

Teaching guidelines

Empowering Leadership in Times of Polycrisis

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Material information

This teaching material examines empowering leadership as a response to contemporary polycrisis, characterized by overlapping economic, geopolitical, technological, environmental, and social disruptions that create persistent uncertainty for organizations. Designed primarily for bachelor's students in management, leadership, organizational behavior, and international business, the material explores why traditional leadership approaches often struggle under such conditions and why empowering employees has become increasingly important.

The resource introduces the concept of leadership as a process of influence, vision, relationship-building, and adaptability, emphasizing its role in helping organizations make sense of uncertainty, coordinate responses, build resilience, and maintain trust. Special attention is paid to empowering leadership, which encourages employee participation, initiative, and responsibility while simultaneously providing guidance, support, and psychological safety.

A central theme of the material is perceived supervisory agency - employees' belief that their supervisor possesses the competence, influence, and capability to act effectively during uncertainty. Drawing on Social Information Processing Theory, Uncertainty Reduction Theory, and Conservation of Resources Theory, the resource demonstrates that leadership effectiveness depends not only on leaders' behaviors but also on how employees perceive and interpret those behaviors.

To illustrate these concepts, the material presents a mixed-methods empirical study involving 497 employees from Poland and Portugal. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) and qualitative interviews, the study examines the relationships between supervisory agency, organizational crisis response capability, macro-level certainty, empowering leadership, and workplace discrimination. The emphasis is placed on research design, theory testing, and interpretation of results rather than statistical techniques.

The findings show that empowering leadership in times of polycrisis requires balancing employee autonomy with structure and direction. They highlight the importance of supervisory credibility and suggest that organizational resilience and leadership mutually reinforce one another. By combining theoretical perspectives with empirical evidence, the material helps students understand how leadership can support organizational adaptation and resilience in highly uncertain environments.

While intended primarily for undergraduate courses in leadership, management, organizational behavior, and international business, the resource can also be used in modules focused on human resource management, crisis management, organizational resilience, and workplace diversity and inclusion.

Learning objectives and outcomes

This teaching material focuses on empowering leadership in the context of contemporary polycrisis, examining how leaders can support organizational resilience, employee engagement, and adaptation in environments characterized by overlapping economic, geopolitical, technological, and social disruptions. Its core objective is to help students understand the theoretical foundations of empowering leadership, the importance of perceived supervisory agency, and the role of organizational resilience in shaping effective leadership under conditions of uncertainty. Through the integration of leadership theories and an empirical mixed-methods research study, the material demonstrates how leadership can be examined in contemporary management research while encouraging students to critically evaluate the factors that enable organizations and employees to navigate uncertainty, balance autonomy with guidance, and sustain effectiveness in turbulent environments.

Learning outcomes are categorized as follows:

Knowledge

- Student is able to explain the concept of empowering leadership and its importance in polycrisis conditions.
- Student is able to describe the role of perceived supervisory agency and its influence on leadership effectiveness under conditions of uncertainty.

Skills

- Student is able to analyze how empowering leadership supports organizational adaptation and resilience during periods of uncertainty.
- Student is able to evaluate the influence of perceived supervisory agency and organizational context on the effectiveness of empowering leadership.

Social Competences

- Student is able to recognize the importance of trust, collaboration, and employee participation in organizations operating under conditions of uncertainty.
- Student is able to demonstrate openness to shared responsibility and inclusive leadership practices in dynamic organizational environments.

Overview

The provided teaching materials - comprising a PowerPoint presentation and a video lecture - are designed to support undergraduate instruction in leadership, management, organizational behavior, and international business, with a particular focus on empowering leadership in the context of contemporary polycrisis. Both

materials follow an identical structure, allowing instructors to deliver the content either during classroom sessions or through asynchronous learning formats.

The lecture begins by introducing the concept of polycrisis, explaining how overlapping economic, geopolitical, technological, environmental, and social disruptions create unprecedented levels of uncertainty for contemporary organizations. The discussion highlights how such conditions challenge traditional management approaches and increase the importance of leadership capable of providing direction, stability, and adaptability. Students are also introduced to the distinction between leadership, management, and control, and explore the key characteristics of effective leadership, including influence, vision, relationships, and adaptability.

The next section examines the role of leadership under conditions of uncertainty. Students learn how leaders contribute to organizational effectiveness through sensemaking, coordination, communication, trust-building, adaptation, and resilience development. Particular attention is devoted to empowering leadership, emphasizing its ability to foster employee participation, initiative, and engagement while simultaneously providing support and guidance during periods of disruption.

The core section presents the theoretical foundations of empowering leadership by introducing the concept of perceived supervisory agency. Students learn how employees evaluate whether supervisors possess the competence, authority, and capability necessary to guide teams through uncertainty. The lecture integrates Social Information processing theory, uncertainty reduction theory, and conservation of resources theory to explain how employee perceptions influence leadership effectiveness and the acceptance of empowering leadership behaviors.

The lecture subsequently introduces an empirical mixed-methods study conducted among 497 employees in Poland and Portugal. Students are guided through the research design, including the development of the conceptual framework and the application of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships between perceived supervisory agency, organizational crisis response efficacy, macro-level certainty, empowering leadership, and workplace discrimination. Qualitative interviews with managers complement the quantitative findings, providing additional insights into leadership experiences during periods of uncertainty. The emphasis is placed on understanding research design, hypothesis testing, and interpretation of findings rather than statistical calculations.

