

# Building a Public Health Leadership Curriculum

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## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the **importance** of global health leadership. Public- and global health leaders took different approaches to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Leaders needed to communicate effectively to the public and cooperate with stakeholders to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. These are only two examples of skills for students to develop to prepare for a public health leadership position. **Public health leadership skills** are not yet being **taught** in the Northwestern University Master of Public Health curriculum. Therefore, essential public health leadership skills were investigated, and a course syllabus was developed.

## Research Objectives

**Objective:** to create a public health leadership curriculum in order to teach future public health leaders essential leadership skills.

### Subobjectives:

1. To identify public health leadership **lessons learned** during the COVID-19 pandemic
2. To identify effective **methods** through which public health leadership skills can be taught to public health students
3. To identify **case studies** that can be used to teach students about public health leadership

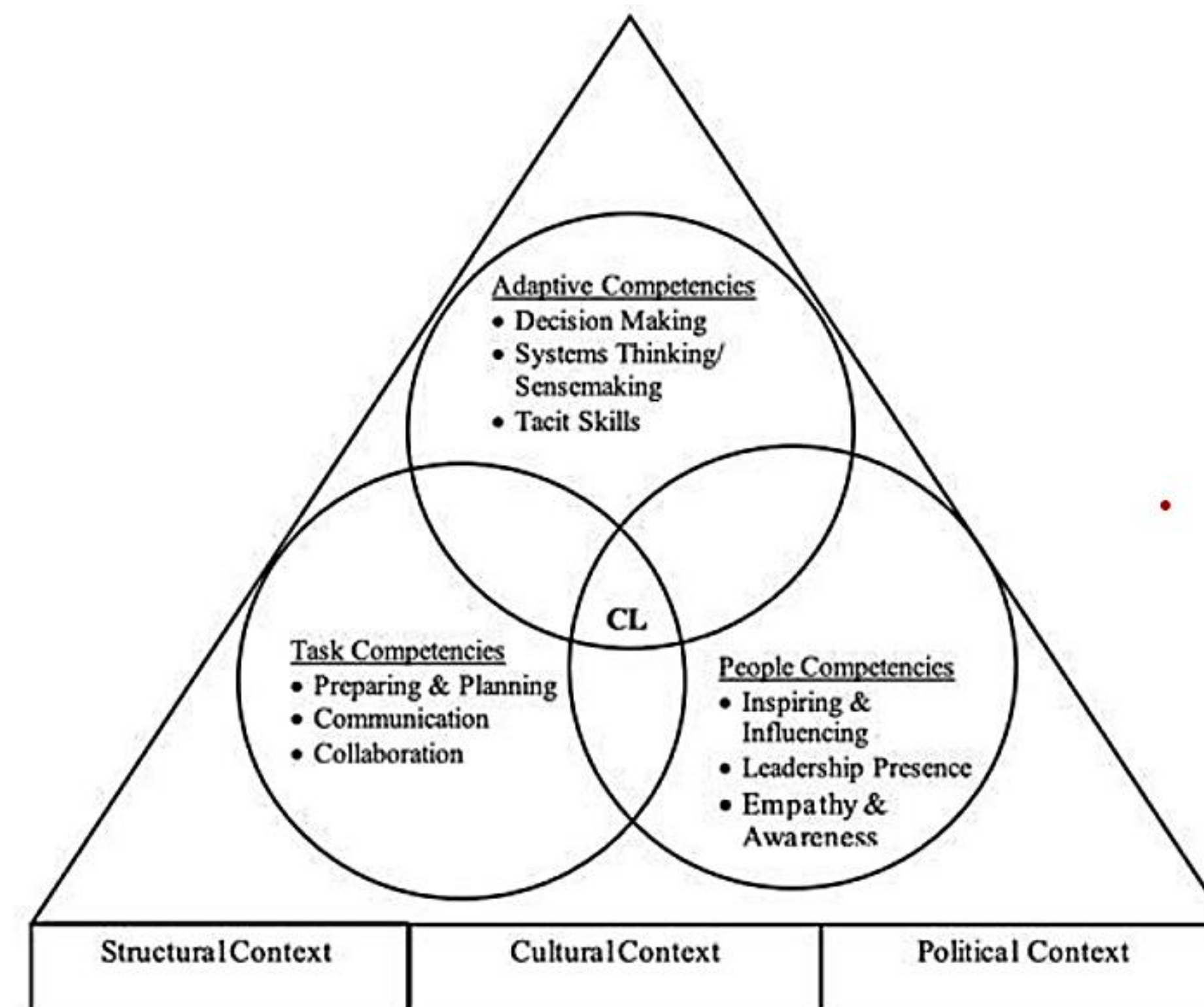
## Methods

1. **Literature review** of essential leadership skills in times of pandemic
2. Conduction and qualitative analysis of **six 30-60- minute interviews** with public health leaders in Chicagoland area exploring lessons learned during the pandemic

Appreciation and indebtedness is particularly expressed to the following public health leaders:

- Dr. Rachel Rubin, MD, MPH, FACP: Senior Medical Officer and Co-Lead at the Cook County Department of Public Health
- Dr. Kiran Joshi, MD, MPH: Senior Medical Officer and Co-Lead at the Cook County Department of Public Health
- Sarah Franks, DNP, B.S.N, R.N.: Communicable Disease Specialist High Risk Populations at the City of Evanston
- Ikenga Ogbo, MPH: Director of Health and Human Services Department at the City of Evanston
- Nikhil Prachand, MPH: Director of Epidemiology at the City of Chicago
- Juana Ballesteros, BSN RN MPH: Manager Community Public Health Outreach at the Illinois Department of Public Health, and Health equity Senior Program Manager at the American Medical Association

Figure 1: Emergency leadership framework (Sriharan, 2021)



## Quotes:

*‘Believe in your work, also if you do not yet see the impact of it. Realize that the work that you are doing is impacting day-to-day lives, and decisions impact life and death.’ ~ Nikhil Prachand*

*Appreciate people you work with. The ability to do fundamental public health work, and to collaborate with people is a privilege. – Kiran Joshi*

*Listen to people, assure that the information you provide is impactful and science based, and stay professional regardless of the circumstances. – Ikenga Ogbo*

## Results

A public health leadership **course syllabus** was developed.

The course consists of **four segments**:

1. Essential public health leadership skills in times of pandemic
2. Introduction to outbreak investigation
3. Global health disparities
4. Personal leadership skill development

**Teaching methods:** case-based, narratives, reflection, podcasts, teamwork

The course is concluded by a public health **policy debate**. Two groups will be formed, and each member will get assigned a different personal aim. Through negotiation students will be asked to develop a new policy.

## Limitations

1. Due to the academic quarter system schedule the course syllabus had to be compressed into a ten-week timeframe. Therefore, only **limited topics** can be discussed in the course, and the number of skills that can be taught is limited.
2. Although teaching global health leadership skills through classes is beneficial, the interviewed public health leaders mutually agreed that **field experience** is needed to build public health leadership skills. Therefore, this course solely will not sufficiently prepare students for a future leadership position.

## Conclusions

The following skills were necessary for public health leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Social** skills: teamwork, communication, advocacy, negotiation
- **Emergency response** skills: strategic thinking, triage
- **Epidemiology**
- **Outbreak management**
- **Technical** skills: public health infrastructure, data surveillance software, literature analysis
- **Personality traits:** flexible, accountable, empathetic, has a vision