

**Adaptive Leadership as Leadership Strategy on Curriculum Change:
a Case Study in XYZ School**

Ester Abigail Tanio, Budi Wibawanta

Universitas Pelita Harapan

esterabigailtanio@gmail.com , budi.wibawanta@uph.edu

ABSTRACT

As curriculum change is inevitable in education, the principal plays an important role in the process of curriculum change. The importance of the right leadership strategy in implementing curriculum changes in a school is very crucial. Adaptive leadership is one of leadership strategy that can be applied by principal as the school hinders with curriculum change. This study is qualitative research with the case study method in XYZ School, in which the principal applied the adaptive leadership as his strategy on curriculum change. The results showed that the implementation of adaptive leadership at XYZ School has supported the process of curriculum change. The principals are able to support the teachers on their role as change implementer, feedback giver and collaborator.

Keywords: Adaptive Leadership, Curriculum, Change

ABSTRAK

Perubahan kurikulum merupakan hal yang tidak dapat dihindari dalam dunia pendidikan dan kepala sekolah memegang peranan penting dalam proses perubahan kurikulum. Pentingnya strategi kepemimpinan yang tepat dalam mengimplementasikan perubahan kurikulum di sekolah menjadi sangat krusial. Kepemimpinan adaptif merupakan salah satu strategi kepemimpinan yang dapat diterapkan oleh kepala sekolah dalam menghadapi perubahan kurikulum. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus di Sekolah XYZ, dimana kepala sekolah menerapkan kepemimpinan adaptif sebagai strateginya dalam perubahan kurikulum. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan kepemimpinan adaptif di Sekolah XYZ telah mendukung proses perubahan kurikulum. Kepala sekolah mampu mendukung para guru dalam perannya sebagai pelaksana perubahan, pemberi umpan balik, dan kolaborator.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Adaptif, Kurikulum, Perubahan

INTRODUCTION

There are many changes happening in education world nowadays, and schools need to be able to adapt to these changes. One way to do this is to ensure that principals as school leaders have the right leadership strategies to manage these changes. Curriculum change is one of the most frequent occurrences in education. Therefore, schools must be able to adapt themselves quickly and appropriately in order to continue to provide good services to their students.

Adaptive leadership is one form of strategy that can be used in dealing with curriculum changes. Adaptive leadership can be summarized as a change in behavior that is appropriate when the situation changes. Other terms synonymous with

adaptive leadership are “flexible”, “adaptable”, “agile”, “versatile” - but all aim to describe leaders who are able to accurately understand a particular situation and modify their behavior accordingly (Aldhaheri, 2020, 2).

In adaptive leadership theory, this leadership is an appropriate strategy in dealing with adaptive challenges. Adaptive challenges themselves have four main patterns, namely the gap between espoused values and actual behavior, showing commitment to competition, calling for the unspeakable and work avoidance (Heifetz et al., 2009, 72). These adaptive challenges are not challenges that can be solved by technical strategies such as creating and implementing preventive plans. Instead, adaptive challenges require leaders who work with and learn from leaders who work with, and learn from, a variety of stakeholders to iteratively develop fundamental changes to the status quo (Carter et al., 2020).

The challenge of adaptive leadership in curriculum change is to determine how to close the gap between the curriculum to be used and teacher competencies without causing too much disruption (Heifetz et al., 2009, 73). Leaders with adaptive leadership must be able to identify how to make choices that sometimes have conflicting goals (Heifetz et al., 2009, 70), so that the new curriculum program coherently “meshes with prevailing pedagogical perspectives and attitudes” in teaching and the school's own values. As for avoiding the “undiscussables”, i.e. issues that tend to be avoided for discussion, the leadership goal is to bring up these difficult conversations to move the organization forward, despite the possibility that such conversations may lead to conflict (Heifetz et al., 2009, 72). The challenge of work avoidance reflects an adaptive challenge that appears to be particularly threatening to the curriculum change process. In these cases, leaders sometimes redefine problems as technical issues, simplify the nature of the problem, deny the existence of the problem, overemphasize and maintain the status quo, or avoid the problem by externalizing the enemy or delegating work (Heifetz et al., 2009, 72).

The research question simply is how the adaptive leadership help the principal as he implementing the curriculum change among the teacher. Moreover, how the principal are able to support teachers on doing their role In the curriculum change using the adaptive leadership method.

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership is a leadership style that focuses on a leader's ability to adjust to changing situations and conditions and make appropriate actions according to these conditions (Hoerudin, 2020, 95). Adaptive leadership emphasizes that a leader must have the ability to change their strategy and adapt to the changing environment to achieve the desired results.

Based on the article Adaptive Leadership: Four Principles for Being Adaptive, it is stated that adaptive leadership involves the leader's ability to adjust to changes in the environment and make appropriate actions according to the current situation and conditions (Glover et al., 2018, 16). Adaptive leadership also emphasizes the

importance of understanding and analyzing the environment and monitoring the changes that occur.

According to Ryan Dunn (2020, 2), in the context of leadership that is full of complexity, adaptive leadership has proven to be the most effective. This means that in the dynamic world of education, adaptive leadership can be an effective leadership strategy. This kind of environment requires a tendency to experiment and explore. While pre-existing ideas and solutions may exist, the dynamic nature of the education world will demand continuous learning, reflection and understanding to effectively navigate and overcome challenges.

Based on the theories above, it can be concluded that adaptive leadership is a leadership style that focuses on a leader's ability to adapt and adjust their strategies based on changing situations and conditions. It requires leaders to have the ability to identify changes that occur and adjust their strategies effectively. Adaptive leadership allows leaders to lead their teams to success by ensuring that they are always adapting and adjusting to the changing environment.

Adaptive Challenge

The challenges that arise in a change can be identified into technical challenges and adaptive challenges. In contrast to adaptive challenges, technical challenges are challenges that have known solutions and can be implemented with existing knowledge or authority while adaptive challenges themselves require a change in team members in terms of changes in priorities, beliefs, habits and loyalty (Heifetz, 2009, chapter 2). Adaptive challenges are problems that cannot be easily identified and cannot be solved only with the leader's authority or normal methods.

In dealing with challenges, it is helpful if the adaptive leaders are able to distinguish between technical problems and adaptive challenges. According to Heifetz, technical and adaptive challenges can be distinguished by the definition of the problem, the solution required and the locus of the work. Technical challenges are straightforward with well-defined problems and solutions managed by authorities. In contrast, technical and adaptive challenges present clear problems but require learning to find solutions, involving authorities and stakeholders. Purely adaptive challenges present ambiguous problems that require learning to address, with the primary responsibility resting with stakeholders.

Not all challenges that arise can be categorized as adaptive challenges. In fact, most problems combine elements of both. When facing new challenges, they are rarely labeled as purely technical or adaptive. Instead, they often have aspects of both, requiring a blend of clear solutions and adaptive thinking. An adaptive leader needs to fully understand the difference between adaptive and technical challenges in order to take the right steps.

Adaptive Leader

According to Heifetz (2009, 73), a leader who implements adaptive leadership will exhibit behaviors that:

1. Going up to the balcony: Going up to the balcony is a picture where someone steps out of the middle of the problem to see the big picture or another perspective of the problem.
2. Able to identify adaptive challenges: Adaptive challenges are a major part of adaptive leadership. An adaptive leader is someone who is able to understand the type of challenge faced, whether it is a technical challenge or an adaptive challenge.
3. Able to manage pressure: As adaptive challenges require solutions where someone may be asked to change their mindset, habits, and even personal values, pressure in workplace will be inevitable. Changes that push someone out of their comfort zone can certainly make someone feel pressured. Therefore, an adaptive leader needs to encourage their followers to realize the need to make changes but at the same time, nurture them so that they are not pressured by the changes themselves
4. Maintaining disciplined attention: Attention or focus is required for the successful implementation of change. Adaptive leaders must be able to encourage their followers to focus on what they should be doing.
5. Returning work to people: Returning work in this case is an action where a leader can delegate work to followers by not micro-managing or making followers depend one hundred percent on the leader. When they understand that they cannot depend one hundred percent, then followers will be encouraged to be independent, solve problems by themselves and even foster their creativity.
6. Protecting the voice of leadership from below: The voices in question are those of the minority followers in the group, where their voices are often unheard, alienated, or even considered deviant. An adaptive leader must be able to create a safe and equal space for followers to express ideas or opinions.

The six characteristics above can be a benchmark for whether there is really an application of adaptive leadership as a leadership strategy from a leader. Research instruments in the form of interview and observation instruments were prepared based on the six written characteristics above. The teachers provide testimony regarding the presence or absence of such behavioral activities which can then be explored by researchers in examining the application of adaptive leadership in the institution under study.

Adaptive Leadership Strategies in Curriculum Change

According to a study published in the Journal of Leadership Education, "adaptive leadership requires a principal to have the ability to recognize signs of environmental change and to take action accordingly." (Smith, 2019). Adaptive leadership also requires a principal to have the flexibility and ability to change their strategies according to changing situations and conditions. Adaptive leadership is key to overcoming challenges and capitalizing on opportunities that arise from changing environments.

Curriculum change is one example of a changing environment that requires adaptive actions from school principals. In an article published in *Frontiers of Education*, Corrigan (2022, 8) states that curriculum change requires principals who are able to bring about change and transformation to ensure that schools can keep up and meet new standards. Principals must have strategies to cope with curriculum changes and ensure that schools can adapt well.

In terms of curriculum change, adaptive leadership is needed in the sense that principals need to have the ability to understand and analyze the environment, monitor the changes that occur, and make appropriate actions according to these changes. Principals should also have the flexibility and ability to change their strategies according to changing situations and conditions.

Therefore, in addressing the challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities arising from the curriculum changes, principals must have adaptive leadership capabilities. Adaptive leadership helps leaders to ensure that curriculum changes are carried out effectively and in accordance with the current situation and conditions. Thus, curriculum change can achieve better results and improve the quality of education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is qualitative research which will be based on case study method. According to Fitrah and Lutfiyah (2017, 40), there are several advantages of the case study research method as follows: First, there is intensive data analysis that is not done by other methods. Second, in special cases it can produce new knowledge. Third, case studies are the right way to explore phenomena that have not been studied in detail. Fourth, the results of case studies usually have usefulness in generating hypotheses that are tested more rigorously, in detail and as thoroughly as possible in subsequent research. Fifth, good case studies can be a source of descriptive information for theory development or in refuting a theory. Sixth, case studies are able to define and explain an event as a whole.

Instrument

This research not only utilizes the case study method, but also relies on appropriate research instruments to obtain relevant data. According to Sugiyono (2018, 465), research instruments are tools used to measure observed natural and social phenomena. In this context, researchers will use interviews and observations as the main instruments. Fitrah and Lutfiyah (2017, 39) state that an effective qualitative study will be based on interviews developed based on the results of a literature review and observations that are systematically recorded. The researcher will use the mentioned instruments, namely semi-structured interviews and passive participatory observation, along with document studies to complement them.

Data Analysis

Based on the theory of Miles and Huberman cited in Sugiyono (2018, 246), qualitative data analysis should be carried out repeatedly until the data reaches

saturation. This process involves three interactive models: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data collection instruments are used in research to collect data systematically and accurately. With the help of these instruments, the data collected will be used to answer problems, find solutions to research objectives, and prove hypotheses. The data collected is determined by the hypothesized variables that have been formulated previously.

The data reduction process is carried out to summarize and select important elements from the voluminous field notes. Data reduction aims to provide a clearer picture so that it makes it easier for researchers to collect additional data and search for it when needed. Each researcher must be guided by the research objectives when reducing data. This process requires intelligence and deep insight because it must pay attention to patterns or elements that may seem unfamiliar or different.

The results of data reduction are then displayed in various forms such as narrative text, charts, short descriptions, or flow charts to help researchers understand the patterns, categories, focus, and themes found. Conclusion drawing and verification are carried out to ensure that the initial conclusions produced can change if not supported by evidence at the next data collection stage. Therefore, conclusions from qualitative research can answer the initial problem formulation, but can also change according to findings in the field.

