerge if the formal authorities and emergency services cannot deal with the crisis events” (p. 34). Many individuals have experienced or observed emergent leaders in action during chaotic and uncertain situations when those in authority are at a loss at how to respond to an unexpected crisis. During these scenarios employees without authority to lead often use their initiatives to respond, while those with positional leadership strategize over a more suitable approach.

Situations including mass shootings, natural disasters, as well as those previously mentioned have resulted in institutions experiencing crises that require adaptive- collaborative-transformative leadership practices, which include the participation of stakeholders at all levels of a system. The examination and delineation of the most impactful principles of these leadership theories are explored below to develop the ACT framework to assist mid-level academic executives to respond effectively in times of crisis.

Adaptive Leadership

For leaders to thrive amidst tensions, complex challenges, institutional, or external crises, Heifetz et al. (2009), proposed an adaptive leadership model that facilitates multiple stakeholders working together to define what it means to thrive and work towards a mutual end. The adaptive leadership theory provides an avenue through which HEIs’ stakeholders can conceptualize innovative solutions that can sustainably address their unique organisational challenges (Nelson & Squires, 2017). The adaptive view of leadership provides a targeted response to organizational challenges, which frames leadership as an activity or process that looks beyond the actions and behaviours of those in formal leadership positions within institutions.

Academic mid-level managers who engage in a systematic process and utilize this framework are better able to anticipate the future needs of the institution and articulate those needs to build a collective understanding among stakeholders (Ramalingam et al., 2020). They also noted that the use of this framework facilitates the implementation of systems that allow HEIs to adapt to the changing environment as needed and incorporate a process of accountability that facilitates transparency in decision making. The adaptive leadership framework allows mid-level executive academic leaders to create an atmosphere in which all stakeholders affected by the organisational challenge play a role in identifying and enacting solutions to the problem/challenge. This leadership framework engenders a collaborative approach to problem-solving which facilitates “positive change by provoking debate, encouraging new thinking, and advancing social learning” (Heifetz et al., 2004, p. 29), thereby, mobilizing parties to form mutually beneficial solutions.

The adaptive leadership process requires individuals to focus on the issues affecting institutions and changes the way leaders and mid-level executives work to positively respond. The process of adaptive leadership entails six activities. These include understanding the nature of the challenge facing the organization, identifying the nature of the challenge, regulating distress, maintaining disciplined attention, giving the work back to the people and protecting leadership voices at all levels (Heifetz et al., 2004). These activities should be executed using a systematic process established through the input of all stakeholders.

This process is iterative and requires middle managers to observe events and patterns around them, interpret what is being observed and facilitate the design of interventions to solve the adaptive challenge identified. In the case of CoVid-19, some institutions had the privilege of observing responses from other institutions that were impacted at the onset of the pandemic. The ability to observe responses from other institutions allowed those mid-level executives who were not immediately impacted to interpret the situation and develop strategies specific to their organizations. Resulting from these activities, leaders and other stakeholders in these institutions would be equipped with the skills needed to adapt, survive or thrive through the challenges.

Collaborative Leadership

Similar to the adaptive leadership framework, collaborative leadership approaches are critical to managing challenging and complex situations. Times of crisis inevitably drive HEI leaders to adapt and implement new measures to accomplish targeted goals. This need often requires leaders to reach across organizational boundaries to cope and move past adverse situations through shared investments in ideas and activities. Collaborative leadership can be identified through “shared vision and values, interdependence, shared responsibility, mutual respect, empathy and willingness to be vulnerable, ambiguity, effective communication, and synergy” (Lawrence, 2017, p. 91) among academic mid-level leaders and their charges.

Based on the principles of collaborative leadership, mid-level executive academic leaders who engage in collaborative practices are not bounded in location or particular groups; rather, they establish co-dependence (Archer & Cameron, 2013), which allows them to outsource their needs and weaknesses. This kind of leadership constitutes and facilitates a culture change (Otter & Paxton, 2017), which sees leaders including stakeholders from all levels and departments of the institution including representatives from maintenance staff, student representatives (undergrad and graduate) and other staff and faculty.

Collaborative practices are essential among these constituents, enabling them to build trust and garner support, particularly in these predominantly bureaucratic institutions. This practice empowers stakeholders both on a personal and collective level by activating “confidence which enables them to respond critically to the demands of the workplace” (Telford, 2003, p. 19). Collaborative leadership, moreover, is non-hierarchical as all members take responsibility for leadership while showing restraint and resilience (Lawrence, 2017).

Through collaborative leadership, mid-level executive academic leaders can create partnerships that are mutually beneficial during crises, while building value from the differences among team members as they work together to handle conflicts, build relationships, and establish a shared process of responding to issues (Archer & Cameron, 2013). Additionally, this kind of leadership includes and engages opportunities for inclusion and interrelationality among team members (Bebbington, 2021; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Lawrence, 2017), which feeds into the final leadership approach examined, in the development of the ACT framework.

Transformative Leadership

Increasingly HEIs have been called out for taking actions that disproportionately impact marginalized stakeholders and are now engaged in continually seeking to improve their equity, diversity and inclusion policies and practices. Transformative leadership (TL) addresses issues of equity, justice, and democracy. Specifically, it raises questions about inequitable practices among users of public goods such as education

(Shields, 2010). Transformative leadership is a critical theory that addresses issues of inclusion, equity, excellence, and social justice in educational institutions (Shields et al. 2020). This leadership theory applies and further extends Burn's (1978) call to action via his transformational leadership theory (which speaks to the transformation of education systems by change leaders). Notably, transformative leadership is distinctive from transformational leadership and is rooted in morality. Transformative leadership is defined as "an ethically-based leadership model that integrates a commitment to values and outcomes by optimizing the long-term interests of stakeholders and society and honouring the moral duties owed by organizations to their stakeholders," which "honours the governance obligations of leaders" (Caldwell et al., 2012, p. 175).

The theory is usually premised on the inappropriate use of power and privilege that leads to a perpetuation of inequities and injustices. For example, the CoVid-19 pandemic created instances where stakeholders in HEIs experienced inequities whereby students experienced varying degrees of disparities in accessing education during a period when most HEIs shifted from in-person to remote learning using various technological platforms. The result was that some less privileged students were either excluded or not fully included in the change process, which in turn, impacted their abilities to fully engage and succeed in their programs of study. Issues such as the capacity to function equitably and successfully in a remote-learning setting (whether because of invisible or other disabilities, access to reliable internet connections for students living in remote areas or even international students who were forced to continue their studies from areas without reliable resources and requisite support to succeed). An assessment of the theory's past use and its utility in higher education suggests that its application could result in more inclusive, equitable, and successful educational environments (Hoffman & Burrello, 2004; Kose, 2007; Shields, 2008).

Empirical studies have shown that the application or infusion of transformative leadership by educational leaders results in successful academic outcomes, and more inclusive and socially just educational environments (Shields, 2010). According to Omalley (2018), Chris Roache, director of the Institute for Human Society and Social Change at La Trobe University suggested that with the use of transformative leadership HE leaders are able to help steer the collective efforts needed to address some of the complex and wicked problems faced globally; challenges such as poverty, social injustice, global warming, disasters (natural and man-made), pandemics and their resulting inequities.

Essential to transformative leadership is the ability of leaders to engage in reflexivity and more specifically, being able to evaluate their values, morals, ethics and principles of fairness in their practices and decision-making processes. As such, during these complex and challenging times, creating capacity for mid-level executive academic leaders may require them to unlearn old practices and assumptions to facilitate the co-creation of shared visions while honing the art of collaborative leadership.

Adaptive, collaborative, and transformative leadership practices are instrumental when dealing with higher education crises or challenges. The adaptive leadership model augments the offerings of both collaborative and transformative leadership approaches. The model provides university mid-level executive academic leaders with a systematic approach to respond to the complex adaptive challenges affecting their institutions in the midst of a multi-dimensional crisis such as the CoVid-19 pandemic. Constricted by institutional policies and managerialism skills deficit, the re-framing of academics as institutional mid-level executive academic leaders through ACT, premised on adaptive, collaborative and transformative leadership techniques and practices, can facilitate the development of skills to respond to various extremities of crises. The ACT framework also has the potential to further strengthen middle leaders' capacity to pursue adaptations that are relevantly contextual to the nature of their institutions.

This chapter posits that an application of the ACT model of transformative, collaborative, and adaptive leadership approaches could aid middle managers in solving complex problems while adapting to changes in HEIs.

ACT: A Hybridized Framework

The hybridized adaptive-collaborative-transformative (ACT) framework is grounded in adaptive, equitable, inclusive, and responsive leadership in times of extreme crises or major change and can be used by mid-level executives in times of crisis. This framework is based on research studies as indicated in Table 1. and a reflection of the literature on the benefits of adaptive-collaborative-transformative leadership models. A generic problem-solving process was used to determine the elements of the adaptive-collaborative-transformative theories that might be used by mid-level executive managers

Table 1. Research Studies and Conceptual work on Adaptive Collaborative and Transformative Leadership

Authors, Year	Article Title	Theories
Casiello (2019)	Adaptive leadership approaches in online education: A study of trust creation and change management in higher education.	Adaptive
Hayashi & Soo (2022)	Adaptive leadership in times of crisis.	Adaptive
Yukl & Mahsud.(2010)	Why flexible and adaptive leadership is essential.	Adaptive
Müller & Van Esch (2020)	Collaborative leadership in EMU governance: A matter of cognitive proximity.	Collaborative
Nelson & Squires (2017)	Addressing complex challenges through adaptive leadership: A promising approach to collaborative problem solving.	Collaborative
Shu & Wang (2021)	Collaborative leadership, collective action, and community governance against public health crises under uncertainty: A case study of the <u>Quanjingwan</u> community in China.	Collaborative
Kapucu & Ustun (2017)	Collaborative Crisis Management and Leadership in the Public Sector.	Collaborative
Archer, & Cameron (2013)	Collaborative leadership: Building relationships, handling conflicts, and sharing control.	Collaborative
Austin-Smith (2020)	Universities and colleges heading for a crisis: Governments need to invest in post-secondary education for a strong recovery.	Transformative
Caldwell et al. (2012)	Transformative leadership: Achieving unparalleled excellence.	Transformative
Shields (2010)	Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts.	Transformative

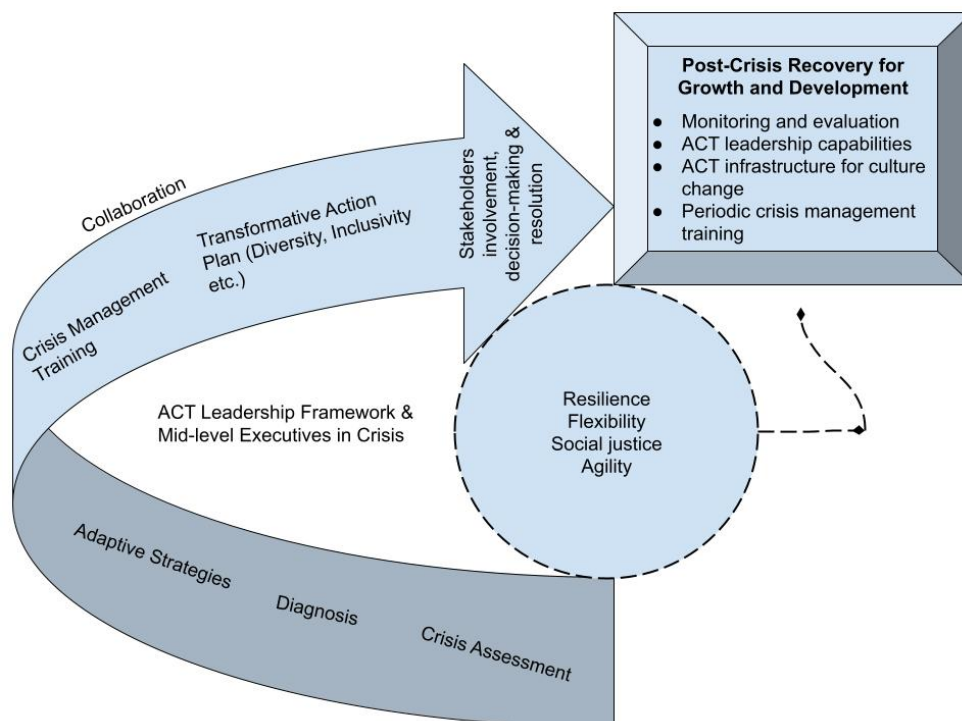
during challenging times. From this process, the researchers developed a five-stage crisis management framework to respond to major crises that might be useful to middle managers in HE. The framework focuses on the foundational principles of flexibility, equity, diversity, inclusion, collaboration, agility, social justice and resilience.

