

## The Role of Agile Leadership in the Success of a Contemporary Organisation: A Conceptual Discussion.

Lingani Ncube<sup>1</sup>, Sikhulekile Mahlangu<sup>2</sup>, Kudzai Kamango<sup>3</sup>, Nozipho M Ncube<sup>4</sup>, Musilahane Moyo<sup>5</sup>, Trust Phiri<sup>6</sup> and Paul Nemashakwe<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1-6</sup>Department of Information Technology and Innovation, Catholic University of Zimbabwe, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

<sup>7</sup>Department of Business Management and Innovation, Catholic University of Zimbabwe, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56293/IJMSSSR.2024.5302>

IJMSSSR 2024

VOLUME 6

ISSUE 6 NOVEMBER – DECEMBER

ISSN: 2582 - 0265

**Abstract:** In an increasingly complex and fast-paced business environment, organisations must navigate constant change, technological disruption, and shifting customer expectations. Traditional leadership models, which often focus on hierarchy, control, and long-term planning, struggle to keep pace with these challenges. These traditional models are often insufficient or ill-equipped to drive organisational success. Agile leadership, characterised by adaptability, collaboration, empowerment, and continuous learning, has emerged as a critical approach for organisations to remain competitive and innovative. This paper positions agile leadership as necessary for organisational success. The discussion shows how agile leadership enables faster decision-making, fosters a culture of innovation, and enhances employee engagement. By empowering teams to operate with greater autonomy and embrace change, agile leadership helps organisations respond rapidly to shifting market demands and technological advancements. Additionally, this leadership style supports the development of customer-centric strategies that are essential in maintaining relevance in competitive markets. Through real-world examples and a proposed conceptual framework, this paper demonstrates that agile leadership is not only beneficial but essential for organisations seeking long-term sustainability and success in a dynamic global landscape.

**Keywords:** Agile leadership; Leadership; VUCA,

### 1. Introduction

In an increasingly complex and fast-paced business environment, organisations must navigate constant change, technological disruption, and shifting customer expectations (Verma, 2024). Traditional leadership models, which often focus on hierarchy, control, and long-term planning, struggle to keep pace with these challenges (Smith & Bhavsar, 2021). As a result, many organisations have turned to agile leadership to drive success in this uncertain landscape (Theobald, Prener, Krieg & Schneider, 2020). Agile leadership, which is based on flexibility, collaboration, and continuous improvement, enables organisations to remain competitive by fostering innovation and empowering teams to respond quickly to latest information (Rigby, Sutherland, and Takeuchi, 2016). The necessity of agile leadership in modern organisations cannot be overlooked but taken seriously. It is not merely a management trend but a critical approach for achieving sustainable success in today's ever-changing business environment (Akkaya, Panait, Apostu & Kaya, 2022). Agile leaders create adaptive cultures that thrive on feedback, learning, and customer-centricity, helping organisations to pivot when necessary and capitalise on emerging opportunities (Hayward, Freeman & Tickner, 2017). This paper will explore the role of agile leadership in the success of modern organisations. By examining its theoretical foundations, practical applications, and real-world examples, this paper seeks to demonstrate how agile leadership is essential for fostering innovation, enhancing organisational agility, and driving long-term success (Radu, 2023). The paper will also explore the challenges associated with agile leadership as an increasingly acceptable form of leadership in contemporary organisations around the world. The conceptual discussion will conclude by proposing a conceptual framework to ensure that agile leadership plays a key role in ensuring the success of contemporary organisations.

## 2. The Concept of Agile Leadership

Agile leadership is characterised by its focus on fostering an environment conducive to collaboration among cross-functional teams (Porkodi, 2024). This leadership style is grounded in the principles established by the Agile Manifesto, which emerged in 2001 from a collective of software developers aiming to enhance project management efficiency and adaptability (Daraojimba, Nwasike, Adegbite, Ezeigwenewe & Gidiagba, 2024). Originally, the Agile Manifesto emphasised several core values: prioritising individuals and interactions over rigid processes and tools, valuing working software more than extensive documentation, promoting customer collaboration instead of strict contract negotiations, and advocating for responsiveness to change rather than adherence to predetermined plans (Hohl et al., 2018).

At its core, agile leadership seeks to create a culture where team members feel empowered to share ideas, take initiative, and work collaboratively towards common goals (Jerab & Mabrouk, 2023). This approach encourages open communication, trust, and mutual respect among team members, which are essential for fostering innovation and creativity (Yermolaieva, 2021). Agile leaders facilitate this environment by actively listening to their teams, providing constructive feedback, and encouraging experimentation and learning from failures (Joina & Josephs, 2007). They understand that the best solutions often arise from diverse perspectives and collaborative efforts, making it crucial to break down silos and promote cross-functional teamwork (Daraojimba et al, 2024).

Initially designed for the software development sector, the principles of agile leadership have transcended their original context, influencing a diverse array of industries, including healthcare, finance, education, and manufacturing (De Smet, Lurie & George, 2018). This broader application underscores the versatility and relevance of agile methodologies in contemporary organisational practices (Pacheco-Cubillos, Boria-Reverter & Gil-Lafuente, 2024). In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and shifting market dynamics, organisations are increasingly recognising the need for flexibility and responsiveness (Shulze & Pinkow, 2020). Agile leadership equips teams to navigate uncertainty and change effectively, enabling them to pivot quickly in response to new information or evolving customer needs (Clayton, 2021).

Moreover, the agile approach emphasises continuous improvement and iterative progress (Jareb, 2023). Agile leaders encourage teams to regularly reflect on their processes and outcomes, fostering a culture of learning and adaptation (Akkaya, Mirela & Apostu, 2022). This commitment to ongoing development not only enhances team performance but also contributes to higher employee engagement and satisfaction (Maridian, 2024). When team members see their contributions valued and their growth supported, they are more likely to remain motivated and committed to the organisation's goals (Driskell, Driskell & Salas, 2018).

