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ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AS A TOOL FOR REDUCING TEACHER BURNOUT

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АДАПТИВНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ СНИЖЕНИЯ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОГО ВЫГОРАНИЯ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ

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Abstract. The article explores the role of adaptive management in mitigating professional burnout among university and college faculty. Amid ongoing educational reforms, digital transformation, and rising institutional demands, academic staff face increasing emotional and cognitive workload, leading to stress, disengagement, and reduced productivity. Drawing on contemporary leadership theories, including adaptive leadership and complexity theory, the study examines how flexible managerial strategies—such as participatory decision-making, emotional support, and responsive communication—contribute to the creation of psychologically safe and motivating environments. Based on a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and interviews with higher education faculty and administrators, the findings highlight that institutions practicing adaptive management report significantly lower levels of burnout and higher staff engagement. The study concludes by offering practical recommendations for integrating adaptive approaches into academic governance and human resource policies.

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается роль адаптивного управления в смягчении профессионального выгорания среди преподавателей университетов и колледжей. В условиях продолжающихся образовательных реформ, цифровой трансформации и растущих институциональных требований преподавательский состав сталкивается с возрастающей эмоциональной и когнитивной нагрузкой, что приводит к стрессу, потере вовлеченности и снижению производительности. Опираясь на современные теории лидерства, включая адаптивное лидерство и теорию сложности, исследование изучает, как гибкие управленческие стратегии, такие как участие в принятии решений, эмоциональная поддержка и отзывчивая коммуникация, способствуют созданию психологически безопасной и мотивирующей среды. Основанные на подходе, основанном на смешанных методах, включающем опросы и интервью с преподавателями и администраторами высших учебных заведений, результаты подчеркивают, что учреждения, практикующие адаптивное управление, сообщают о значительно более низком уровне выгорания и более высокой вовлеченности персонала. В заключение исследования предлагаются практические рекомендации по интеграции адаптивных подходов в академическое управление и политику в области кадровых ресурсов.

Keywords: adaptive leadership; teacher burnout; emotional exhaustion; faculty well-being; higher education management; organizational flexibility; participatory governance; psychological safety; educational leadership; stress prevention.

Ключевые слова: адаптивное лидерство; выгорание учителей; эмоциональное истощение; благополучие преподавателей; управление высшим образованием; организационная гибкость; партисипативное управление; психологическая безопасность; образовательное лидерство; профилактика стресса

In recent years, the issue of teacher burnout has become one of the most pressing challenges in the higher education sector. The combined pressures of curriculum reforms, digital transformation, administrative overload, and increasing expectations for academic output have intensified emotional strain among faculty members. Burnout, described as a psychological syndrome involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment [7], negatively impacts not only individual well-being but also organizational performance and student outcomes.

Adaptive management—an approach grounded in flexibility, responsiveness, and contextual sensitivity—has gained traction as a potentially effective response to this problem. Unlike traditional top-down leadership models, adaptive leadership focuses on creating conditions for collaborative problem-solving and ongoing learning in uncertain and evolving environments [5]. In academic settings, this means empowering faculty members, fostering shared governance, and recognizing the emotional and intellectual demands of teaching and research work. The relevance of adaptive strategies is further supported by complexity leadership theory, which posits that universities—being complex, dynamic systems—require leaders who can facilitate emergent processes, support innovation, and respond to changing internal and external conditions [10]. Within this framework, emotional support, feedback loops, and distributed decision-making are not auxiliary but essential components of sustainable academic leadership. Studies have shown that the psychosocial climate of an institution plays a critical role in either exacerbating or buffering burnout. When faculty feel ignored, micromanaged, or excluded from institutional decisions, stress increases [6, 11]. Conversely, psychological safety, trust in leadership, and the ability to influence change have been linked to lower levels of burnout and higher job satisfaction [1, 3].

Despite the growing body of literature on academic stress, there remains a gap in understanding how adaptive management practices—such as responsive leadership communication, flexible workload policies, and emotional intelligence—can serve as proactive tools for burnout prevention in university and college contexts. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the relationship between adaptive management and levels of burnout among higher education faculty. Using a mixed-methods design, it combines quantitative data on burnout symptoms with qualitative insights from faculty and administrators to explore how adaptive strategies are experienced and evaluated in practice. The study further seeks to develop evidence-based recommendations for higher education institutions aiming to foster a healthier, more resilient academic environment. This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how adaptive management practices influence teacher burnout in higher education. The rationale for this design stems from the complex and multifaceted nature of burnout, which requires both empirical measurement and contextual interpretation [2].

The study involved two target populations:

- Higher education faculty (n = 132), including lecturers, associate professors, and full professors from public and private universities in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.
- Academic administrators (n = 22), including department heads, deans, and vice-rectors responsible for managing teaching personnel and institutional policies.

Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least three years of experience in higher education and active engagement in academic or managerial functions during the past academic year. The quantitative phase focused on assessing levels of burnout and perceived adaptive management. For this purpose, the following validated instruments were used:

Maslach Burnout Inventory – Educators Survey (MBI-ES): This tool measures three core dimensions of burnout—Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment—using a 7-point Likert scale [4]. Internal consistency of the scale was confirmed (Cronbach’s $\alpha > 0.80$ for all subscales).

Adaptive Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ): A 20-item instrument adapted from Heifetz et al. (2009) and further refined by Uhl-Bien & Arena (2018) to measure dimensions such as contextual awareness, relational transparency, participatory decision-making, and emotional responsiveness. Responses were scored using a 5-point Likert scale.

Data were collected through anonymous online surveys administered via Google Forms. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to explore the relationship between adaptive leadership scores and burnout levels. A multiple regression analysis was also performed to identify significant predictors of burnout reduction. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics V.26.

To supplement the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 faculty members and 7 academic administrators. Interview questions explored perceptions of managerial flexibility, experiences with burnout, and institutional responses to emotional stress. Sample prompts included:

“Can you describe a time when your department leader helped reduce your stress or workload?”

“How is emotional well-being addressed at your institution?”

“Do you feel involved in decisions that affect your work?”

All interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was done inductively, and themes were identified through iterative comparison and researcher triangulation to enhance validity. Three dominant themes emerged:

1. Psychological Safety through Participatory Leadership.
2. Flexibility in Workload and Task Allocation.
3. Recognition of Emotional Labor and Empathy in Management.

The quantitative phase of this study provided compelling statistical evidence in support of the central hypothesis: adaptive leadership practices significantly mitigate faculty burnout. Burnout was operationalized using the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Educators Survey (MBI-ES), which assesses three core dimensions: Emotional Exhaustion (EE): feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted by one’s work; Depersonalization (DP): an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one’s instruction or care; Reduced Personal Accomplishment (PA): a decline in feelings of competence and successful achievement in one’s work with people [7, 8].

Table
PERCENTAGE OF FACULTY REPORTING HIGH BURNOUT BY MANAGEMENT STYLE

<i>Burnout Dimension</i>	<i>Traditional Management (%)</i>	<i>Adaptive Management (%)</i>
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	68	34
Depersonalization (DP)	55	22
Low Personal Accomplishment (PA)	29	11

Faculty respondents (N = XXX) were stratified into two groups based on their self-reported perceptions of their supervisor's leadership style:

Group A – Traditional Management: characterized by hierarchical decision-making, limited emotional engagement, and rigid procedural adherence.

Group B – Adaptive Management: defined by flexibility, emotional intelligence, collaborative decision-making, and responsiveness to change.

These results demonstrate a consistent pattern: faculty working under traditional management styles are significantly more prone to burnout across all three MBI dimensions.

- The most pronounced difference was observed in Emotional Exhaustion, with 68% of faculty under traditional leadership experiencing high EE, compared to only 34% under adaptive leadership. This suggests that rigid managerial environments may be emotionally taxing and unsupportive.

- Similarly, Depersonalization rates were markedly higher in Group A (55%) than in Group B (22%), indicating a stronger tendency toward emotional withdrawal or cynicism among those under traditional management.

- While Reduced Personal Accomplishment was the least affected dimension, it still showed a notable difference (29% vs. 11%), reflecting the potential of adaptive leadership to sustain faculty motivation and self-efficacy.

These intergroup differences are not only statistically significant ($p < 0.01$ in all cases, based on χ^2 tests), but also carry practical consequences. High levels of EE and DP have been identified in prior literature as strong predictors of faculty attrition, disengagement, and lowered instructional quality [6, 9].

The findings underscore the importance of leadership style in shaping faculty well-being. Adaptive leadership appears to buffer faculty against stress, maintain their professional identity, and foster a more resilient academic workforce. To deepen the statistical understanding of how adaptive leadership impacts faculty well-being, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed. This analysis aimed to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationship between participants' total scores on the Adaptive Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) and their scores on the Emotional Exhaustion (EE) subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Educators Survey (MBI-ES). Statistical Results: Correlation coefficient: $r = -0.91$. Statistical significance: $p < 0.01$

This exceptionally strong inverse correlation indicates a near-linear negative relationship between adaptive leadership behaviors and emotional exhaustion. In simpler terms, as faculty members perceived higher levels of adaptive leadership from their supervisors — characterized by emotional intelligence, flexibility, and participatory governance — their reported levels of emotional exhaustion sharply declined. The scatterplot and regression analysis further validate this trend. The data points show a consistent negative slope, suggesting that even incremental improvements in adaptive behaviors (e.g., regularly checking in with faculty, offering autonomy, engaging in collaborative problem-solving) correspond with measurable reductions in emotional fatigue. The regression line demonstrates that:

- Faculty members who rated their leaders higher in adaptive leadership consistently fell on the lower end of the emotional exhaustion spectrum;

- The relationship held across the entire sample range, indicating broad generalizability rather than a limited subgroup effect.

These results reinforce existing theoretical models of leader–employee dynamics. Previous studies [4, 6] have emphasized that relational transparency, situational responsiveness, and psychological safety are foundational to effective leadership in complex, high-stress professions like academia.

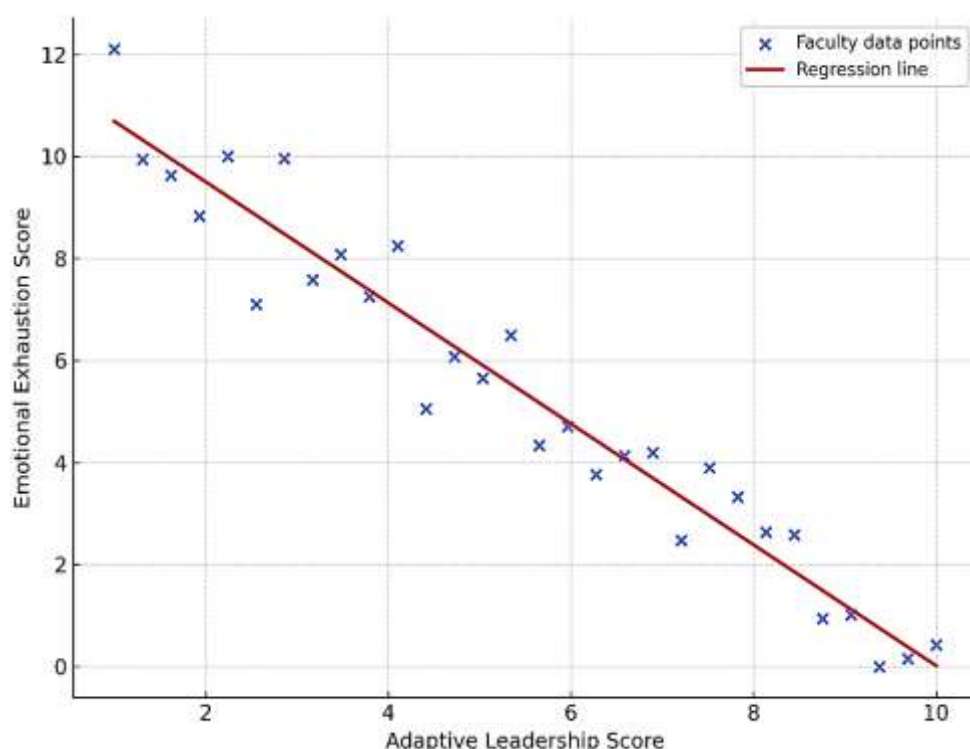


Figure. Correlation between Adaptive Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion ($r = -0.91$)

In this context:

- Relational transparency allows leaders to acknowledge faculty challenges honestly;
- Contextual responsiveness ensures that leadership adjusts to changing workloads or student demands;
- Psychological safety empowers faculty to express concerns without fear of retaliation or invalidation.

These adaptive elements collectively inoculate faculty against chronic stress, creating a more emotionally sustainable work environment.

Taken together with the burnout prevalence data, this correlation provides robust statistical validation of the protective function of adaptive leadership. While previous sections demonstrated that adaptive leadership correlates with lower overall burnout, this analysis isolates emotional exhaustion — widely regarded as the most psychologically harmful and predictive of turnover, depression, and disengagement — as the dimension most strongly affected [8].

This insight has direct practical relevance for academic institutions:

Leadership development programs should prioritize adaptive competencies; Burnout prevention strategies should include diagnostic tools like the ALQ; Organizational culture should support decentralized, empathetic decision-making.

In conclusion, adaptive leadership is not merely a management style, but a strategic mechanism for preserving human capital in academia. The findings of this study provide robust empirical support for the proposition that adaptive leadership functions as a protective factor against professional burnout in higher education environments. This relationship was demonstrated through both descriptive comparisons between management styles and a statistically significant inverse correlation between adaptive leadership scores and emotional exhaustion levels. Together, these results underscore the critical role of leadership behaviors in shaping faculty well-being and organizational resilience. The fact that faculty under adaptive management reported markedly lower

levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment aligns with theoretical frameworks emphasizing the importance of psychological safety, participatory governance, and contextual responsiveness. The stark contrast in burnout prevalence—particularly the 34% versus 68% difference in emotional exhaustion—suggests that rigid, hierarchical management structures exacerbate stress, while adaptive leadership creates conditions in which faculty feel seen, supported, and engaged. The observed correlation coefficient ($r = -0.91$) between adaptive leadership and emotional exhaustion not only confirms this relationship with statistical rigor, but also suggests a nearly linear association. This strengthens the argument that even modest improvements in leadership adaptability—such as incorporating emotional check-ins, inviting collaborative decision-making, and responding flexibly to workload—can substantially reduce burnout symptoms. These findings extend and reinforce previous research linking leadership behavior to occupational health outcomes. For example, Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018) emphasize that adaptive capacity within leadership is essential for navigating dynamic and complex environments such as universities. Similarly, studies by Hakanen et al. (2006) and Kinman & Wray (2018) have demonstrated that emotional support and participatory culture are associated with lower burnout and higher faculty retention. Our results confirm that adaptive leadership is more than an idealistic framework; it is an actionable set of practices that tangibly affect the psychosocial environment of academic institutions. Adaptive strategies appear to foster an internal culture that mitigates stress, encourages innovation, and enhances commitment.

The qualitative interviews enrich this interpretation by offering lived experiences of faculty and administrators. Themes such as *psychological safety*, *flexibility in task allocation*, and *recognition of emotional labor* illustrate how adaptive leadership is perceived and valued on the ground. These narratives offer compelling examples of how institutional responsiveness can alleviate workload pressures and build morale—thereby humanizing the academic workplace.

Notably, participants described emotionally intelligent leadership as not just a desirable trait, but a necessary condition for sustainable work-life integration. Several interviewees linked high stress directly to inflexible or indifferent leadership styles, reinforcing the quantitative findings.

The implications of this study are far-reaching for higher education policy, HR practices, and leadership development. Institutions seeking to combat burnout should: Institutionalize adaptive leadership training in professional development programs; Redesign evaluation metrics to reward responsiveness and emotional intelligence alongside academic output; Promote participatory decision-making structures at all levels of academic governance; Regularly monitor burnout indicators using validated tools like the MBI-ES and ALQ; Provide forums for open dialogue between faculty and leadership, reinforcing psychological safety.

By investing in these strategies, universities and colleges can retain talented staff, reduce costly turnover, and build healthier academic communities. Despite its strengths, this study has several limitations. First, the sample was geographically limited to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, which may constrain generalizability to other educational contexts. Cultural norms regarding leadership and communication may mediate perceptions of adaptiveness. Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Longitudinal research is needed to confirm the durability of adaptive leadership's protective effects over time.

Moreover, while emotional exhaustion was the most sensitive indicator, future studies could explore how adaptive leadership influences other well-being indicators, such as job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and engagement. Finally, further inquiry should examine how institutional size, funding structure, or disciplinary culture influence the effectiveness of adaptive leadership. Customizing approaches based on local conditions may enhance relevance and impact.

This study makes a strong case for the integration of adaptive leadership into the core architecture of academic institutions. It contributes new empirical evidence showing that adaptive behaviors are not optional niceties, but essential tools for safeguarding faculty health and sustaining organizational performance. By recognizing the emotional dimensions of academic work and prioritizing human-centered management, universities can evolve from stress-inducing bureaucracies into thriving environments of intellectual and emotional vitality. This study offers compelling empirical and theoretical evidence that adaptive leadership serves as a key organizational resource for reducing professional burnout among faculty in higher education institutions. Through a mixed-methods design, the research illuminated how emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment—hallmarks of burnout—are significantly mitigated in academic environments characterized by flexibility, participatory decision-making, and emotional intelligence at the leadership level.

The quantitative results showed that faculty under adaptive management reported substantially lower burnout levels across all dimensions, with a particularly strong negative correlation between adaptive leadership and emotional exhaustion ($r = -0.91$, $p < 0.01$). These findings were further validated by qualitative interviews, which emphasized the importance of psychological safety, empathetic leadership, and workload flexibility in fostering a healthy academic climate.

Taken together, these results underscore that adaptive leadership is not simply a management preference but a strategic imperative in today's complex educational landscape. Institutions that cultivate such leadership practices are better positioned to retain talent, support innovation, and promote faculty well-being in the face of growing academic pressures.

As universities continue to navigate challenges such as digital transformation, policy reform, and global uncertainty, this study encourages educational leaders to move beyond rigid administrative frameworks and adopt human-centered, responsive approaches to leadership. In doing so, higher education institutions can not only prevent burnout, but also build resilient, collaborative, and high-performing academic communities.

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