The ACT framework opens avenues for leaders to explore practices in their quest for possible solutions to crises in HEIs. Hence, the principles of equity, social justice, democracy, collaboration, and inclusivity are useful in identifying the nature of challenges. Thereby empowering mid-level executive managers to regulate distress, maintain disciplined attention, transfer work back to the people, and partner with both internal and external constituents to increase the pool of resources to solve challenges.

ACT is a cyclical process of establishing promising practices for leaders—mid-level executives—and their superiors to highlight problems and solutions that are grounded in resilience, social justice, flexibility, and inclusivity. As illustrated in Figure 1, ACT advances from the identification of the problem enveloped by a collaborative process of assessing and diagnosing the situation or crisis through adaptive strategies to a transformative action plan, collaborative implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the plan and its impacts on stakeholders.

The cyclical nature of this framework requires that mid-level executives collaboratively continue the process until they arrive at a solution that is inclusive and representative of all constituents. The decisions taken should represent all stakeholders who will be affected by the outcomes. Thus, through collaboration and deliberations, it is hoped that institutions will develop crisis management strategies that will empower all individuals involved in crises to bring about a transformative resolution.

Figure 1. ACT Leadership Framework



Benefits of the ACT Framework

The ACT framework will benefit mid-level executive academic leaders in various ways including:

1. Providing a practical framework/ guide that can assist mid-level executive academic leaders to meaningfully participate in crisis management training and resolution in HEIs for improved outcomes. This will allow mid-level executive academic leaders to demonstrate flexibility, resilience, and responsiveness during challenging times.
2. Applying transformative crisis management approaches that promote equity diversity, inclusion, and access (EDIA) competencies in mid-level executive academic leaders' operations and decision-making via EDIA sensitivity training.
3. Fostering self-efficacy, positive health and well-being of stakeholders; thereby, creating flourishing HEIs.
4. Promoting the effectiveness of using a hybrid model that facilitates equity, collaboration and agility in responding to complex adaptive/wicked problems through research.

ACT: Bridge Over Troubled Waters

To explicate how the ACT framework can be applied, two crisis management situations where mid-level executives were required to adopt and utilize adaptive-collaborative-transformative principles and strategies in solving problems in HEIs were analyzed. First, we share the cases of the University of Missouri and University E; then we elaborate on how the five-step cyclical process of the ACT model is applied in response to the crises faced by these universities. As previously stated, the cases were selected based on the following criteria:

- Post-secondary mid-level executives faced with crises in their institutions
- HEIs requiring adaptive-collaborative-transformative crisis interventions
- Universities across multiple jurisdictions (the United States & the United Kingdom)

University of Missouri Case

A series of incidents in 2015 escalated racial tensions at the University of Missouri, where 7% of the 35,000 students at the main campus in Columbia is African American (Deere & Addo, 2015). In April, a freshman student was arrested and charged with second-degree property damage motivated by discrimination for drawing a swastika with the word "heil" on the wall of a dormitory stairway. The student would plead guilty to a lesser charge and receive 2 years' probation. The number of racial incidents increased during the fall, including a situation involving the use of a racial slur to refer to the Missouri Student Body President, Payton Head, an African American student. Head indicated that it was not the first time he was subjected to racial slurs, as he mentioned on social media (Deere & Addo, 2015).

On October 5, during a rehearsal for an upcoming Homecoming ceremony performance, a drunk, White male student used a racially insensitive term to call out the Members of the Legion of Black Collegians. The campus safety officer present during the incident did not respond with any urgency, furthering the group's anger (Addo, 2015a). The student who yelled the slur was identified and removed from campus.

In response to these incidents and others, students from across campus used social media to voice their concerns about the climate of the campus. On October 6, Missouri Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin posted a video on the Chancellor's website stating, "it's enough. Let's stop this. Let's end hatred and racism at Mizzou. We're part of the same family. You don't hate your family" (Addo, 2015a). Three days later, the university announced that all incoming freshman would receive online diversity training focusing on student responsibility and inclusivity (Addo, 2015a).

On October 10, during the University's Homecoming Parade, the student activist group, Concerned Student 1950, blocked the car of University President Timothy M. Wolfe. Concerned Student 1950 originated as "MU for Michael Brown" to protest the shooting of African American Brown by a White police officer in nearby Ferguson, Missouri. The group changed its name to Concerned Student 1950 in acknowledgment of the first year that African Americans were admitted to Missouri. Wolfe did not get out of the car, nor did he speak directly with the students. The Concerned Student 1950 group was shouted down by a group of White bystanders chanting "M-I-Z-Z-O-U," until police removed the protesters. As explained by Jonathan Butler, a graduate student protestor, "we disrupted the parade specifically in front of Tim Wolfe because we need him to get our message" (Deere & Addo, 2015).

The Concerned Student 1950 group on October 21 publicized a series of demands, most notably for Wolfe to apologize to the Homecoming day protestors and resign. Other demands included an increase in African American faculty and staff, and mandatory racial awareness and inclusion for all faculty, staff, and students. On that same day, the University of Missouri Board of Curators met in a closed-door session to discuss Chancellor Loftin's leadership in the light of the racial incidents. Nine deans on campus also released a letter calling for Loftin to resign. According to David Kurpius, Dean of the Missouri School of Journalism, "the environment on campus is not conducive to moving forward, resolving issues and trying to make sure that all of our students are in a good learning environment" (Deere & Addo, 2015). The Concerned Student 1950 group eventually met with President Wolfe on October 27, reporting that he would not meet any of the demands of the group. The group issued the following statement: "Wolfe verbally acknowledged that he cared for Black students at the University of Missouri, however, he also reported he was "not completely" aware of systemic racism, sexism, and patriarchy on campus" (Deere & Addo, 2015). The Concerned Student 1950 group decided to boycott university dining and retail services (Addo, 2015b).

On November 2, graduate student Jonathan Butler began a hunger strike and announced that it would continue until Wolfe resigned, leading other students to also camp out in support of Butler. Wolfe released a statement of apology on November 6 for how he handled the Homecoming protests, acknowledging that "my behavior seemed like I did not care. That was not my intention. I was caught off guard in that moment. Nonetheless, had I gotten out of the car to acknowledge the students and talk with them, perhaps we wouldn't be where we are today" (Deere & Addo, 2015). Wolfe also expressed concern for Butler's health.

On Saturday, November 7, Wolfe, while fundraising in Kansas City, was confronted by protestors who asked him to define systematic oppression. He responded accordingly: "I will give you an answer, and I'm sure it'll be a wrong answer. Systematic oppression is because you don't believe that you have the equal opportunity for success" (Addo, 2015b). The message was met with great resistance by the student

protestors who suggested that Wolfe, in his response, was shifting the blame for systematic oppression on them. That same day, the story reached heightened national media attention when the University of Missouri football team announced that it was joining the student protestors. A statement by the football team released on Twitter read “we will no longer participate in any football-related activities until President Wolfe resigns or is removed due to his negligence toward marginalizing students’ experiences” (Addo, 2015b). Several players retweeted the statement. In response to these tweets, the Missouri athletic department stated that it is “aware of the declarations made tonight by many of our student-athletes. We all must come together with leaders across our campus to tackle these challenging issues, and we support our student-athletes right to do so” (Addo, 2015b). On November 8, Missouri Head Coach Gary Pinkel tweeted his support of his players that included a photograph of African American and White players together with their arms interlocked. Missouri would stand to lose \$1 million if it forfeited its game against Brigham Young University scheduled for November 14 (Editorial Board, 2015).

As these events transpired across the university, reporting by Stripling (2015) describes the scrambling of administrators “behind the scenes” in managing the unfolding situation. Leaders communicated by email throughout the situation about a host of different topics related to the crisis, including the need to provide “mental- health resources” to the protestors on campus, the debate over whether or not to prevent access to particular social media sites based on some of the threats being made, and the necessary strategies to “do everything humanly possible to support our students in their free expression.” This summary of the e-mails points to what appeared to be a strong desire to effectively address the crisis, yet it appears that the communication and response came too late to extinguish the spiralling crisis.

On Monday, November 9, Wolfe resigned just as the Board of Curators was beginning an emergency meeting to discuss the racial atmosphere on campus. In his nationally televised on-campus announcement, Wolfe asked for the community to “use my resignation to heal and start talking again.” He added, “this is not, I repeat not, the way change should come about. Change should come about from listening, learning, caring and conversation. My decision to resign comes out of love, not hate” (Deere & Addo, 2015). Loftin later that day announced he would resign as Chancellor and take a lesser role within the university. After the resignations, student celebrations erupted on campus, Jonathan Butler ended his hunger strike, and the football team returned to practice. Donald L. Cupps, chairman of the Board of Curators, suggested that “the problems that we have experienced can’t be blamed on President Wolfe. It can’t be blamed on Chancellor Loftin. It’s got to be blamed on all of us. It’s the fellow students that say things they shouldn’t or do things they shouldn’t. It’s the faculty, staff, employees that do not do what they should do. As board members we have to examine ourselves” (Deere & Addo, 2015). Cupps went on to announce the formation of a task force, the hiring of a diversity, inclusion, and equity officer, and a promise to have the faculty and staff better reflect the student body.

National reactions to the resignations included White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest supporting the protestors in saying, “a few people standing up and speaking out can have a profound impact on the places where we live and work” (Deere & Addo, 2015). Emily Dickens, vice president for public policy for the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, stated, “a public university has a public agenda and an academic agenda. The needs of addressing civil rights and diversity and racism are some of the things that a university can take a lead on. After Ferguson, the students saw that the university could have taken a stand. Students are looking for leadership” (Deere & Addo, 2015). The

St. Louis Post-Dispatch published an editorial that read, “there is perhaps no better place for significant and lasting social change to begin percolating than on the campus of a public university. It is a laboratory with an academic agenda where big ideas can flourish. The agenda should keep civil rights always in the fore-front, and should include scholarship, racial and religious tolerance and cultural acceptance” (Editorial Board, 2015).

Henry Foley, University of Missouri executive vice president for academic affairs, research, and economic development, was appointed interim chancellor. Michael Middleton was appointed interim president, known for being the university’s first African American law professor and founder of the Legion of Black Collegians who in 1969 delivered a list of race-related demands to the University of Missouri chancellor. At a news conference on November 12, Middleton acknowledged “it is imperative to hear from all students and do everything we can to make them comfortable and safe in our community.” He added, “one of the things impeding our ability to get beyond these issues is our inability to talk about it. We have to understand our ugly history permeates everything we do at this institution and in this country. Once we get this truth on the table, we’re poised to reconcile those differences” (Stuckey & Addo, 2015).

