Pedagogical Leadership during Crisis: The Shift to Distance Learning in an Israeli Religious College During COVID-19

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Abstract

Serving as an administrator-leader can be challenging under any circumstance. However, grappling with an unforeseen crisis (the COVID-19 pandemic) tested my endurance and commitment on new levels. I soon realized that there was a need for a new kind of pedagogical leadership as the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. The need for college administrators and instructors to remain "agile" to adapt to the challenges of moving instruction online was apparent. Practitioner inquiry was used in conducting this study to allow reflection in-and-on action. The study, based in Israel in a religious Jewish college, aimed to ascertain the degree to which college faculty were able to transition to online instruction and how well administrators managed the crisis in terms of supporting instruction. Findings indicate the enormous challenges instructors experienced as well as the attempts by the administration to address the crisis. A major contribution of this study is to help school administrators grapple with intractable, often unforeseen crises.

Introduction

The state of emergency generated by the COVID-19 pandemic led to the sudden closure of all educational institutions in Israel. While it was later decided to gradually reopen schools and preschools, higher education institutions were required to maintain distance learning throughout the spring and fall semesters of 2020 and through 2021 until the summer break. As of this writing, an extension of such a lockdown is imminent. The sudden transition to distance learning without pausing to plan and adapt posed challenges for college instructors, who had to continue teaching their courses in an era of uncertainty while simultaneously maintaining quality instruction. These instructors were, for the most part, insufficiently prepared for distance teaching (Gudmundsdottir & Hathaway, 2020).

I am a college administrator at Michlala Jerusalem College in Israel and my primary role is to oversee all master's degree programs facilitating recruitment efforts, program development, and providing instructional leadership. This qualitative study focused on the master's degree program in educational leadership. Given my position, I was charged with the responsibility to lead the transition to distance learning as the COVID-19 pandemic became a reality. Given my penchant for research and as an active participant in the attempt to manage this crisis, I decided to employ a qualitative research methodology, practitioner research (Menter et al., 2016). Given my personal interest for reflection, this method allowed me to think in and on my actions as

a college administrator grappling with a troubling situation brought about by the governmental restrictions imposed due to the COVID pandemic.

On Practitioner Research in this Context

Admittedly, this pandemic took me by surprise. The potential gravity of the situation, given the likelihood that all our courses would have to be transformed to distance learning, was a serious concern because I knew most faculty were limited in knowledge and experience with non-frontal teaching approaches. So, prior to doing anything, I began to reflect upon the crisis. As I reflected on the various options that could be taken, I realized I had to approach this crisis in a structured manner, given my prior experience in reflective inquiry.

As a practitioner, primarily, I was always intrigued by Schon's (1987) "in-and-on action" approach to confronting the realities of problems that emerge in schools. Practitioner inquiry, it seemed to me, was best suited to deal with the crisis I was facing. Drawing upon the work of Menter and his colleagues (2016), Gilchrist (2018), and Robinson and Kuin Lai (2005), I embarked on a process-oriented approach in which I would reflect daily rather than at the end. In this way, I could more fully understand each event, circumstance, or problem that was to emerge amid the crisis. I also became acquainted with the practical approach by Mannion (2017) who outlined several common-sense steps in applying practitioner research. So, I used these steps, some of which I will describe here, and others will follow because I organized this article around these steps.

1. *Reflect*: I articulated the problems we faced. How were faculty going to be able to transition to distance learning? What would the college have to do to support such a transition? What role would I play in this transition? How would we deal with any resistance that might emerge? What about the students and their ability to adjust to online learning? Overall, how could the integrity of maintaining high-quality instruction be accomplished? What would be needed to ensure effective pedagogical leadership amidst the shift to online, distance learning?
2. *Focus by Formulating Research Questions*: I knew I could not address all these and other questions all at once. So, I decided to focus on the two most immediate and pressing questions:
   a. To what degree were college faculty able to transition to an online teaching format as the COVID-19 crisis deepened?
   b. From the perspective of instructors at the college, how well did the college administration manage (guidelines, consultation, direction, and presentation of various options) during the crisis?

