

## ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP: CONCEPTS, MODELS AND THEIR ACTUALISATION IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Mohamad Iwan Fitriani  
Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram  
[iwanfitriani@uinmataram.ac.id](mailto:iwanfitriani@uinmataram.ac.id)

### Abstrack

The need for adaptive educational leadership is increasing along with the emergence of various challenges and demands experienced by educational institutions. Using a qualitative approach, this study aims to describe the concepts, models and practices of adaptive leadership. This study found that adaptive leadership is leadership that is able to respond to challenges faced quickly, precisely and relevantly. As a model, this adaptive leadership has similarities with flexible leadership. Both of these concepts can be applied in the context of education to create adaptive and flexible educational leadership. Furthermore, the implementation of adaptive leadership in education can be applied by; context analysis, schools' leaders determine relevant strategies based on challenges faced, prepare Human Resources (HR), prioritise TEAM, determine policies, and monitor, evaluate and follow up the evaluation results. This study concludes that the adaptive leadership is needed to respond to dynamic realities as a consequence of organisational life and for unpredictable realities for the next better education quality.

Keyword: Adaptive Leadership, Flexible, Educational

### INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership plays an important role in realising the goals of educational institutions (Jäppinen, 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising that educational leadership is one of the themes that is always actual and interesting to study. This is caused by the *constant change*, *the emergence challenges* and *the unpredictable challenges* faced by the world of education which implies that the style, role or strategy applied needs to be adjusted to these constant changes and emergence challenges (Ford et al., 2021; McKimm et al., 2022).

The illustration above shows that educational leadership not only plays a role in responding to the constant change by integrating the sophistication of technology, information and communication in educational institutions, but also plays a role in responding to emergence challenges quickly and accurately for the resilience and sustainability of education in the future (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Because all these

emergence challenges have caused crisis and uncertainty in the world of education. In this context, educational leadership is expected to be able to respond to these conditions with relevant leadership styles or strategies (Ford et al., 2021) through observation, interpretation and intervention (R. A. Heifetz, 1994).

Some examples of *unpredictable challenges* that have been experienced by educational leadership are; Ebola Virus in Africa in 2004, earthquake in New Zealand in 2016, Tsunami in Japan in 2008, Earthquake accompanied by tsunami and liquefaction in Indonesia in 2018, and recently Covid in 2019. All these unpredictable challenges have caused crisis and uncertainty in educational institutions. Many schools were destroyed due to disasters and many schools were closed due to the pandemic. Consequently, the teaching and learning process is disrupted. No one knows for sure when a disaster will come and when it will stop and no one knows for sure which disaster or virus will come next. Clearly, in such uncertain conditions, educational leaders must provide solutions for the resilience and sustainability of education. This article then wants to examine Adaptive Leadership: Concept and Actualisation in Educational Institutions.

## METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted on Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara province. This research used a qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews. Researchers used semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers and principals who were determined by purposive sampling. This non-random sampling technique was used to obtain certain informants based on the quality or knowledge possessed by the informants. In this context, researchers chose individuals who could provide insight, knowledge or experience about adaptive principal leadership.

In the purposive sampling technique, informants are not based on their quantity but on the quality of information and knowledge to be provided. Therefore, the researcher first determines what needs to be known from the informants and finds individuals who can provide knowledge and experience to answer the research questions.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to obtain the desired data from

principals and teachers. An initial interview guide was developed based on the research objectives. All interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, manually recorded and audio-recorded after interviewees were informed of the study's code of ethics and operating procedures. All interviews were transcribed for analysis, and the average interview time was 30-40 minutes. In addition, the items in the semi-structured interviews were developed from adaptive leadership theory. In addition, data were also collected through certain journals or websites related to the focus of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Adaptive Leadership Concept

At least, there are two ways of understanding adaptive leadership, namely; *first*, adaptive leadership is a specific and distinctive leadership model that distinguishes it from other leadership models. For example, this first category is found in Heifetz's theory of adaptive leadership (R. A. Heifetz, 1994); *second*, Adaptive leadership is not a particular type of leadership model, but it is a paradigm related to the ways, strategies or patterns of leadership that are *agile, versatile, adaptable and flexible* which are determined by several elements, such as; the situation and conditions faced, the threats that are or will lurk, the type of position change experienced by the leader, competing values in an organisation, or the traits, behaviours, skills needed in accordance with the emergence that demands a quick and appropriate solution. From this second definition, adaptive leadership is essentially a variety of skills that are relevant in responding to the challenges faced. This second definition is found in the conception of flexible leadership from Yukl and Mashud (Yukl & Mashud, 2010).

