

# Adaptive and Transformational Leadership During Crisis: A Case Study of a Junior High School in Yogyakarta

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges for private schools in Indonesia, particularly in terms of financial stability, declining student enrollment, and weakened institutional management. This study investigates how adaptive and transformational leadership was implemented to manage crisis conditions at Muhammadiyah Junior High School 10 (SMP Muhdasa) in Yogyakarta, with a focus on the leadership practices of a newly appointed female principal. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through field observations, in-depth interviews with the principal, and analysis of school documents between January and March 2024. The data were analyzed using Gadamerian hermeneutics to explore leadership strategies in a crisis context. Findings show that the principal employed adaptive and transformational leadership marked by participatory communication, strategic decision-making, and stakeholder engagement. Internally, the school's resilience was supported by a strong organizational culture, inclusive team dynamics, and spiritual motivation. Externally, collaboration with Muhammadiyah networks, parents, and community stakeholders played a crucial role in supporting the school's recovery and innovation efforts. The study highlights that effective crisis leadership is not only managerial but also deeply rooted in value-based, inclusive, and collaborative approaches. The principal's integration of spiritual values, philanthropic programs, and digital transformation fostered institutional resilience. This case provides a reference model for school leaders navigating educational crises through adaptive and transformational leadership.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged educational services globally and in Indonesian contexts, including Muhammadiyah educational systems. To begin with, the pandemic caused school lockdowns

in the UK and Australia for several months, followed by social distancing among students and school practitioners and limited educational services. In the Indonesian context, this health crisis influenced the low income from tuition fees (*Sumbangan Pembinaan Pendidikan/SPP*) for private schools where their primary source of funding come from societies. For instance, of the approximately 50,000 private schools in Indonesia, more than 30% faced financial difficulties, and over 5,000 schools were forced to close due to declining student enrollment and an inability to pay teachers' salaries (Kemendikbud, 2022). This situation highlights that the sustainability of schools is highly dependent on the capacity and quality of school leadership in managing crises. However, many school principals failed to respond to the crisis with adaptive strategies (European, 2021), causing their educational institutions to collapse amid uncertainty. On the other hand, studies on leadership success to deal with financial and management crises during the COVID-19 pandemic are rare. Therefore, this study intends to explore one of the schools owned as well as managed under the Muhammadiyah foundation, called SMP Muhdasa referring to SMP Muhammadiyah 10 situated in Yogyakarta which successfully navigated the financial and leadership issues during the pandemic. Thus, this article introduces adaptive and transformational leadership models as a theoretical lens, which can be defined as the leadership that implements accuracy in decision-making, flexibility in adaptation, and the ability to foster solidarity among all school stakeholders.

The success of this Muhammadiyah school in overcoming the crisis was not solely based on managerial aspects but also on leadership qualities that fostered a strong sense of responsibility and belonging among teachers, staff, students, and parents. The school principal managed the crisis from an administrative perspective and actively engaged all stakeholders through effective communication, institutional networking, and innovative learning strategies. Her leadership model did not perceive the Covid-19 crisis as a barrier; instead, it was leveraged as an opportunity to enhance the school's competitiveness through adaptive strategies focused on institutional development and sustainability (Sultoni & Gunawan, 2023). This approach aligns with the principles of Change Leadership, which emphasise resilience and flexibility in addressing challenges (Rhenald Kasali, 2015, 2021), such as the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, studying adaptive and transformational leadership at this school during the crisis is crucial. The urgency of this study becomes even more evident when compared to the many schools that failed to survive due to weak leadership during the crisis. This research is particularly compelling and unique because Esti, the school principal participating in this study, was a female teacher appointed as the principal at the peak of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. During this period, she not only had to ensure her own and her family's safety but also had to maintain the school's operations. Additionally, adaptive and transformational leadership models enable the principal to successfully implement flexible policies, increase engagement with stakeholders, and build a more resilient education system (European, 2021; Rhenald Kasali, 2021). Hence, this study is essential for analyzing the effectiveness of the leadership strategies, evaluating the internal and external supporting factors, and contributing both academically and practically to developing educational leadership theories relevant to crisis management and institutional sustainability.

## 2. METHODS

The current research was conducted from January to March 2024. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a field study method (Creswell, 2018) to analyze the adaptive and transformational leadership model at SMP Muhdasa in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Because the main problem of this study was to analyze leadership strategies of the female principal to manage her school, the primary data sources were obtained from this school principal and school policy documents and programs. This female principal was chosen by considering her relatively successful leadership during the covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, secondary data was collected from journal articles, books, and previous relevant studies. This approach enables a comprehensive depiction of

leadership effectiveness in maintaining school stability during the pandemic and identifying the internal and external factors influencing its success. Following the research ethics, the original name of the school and that of the female principal are used after obtaining permission from the principal for this study to provide one of the examples of the school's success in dealing with, for instance, school managerial issues.

This study's data collection techniques included direct observations at the school, in-depth interviews with the principal, and the analysis of school archives and related media publications (Creswell, 2018). Observations were conducted to understand communication patterns, decision-making processes, and adaptation strategies in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. In-depth interviews explored the principal's leadership in fostering responsibility, a sense of belonging, and engagement among all school stakeholders. Meanwhile, school documentation complemented data obtained from observations and interviews, ensuring a more comprehensive data analysis.

