

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP: LEADING THE CHANGE OF THE COVID-19 ENDEMIC ERA

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 has brought a huge change to the world in various sectors and industries. Among the major impact of Covid-19 is the changes in the execution of a country's education system. School leaders had to deal with various issues and challenges which arises from this polemic. This can be seen through the changes in the medium and teaching methods used at the school level as well as other educational institutions. School leaders should take a pro-active stance to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning. Therefore, this paper describes about adaptive leadership approach, building resilience and distribution of leadership responsibilities. In addition, this paper also outlines some new culture fostering practices of the Covid-19 endemic era to be practiced by school leaders. The results give the impression that school leaders need to take action and shape the school climate in order to make the school ecosystem able to face this crisis collaboratively.

Keywords: Covid-19, school leaders, adaptive leadership, pandemic, endemic

INTRODUCTION

The rapid changes in education brought on by the coronavirus endemic continue to pose extraordinary challenges for school leaders. The endemic disrupted education for students as school closures occurred, and all teaching moved to a virtual space (Morgan, 2020). School leaders were forced to rethink the nature and degree of change necessary to support teachers and students in adopting new technologies and technical skills to navigate teaching and learning in a virtual environment (Kaden, 2020). Additionally, school leaders have seen a need to address the emotional well-being of teachers and students who are now themselves apprehensive and fearful about the future of schooling as the pandemic continues (Netolicky, 2020). School leaders are now being tested in ways that they have not been in the past. By adopting an adaptive approach to leadership, school leaders can build resiliency and capacity for their school communities to weather future disruptions cause by the endemic.

Through a press conference, the Senior Minister of Defence on 30 November 2021 stated that the Government will refine the measures to announce the "Transition to Endemic" phase following the development of the Omicron variant that has spread around the world. Through the ruling, the MOE has announced that starting 03 October 2021, schools will be opened in stages according to the VAT Phase with the SOP set. Thus, the MOE will implement a new system which only involves 50% of student attendance to school from the total enrolment of the week rotation. Each school class will be divided into two groups, namely face-to-face lesson and hybrid, which take turns every week. Both groups will take turns to attend school according to the set week to ensure that face-to-face lesson can continue in a safer capacity for students. For students with special needs, full boarding schools, international examinations, schools with fewer students are among those not involved in the rotation of this class (Press conference of the Senior Minister of Education, 12 September 2021).

The MCO (Malaysian movement control order) implemented has had several effects on the running of the education system in Malaysia. The existing education system that implements face-to-face teaching has now turned into online teaching in addition to structured learning using modules. This makes the transformation in the education system in the face of the Covid-19 crisis by prioritizing online teaching applications a priority for teachers in Malaysia through various platforms (Rafiee Jamian et al., 2020).

In addition, school leaders have been aware of the fact that there is a need to address the emotional well-being of schoolchildren who are now worried and fearful about the future of schooling as the epidemic continues (Netolicky, 2020). School leaders are now being tested in ways they have never gone through in the past. By using an adaptive approach to leadership, school leaders are able to build resilience and capacity for their schools to face current and future issues and challenges posed by this Covid-19 epidemic. Adaptive leadership also assists them to offer their effective supports and build the program team in making required changes at schools (Laur, Agarwal, Mukerji, Goulbourne, Baranek, Pus & Bhattacharyya, 2021) through intervention plans to bridge a perceived gap between students existing at schools (Hulme, Beauchamp, Clarke & Hamilton, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adaptive leadership

Adaptive leadership model has been introduced by Heifetz and Linsky at Harvard University (2002, 2009). According to Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), who pioneered adaptive leadership theory, realized that the single-figure, top-down leadership model is outdated and impractical. Their findings, showed no single person can solve all of the problems, which brings in the need for adaptive leadership. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) asserted adaptive leadership is an emerging model that embraces change, experimentation and innovation. It is also a practical approach to organizational problem solving that guides school leaders in discovering and focusing on the critical components of a school management while discarding what can be done without.

Heifetz and Linsky indicated the adaptive leadership model goes against traditional problem-solving methods. In this model, there are two types of problems: technical and adaptive. Technical issues rely on protocol, procedures, rules and regulations to solve them. Adaptive challenges, on the other hand, depend on dynamic, people-focused solutions. The implementation of adaptive leadership enable the school leaders to create creative solutions to strengthen the organization and ensure its long-term success to fulfil the current education demands. This is due to almost everything need to reconfigure, adaptation, capability and effective responses (Linsky & Lawrence, 2011). Therefore, leaders that apply adaptive leadership theory go beyond simply addressing issues and creating solutions (Nelson & Squires, 2017) but they creatively predict issues and identify their root causes increase their skills at judging to make good miscellany which risks are worth taking and which should be avoided at all costs (Choflet, Packard & Stashower, 2021). These allow them to develop the essential adaptive skills needed to ensure their organisation has the best leadership possible.

