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Teaching During War in Ukraine: Service-Learning as a Tool for Facilitating Student Learning and Engagement During Times of Uncertainty and Crisis

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Abstract

As the past 3 years have illustrated, crisis and uncertainty are part of the fabric of our lives. In our roles as management educators, the importance of helping our students develop skills to navigate these challenges has never been greater. In this interview article, we talk with Dean Sophia Opatska, the Founding Dean of the Business School and Vice-Rector for Strategic Development of Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine. Dean Opatska reflects upon navigating the initial trauma of war by expeditiously redesigning her international business course to incorporate a service-learning project for the first time. She shares about her aim of creating desperately needed stability, focus, contribution, and connection for her students during the early days, weeks, and months of the war in Ukraine. We consider Dean Opatska's reflections and contextualize them in terms of examples drawn from the extant literature of other faculty who have used service-learning in times of crisis and uncertainty. We offer suggestions

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for future research and comments regarding the importance of creating connection, facilitating open lines of communication, and remaining flexible when using service-learning during a time of crisis. Finally, we conclude with a call for management educators to move beyond awareness toward a place of preparedness, togetherness, and action.

Keywords

Ukraine, service-learning, experiential learning, community engagement, uncertainty, crisis, student learning

During the past 3 years we have all been impacted by the effects of global uncertainty and crisis through events including the Covid-19 pandemic, natural disasters, hate crimes, severe financial and economic volatility, human rights violations, and war. Some of us have witnessed, firsthand, the death, devastation, and destruction that is the result. Still others have experienced the deep emotional, psychological, and social ripple effects. Regardless of the cause, the pervasive and innately damaging uncertainty has cast a pall upon so many of our lives.

Crises taking place around the world are significantly impacting not only us, as individuals, but also our institutions, our communities, and our roles as management educators (Greenberg & Hibbert, 2020; Hibbert et al., 2022). There can be no doubt that navigating crisis and uncertainty are skills our students need. As such, fostering resilience, coping with ambiguity, and related competencies should be explicit in our learning objectives (Seow et al., 2019). Such aims align well with the familiar goal of fostering informed, global citizens who are not only aware of what is happening around them, but are also prepared and able to understand, process, and engage with uncertainty (Fernández-Mesa et al., 2022). Specifically, our curricula, programs, and learning environments should be designed to help students develop the skills needed to navigate through times of crisis and uncertainty with a focus on their individual-level well-being (e.g., self-care, psychological, and physical) as well as group- and organization-level social and political engagement (Edwards et al., 2021; Kay & Young, 2022; J. S. A. Leigh & Edwards, 2021; Myroshnyk et al., 2022).

In this interview article, we share the experiences of Dean Sophia Opatska, a management educator and institutional administrator who is navigating her way through one of the world's latest and most devastating crises, the war in Ukraine. Dean Opatska is the Vice-Rector for Strategic Development of Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, the largest city in western Ukraine.

She is the Founding Dean of the Business School (LvBS) there and the new Vice-President of the European Federation of Catholic Universities (FUCE). Drawing upon her experiences over the past 12 months, Dean Opatska has become a staunch advocate for service-learning as a teaching tool to help students and faculty navigate through times of uncertainty and crisis. In February of 2022, when the war began, Dean Opatska had never used service-learning in her classes. Her institution had formally positioned service-learning as an approved teaching tool for faculty across the university, and she knew colleagues who had integrated it into their classes, but she had no personal experience using it. Yet when the war began and every aspect of life in Ukraine was uncertain, Dean Opatska quickly transformed her international business course into one with a student driven and community need based service-learning project. She now views service-learning as an incredibly powerful learning and teaching tool—one that enables her to cultivate desperately needed connection, purpose, and engagement for herself and her students.

Before sharing Dean Opatska's experiences and the interview portion of this essay, we should first define and contextualize service-learning. Service-learning is a teaching tool that is used broadly across all academic disciplines and levels of education (primary, secondary, and tertiary). It has been described as a "critical component" of business education (Sabbaghi et al., 2013, p.127), providing educators with a "powerful means" of preparing students to be "engaged and ethical citizens" (Flannery & Pragman, 2008, pp.465–466). Within the management domain, it has been defined as "an approach to teaching and learning that involves engaging students in community-based service activities that are clearly and intentionally connected to their course concepts and learning goals" (J. Leigh & Kenworthy, 2018, p. 1). "At its core, service-learning is about creating opportunities for students to apply theory they learn in the classroom to real-world problems and real-world needs. . . (it) applies only to projects that are imbedded in a theoretical foundation, with clear learning objectives, activities, and reflective components" (Kenworthy-U'Ren & Peterson, 2005, p.272). Service-learning projects enhance student learning through a reciprocity-based "experience of collaboration, service, reflection, and critical thinking" (Tyran, 2017, p.163).

Service-learning is not new to management education. With historical roots in the classic literature on experiential education (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970; Kolb, 1984; Piaget, 1976), it has been a prominent teaching tool in management education for the past 30 years. During that time, there have been numerous articles published across most management education journals including three special issues dedicated to the theoretical, andragogical, and organizational aspects of service-learning in business and management

education in some of our premier outlets: the *Journal of Business Ethics* in 1996, the *Academy of Management Learning and Education* in 2005, and the *Journal of Management Education* in 2010 (Kenworthy & Fornaciari, 2010).

Educators around the world have successfully utilized service-learning to not only expose students to the realities of their environments but also help them to navigate the complexities of those journeys through reflection and reciprocity as they work to create shared value in their communities (Chen et al., 2018; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017). In the business education context, service-learning has been positively linked to learning outcomes including greater understanding of the complexities of social issues (Seider et al., 2011), civic-mindedness (Flannery & Pragman, 2008), communication, teamwork, and global awareness (Blewitt et al., 2018), emotional intelligence and vulnerability (Manring, 2012), and empathy (Pragman et al., 2012), social awareness and civic engagement (Berry & Workman, 2007), leadership and social justice (Sabbaghi et al., 2013), managing stakeholders and social capital (Larson & Drexler, 2010), service leadership (Snell et al., 2015), meaning schema transformation (Chen et al., 2018), motivation to engage in community service (McCarthy & Tucker, 2002), social issues, personal insight, and cognitive development (Yorio & Ye, 2012), and understanding behavioral ethics (O'Brien et al., 2017).

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Within 1 month, over 6.5 million Ukrainians were displaced from their homes (BBC News, 2022a), within 3 months, independent experts described Russia's actions as "inciting genocide and perpetrating atrocities that show an 'intent to destroy' the Ukrainian people" (Parker, 2022). On August 24, 6 months into the war on a day that coincided with 31 years of Ukraine independence from the Soviet Union, "the horrors of war continued" with yet another Russian strike on a civilian railway station (BBC News, 2022b). By late November of 2022, as freezing winter temperatures set in, missile strikes left 6 million Ukrainians without power (Davies, 2022). Today, as we write this interview essay, it has been just over 1 year since the war began; estimates are that Russia has over 180,000 killed or wounded and Ukraine has 100,000 killed or wounded with another 30,000 civilian deaths (H. Cooper et al., 2023), and both sides are "locked in a fight that is expected to grind on for months or even years" (Landry, 2023). As the introduction to their heart wrenching overview of the toll the war has taken on Ukraine's people and their culture, Farago et al. (2022) write,

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has taken the lives of tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians and unleashed the most severe humanitarian and refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. It has also dealt a grievous blow to Ukrainian culture: to its museums and monuments, its grand universities and rural libraries, its historic churches and contemporary mosaics.

In a speech that marked 1 year from the onset of the war, President Volodymyr Zelensky spoke to the people of Ukraine saying, “it was a year of endurance, a year of compassion, a year of bravery, a year of pain, a year of hope, a year of perseverance, a year of unity, and a year of invincibility. . . We have survived. We have not been defeated and we will do everything to win this year” (BBC News, 2023). It is not an understatement to say that Ukrainians are living through daily death and destruction, fighting for their lives, culture, and land, in a war against Russia that they did not provoke. During all of this, Ukrainian faculty members remain focused on, and committed to, their institutions, communities, and students, simultaneously creating the highest levels of safety and learning possible during this unimaginably difficult time.

Interview

Amy Kenworthy (AK): Before we begin, I would like to say an enormous thank you from everyone at the Journal of Management Education (JME) for taking the time to share your story with us.

Sophia Opatska (SO): Thank you for working with me on this. You are helping me to share our story with the world.

AK: Would you take us all back to February 2022, when the war began, to share what it was like for you and your students? I know that your classes were on Tuesdays, and the war started on a Thursday, what happened when the war broke out?

SO: The first week was crazy. We were in crisis and shock. It is hard to remember anything except processing the fact that bombs were going off and people were dying across Ukraine. On Monday, the fifth day after the beginning of the invasion, I communicated with the students to see if they were on campus or not, and I found that most of them were not here. There were only 4 to 5 people on campus and the rest had left for safer places. At first, I thought we could possibly run an appeal together as a team on campus, but when I realized the students were not there, I quickly decided that there were two options we could realistically do to support our country and people. The two options were to have students either write letters to businesses convincing them to boycott Russia or to do media in the field, in very simple and safe ways, with their cameras to use social media as a tool to increase awareness about what was happening around us. Our university was supporting this with our business school driving the engagement. We have a very strong social media presence and an excellent network of alumni, so both options seemed reasonable. My students said they would like to do both. I was very clear with them that this work they were doing was not just something outside of the class that we would forget once were

in the classroom learning theory together again, rather, it was an integral part of the class and their learning in it. The class was international business so every aspect of what we did related to how we could affect positive change in business and organizational environments to support Ukraine, and Ukrainian people, through our work.

On Tuesday morning I confirmed the project, and by 4:00 pm that day I already had some letters students had written and visuals they had created for social media. We started that day and worked intensely on these projects for roughly 3 weeks. We were working together and communicating with each other on a daily basis. Every day, someone was saying, “okay, I’m doing a letter to this organization today.” I think we started with a letter to Apple and to Google—those were two first letters and visuals. Then one of my students said, “this company has probably already boycotted Russia so let’s move on to these other companies who are still there.” I remember we selected YouTube at that point because they have a lot of fashion bloggers who are in Russia and getting paid by YouTube. So, we targeted YouTube and Meta with our social media campaign. Meta had been accused of providing a lot of content which was not checked and, also, allowing Russian authorities to contain social media there. But, as we worked on our letters and visuals for them, somehow Russian authorities closed Facebook in Russia themselves. We took it company by company. Every day we took three or four companies and even my children and their friends became involved helping my students. My children didn’t have classes at that time, so they became engaged by sharing my students’ visuals with other classmates over Instagram, which is their preferred social media platform. They shared the instructions my students had created in terms of what people could write and send to companies to support a boycott of Russia and Russian businesses. It was a much better way for them to spend time and reduce anxiety than to sit around and watch the news all day.

AK: What a wonderful example of the ripple effect of positive engagement.

You shared that you worked hard on these projects for 3 weeks, and then what happened between mid-March and the end of the semester?

SO: Well, the semester ended in May. I asked my students to write reflection papers about the experience of working together on these service-learning projects in our class, how it influenced them, and what they learned. I wanted them to go back and reflect upon what we had been through. Between February and May, we lived 4 months, but it felt like 4 years. So obviously some of the intensity had shifted. I was trying to help students wrap it up somehow, so that it really became a learning

experience and not just a roller coaster moment in which you get off and don't really know what happened. I think this reflection helped them process what had happened and what was continuing to happen around them. Throughout the semester we continued to use our online chat to share news about companies leaving Russian market or not doing so, as well as interesting data and articles on sanctions and how they affect business. I was very happy to see that student communication and engagement with our online chat around the subject was constant and ongoing.

I know they continued with their projects and media outreach, but we started to communicate that the job of students is to study and if we are thinking about recovery of Ukraine, that will be their role. We are reminding students that they have to study now so that they are able to work when we enter the period of recovery. Our students were so involved in volunteering that when we wanted to bring them back to the classroom, which we wanted to do as early as the second week after the war started, it was too strange and unnatural for them. The students told us they needed to save the country, not be in the classroom. Those are the moments when service-learning becomes so important—it was important then and is important now.

Utilizing service-learning in our university as we live through this war is helping us provide an ongoing, step-by-step progression through our natural emotional reactions to both the initial crisis and the ongoing trauma of war. It is bringing us all together as we work to help our people and our country, and highlighting the importance of contributing to the community around us while learning at the same time. My colleagues and I believe that combining service with learning is really the only way we can move forward during such a devastating and uncertain time.

AK: What a powerful reflection. I agree that doing service-learning with intentionality, flexibility, and transparency allows you to help students make connections between volunteering/humanitarian efforts and how those experiences shape their learning. It's really an ideal form of authentic learning, creating an educational win-win, within which students are connected to each other and their communities through meaningful work, and they are reflecting on those experiences with respect to both how they relate to theory and how they have influenced who they are as individuals and informed/engaged citizens.

SO: My goal is to utilize service-learning projects as part of the courses I teach with thoughtfully planned connections to things we are living through. In terms of theory, given the fact that the courses I teach are in

the international business domain, every topic we cover in the course relates to what we are experiencing as a country (e.g., our fight to join the European Union, the pressure we're putting on countries, businesses, organizations, and individual people to boycott Russia, our relationships with businesses that do business both here and in Russia). One of the clearest strengths of service-learning for me is how widely applicable it is because it takes the theories we are discussing and brings them to life, literally, in applications to the current global business environment we're living through at that point in time. My hope is that in the future, our educational interventions like the one we are discussing here, for myself and my colleagues here in Ukraine, will not be made in such a rush with the intensity we experienced. Having more time to prepare will allow us to engage everyone in the process whereas, in this course, we were all so pressed and emotionally and psychologically exhausted, every day felt like a month.

AK: That raises a great question, beyond your desire to have more time to create service-learning projects for your students, are there any other lessons learned that you would like to share with faculty who are interested in using service-learning in their classes?

SO: The major lesson I learned is that service-learning can be approached in two different ways—you can go from learning theory to serving, but you can also go from serving to learning theory. Of course, defining the needs of the community is very important on the front end, but sometimes there isn't much time for that, as it was in our case earlier this year when the war began. Moving forward, I would like to use service-learning as a tool for recovery of our country on a more strategic level.

Another lesson I learned is to trust students and the learning processes that happen among them. There was a lot of initiative in our work together. Indeed, I thought only about letters and communication with businesses, but some of my students also offered their skills with respect to the creation of visuals. Some others started to put together a table to track changes and steps which companies were taking in terms of their interactions with Russia. I had students who proactively searched for the contact information of company top managers, going through LinkedIn and other social media pages. There was an enormous amount of self-organization and initiative on the part of my students. I learned to trust them and their desire to serve the community around them.

Last but not least, I learned that service-learning projects like the one I ran with my students serve a greater purpose to help bring everyone (i.e., students, faculty and members of the larger community we are serving) together in the most difficult of times—this is exactly what my

students valued the most. Also, in the first most psychologically difficult weeks of the invasion, our joint activity brought a sense of normality and peace into their lives; I know that they truly appreciated this.

AK: That's wonderful. I have no doubt it was incredibly important for them to have a shared goal and concrete things they could do to help the community in those first weeks and beyond. Following up on that, how do you think service-learning helps to prepare students for life after university?

SO: I have always said that we should prepare our students not only to become successful, but also to know what to do with their success. We usually tell our students "you will become successful and it's a journey to the success." Sometimes we see people who are successful, they can fulfill the criteria for success, but they don't know what to do with the success and how to use it for the greater good. That was something I was saying before the war. For now, it's different because we're not thinking about the success of individuals, rather, we are thinking about the success of our country. I think for us it's so important that everyone can play a role in this—in the success and recovery of Ukraine—because everyone would like to have a role. We want students to know that it will be a lot of work and they have to be ready from the point of view of knowledge, skills, and, of course, attitudes. These things all matter because right now the situation is still very tense and that makes it easy to make choices because everyone is so focused on our shared goal. However, when the situation becomes calm and normal, it's easier to get lost navigating the environment.

It's interesting. I spoke to a businessman recently and he said that in his company they have been making a plan for 12 h at a time. Not one full day, just 12 h. Whatever the plan is, they have to achieve it in 12 h; they have a clear purpose for 12 h. Then they have another 12 h and work to achieve another purpose. With this, they have an overarching goal for 1 week, so their thinking is focused on only 1 week and goal; it's only one goal, but they are all are working on that goal. I think we have a goal as a country which we would like to achieve, and everybody should know what their piece is in terms of achieving this very large and complicated goal. I would like our students to know what their pieces of the larger goal of Ukrainian success and recovery are, and I have no doubt that service-learning will help our students get there.

AK: Turning to the faculty member side of things, given all the known challenges of running effective service-learning projects, which you were familiar with from the stories of colleagues of yours who had been using this teaching tool prior to the war, what prompted you to choose to use service-learning in response to Russia's attack on Ukraine?

SO: Honestly, when it happened, I was doing things intuitively. We were all so scared and the situation was so unknown that I felt I had to keep my students together somehow. So asking them to do small tasks which made sense in that moment and being in contact with them on a daily basis gave me a chance to focus on something meaningful. It also allowed the students to develop various skills—analytical, presentation, and communication—as they learned new things about global business and the place of Ukraine in it. And this was all happening during a time when we all really needed a positive focus and I knew that social media was, and is, something my students understand and are familiar with and it can be used as a powerful tool for communication and change. Also, I want to say that this year, in 2023, we will continue with the service-learning project on companies. We will be cooperating with a couple of organizations and my students will choose companies and will be updating Wikipedia pages with positive and negative acknowledgments of the companies which left or did not leave the Russian market and either stopped paying taxes in Russia or continued to pay them. My students and I will continue to work harder than we ever did before because now we work to support Ukraine and push for positive change. So, to get back to your question and answer it briefly, I chose then, and choose now, to use service-learning because I care deeply about my country and my students.

AK: That was beautifully said. In terms of your colleagues, do you think that you have more faculty interested in embedding service-learning in their courses now than you had before the war began?

SO: I think yes because it's a natural path; it's something very logical. With service-learning projects, it's not something you have to explain to students why it is important. I think my communication with students became much easier because of our shared goals and connectedness. Faculty members will need to have institutional support to do these projects well, but I believe they will find that it's much easier to communicate with students because the students are eager to become engaged in real-world humanitarian projects like these.

AK: Thank you. That leads perfectly into my last question for you, which is what are some ways our listeners can support people of Ukraine?

SO: Thank you. That's a great question. If you work in business, the greatest things you can do right now is you can look which principles your business organization is using. Are those principles on paper only, or are they really at work in the practice of organizational decision making? If you're working in business education, I think Ukraine is a huge

social laboratory at the moment. There are so many interesting cases to be learned from Ukraine and Ukrainian companies in terms of how resilient they are. We talk a lot to our executive students, alumni, and our partner associations and the stories I hear of what is happening in every company are, without a question, worthy of being written up as nuanced, complex, interdisciplinary, and real-world cases for learning and discussion. There is a lot of learning which is taking place in Ukraine right now. I encourage my international colleagues to take a chance, tell our stories, and engage yourselves and your students with this learning. You don't have to come to Ukraine, we know we are not a safe country right now, but there are a lot of Ukrainian business educators who continue working and who are eager to spread the word about what we are living through. To help us share our stories and lessons learned is a way you can give us a tremendous amount of support. I'm actually very grateful for this *Journal of Management Education* interview article because we are sharing information with the world about the situation in Ukraine. It is an enormous help to have the chance to share our stories.

I truly hope no one else will have to live through this type of experience, but at the same time, we know that we didn't want to have this. We don't want to have the monopoly on pity, as there are approximately 30 wars, if I'm not mistaken, that have taken place around the world in 2022. Unfortunately, crises will continue to happen, so there is a lot of learning which can be taken from Ukraine today. We also hope that you will remember about us—that you engage and communicate with people in Ukraine so we can help you to develop your students' awareness, understanding, skills, and abilities as global citizens.

Commentary

Reflecting on Dean Opatska's experiences of integrating service-learning into her course, as a first time practitioner during a time of war, how can we utilize her reflections to help move management education forward and have a positive impact on thinking and practice in our field? Here, we contextualize her reflections in terms of what others have experienced in similar settings and create next steps for management educators who may find themselves in crisis situations in the future. As devastating and unimaginable as Dean Opatska's experience is for most of us, this is not the first time, nor will it be the last, that service-learning has been used to help students, faculty, university, and community members navigate through a crisis.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, Grenier et al. (2020) drew from their own and their colleagues' experiences as they worked to pivot through the "unprecedented, and as yet unimaginable, challenges" (p. 2) they faced as universities and communities, quite literally, shut their doors to students, staff, and community members. Their overarching message was that "crises reveal the strength of relationships" (p. 1) which they further explained through lessons learned including how important it is to: (1) be genuinely interested in who your students are and what interests, resources, and skills they bring to the project; (2) listen to them; (3) reflect on and learn from your shared experiences and journeys together; and (4) recognize and reshape power (this is a particularly important point in the context of environments in which students initially experience feelings of powerless, like war or other natural disasters). The authors summarized their experiences as follows, "In times of crisis, the relationships that are built out of a service-learning partnership bridge connections and provide support. Students and educators alike see real-time the impact that their support has on communities in need, and in return gain real-world knowledge from these experiences. In times of uncertainty, communities come together, and deeper connections are built" (p. 9). Others have written about similar positive outcomes for service-learning students during the tumultuous first 2 years of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis; these include feelings of stability, support, and meaningful learning (Burton & Winter, 2021), as well as new skill development, ability to manage uncertainty, and confidence in their ability to contribute to the community in positive ways during a crisis (Jordaan & Mennega, 2022).

In yet another example, immediately following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the eastern seaboard of the United States, Schaffer (2004) describes his "radical, midsemester restructuring of the course to include a service learning project" (p.728). Similar to Dean Opatska, he made the decision to abandon existing course assignments and replace them with a service-learning project. The project was designed in response to students' reactions to the attacks—they had become fearful, concerned, and disconnected because so many of them were affected either "directly (called into active service) or indirectly (fellow students, friends, family members, etc. called into service)" (p.730). In his concluding comments, he shares that the "project improved student learning well beyond what might have been expected if I had left the class unchanged" and that service-learning projects "offer a model for fostering student learning in difficult times" (p. 738).

Natural disasters are another cause for crisis and uncertainty in which service-learning has a powerful role to play. In their reflections on students' experiences with service-learning in Christchurch, New Zealand following two devastating earthquakes in 2010 and 2011, O'Steen and Perry (2012) describe the importance of designing a *responsive curriculum*. Drawing upon

literature on disasters (e.g., Fritz, 1996), they characterize crisis events as an educational “call to adjust the curriculum to lean toward the disaster, not shy away from it. This jolt can lead to new ideas, different perspectives and a fundamental restructure of action and reaction according to immediate concerns” (p. 173). Beyond the significant increases in students’ critical thinking skills that they found using pre- and post-service-learning intervention tests, they focused on the need to adapt institutional awareness, adaptability, and responsiveness in ways that will support faculty members who find themselves trying to navigate learning and teaching during times of crisis. Their call for curricula that are “capable of responsiveness to both the dramatic and the everyday” (p. 174) is illustrated in the positive comments of faculty who tracked the learning and outcomes of students’ and community partner experiences during a 3-year service-learning project (Richards et al., 2009). The project was designed in response to the displacement and destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina which affected 15 million people and impacted 90,000 mi² of territory in the United States in 2005. Hurricane Katrina’s devastation was so severe that faculty members from across the United States, in locations thousands of miles away, engaged in long-distance service-learning projects in which students successfully assisted affected residents and helped them to rebuild their communities (Evans-Cowley, 2006).

There is additional evidence of the positive outcomes associated with service-learning in the context of natural disasters extending beyond short-term post-disaster interventions. Faculty members in the Economics department of the Ateneo de Manila in the Philippines have been running a service-learning course continuously since 1975, when it was first designed in response to the 1972 flood in the Central Luzon plains which affected 2.4 million people (Sescon & Tũaño, 2012). Faculty teaching this course report that “service-learning reinforces a deep learning process” through which their students are active and engaged partners in addressing both the short- and long-term effects of natural disasters and the associated social and developmental needs of their communities (Sescon & Tũaño, 2012, p. 69).

What each of the above examples share beyond a context of crisis, devastation, instability, and uncertainty is a call to action. We cannot be complacent. We need to be more critical and self-aware with respect to our performance as management educators (Wright & Kaupins, 2018). We need to acknowledge and work to employ teaching practices that allow students to share their emotions (Vince, 2016) as we strive to move “behind and beyond” outdated expectations of what management education should be (Vince, 2022, p. 985) while recognizing the uncertainty, complexity, and transdisciplinarity of our environments (Cunliffe et al., 2020; Laasch et al., 2020). We should be critically assessing how we shape our students’ educational experiences in terms of connecting them with their communities, and the events and issues that are

shaping their lives, in reflection-based, contributory, and developmental ways (Jordaan & Mennega, 2022; J. Leigh & Kenworthy, 2018).

As shared in this interview article, Dean Opatska's experience in a crisis points to the benefits of integrating service-learning into our courses, programs, and curricula to help faculty members and their students navigate through uncertainty, disconnect, and disruption. Here, we see a faculty member committed to supporting her students' learning through an unthinkable challenging time. And yet, this was her first time using service-learning. She navigated the experience using her knowledge of what others at her institution had done coupled with her innate drive to help her students enact positive change at a time when they needed to feel in control of something. She had prior knowledge of the power and potential of service-learning, and was willing to take on the challenges of utilizing this highly demanding andragogical tool because it was the only way she could see to leverage her students' desire to be a part of something positive to help their community within the chaos of their war-torn, volatile environment.

Taking Dean Opatska's reflections and coupling them with the lessons learned from faculty who have used service-learning in other crisis contexts, one theme that consistently emerges is the importance of facilitating *connection*. To foster this connection, faculty members should reflect upon and work to develop competencies associated with relational pedagogy, which include care, interpersonal communication, attentive presence, and trust (Chika-James, 2020). These connections help us to bridge the gap between student and teacher, creating an inclusive, almost circular, space in which students are encouraged to explore their actual and potential selves (Aspelin, 2014; Gergen, 2009). Building a sense of connectedness in our relationships with students, colleagues, and community partners is one of the keys to running effective service-learning projects in any educational environment (J. Leigh & Kenworthy, 2018); here, we argue that in the context of projects running during times of crisis, it becomes not only a key, but the keystone.

The importance of developing connectedness within educational environments is supported by research drawn from the Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education which, although designed to identify and translate psychological principles for primary and secondary school practitioners, undeniably applies to our tertiary educational environments. In the authors' *Top 20 Principles from Psychology* report, one of their principles is that "learning is situated within multiple social contexts" (American Psychological Association & Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, 2015, p. 21). When explaining this principle, they highlight the critical need for educators to "facilitate a 'classroom culture' that ensures shared meanings, values, beliefs, and behavioral expectations and provides a safe and secure

environment for all students” (ibid, p.21). To enable this, they encourage educators to seek opportunities to “participate in the local community” which will help “connect the relevance of learning to students’ everyday lives and enhance teachers’ understanding of the cultural background and experiences of their students” (American Psychological Association & Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, 2015, p. 21). Through service-learning, faculty are not only creating opportunities for relationship development between themselves, their students, and members of their communities, they are also facilitating learning about the critical nature of how those relational connections both relate to, and shape, students’ everyday lives.

Connections between people provide a foundation for open and effective *communication*, which we saw in Dean Opatska’s experiences with her students (i.e., her comments about the frequency of students sharing in their online chat and the importance of that for students’ feelings of connection with each other and the projects they were working on) and in other’s reflections of successful service-learning project delivery (Grenier et al., 2020; Hidayat et al., 2009; Stoeker et al., 2011). This is supported by another of the American Psychological Association and Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education’s (2015) principles that “interpersonal relationships and communication are critical to both the teaching–learning process and the social-emotional development of students” (p. 22). The authors of this report believe that relationship development is “highly dependent on one’s ability to communicate thoughts and feelings” and further describe teaching environments as providing “a critical context” for helping students learn how to communicate (American Psychological Association & Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, 2015, p. 22). As we see in Dean Opatska’s example, once the service-learning projects began, students engaged in a continuous stream of enthusiastic and engaged online communication with her and with each other. And although traditional service-learning projects would normally involve ongoing communication with a specific community partner(s), in this instance the community partner was Ukraine, with a project outcome focus of support and survival during war, so the most significant communication lines for this project were between Dean Opatska and her students (teacher-student and student-student).

Flexibility is another key to effectively facilitating student learning in times of uncertainty and crisis. One of the greatest strengths and challenges of service-learning is that faculty members must be able to “continuously pivot to account for shifting circumstances” (Grenier et al., 2020, p. 1; O’Steen & Perry, 2012). With the aim of addressing real-world problems and needs, faculty who integrate service-learning projects into their courses need to design their project to be “adaptable to circumstance” in order to be

uniquely “effective during times of uncertainty or turmoil” (Burton & Winter, 2021, p. 8). Tied to flexibility is an awareness that service-learning projects can be much more demanding in terms of time, energy, emotion, and the organizational and relational support required for students and community partners than traditional classroom-based learning (Chika-James, 2020; J. R. Cooper, 2014; Kenworthy-U’Ren & Peterson, 2005). Without that understanding, and an innate drive to foster student learning and project success, faculty may well experience frustration, fatigue, and a sense of being overwhelmed which can significantly and negatively impact not only the quality of project outcomes but also student learning and engagement (D. W. Butin, 2006; D. Butin, 2010). One way to reduce, if not eliminate, these issues is for faculty to be aware that there will most likely be numerous unexpected shifts and pivots throughout the course of students’ projects. In Dean Opatzka’s case, although she had never used service-learning before, she did have a sense of what would be involved in running a service-learning project because of her institution’s historical support (e.g., every November is “service-learning month” at her university) and her exposure to the stories and experiences of numerous colleagues who had utilized service-learning in their courses. Through their stories, and in the context of the chaos of her war-torn environment, Dean Opatzka was keenly aware that flexibility and adaptability would be critical to facilitating student learning through service-learning.

Suggestions for Future Research and Engagement

Drawing upon our last lesson learned, we see the importance of institutional and individual awareness of the strengths and challenges associated with service-learning. We know that one of the keys to successful service-learning projects is a faculty member’s understanding of the teaching tool as well as an interest in, and commitment to, using it (Andrade, 2021; Kenworthy-U’Ren & Peterson, 2005). However, even after 30 years of research, practice, and dissemination of information related to service-learning, we still see huge gaps in terms of our knowledge in the management education domain (Kenworthy & Hrivnak, 2016). In a recent study looking at 101 Business School Deans’ responses to questions about service-learning (which they interchangeably refer to as community-based learning or CBL), Andrade et al. (2022) found that only 17% of Deans believed that their faculty members had an exemplary knowledge of how to use service-learning. The challenges they report include a lack of awareness and understanding, lack of faculty training, not having service-learning recognized in promotion and tenure, lack of faculty rewards and funding, increased stress on faculty workloads when implementing this teaching tool, structural disconnects between

Schools of Business and Universities, and a lack of strategic focus on service-learning. (Andrade et al., 2022). In support of this, Andrade (2021) calls for a “need to better understand faculty mindsets and competencies conducive to CBL and the impact and effectiveness of various forms of training and support” (p. 407).

In an extension to the above, as seen in Dean Opatska’s situation, there is much to be learned about how we can best support faculty members and students to process trauma resulting from “actual or potential threats to one’s life or integrity” (Greenberg & Hibbert, 2020; Shmotkin, 2005, p. 291). Along these lines, and applicable to service-learning in times of crisis and uncertainty, there is a rich and emergent literature on the importance of reflexive practice, self-awareness, and learning in the context of our emotions and vulnerabilities in post-traumatic environments (see Hibbert et al., 2022 for a comprehensive overview). Future research should draw upon this work to explore the impact of these applications and interventions in the context of service-learning projects taking place in trauma-inducing environments (e.g., war, natural disaster, severe economic and/or political disruption and volatility, pandemic or other widespread life-threatening health issues).

A related direction for future research is for service-learning practitioners who have utilized service-learning in times of crisis, like Dean Opatska and the other authors cited above, to work together to design resources in the form of “best-practice” articles and/or a series of short downloadable videos that can be easily accessed and used during regular faculty trainings (i.e., as preparation for the possibility of a crisis event). These resources would be readily accessible, both practically through online access and cognitively in terms of faculty members’ memories, for those who need to immediately shift “in the moment” to either adapt their existing, or implement a newly structured, service-learning projects when crises emerge.

When creating resources for faculty to use in terms of crises, future research should also consider how we can effectively implement service-learning projects in online environments. As we saw with Dean Opatska’s interactions with her students, online course delivery can be useful, if not the only option available, during disasters. To assist with this, there is an emergent literature on service-learning in online environments, however it utilizes several different labels for the practice. These include “eservice-learning” (Faulconer, 2021), “service-eLearning” (Dailey-Hebert et al., 2008), and “extreme e-service learning” (XE-SL), with the latter representing situations where both the classroom instruction and the service projects take place exclusively online (Waldner et al., 2010). In a review of the current literature in this domain, Faulconer (2021) found that students participating in online service-learning projects demonstrated “efficacy in achieving course learning

outcomes” (p. 111) noting, however, that the research to date in this area is based on anecdotal or subjective self-reporting methods (also identified in Waldner et al., 2012). The challenges identified for online service-learning projects include: (1) a less “immersive” experience for students, as compared to traditional service-learning experiences where students are often required to visit community partners’ organizations and spaces, (2) issues of sustainability in terms of both institutional support and continuous access to community partners and experts, and (3) a lack of training and support for troubleshooting in terms of technology and ongoing communication which, in online environments, is a notable and constant risk (Faulconer, 2021). The benefits of online service-learning include global connectedness, knowledge application, and peer learning (Faulconer, 2021), which may be exactly what is needed by students and faculty in times of crisis. In support of this, Burton and Winter (2021), describe the potential for online service-learning courses to “benefit and transform the student learning experience” resulting in “deeper understanding for students” (p. 8).

The crises and associated uncertainties we have all experienced during the past 3 years have not only changed the face of our educational environments but also left indelible marks on all of us. In the context of management education, these crises have shifted the landscape of who we are and what we do (Greenberg & Hibbert, 2020). It is our hope that the journey through devastation and destruction Dean Opatska and her students have lived through during the past year will be the catalyst for each of us to rethink how we approach our jobs as management educators. Her experience drives home the importance of developing trust-based interpersonal connections with our students and community partners, opening direct lines of communication with each other, and embracing flexibility in our approaches to learning and teaching. It also illustrates the fact that we need to develop resources for faculty who find themselves in times of crisis, struggling to quickly adapt their courses in ways that evoke feelings of safety, shared meaning, connection, and learning for their students and themselves. Dean Opatska asks us to remember the people of Ukraine—to work together, tell their stories, and learn from their journeys. It is time to move beyond simple recognition that uncertainty and crisis are part of the fabric of our lives. Let us all harness the fierce resilience, resolve, and commitment to learning shared in Dean Opatska’s reflections to move forward together, taking action that will positively impact both field of management education and those around us who have experienced trauma and need our support.


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