Agile leadership extends the principles of agile project management into the realm of organisational leadership, putting emphasis on flexibility, decentralised decision-making, and continuous improvement (Zhou & Ma, 2023). In agile organisations, leaders focus less on controlling every aspect of the organisation and more on creating an environment where teams can self-organise and respond dynamically to change (Khadair, Hamdan & Kanan, 2024). This approach is particularly crucial in today's fast-paced business world, where traditional hierarchical leadership models often fail to keep up with the need for rapid adaptation (Gregoire, Delalieux & Fatien, 2022). Agile leadership is based on the idea that employees are the drivers of success, and that empowering them to make decisions and take ownership of their work leads to better outcomes (Suvvari, 2024). Leaders in agile environments act as facilitators or servant leaders, ensuring that teams have the resources and support they need to succeed (Penha, da Silva & Scafuto, 2022).

### 2.1 Key Principles of Agile Leadership

Agile leadership is built around several core principles that distinguish it from more traditional leadership models.

#### 2.1.1 Flexibility and Adaptability

Agile leadership's first principles are flexibility and adaptability, particularly in today's rapidly evolving business landscape (Holbeche, 2023). Agile leaders recognise that adhering to rigid structures and inflexible plans can significantly hinder progress, especially in environments characterised by constant change and uncertainty (Bwalya,

2023). Instead of clinging to outdated methodologies, these leaders foster a culture that not only accepts change but actively encourages it (Musaigwa, 2023). They inspire their teams to remain open-minded and responsive, urging them to pivot and adjust their strategies based on new insights, feedback, and emerging trends (Porkodi, 2024).

Agile leadership stands in stark contrast to traditional leadership models, which often prioritise stability, predictability, and long-term planning (Dickson, 2023). In such frameworks, the focus is typically on maintaining the status quo and adhering to established processes, which can lead to stagnation and an inability to respond effectively to new challenges (Martin, 2018). By emphasising a fixed vision and a linear path to success, traditional leadership models may inadvertently create an environment where innovation is stifled, and teams feel constrained by the very structures meant to guide them, as leaders avoid making decisions (Valldeneu, Tarrats-Pons & Ferras, 2021).

It is worth noting that cultivating an adaptable mindset is not just beneficial but essential for organisations aiming to thrive in a fast-paced and dynamic environment (Mundra, 2018). Leaders who prioritise agility empower their teams to experiment, learn from failures, and iterate on their approaches (Porkodi, 2024). This not only enhances creativity and problem-solving capabilities but also positions the organisation to seize new opportunities as they arise (Huzayran, 2024). In essence, embracing flexibility and adaptability is a strategic move for success in an increasingly complex and unpredictable world (Deep, 2023).

### 2.1.2 Decentralised Decision Making:

Agile leadership is fundamentally rooted in the principle of decentralising authority, which stands in stark contrast to the conventional top-down management structures that have dominated many organisations for decades (Kahl, de Klerk & Ogulin, 2022). In traditional models, decision-making is for the upper echelons of the organisation, leading to a bureaucratic process that can stifle creativity and reduce responsiveness (Zamora & Gonzalez, 2022). In contrast, agile leadership fosters an environment where teams make decisions on their own, allowing them to tackle real-time challenges and ride on emerging opportunities without the cumbersome delays that often accompany the need for management approval (Hieu, 2020).

This shift towards decentralisation is not merely a structural change; it represents a profound transformation within organisations (Porkodi, 2024). Agile leaders actively promote the formation of self-organising teams, which are groups of individuals who collaborate and coordinate their efforts without the need for constant management oversight (Kohnova & Salajova, 2021). By entrusting teams with the autonomy needed to make decisions, agile leaders cultivate a keen sense of ownership and accountability among team members (Boss, Dahlander, Ihl & Jayaraman, 2021). This empowerment encourages individuals to take initiatives, experiment with innovative ideas, and learn from their past experiences, fostering a culture that values innovation and adaptability (Porkodi, 2024).

Furthermore, the empowerment of teams has a direct impact on the speed and efficiency of the decision-making process (Malik, Sarwar & Orr, 2021). When team members get the authority to act, they can respond swiftly to changes in the market, customer feedback, or internal challenges (Parsley, 2023). This agility not only enhances the organisation's ability to pivot and adapt but also creates a more dynamic and responsive organisational environment. Teams can iterate on their projects, implement changes, and refine their strategies in real-time, resulting in improved outcomes and greater overall effectiveness (Boss et al., 2021).

In addition to enhancing innovation and accelerated decision-making, agile leadership also promotes collaboration and communication across different levels of the organisation. By breaking down silos and encouraging cross-functional teamwork, agile leaders create an ecosystem where diverse perspectives are valued and integrated into the decision-making process (Moh'd, 2023). This collaborative approach not only enriches the quality of decisions made but also fosters a sense of community and shared purpose among team members (Santos et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the emphasis on self-organisation and empowerment aligns with the growing recognition of the importance of employee engagement and satisfaction (Mansor, 2023). When individuals feel trusted and valued, they are more motivated and committed to their work (Deepalakshmi et al., 2024). This intrinsic motivation can lead to higher levels of productivity, creativity, and job satisfaction, ultimately benefiting the organisation (Akerle,

2023).

### 2.1.3 Customer-centricity:

Agile leadership represents a transformative approach to managing teams and projects, fundamentally shifting the emphasis towards prioritising customer needs, and integrating direct feedback into every stage of the development process (Porkodi, 2024). Unlike traditional leadership models, which typically rely on predetermined and rigid plans, agile leadership champions flexibility and adaptability (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2021). This change in basic assumptions enables leaders to respond dynamically to changing circumstances, market trends, and customer expectations (Porkodi, 2024).

In an agile framework, the focus on delivering value to customers is paramount (Daraojimba et al., 2024). Agile leaders encourage their teams to embrace a mindset of continuous improvement allowing them to refine and enhance their offerings based on real-time feedback (Joy, 2019). The process not only allows for rapid adjustments but also fosters a deeper understanding of what customers truly value (Akkaya et al., 2023). As a result, products and services developed under the tenets of agile leadership are more likely to align closely with customer expectations, directly translating into heightened customer satisfaction and enhanced relevance in an ever-evolving market landscape (Peeters, Voorde & Pauwe, 2022).

Moreover, agile leadership cultivates a culture of responsiveness and innovation (Cleveland & Cleveland, 2020). Teams experiment, explore innovative ideas, and take calculated risks, knowing that their efforts will be evaluated through the lens of customer feedback (Agner, 2023). This creates an environment where creativity flourishes and where team members feel empowered to contribute their insights and expertise (Nwachukwu & Vu, 2020). By prioritising real-world feedback, agile leadership develops solutions that are effective and tailored to meet the genuine needs of customers (Prasongko & Adiando, 2019).

In this dynamic environment, communication plays a crucial role (Bushuyeva, et al., 2019). Agile leaders must foster open lines of communication within their teams and with their customers, ensuring that everyone is aligned and that there is a clear understanding of goals and objectives (Porkodi, 2024). Regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and collaborative planning meetings help in cultivating an atmosphere of transparency and trust (Švejdárová, 2019). This collaborative approach not only boosts morale but also enhances team cohesion, as individuals' contributions are valued and impactful (Khadair, Hamdan & Kanan, 2024).

Additionally, agile leadership promotes a shift in mindset from viewing failure as a setback to embracing it as a valuable learning opportunity (Majd & Majd, 2023). In this way, mistakes are analysed, lessons are learnt, and teams are encouraged to adapt swiftly, leading to more resilient and robust processes (Akkaya and Sever, 2022). This culture of learning and adaptation fosters innovation, as teams are constantly seeking new ways to solve problems and deliver exceptional value to customers (Almeida & Simoes, 2021).

### 2.1.4 Continuous Learning and Improvement:

Agile leadership places a strong emphasis on fostering a culture that prioritises continuous improvement, recognising that this is vital for both individual and organisational growth (Akkaya & Sever, 2022). In an agile environment, teams view every experience—whether a success or a failure—as a valuable opportunity for learning (Radu, 2023). This mindset shifts the focus from merely achieving results to understanding the processes that lead to those results, thereby creating a more resilient and adaptable workforce (Oyewus, 2023).

To support this culture of continuous improvement, agile methodologies incorporate regular feedback mechanisms that are integral to the team's workflow (Daraojimba et al., 2024). Daily stand-ups, for instance, provide a platform for team members to share updates, discuss challenges, and align on priorities (Agner, 2023). This daily touch-point not only enhances communication but also fosters accountability, as team members reflect on their contributions and seek assistance when needed (Porkodi, 2024). Sprint reviews serve as another critical feedback loop, allowing teams to highlight their work to stakeholders and reflect on their progress (Renault & Tarakci, 2023). This collaborative review process not only validates the team's efforts but also opens the door for constructive criticism and current ideas, further enriching the team's understanding of their work's impact (Dunn,

2020).

In a rapidly changing marketplace, the ability to adapt and innovate is crucial for maintaining a competitive edge (Amujouyi, Benjamin & Adeus 2024). Organisations that embrace agile leadership and its focus on continuous improvement can respond to market demands, customer feedback, and emerging trends (Porkodi, 2024). By cultivating a culture that values learning and adaptation, these organisations can not only survive but thrive in an increasingly complex business landscape (Eduzor, 2024).

### 2.1.5 Collaboration and Empowerment:

Agile leadership centres on collaboration which is essential for a dynamic organisational culture (Porkodi, 2024). By prioritising teamwork, agile leaders break down silos that hinder communication and progress, fostering cross-functional collaboration (Sobande, 2020). This diverse teamwork enhances problem-solving and encourages innovative thinking, leading to creative solutions (Abadir, et al., 2019). Additionally, this collaborative approach empowers team members, increasing their engagement and commitment to success (Fischer & Charef, 2022). Agile leaders grant autonomy, cultivating a sense of value and trust, which boosts morale and encourages proactive contributions from the staff (Moe et al., 2019). This empowerment also enhances organisational resilience, enabling teams to adapt to changes and challenges effectively (Akkaya & Sever, 2022). Agile leadership drives collective objectives while nurturing a culture of continuous improvement, ensuring the organisation remains competitive and responsive in a changing landscape (Cleveland & Cleveland, 2020).

## 3. Agile Leadership in a VUCA environment

Organisations today must adapt quickly to maintain competitiveness in a rapidly changing environment (Shchetinina et al., 2023). The VUCA framework—Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity—highlights the challenges leaders face. Volatility refers to the speed and magnitude of change in the market or industry, which can disrupt established norms and practices (Aimar & Smith, 2021). Uncertainty highlights the unpredictability of future events, making it difficult for organisations to forecast outcomes and plan accordingly (Krawczyńska-Zauchka, 2019). Complexity involves the intricate inter-dependencies and interconnections of numerous factors that can influence organisational performance, often leading to confusion and difficulty in decision-making (Taskan, Junça-Silva, & Caetano, 2022). Ambiguity signifies the lack of clarity about how to interpret events or situations, which can result in miscommunication and misalignment within teams (Nemashakwe & Kayawe, 2023).