RESULT AND CONCLUSION

The leadership of SMP XYZ found resistance in the process of socializing curriculum changes at SMP XYZ. The existence of this resistance shows that the challenges that arise in dealing with curriculum change are not merely technical challenges. Teachers felt that they were not fluent enough to teach the new curriculum, both due to language barriers and perceived lack of self-competence. Even in the face of training provided on English language training and teaching competencies, many were skeptical and felt that the training provided was not appropriate.

The leaders of SMP XYZ observed that these challenges were not enough to just provide technical solutions such as debriefing and training, but were adaptive challenges that needed to be reviewed in more depth. In response to this adaptive challenge, the leadership of SMP XYZ decided to implement adaptive leadership as a strategy to deal with curriculum changes at SMP XYZ. The implementation of adaptive leadership as a strategy for curriculum change was carried out with the following steps:

1. Discussing with experts, both from within the school such as the curriculum field, as well as principals in other schools, regarding change management that needs to be done, this strategy is in accordance with the concept of adaptive leadership which shows the behavior of "climbing on the balcony" where the leader is able to step out of the problem and see the problem from another perspective.
2. Discuss with teachers the importance of the curriculum changes in order to open their minds to adopt the changes. This strategy is in line with the

behavior of adaptive leaders who listen to the voice from below, where leaders are willing to sit down to listen to their followers.

3. Categorize the challenges that emerge from the discussion of the teachers, both in the form of adaptive challenges and limited to technical challenges. An adaptive leader must basically be able to distinguish between technical challenges and adaptive challenges.
4. Delegating document preparation assignments and training participation according to teachers' capacity and needs. By delegating assignments according to the capacity of teachers, the leader of SMP XYZ has shown an effort to regulate the amount of work pressure given. Similarly, an adaptive leader must be able to return work to followers, which is shown by the leader of SMP XYZ by not micro-managing and delegating assignments to teachers as part of the preparation for this curriculum change.
5. Motivating teachers to stay enthusiastic and focused on the goals of curriculum change. The leaders of SMP XYZ demonstrate adaptive leadership where an adaptive leader must be able to maintain the attention and focus of their followers.

Based on the explanation of the XYZ school leader, it was found that he put considerations related to adaptive leadership in developing strategies to work with curriculum changes.

In particular, curriculum change itself is impossible without teachers as the frontline. This study found three indicators involving the role of teachers in carrying out curriculum changes at SMP XYZ, including the role of teachers as implementers of change, secondly as feedback providers to the curriculum area, and thirdly as collaborators.

As implementers of change, teachers stated that they had been informed in advance about the curriculum change plan and were asked to prepare themselves and were provided with trainings. In general, teachers prepared themselves by attending the training provided, doing the tasks from the training and studying independently. They started to applied new things they learn in classes as they are the change implementer.

In addition to teachers as implementers of change, school leaders also actively invite teachers to discuss what they face and feel after the implementation of the training results, thus placing teachers also as feedback providers. Teachers generally agree that the principal has been a good facilitator of feedback from teachers to the curriculum area as the decision maker of this curriculum change. The principal facilitates as a listener to teachers' voices, as an adaptive leader who does not ignore voices from below. Teachers stated that they could come and voice their difficulties and needs in dealing with these changes, showed that they also the feedback givers.

Unfortunately, not all of the NR-6's efforts to bridge teacher feedback were considered successful by teachers. The centralized nature of the school system where NR-6 is not the main decision maker also backfired for some teachers. Teachers felt that there was a bias from the school principal towards both stakeholders and the

curriculum area in the school, which emerged in the responses of all teachers who were interviewed for this study.

After further observation, the teachers' disappointment turned out to lead to a lack of feedback on the inputs submitted by the teachers. This disappointment led to a decrease in trust in the principal as a bridge between teachers and the school curriculum. This decline could have been mitigated if the principal had provided feedback on the teachers' inputs, although not all inputs could be accepted, but at least the feedback would provide closure or conclusion to the teachers' inputs.

The third role is as a collaborator. Teachers play an important role as collaborators in the successful implementation of the new curriculum. As collaborators, they work together with fellow teachers to share ideas, strategies and resources to ensure a cohesive approach to teaching the new material. The principal also plays an important role as a facilitator and approver of the collaboration program proposed by the teachers. It is important to encourage the spirit of collaboration and create a workspace that supports collaboration between teachers to achieve the expected changes.

