

## **CRISIS AS PEDAGOGY: Recommendations for Using the Pandemic in Leadership Education**

### **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided leadership educators with a unique and perilous opportunity. The events of 2020 were profoundly impactful and traumatic for our students, but they also illustrate a level of visceral engagement with various leadership topics that is incredibly useful. In this article, we outline some of the pedagogical considerations for using a chaotic and trauma filled set of experiences to teach leadership concepts. Specific theories and topics areas are presented that represent the most likely intersection of the pandemic and leadership, and examples are included for use by practitioners.

### **Introduction**

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic (WHO, 2020). The pandemic is an “unprecedented health and socio-economic crisis which we live in and will mark our times” (Marinoni, 2020, p. 6). While the totality of impact will no doubt be studied and understood by historians in relation to other world altering crises, current scholars (e.g., Figen Ceylan et al., 2020) have already compared the economic and political impacts to the Great Depression, the Spanish Flu, World War I, and World War II. Just as conversations about and references to these global events remain in our discourse, so too will the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figen Ceylan et al. (2020) discuss how global crises such as the Spanish Flu and World War I were intertwined in their histories given large numbers of flu deaths among soldiers. The COVID-19 pandemic occurred in tandem to other social, political, and economic challenges. In the United States in 2020 alone, there has been death, suffering, and disruption as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; social unrest driven by chronic racial inequities, discrimination, and violence against people of color; an election and toxic political climate that exposed a greater-than-ever the level of distrust and fear that members of our society possess; and tremendous economic hardships. While it is true that individually we each face these kinds of inflection moments in our lives, the experiences of 2020 were profoundly universal. Each person experienced the

consequences of these disruptions in different ways, but no one was spared a degree of impact.

As leadership educators, we are faced with an awful opportunity in the experiences of 2020. On one hand, we must recognize 2020 was incredibly traumatic for some of our students (and for some of us). We have an ethical obligation to be mindful of that trauma as we navigate our classes and educational environments in the coming years. On the other hand, we are also presented with the unique circumstance of having a universal touchstone and common reference point of experience among our students. The details differ from person-to-person, but the universal impact from the pandemic crisis is a tremendous resource as we attempt to make real and visceral for students the sometimes-abstract concepts we teach. The year 2020 was bad, but it can be used for good, and it is our job as educators to do that to the best of our ability. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres (2020) noted this, stating:

This is a defining moment in human history. We have the opportunity to reduce inequalities and injustices that the pandemic has exposed and aggravated. We have the responsibility to reduce human suffering and build a better, more caring, world for all. Let us pray together, and work together, to make it happen. (para. 6)

It is inevitable the crises that impacted our students in 2020 will arise in our classrooms. For at least the near term, no class discussion, no teaching activity, no review of leadership concepts, advising, lecture, workshop or training, nor our individual interactions with students will be beyond the horizon of this historical time. We cannot avoid it, so we should do our best to prepare for it, navigate the trauma skillfully, and leverage the unique pedagogical opportunity presented to us.

The purpose of this article is to provide a pragmatic resource for leadership educators who wish to skillfully incorporate the crises of 2020 to teach a variety of leadership concepts. We particularly focus on the COVID-19 pandemic as the universal touchstone, but we also incorporate other contextual elements of 2020 as they are intertwined with the

lived experiences of us all. We believe this article is significant to the discipline both because of the scale of the impact of the pandemic on our students, but also the particular nature of leadership education in addressing the challenging circumstances of our lives. It would be inauthentic to pretend that we, and certainly our students, can simply go back to business-as-usual.

This article is organized to promote practical application. We begin with a review of relevant literature. Then, we share our orientation to leadership education and this crisis. Next, we move to the heart of the article, which is a section on pedagogical recommendations where we identify leadership theories and concepts that the events of 2020, especially the pandemic, provide a unique and rich opportunity for teaching and learning. This includes examples that leadership educators may use when teaching the theories and concepts. We conclude with a discussion of limitations and considerations.