### 3.1 Volatility and the Need for Fast Adaptation

In unpredictable markets marked by sudden changes, organisations need to prioritise agility in their leadership styles (Doner & Effeoglu, 2023). Agile leadership is essential for effectively managing disruptions like technological innovations, economic downturns, or global crises (Poi & Sorbariko, 2022). Traditional leadership models, which often rely on long-term and linear planning may struggle to respond to these rapid changes (Martin, 2018). Agile leaders foster a culture of adaptability within their organisations, encouraging flexibility among team members (Radu, 2023). They highlight the necessity of continuously reassessing strategies and processes to remain in tune with shifting circumstances (Sever, 2022). By utilising short feedback loops and iterative processes, agile leaders empower their organisations to quickly adjust to new conditions, thereby reducing the risk of failing to respond to market fluctuations (Prasongko & Adionto, 2019).

### 3.2 Uncertainty and Decision-Making with Incomplete Information

In an uncertain environment information alone may not provide clear answers, and leaders must often make decisions with a possibility of different and unexpected future outcomes (Jerab, 2023). This is where agile leadership becomes indispensable as they excel at making quick, informed decisions based on the best available information, even when that information is incomplete (Porkodi, 2024). In a VUCA context, waiting for perfect data before deciding can be detrimental (Rimita, 2019). Agile leaders promote a mindset that values action over perfection, encouraging teams to take calculated risks (O'Dwyer & Drury-Grogan, 2013). By empowering employees to make decentralised decisions, agile leaders foster a culture of trust and autonomy, allowing

organisations to respond faster to emerging opportunities and threats (Makkar & Rani, 2024).

### 3.3 Complexity and the Power of Cross-Functional Collaboration

Modern business environments are characterised by their complexity and interdependence, necessitating leaders who can adeptly manage various components simultaneously (Nemashakwe and Kayawe, 2023). Agile leadership emerges as a crucial approach, fostering cross-functional collaboration that dismantles silos and encourages teamwork across different departments (Khalil et al., 2013). This collaborative ethos is particularly vital in a VUCA context, where traditional cause-and-effect relationships may be obscured (Mahel, 2021).

By promoting collaboration among diverse teams, organisations can uncover innovative solutions to intricate challenges (Morrison et al., 2019). Agile leaders cultivate a culture of open knowledge sharing and empower teams to engage in experimentation (Grass, Backmann & Hoegl, 2020). This not only enhances problem-solving capabilities but also enables organisations to develop more comprehensive strategies that reflect the interconnected nature of contemporary business dynamics (Holbeche, 2023). Overall, with agile leadership, there is emphasis on collaboration and agility to enable organisations to navigate the complexities of the modern landscape effectively (Jain et al., 2024).

### 3.4 Ambiguity and Embracing Experimentation

Ambiguity poses significant challenges for organisations that lack preparedness, often leading to paralysis in decision-making (Jerab, 2023). Agile leaders, however, view ambiguity as an opportunity rather than a hindrance (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020). They create a culture that prioritises experimentation and continuous learning, recognising that traditional planning methods may fall short in uncertain circumstances (Porkodi, 2024). The essence of agile leadership lies in its reliance on ongoing feedback, which facilitates the testing of small-scale innovations (Ray, 2023). This process allows organisations to quickly assess outcomes and adapt accordingly. By promoting a mindset of “fail fast, learn faster”, agile leaders empower their teams to navigate ambiguous situations effectively, where established precedents may not exist (Bean, 2021). Ultimately, agile leadership fosters innovation and ensures that organisations remain proactive and adaptable, even in the face of ambiguous environment (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020).

### 3.5 Building Organizational Resilience

In a VUCA environment the capacity of an organisation to endure and recover from unexpected challenges is crucial for success (Rimita, 2019). Agile leadership plays a key role in cultivating resilience within the workforce by promoting adaptability, collaboration, and empowerment among team members (Holbeche, 2023). This leadership approach puts emphasis on the establishment of flexible structures that enable teams to address challenges promptly, rather than adhering to outdated plans or strategies (Perkin, 2023). Furthermore, resilience is enhanced through a leadership style that values continuous learning and improvement. Agile leaders inspire their teams to perceive setbacks as opportunities for growth, which fosters a culture of resilience and innovation (Deep, 2023). In an era characterised by frequent disruptions, organisations that embrace agile leadership do not only survive but also thrive in the face of adversity (Leisten & Donohue, 2021).

## 4. Challenges of Agile Leadership

While agile leadership is highly beneficial in navigating the complexities of a VUCA environment, it is not without its challenges (Jain et al., 2024). The transition to an agile approach often demands significant cultural and operational shifts, which can be difficult to implement (Denning, 2019). Here are some of the key challenges that agile leaders face.

### 4.1 Resistance to Change

Organisations transitioning to agile leadership often face considerable resistance from both employees and managers who are accustomed to traditional leadership models (Lundstrom & Mohamed, 2021). This resistance is primarily driven by fears of losing control and uncertainties about how agile practices will affect established roles

and responsibilities (Kupiek, 2021). Kotter (1996) emphasised that such resistance is a typical response, especially in environments with rigid hierarchical structures. In these settings, employees may be reluctant to embrace greater autonomy and accountability, while middle managers may view agile leadership as a threat to their authority (Gren & Ralp, 2022). This dynamic highlights the challenges organisations must navigate when implementing agile methodologies, as the shift requires a fundamental change in mindset and organisational culture (Holbeche, 2023).