Besides that, adaptive leaders can also focus on making key decisions and think reflectively and rationally (Grissom & Condon, 2021). Hence, they also being able to define their leadership style by being open to input, prepared for inevitable change, adept at adapting to problems, and agile enough to alter course when necessary (Tollman, Keenan, Mingardon, Dosik, Rizvi & Hurder, 2021). Meanwhile, in terms of difficulty, adaptive leadership may also be distinguished (Ford, Ford & Polin, 2021). As for example, technological difficulty is addressed with a one-time solution, but an adaptive challenge requires time and may necessitate organisational culture adjustments to be more focus, being ready and willing to work on changes which has a high rate of success (Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guàrdia & Koole, 2021).

Four Main Principles of Adaptive Leadership

1. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize your own feelings and those of other people. With this awareness, an adaptive leader is able to build trust with other participants and foster quality relationships.

2. Organizational justice

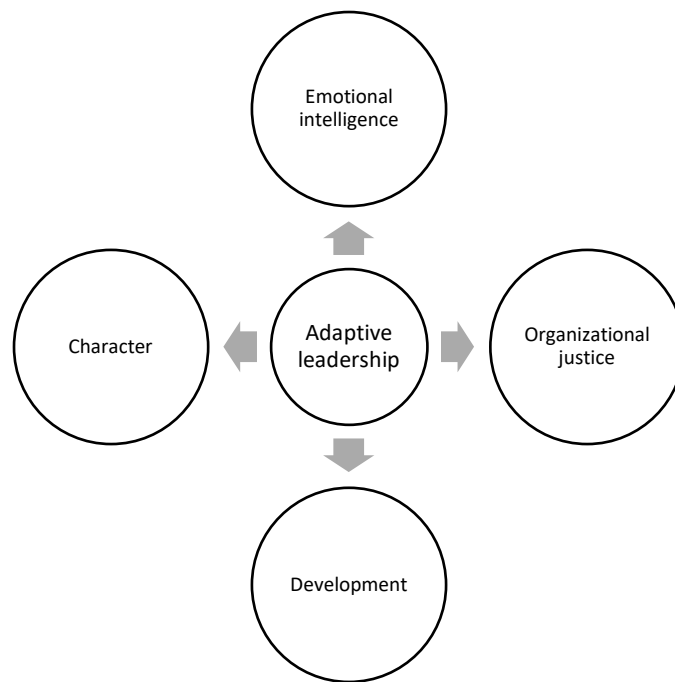
Another fundamental principle of adaptive leadership is fostering a culture of honesty. Adaptive leaders know the best policies to introduce for the good of the organization. They also know the best ways to introduce these changes so that people embrace them. Adaptive leaders are willing to accommodate other peoples' views, hence, assuring them that they are valued and respected.

3. Development

Adaptive leadership entails learning new things. If one technique is not yielding desired results, an adaptive leader goes out of his or her way to discover new strategies that can work. With new techniques, both the employees and the company at large will experience growth and development.

4. Character

Adaptive leadership is about having a deep sense of character, being transparent and creative. Adaptive leaders may not always be right but they earn the respect of those they work with and practice what they recommend.



Heifetz, R. A., Grashow, A., Linsky, M., (2009). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Press.

Challenges in Implementing Adaptive Leadership

As predicted by Heifetz, adaptive leadership does bring a couple of challenges. This leadership model is all about experimenting, discovering new knowledge, and making numerous adjustments throughout your company. It is only through a change of attitudes and adjustment of policies that you will manage to sustain changes and thrive.

However, shifting individuals' values, beliefs, and perceptions is usually more difficult than flossing a cat's teeth. Making changes requires you to be somewhat disloyal to your past. For instance, if you want to implement a new marketing strategy, then you have to first embrace the fact that your current marketing techniques are ineffective. Most senior executives are reluctant to let go of life-long policies that got their companies started. However, sticking to your old ways can hinder the benefits that could result from new methods.

Another challenge that adaptive leadership presents is that it sets the stage for different forms of resistance. This could be from your employees, other company stakeholders, or clients. The most common methods that people use to hinder adaptive change are by marginalizing, diverting, or attacking. If you notice any of said activities, chances are that your employees are hesitant to adopt that new policy you're trying to implement.

Perhaps the greatest challenge brought about by adaptive leadership is the unwillingness of leaders to listen to other people's opinions. As explained earlier, adaptive leadership is less about power and more about teamwork. In theory, adaptive leaders should be willing to listen and adapt recommendations provided by co-workers or clients.

In reality, however, only a few select leaders are willing to listen to individuals who disagree with them. What such leaders fail to understand is that listening does not necessarily mean abandoning individual goals. It simply means that you're better informed about your employees' needs. Therefore, you can work more effectively to execute changes.

1. Lead Adaptively

The Covid-19 pandemic has rapidly changed the pattern of the school system in Malaysia and around the world. Thus, technology-assisted teaching is the main option for reopening school sessions virtually (Kaden, 2020). These drastic changes demand that school leaders move in line with current needs that require change to be implemented (Northouse, 2019). This situation urges school leaders to lead the changes by using different approaches in order to achieve the equivalent goals. The ability of school leaders to adapt situational leadership practices during this phase of rapid change are governed by their abilities to work on precise ideas and action plans (Pedroso, Siason & Tangco-Siason, 2021). Adaptive leadership is needed to be implemented at schools or any organisation as it is the cornerstone of organizational effectiveness (Solomona Nebiyu & Kassahun, 2021).

2. Build Resilience

One of the challenges school leaders face when dealing with this epidemic crisis is building and maintaining relationships. School leaders need to come forward to increase awareness of social-emotional well-being for their school people when faced with ambiguity and uncertainty in the community (Sommer et al., 2016). By taking the opportunity to communicate virtually, school leaders need to build the resilience and self-efficacy of school people in order to properly implement the vision and mission of the school. As resilience is higher, the individual becomes more intelligent, able to adapt and develop a sense of stability (Kuntz et al., 2017; Teo et al., 2017). In short, by building resilience and deepening social relationships, school leaders will help their teachers and community to see a situation that occurs as an opportunity to challenge themselves to adapt and generate their own resilience with the support of those around them. Being resilience enable the school leaders to develop pragmatic, versatile and personally reassuring approaches to communication with parents, staff, pupils, and a range of external agencies, all of which were also facing extraordinary circumstances with varying degrees of resilience (Beauchamp, Hulme, Clarke, Hamilton & Harvey, 2021)

3. Distribute Leadership Responsibilities

To drive the excellence of a school, a school leader does not only rely on his or her own abilities, but also needs the support of other parties. Thus, the distribution of leadership responsibilities can be the basis for cooperation as well as forging relationships in implementing intervention plans in an integrated manner (Kuntz et al., 2017; Raelin, 2016). In addition, school leaders who adopt an adaptive leadership approach better understand how trust, flexibility, and autonomy encourage existing expertise to grow, which can motivate others to take creative approaches in addressing unexpected challenges and needs as they arise (Kuntz et al., 2017). By mobilizing individuals to collectively address challenges, school leaders have the opportunity to shift and change existing practices and thinking (Northouse, 2019; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). In addition, when systems of responsibility are distributed in schools, adaptive expertise allows the school leaders and the teachers to reflect and overcome the novelty and quickly regaining a high level of performance at schools (Grunefeld, Prins, van Tartwijk & Wubbels, 2021). Besides that, reflective practice also helpful to train adaptive expertise among teachers and school leaders by inviting critical dialogue about cases and experiences occur in helping the school community to recuperate to the highest level (Siti Noor Aneeis Hashim & Nurahimah Mohd Yusoff, 2021).

Pandemic and Endemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly created major shifts in human existence today. Norms of living, ways of interaction and the process of just being and becoming differ dramatically now, compared to pre-pandemic days. The pandemic refers to an epidemic that strikes in a larger scope, not limited to a community or district alone, threatening a wider area such as a state, country, continent or perhaps even the whole world if left destitute.

Because it strikes in a wide scope, a pandemic outbreak is a high-risk threat and is often talked about, due to its effects that can kill many people in a short time. WHO more specifically defines a pandemic as "the spread of a new disease around the world". On March 11, 2020, the WHO officially declared the COVID-19 epidemic a pandemic due to the global spread and severity of the disease.

Yet today, numerous nations around the world are still dealing with the Corona battle. In education perspective, will this pandemic affect Learning? As we move to a new normal endemic, what are the changes in teaching and learning that can be expected. Endemic is a term that refers to a disease or epidemic that always exists in a particular area, district, region or population, including in a larger scope such as a country for example.

