

Educational Leadership and Pandemic: A Conceptual Case Study of Gedu College of Business Studies (GCBS)

Author	Abstract
<p>Purnendu Basu¹, Senior Lecturer, Gedu College of Business Studies.</p> <p>Key words:</p> <p>adaptive leadership, COVID-19, educational leaders, GCBS, teaching-learning strategy.</p>	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented and myriad changes in the teaching-learning process of Gedu College of Business Studies. Majority of the educational leaders² did not have any exposure to the online mode of teaching. They were ill-prepared to shoulder the responsibility of offering online education. This conceptual paper discusses the challenges faced by the educational leaders of GCBS and critically examines the adaptive leadership model adopted by GCBS to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic. This study points towards a need for an adaptive leadership as a strategy for educational leaders to respond effectively during a crisis.</p>

Introduction

The pandemic showed that educational institutions were ill-prepared to shift to an alternative mode of teaching-learning. At GCBS, the faculty and students were exposed to an unfamiliar teaching-learning method. The pandemic brought fear and worry at different layers starting from individuals to nations. In Bhutan, the Government tried its best to contain the impact of the pandemic and bring back the normalcy. However, with a sudden surge in cases globally, the best alternative was to prioritize strategies to contain the spread of COVID-19. In Bhutan, education was one of the worst-hit

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² This paper refers to faculty as educational leaders.

sectors because of the pandemic. Educational leaders were ill-prepared to respond promptly to the unprecedented turmoil caused by the pandemic. There were more questions than responses available.

The Covid-19 pandemic transformed the teaching-learning landscape significantly. This demanded that educational leaders embraced innovative pedagogies to ensure effective learning. The only logical strategy that the Royal University of Bhutan recommended to its constituent and affiliate colleges was to adopt online teaching. Unfortunately, the majority of educational leaders were not exposed to the online mode of teaching. This new teaching method became a challenge that demanded them to be learners themselves. In this regard, Bakhmat (2021) argued that lecturers showed low acceptance of online education and were partially satisfied with online teaching. The situation demands adaptive leadership to inspire effective teaching-learning.

Thus, this conceptual paper explores the challenges faced by the educational leaders of GCBS during the pandemic. This paper also critically examines the adaptive leadership strategy opted for overcoming the challenges.

Outlook of Online Teaching-Learning

The pandemic created an environment of uncertainty in educational institutions. At GCBS, the educational leaders explored strategies to ensure the continuity of teaching-learning activities. Some grave questions that everyone at GCBS asked were: 'Is it possible to continue with our teaching-learning process? What kind of infrastructure, facilities, and capacity development would be necessary to ensure continuity of teaching-learning during such tumultuous times? Will online teaching be effective?' This demanded educational leaders respond fast and appropriately so that the decisions made did not have negative consequences on student learning. The decision was to offer online education like all the colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan.

The unprecedented and unprepared shift from offline teaching-learning to online mode posed many challenges for both faculty and students. For instance, one of the senior lecturers commented,

'Imparting education through online mode is very challenging for me. I have limited knowledge of computers. So, the first half an hour is wasted in setting my system for online teaching'.

In this regard, Weidong and Hongyu (2020) concluded that online education is a solution to overcome the present crisis but the sudden shift from the offline to the online mode is a problem. Likewise, Tarkar (2020) acknowledged that online teaching has brought many problems to both teachers and students. Further, even from students' perspective, several studies show that students' satisfaction with online teaching is lower than with offline teaching. For instance, Wang et al. (2020) concluded that students are mostly dissatisfied with online teaching.

Challenges

The pandemic has brought a multitude of challenges in front of educational leaders. The key challenges faced by the GCBS educational leaders are presented here.

Poor Network Connectivity

The poor accessibility of the WI-FI and the unprepared transition to online mode was the major challenge faced by GCBS. One of the senior lecturers from GCBS commented 'Most of the time either I get disconnected or my students lost the connection. At times I feel it is difficult to continue teaching through online mode.' This challenge was faced by both faculty and students since internet connectivity is the main facility to support online education. Bean, et al. (2019) and Noor et al. (2020) found that the quality of online learning is affected adversely by slow and unreliable network connections.

