

Adaptive Leadership: Integrating Technology in Kenyan Universities in the Covid -19 Era

By

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Abstract

The Covid -19 pandemic has thrown the higher education sector into disarray worldwide, putting pressure on educators to become more innovative to ensure continuity of teaching and learning. Universities have turned to emergency remote learning to maintain continuity, but the response differs; some universities excel, while others face significant obstacles. Effective leaders can sense and respond to shifts in the internal and external environment, determine their likely impact on the organization, and successfully change. This conceptual article argues that the leader-centric bureaucratic management solutions that are policy-focused or procedure-based are often successful for developing and leading stable environments rather than the tumultuous or uncertain circumstances associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. It examines the adaptive leadership model and proposes that this leadership approach can enable universities to navigate the difficulties of the Covid-19 pandemic's unpredictable shifts in their environments and allow for innovative ICT integration aligned with the global digital evolution for learning. The article begins with a critical review of bureaucratic leadership approaches, then examines the adaptive leadership theory and how it can enhance the effective integration of ICT in university education in Kenya. It suggests that adaptive leadership necessitates creating a supportive environment in which leaders collaborate with their followers and stakeholders to increase their adaptive capacity to devise adaptive solutions to the obstacles that obstruct innovation for integrating ICT. The article recommends that university leaders move away from the outmoded leader-centric and bureaucratic approaches because of their inability to withstand turbulent environments.

Key words: Kenya, Universities, Leadership, Technology, Adaptive Leadership

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Introduction

The COVID 19 pandemic has caused increased turbulence and instability in university contexts and all aspects of life worldwide. This unknown, unpredictable, and highly infectious coronavirus disease, dubbed Covid 19, first appeared in China in December 2019 and quickly spread worldwide (Schleicher, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic in March 2020 and devised drastic containment steps and protocols to monitor its spread and minimize its impact on the social and economic spheres. The entire education system, both basic and tertiary education institutions, was severely impacted by the lockdowns and school closures since teaching and learning depend on social contact or face-to-face communication (Sintema, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). About 1.2 billion children and youth were affected worldwide (Martinez, 2020; Sintema, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). Universities abandoned traditional face-to-face learning to favor emergency remote e-learning to ensure learning continuity. This transition created a crisis that affected students, university programs, faculty, staff, and leaders (Kruse, Hackmann & Lindle, 2020).

Anecdotal evidence indicates that the shift has called for a drastic revision of policies and procedures, budgeting, and staffing. University leaders have had to make continuous decisions while considering their impact on their learning, faculty, and university goals. The response of university institutions has not been consistent across contexts in developed and developing countries due to challenges attributed to obstacles that have hindered uptake and adaptation to online learning and teaching, resulting in a massive digital divide across the globe and within contexts. For example, the pandemic has led to increased financial stress in the US and illuminated the high disparities between higher education institutions and those between students and communities concerning access to higher learning (Maurrasse, 2021). Within Europe, quality assurance issues, lack of confidence in online learning, and technological, social, and psychological challenges were prevalent (Arhold, Brajkovic, Nikalaev & Zavalina, 2020).

Studies in Africa (Zalat, Hamed, Bolbol, 2021; UKaid, 2020; Worldbank, 2020) reveal that lack of online platforms, limited access to technology, electricity and internet sources, connecting devices, or internet-enabled devices, limited access to learning hindered effective implementation of e-learning. Teachers and learners had to bear with unstable internet, technical challenges and rely on improvised learning solutions. The World Bank (2020) reported that only 25% of students had access to the internet, and only 42% had digital equipment, such as computers. Although 97 percent had cell phones, limited internet access remained a great hindrance to accessing learning resources.

Most African institutions, including Kenya, are thus woefully underequipped to operate digital learning effectively. Universities with more resources have advanced, benefiting some students more than others and creating a digital gap between those who have access to technology and those who do not (UKaid, 2020). This difference means that little progress towards adapting to the current learning mode. This chasm could widen even further, jeopardizing the sustainability of lagging institutions as well as of marginalized communities. Since the effects of this disruption will take time to manifest, university leaders

must employ strategies that enable their followers and stakeholders to adapt to the new norms and introduce measures to close the institutional digital gap and resolve barriers to obtaining successful tertiary education. Leaders should extend learning through innovations and the curriculum adapted for online teaching and learning so that universities remain relevant (Schleicher, 2020). The role of university leaders in articulating environmental changes and navigating challenges to transforming complex environments such as this one is critical for ensuring new structures and adaptive practices in these organizations (Ingelton, 2013). After all, only organizations that can adapt to changing situations will maintain a competitive advantage (Jordaan, 2019).