The series of events has been identified as a primary reason for the reduction in the number of applications and tuition deposits for enrolment for the Fall 2016 semester. As of February 2016, the university projected 900 fewer freshmen in its 2016 class than its 2015 class. Barbara Rupp, Missouri director of admissions, explicitly connected the crises with the enrolment estimates saying the decline is “undoubtedly part of the aftermath last fall” (Addo, 2016). Applications from out of state have particularly declined, causing Rupp to comment “because those students are geographically removed from the campus, they don’t have a sense of what’s going on and they are relying on what they are seeing and hearing in the media. And it’s not particularly positive” (Addo, 2016). University leaders acknowledged the public perception of this crisis in their public statement on November 11: “We feel the weight of the world’s eyes upon us.. We will not flinch from the work ahead” (Stripling, 2015). (Adapted from: Fortunato et al., 2017, pp. 200-204)

University E

When the polytechnics were freed from local authority control they found themselves with a minimum of financial reserves, at a considerable disadvantage as against the existing universities in their physical plant and with a market-orientated funding system set up by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC) which encouraged a rapid expansion of student numbers. Their new governing bodies were made up of hand-picked lay members mostly chosen from the business community who rightly recognized that economic viability represented a priority for management teams, who were necessarily inexperienced in the business of managing expanding institutions outside local authority control. This led to the widespread adoption of the executive dean principle with deans being recruited as line managers of groups of departments, given budgets and recruitment targets, and being made directly answerable for balancing their books to the chief executive. Failure to keep the faculty out of deficit and to pay an overhead charge to the institution could involve termination of appointment. Most deans were given permanent appointments subject to performance.

University E falls firmly into this category, although it might be said that its vice-chancellor, in adopting a heavily devolved structure, did so from a principled view of its value as an organizational model and deliberately kept the institution's central 'directorate' small. Indeed the university's multi-campus location in a mixed urban area bisected with freeways lent itself to this approach. But University E went further than most post-1992 institutions in also devolving student administration and quality management to the faculties as well as full responsibility for budgetary management. Each faculty had its own faculty finance officer and faculty registrar answerable exclusively to the dean. This was a much more clear-cut position..., for example. In effect, what had been set up was a 'business' model with a board, a chief executive, who behaved like a chief executive, answerable to it, and devolved faculties, operating as subsidiary companies where the dean was a line manager answerable to the chief executive. Since the university was not research active the budgets were dominated by student-related funding and the performance measures were essentially to do with meeting student targets.

This structure suited the climate of 1992 well, but the environment changed. The unit of resource in national funding continued to decline making even limited success in the RAE an important source of recurrent finance; the translation of the teaching quality assessment (TQA) scores into league tables (along with RAE scores and student related data) meant that low scoring condemned a non-research active institution to a position in the lower quartile, with damaging consequences for reputation both locally and internationally; the new enthusiasm for initiative funding at the funding councils, particularly in 'third-stream' activities thrust a greater role on the centre; and the growing role of the regional development agencies in offering support to economically regenerative projects did not necessarily cohere with tightly drawn faculty structures. Increasingly the model became unfit for purpose: faculties were not investing differentially in areas which had research potential so the university continued to be unsuccessful in the RAE; some TQA scores were poor because the faculties had insufficient expertise to prepare for them so that quality management had to be pulled back to the centre; overseas student recruitment, and the income that went with it, suffered; student retention rates varied alarmingly between different faculty areas, with financial as well as academic consequences; third-stream and regional activities required central direction and cross-faculty engagement in a way not previously envisaged.

From the late 1990s the increasingly differentiated student market began to undermine the business model even further because some faculties lost numbers to the extent that they became non-viable while others expanded out of the space they had available on a dispersed campus. In addition the government's decision to encourage a more 'consumerist' student culture through its new fee and bursary policy imposed the need for stronger institutional policies in respect to 'customer care'; devolved services risked a failure to meet common standards.

In 2004 the vice-chancellor had to concede that his earlier vision needed amendment and that a greater degree of centralization had to be imposed. As he put it in a staff circular:

In an increasingly competitive environment I see no option but to achieve a greater degree of conformity and consistency that can only be achieved by central direction and at the expense of individual faculty policies. (University E, communication by the vice-chancellor November 2004) (Adapted from: Shattock, 2006, pp 117-19)

Assessing the Situation

The first step in utilizing the ACT framework required mid-level executives to analyse the crises to determine their origins and impact on the university and its constituents. Mid-level executives should have taken an etic or objective approach that would have enabled them to get greater understanding of the underlying issues that are contributing to the challenges. To truly comprehend these issues, mid-level executives needed to move between their day-to-day activities of leading the organization while occasionally stepping back to assess the functioning of the organization from a distance. Heiftz et al. (2009) described this process as moving to the balcony. In moving to the balcony, mid-level executives would have gotten a bird's eye view of the problem and would have gained new perspectives as they sought to identify underlying values or beliefs held by the organization's stakeholders which may also be impacting the functioning of the organization and its capacity to change.

In the case of the University of Missouri, the application of the first step of the ACT framework would have enabled the mid-level executives to get a clear understanding of the underlying origins and nature of the crisis. A scan of the external environment would have brought the mid-level executives' attention to the recent protests in the larger community within which the university is situated. The University of Missouri is near the city of Ferguson. Prior to the increase in racial incidents at the university, Ferguson had experienced protests in the wake of the killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year-old male by a white police officer. With the application of the ACT framework, the mid-level executives would have taken this incident into consideration as they assessed the situation.

Internally, during the assessment phase, the mid-level executive team would have also questioned their underlying beliefs and values, to ascertain how these assumptions and attitudes may or may not have been related to the crisis being faced. Had the university president and the wider mid-level leadership team engaged in this reflective process they would have recognized the nature of the crisis that they were facing and correctly diagnose the adaptive nature of the challenge. Indeed, the denial of the university president of the existence of systemic racism at the university suggests that he would have benefited from this reflective process.

As it relates to University E there was a clear assessment of both the internal and external factors that were impacting the university. The crisis faced by University E was related to its continued financial viability. To determine its response to this crisis the mid-level executive team examined their day-to-day operations across departments and colleges to understand what behaviours and actions internally influenced or contributed to the crisis. Along with that internal analysis, the team recognized that given the declining reputation and a reduction in enrolment the previously adopted decentralized model of operations for the colleges and departments was no longer sustainable if the university were to remain viable.

Diagnosing the Crises

In diagnosing the problem, the middle managers needed to focus on ethical considerations regarding issues of inequity, social injustice, and governance at the institutions. Having observed what is happening from the balcony and through the daily activities of leading their organization in the assessment phase, mid-level executives would have been able to determine whether the challenges were adaptive or technical. Technical challenges are easily identifiable and may be solved by clear-cut solutions which can be implemented by an edict. On the other hand, adaptive challenges require mindset adjustments on the part of organizational stakeholders to effectively manage the crises that the universities were fac-

ing. Adaptive challenges also require that the departments/colleges undergo some modification of their management structure since solutions through ACT require the input of cross-functional teams, external partnerships, and new ways of operating.

The crises that existed in both universities were undoubtedly adaptive challenges that mid-level executives could have mitigated with their interventions. The diagnosis step of the ACT framework would have required mid-level executives to conduct an in-depth investigation and acquire a true diagnosis of the root causes of the issues affecting both universities.

The core issue at the University of Missouri was racial discrimination among its student body; this appeared to have been overlooked or ignored by senior management until the protest actions of stakeholders threatened to interrupt routine activities at the university. In diagnosing the crises at the University of Missouri, the mid-level executives would have conducted a thorough investigation of the crisis to ascertain its origin. During their investigation to diagnose the cause of the crises, mid-level executives would have had dialogue and interacted with a wide range of stakeholders. Through these interactions, mid-level executives would have provided all parties to the case with an avenue through which they could have had meaningful dialogues about the issues with the senior executives of the university.

In addition, the mid-level managers would have ascertained that the university was facing adaptive challenges and could have been the buffer between the students and senior management. Mid-level executives' diagnosis of the crises at the University of Missouri would have revealed that solutions to the challenges required constituents to adjust their mindset and possibly modify the leadership structure at the university.

Similarly, the crises that existed at University E were adaptive challenges, namely a declining reputation and a reduction in enrolment, which led to financial challenges for the institution. Using the ACT framework, diagnostic efforts of the mid-level executives would have revealed that the university's transformation process and its new management structure were central to the crises at the university. The diagnosis would have also revealed that the non-existence of a research-intensive drive at the university was negatively impacting its finances, and ability to attract students.

In both cases, the universities were facing adaptive challenges, which often require that constituents adjust their minds to effectively manage the crises that universities face. Adaptive challenges also require that the universities' management structures be modified and allow constituents to increase their collaboration. After properly implementing the diagnosing step of the ACT framework the mid-level executives of both universities would then move to the planning phase of the ACT framework.

Planning the Strategy

To respond to these crises, mid-level executives need to generate a plan to address the issues facing the university. Members of the team should use the data gathered from the diagnostic phase to formulate a plan that would generate solutions for the ensuing crises. The mid-level executive team's plan of action should embrace the foundational tenets of the ACT framework such as adaptability, flexibility, shared leadership, equity, and fairness. It is imperative that mid-level executives garner and where possible, incorporate the ideas of their colleagues into their plan of action. Hence, after they formulate their plan, the mid-level executive team should have conversations with the various colleges and departments at the university to strengthen and gain support for their plan.

The situation at the University of Missouri was racially charged and required a planned approach to improve relationships between school administration, students, faculty, and staff. There was no evidence

of a planned approach to respond to the racial issues encountered. Thus, the crisis escalated to the extent that students and faculty lost confidence in President Wolfe. This situation further fuelled the declining numbers of student enrolment. In keeping with the foundational tenets of the ACT framework, the mid-level executives at the University of Missouri needed to ensure that their plan of action was adaptable, flexible, collaborative, equitable, and fair. It was necessary that the University of Missouri's mid-level executives garner and where possible, incorporate the ideas of their colleagues into their plan of action, thereby garnering buy-in and support for their plan.

Senior managers are responsible for making decisions regarding system-wide organizational undertakings. Therefore, the mid-level executive team needed to prepare and present an evidence-based plan of action that would convince senior managers of a high percentage of success if implemented. When the mid-level team finalized the plan and arranged the meeting with the senior management team, they should prepare themselves for possible pushbacks or resistance to the proposed changes.

Critical in responding to the challenge the University of Missouri faced, the leadership needed a crisis management plan involving the training of all stakeholders campus-wide. Crisis management training would have prepared all affected parties to be adaptive, collaborative, and transformative in their approach to overcoming the challenges at the institution. Additionally, meetings should have been arranged with student groups, faculty, and staff to discuss and improve the mid-level executive team's plan of action. Invitation to these meetings should have been extended to all stakeholders or representatives from staff and student groups in each college to seek other possible innovative, and adaptive solutions to the challenges. Further, even though a proposal was made for the formation of a task force and the employment of a Diversity, Inclusion and Equity officer, the interim president did not indicate how representative this team would be of the key stakeholders and their mandate.

Engaging in a democratic process would unite the university's constituents and ensure that equity, transparency, and inclusivity are evident in the mid-level executives' attempts to eliminate the crises and mutually achieve the organization's goals and objectives. Stakeholders are more likely to support and take ownership of plans or actions if they are included in activities that contribute to the development and implementation of these plans. After completing the process of meeting with constituents from the various colleges and departments, the mid-level executive team should have met, and if necessary, modified and finalized the plan based on feasible data gathered from meetings with constituents from the various departments.

As it pertains to University E, there seemed to have been a planned approach to counter the financial crisis they encountered. There seemed to have been collaborations among constituents and across departments in planning an approach that worked within the scope. This strategy included the centralization of the academic registry and financial operations of each college to allow for consistency in the management of the University.

