

7-2-2021

COVID-19 Pandemic Leadership A Case for Return to Platonic Values

Richard Runyon

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Richard.Runyon1@erau.edu

Daryl Watkins

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, watkind4@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/publication>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Industrial and Organizational Psychology Commons](#), and the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Scholarly Commons Citation

Runyon, R. D., & Watkins, D. V. (2021). COVID-19 pandemic leadership: A case for return to Platonic values. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies*. 16(2), 29-41. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2324-755X/CGP/v16i02/29-41>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.



VOLUME 16 ISSUE 2

The International Journal of

Interdisciplinary Global Studies

Downloaded on Tue Mar 01 2022 at 14:13:43 UTC

COVID-19 Pandemic Leadership A Case for Return to Platonic Values

RICHARD RUNYON AND DARYL WATKINS



ONGLOBALIZATION.COM

**THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
INTERDISCIPLINARY GLOBAL STUDIES**

<https://onglobalization.com>
ISSN: 2324-755X (Print)
ISSN: 2324-7568 (Online)
<https://doi.org/10.18848/2324-755X/CGP> (Journal)

First published by Common Ground Research Networks in 2021
University of Illinois Research Park
60 Hazelwood Drive
Champaign, IL 61820 USA
Ph: +1-217-328-0405
<https://cgnetworks.org>

The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal.

COPYRIGHT

© 2021 (individual papers), the author(s)
© 2021 (selection and editorial matter),
Common Ground Research Networks



Some Rights Reserved.
Public Licensed Material: Available under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Public License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). The use of this material is permitted for non-commercial use provided the creator(s) and publisher receive attribution. No derivatives of this version are permitted. Official terms of this public license apply as indicated here:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>



Common Ground Research Networks, a member of Crossref

EDITOR

Rafal Soborski, The American International University in London, UK

MANAGING EDITOR

Megan Donnan, Common Ground Research Networks, USA

ADVISORY BOARD

The Advisory Board of the Global Studies Research Network recognizes the contribution of many in the evolution of the Research Network. The principal role of the Advisory Board has been, and is, to drive the overall intellectual direction of the Research Network. A full list of members can be found at <https://onglobalization.com/about/advisory-board>.

PEER REVIEW

Articles published in *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies* are peer reviewed using a two-way anonymous peer review model. Reviewers are active participants of the Global Studies Research Network or a thematically related Research Network. The publisher, editors, reviewers, and authors all agree upon the following standards of expected ethical behavior, which are based on the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) Core Practices. More information can be found at <https://cgnetworks.org/journals/publication-ethics>.

ARTICLE SUBMISSION

The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies publishes biannually (June, December). To find out more about the submission process, please visit <https://onglobalization.com/journal/call-for-papers>.

ABSTRACTING AND INDEXING

For a full list of databases in which this journal is indexed, please visit <https://onglobalization.com/journal/collection>.

RESEARCH NETWORK MEMBERSHIP

Authors in *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies* are members of the Global Studies Research Network or a thematically related Research Network. Members receive access to journal content. To find out more, visit <https://onglobalization.com/about/become-a-member>.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies is available in electronic and print formats. Subscribe to gain access to content from the current year and the entire backlist. Contact us at cg@cg scholar.com.

ORDERING

Single articles and issues are available from the journal bookstore at <https://cg scholar.com/bookstore>.

OPEN RESEARCH

The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies is Hybrid Open Access, meaning authors can choose to make their articles open access. This allows their work to reach an even wider audience, broadening the dissemination of their research. To find out more, please visit <https://cgnetworks.org/journals/open-research>.

DISCLAIMER

The authors, editors, and publisher will not accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may have been made in this publication. The publisher makes no warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein.

COVID-19 Pandemic Leadership: A Case for Return to Platonic Values

Richard Runyon,¹ Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Canada
Daryl Watkins, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, USA

Abstract: In western education, Plato is often cited as a foundational thinker for education of leaders. 2,395 years later, many leaders in governments of the world are struggling to address the COVID-19 global pandemic. The 2019–2021 global pandemic has provided academics with a wonderful opportunity to evaluate government leadership at many levels. All the different forms of governance as well as theoretical economic systems are being tested in real-time. Success can be measured on a government's ability to reduce both deaths and spread of the COVID-19 virus among their citizens. This article will discuss these concepts focused on successful government leadership.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Plato, Leaders, Leadership Qualifications

Problem Discussion

In academics, when we study open systems like the governance leadership, it is often easy to identify correlation, but difficult to identify cause and effect (Smith 2015). The 2019–2021 global pandemic COVID-19 virus was new and unknown entity to most people (Bergrath et al. 2020). Scientists and medical doctors around the world were and are working to understand the virus at the genome level and seeking cures for ill COVID-19 patients with a goal of developing vaccinations (Jing et al. 2020; Bandyopadhyay et al. 2020).

Their clearly defined goal in this effort is to stop deaths caused by COVID-19, and to minimize its future viral outbreaks (WHO 2020). In the global process, governments struggled to acquire and manage protective gear for their medical staff as well as their citizens (Atkinson et al. 2020). Supply chains were stressed and tested at both global and local governance levels as the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted their pre-virus supply chain flows (Vidya and Prabheesh 2020).

