Leadership amidst the COVID-19 Crisis: Exploring a Curriculum for Servant Leadership in HE and Beyond

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Abstract

The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has spread rapidly across the globe, leaving practically no-one unaffected. Evidence suggests that this virus does not discriminate against anyone: every race, gender, class, faith, ethnicity and nation has experienced disorder as a result. It is a demonstration of our common humanity, of our sameness. Through participant observations, the authors, located in South Africa and the United States, offer personal perspectives, observations and experiences of leadership practices at local, national and international levels. By means of this chapter, they explore how leadership as agency can be strengthened and consolidated in the Higher Education curriculum. The chapter draws on the scholarship and theoretical principles of leader-less and leader-full models, to advance an argument for 'servant-leadership' at the individual, community, organisation, national and global echelons of society. The proposed action-oriented leadership curriculum is based on a model of servant leadership that encourages us all to work together to devise ways to make each individual and citizen more capable of managing and responding to change and disruption in critical, empathic and socially responsive ways.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Higher Education Curriculum, Theory of Change, Leader-less, Leader-full, Servant Leadership

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1 Introduction

The Coronavirus (also known as COVID-19) is currently a household name everywhere. It has earned this status at the micro-level of the family unit, but also at the macro-level of governments and multinationals (Cho 2020). Not for prestigious reasons though, but as an uninvited guest. It has taken a seat at the proverbial table and occupies our consciousness from when we wake up until we bed down. Household routines and chores are punctuated with the latest news bulletins, social media feeds and WhatsApp discussions on the trajectory of the virus, not just locally but across the globe. It has become the 'new normal' by dominating our discourse and demanding our attention in every way possible and we are constantly aware of the presence of the imminent threat of our uninvited guest, even if our families are safe and not (yet) infected. Some argue that life will never be the same again. Social, political, economic, environmental, technological, legal and other spheres of life as we knew them, will not be able to revert to a business-as-usual mode, post-COVID-19 (Muller 2020). Perhaps we should ask, should it?

COVID-19 has spread throughout the world indiscriminately, showing no respect for geopolitical borders or all the markers of difference that usually separate us into 'Us' and 'Them'. Despite this, we have rallied together across the globe to protect ourselves from a new colonizer that has occupied our mental, physical and social bodies. In an ironic twist of fate, while the virus has kept us apart through social distancing protocols, it has also united us in a common fight against it. If the COVID-19 crisis has taught us anything, it is that we, independently and collectively, can affect a system. We are alone, together (Turkle 2011).

As participant-observer-authors located in South Africa (SA) and the United States of America (US), alone and together, we are inspired by the strong demonstration of individual and collective agency by both civilians and governments across a diverse spectrum of organisations, institutions and social contexts during the crisis. We believe that Higher Education (HE) can learn much from this agency by leveraging what people have done during the crisis to build a critical and active citizenry through education for the future. In this chapter and acknowledging the great efforts by our leaders thus far, we explore alternative forms of leadership, such as servant leadership, relevant to these times. We conceptualise leadership as a form of agency, negotiated as shared understandings among a group of interacting individuals. Leadership from this perspective is seen as a process in which one harnesses the agentic capabilities

of others, to serve goals that lie beyond any one individual (Spender 2008) in service of the community they belong to.

We explore how leadership as agency can be strengthened and consolidated in the HE curriculum in the future to incorporate the gains made in the social sphere right now. We draw on the scholarship and theoretical principles of leader-less and leader-full models, to advance an argument for servant-leadership at the individual, community, organization, national and global strata of society. We propose that this can be amplified through a taught curriculum on leadership, from primary to tertiary levels. Such a curriculum model would need to engender a deeper dialogue with broader constituencies outside the academy, to embed a more inclusive and socially just trans-disciplinary curriculum with an explicit focus on individual and collective agency (Klemenčič 2015), understood as an alternative genre of leadership.
As scholar-practitioners, we use our lived experiences in organizational and institutional work in both the US and SA to offer personal perspectives, observations and experiences of leadership practices at local, national and international levels. By offering insights into a new social technology that requires a deeply reflective inner journey, we explore the leadership capabilities that reside in us all. This chapter thus serves to inspire each individual to rise to the occasion, see their potential, and understand the need for us all to show up and stand up as leader-full leaders, especially when leading from the wings.

2 Higher Education amidst COVID-19

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has had massive and overarching ramifications in HE globally (Abbey *et al.* 2020). The unprecedented pandemic has cast a dark cloud of uncertainty and fear on the completion of the academic year, in an increasingly tenuous and unpredictable situation. HE has been challenged to re-invent itself and re-imagine different scenarios to keep the academic project afloat, at minimal cost to all.

In South Africa, the unanimous decision to migrate the academic project to online teaching and learning in an Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) mode, has drawn acute attention to the extant deep fissures and unlevelled schisms of inequality in education, already present in the face-to-face mode (F2F), especially in under-resourced contexts (Macupe 2020). The crisis has also revealed deep gaps across differentiated institutions nationally.

In a country like South Africa, riddled with deep social and financial inequalities, the ethical question of who will be left behind is an imperative. Social justice concerns such as these make the gap between the privileged communities and their counterparts stark and exacerbates an already fragile link between those who have and those who do not have. Economic, social, cultural, personal and collective injustices are still at play in HE, even though in a different mode (MacGregor *et al.* 2020).

In the US, Harvard University announced that the university would be transitioning to virtual instruction on 10 March 2020, until further notice (Sidamon-Eristo 2020). Many other colleges and universities quickly followed suit, and virtually overnight, a huge share of the nation's roughly 15 million college students found themselves taking their spring classes online from home, using platforms such as Zoom, and other video conferencing platforms (Sidamon-Eristo 2020). The traditional model of HE in the United States has been a four-year residential college programme that includes life on campus, with lectures, seminars, labs, dorms, social and cultural activities, and institutionalized sports. This comes at an increasingly unjustifiable cost, though. While moving instruction online offers a unique opportunity to reinvent the traditional residential campus model, student debt has more than quadrupled over the last 15 years (Cadden 2020).

Student debt also disproportionately burdens disadvantaged and vulnerable students, whose communities have historically experienced many barriers to higher education (*The Citizen* 2020). Thus, instead of being an equaliser to close the wealth-gap between the rich and the poor, higher education in the US seems to reproduce inequality. It increases the indebtedness of communities who already suffer from high levels of income insecurity and economic precarity. It reinforces the cycle of poverty and the paycheck-to-paycheck life many marginalised families are forced to live, even if they are better educated. The economic fallout of the pandemic threatens to make this situation that much worse.

Given the two geographical contexts discussed above, in relation to HE responses to COVID-19, it is evident that those students who are the most vulnerable now are going to be far worse off post COVID-19. Whether it is due to student debt, no access to data, connectivity issues or an inability to navigate asynchronous on-line learning independently, students globally will have an incommensurate ability to embrace the new platform and online mode of HE, as a result of the unequal playing fields already in place now, in the F2F

mode (Cadden 2020).

While we appreciate that this unprecedented situation has pushed the academy to take extreme and quick decisions to manage the crisis, we question whether this pandemic is allowing us to tap into the best expertise and knowledge that HE can offer society. If we look at how university curricula, programmes, disciplinary expertise and other specialist units and resources are being deployed now, we do have to ask a deeper question about whether we are applying our intellectual and social capital and resources in relevant, responsive and collaborative ways. Are humanitarian and collaborative concerns at the centre of our HE solutions to COVID-19?

A related question we pose here is the question of what forms of leadership are needed now so that no-one is indeed left behind. People live and interact in a social field or in community, and unlike the dominant tradition of centring leadership within the individual (Raelin 2011), leadership emerging from a social field can find expression as an outcome of social interaction and social construction among people who share intersubjective meanings to build collective consciousness of the community (Hosking 2000). Scharmer (2009) describes a social field as having a visible dimension, where we see what people are doing and how they are making decisions and an invisible dimension, where we see the source and interior condition from which we operate. Could these pathways to social fields be translated into a curriculum offering in HE to teach students how to be leaders and how to deal with change, complex as it is?

3 (How) can We All be Architects and Agents of Change?

Whenever an organization experiences a transformation, be it a simple change in policy or a complex organizational shift, it is not uncommon to hear the questions: Who is driving this change? Is there a change manager? Your response should be: It's you. We all need to be architects and agents of change in this crisis as we move forward. We are cognizant that contextual aspects prevent people from rising to the challenge but through education programmes we could all learn how to step up, raise our hand and become an active part of the change, by defining and driving the outcome of the change for the benefit of all. It is important for each of us to awaken the leader and change-maker within us because we all have the potential to lead and manage change by looking inward and outward (Boaz & Fox 2019).

In the COVID-19 crisis, people across the globe have shown that they are leaders in their own right, faced with the challenge of managing their lives and their families, the sick, elderly, infants, communities, work, home schooling, deaths and funerals, religious service, financial woes and mental health issues in this crisis (Tamrat & Tefferra 2020). While most people have been compliant in flattening the curve, very few are waiting for direction on what to think, how to think and how to act in their own lives, especially in lockdown. People across the spectrum, in all spheres of life are demonstrating their collective and individual agency by responding creatively and passionately in authentic ways. People have shown that they are not always static until mobilized by others, making agency an intersubjective collaborative process that can reproduce and change our social realities (Scott & Bhaskar 2015). At the heart of it, when faced with life or death, it seems that people possess tacit knowledge on how to lead from their experience and practice. They use some sort of implicit theory of change to marshal their efforts and garner a unique energy at both intellectual and emotional levels to make themselves heard and felt, and to do what it takes to be safe.

We are advocating a similar change in HE curricula to ensure that students and academics are in a position to learn how to be change agents and innovative leaders in times of any crisis. By exploring their agency through education, students and staff might be able to use their circles of influence to expand the effects outwards. While COVID-19 is an acute crisis affecting us all now, many people live with chronic crises daily as a result of inequality and social injustice. In South Africa, the student protest years of 2015-2017 were a period of intense crisis and change, but also a time of significant gains. We began to see disruption as a necessary intervention to reimagine the university's practices and traditions in the interest of social justice and redress. In their book entitled *Leading Schools in Disruptive Times – How to Survive Hyper-Change*, Carter and White posit that 'education leaders must recognise what is happening, constantly adapt to a changing environment, and use the disruptions to their advantage' (2018: 19).

Through its disruption of lives, the COVID-19 experience should yield similar benefits for HE, in recognizing the need for students and academics to be agents and architects of change, who can learn how to use their individual and collective agency to rally together for the benefit of the whole. This agential response to change is what we are theorising in this chapter as servant-leadership, which will be discussed under the Prospective Leadership Frame.

4 A Proposed Curriculum for Servant-leadership

Drawing on key concepts in leadership theory, we propose a new curriculum offering for all students, from primary to tertiary levels, to provide opportunities to develop their innate leadership skills. This will vary across cohorts depending on cultural and contextual factors but we believe it would be an important gain of the crisis if we could leverage this to make all our students future-ready, as graduates and concerned citizens.

This curriculum suggests a particular epistemological thread, linked with the key ontological arguments advanced thus far, i.e. our sense of individual being is explicitly linked to our social being. The coherence between these two onto-epistemic domains will ensure that the knowledge generated will aspire to be socially just and socially aware. Future leaders (our students) will engage in scholarly/experiential praxis to get a solid grounding in models of social leadership that prepare them to react and response to any critical crisis they face, but with a keen understanding that no one should be left behind. Motsohi (2018), in his book *Fit For Purpose*, lists the following key attributes for successful leaders during turbulent times: exceptional courage; putting the public interest first; integrity and self-discipline; high ethical standards; political/social/economic sensitivity or contextual intelligence; inclusiveness; flexible and adaptable leaders and ability to communicate. We think that these dispositions would be relevant for the envisaged cohort of future servant-leaders.

In our proposed curriculum, leadership knowledge and praxis are vital components (Buschlen & Guthrie 2014) to ground leadership practice in real contexts. The rationale is to offer generative and emerging options for HE in this crisis and beyond, based on what we have gleaned from across the globe thus far. We believe that a curriculum module on servant-leadership should be embedded in each course, at different levels of complexity and challenge, from inception to graduation and linked to the disciplinary content of the course. Throughout a student's education trajectory, they should engage with servant-leadership practices linked to their courses to enable them to think critically, socially and academically about how we can change the world for the betterment of all.

We present this proposed curriculum in three frames: retrospective, circumspective and prospective (Behari-Leak 2015). All three frames are critical for a holistic and well conceptualised leadership curriculum. We will

now expand and unpack each frame by reflecting on relevant theory in relation to our specific geographical and social locations in South Africa and the US. This does not mean that these ideas cannot be applied equally well to other contexts too.

4.1 Retrospective Leadership Frame

This frame involves critically analysing **past models of leadership** to assess whether past exemplars of the leader-follower model serve us best today and if these are relevant and appropriate for our context right now. Leadership scholarship has traditionally used specific models of management and organisational intelligence to define leadership knowledge as a reliance on learning from past experiences and past leaders (Maxwell 2011). This genre also traces the history of conventional and cultural leadership models in organisations, education and government (Quantz *et al.* 2016).

In this frame, students would need to critique the leader-follower model, in relation to its reliance on attributes of leaders in command of a situation or as individuals who are exceptional compared to their followers. Leadership in this frame is understood as an individual property or the physical or mental capacity of any one individual (Neculae & David 2017). Individual property, however, cannot be disentangled from its context. Leadership in this sense cannot be decontextualized from its source and its intention.

Also known as 'command-and-control leadership', this model has been touted across cultural groups as a decisive model to acquiesce people's anxiety in a crisis of uncertainty and prospective failure (Groysberg & Slind 2012). The need for a command-and-control leader is premised on a weak theorization of the follower as always having experiential and existential anxiety, which a leader then assuages as part of this dyad (Grint 2010). Followers are thought of as incapable of exercising authentic internal authority or authoring their own agency (Woods 2004).

This individualistic account of leadership which constitutes a dominant view to date, surfaces many blind spots in the COVID-19 moment. In South Africa, we have seen abuse of this model when the army and defence forces were summoned to enforce the COVID-19 protocols and regulations, with devastating effects on poorer communities. Research has shown that coercive state measures are generally less effective than steps that leverage the moral norms within society (Paterson 2020).

Command-and-control leadership is based on an influence relationship between leader and follower which can quickly translate into leaders' (mis) use of their position to promote self-interests, narcissism, patriarchy and dictatorships through protracted terms of office, for example. In South Africa, corruption has been a particular challenge and leadership has been embroiled in protracted legal action in this regard (Sibanda 2020).

4.2 Circumspective Leadership Frame

This frame involves looking around at our current circumstances in light of COVID-19, to critically assess the **present models of leadership** best suited to the context today. This challenges us to consider the most appropriate solutions needed as well as the process of arriving at these solutions. We need to question in whose interests, decisions are being made and whose interests are being served. We have an ethical obligation as social beings to ensure that all interests, especially those under- or not represented in decisions taken already, are widely canvassed. Inclusion of all voices, especially the poor, downtrodden, homeless, jobless and other vulnerable sectors is critical now as we come together as a global community. With COVID-19 ushering in a new global society and renewed ways of being human in a technology-high world, we need to redefine, now more than before, what it means to be relational human beings and decide what kind of future society we want to live in and co-create (Kolzow 2014).

Relational leadership derives its signature from the interconnectedness among social actors (Sklaveniti 2016). It occurs beyond hierarchical roles and positions and endorses a culture of learning and participation within and across a system. In such an ethos, change agents are supported at multiple levels (Raelin 2011) to come into their own. Relational leadership privileges the development of independence and interdependence and rely on reflexive discourse to be conducive to the many forms of public engagement needed (Raelin 2011), especially in the crisis we face now, to ensure that all perspectives are considered.

In the US, an example of relational agency and collective leadership in this time of crisis, is the initiative that medical students at Harvard Medical School undertook by developing, writing, and compiling a curriculum on COVID-19 (HMS COVID-19 Student Response Team 2020). The inspiration for these students' creativity came from the need to deepen their knowledge of

the situation but to also share with their peers, who did not have the time and resources to do so. Students recognized the lack of clarity in the current moment as well as the uncertainty regarding the future. As a service to the community, and the world at large, this team of students collated and synthesized the vast volumes of information and data about the pandemic into a curriculum of eight modules that are constantly updated as new information on the pandemic surfaces (Buckley 2020).

The public's response to COVID-19, although determined in large part by nation state protocols and regulations, have been organic and creative. In smaller communities where religion, spiritual practice and cultural exchange are important, people have come into their own by using creative ideas to hang on to practices that they hold dear. Online Easter masses, music concerts across the globe, house parties and zoom parties show a kind of leaderless action, initiated to address common needs. As social beings who thrive on human contact, touch, hugs and closeness, we have been challenged to be as inhuman as the virus is, complying with lock down imperatives to be confined in our homes. The simple humanitarian act of clapping or singing from balconies to acknowledge the sacrifices of those in essential services is a demonstration of relational agency and leadership. This form of spontaneous leadership, not imposed by the authorities, is thought of as leaderless leadership which shows the huge potential people have to think collectively, outside the national protocol box and to come up with ways to address their needs (Taggart 2016). The leaderless movements are an example of collective leadership that show how decision-making happens through transparent, open, honest and public dialogue as an important mechanism of democracy. The organisational ability of leaderless movements shows how traditional power can be reimagined and re-purposed through social media for example.

Another leadership practice relevant to our proposed curriculum in this frame is a form of leadership known as *leaderful* (Raelin 2011) practice. This stems from the work of organizational developers and psychologists who see leadership as being 'full' of components that people can achieve together through the practice of and emergence of leadership in context and as a lived practice (Raelin 2011). *Leaderful* practice is based on the principles of being collective, concurrent, collaborative and compassionate (Raelin 2011). Compassionate leadership, where people commit to preserving the dignity of every single member of the group, regardless of background, status, or point of view (Raelin 2011), is needed more than ever to make sure no one is left

behind through this crisis.

In Africa, an online letter from more than 90 African intellectuals (including Wole Soyinka) to African leaders about the continent's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, captures critical perspectives on the need for compassionate leadership (Zevounou, Niang & Sylla 2020). In a related article entitled 'On the necessity to govern with compassion', the authors make a plea to all leaders to seize the opportunity of the coronavirus crisis to join efforts in re-thinking an African state in the service of the well-being of its people.

Leaderful practice is based on a democratic ideology that calls for the co-creation of a community. An example of leaderful practice at scale in the US, is the way artists of different music genres, such as Lady Gaga, Paul McCartney, The Rolling Stones, Billie Eilish, Taylor Swift, Lizzo, Celine Dion and Andrea Bocelli collaborated, alone and together, to provide live streams of entertainment to empathize with society (Christian 2020). With this gesture these artists put everything aside to celebrate and support healthcare workers in the frontline during this pandemic, demonstrating leader-full practice from the wings.

The proposed curriculum is based on a similar conceptualization of leaderful practice. The aim is not to teach *about* leadership or teach lists of traits to aspiring leaders (Mintzberg 2004) but to engage with it as praxis. We assert that by embedding leadership as a theorised practice in the curriculum, we will enable every student, academic, administrator or any other stakeholder, to bring their experience into the proverbial classroom, to develop a form of leadership gaze as a rich source of learning how to respond to challenging situations from multi-disciplinary and social perspectives.

In South Africa right now, mainly medical experts have been called in to find solutions to the COVID-19 crisis (Paterson 2020). This one-sided approach totally ignores the social scientists who have much to offer to bolster the effectiveness of the government's response (MacGregor *et al.* 2020). In other countries, social scientists, such as historians, specialists on philosophy and law and pedagogical experts have been called in with medical experts to address key ethical and political issues around state responses by asking 'difficult questions' about the pandemic that might otherwise go unanswered. The lockdown, in South Africa, for example, has been disastrous for a vast majority of citizens who exist below the bread line and live in appalling conditions in informal settlements and townships across the country. Using leaderful practice in this context would ensure that these diverse perspectives

would be used to make sure that all South Africans are represented at the table and that relief is forwarded to those most affected by the virus.

Similarly, in the United States, the COVID-19 outbreak has highlighted the economic inequalities and a fragile social safety net that leaves vulnerable communities to bear the economic brunt of the crisis. Inequality in the US is rarely in the spotlight when compared to South Africa, but evidently very present. While the virus infects people regardless of wealth, the poor in the US are most affected due to longstanding segregation by income and race, reduced economic mobility, and the high cost of medical care. Low-income communities are more likely to be exposed to the virus, have higher mortality rates, and suffer economically. In times of economic crisis, these vulnerabilities will be more pronounced for marginal groups, identified by race, gender, and immigration status (Ro 2020). In the US, economic inequality is closely linked to a racial divide in income and wealth. Incomes and wealth are lower, and poverty is the most acute among Blacks and Latinos (IQ Latino 2020).

Leaderful practice is also understood as being embedded in the social sites where temporary clusters of events, people, and meaning compose one another (Schatzki 2005). We have seen leader-full clusters of events in action across the globe as a new paradigm of research communication is emerging to respond to immediate needs of these times. Ordinary people, not just academies, are writing prolifically now, using social media and technology to disseminate their perspectives and insights. Articles, thought pieces and academic papers are now shared exponentially, making the drawn-out journal publication cycles seem superfluous. These alternative methods are immediate, informative, rich, contextualized and in real-time. The timing and immediacy of online publications such as tweets and blogs mean that academics can easily be shoulder-tapped to respond in the here and now and in ways that have direct impact and use. This contributes to collaborative knowledge generation, which in turn shapes people's thoughts and action in the crisis. The university can no longer claim it is the only (or most legitimate) source of credible and powerful knowledge, now or in the future.

4.3 Prospective Leadership Frame

This frame involves looking to the future (from where we are located now) to envisage emerging patterns and to learn from what is surfacing from **future-oriented models of leadership**. In the time of COVID-19, we are being

awakened to a new world, one that is making space for a new global society, new awareness and new ways of thinking, where new mental and social structures are emerging. We need new forms of leadership to embrace these future-oriented schema and frames.

In a Prospective Leadership Frame, we are interested in looking ahead of the curve, to see what future-ready models of leadership will be contextually appropriate to the collateral damage and gains of COVID-19. It is going to take a long while before countries, universities and students who were in a compromised position before the crisis, recover and get back on their feet. What kinds of future-ready leadership are needed to recuperate a compromised system, dented in human and fiscal resources by the virus?

A prospective frame allows us to think about future-ready leadership as a public good; not an individual property or middle-class value. A public good perspective is in alignment with the African philosophy of Ubuntu (Ramose 2019) which is based on a relational view of existence.

In South Africa, the losses incurred have been disproportionately placed on our most vulnerable and high-risk citizens. There is a need to use our agency and our historical and social context and resources to value every human being regardless of status, over and beyond any logic of profit-making, domination or power capture (Zevounou, Niang & Sylla 2020). To assist this, leading social scientists are calling for greater inclusion and involvement in contributing to mitigation policies regarding financial and other losses due to the COVID-19 virus.

In the US, the scale of the coronavirus crisis calls to mind 9/11 or the 2008 financial crisis – events that reshaped society in lasting ways, from how we travel and buy homes, to the level of security and surveillance. For many American companies right now, navigating the COVID-19 crisis is a complex managerial and leadership challenge (Buckley 2020).

Across the globe, there is a need to do things differently. Business-as-usual might be something of the past post-COVID-19 and we need to be prepared to tackle the future (which is already here in many ways), with new lenses, paradigms and practices. In this frame, we foreground a contemporary model of leadership theory and practice, namely Servant-Leadership, which originated in the writings of Greenleaf (1977). While servant leadership is an oxymoron because it defies a common sense understanding which seems incongruent with leaders being servants at the same time (Shinagel 2016), it is an approach that offers a unique perspective to HE.

Although servant leadership has been of interest to scholars for over four decades, most academic and non-academic writing on the theory has been prescriptive, focusing on how servant leadership should ideally be, rather than focusing on what servant leadership should do (Van Dierendonck 2011). Servant leadership challenges our assumptions about the traditional, hierarchical mode of leadership (Allen *et al.* 2016) which we have internalised as leaders who influence with a sense of authority, while others follow. Servant leadership invites us to consider a model based on community, teamwork and involving others in decision making (Greenleaf 2003). Servant leaders have a strong calling to serve others and are humble, neither needing nor seeking recognition for achievement and success (Wheeler 2012). Other core attributes include authenticity, self-awareness, responsibility, moral courage, and wisdom. According to Northouse (2016),

> Servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then the conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead … The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant - first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test … is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (Northouse 2016: 225-256).

A contemporary US corporate exemplar of servant leadership in action is the Starbucks® Coffee Company owning 39.8% of the US Coffee Market. Starbucks® describes its organizational culture as, 'a culture of belonging, inclusion and diversity' (Starbucks 2020b). The primary pillars of Starbucks' organizational culture are Servant Leadership, Relational-driven approach, Openness, and Inclusion and Diversity. The company's motto *With our partners, our coffee and our customers at our core, we live these values …* (Starbucks 2020a), is an excellent example of servant leadership to improve organizational performance.

Servant leadership could be introduced in HE if leadership is attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize with them, and support them (Allen *et al.* 2016). Servant leaders put followers first, empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities (Russell & Stone 2002; Mahembe & Engelbrecht 2013). Furthermore, servant leaders are ethical and lead in ways

that serve the greater good of the organization, community, and society at large (Spears 2010). There is an abundance of literature that deals with servant leadership and higher education (provide a few sources here to strengthen this argument), however, literature on servant leadership and higher education during times of crises is scarce.