Sustaining Attention

The majority of GCBS faculty did not have the competence to sustain the attention of students. Further, some even shared that they did not even know whether learners were participating and paying attention or not. Students also shared that it was challenging to interact with their teachers as they did in the face-to-face teaching-learning environment. Some students even expressed that it was difficult for them to exercise self-discipline and focus since they had the liberty of studying from home. Wang et al. (2020) found that retaining students' attention during online classes is the biggest challenge. Thus, students are dissatisfied with the online mode

of teaching-learning. Tang et al., 2020 argued that there were many inconveniences relating to online teachings such as low level of interaction and a high degree of distraction resulting from liberty.

Online Know-How and Infrastructure

The poor aptitude of some educational leaders to use ICT had obstructed the effective delivery of online teaching-learning. On the part of the students, many did not have laptops or good quality mobile phones that supported online learning effectively. Some students lived in places with very poor internet connectivity. In this regard, Joshi et al. (2020) concluded that know-how to use ICT is one of the barriers to effective online teaching-learning. Further, the authors also mention that most educational institutions lacked the necessary capacity to deliver online classes. Likewise, Noor et al. (2020) also explained that poor ICT support and low technology confidence of the faculties are barriers to online teaching.

Adaptive Leadership: Leadership Model for Turbulent Times

To overcome the crisis during the turbulent times of pandemic, the adaptive leadership seems to be the best choice as discussed below:

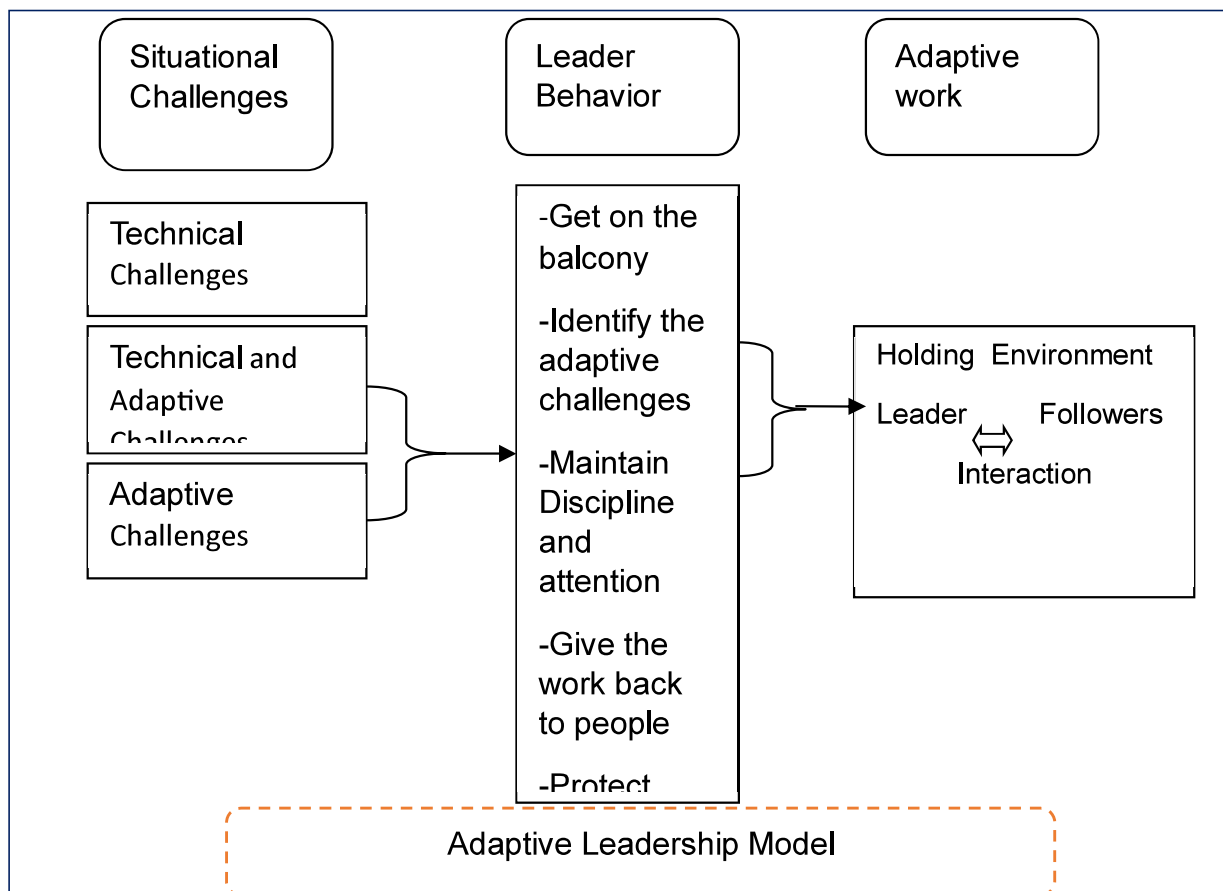
Concept of Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership enables people and organizations to flourish in the face of adversity and prepares them for the process of change. To build capabilities that are in line with an organization's ambitions, this leadership strategy comprises diagnosing, interrupting, and inventing. Adaptive leaders look for solutions to problems beyond those that can easily be addressed. They can foresee problems and determine their underlying causes (Heifetz, 2009). All leaders focus on making important decisions, and adaptive leadership is no exception. But what sets apart their leadership style is that they are flexible enough to change course when necessary, open to criticism, and prepared for the change that is unavoidable. Adaptive leaders embrace uncertainty and adopt new approaches if they are to chart a course amid a turbulent environment (Dunn, 2020). Adaptive leaders create a shared sense of purpose and manage through influence rather than command and control (Torres et al., 2020). The integrative adaptive leadership style improves teamwork and organizational commitment (Martono, 2020). The adaptive leadership framework is shown in figure 1.

The complexity of teaching and learning has unquestionably increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a great deal of uncertainty about

the potential efficacy of solutions in complex contexts. Additionally, complexity can make problems more difficult to resolve using the knowledge and abilities already present within an organization. Adaptive techniques are frequently used by organizations that operate in complicated situations to deal with uncertainty. The adaptive leadership framework mentions three different challenges that leaders will face. The first challenge is technical which needs to be clearly defined to facilitate the leader to address the challenge. The second challenge is technical and adaptive which demands the support of the employees of the organization. The third challenge is adaptive challenges (Northhouse, 2019). Technical and adaptive challenges were what GCBS educational leaders had to deal with. To tackle the obstacle, participation from all organizational levels was necessary.

Figure 1
Adaptive Leadership Framework



Source: Adapted from Northhouse (2019)

The adaptive leadership model requires educational leaders to act in certain ways. These are getting on the balcony, identifying the adaptive challenges,

maintaining discipline and attention, and giving the work back to people. Getting on the balcony requires the leader and followers (students) to step back and gain perspective. The leader tries to assess the gravity of the situation and plans accordingly. The leader should then identify adaptive/situational challenges after recognizing the type of difficulty the leader is facing such as technical challenge, technical and adaptive challenge or an adaptive challenge is necessary. By keeping an eye on the situation and providing assistance, leaders can control discomfort. This may entail constructing areas or holding situations as a part of adaptive work to assist followers to feel comfortable. Mortona et al. (2020) also acknowledged that the adaptive leadership style has a positive effect on teamwork and commitment.

Adaptive Leadership: A Case of GCBS

The GCBS educational leaders gave a clear direction to overcome the crisis and accomplish their tasks after understanding the situational challenges. For this, the leaders got on the balcony to comprehend the seriousness of the situation. In the initial phase of online teaching, many GCBS educational leaders were just attempting to survive as a result of the abrupt shift to online learning. They modified and used the face-to-face classroom materials for online teaching-learning. However, repackaging the face-to-face teaching-learning content and activities for online teaching would not help in achieving the expected teaching-learning outcome. On the contrary, online teaching involves proficient use of technology (Osika, et al. 2009; Miller, 2014). To deliver effective online teaching-learning, it is necessary to design stimulating and creative online activities (Darius, 2021). Thus, the situational challenges confronted by the educational leaders of GCBS were technical and adaptive. After understanding the broad objective of online teaching, the educational leaders of GCBS embraced adaptive leadership to navigate smoothly through the turbulent times caused by the pandemic. The right application of leadership style facilitated the faculty to cope with the new mode of teaching-learning environment within a short span of time. At GCBS, the educational leaders started including more exciting activities in their online classes with the support of the management to ensure the delivery of good quality education amidst the crisis. GCBS faced multiple and complex problems. Adaptive leadership strategy encouraged a collaborative approach to problem-solving where diverse viewpoints were harnessed to address the problems.

Key Adaptive Leadership Behavior

This paper covers three key adaptive leadership behaviors adopted by the educational leaders of GCBS to overcome the crisis caused by the pandemic.

Effective communication

Effective communication is one of the most important aspects of adaptive leadership. The communication between leaders and students and staff should be two-way and effective. A major portion of a manager's time is spent on communication. In this regard, Brown (2020) mentions that clear logical narratives in reporting, open communication, and effective questioning are important elements of communication that are necessary to influence engagement. Further, Giudici and Filimonau (2019) underscore communication as one of the important determinants of leadership. A study by Armour (1998) found that 14% of each workweek is wasted on poor communication. Research findings by Meisinger (2003) show that market value increases by 7% if organizations improve their communication integrity. Barudzic (2022) also pointed out that leaders with good communication abilities will inspire their followers and team members.

At GCBS, the educational leaders established a strong channel of communication among the faculty themselves. They also updated one another on the teaching-learning process and pedagogies to be followed. Likewise, GCBS faculty also built strong channels of communication with the students to deliver regular online classes and also to support their learning regularly. The case of GCBS clearly demonstrated that effective communication which is one of the key parameters of adaptive leadership supported effective teaching-learning.

Clarity of Direction

Clear direction is an important adaptive leadership behavior to respond to turbulent times. Many uncertainties loomed and with it expectations for clear direction on the way forward. For instance, the GBCS educational leaders expected clear direction from the management, while the students expected the same from the faculty. Doubts and uncertainty prevailed in every sphere of activities. While the GCBS management and educational leaders dwelled on the delivering online teaching-learning effectively, the students remained uncertain about their aptitude to cope with online education, however, the clear direction provided by GCBS management and effective implementation by the educational leaders facilitated a smooth transition to online teaching-learning from face-to-face education. Aligned with the importance of clarity of direction, Dewan and Myatt (2008) stated that

setting direction is one of the key leadership qualities indispensable to navigating successfully out of turbulent times.

Collaborative Working

Literature on collaborative leadership underscores the necessity of leaders to help and facilitate building a thriving and engaged community (Chrislip,2002). Generally, studies show that leaders can influence their community by engaging the members in leadership activities and leadership development programs, and knowledge sharing (Cleveland & Cleveland, 2018). Further, by focusing on the impact of collaborative leadership on community engagement, leaders entrenched in the traditional organizational hierarchy, will have the opportunity to expand their creativity, and find innovative solutions for turbulent times.

The GCBS educational leaders opted collaborative working strategy to respond effectively to the crisis injected by the pandemic. This approach enabled those faculty with poor ICT knowledge to learn and receive support from educational leaders with sound ICT aptitude. Similarly, faculty with sound knowledge of online teaching-learning pedagogy supported and built the capacity of those with poor or no knowledge of online pedagogy. Thus, GCBS was able to navigate smoothly through the turbulent times by adopting a collaborative working model. In the context of collaborative working adopted by GCBS Laal & Ghodsi (2012); Ansari & Khan (2020) concluded that collaborative learning helps in higher achievement and greater productivity.

Conclusion

This COVID-19 pandemic brought a sea-change in Bhutanese Education system with a shift from face-to-face teaching-learning to online teaching-learning platform. Further, the educational leaders also became learners and they became familiar with the online pedagogies. The educational leaders of GCBS also learned to cope with turbulent times and be resourceful. Another conclusion that can be drawn from GCBS experience is that adaptive leadership facilitates overcoming crises effectively and if the right leadership model is adopted, online teaching-learning can produce a positive outcome. The final conclusion was that the GCBS educational leaders embraced the adaptive leadership strategy to respond to a crisis and that this model is relevant and effective to address challenging situations for a teaching-learning process.

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