

## Book Review

**Rudolph, J., Crawford, J., Sam, C.-Y., & Tan, S.(eds.) (2024). *The Palgrave handbook of crisis leadership in higher education*. Palgrave Macmillan.**

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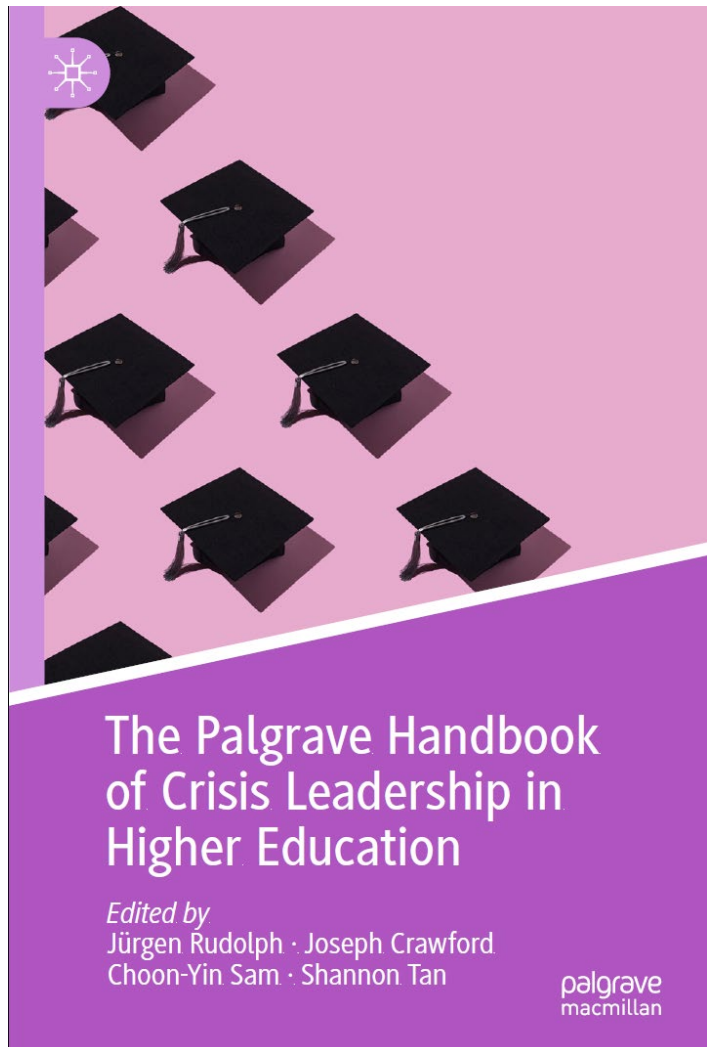
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### 1. INTRODUCTION

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was working in a public university in Wuhan, China. As the global crisis unfolded, I saw firsthand how higher education institutions responded to unprecedented disruptions. With the urgent shift to emergency remote teaching, challenges in institutional governance, and widespread uncertainty of the pandemic's trajectory, academic leaders and community faced enormous pressures. My own experience of being confined to China during this period afforded me a unique perspective on how institutions struggled to maintain educational continuity while managing the multifaceted challenges of the crisis (see Tang & Liu, 2022). These observations deepened my understanding of crisis leadership in higher education, especially as it pertains to institutional adaptability, resilience, and the strategic foresight required to lead our way through crises effectively.

While crisis leadership can be viewed through many lenses, I find the framework

proposed by the editorial team of *The Palgrave Handbook of Crisis Leadership in Higher Education* – Dr. Jürgen Rudolph, Dr. Joseph Crawford, Dr. Choon-Yin Sam, and Shannon Tan – particularly compelling; not mentioning that the editors are all multi-disciplinary experts and frontline academics



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in management, leadership, higher education policy and practices. They argue that crisis leadership in higher education is not always tied to formal titles or positions of authority. Instead, it revolves around the actions of individuals at every level – those who step up, influence, and inspire positive responses during times of crisis (Rudolph et al., 2024, pp. 7-8). Whether it was pivoting to online platforms overnight or supporting faculty and students through the emotional and logistical upheaval of lockdowns, the need for strategic, compassionate, and agile leadership became clear. At its core, true crisis leadership is about cultivating an environment where everyone feels empowered to contribute, creating a sense of psychological safety, and transcending the traditional boundaries of institutional hierarchies.

It is within this framework that I approached this edited book. This timely volume addresses a broad range of crises – financial, political, environmental, and technological – and presents global case studies that offer critical insights into leadership strategies. As someone who has witnessed the direct impact of crises on higher education. I found the thematic structure of this handbook especially relevant. Each chapter rigorously explores the intersection between crisis leadership and institutional survival, demonstrating how crises like the COVID-19 pandemic or those brought upon by generative artificial intelligence (AI) serve not only as challenges but also as potential catalysts for innovation and systemic reform.

In addition to the opening chapter, this handbook encompasses nine thematic chapters (Chapters 2-10) and 23 chapters that explore global case studies (Chapters 11-33) featuring some underrepresented countries or regions in the established literature such as Cambodia, Ghana, Papua New Guinea, and Uzbekistan. The topics that contributors have delved into are structured around leadership models, financial sustainability, digital transformation, social justice and equity, global and regional responses, and environmental sustainability. Due to its exhaustive content, this handbook would be of great interest to academic researchers, teaching practitioners, policy makers, institutional leaders as well as a broader international audience who seek a thorough and practical reference for future crisis handling in higher education.

## **2. OVERVIEW**

This handbook opens with an introductory chapter that does not only describe higher education in crisis. It invites us into the complex web of funding pressures, policy shifts, and technological advancements that have created this need for resilience. The editors reframe what crisis leadership in academia could look like, emphasising that effective responses are not simply top-down mandates but collective, empowering actions. They propose a way forward that involves everyone – from senior management to students – as contributors to stability and resilience. This vision of crisis leadership is set up as an ongoing journey, preparing readers to tackle global challenges beyond COVID-19 that impact academic institutions at all levels.

The subsequent thematic chapters (2–10) explore critical dimensions of crisis leadership, each contributing a distinct perspective to the discussion. Chapter 2, for instance, begins by examining what constitutes a crisis in higher education and differentiates between crisis management and crisis leadership. Through examples like Hurricane Katrina’s impact on Tulane University in 2005, the authors demonstrate what it takes to lead with agility, transparency, and clear communication. This chapter lays the foundation for other case studies involved in the book, framing that true leadership

during crises goes beyond sustaining operations; instead, it builds long-term resilience within the institution.

Chapter 3 then takes on a timely critique of neoliberalism in higher education, pointing to how profit-driven motives can sometimes steer academic values off course. Written with an autoethnographic touch, the author's narrative digs into how corporatisation has impacted higher education's authenticity. This chapter closes with a call for indigenous values like respect, autonomy, and compassion as grounding elements that can bring back a sense of purpose and integrity to the educational experience. It is a thought-provoking perspective that challenges readers to consider education's deeper mission.

Continuing this theme, Chapter 4 shifts to Malaysia, examining how neoliberal values have impacted academic life, particularly in the Global South. The authors utilise the term "academic dehumanisation" to capture how profit and prestige can clash with the ethical values that should ideally drive higher education. It is a striking contrast that makes readers consider globally about the human impact of neoliberalism. The chapter shows a vision that might be adapted in a variety of cultural contexts and promotes a paradigm that puts ethical considerations ahead of market-driven objectives.

Chapter 5 brings us back to the concept of managerialism, exploring how "crisis-as-event" and "crisis-as-process" offer two different approaches to crisis management. Rather than viewing crises as isolated disruptions, the authors suggest that real crisis leadership requires a focus on the ongoing issues these events expose. It is a call for a transition towards a relational, community-focused model that places an emphasis on well-being and connectivity within institutions. This chapter offers a fresh perspective on leadership by demonstrating how a people-centred strategy can transform an institution's response to both minor setbacks and significant disruptions.

The environmental crisis takes centre stage in Chapter 6, reminding readers that education is uniquely positioned to lead the charge on sustainability. This chapter makes the case for integrating environmental awareness and responsibility into academic missions and curricula, with higher education acting as a catalyst for change. It is more than just an argument. In fact, it is a vision for how educational institutions can become active players in the fight against environmental crises such as climate change.

Chapter 7 dives into intersectionality as a critical framework for addressing exclusion within higher education. The author's personal experiences and real-world examples bring intersectionality to life, showing its potential to reshape leadership approaches and foster truly inclusive academic environments. From cultural conflicts over North America's Indigenous practices to local institutional policies that did not consider diverse identities, the chapter highlights how intersectional leadership can make a significant difference in creating equitable spaces.

Chapter 8 starts with a brief history of AI in education. The authors then address the challenges posed by generative AI tools like ChatGPT, which intensify issues like plagiarism and academic integrity. They provide a structured framework for AI integration, with recommendations spanning pedagogy, policy, and cultural adaptation. This chapter is packed with ideas for using AI responsibly, giving academic leaders a thoughtful framework for balancing innovation with ethical considerations.

Chapter 9 brings us to Ukraine, where we see crisis leadership put to the test in a politically unstable setting. The authors present a compelling case study on resilience, emphasising the adaptability

needed to support students and staff in such an unpredictable environment. The lessons in this chapter appear to be generally applicable, namely, any higher education institution dealing with socio-political instability can benefit from that.

Returning to the Australian context, Chapter 10 discusses the employment issues facing the academic workforce as a result of pandemic pressures and neoliberal policies. Here, the authors look into how universities are adjusting to changing labour demands, especially in light of funding reductions that affect job security. As such, the insights here are invaluable and applicable for those leaders dealing with similar issues in academic staffing.

After that, the book moves into country-specific case studies (Chapters 11–33), each of which offers a glimpse into how various regions have handled their own unique challenges. Australia is the subject of Chapter 11's analysis of crisis leadership achievements and failures. The authors demonstrate how empathy and ethical decision-making are essential for maintaining resilience and suggest the integration of these skills in leadership development and training.

Chapter 12 provides a case study of how Brazil's public universities responded to President Bolsonaro's populist leadership. The authors urge data-driven, strategic governance to promote adaptability in uncertain times and highlight the resilience required to maintain educational continuity in the face of political challenges.

As demonstrated in Chapter 13, in spite of their limited resources, Cambodian higher education institutions have effectively managed the COVID-19 crisis. The authors highlight Cambodia's multi-stage response, from remote teaching initiatives to the development of infrastructure for online learning. This indicates how important collective efforts from the government and local community are to preserving institutional stability.

Next, Chapter 14 looks at Egyptian journalism programs and how they adjusted the curriculum in line with the country's complicated socio-political landscape. Through focus group interviews of faculty leaders, the researchers uncover the strategies used to maintain academic independence and freedom in the face of adversity, particularly in a field where these values are crucial.

Ghana's response to COVID-19 is the focus of Chapter 15, which is presented as an example of adaptable crisis leadership, with institutions promptly transitioning to online learning and prioritising equitable access. This chapter offers flexible policy frameworks that serve as models for institutions aiming to build educational resilience.

Greek higher education is examined in detail in Chapter 16, with an emphasis on post-crisis leadership adaptations amidst economic instability. The author suggests innovative managerial approaches that could enhance institutional competitiveness, particularly as universities deal with the complexities of a globalised education market.

In Chapter 17, Hong Kong's pandemic response is analysed through a four-stage framework that highlights the role of government policy in crisis response. The authors discuss how higher education institutions adapted teaching models and improved IT infrastructure, which underlines the importance of aligning academic strategies with governmental guidance.

India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, explored in Chapter 18, displays resilience through hybrid learning models and governance reforms. The authors present India's approach as a roadmap for other education systems, highlighting the adaptability that has helped sustain progress beyond the pandemic.

Chapter 19 introduces the Emergency Response Framework inspired by University College Dublin's response to pandemic challenges in its international campuses. This model provides a structured way to approach crisis management across different settings, a valuable resource for multi-campus institutions.

Chapter 20 covers Malaysia's ICT-intensive strategies, identifying barriers to digital transformation, including pedagogical, professional, and equity-related challenges. The chapter underscores the importance of inclusive leadership that can tackle both technical and socio-economic obstacles to build a robust educational infrastructure.

Mozambique's experience during COVID-19, as discussed in Chapter 21, reveals the significance of building digital infrastructure in resource-limited settings. This chapter highlights capacity-building efforts as essential for improving educational delivery, which provides insights relevant to similarly constrained institutions.

In Chapter 22, the researchers adopt narrative reflections to portray New Zealand's approach to collaborative crisis leadership. This approach is grounded in cultural values such as *tikanga* (practices) and *whakapapa* (heritage), creating a cohesive strategy that draws on the strengths of Indigenous practices. It is an inspiring model for culturally responsive leadership.

Chapter 23 investigates Nigeria's educational leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting shifts toward e-learning and policy adjustments aimed at safeguarding student well-being. The authors strongly support inclusive reforms that enhance educational quality, providing valuable recommendations for institutions seeking to strengthen learning cultures post-pandemic.

Chapter 24 analyses Papua New Guinea's response to the pandemic, where restricted digital infrastructure created considerable barriers. The authors recommend targeted investments in digital tools and capacity-building initiatives. This also underscores the necessity for long-term improvements in educational infrastructure.

In Chapter 25, Singapore's government-led combat against COVID-19 offers a structured model for crisis management. With a focus on top-down policies and innovative programs, this chapter presents Singapore as a case study in efficient, centralised crisis response.

Sri Lanka's educational leadership strategies are outlined in Chapter 26, as exemplified in selected State and affiliated Universities (SAAUs). The authors propose that Ralph Gigliotti (2017)'s crisis leadership framework, involving ethical decision-making and transparency, should be employed by local tertiary institutions to mitigate pre-existing crises and navigate future challenges.

Thailand's crisis management strategies, highlighted in Chapter 27, emphasise flexibility and situational awareness as essential elements of educational resilience. This chapter outlines adaptive leadership practices, offering practical insights into cultivating responsive, learner-centred environments.

Chapter 28 depicts the Philippine higher education leaders as fulfilling multiple roles – as gatekeepers, cultivators, incubators, and networkers – demonstrating a nuanced, multifaceted approach to leadership. This chapter draws our attention to the importance of adaptive leadership roles within higher education.

Chapter 29 shifts focus to Türkiye, where political and economic pressures challenge the autonomy of higher education. The author calls for reforms that enhance academic integrity, positioning academic autonomy as a key to sustaining institutional resilience.

Uganda's higher education response, discussed in Chapter 30, highlights the need for evidence-based, inclusive digital learning strategies. This chapter advocates for targeted investments in technology and pedagogical support, focusing on the needs of vulnerable students in online settings.

In Chapter 31, the researchers conduct a desk-based review of the UK's response to COVID-19, critiquing government migration policies and urging universities to sustain their global competitiveness. They further recommend program innovation to maintain the UK's position as a leader in higher education.

Chapter 32 examines the challenges facing U.S. higher education, from enrolment to funding, and focuses on the need for adaptive, resource-focused leadership to navigate an evolving academic landscape.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 33, explores leadership in Uzbekistan through grounded theory, using student perspectives to outline essential leadership traits for post-pandemic resilience. By identifying transparency, empathy, and critical thinking as key components, this chapter offers a relevant framework for building strong, adaptive institutions.

### **3. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

It has been enlightening for me to read through *The Palgrave Handbook of Crisis Leadership in Higher Education*, which provides a comprehensive exploration of what it means to lead in turbulent times. Every chapter underscores that authentic crisis leadership goes beyond immediate responses; it is about establishing a future where higher education institutions can grow and adapt through challenge. This handbook promotes leadership that values resilience, inclusivity, and innovation at every level and challenges us to reconsider conventional hierarchies and roles within the higher education sector. The ideas and frameworks showcased here do not merely equip us to handle crises; instead, they inspire a proactive approach, where disruption becomes a pathway to transformation. I highly recommend this handbook to those of us who are committed to building more sustainable and equitable learning environments because it serves as both a guide and a profound reminder of the power of intentional, visionary leadership in an ever-more unpredictable world.

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