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Co-authors of the award-winning, best-selling
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Leadership Strategies for Radically Uncertain Times¹

The global pandemic of 2020 is a stark reminder that the true test of leadership is not how well you do in predictable and stable times, but rather how effectively you respond to unexpected and adverse times. Severely challenging times can be the beginning of an unraveling, or they can be the opportunity for greatness. This important issue of the Journal of ICMA Pakistan is an effort to help leaders accomplish the latter, and we appreciate the opportunity to contribute a few brief thoughts on the question of leading people during COVID-19.

To provide some guidance on how to fully engage people and strengthen their resilience in uncertain times, we identified six common strategies that can help you turn this adversity into opportunity.

- 1) **Broaden the context:** View what's happening from a historical perspective. This is not the first-time humanity has faced severe challenges. Research has shown that people who first reflect on their past during stressful circumstances and tell positive stories about handling hardships are more effective in dealing with adversity and rebound more quickly.
- 2) **Defy the verdict:** People want to know the truth during difficult times. If you want your team to respond with fierce determination during periods of business adversity, you need to increase your level of communication about what is really going on. At the same time, you don't need to accept a fate that everyone is doomed. Exemplary leaders acknowledge reality, but do not dwell on the threat. They communicate confidence that solutions will be found, and they back that up with action.
- 3) **Fully commit to what's important:** Periods of adversity remind all of us of the values that are most important. During tough times, exemplary leaders make certain everyone understands the vision and purpose that guide decisions, and they seek to align people on a shared set of values.
- 4) **Take charge:** In times of adversity, you have to seize the opportunity to lead. You have to respond assertively to

moments of trial and challenge. That requires lots of innovation, trial and error, and learning from mistakes - which can be numerous in novel times. In the beginning, no one knows for sure what to do, so they all must be humble and willing to learn as they go.

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- 5) **Engage others:** Collaboration and trust are essential to building capacity to get through extreme difficulties. Nothing extraordinary was ever achieved by the leader alone or by a few elite experts. It requires a “we're all in this together” ethic. Building trust and modeling collaboration, kindness, and respect are critical to getting through this pandemic - and any other crisis you will face.
- 6) **Show you care:** Individual team members need to feel that they are appreciated for the sacrifices they are making during challenging times and that their contributions make a difference. If you want people to hang in there when times are tough and continue to give it their all, you must let them know frequent that you value them and the work that they are doing.

Adapting these six leadership strategies to your situation can enable you and your organization to take the initiative and move forward in this novel normal environment. They can help you turn adversity into opportunity and discover novel ways to thrive in a new normal.

¹ This piece is adapted from the e-book, *Turning Adversity Into Opportunity* by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. Kouzes and Posner wrote the award-winning and best-selling book *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen* and several other award-winning books on leadership.

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Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner are coauthors of the award-winning, best-selling book **The Leadership Challenge** which has sold over 2.8 million copies worldwide and is available in more than 22 languages.

They have also coauthored more than a dozen other award-winning leadership books and developed the widely used and highly acclaimed **Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)**, a 360-degree questionnaire assessing leadership behavior. The LPI has been completed by over five million people around the globe.

Jim is a fellow at the Doerr Institute for New Leaders at Rice University and has been the Dean's Executive Fellow of Leadership, Leavey School of Business, at Santa Clara University.

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