Leading Amidst COVID-19: A Systematic Review of Higher Education Research Studies

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic required higher education administrators to lead their institutions through a period of unprecedented ambiguity and complexity. In just two short years, a new set of skills and leadership tactics for academic leadership emerged for successfully navigating uncharted territory. Following a review of 13 research studies in higher education leadership, five central themes concerning pandemic leadership ultimately formed the basis of this literature review: open and effective communication, leading with compassion and care, flexible leadership in the face of uncertainty, transformational leadership, and adaptive leadership.*

Keywords: *COVID-19; Higher Education; Leadership; Literature Review*

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Infectious diseases, pandemics, and other virulent threats have plagued humanity for as long as recorded history itself (Balkhair, 2020; Pandya et al., 2021; Tsoucalas, 2016). In the past few decades, the specter of a worldwide pandemic had threatened to upend human society—a threat that finally materialized as SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (COVID-19) in December 2019 in Wuhan, China (Ferrer, 2020). As humanity raced to understand the dramatic consequences of a new respiratory virus that was spreading throughout the globe, it became clear in the United States and around the world that quarantine, lockdown, social distancing, and disruption were inevitable by March 2020 (Khan, 2021; McBride et al., 2020).

Having weathered what is perhaps the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic to date, this literature review asks the simple question: Which leadership styles and traits did higher education administrators tend to favor during the pandemic? How can current research help inform leadership in higher education, and what lessons learned will serve future leaders as they guide their institutions through future crises? Finally, where are the research gaps in the studies surveyed, and how might future research on leadership be informed by this analysis?

According to Strielkowski and Wang (2020), higher education's initial response to COVID-19 and its "cataclysmic disrupters" paralleled that of so many other sectors of society: first and foremost was the need to comply with federal and state quarantine measures. College and university leaders struggled with an almost endless number of challenges, as they were forced to make complex decisions about everything from staffing to continued delivery of services, often with incomplete or incorrect information (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Zvavahera, 2021). It was, in the truest sense of the word, a crisis—a "low probability, high impact event that threatens the viability of the organization" (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 60). Indeed, that "low probability" event had finally come to pass in the new millennium.

Around the globe, leaders on college and university campuses struggled to grasp the enormity of the situation and the untenable nature of leading through a seemingly endless string of mini-crises as the pandemic unfolded (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021; Menon & Motala, 2021; Pandya et al., 2021; Simpkins, 2020). As Menon and Motala (2021) observed, providing clear and effective leadership was of paramount importance to organizations of all scales and sizes, including higher education. Unfortunately, external crises can sometimes amplify a "crisis of leadership," making a challenging situation such as COVID-19 even worse (Tourish, 2020).

Defining leadership is an inherently complex task, given the multitude of human and environmental variables that comprise the way in which leadership manifests itself (Northouse, 2010). For instance, Winston and Patterson (2003) conducted a comprehensive review of leadership literature, combing through 160 articles and books to identify common elements connected to leadership definitions. Their research led to the indexing and identification of over 90 "leadership dimensions," ranging from team building to organizational change.

However, for the purposes of this literature review, leadership is simply defined as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (Yukl, 2010, p. 8). As mentioned previously, agreeing upon a universal definition

of leadership is a difficult if not impossible task, as a multitude of studies have sought to reconcile the ways in which this term is interpreted and defined (Lemoine & Richardson, 2020; Northouse, 2010; Winston & Patterson, 2006; Yukl, 2010).

Prior to the pandemic, many higher education leaders and administrators in the United States were guiding organizations on the brink of crisis—or already plunging in headfirst (Gigliotti, 2019). Budget cuts, declining enrollments, rising rates of tuition, and even the perceived value of a college education itself have threatened the very existence of many institutions across the United States (Beattie et al., 2013; Gigliotti, 2019; Nuevo-Chow, 2021). Just one decade prior, the global financial crisis of 2008 proved a challenge that many domestic colleges and universities simply could not survive, with over 300 institutions closing permanently between 2008-2017 (Colston et al., 2020). In short, higher education leadership in the 21st century has not been for the faint of heart.