The current global pandemic provides academics with a wonderful opportunity to evaluate government leadership at many levels (Atkinson et al. 2020). Governance and economic systems are being tested in real-time. Success can be measured on a government's ability to reduce both deaths caused by the COVID-19 virus and spread of the COVID-19 virus among their citizens. "Good leadership is not merely inspiring people with noble vision or mission but involves creating and maintaining the systems and institutions that allow effective and moral implementation" (Nye 2008, 129).

Putting this leadership process into simple visual form in Figure 1, the Mission is to reduce both COVID-19 related deaths and the spread of COVID-19 virus. Leaders and their followers then develop Strategies for accomplishing the Mission. Tasks/Goals are then developed to accomplish the Strategies, and Employees/Resources are assigned and applied to accomplish the Task/Goals. The entire process is measured through analysis and provides feedback to correct problems identified in implementing the model. It is critical that the leader and followers accomplish their clearly defined Mission with disciplined, precise focus.

¹ Corresponding Author: Richard Runyon, Box 115, 300 Range Road, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 3C9 Canada, College of Business, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, FL, 32114, USA. email: runyonr@erau.edu



Figure 1: Mission Leadership Model
 Source: Runyon 2020

In the 2020 pandemic global crisis, leadership from the Republic of Singapore, New Zealand, and Taiwan/Republic of China moved quickly (Davalgi et al. 2020; Lin et al. 2020; McMahon 2020). Their leadership actions appear swift and decisively effective in fighting the COVID-19 virus (Davalgi, et al. 2020; Lin, et al. 2020; McMahon 2020). These two sovereign nations and Taiwan/Republic of China appear to be successfully managing their COVID-19 fighting resources and keeping their citizens focused on the Mission (McMahon 2020; Singapore MOH 2021; Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare 2021). What the data is suggesting is that these leaders have significantly reduced deaths caused by COVID-19 in their Nations (New Zealand MOH 2021; Singapore Ministry of Health 2021; Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare 2021).

Figure 2 is a breakdown of each government’s results from their applied strategies and implementation of the Mission Leadership Model against COVID-19 as of January 2, 2021 (New Zealand MOH 2021; Singapore Ministry of Health 2021; Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare 2021).

Table 1: Government COVID-19 Results

| Government | Total Population | COVID-19 Infection Cases | COVID-19 Deaths |
|-------------|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Singapore | 5,700,000 | 58,662 | 29 |
| New Zealand | 5,084,300 | 2,181 | 25 |
| Taiwan | 23,570,000 | 808 | 7 |

Source: Runyon and Watkins

COVID-19 Response Discussion

Between these two sovereign nations and the government of Taiwan/Republic of China, there were strategic differences in fighting the initial 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. This should not be unexpected as there are significant differences in population size, population density, geographic locations, economics, ethnicity, cultures, and their population’s education levels (CIA 2020).

Additionally, there are also differences in governance authority to apply legislation restricting a citizen's freedom of movement for each of these governance entities (CIA 2020; D. Lee 2020).

For New Zealand, their remote location and low population density enabled the nation to close its borders, effectively reducing the threat of introduction of COVID-19 into the country (McMahon 2020). New Zealand's initial COVID-19 response strategy was not focused on citizen action, where Singapore and Taiwan's response to COVID-19 relied heavily on their citizen's participation to fight the virus (Alexis 2020; Lateef 2020; Chiu 2020).

Neither Singapore nor Taiwan had New Zealand's remote location geographic advantage. These two governments also have dense populations compared to New Zealand. With their dense populations, both Singapore and Taiwan took a strategy approach of ensuring their populations were equipped with medical protective masks to fight the spread of COVID-19 as their initial strategies (Lateef 2020; Chiu 2020).

In the case of Taiwan, each citizen was issued two masks per week by the government, and citizens were also taught how to clean their masks at home using rice cookers (Li, Cadnum, Redmond, Jones and Donskey 2020). Using their home rice cookers without water, the dry high heat generated by the rice cookers effectively sterilized previously used masks. The bacterial filtration efficiency of the masks maintained a level of 99 percent after rice cooker dry-heating enabling mask to be reused five times (Li et al. 2020).

Taiwan also took the approach of monitoring people's temperatures. "Schools, restaurants, offices, and most other public places were required to provide body temperature monitoring and hand sanitizer" (Chiu 2020, 943). The responsibility of implementing this Taiwan temperature check policy was the responsibility of the individual location, not agents of the government. Singapore's government issued their citizens masks.

Before the wearing of face masks was made mandatory in April, the Multi-Ministry Taskforce had already issued reusable masks to residents in Singapore, thereby easing compliance with the rule. This was in addition to the issuance of four surgical masks per household in February, and a subsequent issuance of "better" reusable face masks towards the end of the "circuit breaker." (D. Lee 2020, 665)

A correlation for Singapore and Taiwan's success using an individual response strategy to combat COVID-19 may have been caused by their previous experience with the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). SARS affected both governments significantly compared to New Zealand's one SARS death in the global 2003 SARS outbreak. Experience with SARS in 2003 also provided some past expertise for the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic for both Singapore and Taiwan in success and failure (Lateef 2020). This is illustrative of the feedback loop (learning) from the Mission Leadership Model.

New Zealand's first strategy for COVID-19 was to close their borders to foreign travel on March 19, 2020, followed by lockdown restrictions four days later (NZG 2021). Citizens legally challenged New Zealand's lockdown strategy as unlawful governance policy. The New Zealand high court found the citizen's complaint against the government to be valid (High Court NZ 2020). Singapore also implemented lock downs restriction during the pandemic. Singapore's lockdown strategy became a key in identifying the source of sporadic COVID-19 outbreaks (D. Lee 2020). Taiwan did not have lockdowns as they never had any significant outbreaks during the entire 2020 pandemic.

