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Microfoundations of Strategic Leadership in Encouraging Adaptive Educational Personnel Performance: The Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment in Private University

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of strategic leadership microfoundations on the adaptive performance of educational staff, with the mediating role of psychological empowerment in private higher education institutions. This research is motivated by the increasing demands for adaptation in higher education organizations amidst digital disruption, changes in the work environment, and increasingly complex academic service dynamics. Unlike previous studies that emphasize strategic leadership at the macro-organizational level, this study uses a microfoundations perspective to explain how strategic leadership works through individual psychological mechanisms in shaping employee adaptive behavior. The study used a quantitative approach with a survey method of 171 educational staff at several private universities. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS). The results showed that strategic leadership microfoundations had a positive and significant effect on psychological empowerment. However, the direct effect of strategic leadership on adaptive performance was not significant. These findings indicate that adaptive performance is not formed directly through the leader's strategic vision and control, but through individual psychological processes that create a sense of competence, autonomy, work meaning, and influence within the organization. Furthermore, psychological empowerment was shown to play a key role in explaining how strategic leadership translates into adaptive behavior in educational staff. This study provides theoretical contributions by expanding the literature on microfoundations, strategic leadership, and employee adaptability, and confirms that the adaptive capacity of higher education organizations is rooted in individual psychological dynamics at the micro level.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The increasingly dynamic, digitalized, and uncertain organizational environment demands that private universities rely not only on academic excellence but also on the quality of their human resources, particularly adaptive teaching staff. The adaptability of teaching staff is a key factor in maintaining the sustainability of academic services, administration, and institutional innovation amidst global disruption. (Jafri et al., 2025). However, various empirical phenomena show that the performance of educational staff in many private universities still faces classic problems such as low work flexibility, lack of innovation, and limited capacity to respond quickly to organizational change. From a modern management perspective, these problems cannot be explained sufficiently through a macro-

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organizational approach alone, but rather requires a micro-foundations approach, namely how psychological processes, individual behavior, and internal mechanisms influence organizational performance (Nisrina Hanun Iftadi & Ronita, 2025).

The microfoundations approach to strategic leadership emphasizes that the success of an organization's strategy is largely determined by the actions, cognitions, and interactions of individuals within the organization (Chen & Liu, 2023). Thus, strategic leadership is no longer understood solely as the ability to formulate a vision, but also as how leaders are able to mobilize individual psychological capacities to produce adaptive performance (Chen & Liu, 2023). Strategic leadership in the context of microfoundations plays a crucial role in shaping the adaptive mindset of educational staff by providing work meaning, autonomy, and trust in decision-making (Kadyrova & Shapira, 2024). Recent research shows that an empowering leadership style can improve team change capacity and organizational performance through internal psychological mechanisms such as psychological capital (Palmi et al., 2023).

The adaptive performance of educational staff is a central issue in this study. Adaptive performance refers to an individual's ability to adjust to changes in tasks, technology, and the work environment (Bachmid, 2024). Previous research explains that leadership has a significant influence on improving employee performance, especially when supported by psychological factors such as mental health and emotional intelligence (I Nengah Aristana1, Ni Made Dwi Puspitawati, 2024). However, the relationship between strategic leadership and adaptive performance is not always direct. Recent literature emphasizes the importance of mediating variables, one of which is psychological empowerment (Yusuf & Etikariena, 2023).

Adaptive performance is relevant in explaining an individual's ability to deal with changes in tasks, technology, and the work environment. Adaptive performance not only reflects work results but also includes an individual's ability to learn, innovate, and respond effectively to change (Muhammad Hamid Raza, MHR, Mookadam, Ridewaan, R, 2020). The implementation of agile practices in organizations can improve collaboration, work efficiency, and an individual's ability to adapt to change, which ultimately impacts overall performance (Muhammad Hamid Raza, MHR, Mookadam, Ridewaan, R, 2020). In addition, workforce agility as a concrete form of adaptive performance is also influenced by psychological factors such as motivation, engagement, and individual empowerment (Muhammad Hamid Raza, MHR, Mookadam, Ridewaan, R, 2020).

Adaptive performance Adaptive performance emerged as an extension of the traditional performance concept that only focuses on task performance and contextual performance (Tang et al., 2024)Adaptive performance refers to an individual's ability to adjust to changes in tasks, technology, and the work environment (Kim & Yoon, 2025). Adaptive performance is influenced by psychological factors such as self-efficacy, resilience, and work engagement, all of which are part of positive psychology (Tang et al., 2024). Empirical research shows that empowering leadership and flexible organizational practices can improve adaptive performance by increasing intrinsic motivation and employee engagement (Kim & Yoon, 2025).

Psychological empowerment plays a significant role in increasing individual work engagement and performance, as well as strengthening the relationship between leadership and organizational outcomes (Bani & Tjahjono, 2025). Psychological empowerment serves as a mediating mechanism that strengthens the influence of leadership on employee engagement and performance (Nawaz et al., 2024). Even in dynamic organizational contexts, psychological empowerment has been shown to increase workforce agility and individual resilience in the face of change (Ahmad Azmy, Luthfiyyah Leoni Tania Zahra, 2025). Psychological empowerment is a subjective construct that makes individuals feel competent, have autonomy, and are able to influence their work outcomes, thus serving as a key driver of intrinsic motivation in organizations (Alonso et al., 2024).

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This research is rooted in several key perspectives, namely the Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities Theory, and psychological empowerment theory. RBV emphasizes that an organization's competitive advantage is determined by its ability to strategically manage internal resources, including human capital (Muttaqien et al., 2025). Psychological empowerment explains how individual perceptions of work can influence intrinsic motivation and performance. The integration of these three perspectives provides a strong conceptual framework in explaining the relationship between leadership agility, human capital development, psychological empowerment, and the adaptive performance of academic staff (Jafri et al., 2025).

Psychological empowerment Psychological empowerment is a key variable that bridges the relationship between leadership, human capital development, and adaptive performance. Psychological empowerment reflects an individual's perception of the meaning of work, self-competence, autonomy, and the impact of their work. According to the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), psychological empowerment emerges as a result of job design that meets an individual's psychological needs, thereby increasing intrinsic motivation and performance (Malik et al., 2021). Recent research shows that psychological empowerment has a significant influence on workforce agility, where individuals who feel empowered tend to be better able to adapt to changes in the work environment (Amanda et al., 2024). Furthermore, other studies show that psychological empowerment also plays a role in increasing work engagement, innovation, and individual performance through the mechanisms of intrinsic motivation and self-confidence (Uzzakiyah & Lufityanto, 2024). In fact, in an agile work environment, psychological empowerment has been shown to be a key mediator linking agile practices with improved performance and innovative behavior (Uzzakiyah & Lufityanto, 2024).

However, significant research gaps exist. First, most previous studies have focused on transformational or authentic leadership, without specifically examining microfoundations-based strategic leadership. Second, the research context has largely focused on the business or industrial sector, while studies on educational staff in private universities are still very limited. Third, although psychological empowerment has been widely studied as a mediator, its integration within the microfoundations leadership framework has yet to be comprehensively explored. Fourth, psychological empowerment has been widely studied as a predictor of performance, but it has rarely been used as a primary mediating mechanism in the relationship between strategic leadership and microfoundations-based adaptive performance.

Higher education institutions operate in a more competitive, dynamic, and uncertain environment than many other educational institutions. Therefore, facing these dynamics requires maintaining service quality, adapting to digital transformation, and responding to changing student needs, requiring educators to possess highly adaptive skills. This situation makes private higher education institutions a relevant context for explaining how strategic leadership operates through individual psychological mechanisms, rather than simply through structural organizational policies.

This study positions psychological empowerment not merely as an additional mediating variable, but as a core mechanism explaining how strategic leadership translates into adaptive performance. This research further enriches the leadership literature, which has focused on the direct relationship between leadership and performance without explaining the underlying psychological mechanisms. It also expands the adaptive performance literature by positioning educational staff, who have received little attention, as strategic actors in building the resilience and flexibility of higher education organizations amidst disruption and digital transformation.

By integrating the microfoundations approach into strategic leadership and positioning psychological empowerment as a core mechanism in shaping adaptive performance, this study not only fills a theoretical gap, but also offers a new perspective in understanding how organizational strategy is internalized at the individual level in the dynamic context of higher education.

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2. METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory design that aims to examine the causal relationship between variables, specifically the influence of strategic leadership microfoundations on the adaptive performance of educational staff with psychological empowerment as a mediating variable. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide empirical, data-based explanations of complex and multilevel organizational phenomena (Sugiyono, 2023). According to recent research, quantitative methods are highly relevant in social research because they allow the analysis of causal relationships through statistical techniques such as regression (Baharuddin et al., 2025). In addition, the use of SEM-PLS statistical software has become a standard in data analysis because it is able to process data accurately, from descriptive to inferential analysis (Rochmawan et al., n.d.).

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory design, meaning the research was conducted in two stages. The first stage was quantitative data collection and analysis using SEM-PLS (Abdi Setiawan, Syahran Jailani, 2025). This study employed a quantitative approach with Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), which is appropriate for testing complex models with mediating variables.

2.2 Time and Location of Research

This research was conducted at a private university in Baubau City, Southeast Sulawesi Province. The location was chosen based on the consideration that private universities in Baubau City face quite complex human resource management dynamics, particularly in facing the demands of adapting to changes in the education system, digitalization of learning, and improving academic staff performance. This location is relevant to research focusing on leadership agility, strategic human capital development, and adaptive performance. The research period is planned for four months.

2.3 Population and Sample

The population in this study was all academic staff (academic education personnel) working at private universities in Baubau City. This population was chosen because they are the main actors in the implementation of academic activities and have a crucial role in improving the performance of higher education organizations. According to (Sugiyono, 2023) a population is a generalized area consisting of objects or subjects that have certain characteristics determined by the researcher to be studied and then conclusions drawn. The sampling technique in this study was total sampling, namely the entire population was used as the unit of analysis. The relatively limited population size, namely 171 education personnel, allowed the researcher to include all members of the population as respondents. This approach was chosen to improve the accuracy of model estimation, minimize sampling error, and strengthen external validity in the research context (Sugiyono, 2023).

2.4 Data used

The data used in this study consists of:

a. Primary data, namely data obtained directly from respondents through the distribution of Likert-scale based questionnaires.
b. Secondary data, namely supporting data that comes from scientific journals, books and previous research reports.

Primary data is collected using instruments that have been tested for validity and reliability. Using questionnaires as a data collection tool is the most common method in quantitative research because it can systematically measure respondents' perceptions and attitudes.

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2.5 Data collection

The data used in this study consisted of quantitative data. Quantitative data was obtained through the distribution of a questionnaire using a Likert scale that measures research variables numerically (Sugiyono, 2023).

2.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data processing was performed using SEM-PLS. The analysis stages begin with data input, validity testing using Pearson correlation, reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha, and hypothesis analysis to examine the relationship between variables. The use of SEM-PLS in quantitative research is considered effective because it can process data systematically and produce accurate statistical output. This analytical tool is widely used in social research because it can support comprehensive univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analysis (Dzulhijj & Albina, 2025).

2.7 Validity and Reliability Test

Validity testing is used to determine the extent to which a research instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. A valid instrument will produce accurate and reliable data. According to Sugiyono, validity indicates the level of accuracy between the data obtained from the research object and the data that can be reported by the researcher (Sugiyono, 2023).

Reliability testing is used to determine the consistency of an instrument in measuring research variables. A reliable instrument will produce stable and consistent data. According to Sugiyono, reliability is the degree of consistency of an instrument in measuring a variable (Sugiyono, 2023).

2.8 Mediation Test (Intervening)

This subchapter explains the testing of the mediating variable, namely psychological development, in the relationship between leadership agility and human capital development on adaptive performance. The mediation test was conducted using the Baron approach and reinforced with the Sobel test or bootstrapping to determine the significance of the indirect effect (Sekaran, Uma & Roger, 2020). This analysis aims to determine whether the mediating variable is able to strengthen or bridge the relationship between the main variables in the research model.

2.4. Hypothesis Testing

This sub-chapter discusses the testing of the previously formulated research hypotheses. Hypothesis testing was conducted using a t-test to determine partial effects and an F-test to determine simultaneous effects between variables. The testing criteria were based on a significance value (p-value <0.05), indicating that the hypothesis was accepted. The results of this test serve as the basis for drawing conclusions regarding the relationships between the variables in the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The characteristics of the respondents in this study indicate that the educational staff in private universities is dominated by women with a percentage value of 57.9%. In terms of age, the majority of respondents are in the age range of 25–44 years, which reflects the potential for good adaptation to organizational change. Based on educational level, most respondents have a bachelor's degree (S1), indicating readiness to support administrative and academic tasks. Furthermore, in terms of length of service, respondents are dominated by those with work experience between 5–10 years, indicating a fairly mature level of organizational understanding. Meanwhile, based on work units, the majority of respondents come from the academic administration field, which plays a strategic role in supporting

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university operations. From all these respondent profiles, it shows that educational staff have characteristics that are quite representative in supporting analysis related to adaptive performance in the private university environment.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test Results

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
M	0.897	0.898	0.918	0.583
X	0.887	0.888	0.910	0.560
Y	0.911	0.912	0.928	0.616

Source: SmartPLS/SEM 2026 Processed Output

Based on the results of the reliability and validity tests, all variables in this study demonstrated excellent measurement quality. Variable M has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.897, rho_a of 0.898, and rho_c of 0.918, all of which are above the minimum limit of 0.70. This indicates that the indicators in variable M have high internal consistency. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of 0.583 has also exceeded the minimum limit of 0.50, which means that variable M has good convergent validity, because it is able to explain more than 50% of the indicator's variance. The explanation between variables in the validity and reliability test results is as follows:

a. Variable X also showed similar results, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.887, rho_a of 0.888, and rho_c of 0.910, indicating strong reliability. The AVE value of 0.560 indicates that variable X meets the convergent validity criteria, so this construct can be said to be able to represent its indicators well.
b. The Y variable has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.911, a rho_a of 0.912, and a rho_c of 0.928, indicating a very high level of reliability. The AVE value of 0.616 also indicates that the Y variable has excellent convergent validity.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that all variables in this study have met the criteria for reliability and convergent validity. Therefore, the instrument used in this study is appropriate and reliable for measuring the constructs studied and can be used for further analysis.

3.2. Outer Loadings Test Results

Table 2. Outer loading test results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
M1 <- M	0.772	0.771	0.028	27,648	0.000
M2 <- M	0.767	0.766	0.029	26,049	0.000
M3 <- M	0.787	0.787	0.028	27,840	0.000
M4 <- M	0.797	0.796	0.027	29,951	0.000
M5 <- M	0.731	0.730	0.031	23,344	0.000
M6 <- M	0.799	0.797	0.026	30,138	0.000
M7 <- M	0.706	0.705	0.033	21,579	0.000
M8 <- M	0.745	0.744	0.031	23,913	0.000
X1 <- X	0.726	0.726	0.031	23,435	0.000
X2 <- X	0.791	0.791	0.029	27,299	0.000
X3 <- X	0.710	0.710	0.032	22,043	0.000
X4 <- X	0.764	0.763	0.028	27,232	0.000
X5 <- X	0.741	0.740	0.032	23,157	0.000

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X6 <- X	0.733	0.732	0.034	21,483	0.000
X7 <- X	0.759	0.758	0.029	26,053	0.000
X8 <- X	0.758	0.757	0.030	25,478	0.000
Y1 <- Y	0.795	0.795	0.026	30,090	0.000
Y2 <- Y	0.802	0.802	0.024	33,724	0.000
Y3 <- Y	0.783	0.783	0.028	28,165	0.000
Y4 <- Y	0.801	0.800	0.028	29,030	0.000
Y5 <- Y	0.766	0.765	0.027	27,928	0.000
Y6 <- Y	0.745	0.744	0.032	23,490	0.000
Y7 <- Y	0.807	0.807	0.025	32,678	0.000
Y8 <- Y	0.780	0.779	0.028	28,344	0.000

Source: SmartPLS/SEM Processing Output 2026

Based on the results of the outer loading values above for each indicator, it can be concluded that:

a. For variable X, the outer loading value ranges from 0.710 to 0.791. All indicators X1 to X8 have values above 0.70 with high T statistics (21.483 to 27.299) and a P value of 0.000. This indicates that all indicators in variable X have good convergent validity and are able to explain their constructs strongly and consistently.
b. For variable Y, the outer loading value ranges from 0.745 to 0.807, indicating a very strong correlation between the indicators and their constructs. The very high T-statistic value (23.490 to 33.724) and P-value of 0.000 confirm that all indicators Y1 to Y8 are significant in reflecting variable Y.

The results of the outer loading values, it can be concluded that all indicators in variables X and Y have excellent convergent validity, where the loading value is above the minimum limit of 0.70 and is supported by a high T-statistic value and a P value of 0.000. This indicates that each indicator is able to reflect its construct strongly, consistently, and significantly. In the context of research on the microfoundations of strategic leadership, psychological empowerment, and adaptive educational staff performance, this finding confirms that the instrument used has been able to capture the phenomena studied accurately. Thus, all indicators in variables M, X, and Y are declared valid and suitable for use in further analysis, without the need for elimination, because all have represented their respective constructs adequately and reliably.

3.3. Outer Weight Test Results

Table 3. Results of External Weight Test

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
M1 <- M	0.166	0.166	0.007	24,680	0.000
M2 <- M	0.162	0.162	0.007	23,823	0.000
M3 <- M	0.168	0.168	0.007	25,109	0.000
M4 <- M	0.173	0.173	0.007	23,356	0.000
M5 <- M	0.156	0.156	0.008	19,573	0.000
M6 <- M	0.168	0.168	0.007	23,253	0.000
M7 <- M	0.155	0.155	0.008	20,069	0.000
M8 <- M	0.161	0.161	0.007	22,736	0.000
X1 <- X	0.158	0.158	0.009	17,304	0.000
X2 <- X	0.181	0.181	0.010	18,454	0.000

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X3 <- X	0.162	0.161	0.010	15,831	0.000
X4 <- X	0.165	0.165	0.010	17,179	0.000
X5 <- X	0.162	0.162	0.010	16,235	0.000
X6 <- X	0.167	0.167	0.010	16,283	0.000
X7 <- X	0.172	0.172	0.009	19,170	0.000
X8 <- X	0.169	0.169	0.009	18,372	0.000
Y1 <- Y	0.160	0.160	0.006	26,415	0.000
Y2 <- Y	0.168	0.168	0.006	25,957	0.000
Y3 <- Y	0.157	0.157	0.006	25,374	0.000
Y4 <- Y	0.155	0.155	0.006	26,013	0.000
Y5 <- Y	0.160	0.160	0.007	22,814	0.000
Y6 <- Y	0.148	0.148	0.006	22,990	0.000
Y7 <- Y	0.167	0.167	0.006	26,644	0.000
Y8 <- Y	0.157	0.157	0.007	21,912	0.000

Source: SmartPLS/SEM Processing Output 2026 The results

of the outer weight analysis test show that:

a. Variable X, the indicator coefficient value is in the range of 0.158 to 0.181, with a statistical T value between 15.831 to 19.170 and a P value of 0.000. These results indicate that all indicators X1 to X8 have a significant contribution in reflecting construct X. Although there are small variations between indicator values, all remain at a stable and acceptable level.
b. Variable Y, the indicator coefficient value ranges from 0.148 to 0.168 with a very high T-statistic value, namely between 21.912 to 26.644, and a P value of 0.000. This shows that all indicators Y1 to Y8 contribute significantly to variable Y. Although indicator Y6 has the lowest value (0.148), it is still statistically significant and is still worth maintaining.

It can be concluded that all indicators in each variable have a significant and stable contribution in forming the construct. The T-statistic value is well above 1.96 and the P-value is less than 0.05 for all indicators confirms that no indicators need to be eliminated. Thus, these results strengthen that all constructs in the microfoundations research of strategic leadership, psychological empowerment, and adaptive performance are formed by valid and significant indicators. This provides a strong foundation that the relationships between variables in the research model can be further analyzed accurately, particularly in explaining how strategic leadership works through psychological empowerment to encourage adaptive performance of educational staff in private universities.

3.4. Hypothesis

Table 4. Hypothesis Test Results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
M -> Y	0.862	0.864	0.061	14,139	0.000
X -> M	0.880	0.882	0.016	56,290	0.000
X -> Y	0.048	0.047	0.069	0.705	0.481

Source: SmartPLS/SEM Processing Output 2026

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The results of the analysis test of the relationship between variables can be seen as follows:

a. The T-statistic value of 14.139 and the P-value of 0.000 indicate a positive and significant effect. This means that an increase in variable M significantly increases variable Y.
b. The relationship between X and M has a coefficient of 0.880 with a sample average of 0.882 and a very small standard deviation of 0.016. The very high T-statistic value of 56.290 and the P-value of 0.000 indicate that variable X has a positive and very significant effect on M. This means that changes in variable X will consistently increase variable M with a very high level of confidence.
c. The direct effect between X and Y shows a very small coefficient of 0.048 with a sample mean of 0.047 and a standard deviation of 0.069. The statistical T value of 0.705 and the P value of 0.481 indicate that this effect is not statistically significant, because the T value is smaller than 1.96 and the P value is greater than 0.05.

The results of the relationship test between variables can be concluded that the Microfoundations of Strategic Leadership in Encouraging Adaptive Performance of Education Personnel with the Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment, explained that in the relationship of Psychological Empowerment to Adaptive Performance of Education Personnel, psychological empowerment is proven to have a positive and significant effect on the adaptive performance of education personnel. This shows that the higher the level of psychological empowerment such as self-confidence, meaning of work, autonomy, and impact, the higher the ability of education personnel to adapt to changes in private universities. Furthermore, in the relationship of X to M, microfoundations of strategic leadership have a very strong and significant influence on psychological empowerment, which means that leadership that is able to manage resources, read changes, and make strategic decisions will significantly improve the psychological condition of education personnel. However, in the direct relationship of X to Y, the insignificant results indicate that microfoundations of strategic leadership do not directly improve adaptive performance. Thus, it can be concluded that the influence of strategic leadership on adaptive performance must go through psychological empowerment first, so that this variable acts as a full mediator in explaining the relationship in the private university environment.

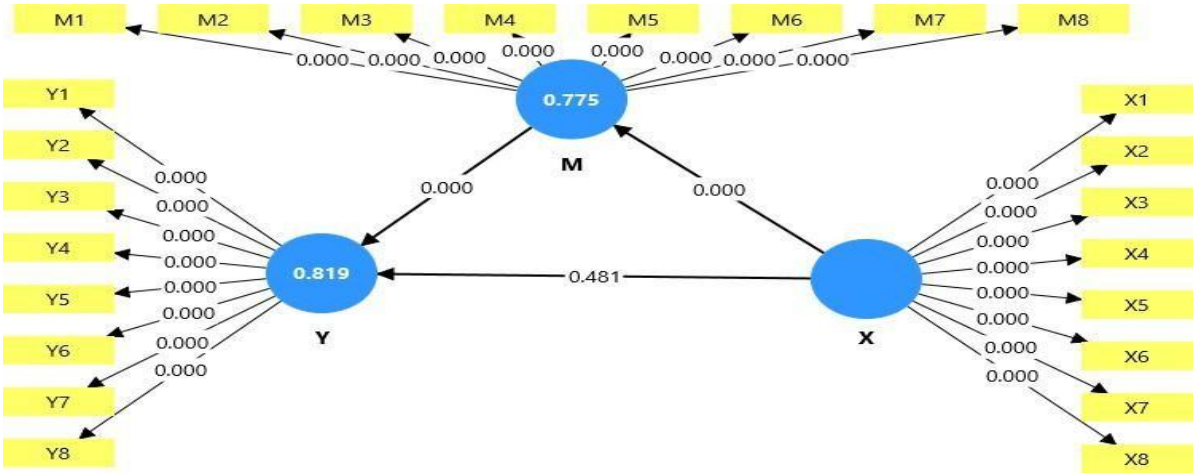


Figure 1. SmartPLS/SEM Hypothesis Test Result Path Diagram Image

The figure shows a SEM model that describes the relationship between variables X (microfoundations of strategic leadership), M (psychological empowerment), and Y (adaptive performance of educational staff). The R-square value on variable M of 0.775 indicates that 77.5% of the variation in psychological empowerment is explained by strategic leadership, while the R-square value on variable Y of 0.819 indicates that 81.9% of adaptive performance is explained by the combination of variables X and M. The paths from X to M and from M to Y are significant (p = 0.000), while the direct path from X to Y is not significant (p = 0.481). This confirms that psychological empowerment acts as a

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full mediator, so that strategic leadership influences adaptive performance indirectly through improving the psychological condition of educational staff.

3.5. Mediation Test Results

Table 5. Mediation Test Results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
X -> M -> Y	0.759	0.762	0.058	13,178	0.000

Source: SmartPLS/SEM Processing Output 2026

Based on the results of the indirect influence test, the relationship between strategic leadership microfoundations (X) and adaptive educational staff performance (Y) through psychological empowerment (M) shows a coefficient of 0.759 with a T-statistic value of 13.178 and a P-value of 0.000. These results indicate that the indirect influence is positive and significant. In the context of the study, this finding confirms that strategic leadership does not directly improve adaptive performance, but works effectively through increasing the psychological empowerment of educational staff. This means that when leaders are able to build self-confidence, work meaning, autonomy, and influence in individuals, educational staff will be better able to adapt to change. Thus, psychological empowerment is proven to play a key role (mediator) that bridges the influence of strategic leadership microfoundations on adaptive performance in private universities.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Microfoundations of Strategic Leadership on Adaptive Performance

The discussion of the results of this study confirms that the microfoundations of strategic leadership are an important foundation in building adaptive performance among educational staff, but their influence is not direct. This actually strengthens the microfoundations perspective, which states that employee adaptive behavior is not formed automatically through the vision, strategy, or control of leadership. In the context of educational staff, adaptability is more determined by the individual's psychological processes in interpreting change, feeling competent, having autonomy, and feeling empowered. This indicates that adaptive performance is not simply the result of adherence to organizational strategy, but the outcome of internal psychological mechanisms formed through strategic leadership practices. This finding also challenges the dominant assumption in the leadership literature that tends to assume the influence of leadership is direct on performance. However, the results of this study demonstrate that in complex and digitalized higher education organizations, the influence of leadership on adaptive behavior is more indirect, contextual, and dependent on individual psychological dynamics.

This research aligns with research (Saptaningsih Sumarmi, Heru Kurnianto Tjahjono, Ika Nurul Qamari, 2024). which also found that authentic leadership influences performance through adaptive capacity as a mediating variable, thus reinforcing the notion that the relationship is not always direct. Furthermore, other research shows that knowledge-based and strategic leadership can improve organizational performance through innovation and other internal mechanisms (Manzoor et al., 2023). This confirms that strategic leadership operates through internal organizational processes, not directly on performance output.

While many previous studies have tended to assume a direct relationship between leadership and performance, this study demonstrates that the relationship is non-linear and dependent on intermediary variables. In the Baubau context, this can be explained by the bureaucratic and normative nature of educational organizations, which means that leadership policies or directives are not always

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directly translated into adaptive behavior by educational staff. This confirms that leadership success is not measured by how powerful instructions are given, but by how deeply that influence can shape an individual's psychological state.

The results of this study establish a more integrated conceptual relationship by placing strategic leadership within a microfoundations perspective, namely that the influence of leadership on adaptive performance does not occur directly, but through individual psychological mechanisms. In this context, strategic leadership is understood as the leader's ability to shape the meaning of work, a sense of competence, autonomy, and involvement of educational staff in facing organizational change. This psychological condition is reflected in psychological empowerment, which then becomes the primary mechanism in encouraging employee adaptive behavior. Thus, this study confirms that adaptive performance is not merely the result of the leader's strategic direction, but rather the outcome of a psychological internalization process formed through strategic leadership practices at the micro level.

It can be concluded that private universities, through strategic leadership microfoundations, play a key role in shaping the psychological well-being of their teaching staff in Baubau City. Adaptive, visionary, and change-responsive leadership will create a supportive work environment, but its effectiveness depends heavily on how these conditions translate into individual psychological empowerment. Furthermore, the microfoundations of strategic leadership must be understood as a leader's ability to build organizational sensemaking. This means that leaders not only direct but also help educational staff understand the meaning of change, feel involved, and have a role in the organization. Without this process, strategic policies will become merely administrative formalities that have no impact on work behavior. Therefore, this variable is not only a mediator but also a strategic factor in higher education human resource management.

4.2. Microfoundations of Strategic Leadership on Psychological Empowerment

The research results show that the microfoundations of strategic leadership have a positive and highly significant influence on psychological empowerment. This finding confirms that the effectiveness of strategic leadership is fundamentally built through micro-mechanisms operating at the individual level, particularly in shaping the psychological well-being of educational staff. The stronger a leader's ability to establish strategic direction, communicate change, support, and engage individuals, the greater the sense of competence, autonomy, meaningful work, and influence felt by educational staff within the organization.

The research findings reinforce the microfoundations perspective, which emphasizes that organizational success is determined not only by strategy at the structural level but also by how leadership influences individual psychological dynamics. These findings demonstrate that strategic leadership is not simply a macro-level decision-making function, but rather a process of building psychological energy that enables individuals to feel trusted, empowered, and empowered to navigate organizational change. Thus, this research clarifies that psychological empowerment is a direct outcome of effective strategic leadership practices at the micro-level.

The results of this study align with those of (Xu & Zhang, 2022). in Frontiers in Psychology, which found that empowering leadership significantly improves psychological empowerment and adaptive performance in higher education educators. This research is also supported by a study by Mahir Samodien et al. (2024), which confirms that adaptive and strategic leadership can improve the psychological capacity and performance of higher education institutions in facing environmental changes. Furthermore, research (Saptaningsih Sumarmi, Heru Kurnianto Tjahjono, Ika Nurul Qamari, 2024) shows that authentic leadership influences adaptive capacity through psychological mechanisms and individual dynamic capabilities.

These findings suggest that, in the context of private higher education institutions facing the pressures of digitalization and organizational change, formal strategic policies alone are not sufficient

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for educational staff. They require leadership capable of fostering self-confidence, engagement, and work autonomy to foster psychological readiness for change. Therefore, this study strengthens the argument that psychological empowerment is a key foundation for building organizational adaptive capacity based on microfoundations leadership.

4.3. Psychological Empowerment for Adaptive Performance

Psychological empowerment emerged as a crucial variable in bridging the relationship between the Microfoundations of Strategic Leadership and Adaptive Performance. The results of the study indicate that psychological empowerment has a very strong influence on adaptive performance, while also acting as a full mediator. This suggests that psychological dimensions such as self-confidence, work meaning, autonomy, and perceived impact have a far more strategic role than structural factors. In the context of educational staff in private universities, psychological empowerment is key because they are in operational positions that directly face the dynamics of change, both in the academic system, administrative services, and the demands of digitalization.

The findings of this study reinforce the relevance of Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that individuals will demonstrate optimal performance when basic psychological needs are met. In this study, psychological empowerment proved to be a medium that transforms strategic leadership into adaptive work behavior. This means that leadership that fails to meet individual psychological needs will lose its effectiveness. This explains why in many organizations, including private universities in the regions, performance improvement programs often fail because they focus too much on policy without addressing the psychological aspects of individuals.

This aligns with the results of a meta-analysis that found psychological empowerment to be a key motivational factor that improves individual and organizational performance (Alonso et al., 2024). This means that individuals who feel empowered tend to be more proactive, creative, and adaptive at work. Previous research also shows that psychological empowerment acts as a mediator in various organizational relationships, such as between growth mindset and innovative behavior in higher education (Nisrina Hanun Iftadi & Ronita, 2025). This confirms that empowerment is a psychological mechanism that bridges the influence of external variables on work behavior.

This study demonstrates that psychological empowerment is key to improving the performance of educational staff. When educational staff feel trusted, have autonomy, and understand the meaning of their work, they are better prepared to face change, thus demonstrating adaptive performance. Psychological empowerment in higher education is highly strategic because educational staff are in positions that demand high flexibility. They must navigate changes in the academic system, the digitalization of services, and complex administrative demands. Without confidence, autonomy, and meaningful work, individuals tend to be resistant to change.

Psychological empowerment in this study is not merely a mediating variable, but a core driver of adaptive performance. Organizations seeking to improve performance do not. The mediating role of research suggests that leadership failure is often not due to flawed strategies, but rather to an inability to address the psychological aspects of individuals. Leadership that focuses solely on instruction without empowerment will be ineffective.

Thus, psychological empowerment is a key mechanism explaining how strategic leadership works. The implication is clear: private universities must integrate strategic leadership with an empowerment approach to produce adaptive, resilient, and change-ready teaching staff.

4.4. Mediation Role (Relationship X → M → Y)

The results of the study indicate that psychological empowerment (M) fully mediates the relationship between the microfoundations of strategic leadership (X) and adaptive performance (Y). This means that the influence of strategic leadership will only be effective if it can first improve an

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individual's psychological state. This can be explained through Social Exchange Theory, which states that when an organization or leader provides support and trust, individuals will respond with positive behavior, including improved performance. In this context, psychological empowerment becomes a form of "reciprocity" for leadership treatment.

The full mediation results also show that psychological empowerment is not simply an additional intervening variable, but rather a core mechanism explaining how strategic leadership translates into adaptive behavior. This suggests that adaptive performance is actually a psychological outcome before it becomes a behavioral outcome. This means that educational staff will demonstrate adaptability when they feel in control of their work, are confident in their competence, and see their work as meaningful within the organization. This perspective expands the literature on employee adaptability, which has primarily explained adaptability through technical competence or the pressures of organizational change, by emphasizing that individual psychological processes are the primary foundation of adaptive behavior.

This research aligns with previous research, which found psychological empowerment to be a mediator in the relationship between leadership and adaptive performance in higher education settings (Xu & Zhang, 2022). Furthermore, other studies have shown that various forms of leadership require mediating variables to optimally influence performance (Saptaningsih Sumarmi, Heru Kurnianto Tjahjono, Ika Nurul Qamari, 2024).

This study also critiques the notion that transforming higher education organizations cannot simply rely on strategic leadership at the policy level. Successful change depends heavily on leaders' ability to develop psychological mechanisms that enable educators to internalize change as part of their identity and work responsibilities. Thus, this research reinforces the perspective that organizational adaptive capacity in the era of disruption is built at the micro level through individual psychological dynamics, not solely through structural interventions or strategic organizational decisions.

Thus, this study provides clear implications for human resource management at private universities in Baubau City. Leadership must not only focus on formulating strategies or policies; it must also be able to create a psychologically empowering work environment. This can be achieved through providing job autonomy, involvement in decision-making, competency development, and recognition of individual contributions. Without these efforts, strategic leadership will lose its transformative power.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that this study confirms that the microfoundations of strategic leadership have a very strong influence on the psychological empowerment of educational staff, but do not have a significant direct effect on adaptive performance. This finding indicates that the effectiveness of strategic leadership in higher education organizations does not work directly through organizational control, vision, or policies, but through individual psychological mechanisms. In other words, educational staff do not automatically become adaptive simply because of the leadership's strategic direction, but when they feel they have competence, autonomy, work meaning, and influence within the organization. Therefore, psychological empowerment is proven to be a core mechanism that translates strategic leadership into adaptive behavior of educational staff. . Thus, the relationship between leadership and performance is indirect and depends on the quality of the psychological condition of individuals within the organization.

This research strengthens the microfoundations perspective by demonstrating that organizational adaptive capacity is rooted in individual psychological dynamics at the micro level, not solely in organizational strategy and structure. It then expands the strategic leadership and employee

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adaptability literature by emphasizing that adaptive performance in higher education organizations is more contextual and psychological in nature and cannot be explained solely through a structural approach.

5.1 Recommendation

Private universities need to shift leadership practices from an administrative and bureaucratic approach to one that focuses on the psychological empowerment of their teaching staff. Leaders must not only communicate organizational strategies but also foster a sense of confidence, engagement, autonomy, and meaningful work for their staff, ensuring they are adaptively prepared to navigate organizational change and digital transformation.

Furthermore, higher education institutions need to develop more flexible, collaborative, and innovation-supporting work systems to provide educators with the space to express adaptive behavior. Strengthening training based on learning agility, digital competency, and an organizational learning culture is also crucial to strengthening educators' adaptability amidst the increasingly complex dynamics of the higher education environment.

For further research, it is recommended to develop a broader model by including other variables such as organizational support, learning culture, digital capability, or work engagement to deepen understanding of the psychological and organizational mechanisms that shape adaptive performance in the context of higher education.

Author Contribution Statement

The main contribution of this research lies in its success in repositioning strategic leadership from a microfoundations perspective, namely that the effectiveness of organizational strategy is actually determined by the psychological mechanisms and individual behavior at the micro level. In contrast to previous studies that tend to view strategic leadership as a structural and macro-oriented phenomenon, this research shows that organizational success in building adaptive performance does not primarily come from strategy formulation or leadership authority, but from the leader's ability to transform strategy into a psychological condition that encourages employee adaptation readiness. Thus, this research shifts the focus of the literature from "strategic leadership as organizational control" to "strategic leadership as a psychological enabling mechanism."

Furthermore, as an academic contribution, this study strengthens the literature on microfoundations, strategic leadership, and adaptive performance by demonstrating that employee adaptive capacity is not formed directly through organizational strategy, but rather through individual psychological mechanisms, particularly psychological empowerment. These findings broaden the study of management and leadership from a structural approach to a psychological and behavioral approach that emphasizes the importance of internal individual processes in determining organizational effectiveness.

Furthermore, in practical terms, the results of this study also demonstrate that higher education leaders cannot simply focus on organizational policies and controls. They also need to develop empowerment-based strategies that foster a sense of competence, autonomy, engagement, and meaningful work for their staff. This approach is crucial for enhancing staff adaptability in the face of digital transformation, organizational change, and the increasingly complex dynamics of higher education services.

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expected to contribute to the development of studies on strategic leadership, psychological empowerment, and adaptive performance in the context of higher education.

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