Manajerial: Jurnal Manajemen dan Sistem Informasi 24(1) (2025) 35 - 48

Manajerial:
Jurnal Manajemen dan Sistem Informasi

Journal homepage: https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/manajerial

Adaptive Leadership in Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Academic Leaders in Indonesian and Uzbek Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study examines adaptive leadership practices among academic leaders in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Indonesia and Uzbekistan. Drawing on a comparative qualitative research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews and a bilingual open-ended survey involving a total of 88 academic leaders from Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI), Tashkent State University of Economics (TSUE), and Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies (TSUOS). Using thematic and frequency-based analysis, five core dimensions of adaptive leadership were identified: adaptability, resilience, communication, collaboration, and crisis responsiveness. The findings reveal that while adaptive leadership is universally relevant, its application is significantly shaped by cultural norms, institutional structures, and leadership traditions. Indonesian leaders emphasized participatory decision-making and proactive crisis planning, whereas Uzbek leaders demonstrated structured, hierarchical approaches rooted in administrative continuity. Quantitative frequency data supported these patterns, with Adaptability (87%) and Resilience (82%) emerging as the most prominent themes across institutions. This study contributes to the adaptive leadership literature by offering empirical insights from under-researched non-Western contexts and provides practical recommendations for leadership development in higher education systems undergoing transformation.

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Submitted/Received 01 Apr 2025
First Revised 27 Apr 2025
Accepted 28 May 2025
First Available online 01 Jun 2025
Publication Date 01 Jun 2025

Keywords:
Adaptive Leadership, Higher Education, Academic Leadership, Cultural Context, Indonesia and Uzbekistan

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly confronted with multifaceted challenges stemming from rapid technological advancement, global health crises, and shifting socio-political dynamics. These disruptions have exposed the limitations of traditional leadership models that rely heavily on hierarchical authority and static planning mechanisms. In response to this volatility, the concept of adaptive leadership has gained prominence in both academic discourse and institutional practice (Heifetz et al., 2009; Pujianto et al., 2023).

Adaptive leadership is broadly defined as the capacity to mobilize people, foster continuous learning, and navigate complexity through collaborative problem-solving. Central to this approach are the principles of flexibility, emotional intelligence, stakeholder engagement, and the ability to lead effectively in conditions of ambiguity (Boyar et al., 2023; Koh, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, served as a global stress test for educational leadership demonstrating the need for decision-making that is not only responsive but also inclusive, iterative, and sensitive to institutional culture (Crippen, 2023; Stern, 2013).

Recent scholarship highlights the utility of adaptive leadership across sectors such as education (Özen & Yavuz, 2023; Ibardaloza, 2023), healthcare, and library management (Wong & Chan, 2023). These studies have illustrated how adaptive leaders encourage innovation, ensure team resilience, and sustain performance under pressure. However, much of this literature is situated within Western academic settings, which raises concerns about the generalizability of these findings across diverse global contexts.

Despite the growing interest in leadership transformation, there remains a notable lack of empirical research exploring how adaptive leadership is understood and enacted in non-Western higher education systems, particularly in regions such as Southeast and Central Asia. Leadership practices are inherently shaped by contextual factors such as culture, institutional norms, political structures, and governance traditions. Therefore, models developed in Western contexts may not fully capture the complexity of leadership behaviors in countries with distinct administrative legacies.

Indonesia and Uzbekistan both currently undergoing systemic reforms in higher education offer valuable case studies for exploring these dynamics. Academic leaders in both nations operate under varying degrees of centralization, cultural expectation, and historical influence, which can significantly shape their adaptive capacities and leadership practices. Yet, scholarly insight into how adaptive leadership manifests in these institutional landscapes remains limited.

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the perspectives and practices of academic leaders in Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) and Tashkent State University of Economics (TSUE). By analyzing how leadership is exercised in response to disruption within these two distinct yet comparable systems, the research contributes to the refinement of adaptive leadership theory and its applicability in culturally diverse higher education contexts.

1. What defines adaptive leadership among academic leaders in Indonesia and Uzbekistan?

DOI: https://doi.org/10.17509/manajerial.v24i1.83460
ISSN: 1412-6613 & E-ISSN: 2527-4570

2. How is adaptive leadership used to foster innovation and organizational resilience in higher education?
3. In what ways do cultural and structural differences influence leadership adaptation in these contexts?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Foundations of Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership is conceptualized as a dynamic approach that enables leaders to navigate complex and ambiguous challenges by fostering collaboration, continuous learning, and distributed problem-solving. Heifetz et al. (2009) define adaptive leadership as a model that goes beyond authority, emphasizing the mobilization of stakeholders in the face of uncertainty. Unlike traditional leadership paradigms that rely on formal power or technical expertise, adaptive leadership prioritizes flexibility, responsiveness, and shared decision-making processes.

This model is particularly suited for turbulent environments, as adaptive leaders are expected to remain attentive to both internal organizational dynamics and external disruptions (Pujianto et al., 2023). Furthermore, Cojocar (2009) contends that although adaptive leadership shares conceptual proximity with transformational and situational leadership, it should be regarded as a distinct theory due to its emphasis on preparing others to manage change rather than prescribing fixed solutions. In doing so, adaptive leadership fosters organizational resilience and legitimacy during times of crisis or institutional transformation.

2.2. The CARE Framework and Measurable Traits

To operationalize the characteristics of adaptive leadership, Koh (2023) introduced the CARE model, which highlights four key personal competencies: Creativity, Adaptability, Resilience, and Emotional Intelligence. Each of these attributes plays a crucial role in enhancing a leader's ability to navigate high-stress or uncertain environments.

Creativity enables innovative problem-solving when conventional strategies fail. Adaptability ensures the capacity to adjust directions or plans rapidly. Resilience equips leaders to endure adversity, while emotional intelligence facilitates empathy, trust-building, and relational leadership—especially vital during crisis conditions. Empirical validation by Boyar et al. (2023) demonstrated that high levels of emotional intelligence and analytical reasoning significantly contribute to leaders' adaptability, thereby reinforcing the practical utility of the CARE framework for leadership development programs.

2.3. Applications Across Sectors

Adaptive leadership has been used in many areas outside of education. In schools, Özen & Yavuz (2023) found that it helped leaders build a stronger, more positive environment for students. Leaders who encouraged teamwork and flexibility were better at supporting student well-being and resilience.

In healthcare, Crippen (2023) showed that adaptive leaders were better at managing hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic. These leaders communicated clearly, made ethical

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ISSN: 1412-6613 & E-ISSN: 2527-4570

decisions, and kept staff and patients informed. This helped reduce stress and improve performance during crisis situations.

Academic libraries also used adaptive leadership. Wong & Chan (2023) studied how library leaders created new services by encouraging staff feedback and trying new ideas. Their findings show that adaptive leadership helps organizations learn and grow, especially when dealing with new challenges like digital technology.

2.4. Adaptive Leadership in Higher Education

Adaptive leadership is useful in higher education, especially when universities face big changes. Mukaram et al. (2021) found that when academic and adaptive leadership were used together in Pakistani universities, it made them more ready for change. Leaders were better at learning from experience and encouraging others to do the same.

Another important part of adaptive leadership is emotional support. Caringal-Go et al. (2021) found that during the pandemic, leaders who were honest, caring, and calm were more successful. They helped keep staff motivated and made students feel supported, even in difficult times.

Stern (2013) adds that good leaders not only respond to crisis, but also prepare for it. They train their teams, plan ahead, and stay alert. This kind of preparation is a key part of adaptive leadership and helps universities stay strong in uncertain times.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate how adaptive leadership is conceptualized and enacted by academic leaders in Indonesian and Uzbek higher education institutions. A qualitative approach is deemed appropriate for this inquiry because it enables an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes—dimensions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative instruments (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To analyze the qualitative data, the study adopts thematic analysis, a flexible and rigorous method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns or themes within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is especially useful for capturing how social and cultural contexts influence leadership practices across different institutional settings. It also facilitates cross-case comparisons between the two countries by allowing the researcher to code data inductively while remaining sensitive to cultural nuance.

This research design is intended to generate rich, context-specific insights into the adaptive leadership behaviors of academic leaders during organizational transformation. By prioritizing participant voice and thematic patterning, the study offers a grounded understanding of how leadership is enacted under uncertainty.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals with substantial leadership experience in higher education. The qualitative component involved 15 academic leaders—5 each from Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI), Tashkent State

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ISSN: 1412-6613 & E-ISSN: 2527-4570

University of Economics (TSUE), and Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies (TSUOS). These participants included deans, vice-deans, department heads, and senior faculty members, each with a minimum of three years of leadership experience. They actively oversaw academic teams, programs, or institutional operations.