   Thus, my goal was to assess the effectiveness, both the faculty's ability to transition to distance learning and the degree to which the college administration was successful in its efforts to manage the crisis.

3. *Read About Topic:* which the literature that follows addresses.
4. *Choose Research Methods:* that I would employ to collect and analyze the data, as explicated in the Methods section later.
5. *Evaluate my Inquiry:* I asked these questions as the pandemic and my study progressed: "How is it going?"; "What is going well or not so well, and why?"; "Can I identify the most formidable obstacles?"; "Is there some sort of intervention I might employ?"; "What should I have done differently?"; "What can I still do to assist?"; and "How do these efforts inform my practice now and into the future?" At various points in this article, in the Findings section, I will include selected excerpts from my journal (called *Reflections*) as my study proceeded.
6. *Sharing my Findings:* (via person-to-person contacts, email, and at least two PD sessions I gave using Zoom) with colleagues at the College, both fellow administrators and faculty. This article is an attempt to summarize my findings and reflections.

Literature Review

Events that cause worldwide, border-crossing uncertainty like the present COVID-19 crisis, which have occurred with greater and greater frequency in a world that depends upon advanced technology and mobility, also present challenges to teaching and learning (Donitsa-Schmidt, & Ramot, 2020). The emergence of new forms of pedagogy has become a priority (Kidman & Chang, 2020). A useful approach to understanding and dealing with the new teaching and learning reality is known as VUCA, standing for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (Mink et al., 1993). The VUCA corollary for leaders is called VUCA prime (Johnson, 2009), an expression meant to represent a systematic approach to addressing the leadership problems in any chaotic situation. In such a situation one needs to operate according to the parallel principles: Vision, Understanding, Clarity, and Agility.

An explication of the entire VUCA principle goes beyond the purposes in this context, however, a focus on two concepts, volatility, and agility as a response to uncertainty brought about by the COVID-19 crisis in schools, and in our case colleges, will elucidate the ever-changing nature of pedagogy. When pedagogy is exposed to volatility, those who are responsible (college and other school leaders) need agility – to be accessible and flexible. With respect to accessibility, we can say that leaders need to set aside time and resources for empathy, reflection, planning, mentoring, and implementation of pedagogic strategies, especially in times of crisis. It is the instructors, however, who are on the frontlines who bear the responsibility of teaching, which requires them to plan lessons and develop pedagogical tools to effectively meet the emerging crisis. In this sense, it is both the college administrator and instructor who need 'agility' within a volatile educational environment.

The COVID-19 crisis placed inordinate strain on the teaching and learning process. Instructors, many of whom had never taught a course online, synchronously or otherwise, were thrust into an unprecedented period of uncertainty and expected to plan and implement online pedagogy. Many soon realized that teaching online was very much different than face-to-face classroom instruction. Initially, many faculty members met resistance and had much difficulty as they tried to replicate the same kind of pedagogy online as they did when teaching face-to-face. A plethora of challenges readily became apparent. The challenge was how best to offer effective instruction (i.e., teaching) at a distance.

Distance learning is characterized by the activities of teaching and learning taking place at separate locations, with the teacher-student interaction mediated through a printed or electronic medium of some sort that helps bridge the gaps in time and distance. Although at its outset, distance teaching and learning were asynchronous, the development of the internet has produced the option of synchronous distance learning (Bozkurt, 2019; Simonson et al., 2019).

Optimal implementation of distance learning requires a continuous and supportive professional development program for instructors not only for orientation in and mastery of digital tools and the technological skills needed to operate them but also for familiarity with the forms of pedagogy suited to these tools and their practical use. The aim is to ensure that the level and effectiveness of the teaching-learning process is maintained to provide value-added benefits that do not exist in traditional teaching (Shonfeld & Magen-Nagar, 2019; Shenhav & Geffon, 2021). In terms of the SAMR model (Puentedura, 2006, cited in Hamilton et al., 2016), which describes four levels of technology use for teaching purposes, it is not enough to use a new technology as a direct substitute for traditional teaching without a functional change in pedagogy (**S**ubstitution). Nor is it enough to introduce specific improvements in pedagogy (**A**ugmentation). Rather, it is necessary to strive toward two advanced levels of implementation that involve pedagogical change: redesign of the pedagogy (**M**odification), and the harnessing of technology to create new teaching methods (**R**edefinition).

