

## **Serving with Values in Challenging Times: Exploring Institutional Leaders' Values Work at Local Level During COVID-19**

FATİH KOÇ, MUZAFFER AKDOĞAN, ALI YEŞİLDAL, ABDULLAH KIRAY & OKTAY  
KOÇ

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CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS: Fatih Koç, Ph.D, Associate Professor, Kocaeli University, Faculty of Business Administration, Kabaoğlu Mahallesi, Kocaeli Üniversitesi Umuttepe Yerleşkesi, 41350, İzmit, Türkiye, e-mail: fatih.koc@kocaeli.edu.tr. Muzaffer Akdoğan, Ph.D, Associate Professor, University of Health Sciences, Hamidiye Faculty of Health Sciences, Istanbul, Selimiye Mah. Tıbbiye Cad. No: 38, 34668, Üsküdar/İstanbul, Türkiye, e-mail: muzafferakdogan@gmail.com (corresponding author). Ali Yeşildal, Ph.D, Associate Professor, Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, Karabaş Mah. Salim Dervişoğlu Cad. No: 80, 41040, İzmit/Kocaeli, Türkiye, e-mail: aliyesildal@gmail.com. Abdullah Kıray, Ph.D, Assistant Professor, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Faculty of Political Sciences, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi Terzioğlu Yerleşkesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi, 17100, Merkez/Çanakkale, Türkiye, e-mail: akiray@comu.edu.tr. Oktay Koç, Ph.D, Professor, University of Health Sciences, Hamidiye Faculty of Health Sciences, Istanbul, Selimiye Mah. Tıbbiye Cad. No: 38, 34668, Üsküdar/İstanbul, Türkiye, e-mail: oktay.koc@sbu.edu.tr.

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**Abstract** While existing literature mostly analyzes public leaders' pandemic responses, limited attention has been paid to local government leaders in terms of values work. This study examines the values created and infused by senior managers who serve as institutional leaders in local governments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on the data collected from the responses of the sample set, the study aims to illuminate the processes of creating and infusing values among senior managers of a metropolitan municipality in Türkiye. For this aim, interviews were conducted with 11 senior managers of this metropolitan municipality. The findings produced within the scope of two propositions firstly reveal three types of value created for, and infused into the organization: personal, organizational, and service-related. Secondly, the study identifies the uniform process devoted to values work among senior managers and reveals that there are no significant differences in the styles of creating and infusing values (i.e., values work) among managers at different levels of local government in challenging times.

**Keywords:** • institutional leadership • crisis management • value • values work • value infusion • COVID-19 pandemic

## 1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected societies as a whole for a significant period. Public authorities at the beginning of this unprecedented pandemic attempted to understand what happened first, but after a while embarked to prevent its negative effects on societies, on the one hand, and individuals in the societies on the other. Along with this, it has also been observed that not just people in societies, but also economic and social organizations needed strong support for survival (e.g., Carter & May, 2020; Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2020). Both local and central governments, for the most part, have not been successful in managing this unprecedented and sudden event by using conventional approaches (Ansell et al., 2020). Three different approaches at governmental levels have been taken by governments to manage the pandemic and prevent its effects. Kuhlmann, Hellström, Ramberg, and Reiter (2021) speak of these approaches by comparing different examples from three countries: According to them in some countries (e.g., France) the central government reacted determinedly and hierarchically, through containment measures. On the contrary, in some countries (e.g., Germany) a bottom-up response strategy has been taken. Lastly, in the case of Sweden, which is a smaller country compared to other countries, a relatively loose response strategy was also taken. In addition, some scholars (e.g., Kuhlmann & Franzke, 2021) have found that response strategies may also differ, for example, in terms of governmental levels (i.e., central and local levels). Furthermore, a limited number of scholars (e.g., Wallace & Dollery, 2021) have focused on understanding the response strategies of local governments and determined that some of their strategies could be inconsistent or insufficient in responding to the pandemic. Similarly, the findings of dos Santos' study (2021) demonstrate that the different roles of actors and the usefulness of multi-level governance to provide fast and complex responses are critical factors in responding to the pandemic.

