

Developing a Systemic Model of Organizational Adaptability Through Evolutionary Leadership Practices

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Abstract

This study aimed to develop a systemic model explaining how evolutionary leadership practices shape organizational adaptability in contemporary organizations facing complex, uncertain, and rapidly changing environments. This qualitative study was conducted using an inductive exploratory design. Participants included 22 senior managers, middle managers, human resource specialists, organizational development consultants, and strategic planning experts working in knowledge-intensive and service-oriented organizations in Tehran, Iran. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on direct experience with organizational change, adaptation, restructuring, innovation, or leadership development. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting between 45 and 75 minutes. Theoretical saturation was achieved after the nineteenth interview, and three additional interviews were conducted to confirm the stability of the emerging categories. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic coding supported by NVivo software. To enhance trustworthiness, the study used member checking, peer review, constant comparison, prolonged engagement with the data, and audit-trail documentation. The analysis produced five main categories: evolutionary sensemaking and environmental scanning, adaptive learning and experimentation, distributed leadership and participatory decision-making, resource reconfiguration and ambidextrous coordination, and feedback-based institutionalization of adaptability. The core category was identified as “evolutionary leadership as a systemic adaptation mechanism.” The findings indicated that organizational adaptability does not emerge merely from flexible structures or isolated innovation initiatives; rather, it develops when leaders continuously interpret environmental signals, mobilize collective learning, redistribute decision authority, reconfigure resources, and stabilize adaptive routines through feedback loops. The proposed model suggests that evolutionary leadership practices convert environmental uncertainty into organizational learning, strategic renewal, and adaptive capability. The study contributes to leadership and organizational change literature by explaining adaptability as a systemic, iterative, and socially embedded process rather than a single managerial outcome.

Keywords: Organizational adaptability; evolutionary leadership; systemic model; qualitative research; dynamic capabilities; adaptive leadership; organizational renewal.

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1. Introduction

Organizations increasingly operate in environments characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Technological disruption, shifting labor expectations, geopolitical instability, digital transformation, ecological pressure, and accelerated market cycles have made adaptability a central condition of organizational survival. In this context, adaptability refers not only to an organization's ability to react to external change but also to its capacity to anticipate emerging conditions, reinterpret internal routines, mobilize learning, and reconfigure resources in ways that sustain renewal over time. This view is consistent with the dynamic capabilities perspective, which argues that long-term competitiveness depends on an organization's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies in response to changing environments (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). However, while the dynamic capabilities literature has extensively examined strategic and resource-



based aspects of adaptation, the leadership practices through which adaptability becomes embedded in everyday organizational systems remain insufficiently clarified.

The need for a systemic understanding of adaptability becomes more important when organizations are understood as complex social systems rather than mechanical structures. In complex organizational systems, change rarely follows a linear sequence of planning, implementation, and stabilization. Instead, adaptation emerges from interactions among actors, routines, technologies, structures, meanings, and environmental pressures. Complexity leadership theory emphasizes that leadership should not be reduced to formal authority or top-down influence; rather, leadership can be understood as a dynamic process that enables learning, creativity, and adaptive capacity within complex adaptive systems (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). This perspective shifts attention from individual leadership traits to relational and systemic leadership practices that enable organizations to respond to uncertainty through distributed intelligence, experimentation, and emergent coordination.

The concept of evolutionary leadership is especially useful for understanding adaptability in such conditions. Evolutionary leadership practices refer to leadership behaviors and processes that help organizations preserve valuable capabilities, discard obsolete routines, and generate new patterns of action in response to environmental change. This interpretation is aligned with adaptive leadership theory, which views leadership as the work of mobilizing individuals and groups to face difficult challenges, question established assumptions, and develop new capacities for thriving under changing conditions (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). From this perspective, adaptability is not merely a technical response to external pressure but a collective process of learning, interpretation, loss, conflict, and renewal. Leaders must therefore create conditions in which people can examine what must be preserved, what must be abandoned, and what must be invented.

A central problem in many organizations is that adaptability is often treated as a structural feature rather than a leadership-enabled capability. Organizations introduce agile teams, flexible work systems, digital platforms, innovation units, or restructuring programs, but these mechanisms may fail when leadership practices continue to reinforce control, risk avoidance, centralized decision-making, and short-term performance metrics. Strategic agility research similarly shows that renewal requires more than structural flexibility; it depends on strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). These elements are deeply leadership-dependent because they require leaders to recognize weak signals, build shared commitment, and move resources across organizational boundaries. Without such practices, organizations may possess formal change programs but lack the social and cognitive capacity to adapt.

The dynamic capabilities literature provides another foundation for the present study. Teece et al. (1997) described dynamic capabilities as the capacity to sense opportunities and threats, seize opportunities, and reconfigure resources. Later work extended this view by emphasizing the role of managerial cognition, entrepreneurial judgment, and leadership in shaping organizational agility (Teece, Peteraf, & Leih, 2016). Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) argued that dynamic capabilities are identifiable organizational processes, including product development, strategic decision-making, alliance formation, and resource reconfiguration. Although these contributions are highly influential, they do not fully explain how leaders cultivate the micro-level practices that allow these capabilities to become systemic and repeatable. The present study addresses this gap by focusing on the leadership practices that transform adaptation from an episodic reaction into an organizational capability.

Organizational learning theory also contributes to the conceptual foundation of this study. Senge (1990) argued that learning organizations require systems thinking, shared vision, team learning, mental model examination, and personal mastery. These principles suggest that adaptability depends on an organization's ability to interpret patterns, challenge assumptions, and learn collectively. However, learning alone does not guarantee adaptability. Learning must be connected to decision-making, resource allocation, authority distribution, and institutional routines. In other words, adaptive learning must become systemically organized. Evolutionary leadership can play this bridging role by translating learning into coordinated action, experimentation, and renewal.

A further conceptual issue concerns the balance between exploration and exploitation. Organizational ambidexterity refers to the ability to exploit existing capabilities while exploring new opportunities (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). Adaptability requires this balance because organizations must maintain operational reliability while also experimenting with new practices, technologies, and business models. Too much exploitation can create rigidity, while excessive exploration can produce fragmentation and instability. Evolutionary leadership practices may help organizations manage this tension by creating spaces for experimentation while preserving alignment around strategic priorities. Thus, adaptability is not equivalent to constant change; rather, it involves selective variation, disciplined experimentation, and systemic integration.

Leadership also influences adaptability through sensemaking. In uncertain environments, organizational actors do not simply respond to objective conditions; they interpret signals, construct meanings, and act based on shared or contested understandings. Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) emphasized the importance of mindful organizing, especially in uncertain and high-reliability contexts. Adaptive organizations require leaders who encourage attention to weak signals, resist oversimplification, support open communication, and normalize the discussion of errors. This sensemaking function is evolutionary because it helps organizations detect whether existing routines remain fit for purpose or require modification.

Despite the richness of existing literature, several gaps remain. First, studies often examine leadership, adaptability, dynamic capabilities, and organizational learning as separate constructs rather than as interdependent components of a systemic process. Second, many models of adaptability are conceptually strong but do not sufficiently explain how leaders enact adaptation through concrete practices. Third, empirical studies in non-Western organizational contexts remain limited, particularly in relation to how managers in urban, knowledge-intensive environments interpret and operationalize adaptability. Tehran provides a relevant context for such inquiry because organizations in this environment frequently face technological turbulence, regulatory uncertainty, economic pressure, talent mobility, and institutional complexity. These conditions make adaptability both necessary and difficult.

Accordingly, the present study develops a systemic model of organizational adaptability through evolutionary leadership practices. Rather than treating adaptability as a static organizational characteristic, the study conceptualizes it as an emergent capability produced through leadership-enabled sensemaking, learning, participation, resource reconfiguration, and feedback institutionalization. By using qualitative interviews with managers and organizational experts in Tehran, the study seeks to capture the lived managerial interpretations and practical mechanisms through which adaptability is developed. The aim of this study was to develop a systemic model explaining how evolutionary leadership practices shape organizational adaptability in contemporary organizations facing complex and changing environments.