As explained above, adaptive leadership is a unique leadership model, it has characteristics that are different from other leadership typologies. Some concepts about adaptive leadership are:

- a. Adaptive leadership relates to a mindset designed to build principals' resilience to address complex organisational challenges (Simmons, 2021).
- b. "*Adaptive leadership is about how leaders encourage people to adapt-to face and deal*

*with problems, challenges, and changes. Adaptive leadership focuses on the adaptations required of people in response to changing environments"* (Northouse, 2016, p. 11).

(Adaptive leadership is concerned with how leaders encourage people to adapt to face and deal with problems, challenges, and changes. Adaptive leadership focuses on the adaptations required of people in response to changing environments)

- c. Leadership relating to the 4 A's, namely; *Anticipation*, i.e. anticipating possible future needs, trends and options. *Articulation*, which is the articulation of anticipated needs to build collective understanding and support for action. *Adaptation*, adaptation aimed at continuous learning and adjusting responses as necessary. *Accountability*, this relates to transparency in the decision-making process and openness to the challenges faced (Ramalingam et al., 2020).

Another term similar to adaptive leadership is flexible leadership. The term flexible leadership can be considered as an old and new term at the same time. Yukl & Mashud (2010) stated; "*Flexible and adaptive leadership involves changing behaviour in appropriate ways as the situation changes* (P. 81)". Many other terms refer to the behavioural characteristics of leaders in response to changing situations such as; flexible, agile, versatile, adaptable (Yukl & Mashud, 2010; Kaiser, Lindberg, & Craig, 2007). Burke & Cooper (2004) also confirmed the importance of flexibility and adaptiveness of leaders (managers or administrators) to respond to changes faced by an organisation. Then, Flexible leadership is considered a new term when it is associated with emergence challenges faced by leaders, such as the covid-19 case because Unesco calls these challenges *unprecedented challenges* (Unesco, 2020).

Based on the illustration above, an adaptive or flexible leader is required to;

(1) respond to *unusual events* that have caused immediate crisis and emerging threats with adaptive leaders (Yukl & Mashud, 2010); (2) accurately diagnose the situation at hand to determine an appropriate and effective response or respond to different and changing contextual demands by adjusting leadership styles, methods and approaches (Kaiser et.al, 2010); (3) respond to dynamics that occur continuously and systemically (Yawson and Greiman, 2016). Flexible leaders are essentially responsive leaders who demonstrate their responsiveness to the situation at hand (Leithwood,

Harris & Hopkins, 2020). Then, specifically, Yukl & Mashud (2010) provide several steps, namely;

Table 1

## Practical Guideline of Flexible leadership (Yukl &amp; Mashud, 2010)

NO	Practical Guideline of Flexible leadership
1	Monitor external changes and identify emerging threats and opportunities. appear)
	Identify relevant strategies, decisions, and actions for responding to external changes. respond to external changes)
3	Articulate an appealing vision of the likely benefits from proposed changes (Articulate an appealing vision of the likely benefits from proposed changes)
4	Identify reasons for resistance to change and seek to convert opponents to change agents. trying to turn opponents into agents of change)
5	Build optimism for a new strategy but balance it with the recognition that change will not be easy. with the recognition that change will not be easy)
6	Monitor progress for the effects of major changes and make any necessary adjustments. necessary adjustments).
7	Keep people informed about the progress of change and maintain commitment to it (Keep people informed about the progress of change). change and maintain a commitment to it)
8	Use information about the outcomes of strategic decisions to refine mental models. refining the mental model)

Based on the illustration above, a *flexible educational leader* is a leader who is able to respond quickly and effectively to the emergence conditions being faced by facilitating flexible learning through various relevant roles with various strategies. An interesting statement comes from Drysdale & Gurr (2017) which states:

*... there are practices that are likely to remain constant whereas the capabilities that underpin these practices can change. We have for some time used a seven domain framework to help order our knowledge base about educational leadership: understanding the context, setting direction, developing the organisation, developing people, improving teaching and learning, influencing, and leading self (p. 131).*

## 2. *Adaptive-Flexible Leadership Model*

In this article, the term adaptive leadership refers to the work of Heifetz and his colleagues. The following is an overview of adaptive leadership.



