

# Chapter 16

## Navigating Uncertainty and the Unknown: Andragogical Education Leadership in Times of Change

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Within the global community, the only constant is change. In Spring 2020, as COVID-19 became a global pandemic, countries closed their borders and closed schools, businesses, and governments. Universities that already had significant online presences and available courses/programs could be reassured that at least some of their programming would continue with minimal interruption. Effective university leaders were able to identify paths forward for their institutions that encompassed their education and were much more able to support faculty, staff, and students with the abrupt change. The authors look at professors as learning leaders, the leadership in higher education institutions, as well as leadership in the private sector. They examine how andragogical leadership can be utilized to shift current educational practices and consider how we might shape learning environments in order to foster more robust learning environments. But essentially, they explain how education leaders develop and organize institutional learning as technology continues to play an essential role.*

## INTRODUCTION

Change can occur incrementally, with small steps taken over time. One example is the establishment of same-sex marriage rights (*Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015*). This is also true for the contraction of rights, such as the recent US Supreme Court decision that removed the fifty-year right to abortion (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, 2022*). It can occur without warning, requiring immediate responses. Shifting societal viewpoints may fuel these changes, but at other times, shifts occur swiftly as a response to environmental factors. For example, when American men left the country to fight in the world wars, women were brought into factories and workplaces to take on the roles these men had left vacant. Another example of profound change was the global introduction of desk-top computers in the early 1980's, leading to the proliferation of many households buying this "new" technology and learning to use computers for various everyday professional and personal tasks. The Covid-19 pandemic is the most recent example of swift change. In Spring 2020, as Covid-19 became a global pandemic, countries closed their borders and closed schools, businesses, and governments. Essential services remained open, but most other non-essential employees from various industries were relegated to working indefinitely from their homes (Centers for Disease Control, n.d.). This policy had a significant impact on all facets of life. Organizations and institutions scrambled to identify ways to provide goods and services to customers, clients, students, and citizens while also supporting their employees to learn innovative technology and to continue their work from their homes.

Organizations and institutions weathered the changes wrought by Covid-19 with varying degrees of success. We believe individuals who adopted andragogical leadership approaches during this time were able to support their employees and make decisions that embraced the challenges brought forth by Covid-19. Our chapter will explore the need for adult educators to develop learners not only to be able to undertake the day-to-day responsibilities of their current or immediate employment, but also to prepare them to embrace future work environments which are, in essence, unknown. We believe ground-shifting events like Covid-19, will continue to occur and that it is essential to have leaders and learners who can flourish in uncertainty. We use Covid-19 as a case example to understand how andragogical leadership, coupled with Lewin's theory of change (Burnes, 2004) and Schein's (2010) further development of Lewin's model, can encourage leaders to embrace challenging situations and use them as a platform for positive change. We will emphasize the need to develop an orientation of adaptability and creativity as we may not be able to envision what our workplaces will be like in 10, 20, or 50 years. We link this argument to the role of educational leaders and innovative approaches taken by them when faced with swiftly changing circumstances.

### **Uncertain Times and Swift Changes**

The pandemic affected all areas of life and similar challenges were faced by leaders across many industries. Due to government lock-down orders, employees were required to shift quickly from in-person work, meetings, and interactions with co-workers to working from home on computers, possibly having to learn unfamiliar software and computer applications to accomplish their daily tasks and projects. Industry leaders and managers had to make rapid decisions on how to best train their workers to use innovative technology for their ongoing or new work while at the same time encouraging continual employee development. Employees had to learn new skills and technologies while continuing to not only meet their job requirements, but also to contend with working from home or at a distance from their

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