Regarding public leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, it should be noted that there are a limited number of studies in the literature focusing on illuminating the necessity, styles, and/or functions of public leaders. For instance, Ansell et al. (2020) speak of the game-changer role of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in public administration and leadership. In the same line, Dirani et al. (2020) emphasize that leadership competencies are essential in response to this global crisis. Furthermore, Nicola et al. (2020), by using microlens in their study on leadership models during the COVID-19 pandemic, argue leadership compartmentalization, leadership issues, and ethical dilemmas that may arise amidst the pandemic. More specifically, Meagher, Singh, and Pate (2020) point out gender-inclusive leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alam (2020), by adopting a functional focus, observes a dysfunctionality in the COVID-19 pandemic management system that is a direct consequence of the administrative leaders' preference for leading from behind. By taking a different perspective,

Placek, Spacek, and Ochrana (2020) show that municipal leaders attempted to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic with a variety of (non-)adaptation strategies. Finally, Binagwaho (2020) argues that this pandemic highlights the need for leaders to be educated in the implementation of scientific principles to be able to make evidence-based decisions through a multi-sectoral and integrated response that takes into account contextual factors influencing implementation.

Although all of these studies are focused on management and leadership during the pandemic as a crisis to some extent, and easing the pandemic's negative effects by taking different strategies and measures and doing various deeds, there is -nearly- no evidence in the literature on values expected as an outcome of administrative processes undertaken by public leaders for sweeping negative effects of the pandemic. However, when it comes to public services and leadership, values are deeply important to the effective practice of public administration (Witesman, 2020) and values work stands out as a much more vital management function than traditional functions. Moreover, there is a need, in this era, to relate values to work, and agency of leaders as well as various groups of organizational actors (Askeland, Espedal, Løvaas, & Sirris, 2020). In this sense, a leader who undertakes the function of creating for, and infusing values into the organization should be an institutional leader, as defined by Selznick (1957). Interestingly, not many applied studies have been conducted on institutional leadership in practice so far. This concept appears to have remained frozen in the 1950s (Kraatz, 2009). Because, researchers have interestingly tended to rely more on psychological theories of leadership that emphasize the individual and less on the more macro-level theories that might situate leadership (Glynn & DeJordy, 2010).

With this study, we aim to first unpack the institutional leadership box in the processes of managing the pandemic and thus explain value creation and infusing processes in tackling the pandemic, which were conducted by senior managers of local governments as institutional leaders. More clearly, we attempt to elucidate how institutional leaders can create values for, and infuse them into the organizations in the scope of this research question: "How do institutional leaders create values for, and infuse them into the organization?"

Secondly, we aim to define the types of values that are expected to be created as an outcome of managerial processes of pandemic struggle in the direction of a second research question: "What kind of values are expected to be produced (by institutional leaders) at the end of managerial processes of local governments' pandemic struggle?"

In wrapping up, this study promises to make a two-fold contribution by solving two different propositions: The first of the propositions is that "in challenging times, institutional leaders produce values for and infuse them into the

organization by doing similar works". The second proposition is that "the values that institutional leaders produce and infuse into the organization differ from each other". A likely contribution in this direction is, firstly, it sheds light on the styles involved in value creation and the process of infusing those values. This is crucial in understanding how leaders can effectively imbue their organizations with meaningful principles and objectives. Secondly, it delves into the realm of identifying distinct categories of values in tackling great societal challenges such as the pandemic. This dual approach not only adds depth to our comprehension of leadership dynamics in challenging times but also enhances our understanding of the impacts and outcomes associated with those challenges' response strategies.

## 2 Literature review

The new century has brought an upsurge of international terrorism, but also a creeping awareness of new types of contingencies. In times of such situations, citizens look at their leaders: presidents and mayors, local politicians and elected administrators, public managers, and top civil servants (Boin, Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2005). In the same line, Nye (2010) argues that citizens may hand over power to leaders for this aim. Moreover, a crisis generates a strong demand from citizens to know what is going on and to ascertain what they can do to protect their interests. In this regard, crisis management bears directly upon the lives of citizens and the well-being of societies. Because crises differ in context, the public's expectations of their leaders might vary from one crisis to another (Jong, 2017). Hence, leaders should offer a convincing rationale that generates public and political support for their crisis management efforts (Boin, 2009). To do that, they should arrive at a collective understanding of the nature, characteristics, consequences, and potential scope and effects of evolving threats at the onset of the crisis (Boin, Kuipers, & Overdijk 2013). Moreover, public leaders must undertake a particular responsibility to take measures to mitigate the spreading effects of the crisis. It means that they should undertake to safeguard society's functionality and preserve society's ability to react to crises (Nordgren, 2015). After taking action, when the response and recovery processes associated with this situation are going well, it brings credibility to public leaders who have been visibly associated with these events (McLean & Ewart, 2020). Recently, such services and activities are discussed and evaluated in terms of producing public value, which is more generally considered in the sense of "individual and collective trans-situational conceptions of desirable behavior, objectives, and ideals that serve to guide and evaluate practice" (Askeland et al., 2020).