What follows is the main body of this literature review structured into seven sections. First, an overview of study identification and criteria is presented to summarize the selected materials. Next, findings are presented under the following subheadings: study parameters, open and effective communication, leading with compassion and care, flexibility and adaptability in the face of uncertainty, transformational leadership, and adaptive leadership.[1] Finally, concluding remarks along with recommendations for future research are presented at the end of this review.

Method

Study identification and criteria

Given the limited historical timeframe and rapid trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic, this literature review was restricted to the years 2019-2022 and utilized a combination of the following keyword search terms: university, college, "higher education," management, leader/leadership, administration, COVID-19, coronavirus, and pandemic. Research studies that focused specifically on PK-12 and industries outside of higher education were excluded entirely. Additionally, studies that focused solely on student achievement, the transition to online learning, or those that did not examine leadership theories or traits were not included.

The following electronic databases were used to conduct the initial search for research studies: EBSCO, ERIC (ProQuest), Google Scholar, JSTOR, PsycINFO (ProQuest), and SAGE Premier. Additionally, "snowballing"—a research methodology in which the reference list of key journal articles is scrutinized to secure additional research material—was employed to maximize the number of prospective articles for consideration (Wohlin, 2014). While snowballing did not uncover additional research studies, it did yield seven new journal articles of secondary interest.

Ultimately, 44 research articles and seven secondary (snowballed) articles surfaced, for a total of 51 articles that featured most of the keywords cited above. Upon further examination, 10 qualitative studies, two quantitative studies, and one mixed methods study were compiled for inclusion in Table 1 and Table 2. These research studies form the basis of this review.

Methodological overview

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[1] Section themes emerged based on the frequency with which leadership styles and traits appeared in the literature as outlined in Table 1 and Table 2.

Seven leadership studies led by international researchers emerged during this review of literature, while six were identified as having originated in the United States. Table 1 (international studies) and Table 2 (domestic studies) outline the authors and sample size, origin of study, research methodology, and leadership styles and traits emphasized in the literature.

Most of the studies included here for consideration are qualitative in nature; in fact, all six of the studies reported from the United States are grounded in qualitative research methodology. According to the data, researchers abroad were more likely to choose a variety of research methodologies such as quantitative or mixed methods, but still favored qualitative methodology 57% of the time. The data presented below are sorted from most current to least current and appear alphabetized by last name.

Table 1

Prevailing Higher Education Leadership Styles Reported Among Research Participants

(International)

Author(s) and sample size	Origin of study	Methodology	Leadership style and traits
Engelbrecht, 2022 N = 48	South Africa	Qualitative; Interviews: semi-structured, 45-60 minutes	Transformational leadership Leader traits: "supportive, approachable; knowledgeable, share information, developmental, guidance, trust, collaborative and empowered them"
Yokuş, 2022 N = 32	Turkey	Qualitative; Social network analysis	"Educational leadership for a new normal" Leader traits: networking, calmness, compassion, analytical/strategic thinking, transparency, and distributive leadership
Antonopoulou et al., 2021 N = 20	Greece	Quantitative; Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 2004)	Transformational leadership (highest frequency) Transactional leadership (next highest frequency)
Dumulescu and Muţiu, 2021 N = 11	Romania	Qualitative; Interviews: semi-structured 20-35 minute interviews	Complexity and shared leadership Themes: the leader's personal attributes, unity through decentralization, and an opportunity to reinvent
Ewing, 2021 N = 20	Australia	Qualitative; "Grand tour" interviews and email responses	Leader traits: flexibility, adaptability, communication, and a "can do" mindset
Mukaram et al., 2021	Pakistan	Quantitative;	Adaptive leadership

N = 404		Stratified random sampling and co-variance modeling	"The results confirm a significant positive relationship between adaptive leadership and organizational readiness for change"
Nissim & Simon, 2021 N = 48	Israel	Mixed Methods; Qualitative: action research methodology Quantitative: attitude questionnaire	Adaptive leadership Leader traits: agility/flexibility, flattening of the hierarchy curve, "smart" risk taking, and clear communication

Note. Table 1 summarizes the authors and sample size, origin of study (international researchers), research methodology, and leadership styles and traits emphasized in the literature.

Table 2

Prevailing Higher Education Leadership Styles Reported Among Research Participants (United States)

Author(s) and sample size	Origin of study	Methodology	Leadership style and traits
Barnes & Gearin 2022 N = 11	United States	Qualitative; Semi-structed interviews 45 minutes (average)	Adaptive leadership Themes: "development of self through others, bold transparency, high tolerance for ambiguity, and commitment to due diligence and data"
Burch et al., 2022 N = 10	United States	Qualitative; One-time blinded Zoom interviews with 10 questions	Leader traits: emotional intelligence, framing the problem, communication, trust, rapid decision making, acting boldly, and helping others
Chisholm-Burns et al., 2021 N = 21	United States	Qualitative; Three focus group interviews via Zoom	Themes: communication, connectivity, adaptable/flexible, productive, and turning crisis into opportunity
Liu et al., 2021 N = 55	United States	Qualitative; Semi-structured interviews 46 minutes (average)	Themes: "engage in accuracy, transparency, and accountability; foster deliberative dialog; prioritize safety; support justice, fairness, and equity; and engage in an ethic of care"
McNamara, 2021 N = 3	United States	Qualitative; Semi-structured interviews	Mindful leadership Themes: "culture and values, communication, and collegiality" Leader traits: responsive, trust, listening, presence, patience, and acceptance
Nuevo-Chow, 2021 N = 5	United States	Qualitative; Semi-structured interviews	Strategic Leadership theory Themes: "building a motivated and committed team (compassion), preparing

relentlessly, deciding and prioritizing objectives, reevaluating current strategies and implementing the right one, and communicating effectively (transparency)"

Note. Table 2 summarizes the authors and sample size, origin of study (domestic researchers), research methodology, and leadership styles and traits emphasized in the literature.

Findings

Study parameters

Study authors presented a wide range of explanations for initiating their research amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Nissim and Simon (2021) noted that research studies in the recent past have often overlooked the critical linkages between various leadership theories such as adaptive leadership, and the way leadership functions in higher education during a crisis. A similar line of deductive reasoning was applied to a study carried out by Antonopoulou et al. (2021), in which they conducted quantitative research on 20 higher education leaders to assess transformational leadership qualities.

Several researchers based outside of the United States tested hypotheses using quantitative research methodology exclusively. Both Antonopoulou et al. (2021) as well as Mukaram et al. (2021) created survey instruments to assess the linkage between higher education leadership styles during the COVID-19 pandemic and a correlation with transformational leadership and adaptive leadership styles respectively. These two styles of leadership, along with general findings from several relevant studies, are explained in more detail below under their own thematic subheadings.

Other researchers relied upon an inductive approach and let the research results guide the types of higher education leadership qualities that surfaced (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2021; Dumulescu and Muţiu, 2021; Ewing, 2021; Liu et al., 2021; McNamara, 2021; Yokus, 2022). For example, McNamara (2021) relied upon a small yet intimate network of professional colleagues to participate in semi-structured interviews, the results of which yielded leadership themes such as "culture and values, communication, and collegiality" (p. 6). On a similar note, Ewing took a grand tour approach during the interview process with higher education leaders. They argued that a higher order approach to interviews would allow senior administrators much needed flexibility to speak to their own experience, background, and institutional challenges.

