

**THE IMPACT OF THE ETHICAL PARADIGMS ON  
DECISION-MAKING IN TIMES OF CRISIS**

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this pragmatic sequential mixed-method study was to explore the impact of the ethical paradigms on the decision-making process of school leaders during a time of crisis. The goal of this research study was to gather data about how school leaders make decisions during crises and to identify what ethical paradigms they are employing in their leadership during these times.

This study focused on decision-making during crisis situations in school settings that involve violence. The research was conducted during the end of the Coronavirus pandemic (Spring 2023) with school leaders in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Therefore, school leaders were given an opportunity to share their experience leading through the Coronavirus pandemic (crisis situation), including the impact on them and their school communities. The quantitative data collected through the anonymous survey provided the breadth of data to answer the research questions. The survey gathered data from school leaders on their educational backgrounds, leadership preparation, job-embedded professional development, leadership experience, and preparedness on crisis management. The survey provided leaders with an opportunity through an embedded link to volunteer for a follow-up interview. The qualitative data collected through the follow-up interviews provided data on the depth of experiences of school leaders and how they were trained both during their leadership preparation programs and through job-embedded professional development offerings.

The findings from this research study highlighted the gaps in crisis management preparation for school leaders. The findings also shed light on the needs of school leaders to be successful in making decisions and leading their school communities during and

after a time of crisis. Additionally, the data from this study showed that school leaders primarily make decisions out of the ethical paradigms of care and the profession. The findings from this study are intended to be used to inform both policy and practice of how school leaders are trained and supported in leading their school communities through crises.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate my dissertation to my loving and supportive village. To my two sons, Emile and Drew, I love the two of you beyond the words I can pen on this page. The two of you are my “why” and the greatest inspiration for the work I do in this world. I am blessed that you call me mom, and I hope that I continue to make each of you proud of me. Thank you for sharing me with my educational pursuits and the numerous educators, families, and students of the city of Philadelphia. The sacrifices the two of you have made over the years have allowed me to do the work that truly makes my heart smile—educating the youth of Philadelphia. I thank you, love you, and look forward to watching both of you walk in your destiny.

To my husband, Wyman, thank you for your support throughout this process. Your encouragement, gentle pushes to keep going, and patience truly mean the world to me. I could not have made it through the past 4 years without you. I love you!

To my siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, and extended family, thank you for loving and supporting me always. I do not take for granted having a large loving family! I am truly blessed because I have all of you surrounding me. I truly hit the jackpot when it comes to families! I love all of you and pray that I continue to make you proud of me.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my foundation, who are all no longer with me. To my maternal grandmother, Dorthia Arbor Ferron, my first teacher and the smartest person I ever met. She was an education major as well and instilled in me the importance of learning at an early age. To my maternal grandfather, James Emanuel Ferron, the provider of the family. He taught me the importance of hard work,

commitment, problem-solving, and building strong bonds with family. To my father, George Pope Warthen, my biggest cheerleader. My father taught me so many valuable lessons about life that I cherish and hold in my heart. My father was an outspoken man and a true social butterfly (now you know where I get it from). To my mother, Ruby Gail Jefferson, my role model and biggest supporter. She was my example of motherhood and what it looks like to make sacrifices for your family. She was always in my corner supporting me with my work and schooling. She was and will always be my favorite girl! I miss her and think of her daily. I truly wish both my grandparents and parents were here to celebrate this special milestone with me. I pray I continue to make them and my entire family proud as I do the work I have been called to do!

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Lastly, I would like to thank the school leaders (school and district level) who participated in this research study. Their willingness to be vulnerable and share their experiences as well as their needs with me is truly appreciated. As a school leader myself, I understand the various demands and challenges placed on the participants in this survey. I thank all of you for your leadership, and I am rooting for all of your continued success!



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Define the Problem**

The inception of the Coronavirus pandemic altered the concept of schooling and school leadership in our country. Many school systems were charged with creating a viable school model from scratch with no preparation in a very short timeframe. School leaders like myself were forced to adapt our way of leading to meet the ever-changing needs of our school communities. School leaders were tasked with coordinating food distribution, technology distribution and repairs, social-emotional support, and health services, as well as maintaining the normal duties of school administration. The Coronavirus pandemic and its lasting impact on the educational system are unprecedented and revealed the lack of preparation many school leaders possessed to handle the multitude of demands being placed before them. However, the difficult lessons learned since March 2020 can be used by school systems and leadership preparation programs to prepare current and future school leaders to meet the ever-changing landscape of education in our country.

Leaders must be cognizant that crisis management often requires them to address and respond to dilemmas that have more than one viable solution. A leader must have the knowledge and skill to execute a decision swiftly while thinking about the short-term and long-term implications of their choices for all stakeholders. They must continue to display the characteristics of effective leadership when dealing with a crisis, such as the Coronavirus pandemic. The many tough decisions that leaders had to make in the year following the Coronavirus pandemic were met with both applause and criticism

from various stakeholders. While leaders must consider the best interests and opinions of stakeholders when making decisions, they ultimately should be basing their decisions on what is best for their students (Harris, 2020).

### **The Role of a School Leader**

The role of a school leader before the March 2020 school year was complex and ambiguous in the breadth and scope of what the job duties entails at times. West et al. (2010) described the traditional role of a school administrator attending to the following responsibilities as a part of their daily cadence: attending meetings, observing classroom instruction, being present in the school community, and completing leadership tasks. The main focus of a school leader's role was intended to meet the various needs of the students, staff, families, and community members, while simultaneously meeting the operational, facility, and organizational demands of their school and district. At the core of the school leader's role is being an instructional leader. The leader's key responsibility as an instructional leader is to prioritize the learning and achievement of all students.

Glasman and Heck (1990) described the shift of the principal role from being primarily managerial before the early 1990s. They attributed the change in focus to the body of research that has been done on the impact of school leaders on student achievement. This has led school leaders to balance their time consistently between instructional leadership and the many operational responsibilities that often monopolize their time. The demands of the school leader role are often exacerbated by the societal and organizational contexts of their school organizations and communities. Additionally, school leaders are often thrust into responding to unanticipated and often high-intensity situations that alter both their work and the education of their students (West et al., 2010).

Many school leaders struggle with defining their role, time, and priorities in the educational setting while attending to and addressing the many complexities that come along with the modern-day school leader position.

Educational leaders are tasked with making hundreds of decisions in the course of a school day, according to an article published by The School Superintendent Association (*Feature: McDaniel\_Gruenert*, 2018). McDaniel and Gruenert discussed the impact of the number of decisions that school leaders make on their effectiveness as leaders, largely because the majority of the decisions they make in a day is unrelated to instruction and improving student outcomes. Occasionally, educational leaders are faced with making high-stakes decisions in a crisis that impact the safety and well-being of members in their school community. Crises generally come about without warning and have the added disadvantage of lacking prior preparation time to respond. By nature, a crisis is unexpected and can impact the organization and its stakeholders immensely (Bhaduri, 2018). A crisis can exist either internally (within the organization) or externally (outside the organization). The primary goal of the school leader in a crisis should be to make informed decisions that meet the needs of the school community. The leader must also be cognizant of the intended and unintended consequences to their school community as a result of their decision-making process.

## **Conclusion**

Educational leadership, as many knew or experienced it, was severely challenged at the core in March of 2020. School leaders all around the world were tasked with the responsibility of figuring out how to educate and operate schools virtually. The skills required to develop and lead a school organization virtually were non-existent among



most current educational leaders and organizations. School leaders had to make tough decisions that have altered the very fabric of schooling as it has been known in this country for the last century. The decision-making process for many leaders has been reactionary and based on the ethical paradigm of care for their students and school communities. Many leaders are looking to provide responses and solutions that meet the immediate needs of their school communities, drawing from their repertoire of decision-making strategies. The unprecedented impact of crises such as the Coronavirus Pandemic on school systems highlights the lack of crisis management training and preparation that current and future leaders receive in school leadership programs and from their school organizations.

My experience as an educator has been gained over the past 24 years working in various roles (teacher, interventionist, teacher leader, assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent) in both charter and traditional public schools in a large urban school district. I had the privilege of serving as a school leader of a small elementary school (pre-kindergarten through eighth grade) for 6 years. The last 16 months of my tenure as a school principal was during the Coronavirus pandemic. During my time as a principal, I was faced with many crises that stretched me as a leader. The following are a few examples of crises that I encountered during my time as principal: missing student, attempted abduction, weapon on-premise, carbon monoxide leak (evacuation and relocation), students ingesting an illegal substance, teacher assaulted, severe medical emergencies, death of school community members, and violent incidents that involved the arrest of students. My school organization has protocols and procedures for many of the events listed above. However, due to the dynamic nature of each school setting and/or

the timing of the crisis, the protocols are not inclusive of every step a leader must take to address the crisis. Generally, during times of crisis when I am required to make split-second decisions, my adrenaline and emotions tend to run high. As a leader, I tried to remain cognizant of the impact that my split-second choices would have on various members of my school community, immediately and long term. Unfortunately, my formal leadership preparation did not equip me with all the skills necessary to address the various challenges and obstacles I was faced with during my tenure as a principal addressing crises. My personal experiences of responding to and leading through crises have fueled my desire to research this topic in more depth.

The skills required by an educational leader during a time of crisis are unique to the problem they intend to solve. However, there are crucial competencies, training, and strategies that leaders possess or rely on when called upon to respond to a crisis.

Educational leaders generally employ various strategies and resources at their disposal when making decisions. The following are some of the common factors that can be at play for leaders when they are faced with making decisions in a time of crisis:

experience, organizational protocols, ethical beliefs (paradigms), directives from superiors, advice from mentors/colleagues, feasible alternatives, or the harm factor to all stakeholders involved. This research study explored the formal relationship between ethics and decision-making by school leaders in crises involving climate in schools.

### **School Leaders as Decision Makers**

School leaders are responsible for the overall growth, development, and well-being of their school communities. During times of crisis, a school leader is responsible for systematically responding to the demands of a crisis while attending to the well-being

of their stakeholders. A significant body of research has highlighted the importance of stability, communication, and attention to the needs of stakeholders during a time of crisis (Guest, 2020). According to the 2020 Global Workforce Resilience Report (n.d.), leaders who prioritize and respond to the needs and well-being of their employees have a positive impact on the ability of an organization to weather the crisis. The researcher found that employees were more willing to follow the direction of their leader and weather the crisis when their well-being was attended to and they felt valued. Additionally, leaders must be willing to communicate effectively and lead by example for the overall health and well-being of their organizations.

In times of crisis, leaders rely on their training, past experiences, organizational resources, and personal/professional code of ethics to develop a plan of action. When making day-to-day related decisions, leaders may rely on one or a combination of the following components, which make up their personal and professional code of ethics: education, background, work-related experience, organizational policies, best practices from their discipline (replication), moral or ethical beliefs, and/or advice from a trusted source (colleague, mentor, supervisor). Occasionally, leaders are thrust into making urgent decisions in reaction to a crisis within their organization; or a crisis outside the organization that has the power to impact the school community or daily operations negatively. Regardless of the origin of the nucleus of the crisis (internal vs. external), a leader's decision-making strategies are rooted in one or more ethical paradigms.

Educational leaders are charged with making multiple decisions daily both for routines and matters of crisis that can be associated with one or more of the ethical paradigms: care, critique, justice, profession, and community. School leaders may differ

in the process and approach they take in decision-making in their school context.

However, all of their approaches and processes still can be associated with one or more ethical paradigms.

Leaders undergo the process of decision-making through the use of formal and informal models or processes of determining a solution. In general, the process should include the following: gathering and reviewing relevant information; consulting with relevant stakeholders; weighing pros and cons; identifying alternative solutions; making a decision; taking action; communicating; and reflecting and determining next steps (Oliveira, 2007). In addition to or in the absence of leaders following a specific theory or model for decision-making, they often rely on their personal and professional ethical code to assist in determining their choice of action. All educational leaders should tackle crisis management with an outlook for both immediate conditions and what this means for the future of schooling (Netolicky, 2020). Leaders should be looking to answer the following question: Will the solution that I am imposing fix both an immediate problem and an issue within the organization that needs to be overhauled?

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were explored:

1. What does a leader identify as a crisis?
2. What role do the various ethical paradigms play in the decisions that educational leaders make, especially during a crisis?
3. What influence does an educational leader's leadership preparation have on the process employed for making decisions, especially in times of crisis?

4. What processes do educational leaders employ when tasked with making a decision, especially during a crisis situation?

The information gleaned from this study can be used to impact educational leadership courses for aspiring leaders as well as provide guidance to school organizations for ongoing professional development opportunities for existing school leaders.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

A large body of research exists on ethical paradigms and how leaders in both the private and public sectors use them to guide their practice. Ethical paradigms include care, justice, critique, profession, and community. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) concluded from their research that leaders generally employ several ethical paradigms simultaneously when leading and making decisions. This is known as the multiple ethical paradigm approach. The body of research I have consumed on this topic largely looks at how leaders make decisions and choices for their organizations. A large portion of the research available about decision-making refers to leaders in educational organizations outside of the United States or the business sector. The research surrounding school leaders primarily focuses on what ethical paradigms are dominant as well as how leaders employ the ethical paradigms simultaneously. However, the research that exists provides limited to no conclusive evidence on what ethical paradigms are at play when an educational leader is leading through a crisis or an unprecedented incident such as the Coronavirus pandemic.

#### **Ethical Paradigms**

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) have researched and written extensively on the ethical paradigms regarding educational leadership. They described ethics in terms of the attributes that individuals display, such as demeanor, character, customs, and the sanctioned way of behaving in a particular context. The definition listed above references the concept of right and wrong and a standard of the way individuals should conduct

themselves. The individual attributes of the ethical paradigms give more guidance for how leaders can determine what the standard of behavior is for leading within a given paradigm. The five ethical paradigms are as follows: justice, critique, care, profession, and the community.

The ethic of justice is based on rights, policies, and laws of the given community/organization. Leaders who lead from this paradigm are focused on decision-making that is based on what is good for the group as a whole. Inherent in this paradigm is the pursuit of social justice, equity, respect, fairness, and moral leadership (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Sergiovanni (1992) believed that educational leadership was a calling, and leaders should therefore lead with a moral compass. He wanted leaders to create virtuous schools that were both just and beneficent. Sergiovanni believed that school organizations should be concerned with the welfare of the entire school community (including families) to be a just and moral institution (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

The ethic of critique centers around questioning, examining, and challenging the laws or status quo. Leaders who lead from this paradigm are concerned with identifying inequities and unfair practices in schools that often mirror our society. These leaders not only question the laws and status quo that often benefit the more powerful or elite in the organization. They are concerned with providing a voice for silenced and marginalized stakeholders. Their work and convictions lead to actionable change. Leaders who lead from this perspective are often morally driven. Capper (1993) described this phenomenon as a leader seeing their life's work as awakening individuals to the inequities of their organization, in hopes of rectifying oppressive mistakes and creating a moral and democratic society.

Noddings (1992) regarded the ethic of care as arguably the foundation for any successful educational system. This ethical paradigm is centered around caring (nurturing and encouraging) for the student/organization. School leaders who lead out of this paradigm are also concerned with inequities in their educational system. These leaders have a great sense of social responsibility for the overall well-being of their students and organizations. The ethic of care paradigm embodies shared decision-making, where leaders listen to others and include them in the process. Martin (1995) stated this can be accomplished through the three C's: caring, concern, and connections. Leaders who lead through this paradigm take the time to build relationships with their stakeholder groups.

The ethical paradigm of the profession incorporates aspects of the above-mentioned ethical paradigms. In addition, it encompasses a leader's personal and professional ethical code. A leader's ethical code is composed of their values, beliefs, experiences, and background, whereas the professional code of ethics is set forth by the discipline (education) and governing bodies (departments of education and/or school organizations). A leader's professional judgment in decision-making is grounded in both their personal and professional codes of ethics. Leading from this paradigm requires leaders to be reflective practitioners and receptive to the diverse perspectives and needs of their communities. This paradigm challenges leaders to grapple continually with aspects of their personal and professional codes of ethics that do not align with one another. They need to define clearly what they believe and stand for personally and professionally (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

Furman (2004) found that the ethic of the community centers on a more distributive model of leadership and decision-making. Leaders who lead from this



paradigm view the importance of the whole community when educating and meeting the needs of the school's community and students. This paradigm is comparable to the democratic style of leadership. Inherent in this paradigm is the need to balance the differing opinions and needs of the members of the community.

### **Educational Leadership**

Over the course of the past few decades, numerous researchers have completed studies on the connection between school leaders' ethics and morals and the impact this connection has on their leadership capabilities. One of the most notable researchers on ethical leadership was Noddings (1984), whose research was situated in the feminist approach. She stated, "Caring should be the basis for the decision-making of the educational leader" (p. 650). Noddings' work was a catalyst for Starratt's (1991) research in which she created a cohesive conceptual framework of what ethical leadership is and looks like in action.

Cherkowski et al. (2015) conducted a study with Canadian school leaders to identify their ethical decision-making processes as well as to illuminate the moral agency that educational leaders have to impact the moral and ethical climate of their school communities. Campbell (1997) shared similar views on the ethical responsibilities of school leaders. In addition, Campbell called for greater awareness by school leaders on the impact of their decisions and actions on others. These researchers defined moral agency as "a person's ability to make moral judgments based on some commonly held notion of right and wrong, to do so on behalf of others, and to be held accountable for these actions" (p. 3).

Data were collected in this research study through a survey including open-ended questions. Cherkowski et al. wanted to gather the respondents' experiences and insights into the following topics: ethical decision-making; their moral agency; and the role of relationships in decision-making. Overall, the principals in the study described being collaborative and inclusive in the decision-making process when faced with an ethical dilemma. The findings of the study also highlighted that for collaborative decision-making, there must be strong levels of trust in the organization. The researchers' analysis revealed the following: "as public employees, principals often have to walk a difficult line between developing a culture of collaborative decision-making among professionals and adhering to the rules and prescriptions that often characterize a public bureaucracy" (p. 11). Furthermore, the principals in the study saw themselves "as ethically motivated individuals who work toward the best interests of children in their schools and whose personal code of ethics aligns with many of the professional values of school leadership" (p. 12). This research study highlighted how school leaders' identities and actions (moral code) played into how they made ethical decisions. Additionally, the study underpinned the importance of building trusting relationships with the members of their school community members. These trust relationships allowed the leaders to collaborate with the members of their school communities to solve ethical dilemmas.

Arar et al. (2016) conducted a study in Israel to see the impact of the ethical paradigms on how Arab school leaders made decisions. The study focused on only three of the ethical paradigms: care, critique, and justice. This study was beneficial because it looked at ethical leadership within a context outside of the United States. The findings of the research revealed the following:

the importance of social and cultural background in the research on ethical leadership for social justice...that some of the respondents' background variables seem to have a connection with their ethical leadership conduct...culture and social circumstances are related to ethical leadership...social identity, in traditional societies, such as AI, is solidly connected to their community and extended family and influences their leaders' behaviors. (pp. 655-656)

The study used a closed questionnaire based on the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) of Lyse Langlois. The ELQ asked leaders to examine statements about various educational leadership tasks. The ELQ was designed to measure the following abilities of leaders: "The ability to identify an ethical dilemma; the ability to solve it; the types of decisions made when facing an ethical dilemma; the influence of organizational influence on the process; and the pressures felt while resolving the ethical dilemma" (pp. 651-652). Arar et al.'s (2016) findings highlighted how the context within which the leaders were leading as well as their background had a bearing on how they will lead ethically and make decisions.

Truong and Hallinger (2015) discussed how aspects of ethics regarding right and wrong can be universal, while other factors such as context and cultural norms impact what is considered ethical in a particular society. Additionally, a leader's moral beliefs, background, and experiences impact how they lead and make decisions for their school communities.

### **Ethical Decision-Making**

School leaders engage daily in various approaches and processes to leading and making decisions for their school organization. School leaders can rely on their organization's policies and procedures to make general everyday decisions. Shapiro and Gross (2013) stated, "The most difficult decisions to solve are ethical ones that require

dealing with paradoxes and complexities” (p. 3). The above text was taken from their text *Ethical Educational Leadership in Turbulent Times: (Re)Solving Moral Dilemmas*. They wrote this book to help educational leaders navigate leading and making decisions, especially during turbulent times. Shapiro and Gross (2013) used research from Foster (1986), Fullan (2001), and Homer-Dixon (2000) as the basis for their work on supporting school leaders with leading ethically during turbulent times. This text takes the theoretical approach that encompasses the multiple ethical paradigms (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016) and Turbulence Theory (Gross, 1998).

Foster (1986) discussed the moral and ethical challenges that a leader faces when tasked with a moral dilemma that impacts their school community. They are charged with making decisions that can potentially alter the current conditions of their school community. Fullan’s (2001) research discussed the problematic nature of leaders responding to matters layered with complexities and mitigating circumstances in “once-and-for-all answers” (p. 2). This approach does not account for the subsequent decisions leaders need to make in order to respond to the impact of their initial response on their school community. The work of Homer-Dixon (2000) exemplified the phenomenon being studied: how leaders make decisions in times of crisis. Homer-Dixon wrote:

We demand that (leaders) solve, or at least manage, a multitude of interconnected problems that can develop into crises without warning; we require them to navigate an increasingly turbulent reality that is, in key aspects, literally incomprehensible to the human mind. (p. 15)

Lyons and Achilles (1976) conducted an experimental study on the impact of the principal’s mood and disposition on their ability to make decisions. The study was conducted with both principals and vice principals of a school district in southern

Tennessee. The participants in the study were randomly assigned to either the placated or frustrated groups. Participants in both groups were assigned the same decision-making task to respond to on educational policy matters. However, the logistics of the principal meeting and conditions were reflective of their group assignment. The participants in the placated group reported to their meeting at their regularly scheduled weekly leadership meeting time. The meeting was held in an aesthetically pleasing environment that included air conditioning and parking. They were provided refreshments and the opportunity to socialize with other educational leaders. Their meeting concluded early enough so that they would not be impacted by rush-hour traffic. The participants in the frustrated group received the logistics for the meeting and were instructed to arrive later than the normal time of their weekly leadership meeting. The meeting was held in an unfamiliar environment that lacked air conditioning and parking near the building. They were made to wait outside in the heat as they prepared the space for the meeting. The participants in this group were told at the onset of the meeting that they would be dismissed at 4:30, which coincided with rush hour. The researchers found in this study that there was no significant difference in how the principals responded to the decision-making task exercise, regardless of group placement. The researchers concluded the following:

Apparently, professional educational administrators in their role performance as administrators are able to suppress “frustrations, irritations, confusion, and criticisms” in order to perform in a professional manner.... In other words, a frustrated mood state does not affect (adversely or positively) decisions of a professional, educational nature.... They clearly were influenced by environmental (immediate physical and psychological) settings, and yet they were capable of drawing on a specific professional orientation to accomplish tasks perceived as representative of their functions as professional educators. (p. 52)

The study highlighted the ability of principals to detach from their personal feelings and emotions when making decisions in the best interest of their school communities.

Eyal et al. (2011) conducted an exploratory study to determine how educational leaders resolved everyday ethical dilemmas. The researcher conducted this study with educators enrolled in an aspiring principals' program in Israel. The adoption of a multiple ethical paradigm approach to addressing dilemmas was utilized in both the program and research:

This approach assumes that principals can simultaneously examine and utilize different ethical perspectives in their decision-making. These ethical perspectives include the ethic of justice (fairness and utilitarianism), the ethic of critique, the ethic of care, and the ethic of profession. Furman (2003) recently suggested incorporating an ethic of community into the multiple ethical paradigms. (p. 398)

The researchers developed a self-reporting testing tool called the Ethical Perspectives Instrument (EPI) to utilize in this study. The researchers stated the following reasons why they used the EPI:

By using the EPI, we attempted to avoid the problem of an overabundance of information (also mentioned by Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). The EPI captures the core of the ethical dilemma. The construction of the scenarios carefully avoid excessive detail that could prejudice respondents and add noise to their choices or represent confounds that could seriously bias the research results. (p. 402)

The results of this study found that there was a significant negative correlation between the ethics of fairness and care. The ethics of fairness had a negative correlation with all of the other paradigms. The ethics of care and professionalism had a significantly higher positive correlation than that of the other paradigms. The negative correlations could be attributed to the participants' (school leaders) interpretation of what was in the best interest of the school community. Despite the limitation that this study was conducted

with aspiring leaders, not current leaders, it did provide the field with valuable information, as noted by the authors:

Despite its shortcomings, as exploratory research, the present study provides a preliminary and tentative look at the ethical judgment of school leaders when faced with specific administrative and instructional dilemmas. Based on the findings, this appears to be a fruitful and promising line of research. Furthermore, beyond its theoretical contribution, this study may have significant practical implications for the design of school leadership training programs and for the development of school principals. (p. 408)

### **Crisis Management**

Crisis management for school leaders has not received sufficient attention from educational researchers, school organizations, or educational leadership programs.

Grissom and Condon (2021) defined a school crisis as an “unexpected, fundamental disruption to school functioning with potentially high consequences for the organization, its stakeholders, and its reputation” (p. 315). The definition they utilized for this research for crisis management was adapted from Gainey’s (2009) research: “Crisis management covers strategies for preparing organizations for crises—that is, making them ‘crisis ready’—and handling them when they arise in ways that minimize their damage to the organization and its stakeholders” (p. 315).

This research focused on the crisis leadership of multiple school systems during the Coronavirus pandemic. The study focused on leadership members’ actions through the lens of the *Crisis Management Life Cycle in Schools in Districts*, which they adapted from Wooten and James’s (2008) model. This model viewed crisis management in three stages: pre-crisis, prevention, and preparedness; during crisis, response, and recovery; and post-crisis, reflection and learning. Grissom and Condon concluded the following:

School leaders need both the skills and the structures in place to mitigate crises, prepare for them, respond to them, and recover and learn from them. Viewed separately, the skills required for crisis leadership are not wholly distinct from the skills successful school leadership demands. (p. 321)

MacNeil and Topping (2007) conducted a research study on crisis management in schools that focused on prevention. The working definition of crisis that they used encompassed the element of psychological harm: “Events that cause severe emotional and social distress may occur at any time and without warning. Such occurrences have been variously called traumatic incidents, critical incidents, crises, disasters, and emergencies” (p. 66). MacNeil and Topping believed, “there is a clear need, arguably a legal obligation under ‘duty of care’ (Tronc 1992), for all schools to establish a crisis management plan” (p. 66). The article discussed the unexpected nature of the various types of crises that are faced by school communities and the lack of experience and guidance that school leaders may have in dealing with particular matters of crisis. The researchers warned against the additional impact on the community when school leaders are left to interpret procedures through the lens of their experiences, skills, and beliefs. In their opinion, this may lead to worse outcomes for the school community due to what they call a leader applying common sense and clinical judgment. “Many school managers and consultants still lack training in crisis intervention or in how to recognize and make effective decisions under conditions of stress and in the absence of sufficient information, time, and resources” (p. 67). MacNeil and Topping’s research findings suggested the best method of preparing school leaders to address crises at their school level is through prevention strategies. They found that the implementation of various crisis management frameworks was useful when school leaders had opportunities for training and support



using them. They grounded their study in the work of Eaves (2001) and Poland (1997), who both believed that ongoing planning, preparation, training, and practice were crucial to preparing school leaders to be more prepared to manage crises. MacNeil and Topping concluded that crisis management research is underdeveloped, and more research needs to be conducted to define strategies that can be implemented by school leaders when addressing matters of crises.

