

Harnessing Adaptive Leadership to Manage Workplace Diversity for Organizational Productivity: A Literature Review Approach

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Abstract

In an increasingly competitive business world, leadership strategies to improve performance depend heavily on the quality of human resources. Diversity in the workplace is an unavoidable reality in the era of globalization, where technological advances and labor mobility have opened up opportunities for interaction between individuals from various cultural backgrounds, religions, ages, and life experiences. When diversity is not managed properly, it can cause misunderstandings, conflicts, and even discrimination, which hinder productivity and lower employee morale. The purpose of this study is to analyze in depth the application of adaptive leadership strategies in managing employee diversity to improve organizational productivity. This research uses a qualitative approach with literature review methods. The results of the study show that adaptive leadership plays an important role in creating an inclusive, collaborative, and harmonious work environment, through open communication, flexibility in approach, and employee empowerment. These findings imply that organizations aiming to boost performance in a diverse workforce environment should prioritize leadership development programs that embrace adaptability and cultural intelligence. Therefore, it can be concluded that adaptive leadership is an effective strategy in dealing with the complexity of diversity in the modern workplace, but it is also a strategic key in increasing competitiveness and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Keywords: Adaptive Leadership, Diversity, Character, Employees, Company

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive business world, leadership effectiveness is key to determining organizational success, especially in the context of human resource management. The quality of human resources is influenced not only by initial qualifications but also by a continuous development process through targeted and relevant education and training (Risman, 2024). Strategically designed education and training, taking into account diverse individual characteristics, are important instruments in developing the technical and managerial competencies needed to navigate the ever-changing dynamics of organizations (Diva Nurhaliza, 2025; Utami et al., 2024). Such education and training not only develop technical skills but also managerial competencies that are essential for organizations to improve overall productivity and performance (Desto et al., 2024). However, in practice, the effectiveness of these programs is largely influenced by the ability of leaders to understand and adapt their approaches to the diversity of employee characteristics (Ariyanto et al., 2024). A leader must be able to recognize individual differences and manage this diversity strategically so that each employee can develop optimally. Therefore, the success of

improving organizational performance not only depends on the training program itself, but also on the quality of leadership that is able to integrate diverse characters in the human resource development process (Ainun Ilmi et al., 2024; Zahra & Gunawan, 2025).

Diversity in the workplace is an inevitable reality in the era of increasingly advanced globalization, where advances in information technology and increased global workforce mobility have created a vast and intense space of interaction between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, religions, generations, ages, genders, and very diverse life experiences (Gerhard Grandnaldy Manurung¹, 2023; 2024; Tanjung & Mardhiyah). Each generation brings different values, thoughts, perspectives on work, and communication styles, which ultimately directly impact the way they work, build interpersonal relationships, and interact with colleagues in the existing organizational structure (Paska et al., 2025). Amidst this increasingly multicultural work environment, companies are required to be able to manage diversity constructively, which requires inclusive internal policies, adaptive cross-cultural communication approaches, and the development of an organizational culture that respects differences, to form a harmonious, collaborative, and highly productive work team (T. M. Adriansyah, 2022; Tanjung & Mardhiyah). However, when diversity in an organization is not managed appropriately and wisely, the potential for internal conflict can increase, disagreements arise between individuals or groups, and can even trigger covert discrimination, which will ultimately have a negative impact on work morale, employee productivity, and reduce overall team morale (Elok Rahma Sarita, 2022; Shirma Sarita, 2022; Shirlyn, 2022).

Therefore, the success and sustainability of an organization depends greatly on the extent to which its leaders have the skills and sensitivity to strategically manage internal organizational dynamics, inclusively and responsively to changes and differences among team members. A leader who has the capacity to understand, direct and inspire their organization effectively will have a greater chance of leading the organization sustainably to achieve its goals and survive in fierce competition. While non-adaptive leadership can actually be a major obstacle to organizational progress (Nahnudin et al., 2023).

Adaptive leadership is leadership that is capable and wise in dealing with various situations and events (Nababan et al., 2024; Prayoga et al., 2025). Adaptive leadership refers to how a leader can solve problems and is able to control emotions to have the desired change attitude (Rofiyana & Aziz, 2024). Adaptive leaders can respond quickly to environmental changes, identify new opportunities and manage risks effectively. They must also be able to empower employees, encourage collaboration, and create a work environment that supports professional growth and development (Erman & Winario, 2024; Lestari et al., 2021). In addition, adaptive leaders also need to have the ability to communicate effectively with various parties both internally and externally to ensure that all members of the organization understand and support the shared vision and goals. Furthermore, adaptive leaders also play a key role in creating a safe psychological environment, where each team member feels valued, free to express their opinions, and dares to take initiatives without fear of blame, which in turn will strengthen team unity and accelerate collaborative strategic decision-making (Witri et al., 2024).

Previous research has extensively discussed the importance of diversity and inclusion in organizations, as well as the role of training in improving employee performance. Several studies have shown that cross-cultural communication training and inclusive work environments have positive effects on motivation and productivity. However, most of this research has focused on technical or communication training interventions without directly linking them to the strategic role of leadership in addressing individual personality diversity in the workplace. Furthermore, there is limited research examining how adaptive leadership strategies are used to manage employee personality differences to improve organizational productivity. This gap in the literature highlights the need to reposition leadership—especially adaptive leadership not just as a supportive mechanism, but as a central agent in managing workforce diversity.