Planning is an essential phase when dealing with crises. In both cases identified above, there was the need for planned approaches to managing the crises encountered. The University of Missouri seemed unprepared to deal with the racial issues that developed; thus, the situation spiralled out of control and led to the resignation of senior personnel when pressured by students and faculty. The media amplified this situation. A crisis management plan would have helped to avert this situation. On the other hand, University E recognizing their need for financial growth and autonomy developed a collaboratively planned approach. This planned approach allowed for "buy-in" from all departments, which maintained the autonomy they sought and increased the accountability needed for the financial viability of the university.

Implementing the Plan

After the mid-level executive team finalized its planning phase, they should have approached the senior management team with the proposed plan for their perusal, review, contemplation, discussion, and decision. The nature and success of the ACT leadership framework are embedded in the willingness of officially designated leaders to relinquish some of their control to other constituents both inside and outside of the organisation.

Shared power is intricately woven throughout the ACT framework. In addition, ACT also involves incorporating constituents in the work of the organisation; both senior management and mid-level executives should be prepared to release some of their authority to other constituents with whom they partner. In the case of the University of Missouri, applying the ACT framework successfully would have resulted in a shift in the balance of power; this is key, as solutions to the problems facing the university also resided in those stakeholders close to the problem.

Effective implementation of ACT includes efforts where constituents engage and challenge each other's thinking. Mid-level executives should bravely argue their points but also be flexible and responsive to constructive suggestions that could improve the robustness of their proposed plan of action. Middle managers should also be willing to adjust during the implementation phase. To maximize the probability of success, the mid-level executives should continue to observe the foundational principles of the ACT model, highlighted earlier in this chapter - principles such as inclusivity, collaboration, fairness, adaptability, flexibility, good governance, social justice, and shared leadership.

The work of the newly formed strategic partnerships and cross-functional teams at University E would have had a great impact on the outcomes of the mid-level executives' plans. For the University of Missouri, the mid-level executives should have established a process to facilitate the sharing of information about the decisions being made. The middle managers should have received and thoroughly examined feedback from all stakeholders before making major decisions. This would have ensured that the solutions to the challenges facing their universities receive broad stakeholder support and ownership.

Additionally, systemic changes require resources if they are to be successful. Therefore, along with the crisis management training, stakeholders at the University of Missouri should have been exposed to other training and development opportunities that would have assisted them in responding to these shifts. The crisis management training could have been implemented through the form of professional learning activities (PLAs); these PLAs could have been convened and delivered by knowledgeable and capable constituents at the university. However, if there were no suitable individuals at the university to conduct the PLAs, the mid-level executive team could have outsourced and identified individuals with the requisite skills to conduct the training. The content of the PLAs could be context specific to the various crises that the university was facing and would target all constituents, but especially those individuals who were immediately and directly impacted by the crises.

The ACT framework also requires leaders to demonstrate positive reinforcement to constituents throughout the implementation phase. When constituents are encouraged their level of output and efficiency increases. Hence, mid-level executives should use all available methods of reinforcement, as often as possible, to encourage stakeholders to continue with the implementation of the plan to eliminate the crises that the university is facing. In addition, mental health and wellness supports should have been made available to constituents, as they explored novel and innovative solutions through the ACT framework.

In the cases highlighted, mid-level executives, as well as senior leaders at the University of Missouri and University E, were faced with scenarios typically experienced during crises - these include

information overload or insufficient information, high levels of anxieties and emotions, among others. The crises that the University of Missouri faced required an agile approach to dismantle the systemic issues, which escalated into a crisis. A failure to adequately assess and diagnose the challenges facing the institution resulted in a lack of effective planning to successfully resolve the issues in an adaptive-collaborative-transformative manner. This suggests that the institution's leaders did not have an accurate picture of what was happening on the ground or failed to accept the nature of the crises. The university leadership should have sought input from diverse groups of stakeholders including external constituents to facilitate discussions and to help them adapt bold strategies.

The University of Missouri would have benefitted from a multitude of innovative, adaptive, equitable and inclusive strategies that are reflective of the ACT leadership framework. As such, the university's leadership would have been able to identify early warning signs of crises especially given the history of the systemic issues within the institution to put measures in place that would mitigate impending escalation. The implementation of the leadership framework would have facilitated the reduction or eradication of any disconnect that existed between the institution's leadership and the stakeholders affected by the crises. Further, at the University of Missouri, implementation of the ACT framework would ensure that leadership presence is felt throughout the institution. The collaborative leadership engagement and actions through the ACT strategies would promote the deinstitutionalization of the inequity, which existed at the institution.

Monitoring and Evaluating

The final phase of the ACT framework is on-going monitoring and evaluation (M & E) of the entire process but especially the planning and implementation stages. The ACT framework requires that mid-level academic executives prepare a monitoring and evaluation (M & E) plan, revisit its plan and modify it where possible to ensure that it is fulfilling its intended purpose. The mid-level executives should conduct periodic reviews during the implementation phase of ACT to guarantee that the original or modified goals of the plan are being achieved or are progressing towards achievement efficiently. This may be done via quarterly and annual reviews and M & E meetings with relevant stakeholders depending on the nature of the change or crisis. During the monitoring and evaluation phase, middle managers should be flexible and responsive.

The monitoring and evaluation process should also ensure that the principles of good governance, shared leadership, and equity are observed and enforced throughout the implementation phase. There should also be scrutiny of the execution of the plan to ascertain its impact on equity for all constituents. The implementation of the plan should improve the lives of constituents. Regular meetings of the mid-level executives to monitor the process would be useful; the frequency of these monitoring sessions would be context specific and should be determined by mutual agreement.

When the evaluation process reveals that there are inefficiencies in the implementation of the plan, the mid-level executives should investigate to ascertain the reason(s) for these inadequacies and take the necessary steps to correct them. In some cases, it might mean the mid-level executives will have to retrain some personnel, reassign some responsibilities, modify the personnel on teams, or simply encourage and inspire their colleagues to continue the process of pursuing the goals and objectives.

In applying the M & E phase of ACT to the University of Missouri, a number of decisions and actions could have been done differently. Firstly, the mid-level executives should have been more responsive through calls of action to the senior leadership and other stakeholders of the institution to address the challenges even before they escalated to the level they did. These calls to action might have included strategies such as:

- A plan that includes both immediate and long-term strategies to address issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization (EDID) at the university. These strategies should include the collaborative development of an EDID policy involving all stakeholders especially those whom the policy most impacts. The strategy should also include a plan to monitor and evaluate its development and implementation across campus; hosting and monitoring of immediate engagement sessions with the student body and groups involved in the current crisis. The goal would be to collaboratively achieve mutually beneficial immediate outcomes that effectively manage the crisis while initiating discussions for more sustainable solutions. It is critical to have discussions around creating a safe and healthy space for all students, faculty and staff regardless of race, a commitment to concrete actions that address racial discrimination on campus, and a culture of discrimination, and strategies to create a more inclusive and equitable climate on campus and a plan to effectively monitor these change initiatives.
- These and other proposed changes to the culture, systems and climate at the University of Missouri represent a major systemic transformation, which requires the input of all stakeholders. As such, an effective M & E plan should also be inclusive and collaborative, requiring all stakeholders' involvement, buy-in, and engagement.
- In addition to the periodic and on-going reviews of the implementation strategies and in alignment with the ACT framework, the monitoring and evaluation of the changes (or management of the crisis) should be flexible and responsive, adapting to the current needs of stakeholders even as the crisis evolves. If the University of Missouri had applied the ACT framework, the mid-level and senior academic leaders of the institution would have intervened earlier, responded to and monitored the students' calls for action in an inclusive manner, rather than allegedly ignoring the voices (and experiences) of the minority (thereby, averting or effectively managing the heightened crisis that persisted at the university).
- The University of Missouri's application of the ACT framework would have also resulted in organizational learning and monitoring and evaluation of the initiatives undertaken or led by mid-level executives such as conducting and evaluating workshops, and webinars on EDID. Another essential component of the application of the framework is the monitoring and evaluating of the university's crisis management training, and reviewing of existing curricula to be responsive to the changing climate on campus with respect to race, equity, and diversity in society. After all, the halls of academia are where the most sustainable changes should be initiated.

On the other hand, the crisis that existed at University E presented adaptive challenges, mid-level academic executives would need to be flexible, resilient, and adaptable in their response. An application of the ACT framework in the case of University E necessitated on-going monitoring of the changes that took place in both the internal and external environment particularly as it related to the university's 'crisis of financial vitality,' declining reputation, and reduction in enrolment. Effectively addressing this crisis required the continuous collaboration of multiple stakeholders especially since part of the proposal by senior leadership required a major systemic change - a shift from decentralization to centralization. This change could have required cross-sectoral or multi-scale consultation and engagement. As such, mid-level executives would need to adapt and lead within the context of these major shifts while continuously monitoring and evaluating the impact of the changes on the institution's viability and sustainability.

Exercise: A Case Study

Read the case study below and answer the discussion questions at the end. This activity can be completed individually or as a small group activity, followed by large group class discussions to enrich the learning experience.

CONCLUSION

Reid University on the Verge of Collapse: A Case for Discussion

Caribbean universities are prone to damage from natural disasters, which often leave administrators grappling with the after effects. Reid University, which is located in the Caribbean, was damaged by hurricane Maria in 2017. This disaster along with the global pandemic and the uncertainties surrounding the university's restructuring process exacerbated the crisis situation at the university. The case describes some of the challenges experienced by the administrators of Reid University as they navigated the crises.

Reid University (RU) is a small private university founded in 1906. RU had always embraced diversity, with students entering its halls from countries across the globe because of its robust courses and highly renowned faculty. A champion for the education of minority groups and underserved communities, this university gained prominence and was one of the top-tiered research institutions located on an island in the Caribbean. The university's population continually increased over the years.

In 2010, RU boasted a student population of over 12,000 and a staff complement of over 1800. With the rise in student numbers and their diverse needs, the management of the university added a new stream of leadership and professional courses. To facilitate these courses, they hired and added to the staff more than 75 new members. The university was thriving. At this point, the board of management, at a high-ranking meeting, decided that the university needed to rebrand and strategize to meet the needs of the future workforce.

In 2015, an interim president was contracted to lead the restructuring process. It was rumoured that, among his first tasks, he would cut staff by 15% and adjust student fees. The rumours of his intentions caused a stir across the campus putting everyone on edge. He readily assured the campus community that although this was a mandate, its implementation would be a gradual process that he estimated would take five years to complete. That satiated the community momentarily but left many constituents with subdued agitation because of the uncertainties.

To compound the situation, at the beginning of the school year in 2017, Hurricane Maria pummelled the island with high winds and heavy rainfall causing major damage to the campus facilities. The heavy winds left the island and the university without power for three weeks. The Murray Campus Lecture Hall—the campus's central building for conferences and lectures—was destroyed, leaving only the walls of a building that had a seating capacity of 10,000. The administration building was also badly damaged. A section of the student residence was destroyed. This caused a disruption in the activities of the university. Students and staff were not able to access campus facilities and classes for one month. This disaster led to a major fallout as many students withdrew from their programmes and requested that they be refunded for their tuition and fees.

About 3 years later, in 2020 after the hurricane, RU was barely recovering, when the global pandemic hit and caused the university to pivot to remote and online learning. The lack of adequate technology to

facilitate online learning forced RU's senior management to take drastic measures and cut some courses. More students dropped out and some faculty resigned over the unfavourable and strenuous conditions under which they were expected to work.

By 2021, RU had reached the point where senior management considered closing the doors to the university. The university was in a crisis. Fewer students had returned to classes dragging the overall enrolment down by 35.8% combined with the already 15% drop from the fallout from Hurricane Maria at the start of the academic year. But the university's enrolment of just over 6,000 students at a university of roughly 12,000 had made it a target of budget and staff cuts and, for the second time in a decade, threatened it with elimination.