Theme 1: Open and effective communication

Perhaps no other thematic element surfaced more in this literature review than that of communication. Put simply, "Leadership is a communication endeavor; that is, communication constitutes the DNA of leadership" (Gigliotti, 2019, p. 85). A recent quantitative study undertaken by Men et al. (2020) confirmed that energizing and effective communications from leadership have a net positive effect on employee trust in the organization. Trust, they argued, is a critical element in guiding an organization through change and crises (i.e., the COVID-19

pandemic). Likewise, Gilly et al. (2009) confirmed in their research study that leadership skills such as effective communication are inextricably linked to organizational and team success.

A majority of the studies cited communication as a critical leadership quality during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even when communication was not explicitly referenced, it can likely be extrapolated based on the evidence presented (Antonopoulou et al., 2021; Barnes & Gearin, 2022; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2021; Engelbrecht, 2022; Ewing, 2021; McNamara, 2021; Nuevo-Chow, 2021). For instance, transformational leadership calls upon leaders to inspire, motivate, stimulate, and boost the morale of their teams, which necessitates the need for communication that is both clear and convincing (Bass, 1999; Men, 2014). A direct example of this is Antonopoulou et al.'s (2021) research study. Based upon their research, they determined that transformational leadership was a key element of successful higher education leaders in the population they surveyed, yet the study did not specifically cite communication as a central theme or trait connected to success.

The rapid pace of change and uncertainty also led to an increase in communication efforts by leadership (Burch et al., 2022; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2021; Engelbrecht 2022; Nuevo-Chow, 2021). Engelbrecht (2022) noted that one study participant emphasized the need for increased communication to navigate unexpected changes and challenges, while Burch et al. (2022) reported 70% of leaders in their study underscored the connection between frequency of communication and trust-building. Furthermore, Nuevo-Chow's (2021) study stressed the need to consider more frequent communication, with one academic dean commenting: "How are we going to be much more intentional about our communication?" (p. 111).

Lastly, leading with confidence and projecting reassurance through clear and concise messaging was an important theme that surfaced during several studies (Burch et al., 2022; Ewing, 2021; McNamara 2021; Nuevo-Chow, 2021). In a qualitative study of 20 deans and college administrative leaders conducted by Ewing (2021), an associate dean at a university in Hong Kong highlighted the need for unified messaging from college leadership that was both timely and clear. Reassurance through presidential-level messaging was also noted in studies conducted by Burch et al. (2022) as well as McNamara (2021) and Nuevo-Chow (2021), stressing the critical need for clear communication from the highest levels of leadership.

Theme 2: Leading with compassion and care

Given the tremendous degree of stress, anxiety, and upheaval presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is perhaps not surprising that leading with compassion emerged as a theme among the compiled studies. International studies included in this literature review referenced care and compassion as significant findings or subheadings 25% of the time (Engelbrecht, 2022; Yokus, 2022). However, for reasons that are not quite clear, 66% of the study data from the United States specifically pointed to leadership that drew upon emotional intelligence, compassion, kindness, empathy, or a mindful leadership approach (Burch et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021; McNamara, 2021; Nuevo-Chow, 2021).

For instance, Nuevo-Chow (2021) conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with five academic deans located in California during the pandemic. Her research led to the

conclusion that several academic leaders applied a mindful leadership framework to the way they led their teams. According to Mellor et al. (2015), this leadership framework relies upon self-reflection, empathy, and a keen understanding of the environment around oneself. It is within this context that Nuevo-Chow (2021) observed two participants who both emphasized the need to lead with compassion. She shared the following from one academic leader, "Well, I think the biggest thing is care, love, and empathy. This is a time of a lot of suffering, great challenge, and difficulty. So the big value that we're trying to live by is compassion" (pp. 100-101).

Similarly, Burch et al. (2022) and Liu et al. (2021) reported in their participant interviews that small gestures emphasizing care and compassion went a long way in supporting staff morale by emphasizing the human element in their leadership. Liu et al. (2021) noted that the administration at one university created a "COVID bank" of additional paid time off for employees that needed supplemental financial support, in addition to leaders sending handwritten notes and small gifts of appreciation to staff while working from their homes.