#### 4.2 Balancing Autonomy and Control

Agile leadership concentrates on decentralisation and the autonomy of teams, allowing them to make independent decisions (Standahl, Seline & Karlsen, 2024). This approach fosters innovation and responsiveness but can create tensions between team freedom and the need for alignment with organisational objectives (Ravn et al., 2022). Leaders encounter challenges in maintaining this balance, as excessive autonomy may lead teams to pursue divergent goals, potentially resulting in inefficiencies (Standahl et al., 2024). The key insight is that while team independence is crucial for agility, organisational strategies must not be compromised (Chatwani, 2019).

#### 4.3 Scaling Agility

Scaling agile leadership in larger organisations presents notable challenges primarily due to bureaucratic obstacles that arise as the organisation grows (Santos & de Carvalho, 2022). While small, cross-functional teams can effectively implement agile methodologies, the transition to multiple departments or global teams is often complicated by the emergence of more rigid processes (Javanovi et al., 2020). These processes, which are typically established to manage complexity can significantly impede decision-making and ultimately hinder the organisation's overall agility (Prange & Henning, 2019).

#### 4.4 Decision-Making Under Uncertainty

In a VUCA environment, agile leaders are often forced to make decisions with incomplete or rapidly changing information (Morrison et al., 2019). This can lead to decision fatigue or hesitancy to act, particularly in organisations where decision-makers normally rely on extensive data and forecasting (Jerab, 2023). As Snowden & Boone (2007) noted, leaders in uncertain environments must develop the ability to make quick, informed decisions without waiting for perfect information. However, this decision-making style can increase the risk of mistakes, particularly if teams are not adequately prepared to manage the consequences of rapid decisions (Jassmy & Katea, 2022).

#### 4.5 Cultural Shifts and Mindset Changes

Agile leadership represents a transformative approach to organisational operations, emphasising a departure from traditional command-and-control structures (Kadenic & Tambo, 2023). This shift necessitates a fundamental change in mindset among both leaders and employees, fostering an environment that prioritises collaboration, continuous learning, and iterative improvements (Kenaphoom, 2024). The transition to agile leadership is often fraught with challenges, particularly in organisations that are entrenched in established traditions and habitual practices (Morrison, et al., 2019).

### 5. Case Studies on Agile leadership

Agile leadership has played a significant role in the success of various major organisations such as Spotify, ING Bank, Amazon, and Microsoft (Binns, O'Reilly & Tushman, 2022). These companies exemplify how agile methodologies can enhance adaptability, foster innovation, and improve team collaboration. Key insights reveal that agile leadership encourages a culture of continuous improvement and responsiveness to change, allowing organisations to navigate complex and dynamic environments effectively (Porkodi, 2024). Notable findings indicate that such leadership styles promote empowerment among team members, leading to increased engagement and productivity as shown by market capitalisation and profitability (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020).

### 5.1 Spotify: Scaling Agile Across a Global Organization

Spotify, a global leader in music streaming, is a prime example of agile leadership in action (Wijaya, Kumorotomo & Djunaedi, 2024). The company's leadership recognised early that traditional hierarchical structures would not support the fast pace of innovation required in the technology industry (Safonova, 2023). Instead, they adopted agile principles to foster flexibility, collaboration, and innovation (Fan, 2023). Spotify's organisational model includes autonomous and cross-functional teams known as "squads" (Salameh & Bass, 2019). Each squad operates like a mini start-up, with a leeway to develop, deploy, and improve features independently. Agile leadership is key to enabling these squads to function efficiently, as leaders focus on empowering teams rather than micromanaging them (De Roo et al., 2020). Spotify's agile leadership encourages autonomy, cross-functional collaboration, and decentralised decision-making, enabling rapid innovation and adaptability in a fast-moving industry (Uludag et al., 2021).

### 5.2 ING Bank: Agile Transformation in Financial Services

ING Bank, a large multinational financial institution, undertook a significant agile transformation in the mid-2010s in response to increasing competition, changing customer expectations, and the VUCA environment of the financial services sector (Calnan & Rosen, 2019). ING's leadership realised that traditional banking structures, characterised by bureaucracy and long decision-making processes, were hindering the company's ability to innovate and grow in the face of rapid market changes (Karpik, 2018). Inspired by tech companies like Spotify, ING implemented an agile model across the organisation where teams were reorganised into "squads" that could make decisions quickly without waiting for approval from management (Girodi, 2023). This structure helped ING to reduce time-to-market for new products, improve customer satisfaction, and increase employee engagement (Rusconi, 2020).

The bank's agile transformation, however, faced scrutiny from regulators as it needed to comply with the law (Calnan & Rosen, 2019). However, agile leadership within the organisation played a crucial role in overcoming these challenges by fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability (De Smet, Lurie & George, 2018). ING's agile leadership enabled the bank to transform its structure, reducing bureaucracy and empowering teams to innovate faster in a highly regulated and competitive industry (Santhanam & Suresh, 2022).

### 5.3 Amazon: Customer-centricity Agility

Amazon is another well-known example of agile leadership in action. From its inception, Amazon's leadership, led by Jeff Bezos, has prioritised agility and customer-centricity as core founding principles (Bennet, 2024). Bezos famously instituted the "two-pizza rule," where teams should be small enough to eat two pizzas (Georgousis, 2024). This principle enabled the teams to remain agile and autonomous, and able to make decisions quickly without unnecessary bureaucracy. Agile leadership at Amazon also emphasised continuous experimentation (Clatworthy, 2019). The company is known for its willingness to launch new products or features quickly and then make necessary changes based on customer feedback. This approach has led to the development of innovative services such as Amazon Web Services (AWS), Amazon Prime, and Alexa (Kang et al., 2024). Each of these products started as a small initiative within the company and grew rapidly due to the agile leadership that encouraged experimentation and rapid scaling. Amazon's leadership also embraced a culture of "Day 1", which emphasised the importance of remaining in a start-up mindset, constantly innovating, and avoiding complacency (Bezos, 1997). Amazon's agile leadership, with its focus on small, autonomous teams and a culture of continuous experimentation, allowed the company to innovate rapidly and remain in a customer-centricity state in a highly competitive environment (Ragas & Culp, 2021).

### 5.4 Microsoft: Leadership Transformation to Agile

Under the leadership of Satya Nadella, Microsoft has undergone a significant cultural transformation that embraced agile leadership principles (Denning, 2019). When Nadella took over as CEO in 2014, Microsoft was a company that was struggling with internal silos and slow decision-making processes, making it difficult to compete in the fast-evolving tech industry (Leisten & Donohue, 2021). Nadella's agile leadership focused on decentralising decision-making and fostering a growth mindset across the organisation. He encouraged teams to experiment,



take risks, and learn from failures; a stark departure from the company’s historically risk-averse culture (Leisten & Donohue, 2021). Nadella also promoted collaboration across previously silo departments, breaking down barriers between engineering, sales, and marketing teams (Blomberg, 2021). This agile leadership approach has led to a number of successes for Microsoft, including the rapid growth of its Azure cloud platform, the acquisition and integration of LinkedIn, and the development of new products like Microsoft Teams (Smith & Krivasek, 2019). These innovations have helped Microsoft reclaim its position as one of the world’s most valuable companies (Zada, 2022).

### 6. Proposed Conceptual Framework

For agile leadership to play a key role in the success of an organisation, a comprehensive and structured approach must be put in place to ensure that both leaders and teams can adapt to the fast-paced, uncertain, and complex environments that characterise the modern business landscape. The proposed conceptual framework for agile leadership shown by figure 1 below is built around four core components namely Principles, Enablers, Processes, and Outcomes. Each component plays a critical role in fostering an agile leadership culture that can drive organisational success.



Figure 1: A Conceptual Framework

#### 6.1 Principles of Agile Leadership

For agile leadership to function well, there are five guiding principles that inform how leaders should think, behave, and make decisions. These principles serve as the cornerstone of the framework and are critical for creating an environment that supports agility. Firstly, agile leaders must be able to adjust their strategies and approaches in response to rapidly changing external conditions. This includes being open to latest information and continuously evolving their leadership style. Secondly, leaders must empower the teams, allowing a greater degree of autonomy to enable them to respond to challenges and opportunities without having to be in contact with superiors. Agile leaders should also allow collaboration, encourage open communication and knowledge sharing between teams and departments. To ensure that the organisation stays at the top, agile leaders should foster a growth mindset where teams take success and failures as a learning curve through experimentation, feedback circle backs and iterative improvements. Customers are a key to an organisation’s success and as such agile leaders should ensure that programmes and activities are aligned with customer needs and market dynamics.

## 6.2 Enablers of Agile Leadership

For effective implementation of agile leadership, certain enablers must be in place within the organisation. These enablers provide the structural, cultural, and technological foundations necessary for agile leadership to thrive. Firstly, the culture of the organisation must support openness, flexibility, and innovation. Leaders should foster a safe environment where employees feel comfortable taking risks, experimenting, and learning from failures.

Secondly, agile leadership requires that decision-making authority should be distributed throughout the organisation. This involves flattening traditional hierarchical structures and empowering teams to make decisions at all levels. Furthermore, agile leadership strives on ensuring that teams have right tools and technology to create collaborative platforms, real time communication and knowledge sharing. Training and development are key for agile leadership to succeed, and all the leaders and teams must receive ongoing training in agile methodologies and servant leadership. Lastly, leadership mindset plays a crucial role in enabling agile practices. As such, agile leaders must embrace uncertainty, be comfortable with ambiguity, and view their role as facilitators rather than controllers. They should focus on empowering others and fostering innovation.

## 6.3 Processes for Agile Leadership Implementation

The processes describe how agile leadership principles and enablers are operationalised in practice. These processes ensure that the organisation remains agile, responsive, and customer centric. At the forefront, agile leadership relies on short cycles of planning, execution, and review. Leaders and teams should set short-term goals, execute them quickly, and gather feedback, which informs future actions. This process allows organisations to adapt rapidly to changes in the external environment. Secondly, agile leadership should encourage collaboration across departments, breaking down silos and enabling teams to work collectively toward common goals. Regular meetings, such as stand-ups, sprint reviews, and retrospectives, foster transparency and collective problem-solving. Rather than relying on assumptions or long-term forecasts, agile decision-making is based on data and real-time market insights.

Customers are a very important stakeholder, and an agile organisation must ensure that there is continuous integration of customer feedback. Agile leaders should ensure that teams remain focused on delivering value to customers by regularly seeking input from users and adjusting products and services accordingly. In agile settings, leaders function as facilitators or 'servant leaders' whose primary role is to remove obstacles, provide resources, and support their teams. This shift from a command-and-control leadership style to a servant leadership model is critical for fostering a culture of empowerment and innovation.

## 6.4 Outcomes of Agile Leadership Implementation

When agile leadership is implemented, organisations can expect several positive outcomes. These outcomes not only improve organisational performance but also enhance the company's ability to thrive in a VUCA environment. In the forefront, organisations become more capable of responding quickly to changes in the external environment, whether driven by market trends, technological advancements, or competitor actions. Furthermore, there is improved innovation and creativity where teams try innovative ideas and learn from failures which results in more creative problem solving. Consequently, empowering teams to make decisions and contribute to the organisation's success increases employee engagement and job satisfaction. Employees feel more invested in their work and motivated to contribute to the company's growth.