Figure 1: Adaptive Leadership Model of R. Heifetz & Laurie  
(Northouse, 2016, p. 261)

Based on the figure above, there are two challenges faced by a leader in his leadership, namely *technical* and *adaptive challenges*. The first relates to challenges that can be overcome with solutions or strategies that have been prepared in advance, and the second relates to various situations and conditions that demand solutions in ways that cannot be predicted in advance (R. A. Heifetz, 1994), so that a leader needs adaptive leadership (R. Heifetz & Laurie, 2001) or flexible leadership (Yukl & Mashud, 2010). This means that there are normal conditions that can be overcome with the type or style of leadership that the leader has mastered (Alvunger, 2015; Rumeli et al., 2022) and there are abnormal conditions such as; uncertainty, emergence, crisis, *turbulent time* that requires *agility*, *creativity* and *adaptability* of a leader in his leadership (Ansell et al., 2021; Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022; Chua Reyes et al., 2022; Yang & Huang, 2021).

Focusing on technical challenges (normal conditions) and ignoring adaptive challenges (abnormal conditions) will lead to failure in leadership (R. A. Heifetz, 1994). In addition, an important element in adaptive leadership is leadership behaviour as described below.

Table II: Adaptive Leadership Behaviours (Northouse, 2016)

No.	Practical guide	Definition
1	Get on the balcony	This is an illustration where a leader is on a balcony in order to have a clear view of what is happening.
2	Identify the challenge	A leader must be able to analyse challenges faced appropriately
3	Regulate distress	This stage deals with how a leader creates a supportive environment, provides direction, protection, conflict management to overcome problems, pressure or stress in the organisation.
4	Maintain discipline and attention	This relates to the need for leaders to encourage people to focus on work.
5	Give the Work Back to the People	<i>Giving work back to the people</i> means that a leader is mindful of when to step back and let people do the work that they need to do.
6	Protect leadership voices from below	This step relates to maintaining leadership by paying attention to the voices of others, be it subordinates or the voices of those who are marginalised

In addition to the steps described above, other steps of adaptive leadership are proposed by Dunn (2020) as follows:

- a. *Developing a mindset of acceptance* (Dunn, 2020). This relates to a leader who is willing to accept the complexity of an uncertain, non-static and always dynamic environment in which he/she leads or works.

This mindset allows a leader to be alert in the face of the unexpected.

- b. Developing situations with action* (Dunn, 2020). An adaptive mindset understands that taking the first step is important, because by taking that first step we as leaders will find the most appropriate second step. This means that situations are developed with action, not wishful thinking.
- c. Focus on Teams, not Individuals* (Dunn, 2020). An adaptive leader looks for causes that hinder the process being carried out, for example the learning process through TEAMS, not individually they collectively try to solve it.
- d. Designing the improvement process* (Dunn, 2020). This step is done by keeping the process as short as possible, the aim being to prototype the practice by minimising the resources required to discover quickly, whether the proposed practice proves effective or not.
- e. Maintaining psychological comfort* (Dunn, 2020). In teams with high psychological safety, teammates feel safe to take risks around their team members. This last step is also related to how to increase confidence to take steps that may have risks.

### 3. Implementation of adaptive leadership in education

In the context of education, the application of adaptive leadership can take the following steps, namely:

#### 1. Context analysis

This step can be related to what Yukl & Mashud call "*Monitor external changes and identify emerging threats and opportunities*". This analysis is concerned with monitoring the external challenges faced by the educational institution and identifying emerging threats and opportunities to be selected (Yukl & Mashud, 2010). In addition, the context analysis aims to determine whether the challenges faced are technical challenges or adaptive challenges, as the two challenges are different from each other (Northouse, 2016).

In the Indonesian context, for example, the context analysis aims to address the



real challenges faced whether the school is in a pandemic condition or not, whether the school is in a natural disaster condition or not and so on. The earthquake in Lombok in 2018 followed by Covid-19 in 2019 has caused school leaders to conduct a context analysis to determine relevant leadership strategies. For example, one of the school principals, Mrs Sabariah, stated:

"Adaptive leadership is needed for a leader, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic. A leader is required to be able to analyse the context or reality faced quickly and accurately, because it will determine the next step" (Interview, 23/04/2020).

Another informant Mrs S. Ida Royani added:

". analysis of the situation and context is carried out to find out whether

the school is in a zone that is prohibited for the face to face system because it is in the yellow, orange, red zone or is allowed because it is in the green zone while still following the covid-19 protocol (Interview, 23/04/2020).

2. The principal determines relevant strategies based on the challenges faced Context analysis is not enough, principals are also expected to follow up the context analysis with the determination of relevant strategies. In other words, the strategies chosen are tailored to the challenges faced. For example, one principal, Mr Hartono, stated:

"A good strategy is based on its ability to address the problem at hand. Therefore, the solution must be in accordance with the problem at hand. For example, the strategy when a school faces an earthquake disaster is relatively different from a school that is facing Covid-19," (Interview, 23/04/2020).

3. Preparing human resources

Adaptive leadership, like other types of leadership, requires competent human resources. Therefore, in its implementation, adaptive leadership needs to be supported by human resource development. This can also be called "*developing people*".

An educational institution that wants to adapt to the Industrial Revolution 4.0, for example, requires HR competence in the field of technology. Consequently, leaders need human resources that support this goal. One of the teachers, Mr Fajri S., stated;

"Competent human resources are needed to support the leadership of the principal, for example, when the leader wants to implement Flexible learning or online learning, then teachers must be able to master applications that support flexible learning such as Zoom, Google Meet and other video conferences" (Interview, 24/04/2022).

#### 4. Putting the TEAM first

Adaptive leadership requires the co-operation of all members. This is because education is a system, consisting of various components that are interconnected to achieve goals. The many components of education require teamwork. Here, leaders are required to develop a TEAM or apply a systemic approach. In this regard, Northouse states that: "*Problems are viewed as complex with many facets, dynamic in that they can evolve and change, and connected to others in a web of relationships*" (Northouse, 2016, p. 259). Based on this concept, the majority of principals stated that a strong TEAM will determine the success of the school (Khaled, Noto, Interview, 23 April 2022). This is also in line with Dunn (Dunn, 2020) who emphasises the importance of Tim in a leadership.

#### 5. Create and socialise policies

The role of a leader is to make strategic policies related to the situation at hand. After that, the leader socialises the implemented policy to teachers, education personnel, parents and students. A deputy principal, Mr Amin Kutbi, stated that;

"The dissemination of this policy is carried out to provide information about the policies implemented in schools to teachers, parents and students. This dissemination can also be understood as the execution of policies that have been made by the principal (Interview, 24/04/2022).

## 6. Monitoring, evaluation and *follow-up of strategies* or policies

Policy execution requires dissemination to all school members, parents and students. After the policy is disseminated and executed, the principal then monitors and evaluates the implemented policy to improve the next process. In general, primary school principals in Lombok conduct evaluation by: what has been done and what are the results; what has not been done and why. For example, one principal, Ibu Sabariah, explained her experience in implementing adaptive leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic:

From the results of the temporary evaluation, teachers need a special guidebook for flexible learning and a special guide for parents in accompanying children while learning from home (Interview, 24/04/2022).

The illustration above shows that the Principal needs a sense of emergence and responsive to emergence with context analysis. This step supports the practical guide proposed by Yukl & Mashud (2010) in which an *adaptive leader*. Similarly, Drysdale & Gurr (2017) stated that *understanding the context* is the first role before *setting direction* for the success of the educational process (Drysdale & Gurr, 2017). *Understanding the context* requires a *sense of emergence* from a leader.