Finally, research data from both McNamara (2021) and Yokus (2022) pointed to care, calmness, and compassion as desirable leadership qualities during the pandemic. When McNamara (2021) asked research participants about their perceived roles as leaders, several high frequency words stood out: care (three times), feelings (seven times), humans (six times), and welfare (three times). Yokus (2022) also reported similar thematic elements in their study, citing compassion along with concern for the wellbeing and welfare of staff as core leadership traits.

Theme 3: Flexible leadership in the face of uncertainty

Given the rapid pace at which society had to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, leadership traits such as flexibility and agility surfaced throughout a number of research studies presented here. Flexibility is perhaps best described by Norton (2010), who explored flexible leadership and the value it brings to an organization in his integrative survey of the literature; specifically, he surveyed the way in which "leadership versatility" could be applied to the post-2008 global economic crisis. His work also raised a number of valuable questions, including flexibility and generalization versus specialization of skillsets. In other words, at what point is a leader or a team perhaps too flexible?

Six of the study authors cited some degree of flexibility or agility as a competency for higher education leaders (Barnes & Gearin, 2022; Burch et al., 2022; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2021; Ewing, 2021; McNamara 2021; Nissim & Simon, 2021). In a qualitative study conducted by Barnes and Gearin (2022), they recounted that several participants led teams with the expectation that change will never stop—that change was essentially the only variable that *was* known. It was leading through uncertainty that ultimately surfaced a "tolerance for ambiguity" (i.e. flexibility) that Barnes and Gearin (2022) identified as a core theme in their study.

This "tolerance for ambiguity" as noted by Barnes and Gearin (2022) was also readily apparent in a qualitative interview recorded by Chisholm-Burns et al. (2021), in which the participant stated: "We can't control the wind, but we can adjust our sails" (p. 1308). The study

participant went on to specify that the quote was from Charles Darwin, and that serving as an academic leader in a time of such great uncertainty and upheaval required a shift in being flexible and adaptable with sudden changes. Accepting that change was inevitable made the process of leading for this individual more palatable.

Finally, Chisholm-Burns et al. (2022) and Nissim and Simon (2021) both reported the necessity of flexibility and adaptability in the face of a leadership crisis. Nissim and Simon (2021) go on to explain that crises such as a pandemic create the perfect opportunity for leaders to demonstrate their agility and flexibility, as solutions must often be implemented quickly and with little information or case study to rely upon. Therefore, they argue that individuals are presented with opportunities to "reveal" their true leadership potential during times of crisis.

Theme 4: Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership has a long history, dating back to 1978 when scholar James Burns first outlined the differences between transformational leadership and transactional leadership (Yukl, 1989). According to Bass (1999), transformational leadership calls upon leaders to inspire, motivate, stimulate, and boost the morale of their teams, while transactional leadership is limited to the self-interested benefits or exchange of work for pay, benefits, pensions, etc. As Bass (1999) further explains, the leadership tools and methods that motivate teams in the 21st century (e.g., transformational leadership) have in large part emerged in response to employee-employer expectations and practices.

In a small research study led by Antonopoulou et al. (2021), the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (2004) was administered to 20 higher education leaders in Greece to assess transformational leadership qualities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The MLQ is a survey instrument designed to measure transformational and transactional leadership values in populations (Bass, 1999; Yukl, 1989). Based on the results of the MLQ, Antonopoulou et al. (2021) concluded that educational leaders at the University of Peloponnese displayed transformational leadership qualities more frequently than transactional leadership by a statistically significant margin.[2]

Similarly, Engelbrecht's (2022) study considered transformational leadership as well but drew upon qualitative research methodology and a larger pool of participants, unlike the smaller quantitative study employed by Antonopoulou et al. (2021). In the study, Engelbrecht (2022) used semi-structured interviews with leaders to assess transformational leadership qualities. What emerged were key themes that also overlap with the previous thematic subsection, Theme 2: Leading with compassion and care. The key leadership themes from Engelbrecht's (2022) study—supportive, approachable, knowledgeable, share information, developmental, guidance, trust, collaborative, and empowered—bear resemblance to Bass's four characteristics of transformational leadership to inspire, motivate, stimulate, and boost the morale of teams (Bass, 1999; Engelbrecht, 2022; Sayyadi et al., 2015).