This conceptual article reflects on adaptive leadership as an alternative approach for responding to the turbulence associated with the Covid 19 pandemic on teaching and learning within university contexts in Kenya. It suggests that leader-centric strategies designed for the industrial age are unsuited to dealing with the turbulence in 21st-century organizations, where uncertainty and ambiguity are the norms. It shows how adaptive leadership can effectively handle the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on teaching and learning in Kenyan universities and navigate substantive change that improves and institutes innovation in these settings. The article has significant policy implications for the professional development of university leaders managing organizations in an era of constant turbulence to ensure sustainable organizations. The article is structured as follows: first, it examines the contextual issues that have emerged in the university context in Kenya. Second, it describes the adaptive leadership concept. Then it looks at its principles and how they can potentially help implement change in online teaching and learning within Kenyan universities, considering the challenges they face. It concludes that more research is needed to verify or apply the recommendations.

Statement of the Problem

Universities in Kenya are increasingly experiencing complexities following the onset of the covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated the transition from the establishment of emergency remote learning. As a measure to meet the WHO health protocols. There is an indication that challenges mar the transition and that universities struggle with its implementation (Kigotho, 2020; Temitiyo, 2020; World Bank, 2020). However, scholars have previously called for new approaches to navigate the education contexts that face complexities (Heiftz & Linsky, 2004; Owens & Valesky, 2007; Nelson & Squires, 2017). There has been no exploration of leadership approaches that are ideally suited for leading unprecedented change in complex environments in universities in Africa and Kenya specifically. Universities are supposed to be centers of excellence and lead the society in knowledge and uptake of the best systems, approaches, or innovations because they play a critical role in the economy and development of a country. Against this backdrop, this article explores how the adaptive leadership approach can support leaders in navigating the unprecedented challenges associated with the shift to online teaching and learning in Kenyan universities.

Leadership and Crisis

The leadership concept keeps evolving. For this reason, leadership definitions are innumerable. For this article, leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2019, p. 5). Thus, leadership is seen as the acts, procedures, engagements, or interactions carried out by leaders to achieve goals and not a trait or skill of a leader. Leadership is critical for navigating through crisis

events or unprecedented change in the environment and especially during a crisis, given their position. There is a remarkably high expectation and much scrutiny of a leader's response because people look up to them for direction. Crisis exerts new demands on leaders, and thus they must be able to make sense of the environment to comprehend the nature of presenting change with high precision (Lagowska, Sobral, & Furtado, 2020). Literature has also explored the skills leaders need to navigate through a crisis (Gilstrap et al. 2016; Harris & Jones, 2020). Several scholars (Chen, Zheng, Yang, and Bai, 2016; Rikkerink, Verbeeten, Simons, and Ritzen, 2016) emphasize that leaders must foster an environment that promotes innovation when a crisis occurs. Leaders must demonstrate a willingness to learn, the ability to adjust to fast-changing conditions, and to perceive possibility amid tragedy (James & Wooten, 2011). Harris & Jones contend that the Covid-19 pandemic has destabilized the education environment, and leaders must explore new ways of work adding that effective leaders focus on being "collaborative, creative, and responsive" (p.246), distribute leadership, and forge relationships. Furthermore, engage more with communities, including staff, families, to discuss the crisis to benefit from their expertise and knowledge.

With the increasing shift in environments today and increased dynamism, leaders need various options for navigating through the constantly changing environment. The predominant literature on leading organizational change illuminates several prescriptive models for leading and managing change, allied to a heroic leader perspective. These define the steps and processes that leaders should follow to change organizations (Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Arthur-Mensah & Zimmerman, 2017). Gilley, Mc Millan, & Gilley, (2009) study shows that leader's efficacy is measured by how successfully they model the predetermined stages, which is often the result of their qualities, behaviors, or actions. Scholars have questioned the leader-centric approach to change (Gronn, 2002; Lane and Dane, 2010; Mazurkiewicz, 2021; Spillane, 2007; Yukl, 1999) underpinned by defined models and steps that leaders use to navigate through change. Yukl (1999) challenges the assumption that leaders are entirely accountable for change since change decisions are routinely delegated or shared. That interdependence is a critical component of any change process because leaders cannot claim to have a comprehensive understanding of quickly changing situations.

That is why top-down bureaucratic structures are inappropriate for complex contexts or dynamic environments (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007). Lane and Down (2010) add that change models are better suited to planned change and do not fit today's extremely unpredictable, volatile, and dysfunctional contexts. Furthermore, they frequently ignore the social aspects of transition that have more impact on people. According to Uhl-Bien et al. (2007), a leader-centric strategy is more "aligned to ensure performance management and accountability... [it] might stifle a firm's innovation and fitness" (p.315). Gronn (2002) contends that since leadership is an emergent phenomenon, it cannot be limited to a fixed set of permanent traits.

Organizational leadership approaches for leading change can be classified as either classical/traditional heroic or post-heroic. Heroic leadership draws from the conventional classical approaches that emerged in the industrial age. It gives prominence to the person of the leader, their traits, and behavior; consequently, the term "leadership and leader refer to individual and what an individual does" (Ford & Ford, 2012, p. 3). The leader's persona, attributes, and conduct are stressed to identify what leaders do and their activities to transform organizations. The leader is more visible than the followers and thereby takes responsibility to oversee, develop policy, strategy, motivating followers, evaluating and rewarding them (Fletcher, 2004). Northouse (2019) mentions the common leader-centric

leadership theories that inform leadership practice: the great man theory, traits and skills, situational theory, and path-goal- theories; and related leadership approaches, including charismatic, visionary, transactional, and transformational leadership. For example, situational leadership theorists contend that the characteristics or qualities of followers inform the leader's actions; thus, a leader's effectiveness depends on their ability to adapt to the followers' needs (Northouse, 2019). Additionally, transformational leaders draw from leaders' traits, e.g., charisma, to carry out their influence on followers and are thus categorized as heroic- since it lays more emphasis on the leaders' role rather than the followers.

A post-heroic leadership view has arisen as a new paradigm to contradict the heroic leadership approach and explain that leadership is not limited to a single individual. It considers leadership as the collective, relational, and participatory nature of leadership to show that leaders are not the only drivers of organizational performance (Sobral & Furtado, 2019). Categories of leadership theories that fall here include shared leadership, emergent leadership, distributive leadership, servant leadership, and collaborative leadership. The leader encourages the participation and interaction of several actors, both in formal and informal positions in the organization (Bolden, 2011). Distributed leadership is closely related to shared, collaborative, collective, participative and emergent, dispersed, and co-leadership perspectives which share a common belief that leadership is not located in an individual but distributed across members an organization (Bolden, 2011). In distributive leadership, leaders with a position and their followers engage in leadership activities (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). The authors conclude that a leaders' role is to empower followers and promote cooperation and collective responsibility and thus the relationships between leaders, followers, and the circumstances define leadership practice.

Likewise, new theories and studies on the complexity leadership theory have emerged and demonstrated that adaptive leadership is suited for versatile and changing situations (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007). Amis & Jantz (2020) emphasize the need for a people-centered approach that places stakeholders and coping mechanisms at the center of the change process. Johansen (2012, as cited in Jordaan, 2019,) states that turbulent environments require "a leadership characterized by agility or adaptiveness, the ability to make a rapid adaptation in response to changing circumstances, creativity, improved decision-making ability through collaboration and trustworthiness" (p.61). Drawing from the experiences associated with the covid 19 pandemic, Mazurkiewicz (2021) avers that leadership should signify "a complex process constructed and experienced in groups" (p.8). Thus, it advocates for a participatory, distributive leadership approach because leadership occurs through interaction or relationships underlain by trust and respect and grounded on the experiences within the environment or context.

The Kenyan Context

University leaders in Kenya are "vested with the largest degree of individual authority and responsibility" for directing all activities in their institutions: academic, finance, and quality standards of the university (Sifuna, 2012, p. 123). The Vice-chancellor serves as the administrative and academic head of the university and alongside other top leaders assumed to have the expertise, values, qualities, and behaviors that endear follower's commitment and participation in all organization activities (Sifuna, 2012). These enable them to take care of the organization dynamics and navigate change and resolve all organizational challenges. A "rationalized control" is often outlined within established policy and procedures (Uhl-Bien,

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Marion& McKelvey, 2007). The authors explain that this leadership perspective assumes that a leader's predominant role is to influence followers to attain specific objectives to attain efficiency and effectiveness, all geared toward stability and uncertainty avoidance. In environmental turbulence, such as new technologies and shifts in the environments, leaders devise strategies to steer the organization towards a grand vision by setting up systems. These structures enable stakeholders and organization members to commit to the change. The presenting culture and approach to leadership in Universities in Kenya is bureaucratic (Akuno, Ondieki, Barasa, Otieno, Wamuyu & Amateshe, 2017). There is more emphasis on ranks, the "formalization of policies and procedures, specialization and hierarchical decision making" (Jordan, p.60) to create predictable environments with knowledge and established responses to every issue.

Covid -19 and ICT integration in Kenyan universities

The transition to online learning is under the government policy indicated in its blueprint, Kenya vision 2030 (GoK, 2007), and the big four agenda target for opening access to high-quality learning for marginalized communities and higher education institutions social, economic development. Following the COVID 19 pandemic, the Kenya government, in adherence to the WHO health protocols, closed all schools and universities on March 15, 2020, until further notice to combat the Covid-19 virus outbreak. The Ministry of Education Kenya then made a call for institutions to look at ways to incorporate new technologies into teaching and learning (Martinez, 2020). University leaders used their own devices to create policy and various approaches, to support emergency remote teaching and learning as a gap measure to ensure learning continuity without a consistent structure or framework (Kathula, 2020). In August 2020, the Commission for Higher Education (CUE), Kenya, developed and circulated guidelines for use by universities to ensure that Open and Distance education and learning (ODEl) offered in universities is credible. The guidelines spelled out expectations on staffing, electronic devices or facilities curriculum content, and provisions for ensuring the quality of learning and assessment and security that university policies must address to pivot effective remote education in these institutions.

There is an indication that most public universities in Kenya are still figuring out how to better incorporate technology into teaching and learning because of financial difficulties have (World Bank, 2020). The swift transition from a familiar teaching and learning approach, without the necessary expertise, critical requirements of a secure and stable internet connection, power supply, and electronic equipment, has made ICT integration challenging (Temitiyo, 2020). It has also hindered investment in online resources and payment of staff salaries; some have laid off staff; and faced obstructions in implementing the changes necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kigotho, 2020). Lack of access to learning spaces, computers, laptops, or reliable mobile devices to access learning facilities and equipment, electricity, and broadband or internet connection (UKaid, 2020) has led to increased student dropouts. Moreover, some university leaders, staff, policymakers, and stakeholders have been sceptical about the change (Kathula, 2020). Critics have raised questions about universities' use of commercial channels not vetted for learning and quality problems with student assignments and exams, including plagiarism (Yadav & Rashid, 2020). Although not specific to Kenya, university leaders will have to deal with student and staff privacy in online programs in the future.

The pandemic has exposed the lack of preparedness of many leaders of tertiary education institutions in navigating drastic change that requires swift decision-making and

effective response to make an incredible difference to all learners and progressive transformation of their institutions. Although some universities had previously established online or distance learning programs and only had to revamp them, others had to create systems to develop them.

The review indicates that leaders draw from a leader-centric hierarchical approach applicable in stable environments and not in uncertain environments such as that associated with the COVID 19 pandemic. The challenges identified hinder the transition to remote online teaching and learning and suggest that leaders have not effectively managed the crisis. The challenges, especially those related to attitudes, values, and beliefs of teachers, students, and stakeholders, cannot be ignored but addressed through close engagement and not policy. These need to be attended to by a leadership perspective that promotes discussion, brainstorming, and shared decision-making to confront these hindrances.

The leader-centric approach is evident from the instructions issued by the university quality assurance body, the Commission for Higher Education (CUE). The policy statements they gave to direct the implementation of remote teaching and learning comprise what is considered best practice and are intended to ensure continuity but are not ideal in turbulent situations where the decision-making process has changed (Bolton & Stolcis, 2008). There are not suitable for tackling the difficulties associated with the dynamic environment. Uhl - Bien et al. (2007) would aver that the statements seek “stability and uncertainty avoidance through organization structure and processes” (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007, p. 301).

Boin (2005) would argue that centralized authority employs a hierarchical rationalized control structure to direct university leaders' response to the crisis through strategies, policies, and coordination based on the assumption that the situation has a cause and a solution. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and no single leader or institution can claim to know everything there is to know about a crisis. It is also problematic to presume that the rules and regulations can handle emergencies since some might not be applicable in the real world (Lagadec & Topper, 2007). Finally, Jordaan (2019) emphasizes that organizations' agility or adaptability lies in leadership, especially their ability to instil a collaborative culture within and outside the organization but not by mere strategies evident in policies and procedures.

Research confirms that integrating e-learning in public and some private universities in Kenya have been slow (Makokha & Mutisya, 2016; Oduol & Olala 2020; Tarus, Gichoya, & Muumbo, 2016). Makokha and Mutisya's (2016) study of the status of e-learning in seven public universities in Kenya, using students and lectures as data sources, revealed that e-learning was still in its infancy, with insufficient digital participation and a lack of policies and infrastructure to sustain it. Tarus, Gichoya, and Muumbo (2016) revealed that limited funding, inadequate equipment, and lack of technical skills hindered the adoption of e-learning in public universities. Oduol & Olala's (2020) review of the literature discovered the same issues. They emphasized that lack of preparedness evident through inadequate infrastructure, insufficient e-services, insufficient or non-existent e-learning policies, and unprepared and uncommitted faculty and students – led to low e-learning adoption. They further emphasized that successful e-learning integration mostly hinged on the teachers' commitment, enthusiasm, and motivation. More recently, Radoli's (2020) study of computer-mediated classrooms in private universities revealed that a rushed transition from implementing computer-mediated learning to online mode was challenging and executed without sufficient thought or guidelines. Lecturers had minimal technical skills, no practical experience with online education or learning tools, experimented with online pedagogy, depended on classroom formats and pedagogy, and had an additional role in managing

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students' technical challenges and emotional needs. The extra workload and stress left staff demotivated. It indicates that universities were more likely to respond to policy to implement remote learning without preliminary interrogation or engagements to help them navigate this new transition. No studies have explored how adaptive leadership should support technology integration due to the covid in the pandemic season in Kenya and Africa.

Adaptive Leadership

Leadership remains a critical factor for responding to the implementation of rapid change and reforms (Atkinson & Mackenzie, 2015) for innovation and effective integration and use of ICT (Mwawashi, 2014; Quershi, 2013). The Adaptive leadership concept was first published by Heifetz in 1994 and then updated later by his colleagues (Heifetz & Laurie, 2007; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). It is the "practice of mobilizing people to overcome difficult challenges and thrive" (Heifetz et al., 2009a, 1994, p.14). Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) aver that it is "a complex dynamic rather than a person (although people are, importantly involved) we label it leadership because it is a, and arguably the proximal source of change in an organization" (p. 306). Adaptive leadership is thus not about being an authority or the position, power, or expertise one has, but as Heifetz et al. (2009b) points out, it is about mobilizing people to address a pressing challenge, often in periods of uncertainty, and helps them discern what is essential.

Adaptive leaders recognize the complexity of their environments and engage their team members to alter their thinking and approach towards the crisis. They are determined to develop followers' adaptive skills and to move away from reliance on technical solutions that appear to depend on authority or hierarchical power to solve organizational problems because it weakens their attempts to implement change effectively.

This approach is distinct from previous leadership styles such as transactional, transformational, and other behavioral leader approaches underpinned by a leader-centric philosophy (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009a). Since it focuses on how a leader leads others and themselves, the theory is related to visionary, transformative, and transactional leadership (Bass, 1985). It closely relates to leader-member exchange and path-goal leadership theories Northouse, (2019) which emphasize a leaders' activities, interactions, and mobilization of followers and engagement in actions that increase their capacity to face obstacles, resulting in their adaptation to change in dynamic contexts.

The complexity leadership theory reinforces adaptive leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Clarke, 2013; Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016) as the leadership strategy required in the twenty-first century, particularly in the information or knowledge era (Northouse, 2019), characterized by a dynamical change which concerns change that is not only unpredictable but "the causation is not simply one direction, the nature of change changes" (Marion, 2008, p.22). The theory is emphatic that leaders do not have sole authority over all activities in an organization and that leadership is more than just an individual's influencing act, but it is rooted in a complex interplay of many interacting forces (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Leaders facing complex change need complexity leadership which moves away from the past hero type leader, who thinks linearly i.e., have all the expertise, authority and control, and answers to every challenge to an approach that is a non-linear approach that encourages flexibility, collaboration, shared leadership to navigate through these complexities.

According to the complexity theory, leadership comprises three roles that interact to produce adaptive outcomes: administrative, enabling, and adaptive leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). They explain that administration is the formal top-down authoritative function of a

leader and involves creating structure, vision, goals, rules, and decision making and is essential for things to get done in the organization. The enabling leadership function mediates between the two. Sometimes, a leader will engage in administration and adaptive process and innovation because it creates conditions for adaptive space, is responsible for getting things done, keeps the administrative role in check, and fosters interaction.

The adaptive aspect is a more informal, emergent, and dynamic role that occurs when a leader communicates or connects with followers to resolve disputes, have conversations, learn, and innovate (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Adaptive leadership, according to this framework, arises from adaptive work, which is the contact between leaders and followers as they work through problems, conflict, or a challenge, resulting in information sharing, new practices, and adaptive change (Lichtenstein, et al., 2006). This exchange creates more leaders, as well as innovative and adaptable ideas. This framework describes adaptive leadership as what emerges from adaptive work: the interaction between the leaders and followers working together through issues, conflict, or a problem of which knowledge is shared, and new practices and adaptive change emerge. This exchange produces adaptive capacity, creating more leaders and innovative ideas for the organization's creativity, adaptability, and learning (Lichtenstein et al., 2006). They add that only when there is interaction with others in organizations and when challenges are creatively solved is leadership considered to occur.

Several studies have advocated for a move away from leadership techniques from the past that are obsolete and unsuitable for directing situations in organizations that necessitate fast responses or creativity within education contexts(Bagwell, 2020; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Heifetz & Linsky, 2007; Robertson & Webber, 2002). Bagwell (2020) encourages leaders to abandon the out-of-date heroic leadership strategy favoring innovative techniques that foster shared learning, promote diversity of views, increase partnerships, and solve the issues of virtual learning settings. According to Fernandez and Shaw (2020), three leadership techniques are critical for navigating through the adaptive problems connected with the Covid 19 pandemic: connecting with people, mutual trust, and distributing leadership; and communication. University leaders should therefore re-evaluate their approaches in leading in a time of the covid 19 pandemic.

According to the adaptive leadership model, six deliberate measures, attitudes, tactics, or behaviors that a leader with authority (Heifetz, 1994) uses to incorporate adaptive practice. These include going to the balcony: reflecting on the issue presented and carrying out an assessment and scrutiny of the matter; identifying or carrying out a diagnosis of the adaptive challenge, regulating distress; giving work back to the people, and protecting leadership voices from below" (Northouse, 2016, p.261; Heifetz & Laurie, 2007; 2016). Leadership here relates more to the leaders the adaptive work and dealing with the adaptive challenges. University leaders in Kenya can use these to encourage actions and conversations that foster cooperation, coordination, and collaborative decision-making in the radically changing teaching and learning environment. To navigate through the adaptive challenges or complexities associated with the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on teaching and learning environments. These steps generate processes that encourage teamwork, collaborative decision-making, and innovative thinking. All the leader needs to do is mobilize followers, inspire them, and draw their attention to what matters in the organization.

The first strategy is, "get onto the balcony" (Northouse, 2019,p.262). This step aims to explore ways of anticipating the challenges prevalent in their environment to get to the root. The leaders spend time understanding the unpredictable events and tensions or the complex issue around them to avoid making rash decisions (Acosta, 2019). The leader steps

back from their daily activities and devote more time away to reflect, evaluate critically and thoroughly, analyze, diagnose, or view the presenting problem or circumstance to understand better (Heifetz et al., 2009; Heifetz, 1994, Northouse, 2019). The leader devotes time to "observe events and patterns, interpreting and designing interventions" (Heifetz et al. 2009b, p.20). The authors emphasize the need to carry out self-examination and assessment of followers to know their needs, abilities and pay attention to its long-term implications on the organization structure, processes, staffing, and resources while considering the possible actions needed (Heifetz et al. 2009b). They seek possible solutions and experiment while considering the organization's priorities. Heifetz et al. (2009a) explain that at this stage, a leader takes time to understand structural problems or weaknesses, explores, experiments, and experiments with the available unknown options such as new relationships and interactions to help attain solutions.

Considering the Kenya university context, a leader should understand the environment and the need for emergency remote learning. This should not be treated as a problem of the ICT department alone but the organizations' problem. The leaders must be open and flexible as they scan the university environment, take stock of the organization's internal strengths, staff levels, organization structure, and staff competencies, and seek to learn from developments around them and across the world. It calls for a reflection on its ramifications on staffing, organization structure and processes, the students, and university stakeholders. They should determine the risks and mitigations needed for managing the challenges. Lastly, the leaders should interpret the data gathered and move it to the next level—identifying the best approach and considering the systemic issues or flaws.

The adaptive leadership framework emphasizes that leaders identify and distinguish between the two types of problems found in organizations: the adaptive and technical challenge, which are an essential step of diagnosis of the issue before taking any action because this helps to determine the best answer or resolution (Northouse, 2019; Heifetz et al., 2009b). This critical step enables leaders and followers to recognize the adaptive problem and work towards a solution (Northouse, 2019). An adaptive challenge differs from a technical challenge which is explicit or straightforward and has ready-made solutions. The organization's procedures, structure, or organizational knowledge overcome technical difficulties that are obvious and have ready-made answers (Heifetz et al., 2009b). For example, within the context of Kenya's universities, the Covid- 19 pandemic there is evidence of both technological and adaptive challenges in university settings. The shift to emergency remote learning requires a university to use the set policies and procedures to obtain adequate ICT equipment, providing a suitable online platform for teaching and learning, and addressing the problem of insufficiently trained teachers for this purpose.

On the other hand, as Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) state, "adaptive challenges are not amenable to authoritative fiat or standard operating procedure, but rather require exploration, discoveries, and adjustments" (p.300) and have no clear-cut answers. There is no explicit manual for addressing them. These challenges are characterized by distress or anxiety in organizations because habits, assumptions, principles underpin them, and mindsets that are difficult to let go of and necessitate debates or scrutiny (Heifetz et al., 2009b), and are often a hindrance to the changing environment. A policy cannot resolve them but requires organization members to learn, acquire new skills, behavior, and be more innovative. The team must confront their habits, values, and beliefs (Heifetz et al., 2009b), and often this results in conflicts or resistance, which the leader must address. For example, Kenya's university's new teaching and learning paradigm necessitates a rethink of the pedagogy,

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programming, timing, concerns of justice and equity, and a shift in teachers, learners, and stakeholders' attitudes to implementing remote teaching and learning effectively. A study by Zalat et al. (2020) highlights the notion that, in contrast to the younger generation, a generation of lecturers accustomed to traditional teaching and learning with limited experience and interaction with technology remain opposed to new developments.; this is one of the apparent adaptive problems to be tackled.