Context analysis is conducted to accurately diagnose the situation at hand and then identify appropriate responses. In addition, this context analysis is strengthened by analysing government regulations so that principals can get a legal umbrella for the policies they will take or the roles they will play. This context analysis is necessary because it will determine the next steps such as the strategies to be implemented, the parties involved, and the monitoring and evaluation that will be chosen.

## CONCLUSION

This research concludes that adaptive and flexible principal leadership is leadership that responds to situations and conditions quickly and appropriately. Adaptive leadership is needed not only to respond to challenges that are being faced or that will be faced (*anticipation*), but also to respond quickly to challenges that cannot

be predicted in advance. That is why, in adaptive leadership, there are terms such as technical challenges and adaptive challenges. Some adaptive or flexible leadership theories from experts (Drysdale & Gurr, 2017; R. Heifetz & Laurie, 2001; Yukl & Mashud, 2010) and others can be translated in the context of education to realise ideal adaptive leadership.

## REFERENCE

- Alvunger, D. (2015). Towards new forms of educational leadership? The local implementation of *förstelärare* in Swedish schools. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 2015(3), 30103. <https://doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v1.30103>
- Ansell, C., Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic as a game changer for public administration and leadership? The need for robust governance responses to turbulent problems. *Public Management Review*, 23(7), 949-960. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1820272>
- Balasubramanian, S., & Fernandes, C. (2022). Confirmation of a crisis leadership model and its effectiveness: Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Cogent Business & Management*, 9(1), 2022824. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2021.2022824>
- Chua Reyes, V., Hamid, O., & Hardy, I. (2022). When reforms make things worse: School leadership responses to poverty, disasters, and cultures of crises in the Philippine education system. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 25(2), 331-344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2021.2009038>
- Drysdale, L., & Gurr, D. (2017). Leadership in Uncertain Times. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 45(2), 131.
- Dunn, R. (2020). *Adaptive Leadership: Leading Through Complexity*. 48, 31-38.
- Ford, J., Ford, L., & Polin, B. (2021). Leadership in the Implementation of Change: Functions, Sources, and Requisite Variety. *Journal of Change Management*, 21(1), 87-119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2021.1861697>

- Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Heifetz, R., & Laurie, D. L. (2001). "The work of leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, 79, 131-141. <https://hbr.org/2001/12/the-work-of-leadership>.
- Jäppinen, A.-K. (2017). Analysis of leadership dynamics in educational settings during times of external and internal change. *Educational Research*, 59(4), 460-477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2017.1376591>
- McKimm, J., Ramani, S., Forrest, K., Bishop, J., Findyartini, A., Mills, C., Hassanien, M., Al- Hayani, A., Jones, P., Nadarajah, V. D., & Radu, G. (2022). Adaptive leadership during challenging times: Effective strategies for health professions educators: AMEE Guide No. 148. *Medical Teacher*, 0(0), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2022.2057288>
- Northouse, P. G. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (7th ed.). Sage Publication.
- Ramalingam, B., Nabarro, D., Oqubay, A., Carnall, D. R., & Wild, L. (2020, September 11). 5 Principles to Guide Adaptive Leadership. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2020/09/5-principles-to-guide-adaptive-leadership>
- Rumeli, M. S., Rami, A. A. M., Wahat, N. W. A., & Samsudin, S. (2022). Distributive Leadership Roles for Primary School Teachers' Efficiency in New Norm: Focus Group Analysis. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 18(1), 217-230. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=pandemic+leadership+principal&ft=on&id=EJ1336233>
- Simmons, K. (2021). *Building the Endurance to Lead*. ASCD. <https://www.ascd.org/blogs/building-the-endurance-to-lead>
- Yang, B., & Huang, C. (2021). 'Turning crisis into opportunity in response to COVID-19: Experience from a Chinese University and future prospects. *Studies in Higher Education*, 46(1), 121-132.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1859687>

Yukl, G., & Mahsud, R. (2010). Why flexible and adaptive leadership is essential.

*Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 62(2), 81-93.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019835>

Yukl, G., & Mashud, R. (2010). Why flexible and adaptive leadership is essential. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 62, 81–93.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019835>