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[2] Statistical results reported by Antonopoulou et al. (N = 20):
Transformational leadership (Mean 4.09). Transactional leadership (Mean 3.66).

Theme 5: Adaptive leadership

The concept of adaptive leadership was first introduced in 1994 by Ronald Heifetz, in which he argued that this leadership style pushes employees to stretch themselves and solve challenges, resulting in growth and success (Heifetz et al., 2009). Leaders do their teams and their employees a great disservice, he notes, when they simply solve a problem for employees without addressing the core issue. Additionally, Heifetz and Laurie (2001) note that open communication is central to adaptive leadership, along with the following six principles: "getting on the balcony, identifying the adaptive challenge, regulating distress, maintaining disciplined attention, giving work back to people, and protecting voices of leadership from below" (p. 132).

Research studies, case studies, and essays published during the pandemic reinforce the value of adaptive leadership in guiding higher education leaders through a period of immense turbulence and uncertainty (Barnes & Gearin, 2022; Dumulescu, 2021; Fernandez et al., 2020; Marshall et al., 2020; Mukaram et al., 2021; Nissim & Simon, 2021). For instance, Fernandez et al. (2020) posited that a new "toolbox" of leadership tactics is necessary for the rapidly changing world of higher education. These new tools for a post-pandemic reality emphasize accountability, empathy, compassion, trust, flexibility, authenticity, integrity, communication, and credibility. Many of these tools, such as emphasizing accountability and maintaining disciplined attention, align closely with Heifetz's six principles of adaptive leadership (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001).

One of three research-driven studies that investigated adaptive leadership in higher education was led by Barnes and Gearin (2022). They conducted qualitative research on 11 mid-career higher education leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilizing qualitative research methods, they selected participants who identified with the millennial generation (those born between 1980 and 1994) for interviews that spanned 40 to 60 minutes. Their study sought to understand how millennial leaders in higher education utilize an adaptive leadership model—particularly during times of crisis.

Despite the small sample size, the study revealed four themes: developing oneself by investing in and tending to employees, the high impact of transparency, the ability to live with ambiguity and uncertainty, and trust in data-driven decision making (Barnes & Gearin, 2022). As the authors noted, there was close alignment between the themes that emerged in the study and those associated with adaptive leadership, such as investing energy into developing others, as well as the connection between Heifetz's "productive zone of disequilibrium"—that is, the productive "sweet spot" found within a challenging situation—and this study's findings that revealed a high tolerance for ambiguity among surveyed participants (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 29).

Finally, both Mukaram et al. (2021) and Nissim and Simon (2021) employed quantitative methodologies in their search for adaptive leadership qualities among higher education leaders. Mukaram et al. (2021) verified a positive relationship between adaptive leadership and organizational change during the pandemic, while Nissim and Simon (2021) also confirmed a statistically significant relationship between a university leadership that

embraced adaptive leadership qualities and overall faculty satisfaction. Of particular note, Nissim and Simon (2021) acknowledged that there were few previous studies to draw upon that connected adaptive leadership research with higher education during the pandemic.

Conclusion

As Fernandez et al. (2020) proposed in their research, a new "toolbox" of skills and leadership tactics for academic leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic was required for successfully navigating uncharted territory. Following a review of 13 current research studies in higher education leadership, five central themes ultimately formed the basis of this literature review: open and effective communication, leading with compassion and care, flexible leadership in the face of uncertainty, transformational leadership, and adaptive leadership.