The state of emergency generated by the COVID-19 pandemic led to the sudden closure of all educational institutions in Israel. While it was later decided to gradually reopen schools and preschools, higher education institutions were required to maintain distance learning throughout the spring semester of 2020 and subsequently as well. This sudden transition to distance learning without pausing to plan and adapt posed challenges for instructors, who had to continue teaching their courses in a reality of uncertainty while simultaneously maintaining quality instruction and effective assessment of learning. They were, for the most part, insufficiently prepared for distance teaching (Gudmundsdottir & Hathaway, 2020).

Methods

This qualitative study focused on the religiously observant Jewish Israeli sector at Michlalah Jerusalem College, a religious academic college of education, and one of the oldest of its kind in Israel. Students attend Michlalah because it is respectful of their religious requirements such as separate men and women classes, adherence to particular dress codes, and other cultural factors (Gonen, 2005). The college has four departments for academic degree studies: a full bachelor's degree track for women, a shortened track for men who graduated from yeshivot (a non-traditional religious school), a continuing education program for women who graduated from orthodox Jewish seminaries (secondary and post-secondary schools for girls) possessing a "senior certified teacher" certificate, and a graduate school comprised mostly of students seeking a master's degree in educational leadership.

During the 2019-2020 academic year, these four programs had a total of 1,769 students, men and women. Nearly all the students enrolled in the Department of Continuing Education are graduates of religious seminaries. In the other departments, 95% of the student body is religiously observant. Most, if not all, of the college's courses are taught face-to-face. Many students had little experience with online technologies in their personal lives, yet the college did expose them, prior to the COVID pandemic, to some digital technologies in selected courses. In addition, students in all the departments are offered more than 120 mandatory and elective courses in a range of fields for independent distance learning using digital platforms, printed workbooks, or a combination of the two.

I interviewed forty-five bachelor's and master's degree instructors at Michlalah Jerusalem College during the second semester of the 2019-2020 school year utilizing a semi-structured format. I selected instructors based on the principle of maximum variation sampling (Creswell, 2014), such that the sample included instructors with different levels of digital skills, who represented the various college departments, religious sub-sectors, and the wide range of ages and years of experience. The participants included 30 men and 15 women. Their ages ranged from 35 to 74 (average age 56, standard deviation 10), and their years of teaching experience ranged from 7 to 49 years (average 27, standard deviation 11). Of the participants, 100% were themselves religiously observant. The interviews lasted 40 minutes on average. In line with ethical standards, I explained the purpose of the study to the participants, and I changed their names to maintain their privacy.

I analyzed the data using a four-stage process: condensing, coding, categorizing, and theorizing. First, I sorted and condensed the data (Miles et al., 2014), seeking out the relevant comments made by the participants about their experiences with the move towards distance learning as well as teaching online.

During the second stage, I coded each segment of data (utterance) according to the aspect it represented (Tracy, 2013). After having captured the essence of utterances in the second stage, the third stage of categorizing consisted of similar utterances that I had assembled into clusters to generalize their meanings and derive categories. Finally, the theorizing stage aimed to reach a conceptual construct of the categories derived in the previous stage, and to see how they were interconnected and influenced each other as parts of one abstract construct (Richards & Morse, 2013).

Findings

My first of two research questions was "To what degree were college faculty able to transition to an online teaching format as the COVID-19 crisis deepened?"

In thinking about this question, especially regarding my concern that we handle this crisis effectively, I reflected as follows:

Reflection: I am concerned, if not terrified, how the pandemic will affect instruction. Although we, the administration, have discussed broadening our preparation of faculty in distance technologies, we hadn't yet made sophisticated progress.

Transitioning to online teaching as a challenge for college instructors

Several themes or stages emerged from the data:

Shock

Like other academic institutions, the college faculty was not prepared in advance for an emergency transition to distance learning. Data from the interviews indicate that faculty went through several stages somewhat similar to someone going through grief, although, of course, not as dramatic.
The first stage was *shock*.

> Not only was I shocked by the magnitude of the COVID-19 crisis in terms of its impact on my family, community, and myself, but it threw me off completely at work while trying to teach.

> Corona caught everyone by surprise, . . . stunned.

> I was frightened . . . I did not know how I could teach . . . I felt like I had to jump into the river without a life-vest. There was no time to think . . . I was not scared of it. I was terrified.

> I can't believe I have to teach online . . . . I never taught a course online before, uh, I mean I took a course online a few times….but never taught one.

Sensing and hearing faculty concerns about managing instruction in midst of the crisis, I asked myself:

> *Reflection: What measures can we as administrators take to support faculty during this unprecedented crisis? Specifically, what can I do in my role as pedagogical leader? I turned to colleagues for ideas, and I read more of the recent literature on pedagogical leadership.*

From Loneliness to Support

Sensing that faculty were ill-prepared, the college provided a range of real-time professional development and support services for teaching through the "Moodle" and "Zoom" systems. In addition, the college made it possible to offer course instruction with the aid of a telephone and email for students without regular internet access. In the Department of Continuing Education, instructors were asked to use only these tools. When it became clear that the college would remain closed for an unknown period, the heads of the college sent a letter to the staff asking instructors to prepare for the continuation of distance learning, with the overriding goal of "maintaining the college's quality of education, while at the same time striving to provide maximum support to students to enable them to finish the semester successfully without compromising the timetable for receiving their degree" (Michlalah Jerusalem College, 3 April 2020).

In reaction to this memorandum, several faculty reported that they felt inadequate to meet the new challenge. Others were a bit more optimistic, but felt they lacked the tools and experiences necessary to teach effectively at a distance. As the crisis worsened, faculty were exceedingly challenged. Data from the interviews indicated that a second stage emerged in terms of their attempts to manage this unforeseen, yet worsening crisis. Despite efforts by the administration to offer assistance, faculty indicated that a sense of *loneliness* prevailed

> I feel I have to go it alone. . . . I mean they are trying to assist by sending us links and videos, etc., but I feel all alone. I mean I'm there all alone.

> I never taught online. I feel inadequate. I feel alone.

> I tried to talk with _____ (a colleague) but he's as perplexed as I am. We can't even help each other.

> The Whatsapp messages from the Technology Department addressed some of the issues we were facing, but I was overwhelmed by being bombarded by many messages.

The college administration did not relent in their efforts to assist.

> I realize they [the administration] is trying to provide us with resources and services of all sorts, and that is great. But, I mean, this all came upon us suddenly. But we are professionals and we will try our best.

Acceptance

Faculty realized that COVID-19 wasn't going away any time soon. Data from the interviews indicated that faculty accepted the situation and were determined to push forward; hence, the third stage of *acceptance*.

> This situation is apparently here to stay. I accept that, . . . I have watched various videos and some of the materials I received from _____ [a college administrator] was helpful, . . . I'll try some of the ideas.

> The Technology Department was now targeting their messages in a kind of differentiated way, . . . I mean, aimed at the varied needs of faculty with different levels of experience with distance learning.

> I got together with ____ [another faculty member] and we planned some of the strategies and techniques offered in the professional development sessions. We'll try them out.

Mistakes along the Way Lead to Envisioning New Ways of Teaching

One of the major mistakes many faculty made was to try to teach in almost the same manner as they did while teaching face-to-face. They soon realized such a strategy did not work. They envisioned new ways of teaching; hence, the fourth stage, *envisioning*. Envisioning involved planning new ways of presenting information and creating opportunities for enhanced student participation.

> Students complained that the lectures I presented lacked opportunities for them to participate in some manner. . . . I mean like Discussion Forums, . . . like that. . . . I realized I need to build a new way to teach online.

> After participating in a few professional development sessions offered by the Technology Department, I had a new vision about improving my teaching.