## Literature Review

**Crisis.** There are several relevant areas of prior scholarship that may be brought to bear on this topic. First, it is important to define what a crisis actually is. Our English word, “crisis” originates from the Greek word “krísis.” Early in its usage in both Greek, then Latin, and finally in 15<sup>th</sup> century English, this word primarily had a value-neutral connotation and could have been translated as “turning point” or “critical stage;” think of the moment in a serious illness when the patient is posed to either turn better or transition to end-of-life (Shrivastava, 1993). This is interesting compared to other definitions of crisis from other cultures and languages. For example, in Chinese culture, the term commonly translated as crisis is “wēijī,” which means “danger opportunity” (the veracity of this translation is somewhat disputed, and perhaps a better translation of the second character is “incipient moment,” which would be more closely aligned with the negative aspect of crisis; Mair, 1992). While in contemporary Western culture we often portray crisis as inherently negative, the origin of the word describes a much more nuanced understanding that acknowledges danger and uncertainty, but also potential utility.

Modern scholars that study crisis offer various definitions that distinguish this phenomenon from similar circumstances. Even 50 years ago, crisis was already appreciated as an important organizational dynamic, when Hermann (1963) emphasized three elements that uniquely describe crisis differently from other negative situations: (1) surprise, (2) threat, and (3) short response time. However, even while acknowledging the negative aspects of crisis, Ulmer et al. (2018) describe crises as “unique moments in the history of organization” (p. 5). That is, a crisis itself might be bad (even detrimentally so), but its *use* afterwards can potentially be illustrative or educational.

Crisis may seem random, but research developed out of chaos theory suggests it follows patterns (Li & Yorke, 1975; Wheatley, 2006). Crisis can have many negative outcomes, but nearly always has at least one positive potential consequence, and that is simply that organizations and individuals that experience crisis are very likely to find the crisis itself caused a re-centering, reconsideration, or public

acknowledgement of values (Arnett et al., 2013; Coombs, 2018). This is inherently the “danger opportunity” nature of crisis, because it is not guaranteed to be a positive experience. In fact, it is not hard to examine society today and quickly identify organizations that experienced crisis and did not successfully capitalize on the scrutiny of their values (Roitman, 2014). But, whether positive or negative, it is almost inevitable that crisis will create a space for emotional and psychological evaluation of values, and that space can be utilized for powerful experiences (Gigliotti, 2020). Even with positive outcomes, crisis may also cause trauma. Therefore, the next section focuses on trauma-informed practices that can inform educators.

**Trauma-Informed Pedagogy.** We simultaneously recognize the pandemic is a crisis that can provide many learning opportunities, and it may also require students and instructors to revisit trauma associated with the pandemic (i.e., loss of a loved one, depression from isolation, food insecurity). There is an emerging body of literature around trauma-informed pedagogy, which encourages educators to “foster an appreciation of the existence of invisible trauma” to bring conversations about trauma into the classroom to build “resilience and support student success” (Pica-Smith & Scannell, 2020, p. 79). Literature regarding trauma-informed pedagogy is more heavily focused on K-12 settings as “up to two-thirds of U.S. children have experienced at least one type of serious childhood trauma, such as abuse, neglect, natural disaster, or experiencing or witnessing violence” (Minahan, 2019, p. 30). Yet, college students have been shown to experience trauma at high rates before COVID—estimated between 64% and 84% of students experiencing “potentially traumatic events” (Read et al., 2011, p. 148).

Pica-Smith and Scannell (2020) provide recommendations to educators specifically from a trauma-informed lens in the context of COVID-19 and racial violence of 2020. The recommended educator should:

1. “Recognize that students cannot decontextualize their learning from their

social identities or the sociopolitical context” (p. 79).

2. “Find ways to authentically connect with each student and have willingness to be vulnerable” (pp. 79-80).
3. “Be prepared to play multiple roles and to be flexible” which may include “flexibility in scheduling, reaching out to students who have fallen behind, and employing crisis-intervention skills with compassion and sensitivity” (p. 80).
4. “Be clear and consistent in our expectations and communication” which can lead to “decreased confusion and increased participation and success” (p. 80).

Pica-Smith and Scannell’s narrative supports our assertion that discussing the pandemic in the classroom is inevitable; therefore, we must be prepared to facilitate student learning while navigating this traumatic event. Leadership educators should also note that many significant leaders have emerged from trauma-inspired events. Williams and Allen (2015) found in their study of the transition of seven trauma survivors into leaders that “trauma-inspired leaders transform personal loss into a starting point for social good” (p. 86). As leadership educators, we can play an important role in the transition process for students who have experienced trauma to develop into capable leaders.

**Teaching Leadership Through Crisis.** As educators, it is likely we may have found ourselves in a classroom during or immediately following a crisis. This is certainly a time we might feel compelled to teach through crisis. Harad (2003) writes about her colleagues teaching literature in the wake of September 11th:

They were caught up, not only by a sense of inadequacy (“What I do has no meaning in this context”), but by a fear of being out of step, isolated from the instant community of urgency that had sprung up in the wake of the attacks (“How can I ask

my students/myself/the nation to think of anything else?”). Their everyday pedagogy, they felt, failed to bear adequate witness to the crisis of the day. (para. 2)

Harad makes a compelling argument that when such crises occur, teaching without them in our contexts creates inadequate teaching. Yet, she also advocates for teaching about these crises over time to “examine how literature makes visible the long-term effects of historical traumas” (para. 4) instead of perpetuating a rhythm of remembering and forgetting; therefore, it is important for educators to intentionally develop crises into our planned curriculum.

The chaos of 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic has already impacted our students. We cannot influence the trauma that has already occurred (although one might argue we have a strong ethical imperative to prevent future trauma to the extent of our ability), but we can potentially utilize this circumstance to enhance the leadership education of our students. Educators may utilize pedagogical strategies to attempt to connect theory and concepts taught in the classroom to meaningful experiences from students’ lives (Seemiller & Priest, 2017). This might take the form of any number of techniques, from case studies, to activities, to fieldwork, to simulations. Each of these strategies is attempting to create a “realness” of the learning experience that allows students to go beyond the sterile, abstract nature of theory and dig into the very real application of what they are learning. For example, Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) discuss case study as a popular and effective method for leadership education. Case study “refers to a written description of a problem or situation for analysis” (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018, p. 190). The authors explain that cases can provide context for students to analyze relational leadership and decision making. Poliner Shapiro, and Stefkovich (2016) provide a book of case studies focused on ethical leadership and decision making where they include case studies on crises such as school shootings and whether teachers should now have guns.

While using real world cases is established in pedagogy, using crisis as pedagogy is not as prevalent. Leadership education has a particular charge in regard to this point of application. At its core, leadership education is about helping students develop skills and learn theory that allows them to make targeted interventions in their organizations and circumstances, or moving from pedagogy to practice (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Students (particularly undergraduate students) often approach this in an idealized fashion, waiting for the textbook-defined perfect circumstances in order to deploy their shiny new skills. While this is understandable, it limits the capacity of those students, and presents a distorted view of the complexity of human organizations the students will eventually need to appreciate. The crisis that students and others have lived through during the pandemic, therefore, presents a real opportunity to make visceral and personal some of the complexities students often struggle to understand.

Change making, conflict, communication, and a host of other relevant skills can be examined in intimate detail through the lived experiences of students going through crisis. The use of personal experiences is, of course, not a new pedagogical practice, but the current circumstances are unique. Few times have students experienced such a universally shared crisis experience, and that poses a new degree of utility faculty may not have had available in the past. This is not to say this technique is without risk. Finding an appropriate balance between validation of just how painful and traumatic the experiences of students are, while still being able to use those for educational purposes is fraught with difficulty. Faculty will need to be sanguine without being cheerful—caring while being honest. This crisis, like most, can be *used* for good while still being awful.

## Subjectivity Statement

I, Brett, have been teaching in Fort Hays State University's Organizational Leadership degree program for more than 10 years. In March of 2020, I was eight months into serving as the new chair of our academic department. This crisis cut across all

aspects of our work, and I have since reflected on just how profoundly it impacted everyone associated with our program. As we discuss the nature of crisis in this manuscript, it hits home, because the uncertainty, short-term orientation, and negative consequences are all too real. Faculty in our program have been harmed in many ways, and yet, we have learned through this crisis. We learned about new ways of teaching and things we did not think were possible to do remotely or online could be done. We learned about resilience and the grit that many of our students showed through incredibly tough circumstances. Moreover, we grew in our compassion and understanding of the great sacrifice that many of our fully online, working adult students face every day in balancing an impossible set of expectations. I will never be glad for the crisis of COVID-19, but I will try to be a better faculty member after having that awful experience.

At the start of the pandemic, I, Lori, lived in Greensboro, NC, a minority-majority city, and worked at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, a minority-serving institution where I had recently completed my Ph.D. in Educational and Cultural Studies. The pandemic hit us early and hard. It was apparent to me in that context the pandemic intersected with already existing racial health inequity and economic hardship. Like most others, I packed up my work materials in March of 2020 and headed home to work, but uniquely, I interviewed for my current position at Fort Hays State University virtually in March and then moved to Hays, KS in the summer. When I arrived in Hays, a small town in my home state of Kansas, it was as if I had gone back in time—restaurants were open, people weren't wearing masks, and the number of confirmed cases for the whole county was five. Five! While COVID did not sweep through our area until late fall, my students were enthralled with the pandemic. When I asked them to think of examples of ethical leadership, women in leadership, adaptive challenges, and many other leadership concepts and theories, they continually returned to the pandemic. In my 10 years of teaching leadership, I never experienced something so universal for my students. I believe it will continue to be a significant touchstone for many years to come.

## Pedagogical Recommendations

In this section, we provide recommendations for teaching a set of theories, models, styles, and/or concepts of leadership through the lens of 2020 (particularly the pandemic). Our intent is to help leadership educators skillfully navigate the connections between this key societal crisis and leadership studies content. Our process for determining the pedagogical recommendations started with a general reflection on the central thesis of this manuscript: how to limit the harm of trauma, while using it to maximize pedagogical gain in our courses. We then selected an organizing framework, the details of which we discuss in the following section. From there, we developed an initial model and recommendations, which we presented as a round table at the Association of Leadership Educators conference in June of 2021. During this roundtable, we were able to solicit feedback and improvements from other leadership educators, which we used to refine and improve our recommendations. Finally, we have begun utilizing this information and these strategies in our own teaching, and we describe those experiences in the applications section.

The pedagogical recommendations are organized using the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (SCM, Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). The SCM was developed as a model for student leadership development that included seven values organized in three levels—community, group, and individual. The SCM also includes six key assumptions that emphasized leadership as a collaborative process all students can participate in and that leadership is “concerned with effecting change on behalf of others and society” (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996, p. 9).

We selected the SCM as an organizational framework for two reasons. First, the pandemic was a force for making social change that deeply impacted many components of society. It also required a range of citizens to enact social change leadership to respond to the pandemic and other social issues it exacerbated. Second, the values of the SCM help highlight the need for leadership within and across communities, groups, and

individuals—all of which are present in the pandemic crisis. We provide specific pedagogical recommendations for teaching a variety of leadership concepts highlighting the categories of individual leadership development, group leadership development, and community applications and considerations (see Figure 1).

We recognize this is not a comprehensive discussion. Yet, we have worked to highlight strong connections to provide guidance to leadership educators. To prioritize the recommendations discussed, we have organized the concepts within those subsections based on the likelihood they will surface during leadership development moments. Those deemed inevitable to arise in leadership courses will be described most robustly. Topics we believe are likely to arise are mentioned more briefly. We have intentionally limited our explanation of each leadership concept to focus on the connection between the concept and the pandemic. Therefore, we provide a key reference for each concept and encourage readers to seek these resources if they would like more information on the leadership concept. Lastly, we provide one example to a real-world example that may serve as a starting point for student discussion and activity for each leadership concept discussed.

**Figure 1**

*Pedagogical Recommendations*



**Community.** The issues of 2020 arguably provide the biggest opportunity for teaching leadership at the community or societal level. This might especially be so for traditional-aged college students who have not had many opportunities to experience social change at a large scale or outside of their hometowns. We highlight in this section adaptive leadership and transformative leadership as two frames for teaching about complex social systems and their desperate need for leadership.

*Adaptive Leadership.* The fundamental element of practicing adaptive leadership is distinguishing between technical and adaptive elements. The pandemic provides a unique opportunity for unpacking both of these two elements in a situation in which students likely have significant investment. As Heifetz and colleagues describe (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009), technical challenges are those with clear problems and solutions which can be solved by experts. The race for a vaccine was an example of a significant technical challenge that required funding teams of experts to develop this technical solution. While waiting for a vaccine, our world faced numerous adaptive challenges—which are wicked or intractable problems in which

identifying the problem itself is part of the learning required for the solution. These challenges often require behavior and value-based changes, such as the personal ones we were asked to make like staying home and limiting personal touch, or more systemic changes like finding ways to keep children fed outside of school or reducing mental health issues.

Heifetz et al. (2009) explain that once we have identified an adaptive challenge, it is important to spend significant effort in diagnosing that challenge before acting. The pandemic can serve as a case study for leadership educators to effectively introduce the practice of diagnosing the situation on a community issue in which students have lived experience. Diagnosis involves naming technical and adaptive elements, identifying the stakeholders and their values, loyalties, and potential losses, and even identifying our own part in the mess (Heifetz et al., 2009). Similarly, for students in the United States especially, having them apply learning about adaptive leadership to issues of racism can also help them see the adaptive nature of the social challenge. Seeing that these adaptive challenges require the work of stakeholders, not just experts, to make progress may incite a better understanding of why leadership is needed in communities.

An example of using the pandemic to teach adaptive leadership is found in [a podcast by Change Matrix](#) in which the discussants provide several examples of applying adaptive leadership during the pandemic in the healthcare field (Waetzig, 2020). They highlight concepts such as creating a holding environment and getting on the balcony, as well as discussing adaptive and technical elements of their work during the pandemic.

*Transformative Leadership.* The year 2020 demonstrated our systems are deeply interconnected and fragile. What seemingly appeared as only a health crisis, quickly became a crisis for our entire health system, the economy, social support systems, equity, and more. The challenges we faced did not reside within one country, one sector, or one organization. Instead, we saw the need for many people and organizations to

work together to find new solutions quickly; therefore, reflecting at a community and systems-level on the pandemic and its interrelated challenges provides a complex and rich opportunity to teach transformative leadership. McKee and Bruce (2020) explain that transformative leadership “requires that individuals reframe their world views and their senses of self in order to rethink assumptions and develop new solutions and systems,” and that also requires leadership educators to “approach teaching transformative leadership as identity development” (p. 49). They frame identity development through the Student Leader Activist Identity Continuum which progresses from learner, to ally, advocate, and activist (Bruce et al., 2019).

Many students around the world have found themselves on that Student Leader Activist Identity Continuum in response to school policies related to the pandemic. There has been activism from multiple perspectives including those who want more restrictions and those who want less. Leadership educators may consider unpacking how students can—or already did—situate themselves on the continuum and what leadership looks like for them.

An example of transformative leadership during the pandemic can be found in [an article from \*The World\*](#) (Emmanouilidou, 2020). It describes the ways students in Greece protested the lack of safety measures in their schools. Students could examine the actions described in this article and research student activism on their own campus on current or past issues.

*Additional Considerations.* The pandemic also provides an opportunity to talk about global leadership and how leadership processes differ across cultures. For example, students might use the GLOBE study (GLOBE, n.d.; House et al., 2004) to analyze news stories from different country clusters and look at social practices during the pandemic. Another great connection is between the idea of citizen leadership (Couto, 1992) and the need for leadership in communities during this time. Citizen leaders are often not seeking leadership, but instead are drawn into the work by their community.

Students may have examples of being called into lead in their communities, work, or families to play new roles during 2020.

The authors in [this article from the Center for Disease Control](#) (Airhihenbuwa et al., 2020) discuss how communicating about the pandemic differs across the globe, providing an example one can use to teach global leadership. They take a particular look into the role of culture, and how culture is a central consideration for communicating about public health issues. Students may use this as a starting place to explore how various countries reacted to the pandemic or even how different cultures in their own country experienced the pandemic differently (e.g., urban vs. rural).

The three residents of three communities in the United States are highlighted in [this article from the Urban Institute](#) (Peiffer, 2020) for their efforts to lead change especially during the pandemic. These examples illustrate the work of citizen leaders. Students may examine these examples, search for examples in their own community, and/or write about ways they have or will lead in their communities.

**Group.** At the group level, the events of 2020 are considered in regard to how people have acted collectively. Leadership studies, with its core emphasis on human interaction, has numerous direct connections between these collective actions and the experiences of 2020. In particular, we highlight contextual leadership and team dynamics as two specific content areas at the group level that are particularly connected to the events of 2020.

*Contextual Leadership.* The first area of group level content where the events of 2020 will inevitably arise is in any class or curriculum teaching contextualized leadership. For the purpose of this article, we are defining contextualized leadership as those programs, classes, or experiences that attempt to teach the principles of leadership within a specific context or particular to a specific group of people. Examples of contextual leadership might be business leadership, higher education leadership, civic and nonprofit leadership, women and

leadership, military leadership, etc. (Morris & Giblin, 2019; Russell et al., 2015). These types of programs and courses will not be able to escape a close examination of the events of 2020 in the relevant context they are examining.

The events of 2020 were so disruptive to society because they forced change upon groups and organizations in ways that mandated new modes of operation. Faculty teaching in a contextual setting should be prepared to navigate this topic, as it is bound to arise. Take, for example, a course focused on civic and nonprofit leadership. The pandemic, and the ensuing economic fallout, created a two-fold problem for social service agencies and related nonprofits. These groups were faced with unprecedented demand on their services, while at the same time attempting to navigate many of the same restrictions and limitations on normal operations the rest of society was facing. An example of this is food banks. According to Feeding America (2020), nationwide food banks served about 55% more people than before the pandemic began, and four in 10 people visiting the food banks were seeking help for the first time. This type of massive change in demand and business operations cannot be ignored in any rigorous examination of this context. The details will certainly be different for specific contexts, but the overall narrative will be strikingly similar across any curriculum that is embedded in a particular contextual frame.

Another example which can be used to teach contextual leadership comes from [this article from Reuters](#) (Scott, 2020), which discusses how the pandemic forced businesses to adapt to new technological and digital solutions in weeks rather than years. This could be a good example of how leadership and change management would naturally arise in a business context, but similar articles can be found for many other fields.

*Small Group and Team Dynamics.* A great many leadership education programs incorporate curriculum focused on team dynamics (Bloomquist et al., 2018). These types of courses examine the dynamics and interaction of individual people in small groups and often have a heavy emphasis on

skill development as it relates to group dynamics. Students may be studying such topics as the use of power and influence, interpersonal and small group communication, team development, strategic planning and doing, and change making (Levi & Askay, 2021). In all of these areas, the events of 2020 have been profoundly impactful.

One example is a course or content that is focused on small group communication. Faculty teaching this material would have already been addressing issues like communication channels, communication richness, listening, sharing tacit information, and feedback mechanisms. During the pandemic, however, when the vast majority of work had to shift to remote interaction, every single one of these topics was influenced. Organizations and groups had to develop strategies to effectively communicate while operating almost entirely without personal interaction. Entirely new concepts and methods for group interaction were invented extemporaneously, and out of necessity. Many of these strategies may not have been fully successful, but all were insightful in learning about how we, as humans, interact and communicate when there are significant limitations placed on our movement and ability to work together.

This [special issue from the American Psychological Association](#) (Parks, 2020) presents six articles focused on how the pandemic has impacted group dynamics and processes. The authors discuss both how groups must react in the face of new challenges, but also how the social nature of humans to naturally organize in group settings exacerbates the crisis itself.

*Additional Considerations.* Beyond contextual leadership and team dynamics, a number of other topics at the group level might be rich sources of examination for the events of 2020. Certainly, it seems that content focused on decision making will have a trove of examples of that process taking place throughout the pandemic that faculty could incorporate in illustrative ways. Additionally, the topic of creative thinking and innovation will be influenced. In many ways, all of our collective reaction and response to a novel crisis represented so many instances of creative thinking and innovation in the face of challenging circumstances. This kind of

experience is hard to replicate, and we may be able to use it for truly unique educational outcomes given the universality of the experiences of which our students are likely to share.

With regard to decision making, [this article](#) from the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* (Berger et al., 2021) discusses how policymakers can engage in rational decision making in the face of great uncertainty during a pandemic. Communities and political leaders all around the world were faced with a number of difficult decisions that had to be made with massive consequences connected to the outcomes of those decisions.

Despite the horrors of the pandemic, the COVID-19 crisis has been a boon for technological innovation and creative release, as shared in [this article from the University of Miami](#) (Tannen, 2020). Emergencies and necessity can be effective sources of innovation, and certainly our society has experienced a variety of those types of events during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Individual.** There are a myriad ways to lift up examples of individuals who enacted leadership during the pandemic. When doing so, we encourage leadership educators to consider Heifetz et al.'s (2009) distinction between leadership and authority and provide examples of leadership within and outside of authority roles. We highlight considerations of ethical leadership and authentic leadership as two key considerations of individual styles of leadership.

*Ethical Leadership.* The pandemic was full of ethical challenges as we all attempted to navigate numerous changes. We believe it is inevitable, as we witnessed in our classes this year, that students will make connections between ethical leadership and the pandemic. Kidder (1995) describes ethical temptations as those challenges with a clear right versus wrong such as intentionally running a red light because you do not want to wait for it to change. In contrast, ethical dilemmas are challenges with seemingly two right choices that may differ

based on values such as running a red light (value of abiding by the law) while driving to the emergency room with an injured passenger (value of saving a life). Kidder outlines four patterns of ethical dilemmas, which can help in identifying the value conflicts in such issues.

First, individual versus community was a recurring dilemma at multiple levels during the pandemic. Masks became a loud and central example of this dilemma as it posed individual values, freedoms, and comfort against the public health of the community at-large. This example can be unpacked through the sharing of students' own experiences; discussing informal social practices; and examining policies such as university, local, and federal mandates.

Next, truth versus loyalty presents itself through the loyalty of private health information and the truth of someone's health status (i.e., having COVID, being vaccinated) and how it might impact others. Short-term versus long-term could include examining how countries, businesses, families, etc. made decisions about restrictions such as staying home. The short-term goal was to pause activity and keep people from spreading the virus, yet many people saw long-term impacts could also harm people, such as an unstable economy and mental health issues. Lastly, justice versus mercy helps frame choices about holding people accountable or granting forgiveness. Individuals at all levels including heads of nations, university presidents, parents, college students, teachers, landlords, employers, etc. had to make tough choices throughout the pandemic, and there are many examples of people who made arguably bad decisions. This pattern can help students think through how we deal with the aftermath of the pandemic.

One of the core dilemmas of the pandemic is around sharing medical knowledge with the public versus maintaining private health information. Strous and Karni (2020) highlight this ethical challenge in [their article](#) outlining the key ethical concerns and tensions, which can provide a rich context for discussing or debating Kidder's (1995) four patterns of ethical dilemmas.

*Emotional Intelligence.* The pandemic was an emotional rollercoaster for many people including the joy of staying in sweatpants all day, the extreme loss of experiences and loved ones, disappointment over cancelled events and holidays, anger at how some people acted, relief as a new normal started unfolding, and more. Goleman (1998) posits that our “thinking brain” is not enough to lead intelligently; instead, we must also engage our “emotional brain” (p. 21). Goleman’s five characteristics of emotional intelligence (EQ) include self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating others, showing empathy, and staying connected. These characteristics can be developed over time and they provide key skills for leading others through change.

As the “staying connected” characteristic highlights, our emotions are interconnected. The pandemic provides a rich case for showing how individuals identified and managed emotions. A narrative that surfaced during the pandemic was that countries with female leaders were quite successful in reducing COVID numbers. Katz (2021) points out the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, as an example of a female leader who led through emotional intelligence, “In showing her own vulnerability and concern for others, she demonstrated a keen emotional intelligence and dispelled the myth that compassion and humanity are shortcomings in a leader” (para. 4).

In addition, something we tried this past year was providing students scenarios and having them role play how they would respond. For example, you are the president of the Student Government Association and the university has just announced it will be continuing with fully-online learning for one more semester. You have an opportunity to record a 90-second video to be included in the announcement, what would you say using your best EQ skills? Another example, you are part of a student club on campus and you notice that one member missed last week’s meeting and this week she is abnormally quiet. You catch her as everyone is leaving, what might you say? Emotional intelligence is a skill that can be developed, and the pandemic is a rich case for students to observe other leaders demonstrating EQ and practice how they may enact EQ themselves.

As described previously, examples of leaders such as Prime Minister Ardern provide a rich contrast to other national leaders in their ability to apply EQ. [This article](#) (Katz, 2021) highlighting female leadership discusses the use of EQ in pandemic leadership. Leadership educators might consider gathering examples of public announcements from a variety of leaders and letting students examine them for the characteristics of EQ.

*Additional Considerations.* Leadership is an act that involves others (i.e., followers, collaborators), yet it also requires individuals to take action to make change. The pandemic provides a rich case for unpacking both ethical leadership and emotional intelligence from an individual lens. Leadership educators might also see strong connections to other approaches to leadership that focus on an individual’s style. For example, leadership educators may consider inviting local community members who enacted leadership in their neighborhoods, faith communities, or families to highlight characteristics of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970). Authentic leadership could also be unpacked by looking at how various political leaders shared or withheld information.

Walker (2020) makes the case in [this article](#) that servant leadership is needed especially during a time of crisis. The author names specific characteristics of servant leadership and how they can be applied in crisis using the pandemic to set the stage. In [this article](#), Radhakrishnan (2021) makes the case that during times of uncertainty, leading through authenticity is especially important. The author highlights key practices such as having mindfulness, showing vulnerability, and being empathetic as ways to lead through an authentic leadership lens.

## Applications

Both of us informally applied these recommendations in our classes in the 2020-2021 school year. After drafting this article in the summer of 2020, we became more intentional about how to incorporate the pandemic in our classroom in the fall

of 2021. We have found that coming to class with planned examples and applications has made our use of teaching through the pandemic more impactful. Leadership educators bring in contextual examples regularly, and we did so in a proactive mode since the pandemic began.

For example, I Lori, have taught Kidder's four patterns of ethical dilemmas for years, and I have typically used the death penalty as an example of justice vs. mercy. While this will always, to some extent, be a topic of interest in our society, at the moment it is not as relevant as the pandemic. In fall 2021, I was able to use the pandemic as a justice vs. mercy example, and the students related to it more readily. Similarly, when teaching adaptive leadership, using the pandemic to explain technical and adaptive problems seemed to make the concept more comprehensible than previous examples. Through our own application, planning our use of the pandemic in the leadership classroom has been effective. We encourage other leadership educators to take time and intentionally develop their curriculum, and we believe the pedagogical recommendations provided in this article may help.

## Limitations and Considerations

We invite readers to be aware of a number of limitations relative to this manuscript. The most obvious limitation is the materials presented represent the perspective of the authors themselves and their lived experience through the pandemic. As noted in the subjectivity statement, we experienced certain elements of the events of 2020 in greater degrees of relevance than others. Different people (both faculty and students) will have lived very different lives throughout 2020, and we recognize the elements identified will be more or less important in the history of different people. We believe the overall perspective of skillfully using the experiences of the pandemic as a teaching tool is valuable to all but recognize that the details are highly contingent upon the audience.

Another important limitation to acknowledge is the model presented cannot possibly include all theories or examples that might prompt the incorporation of

pandemic experiences in the classroom. We have strived to identify the most likely sources of those connections, but we encourage readers to reflect on their own personal teaching habits and materials covered in their courses, and to prepare and anticipate for ways in which these topics are likely to arise. Furthermore, we acknowledge there are likely other theories or models that could be added to the conceptual model, and that we may have omitted something others feel is important.

Finally, a consideration we believe is important to acknowledge is we are not suggesting leadership educators attempt to engage in counseling or clinical response to trauma. Certainly, as educators, we have opportunities to help connect our students with mental and emotional health resources, and we should do so whenever appropriate. At the same time, we should be cautious about attempting to directly provide counseling outside of our individual training and skill sets. It is our experience as educators that these types of conversations and traumas are likely to arise in our classrooms, through advising, and in student interactions—even if we do not intend for that to happen—and so we have an obligation to be prepared. This preparation does not imply we will be able to offer professional level services, but by being prepared we can do well with the education of our students and create the best possible climate to assist them if they do need access to mental or emotional health resources.

## Conclusion

The events of 2020 were profoundly impactful on our society, and our students' lives will forever be shaped by their experiences during this time. Many of those experiences were bad and trauma-filled, and the impact they left will no doubt be remembered as a negative moment in the life arc of the students we are working with now and in the future. As leadership educators, we are presented with the dramatic juxtaposition of these two themes: a shared profound experience that is especially useful for teaching our content and a shared trauma that must be carefully navigated. This is the dangerous opportunity of the crisis we have experienced.

In this article, we have provided a set of pedagogical recommendations for leadership educators to use when reconciling the inevitability of the pandemic arising within their classrooms. The literature on crisis and trauma-informed pedagogy gives us a starting point, and the Social Change Model provides a framework for this understanding. We have highlighted the relevant scholarly theories and concepts that are most likely to prompt this topic, and we have provided explanations and examples to help educators be prepared for these conversations.

As we conclude, we hope readers will be able to apply the recommendations contained herein in a pragmatic way to their teaching in the coming semesters. We believe the events of 2020 will inevitably arise in leadership classrooms, and the faculty have an obligation to carefully curate those experiences to maximize utility and minimize harm. Over time, though, the immediacy of the pandemic and its related experiences will diminish. Like so many other massively impactful experiences, the events of 2020 will become part of our society's totality of lived history, and students will reflect on these experiences not as personal injuries, but as historical artifacts. Time may not heal all wounds, but it does blunt them, and our collective concern about trauma associated with the pandemic will eventually fade.

Finally, we should consider prudence in the use of 2020 as pedagogical examples. At least part of the trauma of 2020 was a result of the overwhelming and inescapable nature of the events, and we do not wish to repeat a small-scale version of that in our classes. Faculty should be mindful of how often these events are being referenced and make efforts to consciously utilize other examples. Pandemic burnout is real, and we all need to be reminded at times that life, and leadership education, is larger than the events of 2020.

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