Based on the evaluation of previous studies, it can be concluded that there is a research gap that needs to be addressed regarding how to implement adaptive leadership strategies to manage employee diversity in organizations. Previous research has focused more on cross-cultural communication training and inclusive work environments, but has not sufficiently examined the role of leadership in dealing with individual diversity in teams. The focus of this study is to develop a model of adaptive leadership strategies that can adapt leadership styles to the characteristics of diverse employees and examine how this approach can increase employee productivity and engagement in organizations. Therefore, this study attempts to fill the existing gap by providing a deeper understanding of the importance of adaptive leadership in managing diversity to promote better team performance. This study not only addresses the conceptual void but also contributes practically by mapping out how adaptive leadership can be tailored to individual differences in real organizational settings.

This study aims to deeply analyze the application of adaptive leadership strategies in managing employee diversity to improve organizational productivity. Furthermore, it assesses the extent to which leaders adapt their leadership approaches to individual differences in work teams and how adaptive leadership can create an inclusive, collaborative and productive work environment. This objective underscores the study's relevance in aligning leadership strategies with the contemporary demand for inclusive organizational development.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method. The purpose of this method is to gain a deeper understanding of adaptive leadership strategies in managing employee character diversity to increase organizational productivity. Through a literature review, the researcher compares related theories with various findings from previous studies that address similar issues. The qualitative approach was chosen because of its exploratory nature, allowing the researcher to comprehensively examine the dynamics of character diversity in the workplace and how adaptive leadership can be implemented strategically. This study does not use quantitative instruments or statistical data, but rather emphasizes the analysis of relevant literature such as scholarly journals, academic books, and articles from previous research. The literature was sourced using electronic databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and ProQuest, with a focus on publications between 2018 and 2024 to ensure the relevance and recency of the data. Inclusion criteria included peer-

reviewed articles written in English or Indonesian, directly related to adaptive leadership, workforce diversity, and organizational behavior. Exclusion criteria involved articles lacking empirical basis, opinion pieces without scholarly references, and sources not accessible in full-text format. This systematic review strategy ensures that the analysis is grounded in credible and thematically consistent academic sources.

Results and Discussion

The diversity of employee characteristics in organizations is an increasingly prominent phenomenon in the era of globalization. Literature studies show that this diversity encompasses not only differences in culture, religion, age, and educational background, but also variations in individual work styles, thinking, and values. This diversity brings great opportunities for the emergence of innovative ideas, increased team creativity, and strengthened organizational competitiveness. However, on the other hand, diversity can also pose complex challenges such as miscommunication, interpersonal conflicts, and gaps in perception in the workplace. Therefore, diversity needs to be managed with the right approach to become a strength, not a hindrance. One effective way is to implement adaptive leadership. Leaders play an important role in bridging existing differences and ensuring that diversity becomes a source of excellence for the organization.

Adaptive leadership is a form of leadership that adapts its approach to the situation at hand. Adaptive leaders not only focus on the target but also understand the needs and characteristics of each team member. By recognizing the uniqueness of individuals, leaders can develop appropriate and more effective work strategies. They see differences not as obstacles but as potential for development. One key to adaptive leadership is open communication between leaders and employees. Open and respectful dialogue can build healthy and productive relationships. When leaders allow all voices to be heard, employees feel valued and are more engaged in their work. This creates a work culture that respects diversity and strengthens teamwork.

Good communication is an essential foundation for dealing with diversity in the workplace. Leaders who are empathetic and socially sensitive can better read the emotional states of their employees. When a leader understands the feelings, needs, and backgrounds of their employees, working relationships become more harmonious. Empathetic communication fosters trust among team members. This mutual trust is essential for building strong collaboration and avoiding conflict. Furthermore, open communication allows fresh ideas to flourish. When every employee feels free to express their opinions, the spirit of innovation increases. Therefore, leaders need to continue to develop effective communication skills to facilitate diversity in a positive way.

In addition to communication, flexibility in leadership style is also an important aspect of adaptive leadership. Not all employees can be led in the same way, because their personalities and work styles are different. A flexible leader can adapt their approach to the current situation in the team. For example, for more independent employees, the leader can provide more freedom in their work. However, for employees who still need guidance, the leader can provide more intensive direction. This approach shows a leader with high situational intelligence. With this flexibility, the team can function more effectively because

each individual feels that the approach is tailored to their needs. This will help maintain harmony and increase work productivity.

Flexibility also reflects a leader's understanding of the ever-changing dynamics of the workplace. Rigid leaders who cannot adapt their leadership style can hinder team growth. Therefore, the ability to read situations and respond appropriately is essential in a diverse work environment. In practice, adaptive leaders often shift roles between mentor, facilitator, and director according to the needs of the team. This diverse approach allows leaders to maintain a balance between productivity and workplace well-being. When employees feel that the leader's approach aligns with their character, morale increases. This creates a supportive and energizing work environment. Therefore, flexibility is not just a virtue, but a necessity in modern leadership.

Employee empowerment is also an important part of adaptive leadership strategies. Leaders not only control but also give employees the opportunity to play an active role in the work process. By giving trust and responsibility, leaders encourage employees to grow professionally. Empowered employees are usually more confident, independent, and willing to take initiative. This has a direct impact on increased productivity and work quality. Furthermore, when employees feel valued, they tend to have a stronger commitment to the organization. A work culture that values individual contributions will increase loyalty and a sense of belonging. Therefore, empowerment is not only about distributing tasks, but also about creating space for employees to grow.

Empowerment strategies have been proven to significantly increase work motivation. When employees are given the space to express ideas and make decisions, a greater sense of responsibility emerges. This also opens up opportunities for greater innovation and initiative. Adaptive leaders encourage learning from experience, both successes and failures. This approach allows employees to feel safe trying new things without fear of criticism. A psychologically safe work environment is the foundation for building creative and dynamic teams. In the long run, this empowerment strategy is an investment in strengthening the human resources of the organization. Therefore, it is important for leaders to continue to create an atmosphere that encourages employee development.

However, in practice, adaptive leadership does not always work smoothly. A common challenge is resistance to change, both from employees and leaders. Change often creates discomfort, especially when there is a lack of understanding of its purpose. Furthermore, differences in perceptions and expectations among team members can also create tension. If not managed effectively, this can hinder teamwork. The complexity of individual characteristics also makes it difficult for leaders to implement a unified approach. Therefore, a deep understanding and appropriate strategies are needed to prevent differences from becoming a source of conflict. These challenges show that being an adaptable leader requires significant effort and awareness.

To overcome these obstacles, developing leadership competencies is an important step. Leaders need to be equipped with emotional intelligence and the ability to understand diverse cultural backgrounds. Training focused on self-awareness, emotional management, and cross-cultural communication is essential in strengthening leadership capacity. Furthermore, organizations must create an environment that supports the continuous

development of leadership skills. This can be achieved through mentoring, coaching, and experience-sharing forums. When leaders can see diversity as an asset, they are more likely to build healthy collaboration. Organizations that invest in leader development will be better prepared to face future changes and challenges. Therefore, strengthening adaptive leadership is a critical priority in human resource management.

From the various discussions above, it can be concluded that adaptive leadership is an effective strategy for managing employee diversity. This approach prioritizes open communication, flexibility in leadership style, and employee empowerment as the keys to its success. These three aspects are interrelated and reinforce each other in creating a positive work environment. However, the success of this strategy depends largely on the commitment and competence of leaders in dealing with the dynamics of diversity. Without consistent leadership and openness to change, this strategy is difficult to implement comprehensively. Therefore, investment in leadership development must be part of an organization's long-term strategy. With adaptive leaders, organizations can optimize the potential of diversity into collective strength.

Adaptive leadership also plays a key role in increasing an organization's resilience to change. In an ever-changing workplace, adaptability is essential for survival and growth. Adaptive leaders are able to see opportunities in challenges and devise appropriate strategies to address them. They also encourage teams to remain flexible and open to new ways of working. Therefore, adaptive leadership is not only relevant for managing diversity but is also essential for building resilient organizations. When all team members feel valued and heard, team spirit naturally grows, which in turn improves overall team performance.

Overall, the results of this literature review reinforce the view that adaptive leadership is an essential foundation for creating an inclusive and productive workplace. Leaders who communicate effectively, are flexible in their approach, and empower employees will foster a healthy and collaborative work environment. While the path to success is full of challenges, leaders who are willing to continue to learn and adapt will bring positive change to their organizations. Diversity is no longer an obstacle, but an opportunity that can be transformed into a team strength. Thus, organizations that develop adaptive leadership will have an advantage in facing a dynamic future. This type of leadership is not only necessary but also key to long-term sustainability and success. Therefore, building a culture of adaptive leadership must be part of the strategic mission of every modern organization.

Conclusion

This study shows that adaptive leadership strategies play a crucial role in managing employee diversity to increase organizational productivity. The literature review confirms that adaptive leaders are able to create an inclusive, collaborative, and harmonious work environment. This is achieved through open communication, a flexible approach, and targeted employee empowerment. In this context, diversity is no longer a challenge, but rather a potential that can be optimized if managed wisely.

However, the success of this strategy still depends heavily on the leader's ability to understand and respond to emotional and cultural differences. Barriers such as resistance to change and interpersonal friction remain common and require careful management.

Therefore, developing leadership capacity especially in the areas of self-awareness, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding is essential. Adaptive leadership is not only relevant in today's workplace but is also a strategic key to increasing competitiveness and maintaining organizational sustainability. Organizations that consistently embody adaptive leadership values will be better prepared to face future complexity and change. Nonetheless, this study is limited by its exclusive reliance on literature-based data without empirical validation. Future research is recommended to explore adaptive leadership implementation through case studies or field observations in multicultural organizations, as well as examine its interaction with variables such as psychological safety, team performance, or innovation outcomes, to strengthen the model's applicability in diverse organizational contexts.

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