Through a press conference, the Senior Minister of Defence on 30 November 2021 stated that the Government will refine the measures to announce the "Transition to Endemic" phase following the development of the Omicron variant that has spread around the world. The table below briefly details the differences between pandemic and endemic characteristics.

Pandemic	Endemic
The spread of new infectious diseases around the world.	A virus or disease still exists in a community or in a place, yet people have adapted and learned to live with it.
Spreads fast without being controlled.	Outbreaks that exist and are controlled in a particular population.
A curfew was issued by the government.	Outdoor activities have been opened in stages according to the current status.
All Industries including educational institutions are closed completely.	The industrial sector and educational institutions are opened with certain SOPs.
Completely online learning.	Face -to -face and online learning.

As it has threatened human lives, WHO has declared this condition as a pandemic (Jafri Malin Abdullah et al., 2020). In the wake of this declaration, most countries have implemented curfews in an effort to curb the spread of Covid-19 from continuing to spread widely. All economic and social activities have been suspended for a while to ensure control of the epidemic from spreading further. At the same time, some authorities are working on clinical prevention measures with the manufacture of vaccines.

Malaysia has also taken the initiative to overcome the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic. The Malaysian government has already declared the first Malaysian Movement Control Order (PKP) nationwide on 18 March 2020 (Rashid & Dorashid, 2020). However, PKP has gone through eight phases consisting of the first phase which is 18 March 2020 to 31 March 2020. The second phase on 1 April 2020 until 14 April 2020, followed by the third phase on 15 April 2020 until 28 April 2020. Then the fourth phase has begun on 29 April 2020 until 3 May 2020 then followed by the Conditional Movement Control Order (PKPB) in the fifth phase which is on 4 May 2020 until 11 May 2020. The sixth phase began on 12 May 2020 until 9 June 2020 accompanied by the Rehabilitation Movement Control Order (PKPP) (Sharifah Rohayah Sheikh Dawood & Som, 2020). After going through a prolonged PKP phase, in January 2021, the Malaysian government gazetted the Conditional Movement Control Order (PKPB) for certain areas only and then moved to the Rehabilitation Movement Control Order (PKPP) phase.

DISCUSSION

Covid-19 Endemic Era New Cultural Fertilization Practices

Various educational organizations are pro-actively exploring practical methods that allow for an appropriate method as a response to a rapidly changing and complex world. Although some educational organizations have proposed some basic principles and guidelines, there is still a lack of practical suggestions in the form of practice. Practical adaptation is in the form of a framework and capabilities that encompass a set of principles and practices. As the authors conduct general observations of school leaders throughout the crisis facing this past Covid-19 outbreak, then there is a need to use adaptive working methods, some key principles that school leaders need to consider;

- **Develop open thinking.**

We need to accept all forms of complexity that arise in our work environment. As school leaders, we need to accept the ambiguity and uncertainty in our systems and ecosystems. In this way, school leaders begin to realize the fact that the system being built does not remain static and requires us as school leaders to take a responsive and dynamic attitude (Muhd Zulhilmi Haron et al., 2020). This open-mindedness allows us to deal with the unexpected, as we accept these situations as part of our daily work facing any form of complexity.

- **Develop the situation through action.**

Dynamic school leaders understand that solutions are being developed rapidly despite sourcing an incomplete evidence base. There are inevitable uncertainties with complex situations when facing school sessions during as well as endemic eras. Therefore, school leaders need to be prepared to develop the situation through swift action before the situation gets worse. An adaptive mind that is able to understand the current situation is the first step is important, as by taking the first step, we then find the next step that is most appropriate and effective.

- **Focus on the team, not the individual.**

A responsive school leader continues to identify barriers that may be obstacles to the development of the teacher team and work to resolve them. A responsive school leader supports a team of teachers to make rapid intervention measures in order to achieve the goal of implementing teacher instruction during the Covid-19 pandemic. This action can be achieved through practices such as deep listening, self-awareness and commitment to others. We need to realize that individual intelligence influences team performance, yet so team collective intelligence is far more important. Accordingly, it is easier to change team behaviour rather than individual behaviour as a driver of excellence in education.

- **Design an improvement process.**

School leaders need to implement a process of continuous improvement by leveraging existing resources in designing an effective action. In this regard, school leaders in each state and district try to share their best practices in the success of teachers' teaching. In addition, the authorities in the education sector have also proposed several intervention plans that are appropriate to the circumstances and resources around the school through reflective practice to nourish their teaching professional development during the Covid-19 pandemic (Siti Noor Aneis Hashim & Nurahimah Mohd Yusoff, 2021).