Even before the coronavirus, Hurricane Maria, and the relentless decline in student numbers, the university already had plans to purge itself of programmes that had low enrolment figures or that the board of governors and legislators did not think would lead to jobs. The university's senior management team had also harboured plans of cutting staff and adjusting student fees. Now, with the pandemic taking a multibillion-dollar toll on the university, and lessening state budget allocations and enrolment expected to plummet even further, more academic programmes and jobs are expected to be on the chopping block.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

ACT Model: A leadership model that embraces elements of adaptive, collaborative and transformative leadership styles that enable leaders to act responsibly in times of crises.

Adaptive Leadership: A leadership style that facilitates a collaborative response to complex problems facing organizations.

Collaborative Leadership: This leadership style involves individuals in organizations working together while pulling resources from a range of sources internally and externally toward mutual goal.

Crisis Management: Crisis management is using strategies and techniques to help individuals in organizations deal with unpredictable and sudden crises.

Higher Education: Post-secondary or tertiary education, including universities, colleges and polytechnics.

Mid-Level Executives: Refers to middle managers or leaders with special and specific responsibilities and are central to strategic decision-making in higher education institutions. Used interchangeably with middle managers and mid-level academic executives.

Transformative Leadership: This is a leadership style that is anchored in critical theory and addresses issues of inclusion, equity, excellence, and social justice in educational institutions. The theory raises questions about inequitable practices among users of public goods such as education (Shields, 2010).

APPENDIX

Questions for Discussion

Pretend that you are a member of the mid-level executive team at RU.

1. Identify the issues Reid University faced and what caused them.

2. How would you classify each problem? Give reasons for your classification.

3. Using the ACT framework, suggest strategies and processes that the mid-level executives at Reid University could use to alleviate each crisis.

4. Tabulate your response for each item in question 3 above and discuss possible outcomes.

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Olivene Burke is the Executive Director, Mona Social Services/Community Film Project, The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus since 2011. She has responsibilities for community development, implementation and monitoring of social intervention programmes and services to medium and high-risk residents of volatile communities. Prior to that she taught in the Jamaican high school system and worked at the University Council of Jamaica in the capacity of Director, General Administration. Dr Burke is a graduate of Mona Campus with a BA (Honours) in Language and Literature with Social Sciences; Nova Southeastern University, USA with MSc in Human Resource Management (Honours) and UWI, Mona, Doctor of Philosophy in Education. This is in addition to several professional development certificates and diplomas. Dr Burke is also a certified Young American Business Trust (YABT) specialist for the delivery and assessment of Green Enterprise Business labs with a focus on Innovation. Dr Burke has a distinguish career as an educator, planner, administrator and community development professional. She has been instrumentally involved in working with youths in underserved communities which includes facilitating and organizing training and leadership development workshops, among other initiatives. Within this context she has trained over 250 young entrepreneurs and 40,000 young people locally and regionally. Dr Burke lectures Learning Strategies, Transformational Leadership & Management and Human Resource Management at Mona School of Business and Management, Mona and Western Jamaica Campuses as well as at the Mico University College. Additionally she facilitates workshops and seminars. Dr Burke has co-authored and published books and articles. Her most recent book chapters are: A Job or Two to Keep the Economy (A) Float: A Cross Sectional Study on Tourism Workers Attitude Towards COVID-19 Vaccines and Community-Based Tourism: A Pandemic Resilient "Fit-For-Purpose" Model. She has served on several public and private sector boards and committees in Jamaica including School of the Performing Arts, Excelsior Community College, Jamaica National

Building Society Advisory Committee, Centre for Leadership and Governance, Hope Valley Experimental Primary School, Human Resource Management Association of Jamaica and Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education. Dr Burke holds membership on the British Educational Research Association, American Educational Research Association and Community for Development Society. She is the recipient of the Governor Generals Achievement Award 2020, Anthony N Sabga Caribbean Laureate Award 2020 in Public and Civic Contributions. She also received the Vice Chancellors Award for Excellence in Contribution to Public Service in 2020. Dr Burke is also a Justice of the Peace.

Ian Corrie, recently gaining his Doctorate in Adult Transformative Learning, Transformative Leadership and Transformative Coaching, is interested in championing social justice and developing new ways of teaching and learning. As the Honorary Colonel of 335 Medical Evacuation Regiment and a Principal Lecturer in Nursing, Health and Professional Practice at the University of Cumbria, Ian has worked extensively with the NHS (health), UK military and nuclear industries across the United Kingdom in the provision of leadership training. Ian is responsible for the Continuing Professional Development portfolio across the Institute of Health at the University of Cumbria.

Tracey Deagle is an Assistant Professor of P-12 Educational Leadership, teaching courses for Master's and Ph.D. programs at Mercer University, Georgia, USA. Before joining the Tift College of Education faculty, Dr. Deagle served as a Deputy Superintendent of a public school district, Middle School Principal, High School Assistant Principal, and High School Social Studies Teacher. Dr. Deagle was appointed to the Ohio, State Board of Education by then Governor Strickland. In her role as a State Board of Education member, Dr. Deagle was responsible for adopting the Common Core Standards in Ohio, and served on the Governor's Early Childhood Education Taskforce. While a teacher, Dr. Deagle was invited by the U.S. Department of Education to participate in a revision of status report for rural education in America, and received a Legislative Action Award by the Ohio Federation of Teachers. She also served as a board member for the Ohio Fair Schools Campaign, an organization advocating for Ohio school funding revision as a result of the *DeRolph v. Ohio* State Supreme Court decision. Dr. Deagle has degrees from the Ohio State University, Indiana University, and the University of Dayton.

Sherian Demetrius was born in the town of Falmouth, Trelawny, Jamaica, where she received her early education at the Falmouth Infant, Falmouth All-Age school and William Knibb Memorial High School. She migrated to the United States of America in 1987 where she continued her education as an educator. She received a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and a Master of Science in Varying Exceptionalities from Nova Southeastern University and a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction, Reading and Language Cognition from Barry University. She currently works as a Curriculum Support Specialist with Miami-Dade County Public Schools and as an adjunct professor with Barry University and the University of Phoenix. Dr. Demetrius' work with youth and adults is evidenced in the many workshop that she has led over the years and the influence she has had in encouraging others to become educators and or a dedicated influential member of their community. Dr Demetrius has a clear vision and a deep understanding of what it takes to be an educational leader, particularly in the areas of curriculum and instruction and community building. She demonstrates "putting theory into practice," and does this in a way that directly empowers her fellow educators as well as students and administrators.

About the Contributors

Vanessa Ellis Colley is originally from St. Mary, Jamaica and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. Her research interests are higher education leadership, policy development, leadership development, governance and education equality. Vanessa has over 20 years experience in higher education where she developed a curiosity for the complexities and dynamics of higher education leadership while employed at a university. She is a co-investigator on the research project, “Exploring the psycho-social, academic and financial wellbeing of international students during the COVID-19 pandemic” funded under SSHRC Explore Grant, with Drs Susan Fowler-Kerry and Yolanda Palmer-Clarke.

Denise Furlong holds an EdD in Literacy Education with a concentration in educating English learners from Rutgers University. She is an Assistant Professor and Director of Advanced Studies for the Reading Specialist and ESL Programs at Georgian Court University in New Jersey, USA. She has over 20 years experience teaching multilingual learners and coaching their teachers in a variety of educational settings. Her book, *Voices of Newcomers: Experiences of Multilingual Learners*, was published through EduMatch Publishing in 2022 and has been honored as an outstanding teacher resource for multicultural education. Through Furlong Educational Consulting LLC, Dr. Furlong provides professional learning support for educators through national conferences, presentations, and in-district coaching. Her research interests include authentic and meaningful professional learning for preservice and current educators, inclusive practices for learners with diverse strengths and abilities, and connective and responsive pedagogical practices in school communities.

Catherine Hayes is qualified in Podiatric Medicine in 1992 and is Professor of Health Professions Pedagogy and Scholarship at the University of Sunderland. She was awarded a UK National Teaching Fellowship and Principal Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy in 2017. She holds Fellowship of the Institute of Leadership and Management and is a Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute in the UK. Catherine has published widely in the fields of Health, Higher Education and Interdisciplinary Doctoral Research Design and Methodology.

Freddy James is the Deputy Dean for Graduate Studies and Research in the Faculty of Humanities and Education and lecturer of Educational Leadership at the School of Education, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. She is a University of Warwick Postgraduate Research Fellowship Scholar. She is Vice-Chairman of the CARICOM team responsible for developing and implementing standards for educators and school leaders. She is the President and Founder of Caribbean Visionary Educators Foundation. Her current areas of research focus on innovation and entrepreneurship, building collective leadership capacity, professional learning, action research and educational change and improvement. She has published widely on these areas in a range of journals internationally, regionally and locally, including: *Education Action Research Journal*, *School Leadership and Management Journal*, *Caribbean Curriculum and School Effectiveness* and *School Improvement*. Dr. James has presented her research at many international and local conferences and is also involved in a number of local, regional and international education projects focused on embedding innovation into the teaching and learning process. In this regard she brought a team from Finland to conduct a training workshop on innovative pedagogy for selected staff at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. She is currently involved in an international project focused on creating social entrepreneurship to fight poverty.

Beverley Johnson is a graduate of the Mico Teachers' College (now The Mico University College) having earned a teachers' certification with credit. She is also a graduate of the University of the West Indies (UWI) having earned her bachelor's degree with honours, her master's degree with distinction, and her Ph.D. in Educational Administration. She has 55 years teaching experience and has worked in the education system in Jamaica and USA having served as a primary school principal in Jamaica for 15 years. She currently serves as a senior research fellow and lecturer at the Mico University College and senior adjunct lecturer at UWI. She has published in *Journal of Education in the Caribbean* Vol. 9 (2006/7) and *Leadership for School Improvement in the Caribbean* (2007); *The Mico Journal* 2016 and 2017. She also co-edited and co-authored a published leadership text: *Leadership for Success: The Jamaican School Experience* and has co-authored a paper in the *Jamaica Teachers' Association Magazine* 2021. In 2019, she was recognized by UWI for excellence in teaching having scored above 4.5 out of 5 from students' evaluation.

Antonios Kafa is a Lecturer in Educational Management and Leadership at Frederick University in Cyprus. He teaches in the department of education in areas related to educational leadership and administration. He is a Ph.D. holder in Educational Leadership and Policy at the Open University of Cyprus. He holds a BA in Philosophy, Education and Psychology from the University of Athens and an MA in Educational Leadership from the European University Cyprus. His doctoral dissertation was awarded as a "Highly Commended Award Winner" in the Emerald/EFMD Outstanding Doctoral Research Awards 2016. He is also a member and researcher in the international comparative research project entitled "International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP)", conducting research on behalf of Cyprus. Furthermore, he is one of the members of the Board of Directors of the Cyprus Educational Administration Society, a co-convenor of the Educational Leadership network of the European Educational Research Association (EERA), a visiting lecturer at the Cyprus Police Academy, as well as a reviewer for various scientific journals in the area of educational management and leadership. He authored a number of papers in peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, and participated in various European and international conferences. His research interests include different aspects of educational leadership and administration, such as successful school leadership, school principals' personal values systems and authentic leadership, low-performing schools, and school leadership in crisis and times of uncertainty.

Jason Marshall is currently a Lecturer in Educational Psychology with The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, where he also obtained his Ph.D. in Education. As a trained educator, he has core competencies in key areas of education including virtual and face-to-face programme development and evaluation, and instructional design, delivery, and assessment. He continues to apply both pedagogical and andragogic models/strategies to guide his instructional design, instructional strategies, and assessments. From 2016 to 2020, Dr. Marshall led, managed, and mentored staff and students as part of his quality assurance responsibilities associated with teaching and learning in the online environment. He also has over a decade of experience working with renowned organizations and several Caribbean countries on projects that required research, programme development/innovation, and evaluation. These projects were spearheaded by organizations such as KIXSUMMA, the OECS-EDMU, UNICEF, The UWI, Sagicor, and the Caribbean Leadership Project.