Similarly, the concern by teachers that technology would rob them of control in the classroom is perhaps misguided (Oduol & Olala, 2020). More consultation and engagements are needed to support instructors, learners, stakeholders to confront the fears, beliefs, and values, to reach a consensus. A transformation of long-held habits leads to innovation, better educational services, expanded and better use of online learning, and support for teachers and learners. It develops highly energized staff and stakeholders who display more enthusiasm for change and show willingness to explore the best measures for addressing the problem and manage the pandemic's effects within the university.

The adaptive process requires leaders to be alert to the stress levels associated with change and keep them within acceptable range through tracking to ensure that it does not overwhelm followers, the organization, or get in the way of change (Northouse, 2019). The reason being that adaptive challenges often take time to resolve and can become daunting to followers and organizations because transitions create a lot of inconveniences (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). University leaders should create a holding environment, "an atmosphere where people feel safe tackling difficult problems" (Northouse, 2019, p.265). The leader, followers, and stakeholders use this holding environment to discuss the upcoming transition, their concerns, shortcomings, and new roles, and how the change will affect them. As Heifetz and Laurie (1997) indicate, leaders use this avenue for settling conflicts, provide learning opportunities while working together to build engagement rules that will guide the team's activities and ensure security.

The leader must orchestrate or generate conflict, heated discussions in the holding environment to challenge the values, beliefs and habits, expectations of the followers, disappoint them to create the urgency for change, but ensure that the temperature or stress associated with this is within the "productive zone of disequilibrium" (Heifetz et al. 2009b, p.17). It stimulates followers learning and unlearning of old ways and learning from the team (Heifetz & Laurie, 2003), meaning that effective change occurs in the holding environment because this is where the adaptive work requires a transformation of values held place (Heifetz et al., 2004). A leader should also take care of their distress, which stems from handling organization stress and relinquishing their role as experts to rely on teams to affect organization processes. Regulating personal and organizational pressure reduces ambiguity, increases followers' adaptive ability, and is essential for implementing change (Northouse, 2019). Heifetz et al. (2004) reiterate that this aids in maintaining the leader's concentration and motivation in the face of imminent change.

Another strategy that university leaders in Kenya can use during the imminent shift to remote learning is maintaining disciplined attention (Northouse, 2019). Here the leader reminds the team about the adaptive problems or issue and the need to confront them or any "learning required by followers to deal with the conflict coming from their habits, beliefs, and values against what is demanded of them by reality" (Heifetz, 1994, p.22). The leader must be alert to the follower's inclination to avoid adaptive tasks by being alert to any changes in behavior or techniques that followers might use to slow down or halt work to relieve stress, such as an ongoing blame game, undermining the process, and assaults on

others (Northouse, 2019). As Heifetz (2004) suggests, it also entails looking for ways to deal with distracters and followers to encourage them to stay committed to the adaptive work and change process.

University leaders should bear in mind that the loss of deeply held beliefs, values, cherished habits, and even roles causes distress, confusion and can affect followers' focus and reaction towards the shifting environment. Thus resistance, criticism, and skepticism from learners, teachers, and various stakeholders concerned about its practicability will arise. The leader should mobilize people, facilitate discussions of hot topics, resolve disputes where divergent viewpoints exist, and deal with loss. They should be open and accessible, lend a listening ear, clarify assumptions, and strive to create a team focused on progress to allow new ideas and innovative solutions. Leaders should be patient and take time to interrogate and reflect on any suggested improvements to see how they relate to the common objective or intent while considering the available or necessary resources (Heifetz & Linsky, 2009b). Marion and Uhl-Bien, (2001) are emphatic that reflection and experimentation are essential for learning about what works and what does not and enables the leader and team to adapt to the change and builds an adaptive culture.

The leaders should endeavor to effectively institute disruptive change in Kenya's university leaders by "give[ing] work back to the people" as this builds the adaptive capacity of their followers (Northouse, 2019, p.269). Leaders use this strategy as an opportunity to create awareness of the presenting challenge. The aim is to inspire and encourage followers and stakeholders to take on the task and develop strategies to adapt to the change (Mensa & Zimmerman 2017) without excessively commanding or directing (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). The university leader taps on followers' or stakeholders' knowledge, skills, perspectives, and interests using collaborative processes such as brainstorming and discussing complex problems, promoting information and expertise sharing, and developing creative solutions to effect change (Yukl, 2013). Mensa & Zimmerman (2017) argue that this process allows the collaborators, including followers, to develop problem-solving, creativity, and collective accountability skills, which provoke the organization to become adaptive and thrive in the face of changing demands.