> After reorganizing my course, I realized that I could connect with my students more closely online than I was ever able to do in class, uh, I

mean face-to-face. . . . In class lectures maybe 4 or 5 students asked questions, while the rest just listened. Online, I require all students now to post questions and comments about the material I present. . . . I even require them to interact with each other, . . . like reacting to fellow students' comments.

Planning

Analyzing responses from these instructors led to the emergence of fifth stage – *planning*. Instructors, as the pandemic progressed and as they were resigned to the face that face-to-face teaching was no longer imminent, instructors planned for long-range instructional opportunities. Their levels of sophistication in the use of Moodle and Zoom allowed them to establish concrete goals and objectives for online learning. It even precipitated instructors, in some cases, to join in co-planning with other instructors.

Rather than teach online off-the-cuff, I found myself more comfortable with the technologies and was able to plan two, three, even four lessons at a time, . . .it allowed for better continuity in my instructions.

Students appreciated the planning I did. It was evident that this online course had a rhyme and reason to it.

_____ [another instructor in the master's program] and I talked a lot about our courses and ways we could help each other by planning, . . . by helping each other, . . . like we would review each other's lessons. . . . It was very helpful. We never really did this kind of planning and assisting each other before.

Taking Action

The sixth and final stage that emerged from the data was the theme called *action*. At this stage, near the end of the semester, the confidence of the faculty grew enormously and they were ready to continue to teach at a distance with more confidence. Parenthetically, it should be pointed out that faculty, only a handful, who had taught online before the pandemic had, understandably, little problems teaching during the pandemic. The only issue that arose was that since all instructors were teaching online, students felt that the workload was cumbersome. To offset this issue, some instructors met to coordinate assignments to alleviate the extra burden of assignments for students.

I have taught online courses for several years, so I had no real issue continuing to do so during the pandemic. However, I noticed early on that students became burdened by the enormity of assignments they had to complete now that all courses were being taught online. . . . I made adjustments to benefit the students.

By now I am much more comfortable teaching online. Admittedly, though, I learned through trial and error, . . . mostly error. . . . It was a learning experience for all. Working with a close colleague of mine helped.

I am ready to continue teaching online, if I must, in the future.

I'd prefer, quite honestly, to resume teaching face-to-face, but I am somewhat confident to continue teaching at a distance.

Faculty, supported by the college administration, in order to try to accommodate students' learning needs developed student-oriented pedagogy meant to ensure that students had resources and guidance suited to their circumstances and abilities. Emphasis was placed on meeting the academic and even emotional needs of students. In one documented instance, an instructor repeated the entire lesson for a single student who had been uninformed of the scheduled lesson in the virtual classroom. Other student supports included, for example, extending time deadlines for assignments.

In sum, the COVID-19 crisis prompted a transition to distance learning at higher education institutions early in the 2020 spring semester. The sudden shift posed many challenges for instructors. For the most part, they were insufficiently prepared for distance learning, and alongside the "technological shock" they also experienced a "pedagogical shock" (Yakov, 2020). In this reality, though, instructors were required to ensure effective teaching, meet set objectives, and provide efficient means to assess student learning.

Administrative Challenges in Managing a Crisis

My second of two research questions was "How well did the college administration manage the crisis? In thinking about this question, I reflected in my journal as follows:

> *Reflection: We've (I mean I) never really confronted a crisis of this nature or magnitude before. I wonder if we, as administrators, will be able to effectively meet this incredible challenge. Do we have sufficient resources to employ to support pedagogy? Fortunately, we have motivated and competent personnel in our IT Department. Still, they too seem overwhelmed. . . . I expect we'll make mistakes along the way.*

In the section above I discussed several challenges instructors encountered in the transition to online teaching because of the sudden pandemic. In this section I discuss several administrative challenges that emerged from the data. Analysis of the interviews indicates that there were unique characteristics related to the administrative guidelines issued by college management that either detracted or assisted in the transition to online teaching and learning.

Then, I briefly address the degree to which the management was able to deal with the crisis overall and in what manner. Therefore, I am dividing these findings under two themes: The Guidelines and the Management Approach.

The Guidelines

Media publicity and internal college announcements made it known that regular on-campus studies were suspended, and that the continuation of studies would require a transition to distance learning. Initially, deliberations focused on asynchronous teaching that would involve sending out academic assignments, which would then be returned, but after a week or two, the discussion began to focus on a shift to teaching by Zoom synchronously. At the same time, however, some of the statements attest that the transition overall was chaotic:

> We kept getting conflicting messages from the administration. First, we were expected to teach asynchronously, . . . later, synchronously.

> For two or three weeks we ourselves did not know right from left . . .

> This all came upon us suddenly and I didn't know what was expected of me . . . didn't know what to do.

> In my view, there must be technological oversight by the administration. Often students couldn't hear me and I couldn't hear them. The technology is not doing its job….frustrating.

During the interviews, although instructors expressed confidence in the college's leadership in the past, the initial lack of guidelines and poorly functioning technologies heightened stress among faculty.

As the semester progressed, both administrators and instructors overcame, to some extent, technological and pedagogical shock as more clear guidelines and assistance were provided to instructors.

> As we got over the initial hurdles, there was preparedness, direction, guidance, and leadership as well as close monitoring and immediate resolution of challenges.

> There was leadership in terms of preparations [as well as] regular updates, [which gave me] a better understanding of how to prepare and what to do and helpful information about how to meet the needs of my students, who also were confused and overwhelmed.

As time went on, I received clear guidelines, tailor-made to my needs, and so did the students.

Despite the comments above, other instructors described the college management as providing only a preliminary and general solution, leaving it to the instructor to continue the practical implementation of providing lessons and solutions for communication and interaction with the students:

> The preparations gave me a sense of order and I understood the importance and immediately prepared to implement all the lessons and exercises; I was assisted by my wife, who is well-versed in technology, otherwise, I would have had to rely upon the support services of the college, which, it seemed to me, were inadequate.

It emerges that according to most of the study participants, the administration provided only partial guidelines in dealing with the shift to distance learning. This partial nature sometimes took the form of messages from the college about "what" to do without specifying the "how":

> There was general preparedness; there was a decision about what to do but not how to do it; the technical knowledge was insufficient; in this respect, I exhausted the technological possibilities that I was aware of, sharing by Zoom, questionnaires, what I knew and was familiar with.

> I could have used more explicit and specific assistance regarding pedagogical possibilities or strategies to teach online.

The partial nature of the guidelines sometimes took the form of broad, general definitions, without support for the technical details. Nevertheless, it appears that most of the instructors did not view this as a deficiency or as a need that they expected the college administration to address:

> COVID-19 caught everyone by surprise; it's okay to lower expectations considering the surprising situation. I felt that this was the point of the guidelines, that is, to demonstrate "agility" while maintaining the academic rigor.

Faculty realized the challenging nature of the crisis at hand and also realized that the administration too was surprised at the suddenness of the situation. The partial yet inadequate guidelines were not surprising.

> I realized we were all in a quandary. I appreciated the attempts to help us. Gradually, there was attention to the pedagogical challenges we face as instructors. I needed support, (I asked) and I received it.

Management Encouraged Autonomy

Another major issue that emerged from the interviews centered on the managerial autonomy that the instructors received or took, willingly or unwillingly, from the college administration. The instructors were asked to

describe the degree of autonomy and assistance they received from the college administration in terms of initiative, decision-making about their course, the conduct of the interaction, its frequency, matters of time, and tasks.

> [The college] demonstrated flexibility and did not force the instructor to make the transition one way, and this gave me more motivation to succeed.

> The college actually made it possible to communicate and manage in any way whatsoever. The college also offered assistance throughout the semester through videos and even close guidance, but I preferred to learn by doing. . . .
> We had a free hand to implement the change, . . . they trusted us. I prepared very quickly for the change including [through] the training I received.

> I felt that if I needed assistance, in any way, I could call on the administration, . . . especially the Technology Department.

> I did not feel coercion in relation to my independence [regarding] how to teach, although there was a defined framework.

> They gave us various pedagogical options, but didn't mandate one strategy over another. . . . The principle administrators applied of "one size does not fit all" was appreciated.

Indeed, most of the study participants, instructors at the college, stated that they needed these general, preliminary, and primarily informative guidelines from the administration, but at the same time, they needed "autonomous authorization" in managing their affairs following the transition to distance teaching. Participants attested to the fact that the administration adapted well, at least half-way into the pandemic, and allowed faculty much leeway but at the same time offered situational assistance as needed. The management, it was felt by an overwhelming number of instructors, fostered various positive supports along the way, adapted well to the unexpected challenges, and, most often cited, allowed autonomy to the instructional staff.

Discussion & Implications

On the first research question dealing with the transition to online teaching

Transitioning to online teaching as a result of the COVID-19 crisis was challenging. The COVID-19 pandemic led to worldwide closures of schools, colleges, and universities, quickly evolving into a testing ground for online and distance learning. School leaders and faculty were forced to rethink the aims

and methods of schooling to adapt to the crisis. While an exhaustive examination of the results and implications of crisis pedagogy requires a long-term perspective, it is already possible to derive some conclusions from this experience.

Preliminary data indicate that the transition to online learning cannot be simplified as a "success" or a "failure" (Henriksen et al., 2020). Rather, this transition provides insight into the ability of educational leaders and faculty to adjust their educational aims to fit the situation and its impact on teaching. Reflective of the literature review earlier, when educators successfully adapt their paradigms to the necessities of crisis pedagogy, the challenges of distance learning become an opportunity to further the learning process.

In terms of the data I presented, faculty members did not come to such a realization immediately; it took time. Such a finding is not inconsistent with the extant literature that has emerged since the COVID-19 pandemic surfaced. The faculty were unprepared and overwhelmed. One of the important implications of this crisis is the need to proactively prepare for further crises that might catapult a faculty to distance learning. Perhaps further efforts at professional development are needed as well as requiring future hires to already possess experience with and competence in distance technologies.

Moreover, with the onset of the 21st century and the increase in digitalization and automation, standardized knowledge and skills have gradually become irrelevant, as knowledge is digitally available and human skills are replaced by artificial intelligence. Twentieth-century skills have been replaced by the ability to correctly identify problems and the means of resolving them, to access, identify, and critically analyze the relevant information, to efficiently utilize digital resources, and to work individually and collaboratively until a successful resolution of the problem is achieved.

Schleicher (2012) defined four skills as the core of 21st-century learning: Critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. Others identify six dimensions, collectively referred to as "deeper learning skills" (Martinez & McGrath, 2014), which include the ability to learn how to learn (Hewlett Foundation, 2013; Huberman et al., 2014). Many other definitions have been suggested (e.g., OECD, 2005; Trilling & Fadel, 2009), but the common theme of the different definitions is the importance of encouraging autonomous learning and self-motivation. This literature finds relevance for instructors and administrators who were the focus of this study.

On the second research question dealing with the manner in which the administration managed the crisis

The findings of this study indicate that faculty expected the administration to be supportive, trustworthy, and knowledgeable. They appreciated the balance between "requiring" and "letting go," and offering instructors choice and autonomy, albeit with support.

Quite naturally, the study found that the instructors' attitude toward the college's guidelines ranged along a scale from statements about chaos and the lack of guidelines to descriptions of guidance and full support (and even to the guidelines being unnecessary). A majority of the instructors presented various definitions of the "partial nature" of the guidelines, and most of them commended the fact that the guidelines were partial, or at least viewed this situation as giving them greater autonomy.

As reflected in the SAMR model presented in the literature review, the professional-technological knowledge of the interviewed instructors also ranged from non-technological to expert, and a relationship was found between critical remarks about the administration's guidance, made by instructors who were not proficient in technology, and statements that commended the independence granted to instructors, which came from the more proficient ones. Yet everyone grappled with the issue of assisting the Jewish student population who had difficulties, at least initially, in navigating distance learning. The study demonstrates that "enabling management" is the appropriate approach in a situation of uncertainty and crisis, and even more so when the range of knowledge and skills for operating and accessing technological-online teaching tools such as Zoom is so vast.

An important and instructive finding that emerges from the interviews relates to the managerial autonomy between a manager and his or her staff, and in the present case between the college administration and the instructors. Most of the study's findings indicate that even instructors who were critical of the insufficiency or lack of efficiency in the administration's guidelines, as well as instructors who spoke positively about the college's management of the shift to online teaching, commended the managerial autonomy given to instructors.

Although overwhelmed at the beginning, the college administration realized they had to differentiate their support. Those instructors with little technological experience needed more guidance that eventually led to a degree of autonomy. For those who were more technological savvy, management increased opportunities for autonomy and only interceded when requested to by a faculty member. Pedagogical leadership too was differentiated along the same lines. The college manager played several roles as an initiator, facilitator, leader, and presenter of pedagogical options for instructors.

The interviews indicated that instructors were more favorably predisposed to managers who trusted faculty who wanted autonomy and gave it

to them. Instructors lauded the support of technological services at the college that introduced varied options to enhance pedagogy online. The great challenge of the administration was to properly balance directives and guidelines to ensure high instructional accountability while, at the same time, allowing for autonomous planning and teaching. This balance between letting go and asserting requirements is evident when a manager conveys openness to proposals by instructors because it is the instructors who are the experts in their field in terms of familiarity with the student body and the type of teaching best suited to a given situation. Thus, this study demonstrates the need to balance issuing top-down guidelines and allowing the staff to manage their affairs and take initiative. This balance wasn't accomplished at once. The administration, through trial and error, remained flexible and responsive to instructors' needs. In a period of uncertainty, managers need to judiciously grant autonomy to the staff and to position themselves as enablers and supporters.

A study conducted in Australia among school principals following the outbreak of COVID-19 (published by the Ministry of Education Knowledge Team in Israel in May 2021) found that principals whose leadership encourages autonomy among teachers succeed in reducing stress, emotional burden, and exhaustion among teachers (Collie, 2021). This study can be seen as validating managerial decision-making that grants administrative and pedagogical autonomy to staff in times of uncertainty in ways that are appropriate to meet the needs of the time. Although the study focused on a college with an Israeli Jewish religious community, the implications of responding to the COVID crisis are applicable to almost any college or group of students.

Conclusion with a Final Reflection

This study of college instructors' perceptions of the administration's management of the shift to distance learning at a religious college indeed attests to the need for adaptive leadership that is characterized by the granting of managerial autonomy to the faculty, in such a way that they become the initiators and implementers while the managers serve as change enablers. Although the context of this study is unique in terms of its geographic location and student body, the challenges that instructors and administrators faced here might be instructive in different contexts during almost any kind of crisis. The struggle to move to distance teaching and learning is relevant to any context, college or even in K-12 settings.

It was challenging to undertake a formal study as described above, especially in midst of a crisis of this magnitude. Some of my colleagues at other institutions were, quite understandably, overwhelmed by the crisis itself, let alone have the wherewithal to undertake a study. Yet, as I had learned in my own graduate studies of the importance of reflection "in-and-on action" (Schon, 1987), I was prepared to undertake this venture.

Upon reflection (Step 5, *Evaluating the Inquiry*), I wasn't surprised by the formidable challenges instructors faced, but I was gratified as they proceeded through the six stages I described earlier, moving from pedagogical shock to proactive action. Similarly, my research review helped me focus on an administrative strategy that emphasized the importance of "agility" on part of the administrative team, as reflected in the VUCA model described earlier. Over time, I was able to provide support and encouragement to faculty in the varying ways described earlier. Providing faculty gradual autonomy, in selected cases, along with technological support went a long way to managing the crisis in mostly positive ways. Probably the most important lesson for administrators garnered from this study is that it is not only important to provide organizational stability during a crisis, (i.e., issuing clear and meaningful directives, opening channels of communication, and providing technological support mechanisms), but also to provide pedagogical leadership. Such leadership, in this study, was manifested by providing focused professional development to those faculty members with little knowledge or experience in online instruction.

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