What makes Singapore's application of the Mission Leadership Model (Figure 1) during COVID-19 more interesting than New Zealand and Taiwan was Singapore's implementation of the Measurement/Analysis/Feedback loop. Singapore was highly effective at controlling COVID-19 outbreaks from the mass of their citizen population, but during the course of the global pandemics, small sporadic outbreaks occurred throughout Singapore (D. Lee 2020). Using the Measurement/Analysis/Feedback loop (Figure 1) Singapore's government was able to

discover their temporary work force housed in dormitory accommodations was causing their new sporadic outbreak spread of COVID-19 (H. L. Lee 2020).

The temporary worker dormitory accommodations in Singapore operated by the private sector featured shared cooking spaces, shared bathing spaces, and shared bathrooms. The hypothesis was that these communal areas were enabling the virus to spread among the temporary workforce population. This temporary workforce did not intermingle regularly with the mass general population of Singapore. It was these occasional interactions between COVID-19 carriers from the temporary workforce that were the cause of Singapore's sporadic COVID-19 outbreaks (H. L. Lee 2020).

Once the Singapore government discovered this oversight of the dormitory close habitat accommodation problem, testing for COVID-19 for the potentially affected temporary workers occurred on a massive scale (H. L. Lee 2020). This group of foreign temporary workers became the majority of Singapore's COVID-19 confirmed virus cases (H. L. Lee 2020). Once the COVID-19 patients were identified, the sporadic COVID-19 outbreaks in Singapore were neutralized (Lateef 2020).

Leadership Analysis Background

What education, skills, and ethos are required to be a successful government leader to accomplish the Mission (as identified in Figure 1)? We argue this is an important question in light of the mass deaths caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic and the struggles of global governments to overcome the pandemic. Plato is often considered a foundational thinker for both meritocracy and leader education (Turan 2011).

Plato argued that it took decades to develop and identify people for top governance leadership. He called these leaders Philosopher Kings (Plato 375 BCE). For Plato, throughout the decades of long leadership development processes, potential candidates were to be evaluated for worthiness to continue leadership development progression (Plato 375 BCE). At the age of 55 in the Republic, after a lifetime of excellence in many different areas of knowledge and fifteen years of dedicated practical application problem solving experience, the best leadership candidates would be promoted to the highest position of governance, Philosopher Kings (Plato 375 BCE).

Figure 3 is a visual breakdown of the educational areas and years of study recommended by Plato for his Philosopher Kings. In Plato's Republic, everyone was to have core education (Plato 375 BCE). Early physical education was for both health and physical development (Plato 375 BCE). Early Education for children was also to be focused on literature, storytelling and poetry (Plato 375 BCE). This was the stage of education to start developing good character/ethos in citizens (Plato 375 BCE). Children were taught about heroes and villains, with the emphasis in living a righteous and just life (Plato 375 BCE).

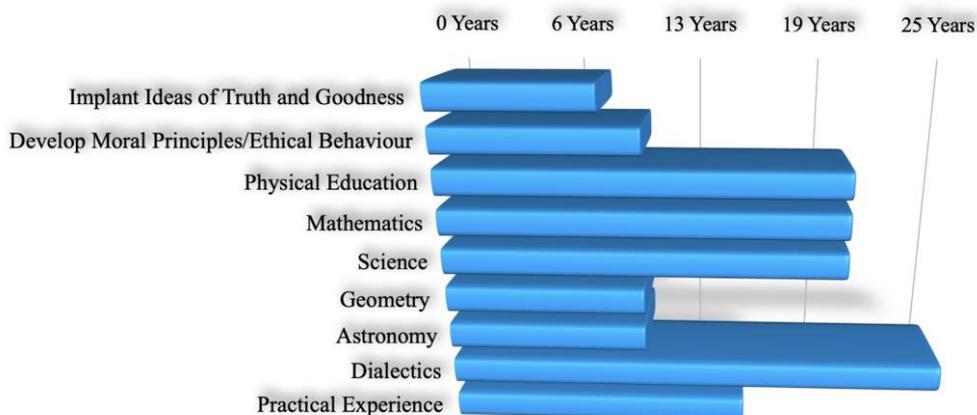


Figure 2: Plato’s Philosopher King Educational and Experience Requirements
 Source: Runyon 2020

As the child developed into a young adult, Plato argued Elementary Education followed Early Education (Plato 375 BCE). Elementary Education, which lasted for ten years, was predominantly physical education, mathematics, history, science and music (Plato 375 BCE). At the age of twenty, the students would be evaluated to move forward with additional leadership development (Plato 375 BCE). Plato argued that they should:

Exhibit pre-eminently the virtues of courage and self-control. This does not mean that the picked men are the champion runners or fighters in armor, or those who can rattle off the greatest number of memorized poems or accompany themselves most artistically on the lyre. It means, rather, those who have the most steadfast characters, and allow nothing to seduce them from their loyalty. (Lodge and Frank 1947, 89)

Plato also argued “these picked men are hard workers, industrious, not afraid of toil and pain, and definitely superior to the allurements of pleasure” (Lodge and Frank 1947, 89).