First, it would seem that higher education leadership during a pandemic requires clear and consistent messaging at all leadership levels (Burch et al., 2022; Ewing, 2021; McNamara, 2021; Nuevo-Chow, 2021). While some study participants cautioned against overcommunicating and flooding students, staff, and other campus stakeholders with information (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2021), the aggregate study data seem to suggest that communication is a leadership skill of great value. These findings align with contemporary literature on the importance of communication in building trust (Boies et al., 2015).

Secondly, compassion surfaced as a guiding leadership principle in the literature. According to Nuevo-Chow (2021), mindful leadership—which stresses empathy and compassion—was employed by several of her study participants, while both McNamara (2021) and Yokus (2022) found that successful leaders emphasized care, calmness, and compassion during the pandemic. There was also a general acknowledgement that everyone was living through exceptional times that required caring for one another as humans (Burch et al., 2022).

The third theme surveyed in this literature review emphasized flexibility. Chisholm-Burns et al. (2022) and Nissim and Simon (2021) both reported the necessity of flexibility and adaptability in the face of a leadership crisis, while Barnes and Gearin (2022) concluded that their study participants had a high threshold for ambiguity. Leaders with these traits are perhaps more apt to tolerate uncertainty and abrupt changes, particularly during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Marshall et al., 2020).

In addition to the leadership traits mentioned above, two leadership styles emerged with a greater degree of frequency than others: transformational leadership and adaptive leadership. Both leadership models offer unified frameworks by which leadership traits and processes can be explained. Engelbrecht (2022) and Antonopoulou et al. (2021) confirmed positive correlation between their study populations and transformational leadership qualities, while Mukaram et al. (2021) and Nissim and Simon (2021) verified the presence of adaptive leadership elements within their study populations.

However, it should be noted that more research is needed to verify the widespread adoption of some of the leadership styles and traits advanced in the studies cited here. Several researchers, including McNamara (2021) and Nuevo-Chow (2021), utilized limited sample

sizes of N = 3 and N = 5 respectively, or were restricted to a small geographic region. Application of the results to higher education systems of different size, scale, culture, and location may prove unreliable. Future research efforts should focus on higher education crisis leadership styles in the United States in comparison to another country or region of the world.

Additional research may also be useful in investigating the flattening of higher education reporting structures and hierarchies in the midst of a crisis. While sufficient data was lacking for this review, future work could focus on distributive leadership[3], which surfaced on several occasions. In particular, Dumulescu and Muţiu (2021) found that a core leadership strength that emerged during their qualitative research was that effective leaders abandoned old hierarchical structures. Likewise, Nissim and Simon (2021) argued that leadership needed to be distributed and shared in an effort to divide responsibility and workload successfully.

It should also be noted that some of the studies reported here utilized their own place of employment as the sample population or drew upon their own personal network of contacts (Engelbrecht, 2022; McNamara, 2021), while others sought participants from wider pools of candidates (Liu et al., 2021) There is also the consideration of who was surveyed by researchers. The studies included in this literature review included leaders ranging from deans and college presidents to conservatory leaders in the performing arts. More research could be done in determining whether leadership styles, tactics, and effectiveness can be applied to other types of programs and higher education structures. For example, did higher education leaders from campus libraries and museums respond to crises in the same way as deans and college presidents, or did their tactics and tools differ significantly?

Finally, while COVID-19 continues to evolve in unpredictable ways, research and surveys conducted in the field of higher education leadership may never look quite like the years between 2019 and 2022 again. In many respects, higher education leaders and administrators will have to continue writing the next leadership chapter on their own, with research studies perhaps serving as lagging indicators of how they might guide their institutions through the 21st century.

Acknowledgements

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[3] Distributive leadership seeks to build relationships among one another, rather than employing a top-down or power-centric model of leadership behavior (Bolden, 2011).

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