## **Conclusion**

The body of literature is extensive on the ethical paradigms and their impact and implications on school leaders. The review of ethical paradigms was crucial in determining what processes leaders utilize when making decisions during times of crisis. Noddings's (1984) research affirmed that the ethic of caring should be the lens through which all school leaders begin their decision-making process. Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2016) research over the past few decades highlighted how school leaders employ the ethical paradigms singularly, but also simultaneously. They coined the use of leading out of more than one ethical paradigm—the multiple ethical paradigm approach. The ethical paradigms of care, critique, and the profession were noted the most in the research reviewed for this study.

The role of the school leader has evolved over the past few decades. School leaders have additional responsibilities that may be more complex than what they have been prepared to handle during their leadership preparation coursework or job-embedded professional development sessions. One of the responsibilities of a school leader that the literature showed remains underdeveloped is crisis management. This is an area of great concern because, as Foster (1986) highlighted, it has the greatest impact on altering

individual members and entire school communities. The body of research that I evaluated for my research points to the utilization of a crisis management framework that is inclusive of the following on an ongoing basis: planning, preparedness (awareness), training, education, practice, and debriefing (MacNeil & Topping, 2007).

The research reviewed for this study showed the need for more research to be conducted to support the field of school leaders with leading during a time of crisis. Additionally, school organizations and leadership preparation programs must also prepare our school leaders for handling the myriad challenges they are facing in their school setting.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the formal relationship between the ethical paradigms and the decision-making strategies employed by school leaders during times of crisis. This research study intended to gather knowledge about how leaders respond to and make decisions during crises, and to provide support and guidance for future considerations for the professional development of school leaders. The following research questions were explored during this study:

1. What does a leader identify as a crisis?
2. What role do the various ethical paradigms play in the decisions that educational leaders make, especially during a crisis?
3. What influence does an educational leader's leadership preparation have on the process employed for making decisions, especially in times of crisis?
4. What processes do educational leaders employ when tasked with making a decision, especially during a crisis situation?

#### **Data Collection Procedures**

The philosophical paradigm that this research study falls within is the pragmatic paradigm. Research grounded in the pragmatic paradigm collects both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research question(s) being explored (Mertens, 2020). The research design employed for this study was the pragmatic sequential mixed-method design. However, given the sensitivity of the topic, the emphasis was on the qualitative material collected. Creswell (2009) described this design as collecting one type of data

(quantitative) as a basis for collecting the second type of data (qualitative). Conclusions were based on analyzing both strands of data in the sequential mixed-method design.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Quantitative data were collected through a survey distributed to school leaders in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Qualitative data were collected through individual interviews conducted with a group of school leaders who indicated their willingness to participate in the survey. Both the quantitative and qualitative data collected during the research study were analyzed to answer the study's research questions. The data compiled from the survey provided the breadth of the analysis, while the interviews provided depth through concrete examples and context to answer the research questions posed in this study.

An introductory email was sent to principals in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania describing the research study and inviting them to participate in the survey (Appendix A). Data collection for both the survey and the interview were standardized across all participants. Additional questions were only asked if clarification was needed for a respondent's answer to the interview questions. The survey and interview questions can be located in Appendix B and C. School leaders were given the opportunity to express interest in participating in the follow-up interview utilizing a separate link provided at the end of the survey. The follow-up interview was conducted utilizing the interview protocol found in Appendix D. The interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform and recorded for transcription purposes. Consent for participation, recording, and participant's rights were shared before the interview commenced (Appendix E).

## **Recruitment**

Participants were recruited through an email communication sent out to the principals listed on the Pennsylvania Department of Education database. Participants who completed the survey had the opportunity to recommend additional leaders for consideration in this research study. The snowball method was employed to accommodate schools in Pennsylvania that are led by multiple leaders (principals plus several assistant principals) due to the size of their student population. In larger schools, the principal may not be the sole administrator responsible for addressing disciplinary concerns.

The participant survey was sent out to educators listed on the database of principals (on the PDE Website) for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. After 3 weeks, a reminder email was sent out. This was followed up by an email once a week for 3 weeks to elicit as many responses to the survey as possible. The goal was to obtain at least 20% of the surveys completed by the end of the 3-week survey window. The survey provided a separate link for participants to indicate their willingness to take part in the follow-up interview. This was done so that all survey responses would be anonymous.

A computer-based randomizer was then used to select 20% of the willing participants from the introductory survey for the follow-up interview. The follow-up interviews were conducted using a standard interview protocol (Appendix E) on the Zoom platform.

## **Sample**

The participants in this study consisted of educational leaders serving in the role of assistant principals, principals, assistant superintendents, and other central office

leaders who have led a school in Pennsylvania. The participants consisted of school leaders from parochial, private, charter, and traditional public schools. This study focused on school leaders to understand how they were prepared to respond to crises at the school level. School leaders were selected as the target participants because of their first-hand knowledge of and experience with handling this phenomenon. The survey included questions around the following topics: school leader's personal demographics, educational background, school demographics, leadership experience related to discipline, and willingness to participate in a follow-up interview (Appendix D). The researcher used a randomizer to select willing participants for the follow-up interview. In all, there were 55 survey respondents. Of the survey respondents 10 were interviewed.

### **Description of Participant Characteristics**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2020-2021 school year data, 6.9% of the principals in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania were African American or Black, while 88.8% were White. The racial and ethnic data of the participants in this research study do not reflect the data of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The data below show the demographic data of the participants in this research study.

### ***Survey Respondents***

To assess if self-selection bias were an issue, the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents were analyzed. In this context, it was found that there was a statistically significant relationship between Gender and Race/Ethnicity (Chi Sq = 18.789,  $p = <.001$ ). On a percentage basis, the female respondents tended to identify as African American or Black (19, 63.3%), while the male respondents tended to identify as

White (22, 88.0%). The race/ethnicity of the respondents did not prove to be a factor in any other analyses and was dropped. Gender, however, did and will continue to be analyzed. See Table 3.1 for further details.

**Table 3.1**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Race*

	African American or Black	Asian American or Asian	White	Total
Male	3 (12.0%)	0 (0%)	22 (88.0%)	25 (100.0%)
Female	19 (63.3%)	2 (6.7%)	9 (30.0%)	30 (100.0%)
Total	22 (40.0%)	2 (6.7%)	31 (56.4%)	55 (100.0%)

Chi-Square 18.789,  $p = <.001$

While the results were not statistically significant between gender and job category of the respondents (Chi-Square 4.055,  $p = NS$ ), on a percentage basis, female respondents were more apt to identify as a principal (f:25, 83.3%, m:16, 64%), while male respondents identified as assistant principals (m:5, 20%, f:3, 10%). See Table 3.2 for further details.

**Table 3.2**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Job Category*

	Assistant Superintendent	Principal	Assistant Principal	Other School Leaders	Total
Male	2 (8.0%)	16 (64.0%)	5 (20.0%)	2 (8.0%)	25 (100.0%)
Female	2 (6.7%)	25 (83.3%)	3 (10.0%)	0 (0%)	30 (100.0%)
Total	4 (7.3%)	41 (74.5%)	8 (14.5%)	2 (3.6%)	55 (100.0%)

Chi-Square 4.055,  $p = NS$

The results of the survey revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the respondent's gender and the type of school led (Chi-Square 2.437,  $p = NS$ ). On a percentage basis, the majority of the respondents led traditional public schools (m = 22, 88.0%, f:28, 96.6%). See Table 3.3 for further details.

**Table 3.3**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by School Type*

	Private or Parochial School	Traditional Public School	Other	Total
Male	2 (8.0%)	22 (88.0%)	1 (4.0%)	25 (100.0%)
Female	0 (0%)	28 (96.6%)	1 (3.4%)	29 (100.0%)
Total	2 (3.7%)	50 (92.6%)	2 (3.7%)	54 (100.0%)

Chi-Square 2.437,  $p = NS$

On a percentage basis, male respondents were both less experienced (6, 24.0%) than female respondents (4, 13.3%) and more experienced than female respondents (m:14, 56.0%, f:11, 36.7%). See Table 3.4 for further details.

**Table 3.4**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Years of Leadership Experience*

	0-3 Years	4-6 Years	7-9 Years	10+ Years	Total
Male	6 (24.0%)	3 (12.0%)	2 (8.0%)	14 (56.0%)	25 (100.0%)
Female	4 (13.3%)	7 (23.3%)	8 (26.7%)	11 (36.7%)	30 (100.0%)
Total	10 (18.2%)	10 (18.2%)	10 (18.2%)	25 (45.5%)	55 (100.0%)

Chi-Square 5.551,  $p = NS$



The results of the survey revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the respondents' gender and whether they were exposed to ethical paradigms in their educational leadership preparation courses (Chi-Square .003,  $p = NS$ ). On a percentage basis, the respondents who answered yes (m:19, 76.0%, f:23, 76.7%) and no (m:6, 24.0%, f:7, 23.3%) were similar. See Table 3.5 for further details.

**Table 3.5**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Exposure to the Ethical Paradigms in Their Leadership Preparation Program*

	No	Yes	Total
Male	6 (24.0%)	19 (76.0%)	25 (100.0%)
Female	7 (23.3%)	23 (76.7%)	30 (100.0%)
Total	13 (23.6%)	42 (76.4%)	55 (100.0%)

Chi-Square .003,  $P = NS$

The results of the survey revealed that respondents' gender and whether they participated in job-embedded professional development on the ethical paradigms were not statistically related (Chi-Square .282,  $p = NS$ ). On a percentage basis, the respondents who answered yes or somewhat were similar for both male and female respondents (m:16, 91.2%, f:19, 98.8%). See Table 3.6 for further details.

**Table 3.6**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Participation in Job-Embedded Professional Development on Ethical Paradigms*

	Yes	Somewhat	No	Total
Male	9 (50.0%)	7 (41.2%)	8 (44.4%)	24 (45.3%)
Female	9 (50.0%)	10 (58.8%)	10 (55.6%)	29 (54.7%)
Total	18 (100.0%)	17 (100.0%)	18 (100.0%)	53 (100.0%)

Chi-Square .282, p = NS

The results of the survey revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the respondents' gender and whether they were exposed to crisis management in their leadership preparation courses (Chi-Square .092, p = NS). On a percentage basis, the respondents who answered yes (m:9, 36.0%, f:12, 40.0%) and no (m:16, 64.0%, f:18, 60.0%) were similar. See Table 3.7 for further details.

**Table 3.7**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Exposure to Crisis Management in Their Leadership Preparation Program*

	No	Yes	Total
Male	16 (64.0%)	9 (36.0%)	25 (100.0%)
Female	18 (60.0%)	12 (40.0%)	30 (100.0%)
Total	34 (61.8%)	21 (38.2%)	55 (100.0%)

Chi-Square .982, p = NS

The results of the survey revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the respondents' gender and whether they participated in job-

embedded professional development on crisis management (Chi-Square .923,  $p = NS$ ). On a percentage basis, the respondents who answered yes or somewhat were similar for both male and female respondents (m:22, 88%, f:26, 86.6%). See Table 3.8 for further details.

**Table 3.8**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Participation in Job-Embedded Professional Development on Crisis Management*

	Yes	Somewhat	No	Total
Male	14 (56.0%)	8 (32.0%)	3 (12.0%)	25 (100.0%)
Female	13 (43.3%)	13 (43.3%)	4 (13.3%)	30 (100.0%)
Total	27 (49.1%)	21 (38.2%)	7 (12.7%)	55 (100.0%)

Chi-Square .923,  $p = NS$

While the results were not statistically significant (Chi-Square 2.738,  $p = NS$ ), on a percentage basis, male respondents were more apt to be in schools with a code of conduct than were female respondents (m:25, 100.0%, f: 26, 89.7%). See Table 3.9 for further details.

**Table 3.9**

*Crosstabulation of Gender and the Presence of a Code of Student Conduct in Their School*

	No	Yes	Total
Male	25 (100.0%)	0 (0%)	25 (100.0%)
Female	26 (89.7%)	3 (10.3%)	29 (100.0%)
Total	51 (94.4%)	3 (5.6%)	54 (100.0%)

Chi-Square 2.738,  $p = NS$

While the results were not statistically significant (Chi-Square .684,  $p = NS$ ), on a percentage basis, female respondents reported spending more time during their workday handling discipline concerns. (14, 46.7%) than did male respondents (9, 36%). See Table 3.10 for further details.

**Table 3.10**

*Crosstabulation of Gender and Time Spent on Handling Discipline Concerns*

	0%	1 - 25%	26 - 50%	51 - 75%	Total
Male	1 (4.0%)	15 (60.0%)	8 (32.0%)	1 (4.0%)	25 (100.0%)
Female	1 (3.3%)	15 (50.0%)	12 (40.0%)	2 (6.7%)	30 (100.0%)
Total	2 (3.6%)	30 (54.5%)	20 (36.4%)	3 (5.5%)	55 (100.0%)

Chi-Square .684,  $p = NS$

While the results were not statistically significant (Chi-Square .616,  $p = NS$ ), on a percentage basis, male respondents reported spending more time during their workday on Culture/Climate Management (7, 28.0%) than did female respondents (7, 23.3%). See Table 3.11 for further details.

**Table 3.11**

*Crosstabulation of Gender and Time Spent on Culture/Climate Management*

	1-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76% and Higher	Total
Male	9 (36.0%)	9 (36.0%)	3 (12.0%)	4 (16.0%)	25 (100.0%)
Female	13 (43.3%)	10 (33.3%)	4 (13.3%)	3 (10.0%)	30 (100.0%)
Total	22 (40.0%)	19 (34.5%)	7 (12.7%)	7 (12.7%)	55 (100.0%)

Chi-Square .616,  $p = NS$

A summative scale of job satisfaction was made of the following nine Likert-based statements. It was assumed that the ordinal measures captured intensity. Thus, the scale ranged from possible score of 0 to a high of 45.

- The stress and disappointments involved with being a principal at this school aren't really worth it.
- I am generally satisfied with being the principal at this school.
- I am generally satisfied with being a principal overall.
- If I could get a higher-paying job, I'd leave this job as soon as possible.
- I think about transferring to another school.
- I don't seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began this job.
- I think about just staying home from school because I am just too tired to go.
- I think about transferring out of this school district.
- The COVID pandemic made this job much harder. Please explain.

On the whole, the survey respondents were satisfied with their positions as scores ranged from 18 to 43 with an overall mean of 30.1 points. Men were very slightly higher ( $x = 32.96$ ) than women (30).

### ***Interview Respondents***

The follow-up interview to the survey was conducted with 10 school leaders, who all served in the capacity of a principal within the past 5 years. Of the school leaders who participated in the interview, two have been promoted to assistant superintendents, seven are still school principals, and one has retired but serves as a substitute principal when needed. All of the leaders have been in education for more than 10 years and have served

in various capacities in the school context. The leaders interviewed all had experience with addressing crises in their school organizations that involved but were not limited to the following: weapons, facilities, and pandemic schooling. See Table 3.12 for more details about the school leaders interviewed.

**Table 3.12**

*The School Leader Interviewed Profiles*

Pseudonym	Position (Current)	School District	School Type	# of Years in Leadership	Race/Ethnicity	Gender
Adam	Assistant Superintendent	Large Suburb	K-12	11-15 years	White	Male
Amanda	Principal	Large Suburb	5-8	16-20 years	White	Female
Calvin	Principal	Large Urban	3-12 (Alternative)	6-10 years	African American	Male
Devon	Principal (Retired)	Small Urban	K-8	16-20 years	White	Male
Donna	Principal	Large Suburb	K-6	1-5 years	African American	Female
Jessica	Principal	Large Urban	K-8	1-5 years	African American	Female
Lamar	Principal	Large Urban	K-12	6-10 years	African American	Male
Marie	Principal	Large Urban	K-5	11-15 years	African American	Female
Rachel	Principal	Large Urban	K-8	6-10 years	African American	Female
Scott	Assistant Superintendent	Small Urban	K-12	16-20 years	White	Male

**Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to determine how educational leaders in various school settings make decisions in times of crisis. The information gathered in this study can be used to add to the field of educational leadership literature. The findings of this study can be used to shape leadership preparation programs and aid school districts in providing professional development and support for both novice and veteran leaders regarding

crisis management. This research study arose out of the shift in school administrators' responsibilities in response to the Coronavirus pandemic and increased trauma in school settings (civil unrest and increased violence).

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The major scope of a school leader's work is constant: human resource management, family and community engagement, instructional leadership, and school resource management. However, other aspects of a school leader's work ebb and flow depending on the context of the school: the needs of the school community, the financial standing of the school, and societal factors impacting the school. School leaders are required to make multiple decisions every day on behalf of their school communities. When handling a crisis, school leaders may rely on their past experiences or personal beliefs on what is the best way to handle the situation. In addition, they may rely on training they received in their leadership preparation program, job-embedded professional development, and/or organizational emergency management protocols to handle the urgent matter. The range of support and oversight a school leader receives when handling a crisis depends on the organization and management structure of the educational organization. All of the school leaders who participated in the follow-up interview acknowledged the presence of crisis management plans and protocols in their school organization. Several school leaders discussed not being well-versed in all of their emergency management plans and protocols because another administrator on campus (assistant principal, dean, climate manager) was primarily responsible for the creation and implementation of the plans. Only one principal shared during the follow-up interview that she received ongoing preventive training in crisis management from her



district leadership and township, whereas all the other principals interviewed only could speak to the support they received after an incident occurred.

The goal of this research study was to determine how school leaders were prepared (leadership coursework, job-embedded professional development) to make decisions (strategies and processes) during times of crisis. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected during this study. Quantitative data were collected through a survey sent out to 558 principals in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Of the 558 principals who were sent the introductory email (see Appendix A), 55 respondents completed the survey. The survey respondents can be categorized by the following characteristics:

- Gender: Female, 30 (54.5%); Male, 25 (45.5%)
- Race and Ethnicity: African American or Black, 22 (40.0%); Asian American or Asian, 2 (6.7%); White, 31 (56.14%)
- Role: Assistant Superintendent, 4 (7.3%); Principal, 41 (74.5%); Assistant Principals, 8 (14.5%); Other School Leaders, 2 (3.6%)
- Leadership Experience: Under 3 years, 10 (18.2%); 4-6 years, 10 (18.2%); 7-9 years, 10 (18.2%); 10+ years, 25(45.5%)

The survey provided the researcher with data on school leader demographics, leadership preparation, experiences, and how the leaders occupy their work time. The survey included two optional open-ended questions for responses from the school leaders. The questions were posed to ascertain why the school leaders believed their job was harder post the Coronavirus pandemic and what they need to be more prepared and successful in completing their job responsibilities.

The qualitative data were collected through follow-up interviews with school leaders for this research study. Of the 55 survey respondents, 21 (38.1%) indicated on the survey (separate link) that they would be interested in being considered to participate in the follow-up interview. Of the school leaders who volunteered, 10 (47.6%) were selected utilizing a randomizer to participate. The school leaders selected for the interview were categorized by the following characteristics:

- Gender: Female, 5 (50.0%); Male, 5 (50.0%)
- Race and Ethnicity: African American or Black, 6 (60.0%); White, 4 (4.0%)
- Role: Assistant Superintendent, 2 (20.0%); Principal, 8 (80.0%)
- School Type: Elementary School, 5 (50.0%); Middle School, 1 (10.0%); K-12, 3 (30.0%); Alternative School, 1 (10.0%)
- School District: Small Urban, 2 (20.0%); Large Suburban, 3 (30.0%); Large Urban, 5 (50.0%)

The interviews provided clarity on concepts covered in the survey, concrete examples through lived experiences, and the school leaders' perspectives of what they need to be successful.

### **Research Question 1**

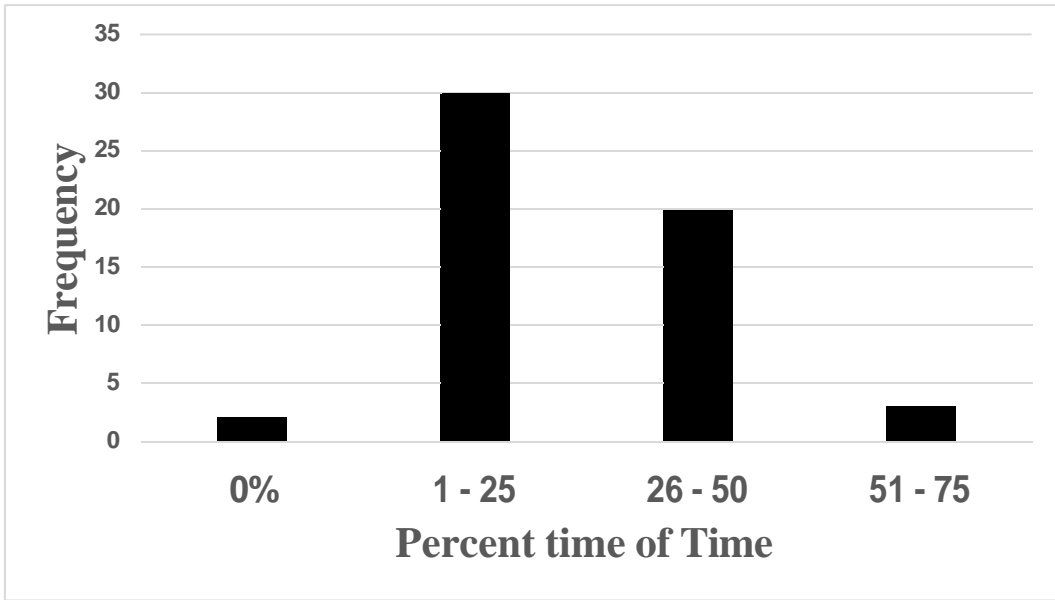
**What does a leader identify as a crisis?**

**(How do educational leaders report spending their time?)**

On the whole, survey respondents reported spending more time on discipline issues than they did on more general climate management, as can be seen in Figure 4.1 and 4.2.

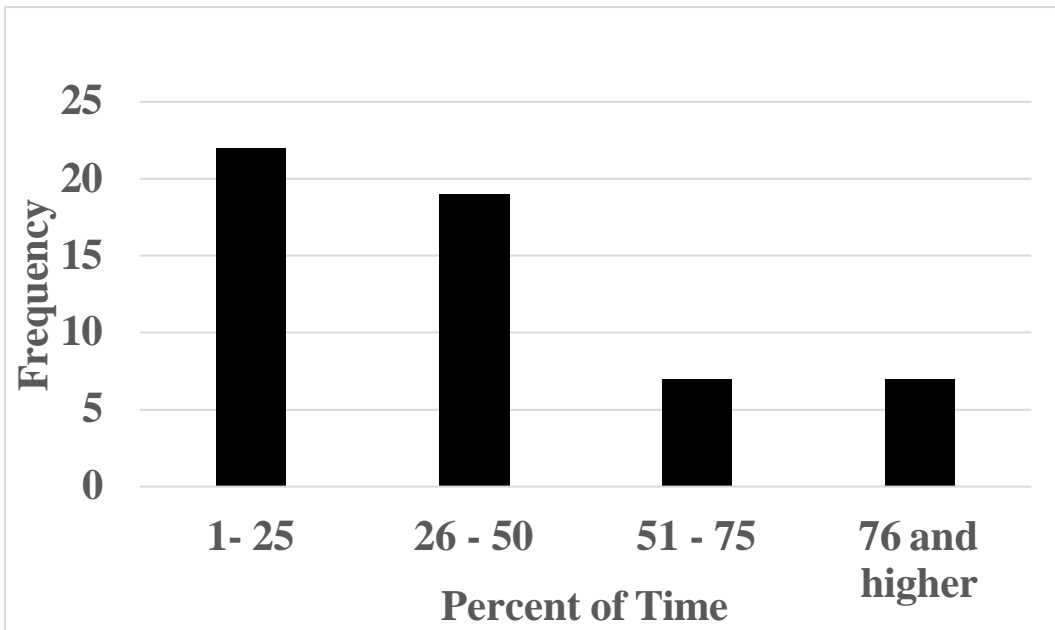
**Figure 4.1**

*Time Allocation Spent in an Average Week on Discipline Issues*



**Figure 4.2**

*Time Allocation Spent in an Average Week on Climate Management*



School leaders who participated in the follow-up interview to the survey were asked to share examples of crises they have encountered and/or had to address in their school settings. The experiences shared by the respondents were all related to crises that originated from outside-of-school or school climate concerns. The respondents discussed examples of crises that can be categorized into the following themes: facility malfunction, weapons on school property, violence in the neighborhood, death of a school member, and fights between students. Of the examples given by the school leaders during the interviews, all except for fights between students could be characterized as being outside the scope of what they were taught to address in their former education preparatory programs. The school leaders interviewed did not include any aspects of their work as instructional leaders as being a crisis, such as teacher hiring, evaluations, curriculum, and pedagogy.

During the follow-up interviews, school leaders in both urban and suburban school settings shared similar examples of crises to which they have had to respond during their careers. Some of the examples such as weapons on school property, fights between students, and violence in the neighborhoods in which the school resides were crises that leaders commented on responding to on more than one occasion. Pseudonyms are used for the school leaders' names throughout this document to maintain anonymity (see Table 3.12 above for more details). Jessica, an elementary principal in a large urban school district, identified the following as a crisis that she handled:

There was a shooting on the street right next to the school. The individuals were shooting and running down the street past the school. The kids were in the yard. I had never dealt with something like this before. My first instinct was to get all the kids in safely and put the building on lockdown. No one in, no one out.

Similarly, Amanda, a middle school principal in a large suburban school district, shared the following type of crisis that she had to handle multiple times:

I had a weapon situation where a student brought a knife to the building with the intent to use it on another student. This was in retaliation to an incident that happened in the park over the weekend. Fortunately for me, a student alerted me by email the night before. I was able to intercept the student at the door and confiscate the knife.

Multiple principals interviewed—including Devon, a retired elementary principal in a small urban school district—identified group assaults as a crisis that they had to deal with on multiple occasions:

At the end of last year, there was a serious incident. A group assault of six to seven boys against one student. It caused an unsafe situation in our building. Students were everywhere recording and making the matter worse. The student wasn't hurt as badly physically as he was mentally and emotionally.

The school leaders expressed their concern and frustration with the lack of skills and formal training in handling these types of crises in their school setting. School leaders generally rely on their school organization protocols and procedures for how to address the above-mentioned crises. The leaders acknowledged that they did not receive training in their educational leadership programs to prepare them for addressing many of the situations they encounter daily. However, many of the leaders discussed using the protocols provided by their organization, along with best practices from their leadership experience, to address matters to the best of their abilities.