Those students that failed the evaluation process to proceed with more leadership training at age twenty were qualified to be businessmen, clerks, workers, farmers, and the like (Plato 375 BCE). Those that passed the evaluation would move forward with higher education and more evaluation (Plato 375 BCE). The long-term goal of being selected to become a Philosopher King (Plato 375 BCE). The recommended Higher Education was similar to the Elementary Education and was to be conducted for another ten years (Plato 375 BCE). This Higher Education consisted of more physical education, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, science, and the new inclusion of the dialectics (Plato 375 BCE). Dialectics would be defined as reasoning, argumentation, rational, logical analytical, disputatious, debate, discussion (Plato 375 BCE).

In today’s North American western education system, the Critical Thinking body of knowledge is often the closest formal education for Plato’s dialectics (Golding 2011, 357). When we discuss critical thinking, this is a skill that has to be developed and practiced. Dr. Diane Halpern, a global leader in the body of knowledge of Critical Thinking defines Critical Thinking as:

The use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed—the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions, when the thinker is using skill that are thoughtful and effective for a particular context and type of thinking task. (Halpern 2014, 6)

Upon completion of Plato's higher education, another evaluation was to be administered at the age of thirty for the Philosopher King candidates (Plato 375 BCE). Those that fail this second evaluation at the age of thirty could become executive assistants, auxiliaries and military officers of the State (Plato 375 BCE). Those that pass this second evaluation move into Plato's proposed highest education program, which consists of an additional five years of the dialectics (Plato 375 BCE).

From this additional Advanced Education, the best candidates are chosen for the highest tier of leadership development, which consists of fifteen years of practical application of the dialectics (Plato 375 BCE). Out of this final group, the best are selected to be senior leaders for governance/Philosopher Kings (Plato 375 BCE). These top leadership positions would occur at age fifty after a large portion of their lifetime was spent developing their ethos, and problem-solving skills through both education and practical application education (Plato 375 BCE).

COVID-19 Leadership Conclusions

Although New Zealand's numbers for countering COVID-19 are impressive (Figure 2), their policies were more focused on taking advantage of their geographic location instead of mobilizing their population in a group effort against COVID-19. When policies for a group effort were attempted using lockdowns in New Zealand, citizens combated the leadership decisions in their high courts (High Court NZ 2020).

For both Singapore and Taiwan, their leadership's ability to manage pandemic resources, and implement strategies for fighting the COVID-19 pandemic both requiring mass citizen participation beckons academic analysis. Both modern governments have very different foundations for their current leadership models. These differences help to make analysis of their results intriguing and challenging.

Singapore was a former British Colony for over 123 years, with three years of brutal Japanese control during World War II. Thrust into self-governance with their separation from Malaysia in 1959, many of Singapore's founding leaders were educated under the British Education system (Runyon 2010). Both their current government political and education systems have strong ties to their previous England hinterland (Lee 2000).

Taiwan has many different influences toward their current governance model. After 6,000 years of indigenous self-rule, Taiwan came under Dutch colonial influence with mass Han Chinese immigration from Mainland China in the 17th century. The Qing dynasty of China annexed Taiwan in 1683 with the Empire of Japan taking control of Taiwan in 1894 till the end of World War II. From 1949 to 1987, Taiwan had an era of Martial law between 1949 and 1987, which may help to explain Taiwan's ability to mobilize the population cohesively against COVID-19.

Meritocracy

Potentially a correlation, between both entities, Singapore and Taiwan's governments have meritocracy as a core foundation for selecting and promoting government leaders (Lee 1998, 2000; So 2015). Meritocracy finds its origins in ancient Greek writings like Plato and Plato's Republic from 375 BCE Chinese culture records a system of Meritocracy successfully implemented the Qin and Han dynasties around 200 BCE and was also integrated in Confucianism. Plato argued in his Socratic dialogue *Republic*, the need to develop the best and brightest for senior leadership positions and selecting successful candidates through meritocracy. This selection process was to be done through a rigorous leadership education and training. Plato also argued that everyone in society should strive for excellence regardless of their profession.

Reflecting Singapore's multicultural nature, the Singapore National Archives records the roots for Singapore's meritocracy from Plato's Republic, Confucius and Qin and Han dynasties, and Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule over Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims in the early nineteenth century (Lee 1996; Nair 1984). Singapore's first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, argued that meritocracy was the best method for ensuring the most qualified would lead their Nation (K.Y. Lee 2000). Lee and his fellow Singaporean leaders also stressed that strict application of meritocracy ensured all their citizens with equal opportunities (K.Y. Lee 1998, 2000).

Whatever system is put in place we can be sure that it is based on transparency, meritocracy and education as a means for social mobility. This means that everyone has equal opportunity to try to realize his aspiration. Our children have equal chance to be a national leader, community leader, a successful entrepreneur, a CEO of a company or scientist based on his own merit. (Yu-Foo 2000, 3)

Singapore's meritocracy also forced people to strive for excellence in all professions at all levels of society. "Meritocracy has served us well. Equal opportunities have enabled those who are talented to rise socially regardless of race, creed or background" (Lim 1985, 5). Even people from poor families could rise in Singapore to positions of great leadership (Yu-Foo 2000).

Multicultural vs. Monoculture

Singapore is multicultural nation, and Taiwan is monoculture (CIA 2020). In 1964 Singapore had racial riots leading to the death of "21 persons and 460 people injured (Han et al. 1998, 127). This led to many government policies throughout the decades to ensure social harmony in Singapore to include education programs, and equal public holiday allocations for each race (President's Office 1989). When Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965, the government chose English as the nation's working language.

This language decision was made because English was the dominate language of science and technology in 1956, and the leadership wanted to provide employment opportunities for their citizens (Han et al. 1998). Singaporean citizens were encouraged to learn a second language, the dominate second languages in Singapore in 1956 being Malay, Chinese Hokkien or Teochew/written Mandarine, and Indian Tamil (Latif 2009). This strategy also helped to end "ethnic quarrels over language" (Latif 2009, 257).

In addition to language, the Singapore government also took strategies to avoid congregations of specific ethnic segregation in housing. They did not want to duplicate the ghetto's found in other countries that tended to be of one race (Latif 2009). "Housing Development Board (HDB) flats are home to over 80 percent of Singapore's resident population, with about 90 percent of these resident households proudly owning their home" (HDB 2021a). For government HDB, occupancy is determined by ethnicity, so each housing block has a mix of each Singaporean ethnic group. Once an ethnic group quota is met in an HDB building nobody from that ethnic group can move into the HDB building until someone of the same ethnicity moves out (HDB 2021b).

In the case of Singapore compared to Taiwan, leading in multicultural environments is more challenging than leading in Taiwan's mono-culture environments. People have different needs and wants, and when you add to the governance equation the addition of different religions, political and cultural beliefs, multicultural environments like Singapore add significantly more variables into the governance leadership equation in comparison to mono-culture Taiwan.

Leadership Selection

In Putnam's (1976) analysis of political elites and government leaders, he discovered that selection of leaders differed between nations and governments. Putnam argued that governance leadership selection often depended on culture. Putnam also argued that there were many checks in balances in some governments to ensure the "right" people would move into top leadership positions.

Although Putnam discovered correlation for elite groups and particular educational institutions, there was no evidence to suggest ensured success in accomplishing the Mission for these selected elite leaders. In our analysis between New Zealand, Singapore, and Taiwan government's leadership, we find similar conclusions to Putnam's arguments. It appears though that Singapore's battle with COVID-19 was more complex than New Zealand and Taiwan.

The Republic of Singapore Government Leadership

Being an English-speaking nation with a recent and well-documented history, the study of Singapore's governance leadership is easily attainable for scholarly study. Both Singapore policy makers and academics have well documented Singapore's development and often Singapore's leader decision making processes. Delving into Singapore's government leadership development and leadership selection process is the task for the remainder of this article.

Lee Kuan Yew was Singapore's first Prime Minister and was a key leader for moving Singapore from a Third World country to a First World country in less than twenty years (Runyon 2010). Lee argued, "To get good government, you must have good men in charge of government. I have observed in the last 40 years that even with a poor system of government, but with good strong men in charge, people get passable government with decent progress" (Lee 1994, 331). Similar to Plato's argument for honorable leaders of proper ethos, Prime Minister Lee also argued the importance of having ethical leaders. "But most of all, their character and their motivation, because the smarter a man is, the more harm he will do to society" (Lee 1994, 331).

A large problem in many societies is qualified candidates for governance leadership positions are finite. In 1994, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew discussed Singapore's struggle to recruit, and retain qualified top government leaders, "Out of a cohort of 40,000 to 50,000, the nation would only recruit 10 to 12 government leaders per year" (Prime Minister's Office 1994, 2). Lee Kuan Yew explained, the reason for this low number of recruitments was caused by Singapore's requirements for top government leaders being extremely high (Prime Minister's Office 1994). The private sector was also competing for this high caliber talent too, and the private sector would often provide higher wages (Prime Minister's Office 1994). In the Singapore Competitive Salary White Paper analysis of these problems, in the long term, competition from the private sector created qualified leadership retention issues for Singapore's government. Back in 1994, Singapore's recommended solution was to align government wages with the private sector.

When Singapore gained self-governance in 1959, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew struggled to find qualified people to take up Ministry leadership positions. As with many third world countries Prime Minister Lee originally sought out well educated academics from their local University (K.Y. Lee 2000). He also looked toward professionals like lawyers and medical doctors to fill Singapore's new top government leadership positions (K.Y. Lee 2000).

History shows these newly recruited well educated leaders were ethical, strong ethos, and worked for building a stronger Singapore. However, Prime Minister Lee soon discovered that many of these newly elected and appointed leaders did not have all the skills or experience to be successful to accomplish their assigned Missions. Many of these leaders lacked the operational practical application experience required for their jobs. They were unable to make difficult decisions, or the "right" decisions (Lee 1998). Essentially, their lack of real-world experience hindered their ability to accomplish their assigned Missions.

Plato also identified this potential failure for his potential Philosopher Kings. Plato's solution was to ensure his candidates for top leadership had fifteen years of practical application experience solving difficult problems (Plato 375 BCE). For Plato's leaders, this higher level of practical application was to come toward the end of decades of previous education, training, and life experiences. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's solution was also similar to Plato's recommendations regarding to practical application experience. His government sought out successful people from the private sector who were already doing a similar job as required by the government Ministry positions (K.Y. Lee 2000). One of the more famous Singapore examples of this strategy was Lim Kim San.

Prior to his involvement with Singapore government, Lim Kim San was a highly successful entrepreneur private sector millionaire with experience in many industries. Formally educated in economics, he was also involved in Singapore's banking industry, heading the United Chinese Bank, Batu Pahat Bank and Pacific Bank in the 1950s (Chew 1996). In 1960, he was recruited by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew to fix Singapore's housing problems.