Since crises should be viewed as critical situations that, if mishandled, can inflict severe damage and adverse outcomes that may affect the entire organization, an agency of leaders should be seen as vital for value-driven crisis management (Askeland et al., 2020; Lee, 2020; Vassilikopoulou, Siomkos, Chatzipanagiotou,

& Pantouvakis, 2009). Hence, when organizations encounter a crisis, the most senior executives must undertake the “responsibility for the well-being of the organizational whole” (Selznick, 1957). To do that, the most important instrument in the hands of public leaders should only be public organizations and they will be able to manage crises properly, and in turn create value for the public using those organizations (Van Wart & Suino, 2012). It means, there must also be an institutional machinery that enables a decisive response behind this type of leader (Kuipers, 2018).

Yet, sometimes crisis leaders can make a crisis worse by ignoring impending threats, making “stupid” decisions, or acting in ways that imply they do not care (Boin & Hart, 2010). Therefore, the most senior executives are in the spotlight and have a responsibility to lead the organization to safe grounds especially when organizations encounter a crisis (AlKnaawy, 2018; Boin et al., 2005) and must make critical decisions to manage a crisis (Boin & Christensen, 2008). In Selznick’s words (1957), those leaders might also be dubbed defenders and stewards of the living social entity. In fact, with this definition, Selznick sets a very high bar for the would-be leader (Kraatz, 2009). Moreover, according to Selznick, the administrator becomes a leader as he begins to concern himself with defining the mission and values of an organization, by creating structures that embody those values and ensuring the organization’s adaptation to changing circumstances. There is no doubt that leaders need the energy to provide emotional identification with the organization that may increase day-to-day effort and, especially, be summoned in times of crisis or threat (Selznick, 1957). However, such leaders must transcend their narrow administrative role and technical functions to see organizations as underpinned by core-value structures (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009). In short, Selznick’s leader is in large part just an administrator who understands the sociological and political complexities of the organization and acts accordingly (Kraatz, 2009).

It is obvious that rules alone cannot be enough in crises; values also need to be re-negotiated when the situation demands it (Sirris, 2020). Thus, crises and sudden changes may bring opportunities for managers and leaders to perform strategic values work that is guided mostly by their willingness and skills (DiMaggio, 1988). By doing values work, managers ensure the integrity of the institution as if it were their own (Selznick, 1957). To work with values in such circumstances involves probing why people work and behave the way they do (Askeland et al., 2020). Institutional leaders, then, need to be a realist and a sentient and self-aware participant in an ongoing process, such as crises, that is likely to confuse and perhaps victimize others (Kraatz, 2009). Because, a value-based leadership approach requires dealing with events, emotions, and consequences in the immediate present in ways that minimize personal and organizational harm in times of crisis (Smith & Riley, 2012). Furthermore, values guide the choice action

by signifying what is desirable or appropriate, and values work serves to bridge everyday practices with the organizational purpose (Askeland et al., 2020). With values that work, institutional mission and purpose are linked to values by institutional leaders, and they constitute the true ends of the institution itself (Kraatz, Flores, & Chandler, 2020). In organizations, especially in times of crisis, value creation may be undertaken more by managers. Because citizens may not be able to be involved in value creation, especially in times of crisis with a high-risk level, such as COVID-19 (Blaug, Horner, & Lekhi, 2006). Finally, organizations focusing on values work through the hands of their administrators might be in a better position to improve their practices, quality of services (Askeland et al., 2020), and public satisfaction, in turn, to guarantee organizational survival that is fundamental aims of organizations (Selznick, 1957).

As for COVID-19 as a widespread social crisis (Marzulli & Pavesi, 2022), during the process increased leadership, and coordination among state leaders were witnessed concretely (Carter & May, 2020). Because decisions on how to organize, regulate, and prepare for crises and how to respond to them involve priorities and values and are therefore inherently political and critical decisions (Christensen, Laegrid, & Rykkja, 2014), it is necessary that the leaders best suited to take responsibility for finding new ways to properly manage crises (Boin et al., 2013). Although it is claimed that leadership is necessary to manage crises, it is also necessary to focus on values work to do this properly. Because, in one sense, values work is interpreted as restoring human values in times of crisis, leading to sustainable living conditions (Daskalaki, Fotaki, & Sotiropoulou, 2018). Moreover, meaning-making as values work is crucial to the legitimacy of public organizations and their leaders (Boin et al., 2013) since legitimacy is the surest way of guaranteeing the survival of an organization. When crisis management is considered from a values perspective, the necessity of leaders' values work can be better understood. Because, crises are often about the degeneration of values (Brookes, 2014). Hence, values must be invoked by institutional leaders politically to restore values in a crisis (Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville, & Scully, 2010) because of their very nature which may affect organizational behavior and outcomes (Kraatz & Flores, 2015).

Values, as vital elements in governing turbulent circumstances, reflect also organizational vulnerabilities and resilience partly because of their embeddedness in organizational structure (Selznick, 2008). Since the very aim of any organization is to survive, institutional leaders must be on the front line of this battle (King, 2015) as a guiding hand (Selznick, 1957), especially in protecting institutional integrity. Institutional integrity, in the end, as a cornerstone of an organization's distinctive competence, should be labeled as indispensable (Selznick, 1957) in terms of handling crises when considering institutional leadership responsibilities. During this process, institutional leadership is focused

on the long-term purpose, enduring identity, and protection of values that define the enterprise (Glynn & Navis, 2010). Regarding those and other roles, as Fleck (2007) and Podolny, Khurana, and Hill-Popper (2005) also emphasized, Selznick, ascribed four activities to institutional leadership: defining institutional mission and role; ensuring institutional embodiment of purpose; guaranteeing institutional integrity, and ordering institutional conflict. For protecting institutions from the adverse effects of troublesome situations such as crises, institutional leaders are also expected to move towards benefitting shared ideas about personal and institutional responsibility (Selznick, 2008). Similarly, as Selznick (1992) also emphasized in “The Moral Commonwealth”, leaders should seek to discover and articulate existing values that are meaningful to organizational members and society at large, not to create new meanings from whole cloth (Besharov & Khurana, 2012), at the outset. Because, values can make human lives seem meaningful, infuse their day-to-day behavior with long-run meaning and purpose, and be considered critical determinants of attitudes, work behavior, and decision-making (Askeland et al., 2020; Selznick, 1957; Washington, Boal, & Davis, 2008).

### **3 Research**

#### **3.1 Research context**

Our study is built on two contextual pillars: One of them is the COVID-19 pandemic as a great social challenge in general, and the other is Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality as a local government unit with the measures it has taken against this great social challenge. The reason why we examined such a local government unit in this study is that, in the COVID-19 pandemic context, the elected municipal governments provided vital local leadership (Chatterji, Roy, & Chatterjee, 2021).

As for the first contextual pillar, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused important public problems in Türkiye as well as around the world. Although the spread of the pandemic has been followed meticulously from the beginning by the public, health, and political authorities, a significant number of deaths and infections have occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both central and local governments have undertaken important duties to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye. But some critical duties such as coordination and intervention remained under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, as an important actor of the central government. In addition, a scientific committee was formed and decisions such as “closing down” were made by this committee along with political actors, and these decisions were implemented throughout the country by actors including local governments. Although the measures of the central government have come to the fore more intensively during the COVID-19 process, local governments have also become important actors with the vital local measures and actions they



have taken. Moreover, some authors even assertively claim that subnational governments are at the frontline respondents to the COVID-19 pandemic globally (Matamanda et al., 2022). More specifically local public managers are required to manage crisis situations with transparency and clarity (both core public values) and in the public interest (Shand et al., 2022).

For the second contextual pillar of our study, it should be stated that Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality is a local government organization authorized to be responsible within the provincial borders by the constitution and relevant laws. It has its own autonomous administrative units such as a council and 12 different districts with autonomous administrative bodies. Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality serves a total population of more than 2 million. During the pandemic period, Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality acted within the framework of both the decisions and guidance of the central government and the programs and policies determined by its own autonomous bodies. In this sense, the metropolitan mayor and lower-level district mayors intervened by using their own resources to eliminate the negative consequences caused by COVID-19. These interventions can also be called values work aimed at creating value for the public. Since local actions and measures against COVID-19 are determined by local government leaders (Anttiroiko & Haveri, 2022), in this study local government leaders were examined through the lens of institutional leadership. The selection of Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality as the sample was driven by two key considerations: Firstly, the availability of readily accessible data pertaining to their COVID-19 response initiatives facilitated a comprehensive analysis. Secondly, the municipality's noteworthy financial and material support (approximately \$10 million) during the pandemic, coupled with its pioneering approach to pandemic-specific services, positioned it as a frontrunner among Turkish municipalities.

Some measures taken by Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality regarding services that we assume create value during the pandemic are listed below:

At the beginning of taking measures regarding the pandemic, Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality immediately started services such as providing protective clothing for its staff and healthcare workers, providing preventive materials for disinfection processes, and installing disinfectant units in the city. In addition, extraordinary measures were also taken during the process, such as providing social and financial aid to those in need, providing e-library services, providing financial aid to tradesmen and merchants, providing food and cleaning aid to those who lost their jobs, providing free internet to students, providing remote video psychosocial support and distributing additional food to stray animals. The Mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality, 12 district mayors, and the Council of Metropolitan Municipality took responsibility for taking those measures. It was also ensured that the decisions of the central administration were

followed and complied with. Despite all these measures, a total of around 250 thousand cases were detected in Kocaeli during the pandemic and unfortunately, 2805 of them lost their lives.

### 3.2 Data collection and analysis

In this study, we conducted qualitative research. We focused on understanding and explaining value creation processes on one hand, and defining value types on the other. These are under-researched and neglected issues to some extent in the leadership literature (Espedal, 2020). Depending on this, we collected primary data from senior managers of two different local governments as cases, since Yin (2003) proposed that case analysis, is one of the most preferable instruments for less understood phenomena. We purposively chose those local governments and their seniors under their intensive efforts to manage the pandemic as a crisis and sweep its negative effects. In the direction of this study's aim, only senior managers may have provided expected data because of their direct responsibility to realize managerial processes of the pandemic struggle. Furthermore, in this way, they were in a strategic position that provided a privileged agenda for them to plan produce for, and infuse values into the organizations.

In the end, we interviewed 11 senior managers not face to face but by using some applications and telephone due to the pandemic. After collecting data, we transcribed all records and then analyzed texts to find answers to research questions. For analysis, we preferred to use descriptive phenomenological analysis (Giorgi, 2012) since we aimed to collect data on senior managers' experiences during the struggle processes. To further strengthen the validity of our findings and employ a multifaceted data collection approach, we triangulated interview data with official reports and other documents issued by Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality. In the end, we employed an interpretive approach to analyze data in explaining processes and defining value types by using a manual coding technique to categorize our findings at the same time.

Some information about interviews is provided (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Information about interviews

Interviewee	Role	Duration of interview
1	Director	20'
2	Director	25'
3	Director	12'
4	Director	25'
5	Director	35'
6	Coordinator	45'
7	Head of the department	25'

Interviewee	Role	Duration of interview
8	Head of the department	20'
9	Head of the department	Via e-mail
10	Vice General Secretary	Via e-mail
11	Vice General Secretary	Via e-mail

#### 4 Discussion

The findings of this study were categorized to answer two main research questions. For this purpose, the obtained data was coded and processed. Finally, we noticed that there were not many differences among municipal leaders in terms of approach to values during the pandemic. There are often commonalities among leaders in terms of their values. Therefore, we examined the processes of value creation and infusion processes together. We also found, contrary to Kuhlmann and Franzke's (2021) finding, that the processes of creating for, and infusing value into the organization are similar for mayors. Perhaps in crisis or unexpected situations, leaders may tend to imitate each other and behave in the same way or the same manner because they do not know exactly what to do. In our opinion, there should also be a signal for this sameness: The directives and imperatives of a central authority, in our case Ministry of Healthcare (e.g., Kuhlmann et al., 2021). The responsibility for struggling against the pandemic was attributed to this Ministry. The functionaries of this Ministry attempted to plan, organize, and conduct (etc.) all the activities and other works in the direction of a central authority logic. Along with this, there is no choice but mimicry or imitation against this type of unprecedented issue.

We further defined three types of values that we noticed have not been defined in the literature so far. And we also have presented them in this section.

##### 4.1 Types of values

Within the scope of our first proposition, there are three types of values that emerged from the data processed: Personal, organizational, and service-related. Those values may be changed depending on leaders' and/or organizations' characteristics. For example, some leaders do not tend to realize personal gains by using public and/or organizational resources. Boin et al. (2005) also put forth that leaders have to prioritize the [social] needs and problems triggered by different factors. But in some cases, leaders may be in a character that indicates that they will try to prioritize their own interests by taking an opportunist approach.

#### 4.1.1 Personal values

This value type is closely related to a leader's personal expectations or plans. Political leaders might be in a situation that motivates them to strive for their personal interests (e.g., maximizing votes). Depending on this, they mostly maneuver to gain their own interests whether implicitly or explicitly, regardless of the issues they face. It is actually that these leaders see themselves as the most important actors above all other elements (Selznick, 2008; Smith & Riley, 2012). For example, in our cases, mayors of the cities designed some of their personal values in accordance with their personal expectations and then imposed them on their subordinates even during the pandemic. Indeed, there can always be various values depending on the personalities and characteristics of leaders and all leaders want to see those values applied in the operational field. Selznick (1957) also mentioned this position by saying: "The administrator/politician becomes a leader as he begins to concern himself (at least outwardly) [...]." Two of our interviewees expressed that in this direction:

"My primary preference in doing my job, and fulfilling my duties is my religious beliefs. Isn't that right? If you work in the public sector, you shouldn't think a material gaining first."

"For example, a top manager who wants to gain the favor of the mayor in order to reach higher positions is more after his own interests. We have also encountered such examples, including the pandemic. Unfortunately, there were some managers who acted as if they had discovered the services and new ideas themselves."

Another interviewee directly aimed to reveal the mayor's situation in the values work. This is actually a very well-known and generally "considered" normal in politics:

"For example, the president, as politically responsible to the public, will not want to create a bad image. That's the nature of politics. To be honest, a bad image means a loss of votes - more or less. For this reason, I think it is necessary to see at least a little bit of personal values in the values of presidents."

As it is seen here, some leaders may be in a situation within which they cannot understand, and be aware of reality clearly because crises force governments and leaders to confront issues they do not face daily (Boin et al., 2005). Hence, they tend to behave as they always do and might focus in this direction on their values and then the organization might be constrained in the hands of the leaders for their interests (Christensen et al., 2014). In this regard, it can be concluded that a

leader's personality can be seen as the most important component when talking about this type of value (Lindheim, 2020).

#### 4.1.2 Organizational values

A leader's role in an organization is to fulfill organizational duties rightly and achieve organizational aims. Organizational values can be dubbed pertinent to organizational aims (Selznick, 1957; Askeland et al. 2020). Some administrators in our sample set showed an exact model of this during the pandemic. It is understood from this point of view that organization is the most important asset for these administrators since they prioritize organizational aims and organizational values such as responsiveness and agility. Because of this local leaders attempted to create values for the public by means of their organizations (Van Wart & Suino, 2015) and for the well-being of the organizational whole (Selznick, 1957). In this sense, in his introduction to the 2021 fiscal year performance program, the Mayor of Metropolitan Municipality made the following statement, which also points to organizational values specific to the pandemic (Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, 2021):

“The pandemic period once again showed the importance of strong municipalities, especially strong Metropolitan Municipalities.”

One of our interviewees explained this point as:

“Our first aim is to realize organizational aims. We are here for this and thoroughly realizing relevant operations. During the pandemic, standard operations of our organizations have been stopped or slowed down. After that, our sole focus was the pandemic, which gave us a new, unprecedented, and unusual purpose.”

Most of the local governments began to struggle against the pandemic in the second phase of the pandemic and their efforts were mostly supportive to the central government. Because most of the countries used centralized strategies in struggling pandemic. However, this situation was not an obstacle to producing values for and infusing them into the organization (i.e., managing organizations by, and for values). One of our interviewees explicated this point by saying that:

“Whether it is a pandemic or a normal time, our first job is to achieve the goals set for our organization. Because we are fulfilling the public duties imposed on us by law. For this reason, we have to provide to the outside world a clear appearance of a good organization. Otherwise, our legitimacy might be damaged and we might become controversial. We have seen many examples of this during the pandemic.”

Askeland et al. (2020) in this regard claim rightly that organizations focusing on values work tend to use these values to improve their practices and quality of services and further they aim to use these values to bridge everyday practices with organizational purpose since values considered key determinants of attitudes, work behavior, and decision-making. Institutional leaders, in this meaning, tend to constitute the true ends of their organizations (Kraatz et al., 2020). To put it, institutional leaders as senior managers attempt to create values on one hand, and on the other infuse them into the organizations in the direction of organizational aims (Selznick, 1957). Organizations are the most important part in the eyes of leaders when talking about this type of values.

#### 4.1.3 Service-related values

This type of value is devoted to the public as a whole. At first sight, they may seem like organizational values. But they have different functions than organizational ones. For example, this type of value is directly connected with public demands and expectations. They are designed in the direction of public needs as well as public satisfaction, not just simply a concrete organizational output. During the pandemic process, for example, organizations must have produced their pandemic-related services innovatively and consistently. By doing so, they attempted to sweep the pandemic's negative effects and to keep citizens in harm's way (Boin et al., 2005; Smith & Riley, 2012). In this context, in order to contribute to the efforts to combat the new type of Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic carried out in Kocaeli, the Kocaeli Provincial Hygiene Board took the following decisions (Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, 2020a):

“Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality will provide the following services free of charge:

- Providing free internet access to students,
- Meeting the accommodation, food and beverage, transportation and other needs of healthcare professionals,
- Providing personal protective equipment, hygiene and cleaning materials such as sterilized medical masks needed by public institutions,
- Establishment of Temporary Care Centers to accommodate people who need to remain under quarantine.”

The sewing and distribution of 3 million masks by the Metropolitan Municipality Vocational Courses and other units can be given as a simple example of the Metropolitan Municipality's diversified and differentiated services aimed at producing value against the pandemic (Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, 2022).

Our interviewees also expressed in this direction that:

“Our primary aim as a local government is to provide services in the direction of public satisfaction. During the pandemic process, we tried to ensure public satisfaction by new and unusual services provided: for example, providing face masks or disinfectants. Since we had never encountered such a problem before, these were not familiar to us. During this process, our residents expected continuous and consistent services.”

“The services had to be of a quality that would produce value. On the contrary, we have also seen tragicomic examples. The issue is that in other places they put cabins or tunnels in the squares to disinfect people or wash streets with detergent. Of course, we can say that these were services that were thought of in a panic, and their benefits were overlooked.”

“What we call service should benefit people. We have seen municipalities trying to wash the streets of the city with sparkling water because there is a pandemic. In my opinion, these have been a waste of resources and have had a negative impact on the public's view of public services. We are more focused on services that will truly create value for the public as a whole. For example, we helped local tradesmen who could not open their shops. Or we did the shopping for people who couldn't leave their homes. We picked up the patients from their homes and took them to the relevant institutions.”

According to Selznick (1957), institutional leadership is a kind of work done to meet the needs of a social situation. Hence institutional leaders tend to create for, and then infuse values into public organizations particularly to provide public services sufficiently, efficaciously, and effectively to ensure public satisfaction. Those values are deeply important to the effective practice of public administration (Witesman, 2020). To do this, leaders must attempt to make sense for all parties during crises, it may help to reduce uncertainty and anxiety (McLean & Ewart, 2020). Regarding this type of values, services should be the most important part of the leadership work. In the end, our first proposition, which assumes that leaders do different values work from each other, was confirmed. Thus, it was concluded that as the competencies and expectations of leaders differ, their values work will also differ.

#### **4.2 Value-creation and infusing processes**

Our second proposition investigates the potential for variation in the scope of values work undertaken by managers at different levels within a sample local government. Since values are the soul of public administration (Frederickson, 1994) and an important part of the dynamic nature of organizations (Gutierrez et al., 2010) and depending on the consensus that values provide unity (Selznick,

1957), values work (as creating values for, and infusing them into the organizations) is defined as an indisputable and clear responsibility and duty for senior leaders. At this point, an important question that needs to be asked arises: Which type of leadership is more eligible to take on this responsibility and fulfill the duty? According to Selznick (1957), institutional leadership is the most appropriate leadership approach to create values. This type of leaders must undertake the role of value creation for, and infuse them into the organizations along with traditional and/or technical leadership roles (Selznick, 1957). This role is indeed associated with the strategic position of the leaders in which government leaders and political actors are located (McLean & Ewart, 2020). In this direction, one of our interviewees emphasized especially that:

“In our case, the senior level is more responsible for the services, the values that the services are expected to produce, and how they will be produced. In a critical situation like a pandemic, it would not be right to give responsibility to lower-level administrators.”

Another interviewee described the work structure and similarity as follows:

“Moreover, in a crisis with devastating effects such as a pandemic, it would not be right to pursue different goals as if they were rivals. So we all started working to do the same or similar things in similar or same ways. We have already started working in a committee structure so that there are no different tasks.”

Furthermore, the different documents we have obtained on this subject also support what our interviewees said in this context. For example, the Anti-Pandemic Commission was established to ensure uniformity of implementation in the subsidiaries and affiliates of Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, and this Commission held its first meeting on 28 August 2020. The official document written for this purpose explains this point as follows (Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, 2020b):

“In order to put forward an effective fight against the pandemic and take precautions against the pandemic, the Metropolitan Municipality has established the Anti-Pandemic Commission to implement the decisions taken by the Presidency, the Ministry of Health and the Kocaeli Governorship, and to disseminate and ensure unity of implementation in the subsidiaries and affiliates of the Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality. The Commission includes the Head of Human Resources and Education Department, Head of Health and Social Services Department, Head of Support Services Department, Head of Resource Development and Affiliations Department, Head of Human Resources and Education Department of ISU General Directorate.”



Additionally, the data we obtained from Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality's senior managers revealed that institutional leaders can primarily consider their resources (such as knowledge and/or experience) in creating and infusing values by services produced for those struggling with the pandemic (cf. Van Wart & Suino, 2015). In some cases, when, for example, they have no experience or idea, they tend to seek consultants or academicians for help. Two of our interviewees clarified this point as:

“I often had to decide on my own what services to produce that would be of value. Because during the pandemic, it was necessary to make quick decisions and implement them quickly. But of course, this is not a totalitarian style. Before or at least after taking the decisions, we discussed them with other managers, with whom I worked closely, whenever we had the opportunity. But I also knew that it would not be enough. In such situations, I must seek the help of other people for example academicians or practitioners, and healthcare professionals. By using their knowledge and experience as leverage I could develop some value-added services.”

“I compiled information about new studies carried out abroad, especially from the USA, and discussed it with the mayor. Then, we were able to take measures that no one else had taken or thought of yet. Additionally, since my own expertise is in healthcare, we were able to make accurate decisions about services against the pandemic and the values they will produce.”

Similar to this finding, Soler and Sietchiping (2022) also suggested that “urban leaders can change the course of the pandemic through knowledge and scientific evidence that allows them to implement better tools.” Naturally, it may seem quite logical and legal for managers to make and implement decisions in their own areas of responsibility. However, it should also be stated that in vital and critical problems such as pandemics, there may be some situations that exceed the knowledge and skills of a single manager. Therefore, it should be stated that it is quite acceptable to carry out the value-creation process in cooperation with others. These processes should involve relevant actors, incorporate their feedback, regularly check on common understanding and agreement of the arising operational picture, and map (un)certainties, and information needs (Kuipers, 2018). Carter and May (2020) likewise state that public actors should work in tandem with public health experts, healthcare professionals, and civil partners against the pandemic. This situation is interesting as it shows that working with others is inherent in the values work processes of institutional leaders.

However, it has also been revealed that our sample set tends to use mostly top-down processes in creating for, and infusing services that will enable value

creation into the organizations. This finding also shows that they have a hierarchical tendency in managerial processes. A critical explanation of this issue came from two of our interviewees:

“Under this circumstance, you must be authoritative since there is an unexpected situation emerged, and to be honest nobody knows clearly what should be done.”

“Foremost, I thought that I had to take control of my department in accordance with our action plan that was designed by our mayor. After that, I tended to manage my personnel, not usually, but in a different way. Naturally, I must have been authoritative in most cases during the challenging times.”

Although these statements may seem disturbing to some, they may be a little more acceptable considering the conditions of crises. For example, Boin et al. (2005) similarly argue that in a crisis, leaders are expected to reduce uncertainty and provide an authoritative account of what is going on, why it is happening, and what needs to be done. In fact, since getting public bureaucracies to adapt to crisis circumstances is a daunting task itself (Boin et al., 2005), institutional leaders expected to do values work will need to be effective organizational politicians (Kraatz, 2009) and perform different manoeuvres. Thus, our second proposition regarding the lack of significant variation in local government administrators' values work was confirmed. This uniformity is believed to be a consequence of the unprecedented crisis's devastating effects.

## 5 Conclusion

In times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, citizens naturally look for leaders who are not only willing but also capable of assuming responsibility for addressing these unprecedented challenges. However, these leaders should not adopt a traditional approach to intervening in crises and eliminating their effects. Instead, recognizing the significance of values in comprehending the diverse motivations and behaviors of individuals within organizations, public leaders must actively engage in value-oriented works to create principles that align with various organizational duties. In this sense, leaders, especially those referred to as institutional leaders, tend to manage these daunting situations by creating values for, and infusing values into organizations.

Both of the propositions that we developed to base this study have been confirmed. In fact, senior managers, called institutional leaders, tend to be value-oriented in maintaining services in challenging times. In this context, these leaders attempt to develop three different types of values in service production and provision: personal, organizational, and service-related values. It is understood that leaders

will draw heavily on their own skills, experience and knowledge as they embark on the value creation journey. However, it must be acknowledged that in some cases, leaders are ill-equipped to manage events comprehensively, and this may prompt them to seek help from their immediate circle. In such cases, leaders may turn to consultants and/or academics for additional support and expertise. This multifaceted approach underscores the dynamic nature of leadership during crises and recognizes the need for adaptation and collaborative problem solving.

Moreover, it is also understood that institutional leaders at different levels tend to think or behave similarly to each other in the production of value-oriented services, especially in difficult periods, thus tending to reduce possible risks. More clearly, one of the important reasons why value creation and infusion processes are similar is that top-down management processes are more preferred in difficult times. Because senior managers do not want to incur additional losses beyond the damage caused by the crisis due to different approaches to dealing with the crisis.

The current study employed a sample of 11 participants within a local government organization. While the sample size aligns with established literature (e.g., Hennink & Koiser, 2022), future studies could benefit from larger participant pools. Additionally, comparative research across multiple local government organizations is crucial to establish generalizability. Such comparative studies would offer insights into potential similarities and differences in value-creation approaches, not only within organizations but also between them. Finally, conducting future studies repeatedly at designated intervals could yield valuable new information on evolving trends and leadership practices.

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