In addition to the interviews, a supplementary online survey was distributed to a broader pool of academic staff and leaders across the three universities. A total of 88 valid responses were collected via this bilingual Google Form (English and Russian). The survey included open-ended and semi-structured questions aligned with the themes of adaptive leadership (adaptability, resilience, communication, collaboration, and crisis response). This allowed for triangulation of qualitative findings and provided frequency data that supported the thematic analysis presented in the results.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection employed two qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews and a qualitative online survey. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected academic leaders from the three participating institutions. Each interview lasted approximately 15–30 minutes and was guided by a flexible protocol that explored leadership experiences, institutional challenges, adaptability, team management, and decision-making during periods of disruption. Interviews were conducted virtually and recorded with participant consent for transcription and analysis purposes.

The online survey aimed to capture a wider range of institutional voices and reflections. The bilingual instrument—titled *"Adaptive Leadership in Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Academic Leaders in Indonesian and Uzbek Universities"*—contained 14 open-ended questions. These addressed leadership responses to change, communication strategies, interdepartmental collaboration, crisis management, and reflective learning. Participants were asked to indicate their country, position, and years of leadership experience before answering. A total of 88 complete responses were obtained and included in the thematic analysis.

This combination of interviews and open-ended survey responses allowed for both depth and breadth in data collection, supporting a comprehensive understanding of adaptive leadership practices across two national contexts.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). This method was selected for its adaptability in organizing qualitative data into meaningful patterns while accommodating contextual variation. The analysis sought to identify recurrent themes that reflect adaptive leadership behavior within the diverse institutional settings of Indonesia and Uzbekistan.

The process involved six phases:

1. Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and survey responses.
2. Generation of initial codes derived inductively from the data.
3. Clustering of related codes into candidate themes.

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ISSN: 1412-6613 & E-ISSN: 2527-4570

4. Review and refinement of themes to ensure internal coherence and external distinctiveness.
5. Defining and naming themes to capture their analytical scope.
6. Writing up the findings with thematic interpretation and illustrative quotations.

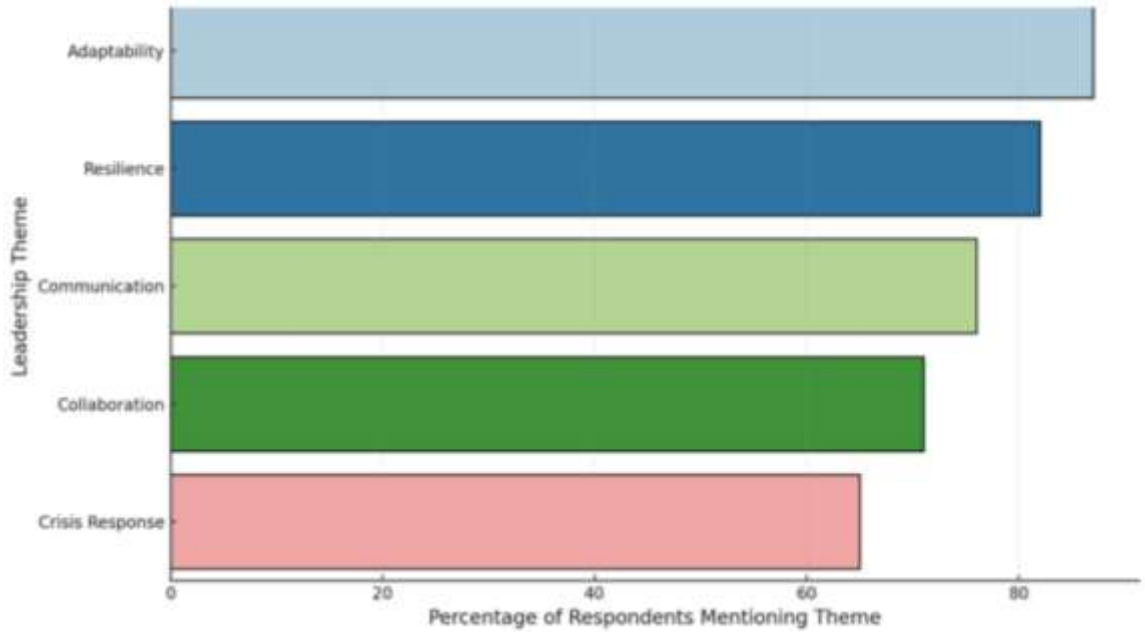
To supplement qualitative findings, frequency analysis was conducted on the coded survey data. This enabled the visualization of theme prevalence using bar charts and comparative tables across institutions. Although not statistical in nature, the quantitative layering enhanced pattern recognition and enabled triangulation between individual narratives and collective patterns (Nowell et al., 2017).

Five dominant themes were identified: **adaptability, resilience, communication, collaboration,** and **crisis response.**

To ensure ethical standards were upheld, all participants were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Verbal consent was obtained prior to recording interviews. The online survey included a consent statement, and submission was treated as informed consent. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all data were stored securely. Institutional names were generalized in reporting to protect confidentiality. The study was approved by the supervising academic body.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the thematic findings of the study based on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with academic leaders from three universities: Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI), Tashkent State University of Economics (TSUE), and Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies (TSUOS). Through thematic analysis, five dominant themes emerged: adaptability, resilience, communication, collaboration, and crisis response. These themes reflect how academic leaders in Indonesia and Uzbekistan interpreted and applied adaptive leadership in response to institutional challenges.



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Figure 1: Frequency of Adaptive Leadership Themes Mentioned by Respondents
This bar chart shows that Adaptability (87%) and Resilience (82%) were the most frequently mentioned leadership traits, based on 88 total responses.

4.1 Adaptability

Participants from all three universities identified adaptability as a foundational element of effective leadership. At UPI, leaders shared multiple examples of how they had to improvise during the early weeks of the pandemic. In one department, a self-organized digital training task force was created to train lecturers on video conferencing tools and LMS platforms. Faculty members also reported revising syllabi overnight to meet new delivery modes.

> *"We didn't wait for centralized instructions we immediately formed a task group to assess online teaching needs and launched pilot classes by the end of the week,"* explained a department head at UPI.

> *"*Within *the first few days, we mapped out which lecturers were ready, which needed support, and created a simple training plan using Zoom and Google Classroom,"* added a senior faculty coordinator.

These efforts mirror findings by Rofaida & Ciptagustia (2021), who emphasized that strengthening digital literacy is essential not only for organizational adaptability but also for maintaining institutional competitiveness during times of disruption. At TSUE, adaptability was demonstrated more cautiously. Leaders followed national policy shifts but made strategic internal adjustments such as assigning IT mentors to each faculty and limiting synchronous sessions to reduce digital fatigue.

> *"We formed a digital adaptation team. Each department nominated two tech-support staff. That helped senior teachers feel less stressed,"* said a TSUE dean.

At TSUOS, adaptability meant preserving traditional content while shifting to new modes of delivery. Leaders carefully curated which courses could be digitized without losing cultural richness.

> *"We had courses on ancient languages and manuscript analysis it's not easy to teach that online. So we recorded step-by-step tutorials using cameras and blackboards,"* explained a TSUOS program head.

4.2 Resilience

Resilience both emotional and institutional was highlighted by all respondents. At UPI, resilience was strengthened through a bottom-up approach. Leaders encouraged open conversations about emotional burnout and introduced flexible deadlines and wellness breaks for staff.

> *"Some of our best initiatives didn't come from leadership they came from junior lecturers who volunteered to create mental health check-ins,"* noted a vice dean.

At TSUE, structured planning played a more central role. A Crisis Management Committee met weekly to assess progress and psychological resilience workshops were offered through the HR division.

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"The moment panic rose, we responded with structure: first communication, then procedure. Our staff found calm in order," said a TSUE vice dean.

At TSUOS, resilience was understood through a cultural lens. Leaders described how values such as mutual respect, patience, and moral duty contributed to institutional endurance.

"We asked our students to stay strong, but we also shared our own struggles. That honesty built unity," shared a TSUOS senior lecturer.

"I reminded my team: our legacy has survived centuries we must lead with dignity and continuity," said a department head.

4.3 Communication

Communication styles varied widely but were central to leadership success. At UPI, leaders implemented participatory channels: Google Forms to gather feedback, weekly Zoom town halls, and group chats with teaching teams.

"We had a group chat with 74 lecturers. Every evening we shared challenges—and solutions," said a UPI faculty member.

"Our open meetings created space for real conversation, not just top-down directives," explained a department coordinator.

At TSUE, formal communication dominated. Circulars were issued for every policy shift and emails followed a strict approval chain. Despite its formality, this method was appreciated for clarity.

"We don't improvise when it comes to communication. Everything must be verified and official," stated a TSUE administrator.

TSUOS combined both approaches. While official guidance was circulated through memos, many department heads personally contacted staff and students by phone or messaging apps.

"When internet was unstable, I simply called my team one by one. That meant more to them than a perfect e-mail," noted a TSUOS language coordinator.

These varied approaches highlight how adaptive leaders in higher education navigated communication barriers by combining formal structures with relational strategies. Similar patterns of effective digital collaboration and participatory engagement have also been observed in the business sector, particularly among MSMEs. Such evidence reinforces the value of adaptive tools—such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems—not only for maintaining stakeholder engagement but also for fostering organizational learning during periods of disruption (Gaffar et al., 2023).

4.4 Collaboration

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All universities reported increased collaboration during the crisis, though the nature of collaboration differed. At UPI, interdisciplinary collaboration flourished. Faculty from psychology, education, and IT joined forces to design new student support systems.

> *"For the first time, I worked with tech and counseling teams to create a digital well-being module. It was a crash course in cross-faculty teamwork,"* recalled a UPI project lead.

At TSUE, collaboration was mainly within units. Coordination was effective but remained within formal chains of command.

> *"We had great cooperation—but mostly vertical. Decisions still passed through heads and vice deans,"* explained a faculty administrator.

TSUOS highlighted intergenerational collaboration. Junior staff assisted with technology, while senior staff ensured academic depth. This dynamic created new respect across roles.

> *"Our youngest lecturers became our digital trainers. The older ones brought wisdom. Together we balanced speed and tradition,"* said a TSUOS dean.

4.5 Crisis Response

Crisis response strategies showed both shared patterns and contextual differences. UPI acted early with a proactive mindset. Leaders created simulation-based training and scenario planning tools weeks before national orders were issued.

> *"We didn't wait. We built a red-orange-green system for pandemic scenarios—and practiced them online,"* shared a UPI administrator.

At TSUE, the response followed the national protocol but was executed swiftly at the university level. Compliance was key, but internal flexibility was allowed where needed.

> *"When the directive came, we were ready with department-level execution plans. It was like opening a drawer marked 'emergency,'"* said a TSUE planning director.

TSUOS leaders treated the crisis as a test of ethical leadership. Crisis meetings included discussions on fairness, community care, and long-term reputation.

> *"We asked: How do we stay human under pressure? That became our guiding principle,"* said a TSUOS ethics committee chair.

This grouped bar chart (Figure 2) compares how frequently each of the five adaptive leadership themes was mentioned by respondents from the three universities.

UPI consistently scored highest across all categories, with 92% of its academic leaders mentioning Adaptability, 89% Resilience, 85% Communication, 78% Collaboration, and 70% Crisis Response.

TSUE followed with 84% Adaptability, 80% Resilience, 72% Communication, 67% Collaboration, and 60% Crisis Response, reflecting a more structured but responsive leadership culture.

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TSUOS showed a balanced but slightly lower distribution: 85% of its leaders cited Adaptability, 77% Resilience, 70% Communication, 68% Collaboration, and 65% Crisis Response, emphasizing intergenerational teamwork and ethical continuity.

The pastel color scheme distinguishes each university UPI in light red, TSUE in soft blue, and TSUOS in pale gold—and visually highlights institutional differences in adaptive leadership emphasis while maintaining visual clarity and aesthetic harmony.

