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Organizational Leadership and Covid-19 Adaptation Mechanisms: Evidence from a Nigerian Public Sector Institution

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Abstract:

Organizations globally experienced significant unforeseen disruptions to their business operations due to the Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic. With the enforcement of a global lockdown and social distancing restrictions, people could not move around and carry out business as usual. Organizational leaders had to quickly respond to the developing conditions, innovating and coordinating to ensure continuous operation and survival. This study focuses on the role of leadership in building the adaptive capacity of an organization and the leader's influence on its ability to cope with emergent situations. This study examines the experiences of a Nigerian Public Sector Institution during the pandemic, highlighting the measures employed by its leaders to deal with issues arising from the effect of Covid-19 pandemic and their impact on organization adaptation.

Keywords: Leadership, Crises management, IT readiness for teleworking, Exploitation and Exploration, Coordination, Dispersed teams, Organizational learning, Organizational adaption

1 Introduction

The World Health Organization on 11 March 2020 declared the Covid-19 pandemic. It was the beginning of unforeseen crises which effect on organizations would shortly be felt on a global scale. Restriction of movement orders enacted in many jurisdictions made it necessary for organizations to rely on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to carry on business operations. The Covid-19 era highlights the impact of the digital divide. I.e., the inequalities in access to ICT technology globally (Lai & Widmar, 2021). Many organizations attempt to cope with the pandemic crises in diverse ways, with most organizations having to work with fewer employees and adjust to new working methods and work arrangements. Unlike some other crises periods that have lesser durations, the prolonged nature of the Covid-19 pandemic suggests a greater possibility that some of the working methods and work arrangements adopted during the crises will continue in the post-Covid-19 era.

While most organizations experienced a decline in business operation, leading to huge losses and closure for some, others experienced exponential growth and prosperity. The organizations with adept and innovative leaders and preexisting ICT readiness fare better than the others in their industry (Khanal et al., 2021). They are enabled to carry on with their operations, reach out to customers, and engage with other stakeholders during the Covid-19 pandemic. Further, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic vary across industries. For instance, while the hospitality and tourism sector were generally more negatively affected when compared to other business sectors (Hu et al., 2020), the producers of face masks and hand sanitizers gained increased relevance.

As a consequence of the challenges arising from the pandemic crisis, it became necessary for organizations to adapt in response to the dictates of the environment. Organizations had to innovate leveraging on their existing assets, knowledge, and resources, i.e., exploitation, while experimenting and exploring new ways to adapt to the changes in their environment. Exploitation which entails improving on existing efficiencies, provides organizations cost viable ways to respond to challenges. It, however, makes it difficult for the organization to adapt to its environment. It is thus essential for organizations to explore new options to remain relevant in the future (Khanal et al., 2021).

Further, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, dispersed teams enabled by technological advancement have become necessary and broader spread. Many organizational leaders and employees who interacted only face-to-face before the pandemic crisis now have to manage dispersed workgroups with no prior experience. As a result, coordination and knowledge management among members of organizations have become very difficult and challenging (Fang et al., 2021). Members of organizations found it challenging to achieve shared understanding due to a lack of common workspace.

Furthermore, communication is one of the most effective coordination tools, and communication during a crisis is critical and sensitive. When an organization lacks effective communication, coordination becomes challenging to achieve, and lack of information and uncertainty within organizations breeds mistrust and panic. Studies show that leadership communication strategies that promote effective coordination during crisis differ from those effective in non-crisis periods because traditional means and communication networks get disrupted in the time of crisis. Thus, responsive

organizational leadership needs to provide communication channels based on the needs of their stakeholders to enable continued business operations in times of crisis. (Attieha&Zouhairry, 2021; Khalid et al., 2021; Dynes & Aguirre, 1979; Watkins & Yaziji, 2020).

This paper presents a literature review on the factors that affect organizational ability to adapt during a crisis. It emphasizes the role of leadership in developing the organization's adaptive capacity and leadership influence on followers during a time of crisis. It highlights the different perspectives of organization adaptation. The paper aims to assess leadership innovation through exploitation and exploration and the types of coordination used during the pandemic. The study also suggests managers should learn how best to balance exploitation and exploration and coordinate an organization in crisis time. The finding points out the pitfall of leadership actions during a crisis and suggests possible correction measures. It also provides suggestions on which management practices organizations should adopt and the need for developing communication channels to improve their ability to adapt. This research also provides empirical evidence to help organizations understand the influence of leadership on organization adaptation in times of crisis. The study also provides input to policymaking.

2 Literature Review

According to Khanal et al. (2021), the ability of an organization to adapt in a time of crisis is affected by internal and external factors. These internal factors refer to the degree to which the experience of an organization and its resources align with the challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (Khanal et al., 2021). Thus, the less the internal adjustments and organization need to make, the more mitigated the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on its operation. The External factors, in this case, include the international, national, and regional policies that governed business interaction during the pandemic. The effect of government Covid-19 policies on organizations varies based on the nature of the business operations. For example, organizations that were ICT-ready suffered fewer consequences due to movement restrictions.

From a relational point of view, Teo et al. (2017) state that the behavior of leaders determines the performance of organizations and their employee behavior during crises. They further say that leaders fall back on physical and intangible assets to hasten recovery in times of crisis. Nguyen et al. (2016) also recognize that the resilient behavior of employees in a time of crisis is dependent on leadership and other intrapersonal and organizational factors. The study further notes that the role of leaders is to clarify the goals and expectations of the organization and provide work and other non-work support. Kaiser et al. (2008) state that the actions of leaders in an organization will either enable or prevent innovative practices in the organization.

The concept of adaptation is prevalent in management theory and studied from numerous perspectives (Sarta et al., 2021). Researchers used the term adaptation inconsistently. Furthermore, Studies on adaptation are at different levels of analysis (Sarta et al., 2021). Some researchers believe that organizational ability to adapt to crises is a function of planning and that organizations can prepare for even unanticipated events (Knowles & Saxberg, 1988). However, Quarantelli (1988) shows that disaster planning is of no use because of the gap between the plan and what happens. Thus, an alternative is to view organizations as complex adaptive systems that adapt to crises through investigation and experimentation (Khanal et al., 2021).

2.1. Exploitation and Exploration

Further, one can view adaptation in terms of exploration and exploitation in a complex system. According to Khanal et al. (2021), there is usually a trade-off between exploitation and exploration. Organizations that choose to exploit rather than explore may find it harder to adapt to changes. On the other hand, preferring exploration to exploitation may cause organizations to incur costs without gaining commensurate benefits. Despite the tendency of organizations to explore in turbulent times, studies suggest it is better to exploit rather than explore during turbulence if the changes are of a discontinued nature. When changes are discontinuous, it reduces the value of lessons learned and efforts made by the organization during a crisis. Thus, the experience gained during the crisis may not be relevant for the future (Luger et al., 2018). Carugati et al. (2020) suggest that crises will force organizations to explore and adopt IT tools and applications but cautions that the immediacy of crises-born innovation is soon lost when things return to normal. Therefore, it may be advisable for organizations to resist shifting their exploitation-exploration balance based on short-term pressures.

According to Alghamadi (2018), exploitation and exploration are two modes of learning through which organizations adapt to their environment. Exploitation involves refining, selecting, improving efficiency, and implementation. In contrast, exploration involves experimentation, increased flexibility, variation, and the discovery of new ways of doing things (Luger et al., 2018). On the one hand, exploitation is evolutionary, incremental, usually lower cost, and aligned with existing resources. While on the other hand, exploration is revolutionary, involves radical changes that enable organizations to adapt to changing environments.

An organization that strives for exploitation experiences greater certainty because exploitation is rooted in existing routines instead of revolutionary innovation. Exploitation implies continuity, repetition, fine-tuning, and increasing existing competencies and skills that can benefit the organization. Exploitation ensures scaling and allows the transmission and institutionalization of knowledge and standards through the setting of standards and formal procedures. Exploitation may lead to the development of specialized knowledge within an organization. It may create a competitive advantage in the short term by enabling organizations to increase economic growth by leveraging existing knowledge. On the downside, it might set a stage for the obsolescence of organizational knowledge (Popadiuk & de Souza Bido, 2016).

Exploration, on the other hand, involves new possibilities, flexibility variation, risk-taking, and experimentation. Exploration allows an organization to be more responsive to changes in its environment. The returns from exploration activities are often uncertain and futuristic (Popadiuk & de Souza Bido, 2016). According to Brix (2019), organizations that

overemphasize exploration risk using scarce resources with no assurance of returns. It usually is more difficult for managers to gain support for exploratory activities and for an organization to adopt exploration because exploration does not usually result in short-term gains; thus, it attracts more resistance.

Many research proposes the need for organizations to reconcile the paradoxical demand to exploit and explore to enjoy continuous success (Brix, 2019; Sinha, 2015; Alghamdi, 2018). Popadiuk and de Souza Bido (2016) state that organizations cannot position themselves in only one form of orientation because the two concepts refer to organizational learning and cannot be separated. Continuous learning involves exploitation, which refers to an organization's evaluation of its internal knowledge, and the valuation of what happens in its environment, which involves exploration (Popadiuk & de Souza Bido, 2016). Both exploitation and exploration are essential to an organization and share a common purpose of innovating to achieve organizational goals. Thus, an organization must maximize its current competencies while seeking new competencies for future survival (Alghamdi, 2018).

Obtaining a balance between exploitation and exploration is necessary for the long-term survival of an organization (Brix, 2019). Studies have also shown that organizations achieve a unique competitive advantage if they can balance exploitation with exploration. Studies also show that the exploitation-exploration balance is as necessary for the public sector as private organizations (Brix, 2019). Further, according to Brix (2019), although the balance between exploitation and exploration is desirable, this balance may be challenging to achieve in reality. Switching between exploitation and exploration may not be as easy in practice as an organization may be more experienced in what suits its current situation (Brix, 2019).

The difficulty in achieving the desired balance between exploration and exploitation may also arise because exploration and exploitation require two different orientations (Luger et al., 2018). Exploitation and exploration require divergent skills, capabilities, culture, processes, mindset, and governing system. The challenge is that there is a contradiction between exploration and exploitation forces. (Luger et al., 2018). Thus, it is often difficult for individuals, employees, or leaders to switch between the two. Studies show that ambidexterity is a necessary precursor for innovation in an organization. For organizations to be successful in a dynamic environment, they need to be ambidextrous, i.e., fit for the present while adaptable for the future (Alghamdi, 2018).

Organizational ambidexterity can be either structural, sequential, or contextual (Alghamdi, 2018; Luger et al., 2018; Brix, 2019). The structural and sequential ambidexterity represent the differentiation view, suggesting that exploitative and explorative learning are incompatible and compete for the same resources. Therefore, it is either one or the other in operation at a point in time. Alternatively, from an integration viewpoint, contextual ambidexterity connotes an organizational setting that gives the employees the autonomy to engage simultaneously in both exploiting and exploring behavior (Brix, 2019).

Structural ambidexterity is when an organization uses its structure to achieve a balance between exploitation and exploration. Thus, exploitation and exploration effort are carried out independently in an organization because they require different orientations and capabilities (Caniëls & Veld, 2019). I.e., employees of different organizational units are responsible for exploiting or exploring while the leaders coordinate at the top level to ensure unification. Sequential ambidexterity occurs when organizations adopt processes that aid their ability to transition from one state of ambidexterity to another, usually through implementing change management programs.

Further, contextual ambidexterity demonstrates the employees' ability to be aligned with the current situation while simultaneously adapting to future needs. Alghamdi (2018) further states that ambidexterity does not mean a trade-off between exploitation and exploration, as an increase in one does not necessarily mean a decrease in the other. Instead, combining exploitation and exploration can lead to a balance between the two (Caniëls & Veld, 2019). They further propose that employees who are high in both exploration and exploitation are more innovative and have higher performance than those that are low in both exploration and exploitation.

Brix (2019) suggests that interactions between leaders and employees can foster or inhibit contextual ambidexterity among employees as employees make efforts to respond to changes in their environment. Caniëls and Veld (2019) further suggest that employees can practice a high level of exploitation and exploration simultaneously and that exploitation and exploration reinforce each other. According to Alghamdi (2018), Leaders have the most significant influence on employees' innovation and performance. He suggests that leaders should encourage exploitation and exploration behavior in employees. He also proposes that high levels of exploration and exploitation in employee behaviors will result in high employee innovation and performance levels. He further proposes that beyond the ambidexterity at the organization level, there is a need to achieve balance in exploitation and exploration among teams and individual employees.

Further, according to Alghamdi (2018), for an organization to be ambidextrous, the leadership must have: opening leadership behavior, closing leadership behavior, and the flexibility to switch between the two behaviors as necessary. Opening leadership behaviors are leadership behaviors that promote exploration. These are behavior that allows variance, encourage experimentation and autonomy among employees. Closing leadership behaviors, on the other hand, are the behaviors that encourage exploitation. It involves leadership behaviors that reduce variance, ensure employees comply with laid down rules and procedures.

According to Luger et al. (2018), the flexibility required of an ambidextrous leader is paradoxical and complex. Usually, tensions arise in the pursuit of diverse opportunities and goals. Exploration requires employees to learn new skills and adapt to the current realities, while exploitation involves utilizing existing skills to make improvements in the short run. In reality, leaders usually have inclinations to lean on one side or the other. However, changes in the environment require adjustments to an organization's exploration-exploitation balance to remain aligned with its

environment. It is, thus, the leader's responsibility to choose the appropriate exploitation-exploration balance based on the conceptual requirement of the organization at any point in time.

Further, according to Alghamdi (2018), ambidexterity is not a psychological trait. Instead, ambidexterity is the capability of an individual to rotate between exploitation and exploration. Ambidextrous leaders and employees require intelligence to engage in complex reasoning processes that enable them to switch between paradoxical thinking seamlessly. They require will, strength, social and physical capability to experiment on one hand and adhere to laid down rules and routines simultaneously (Alghamdi, 2018). Likewise, Luger et al. (2018) state that ambidexterity in organizations has a self-reinforcing effect. Thus, the ambidextrous organization learns and maintains ambidexterity through experiences gained from successive choices.

On the contrary, Caniëls and Veld (2019) suggest that a person's preference of exploitation or exploration has a bearing on the individuals' personality traits and the way they prefer to work and are motivated. Studies in psychology show that people differ in the way they handle situations. While risk-averse people will tend towards exploitation, people with higher risk tolerance tend to be more explorative. Caniëls & Veld (2019) further suggest that generalist individuals tend to be more explorative while specialists are more exploitative in their approach. Also, contrary to other studies, Caniëls & Veld's (2019) study suggests that specializing in either exploitation or exploration at an individual level is equally beneficial for innovation and high work performance. Thus, organizations leaders should consider individual employee preferences rather than promoting exploitation-exploration balance among all company employees.

2.2. Coordination

Dynes and Aguirre (1979) view organizational adaption in terms of coordination. They propose that crises usually require modifications to standard procedures and habitual behaviors within an organization. This modification heightens the need for coordination during a time of crisis. They further propose that in a time of crisis, the rate and the pattern of communication change. Furthermore, these changes have implications for coordination. According to Dynes and Aguirre (1979), a crisis would cause an organization to move away from planned coordination to coordination by feedback.

According to Kukreja (2021), the concept of coordination is universal in its application and cut across all spheres of life. Coordination is a deliberate management effort that does not occur by chance. Coordination is necessary only when groups and not individual's effort is required. It is also a continuous process that ensures undisturbed balance within an organization. Coordination is crucial to all levels of Management. It also seeks to ensure that the top, middle and lower levels of Management's efforts are synchronized and integrated. Thus, coordination is not a separate function of Management; instead, every management function must be coordinated. Coordination thus is achieved through the basic functions of planning, organizing, controlling, directing, and staffing. (Tanuja, n.d.)

Organizational leaders seek to achieve coordination by harmonizing plans across various departments to ensure the achievement of the overall organizational goal while maximizing resources. Coordination helps the manager to decide what a plan should include or and what it should exclude. It allows the organization management to organize tasks and activities assigned to various individuals or groups and helps managers direct subordinates with focus. Coordination helps managers monitor and ensure minimal variation between actual and planned performance. Through coordination, managers ensure that the correct number of employees with relevant qualifications and skills are employed, and employees are assigned to do the appropriate jobs (Kukreja, 2021).

In the context of an organization, coordination can be either internal or external. Internal coordination refers to managers ensuring a smooth internal working arrangement within intra-organizational groups. Internal coordination encompasses the relationships between all organization's internal components, including executives, managers, employees, departments, and branches. Internal coordination entails each group working in harmony with all other groups within the organization. A primary purpose of coordination is to create unity in the actions and activities of the various members of an organization. Thus, every group needs to know its contribution to the overall objective of the organization. Additionally, the work schedule of every department needs to be adjusted and synchronized to ensure different departments are working in unison. (Kukreja, 2021; Kamola, n.d.). Internal coordination can be categorized further into vertical and horizontal coordination. Vertical coordination is an integral part of the vertical structure of an organization, and the organizational structure reflects the flow of communication and delegation of authority within an organization (Kukreja, 2021; Kamola, n.d.).

Burton and Obel (2018) state that coordination choices are dependent on the organization's structure. While vertical coordination refers to managers harmonizing their work with that of their subordinates and subordinates, ensuring they synchronize their work with that of their manager, horizontal or lateral coordination refers to coordination between persons on the same level and between groups that do not have authority over each other. For example, hominization of effort between different departments, units, co-workers, and peers. (Kukreja, 2021; Kamola, n.d.)

According to Kamola (n.d.), organizations can achieve horizontal coordination in three ways, i.e., slack resources. Information systems and lateral relations: Slack resources involve creating buffers for human, financial, material, inventory, and other resources and maintaining excess capacity as a way of ensuring continued and uninterrupted business operations. Information systems provide the platform for ease of communication between different groups in the organization. Thus, it promotes effective coordination between groups. Lateral relations denote the relationship between organizational groups and the interactions that enable the groups to innovate and solve problems.

Organizations also cannot exist without proper interaction with their external environment. Thus, external coordination is crucial to ensure harmony between the organization's agents and its outsiders. ExternalS coordination refers to the effort organizations make to adapt to and integrate with their environment. The organization's external stakeholders include the suppliers, customers, financial institution, market, the general public, other organizations, and

government, among others (Kukreja, 2021) (Kamola, n.d.). External coordination also covers how an organization responds and is affected by external forces such as technological advancement, competition, government policies, and regulations (Kamola, n.d.).

Organizations use several coordination mechanisms to promote integration internally and externally. However, Popadiuk & de Souza Bido's (2016) study broadly categorizes coordination mechanisms into two, i.e., formal and informal. It suggests there is a relationship between exploitation and exploration and coordination mechanisms within an organization. The formal coordination mechanism consists of centralization and formalization embedded in the organizations' hierarchical structures. On the other hand, the informal coordination mechanism refers to the connectedness of members of the organization.

Centralization refers to the way power and decisions making are distributed within the organization. Also, formalization refers to the extent to which rules and regulations are established within the organization. Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020) propose that less skilled teams require centralized authority. In contrast, highly specialized teams work well with decentralized authority. Connectedness, on the other hand, refers to informal collaborations developed from social interactions within the organization. Popadiuk & de Souza Bido's (2016) research suggests that the greater centralized and formalized an organization is, the greater its tendency to be more exploitative in orientation. Likewise, the lower the centralization and formalization, the greater the organization's tendency to be explorative. Their study also proposes that the greater the connectedness within an organization, the more it tends to be explorative.

2.3. Coordinating Dispersed Teams

As a result of the unprecedented and uncertain nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, many organizations had little or no time to handle the situation with their existing crisis management plan. They were also unable to minimize the impact of the crisis on their business operations. To further complicate the situation, the Covid-19 pandemic is prolonged and continues to persist. Working in dispersed teams became vital for organizational survival, more so due to travel restrictions and lockdown. Employees were constrained to work from home, and in most cases, the role and assignment of the employees working from home did not necessarily differ from when they worked in the office (Klostermann et al., 2021).

Managing dispersed workgroups created as a result Covid-19 pandemic was challenging because the groups were unplanned and borne out of necessity. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the newly dispersed worker experienced low social interaction and communication challenges.

Hans et al. (2020) suggests that the more dispersed a team, the greater the communication challenge and the less cohesion within its members. Their study proposes that dispersed teams create a greater challenge for coordination and leadership. They further suggest that dispersion may have a negative influence on organizational performance. They, however, state that leadership and training mediate the performance and characteristics of dispersed teams.

Further, Hans et al. (2020) identified leadership role as having the most significant influence on team performance and satisfaction. They propose that effective dispersed leaders are those who can assert authority and maintain firm control without being perceived as inflexible. They further propose that influential leaders can play multiple roles and respond to paradoxical needs simultaneously. Studies show that team members depend on their leaders to set goals, provide required information regularly, monitor and coordinate teamwork. They also depend on them to mentor team members, build relationships, promote collaboration, facilitate work processes, innovate and provide resources for the group (Hans et al., 2020; Kupa, 2020). Studies also recognized the importance of team capacity building to improve processes, meet goals, accomplish tasks, and overcome challenges that the team encounters (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

Like many other studies, Siemens (2020) identified communication and coordination difficulties as a primary challenge of dispersed work teams. While synchronous IT tools like video conferencing complement coordination and decision making in dispersed workgroups, the study suggests that even the most interactive IT tools such as video conferencing are not as effective as face-to-face meetings. The study proposes that distance makes team members blind to each other. Furthermore, the study proposes that people who work together on site are more likely to see each other as a team and work to support mutual goals. It also suggests that virtual communications lack personal cues that help individuals pay more attention to each other.

Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020) state that dispersed team leaders face greater challenges monitoring, interdependences in task, resources, and personnel. Furthermore, they state that dispersed team leaders encounter difficulty ensuring team members give teamwork priority. Kupa (2020) also state that dispersed teams face several challenges, which includes: Lack of personal connection, technological issues such as inability to connect to communication platforms for various reasons, language barriers for a global team, lack of non-verbal expressions, which lead to misunderstanding, misrepresentation and conflict, lack of social presence which help build trust and team spirit, inadequate information communication infrastructure such as electricity, gadgets, high-speed internet, unavailability of teleconferencing software, and challenges in choosing the correct IT tools that people are comfortable using.

Attieha and Zouhairi (2021) considered leaders' performance during the Covid-19 pandemic from the viewpoint of followers, stating that accommodating the needs of the followers is vital for the success of leadership. For dispersed teams to thrive, team members need to have a clear vision, have a good understanding of well-defined team goals, have a sense of belonging, and acknowledge the group's common purpose. The study examined the influence of charismatic leaders on dispersed teams, especially in a period of crisis. They propose that the success of leadership in any situation depends on matching the proper leadership style with the situation faced. They propose that in a crisis with so much

uncertainty and confusion, a charismatic leader with a dominant personality and clear vision is needed to transform the work atmosphere and gain followers' trust.

Further, Attieha and Zouhairi (2021) propose that charismatic leaders tend to emerge during a crisis to provide followers with the much-needed support and sense of direction. They also identified that followers' associate charisma as a leadership characteristic and that charismatic leader could be found at all levels of the organization. They, however, say charismatic leaders in authoritative positions will have a greater influence on the organization, especially in a time of crisis, than those at other levels. Their study further distinguishes between leaders and managers. They described charismatic leaders as confident, bold, strong, convincing, determined, and willing to sacrifice. They further state that charismatic personalities attract followers and make followers feel safe and happy. Charismatic leaders are also known to be innovative. Therefore, charismatic leaders are well suited to manage unplanned situations and can align followers towards achieving organizational goals in a time of crisis.

Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020) show the different influence of four main leadership styles: transformational leadership, empowering leadership, emergent leadership, and shared leadership has on teams. According to Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020), transformational leadership is not effective when managing highly dispersed teams due to hindrances in communication that can limit the leader's influence on followers. They propose that empowering leadership positively influences dispersed team members because it entails sharing power and providing a supportive environment for team members in cases where team members are required to make situational judgments. Their study further proposes that emergent leaders thrive and positively affect dispersed team performance.

Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020) also state that shared leadership is a collective style of leadership that allows many team members to participate in leadership functions and have a mutual influence on team processes and each other. They propose that shared leadership positively influences dispersed teams and can benefit dispersed teams in many ways. They further propose that shared leadership can help build trust and agreeableness among team members. While noting the challenges that dispersed teams pose to create opportunities for social interactions, they propose that shared leadership promotes social interactions within team members and that social interactions create trust, commitment, and cohesion among team members. They also propose that shared and emergent leadership styles help build stronger dispersed teams. These leadership styles encourage inclusiveness, openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability among team members. Further, like Attieha and Zouhairi (2021), Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020) also propose that the leader's level of authority also matters in addition to the leadership style. Thus, the greater the level of the leader's authority, the greater the leader's influence.

According to Kupa 2020, Assertive leadership is vital to manage changes, minimize waste of resources and prevent chaos in a time of crisis. The study further proposes that dispersed teams' leaders need to be proactive and interactive and create strategies to establish a sense of cohesion within the team. Organizational leaders are critical to the success of dispersed teams as they are responsible for overseeing the evolution of new practices within the organization. The leadership's responsibility is to help dispersed teams realize benefits while overcoming challenges (Kupa,2020). The emergence of a dispersed team requires specific leadership skills to manage the changes occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic instead of relying on existing procedures and processes that have become inappropriate because of the situations. The leadership needs to guide the organization in adapting to the changes in the environment. Leadership is also required to manage any resistance to change.

Attieha and Zouhairi (2021) identified that the characteristic of a successful dispersed team leader includes: The ability to measure the team efficiency despite the long distance. The ability to provide both formal and informal information and feedback. The availability of good information and knowledge management system and supporting technology. The ability to conduct and host meetings virtually. The ability to develop and maintain relationships between distant team members and motivate them to contribute their best to team success. The study further identified the three prominent roles a dispersed leader needs to perform as

- A liaison who links all members of a team,
- A direction setter who ensures that all teams are working in alignment to achieve the organization's purpose and goals, and
- A coordinator that identifies and allocates resources to develop solutions for any problem that arises.

Kupa (2020) also, from a leadership point of view, recognized performance management and team development as the primary functions of a team leader, noting that lack of face-to-face interactions restricts the leaders' ability to monitor the performance of individuals and the team. The study also states that dispersed teams make it difficult for leaders to perform the typical team development functions such as coaching and mentoring. Further, according to Kupa (2020), dispersed teams alter the interaction between the leaders and team members based on four dimensions identified by Liden and Maslyn (Kupa, 2020), which are: The leaders' ability to develop mutual affection with team members. The team members' sense of loyalty to their leaders and other team members. The leaders' contribution to teamwork, such as constructive feedback that improves team performance and professional respect. The confidence leaders have in their team's capabilities and vice versa.

Many studies have shown the benefits dispersed teams can bring to an organization (Kupa, 2020). Kupa 2020 identified various benefits of the dispersed team, which include:

- Flexibility: The flexibility of time and space team members enjoy, i.e., with greater control of their own time and location, team members can choose where and when it is most convenient for them to work. This flexibility help employee to maintain a better work-life balance which can lead to greater job satisfaction and wellbeing of the employees.

- Cost savings; Working with dispersed teams, organizations may also enjoy more significant cost efficiency because information and communication technologies reduce the cost of travel, office space, and related overheads.
- Access to the global workforce and expertise; Working with dispersed teams, organizations are no longer restricted to getting experts from their immediate locality. Information and communication technology allows the organization to engage experts from any part of the world, which saves time and cost, increases the organization's productivity and problem-solving, and can thus be a competitive advantage.
- Better knowledge sharing and retrieval: Due to the nature of interactions and the medium for communication, most information and knowledge shared among dispersed team members are well documented and can be easily retrieved for future reference. E.g., email trails, shared documents, recorded video conferences used for communication between team members act as a knowledge repository for the organization.

According to Fang et al. (2021), coordinating knowledge is crucial for high performance, and dispersed organizational groups rely heavily on information technology to carry on business and coordinate work. Fang et al. study shows how team members use digital artifacts, e.g., email messages and electronic documents, spreadsheets, presentations, reports, and information posted on the intranet, to overcome challenges created by physical distance and coordinate work processes. Knowledge coordination involves sharing individually held knowledge among dispersed team members to help them perform complex tasks. Digital artifacts also act as an information repository for the organization.

The context of Covid-19 dispersed teams differs from those covered by previous researches on dispersed teams. Under regular conditions, organizations have time to plan for and form dispersed teams, allowing team members time to adjust to dispersed team conditions. Most teams formed during the Covid-19 period were forced to abruptly adjust to disperse working conditions with little or no prior experience (Klostermann et al., 2021). More so, the government directives to work from home were mandatory and not based on employee preference. In most cases, the existing co-located teams simply recreated their work processes using virtual technologies (Frost & Duan, 2020).

A prominent factor that helped the adjustment of many dispersed teams formed during the pandemic period was that the team members had the advantage of working together as a co-located team prior to the pandemic. Further, these teams suffer no language barriers or time zone issues (Khalid et al., 2021). Another factor that eased dispersed teams' ability to adjust instantly was that they maintained their existing processes. Also, other factors such as team-technology fit and task-technology fit impacted the team's ability to adjust (Klostermann et al., 2021). Further, according to Klostermann et al. (2021), factors that predict dispersed team success under the Covid19 conditions include effective communication, effective coordination, and effective conflict management. They also emphasize trust and cohesion as a necessity for team satisfaction and performance.

In converting co-located teams to dispersed teams, leaders need to understand and address the challenges employees encounter due to remote communication. According to Kupa (2020), Leaders should seek to promote technology practices that help employees cope with the challenges of dispersed work. Leaders should also ensure they make the right choice of communication media and utilize available team formation technologies to build relationships within dispersed teams. Leaders also relying on information and communication technology need to develop effective ways to collect data, send and receive information and provide feedback (Kupa, 2020).

Further, according to Kupa (2020), team formation in dispersed teams goes beyond the traditional team formation process because information technology is an integral part of dispersed teams. Frost and Duan (2020) propose that organizations consider technology as part of dispersed teams rather than being seen as an alternative to co-located teams. They further propose that organizations consider using emerging technologies such as automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence when creating teams. Also, that organizations can use these technologies for team building and optimizing team performance. Thus, organizations should define the functions and limits of technology alongside the responsibilities of team members (Frost & Duan, 2020).

According to Watkins and Yaziji (2020), the industries that rely on social interaction, such as travel and tourism, transportation, and those that had a reduction in the demands for their products due to the lockdown, such as oil and gas, were most affected. While dispersed teams were becoming popular in business over the years, working from home became the only option due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and managers lost the usual privileges of direct supervision. Therefore, making dispersed teams succeed became a priority in any organization. An additional challenge to managing dispersed teams created during the pandemic crisis was that leaders and workers alike faced much stress, with those working in the most impacted industries experiencing more stress (Watkins & Yaziji, 2020).

On a personal level, members of organizations suffered health challenges, social activity disruptions, income reduction, financial hardship, loss of jobs, uncertain future, inability to travel, and family separation. Employees lacked motivation, suffered from anxiety, faced distractions working from home, and had greater workloads. Some employees, however, reported they benefited from having more time with family and that they were more focused and productive working from home. Also, many organizational leaders felt they were overworked and unappreciated (Watkins & Yaziji, 2020). Further, at an organizational level, many organizations suffered a loss of revenue, inadequate cash flow, disrupted supplies, and loss of capabilities, loss of efficiencies, inability to continue and preserve organizational culture, difficulty adjusting to new methods, and acquiring new capabilities (Watkins & Yaziji, 2020). According to Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020), leaders with understanding and empathy can help reduce stress in the organization, thereby enhancing team performance even in the face of all the challenges.

Beyond the Covid-19 pandemic period, Watkins and Yaziji (2020) advise organization leaders to consider both the short and long-term effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the opportunities that the crisis will create. They further advise that organizations set up post-crisis planning teams to develop strategies to accelerate business operations. The post-crisis planning teams should look into the possibility of gaining a competitive advantage post-Covid-19 pandemic, considering

the likely permanent changes resulting from the crisis and the current changes likely to create opportunities or threats post-crisis. They should also consider which trends are likely to continue or be discontinued post-crisis, the lessons learned, and capacities developed. They also invite leaders to realize that after the crisis is over, a hybrid of both the old and new practices will emerge because of the prolonged nature of the pandemic and enhance remote working facilities acquired by the organization during the period.

3. Methodology

The study used Key Informant Interviews (KII) and questionnaire surveys to get data from respondents. The Interviews were designed to aid the understanding of leadership innovation and coordination tactics during the Covid-19 pandemic. The interviewees were encouraged to give any information they felt necessary to throw more light on the subject. The respondents to the interviews were selected using purposive sampling techniques. Eighty participants from a population of 800 employees in a public sector institution were issued questionnaires for the Quantitative analysis. The questionnaires were issued at random, subject to an indication of willingness to participate in the studies. The questionnaire survey contains 40 questions and option answers on a scale of 1-5, and it also provides a column for comments to enable respondents to provide further information. The purpose of the questionnaire is to reveal the experience of study participants on the ease or difficulty encountered adjusting to new working methods and work arrangements, their level of awareness, and the degree to which employees are satisfied with leadership's Covid-19 response measures.

4. Results and Discussions

Like any other organization, the business operations of public sector institutions were affected by the lockdown and travel restriction imposed by the central government due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, government institutions are ingrained in traditional bureaucracy; their organizational structures were not altered either were the formal communication channels reflected in the organizational structures altered officially. A problem with a hierarchical organization structure is that it does not function well with a bottleneck, especially in a crisis period. A break in the chain of command in a hierarchical organization structure due to an unforeseen circumstance will cause a delay and, worst case, halt a business process within the organization.

Despite the need for urgent actions on occasions during the pandemic, the decision-making process within public organizations remained centralized. The centralization of decision-making often causes delays when the approval authorities are unavailable. Also, organizational processes are hampered, especially in areas that the organization's Top Management does not consider a priority. Although not unique to times of crisis, the pitfall of centralization becomes more apparent by the need for a prompt and timely response in a crisis.

Research shows that centralization inhibits exploration (Popadiuk & de Souza Bido, 2016). However, findings from the study show that centralization can support exploration in a time of crisis more so if the innovation is in line with Top Management's priority. The organization, leaning on the opportunity given by the government to carry out emergency procurement because of the Covid-19 pandemic, increased its expenditure budget and freely supported IT innovations. The IT department had an opportunity to explore and come up with innovations that would allow the organization to adapt to the changes resulting from the pandemic crisis and improve the organization's future capabilities. One of the pitfalls of IT exploration in a time of crisis is that if the crisis comes to an end, the change and the lessons learned may no longer be relevant. Thus, the suggestion is that organizations should favor exploitation over exploration in a time of crisis, although a crises situation predisposes organizations to explore Khanal et al., (2021).

The study shows that most ICT innovations in the organization, however, tended towards exploitation. This occurrence may be due to the organization's preexisting level of ICT readiness to cope with environmental challenges. The organization's level of ICT readiness mitigated the disruption in business operations caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and its effect. Although the organization encountered some challenges, the preexisting IT infrastructure before the crisis was robust enough to ensure continued communication within the organization and between the organization and its stakeholder.

4.1. ICT Measures

In order to enhance organizational performance during the pandemic, the organization embarked on the following ICT measures:

- Provision of modems and data subscriptions to enable employees to work from home due to the stay-at-home directives.
- Provision of high-capacity laptop computers as a replacement for existing office desktops and laptops to save cost, improve efficiency, and support telework.
- The use of teleconferencing applications for meetings training activities and engagement of stakeholders
- The provision of bandwidth redundancy to support existing networks to meet the surge in bandwidth demand, keep the internet up and minimize downtime in the office.
- The creation of Security Awareness among employees because working from home requires different security measures than working in the office.
- The deployment of a Cyber-security solution to proactively protect the organization's endpoint devices and protection from cyber threats such as malware and ransom ware attacks
- The introduction of an online document registry for tracking formal correspondence between departments

- The provision of Power Backup to support existing power infrastructure and ensure a continuous supply. In the event of a power outage.
- The introduction of a digital catalog and online library loan system to ease the borrowing of books and reduce the need to visit the library
- The automation of Finance processes for Receipts issuance, processing of third-party vouchers, and processing of staff claims

There were also plans to improve IT infrastructure and service, and some IT projects were at various levels of implementation before the crisis. Thus, at the time of the crisis, the IT department was ready to exploit, improve and expand the implementation of the existing ICT system. Further, because of the review and increase of the IT budget, the organization was able to execute its existing plans, intensify and improve on some of its existing projects, thus improving the organization's capability to cope with the crisis in the short term and adapt in the long run.

During the Pandemic crisis, the circumstance forced employees to adapt to the new working arrangement. It became crucial to provide employees with working tools such as high-capacity mobile workstations that enhance remote and telework and high-speed internet modems. It also became necessary to support the organization's IT infrastructure by providing Power Backup to support existing power infrastructure. Also, to increase the bandwidth redundancy of the organization. The increase in bandwidth redundancy improved the internet speed, reliability, and availability in the office, thus improving online business operations and users' experience. Although some of these projects were planned, their implementation became crucial because of the Covid-19 pandemic and was fast-tracked to meet the demands for the organization.

Further, The IT department deployed enhanced cyber security solutions to protect the organization's endpoint devices and protection from cyber threats such as malware and ransomware attacks. This enhancement of the cyber security solutions is critical because working from home increased remote access to the organization's IT infrastructure and thus the risk of attack. More so, the organization increased dependence on IT for its operations makes it necessary to secure its IT infrastructure from cyber-attack.

Further to the deployment of cybersecurity solutions, the IT department intensified its security awareness training program. The IT department carried out online cybersecurity training programs. The purpose was to educate employees, especially those working from home, on ways to protect or minimize instances of security breaches. However, it was more difficult for the IT department to assess the effectiveness of these training programs compared to the prior face-to-face training. Also, the IT department could not ensure employees' compliance with the organization's security measures, as was when all employees worked from the office. m

The need for the automation of manual processes became crucial because employees had to work from home during the lockdown period. The automation of manual processes is an area that usually experiences employee resistance. A notable effect of the Covid-19 crisis that organizations witnessed was reducing employee resistance to changes in information technology. Some of the IT initiatives which had experienced employee apathy, and in some cases, stiff resistance, had become vital and better appreciated because of the situation. Employees can resist change in IT for various reasons, including; fear of the unknown, being accustomed to the old practices, processes, and procedures, poor implementation of IT programs, and lack of management commitment to the change.

This evidence from the study shows that the IT department's leadership had, in most cases, chosen to exploit by adhering primarily to its existing plans and improving on them. Also, there are indications that the leadership intentions, approach, and actions related to ICT during the pandemic were resourceful and not just aimed at adapting or coping with the pandemic. Having faced limitations in the form of resistance from employees on some projects, budget constraints, and lack of management buy-in on others before the pandemic, the IT department was deliberate in maximizing the opportunity created by the pandemic to put the organization on a sound footing.

There are clear signs of ambidexterity in the IT department. The IT department was able to exploit and explore simultaneously and seamlessly. This observed ambidexterity may be due to the nature of ICT and, by extension, ICT professionals. The fast pace of continuous technological advancement the world is experiencing in recent years requires research and continuous innovation by ICT experts. Findings also show improved coordination within the IT department. Employees could now easily retrieve information shared because of collaborative tools such as file sharing introduced.

4.2. Human Resources Measures

Alongside the role of the IT department, the Covid-19 pandemic crisis highlighted the role of the human resource department. Many employees were facing much stress due to uncertainty, health challenges, and changes in work arrangements. The human resource department played a vital role in managing employees to ensure continuous business operation. Like the Chief financial officers during the financial meltdown 2007-2009, the Chief human resource officers gained prominence during the Covid-19 pandemic (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

The following were the roles Human Resources carried out during the pandemic.

- Communicate Government Directive to employees:
- Schedule employee's attendance GL 12 and below on a rotation basis in compliance with directives from the central authority.
- Establish protocols for confirmed Covid-19 infection cases:
- Promote Hygiene and safety,
- Employee welfare
- Virtual capacity building training programs.

The Human resource department was responsible for communicating all directives of the Presidential task force and NCDC recommendations to all employees. They are also responsible for enforcing compliance with government directives in the workplace to avoid government sanctions and penalties from the central government. The essence of this communication was to ensure that all government officials and workers had access to authentic information on government directives in the face of fake news that was prevalent during the period. The challenge human resource faced in carrying out this assignment was that the official intranet portal, which is the organization's official communication platform, could be accessed online.

Over the years, it has been Management policy not to allow the information on the employee portal to be accessible outside the office to protect official information. This decision hindered the free flow of vital information within the organization during the pandemic. As an alternative, human resources sent emails to all employees, but they could not guarantee that all employees got or read their official email. More so, many employees could only access their official email from their office desktop computers.

Further based on government directive for junior cadre employees on grade level 12 and below employees to work from home one week in and one week out on a rotation basis while those on grade level 13 and above work from the office the human resource requested heads of department to develop work attendance rosters and communicate the same to employees. However, for lack of effective communication platform at the early stages of the pandemic mentioned above, Managers experienced difficulty contacting subordinates who sometimes could not be contacted on the phone or through emails.

As a result, some employees did not turn up on duty for lack of information, and others called in ill. It was difficult for managers to ascertain if a subordinate was inaccessible or unavailable based on a genuine challenge or if an employee was absconding from duty because they had an opportunity to do so. Most department heads resorted to using social media platforms such as informal intradepartmental WhatsApp groups to help departments communicate with employees in the absence of a formal communication channel. Managers' experience during the pandemic intrapersonal relationship and connectedness improve communication during a crisis.

Further, to keep the office environment safe and hazard-free, the human resource's responsibility was to promote and ensure employees comply with hygiene and safety measures in line with directives from the central government. Compliance with health and safety rules was made mandatory and enforced on the office premises. This measure was vital because, as evident in the community, not all employees believed in the existence of the Covid-19 virus. Some employees mistrusted the information from the government, believing that the Covid-19 pandemic was an international conspiracy to control people. Human resources provided employees with facemasks and hand sanitizers, performed temperature checks, bought and installed sanitizing equipment at the office entrance to encourage compliance with government directives. Further, all social distancing was encouraged and enforced in line with government directives and advice from NCDC.

Further, the organization had in place an existing welfare program. With the recognition of the hardship faced by some employees because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the welfare program expanded, and more funds were budgeted to meet the demand situation. The purpose of this expansion was to enable the organization to provide medical and financial support to employees infected by the covid-19 virus. Human resources also provided counselling and moral support to employees and their family members.

The Human resource continued the implementation of its annual capacity program building training for employees despite the pandemic. The department organized virtual capacity-building programs for employees during the lockdown. However, they based these capacity-building programs on the pre-planned topics that did not address the current challenges. Further soon after the relaxation of the lockdown restrictions, Human resources gave employees options based on their preference to attend training programs either physically or virtually. Very few employees opted to attend virtual training programs. The employees' choices give a strong indication that virtual training programs may not continue when the pandemic is over.

Unlike the case of the IT department, the Human resource tended towards compliance rather than innovativeness. The Covid-19 pandemic crisis exposed several organizational strengths and weaknesses that affected its ability to adapt to its environment. Further findings of the study show that some departments fared better than others due to varied departmental culture within the organization, the nature of the department operations, the type and influence of the department's leadership, and the level of connectedness and interactions between employees and between managers their subordinates. Also, due to individual differences and varied experiences, some employees coped better with the crisis than others. Further, because of the roles of some departments, employees from departments such as the IT, HR, Procurement, and Finance departments felt overworked in contrast to other departments that had less work.

The adoption of a hybrid system of work arrangement whereby some employees work from the office mitigated the impact of the dispersion of the organization's workforce. The central government had mandated civil servants to work from home when some of them could not do so because they did not have the work tools required to work from home. The hybrid teams continued with the existing procedures thus, making it easier for some employees to adjust compared to if the whole organization had to work from home. On the downside, the hybrid work arrangement was the middle managers' nightmare. Managers are primarily senior staff, and because senior staff cadre worked from the office, the official communication channels between top Management and managers and those between managers were less disrupted.

In contrast, the official communication channels between the middle manager and their subordinates were disrupted because they now work from home. Middle managers were now faced with the greater responsibility and challenges of managing their dispersed subordinates, with most not having any prior training or experience in managing dispersed teams; further, according to Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020), the greater the level of the leaders' authority, the

greater the leader's influence. In the case of the hybrid work arrangement, the leaders with lower authority bore the brunt of managing the dispersed workforce.

Further, the traditional methods of staff performance appraisal were not suitable for the crisis period; nevertheless, the Human resource required managers to appraise staff at the usual time based on the post-pandemic appraisal measures. Some employees were going through a tough time, so managers could not demand quality performance in the face of personal difficulties. In some cases, work processes experienced delays when senior staff working from the office lacked the skill to carry out specific job assignments, especially when junior employees with specialized skills were unavailable. Further, some junior staff saw the 50% work from home as a time off duty, and it was difficult for managers to ensure priority was given to office work when done from home. Project managers also experience difficulty carrying out project verification and managing the progress of projects virtually. To further complicate matters, some contractors were dishonest and took advantage of the inability of project managers to visit sites because of the restrictions on interstate travels to make false claims on project progress.

5. Recommendations

Organizations need to develop a robust communication channel that will help the organization adapt to its environment, especially in a crisis. The role communication plays in coordinating an organization cannot be overemphasized. Leaders need communication to influence their followers. Effective communication within members of an organization and between the organization and its stakeholders is a prerequisite for continuous business operations. Investing in modern information and communication technology that is secure and flexible puts the organization in a ready place to handle the emergent situation. Communication should be such that it promotes collaboration among members of the organization.

In designing organizations, communication network leaders should pay attention to both communication content and technology. Content-wise, employees need to have access to complete, clear, and consistent communication. The absence of complete, accurate, and timely information breeds uncertainty, stress, anxiety, frustrations, and mistrust among members of the organization. When choosing communication technology, leaders should consider the appropriateness of technology for the task and the team-technology fit (Klostermann et al., 2021).

Organizations need to revisit their policies on information access to ensure remote accessibility. In doing this, the organization needs to take appropriate security measures to protect its data. Thus, granting all employees equal access to official information irrespective of their location. Beyond providing an effective operational communication structure, the leadership needs to implement an effective management information system that will help leadership manage its performance.

The leadership should encourage innovation across all levels of the organization. To do this, leaders should first lead by example. Leadership should also seek to identify and reward innovation at all levels of the organization. Organizational leadership can also, through employee selection, improve the organizational capacity to adapt to its environment by identifying and recruiting ambidextrous individuals at all levels of the organization. Although studies suggest, centralization and formalization tend to reduce innovations (Popadiuk & de Souza Bido, 2016), there is no evidence that centralization and formalization preclude innovation.

Public sector organizations can achieve shared leadership by introducing multiple authorization levels within the organization and granting Lower-level managers some autonomy to allow continued operation and reduce delays, especially when top Management is overwhelmed. The Covid-19 crisis has shown that the organizations could have fared better with shared leadership because slowed processes could have been faster if lower-level managers could take decisions rather than wait for central approval. Further, if the middle manager entrusted with managing dispersed employees had the greater influence, they may have managed the situation better.

Further, considering that the Covid-19 crisis has prolonged, there are greater chances that business operations will not completely go back to how they were before the crisis. Also, the crisis has exposed many areas of strength and weakness within the organizations. Organizations should thus consider setting up a post-crisis management team to evaluate the organization's experience during the crisis. The post-crisis management team should ensure the organization takes advantage of all relevant lessons learned during the crisis. Further, organizations should consider incorporating change and crisis management strategies as part of their overall strategy.

Further, to reduce staff resistance to technology and leadership's change initiatives, the Management should design change management programs. Management may conduct surveys on employee satisfaction to help Management gain insight into employees' acceptance of management measures innovations and initiatives. Lessons learned from such surveys, mainly reasons employees give as the cause of their dissatisfaction, will help Management design change management programs to address employee concerns, reduce employee resistance and increase adoption levels. However, Management should not consider lack of satisfaction or acceptance on the part of employees as a reason to let go of the execution of projects because it is the leadership's responsibility to hang tough and drive the organization to its desired status.

Organizations need to review their human resource strategy. The role of human resources is crucial and should be proactive. The human resource function within the organizations should not restrict to compliance. With a well-developed human resource, organizations can develop well-rounded employees. More so, modern human resource practices promote self-regulation (Surbhi, 2018). The human resource strategy should emphasize employee capacity building and development (Al-Kassem, 2021), which better equips organizations to adapt to changes in the environment. Capacity building and employee training programs are viable ways to improve managers' and employees' competence to cope with a crisis. Capacity-building programs can address many of the challenges experienced by the organization during

the crisis. Human resources need to organize and conduct capacity-building programs that address the challenges on the ground to help managers and employees alike cope with the crisis.

Studies show that capacity-building programs can facilitate team formation and the development of dispersed management skills. It can also be an effective tool to aid cohesion among team members. It can motivate employees, especially in the stressful situation presented by the covid-19 crisis. Employee training can improve organizations' health and safety practices. Further employee training on the use of technology can reduce employee apathy and resistance to using ICT. With capacity-building programs, organizations can also achieve cross specialization that would help teams function optimally. Further, the organization can introduce ambidexterity into its capacity-building programs to improve its ability to adapt (Watkins & Yaziji, 2020; Caligiuri et al., 2020; Brix, 2019).

6. Conclusion

The uncertainty faced during the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need for competent leadership for organizational adaptability and survival. However, to understand the influence of leadership on organization adaptation in times of crisis, it is crucial first to understand who a leader is? The words leader and manager are used interchangeably. Some theorists, however, differentiate between the two functions (Naseri, 2021). While a leader connotes someone who influences others to achieve desired organization objectives, a manager is responsible for planning, directing, controlling, and managing human and other resources to achieve pre-determined organizational goals (Walker, 2021).

In the context of an organization, the term leader usually refers to the chief executive officer, board members, and top executive management in organizations. By their position in an organization, these leaders are able to exact greater influence on the organization (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). The term leaders can also refer to heads of department, heads of unit, line managers, or emergent leaders who are individuals without official authority who take up the leadership responsibility, especially in a time of crisis (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

Regardless of the theoretical distinction between leaders and managers, this distinction is not always clear in practice. Is it difficult to differentiate who a leader is? Or who is a manager? Because everyone is both a leader and a manager (Walker, 2021), depending on the context. Evidence from this study indicates that due to the adoption of a hybrid working arrangement that required junior cadre employees only to work from home, the responsibility of managing the dispersed worker rested on the middle managers. Thus, the leadership qualities of middle managers greatly influence the organizational performance during the crisis. The danger in viewing only those at the top of the organizational hierarchy as leaders are that it can inhibit employees' initiatives and stop individuals from stepping up the plate when the need arises. Thus, going beyond the distinction between who a leader or a manager is, organizations need to emphasize and develop employee leadership and management skills at all levels.

Lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic show that innovative organizations are more likely to adapt, survive and thrive amid challenges. The disruptions that arise in crisis emphasize the need for organizational innovativeness at all levels of the organization. Organizations require skilful and ambidextrous leaders who can both exploit the organization's existing resources and explore new ways to survive the crisis. Beyond promoting ambidexterity among the leaders, it is also beneficial to encourage contextual ambidexterity among employees as this will enhance the organization's ability to adapt to a crisis. When there is a disruption of normal processes within an organization, innovativeness becomes necessary to deal with arising problems to ensure continuous operation. Thus, organizations need to include ambidexterity as part of their human resource strategy to enable the organization to become flexible and adaptable to their environment proactively.

Also highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis is the need for organizations to rethink their ICT and human resource strategy. The proliferation of dispersed teams during the pandemic has set a stage for increased technology adoption in business. The Covid-19 crisis shows that ICT has become a necessary resource for conducting business and can no longer be considered a just competitive advantage. For lack of adequate ICT infrastructure and skills, many businesses suffered losses, and some failed. Similarly, the Human resource's function is responsible for ensuring the development of new capacities within an organization. Organizations can no longer view dispersed teams as an exclusive preserve for large and multinational corporations. The Covid-19 crisis has shown that everyone in business needs to develop new competencies on how to form and manage dispersed teams, not just as a preferred way of conducting business but also as a strategy for adaptation and survival.

The emergence of hybrid dispersed teams is one of the new areas yet to be covered extensively by research. From existing theory, the characteristics of co-located teams and those of dispersed teams differ. Also, the leadership and management practices that promote performance in co-located teams differ from those of dispersed teams (Attieha&Zouhairi, 2021; Kupa, 2020; Caligiuri et al., 2020; Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Although these hybrid work arrangements have a lot to learn from existing management theory on co-located teams and dispersed teams, there is a need for further research on hybrid teams to help organizations develop better functioning hybrid teams. More so because of the ICT investments made by organizations during the pandemic period. Further, for organizations that decide to continue having some of their employees work from home, the hybrid team trend is more likely to be a continuous practice.

Further, the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic once again underscored the weaknesses inherent in bureaucracy. In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, government organizations and agencies struggle to adapt to environmental challenges with structures and coordination mechanisms that are outdated and unsuited for current realities. Government organizations and agencies are structured inflexibly. Furthermore, bureaucracy impedes leaders of government organizations from making decisions that may facilitate organizational adaptability in times of crisis.

According to Burton and Obel (2018), decisions on coordinating an organization cannot be independent of the organization's structure.

Further, various studies show that organizations with a networked structure fare better in crisis than those with a Hierarchical structure. Further studies also show organizations with shared leadership, dispersed workforce, generalists, less interdependence in tasks and among its parts, and flexible rules and procedures (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020; Caniëls & Veld, 2019; Popadiuk & de Souza Bido, 2016). However, that the leaders of government agencies have limitations carrying out reform does not mean there is no room for leadership innovation. Instead, innovative leaders are those that conquer their environment and turn challenges into opportunities. Government employees also require conditions that support the development of their innovative capabilities to help them perform their work satisfactorily.

Further, at the central government level, the Covid-19 pandemic crisis has thrown light on areas of weaknesses the government needs to focus on, to take corrective measures, and policy formulation that will help the country survive any future crisis. One of the impacts of the lockdown and travel restriction imposed by the government was that it highlighted the digital divide within the society. Many organizations, including government agencies, could not carry-on operations because they lacked IT and internet facilities. This lack had a negative impact on the organizations and, in turn, the economy. Many citizens lost their jobs, thus increasing unemployment in a country that already has a high level of unemployment.

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the critical role of ICT in society. The ICT sector affects all other sectors. The health sector was overwhelmed and unprepared to meet the challenges they faced. Many employees could not access healthcare services online because of the dearth of ICT infrastructure and internet facilities. However, government restrictions prevented individuals with minor ailments from hospital visits. Schools were unevenly prepared to handle the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. While some students, especially those in high-end private schools, continued their education with little or no interruptions, all public schools were closed for lack of internet facilities. The Covid-19 pandemic experiences show a generally poor state of ICT readiness among government organizations and public institutions. Finally, the lessons learned from this study suggest the central government's need to focus on ICT infrastructure development and promote ICT adoption in government organizations and public institutions. The study also suggests the need to reform the structure and coordination of government organizations to fit the current reality of the environment.

7. Limitations of the study

The organization examined is a government agency, so the leadership is constrained to comply with some of the central government directives to government agencies irrespective of its appropriateness. An example is the directive of the central government to work from home after suspending the lockdown restrictions in Nigeria. Grade level 12 and below stayed at home for most of 2020 while grade level 13 and above came to work. Currently, employees on grade level 12 and below work from home 50 percent of the time. Consequently, managers and employees have to plan work schedules to comply with government directives irrespective of what the organization requires. Such constraints mitigate the influence of leadership on the organization and the applicability of the finding of these studies in the private sector, where the influence of leadership is not constrained.

Due to limited finance and time, this study covers only one organization. A comparative study of similar organizations across regions would bring out further information on the implications of the digital divide on organization adaptation and the effect of differences in local, national, and regional policies on Covid-19, and other factors resulting from regional and cultural differences. Further, some of the findings are unique to the organization, so a generalization of the recommendation to apply to other organizations may be inappropriate.

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