## **Research Question 2**

**What role do the various ethical paradigms play in the decisions that educational leaders make, especially during a crisis?**

School leaders employ various methods when addressing crises, depending on the context and impact on the school community. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) researched and wrote about the characteristics of educational leadership and decision-making for school leaders for the past two decades. All decisions that school leaders make during a crisis can be associated with one or more of the ethical paradigms—namely, care, justice, critique, profession, and the community. The survey results revealed that 76.4% of respondents (see Table 3.5) were exposed to the ethical paradigms in their leadership preparation courses, while on a percentage basis, over half of the survey respondents received some type of job-embedded professional development on the ethical paradigms (see Table 3.6).

During the follow-up interviews, the respondents were provided the opportunity to discuss what ethical paradigms they most often employ when leading and making decisions during times of crisis. In general, the leaders described how they made a particular decision, then referred to the definitions of the ethical paradigms (see Appendix F) to juxtapose their original identification or to align their practice with the correct paradigm. Through this process, leaders were able to identify the ethical paradigms on which they based their decision-making and reflect on their thought processes when addressing crises.

There were differences based on gender in how the respondents answered this research question. On the whole, female respondents were more apt to respond from the ethic of care than were the male respondents. For example, Amanda, a middle school principal, said, “I think I am more situated in the ethic of care. I am known as the students’ principal. I am definitely not justice. I have to do what is best for the kids first.

If it's the best decision for kids, then I will take the risk and get in trouble in the end." On the other hand, Devon, a retired elementary school principal, stated, "I am an analytical guy. I have a degree in biology and chemistry. I always start with justice. I lead with rights and policy in mind."

The type of community that the interviewees led also affected their responses to this question. Principals of schools in suburban communities were more apt to respond out of the ethic of care, regardless of their gender. Donna, a principal of an elementary school in a suburban school district, responded, "I lead out of the care paradigm. I want to treat people the way that I want to be treated. I believe in the Golden Rule," whereas Rachel, a principal of an elementary school in an urban school district, responded, "I most often lead from the ethic of critique. I ask myself questions like: Why am I doing this? Who said I need to do this? Who is it going to hurt or impact? And taking time to be critical of the process and what actions I need to make."

The results of the survey revealed that there was no statistical significance between the respondents' gender and if they participated in job-embedded professional development on the ethical paradigms (Chi-Square .282,  $p = NS$ ). On a percentage basis, the respondents who answered yes or somewhat were similar for both male and female respondents (m:16, 91.2%, f:19, 98.8%) (see Table 3.6 for further details).

The results of the survey revealed that there was no statistical significance between the respondents' gender and whether they participated in job-embedded professional development on crisis management (Chi-Square .923,  $p = NS$ ). On a percentage basis, the respondents who answered yes or somewhat were similar for both male and female respondents (m:22, 88%, f:26, 86.6%) (see Table 3.8 for further details).

The interview data showed that many school leaders embodied the characteristics of the various ethical paradigms and applied them when leading and making decisions. However, many of the respondents required me to share the definition and characteristics of the ethical paradigms so that they could answer the specific questions being asked. The school leaders were more familiar with the attributes of the ethical paradigms than their specific names. The data collected from the respondents during the interview revealed that leaders predominantly lead and make decisions from the ethic of care. The school leaders interviewed overwhelmingly made decisions with the best interests of the students and their school community in general at the forefront of their thought process. School leaders discussed balancing caring for their community while applying the rules and policies that govern their school organization. The following quote is from Lamar, a secondary principal in a larger urban school district in Pennsylvania: “I would say I am a combination of justice and care. I would like to think I try to always do the right thing that needs to be done. But I also try to take special care of the people I am leading.”

### **Research Question 3**

**What influence does an educational leader's leadership preparation have on the process employed for making decisions, especially in times of crisis?**

Educators do not necessarily follow just one path to becoming a school leader. The most traditional pathway is through an educational leadership program in a graduate school of education. Another pathway to becoming a school leader is through a leadership residency program, which is sponsored by a certifying educational organization or entity. While other educators may come into school leadership through other educational positions on a temporary or an emergency basis, during this time, they



are allowed to serve as a school leader on an emergency certificate for 2 years in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as they take steps to make their certificate permanent (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.). As discussed above, there are multiple pathways to school leadership; therefore, the content covered in a school leader's preparation program may not be identical.

The purpose of this question was to determine what impact, if any, school leaders' formal leadership training has on the way they make decisions, especially in times of crisis. The goal was to see if there was specific content from their leadership preparation courses that they relied on when leading and making decisions during times of crisis. Data were gathered from the respondents through the survey on whether they were exposed to content on the ethical paradigms and/or crisis management during their leadership preparation program. During the follow-up interviews, school leaders were provided the opportunity to share any additional context on how their leadership preparation program has prepared them for handling crises at their schools. Donna, an elementary school principal of less than 5 years, described the impact of her leadership preparation program on her ability to lead during a time of crisis:

My formal training was over ten years ago. I guess the training in life, experiences, and being in professional development sessions have been my official training in ethical paradigms and crisis management. I lead out of care all of the time. I treat people the way I want to be treated. The Golden Rule.

The results of the survey revealed that there was no statistical significance between the respondents' gender and if they were exposed to the ethical paradigms in their educational leadership preparation courses (Chi-Square .003,  $p = NS$ ). On a

percentage basis, the respondents who answered yes (m:19, 76.0%, f:23, 76.7%) and no (m:6, 24.0%, f:7, 23.3%) were similar (see Table 3.5 for further details).

The results of the survey also revealed that there was no statistical significance between the respondents' gender and if they were exposed to crisis management in their leadership preparation courses (Chi-Square .092,  $p = NS$ ). On a percentage basis, the respondents who answered yes (m:9, 36.0%, f:12, 40.0%) and no (m:16, 64.0%, f:18, 60.0%) were similar (see Table 3.7 for further details).

The data collected from school leaders through the survey and follow-up interviews revealed that the respondents' leadership preparation programs typically did not address crisis management. According to the survey results, 61.8% of the respondents reported that they were not exposed to coursework on crisis management in their leadership preparation program (see Table 3.7). However, 76.4% of the survey respondents were exposed to ethical paradigms in the leadership preparation coursework (see Table 3.5).

In the follow-up interviews, school leaders shared how they use the guiding principles of the ethical paradigms, their work-related experience, and their moral compass to handle crises at their schools. School leaders discussed centering their leadership and responsiveness to situations impacting individuals or the entire school community through the ethic of care and the profession. Many leaders shared that it is their ethical responsibility to do what is in the best interest of their students while also upholding the organization's norms and expectations of their district. Scott, a current assistant superintendent in a small suburban district (former principal of both a middle

and high school), described the impact of his leadership preparation program in managing times of crisis:

I can't quite remember from my principal training program, but I do believe ethical leadership characteristics were lightly touched on in some of my learning over the years. But I do not believe that I have had any formalized training on crisis management. I recently learned about the ethical paradigms in my doctoral program.

#### **Research Question 4**

**What processes do educational leaders employ when tasked with making a decision, especially during a crisis situation?**

School leaders are tasked with making dozens of decisions each day. The majority of the decisions they are required to make involve content in which they are well versed or structures are in place to support their decision-making process. For instance, 94.4% of the survey respondents work in schools that have a student code of conduct (see Table 3.9), which outlines the expectations for their students' behaviors. The student code of conduct also outlines the parameters for addressing and administering consequences for violations of the expected behavior. This document can aid a school leader's decision-making process when handling crises that involve school violence. The interviewed participants' respective school organizations differed in what type of protocols and procedures were in place regarding crisis management. All school leaders interviewed were able to discuss the mental and physical processes they go through when handling a crisis. At the root of all of their processes was ensuring that all members of their community were safe. Additionally, all leaders included other members of the school team or central office team to support their decision-making and subsequent execution of

the plan. Jessica, an elementary principal of less than 5 years, explained her process for handling crises at her school:

I typically make decisions in crisis situations with the people on my team that are closest to the situation or student, that have a connection or this is their field of work. I value feedback and input from others, I need a thought partner. I also thought to partner with my colleagues and members of our Central Office team as needed to make a rational decision on how to handle the matter.

Amanda, an elementary school principal of almost 20 years, shared her reason for involving others in the handling of crises: “Sometimes I bring others into the decision-making because I am too close to the students. I have to step out because I know my bias would be up.”

While the results were not statistically significant (Chi-Square 2.738,  $p = NS$ ), on a percentage basis, male respondents were more apt to be in schools with a code of conduct than were female respondents (m:25, 100.0%, f: 26, 89.7%) (see Table 3.9 for further details).

While the results were not statistically significant (Chi-Square .684,  $p = NS$ ), on a percentage basis, female respondents reported spending more time during their workday handling discipline concerns (14, 46.7%) than did male respondents (9, 36%) (see Table 3.10 for further details).

While the results were not statistically significant (Chi-Square .616,  $p = NS$ ), on a percentage basis, male respondents reported spending more time during their workday on culture/climate management (7, 28.0%) than did female respondents (7, 23.3%) (see Table 3.11 for further details).

School leaders utilize the resources at their disposal to aid in their decision-making process during times of crisis to ensure the safety and well-being of their school community members. The school leaders interviewed as a part of this study all employed a decision-making process that involved consulting and working collaboratively with others in the school organization to ensure that all members are safe and the proper procedures and protocols are followed. Rachel, an elementary school principal, shared her thought process around decision-making:

I want to be a leader who is clear about what guides my decision-making and ensures that it's transparent to the people that I am responsible for leading. I do not make high-stakes decisions alone. I trust my leadership team, and I thought partner with them always.

The survey results showed that school leaders do not spend an equal amount of their day focused on discipline matters or improving the culture/climate of the school (see Tables 3.9 and 3.10). The follow-up interviews highlighted the various types of work and experience that school leaders had with handling crises and routine discipline concerns. Regardless of a school leader's experience and thought process with decision-making, all of them were concerned with the safety and well-being of their school community members.

#### **Survey Question 14a**

##### **The Coronavirus pandemic made this job much harder.**

The results of the survey revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the respondents' gender and how they responded to whether the Coronavirus pandemic made the job of being a school leader harder (Chi-Square 1.372,

p = NS). On a percentage basis, respondents who identified as male were less apt (20, 36.3%) than respondents who identified as female (25, 45.50%) to respond somewhat or strongly agree that the job as a school leader was harder after the Coronavirus pandemic (see Table 4.1 for further details).

**Table 4.1**

*Crosstabulation by Gender on How the Participants Responded to Whether the Coronavirus Pandemic Made This Job Much Harder*

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Indifferent	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	1 (1.80%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (7.30%)	7 (12.70%)	13 (23.60%)	25 (45.50%)
Female	1 (1.80%)	1 (1.80%)	3 (5.50%)	10 (18.20%)	15 (27.30%)	30 (54.50%)
Total	2 (3.60%)	1 (1.80%)	7 (12.70%)	17 (30.90%)	28 (50.90%)	55 (100.0%)

Chi-Square 1.372, p = NS

The results of the survey revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the respondents' race and ethnicity and how they responded to whether the Coronavirus pandemic made the job of being a school leader harder (Chi-Square 16.934, p = .031). On a percentage basis, respondents who identified as African American or Black were less apt (17, 30.90%) than respondents who identified as White (27, 87.10%) to respond somewhat or strongly agree that the job as a school leader was harder after the Coronavirus pandemic (see Table 4.2 for further details).

**Table 4.2**

*Crosstabulation by Race/Ethnicity on How the Participants Responded to Whether the Coronavirus Pandemic Made This Job Much Harder*

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Indifferent	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
African American or Black	0 (0%)	1 (1.80%)	4 (7.30%)	5 (9.10%)	12 (21.80%)	22 (40.0%)
Asian American or Asian	1 (1.80%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.80%)	2 (3.60%)
White	1 (1.80%)	0 (0%)	3 (9.70%)	12 (38.70%)	15 (48.40%)	31 (56.40%)
Total	2 (3.60%)	1 (1.80%)	7 (12.70%)	17 (30.90%)	28 (50.90%)	55 (100.0%)

Chi-Square 16.934, p = .031

**Survey Question 14b**

**The Coronavirus pandemic made this job much harder. Please explain.**

The responses to this open-ended question provided insight into how the Coronavirus pandemic made the job of school leaders harder. Of the 55 survey respondents, 36 (65.5%) answered this question. One of the major themes that emerged from the respondents' answers to this question was the mental health needs of both students and staff. Multiple school leaders discussed the increased challenges they are facing in responding to and supporting the members of their school communities regarding their social and emotional well-being. Another theme that emerged from their responses was the lack of motivation and off-task behaviors exhibited by students. One leader commented, "Student behavior issues before the pandemic were much more manageable. Our learners are not the same children who left." The last theme that emerged was the lasting impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on school leaders. During

the height of the Coronavirus pandemic, the school leaders' focus was on meeting the educational, social-emotional, and, at times, life-sustaining needs of their school communities. Many school leaders neglected their personal needs and feelings as they navigated the unprecedented times supporting their school community. One school leader shared, "During the pandemic years, they were the most challenging days of my entire career. The pandemic pushed me out of my comfort zone. We are still feeling the effects of the pandemic."

### **Survey Question 15**

**This project is focused on learning more about what educational leaders need to succeed. Is there anything you would like to add?**

The responses to this open-ended question provided insights into how the Coronavirus pandemic made the job of school leaders harder. Of the 55 survey respondents, 24 (43.6%) answered this question. The major theme that emerged from the respondents' answers was the need for recognition and support from senior-level administrators. The statements by survey respondents highlighted the need and desire to be supported:

Senior leadership needs to be more supportive of principals! This job is multi-layered, stressful, and often feels thankless; I don't think enough time is spent making sure that leaders are taking care of themselves; Support, recognition, less on the principal's plate, focused and relevant professional development to increase success rates of leaders.

Survey respondents called out the need to be supported by their senior administrative team to build their capacity as school leaders. Multiple comments discussed the need for increased professional development and coaching. Several leaders called out explicitly the need for professional development in crisis management. One



school leader wrote, “Leaders need professional development to develop them as leaders and not training to complete tasks,” while another school leader wrote, “Educational leaders, in my opinion, need more training when it comes to crisis management. More scenario-based practice with handling students, parents, and staff issues. I believe that crisis management training would be very valuable.”

## **Conclusion**

School leaders have multiple areas on which they are required to focus during the course of a school day/week. The areas of focus are inclusive of instruction, talent management, operations, facilities, parental and family engagement, and culture/climate. All aspects of a school leader’s work are important and require their focus and attention for the school to run efficiently. In this research study, the work a school leader does in the domain of culture/climate was the focus. Primarily, this research study focused on how factors, such as a school leader’s formal preparation, affect how they make decisions in times of crisis. The research study also focused on what processes school leaders employ during the decision-making process.

The data collected from both surveys and interviews illuminated the need for leadership preparation programs to provide preservice leaders with explicit content on the non-academic aspects of school leadership. Additionally, there is a need for school organizations to provide ongoing professional development on the resources provided for supporting leaders in crisis management. The school leaders interviewed identified examples of crises that they had to address over the past few school years. None of the crises presented were related to instruction, talent management, or parent engagement. The majority of the examples shared involved violence either in the school or

surrounding community. The school leaders interviewed shared how they utilize resources (student code of conduct, emergency management plan) from their school organization, prior experiences, and collaborating with other members of the school community when addressing crises.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### **Introduction**

In March of 2020, all school leaders (including myself) were faced with handling an unprecedented crisis, the Coronavirus pandemic. School leaders were thrust into a situation where they needed to provide care and direction for their school communities, while simultaneously taking care of their own families. They worked collaboratively with members from their school organizations as well as outside agencies to develop plans to provide resources to their school communities, such as access to the internet, computers, food, and supplies. Their new stream of work required them to work in conjunction with their school communities and partners in order to provide virtual schooling. School leaders did this so they could provide an opportunity for students to engage in learning and socialization with their school family members. School leaders led and did what was needed to provide their school communities with a sense of normalcy—“school” during an unprecedented crisis.

The Coronavirus pandemic has had a lasting impact on the way school leaders operate and lead. The needs of the individual and collective members of the community have shifted in some areas post-pandemic. School leaders shared through the data collected on the survey how their jobs have gotten increasingly harder since returning to in-person schooling. Survey respondents lifted the following examples of how their work has been impacted post-pandemic: high incidents of staff and student trauma, lack of student engagement, more protocols to manage, and decision-making being more reactionary instead of proactive. One school leader, Lamar, shared during his interview

how leading through the Coronavirus pandemic (crisis) was the most challenging and rewarding part of his career:

Those pandemic years, were the most challenging days of my entire career. I had to make decisions at the drop of a dime with no road map. I was scared for myself, my family, and my school community. My students' behavior problems before the pandemic were much more manageable. We are still feeling the effects of the trauma from the pandemic, which both adults and students are grappling with daily. Looking back all my decisions were based on the ethic of care. My focus was to do everything I could to make sure the needs of my school community were met. This meant connecting them with food resources, COVID testing and vaccinations, internet access, school supplies, and social activities online and in our schoolyard. Leading through a crisis such as the pandemic was also rewarding. My school community and I became so close. I am forever grateful for the communication pathways and trustful relationships we established.

Multiple leaders shared in both the surveys (open-ended questions) and interviews how the social-emotional well-being of both the staff and students has changed post-pandemic. These changes have impacted the work that school leaders are responsible for doing regarding culture and climate work.

The goal of this research study was to determine how school leaders lead and make decisions in times of crisis involving violence in their school communities. Additionally, I aimed to understand how their leadership preparation coursework prepared them to lead in a time of crisis. Lastly, I wanted to ascertain if the ethical paradigms have any impact on how decisions are made by school leaders during times of crisis.

The research topic of decision-making during a time of crisis was born out of my firsthand experiences as an elementary school principal and an assistant superintendent. I was a building principal during the first 16 months of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Additionally, I have led a school community through crises such as weapons on premises, group assaults, the sudden death of both a staff member and students, asbestos closure, and relocation due to facility concerns. I reflected on feeling unprepared as a principal when responding to crises, despite the presence of district protocols for handling emergencies. I hope to identify the gaps in the participants' practice so that the field of education (school districts and schools of education) can better develop and support current and future leaders in responding to crises.

### **Summary of the Research Study**

The research study was grounded in the pragmatic paradigm. The research method employed for this study was the sequential mixed-method design (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative data were collected through a survey of school leaders, while the qualitative data were collected through interviews with a randomly selected group of school leaders who took the survey. This study was conducted with school leaders in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The anonymous survey was sent out to principals on the Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) database during the month of April 2023. Principals were permitted to share the survey with fellow school leaders to complete. A total of 55 school leaders responded to the survey. The survey questions were aimed at collecting demographic characteristics, leadership preparation, leadership experiences, job responsibilities, and support provided by their district regarding handling culture/climate concerns.

The survey contained a separate link for respondents to indicate if they wished to volunteer for the follow-up interviews. Of the 55 survey respondents, 21 (38%) school

leaders volunteered to participate in the interview. Only 10 of the volunteers were selected at random to participate in the 60-minute follow-up interviews. The school leaders interviewed represented schools located in both suburban and urban school districts. All the school leaders interviewed had been principals at some point in their careers. At the time of the interviews, seven were current principals, one recently retired but serves as a guest principal, and two were assistant superintendents. The school leaders interviewed personal demographics were as follows: four African American females, two African American males, one White female, and three White males. The experience of the school leaders interviewed ranged from 3 to 19 years of school leadership experience.

All the interviews were conducted on the Zoom platform during the months of May and June of 2023. The questions asked during the interviews were structured around the ethical paradigms, leadership preparation programs, job-embedded professional development, leading through times of crisis, and decision-making strategies. A portion of the questions asked in the interviews provided school leaders with the opportunity to share examples of crises that they have encountered and explain their thought process around handling these situations. The school leaders were also provided with the opportunity to reflect on these decision-making strategies through the lens of the various ethical paradigms.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The data gathered through the survey and interviews provided a wealth of information for answering the four research questions. I also gleaned pertinent information from the school leaders on their perspective of what they need to be able

to lead their school communities effectively during a time of crisis. A major theme that emerged from both the survey and the interviews was the impact of the increased amount of violence in our communities on the students and schools.

School leaders shared the challenges associated with navigating and keeping their students both physically and psychologically safe in our current environment of increased violence and crime. One school leader shared the anxiety she experiences daily during admission and dismissal because of the ongoing incidents of gun violence near her school. Another school leader discussed the impact of violence and crime on relationships among individuals and groups of students. From the many accounts given by the school leaders, I inferred that many felt unprepared and often second-guessed their responses. However, all leaders believed they were doing what was in the best interest of their school communities with limited guidance, support, and training.

The research study consisted of four questions. The first research question was posed to allow school leaders the opportunity to share how they identify a crisis in a school setting and then to provide examples from their leadership experience. The data for this question were gathered solely from the interviews with school leaders. The following questions were asked to determine what the participants identified as a crisis and how they handled the situation:

- Briefly describe a time when you had to address a student code of conduct violation that involved violence. Please walk me through the process of how you handled this situation. Please share with me your thoughts about each decision you made.

- During crisis situations when you are required to make decisions, do you conduct this process alone? If not, who are your thought partners in this work?

Why do you consult with these individuals?

The examples that were shared during the interview were overwhelmingly related to the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students. The themes that emerged from the interviews with the school leaders were as follows: facility malfunction, weapons on school property, violence in the neighborhood, death of a school member, and fights between students. The school leaders discussed their level of comfortability and preparedness in handling each of the situations they were faced with addressing. Calvin, a principal of an alternative school, noted the following when addressing crises in his school context:

My main goal is to ensure the safety of members of my school community. Do I always feel prepared and know exactly how to address each matter, the answer is no. Each crisis that I encounter around school violence is nuanced. Yes, there are similarities, so I know the basics of how to handle the matter based on my school district's protocols. But I must take into account the context in front of me "the students," in my decision-making process on how I will handle the matter.

I noted that none of the school leaders identified any aspects of their work in the instructional domain (hiring teachers, evaluations, curriculum, and pedagogy) as being a crisis they were charged with handling.

Based on the data gathered from the above questions, the leadership preparatory programs that these school leaders attended did not prepare them for leading (decision-making) during a crisis. In the absence of formal training and limited support from their educational organization, school leaders have resorted to creating strategies and procedures for addressing the crises they are forced to lead. All of the school leaders



discussed collaborating with members of their immediate school teams or colleagues in their organization. Jessica, an elementary principal in a large urban district, shared the importance of connecting and collaborating with the members of her leadership team and learning network. She commented, “This work is too much to do alone. I could not lead in these days without my team and network. Every leader needs a thought partner, a sounding board.” The data gathered to answer this research question speak to the resourcefulness of school leaders to create problem-solving networks for themselves in the absence of structures provided by their educational organizations.

The second research question was framed around the impact of the ethical paradigms on the decision-making process that school leaders employ when addressing a crisis in their school community. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) researched and wrote much about ethical paradigms and how school leaders employ them both separately and simultaneously in leadership. The ethical paradigms are care, justice, critique, profession, and the community. I sought to identify which paradigms and specific characteristics of the paradigms were most evident in how school leaders make decisions during times of crisis.

I collected data from both the survey and interviews to answer this research question. The survey results showed that 76.4% of the respondents were exposed to the ethical paradigms in the educational leadership preparation program (see Table 3.5). Additionally, over half of the survey respondents have been exposed to the ethical paradigms through job-embedded professional development (see Table 3.6). The gender of the respondents did not have an impact on whether they were exposed to the ethical

paradigms through their leadership preparation program or job-embedded professional development.

Despite the large percentage of school leaders who reported on the survey that they had been exposed to the ethical paradigms through coursework or professional development, the majority of leaders during the interviews needed me to share the definitions (Appendix F) to refresh their memories. In general, I found that the participants were able to describe their thought process and actions during decision-making that correlated to the characteristics of the various ethical paradigms. However, most participants needed to refer to the definitions, at times along with support from the research, to identify to which paradigm their leadership actions and beliefs corresponded. I asked the following question to elicit data to answer the above research question:

Based on your knowledge of the ethical paradigms, which paradigms do you believe you employed this week? Please explain.

The interview data showed that school leaders who identified as female tended to respond to crises out of the ethic of care. Donna, an elementary school principal, shared, “I lead out of care all the time. I want to treat people the way I want to be treated. I follow the “Golden Rule.” By contrast, school leaders who identified as males tended to respond from the ethic of justice. For example, Devon, a retired principal, stated, “I’m an analytical guy. In my practice, a lot of things start with justice. The rights of others and following the policies.”

The interview data also revealed some differences in which ethical paradigm school leaders from urban and suburban districts tended to respond to when handling crises. Urban school leaders, regardless of race or gender, were more apt to lead out of

both the ethic of care and critique paradigm simultaneously. Jessica's answer to this question showed how this phenomenon in the data could be true:

I lead from justice because I think based on the rights of others. I do not think necessarily about policies and laws. But more around social justice and equity lines. Who has access? Who does this favor?

The ethical paradigm of critique was cited more by leaders who serve in schools with predominately African American and Hispanic populations. Several school leaders discussed the need to reflect on and question policies, procedures, and decisions to ensure they are equitably meeting the needs of their students and not promoting additional harm or injustice. Two school leaders, in particular, discussed simultaneously employing the ethical paradigms of critique, care, and justice when deciding how to address a student caught with a weapon on campus, and the purpose of the weapon was for safety traveling to and from school. The leaders recanted grappling with making a decision about the appropriate consequences for the student to uphold the school rules, but being mindful of negatively impacting the trajectory of the student's future.

I concluded that school leaders use a combination of their moral beliefs and experiences, district guidance, and elements of the ethical paradigms to make high-stakes decisions. The ethical paradigm of care was evident in almost all of the examples and experiences that the school leaders shared during the interviews. Noddings (1992) placed students at the center of the work of schools. She saw a school leader's major responsibility as encouraging and nurturing their students. The ethics of the profession was the second paradigm reflected in the responses during the interview. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) discussed the need for the ethical paradigm of the profession, due to the unique nature of making decisions in an educational context. The ethical paradigm of

the profession takes into account the educational context and professional standards and codes. Thus, I concluded that care and the profession were cited more often because both paradigms embody the behaviors of good educational leaders. The other paradigms were inconsistently elevated in the responses of the leaders.

The third research question focused on how a school leader's formal leadership preparation and job-embedded professional development impact how they lead and make decisions during times of crisis. The data collected from school leaders through both the survey and interviews helped me answer this question. As mentioned above and referenced in Tables 3.5 and 3.6, a large percentage of school leaders have had exposure to the ethical paradigms through their leadership preparation program and/or through job-embedded professional development. The survey revealed that 61.8% of respondents did not receive explicit training in crisis management in their leadership preparation program (see Table 3.7). However, 87.3% of respondents received some level of job-embedded professional development in crisis management (see Table 3.8). Additionally, 94.4% of respondents work in a school that has a code of conduct to govern behavioral expectations, as well as the rights and responsibilities of members of the school community (see Table 3.9).