- **Foster safe emotions**

Safe emotions refer to an individual's perception of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks or the belief that teams are safe to take risks in the face of being seen as ignorant, incompetent, negative, or even disruptive. In a team that has a safe level of emotion, teammates feel safe to take risks around their team members. They feel confident that no one on the team will embarrass or punish others for admitting mistakes, asking questions, or offering new ideas (Edmondson, 2004). This is expressed through certain behaviors such as encouraging teachers to express opinions and ideas, encouraging collaborative decision making, supporting information sharing and teamwork (Muhd Zulhilmi Haron et al., 2021) and not judging (Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro & Farh, 2011).

Pandemic Implications on the Education System

In December 2019, pneumonia of unknown cause jolted Wuhan city of Hubei province in China, spread across Asia and the world like wildfire, and, by the end of January 2020, was declared as a public health emergency of international concern by the WHO.¹ New coronavirus (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 or SARS-CoV-2) was identified as the cause of this disease and was named COVID-19 by the WHO. The symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough and breathing difficulties and can lead to death. These symptoms appear similar to common influenza, but the spread is way far speedier. Despite its low fatality as compared with severe acute respiratory syndrome, its high infection nature has led to a contagion of fear worldwide. Originated in China, the COVID-19 has now been spread across many other countries and has escalated as a global pandemic.² As of 9 April 2020, the COVID-19 outbreaks reached 203 countries, affecting 1 476 819 persons, with 87 816 deaths (84 477 of which are outside China).

In Malaysia, the first COVID-19 case was detected on 25 January in travellers from China arriving via Singapore.³ The reported cases in Malaysia remained relatively low until the first wave of cases in late February. After the religious gathering held in Kuala Lumpur in late February and early March, localised clusters began to emerge in Malaysia, and within weeks, Malaysia recorded the largest cumulative number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Southeast Asia, and by 13 April 2020, the total number of confirmed infections in the country raised to 4817 with a death toll of 77 cases.

During the MCO Phase 1 period, all schools and educational institutions were completely closed and the education system in Malaysia was held entirely online, is through online learning only. No face-to-face classes can be conducted to ensure the safety of teachers and students. Challenges for educators are beginning to be felt in the syllabus layout and effective delivery methods. At the beginning of the implementation of online learning, various opinions and views were thrown to teachers, school leaders and the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE).

In this regard, the MOE has issued a series of Guidelines for the Operation and Management of School Opening to ensure that student learning is not affected during school closures. The first guideline issued on 13 March 2021 is the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Prevention of Coronavirus Infection 2019 (COVID-19) in MOE schools and the latest guideline is the School Management and Operation Guideline 3.0 issued on 24 September 2021. These guidelines apply to all primary and secondary schools including Vocational Colleges and Form Six Colleges under the MOE and Private Educational Institutions (IPS) registered with the MOE.

Moving on to Phase 2, learning is still done online and only classes that are involved with important examinations such as SPM and STPM are allowed to go to school. The students involved are allowed to go to school but with strict SOPs for smooth learning to face the examination. Subsequently, through Phase 3, all educational institutions under the MOE will be opened in stages with the determination and risk assessment set by the MOE. Later, in Phase 4, which is the National Rehabilitation Plan (PPN) Phase, all educational institutions are fully opened with the current risk assessment and assessment set by the MOE. The following table describes the phases that Malaysia went through during the PKP and PPN period.

NATIONAL REHABILITATION PLAN PHASES

Phase	Action
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">All educational institutions are closed.All teaching and learning activities are online only.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">All educational institutions are closed.All teaching and learning activities are online onlyOnly examination classes will be allowed into the school
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">All educational institutions under the MOE are opened in stages with the determination and risk assessment set by the MOE.
4 PPN	<ul style="list-style-type: none">All educational institutions are FULLY opened with current risk assessments and assessments set by the MOE.

CONCLUSION

Leading change in school organizations to become more adaptive requires school leaders to develop high interpersonal skills and competencies. School leaders need to develop their stance on the adjustments that need to be made by constantly looking for the best solutions in their unique school context. Complex adaptations require school leaders to provide valuable tools in addressing the various emerging educational issues. There is no denying that complexity has always plagued our education system, not to mention that the Covid-19 pandemic situation has increased complexity and uncertainty even more significantly in the Covid-19 endemic era.

An adaptive stance is an intellectual stance that establishes the prerequisites for adaptation and certain patterns in making the right decisions in complex situations. Adaptation in the implementation of operations in schools is important to develop school people to

the current situation and be able to work through complex situations. In addition, this stance builds school children who are able to adapt quickly to rapidly changing circumstances and seize previously unexpected opportunities.

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