About the Contributors

Novelette McLean-Francis is a Curriculum Officer with twenty years of experience in curriculum development, implementation, and monitoring. She has experience in developing and reviewing curriculum resources and in training school leaders, teachers, and stakeholders from across the education system in aspects of the national curricula. She is an executive member of the National Association of Teachers of English and a Member of the Society for Caribbean Linguistics. She holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of the West Indies, Mona, St. Andrew, Jamaica, West Indies.

Richard Muschette is a final year student in Aerospace Engineering (Major, Aircraft Maintenance Engineering) at Coventry University in partnership with Solihull College and University Centre, England, United Kingdom. He holds Diplomas in Engineering Aircraft Maintenance and Industry Instrumentation and Control Systems and has over 15 years of work experience in Industrial and Aviation Engineering sector and has worked as Crew Chief/Team Leader in Ground Operations in the International Airport sector in Great Britain. As a supervisor, Richard efficiently and safely led his team for years on the operations of the world's largest airliner plane, the Super Heavy A380 among many other wide-body heavy and narrow-body airliner jets, business/private jets, and helicopters. He is the holder of a European Aviation Safety Agency Private Pilot Licence, flying general aviation aircraft in Great Britain for over seven years. Richard has comprehensive knowledge and awareness of European air laws airspace aerodynamic flight operational procedures and navigation, stipulated, and regulated by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority. Richard is pursuing further modular advance flight training to the commercial pilot, multi-engine instrument rating and is a former member of the Jamaica Defence Force.

Tenneisha Nelson, originally from Jamaica, has 16 years of experience as a Communications Specialist, 8 of which were in the field of productivity and process improvement. She also has 10 years of experience teaching at the post-secondary level. Her areas of research are leadership theory and practice, school leadership and principalship, rural education, school improvement and change management. Her publications include *Exploring Leadership as Practice in Rural Education*; and *Addressing Complex Challenges through Adaptive Leadership: A Promising Approach to Collaborative Problem Solving*. Tenneisha was the 2019 Graduate Finalist for the International Journal of Leadership in Education's Emerging Scholars Competition. She holds a Ph.D. in Educational Administration from the University of Saskatchewan in Canada where she currently resides.

Yolanda Palmer-Clarke, originally from Jamaica, has over 25 years of teaching experience at the secondary and tertiary levels. Yolanda is currently a researcher at the University of Saskatchewan. She also has extensive knowledge and expertise in internationalization and international students. Yolanda has expertise in qualitative research and communication and has published articles on international students' experiences in Canada. Her research interests include internationalization, international students, diversity, second language learning, and academic resilience. She is the author of the book *When faith meets opportunity: leaving, learning and living in a foreign land*.

Lee-Ann Pierre is currently the Director of 21st Century Educators and a Part-time Lecturer of Technology Integration in the Diploma of Education programme at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. She was a Modern Languages' teacher for over 19 years at the secondary school. She has a Master's in Digital Technologies, Communication and Education with distinction from the University of Manchester. She also possesses a certificate in Designing & Facilitating E-Learning through the Open Polytechnic in New Zealand. Additionally, she has a level 1 certification in Flipped Learning. She obtained a distinction in the PG diploma in Education in Teaching of Foreign Languages and possesses a first-class honours in B.A. in French/Spanish from the University of the West Indies. Lee-ann was also an ICT Facilitator for the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago (MoETT) and was part of the team, which developed the UNESCO ICT programme. She has also presented at several educational workshops locally and internationally including at the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) in Chicago and American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) in San Diego in 2019. In 2021, she was a panelist at the ICDL's Caribbean Digital skills conference. She was also the feature speaker of The Supervision Unit of the Division of Education, Innovation and Energy (Tobago) Principal's Conference in 2021.

Jennie Ricketts-Duncan migrated from the beautiful island of Jamaica in 2008 to pursue post-graduate studies at Barry University in Miami Shores, Florida. Upon completion of her studies, she joined the Adrian Dominican School of Education as an Adjunct Professor in the Reading and Literacy Studies department. Over time, her commitment and excellent work performance promoted her to Assistant Professor and subsequently tenured to an Associate Professor. She teaches undergraduate and graduate reading courses within the Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Research Interdisciplinary Unit. Dr. Ricketts-Duncan has more than 30 years of combined K-12 teaching experience from Jamaica and the United States. She has taught literacy instruction internationally in Jamaica and as a Barry University faculty member, in Nassau and Freeport, Bahamas. Dr. Ricketts-Duncan is active in local, state, and international reading associations and has presented at peer-reviewed international, national, and state conferences. She currently serves on multiple university and school committees at Barry University and is a Senator on the Florida Literacy Association Board and co-editor for Teachers on the Cutting Edge, an annual publication of the Florida Literacy Association. She serves on several editorial boards, namely, The Reading Horizon Journal, Journal of Reading Education, Current Issues in Education, and an ad hoc member of the editorial board for one of the International Literacy Association's journals, The Reading Teacher Journal. She also serves as subject matter consultant for the Florida Department of Education Teacher Certification Examinations (GK Reading and K-12 Reading SAE) and once as a consultant for the Louisiana Department of Education Striving Readers Grant. Dr. Ricketts-Duncan has published several peer-reviewed articles and participated in many local, national, and international conferences.

Darcia Roache worked for private and public sector organizations in Jamaica in the capacity of accountant, director of administration, and acted as chief executive officer. Her work experiences also included employment as a research assistant for various organization overseers. Her passion for administrative work led to her pursuing both a master's and doctoral degree in Business Administration. She now works as research supervisor, second examiner, and group facilitator for the University of the West Indies Open Campus. Before that, she also had several years of experience working as associate facilitator at the University of the Commonwealth Caribbean, the Management Institute for National Development, and the HEART Trust/NTA Training Institute in Jamaica. Dr. Roache is now pursuing a second PhD in Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. She has published several articles and book chapters and her research interest focuses on the success of educational leaders and teachers.

About the Contributors

Dacia Smith is a veteran educator for over twenty years. She has served at the primary, secondary, continuing, and tertiary education levels as an instructor. Ms. Smith holds a Masters in International Postgraduate Certification in Education degree, Master of Science in Human Resource Management degree, Bachelor of Education degree, Diploma in Education, and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy degree. Her research interest is in educational leadership and online education. Ms. Smith has experience as an educator which spans several countries both using the face-to-face and online teaching and learning modalities.

Carly Spina has 16 years of experience in Multilingual Education, including her service as an EL teacher, a third-grade bilingual classroom teacher, and a district-wide Multilingual Instructional Coach. She is currently a multilingual education specialist at the Illinois Resource Center, providing professional learning opportunities and technical assistance support to educators and leaders across the state of Illinois and beyond. She is deeply passionate about equity and advocacy for multilingual learners and fights for access and inclusive opportunities for kids and families. She has spoken at various national conferences and events and has received several awards over the years, including the Illinois Education Association Reg Weaver Human & Civil Rights Award in 2015 and the Distinguished Service Award for Excellence in the Team Category for EL Community Engagement in 2019. She was the WIDA Featured Educator in April 2019 and was named a Paul Harris Fellow in July of 2019. Spina enjoys connecting with other educators and leaders across the country and internationally and is an active member of the multilingual education professional learning community. Her first book, *Moving Beyond for Multilingual Learners*, was published in November 2021 by EduMatch Publishing.

Oral A. W. Thomas is a native of Antigua, the birthplace of Caribbean Methodism, President of the United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI), where he previously served as Senior Methodist Warden and Ministerial Tutor. Rev. Dr. Thomas completed his undergraduate studies in theology at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus in 1987, while pursuing ministerial formation through the Diploma in Ministerial Studies UTCWI. He obtained his Master's Degree in 1996 from Eden Theological College in the United States of America. In 2007 he was awarded a PhD degree in Biblical Hermeneutics from Birmingham University in the United Kingdom. Through his research interests of contextual theologies and liberating biblical interpretation, Rev. Dr. Thomas continues the project of advancing Caribbean theology started by previous theologians whose mission was to reimagine Caribbean theology in the image of the Caribbean people and their realities. His formulation of a resistant reading strategy is fully articulated in his book "Biblical Resistance Hermeneutics within a Caribbean Context" which was published in 2010 and in several Journal articles.

Stanley Bruce Thomson holds a PhD from Monash University focusing on religious diversity management. Other research interests include Human Resource Management in China, turnover and retention strategies, the nexus between HRM and intellectual capital, and qualitative research methods. Dr. Thomson currently teaches in the School of Business at MacEwan University and NAIT.

Ardene Virtue is a teacher educator who has eighteen years of instructional experiences, inclusive of years spent teaching at the secondary and tertiary levels of education. She is presently a senior lecturer in the School of Languages and Literatures at Church Teachers' College: Mandeville, Jamaica. Significantly, she is involved in research and publication that enable her participation in discourses and interventions aimed at constructively solving teaching and learning related challenges. In addition, she participates in curriculum writing, and is a competence building workshop facilitator who is passionate about sharing best practices, and personally crafted pedagogical philosophies for the purpose of improving instructional methodologies.

Index

21st Century Educators 251, 256, 258, 263, 265, 268, 273

A

ACT Model 423-424, 428, 430, 438, 445
 Action Research 107, 219, 374, 376, 389-390, 399
 Adaptive Leadership 156, 349, 357-359, 368, 425-428, 442-445
 Adult learning theory 400, 403, 413, 420
 Advocacy 32, 44-45, 48, 52, 307, 336
 Agency 82-83, 85, 101-102, 107, 109, 131, 134-135, 140, 143, 146-147, 150, 155, 224, 226, 233-237, 244, 246-247, 249, 253, 293, 303-304, 306-310, 313-317, 319-323, 345, 355, 357, 363-364, 366, 368, 372, 374-375, 390, 399, 423
 Autonomy 38, 44, 53, 85-87, 91-92, 109, 114, 122, 125, 141, 150, 152, 193-204, 208-210, 212-216, 219, 221-222, 233-236, 242, 244, 286, 296, 346-347, 366, 437

C

Capacity Building 98, 128, 227, 243, 250-251, 254-255, 267, 312, 388, 391-392, 422
 Caribbean Visionary Educators 251, 256, 258, 261, 265, 268, 273
 Case Study 6, 109, 126, 132, 157, 162, 190, 193, 204-205, 216, 221, 247, 270, 322, 326-327, 374, 376, 441, 443-444
 Centralized Education System 112, 114-115, 117-121, 125, 127, 131, 133
 Change Initiatives 203, 400, 440, 444
 Change Management 3, 29, 66, 75, 156, 180, 187, 193-198, 203, 208, 212, 218, 220, 222, 226-229, 242, 246, 248, 254, 442
 Chief Executive Officers 193, 197, 199, 204
 Climate 32-34, 36-53, 88-89, 112, 137-138, 146, 152, 201, 212, 276-278, 287, 291, 294, 296, 298, 315, 404, 415, 431, 434, 440

Collaborative Leadership 227, 423, 426-427, 439, 442-445

Communication 2, 7, 11, 20, 23, 32, 37, 39-43, 45, 48-49, 51, 58-59, 65-66, 71-72, 91, 96, 98, 104-105, 116-117, 121-122, 124, 128, 130, 134, 141, 143, 145-147, 150-151, 153-155, 165, 169-171, 176-177, 180-184, 189, 199, 203, 209, 215, 230, 237, 246, 297, 308-309, 312, 314, 316, 318, 320, 334, 346, 351-352, 354-355, 359, 362, 367, 369-371, 377, 393, 395, 405, 407, 409, 413-414, 416, 424-426, 432, 434, 443-444