As a third world country in 1960, Singapore had a largely uneducated labor force (K.Y. Lee 2000). They also had very limited national financial reserves, and low life expectancy rates. This environment was similar to other third world Asian countries of the time. Many Singapore people lived in traditional villages called kampongs, or in squatter shacks (K.Y. Lee 2000). Clean running water, electricity, and proper sanitation were not the norm for Singapore's 1960 housing (K.Y. Lee 2000). "More than 35 per cent of the population then lived in squatter settlements" (Latif 2009, 78).

Within his first years, Lim Kim San built more housing than the previous British government had built in twenty years (Tan and Er 2018). This effort was not without struggles as Lim Kim San ran up against opposition from pre-existing career government bureaucrats (Han et al. 1998). The bureaucrats wanted the Singapore government to assume full control of construction including complete management of the construction workforce (Han et al. 1998). Lim Kim San's real-world Singapore experience led him to different solutions (K. Y. Lee 2000). In a discussion with Prime Minister Lee on the problem,

"Let me explain," Lim Kim San said. "Every contractor has an elaborate supervisory system. He has his relatives. He has his trusted 'kepalas' (tribal chiefs). They in turn have each a gang and they know each person in that group and each person has got to produce results to deserve pay. Now if I hire them all, including the 'kepalas' who don't know each other, you'll be lucky if you get half a 'flat' (home) for where you would have a full 'flat' (home)." (Han et al. 1998, 660)

Unlike the many pre-existing career government bureaucrats in charge before Lim Kim San, Lim had real world experience working closely with many different industries in Singapore (Tan and Er 2018). His experiences from his family's businesses in gasoline, salt, rubber and sago provided decades of hands-on, real-world experience for problem solving in Singapore's real-world business environment (K. Y. Lee 1998). Lim Kim San understood what would work to build mass housing and what would fail in 1960s third world Singapore.

Similar to Singapore's failed experience using academics, even the existing bureaucrats at Singapore's independence lacked the knowledge to succeed in many important areas of nation building. The career bureaucrats fought to disprove Lim Kim San's approach to government housing construction (K. Y. Lee 1998). These bureaucrats even conducted a study to determine if Lim Kim San could build 10,000 homes in one year (Chew 1996).

With great joy and celebration, "Lim Kim San completed the construction of the homes before the bureaucrats could finish their study" (Chew 1996, 165). A few years later, Lim Kim San was elected into a formal Singapore top leadership ministry position. His successes created an expectation of excellence for Singapore's top leadership (Han et al. 1998).

Prime Minister Lee argued for successful nation building, “You need people with different backgrounds who will sit down, cross-fertilize ideas, improve and sometimes block a plan which is theoretically marvelous, but will not work out in practice” (Han et al. 1998, 661). A core theme in Singapore’s government leadership selection is to identify candidates from the private sector who are successful in their profession (Han et al. 1998). They use databases to track recommended potential candidates from the population (Han et al. 1998).

In 1994, Prime Minister Lee discussed in detail that he had spent 40 years trying to select people for leadership positions in government. He decided that Shell Oil Corporation had the best system for selecting top leadership (Han et al. 1998). As a result, Singapore’s government leadership selection attributes went from 40 to three. “What are they? Powers of analysis; logical grasp of facts; concentration on the basic points, extracting the principals” (Han et al. 1998, 196). Lee argued, “They must have a sense of reality of what is possible. But if you are just realistic, you become pedestrian, plebeian, you will fail. Therefore, you must be able to soar above the reality and say, ‘This is possible’—a sense of imagination.” (Han et al. 1998, 196).

Singapore’s focus is on getting the best qualified people to be their leaders (Han et al. 1998). Key emphasis is placed on thinking, and real-world performance (Han et al. 1998). Potential Singapore elected government leadership candidates have to walk the campaign trails for many years before running for first time election (Nathan 2013). Similar to Plato’s long evaluation process, those potential candidates who could also navigate Singapore’s politics, and show strong leadership among the population are put forth as senior elected officials for top government leadership positions.

In Singapore’s case, once elected these leaders from the private sector, who are also trained in politics are able to get the Mission accomplished (K. Y. Lee 1971). An important component of Singapore’s government culture that is not well discussed by Plato is accountability. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was notorious for firing people who could not complete their assigned Mission. He would also personally inspect newly completed projects and hold his leaders accountable for bad or poor decisions.

Lee’s penchant for pulling up government leaders for sloppy work or publicly dressing down an entire organization is legendary, its effect on the (civil) service immediate and sobering. For some it must have seemed like a cold-water shower, as when he caught a works brigade napping and haled up those responsible the next day. Even ministers were not spared if caught wanting. (Han et al. 1998, 176)

This strategy aligns with the Measurement, Analysis and Feedback discussed in Figure 1 of the Mission Leadership Model.

Conclusion

For Singapore, in 1965, their Mission was to move Singapore from a Third World nation to First World nation (K. Y. Lee 2000). Their strong experienced, well-educated, and well-developed government leadership potentially explains Singapore’s success to become a First World nation in less than twenty years (K. Y. Lee 1971). This strategy also shows correlation with Plato’s recommendations for leadership development for his philosopher kings.

Singapore has also taken a proactive approach to identify and recruit potential candidates for top government leadership. They have both processes and formal systems in place to implement their government leadership development programs. This also potentially explains why Singapore has performed so well against the recent global pandemic COVID-19 virus with very few deaths.

