

FRAGMENTATION OF AUTHORITY TOWARDS NETWORKED LEADERSHIP: Reconstructing the Role of Pre-Adaptive Educational Leaders at the Beginning of Digital Disruption

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the phenomenon of authority fragmentation in educational leadership and reconstruct the role of educational leaders toward a network-based and pre-adaptive leadership model in the early phase of digital disruption. The transformation occurring around 2016–2019 indicates a significant shift from hierarchical leadership structures to more open, collaborative, and network-oriented systems. This study employs a qualitative approach using library research by analyzing relevant academic literature. The findings reveal that digitalization has accelerated the fragmentation of authority, where influence and decision-making are no longer centralized but distributed across multiple network nodes. This condition requires a transformation from authority-based leadership to influence-based, collaborative, and connective leadership. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the importance of pre-adaptive leadership, which not only responds to change but also anticipates and prepares organizations for future uncertainties. The reconstruction of educational leadership roles includes functioning as network connectors, innovation facilitators, sense-makers, and change navigators. Therefore, leadership in the early digital disruption era is no longer defined by formal power but by the ability to build relationships, manage complexity, and drive collective change.

Keywords: authority fragmentation, network leadership, pre-adaptive leadership, digital disruption, educational leadership

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis fenomena fragmentasi otoritas dalam kepemimpinan pendidikan serta merekonstruksi peran pemimpin pendidikan menuju model kepemimpinan jaringan yang bersifat pra-adaptif pada awal era disrupsi digital. Perubahan yang terjadi pada sekitar tahun 2016–2019 menunjukkan adanya pergeseran signifikan dari struktur

kepemimpinan yang hierarkis menuju sistem yang lebih terbuka, kolaboratif, dan berbasis jaringan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kepustakaan (library research) melalui analisis terhadap berbagai literatur ilmiah yang relevan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa digitalisasi telah mendorong terjadinya fragmentasi otoritas, di mana pengaruh dan pengambilan keputusan tidak lagi terpusat pada satu aktor, melainkan tersebar dalam berbagai simpul jaringan. Kondisi ini menuntut transformasi kepemimpinan pendidikan dari model berbasis otoritas menuju kepemimpinan berbasis pengaruh, kolaborasi, dan konektivitas. Lebih lanjut, penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya kepemimpinan pra-adaptif, yaitu kepemimpinan yang tidak hanya responsif terhadap perubahan, tetapi juga mampu mengantisipasi dan mempersiapkan organisasi dalam menghadapi ketidakpastian. Rekonstruksi peran pemimpin pendidikan mencakup fungsi sebagai penghubung jaringan, fasilitator inovasi, pembentuk makna, dan pengelola perubahan. Dengan demikian, kepemimpinan pendidikan pada awal disrupsi digital tidak lagi ditentukan oleh kekuasaan formal, tetapi oleh kemampuan membangun relasi, mengelola kompleksitas, dan menggerakkan perubahan secara kolektif.

Kata kunci: fragmentasi otoritas, kepemimpinan jaringan, kepemimpinan pra-adaptif, disrupsi digital, kepemimpinan pendidikan

A. Introduction

Entering the late 2010s, the world of education experienced very rapid changes due to the increasingly massive penetration of digital technology. The year 2019 can be understood as the early phase of digital disruption that began to significantly shift traditional patterns in educational management toward systems that are more open, flexible, and network-based. This transformation not only affected the technical aspects of learning but also disrupted the structure of authority within educational organizations, which had long tended to be hierarchical and centralized (Schwab, 2016).

In this context, educational leadership faced fundamental challenges in the form of fragmented authority, working collaboratively within teams and demanding collective rewards, recognizing that everyone can be a leader, doing the right thing based on context (hypertext) and process, taking appropriate risks, and providing training and delegation (Siswadi, 2017). Authority, which was previously concentrated in a single leadership figure, has now become distributed across various network nodes through digital platforms, learning communities, and cross-institutional collaborations. This phenomenon marks a shift from traditional leadership models toward network leadership, where power no longer lies in formal positions, but rather in the ability to build relationships, collaboration, and influence within a complex ecosystem (Castells, 2017).

On the other hand, education in the early era of digital disruption was also marked by the emergence of various innovations such as online learning, the use of social media as an educational medium, and increasing access to open learning resources. However, these changes were not always accompanied by the readiness of educational leaders to manage such dynamics. Many leaders remained trapped in old paradigms emphasizing control, bureaucracy, and stability, while reality demanded flexibility, adaptability, and speed in decision-making (Fullan, 2018).

This condition indicates a gap between the demands for change and the available leadership capacity. Therefore, there is a need to reconstruct the role of educational leaders who are not only adaptive but also pre-adaptive, meaning leaders who are capable of anticipating changes before they occur. Pre-adaptive leaders do not merely respond to disruption, but proactively build systems that are prepared to face uncertainty (Heifetz et al., 2017).

Based on this background, this article aims to examine in depth the phenomenon of fragmented authority in education, analyze the shift toward network leadership, and reconstruct the role of pre-adaptive educational leaders in confronting the early stages of digital disruption.

B. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study lies in the conceptual and theoretical analysis of paradigm shifts in educational leadership during the early era of digital disruption. Data were collected from various relevant scientific literature sources, including international journals, academic books, and research reports published between 2016 and 2019.

The data analysis technique used in this study was content analysis, in which the researcher identified, classified, and interpreted key concepts related to fragmented authority, network leadership, and pre-adaptive leadership. The analysis process was conducted systematically by comparing various theoretical perspectives in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding.

In addition, this study also applies an interpretative-critical approach, which not only describes the phenomenon but also critically examines and reconstructs the concept of educational leadership to make it more relevant to the context of early digital disruption. Thus, the findings of this research are expected to provide a conceptual contribution to the development of educational leadership theories that are adaptive to changing times.

C. Discussion

The transformation of educational leadership in the early phase of digital disruption cannot be separated from the fundamental changes in the surrounding social and technological structures. One of the main findings of this study indicates that fragmented authority is not merely an administrative phenomenon, but rather a logical consequence of the shift toward a network society. In such a society, power is no longer concentrated vertically but is distributed horizontally through dynamic and fluid digital relationships (Castells, 2017).

In the context of education, this fragmentation is reflected in the increasing role of non-structural actors such as online learning communities, digital educational platforms, and individuals who possess knowledge-based authority rather than formal positions. This phenomenon demonstrates that leadership legitimacy is no longer determined solely by structural position, but also by intellectual capacity, collaborative ability, and influence within networks (Uhl-Bien, 2018). Consequently, there has been a shift from authority-based leadership toward influence-based leadership.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that digitalization has accelerated the process of disintermediation in education. Teachers are no longer the sole source of knowledge, and school principals are no longer the only strategic decision-makers. Open Educational Resources (OER), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and digital learning platforms have created new spaces that enable significant redistribution of authority (Selwyn, 2016). This condition requires educational leaders to transform their perspectives on power and control.

From the perspective of complexity theory, educational organizations in the era of digital disruption can be understood as complex adaptive systems, in which interactions

among elements generate new patterns that cannot always be predicted linearly (Mason, 2016). In such systems, leadership no longer functions as the primary controller, but rather as a facilitator capable of creating conditions that enable innovation and collective learning to emerge.

In line with this, network leadership has become an increasingly relevant model. This form of leadership emphasizes the importance of connectivity, collaboration, and role distribution within organizations. Leaders act as key nodes within networks that connect various internal and external actors. This role requires the ability to build trust, manage relationships, and integrate diverse interests (Harris, 2018).

However, the implementation of network leadership is not without challenges. One important finding of this study is the emergence of role ambiguity and potential conflict resulting from the distribution of authority that is not balanced with effective coordination mechanisms. When many parties possess authority, the risk of policy overlap and unclear responsibilities becomes increasingly high. Therefore, leadership capable of managing the tension between decentralization and integration is required (Fullan, 2018).

In addition, fragmented authority also impacts communication patterns within educational organizations. Communication, which was previously formal and one-directional, has now become more open, interactive, and technology-based. Social media, collaboration platforms, and online communication applications enable real-time information exchange. However, on the other hand, this also increases the risks of misinformation, information overload, and the decline of interpersonal communication quality (Selwyn, 2016).

In this context, educational leaders are required to possess high levels of digital literacy, not only in technical aspects but also in ethical and critical dimensions. The ability to filter information, understand digital dynamics, and manage communication in virtual spaces has become an essential competency (Redecker, 2017). Without these abilities, leaders will face difficulties in managing increasingly digitalized organizations.

The findings also reveal that during the early stages of digital disruption (around 2016–2019), most educational leaders were still in a transitional phase. They were positioned between two paradigms: the old paradigm based on control and stability, and the new paradigm based on flexibility and innovation. This condition often created tensions

in decision-making, where leaders had to choose between maintaining existing systems or implementing risky changes (Schwab, 2016).

In such situations, the concept of pre-adaptive leadership becomes highly crucial. Pre-adaptive leadership focuses not only on responding to change but also on the ability to anticipate and prepare for future possibilities. Pre-adaptive leaders possess long-term orientation, the ability to identify trends, and the courage to experiment (Heifetz et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the reconstruction of the role of pre-adaptive educational leaders includes several strategic dimensions. First, leaders as sense-makers, namely individuals who help organizations understand ongoing changes and provide meaning to uncertainty. In disruptive conditions, this ability is essential for maintaining the psychological stability of organizations (Weick, 2017).

Second, leaders as boundary spanners, namely individuals capable of bridging various boundaries, including organizational, cultural, and technological boundaries. In the digital era, these boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred, requiring leaders who can integrate diverse elements (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

Third, leaders as enablers of innovation, namely individuals who create environments that support experimentation and learning. Leaders not only permit innovation but also actively encourage and facilitate it. This aligns with findings that innovative organizations tend to have leaders who are open to risk and failure (Fullan, 2018).

Fourth, leaders as orchestrators of networks, namely individuals who are capable of managing and optimizing organizational networks. In this regard, leaders do not merely build networks but also ensure that such networks function effectively in achieving organizational goals (Uhl-Bien, 2018).

In the context of Indonesian education in 2019, the implementation of this concept faced various structural and cultural challenges. Limited technological infrastructure, digital divides between regions, and organizational cultures that remained hierarchical became major obstacles to the implementation of network leadership. However, on the other hand, there were significant opportunities that could be utilized, such as increasing

internet penetration, the growth of digital learning platforms, and rising awareness of the importance of innovation in education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019).

Furthermore, the findings also indicate that the success of leadership transformation is strongly influenced by organizational culture. Organizations with open, collaborative, and adaptive cultures tend to be more successful in implementing network leadership compared to organizations that are rigid and bureaucratic (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2016). Therefore, changes in leadership must be accompanied by comprehensive transformations in organizational culture.

From a practical perspective, the reconstruction of educational leadership in the early phase of digital disruption requires integrated strategies. Leaders need to develop their capacities through digital literacy training, build collaborative networks with various stakeholders, and create systems that are flexible and responsive to change. In addition, it is also important to develop policies that support innovation, such as providing spaces for experimentation for teachers and students.

Thus, it can be concluded that fragmented authority and the emergence of network leadership are unavoidable phenomena in the era of digital disruption. The challenge faced is not how to avoid these changes, but how to manage them strategically and constructively. In this regard, pre-adaptive leadership becomes the key to ensuring that educational organizations are not only able to survive, but also thrive in the face of uncertainty.

D. Conclusion

The fragmentation of authority that occurred in the early era of digital disruption has fundamentally transformed the paradigm of educational leadership. Authority, which was previously centralized, is now distributed across various dynamic and complex networks, thereby requiring leadership models that are more flexible and collaborative. In this context, network leadership emerges as a relevant approach because it is capable of integrating various actors within the educational ecosystem.

However, such changes cannot be addressed merely through ordinary adaptation. There is a need to reconstruct the role of educational leaders toward pre-adaptive leadership that is capable of anticipating changes before they occur. Pre-adaptive leaders

function not only as organizational managers, but also as network architects, innovation facilitators, and navigators of change.

Thus, the success of education in confronting digital disruption largely depends on the ability of leaders to manage fragmented authority and build effective collaborative networks. Educational leadership in this era is no longer determined by formal power, but by the ability to build relationships, create meaning, and collectively drive change.

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