Based on the results of observations and interviews, the three roles were found. The role of the teacher as an implementer of change, as a feedback provider to the curriculum, and as a collaborator is categorized as having been done well by the teachers and needs to be lived continuously.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of interviews related to the implementation of adaptive leadership strategies amidst curriculum changes in the context of Christian schools, it was found that the implementation of adaptive leadership at SMP XYZ has been largely successful, with leaders demonstrating key competencies such as:

1. Creating discussion spaces for collaborative problem-solving.
2. Accurately identifying adaptive challenges.
3. Managing stress in team.
4. Maintaining disciplined focus.
5. Delegating tasks effectively.

These efforts have demonstrated the application of adaptive leadership as a leadership strategy in the face of curriculum change.

However, there is still a critical area for improvement: improving the system for listening to feedback from teachers. Building a strong mechanism for feedback not only ensures that teachers' voices are heard, but also builds trust and fosters a sense of ownership among staff. By addressing these gaps, the principal can further strengthen the adaptive leadership framework at SMP XYZ, ensuring that all voices are valued and contribute to continuous school improvement.

Adaptive leadership is essential in navigating the complex curriculum changes at SMP XYZ. The principal's strategic use of adaptive leadership helped address the challenges posed by the new curriculum. By encouraging continuous professional development, the principal ensured that teachers were prepared to

handle new materials and teaching methods, reducing the anxiety that often comes with significant education reform.

The curriculum change preparation in XYZ School was started long time ago in 2020. The pandemic has complicated coordination, highlighting the need for a flexible leadership approach. Despite of that challenges, the principal effectively used technology to facilitate virtual collaboration, keeping teachers connected and informed despite the challenges of remote working. This strategy not only addresses logistical issues, but also encourages an integrated approach to implementing the new curriculum. By encouraging collaborative problem-solving and involving teachers in decision-making, principals foster a sense of ownership and commitment among teachers.

Addressing the emotional and psychological impact of these changes is also crucial. The principal provides emotional support through regular heart-to-heart discussions, to increase teachers' resilience, attachment and morale. By maintaining a clear focus on the school's educational goals, the principal ensured that SMP XYZ stayed on track during the transition. The principal's application of adaptive leadership not only addressed the current challenges but also built a resilient and adaptable school culture that is ready for future changes.

REFERENCES

- Aldhaheri, A. (2020). *Measuring School Leaders' adaptability in the UAE: Development of a scale to measure leadership adaptability. Evidence-Based HRM: A Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship*, 9(1), 34–46. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ebhrm-04-2020-0051>
- Carter A., Maki E., Pandya J. (2020, April 1–3). *Assessing and improving the impact of K-12 curriculum implementation in Stockton Unified School District* [Conference session]. Carnegie Foundation Summit on Improvement in Education, San Francisco, CA, United States. Retrieved from <https://www.pivotlearning.org/on-demand-presentation-assessing-and-improving-the-impact-of-k-12-curriculum-implementation-in-susd/>
- Corrigan, J., & Merry, M. (2022). *Principal Leadership in a Time of Change*. *Frontiers in Education*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2022.897620>
- Dunn, R. (2020). *Adaptive Leadership: Leading Through Complexity*. 48(1). Retrieved from <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/bitstream/handle/11343/258917/Dunn>
- Fitrah, M., & Luthfiah. (2017). *Metodologi Penelitian; Penelitian Kualitatif, Tindakan Kelas & Studi Kasus* (1st ed.). Jejak Publisher.
- Glover, J.M., Jones, G., Friedman, H.L., Rainwater, K., & Clevidence, J. (2002). *Adaptive Leadership: Four Principles for Being Adaptive* (Part 2).
- 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.
- Hoerudin, C. W. (2020). *Adaptive Leadership in Digital Era: Case Study of Ridwan Kamil*. *CosmoGov: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 6(1), 89. <https://doi.org/10.24198/cosmogov.v6i1.26793>
- Smith, J., et al. (2020). *Effective Team Coordination in Collaborative Communication Leadership*. *Leadership Quarterly*, 31(2), 101-117.
- Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif*. Retrieved from http://digilib.fe.unj.ac.id/index.php?p=show_detail&id=4490