The Impact of Leadership Styles on Agile Project Management in Global IT Sector[1]

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Abstract

The impact of leadership styles on agile project management performance in the global technology industry is investigated in this conceptual study. