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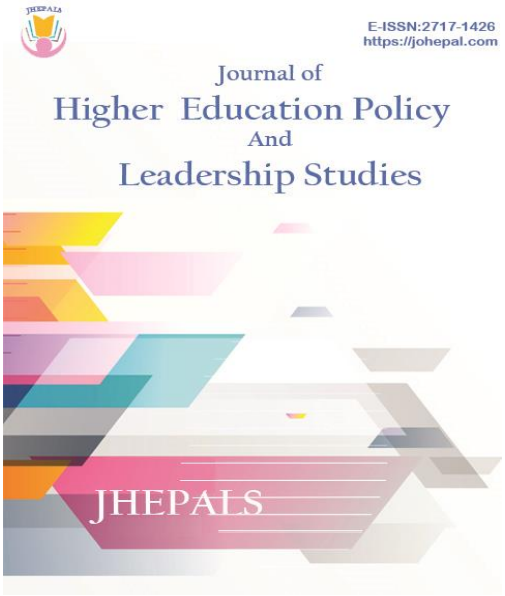
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Navigating Change and Trauma: Essential Leadership Insights for Higher Education



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Navigating Change and Trauma: Essential Leadership Insights for Higher Education

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Abstract

This article examines the evolving challenges in higher education leadership, including financial pressures, demographic shifts, post-pandemic recovery, and systemic inequities. Acknowledging the trauma and transformation experienced by stakeholders, it introduces an integrated leadership approach combining Transformational, Servant, Adaptive, and Trauma-Informed Leadership theories. These frameworks emphasize empathy, adaptability, inclusivity, and innovation to foster resilience and equity in academic institutions. Leadership vignettes illustrate practical applications in addressing economic crises, racial trauma, faculty resilience, and post-pandemic transitions. By offering actionable strategies, the article provides a roadmap for creating inclusive and adaptive academic environments that align with workforce and student expectations. This approach promotes sustainable success and cultivates a culture of trust and collaboration in higher education.

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Keywords: Trauma; Servant Leadership; Adapted Leadership; Trauma-Informed Leadership; Organizational Culture

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Introduction

Today's higher education leaders face unprecedented challenges in a rapidly evolving world, and being creative and innovative are paramount. From financial pressures and shifts in student demographics to the lingering impacts of a global pandemic, leaders must navigate complexities that demand innovative, compassionate, and adaptive leadership approaches.

Leadership in higher education has shifted toward a market-driven model, with administrators focused on revenue generation, efficiency, and competition (Carducci et al., 2024). This shift fosters an entrepreneurial mindset across campus and emphasizes centralized administrative power and the reduction of shared governance and faculty leadership roles, which at times undermines academic values and collaborative work at times creating discomfort, challenge or conflict between different leadership bodies within the higher education system (Buller, 2014; Black, 2015; Carducci et al., 2024). Leaders in executive and professional roles must balance the priorities of academic colleagues, while faculty leaders and academic programs face increasing pressure to incorporate financial and managerial responsibilities into their leadership. Due to these factors, leaders in all roles must consider all system stakeholders (Randall & Coakley, 2007).

Over the last decade, and even more so since the pandemic five years ago, higher education has been at a precipice of change, needing to adapt and shift in a changing and challenging economy plagued by a global pandemic, widespread ethnic, racial, and gendered violence, and a national recession. Universities and colleges are merging, closing, and reorganizing across the country in order to address the shifting student enrollment, large school faculty and staff exodus, and financial insecurity that plagues so many (Greenberg, 2022; Hess, 2021; Kelchen, 2020; Nietzel, 2020; Vlachopoulos, 2021).

As stated by Carducci et al. (2024), "higher education professionals must commit to approaching and facilitating the work of leadership differently" (p. 277). The effective integration of new frameworks to adapt to change while integrating equity-based principles for transforming people and organizations is essential (Carducci et al., 2024). The changes necessary for successful transformation will require an adaptive approach that recognizes the entire decade of the 2020s thus far has been one of trauma for almost all stakeholders. We share some theories that continue to be relevant and accessible here while acknowledging that in changing times, one has to continue to use wisdom, experience, and innovation in ways that have not been tried previously. We are indeed embracing tomorrow's challenges with new ways of thinking systemically.

The purpose of this article is to first review and reflect on current applicable theories and practices that are best aligned with the trends and needs of higher education leadership at this time. We will then provide leadership vignettes to bring to life these experiences in a way that highlights how to utilize and apply the theories we have reviewed, ensuring that this article is both theoretical and practical in nature.

Understand Leadership Theories to Address Trauma in Higher Education

The foundation of effective higher education leadership lies in an understanding of several key theories: Transformational Leadership, Servant Leadership, Trauma-Informed

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Leadership, and Adaptive Leadership. Each offers unique perspectives on engaging teams, driving change, and fostering supportive organizational cultures.

Transformational Leadership theory emphasizes inspiring and motivating followers by setting a compelling vision, fostering creativity, and supporting individual development. Transformational leaders work closely with team members to build a shared sense of purpose, inspiring them to reach new heights through personal growth and team synergy. This theory is based on the assumption that leaders who are focused on creating supportive relationships, motivating individuals within the organization, and facilitating positive emotions and hard work from their employees are going to be more effective and successful than those focused on task completion and providing supervision (Avolio, 1999; Avolio et al., 1999; Den Hartog et al., 1997; Lyons & Schnieder, 2009; Northouse, 2004). In higher education, transformational leadership has been demonstrated to improve teaching effectiveness and overall job performance (Ahmad & Rochimah, 2021; Jyoti & Bhau, 2015), motivate faculty, and create a team atmosphere (Baba et al., 2021; Majeed & Jamshed, 2023), and effectively manage change (Basham, 2012; Ottman & Hamid, 2023).

Robert Greenleaf introduced servant leadership, which places the needs of others before organizational goals, prioritizing community building, empathy, and authentic engagement (Greanleaf,1998; Greenleaf, 2002). Leaders who adopt this approach focus on developing individuals' potential, seeing success through the lens of how well they serve their teams and communities. Through the integration of multiple studies on Servant Leadership, Eva et al. (2019) provided the definition of this leadership as "an other-oriented approach to leadership, manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, and outward orienting of their concerns for self toward concerns for others within the organization and larger community" (p. 114). Generally, servant leadership is understood as a practice which prioritizes the led over self and the good of the people and community over that of the company or organization (Eva et al., 2019; Greenleaf, 1998; Greenleaf, 2002; Laub, 2004; McQuade et al., 2020; Gregory Stone et al., 2004). Study results indicate that Servant Leadership leads to improved student outcomes (Negussie & Hirgo, 2023), improved job satisfaction and increased retention (Aboramadan et al., 2021; Baqui, 2020; Negussie & Hirgo, 2023) and effective change management (Al-Asfour et al., 2022; Lutfia et al., 2021) in university settings.

The trauma-informed Leadership approach stresses empathy, trust-building, and a deep understanding of trauma's effects. Trauma-informed leaders create safe, inclusive environments, acknowledging past hardships while providing a space for healing and resilience. At its core, this model defines trauma as what "results from exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being" (Center for Healthcare Strategies, 2025) and recognizes that trauma impacts both the people within an organization and the culture of the organization itself. This approach recognizes that trauma has been or is currently experienced by most individuals, both as part of their environments and in relation to their identities, and has negative impacts on individuals physical, emotional and relational wellbeing (Manderscheid, 2014; Middleton et al., 2015; National Council For Behavioral Health [NCBH], 2022; Trauma Informed Oregon [TIO], 2021).

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Navigating Change & Trauma

Trauma-informed leadership integrates trauma-informed principles and approaches to address the individual and organizational impacts of trauma through practices exhibited in positional and non-positional leadership (Hormann, 2018; Manderscheid, 2014; Middleton, et al., 2015; NCBH, 2022; TIO, 2021).

Trauma-informed leaders create a holding environment where difficult conversations are possible, stress is expected and tolerated, and diversity of opinion and experience are welcome by gaining a deep understanding of their stakeholders, the impact of trauma on their lives, and ensuring that voice and choice are honored. These leaders take risks and show courage by engaging in discussion and dialogue, balancing inquiry and advocacy, and ensuring that they empower others by confronting cultural, historical and gender issues within the organization. Proponents of this approach in higher education indicate that through implementing trauma informed practices leaders will be able to foster a sense of inclusion and safety (Imad, 2021; McClinton & Laurencin, 2020; Pimental, 2023), center well-being and care for students and faculty (Imad, 2021), increase student retention and success rates (Henshaw, 2022; Pimental, 2023; Wells, 2023), and support faculty and staff productivity and wellbeing (Henshaw, 2022; Imad, 2021).

Adaptive leadership is based on the notion that leadership is a process rather than a role, and adaptive leadership focuses on navigating complex, changing environments. Adaptive leaders engage stakeholders in collaborative problem-solving, encouraging flexibility, innovation, and continuous learning to address emerging challenges. Adaptive Leadership (Heifetz, 1994) posits that leadership is not contained within a person or position, but is instead a process focused on managing change (Heifetz et al., 2009; Raei & Rasmussen, 2021) Adaptive leadership theory provides a way to understand how those in positional and non-positional leadership roles are able to effectively influence organizations during change in order to manage adaptive challenges; both a framework and a capability that includes a set of principles and practices (Dunn, 2020). Adaptive leadership is an iterative process that includes observing events and patterns, interpreting those observations into your own understanding of what the adaptive challenge is, and then designing interventions that address that challenge (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Raei & Rasmussen, 2021). Adaptive leadership builds on the past, relies on diversity, and enables the capacity to thrive through experimentation and adaptation (Heifetz et al., 2009). This approach to leadership supports leaders in developing innovative solutions to current problems rather than relying on traditional approaches to challenges in higher education. By relying on the groundwork of trust, collaboration, and collective problem solving, adaptive leaders are able to build resiliency and capacity for organizations to manage change processes that are both expected and unexpected (Bagwell, 2020; Cooney et al., 2023; Randal & Coakley, 2007).

Relevance of Trauma-Informed Knowledge in the Workplace

We have seen a rise in the importance of psychological safety in the workplace. In fact, today's employees expect employers to know and prioritize mental health and well-being. Trauma-informed leadership is a proactive approach that encourages leaders to have some knowledge and understanding of the psychological impacts of trauma and to engage with others to create environments where people feel secure to share ideas, admit mistakes, and

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collaborate openly. This culture of psychological safety is foundational for innovation and retention in an era where employee well-being is directly linked to organizational performance. This requires all to change perspectives and assumptions across multiple generations of people.

Nothing is permanent, but change can be emotionally and psychologically difficult for many individuals. However, adaptive approaches to change have led to success. Higher education has faced a remarkable rate of change, from financial pressures and enrollment shifts to technological advancements and changes in student and employee demographics. Adaptive leadership through a trauma-informed lens, emphasizes flexibility and collaborative problem-solving, empowers leaders to navigate these changes effectively, balancing the need for stability with the agility to respond to evolving challenges. This approach to the workplace must be authentic and sincere to build trust with community members who are extremely diverse and hold their intersectional identities as necessary.

Today's university systems are more diverse than ever, with employees bringing a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and expectations. Trauma-informed and servant leadership prioritize empathy, equity, and inclusion, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives are valued and supported. Similarly, servant and transformational leadership build trust, engagement, and commitment, enhancing job satisfaction and reducing turnover. These leadership approaches are especially relevant in higher education, where recruitment and retention challenges persist. A diverse student and staff population enriches both learning and work environments, and institutions that prioritize inclusion, individual growth, well-being, and professional development attract and retain engaged employees and students. Through integrating these leadership styles, university leadership can cultivate a more loyal, motivated, and resilient community.