There are many synchronicities between Servant- and Teacher-Leadership, where both forms of leadership are emergent and focused on the actions one takes rather than a position, authority or title (Northouse 2016). Today's leaders in higher education should adopt a more holistic approach and future-orientation to individuals' development, by cultivating a disposition that is in service of the people they lead – their students. Traditional teacher-centred classrooms that focus mainly on what the teacher does and says, amplify the teacher in a position of power as knowledgeable expert, while students are seen as passive recipients of the curriculum and knowledge.

When servant leadership is applied to the HE classroom, it can change the power dynamics between teacher and students by placing the student at the centre of all pedagogical engagements so that students are active, participative and collaborative (Biggs 1999). This mirrors some of the central tenets that servant leadership advocates, namely putting the needs of other first, sharing power, helping individuals develop and optimising performance (Allen *et al.* 2016). Servant leadership also helps with community building and trust in classroom spaces (Spears 2010) through the teacher's or servant leader's commitment to individual growth to cultivate an environment of academic freedom and effective scholarship (Allen *et al.* 2016). Certain characteristics of the servant leader such as listening, empathy, healing, persuasion, awareness and foresight are dispositions that caring and effective university teachers want to emulate as well (Spears 2010).

In the US, there is evidence that only about a 100 universities teach servant leadership in the classroom, as part or all of a class on leadership (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership 2010). There are a number of institutions in the US that offer servant leadership as degree, non-degree, certificate, non-certificate, online and campus-only programmes (Modern Servant Leader 2020). These programmes have an emphasis on service learning but this is not what we are proposing.

We are advocating a curriculum that locates servant leadership as a critical intervention for dealing with crises, such as the current COVID-19 crisis. Servant leadership should be cultivated in the classroom at all

educational levels, from elementary, middle, and high schools through to higher education (Mattingly 2014). Servant leadership should not only be offered as a stand-alone course or programme, but the elements of servant leadership should be embedded into the curricula of every subject, course, or programme taught. It is also imperative to shift from service learning to servant leadership.

5. Conclusion

At some point, the Covid-19 pandemic will come to an end, and most aspects of daily life might return to normal, but HE may never be the same again. Our colleges and universities are now engaged in the largest, most drastic, and most disruptive technology-enabled pedagogical experiment. Unless we take the time to pause now and take care of everyone, marginalized students will find it difficult to succeed through and after the crisis. In South Africa, this is evidenced by students from these communities who continue to have internet connectivity challenges, availability of data, studying in conditions that are not conducive to support success, etc. This will have a ripple effect on the families that they intend to support financially, and this will impact the economy negatively in general. If a knowledge economy is what we are investing in, the outcome of this crisis will be counter-productive to the sustainability of those objectives in the long run.

The curriculum we have proposed is based on a range of leadership models that encourage us all to work together to devise ways to make each individual and citizen more capable of managing and responding to change and disruption in critical, empathic and socially responsive ways. We highlight the aptness of servant-leadership as a model for crises as it responds directly to the needs of those in crisis and encourages all people to take responsibility and exercise their agency in meaningful ways.

In HE, this brings attention to the need for agency to be foregrounded as important and necessary in educational practice in the class and for conditions to be created for students and academics to practice their agency in ways that make a difference in the world by mobilizing social actions.

We assert that even in varying degrees, everyone is fit to lead and must be supported to do so, in any and all aspect of their lives. Nelson Mandela proclaimed, ‘The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow’. That proclamation has never been truer than today. The current leadership in power

has a duty to cultivate the servant leader in our youth so that they are equipped to persuade, heal, listen, and empathize. Everyone has leadership capabilities, but often these leadership traits that reside within an individual remain dormant because they were never cultivated as a child. It is vital to awaken the leadership potential in our youth today in order to prepare them for their future that lies ahead. This links to earlier discussions in this chapter on relational, collective, collaborative, decentralized, and leaderful practices that constitute a leader in service of the needs of the community, society, or organization they serve.

In conclusion, we advocate an action-oriented leadership curriculum that serves the public good and does not become a middle-class value that inheres only for the privileged. In this way, we imagine that all, especially the marginalised and vulnerable students and their communities, will be taught the means through which they can exercise agency in their own lives, even though beholden to the nation states in which they live and on which they depend. Such an intervention seeks to preserve the humanity and dignity of those less able to have control over their lives right now, in the COVID-19 crisis.

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Leadership amidst the COVID-19 Crisis

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