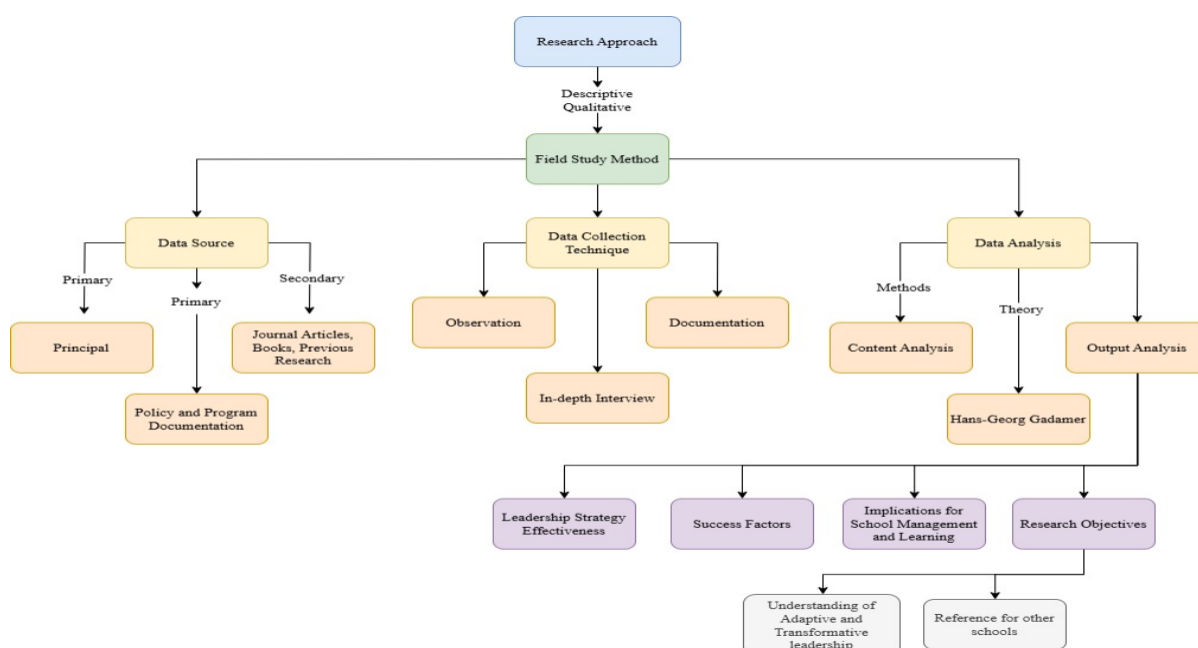


Figure 1. Research Flow

The data analysis in this study utilizes a content analysis approach based on Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory, which allows for the interpretation of data through a dialogical process between text and context (Leiviskä, 2016), allowing the researcher to be able to interpret and explore details of the female principal's leadership strategies in the context of educational crises partly due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic. The analysis results are organized into key themes, such as the effectiveness of leadership strategies, factors influencing success, and implications for school management and learning processes. This research is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of adaptive and transformational leadership in crisis management and serve as a reference for other schools in developing resilient leadership strategies that prioritize the sustainability of educational institutions.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Research Findings

##### 3.1.1. Challenging and Critical Issues Impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic

In an interview, Esti (the principal) stated that she was first appointed as the school principal of SMP Muhdasa on June 1, in 2021, at a time when Indonesia, including Yogyakarta, was experiencing

the peak of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic caused by the Delta variant. During this period, daily Covid-19 cases surged dramatically, the healthcare system was on the brink of collapse, and many patients struggled to receive medical care. This situation led to strict social restrictions, hampering public mobility and nearly paralyzing the economy. The education sector also faced significant disruptions, with policies shifting from classical (face-to-face) learning to remote learning, which required additional costs for procuring learning devices such as laptops and mobile phones.

Apart from external challenges, Esti, who had no prior experience as a school principal, was confronted with critical internal issues at her school. The school was in a financial crisis then, with insufficient cash to pay staff salaries for even one month. Additionally, the school operated on leased land, and the unpaid annual obligation created tensions between the school and the landowners. The school's physical conditions, including faded wall paint, an untidy courtyard, and a lack of clear school identity in its external appearance, further worsened its image.

Furthermore, SMP Muhdasa faced a crisis in both management and academics. Relationships among teachers, teachers and staff, and teachers, staff, students, and parents were strained. Teacher and staff morale was low, particularly regarding the success of the student admission program (PPDB), a crucial source of operational funds for the school. The PPDB program was unprepared, with the number of applicants falling far below the target. By June, the school was expected to have filled at least two of the three planned classes; however, the number of enrolled students was still below one whole class. Similarly, the teaching of al-Islam, Kemuhammadiyah, and Arabic (ISMUBA), a distinguishing characteristic of Muhammadiyah schools, was not functioning optimally, with only about 20% of students able to read the Qur'an. Additionally, student moral conditions were declining, with increasing reports of juvenile delinquency, some even involving the police.