Agile leadership reduces bureaucratic delays and enable teams to bring products and services to the market faster. By working in short, repetitive cycles, organisations can deliver value to customers more quickly and adjust based on feedback. As a result, organisations that embrace agile leadership are able to maintain a competitive advantage in a VUCA world. Their ability to pivot, innovate, and respond to customer needs gives them a distinct edge in dynamic markets.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper positioned agile leadership as key in ensuring organisational success. By adhering to core principles such as adaptability, empowerment, and continuous learning, organisations can leverage agile leadership to thrive in difficult and VUCA environments. The enablers, processes, and outcomes outlined in the proposed framework offer a clear roadmap for leaders seeking to foster a culture of agility and innovation within their organisations. The proposed conceptual framework shows how agile leadership can work to ensure success. It also provides a comprehensive blueprint for the effective implementation of agile leadership. It is however, recommended that future studies be conducted to empirically test the proposed elements of the conceptual framework.

## References

1. Aimar, C., and Smith, D. K., 2021. *Global Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 5.
2. Agnér, W. 2023. *Leadership in the Hybrid Era: Navigating Agile Software Development Teams*.
3. Akkaya, B., Panait, M., Apostu, S.A. and Kaya, Y., 2022. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(8), p.4834.
4. Akkaya, B. and Sever, E. 2022. *IGI Global*. pp. 213-228.
5. Akerele, O.O. 2023. *International Journal of Business Ethics and Governance*, 6(1).
6. Almeida, F. and Simões, J. 2021. *International Journal of Information Technology Project Management*, 12 (2), pp. 30-44.
7. Amajuoyi, P., Benjamin, L. B. and Adeus, K. B., 2024. *GSC Advanced Research and Reviews*, 19 (2), pp. 249-267.
8. Attar, M. and Abdul-Kareem, A. 2020. *Emerald Publishing Limited*. pp. 171-191.
9. Bean, R., 2021. *Fail Fast, Learn Faster: Lessons in Data-driven Leadership in an Age of Disruption, Big Data, and AI*. John Wiley & Sons.
10. Binns, A., O'Reilly, C.A. and Tushman, M. 2022. *Corporate explorer: how corporations beat start-ups at the innovation game*. John Wiley & Sons.
11. Boss, V & Dahlander, L & Ihl, C and Jayaraman. 2021. *Leading agile transformation: The new capabilities leaders need to build 21st-century organization*. Mckinsey.com
12. Bushuyeva, N., Bushuiev, D. and Bushuieva, V. 2019. *Journal of Business Management*, 4 (10), pp.77-84.
13. Bwalya, Arthur. (2023). *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management, and Innovation*. 11.
14. Cabrera, D. and Cabrera, L.Y. 2023. *Journal of Systems Thinking*. pp. 1-23.
15. Calnan, M. and Rozen, A. 2019. *Journal of Creating Value*, 5 (2), pp.190-209.
16. Clayton, S. J. 2021. *Harvard Business Review*.
17. Cleveland, M. and Cleveland, S. 2020. *International Journal of Public and Private Perspectives on Healthcare, Culture, and the Environment*, 4 (1), pp. 1-9.
18. Chatwani, N. 2019. *Springer International Publishing*, pp.978-3.
19. Daraojimba, E. C., Nwasike, C. N., Adegbite, A. O., Ezeigweneme, C. A. and Gidiagba, J. O. 2024. *Computer Science & IT Research Journal*, 5 (1), pp. 190-218.
20. Deepalakshmi, N., Tiwari, D., Baruah, R., Seth, A. and Bisht, R., 2024. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30 (4), pp. 5941-5948.
21. Deep, G., 2023. *Magna Scientia Advanced Research and Reviews*, 9 (2), pp. 086-091.
22. Denning, S. 2019. *Strategy & Leadership*, 47 (1), pp. 3-10.
23. De Smet, A., Lurie, M. and George, A. 2018. *McKinsey & Company*, 15 (1), pp.1-27.
24. Döner, E. and Efeoğlu, İ. E. 2023. *Akademi*, 3 (2), pp. 28-53.
25. Drury-Grogan, M. L. and O'DWYER, O.R.L.A., 2013. *International Journal of Information Technology & Decision Making*, 12 (06), pp.1097-1120.
26. Driskell, J. E., Salas, E. and Driskell, T., 2018. *American Psychologist*, 73 (4), p.334.
27. Dunn, R. 2020. *International studies in educational administration*, 48 (1), pp .31-38.
28. Fan, R. (2023). *Spotify's Agile Software Development for Enhanced Collaboration and Innovation*.
29. Fischer, B. D. and Charef, L. 2021. *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics*, 18 (4).
30. Georgousis, I. 2024. March. In *Forum for Economic and Financial Studies*. vol. 2, number 1, pp. 437-437.
31. Girod, S. J. 2023. *Agile Organizing. Designing Adaptive Organizations*, p.143.
32. Grass, A., Backmann, J. and Hoegl, M. 2020. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 37 (4), pp. 324-

- 351.
33. Grégoire, M., Delalieux, G. and Fatien, P., 2022. *Leadership*, 18 (6), pp. 729-753.
  34. Gren, L. and Ralph, P. 2022. *Proceedings of the 44th international conference on software engineering*, pp. 2402-2414.
  35. Hayward, S., Freeman, B. and Tickner, A. 2017. *The Palgrave Handbook of Leadership in Transforming Asia*, pp. 71-87.
  36. Hohl, P., Klünder, J., van Bennekum, A., Lockard, R., Gifford, J., Münch, J., Stupperich, M. and Schneider, K. 2018. *Journal of Software Engineering Research and Development*, 6, pp.1-27.
  37. Holbeche, L. 2023. *The agile organization: how to build an engaged, innovative, and resilient business*. Kogan Page Publishers.
  38. Jain, A., Kamat, S., Saini, V., Singh, A. and Whig, P. 2024. *Practical Approaches to Agile Project Management*. IGI Global. pp. 32-47.
  39. Jassmy, B. A. K. and Katea, E. A. H. 2022. *AL-Qadisiyah Journal for Administrative and Economic Sciences*, 24 (3), pp. 95-110.
  40. Jerab, D. and Mabrouk, T. 2023. *The role of leadership in changing organizational culture*. Available at SSRN 4574324.
  41. Kadenic, M. D. and Tambo, T. 2023. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 16 (3), pp. 521-542.
  42. Kahl, J., de Klerk, S. and Ogulin, R., 2022. *Management Decision*, 60 (1), pp.146-166.
  43. Kenaphoom, S., Wattanapanit, N., Tanchaisak, K. and Niyomves, B. 2024. *Modern Management Science Practices in the Age of AI*. IGI Global. pp. 237-266.
  44. Khalil, C., Fernandez, V., Houy, T. (2013). *Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing*, vol 205.
  45. Kotter, J. P. 1996. Harvard Business School Press: Boston, MA, USA.
  46. Majd, S & Majd, Z. 2023. *Integrated Research in Health and Disease Journal*. 1. 21-31.
  47. Makkar, M. 2024. *Framework*, 4 (1).
  48. Malik, M., Sarwar, S. and Orr, S., 2021. *International Journal of Project Management*, 39 (1), pp. 10-20.
  49. Mahel, T, A. 2021. *European Journal of Humanities and Educational Advancements*, vol. 2, no. 5, 2021.
  50. Moh'd, S., Gregory, P., Barroca, L. and Sharp, H., 2023. *German Journal of Human Resource Management*, p.23970022231226316.
  51. Morrison, E., Hutcheson, S., Nilsen, E., Fadden, J. and Franklin, N. 2019. *Strategic doing: Ten skills for agile leadership*. John Wiley & Sons.
  52. Mundra, S. 2018. *Enterprise agility: Being agile in a changing world*. Packt Publishing Ltd.
  53. Musaigwa, M. (2023). *International Review of Management and Marketing*. 13. 1-9.
  54. Neto, J. D. S. A., Penha, R., da Silva, L.F. and Scafuto, I. C., 2022. *Research, Society and Development*, 11(5), pp.e44511528117-e44511528117.
  55. Nemashakwe, P. and Kayawe, J. 2023. *The Fountain: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 7(1), pp.1-17.
  56. Nwachukwu, C. and VU, H. M. 2020. 36th International Business Information Management Association (IBIMA).
  57. Pacheco-Cubillos, D. B., Boria-Reverter, J. and Gil-Lafuente, J. 2024. *Systems*, 12 (4), p. 142.
  58. Perkin, N. 2023. *Agile transformation: structures, processes, and mindsets for the digital age*. Kogan Page Publishers.
  59. Poi, G. and Sorbarikor, L. 2022. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management*, 10(1), pp. 2844-2851.
  60. Porkodi, S. 2024. *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management, and Innovation*, 20 (2), pp. 117-138.
  61. Prange, C. and Hennig, A. 2019. *Journal of creating value*, 5 (2), pp. 111-123.
  62. Prasongko, A. and Adianto, T. 2019. *Jurnal Pertahanan: Media Informasi tentang Kajian dan Strategi Pertahanan yang Mengedepankan Identity, Nasionalism dan Integrity*, 5 (3), pp.126-133.
  63. Radu, C., 2023. *Human Resource Management-An Update*. IntechOpen.
  64. Ravn, J. E., Moe, N. B., Stray, V. and Seim, E. A., 2022. *AI & SOCIETY*, 37(2), pp.701-710.
  65. Renault, M. A. and Tarakci, M., 2023. *California Management Review*, 65 (4), pp. 137-157.
  66. Rimita, K. N., 2019. *Doctoral dissertation*, Walden University.
  67. Safonova, I. 2023. *A comparative analysis of challenges in the adoption of agile scaling frameworks*.
  68. Santhanam, S. and Suresh, M. 2022. *Indian International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management*, Warangal, Telangana, India. pp. 16-18.
  69. Santos, P. D. O. and de Carvalho, M. M., 2022. *Requirements Engineering*, 27 (1), pp.117-134.

70. Schulze, J. H. and Pinkow, F. 2020. *Administrative Sciences*, 10 (3), p.37.
71. Santos, V., Goldman, A. and De Souza, C. R. 2015. *Empirical Software Engineering*, 20, pp.1006-1051.
72. Smith, K. and Bhavsar, M. 2021. *Healthcare Management Forum*, vol. 34, Number 6, pp. 332-335).
73. Standahl Johannessen, S. and Karlsen, J. T. 2024. *International Journal of Energy Sector Management*.
74. Suvvari, S. K. 2024. *Journal of Advanced Management Studies*, 1(2), pp. 31-41.
75. Snowden, D. J. and Boone, M. E., 2007. *Harvard Business Review*, 85 (11), p.68.
76. Taskan, B., Junça-Silva, A. and Caetano, A. 2022. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 30 (7), pp.196-217.
77. Ray, S. K. S. 2023. *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 17(1), pp. 5-17.
78. Valldeneu, M., Tarrats, E. and Ferràs, X. 2021. *Organization Development Journal*, 39 (1), pp.13-22.
79. Wijaya, R., Kumorotomo, W. and Djunaedi, A. 2024. *Polit Journal Scientific Journal of Politics*, 4 (2), pp.74-91.
80. Zada, I. 2022. *International Business Research*. 15. 43. 10.5539/ibr. v15n9p43.