The qualitative data collected from the school leaders during the interviews revealed that the participants received limited professional development on ethical paradigms and crisis management. I heard repeatedly that school leaders do not feel prepared to handle the complex challenges they are experiencing with the increased mental health issues and violence in their communities. School leaders expressed the

need for training so they can better respond to the crises they are experiencing. They are asking for support through professional development and coaching.

The school leaders desire professional development that goes beyond the technical aspects of leading through a crisis. They are requesting training that supports critical thinking, communicating effectively, and mitigating the trauma of all community members. One school leader interviewed, who experienced multiple crises during the 2022-2023 school year, expressed the need for support not only during the crisis but afterward as well. She expressed concern over dealing with the residual effects of the crisis in the days and weeks that followed. I concluded that educational organizations should invest in providing training in crisis management for their school leaders. Training school leaders in crisis management will support them to be able to plan proactively and prepare for keeping their communities safe. This would result in a decrease in reactive decisions and behaviors by school leaders due to a lack of knowledge and preparedness during a crisis. Crisis management training should be coupled with training on responding to and supporting individuals with trauma associated with experiencing crises. The training should be rooted in current best practices in the educational field of crisis management, and it should reflect the geographical area in which the leaders serve. Additionally, the school leaders should receive coaching and simulated practice opportunities with their supervisors and peers. Interview participants shared how supporting others both during and after a crisis has taken a toll on them mentally and physically. From their perspective, if they were better prepared to lead through a crisis, they would do a better job of protecting both their school communities and themselves.

The fourth research question is geared towards understanding what processes and strategies leaders rely on when making decisions during times of crisis. The data gathered to answer this research question were obtained solely from the interviews with school leaders. During the follow-up interviews, school leaders shared examples of crises that they have experienced in their career and how they handled the situation. School leaders were provided with an opportunity to reflect on a decision they made in response to a crisis in their school context. They were asked to share the strategies and thought processes they utilized to make the decision. Lastly, they were asked to explain what, if any, aspects of their processes they would change if faced with the same crisis again.

Maria, an elementary school principal, shared an example of a crisis that she had to address that involved a group of middle school students. She outlined the steps that she took to address the chaos that ensued because a group of students decided to attack another student in the lunch room. Several staff members and students were hurt during this episode. Inclusive of the steps she took were restoring order in the lunch room, securing medical attention for injured parties, contacting school police for assistance, communicating with relevant parties, investigating the matter, and assigning appropriate next steps. Marie elaborated on all the steps she implemented, explained her “why,” and reflected on the impact on her community. Marie confidently said that she would follow the same steps if faced with this situation again. She shared, “You sleep well at night when you make a decision with an ethical lens.”

In response to this question, all school leaders interviewed discussed utilizing the policies and procedures at their disposal from their school organization when handling a crisis. Additionally, all leaders discussed the various members of the school or central

office team with whom they worked collaboratively when handling a challenging matter. The school leaders were transparent when sharing their areas of growth and pleas for more support in terms of being able to lead their school communities through the challenging situations they are faced with daily. School leaders in both the survey (open-ended questions) and interviews discussed the need for more coaching and professional development to be prepared to lead through a crisis. I concluded that school leaders have established strategies and processes adapted from the guidelines available to them to handle the situations placed upon them. The data gathered in this study showed primarily that school leaders behave and make decisions out of the ethical paradigm of care and the profession. I also concluded that the school leaders interviewed were not adequately trained in utilizing the ethical paradigms to guide and reflect on their decision-making and behaviors. The interviews revealed that the school leaders relied heavily on their past experiences and moral beliefs to guide their decisions and behaviors. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) discussed the importance of training school leaders on the ethical paradigms so they can apply ethical practices in their leadership behaviors and decision-making. The ethical paradigm of the profession embodies the skills and characteristics that school leaders should exhibit when leading through a time of crises. Shapiro and Stefkovich concluded:

In sum, we have described a paradigm for the profession that expects its leaders to formulate and examine their own professional codes of ethics in light of individual personal codes of ethics, as well as standards set forth by the profession, and then calls on them to place students at the center of the ethical decision-making process. (p. 27)

The data supported my claim that increased training and support for principals with regard to crisis management will increase the likelihood that school leaders will be able

to manage the physical and psychological well-being of the members of their school community effectively during a time of crisis.

### **Limitations of Study**

This research focused on understanding how school leaders identify crises, whether they receive formal preparation for addressing them, and how the ethical paradigms impact their decision-making process when addressing crises. One of the limitations of this research was the small sample size (55 survey respondents and 10 interviews). Only principals from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania were solicited to participate in this research. The survey was emailed to principals listed on the Pennsylvania Department of Education's database. Unfortunately, some email addresses were inoperable due to principals changing school districts, as well as security measures that school districts have in place to limit emails coming from outside of their organization. Additionally, the research was conducted during the spring, which is a busy time of year for school leaders (budgets, hiring, state testing, proms, graduations, and teacher evaluations).

Another limitation of this research study was that it was reactive. The school leaders were provided questions in both the survey and interviews to respond to from their prior experiences in an educational leadership program and their work environment. The school leaders were informed of the focus of the research, and consent was obtained before participating in the study. The school leaders knowing or unknowingly responded to questions during the interviews in a manner that spoke directly to what the research was aiming to understand. For instance, school leaders responded to various questions during the interviews by stating the ethical paradigm and citing evidence from the



definition that aligned with their thinking (see Appendix F). The school leaders were hyper-sensitive to the topic of focus; therefore, they may have limited their responses at times to fit the perceived context.

Another limitation of the research was that the school leaders who participated in the follow-up interviews did not represent a diverse group of leaders by school type and grade configuration. All the school leaders interviewed lead in traditional public schools located in an urban community or a suburban community that directly borders an urban area. The survey was emailed to principals serving in charter schools. However, no principals leading in a charter school in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania were randomly selected for the follow-up interviews. The perspective of high school principals was not as prevalent in this research study due to the limited number of high school principals who participated in both the survey and the follow-up interviews. Of the 10 school leaders interviewed, only two were currently leading in the high school grade band, one of the principals serves in an alternative school 3-12, and the other is on special assignment serving in both elementary and high schools. The elementary/middle school principals made up the majority of the follow-up interviews, totaling six. Two additional school leaders were interviewed who are now serving in the role of assistant superintendent, which has taken them further from the daily work of the school. They are primarily only involved in matters of crises that elevate to the central office level, not the initial response as current principals do. Therefore, some of their reasons dated back to their time as a principal or were second-hand accounts elevated to them for follow-up.

### **Implications: Policy Issues**

The data findings from this research study highlighted several areas that have implications for educational policy, educational leadership preparation programs, and individual school district administrative procedures (protocols, professional development, and management) on crisis management and ethical leadership (ethical paradigms). The findings from this research study also have implications for local and state governmental agencies. The survey and interview data highlighted that school leaders are not receiving adequate preparation and guidance to address crises at the school level, mainly those involving physical or psychological safety. All school leaders interviewed in this study had commonalities in how they addressed the various crises they were faced with in their school context: reviewing school organization protocols, collaborating with colleagues, relying on previous experiences, and doing what is in the best interests of the school community at that given time.

### ***Educational Policy***

As discussed throughout this research study, school leaders are not adequately prepared to handle all of the types of crises that arise in their school setting. In particular, school leaders expressed being inadequately prepared to handle crises that involved violence either in the school or in the surrounding community. School leaders expressed concerns about supporting their communities not only during the crises but during the aftermath. The school leaders who participated in this research study represent a small portion of the school leaders in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (representing multiple school districts); however, they demonstrated the need for more training and support in handling both physical and psychological crises.

The findings of this study highlight the need for education policy to mandate at the state level for preservice and current school leaders to receive training on crisis management that addresses both the physical and physiological safety of the members of their community. The findings of this research study support the call for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania not only to mandate the training but also to regulate the frequency and content requirements. The content of the training for all leaders should include at a minimum: crisis management, ethical leadership inclusive of the ethical paradigms, and trauma-informed practices. The training should include both content and opportunities for application (scenario) by school leaders.

### ***Educator Training***

The educational leadership experience of the participants in this study ranged from 3 to 19 years of school leadership experience. None of the school leaders represented in this study experienced the same coursework or formal training in their educational leadership programs. As stated above, education policy should mandate that all preservice school leaders receive coursework during their leadership program that addresses crisis management to maintain the physical and psychological safety of the members of the school community.

The school leaders who participated in the follow-up survey were all allowed to share what they identified as a crisis in a school setting. None of the school leaders interviewed identified any crises involving instructional matters. The school leaders shared through their commentary that they overall feel prepared to handle matters of instruction, parental engagement, and staffing. Several leaders highlighted the training they received in their leadership preparation program or other leadership residency

programs as preparing them to be instructional leaders. However, most leaders shared the sentiment that crisis management coursework was missing from their formal training and would be beneficial in their pursuit to ensure a safe and orderly environment in their schools. One school leader shared the following statement on the survey that highlights the essence of many of the leaders surveyed and interviewed: “I believe that crisis management training is very valuable. Instead, this feels like a learn-on-the-job skill, even though it is a very important and stressful part of the job.” The needs of individual students and school communities as a whole mirror that of the communities in which they are located. In the past decade, school leaders have been challenged with leading through an increase in school violence, the Coronavirus pandemic, and mental and trauma-related crises. As discussed previously, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania should mandate preservice school leaders to take coursework through their education leadership preparation program that addresses the following content: crisis management, ethical leadership inclusive of the ethical paradigms, and trauma-informed practices. This coursework would support building preservice leaders’ knowledge base as well as supporting their readiness to lead a school community through a crisis.

### ***School District Administrative Practices***

School districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania must take responsibility for providing their school leaders with the proper tools necessary to ensure the physical and psychological safety of their school community members. As discussed above, education policy needs to mandate that school districts provide their school leaders with resources, professional development, coaching, and management regarding crisis management. The findings of this study revealed that many school leaders are not

receiving adequate training and support from their school districts to lead and support their communities effectively through times of crisis. School leaders shared on the survey and during the interviews that they desire support and training that prepares them to meet the needs of their school communities both during and after a crisis. One school leader stated the following: “Principals need training and coaching to develop them as leaders. We need more than what steps to follow for compliance only. We need more support from senior leadership.” School leaders are faced with leading through challenges that their leadership preparation program did not prepare them to address. Therefore, it is the responsibility of individual school districts to equip their school leaders with the skills and resources necessary to meet the needs of their school communities.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania needs to outline the provisions that are expected by each school district under its authority for how they will train and support school leaders in leading during a time of crisis. In-service school leaders should be required to take a course every 2 years on the following content: crisis management, ethical leadership inclusive of the ethical paradigms, and trauma-informed practices. The school leaders should receive this content through professional development inclusive of opportunities to apply the new learning through scenario-based practice, discussions, and reflection opportunities. Moreover, school systems should establish crisis management team structures that emphasize collaboration by both school and district team members. The school leaders in this study all relied on collaborating with their colleagues to handle a crisis. School systems need to formalize the crisis management team structures with their schools to ensure that the collaboration includes the members of both the school and district teams with the proper skills and knowledge to address a crisis. The

implementation of these two mandates would ensure that all school leaders in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are being adequately trained and supported to lead their school communities both during and after a crisis.

### ***Local and State Governmental Agencies***

The findings of this research study also have implications for both local and state governmental agencies. In particular, most school districts have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with their local emergency management departments, namely the police department and fire/rescue. The MOU is in place to provide emergency care, training, and management as needed in school settings. The findings indicate a need for a similar MOU for school systems with local and state public health and behavioral health departments. The establishment of these MOUs will provide school systems with the support and training needed to address the challenges school leaders are facing as a result of the increased presence of gun violence in their communities as well as the aftermath of the Coronavirus pandemic.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research study was conducted with principals from only the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This study could be replicated with school leaders from multiple states. A comparative study could also be conducted if more than one state were participating in the research study. The current research study included a small sample size (55 school leaders). A more robust study could be conducted to gather a more diverse perspective on how school leaders make decisions during a time of crisis. Future research should include a wider range of principals to be studied, potentially using the following characteristics: school type, grade configuration, geography, years of leadership experience, and pathway

to leadership (principal residency program or graduate school leadership program). This research study has established the basis for a more robust study of how principals are formally trained to lead during crises through their leadership preparation programs and job-embedded professional development. Lastly, a more elaborate study could be conducted to evaluate the impact of the trauma caused to the school community as a result of dealing with the various crises that involved violence.

### **Conclusion**

This research study aimed to get a better understanding of how school leaders identify and address crises in their school communities as well as ascertain what impact the ethical paradigms and a school leader's formal training play in how they make decisions during a crisis. All school leaders in this study identified crises as events that caused or could potentially cause members of their school community harm. The quantitative data collected in this study provided the breadth of knowledge, while the qualitative data provided the depth of knowledge needed to answer the research questions. The survey (Appendix D) provided the researcher with the opportunity to collect a large amount of data from a group of school leaders efficiently and anonymously. I was able to analyze the data collected through the survey by the demographic characteristics of respondents to identify trends. The individual follow-up interviews allowed me the opportunity to explore the trends identified in the survey data through a standardized group of questions (Appendix E). During the interviews, school leaders shared crises that they have had to address in their school context as well as sharing their thought process when handling the matter.

The data collected throughout this research study highlighted the need for education policymakers, colleges of education, and school districts to rethink how both preservice and current school leaders are prepared and trained regarding crisis management. The data from both the survey and interviews showed that school leaders are not receiving adequate preparation and ongoing training to address meeting the physical and psychological needs of their school community during a time of crisis. The findings from this research study showed that school leaders are relying on the protocols from their school organizations, past experiences, and collaborations with their colleagues to address the crises they face. The school leaders overwhelmingly reported the driving factor in how they lead during a time of crisis is doing what is in the best interest of the members of their school community's safety.



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## APPENDIX A

### INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

Dear PA Administrator,

My name is Shakeera Warthen, and I am a lifelong learner and educator. I am a doctoral student at Temple University in the Graduate School of Education. My educational experience has been gained by working in a large urban school district in a variety of teacher and leadership roles. I am currently a systems leader; before this role, I was an elementary principal for six years. I am interested in studying what factors influence how school leaders make decisions during crisis situations.

For my dissertation, I am using a survey to collect some information about participants' educational and field experiences. The survey should take no more than 15 minutes. In this survey, school leaders will also be able to express their interest in participating if selected in a follow-up interview. The follow-up interview will last approximately 30 minutes either in person or via Zoom. All Centers for Disease Control Prevention (CDC) guidelines will be adhered to when conducting the interviews. All interviews will be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient for the participant.

The consent form for this study is attached for you to review. The consent form contains the following key elements:

- Your participation in this study is voluntary.
- I will protect your identity throughout the study and when reporting my findings.

If you are interested in participating in my study, and I hope you are, please click the following link: [https://educationtemple.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5owiihYqfXKEWhM](https://educationtemple.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5owiihYqfXKEWhM).

If you have questions regarding my research or this survey, please feel free to contact me by email at tuk96869@temple.edu. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Shakeera Warthen, M.S. Ed.

Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership

College of Education and Human Development

Temple University

## **APPENDIX B**

### **FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

The following statement will be read to the study participant before the interview:

I appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to participate in this interview. As I shared in my introductory email, I am a doctoral student at Temple University. I am interested in studying what factors influence how school leaders make decisions during crisis situations. By interviewing school leaders such as yourself, I hope to gain a better understanding of what influences how decisions are made in times of crisis in school settings.

- This interview is approximately 60 minutes in length. I will ask a series of questions about your educational and professional experiences. If you need me to repeat or clarify any questions at any time, please do not hesitate to ask me.
- Your participation in the interview is voluntary. If at any time you do not wish to participate anymore in the research study, please let me know and the interview will be discontinued.
- I am recording our interview to ensure that I am capturing all of your responses accurately. The recording will be used for the sole purpose of analyzing data for my research study. The recording will only be shared if needed with members of my dissertation committee. Do I have your permission to record this interview?
- Again, Thank You for agreeing to participate in my study and for signing the consent form.
- Before we begin, do you have any questions?

## APPENDIX C

### MINIMAL RISK CONSENT FORM

#### RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

**Title:** The Impact of the Ethical Paradigms on Decision Making in times of Crisis

IRB Protocol Number: 30472-0001

**Investigator:** **Judith Stull** 215-204-3012  
Shakeera Warthen 267-738-7948

#### RESEARCH CONSENT SUMMARY

You are being asked for your consent to take part in a research study. This document provides a concise summary of this research. It describes the key information that we believe most people need to decide whether to take part in this research. Later sections of this document will provide all relevant details.

#### What should I know about this research?

- Someone will explain this research to you.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- If you don't take part, it won't be held against you.
- You can take part now and later drop out, and it won't be held against you
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

#### How long will I be in this research?

We expect that you will be in this research for about 15-20 minutes while completing the survey. For those who volunteer to participate in an interview, you will be asked to meet for a 60-minute interview with the researcher. The interview will be audiotaped with consent by the participant. The survey data and interview data collection will take place from March to May 2023.

#### Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge about the process school leaders utilize when making decisions in times of crisis. The intent of this study is to explore the formal relationship between ethical paradigms and decision-making by school leaders in crisis situations. The information gleaned from this study could be used to impact the educational leadership courses for future leaders; as well as provide guidance to school organizations for ongoing professional development opportunities for existing school leaders.

#### What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?

Participants will complete a brief 20-minute survey during March and April 2023. The survey will be the extent of involvement for the majority of participants. Participants will be anonymous. Participants will be given the opportunity to provide their contact

information to voluntarily participate in a one-on-one interview during April and May 2023. The interviews will be held in person or on Zoom. The interview time is expected to last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be done in a conversational style with the researcher asking questions about the participants' experiences as a leader. Participants will be asked questions about their background, perceptions, and experiences as a leader. The interview responses will be used as data for this study.

### Could being in this research hurt me?

There are no expected risks or discomfort in participating in this research. Although, it may prompt participants to reflect on their educational and school leadership experiences.

In addition to these risks, taking part in this research may harm you in unknown ways.

### Will being in this research benefit me?

It is not expected that you will personally benefit from this research. We cannot promise any benefits to others from you taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to others include informing leadership professional development opportunities for school leaders.



## **DETAILED RESEARCH CONSENT**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. A person who takes part in a research study is called a research subject, or research participant.

### **What should I know about this research?**

- Someone will explain this research to you.
- This form sums up that explanation.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

### **Why is this research being done?**

The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge about the process school leaders utilize when making decisions in times of crisis. The intent of this study is to explore the formal relationship between ethical paradigms and decision-making by school leaders in crisis situations. The information gleaned from this study could be used to impact the educational leadership courses for future leaders; as well as provide guidance to school organizations for ongoing professional development opportunities for existing school leaders.

### **How long will I be in this research?**

We expect that you will be in this research for about 15-20 minutes while completing the survey. For those who volunteer to participate in an interview, you will be asked to meet for a 60-minute interview with the researcher. The interview will be audiotaped with consent by the participant. The survey data and interview data collection will take place from March to April 2023.

### **What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?**

Participants will complete a brief 20-minute survey during March and April 2023. The survey will be the extent of involvement for the majority of participants. Participants will be anonymous. Participants will be given the opportunity to provide their contact information to voluntarily participate in a one-on-one interview during April and May 2023. The interviews will be held in person or on Zoom. The interview time is expected to last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be done in a conversational style with the researcher asking questions about the participants' experiences as a leader. Participants will be asked questions about their background, perceptions, and experiences as a leader. The interview responses will be used as data for this study.

## What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?

If you participate in this research, you will be responsible for meeting and interviewing with the researcher.

## Could being in this research hurt me?

There are no expected risks or discomfort in participating in this research. Although, it may prompt participants to reflect on their educational and school leadership experiences.

In addition to these risks, taking part in this research may harm you in unknown ways.

## Will being in this research benefit me?

There are no benefits to you from your taking part in this research. We cannot promise any benefits to others from you taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to others include informing leadership professional development opportunities for school leaders.

## What happens to the information collected for this research?

Your private information will be shared with individuals and organizations (if applicable) that conduct or watch over this research, including:

- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research
- Temple University

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

We protect your information from disclosure to others to the extent required by law. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

Data or specimens collected in this research might be de-identified and used for future research or distributed to another investigator for future research without your consent.

## Who can answer my questions about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or [irb@temple.edu](mailto:irb@temple.edu) if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

## Can I be removed from this research without my approval?

The person in charge of this research can remove you from this research without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include:

- It is in your best interest
- You are unable to keep your scheduled appointments

We will tell you about any new information that may affect your health, welfare, or choice to stay in this research.

## What happens if I agree to be in this research, but I change my mind later?

If you decide to leave this research, contact the research team so that the investigator can remove your data from consideration in the study. Additionally, your decision to participate or to withdraw will be confidential and will not be shared with other participants.

## Statement of Consent:

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

_____ Signature of adult subject capable of consent	_____ Date
_____ Printed name of subject	
_____ Signature of person obtaining consent	_____ Date
_____ Printed name of person obtaining consent	

**APPENDIX D**  
**SURVEY QUESTIONS**

Q1 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
  - Female (2)
  - Other. Please specify. (3)
- 

Q2 With what race/ ethnicity do you identify?

- African American or Black (1)
  - Asian American or Asian (2)
  - Hispanic or Latinx (3)
  - White (4)
  - Other. Please specify. (5)
- 

Q3 In what year did you first teach full-time?

---

Q4 In what year did you become a full-time administrator?

---

Q5 What is your current job title?

---

Q6 What type of school do you lead?

- Private or Parochial School (1)
  - Charter school (2)
  - Traditional Public School (3)
  - Other. Please explain. (4)
- 

Q7 What grade band does your school serve?

---

Q8 How many years have you served as a school leader?

- 0 -3 years (1)
- 4 - 6 years (2)
- 7 - 9 years (3)
- 10+ years (4)
- Other. Please explain. (5)

Q9 In any of your leadership preparation coursework was the following content covered?

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Does not apply (3)
Ethical paradigms (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Crisis management (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10 In job-embedded professional development was the following included?

	Click to write Scale Point 1 (1)	Click to write Scale Point 2 (2)	Click to write Scale Point 3 (3)
Ethical paradigms (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Crisis management (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11 Does your school organization have an official student code of conduct?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q12 About what percentage of you time is spent on

	0% (1)	1 - 25% (2)	26 - 50% (3)	51 - 75% (4)	76% and higher (5)
Discipline concerns (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Culture/ Climate management (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q13 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Indifferent	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The stress and disappointments involved with being a principal at this school aren't really worth it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am generally satisfied with being the principal at this school (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am general satisfied with being a principal in general. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I could get a higher paying job I'd leave this job as soon as possible. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think about transferring to another school. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began this job. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>I think about just staying home from school because I am just too tired to go. (7)</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>I think about transferring out of this school district. (8)</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>The COVID pandemic made this job much harder. Please explain. (9)</p>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q14 The COVID pandemic made this job much harder. Please explain. \_\_\_\_\_

Q15 This project is focused on learning more about what educational leaders need to succeed. Is there anything you would like to add? \_\_\_\_\_

Q16 Would you be willing to be interviewed?

- Yes
- Sorry no, not at this /me.

*Skip To: End of Survey If Would you be willing tp be interviewed? = Sorry no, not at this time.*

Q17 Would you be willing to be interviewed? If yes, please copy the link below, click the blue arrow (bottom right), and then paste the link into another browser  
[https://educationtemple.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_eJb06yu8DPeanJk](https://educationtemple.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eJb06yu8DPeanJk) Thank you!

\_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX E

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Ethical Leadership Questions:

1. Please describe your definition of an ethical leader.
2. Can you give me an example of an ethical leader in your opinion that you know personally and one from society? Please explain why you believe both individuals are ethical leaders.
3. Can you please describe what preparation you have experienced relating to ethical paradigms? Do you think you had adequate experience? Please explain. What changes or additions would you suggest?
4. Based on your knowledge of the ethical paradigms, which paradigms do you believe you employed this week? Please explain.

#### Crisis Management & Decision-Making Process

1. Please describe what your responsibilities are on a typical day relating to school climate and discipline.
2. What type of professional development and protocols has your school system provided for its leaders over the past 12 months around discipline, culture, and climate? Have you used them? Why or why not?
3. Briefly describe a time when you had to address a student code of conduct violation that involved violence. Please walk me through the process of how you handled this situation. Please share with me your thoughts about each decision you made.

4. If faced with the same type of crisis situation today, would you do anything differently? Why or why not?
5. During crisis situations when you are required to make decisions, do you conduct this process alone? If not, who are your thought partners in this work? Why do you consult with these individuals?
6. As a school leader what additional training and resources do you think are needed for you to ensure a safe school environment and be better equipped to handle crisis situations?

Scenario Question:

Edward is an eighth-grade honors student who never gets in trouble in school. Edward is on the debate, chess, robotics, and swim team. He is well liked by all school staff members and the majority of his classmates. Edward has been the subject of bullying on the way home from school over the past few months. Edward started carrying a pocket knife in his backpack for protection, without the knowledge of his family. One afternoon after chess practice, Edward was packing up his belongings in the library. The chess coach and several members of the team were present, when the pocket knife fell out of his bag. The chess coach immediately confiscated the knife and took both the knife and Edward to the principal's office.

- a. What are your initial thoughts?
- b. Walk me through how you would handle this situation.
- c. What school policies or ethical paradigms are at play in your decision-making process?

- d. What impact do you believe your decision will have on Edward and his chess teammates?
- e. Would the way you handle this situation change if Edward was not an honor student and involved in multiple extracurricular activities? Explain.

NOTE: There is no way any survey responses can be linked to any interview responses.

## APPENDIX F

### ETHICAL PARADIGMS DEFINITIONS

<b>Ethical Paradigm</b>	<b>Definition/Explanation</b>	<b>Leadership Style/Behavior</b>
<b>Justice</b>	The ethic of justice is based in rights, policies, and laws of the given community/organization.	Leaders base their actions on what is good for the whole group. Leaders are concerned with matters of social justice and equity.
<b>Critique</b>	The ethic of critique centers around questing, examining, and challenging the laws or status quo.	Leaders that lead from this paradigm are concerned with identifying inequities and unfair practices in schools that often mirror our society. Leaders are concerned with providing a voice to silenced and marginalized stakeholders.
<b>Care</b>	The ethic of care is centered around caring (nurturing and encouraging) for the student/organization. The ethic of care paradigm embodies shared decision making, where leaders listen to others and include them in the process.	These leaders have a great sense of social responsibility for the overall well being of their students and organizations. Leaders who lead through this paradigm take the time to build relationships with their stakeholder groups.
<b>Profession</b>	The ethic of the profession incorporates aspects of the justice, critique, and care paradigms. Additionally, it encompasses the personal (values, beliefs, experiences) and professional (guidelines set forth by the discipline) ethical code.	Leading from this paradigm requires leaders to be reflective practitioners and open to the diverse perspectives and needs of the various stakeholders in their communities.