Introduction: Crises and Caring School Leadership

Crisis Comes

Crisis has become a prominent condition of contemporary organizational life.[2] No organization is immune. It is not a question of whether a crisis will strike an organization but only a matter of when, how, what form it will take, and who and how many people will be affected.

It follows that all organizational leaders can count on facing some kind of crisis at some point in their careers.[3] Most will face multiple crises. Sometimes crises will come one at a time and will be spread far apart. Sometimes they will come in rapid succession, even simultaneously. Thus, every leader will at some point become a crisis leader.

Most crises do not announce their coming. Sometimes they can be anticipated, but many times they cannot. Regardless, crises do not wait until organizations are prepared for them. Nor do they wait for leaders to develop the ability to guide their organizations through them effectively. Joshua Sharfstein of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health makes the wry observation: "There's a name for the day when crises hit public health agencies: Monday. Also, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday."[4]

Similar observations have been made about crises and schools. Increasingly, schools across the globe have had to respond to traumatic incidents affecting them and their surrounding communities.[5] The frequency and severity of some types of crisis have increased. No matter what they do to prevent and prepare for them, schools cannot avoid completely unwanted disturbances and intrusions of crisis.[6] They cannot avoid completely the prospects of negative consequences for their operations and outcomes and for the safety and well-being of students, teachers, and staff.[7]

How school leaders lead during crises is of critical importance to how schools will fare as a result of them. In this introduction we explore caring as a critical quality of crisis leadership. We argue that caring is not a function apart from other functions of crisis leadership. Rather, it is the matter, manner, and motivation of those functions and how they are performed. This is the same as understanding caring to be a quality of all leadership actions and interactions and of any school leadership function.

We begin this introduction examining the meaning of crisis in organizations generally and in schools in particular. We turn to discuss the core functions of crisis leadership and the critical "through line" of human relationships and caring in the performance of those functions. This discussion takes us to examine the meaning and expression of caring in school leadership and to a model of caring school leadership. We conclude this introduction by applying this model to school leadership in times of crisis.

The Meaning of Crisis

The word *crisis* comes from the Greek word *krisis*, which means turning point or decisive point in the progression of something. Following this original meaning, Gene Klann of the Center for Creative Leadership considers crisis a "turning point in the affairs of an individual or an organization."[8]

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[2] Gigliotti (2020), Klann (2003).
[3] Klann (2003).
[4] Sharfstein (2018, p. 59).
[5] MacNeil and Topping (2007).
[6] Thompson (2004).
[7] Mutch (2015).
[8] Klann (2003, p. 4).

Such turning points are significant because they may be critical to the future of that individual or organization.

> **Crisis:** a turning point in the affairs of an individual or an organization, potentially critical to the future of that individual or organization.

Most definitions of crisis describe it as a time of intense difficulty or danger, a time when a hard or consequential decision must be made, even a time when the survival of a person or an organization is at stake. For example, Arjen Boin and his colleagues describe crisis as "a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly certain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions."[9] Christine Pearson and Ian Mitroff define crisis as "an incident or event [that poses] a threat to the organization's reputation and viability."[10] And Erika James and Lynn Wooten see crisis as "a rare and significant situation that has the potential to . . . bring about highly undesirable outcomes . . . therefore, requiring immediate corrective action."[11]

Education scholars offer similar definitions of crises in schools. Mary Margaret Kerr and Garry King define a school crisis as an event or condition that affects a school, causing individuals to experience fear, helplessness, shock, or horror.[12] To them, a school crisis requires extraordinary actions to restore a sense of psychological and physical security. Similarly, Wilson MacNeil and Keith Topping describe school crises as "sudden, unexpected events that have an emergency quality and have the potential to impact the whole school community."[13] To MacNeil and Topping a school crisis might be any situation far outside the normal experience by staff or students that causes unusually strong emotional reactions that interfere with their ability to perform. And to Matthew Pepper and his colleagues, a school crisis is "an event or a series of events that threaten a school's core values or foundational practices."[14]

Across these definitions are several factors that distinguish crises from other situations, such as routine problems and challenges, even those that pose difficulty and discomfort. Indeed, not every problem, not every piece of "unfortunate or unpleasant business" rises to the level of a crisis.[15] According to Christine Pearson and her colleagues, crises "hyper-extend" the capabilities of the organization: "They tug high-impact organizational decisions and actions into uncharted waters."[16] Crises pose serious threats in real time and create substantial uncertainty and stress. They can be chaotic and confusing. They can cause severe disruption. And they have the potential to overwhelm usual coping mechanisms and require immediate response.

Crises can originate inside or outside a school, and they can be unpredictable or foreseen.[17] They may arrive in a flash or result from a slow boil.[18] Their sources can be natural or man-made.[19] Crises can occur at the personal, organizational, or community level.[20] A crisis that originates at one level may have important implications for other levels. For example, a crisis that occurs in a community may

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[9] Boin et al. (2005, p. 3).
[10] Pearson and Mitroff (1993, p. 49).
[11] James and Wooten, 2010, p. 5).
[12] Kerr and King (2019, p. 3).
[13] MacNeil and Topping (2007, p. 66).
[14] Pepper et al. (2010, p. 6).
[15] James and Wooten (2004, p. 5).
[16] Pearson et al. (1997, p. 52).
[17] Mitroff et al. (1988), Pepper et al. (2010).
[18] James and Wooten (2004).
[19] Raphael (1986).
[20] Dückers (2017).

have important implications for schools therein. A personal crisis may have significant implications for the school as a whole. A relatively small, manageable crisis may blossom into a large, unmanageable one for numerous reasons, including lack of preparedness or inadequate initial response. Indeed, James and Wooten observe that it is not the crisis itself that necessarily poses the greatest threat but the handling of the crisis.[21]

It is equally important to understand that what makes a situation a crisis is more than calling it one or an objective assessment of the situation. Crisis has a socially constructed meaning. It involves a subjective understanding of threat and risk. At the heart of a crisis is a perception of vulnerability and the ability to respond.[22] This phenomenological dimension of crisis is shaped by one's role and responsibility, one's history with crisis-like situations, and one's perceived ability to deal with the conditions present.[23] It is also shaped by the meanings constructed by and with others.

Why does this matter? Both facts and subjective meanings will influence how an organization—a school—anticipates and prepares for crisis, engages and contains crisis, and recovers and learns from crisis. Together, they will shape the nature and function of what is called crisis leadership. The importance of the subjective understanding of crisis drove our approach to story elicitation and our decision not to impose our own definition of crisis on our storytellers.

Crisis Leadership and the Through Line of Caring

Crisis leadership is a special case of general leadership. What makes it a special case are particular functions that are different from or variations of the functions that organizational leaders typically perform.[24] These functions are critical to navigating crisis. They include recognizing emerging threats, initiating efforts to mitigate them and deal with their consequences, and once the acute period of crisis has passed, reestablishing a sense of normalcy and learning from the experience. We will say more about these functions shortly.

Crisis Management and Crisis Leadership

Crisis management: an approach that focuses on operational and managerial domains of leadership work performed before, during, and after a crisis.

A distinction is sometimes drawn between crisis management and crisis leadership. Both point to important aspects of dealing effectively with a crisis. Crisis management focuses on operational and managerial domains of leadership work performed before, during, and after a crisis. These include but are not limited to crisis planning, conducting training and drills, forming crisis teams, assigning specific roles to be performed during a crisis situation, and managing communications and public relations. This work is necessary but insufficient to guide organizations through a crisis successfully.

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[21] James and Wooten (2004, p. 8).
[22] Sharfstein (2018, p. 5).
[23] Gigliotti (2020).
[24] Klann (2003), Mutch (2015).

> **Crisis leadership:** an approach maintaining a vision of what was, what is, and what could be; staying attuned to the big picture; promoting meaning and sensemaking; sustaining organizational culture and social relationships; and seeking opportunities that may result from crisis.

Crisis leadership is a broader construct that includes these operational and managerial domains and adds to them a crucial executive domain.[25] The executive domain includes, among other things, maintaining a vision of what was, what is, and what could be; staying attuned to the big picture of crisis situations; promoting meaning and sensemaking; sustaining organizational culture and social relationships; and seeking opportunities for the organization that may result from crisis. We prefer the broader, more inclusive construct of crisis leadership to crisis management. Our preference aligns with findings of research that leaders who successfully recover from crisis and maintain the reputations of their organizations understand the importance of crisis management and do it well. At the same time, they say that management is insufficient, that the broader, executive function of crisis leadership work is also critically important.

Phases of Crisis Leadership

Crisis leadership is often described according to phases or stages of crisis. At its simplest, crisis leadership can be thought of in terms of an "emergency phase," when the task is to stabilize the situation and buy time, and an "adaptive phase," when the underlying causes of the crisis are addressed and capacity to thrive in a new reality are developed.[26] More common is to think about crisis leadership in terms of four or five phases. The PPRR Model focuses on phases of prevention, preparation, response, and recovery.[27] This model was adopted and slightly modified by the U.S. Department of Education in 2013.

Five-phase models elaborate these phases and are more specific about the work associated with each. To illustrate, we look across two similar models developed by Ian Mitroff and his colleagues[28] and Erika James and Lynn Wooten and find the following.[29]

1. *Signal detection* involves anticipating crisis and spotting red flags or warning signals that something is wrong.

2. *Preparation and prevention* include measures to fend off crisis and to ready direct responses when crisis comes. Preparation can include probing one's organization for weaknesses, identifying organizational resources that might be drawn upon, assigning roles and responsibilities that will need to be performed, and preparing people for those roles and responsibilities. Often preparation involves developing structures, such as crisis teams, to manage crisis response.

3. *Containment and damage control* focus on direct response to a crisis when it strikes. This phase may include actions to isolate and absorb the shock of the crisis, cope with it, and limit negative impact.

4. *Recovery* is the work of short- and long-term healing and repair, and it involves steps to return to normalcy.

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[25] James and Wooten (2004).
[26] Heifetz et al.(2020).
[27] MacNeil and Topping (2007).
[28] Mitroff et al. (1988), Pearson and Mitroff (1993).
[29] James and Wooten (2010).

5. ***Reflection and learning*** involve explicit efforts to understand the underlying causes of the crisis and to assess the implementation and effectiveness of the response. Done well, this phase is crucial for improving each of the first four phases for future crises, especially preparation and prevention. This phase can also be an effective springboard to promoting more general improvement to organizational performance and outcomes.

The Work of Crisis Leadership

Leading during crisis requires, as Christine Pearson and her colleagues observe, a "coordinated, full-blown multifunctional effort."[30] This effort involves operational, managerial, and executive domains of leadership we highlighted earlier. Crisis leadership is context-specific work. Its effectiveness is determined by its relevance to the "situational contingencies" of a particular organization and its community.[31] Moreover, although effective crisis leadership is "planful," it is also "emergent" and "auto-adaptive." That is, it adjusts to fit the ever-changing crisis situation and context.[32]

Now, we examine 10 specific functions that constitute the work of crisis leadership. Most of these functions apply across different phases of crisis leadership. A number have managerial as well as executive dimensions. As such, we do not identify them with specific phases or domains. We encourage you to consider the managerial and executive aspects of each as well as how different functions might apply to different phases of crisis leadership.

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10 Functions of Crisis Leadership

1. Reinforcing the organization's mission and core values and setting a vision and priorities for the future

2. Promoting meaning and sensemaking

3. Providing assurance, inspiring, confidence, and creating stability

4. Communicating

5. Sharing leadership and decision-making

6. Coordinating operations and management

7. Acquiring and allocating resources

8. Learning from crisis

9. Improving into the future

10. Tending to people and to relationships

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1. ***Reinforcing the organization's mission and core values and setting a vision and priorities for the future.*** Effective crisis leaders reinforce the core purposes and values of the organization for its members, constituents, and stakeholders. This provides an important source of stability amid the uncertainty and threat of crisis. Effective crisis leaders also facilitate a shared vision for what is desired throughout and following a crisis.[33]

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[30] Pearson et al. (1997, p. 52).
[31] Quarantelli (1998, p. 375).
[32] Anderson (2018, p. 50), Comfort (2007, p. 195).
[33] Anderson (2018).

Such a vision sets an expectation that can unify an organization emotionally, operationally, and politically. And it can promote common understanding that enables coordinated action. Reanchoring on organizational mission and core values, and projecting a vision for moving forward, lays the foundation for short- and long-term priorities that set strategic direction when responding to a crisis and working to recover and learn from it.

2. *Promoting meaning and sensemaking.* Effective crisis leadership aims to promote collective understanding of a crisis and help people make meaning of it in ways that bring authentic hope, confidence, and resilience.[34] A shared base of knowledge and understanding—a "common operating picture"—is crucial for collective action in extreme circumstances.[35] It is important to ground meaning making of a crisis in the organization's mission, vision, core values, and priorities.

3. *Providing assurance, inspiring confidence, and creating stability.* Crises can disrupt, disorient, and damage. They can introduce danger, upheaval, and debilitating ambiguity and uncertainty. A key function of crisis leadership is to provide assurance and inspire confidence that the organization is taking ownership of the situation as much as possible, not allowing the situation to take ownership of the organization.[36] How leaders demonstrate responsibility in a crisis, how they explain problems, and how they collaborate and make key decisions with others can go far to inspire confidence and credibility. Leaders can promote assurance by modeling coping, encouraging the expression of feelings, and affirming emotional responses. Leaders can promote stability through regular communication, reasserting routines and rituals, elevating symbols that convey shared meaning, and reinforcing the organization's mission and core values.

4. *Communicating.* Keeping people informed about a crisis, what is being done to address it, and the progress being made are crucial to crisis leadership. Effective communication is vital to developing a common understanding, conveying important information for action, and promoting credibility and trust. A formal communication strategy is essential to any organization before, during, and after a crisis situation. Because crises can disrupt normal communication channels, creative use of unconventional means of communication may be necessary. Effective communication allows leaders to maintain quality control over the flow of information within and outside the organization.[37] It allows leaders not only to share information but to form a persuasive narrative that explains what happened, the consequences, how the situation can be resolved, and who can be relied upon to resolve it.[38] The amount of communication is less important than the ability to develop the "cognition" of risk and response.[39] Personal communication involving humble inquiry[40] and strategic listening[41] is crucial. Hallmarks of effective crisis communication include clarity, accuracy, consistency, honesty, and authenticity. It is important to tell it straight but also shape the message considering how it will be received. Leaders can communicate a great deal about their seriousness and sincerity by being visible and physically, mindfully, and emotionally present. They should be seen and heard. Being present can convey empathy and concern

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[34] Gigliotti (2020), Teo et al. (2017).
[35] Comfort (2007).
[36] Waldron and Wetherbe (2020).
[37] Pepper et al. (2010).
[38] Sharfstein (2018).
[39] Comfort (2007).
[40] Schein (2013).
[41] Tate and Dunklee (2005).

and build trust and confidence in ways that written words cannot.

5. ***Sharing leadership and decision-making.*** Too often, leaders assume that centralized control and decision-making must be imposed to confront the disruption and

> Hallmarks of effective crisis communication include clarity, accuracy, consistency, honesty, and authenticity.

uncertainty of crisis. Just the opposite may be needed. Proactively affording people affected by crisis more influence and control may reduce feelings of insecurity and helplessness and increase a sense of control. Making sure that people have meaningful things to do can calm anxiety, help restore order, and promote a sense of agency.[42] Moreover, tapping multiple points of view can lead to better decision quality. It is important to expand influence across what happens during a crisis and over how and when these things happen.[43] Related to sharing leadership and decision-making is managing politics. Effective crisis leaders manage the politics within their own organizations. They encourage a shift from adversarial to more consensual politics where the pursuit of collective interests replaces the pursuit of self and group interests. Leaders should look beneath a particular political issue to understand the interests, fears, aspirations, and loyalties that have formed around it.[44] Effective crisis leaders also work with external political leadership, such as that in the larger community. External political leadership may be a crucial source of support, providing moral and legal authority and political leverage to enact potentially controversial decisions and to secure needed resources.[45]

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6. ***Coordinating operations and management.*** This function includes making sure that there is a strong management system in place before crisis comes and that the components of this system are coherent, well coordinated, and flexible enough to adapt to crisis situations. Effective crisis leaders make sure that there are clear protocols and assignments, sufficient resources, and opportunities for management and operations personnel to raise questions, anticipate problems, share information, suggest new solutions, and make decisions themselves.[46]

7. ***Acquiring and allocating resources.*** Crises may call on leaders to acquire additional resources and allocate them to meet particular needs. These may include fiscal, material, and technological resources. They may also include space, time, and human resources, especially human service professionals and other sources of service and expertise. Acquiring such resources may depend on entrepreneurial acumen. Importantly, effective crisis leaders ensure that resources flow to priority areas.[47] Their allocation and use need to be monitored and adjusted as conditions change. Importantly, leaders will need to employ the social resources of the organization—interpersonal relationships, trust, support, and mutual commitment.

8. ***Learning from crisis.*** Effective crisis leaders take steps to understand the experience of crisis and learn what might be done better in the future.[48] Leaders should reflect and engage

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[42] Sharfstein (2018).
[43] Sutton (2020).
[44] Heifetz et al. (2020).
[45] Kahn (2020).
[46] Sharfstein (2018).
[47] Pepper et al. (2010).
[48] O'Connor and Takahashi (2014).

others throughout the organization in post-mortem activities to assess what aspects of anticipation, response, and recovery were successful or unsuccessful.[49] Such learning can be directed toward improved crisis planning and prevention as well as toward developing more effective strategies for response and recovery. Often, this function is associated with a recovery or post-recovery phase of crisis leadership. After the pressure of crisis subsides, post hoc learning can provide important perspectives. However, real-time reflection and assessment may help keep response and recovery on track as well as yield useful insights and lessons.

9. *Improving into the future.* Effective crisis leaders look for ways to use crisis as a stimulus for "a fresh start," as an opportunity for creating a better, more effective organization.[50] Often, the chaos of crisis presents opportunities for innovation.[51] The ideal is for leaders not just to successfully engage and recover from a crisis but to translate the effort into lasting, positive reform that might never have happened otherwise.[52]

10. *Tending to people and to relationships.* Perhaps the most important function of effective crisis leadership, one that cuts across all the other functions and each phase of crisis leadership work, is tending to people and to relationships. Recovery from crisis, no less the survival of an organization, depends on the resilience of its members. And their resilience depends on how leadership understands and responds to the human and social needs, emotions, and behaviors associated with a crisis.[53] Strong, positive social connections can serve as reservoirs of emotional and psychological support that instill confidence and provide means to weather crises well. Indeed, leaders can reduce the duration of a crisis and mitigate its negative effects by addressing the human element before, during, and after a crisis occurs.[54]

We now take a closer look at this last function, focusing specifically on the bright through line of caring.

The Through Line of Caring

In addition to phases and functions, effective crisis leadership is defined by certain qualities.[55] Among them are the readiness, courageousness, resourcefulness, innovativeness, flexibility and adaptability, self-awareness, and resiliency of the leader. Effective crisis leadership is well informed, well organized, innovative, improvisational, and able to tolerate and manage uncertainty and ambiguity. It is also and importantly ethical.

As Paul Argenti explains, effective crisis leadership is "a mixture of head and heart"; it is driven by a "dedication to caring."[56] Indeed it is framed by a mindset concerned with human need.[57] During crisis situations, human need can run wide and deep. The need may be psychological, emotional,

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[49] James and Wooten (2004).
[50] James and Wooten (2004), Pepper et al. (2010).
[51] Waldron and Wetherbe (2020).
[52] Sharfstein (2018).
[53] Klann (2003), Teo et al. (2017).
[54] Klann (2003).
[55] Anderson (2018), Argenti (2020), Comfort (2007), Dückers (2017), James and Wooten (2004), Pepper et al. (2010), Sharfstein (2018),
[56] Argenti (2020, p. 24, 25).
[57] Flynn (2002).

spiritual, physical, social, material, and financial. It may manifest inside and outside an organization, among organizational members, constituents, and stakeholders. In schools, it is the need, born of crisis, of students, teachers, staff, school leaders, families, and members of surrounding communities.

Philosopher David Bauman argues that crisis leadership is most effective when guided by an ethic of care.[58] An ethic of care emphasizes strengthening relationships and fulfilling responsibilities to others. It emphasizes how one's actions may affect the feelings of others, which is critical for strengthening supportive social relationships to address human need. An ethic of care directs leaders to fulfill the organization's responsibilities to its members and to those outside the organization who depend on it. An ethic of care directs leaders to provide aid and comfort, to address human stress and suffering, and in doing so maintain the social fabric of the organization and strengthen its ability to respond to, recover from, and perhaps become better and stronger from the crisis.

The literature on crisis leadership is replete with references to the importance of caring. Many who have explored crisis leadership in schools give it particular emphasis. Caring is a crucial through line of crisis leadership, relevant to all its functions, orienting them toward preserving and promoting human health, well-being, and success.

Caring School Leadership in Times of Crisis[59]

To understand more fully the role of caring in crisis leadership in schools, we step back to examine the meaning of caring and caring school leadership. We begin by laying out reasons to care about caring in schools in ordinary times and in times of crisis. We examine the meaning of caring and what makes leadership actions and interactions caring. And we present a model of caring school leadership. We apply this model to school leadership during crisis.

Why Care About Caring?

There are four important reasons to care about caring in schools and to work to promote it.

> **Why Care About Caring in Schools?**
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> 1. Caring is an intrinsic good.
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> 2. Caring is crucial to the learning and development of children and youth and their success in school.
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> 3. The alternatives to caring are unacceptable.
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> 4. Caring is highly variable in schools today.

First, caring is an intrinsic good, elemental of the human condition, and a worthy endeavor in its own right. It is a foundation stone of being moral and a state for which we long and strive. To care for others is to give meaning for our own lives.

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[58] Bauman (2011).

[59] This section was adapted from Smylie, Murphy, and Louis (2020).

Second, caring is crucial to the learning and development of children and youth and their success in school. It is the bedrock of all successful education. Research repeatedly emphasizes the importance of caring to student engagement, conduct, and academic success. Caring relationships with adults are associated with healthy brain development, cognitive and social-emotional functioning, and the ability to mediate stress, threat, and trauma. Caring is also associated with the development of positive psychological states such as self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, safety, hope, and persistence. It is also associated with children's capacities for prosocial behaviors and resilience, all of which can contribute to academic learning and performance. Moreover, caring can lead to more caring. Children and youth who experience caring from adults and peers are more likely to act in caring ways themselves. Both resilience and replicating caring—paying it forward—may be important as students and schools experience and recover from crisis.

A third reason to care about caring is that the alternatives are unacceptable. Lack of caring or harmful uncaring can impede positive learning and development as well as positive and caring social behavior. Lack of caring can lead to feelings of isolation, antisocial behavior, negative attitudes toward school, and poor academic engagement—all contributing to low academic achievement. Important to our consideration of crisis, lack of caring and support can negatively affect children's ability to regulate stress and manage trauma.

A fourth reason to care about caring in schools is that we cannot assume that caring is present and unproblematic. There is a paradoxical notion that caring is present and strong in schools because caring is what schools are supposed to do. This is an assumption of "spontaneously occurring caring"[60] that is not always born out in student experience. Studies show that substantial portions of students do not see their schools as caring, encouraging places even as educators believe that they are. Moreover, caring is highly variable in schools today, particularly for students of color, students of low socioeconomic backgrounds, low-performing students, and students placed at risk.

Why Care About Caring During Crises?

There are also many reasons why we should care about caring during crises. In addition to the four reasons above, crises can create or intensify human need and amplify the imperative to address them.[61] They can create disruption, damage, and debilitation for students, teachers, staff, and school leaders. They can cause emotional, psychological, and social distress as well as illness, physical harm, and death. Crises can exact financial and property loss, and loss of employment, which may lead to hunger and homelessness. To address these needs—to give care and support and to do so in caring manner—is crucial. As we stated earlier, caring plays an important role in the resilience of children and youth—and adults—in experiencing and recovering from stress and trauma. Inasmuch as the

> ### Why Care About Caring in Times of Crisis?
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> 1. Crises create new human needs and amplify the need to address them.
> 2. To address the human needs born of crisis is to fulfill a duty of care.
> 3. Even in crisis situations, we cannot assume the presence or emergence of caring.

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[60] Brechin (1998, p. 2).
[61] Koehn (2020), Sutton (2020).

ability of schools to encounter and recover from crisis is dependent on the health, strength, and resilience of teachers, staff, and leaders, the human need associated with crisis must be addressed.

Research illuminates the types of human need that may arise in schools as they experience crises. In their work on school crisis prevention and intervention, Mary Margaret Kerr and Garry King emphasize that during crisis many children and adults in schools need the "psychological first aid" of emotional support, understanding of their experiences, and a sense of what they might expect going forward.[62] They need information about what they can do in the moment, and they may need psychological and emotional support services, medical care, shelter, and food. In her study of New Zealand schools recovering from earthquakes, Carol Mutch emphasizes the importance to crisis response and recovery of a positive, caring school community and the strong and trusting social relationships that can provide support and care.[63] Likewise, Peter O'Connor and Nozomu Takahashi, in their case studies of principal leadership during large-scale natural disasters, highlight the importance of putting the interests of children before all else, keeping children safe, and providing support and care to address the psychological, emotional, and medical needs of children, staff, and families.[64] Looking across numerous crisis situations, Pepper and his colleagues stress caring for the emotional well-being of students, families, teachers, and staff during any type of crisis.[65] And from a school counseling psychology perspective, Rosemary Thompson points to the importance of assisting people emotionally in recovering from trauma born of crisis.[66]

In addition, we should care about caring during crisis, especially to address the human need born of crisis, to fulfill an affirmative duty of care we assume as educators.[67] This is a duty to do everything reasonably possible to protect students from foreseeable harm, injury, and death. By extension, this is a duty to address those things that if left unaddressed would result in additional harm. It applies to the protection of teachers, staff, and school leaders in the employ of schools and districts. This duty of care is professional, legal, and moral. Philosophers argue that to care, we must assume a responsibility to care. But to assume responsibility is not enough. Joan Tronto contends that a duty of care requires an obligation to care in situations where caring action or reaction is due.[68] Crises certainly are such situations.

Earlier we argued that it is important to care about caring in schools because, in ordinary time, we cannot assume that it is present nor experienced by all. We pointed to the problematic assumption of "spontaneously occurring caring." This tells us that we should care about caring in times of crisis because we cannot assume that caring is present or will emerge when crisis comes. Although it is said that crises can call out our "better angels," it can also be said, in the words attributed to late 19th-century author James Lane Allen, that "adversity does not build character, it reveals it." As organization and management scholar Ian Mitroff and his colleagues observe, many organizations can be insensitive to the social, emotional, psychological, and physical needs of their members in ordinary time and especially when organizations themselves are under the stress of a major crisis.[69] There is no reason to think that this observation does not apply, at least to some degree, to schools.

There is also a strong argument that we should care about caring in schools *before* crises come because caring creates a context, a resource, that helps schools respond to and recover from crisis.

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[62] Kerr and King (2019, p. 178).

[63] Mutch (2015).

[64] O'Connor and Takahashi (2014).

[65] Pepper et al. (2010).

[66] Thompson (2004)

[67] MacNeil and Topping (2007), Noddings (2013).

[68] Tronto (2005). See also Engster (2005).

[69] Mitroff et al. (1987).

From their analysis of school leadership during different types of crisis situations, Pepper and his colleagues observe that "organizational strength remains the best predictor for whether an organization will successfully surmount a crisis."[70] Successful responses to crisis, they continue, turn on the degree to which schools have previously cultivated trusting, empowering, caring relationships among the principal, teachers, student, parents, and the larger community. Quoting Anna Switzer, principal of an elementary school in New York City in the aftermath of 9/11: "You can only be the school on the day of the crisis that you were the day before the crisis."[71] Mutch makes exactly the same point, emphasizing the importance of an existing culture of care built up over a period of time. When crises came to the schools in her study, the positive relationships and the community of care that principals had cultivated led students and teachers to be and feel cared for and supported. They started caring more, and they started helping others.

What Is Caring?

We use the word "caring" to represent the qualities of relationships and of actions and interactions that exhibit concern, provide support, nurture, meet students' and adults' needs, and promote their success and well-being. Caring is not simply caring about—that is, having concern or sentiment for someone of something. It is important to care about students, teachers, and their success. However, it is another thing to be caring of them. Caring includes but goes beyond feelings of concern and sentiment to actions and interactions—practices—of being in relationships with others and achieving particular aims on their behalf. Caring means both worrying and actively doing something about those worries.

> Caring includes but goes beyond feelings of concern and sentiment to actions and interactions—practices—of being in relationships with others and achieving particular aims on their behalf. Caring means both worrying and actively doing something about those worries.

Caring is not defined by specific actions or interactions. Nor is it defined by a particular set of activities that are necessarily different from those in which one regularly engages. Caring is not necessarily another responsibility that adds to one's job description and workload. All actions and interactions—all activities—can be viewed through a lens of caring. Again, caring, as we define it, is a quality of relationships—the matter, manner, and motivation of personal and professional action and interaction.

What Makes Actions and Interactions Caring?

We believe that three elements together make actions and interactions caring: (1) the pursuit of particular aims; (2) the activation of positive virtues and mindsets; and (3) competent enactment. These elements form a system of antecedents to caring. Each may have personal and professional dimensions. Moreover, the expression of these elements in caring action and interaction may be affected positively or negatively by a variety of interrelated contexts—interpersonal, organizational, and extra organizational.

1. ***Pursuit of the aims of caring*** Caring is neither aimless nor agnostic in purpose. For actions and interactions to be caring, they must focus on achieving particular objectives. Caring aims to promote the functioning, general well-being, and success of others, as individuals and as groups. Caring addresses particular needs of others and promotes their interests. Caring aims

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[70] Pepper et al. (2010, p. 12).
[71] Pepper et al. (2010, p. 12).

> **What Makes Action and Interaction Caring?**
>
> 1. Pursuit of the aims of caring
> 2. Activation of positive virtues and mindsets
> 3. Competent enactment

to help others grow and flourish in their own right. Caring is something framed as a response to pain, suffering, and trouble. But it can be proactive and an affirmative expression of joy and celebration. Caring can also be a worthwhile endeavor in itself.

Caring can aim to address particular needs, problems, and concerns. It can seek to provide tangible benefits, the manner in which and the motivation by which they are provided being as important as the benefits themselves. These benefits can come from particular services and provisions. Caring can aim to promote certain benefits—social, psychological, emotional, and behavioral—that accrue from being in caring relationships and feeling cared for. Finally, caring can aim to promote further caring.

It is not difficult to think about particular aims of education that relate to caring. We consider the general purposes of schooling to provide for students' safety and nurturance; support their learning, development, independence, self-reliance, prosocial relationships, and ability to function in and contribute to community; promote academic success and general well-being; and prepare students for work, further educational pursuits, and citizenship. It is also not difficult to think about the aims of caring leadership in relation to crisis, as we discussed earlier.

2. ***Activation of positive virtues and mindsets*** A second element of caring consists of positive virtues and mindsets that are brought to the pursuit of the aims of caring. These virtues include compassion, empathy, patience, sympathy, and kindness. They include fairness and justice, authenticity, humility, and vulnerability. They also include prudence, transparency, honesty, trustworthiness, and respect for others and their integrity.

Three positive mindsets are particularly important to caring in ordinary times and in times of crisis. The first is attentiveness to others. If caring is to address others' needs and interests, one must be attentive to understand, deeply and genuinely, who persons are and what their needs, concerns, interests, and situations might be.

Another mindset is motivational orientation. If caring truly means acting on behalf of others, one must be motivated accordingly, and this orientation cannot be diminished by attention to one's own needs and self-interests. Attentiveness and motivational orientation toward others do not lead to permissiveness or abdication of responsibility. Rather they become a positive basis for the fulfillment of personal and professional responsibility.

A third mindset consists of personal and professional identities related to caring. How persons see themselves as caring or uncaring human beings and as capable or incapable of caring will likely affect their efforts to be caring. Likewise, how persons see themselves in a professional role, what they perceive the norms of the profession to

require of them, and what they perceive as others' expectations for them in their role may influence caring.

3. ***Competent enactment*** In addition to aims and positive virtues and mindsets, to be caring requires competency. Effort and sincerity are important and may be appreciated, but particular actions and interactions may not be perceived as caring or helpful if they are uninformed, inadequate, misguided, or poorly performed.

In caring, one important area of competency is knowledge and authentic understanding of others and their needs, problems, joys, concerns, and situations. If educators have inaccurate understanding of who students are and what they want and need, they may make well-meaning attempts to be caring but ultimately miss the mark as to what is caring and helpful in the eyes of students. The same applies to teachers and staff. Developing such understanding is related to one's ability to inquire, listen and hear, observe and see, assess and understand, and learn about others. Social-emotional intelligence is particularly important to caring and caring school leadership. Also important is understanding persons' and groups' races, classes, genders, sexual orientations, languages, culture, religious beliefs, and relevant contexts.

A second area of competency concerns understanding the relative effectiveness of strategies to address the needs and concerns of others and to promote their interests. This includes knowledge and skills to engage these strategies successfully. Caring requires knowledge and skill to develop or select, adapt, and enact practices that pursue the aims of caring; that bring virtues of caring to life; and that align with understanding others, their situations, and their joys, needs, and concerns. Caring further requires the ability to wrestle with ethical and practical dilemmas posed by different and competing needs and considerations.

A third area of competency concerns knowledge of self and the ability to develop and deepen one's own capacity for caring. Knowledge of self involves understanding one's orientations and inclinations, strengths and limitations, and predispositions and prejudices. Recognizing the sources of one's fears and joys may be crucial in thinking and acting in a caring manner in ordinary time and in times of crisis.

A fourth area of competency, especially important to school leaders, consists of knowledge and skills for developing caring among others and creating organizational contexts conducive to caring. This includes understanding how to think about caring as a property of classroom and school organization, not only as a quality of interpersonal relationships. It includes knowledge and skill related to professional learning and development and organizational change. It encompasses knowledge and skill to create supportive structures and processes, to design work and social arrangements, and to develop organizational cultures imbued with the virtues and mindsets of caring.
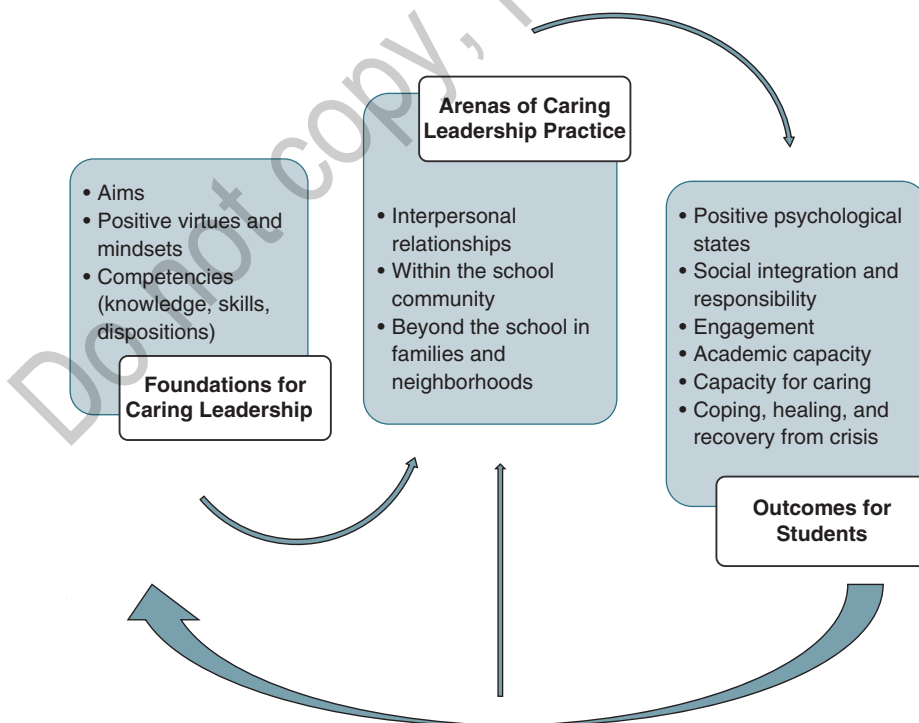
A Model of Caring School Leadership

Following from this discussion, we define caring school leadership as leadership that is itself caring, which proceeds from the aims of caring, positive virtues and mindsets related to caring, and competencies for the expression of caring in action and interaction. We believe that caring is not a special domain of leadership, nor is it a discrete set of leadership strategies. Although its practice may vary depending on the people involved, interpersonal and organizational contexts, and the environments surrounding the school, it is a quality or property of leadership generally. It is the matter, manner, and motivation of school leadership.

As a quality of relationship, action, and interaction, caring can permeate almost everything that a school leader says and does. It can span all of school leadership work. Any aspect of leadership can be caring, noncaring, or even uncaring. What matters is that a school leader brings the aims, virtues, and mindsets of caring to life through competent action and interaction. The relational aspects of leadership—the trusting interpersonal relationships that leaders form with students, teachers, staff, and parents—lie at the heart of caring school leadership. Yet caring leadership is not confined there. Caring can be infused in developing and promoting a school's mission, vision, and core values. It can be integrated into expectations for teaching and student learning. Caring can be a driving force of academic program development and implementation, of instructional leadership, of providing services for groups of students, and of allocating resources to support teaching and learning. Caring can shape the nature of academic demand and support, testing and accountability, student discipline, and administrative decision-making. Caring can guide programs of outreach to families and the school's community. And, as we will discuss shortly, it can guide school leadership in times of crisis.

These points are captured in our model of caring school leadership in Figure 1.1. This model contains three major components: (1) foundational elements for caring leadership; (2) arenas of caring school leadership practice; and (3) outcomes of caring leadership. Our model traces with arrows relationships among these components and how each relates to others. It does not focus on every aspect of school leadership or how the totality of school leadership work might be performed in a caring manner. Our model is presented with students in mind, but it applies to caring for teachers, staff, parents, and others. Indeed, caring school leadership has as its focus the betterment, well-being, and success of all in the school. Moreover, if caring leadership is to foster systems of caring for students within schools, it must attend to the caring of teachers and staff. It is much more likely for teachers

Figure 1.1

Model of Caring School Leadership

to be caring and supportive of their students if teachers believe they are cared for and supported by school leadership.

Our model shows caring school leadership proceeding from the aims, positive virtues and mindsets, and competencies of caring. It suggests that the presence and strength of these elements enable and shape the character and impact of caring leadership practice. At the center of the model lie three arenas of practices. The first arena where caring leadership is practiced is in interpersonal relationships with students, teachers and staff, parents, and other stakeholders. The second arena is the school community. The third arena for the practice of caring school leadership lies outside the school in families, neighborhoods, and broader environments. These arenas are contexts in which caring leadership is enacted and can be the subjects of caring leadership. For example, caring leadership often is practiced in the context of interpersonal relationships. At the same time, the caring actions and interactions of school leadership may be directed at making interpersonal relationships more caring. Likewise, caring leadership may be enacted in the context of the school organization. At the same time, it might be directed at cultivating the school as a caring community to develop the caring capacity of others and shape organizational conditions to be more supportive of caring.

In the lived work of school leaders, these arenas of practice are often intertwined, but our model does not presume that they are. Our model also allows for the possibility of one arena of caring school leadership practice compensating for another.

We expect principals to act in caring ways and provide caring support to students with whom they are able to form trusting interpersonal relationships. At the same time, to ensure that every student receives caring support, principals can promote teacher and staff caring so that each student experiences caring relationships with a number of adults in the school. By doing this, principals need not take on all the work themselves. Principals will be much more effective if they develop the capacity of others, work in partnership with others, and guide and support others to step up and be better at caring.

The right side of the model shows student outcomes that we expect from caring school leadership. The model identifies several types of outcomes important to students that we discussed earlier—positive psychological states, social integration and responsibility, and the capacity for achieving goals, engagement, academic success, and capacity for caring. To these outcomes we can add the outcomes of coping, healing, and recovery from crisis. The model indicates that the stronger the practices of caring school leadership in different arenas of practice, the more likely caring's benefits will accrue. Students benefit most when the totality of caring they experience is strong and positive. The model does not depict outcomes of caring leadership that we might expect for teachers, staff, and others. However, we expect that the types of outcomes would be similar. In times of crisis, we believe that caring leadership would contribute to coping, healing, and recovery among adults as well as students.

The major parts of the model are laid out in linear order, indicating with one-way arrows that the foundational elements of caring shape caring leadership practice and, in turn, promote the outcomes of caring. The model indicates with feedback arrows that outcomes can shape the nature of caring leadership practice and the three foundational elements of caring. For example, students' responses to positive experiences of caring may motivate leaders to continue those practices. When students ignore or resist particular actions or interactions intended to be caring, attentive leaders may seek more information, reflect, and perhaps alter what they are doing. Although it does not depict them, our model recognizes the importance of dynamic and interrelated interpersonal, organizational, and extra organizational contexts. Although the arrows in the model suggest a sequential order of elements, the reality of leadership generally and caring school leadership in particular is more nonlinear and dynamic.

Examples of Practice

We have stated that caring is not a special domain of school leadership, nor is it a discrete set of leadership strategies. It can permeate everything a school leader says and does. Caring is the matter, manner, and motivation of the whole of school leadership, a quality of its enactment. The practice of caring school leadership is situational and it is dynamic.

And so it is with the practice of caring school leadership during times of crisis. We can imagine how the work, the functions of crisis leadership, can be practiced in caring ways. The work of crisis prevention and preparation; of response, containment, and damage control; and of recovery can be seen and pursued through the lens of caring. Reinforcing the school's mission and core values and setting priorities for the future can bring to the fore the aims and virtues of caring, as can promoting meaning and sensemaking about crisis and how to engage and recover from it. Communications can promote the aims and virtues of caring and be executed in a manner that anticipates and addresses the needs and concerns of those affected by crisis. Acquiring and allocating resources can be guided similarly. The work of learning from crisis can focus on the role of caring, and the work of improving into the future can place caring at the top of the agenda. Certainly, caring can and should be at the heart of tending to people and relationships.

Practices that we consider examples of caring school leadership can be found in several studies of schools in crisis situations. In her review of responses to different crises including Hurricane Katrina, Mutch describes how principals helped children process events without dwelling too much on the aspects they find distressing, and how they helped students talk to caring and trusted adults, find support from their peers, and express their feelings through creative activities.[72] She describes how principals tried to reintroduce stability by returning to normal routines or by adopting new ones. These principals spoke frequently to students and teachers about school values, especially love, support and empathy, hospitality, and care. They made special effort to check in regularly with all members of their school communities to see how everyone was faring, learn about their needs, and assess how the school might be able to help. They kept their eyes and ears open for indicators of need. These principals drew on the trust and the social-emotional support of relationships cultivated before the crisis. Above and across all, they put others' interests above their own.

In O'Connor and Takahashi's case studies of New Zealand and Japanese schools recovering from earthquakes, we see principals putting the interests of children before all else, keeping them safe, attending to their needs, and managing their anxiety.[73] They also prioritized the needs of staff and families. These leaders took control with an air of calm and kindness. Practical needs were addressed—medical attention, shelter, water, and sanitation facilities were secured. While power was out, they found new ways to access information and employed multiple means to communicate with parents. These school leaders used community resources to give extra support to children and their families and, in the process, strengthened school–community relationships forged from common experience. When it was time to return to school, these school leaders and their teachers planned how they would welcome back students, provide safe opportunities for them to make sense of their experiences, and help address students' ongoing fear and anxiety.

Other examples of caring leadership practices can be found in works from the field of school counseling and psychology.[74]

To help you in your own practice of leading schools during times of crisis, we present a guide to help you engage the stories to come.

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[72] Mutch (2015).
[73] O'Connor and Takahashi (2014).
[74] For example, Kerr and King (2019), Thompson (2004).