Context 5, 12, 18, 46, 51, 55, 84, 87-88, 96, 103, 112, 114-116, 119-120, 124-127, 131, 133-136, 139-141, 144, 148-150, 153, 155, 159, 187, 190, 194, 205, 229, 231, 234-235, 237, 241, 252, 257, 259, 261, 267, 300, 308, 310, 314, 330, 332, 335, 338-339, 347, 349, 352, 365, 369, 374-378, 380-384, 386, 388, 390-392, 399, 403, 406-407, 412, 438-440

Continuous Support 400

Coping Strategies 1-10, 15-18, 21-22, 24-31

Coronavirus 32, 40, 47, 77, 79-81, 89, 105-106, 109, 128, 184-185, 345, 349, 369, 372-373, 403, 421, 442

COVID-19 1-3, 5-8, 12-13, 21-30, 32-36, 39, 41, 43-45, 54-55, 59-60, 78-86, 89, 91, 94-96, 98-99, 101, 103-105, 107-109, 112-120, 122, 128-132, 134-135, 141, 143-145, 148, 150, 152-155, 158-163, 165-166, 173, 178-180, 184-186, 189-192, 224, 226, 229, 231-232, 245-247, 250-251, 253-256, 259-260, 263-264, 266, 268-269, 271, 274-276, 279-282, 297-298, 300, 304-306, 308, 310-314, 316-319, 324-327, 342, 345-347, 350-351, 355-356, 359, 363, 367-372, 378-379, 381, 392, 395, 400-402, 405, 408-412, 414-416, 418-421, 423-424, 426-427, 444

COVID-19 Pandemic 1-3, 5-8, 21-24, 26-29, 33-35, 39, 41, 43-45, 55, 60, 79-80, 82-84, 86, 89, 94-96, 99, 101, 103-104, 107, 117, 128, 130-131, 134, 152-153, 155, 158-162, 166, 173, 179-180, 185,

190, 192, 224, 226, 229, 232, 245, 250-251, 253-256, 259-260, 263, 266, 268-269, 274-275, 279-282, 297, 304, 306, 308, 310, 316-319, 324-326, 345-347, 350-351, 355-356, 367-368, 370-372, 378-379, 381, 392, 400-402, 405, 408-412, 416, 419-421, 423-424, 427

CPD 176, 192, 380

Crisis 1-2, 5-12, 14, 16, 19-49, 51, 54-58, 60-85, 87, 89-93, 99-105, 108-110, 112-114, 116-123, 125-133, 135, 139-155, 162-166, 168-170, 172-174, 176, 178-181, 183-187, 190-191, 194, 198, 202-203, 209-210, 213-216, 224-239, 241-251, 253-266, 268-269, 271-272, 274-275, 279, 298, 303-326, 328-332, 334-338, 341-343, 345-357, 359-362, 365-375, 378-382, 384, 387, 391-393, 398, 401-402, 404-405, 407-408, 422-430, 432-433, 435-446

Crisis Leadership 5, 8, 21, 31, 64-65, 109, 115, 123, 129, 184, 186, 191, 203, 245, 248, 254, 269, 309, 324-326, 342, 345-347, 349, 351, 368-369, 371, 373, 443

Crisis Management 2, 8, 14, 28-30, 32-33, 35-36, 47, 49, 54-58, 60-65, 69-73, 75-80, 82, 89, 91, 103, 108-109, 112, 115-117, 121-126, 128-133, 143-144, 146-147, 184, 216, 224-239, 241-242, 244-249, 251, 253-257, 259-266, 268-269, 272, 306, 309, 324, 326, 341-342, 369, 378, 380-381, 391-392, 398, 401, 405, 422, 429-430, 437-438, 440, 443-445

Crisis-Induced Reforms 65, 70, 81

Culture 30, 32, 36-38, 44, 49-50, 52-53, 100, 114, 116-117, 122-123, 128, 133, 136, 139-140, 142, 149, 155, 168, 170, 172, 181, 183-184, 187-188, 190, 199-200, 203, 210, 218, 227-229, 236, 238, 249, 262, 276-279, 286-287, 291, 294, 296, 298, 300, 308, 320, 323, 330, 335, 369, 376-378, 409, 426, 434, 440, 442

Curriculum 1-3, 5, 7-10, 12-14, 18-27, 29, 37, 44, 55, 59, 75, 85, 89, 97, 100, 107, 115, 119, 136-139, 143, 150, 152, 160, 247, 253, 255, 262-264, 270, 272, 282, 287, 376, 378, 380, 384, 387, 413, 419

Cyprus 112-115, 117-122, 124-127, 129-131, 133

D

Digital Divide 55, 68, 264, 407, 412, 417, 421

Digital Technologies 158, 250, 376

Discernment 336, 343, 377

Disruptive Innovation 374, 399

Distributed Leadership 90-91, 93, 105-106, 121, 123, 133, 140-141, 153, 157, 190, 366, 370

E

Educational Leader 144, 269, 347, 357, 373

Educators 2-3, 7-8, 10, 13, 33, 54-56, 58-60, 67-77, 136, 213, 224-225, 231-233, 237-240, 249, 251, 255-256, 258-261, 263-266, 268, 272-283, 285-302, 362, 370, 377, 407, 409, 418

Efficacy 5, 7, 38, 90, 274-278, 291, 300-302, 364

Efficacy in Teachers 302

Emotional 1, 3-4, 16-17, 24, 26, 31, 40, 42-44, 63, 70, 74, 89, 117, 203, 216, 221, 233, 259, 262, 274, 279, 283, 289-290, 302, 307, 309, 319, 325, 335, 351-353, 360, 363, 369, 377, 389, 395, 415, 419

Emotion-Focused Coping 4-7, 24-26, 29-31

Empowerment 38, 82-83, 86, 88, 90-92, 98, 100, 105-107, 109, 112, 115, 118, 121, 125-126, 134-135, 140, 143, 146-152, 155, 193-204, 210-222, 224, 249, 274, 287, 294, 302, 309, 328, 334, 339-340, 373, 379

Entrepreneurial Leadership 118, 120-122, 126, 128-129, 133

Equity 32, 35, 41, 55, 68, 77-78, 80, 152, 220, 245, 261, 264, 301, 370, 402, 426-427, 429-430, 432, 436-437, 439-440, 443, 445

ESOL 290, 302

G

GRTC 323

GT 163, 173-174, 182, 192

H

Head of School 134-135, 144, 151, 153, 160

Higher Education 51, 77, 80, 105-106, 108, 131-132, 159, 186-187, 191, 269, 323, 345-350, 352, 354-357, 359, 365, 367-373, 376, 378, 380-381, 393-397, 400-408, 410-425, 427, 442-445

Higher Education Institution 345, 373, 403-404, 406, 414

Holistic 114, 124, 127, 129, 214, 241, 256, 258, 272, 274, 294, 301-302, 322

I

Impact 2-4, 6, 12-13, 17, 22, 24, 26, 29, 31, 33-37, 40-42, 45-47, 52, 54, 62-63, 76, 78-80, 84-86, 89, 91, 93, 97, 108, 112, 124, 130-132, 138, 143, 147, 155, 159, 162, 171-172, 180-182, 184, 187, 189, 197, 200-202, 206, 209, 221, 225, 227, 233, 239, 245, 248, 250-256, 258-263, 265-266, 268-

Index

269, 271, 277-278, 287, 292-293, 300, 304, 306, 316-317, 319-320, 325-327, 343, 351-352, 363, 365, 371, 374-378, 380, 382-383, 386-389, 391, 393, 396, 398-403, 410-412, 420-421, 424, 426, 432, 435, 438-440, 444
Impact of COVID-19 13, 54, 79, 85, 108, 131, 245, 304, 327, 371, 401, 410, 412, 420, 444
Incentives 166, 171, 181, 192
Innovation 31, 66, 92, 118-119, 163, 166, 190, 194, 246, 255-256, 267, 274, 278, 297-299, 302, 372, 374, 376, 383, 399, 423, 443
Innovation in Professional Learning for Teachers 302
Instruction 12, 38, 40, 44-46, 59, 90, 105, 164, 170, 230, 236, 247, 266, 275, 279, 281-282, 292, 296, 348-349, 351, 353, 366, 400-402, 405-408, 412-415, 417, 419-421
International Schools 134-140, 142-145, 149-150, 156-160
Internship 408, 421
Interpretative Paradigm 163, 192

J

Jamaica 1, 54-56, 58-60, 63, 67, 74-79, 82-86, 93, 99, 101, 103-105, 108, 161-165, 173-174, 181, 186, 193, 196, 208, 215-216, 224-225, 231, 245, 247, 303-306, 308, 310, 319, 323-328, 330, 337, 342, 348, 370

K

Kenosis 328, 331-333, 343
Knowledge Transfer 374, 399

L

Leaders 2-3, 20-21, 26-29, 31-32, 35-48, 50-51, 56, 64-66, 71-72, 74, 76, 78, 82-86, 88-93, 95, 99-105, 107, 110, 112-128, 132-137, 139-148, 150-160, 163, 166, 168, 170-173, 179-185, 191-192, 194-197, 199-204, 213, 215-219, 224-231, 234-246, 248-272, 275-278, 285, 288-290, 293-298, 303, 307-317, 319-325, 327-330, 332-343, 345-355, 357, 359-361, 363, 365-373, 377, 396, 407, 409, 419, 422-427, 429-430, 432-433, 438-440, 445
Leadership 1-3, 5, 7-8, 20-22, 26, 28-32, 34, 36-39, 41-47, 49-52, 54, 56, 60, 64-66, 69, 72, 76-80, 82-93, 99-110, 113-133, 135-137, 139-140, 142-144, 146-161, 163-174, 176-204, 208-210, 213-222, 225-227, 229, 231, 234-238, 241, 244-262, 264, 266-272, 277, 292, 298-299, 301, 303, 306-310, 312-315, 317, 319-329, 331-342, 345-351, 353-

361, 363, 365-373, 375, 377-378, 388, 394, 402, 405, 409, 412, 415-416, 419, 422, 424-429, 431-432, 435-445

leadership styles 83-84, 101, 129-130, 161-165, 167-171, 173-174, 176-183, 187-191, 193, 195-196, 208-209, 213-215, 227, 229, 236-237, 306, 309, 349, 445

Leading 25, 34, 41, 48, 52, 54, 56, 65, 77, 81-82, 91, 108, 116, 120, 126, 130-131, 135, 137, 139-143, 156-162, 166-168, 171-172, 182-183, 186-187, 191, 197, 203, 208, 213, 215-216, 218-220, 226, 228, 230, 234, 238, 242-244, 246, 251-252, 255, 258-260, 269-270, 272, 301, 310, 320, 326, 328, 332, 334, 336, 338, 342, 345, 347-349, 351-353, 355-357, 359-360, 365-373, 378, 405, 423, 431, 435, 443

Leading From the Middle 139, 187, 246, 251-252, 270, 272, 347, 353, 356, 365, 369

Local Government Authorities 194-195, 199, 202, 213, 215

Local Government Authority 197, 204, 222

M

Management 2-8, 14, 20-21, 28-38, 42, 44, 47, 49-50, 52, 54-58, 60-67, 69-73, 75-84, 86-89, 91, 96-98, 100, 103-104, 106-109, 112-117, 121-126, 128-134, 137, 140-144, 146-147, 151, 155-159, 162-164, 169, 171-173, 179-180, 182-198, 201-204, 206-208, 210, 212-222, 224-239, 241-249, 251, 253-257, 259-266, 268-272, 299, 303, 305-306, 308-310, 313, 315-320, 324, 326, 328-331, 335, 337-338, 341-343, 347, 354-355, 357, 359-361, 363-381, 385, 391-395, 398, 401-402, 405, 407, 414-416, 422, 424-425, 429-430, 433-434, 436-438, 440-445

