

CHAPTER 1

“WE WILL SURVIVE AND THRIVE”: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP DURING THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Jon McNaughtan, Sarah Maria Schiffecker,
Santiago Castiello-Gutierrez, Hugo A. García
and Xinyang Li

ABSTRACT

While there is research that has explored how institutions have responded to various crises, these are usually locally or regionally situated. However, no event has impacted higher education globally like COVID-19 and it will certainly alter the way top administrators lead and how institutions move forward. Thus, this chapter will explore how to better understand how presidents and top administrators navigate the (inter)national geopolitics as they move the institution forward. In addition, clear and up-to-date communication has proven to be important in battling this crisis. Thus, how presidents at national universities have communicated with students, faculty, staff, and various off-campus communities members regarding COVID-19 and how they have achieved is important to explore. Our findings suggest that presidents and top administrators need to build support to help them navigate the political roadblocks they may encounter. Findings also suggest that communication is the main role they play as leaders on their campus. On/off-campus community members see the presidents as the face of the university and key communicator as relates to

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communicating what the institutions is doing and how they are addressing the crisis. This chapter helps in better understanding the roles presidents and top administrators play during a global crisis.

Keywords: COVID-19; presidential leadership; crisis management; international higher education; student mobility; competing values framework

INTRODUCTION

Given the hierarchical nature of postsecondary education across the world, the role of leadership is critical in times of crisis. However, the structure and role of the top leaders of institutions of higher education differ depending on the cultural and political context in which the institution is situated. For example, in times of crisis, institutions face various political climates, institutional norms, and the required actions to engage with these factors differ from situation to situation. Regardless of the context, higher education institutions (HEIs) are often the center of their communities and can provide solid direction and guidance through various crises. Indeed, university presidents, regardless of national context, play a pivotal role in navigating their institution during uncertainty to ensure institutional survival (Brennan & Stern, 2017). Their role requires an understanding of the values of the institution and the crisis (McNaughtan et al., 2019) which allows them to confront and manage challenges, oversee the implementation of national policies and mandates, and respond to various complaints from numerous constituency groups from on- and off-campus. While times of crisis present challenges that slow or halt their institution's operations, leaders must also keep the university moving toward divergent goals.

The current COVID-19 global pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to better understand how university presidents in various national and global contexts lead their institutions. Given the varying degrees of national, regional, and geopolitical differences among university presidents' experiences, it is critical to better grasp how leaders navigated this global pandemic and how their approaches and messages differ or coincide. Exploring the historical, political, and economic context will help leaders to shape how postsecondary institutions respond to their governments and community members in future crises (Gigliotti, 2020). For example, the level of federal government centralization in response to a crisis may lead to differing challenges for institutional leaders. In addition, the size of the institution or specialization could influence the perception of the leadership.

Given the current challenges posed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, this chapter will present findings from a recent international comparative research project that focused on understanding how 14 university presidents from across 4 different continents and 8 nations navigated their institutions through this crisis given the political context they are embedded in. Furthermore, we will explore how decisions were made and how they provided leadership to ensure the safety of all members of their communities given the political and economic challenges.

The research project resulted in three separate studies that each focused on a different aspect of presidential leadership in times of crisis. In this chapter, we present high level findings from each of these studies, and then focus on the context leadership and how that context informs decision-making with an emphasis on the international nature of the work. Furthermore, this chapter provides insight into how presidents and other top administrators from universities across the world navigated the initial COVID-19 pandemic to emerge stronger and position themselves to serve the local and global needs.

DATA

The data for this chapter are from a larger project that focused on how presidents lead their institutions, consider their external environment, and focus on students during the common shared experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. Perspectives were collected from presidents of postsecondary institutions from across different regions of the world. The research team determined two main criteria for participant selection. First, each participant had to be the president or in the lead role for decisions around COVID-19 at their institution. In their leadership role, the participant oversaw institutional decision-making during the global crisis. Second, invitations were only sent to universities with global reach with a robust number of international students enrolled. This criterion was included to ensure some common perspectives of the institutions which shared a level of prestige within their own country and globally.

Utilizing a purposeful sampling technique, each researcher identified one to three countries and then selected national universities from those countries to invite their respective presidents to participate. An initial list of 85 university presidents in 15 different countries was established. Striving for a balance on the number of responses per country, only 53 invitations were sent initially. Out of those, a total of 14 presidents agreed to participate in the study (see Table 1). The sample included presidents from 8 different countries with years of experience for the presidents ranging from 3 to 36 years in the presidency. There were 9 males and 5 females in the sample and each president had been in their position during the entire duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the guidance provided to reduce barriers to interviewing elites in higher education by [McClure and McNaughtan \(2021\)](#), interviews were conducted on Zoom or Microsoft Teams, questions were provided well in advance, and each interview was conducted in a semi-structured approach to allow the president to guide the discussion more freely.

We acknowledge that there are ample variations in leadership positions at HEIs in different countries. Both the title and main responsibilities of the senior leader are distinct. For this project, our intent was to interview the individual who held the highest authority within a HEI, the person with the power to affect the decision-making process regarding leading the institution through the pandemic. Among our sample, some individuals held the title of President, Chancellor, or Rector, but to simplify reading, we consider all those positions equivalent, and therefore, will use here onward the term “university president.”