By adopting trauma-informed, servant, adaptive, and transformational leadership practices, today’s managers and leaders can better support their teams and organizations in achieving sustainable success. This integrated approach addresses the immediate needs of a complex, evolving workplace and aligns with the expectations and values of a modern, diverse workforce.

What Leaders and Managers Must Know About Trauma

Trauma affects well-being, engagement, and performance, making trauma-informed leadership essential in higher education. Personal and systemic trauma—exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, social injustices, and economic stressors—impacts students, faculty, and staff. Recognizing trauma’s effects on mental health and productivity is critical, as it hinders cognitive and emotional functioning, influencing academic and professional success. Additionally, students and employees seek institutions that prioritize inclusivity and well-being. Colleges and universities that neglect trauma-informed leadership risk reputational damage, making it harder to attract and retain diverse faculty, staff, and students.

Failing to address trauma leads to burnout, high turnover, and decreased retention. Emotional exhaustion and disengagement weaken institutional stability, resulting in the loss of valuable faculty, staff, and students. Unaddressed trauma heightens emotional sensitivity, stress, and irritability, increasing workplace conflicts and mistrust. Mental health challenges linked to trauma, such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD, contribute to absenteeism and

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extended medical leave, burdening staff and disrupting academic continuity. Additionally, trauma impairs focus, memory, and decision-making, reducing productivity.

Institutions that ignore these impacts risk increased stress and instability. Without support, individuals struggle to meet expectations, leading to diminished motivation and engagement. Without trauma-informed leadership, tensions escalate, creating a toxic work environment. Leaders who practice empathy and effective communication can de-escalate conflicts and foster collaboration. A trauma-informed approach fosters a workplace where people feel valued and empowered, improving performance and morale.

Unresolved trauma stagnates innovation and adaptability while harming morale and institutional stability. Employees who feel unsafe are less likely to engage in creative problem-solving. Trauma-informed leadership fosters psychological safety, encouraging collaboration and new ideas essential for institutional growth. Leaders who address trauma build resilience, well-being, and a positive workplace culture. Institutions failing to do so risk long-term decline, as unresolved trauma weakens engagement and depletes talent.

Practical Application for Leaders

Leadership in higher education requires an understanding of the complex challenges institutions, staff, and students face. These vignettes illustrate how leaders apply Adaptive and Servant Leadership principles to issues such as economic trauma, racial tensions, faculty resilience, and post-pandemic recovery. By depicting real-world scenarios, the vignettes encourage reflection on strategic decision-making that prioritizes empathy, support, and community engagement. They serve as discussion prompts for leadership training, fostering analysis of decisions, alternative approaches, and outcomes. They also support role-playing exercises to develop emotional intelligence, empathy, and problem-solving skills.

The principles demonstrated can inform strategic planning, leadership development, and institutional change. They offer benchmarks to evaluate current leadership practices and identify areas for improvement. By engaging with these vignettes, higher education leaders can strengthen their ability to navigate challenges, fostering inclusive, resilient, and thriving academic communities.

Vignette 1: Navigating Economic Trauma

Scenario

Dr. Elena, the Anthropology Department ‘s chair at a mid-sized university, is facing unprecedented budget cuts. The economic downturn has left her faculty and staff anxious about potential layoffs, and morale is at an all-time low.

Leadership Challenge

Dr. Elena must handle the emotional and financial fears gripping her team. She organizes bi-weekly meetings where staff can share their concerns in a safe space, supplemented by private one-on-one sessions for additional support. In her bi-weekly meetings, Dr. Elena confronts the logistical challenges of budget cuts, the impact on the students as well as her own fears and uncertainties. She strives to present a calm and assured front, facilitating open discussions that allow her staff to voice their concerns and fears. Each session tests her emotional resilience and ability to remain transparent and supportive.

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Recognizing that this is likely an experience faculty are feeling across the institution, Dr. Elena encourages the Provost to introduce "Resilience Circles," a series of structured workshops that focus on developing personal and professional resilience skills. These workshops include activities on stress management, adaptive teaching methods, and peer support mechanisms. This creates a supportive space outside of her department where faculty can learn and grow together, sharing vulnerabilities and strengths. Dr. Elena offers to co-lead these sessions and ensures that these sessions are interactive, allowing faculty to share their challenges and successes in adapting to the new curriculum.