The call for technology integration will invite many perspectives. In order to navigate through the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on teaching and learning, university leaders in Kenya should ensure that they protect the leadership voices from below who have no authority but have access to information that others in positions of power and are often more innovative (Heifetz, 1994). It requires leaders to be receptive to varied perspectives, including dissidents and marginalized members of the organization. It allows everyone to learn and contribute to articulating the dynamic change outcome through open dialogue to increase ownership and commitment to the change process (Northouse, 2019). According to Yukl & Mahsud (2010), it gives credence to everyone in the organization increasing participation and knowledge sharing, which is a sign that the concerns or desires of all staff are essential and encourages them to become part of the team. It builds synergy, which motivates organization members and stakeholders to drive the change process.

Discussion

The current call for emergency remote learning and ICT integration is a response to curb the spread of the Covid 19 virus. The current leader-centric- bureaucratic top-down approach prevalent in the university sector in Kenya cannot resolve the adaptive challenges that hamper the progress towards an effective and innovative change in universities. Th approach

is opposed to adaptation and limits leaders' efforts to institute innovative solutions to develop credible online teaching. The adaptive leadership framework provides an approach for leaders in university leaders in Kenya to navigate through the adaptive challenges and turbulence associated with the emergency remote learning necessitated by the covid 19 pandemic. It also allows them to facilitate the process of engaging multiple viewpoints or perspectives from their teams, followers, and stakeholders (both internal and external) in adaptive practice and to build trust, essential for innovation. It ensures that the creative solutions that emerge are agreeable to all as easily implemented. This partnership allows them to collectively diagnose complex issues, transform mindsets, and gather more strategies and information to improve decision-making, which aids in developing innovative solutions (Jordaan, 2018) for high-quality learning outcomes. The university sector is more likely to adapt quickly and be transformed.

Implications

The Covid 19-has instigated challenges that inhibit progress in Kenyan universities and can negatively impact the county's education sector. Adaptive leadership, an agile approach that draws on all stakeholders' cooperation for innovative solutions, is needed.

The study has illuminated implications for practice, such as the need for university leaders to not rely on policy procedures or frameworks alone to resolve the challenges prevalent in the transition to online teaching and learning. The adaptive leadership model presents some of the strategies and behaviors that university leaders can engage in, such as: sitting at the balcony to examine the issue in-depth, distinguishing between the technical and adaptive challenge, having a holding environment, regulating stress, giving work back to the people and protecting the leadership voices from below to institute adaptive practice and adaptive culture that will enable universities to progress towards innovation and effective transformation of online teaching and learning.

The study has implications for rethinking university leadership practice and engagements with key stakeholders, especially the policymakers, industry, social actors and the community for university development. It also has implications for the professional development of staff, both designated university leaders and critical stakeholders to incorporate a new leadership paradigm, to integrate ICT for learning and effectively to have a competitive edge globally.

Although theoretical literature supports the argument presented here (Northouse, 2019; Heifetz, 2009ab), empirical knowledge about how adaptive leadership practices or strategies influences change and innovation in university and education contexts in Africa and Kenya need exploration to understand and refine its elements or steps and its applicability in these contexts. Research is therefore needed to reaffirm the suggestions given in this article and to get a deeper understanding of how adaptive leadership works to extend knowledge on leadership approaches that are essential for education contexts subjected to turbulence or disruptions, which have become a common occurrence in universities and organizations in the 21st century and to counter some of the weaknesses highlighted by some scholars (Northouse, 2019). There is need for research explore the dynamics between university leaders and their followers including stakeholders in times of crisis in Kenya.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has shed light on the adaptive leadership approach and demonstrated how its principles or strategies could instigate innovation and effective change in Kenya's university

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contexts that grapple with adaptive challenges associated with emergency remote teaching and learning. University leaders will need to engage in adaptive practice rather than a heroic leadership approach. It will entail mobilizing their followers and stakeholders to gather “new strategies, abilities, and leadership” (Heifetz et al. 2009b, p.2); to navigate the challenges linked to the shift in pedagogy brought about by the necessity to adhere to the Covid- 19 health protocols. Adaptive practice is essential for building innovative culture, institutionalizing continual learning, and discovering ways to deal with adaptive problems associated with volatility, knowledge explosion, and rapid technological advancements.

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