2. Methods and Materials

This study used a qualitative exploratory design to develop a systemic model of organizational adaptability through evolutionary leadership practices. A qualitative design was appropriate because the purpose of the study was not to test predefined hypotheses but to understand how experienced organizational actors interpret, describe, and construct the processes through which leadership practices contribute to adaptability. The study was informed by inductive thematic analysis and qualitative model development. The research setting included knowledge-intensive, service-oriented, technology-related, consulting, financial, and organizational development environments in Tehran, Iran. Tehran was selected because it contains a concentrated population of organizations facing rapid technological, economic, and institutional change, making it a suitable context for studying leadership and adaptability.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria were: having at least five years of professional experience in management, leadership development, strategic planning, human resource management, organizational development, innovation management, or change management; direct experience with organizational adaptation, restructuring, digital transformation, innovation, crisis response, or business renewal; employment or consulting activity in Tehran-based organizations; and willingness to participate in an audio-recorded semi-structured interview. Exclusion criteria included insufficient professional experience, lack of direct involvement in organizational change processes, and unwillingness to complete the interview. The final sample consisted of 22 participants. Theoretical saturation was reached after the nineteenth interview, when no substantially new codes or categories emerged. Three additional interviews were conducted to confirm the stability, coherence, and explanatory adequacy of the emerging model. This sample size is consistent with qualitative research in which saturation may be achieved with relatively small but information-rich samples when the research focus is clear and participants have relevant experience (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol was designed to elicit participants' experiences and interpretations of organizational adaptability, leadership practices, systemic change, and organizational renewal. The main interview questions included: "How do you define organizational adaptability in your professional experience?" "What leadership practices help organizations respond effectively to environmental change?" "How do leaders recognize that existing routines are no longer effective?" "How do organizations balance stability and change?" "What role does experimentation play in adaptability?" "How are decisions distributed during adaptive change?" and "How do adaptive practices become embedded in organizational routines?" Follow-up questions were used to clarify meanings, request examples, and deepen participants' reflections.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and were conducted in a private setting or through secure online communication according to participant preference. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were written after each interview to record contextual observations, preliminary analytic impressions, and emerging conceptual connections. Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently, allowing early findings to inform later interviews. This iterative process supported theoretical sensitivity and helped refine the emerging categories.

Data were analyzed using thematic coding supported by NVivo software. The analysis followed an inductive process in which the researchers moved from initial codes to subcategories, main categories, and an integrated systemic model. In the first stage, transcripts were read several times to achieve familiarity with the data. In the second stage, open coding was conducted line by line to identify meaningful concepts related to leadership practices, adaptability mechanisms, organizational barriers, learning routines, decision processes, and resource reconfiguration. In the third stage, similar codes were compared and grouped into subcategories. In the fourth stage, subcategories were organized into broader main categories. In the final stage, relationships among categories were examined to identify the core category and develop the systemic model.

NVivo software was used to organize transcripts, manage codes, retrieve coded segments, compare participant groups, and construct category maps. The analysis was informed by the constant comparison logic of qualitative research, in which each code and category was compared with previous and subsequent data segments to refine conceptual boundaries (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The thematic process also reflected Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to identifying, reviewing, defining, and reporting patterns across qualitative data. To strengthen qualitative rigor, the study used member checking with six participants, peer debriefing with two qualitative researchers, and an audit trail documenting coding decisions, category revisions, and model development. Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through participant validation and prolonged engagement with the transcripts. Transferability was supported through detailed description of the research context and participants. Dependability was addressed through systematic documentation of research procedures. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive memoing and preservation of analytic evidence in NVivo.

3. Findings and Results

The final sample consisted of 22 participants from Tehran-based organizations and consulting environments. Twelve participants were male and ten were female. In terms of age, five participants were between 30 and 39 years old, ten were between 40 and 49 years old, and seven were 50 years old or above. Regarding education, four participants held bachelor's degrees, thirteen held master's degrees, and five held doctoral degrees. In terms of professional role, seven participants were senior managers or executives, six were middle managers, four were human resource or organizational development specialists, three were strategic planning managers, and two were management consultants. Participants' work experience ranged from 7 to 28 years, with an average professional experience of approximately 15 years. The organizational sectors represented in the study included technology and digital services ($n = 5$), financial and banking services ($n = 4$), consulting and organizational development ($n = 4$), manufacturing and industrial services ($n = 3$), healthcare and professional services ($n = 3$), and education or knowledge-based organizations ($n = 3$).

The analysis produced five main categories: evolutionary sensemaking and environmental scanning, adaptive learning and experimentation, distributed leadership and participatory decision-making, resource reconfiguration and ambidextrous coordination, and feedback-based institutionalization of adaptability. These categories were integrated around the core category of "evolutionary leadership as a systemic adaptation mechanism." The findings indicated that organizational adaptability is not created through a single leadership behavior or formal

change program. Instead, it emerges when leaders connect environmental interpretation, collective learning, decision distribution, resource movement, and feedback stabilization into an ongoing adaptive system.

4. Evolutionary Sensemaking and Environmental Scanning

The first main category was evolutionary sensemaking and environmental scanning. Participants emphasized that adaptive organizations are distinguished by their ability to notice environmental shifts before these shifts become crises. This category included weak-signal detection, interpretation of market and technological change, questioning dominant assumptions, and creating shared understanding of external pressures. Participants explained that leaders play a central role in transforming scattered information into collective awareness. One senior manager stated, “The first sign of an adaptive organization is not speed; it is awareness. If managers do not see the change early, they only become fast at reacting to damage.” Another participant explained, “In our company, the problem was not lack of data. We had too much data. Leadership helped us decide which signals were meaningful and which were just noise.” The findings showed that evolutionary leadership requires leaders to create interpretive forums where employees can discuss environmental signals, customer feedback, competitor moves, technological developments, and internal performance gaps. This sensemaking process reduces defensive routines and helps the organization distinguish between temporary disturbances and deeper evolutionary shifts.

The second main category was adaptive learning and experimentation. Participants described adaptability as a learning-based capability that develops through controlled experimentation, reflection, and rapid correction. This category included pilot projects, learning from failure, cross-functional problem-solving, after-action reviews, and psychological safety for proposing new ideas. Participants argued that organizations become rigid when failure is punished too strongly or when learning remains trapped within departments. One HR specialist noted, “When people are afraid of being blamed, they hide the exact information that the organization needs for adaptation.” Another participant said, “Our most successful change projects started as small experiments. We did not announce a revolution; we tested, learned, and then expanded.” The findings suggested that evolutionary leaders normalize experimentation without allowing disorder. They create boundaries for risk-taking, define learning objectives, and convert mistakes into organizational knowledge. Adaptive learning was therefore not described as informal trial and error but as disciplined experimentation connected to strategic renewal.

The third main category was distributed leadership and participatory decision-making. Participants repeatedly stated that centralized decision-making slows adaptation because those closest to customers, technologies, processes, and operational problems often detect change earlier than top managers. This category included empowerment of frontline employees, cross-level communication, participatory strategy discussions, temporary task forces, and decentralized decision rights. A middle manager explained, “In unstable conditions, waiting for approval from the top means losing the moment. The people who understand the issue must have enough authority to act.” Another participant stated, “Adaptability improved when leadership stopped acting as the owner of all answers and became the designer of conversations.” The findings showed that evolutionary leadership does not eliminate hierarchy but reconfigures the role of hierarchy. Senior leaders define direction, values, and strategic boundaries, while adaptive decisions are distributed across teams and units. This allows the organization to respond faster while maintaining coherence.

The fourth main category was resource reconfiguration and ambidextrous coordination. Participants emphasized that adaptability requires the capacity to move people, budgets, knowledge, technologies, and managerial attention toward emerging priorities. This category included flexible resource allocation, temporary

redployment of talent, balancing exploitation and exploration, protecting innovation initiatives, and aligning short-term efficiency with long-term renewal. One strategic planning manager stated, “Many organizations know what must change, but their resources are locked in yesterday’s priorities.” Another participant observed, “The leader’s role is to protect the present business while opening space for the future business.” The findings indicated that adaptive organizations do not simply pursue innovation; they coordinate existing operations with exploratory initiatives. Evolutionary leadership helps manage the tension between continuity and change by deciding which routines should be preserved, which should be modified, and which should be abandoned. Resource reconfiguration was therefore identified as a crucial bridge between adaptive intention and adaptive action.

The fifth main category was feedback-based institutionalization of adaptability. Participants explained that many organizations adapt temporarily during crises but return to rigid routines afterward. Sustainable adaptability requires feedback mechanisms that embed adaptive practices into structures, metrics, meetings, training systems, and cultural norms. This category included performance feedback loops, learning dashboards, reflective meetings, revised evaluation criteria, knowledge-sharing systems, and institutional memory. One consultant explained, “Adaptability becomes real only when it enters the calendar, the budget, the evaluation system, and the language of managers.” Another participant stated, “After every change project, we ask what should become a routine and what should remain temporary. That question helps us avoid both chaos and rigidity.” The findings suggested that evolutionary leadership institutionalizes adaptability by converting successful experiments into repeatable routines while keeping the organization open to further revision. Feedback loops prevent adaptation from becoming a one-time response and transform it into a continuing organizational capability.

The integrated model developed from the findings explains organizational adaptability as a systemic cycle. The cycle begins with evolutionary sensemaking, through which leaders and organizational members detect and interpret environmental signals. These interpretations activate adaptive learning and experimentation, allowing the organization to test new responses. Distributed leadership and participatory decision-making then enable rapid and context-sensitive action across organizational levels. Resource reconfiguration and ambidextrous coordination provide the material and structural support needed to implement adaptive responses. Finally, feedback-based institutionalization stabilizes effective practices and incorporates learning into organizational routines. The cycle then restarts as new feedback generates renewed sensemaking. The core category, evolutionary leadership as a systemic adaptation mechanism, connects all five categories. In this model, leadership is not merely an influence process but a systemic practice that coordinates interpretation, learning, authority, resources, and feedback over time.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to develop a systemic model explaining how evolutionary leadership practices shape organizational adaptability. The findings showed that adaptability emerges through five interrelated categories: evolutionary sensemaking and environmental scanning, adaptive learning and experimentation, distributed leadership and participatory decision-making, resource reconfiguration and ambidextrous coordination, and feedback-based institutionalization of adaptability. These findings support the argument that adaptability is not a single structural attribute or managerial intervention but a systemic capability produced through recurring leadership practices. The proposed model suggests that organizations become adaptive when

leaders help the system notice change, learn from uncertainty, distribute authority, move resources, and institutionalize feedback. This interpretation extends previous research by integrating leadership, dynamic capabilities, organizational learning, complexity theory, and ambidexterity into a unified qualitative model.

The first finding concerned evolutionary sensemaking and environmental scanning. Participants emphasized that adaptability begins with the ability to detect and interpret weak signals before they become disruptive crises. This result is consistent with the dynamic capabilities framework, particularly the sensing dimension, which refers to the identification of opportunities and threats in changing environments (Teece et al., 1997; Teece et al., 2016). The finding also aligns with Weick and Sutcliffe's (2007) concept of mindful organizing, in which organizations remain attentive to small failures, resist oversimplification, and maintain sensitivity to operations. In the present study, sensemaking was not described as an individual cognitive act by top leaders; rather, it appeared as a collective leadership practice involving dialogue, interpretation, and shared awareness. This supports complexity leadership theory, which emphasizes adaptive capacity as an emergent property of interaction within complex systems (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Therefore, evolutionary leadership contributes to adaptability by creating interpretive spaces in which environmental signals are collectively examined and translated into strategic awareness.

The second finding concerned adaptive learning and experimentation. Participants described experimentation as essential for converting uncertainty into knowledge. This finding is consistent with organizational learning theory, which suggests that adaptive organizations must challenge assumptions, develop shared understanding, and learn through collective inquiry (Senge, 1990). It also supports Eisenhardt and Martin's (2000) argument that dynamic capabilities consist of identifiable processes through which firms reconfigure resources and routines. In the present study, experimentation was not interpreted as random innovation but as disciplined learning within strategic boundaries. This finding is important because organizations often confuse adaptability with uncontrolled change. The participants' accounts suggest that adaptive experimentation requires leadership practices that protect psychological safety, tolerate intelligent failure, and connect small-scale trials to broader strategic renewal. Such practices are also consistent with adaptive leadership theory, which emphasizes mobilizing people to confront difficult challenges and develop new capacities rather than relying on familiar technical solutions (Heifetz et al., 2009).

The third finding concerned distributed leadership and participatory decision-making. Participants reported that centralized authority limits adaptability because decision-makers at the top may be distant from operational signals. This finding aligns strongly with complexity leadership theory, which argues that adaptive outcomes emerge from interactions among multiple agents rather than from hierarchical command alone (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). It also complements strategic agility research, which identifies leadership unity and rapid collective commitment as essential for business model renewal (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). However, the present study adds nuance by showing that distributed leadership does not mean the absence of hierarchy. Instead, hierarchy is repositioned as a structure for direction-setting, boundary creation, and integration, while adaptive authority is distributed to those with relevant knowledge. This finding suggests that evolutionary leadership requires a paradoxical capability: leaders must provide coherence without overcentralizing control. Such a balance is particularly important in complex environments, where adaptation requires both local responsiveness and system-level alignment.

The fourth finding concerned resource reconfiguration and ambidextrous coordination. Participants emphasized that adaptability fails when resources remain locked into obsolete priorities. This result is directly consistent with the dynamic capabilities view, which defines strategic renewal partly through the reconfiguration of organizational resources (Teece et al., 1997). It is also aligned with the literature on organizational ambidexterity, which argues that organizations must simultaneously exploit existing capabilities and explore new opportunities (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). The present study indicates that evolutionary leadership practices help organizations manage this tension by determining what should be preserved, modified, or abandoned. This finding is theoretically significant because it connects adaptability with evolutionary selection. Organizations cannot adapt by changing everything at once; they must selectively retain valuable routines while creating space for new capabilities. Leaders therefore act as systemic integrators who coordinate continuity and change, efficiency and innovation, present performance and future renewal.

The fifth finding concerned feedback-based institutionalization of adaptability. Participants explained that many organizations adapt temporarily under pressure but fail to convert learning into durable routines. This finding supports the learning organization perspective, which emphasizes systems thinking and feedback as foundations of sustainable learning (Senge, 1990). It also extends dynamic capabilities theory by showing that reconfiguration must be followed by institutionalization. Without feedback loops, adaptive practices remain episodic and dependent on individual champions. The participants' accounts showed that adaptability becomes systemic when it enters organizational calendars, budgets, evaluation systems, dashboards, meetings, and managerial language. This supports Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton's (2013) emphasis on moving from concepts to theoretically meaningful categories in qualitative model development: the present model identifies feedback institutionalization as the mechanism that stabilizes adaptation without freezing it. In other words, adaptive routines must be sufficiently stable to guide action but sufficiently revisable to remain responsive.

Overall, the findings suggest that evolutionary leadership is best understood as a systemic adaptation mechanism. This interpretation advances leadership research by moving beyond trait-based or style-based explanations of adaptability. The model developed in this study shows that leadership contributes to adaptability through interdependent practices: sensing, learning, distributing, reconfiguring, and institutionalizing. These practices correspond to but also extend the dynamic capabilities logic of sensing, seizing, and transforming (Teece et al., 2016). The proposed model provides a more leadership-centered explanation by showing how these capabilities are enacted through social interaction, decision processes, learning routines, and feedback systems. It also contributes to adaptive leadership theory by operationalizing the evolutionary metaphor in organizational settings: leaders help organizations preserve essential strengths, discard maladaptive routines, and generate new configurations for future viability.

The findings also have contextual significance. The study was conducted among participants working in Tehran-based organizations, where environmental uncertainty, economic pressure, regulatory complexity, technological change, and talent challenges often coexist. In such contexts, adaptability may be less about adopting imported managerial models and more about developing internal leadership practices that allow organizations to interpret and respond to complex conditions. Participants emphasized practical mechanisms such as cross-functional forums, temporary task forces, pilot projects, flexible resource allocation, and feedback meetings. This indicates that systemic adaptability can be developed even in constrained environments when

leadership practices create learning, participation, and resource mobility. Therefore, the model may be useful for organizations operating in other emerging or turbulent contexts.

The proposed model also clarifies why some change initiatives fail. Many organizations invest in digital tools, restructuring, or innovation programs but do not change the leadership practices that govern interpretation, authority, learning, and resource allocation. As a result, adaptation remains superficial. The present findings suggest that adaptability requires consistency across multiple organizational subsystems. Leaders must not only communicate the need for change but also redesign how information flows, how experiments are evaluated, how decisions are made, how resources are moved, and how learning becomes institutionalized. This systemic view explains why isolated interventions often produce limited results. Adaptability becomes sustainable only when leadership practices connect cognition, action, structure, and feedback.

The study's theoretical contribution lies in developing a qualitative systemic model that links evolutionary leadership practices to organizational adaptability. Previous research has separately examined adaptive leadership, dynamic capabilities, strategic agility, complexity leadership, and organizational learning. This study integrates these perspectives and identifies five practical categories that explain how adaptability is generated. The model contributes to theory by framing adaptability as a recursive cycle rather than a linear process. Environmental scanning produces sensemaking; sensemaking enables experimentation; experimentation requires distributed authority; distributed action depends on resource reconfiguration; and reconfiguration becomes sustainable through feedback institutionalization. This cycle then generates new information for further sensemaking. Thus, adaptability is both an outcome and an ongoing process.

The study's managerial contribution is that it provides leaders with a practical framework for diagnosing and developing adaptability. Leaders can use the five categories as diagnostic questions. Do we detect weak signals early? Do we experiment safely and systematically? Are decision rights close enough to relevant knowledge? Can we move resources toward emerging priorities? Do we institutionalize what we learn? These questions translate the abstract concept of adaptability into observable leadership practices. The model also suggests that leadership development programs should move beyond individual competencies and include systemic skills such as facilitating sensemaking, designing learning routines, distributing authority, managing ambidextrous tensions, and building feedback mechanisms.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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