Internal Struggle

Dr. Elena feels the weight of her department's future on her shoulders. Each budget report brings a pang of anxiety; every faculty meeting raises the specter of job cuts. She wrestles with the guilt of potential layoffs and the pressure to protect her team's livelihood while maintaining the integrity of their academic programs; grappling with the responsibility of safeguarding her team's jobs while managing a shrinking budget. Each decision about cuts feels deeply personal, intensifying her stress and commitment to transparency. She is also worried about the students in the department and how this may impact their experiences.

Outcome

By proactively addressing the economic trauma her department faces, Dr. Elena fosters a sense of community and mutual support. Her empathetic approach not only stabilizes the team's morale but also enhances their loyalty and productivity, ensuring the department remains effective despite budget constraints. Through these trying times, Dr. Elena finds a renewed sense of purpose in her role as a leader. The trust and appreciation expressed by her staff in response to her efforts bolster her resolve to navigate the department through this crisis, fostering a strong sense of community and resilience among her team. The "Resilience Circles" help faculty members develop stronger coping mechanisms and foster a sense of camaraderie among people across departments and releases Dr. Elena from carrying the burden alone. As a result, faculty engagement increases, and the overall academic atmosphere improves, with teachers feeling more empowered and supported. Dr. Elena's transparent and empathetic leadership helps maintain morale and productivity, fosters a stronger team spirit, and creates collective resilience while enabling the department to navigate economic challenges more effectively.

Summaries and Takeaways

Adaptive Leadership Application

As Dr. Elena manages the budget crisis, she adopts an adaptive leadership approach by actively involving her team in problem-solving sessions. She recognizes that adaptive challenges require inputs from various perspectives to foster innovative solutions. By encouraging her team to adapt to new financial realities through collaboration, Dr. Elena helps them develop resilience and a proactive stance toward change.

Servant Leadership Application

Dr. Elena embodies Servant Leadership by prioritizing the well-being of her department members over simply cutting costs. She engages in active listening during staff meetings,

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ensuring that each team member's voice is heard and considered. Her commitment to serving her team's needs fosters a culture of mutual respect and shared responsibility, which proves essential in maintaining morale and collaboration during budget cuts. Dr. Elena's introduction of "Resilience Circles" is a prime example of Servant Leadership. She focuses on the personal and professional growth of her faculty, recognizing that their development is crucial to the success of the entire college. By investing in their resilience and well-being, she ensures that the faculty are well-equipped to handle changes and challenges, which in turn enhances their capacity to serve their students effectively.

Vignette 2: Healing Racial Trauma

Scenario

After a racially charged incident on campus, Dr. James, the Dean of Student Affairs at a large public university, observes an immediate impact on the mental health and academic performance of minority students. Tensions are high and the campus feels increasingly divided.

Leadership Challenge

Dr. James sets up a campus-wide initiative called "Healing Dialogues," consisting of trauma-informed workshops, open forums, and cultural competency training for all university staff. These sessions are designed to educate while allowing students and faculty space to voice their experiences and seek support in a moderated, respectful environment. Each session serves as a reminder of the power of empathy and the importance of proactive leadership in addressing systemic issues. He grapples with the challenge of balancing heartfelt support with the need to drive meaningful change across the campus. Additionally, he engages in constant evaluation of the interventions he has developed in order to make real-time adjustments as needed.

Internal Struggle

Dr. James is personally moved by the students' pain and feels a deep responsibility to address the racial trauma affecting the campus community. He feels deeply troubled by the racial tensions affecting his students on campus, the community, and the world at large. The pain in their stories resonates with his own experiences, igniting a passionate commitment to fostering healing and understanding. He feels a personal responsibility to mend the rifts that threaten the campus's unity.