The session concludes by discussing the practical implications of the research findings. Students learn that empowering leadership under polycrisis requires balancing employee autonomy with guidance, structure, and psychological safety. The material also highlights the importance of supervisory credibility and demonstrates how organizational resilience and leadership can mutually reinforce one another. Through the integration of contemporary leadership theory and empirical evidence, the lecture helps students understand how organizations can foster effective leadership, resilience, and employee engagement in increasingly complex and uncertain

environments.

Pre-lecture preparation

No formal pre-lecture preparation is required. The teaching material is designed as a self-contained introduction to empowering leadership in the context of a polycrisis and provides all key concepts, theoretical foundations, and empirical evidence necessary to follow the lecture. However, students are encouraged to revise the basic definition of leadership and familiarize themselves with major leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, servant, and empowering leadership. Additionally, it is recommended that students explore contemporary examples of leadership in practice by reviewing online cases of leaders operating under different circumstances, including organizational crises, economic uncertainty, technological disruption, and social change. Such preparation may facilitate a deeper understanding of the lecture content and its practical relevance.

Suggested usage

Copilot said: The provided teaching materials can be used both in traditional classroom settings and as asynchronous learning resources, allowing students to engage with the content at their own pace. The combination of a presentation and a recorded lecture gives instructors flexibility in how the material is incorporated into undergraduate courses in leadership, management, organizational behavior, and international business.

The material is best used as an introductory module to topics related to empowering leadership, organizational resilience, and leadership effectiveness in uncertain environments. It provides students with a conceptual understanding of polycrisis, leadership, and employee empowerment before they engage with more advanced topics in leadership theory, strategic management, human resource management, or organizational behavior.

Depending on the course structure, the content can be delivered during a single lecture session as an overview of empowering leadership under conditions of uncertainty or spread across multiple classes. In the latter case, individual sections can be supplemented with discussions on leadership styles, organizational resilience, employee engagement, workplace inclusion, crisis management, and the interpretation of empirical research findings.

Because the lecture combines contemporary theoretical perspectives with a real-world empirical study, it provides students with both conceptual knowledge and practical insights into how leadership can be examined in management research. The material

also encourages critical reflection on the role of employee perceptions, supervisory credibility, and organizational context in shaping leadership effectiveness. This flexibility makes the resource suitable for undergraduate courses in leadership, organizational behavior, management, strategic management, human resource management, and crisis management, where students are expected to understand and critically discuss how organizations can remain resilient and effective in increasingly uncertain environments.

Engagement activities

This lecture can be supplemented with a range of interactive activities designed to enhance student engagement and deepen understanding of the topic. These activities are flexible and can be used either before the lecture to activate prior knowledge, or after to reinforce key concepts and encourage critical thinking. They are suitable for both live and asynchronous teaching formats.

Activity	Description
Leadership under pressure	Objective: To help students identify and evaluate leadership behaviors that are effective during periods of uncertainty and crisis. Activity: Students work in small groups and analyze a real-world example of an organization facing a major disruption, such as an economic crisis, technological change, or geopolitical shock. They identify leadership actions taken during the situation and discuss how these actions supported or hindered organizational resilience. Groups present their conclusions and compare different leadership approaches.
Can you trust me?	Objective: To help students understand the importance of perceived supervisory agency in shaping leadership effectiveness. Activity: Students are presented with several short leadership scenarios describing supervisors with different levels of competence, credibility, and authority. They evaluate whether employees would perceive each supervisor as capable of leading during uncertainty and discuss how these perceptions might influence employee engagement, participation, and trust. The activity concludes with a class discussion on the relationship between leadership behavior and employee perceptions.
Resilience vs leadership - debate	Objective: To help students critically evaluate the relationship between organizational resilience and empowering leadership. Activity: Students participate in a structured debate based on two perspectives: "effective leadership creates organizational resilience" and "organizational resilience enables effective leadership." Using arguments from theory and empirical evidence presented in the lecture, participants defend their assigned position before jointly discussing how leadership and resilience may reinforce one another in practice.

Post-lecture activities

Students can further explore the paradox of empowering leadership under conditions of uncertainty. They can examine whether employee empowerment and managerial control are necessarily opposing concepts or whether they can coexist during periods of crisis and rapid change. By analyzing organizational examples or case studies, students assess how leaders balance autonomy, guidance, accountability, and psychological safety, and discuss the conditions under which this balance is most effective.

Another valuable extension is to examine leadership through the lens of Principal-Agent Theory. Students can analyze how information asymmetry, divergent interests, and monitoring challenges influence relationships between organizational leaders and employees during periods of uncertainty. Particular attention can be given to whether empowering leadership reduces agency problems by increasing trust, participation, and alignment of goals, or whether greater autonomy may create new coordination challenges.

Students may also investigate the role of employee perceptions in leadership effectiveness by examining how credibility, competence, and trust influence employees' willingness to accept guidance and participate in decision-making. Using contemporary organizational examples, they can compare situations in which similar leadership behaviors produce different outcomes because employees perceive leaders differently. This activity reinforces the importance of perceived supervisory agency as a foundation for empowering leadership.

As a final activity, students can select a contemporary challenge - such as artificial intelligence adoption, geopolitical instability, workforce diversity, remote work, or climate-related disruptions - and analyze how empowering leadership can help organizations respond effectively. They should identify specific leadership behaviors, employee needs, and organizational capabilities that contribute to resilience, adaptation, and sustained performance in that context. This exercise encourages students to connect theoretical concepts with real-world leadership challenges.