Some of Singapore’s neighbors have far greater natural resources, yet they continue to be Third World countries. These nations do not apply meritocracy for selecting top leaders, nor do they implement the Mission Leadership Model with emphasis on Measurement, Analysis, and

Feedback. Those nations also are under-performing concerning COVID-19. The comparisons with Singapore's success with pandemic management prompts the question of how these other nations might attract talented and committed politicians who commit to ethical service.

Limitations

We are advancing a theory that professional politicians may perform better against COVID-19 than politicians who did not benefit from the significant amount of grooming/learning that professional politicians receive. The current study reviewed successful COVID-19 strategies of three countries: Singapore, Taiwan, and New Zealand. The authors proposed that Singapore and Taiwan's successful responses to COVID-19 have roots in leadership and governance structures that reflect mission-focus leadership, meritocracy.

New Zealand's success is more likely due to geography and isolation, rather than leadership and governance. It is possible that other factors may have contributed to the limited numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths. The decisions that resulted in the successful outcomes might attribute to influences other than those described above, correlation is not causation. Better performance cannot necessarily be attributed to the grooming/learning process. There might be other reasons why some countries are performing better than others.

REFERENCES

- Alexis, Robert. 2020. "Lessons from New Zealand's COVID-19 Outbreak Response." *Lancet Public Health* 5 (11): E569–E570. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(20\)30237-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30237-1).
- Atkinson, Christopher, Clifford McCue, Eric Prier, and Allison Atkinson. "Supply Chain Manipulation, Misrepresentation, and Magical Thinking During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *American Review of Public Administration* 50 (6–7): 628–634. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0275074020942055>.
- Bandyopadhyay, Arup Ratan, Diptendu Chatterjee, Kusum Ghosh, and Pranabesh Sarkar. 2020. "COVID 19: An Epidemiological and Host Genetics Appraisal." *Asian Journal of Medical Sciences* 11 (3): 71–77. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ajms.v11i3.28569>.
- Bergrath, Sebastian, Olaf Aretz, Hendrik Haake, Adrian Ringelstein, Ingo Greiffendorf, Ullrich Graeven, and Jochen Windfuhr. 2020. "Characteristics and Unexpected COVID-19 Diagnoses in Resuscitation Room Patients during the COVID-19 Outbreak—A Retrospective Case Series." *Hindawi BioMed Research International* 2020:1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2020/2721381>.
- Chew, Melanie. 1996. *Leaders of Singapore*. Singapore: Resource Press.
- Chiu, Wen-Ta. 2020. "Determinants of Taiwan's Early Containment of COVID-19 Incidence." *American Journal of Public Health* 110 (7): 939–977. <https://doi.org/10.2105%2FAJPH.2020.305720>.
- CIA. 2020. "CIA World Fact Book." Accessed October 22, 2020. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook>.
- Davalgi, Shubha, Malatesh Undi, Rachana Annadani, and Ayesha Nawaz. 2020. "Comparison of Measures Adopted to Combat COVID 19 Pandemic by Different Countries in WHO Regions." *Indian Journal of Community Health* 32 (2): 288–299. <https://doi.org/10.47203/ijch.2020.v32i02supp.023>.
- Golding, Clinton. 2011. "Educating for Critical Thinking: Thought Encouraging Questions in a Community of Inquiry." *Higher Education Research and Development* 30 (3): 357–370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2010.499144>.
- Halpern, Diane F. 2014. *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking*, 5th ed. New York: Psychology Press.
- Han, Fook Kwang, Warren Fernandez, Sumiko Tan, and Kuan Yew Lee. 1998. *Lee Kuan Yew, The Man and His Ideas*. Singapore: Singapore Press Holding : Times Editions.