Outcome

"Healing Dialogues" becomes a cornerstone of the university's approach to handling racial trauma, providing ongoing support and education. Students begin to feel a greater sense of trust, belonging and understanding, and the initiative helps bridge divides, fostering a more inclusive campus culture. He is able to adapt and make change as needed, implementing stakeholder feedback along the way. The success of "Healing Dialogues" provides Dr. James with a profound sense of accomplishment and reaffirms his belief in the power of empathetic leadership. Witnessing the positive changes in campus dynamics reinforces his commitment to promoting an inclusive and supportive educational environment. Dr.

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James's commitment to trauma-informed leadership fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity among students and faculty, enhancing the university's overall cohesion.

Summaries and Takeaways

Adaptive Leadership Application

Dr. James uses adaptive leadership to address racial trauma by facilitating a campus-wide dialogue that allows for the expression of deep-seated fears and frustrations. Understanding that such systemic issues require a change not only in policies but in values and beliefs, he encourages the community to confront uncomfortable truths and learn from each other, fostering a collective learning process that is central to adaptive leadership.

Servant Leadership Application

Dr. James practices Servant Leadership through his dedication to meeting the needs of the student body following a racial incident. By organizing the "Healing Dialogues," he places the emotional and educational needs of the students above the institution's immediate operational concerns. His focus on building a community that supports healing and understanding showcases his commitment to serving and empowering his students, leading to a more inclusive and supportive campus environment.

Vignette 3: Fostering a Trauma-Informed Campus Post-Pandemic

Scenario

Dr. Kevin, the CIO, faces the challenge of reintegrating students and faculty back into on-campus learning after an extended period of remote education due to the pandemic, acknowledging the widespread trauma caused by isolation and pandemic-related anxiety. As students and faculty return to the campus, Dr. Kevin, the Chief Information Officer, recognizes the deep psychological impact of isolation and anxiety experienced by the campus community.

Internal Struggle

Dr. Kevin feels overwhelmed by the scale of emotional and logistical challenges as students and faculty return to campus. He is acutely aware of the lingering effects of the pandemic on everyone, including himself, feeling both a professional obligation and a personal drive to rebuild a sense of normalcy and safety. Dr. Kevin is acutely aware of the daunting task of reintegrating the university community while addressing the widespread trauma. He feels a profound duty to restore a sense of normalcy and safety.

Leadership Challenge

Dr. Kevin spearheads the "Back Together, Better Together" initiative, which includes a comprehensive suite of resources to support the transition back to campus life. This includes training for faculty on recognizing and responding to signs of trauma, establishing "Wellness Hubs" around campus equipped with mental health resources, and integrating relaxation and mindfulness exercises into the daily campus routine. In addition to training faculty on trauma-aware teaching practices, clear communication channels for expressing needs and concerns are established, and mental health resources are integrated within the academic framework. Each decision—from the setup of Wellness Hubs to the training programs for

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faculty—is guided by his deep desire to create a nurturing environment that counters the isolation experienced during the pandemic.

Outcome

The initiative significantly eases the transition back to campus life, reducing the incidence of anxiety and stress-related issues among students and faculty. The university sees an increase in student retention and satisfaction as the community feels more supported and less overwhelmed by the return to in-person learning environments. The trauma-informed classrooms help students and faculty feel more secure and supported, enhancing learning outcomes and classroom interactions. Dr. Kevin's foresight in addressing the lingering effects of the pandemic trauma fosters a more inclusive and empathetic educational environment. As the campus begins to buzz with renewed energy and lowered anxiety levels, Dr. Kevin feels a profound connection to his role and the community. The initiative's success not only bolsters his confidence in his leadership capabilities but also deepens his commitment to fostering a compassionate and adaptive learning environment. Dr. Kevin's initiative significantly eases the transition and enhances the community's resilience. The campus reemerges as a supportive environment where students and faculty feel secure and valued, reinvigorating the educational experience.

Summaries and Takeaways

Adaptive Leadership Application

Dr. Kevin demonstrates adaptive leadership by recognizing the post-pandemic return as a complex challenge that impacts students and faculty in varied and profound ways. His initiative to integrate trauma-informed practices into the daily routine of the campus involves observing the ongoing impacts, interpreting needs, and intervening in ways that support psychological safety and resilience, embodying the iterative process of adaptive leadership.