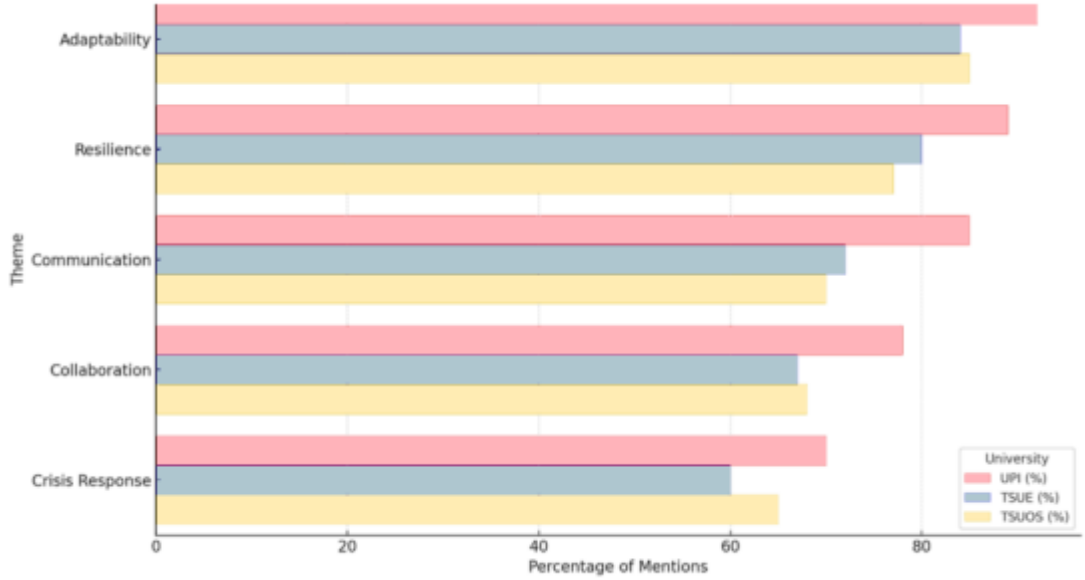


Figure 2: Theme Mentions by University

Table 1: Distribution of Adaptive Leadership Theme Mentions Among UPI, TSUE, and TSUOS Respondents

Theme	UPI (%)	TSUE (%)	TSUOS (%)
Adaptability	92%	84%	85%
Resilience	89%	80%	77%
Communication	85%	72%	70%
Collaboration	78%	67%	68%
Crisis Response	70%	60%	65%

(This table displays the exact percentage of respondents from UPI, TSUE, and TSUOS who mentioned each adaptive leadership theme. UPI leads in all categories, especially in Adaptability (92%) and Resilience (89%), while TSUE and TSUOS show relatively balanced but slightly lower emphasis across themes.)

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted nature of adaptive leadership in higher education and demonstrate how cultural, institutional, and historical contexts influence its practice. Although academic leaders in Indonesia (UPI) and Uzbekistan (TSUE, TSUOS) responded to similar challenges—such as rapid digitalization, communication barriers, and

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organizational uncertainty—their approaches reflected differing institutional norms and leadership traditions.

The theme of adaptability emerged as a defining characteristic of leadership across all three institutions. Leaders at UPI exhibited high degrees of operational flexibility, often initiating local solutions before national policies were issued. This supports Heifetz et al.'s (2009) view that adaptive leaders must lead beyond authority and act under conditions of ambiguity. In contrast, leaders at TSUE followed structured procedures but still demonstrated creative problem-solving within those constraints. At TSUOS, adaptability was framed within a cultural context, balancing modernization with the preservation of academic identity highlighting that adaptive leadership is not merely functional, but also symbolic. This pattern was reinforced by quantitative data, with adaptability being the most frequently mentioned theme (87%), as shown in Figure 1.

Resilience was similarly shaped by institutional culture. UPI promoted emotional support and informal mentoring, reflecting a participatory and relational leadership style, consistent with the findings of Özen & Yavuz (2023) on emotional-centered leadership in education. TSUE, on the other hand, focused on procedural resilience through administrative planning and organizational discipline. TSUOS introduced a cultural dimension to resilience, emphasizing values like dignity, continuity, and collective identity, which resonates with the CARE framework's inclusion of emotional intelligence and contextual awareness (Koh, 2023). These qualitative observations are supported by the survey data, where resilience ranked second in frequency (82%).

In terms of communication, the findings align with Boyar et al. (2023), who emphasized that adaptive leaders must balance clarity with empathy. UPI's use of open forums and informal chats supported bottom-up engagement, while TSUE's formal communication structure ensured stability and credibility in decision-making. TSUOS combined both, revealing a hybrid model where informal personal outreach complemented official instructions. This variation underscores that adaptive communication must adjust not only to crisis conditions but also to institutional expectations.

Collaboration practices revealed differences in how institutions leverage internal networks. At UPI, crisis conditions catalyzed interdisciplinary partnerships and flattened hierarchies, confirming the link between adaptability and innovation (Caringal-Go et al., 2021). TSUE remained vertically coordinated, reflecting traditional structures but still enabling effective intra-unit cooperation. TSUOS emphasized intergenerational collaboration as a strength, suggesting that adaptive leadership can also emerge through respect for institutional memory and peer learning. The theme of collaboration was mentioned by 71% of respondents, indicating its role as a secondary but relevant component (see Figure 1).

Lastly, crisis response strategies further demonstrate how adaptive leadership is operationalized differently across systems. UPI's proactive approach developing scenarios and initiating simulations—exemplifies anticipatory leadership (Stern, 2013). TSUE's compliance-driven model illustrates how adaptation can occur within hierarchical governance when flexibility is permitted at the execution level. TSUOS leaders framed crisis as a moral challenge, highlighting the ethical and cultural dimensions of leadership a theme supported

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by Crippen (2023), who argues that adaptive leadership during crisis must also serve as a model of institutional ethics. Notably, crisis response was mentioned by 65% of respondents, showing a consistent but lower emphasis compared to other dimensions.

In sum, this study confirms that while the core principles of adaptive leadership—such as flexibility, emotional resilience, and stakeholder engagement—are consistent across borders, their expression is shaped by local values, leadership traditions, and organizational logics. The visual comparison by university (Figure 2 and Table 1) further illustrates that UPI consistently reported higher engagement across all five themes, particularly in adaptability (92%) and resilience (89%), whereas TSUE and TSUOS showed more balanced but conservative patterns. This resonates with the notion that distinctive organizational capabilities rooted in contextual responsiveness—can provide sustainable advantage in navigating institutional change (Ciptagustia & Kusnendi, 2019).

6. CONCLUSION

This study explored how academic leaders in Indonesia and Uzbekistan practiced adaptive leadership in response to organizational challenges, with a focus on adaptability, resilience, communication, collaboration, and crisis response. Drawing on interview and survey data from three universities UPI, TSUE, and TSUOS the research revealed that while the core principles of adaptive leadership are shared, their application is shaped by cultural norms, institutional frameworks, and leadership traditions.

Leaders in Indonesia demonstrated high levels of autonomy and informal collaboration, often initiating change before formal guidance was provided. In contrast, leaders in Uzbekistan balanced structural compliance with internal flexibility, emphasizing organizational order and ethical responsibility. Across all institutions, the ability to support teams emotionally, communicate effectively, and foster trust emerged as key elements of leadership effectiveness during uncertainty.

Importantly, this study integrated both qualitative and frequency-based analysis. A total of 88 academic leaders participated in the open-ended survey, complementing the interview data. The results showed that Adaptability (87%) and Resilience (82%) were the most commonly cited themes across institutions (see Figure 1), while UPI consistently reported higher engagement levels across all leadership dimensions (see Figure 2 and Table 1). These quantitative insights strengthened the credibility of thematic findings and provided comparative perspectives across contexts.

By comparing perspectives across national and institutional boundaries, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of adaptive leadership in non-Western higher education contexts. It reinforces the idea that effective academic leadership requires not only individual competence but also cultural sensitivity and contextual responsiveness. The findings offer valuable insights for leadership development programs and policy frameworks in universities seeking to build resilient and adaptive institutions in an increasingly uncertain world.

7. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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ISSN: 1412-6613 & E-ISSN: 2527-4570

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding of adaptive leadership in higher education, particularly within non-Western institutional contexts. Theoretically, it extends the adaptive leadership framework by incorporating cross-cultural comparisons and showing how leadership behaviors are shaped by institutional traditions and national governance structures. The findings support and enrich existing models such as Heifetz's theory of adaptive leadership and Koh's CARE framework by providing evidence from underrepresented regions.

Practically, the study provides actionable insights for university administrators, leadership trainers, and policymakers. It highlights the importance of flexible decision-making, emotional intelligence, and culturally responsive communication during periods of institutional uncertainty. For universities in Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and similar settings, the results suggest that investing in local leadership autonomy, digital readiness, and intergenerational collaboration can enhance institutional resilience. The integration of adaptive communication and customer relationship strategies also mirrors findings from MSME sectors, where CRM tools fostered agile stakeholder engagement (Gaffar et al., 2023). Leadership development programs should be designed not only around competencies, but also around contextual adaptability and ethical leadership values.

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