### **3.1.2. The Principal's Motivation, Decision, Adaptability, and Responsibility in Leading Her School During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Despite these complex challenges, both internal and external, Esti remained resolute in leading the school. For her, the principal position was a mandate that had to be carried out with utmost dedication. Her leadership during the crisis was guided by three core values: religiosity, ideology, and social commitment. As a devout Muslim, Esti anchored her motivation in the principle of *fastabiqul khairat*, meaning competing in goodness or striving to be the best (Tim penyusun MTT PP Muhammadiyah, 2019). With this spirit, she viewed her leadership role as an act of worship and a means to seek divine inspiration from Allah, the only God. Secondly, her ideological motivation stemmed from her role as a committed Muhammadiyah cadre, adhering to the principle of not seeking leadership positions but accepting them as a responsibility when entrusted. Thus, despite the crisis, she embraced her role in developing the school in alignment with Muhammadiyah organizational regulations. Her third motivation was social value, as she aspired to be a person who benefits others. The support from her husband and parents further strengthened her determination to accept the position of principal despite the existing crises.

Armed with determination, Esti, known since her university days as a progressive women's activist, took swift and strategic action in response to the crisis. Her initial step was to oversee the PPDB process intensively to ensure its smooth and successful implementation. She formed a dedicated PPDB success team to expedite the promotion of SMP Muhdasa by visiting households and neighborhoods, engaging with community leaders, and involving alums to attract prospective students. Additionally, the school introduced an incentive program that rewards teachers, staff, students, and parents who successfully recruited new students. This strategy ultimately enabled the school to meet its target of three full classes, thereby preventing a potential financial crisis due to a shortage of students. For Esti, achieving PPDB targets was crucial for the sustainability of private schools, which rely heavily on student tuition fees for operational funding.



**Figure 2.** Student Promoting Team

To address financial needs, Esti initiated a philanthropic program. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in widespread loss of life and economic hardship, affecting students' families. In response, she launched a waste-based donation initiative involving all school members, parents, and the broader community. Participants were encouraged to donate recyclable waste, which was processed and sold by the school. The proceeds were used to support students struggling with tuition fees and to provide scholarships for underprivileged students. Furthermore, Esti established a community-based fundraising team and leveraged the role of Muhammadiyahs Zakat, Infaq, and Sadaqah Institution (Lazismu) as a platform for financially assisting economically disadvantaged students.

Recognizing the importance of fostering a sense of responsibility among school members during the crisis, Esti adopted a personalized communication approach with teachers and staff to build trust and enhance their involvement in decision-making. She emphasized that the school was a shared home, and each member was responsible for its sustainability. This strategy transformed passive teachers and staff into active supporters of school policies and programs.

Esti also understood that teacher and staff morale was critical to maintaining productivity during the crisis. Many educators experienced decreased motivation due to financial uncertainty and reduced incentives. To address this, she organized motivational activities featuring renowned speakers such as Prof. Suyanto, PhD, Dr. Patisina, Dr. Sandiaga Uno, and Dr. (candidate) Abdullah Mukti. Recreational activities, including small-scale outbound events, competitions, and communal meals, were also introduced to strengthen teamwork and morale within the school community.

Esti boldly decided not to implement salary cuts to safeguard teacher and staff welfare despite the school's financial difficulties. This marked a departure from the previous principal's policy of imposing salary reductions for staff who violated school regulations. Esti viewed such measures as unjust and inconsistent with humanitarian values, particularly during a crisis. She believed maintaining financial security for teachers and staff was essential for long-term loyalty and commitment to the school.

### **3.1.3. Expanding Social Engagement of the Principal**

Esti, the female principal, recognized that effective leadership extended beyond the school's internal affairs to building strong external relationships. She actively and intensively engaged with Muhammadiyah leaders and other institutions to secure support for school policies. Through this approach, SMP Muhdasa obtained financial assistance and educational programs to enhance learning quality. Notably, the school received support for Qur'anic literacy programs from Universitas Ahmad Dahlan and the National Zakat Agency (BAZNAS), including additional teaching staff for Qur'anic reading and writing assistance.

Additionally, that principal adapted the learning process to align with government policies requiring a shift from classical to online distance learning (PJJ). Despite pandemic-induced limitations, SMP Muhdasa implemented online learning using digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Google Drive to ensure effective education continuity. Teachers unfamiliar with technology received intensive training and mentorship to enhance their proficiency in managing online learning.

As a Muhammadiyah school, SMP Muhdasa is vital in instilling religious values among students. However, one of the significant challenges Esti faced was student moral degradation, evidenced by rising juvenile delinquency rates. To address this, she prioritized an Islamic character education program, aiming for all graduates to be proficient in reading and memorizing at least one juz of the Qur'an. The school also collaborated with Qur'anic memorization communities to create a more religious and conducive learning environment.

The findings from interviews with the principal demonstrate that the adaptive and transformational leadership model implemented at this school effectively addressed the crisis brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Through decisive decision-making, high adaptability, and participatory communication strategies, SMP Muhdasa survived and thrived despite its limitations. Innovations in economic strategies strengthened learning systems, and increased stakeholder engagement were key factors in the success of Esti leadership. This leadership model can be a reference for other educational institutions in navigating global challenges, particularly in times of crisis.

## 3.2. Discussion

### 3.2.1. Adaptive and Transformational Leadership Model in Crisis Management

#### Religious Motivation of the Principal

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted the global education sector (Davies, 2023; Utama et al., 2022), with particularly severe consequences for private schools in Indonesia. Amid the uncertainty of the second wave of the pandemic, Esti assumed the principalship of SMP Muhdasa on June 1, 2021. Accepting a leadership role during such a critical period reflects a value-driven and courageous orientation consistent with the principles of change leadership articulated by Rhenald Kasali (2015, 2021). Her decision was grounded in the Islamic principle of *fastabiqul khairat*—striving to excel in doing good (Tim Penyusun MTT PP Muhammadiyah, 2019)—which framed her leadership as service-oriented and collective in nature. Rather than prioritizing personal considerations, she positioned her leadership as a form of institutional stewardship. In the midst of widespread educational disruption, Esti sought not only to ensure the school's continuity but also to leverage the crisis as a catalyst for institutional transformation.

The financial repercussions of the pandemic placed significant strain on private schools across Indonesia, with many institutions experiencing severe fiscal distress and some ultimately closing (Riduwan et al., 2024). In numerous cases, ineffective and reactive leadership exacerbated these challenges, contributing to declining educational quality and deteriorating teacher welfare (Harsoyo, 2022). In contrast to such patterns, Esti adopted principles of adaptive leadership as conceptualized by Heifetz and Linsky (2009). Adaptive leadership, in this framework, extends beyond technical or short-term problem-solving; it emphasizes mobilizing stakeholders to confront complex challenges and collectively build organisational resilience (Fernandes et al., 2023; Prayag et al., 2024). By engaging teachers, staff, and the broader school community in navigating uncertainty, Esti maintained a long-term strategic orientation rather than focusing solely on immediate survival. This approach enabled SMP Muhdasa to avoid stagnation and to sustain institutional development despite crisis conditions.

Esti's leadership was further reinforced by her identity as a committed Muhammadiyah cadre and activist (Setiawan & Tjahjono, 2016). She asserted that Muhammadiyah schools require leaders with strong integrity and a firm grounding in organizational values to ensure institutional excellence and progress, even under adverse circumstances (Setiawan, 2020). This perspective aligns with Maxwell's (2019) concept of transformative leadership in *Leadership*, which emphasizes a leader's capacity to shift mindsets and organizational strategies in response to evolving social demands. However, Esti's leadership extended beyond strategic and managerial adaptation. While she implemented necessary financial and operational reforms, she simultaneously reinforced moral and spiritual values as the

foundational pillars of her leadership practice. In doing so, she integrated strategic transformation with ethical and religious commitments, thereby contextualizing transformative leadership within a faith-based educational institution.

Family support—particularly from her husband and parents—also constituted an important enabling factor in Esti’s leadership effectiveness (Utama et al., 2022). Such support contributed to her emotional stability amid the intense pressures of crisis leadership. Research indicates that emotionally stable leaders are better equipped to remain calm, prudent, and confident in decision-making during periods of uncertainty (Prayag et al., 2024). Esti’s experience resonates with Athey’s (2022) argument in *Leading Beyond Crisis* that psychological balance is fundamental to resilient and sustainable leadership. Her ability to maintain composure and clarity under pressure not only facilitated effective strategic decisions but also offered empirical insight into the interplay between adaptive, transformative, and resilient leadership models in crisis contexts.

### **Adequate Decisions During the Pandemic Crises**

One of the fundamental aspects of leadership during crises is the ability of a school principal to make quick and accurate decisions (Rhenald Kasali, 2015, 2021). This perspective aligns with Bass’s concept of transformational leadership, which emphasizes strategic vision, inspiration, and decision-making that is swift, precise, and innovation-driven (Roni Harsoyo, 2022). Bass’s ideas share similarities with the concept of adaptive leadership proposed by Heifetz and Linsky in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. According to them, an adaptive and effective leader must identify core issues and adjust to rapid decision-making processes with accurate strategies (Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, 2009). Similarly, the principal has demonstrated these principles by analyzing the school’s situation, identifying key challenges, and forming a strategic task force to devise solutions tailored to the institution’s conditions and challenges. Strengthening the school’s student admission program (PPDB) by involving various stakeholders reflects a deep understanding of adaptive, responsive, and transformative leadership strategies.

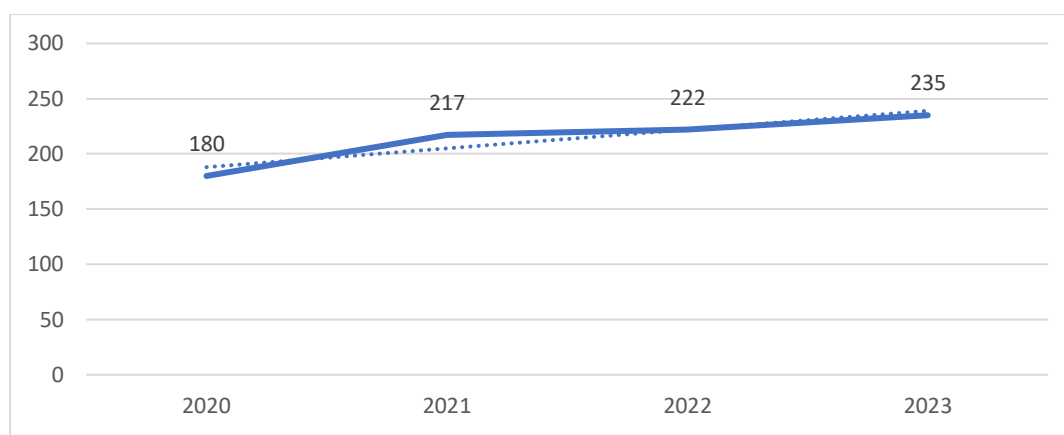
The approach taken by the principal of SMP Muhdasa in responding to the crisis also embodies the principles of Change Leadership as articulated by Kasali. In his book, Kasali underscores the importance of change leaders having the courage to make impactful decisions quickly, accurately, and precisely (Rhenald Kasali, 2015, 2021). The principal’s decision to completely overhaul the school’s vision and mission while establishing a strong working team signifies that the changes implemented were systemic and long-term oriented. This approach aligns with Maxwell’s thoughts in *Leadership*, where he argues that successful leadership during crises is not solely about survival but also about the capacity and quality to drive sustainable transformation (John C. Maxwell, 2019).

The leadership strategy employed by the principal also reflects the pillars of resilient leadership, as explained in *Leading* (Amy B. Athey, 2022). This work highlights the importance of resilient leadership in crisis management through five main pillars: confidence, emotional resilience, effective communication, strategic decision-making and team empowerment. In this context, the principal has demonstrated resilience in facing multiple pressures while maintaining team motivation, communicating a clear vision, and fostering active involvement of teachers and staff in various innovative programs.

Furthermore, despite financial difficulties, the principal’s decision not to cut teachers’ salaries is a concrete example of value-based leadership (Setiawan, 2020; Setiawan & Tjahjono, 2016). This decision aimed to maintain teacher welfare and strengthened their loyalty and commitment to realizing the school’s vision. Similarly, social initiatives such as the “Sedekah Sampah” (Waste Donation) movement (Hasanah et al., 2018; Setiawan, 2020) illustrate that leadership at SMP Muhdasa extends beyond internal crisis resolution. The program was also designed to empower the surrounding community as part of the school’s sustainability strategy (Futaqi & Machali, 2019; Latief, 2013; Siregar, 2020).

One of the primary strategies demonstrating the effectiveness of the principal’s leadership in overcoming the crisis was forming a PPDB success team (Setiawan, 2020). This team involved teachers,

staff, students, and parents in efforts to increase student enrollment. The PPDB success team worked diligently to optimize the 2021 student recruitment process. Their dedication and SMP Muhdasa's policy of providing incentives for those who successfully brought in prospective students significantly impacted student admissions. This effort was further supported by various strategic and innovative programs, such as digital promotions, alum testimonial campaigns, and door-to-door (direct marketing) strategies that effectively reached a broader community (Setiawan, 2020). These strategic initiatives yielded impressive results, as evidenced by the increase in new student enrollments in 2021, 2022, and 2023 compared to 2020 before Esti assumed the principalship. This success was also reinforced by the school's policy, guaranteeing that every graduating student could read and memorize at least one juz of the Qur'an. This commitment became a strong attraction for the community, particularly for prospective students' parents, thereby increasing the demand for enrollment at SMP Muhdasa.



**Figure 3.** Growth in Student Enrollment at SMP Muhdasa

The principal's success in making quick and accurate decisions underscores the importance of proactive and innovative leadership characteristics during crises. The combination of adaptive, transformational, and value-based leadership has proven to be a practical approach to addressing pandemic-related challenges, fostering innovation, and establishing a foundation for institutional sustainability (John C. Maxwell, 2019; Menon, 2023; Rhenald Kasali, 2015; Roni Harsoyo, 2022; Setiawan & Tjahjono, 2016). This model can serve as a reference for other school principals who struggle to navigate crises due to a lack of initiative and an inability to adapt to rapid changes. Therefore, other school leaders can replicate the leadership model practised at SMP Muhdasa, ensuring that their institutions survive and continue to thrive in the face of future crises.

### **Adaptive Responses in Managing School**

The Covid-19 pandemic, characterized by its unpredictability, has necessitated that leaders rapidly adapt to evolving situations (Rhenald Kasali, 2021). In times of crisis, school principals cannot afford to remain in their comfort zones or be trapped in a mindset that merely attributes failures to external circumstances. Adaptability in crises is crucial in ensuring the continuity of the educational institutions they lead (Fernandes et al., 2023; Flaxman, 2023). In this regard, the principal of SMP Muhdasa has demonstrated adaptive leadership in addressing the multidimensional challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including financial crises, declining student enrollment interest, limited human resources, and the psychological impact on teachers, staff, and students. On the other hand, the ability of this principal to respond effectively to these challenges has distinguished this principal from many other school leaders who have failed to adapt, leading to stagnation and regression within their institutions (European, 2021).

Adaptive leadership has been comprehensively explored in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. Adaptive leadership emphasizes recognizing environmental changes, identifying pressing challenges, and taking swift actions to adjust organizational strategies (Khan, 2017; Movahedazarhouli & Jones, 2024; Widarta et al., 2024). The principal of SMP Muhdasa has applied these principles by conducting a comprehensive situational analysis early in their tenure. By understanding the root causes of the school's challenges, the principal could formulate policies based on factual conditions and prioritize impactful short-term and long-term measures (Utama et al., 2022). This leadership model aligns with the Change Leadership theory proposed by Kasali, highlighting the necessity for change leaders to break away from old habits that hinder organizational progress (Rhenald Kasali, 2015, 2021). In this context, the principal demonstrated the courage to implement significant changes, including overhauling the school's vision and mission, forming a more dynamic and cohesive working team, and introducing new student admission strategies. These initiatives ensured the school's sustainability during the crisis and positioned it on a trajectory of progressive transformation.

Maxwell underscores that effective leaders must swiftly adjust their strategies in response to environmental dynamics (John C. Maxwell, 2019; Menon, 2023; Roni Harsoyo, 2022). The principal of SMP Muhdasa has embraced this concept by modifying teaching methodologies during the pandemic, introducing digital learning systems, and optimizing the engagement of school members, parents, and influential figures in supporting school programs. These steps reflect the principal's flexibility, maturity, and readiness in adapting leadership approaches to emerging challenges. Furthermore, in the context of resilient leadership, Athey delineates five key pillars of transformative leadership: strong confidence, emotional resilience, effective communication, strategic decision-making, and team empowerment (Amy B. Athey And, 2022; Prayag et al., 2024). The principal has successfully implemented these five principles through various policies, including fostering strong communication with teachers and staff, adopting collaborative strategies, and strengthening organizational resilience through value-based approaches. The commitment to safeguarding teacher and staff welfare by refraining from salary reductions during the crisis (Futaqi & Machali, 2019) is a concrete example of leadership grounded in empathy and trust.

The adaptive leadership at SMP Muhdasa extends beyond resilience in facing challenges, necessitating flexibility and the ability to interpret changes swiftly (Amy B. Athey, 2022). The principal has embodied this principle by developing innovative fundraising strategies, including community-based philanthropy programs (Latief, 2013; Siregar, 2020) such as the Sedekah Sampah (Waste Charity) initiative and partnerships with donor organizations. The transformation of the learning system into a digital platform is another aspect of this school's rapid adaptation. The school maintained educational quality by leveraging digital learning platforms despite pandemic constraints (Lien et al., 2023; Susanti & Ardi, 2022). The flexibility in these strategies ensured learning continuity and enhanced the digital competencies of educators and students.

The effectiveness of adaptive strategies at SMP Muhdasa has garnered attention from numerous stakeholders. Principals and management teams from various educational institutions within and beyond Yogyakarta have frequently visited the school, eager to study its crisis leadership strategies. This signifies that leadership approaches emphasizing flexibility, innovation, and solution-oriented strategies aid schools in surviving crises and serve as models for other institutions to replicate.

### **Responsible, Moral Leadership and School Connectedness**

Successful crisis leadership is not solely determined by policies but also by a leader's ability to build a cohesive team with a strong sense of responsibility and belonging or connectedness among its members (John C. Maxwell, 2019; Rhenald Kasali, 2015, 2021; Sjahrudin et al., 2024). The principal of SMP Muhdasa has initiated a personalized communication approach with teachers and staff to foster their confidence and engagement in decision-making processes (Setiawan & Tjahjono, 2016). This model is in line with transformational leadership principles, emphasizing the urgency of intrinsic motivation and employee empowerment. Maxwell posits that leaders must adapt to changing

situations, including fostering close relationships with their teams to enhance organizational commitment (John C. Maxwell, 2019).

One of the key strategies employed at SMP Muhdasa to instil a sense of responsibility among teachers and staff is conflict resolution through deliberation (Caputo et al., 2023). In decision-making processes that may lead to differing opinions, the principal involves various stakeholders to ensure their perspectives are acknowledged and valued (Setiawan, 2020; Setiawan & Tjahjono, 2016). This approach enhances the inclusivity of decisions and secures the support of the entire school community (European, 2021). This strategy is consistent with adaptive leadership principles, which argue that leaders should not solely rely on authority but also build harmonious relationships to foster organizational resilience (Fernandes et al., 2023; Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, 2009; Widarta et al., 2024).

Beyond deliberation, personal and cultural communication is pivotal in nurturing a sense of togetherness (Setiawan & Tjahjono, 2016). The SMP Muhdasa principal frequently dialogues with teachers and staff to understand their aspirations and concerns. Every school member is treated with dignity and humanity, fostering a familial bond within the institution. As a result, individuals develop a heightened sense of responsibility for the schools sustainability, as each member recognizes their significant role in maintaining institutional stability. This concept supports Kasali's perspective, which highlights the necessity of a mindset shift in addressing challenges, emphasizing that leaders must instil values of togetherness to facilitate effective organizational transformation (Rhenald Kasali, 2015, 2021).

Additionally, SMP Muhdasa has implemented regular Islamic study sessions for teachers and staff. These sessions at different homes enable school members to learn about each other living conditions and foster stronger bonds (Setiawan, 2020). The initiative aims to strengthen communal ties while enhancing the spiritual commitment of educators and staff. Through these study sessions, Islamic values are instilled more profoundly, contributing to school personnel integrity and work ethic (Hasbullah & Sanusi, 2023; Salam, 2023). The principal's transformational leadership is evident in integrating spiritual and professional development within school management (Setiawan, 2020). Relatedly, Athey highlights that successful crisis leaders build their teams' mental and emotional resilience, emphasizing that spiritual support is crucial in reinforcing individuals' perseverance in overcoming crises (Amy B. Athey, 2022).



**Figure 4.** Islamic study sessions for teachers and staff

SMP Muhdasa has also established a voluntary contribution system among teachers and staff to reinforce solidarity. The funds collected assist school members experiencing hardships, such as illnesses. This initiative aligns with crisis-era leadership models, highlighting the importance of empathy and social support in maintaining work motivation and alleviating psychological burdens (Abdul Rajun et al., 2022; Dewi & Soeling, 2024; Weiner et al., 2021). It also reflects the practice of values-based leadership, as the principal ensures that each individual feels valued and actively contributes to the school community. In this context, Maxwell asserts that successful leaders are not only those who

craft strategies but also those who cultivate a culture of care within their organizations (John C. Maxwell, 2019).

Thus, the leadership of SMP Muhdasa has successfully fostered a strong sense of responsibility and belonging among teachers and staff. This has been achieved through participatory approaches, deliberation, personal communication, and programs that promote social solidarity. With these strategies, the school has survived the crisis and evolved into a more resilient and cohesive educational community. This success is a valuable model for other educational institutions, particularly for principals facing similar challenges but struggling to foster synergy within their organizations. Leadership that prioritizes unity, open communication, and empathy has proven to be more effective in navigating crises (Movahedazarhouli & Jones, 2024) and ensuring institutional sustainability.

### Building Engagement: Morality, Happiness, and Productivity

Times of crisis often lead to a decline in morale and productivity (John C. Maxwell, 2019; Rhenald Kasali, 2015, 2021) among teachers and staff. To address this challenge, the Principal of SMP Muhdasa has made concerted efforts to enhance engagement through motivational and team-building programs, such as motivational training with inspirational figures, outbound activities, and competitions involving all teachers and staff. These initiatives serve as strategies to boost work enthusiasm and foster a stronger sense of community among members of the school. In this regard, Maxwell asserts that effective leadership must drive change by creating a supportive environment where team members feel valued and encouraged to contribute optimally (John C. Maxwell, 2019; Menon, 2023; Roni Harsoyo, 2022).



**Figure 5.** outbound activities



**Figure 6.** teachers and staff competitions

The importance of engagement within an organization, including educational institutions, extends beyond productivity; it is also crucial in fostering a healthy work environment (Anastasiou & Garametsi, 2021; Sjahrudin et al., 2024). Unfortunately, many school principals in various educational institutions fail to recognize this. Instead of building solidarity and an effective team, they often become overly preoccupied with administrative matters, neglecting the importance of establishing a cohesive and healthy team. Leaders who disregard team cohesion frequently experience increasing job dissatisfaction, weakening loyalty, and declining quality of educational services. Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow, in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, emphasize that leaders must be able to identify organizational challenges and adapt their leadership strategies to build long-term engagement and loyalty (Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, 2009).

The involvement of all elements within SMP Muhdasa in fostering engagement has been key to maintaining the institution stability (Sjahrudin et al., 2024). The Principal ensures that every teacher and staff member has the opportunity to contribute and feel part of a larger community. The principal transformative leadership model emphasizes the importance of a collective vision (Nadeem, 2024) in building a resilient school amid crises (European, 2021). This approach aligns with Kasali view that changes leaders must be able to drive innovation through the active involvement of all organizational members, create an inclusive work environment, and cultivate a strong sense of ownership (Rhenald Kasali, 2015, 2021).

Furthermore, the principal has optimized the role of the schools creative media team in promoting and publicizing school activities through various platforms, including social media, the school website, and print media (Setiawan, 2020). Consistent publication efforts enhance the schools image and strengthen the sense of pride among teachers, staff, students, and parents. In this context, Everly underscores the importance of effective communication in reinforcing team engagement and organizational pride, particularly during times of crisis (Amy B. Athey And, 2022; Yozi & Mbokota, 2024). Moreover, engagement efforts at SMP Muhdasa are also evident in creating a supportive work culture. Transformational leadership in this context ensures that teacher and staff morale and happiness are maintained (Anastasiou & Garametsi, 2021), thereby optimizing productivity (Sjahrudin et al., 2024). Everly also emphasizes that emotional and spiritual well-being are critical to sustaining employee motivation and dedication in high-pressure situations.

The emphasis on engagement at SMP Muhdasa demonstrates how collaborative leadership can create a more stable educational environment (Menon, 2021; Nadeem, 2024). This contrasts with other schools experiencing stagnation due to a lack of attention to engagement. The school successfully navigated crisis challenges by fostering active teacher and staff involvement in decision-making, cultivating a supportive work atmosphere, and implementing effective communication strategies. The leadership model of this school can inspire other schools, as an empathetic, adaptive leadership approach is seen as more effective in building loyalty and work enthusiasm than rigid and authoritarian leadership styles. Therefore, the success of the principal in fostering engagement through morality, happiness, and productivity can serve as a model for other schools in creating a healthy, productive, and welfare-oriented work environment.

### **3.2.2. Factors Influencing the Success of Adaptive and Transformational Leadership in Crisis Management**

The success of adaptive and transformational leadership models in managing crises at SMP Muhdasa is closely linked to internal and external factors that support the effectiveness of the strategies implemented (John C. Maxwell, 2019; Menon, 2023; Rhenald Kasali, 2015, 2021; Roni Harsoyo, 2022). First, internal factors include the school principal's leadership characteristics, organizational culture, team engagement, and innovation in school management systems. As the principal, Esti exhibits characteristics such as the courage to make decisions in difficult situations, practical communication skills, and an inclusive approach. These traits position her leadership as strong, enabling her to inspire and motivate those she leads. This aligns with the transformational leadership theory proposed by Bass, which states that effective leaders must inspire and motivate their subordinates to achieve collective goals (Menon, 2023; Roni Harsoyo, 2022). The principal has successfully built a collective vision by mobilizing all school members to remain united in facing challenges and obstacles during crises. This model aligns with the concept of Change Leadership introduced by Kasali, which posits that a change leader must manage uncertainty by fostering innovation and a culture of adaptation within the organization (John C. Maxwell, 2019; Rhenald Kasali, 2015, 2021).

Additionally, a strong organizational culture established within the school environment plays a crucial role in the school's success in navigating crises. The principal continuously instils a sense of responsibility and belonging among teachers and staff through personal communication and

reinforcing spiritual values. According to Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow, strong interpersonal relationships within an organization are essential for maintaining institutional stability and sustainability during crises (Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, 2009). Similarly, practical strategies to secure internal support during crises involve a participatory approach and open communication (Nadeem, 2024). The principal fosters open discussions that encourage the active involvement of teachers and staff in decision-making processes. A more collaborative and innovative work environment is created by providing opportunities for them to share ideas and aspirations (Anastasiou & Garametsi, 2021; Sjahrudin et al., 2024; Yozi & Mbokota, 2024). This model reflects adaptive leadership strategies that emphasize the importance of responsiveness to change and the engagement of all organizational elements in addressing crisis challenges.

Second, external supporting factors include support from the Muhammadiyah organization (Setiawan, 2020; Setiawan & Tjahjono, 2016), parents, community leaders, and other institutions. These stakeholders contribute significantly and are key to SMP Muhdasa's leadership success. The support the Muhammadiyah Central Leadership and its network of Muhammadiyah schools provide is not limited to financial aid and material assistance. It also includes guidance in school management during crises. This synergy exemplifies the importance of values-based leadership, in which organizations with shared values and visions collaborate to create positive change (Caputo et al., 2023; Masry-Herzallah & Stavisky, 2021; Widarta et al., 2024). Everly highlights that one of the pillars of resilient leadership is building networks and securing external support to enhance organizational resilience during crises (Amy B. Athey And, 2022; Prayag et al., 2024). Moreover, parental and community support is a significant external factor reinforcing school leadership success. The principal actively involves parents in school programs, including regular meetings, fundraising initiatives, and student academic mentoring. This parental participation reflects the implementation of the Leadership strategy (John C. Maxwell, 2019) and changes leadership (Rhenald Kasali, 2015, 2021), which suggests that leaders must adapt their leadership approaches to meet organizational needs, including engaging multiple stakeholders to achieve common goals.

The success of adaptive and transformational leadership at SMP Muhdasa demonstrates that a synergistic combination of internal and external factors can foster organizational stability even amid crises. Unlike many other schools that experienced stagnation due to a lack of support, this school has shown that responsive, inclusive, and collaborative leadership can be the key to overcoming complex challenges. Therefore, this leadership model can be a reference for other schools in building organizational resilience and enhancing the quality of school management and learning processes for continuous improvement and excellence.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study show that the female principal of the Muhammadiyah junior high school 10 in Yogyakarta has practised values such as Islamic motivation and adaptive or sufficient responses to the socio-economic crises because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the principal's leadership has combined innovative strategies based on multi-stakeholder collaboration, the integration of spiritual values and the digitalization of school management, enabling the institution to sustain and grow despite various limitations. The leadership model at this school highlights the effectiveness of a participatory communication approach, the reinforcement of organizational and ideological values, and community empowerment in improving school governance. This finding contributes to revealing the school leadership needed for a society grounded in social innovation and expanding social networks during social crises caused by the pandemic. While this study might show the theoretical and practical contributions to (re)shaping a school leadership model during social crises, this study might have limitations of being replicated to other schools with dissimilar circumstances such as school character, principal's personality, and social support. Therefore, further research is

needed to consider various circumstances as well as influential factors, and (dis)similar characteristics of the schools.

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