Servant Leadership Application

In his role as CIO, Dr. Kevin adopts a Servant Leadership approach by prioritizing the holistic recovery of the university community post-pandemic. His efforts to create a supportive atmosphere through "Wellness Hubs" and trauma-informed practices are geared towards fostering an environment where every student and faculty member feels valued and supported. By focusing on their well-being, he enhances the collective ability of the community to engage fully in academic and social activities.

How It All Works Together – Trusting Knowledge, Skills, and Disposition for Impact

Today's leadership is a way of being rather than a set of formulaic skills that you follow. Having general knowledge about various leadership theories and knowledge about trauma in the lives of individuals gives you the tools to work in transformative ways. Given the multiple situations in the workplace, transformation is more powerful when one understands that trauma-informed leadership is just-in-time leadership whereby individuals use all of their skills, knowledge, and dispositions to adapt and lead. Integrated together,

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these four leadership theories provide higher education leaders with seven clear strategies for best practice.

Best Practices: Strategies for Effective Leadership

To navigate today's challenges, higher education leaders can integrate the following best practices:

1. Inspire and Communicate a Shared Vision

Leaders should actively develop and communicate a clear, collective vision that resonates with all stakeholders. Engaging faculty, staff, and students in this vision fosters accountability and a sense of shared purpose.

2. Cultivate a Culture of Innovation and Collaboration

Adaptive and transformational practices encourage collaboration across departments and disciplines. Leaders can create and support interdisciplinary teams, allowing diverse perspectives to foster creativity and break down silos. Recognizing contributions and celebrating successes also supports a positive, risk-tolerant culture.

3. Prioritize Personal and Professional Growth

By integrating servant leadership practices, leaders should invest in individuals' personal and professional growth. Creating mentorship opportunities, offering tailored professional development, and recognizing accomplishments fosters a growth-oriented, supportive work environment.

4. Model Adaptability and Resilience

Adaptive leaders demonstrate resilience and flexibility, embracing change and guiding others through transitions. Leaders who remain open to new ideas and responsive to shifting circumstances serve as role models for resilience. They maintain flexibility by revising goals and approaches as new challenges and opportunities arise, ensuring the institution remains agile and responsive.

5. Promote an Inclusive, Trauma-Informed Environment

Leaders should foster inclusivity and provide trauma-informed training, which cultivates empathy and resilience within teams. By embedding trauma-informed practices into policies, managers can create supportive spaces that encourage well-being and success.

6. Engage all Stakeholders and Promote Shared Leadership

Leaders should work to actively involve faculty, staff, students, and community members in decision-making and problem-solving. They should facilitate open forums for communication, ensuring diverse perspectives are included and valued. Through empowering teams with clear roles and autonomy, leaders promote shared responsibility and celebrate collective successes.

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7. Lead with Empathy and Compassion

Leaders should listen to the concerns and experiences of faculty, staff, and students, demonstrating genuine care and understanding; acknowledging challenges and providing support through resources, encouragement, and thoughtful communication. Modeling emotional intelligence by responding with kindness and maintaining a balanced, positive outlook, especially during times of change or uncertainty, will support stakeholder wellbeing and organizational sustainability.

Conclusion

The combination of transformational, servant, trauma-informed, and adaptive leadership styles gives leaders the skills they need to tackle the complex problems of today's changing higher education environment. Leaders can create inclusive, resilient organizations that foster individual and group development by placing a high value on empathy, flexibility, and creativity. In addition to meeting the organization's immediate requirements, this integrative strategy builds a solid basis for future success and fosters a positive climate where all members of the academic community can flourish.

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Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies Statement

The author(s) claimed that [ChatGPT] is used in this research just for the purpose of improving the language of the manuscript. No further use of these technologies are also confirmed by the author(s) to write different parts of the research. One native speaker of English is also invited to proof-read the text prior to its online publication.

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