Managing 1-5, 26, 29, 34-35, 48, 51, 54, 56, 61, 65, 69, 77, 81-82, 91, 109, 120, 130-132, 140, 151, 159, 165, 169, 173-174, 196, 203, 213, 218, 229, 241, 253, 255, 258, 260, 263, 266, 312, 328, 345-347, 350, 352-353, 362, 370, 423-424, 426, 432-433, 437, 440, 444

Marginalized Communities 303-304, 307, 310, 314-317
Martyr 335, 343

Middle Executives 112, 114-115, 117, 119-121, 125, 127, 133, 275, 277-278, 280, 321, 400, 404, 423

Middle Leaders 3, 29, 82-86, 88, 90, 93, 100-101, 103, 110, 134, 139-143, 145-148, 150-158, 191, 198, 200, 225-226, 230, 234-238, 240-244, 246, 249-272, 345-349, 354-355, 357, 359-360, 363, 365-372, 427

Middle Leadership 84, 86, 134-135, 139-144, 146-147,

153, 155-157, 159, 183, 186, 189, 245-246, 248,
250-252, 255, 260, 262, 266-272, 345, 347, 353,
357, 368-371, 373
Middle Level Leaders 135-136, 139, 143, 145-148,
151-155, 160
Middle Managers 2-3, 5, 26-29, 47, 56, 60, 64-66,
69-70, 72, 74-79, 81, 86, 88, 109, 147, 161-165,
167-169, 172-173, 176-183, 186-188, 192-200,
202-204, 206, 208-216, 218, 220-221, 303, 306,
308-309, 313-314, 321, 323, 337-338, 373, 423-
424, 426, 428-429, 435, 438-439, 445
Middle-Level Technocrats 1, 10-11, 27, 31
Mid-Level Executives 401-402, 404-409, 411-412, 416,
422-426, 428-430, 435-440, 445-446
Mid-Level Leadership 148, 405, 412, 435
Modality 6, 12, 14, 25, 75, 251, 255, 257, 260-261,
272, 312, 318, 407
MPOWERED Frame 100-103, 110
Multimodal 250, 257-258, 272
Multimodal Approach 250, 258
Multi-Tier 256, 272

N

Non-governmental Organization 303

O

online teaching/learning 7, 54, 56, 58, 68
Organizational Change 65, 183, 193, 202-204, 217-
219, 246-247, 372
Organizational Crisis 109, 126, 133, 308
Organizational Health 32, 38, 40-41, 47, 50-51

P

Pandemic 1-8, 10-29, 32-35, 39-41, 43-48, 55, 58-64,
69, 72, 77, 79-80, 82-90, 94-99, 101, 103-104,
106-108, 112-120, 122-123, 125, 127-132, 134-
136, 139-140, 142-144, 147-148, 150-155, 158-
163, 166, 173, 179-180, 183, 185-187, 190-192,
194, 197, 224, 226, 229, 232-233, 235-237, 245,
250-251, 253-256, 259-261, 263, 265-269, 271,
274-276, 279-282, 286, 289, 297-300, 303-304,
306, 308, 310-311, 313-320, 322, 324-326, 328-
329, 346-353, 355-368, 370-373, 378-379, 381,
392, 398, 400-405, 407-421, 423-424, 426-427,
441-442
Pedagogy 33, 37, 45, 53, 72, 183, 256-258, 264, 268,
275, 279, 370, 402, 419
Performativity 374, 378, 382-384, 393, 399
Personal Leadership Resources 1-2, 31

Perspectives 29, 43-44, 48-49, 54, 56, 65, 76-77, 79,
81-82, 84, 86-88, 93-94, 107, 129, 183, 197-198,
202-203, 205, 207, 211-212, 215, 221, 226, 228,
230, 239, 245, 247, 251, 262, 271, 275, 279-280,
285, 291, 293, 298, 301-303, 309, 332, 342, 354-
356, 372, 375, 377-379, 381, 383-387, 389-390,
394, 396, 399, 401, 403, 405, 416, 418, 435, 442
Power Sharing 82-101, 103-104, 106, 109-110
Pre-Service Teachers 298, 401, 408-409, 416-417, 421
Principal 3, 33-52, 70, 84, 92, 95-98, 102, 105, 110,
124-125, 135, 137, 140, 144, 156, 160, 163,
173-174, 188, 199, 235, 246-247, 269, 277, 443
Problem-Focused Coping 1, 4-5, 7, 17, 21-22, 24-26,
30-31
Professional Collaboration 105, 146, 148, 152-154, 409
Professional Learning 4, 28, 48, 99-100, 156-157,
159, 171, 250-251, 254-269, 271-272, 274-302,
389, 438
Professional Relationship 193, 199-200, 212-213, 215
Psychosocial 1-2, 26, 28, 55, 70, 74, 158, 358, 360

R

Readiness 54-56, 58, 67-68, 78, 80-81, 146, 236, 318,
349, 370, 402-403, 406, 414
Reflection 34, 42, 47-48, 82, 103, 143, 147, 164, 172,
180, 184, 234, 236-237, 240, 275, 289, 298, 342,
375, 377, 384, 386, 389, 396, 418, 428
Reform-Induced Crises 65, 70, 81
Responses 10, 21, 42, 54, 56, 70-71, 76, 80, 83, 94,
107, 109, 117, 130, 143, 145, 148-149, 163-165,
204-210, 231, 235, 243, 254, 262, 264, 284, 288,
310-311, 313, 316-317, 323, 337-339, 350, 352,
360-361, 363, 367, 372, 383, 393, 426
Responsive 45, 56, 65-66, 72, 84, 101, 117, 123, 130,
204, 244, 274, 284, 286, 297-298, 300-302, 316,
318-319, 375, 382, 384, 390, 416, 423, 428,
438-440
Responsive Professional Learning 302
Role Clarity 134, 139, 141, 146, 148, 150, 155

S

School Building 32, 36-37, 40-41, 43, 45-46, 48, 52,
278, 289
School Leaders 2, 26, 31-32, 36, 38-39, 41, 43, 48,
50-51, 78, 83-84, 86, 89-90, 92, 95, 99, 103-105,
112-128, 133, 135, 140-141, 143-144, 150-151,
153, 155-156, 180, 184-185, 224, 238, 244, 248,
254, 264, 271-272, 325, 346, 373
Schools 29, 32-36, 38-40, 42, 44, 47-52, 55-56, 63,

Index

- 66-67, 74, 79, 82-94, 96, 98-101, 103-108, 110, 114-115, 118-119, 129-131, 134-145, 147, 149-165, 167-169, 171-173, 176-177, 179-183, 186-189, 191, 217, 224-225, 231, 233, 235-236, 238-239, 243-246, 249, 251-255, 259-260, 262, 264-266, 268-272, 275-276, 278-279, 281-282, 286-287, 290, 293-294, 298-301, 324, 350, 370-373, 400-401, 407-409, 443-444
- Self-Care 1-3, 5, 8-10, 15-18, 21-22, 24-25, 27-28, 30-31, 164, 177-178, 248
- Self-Care Strategies 2, 5, 16, 21, 24, 31
- Self-Giving 328-329, 331
- Servant Leadership 65-66, 303, 306-307, 314, 316, 322-325, 331-332, 335, 340-342, 349, 361
- Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) 274, 279, 283-284, 290-291, 294, 297, 302
- Social Exchange Theory 165-166, 184, 192
- Supervisees 85, 224-226, 234-239, 242-244, 249
- Support 2, 4, 6-9, 11, 14-16, 22, 24-25, 28, 32-33, 36, 40-45, 48, 52-56, 58-59, 65, 69-70, 74-76, 85, 89-92, 94-95, 98, 103, 112, 114-115, 117-118, 120-127, 135, 141-142, 144, 158, 161-162, 166, 168, 171-172, 174, 178, 180-182, 194-197, 199, 201, 208, 211-212, 215-216, 225, 228, 231, 234-235, 239-241, 243, 253-256, 258-259, 274-275, 278-279, 281-285, 287-291, 293-294, 297-298, 304, 306-307, 314-317, 319-322, 345-348, 352, 355, 357, 359-360, 362-366, 369, 387-388, 399, 406-409, 411, 413-418, 423, 426-427, 431-432, 434, 436-438
- Survive 17, 123, 139, 152, 226, 229, 329, 336, 340-341, 426
- Sustainability 54, 77, 188-189, 196, 224, 229, 239, 241, 243-244, 247, 249, 309, 318-319, 329, 354, 378, 388, 397-398, 423, 440
- Synchronous Instruction 421
- Systemised Collaboration 224, 233, 249
- T**
- Teacher Empowerment 105, 217, 302
- Teacher Retention 48, 158
- Teacher Voice 302
- Teachers 3, 6-7, 10, 13-14, 20, 22-24, 26, 29, 31-33, 35-50, 52, 55-56, 58-60, 67-71, 74-76, 78-86, 89-90, 93-100, 107, 113, 115, 117, 119-120, 125, 129, 132, 136-137, 139-140, 142, 145, 147, 150, 152-153, 155-156, 160, 163-164, 166-167, 169, 174, 179, 181, 183, 186, 188-191, 213, 216-217, 224-226, 230-244, 247, 249, 253-255, 259, 262-266, 268-269, 271, 274-280, 282-302, 313, 318, 326, 348, 355, 361, 368-370, 372, 400-401, 404, 408-409, 412, 414-421, 442
- Teaching and Learning 22, 54-56, 58-59, 69, 76-77, 79, 85, 90, 101, 103, 113, 119, 123, 129, 131, 148-149, 165-166, 224-226, 232, 234, 236-237, 239, 242, 244-245, 249, 251, 253-255, 258-259, 263-265, 268, 272, 347, 361-362, 377, 387, 400-401, 405, 407-408
- Temperament 40, 42-43, 53
- Theoretical Framework 5, 21, 129, 165, 167, 192, 403
- Thrive 51, 152, 180, 321, 329, 336, 340-341, 359, 412, 425-426
- Transaction 328, 331, 343
- Transformation 15, 55, 59-60, 66, 78, 128, 186-187, 194, 218, 220, 226, 246, 328, 330-331, 333-334, 336, 338, 340, 342-343, 373, 377, 387-389, 396, 401, 403, 406-407, 416, 419, 427, 436, 440
- Transformative Leadership 422-423, 426-428, 442-443, 445
- Transformative Learning 375, 377-378, 384, 386-387, 393, 396, 399
- Transforming Leadership 303, 340
- Trust 36-43, 45, 48, 50-51, 53, 84, 89, 107, 116-117, 121-123, 128, 130-131, 141, 146, 150, 152-155, 181, 195, 199, 201, 210-213, 215-216, 237, 241, 278, 294, 299, 337, 339, 352, 394, 407, 417, 426, 442
- U**
- University 29-30, 32, 49, 51, 54, 77, 80, 82, 91, 106-107, 109, 112, 129, 131, 159, 161, 185-186, 188-190, 193, 203, 218-220, 247, 250, 271, 274, 291, 298, 300, 303, 322-325, 345, 369-370, 374, 393, 395, 400, 406, 408, 410-412, 414, 416-417, 419-422, 427, 430-444, 446
- V**
- Vision 36-40, 42-44, 46-48, 53, 64, 86, 88-89, 136-137, 139, 153, 171, 184, 190, 195-196, 198-200, 203, 213, 216, 227-230, 236-237, 241, 253, 264, 266, 269, 306-310, 321-323, 332-335, 337-340, 342, 354, 360, 373, 426, 434
- Voice 40, 42, 88, 94, 106, 146-147, 168, 181-182, 258, 274, 296, 299, 302, 320, 338, 355-356, 368, 383, 418, 431
- W**
- Wilderness 328-329, 335-336, 343