Table 1. Participants.

#	Pseudonym	Sex	Region	Institution Type
1	President G	Male	Asia	Public
2	President J	Female	Asia	Public
3	President K	Male	Europe	Public
4	President L	Male	Europe	Public
5	President M	Female	Europe	Public
6	President N	Male	Europe	Public
7	President O	Female	Europe	Public
8	President E	Male	South America	Public
9	President F	Male	South America	Public
10	President H	Male	South America	Private
11	President A	Male	North America	Public
12	President B	Male	North America	Public
13	President C	Female	North America	Private
14	President D	Female	North America	Public

Analytical Approach

This work utilized the comparative case study methodological approach to allow for “flexibility to incorporate multiple perspectives, data collection tools, and interpretive strategies” (Blanco Ramírez, 2016, p. 19). Through the comparative aspect of the case study employed, it is possible to develop “an in-depth analysis of a case” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 14) on multiple national levels. This allows for comparative conclusions that would not be possible by looking at merely one single case (Liebersohn, 2000). The interviews for this study were coded utilizing a content analysis approach by at least two individual coders (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Klenke, 2016). Given that some interviews were conducted in the president’s native tongue and others in English, the research team member who spoke the president’s native tongue first reviewed the transcript and then translated it into English for the second coder.

The coding process employed was Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) three-step approach to coding qualitative data: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Analyst triangulation was accomplished by incorporating a qualitative research team of four people where the work of the two main coders was reviewed by the other two research team members as part of a cross-checking process (Goodman, 2001). Saturation was reached and no new codes emerged following the cross-checking exercise (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Axial coding occurred when the data were reconstructed in new ways. The team engaged selective coding where each member of the team identified the most salient quotes from their respective interviews for each major theme.

The three studies on which this chapter is based, utilized differing theoretical frameworks and highlighted unique themes in the data. Table 2 provides a list of three main areas of study and the resulting themes from the studies. Here we briefly discuss the themes of each study and focus on the role of culture, political, and environmental influences.

Table 2. University Presidential Perspectives of Leadership During COVID-19.

Study One: President’s Roles	Study Two: Organizational Culture	Study Three: Student Focus
Framework: Managerial roles (Cote, 1985; Mintzberg, 1973)	Framework: Competing values (Cameron, 1986; Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1981).	Framework: Intercultural Leadership (Seiler, 2007)
Main themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Collaboration • Support 	Main themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control • Collaborate • Create • Compete 	Main themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Competency • Team Focus • Organizational Support • Context and Situation

UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP APPROACHES

Presidential leadership in higher education during times of crisis is exceptionally complex. As the head of their respective institutions, the challenges of leadership increase exponentially in crisis as presidents must tackle financial instability, constituent confusion, unknown challenges, and are often expected to support local communities and (inter)national needs. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a common case for examination for institutions across the world. The three studies could also be seen as main areas for comparison, which we discuss here including the role of the president, the impact of the organization’s culture, and the president’s focus on student groups.

The Complex Role of the University President (Study One)

With many studies focusing on the role and responsibilities of US college and university presidents, there is a dearth of scholarly work illuminating international perspectives of presidential roles and leadership specifically around the world (Liu et al., 2020). Even within different national contexts, university presidents find themselves in a position of privilege when it comes to insights and information on their institutions as well as “specific executive and academic authority” (p. 2037). Their privileged position gives them unique information and insights into the ways their institutions operate outside of and during crises. Therefore, in our first study, we wanted to understand how university presidents in different contexts enacted managerial roles that helped them lead their institutions through a significant global crisis.

Besides the lack of comparison between different countries, our review of previous literature also identified that a vast majority of previous studies focused individually on the presidents themselves, their careers and trajectories, and their experience navigating such a complex role. Many of these studies are single cases or even autobiographies where presidents share their challenges and successes (see, e.g., Bowen, 2011; Chace, 2009; Douglas et al., 2017; Duderstadt, 2009; Gardner, 2005; Hennessy, 2020; Rangel Sostmann & Murray, 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2007;

Tan et al., 2015). Another stream of research was focused on how, presidents with marginalized positionalities – such as women, BIPOC, queer, and those at the intersections of race and gender – were able to ascend the ranks of a HEI, and the challenges of leading coming from a certain background (e.g., Bullard, 2013; Hu, 2019; Jones, 2013; Madsen, 2008; Phelps et al., 1997; Robinson, 2018; Rodriguez, 2020; Timmons, 2020; Vaughan, 1989; Woollen, 2016). We also identified a series of studies centered on leadership overall but using university presidents as the unit of analysis (e.g., Atwell et al., 2001; Bensimon, 1990; Bensimon et al., 1989; Birnbaum, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1992). These studies, however, are more about the evolution of the role of the president as a key leader in moving forward ever-growing complex organizations such as HEIs.

Hence, an evident gap we identified in the literature is a lack of international comparisons on how university presidents in different contexts exercise leadership. To the best of our knowledge, only Liu et al. (2020) have conducted a study consisting of interviews to multiple university presidents from different countries and continents. Therefore, through our first study under this broader project, we compared how our sample of 14 university presidents in eight countries enacted different managerial roles that helped them lead their institutions through a significant global crisis. Given how HEIs have become closer to the market, and therefore, operate similarly as other organizations (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), we analyzed university presidents' leadership based on traditional management theories. Particularly, we framed this study as a revision to Mintzberg's (1973) foundational theory on managerial roles.

Building upon Mintzberg's theory, and adapting it specifically to higher education, Cote (1985) defined a specific set of presidential roles with the goal of

(1) accommodat[ing] the variety and unique characteristics of academic institutions as well as the language common to higher education; and (2) [presenting] a more detailed, better-differentiated profile of diverse expectations common to presidential role performance. (p. 666)

Based on Cote's profiles and roles of university presidents, we explored in our comparative study which of these roles are prominently enacted by university presidents in different countries when facing the same large-scale crisis (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic). Three research questions guided our study:

1. Which, among the multiple roles that university presidents have, were the most salient ones during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Given the multiple audiences and stakeholders that HEIs have, who, and in what ways, was being served by these leaders?
3. What set of values and priorities guided the decision-making process of a university leader during a time of crisis?

Our analysis of the interviews' responses showed three main themes in relation to the most salient roles enacted by university presidents during the pandemic: (1) communication, (2) collaboration, and (3) support. For each of these themes, three or four specific roles emerged as shown in Table 3.

First, based on how disruptive this crisis was, our participants quickly realized the importance of them being responsible for receiving, synthesizing, and

Table 3. Summary of Main Findings.

University Presidents' Roles While Leading their Institution' Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic		
Communicate	Collaborate	Support
Share accurate information	Coordinate response efforts	Provide resources to support strategic areas and more pressing needs
Speak in alignment with context	Build connections across departments	Keep their campus calm and offer emotional support/security
Be the face of the university	Empower their team Quickly adapt to their constituents' needs	Support/help the local community

disseminating large amounts of frequently evolving information. In other words, they became communicators and the face of the university within and outside of campus. As leaders of a HEI, they were crucial in communicating information on the virus, but most importantly, of its effects on the institution and members of the university community. Students, faculty, staff, parents, the local governments, and other constituents of the universities, relied on messages from presidents on issues like whether or not classes would be suspended, for how long, how would institutions guarantee the safety of their community but also the academic continuity. Being prompt and clear in communicating this was a crucial task during the first phase of the pandemic to avoid the feeling of uncertainty. As President A mentioned, “[my first role is] communicate, communicate, communicate – kind of the three Cs...stay connected with our faculty and their staff, and...obviously, with our students.” Similarly, President J expressed “university leaders, any leader, they have to be crystal clear from the first minute.” President E also identified communication as their most salient role, but also talked about being able to collect different perspectives before responding, or what President C defined as being an “environment scanner...making sense of lots of data [from] inside and outside”

First, keep the community permanently informed. That, I think, has been a very, very important element. Second, it has been to collect, as closely as possible, the voices from the different actors... And on the other hand, through the rest of the actions, fundamentally, we have tried to keep the community very informed, to avoid them going through moments of uncertainty like saying “Yes, tomorrow everyone returns to campus and then we’ll see what happens.” (President E)

The second theme that emerged in our analysis was the role university presidents took as collaborators, as responsible for building connections within and across departments, but also with other entities such as the local community, health authorities, and various government agencies. Regarding their role as a collaborator within the institution, President H distinguished how, “on the one hand, you want to make sure that you’re upfront, but that you are [also] relying on and empowering your team.” President A went further along in describing how, by establishing an internal structure that is less hierarchical and that enhances collaboration, their institution was in a better position to navigate this crisis

We have a matrix organization here. I’ve always felt that universities ought to be much more organic, and that is that everyone rises and falls together... And so therefore, with a matrix

organization, what you're constantly doing is you're constantly making certain that people are backing up and supporting each other, and there were constantly talking about what we're going to be doing next, rather than saying, "It's your job, it's your job, or, it's your job." It's all of our jobs! (President A)

The last theme from our findings was presidents acknowledging the importance of them becoming supporters, of providing resources while also keeping their campus calm and positive amidst all the challenges. President D described himself "as a stabilizer and also as a promoter, to keep people positive and aware of the amazing work they were doing in a time of crisis." Keeping the campus morale high is an important task that must come from the organization's top-leader so that everyone feels that, no matter how complicated this crisis has been, things are moving in the right direction. In this regard, experience becomes fundamental, as expressed by President A

I just think having had so much experience, that I don't get panicked. I just don't get panicked. I sort of have to have a calmness about me, because [of] the fact that I have seen almost everything. I haven't seen this, but I know that we will survive and thrive. And I know that I will too. So I think you look to the hills instead of to the valleys. (President A)

But interestingly, our study also found that, particularly at public institutions, university presidents felt a need to support the larger community outside their campus. Presidents in our sample described how they had to work closely with government officials to support, as much as they could, their local and surrounding community as it related to COVID-19. In some cases, presidents decided to turn their resources (facilities, equipment, human resources, etc.) into the service of the community by becoming key players in projects like testing for positive cases or distributing vaccines. For example, President E explained their institutions' involvement in testing

Let's rescue everything [we have] which we can use to help the country, that is the first thing.... We do not have clinical hospitals, ... but we got to convert three laboratories to support the covid PCR testing... We bought a robot, investments were made...to be able to go out as a university and offer assistance.

In another example, President D shared how when things started opening gradually during the summer of 2020, they drove around the state/region to meet with representatives of the local community, alumni, and current faculty, students, and staff from their satellite locations

[...] to make sure that people in communities knew that [University] was still here, [and] was their university...I had to visit and make sure that people knew that they were thought of and cared about in a time of crisis.

Overall, with this first study, we found that the roles presidents took align well with previous literature. Being communicators or the face of the university, facilitating collaboration, and supporting their inside and outside communities are tasks that presidents do and have done regardless of the social environment. However, where our findings are distinct is how these three roles were the most important ones during the crisis; presidents left aside many of their other traditional roles and responsibilities to focus on the wellbeing of their communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic made institutions (through their presidents and other leaders) to switch priorities. In most cases, a university president's job is more related to moving the organization forward, securing its financial stability, increasing academic quality, and caring for the institution's prestige. But during this crisis, presidents in our sample focus was first and foremost securing the wellbeing of the people within the organization, guaranteeing equitable access to the technology used for the continuity of education for their students, and providing support to all the institution's many stakeholders. In other words, our study shows that university presidents' leadership shifted from being focused on leading for *something*, to leading for *someone*.

Organizational Culture and Presidential Leadership (Study Two)

Bess and Dee (2008) describe culture as a “shared philosophy or ideology, or a set of beliefs, expectations, and assumptions that guide behavior in a social system” (pp. 362–363). In essence, culture is the invisible, yet powerful force that influences our organizational members decision-making and actions. Culture in times of crisis is especially powerful because often when crisis arises, there is little time for reflection on actions leading to organizational members responding in connection to the existing culture or values (Deverell & Olsson, 2010; McNaughtan et al., 2018; McNaughtan & McNaughtan, 2019). In this study, presidents were asked to reflect on how their organizational culture impacted their decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic. Responses were then coded using the competing values framework (CVF) which has been used to understand leadership decision-making and organizational culture for over three decades (Cameron, 1986; Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1981). Using the CVF, this study was guided by two research questions. RQ1: Using the CVF, how do presidents perceive the natural cultural tensions (e.g., internal vs external and stability vs adaptability)? RQ2: Which of the four cultural quadrants (i.e., collaborate, create, control, and compete) are most prevalent during times of crisis?

The CVF is divided into two competing dimensions that highlight natural tensions that exist within the organizational culture. First, flexibility and stability are presented as opposing forces. In this context, flexibility refers to the organizations' willingness to evolve and adjust depending on the needs or wants of organizational members. Stability references the tendency for some organizations to maintain the status quo or to engage in actions that place consistency over change. The second natural tension is the focus of organizations on internal or external forces. Internal focus means that the organizational decisions and actions are mainly focused on responses to the needs of internal stakeholders, whereas an externally focused culture is more responses to market and other environmental forces. Research has found that organizational leaders experience natural tensions along these two dimensions resulting in the categorization of an organization's culture falling into one of four main areas (Cameron, 1986; Whetten & Cameron, 2015).

The first cultural type is the “clan or collaborate” culture, which refers to a team-centered culture. Clan cultures are driven by values such as communication, organizational commitment, and development. A second cultural type is the

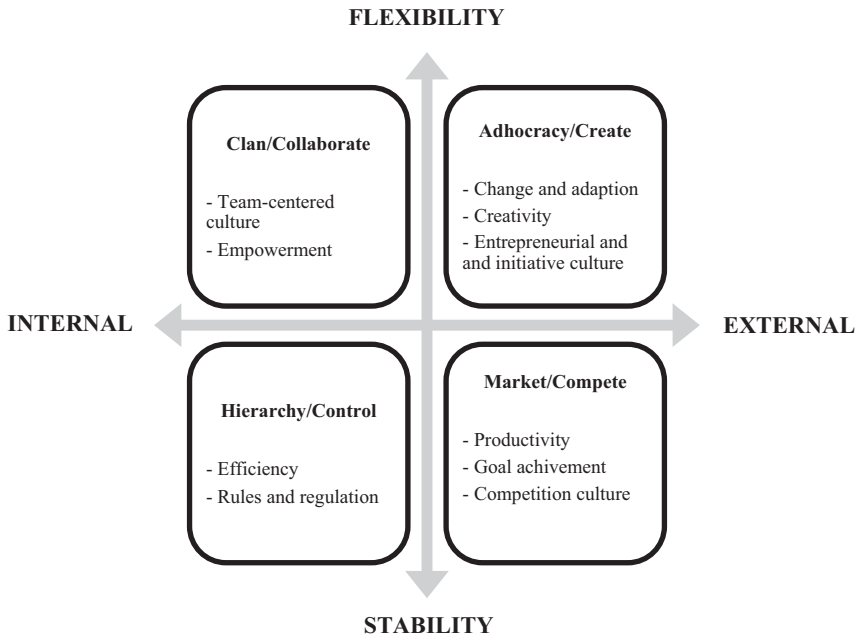


Fig. 1. Competing Values Framework. Source: Adapted from Quinn and Cameron (1983).

“adhocracy or create” culture, which refers to a culture that is creative in nature. The creative culture is driven by innovation, new ideas, and the ability to adjust quickly within environments. A third cultural type is a “hierarchy or control” mentality. Hierarchy refers to a culture that is focused on organization control and values efficiency, consistency, and timeliness, believing that these are the most important attributes of successful organizations. A fourth culture quadrant is the “market or compete.” The market is centered on competition, particularly with external competitors. The market culture is based on the values of productivity and goal achievement as the foundation for which success can be best attained. Fig. 1 illustrates the CVF.

While analyzing the responses of presidents on how organizational culture influenced their decision-making, we find that three cultural types were discussed, and one was noticeably absent from their processes. In addition to their existing culture, presidents discussed how the political and environmental context influenced which culture was most evident in their decision-making.

Clan or Collaborate Culture

HEIs as complex organizations are heavily affected by crises, especially ones of global and ongoing nature like COVID-19. The unknown conditions of the pandemic have put traditional forms of leadership to the test and shifted priorities

from issues like fundraising and other budgetary decisions to arguably more pressing issues of community support and in many cases, tasks as elementary as organizational survival. We found that presidents discussed two main ways they were influenced by a collaborative culture including responsibility to their diverse communities, producing quality experiences, and seeking community input in decision-making.

First, presidents shared a feeling of obligation to lead their universities in ways that demonstrated care, concern and responsibility to their diverse communities, even though it may lead to frustration from some community members. For example, in the United States where significant disagreement about how to best handle the COVID-19 pandemic was evident, President A referred to the historical roots of their campus stating:

we're a research university, but first and foremost, we're a land-grant institution. And we have to revert absolutely to the purpose of what land-grant institution is about in this time, particularly, because it's about safety, it's a community, it's about health, it's about building people's lives in appropriate ways and supporting them.

This president discussed how their roots as a land-grant institution – which in the United States has historically focused on building local communities, or collaboration – guided decisions made by this institution. This implicit perspective was shared by presidents in other country contexts as well.

For presidents in countries where less national debate was occurring around the validity of COVID-19, presidents had an easier time promoting policies and supporting national governments in preventative measures designed to protect institutional and local communities such as wearing masks and social distancing. As President O stated, “We are a public institution, and we have a public responsibility to make sure our students are safe.” This sentiment highlighted how leaders maintained focus on the people in their communities and were guided by a collaborative culture in their decisions.

Second, presidents illustrated an expansion of what they saw their clan including by seeking input from their local municipalities and even neighboring HEIs to make decisions. For example, President I discussed building alliances with other institutions to ensure consistent messaging and collaboration in response to changing information around COVID-19. These collaborative efforts show that institutions saw themselves as interconnected in the broader network of higher education, as opposed to an isolated institution. In addition, the experiences shared by these presidents illustrate just how much the collaborative nature of their institutions guided their work during the crisis and highlight the collegiality that crisis can produce in the higher education community.

Adhocracy or Create Culture

HEIs around the world have been centers for innovation and knowledge production for centuries and this cultural component has been embedded into mission statements and institutional values today (McNaughtan et al., 2019). Global events like WWII or the Cold War have been discussed in scholarly writing to have had significant impacts on higher education with many being at the forefront

in research and development of weapons and policy throughout these world crises (Thelin, 2019). What makes COVID-19 stand out from the hodgepodge of crises humanity had to stand up against in the twentieth century is that not only it has affected human life on a global level, but that there was no instigator or perpetrator of the challenge. This has made the response of institutions unique, and many have relied on innovative approaches to handle the crisis and combat negative outcomes.

One example of the agility and innovation of institutions was how they altered course delivery from mainly face-to-face instruction to online modalities almost overnight (Almaiah et al., 2020; Basilaia et al., 2020; Cheng et al., 2020; Wrighton & Lawrence, 2020). In addition, some institutions developed web pages and other resources to support campus and local communities (McNaughtan et al., 2021). As presidents discussed innovation, it was interesting to note that some presidents discussed innovation as a necessity given the circumstances, whereas other presidents discussed how innovation was needed now but that we needed to take advantage of this opportunity to rethink higher education. For example, President A, from the United States said, “Without change, we have no choice but to slowly sink into oblivion. I always tell them that we need to be the architects of change or its victim.” His perspective highlighted just how much this leader influences the creative culture of this institution and how the pandemic amplified this perspective. In contrast, President L discussed how they were seeking to be innovative, but that they would need to align with national objectives when considering their contributions.

In summary, when it came to the influence of the creative culture, presidents discussed it as either being creative to find a solution to the current challenge, and/or an approach to rethinking the future of higher education. All presidents in our sample took one or both of these approaches illustrating just how important being innovative during a crisis is to the success of institutions.

Hierarchy or Control Culture

HEIs have long subscribed to engaging in practices designed to reduce risk (Wang et al., 2020) and in times of crisis this cultural archetype was found to be especially dominant. As presidents made decisions about campus closings, most sought to make decisions that were centered on student safety, guided by data, and the ability of the institution to control the environment (Almuraqab, 2020; Benneyan et al., 2021; Nurunnabi & Almusharraf, 2020).

As presidents engaged in this process of seeking to maintain safety, the national approach to the crisis was especially influential in how presidents responded or did not respond. In some countries, presidents were able to make decisions specific to their perception of the pandemic in their area, whereas others were held at the will of the national government’s approach. Presidents discussed how this was a proverbial double-edged sword with some presidents being forced to make controversial decisions with little support from a national government, while others appreciated the flexibility they had to respond to their internal communities (e.g., students, faculty, and staff). President C said, “I thought a lot about what

the student experience would be like whether we were on campus or we were fully online for the fall.” This focus on students was possible because of the flexibility of this president’s home country (United States). In contrast, President J discussed how in Taiwan there was some flexibility in how they were able to make decisions for their campus, but that the national conversation drove much of the decision-making.

Market or Compete Culture

Noticeably absent from the discussions with the presidents about the influence of culture on presidential decision-making during times of crisis was the tenants of the compete culture. While presidents did discuss their desire to strengthen their institution despite the challenges of the pandemic, they did not discuss this in comparison to other institutions as part of a so-called “new normal” where all institutions would be different than when the pandemic first began (Harkavy et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2020; Thatcher et al., 2020). Perhaps during this new normal, the influence of competition on decision-making will be more prevalent, but during the crisis, there was little discussion around this process of decision-making.

Presidents and Students (Study Three)

There is an abundance of research dissecting educational leadership during crises with studies focusing mainly on organizational vulnerabilities (Fortunato et al., 2018; Smith & Hughey, 2006) and theoretical implications (Gigliotti, 2019). However, research illuminating the comparative aspects of educational leadership in different national contexts as it pertains to minoritized and vulnerable campus populations is rare, with even less literature on the ways in which university presidents perceive and support their international student communities in times of crisis. Study three hence sought to fill that gap in research by dissecting how university presidents from different countries consider international students during crises and what informs their perceptions particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Looking at the ways in which university presidents from various different national and cultural backgrounds in equally diverse environments perceive and consider a specific campus population, like international students during crises, provides valuable insights into the mechanisms of crisis leadership.

For this study, the theoretical framework of Intercultural Leadership (Seiler, 2007) facilitated the contrastation of the respective leadership experiences of the university presidents in various national contexts and the diverse international student populations they serve at their institutions. Overall, the framework encapsulates the many competences needed for leaders to successfully operate in intercultural environments. Processes of globalization and subsequent interculturalization have to be reflected in successful intercultural leadership (Irving, 2010) as organizations become more and more interculturally complex. Employing a framework like Intercultural Leadership goes beyond the consideration of a culturally diverse environment (Bolten, 2005) to provide “a holistic description of the influencing variables on leadership behavior” (Seiler, 2007, p. 3). The factors considered for intercultural leadership competency were the following: (a)

individual competence, (b) team, (c) organization, (d) general context, and (e) specific situation.

A comparative lens allowed for an analysis of university presidents' intercultural leadership across national borders and cultural contexts. For this third study, two research questions guided our analysis. RQ1: How do university presidents in different contexts perceive their role in supporting international students during a crisis? RQ2: What are the perceptions of presidents on how to best gather information when making decisions about supporting international students during crises in their respective national contexts? The findings reflect this comparative effort and show that university presidents develop their own, personal style of intercultural leadership that is influenced by both their institutional and cultural settings.

Individual competence, for example, was found to be an essential element for the individual presidents in both their perception of international students and the ways in which they gather information about and get involved with this specific campus population. Oftentimes, the presidents relied on personal experiences living abroad or their familiarity with other educational systems. President N for example stated that their "daughter lives [for study] in New York. So, she knows what it is like over there" and also mentioned that he "did have an offer to work as a dean at an American university so I know a lot about the differences." Getting actively involved in programs catering to the needs of international students on their campuses was mentioned by President L who

created an English molecular biology program which has increased by 80% over the past few years. I can say, we are proud to be an international university with about 25% international students.

However, presidents also acknowledged the boundaries of their individual involvement in international affairs stating that they "don't do enough in that regard" (President B). Individual presidential intercultural competency appeared to be strongly tied to the presidents as persons shaped by their own experiences, and not connected to the institutional environment.

While intercultural leadership showed to include this individual component in the individual competence the university presidents employed in their crisis leadership, there was also a strong focus on the importance of teamwork and being able to rely on a strong and competent team when dealing with issues that pertain to the international student community. Being able to assign tasks to a competent administrative team turned out to be an essential aspect of intercultural leadership employed by university presidents during a crisis. President B stated that he gets "a lot of input from (...), the dean of the graduate school," and that there are strong ties to the Student Government Association that has strong international representation. In order to keep up communication with the various offices and administrators involved, several channels of communication were used:

And in these commissions that we have, our coordinator and [inaudible] coordinator have a direct contact with the students and hearing what they need. And this kind of information quickly that comes to my office with the velocity of light. Any problem, I immediately already know. So nowadays, with the social media, especially with the social media, I immediately I'm aware of what's going on. (President F)

Often, the responsibilities of the team extended beyond institutional walls and included reactions to governmental decisions:

In the director's office we have to think closely about what steps to take concerning the regulations put forward by the government. We have to think about immediate measures on how we can manage all that but also what the future will look like. (President N)

Besides relying on leadership teams, the presidents also mentioned relying on support from their institutions when dealing with their international student populations in situations of crisis. International offices represent an important organizational sector that presidents counted on to cater to international students' needs as well to provide important insights and oversight:

We have an office that deals with our international affairs and they work on many different sectors. They also run a welcome center for incoming international students and also for international faculty. So, we have a good oversight over all of our international community and all the exchange programs we run and participate in. (President L)

While the individual competence of the presidents showed a clear separation from their leadership skills as individuals from the institutions that appointed them, presidents did emphasize the importance of the organization and its mission in their intercultural leadership. Whether that is through the international makeup of the faculty "from all over the world" (President N), the administrative staff, or more broadly the value internationalization has for the respective universities that "live off of exchange, communication" (President L):

Higher education is not going to be the same. Not entirely the same. No, we're going to have to change. So I think that the mindset, looking for future development, looking for changes and innovation across higher education institutions is essential, okay? (...) because of the pandemic, we all need to be more mindful and more strategic about partnerships. That's the way to go. Number two, we need to make sure we broaden our understanding and the portfolio of internationalization from student mobility that is face-to-face to one that involves virtual mobility. Three, we also need to be more inclusive and accordingly, do something for all of those who typically can't leave the campus for health, economic or other reasons, and we should explore and exploit the notion of internationalization at home. (President H)

Lastly, it was not surprising that the context of a global pandemic and the specific situations at the respective countries and universities were incorporated in the presidents' intercultural leadership. Presidents were very aware of the specific needs international students have when faced with the challenges of a long-term, global health crisis like COVID-19. President C stated that their institution

wanted them [international students] to be able to continue their education. And so, the biggest role was making sure we support and nurture that community. Your voice is being heard. We care about you.

Making sure that their institutions are "able to give students the attention they require. By attention I mean a concern for them, what they need, if they need to talk" (President E) was part of this attention for context and situation.

Overall, intercultural leadership competence appeared to be closely tied to both the individual personalities of the university presidents (Individual Competence), the leadership teams surrounding them (Teams), the respective universities'

stance on internationalization (Organization) and finally COVID-19 as a global pandemic impacting HEIs around the world (Context and Situation). While the different national and cultural contexts the presidents operate in does shape their individual leadership styles, intercultural leadership competency seemed to transcend borders and unite university presidents in their efforts to successfully lead their institutions and campus populations through crisis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRESIDENTS

Leading during a crisis is one of the often discussed, yet rarely resolved, enigmas of higher education. With most theoretical work on successful crisis leadership circling around contingency theory, both organization and leadership of HEIs are analyzed and described as contingent upon situational and organizational context (Bess & Dee, 2008). These three studies highlight how important it is to consider the context when approaching crisis leadership, even when the crisis is the same. While ensuring that the organization functions as smoothly as possible, and organizational processes are maintained to a great degree (Abraham, 2014; Rollo & Zdziarski, 2007), HEI presidents are also urged to put the needs of their institutions, their faculty, staff and student populations before their own needs and reputation during challenging times (DeCosmo, 2019). This responsibility to their institutions and various stakeholders puts HEI presidents in a challenging position (Brennan & Stern, 2017). Fig. 1 illustrates the connections between these studies presented here using a Venn diagram to highlight what aspects of presidential leadership bridged the three studies.

Global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic have shown us that crisis management cannot be treated as an isolated process, but rather is embedded in complex environmental, social, geopolitical, and economic structures to name just a few. As illustrated in Fig. 2, there are many skills and approaches that presidents must engage with to be successful in navigating a crisis that are discussed in other literature (Ibrahim, 2020; Permata et al., 2020; Rengel & González, 2021), but not discussed in comparison to other countries. Utilizing multinational perspectives, this comparative study provides a vignette into various approaches used by university presidents to lead their institutions during turbulent times. It did so by presenting ideas developed through three studies that result in three significant concepts that should be considered by leaders globally during times of crisis.

Collaboration

In all three studies, the importance of collaboration was discussed. In study one, presidents discussed how their role as a collaborator was critical to understand the perspectives of students, faculty, and staff when making decisions. In addition, collaboration as a management approach led to empowerment for members of the president's team which was needed given the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. This managerial approach also helped to ensure some form of compliance with institutional mandates from constituents.

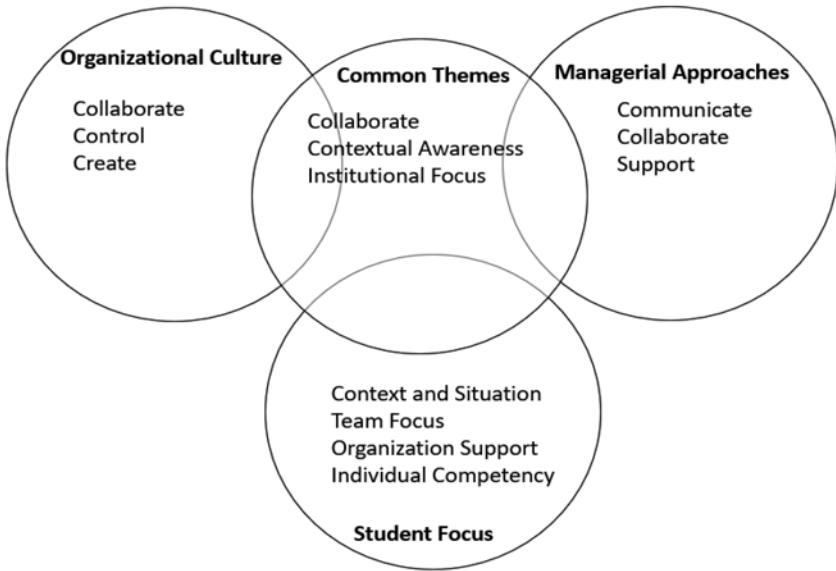


Fig. 2. Venn Diagram Illustrating Common Presidential Leadership Experiences, and Experiences Taken in Context.

In study two, presidents discussed how their institutional culture of collaboration resulted in expectations of communication and responsibility for institutional constituents. While neither this nor any of the other two studies in our project dissect the prominence of this collaborative culture before the pandemic, we did find that it was highly influential during the crisis. Presidents were guided by this collaborative approach in ways connected to study one, which again presidents perceived as helpful to achieve compliance with institutional mandates and better-informed decisions.

Study three found that when focusing on students, presidents relied on the concept of collaboration to achieve efficient and positive outcomes. Presidents’ comments on the “team focus” and the importance of “organizational support” which could only be achieved by a collaborative effort of institutional leaders. In short, institutional collaboration was central for the success of these presidents during the crisis and that collaboration required intentional effort by presidents.

Therefore, it is clear that campus leaders must develop a heightened collaboration during times of uncertainty. Leaders must ensure that institutional students, staff, and faculty are active members of the decision-making process. This allows all voices to be heard and helps shape the response to a crisis, enabling the institution to successfully traverse through uncharted times. Indeed, as indicated by institutional leaders, they relied on their team of staff and faculty to help them make informed decisions and send clear messages regarding what their institutions were doing to support all members of the institutional community. Without a collaborative effort from the entire community, our participants indicated that their institutions would find it more challenging to deal with the crisis on their campuses.

Contextual Awareness

The second common theme across the three studies was the need for presidential awareness of the context in two main areas: institutional and geopolitical. Most presidents shared how the type (public or private) and size of their institution, the characteristics of their students and staff, national research university prominence, and even the resources available influenced their leadership. In studies one and three this manifests itself in the form of support, or the amount of support the president could offer and how that support would occur. In study two, presidents shared the importance of being creative with their resources. In short, institutional context is important to consider and in times of crisis, presidents should not fall victim to isomorphic tendencies but ensure that they understand the institutional context when making decisions.

The geopolitical context of the institutions was also a common factor and another aspect of contextual awareness. For example, presidents shared how their nation's response to COVID-19 was a part of their decision, but they also had to consider the rurality of their campus with one president sharing that because of the isolation and lack of internet for many of their students, they could not shut down their campus in the way that their national government desired. Another president shared that the location of their campus on the border between two countries led to quicker action due to fear of students being unable to return home during the academic year. In addition, some institutions were at the epicenter of outbreaks where others were not, which changed how institutions responded and the level of involvement from their national government. As presidents shared their experiences, it became clear that this second theme of contextual awareness was critical for presidents to consider when successfully navigating a crisis. Other presidents indicated that their institutions were preeminent national research universities. Thus, not only did their local communities look to them for guidance, but the national leaders sought their recommendations on how the nation should address the pandemic. This included working and talking to university faculty from STEM and health to economic and political sciences to help shape national decisions. As such, some university presidents needed to be the face of their institutions to help shape a collective voice as to how their university would be part in addressing how their nation would address COVID-19.

Institutional Focus

The third primary theme across the three studies was the importance of institutional focus. Presidents in study one illustrated this through their discussion of communication to their institutional stakeholders. Their focus on providing information was connected to the needs of those at their institution and was less outward-facing than much of the general university communication (McNaughtan et al., 2019). In study two, this theme was evident in the focus on the control culture. Presidents sought to develop policies and promote approaches to dealing with the crisis that would both keep students and staff safe, while also seeking to strengthen the institution. Institutional survival is always on the mind of all leaders, however, this crisis created conditions that reminded leaders that while

institutional continuity is important, the safety of students, staff, faculty, and administration was paramount. So finding ways to maintain a level of normalcy for all members of the university community when the world was dealing with chaos due to a global pandemic was a primary goal for campus leaders. As such, presidents attempted to regularly communicate through various formats (i.e., social media, institutional webpages, email, etc.) to all community members the steps they were taking to abate the spread of the virus and allow the university to fulfill their mission of educating and serving their communities. This meant addressing how they would allow for students to continue to make progress toward their educational goals; staff and faculty to continue to work; and how their institution would serve local and national needs. Indeed, university leaders recalibrated their focus to ensure their institution met the needs of their students and various communities.

CONCLUSION

While leading hierarchical institutions as complex as universities is extremely challenging, these complexities are amplified during times of uncertainty. This chapter has attempted to explore how presidents from around the world led their institutions in times of crisis to illuminate how postsecondary leaders can better navigate shocks to the higher education system. We have provided various theories and findings that can shape how decisions can inform policy and practices and support institutional missions and objectives. More importantly, our chapter has contributed to better understanding how geopolitics, economic, and social contexts from a multinational perspective shape leadership decisions. Our findings also show how leading through a crisis requires a reprioritization of an institution's strategy so that it is focused on serving the needs of their constituents in light of the specific context brought by said crisis. Finally, we see HEIs as resilient organizations, and crises do present opportunities for reinvention. If HEIs can reinvent themselves from a more equitable place, then, as one of our participants succinctly stated, at the end of this global pandemic, "We will survive and thrive." We agree.

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