

Functioning School Leadership During COVID-19

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Abstract: The current global pandemic has created an extraordinary and unprecedented opportunity for educational authorities to initiate significant reforms in the operating protocols of schools as a necessary response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis. The abrupt shift from traditional, in-person classroom instruction to remote and online learning environments has highlighted the need for swift action and thorough preparedness, requiring educational systems to adapt rapidly to new teaching methods and technologies. The long-lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced additional challenges for school leadership, emphasizing the urgent need for change and adaptation during this ongoing global health emergency. The critical role of academic leadership has become increasingly important, as leaders are now tasked with addressing complex issues and ensuring that education continues to be delivered effectively despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic. This study conducts a comprehensive analysis of the current literature on the effects of school leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to identify significant trends, advancements, and insights regarding academic leadership practices and their impact on school communities during the pandemic. Practical guidelines and views are offered for immediate use and future research areas.

Keywords: Academic Leadership, COVID-19 Crisis Management, Collaborative Networks.

1. Introduction

In times of transition and upheaval, the role and impact of academic leaders become more significant, mainly when dealing with unfamiliar challenges in school governance and management. Before the pandemic, the educational leadership framework adhered to a conventional approach characterized by a hierarchical structure aligned with specific roles and levels of power. Leaders were accountable for overseeing the school's operations and establishing an educational environment that optimized productivity. Throughout the epidemic, instructors at every level were observed delivering instruction by computer, email, or phone. They assume leadership positions in their surroundings by actively participating in various team collaborations, utilizing platforms such as Team Teams, Zoom, or Google Meet, which are popular social media networks. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the leadership approaches evident in schools regarding responsibilities and job allocations were relatively conventional.

Nevertheless, most contacts occur during staff meetings, informal coffee gatherings, and chance encounters in the hallways. This article examines the deficiencies in the educational process that have become more evident due to COVID-19, with a specific focus on school leadership and crisis

management. The analysis will focus on current leadership tactics, particularly those related to dispersed, collaborative, and networked approaches.

2. Literature Review

COVID-19 The emergence of a global epidemic and the rapid upheaval of traditional education are compelling indications of the need for transformation in educational leadership. Leaders are unexpectedly faced with a leadership crisis. They are also tasked with addressing a sudden, unforeseen, and potentially catastrophic crisis that could jeopardize the educational organization's vision and have significant implications for stakeholder relationships. Crisis management is a systematic approach encompassing anticipating, adjusting, and acquiring knowledge from a considerable crisis occurrence. Smith defines a crisis as an urgent situation that necessitates immediate and resolute action from an organization, especially its leaders, which supports this perspective [1]. This argument aligns precisely with educational leaders' challenges when educational institutions were compelled to shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic. An examination of previous studies on school leaders reveals remarkable parallels in the practical encounters and behaviours of school leaders [2]. Many leaders said navigating the COVID-19 pandemic was like "balancing on a tightrope without the safety of a safety net" due to the absence of clear guidance on how school leaders should effectively respond to an epidemic. The citation for the source is Harris and Jones [3].

Educational institutions are unquestionably within the social system where crucial learning and social obstacles are regularly encountered. School administration is typically characterized by a delicate balance between achieving specific policy objectives and implementing independent change processes informed by critical assessment [4]. The role of school leadership in overseeing quality improvement and instructional practices in schools is well acknowledged [5]. Moreover, Antonopoulou et al. [6] underscore the significance of leadership in educational institutions. The primary objective of leaders is to provide guidance and direction to organizations and teams, enabling them to fulfil their educational responsibilities effectively.

Furthermore, schools collaborate with their environment and external participants and maintain communication with political, administrative, or community-related concerns [7]. The headmaster's principal duty is to uphold and foster the school as a cohesive community while supervising the educational institution's legal obligations and processes [8]. The role of the headteacher is frequently compared to that of middle management, tasked with managing the competing interests of many internal and external stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents, local school authorities, and politicians. Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates executives to change their attention from managing risks to managing resilience to address the unpredictability and disruption it brings.

3. Related Leadership Concerns

Leadership effectiveness is of utmost importance and is necessarily influenced by how the leadership style is translated into leadership effectiveness [9]. Research has demonstrated that educational leadership may be classified into three distinct categories: institutional leadership, instructors, and students. In order to enhance leadership effectiveness, institutional leaders must cultivate more adaptability and flexibility. Leadership development at the faculty level facilitates the improvement of the educational system by addressing stakeholder gaps and restrictions. Student leadership emphasizes improving digital abilities and utilizing IT platforms [10]. Prior research [11] has outlined the critical qualities prominent academic leaders' exhibit when confronted with adaptive problems. These qualities encompass, among others, responsibility, credibility, and honesty. Leithwood and his colleagues [12] assert that academic leadership substantially influences educational organizations'

features, favourably impacting the quality of teaching and learning. A comprehensive evaluation of studies on school leadership confirms the importance of leadership in the effectiveness of school development efforts. For instance, within the context of school administration, it is well acknowledged that leaders who are actively engaged in instructional methods significantly impact student academic performance, the overall quality of the school, and its success [13]. This implies that leaders must possess both awareness and a deep understanding of the demands and motivations of their pupils.

Moreover, scholars have observed that educational leadership positions are characterized by difficulties and unpredictability, including a significant rate of personnel changes [14]. It is essential to prioritize the emotional well-being of instructors since they highly appreciate new possibilities for teach. In essence, school leadership is a multifaceted role that involves managing financial limitations and unpredictable school budgets. For instance, factors such as lower tuition fees or falling student enrollments can result in financial setbacks, which can lead to decreased available employment opportunities at some private institutions. These fears and doubts are undoubtedly aspects of leadership that leaders must address in unfamiliar and unpredictable circumstances. This issue pertains to the performance of leaders. Simultaneously, these studies suggest a notable change in which leaders during the pandemic are starting to evaluate their leadership differently.

3.1. Managing uncertainty

Educational institutions must proactively undertake measures to adjust, create new ideas, and effectively handle transformations, which leaders spearhead. Leadership is dedicated to promoting change to address students' most essential requirements. Leaders must effectively utilize all available resources within the organization, especially when facing the constraints imposed by the pandemic.

1. Leaders cultivate proficient multi-directional communication to facilitate and address actual demands and fluctuations involving stakeholders.
2. Leaders cultivate a symbiotic and cooperative network to foster productivity.
3. Leaders cultivate empathy and support enhancements in the work environment to increase educational productivity and well-being.

3.2. Make Clear and Efficient Communication

Establishing an atmosphere and environment of effective communication is crucial for effective leadership, particularly amid an epidemic. Efficient and broad communication, considering the demands and changes of many stakeholders affected by policy changes, is crucial [15]. This further enhances the consistency of standards in educational services and prevents any disparity in rights or lack of negotiation among stakeholders, such as students or education personnel. This endeavour seeks to guarantee that every individual has access to education, without bias or prejudice, within a framework that promotes equal opportunities.

Effective communication is essential for executives to conduct job studies and evaluate the effectiveness of human resources initiatives. Leaders can utilize communication to analyze the potential of resources, capabilities, and human resources commitments to generate options or alternatives for problem-solving. Communication serves as a means for leaders to garner support for their vision and the strategic course established by the organization, particularly during times of crisis. This is because a leader's capacity to comprehend the extent of the epidemic's influence will enhance the range of choices available for decision-making and contribute to high-quality decisions.

3.3. Collaborative Networks with Reciprocal Support

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitates a leadership approach that prioritizes transformative leadership. Transformational leaders can exert influence, ignite inspiration, and drive motivation among their followers to achieve or exceed the organization's goals. According to Mezirow [16], transformational learning involves transitioning from a fixed mindset influenced by biases and preconceived notions to a more comprehensive and perceptive standpoint by being more receptive, introspective, and transformative. This theory provides an ideal framework for leaders to articulate the concepts of learning and leadership in COVID-19. According to Ber-Jaoui and Karami-Akkary [17], assigning leadership tasks is a more successful approach than other leadership techniques during a crisis. This approach enhances the quality of decision-making and empowers employees to participate in the decision-making process. A robust and harmonious collaborative framework will reinforce one another to establish an efficient and advantageous collaboration network. Leaders are driven to enhance their commitment to working more efficiently and effectively with all stakeholders. By delegating leadership tasks, teams maintain motivation. They are incentivized as they have more autonomy to address issues and participate in problem-solving, innovation, and change compared to campuses that follow a hierarchical leadership approach [18]. After a network of teams is established to address a crisis, they concentrate on a suitable moment and disassemble after the crisis is handled. Teams experience a feeling of fulfilment and may gain concrete advantages in the long run.

3.4. The Cultivation and Utilization of Empathy

Mutch [19] created a theoretical structure to discern the three primary elements that impact crisis leaders: emotional, interpersonal, and environmental. Character aspects encompass a leader's upbringing, individual traits, life events, convictions, values, and leadership ideologies. Mutch defines the relational component as the leader's ability to establish a cohesive vision and foster community inside the organization. From this standpoint, the relationship aspect should also encompass leadership, such as trust, loyalty, and collaboration. Contextual variables may ensure that school leaders are held responsible, encourage adaptability and innovative thinking, and facilitate effective cultural management, evaluation, and reaction in times of crisis. In their assessment of crisis management, Smith and Riley confirmed that effective leadership during a crisis requires empathic leaders who can effectively handle the situation and understand the feelings of individuals within the school community. Online teaching is increasing, and leaders must possess flexibility and practical crisis communication skills to support and manage staff or students during stressful situations effectively. Kerrissey and Edmondson [20] highlight the significance of leaders cultivating empathy by experiencing the perspective of others. The COVID-19 epidemic highlights a considerable disparity in school access to digital resources. This is remarkably accurate considering the restricted availability of resources, particularly in rural areas, socio-economically disadvantaged populations, and students from handicapped and illiterate households. Hence, sustaining a feeling of unity and shared objective is essential. Leaders promote safeguarding, conserving, and valuing each person to foster a strong sense of community, inclusivity, and confidence while mitigating anxiety. The shared pursuit of similar and unified objectives establishes a culture of care. Therefore, when managing crises, empathy should include the holistic well-being of individuals, encompassing their emotional needs.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, it is essential to acknowledge that there is no flawless leader or approach, particularly regarding crisis management scenarios. Nevertheless, the capacity of versatile and malleable leaders to acquire knowledge and grow during intense examination is a crucial element of successful

leadership. By adhering to these exemplary leadership strategies, academic leaders will successfully reconstruct and overcome crises, enhancing their capabilities.

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