- HDB (Housing and Development Board). 2021a. "About Us." Accessed October 22, 2020. <https://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/about-us>.
- . 2021b. "Enquiry on Buyer's Eligibility under the Ethnic Integration Policy and SPR Quota." Accessed October 22, 2020. <https://services2.hdb.gov.sg/webapp/BB29ETHN/BB29STREET>.
- High Court NZ. 2020. "Judgement of the Court 19 August 2020 Andrew Borrowdale vs. New Zealand Director General of Health." New Zealand, High Court of New Zealand Wellington Registry.
- Jing, Ran, Rama Rao Vunnam, Yuhong Yang, Adam Karevoll, and Srinivas Rao Vunnam. 2020. "Current Status of Treatment Options, Clinical Trials, and Vaccine Development for SARS-CoV-2 Infection." *Journal of Pure & Applied Microbiology* 14 (1): 733–740. <https://doi.org/10.22207/JPAM.14.SPL1.10>.
- Lateef, Fatimah. 2020. "The Impact of the COVID 19 Pandemic on Emergency Department Attendance: What Seems To Be Keeping the Patients Away?" *Journal of Emergencies Trauma, and Shock* 13 (4): 246–251. https://doi.org/10.4103/jets.jets_133_20.
- Lee, Darius. 2020. "COVID-19 in Singapore: Responsive Communitarianism and the Legislative Approach to their Most Serious Crisis Since Independence." *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies* 2020:630–664.
- Lee, Hsien Loong. 1996. "Speech by Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Ski Singaporeans and Singapore Khalsa Association National Day dinner 1996." Singapore National Archives.
- Lee, Kuan Yew. 1994. "Speech in Parliament on the White Paper on Ministerial Salaries on 1 November 1994." Republic of Singapore: Singapore National Archives.
- . 1998. *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*. Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings.
- . 2000. *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965–2000*, 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Li, Daniel, Jennifer Cadnum, Sarah Redmond, Lucas Jones, and Curtis Donskey. 2020. "It's Not the Heat, it's the Humidity: Effectiveness of a Rice Cooker-Steamer for Decontamination of Cloth and Surgical Face Masks and N95 Respirators." *American Journal of Infection Control* 48 (7): 855–857. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajic.2020.04.012>.
- Lim, Chee Onn. 1985. *Notes of the Speech of Mr. Lim Chee Onn, Member of Parliament for Bukit Merah. During the Debate on the Motion Moved by Dr. Tan Cheng Bock*. Republic of Singapore: Singapore National Archives. <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/record-details/293fbbbc-1d26-11e8-a2a9-001a4a5ba61b>.
- Lin, Cheryl, Wendy Braund, John Auerbach, Jih-Haw Chou, Ju-Hsiu Teng, Pikuei Tu, and Jewel Mullen. 2020. "Policy Decisions and Use of Information Technology to Fight COVID-19, Taiwan." *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 26 (7): 2005–2011. <https://doi.org/10.4269/ajtmh.20-0703>
- Lodge, Rupert Clendon, and Solomon Frank. 1947. *Plato's Theory of Education*. London: K. Paul, Trench.
- McMahon, Anne. 2020. "The Impact of COVID-19 on Moving and Handling in New Zealand." *International Journal of Safe Patient Handling & Mobility* 10 (2): 76–79.
- Nair, Devan. 1984. *Speech by President Devan Nair at the Main Convocation of the National University of Singapore in the Singapore Conference Ball 14 November 1984*. Republic of Singapore: Singapore National Archives.
- Nathan, Sellapan Ramanathan. 2013. *50 Stories from My Life*. Singapore: EDM Books.
- NZG. 2021. "Timeline of Key Events." New Zealand Government United Against COVID-19. Accessed January 2, 2021. <https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-system/history-of-the-covid-19-alert-system/#timeline-of-key-events>.

- New Zealand Ministry of Health. 2021. "COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus)." Accessed January 2, 2021. <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>.
- Nye, Joseph S. 2008. *The Powers to Lead*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- President's Office. 1989. *White Paper on Maintenance of Religious Harmony Presented to the Parliament by Command of The President of the Republic of Singapore Ordered by Parliament to Lie upon the Table*. Republic of Singapore: President's Office.
- Prime Minister's Office. 1994. *White Paper on Competitive Salaries for Competent & Honest Government: Benchmarks for Ministers & Senior Public Officers*. Republic of Singapore: Prime Minister's Office.
- Plato. 375 BCE. *Plato's Republic*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. Overland Park, KS: Digireads Publishing.
- Putnam, Robert. 1976. *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Runyon, Richard. 2010. *A Historical Qualitative Single Case Study on the Founding Leadership of Singapore*. Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest LLC.
- Singapore Ministry of Health. 2021. "Updates on COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) Local Situation." Accessed January 2, 2021. <https://www.moh.gov.sg/covid-19>.
- Smith, Gary. 2015. *Standard Deviations: Flawed Assumptions, Tortured Data, and Other Ways to Lie with Statistics*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.
- So, Bennis Wai Yip. 2015. "Exam-centred Meritocracy in Taiwan: Hiring by Merit or Examination?" *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 74 (3): 312–323. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12139>.
- Tan, Kevin, and Lam Peng Er. 2018. *Lee's Lieutenants: Singapore's Old Guard (Revised Edition)*. Singapore: Straits Times Press.
- Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare. 2021. "Timeline COVID-19." Accessed January 2, 2021. <https://covid19.mohw.gov.tw/en/sp-timeline0-206.html>.
- Turan, Selahattin. 2011. "Plato's Concept of Education in "Republic" and Aristotle's Concept of Education in Politics." *Egitim ve Bilim [Education & Science]* 36 (162): 31–38. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/236385556.pdf>.
- Vidya, C., and K. Prabheesh. 2020. Implications of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Global Trade Networks. *Emerging Markets Finance and Trade* 56 (10): 2408–2421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1540496X.2020.1785426>.
- WHO (World Health Organization). 2020. "World Health Organization Country & Technical Guidance–Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)" Accessed October 22, 2020. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance>.
- Yu-Foo, Yee Shoon. 2000. *Speech by Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for MCDS and Member of Parliament for Bukit Timah GRC for Yuhua National Day*. Republic of Singapore: Singapore National Archives.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Richard Runyon: Adjunct Professor in College of Business, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, FL, USA

Dr. Daryl Watkins: Associate Professor in College of Business, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, FL, USA

The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global

Studies is devoted to mapping and interpreting new trends and patterns in globalization. This journal attempts to do this from many points of view, from many locations in the world, and in a wide-angle kaleidoscopic fashion.

Intellectually, the journal takes three steps: the first is a “this-worldly” step, mapping the details and extrapolating to big picture analyses in order to interpret what is at times challenging, dangerous, and excitingly positive about the “New Globalization.” The second step is to set this New Globalization in the context of earlier globalizations – what are the continuities, and what is genuinely new? The third step is to re-examine and redefine the very concept of globalization – in theoretical, anthropological and philosophical terms. The journal works between fastidiously empirical and profoundly generalizing modes of engagement, analyzing one of the central phenomena of our contemporary existence.

The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal.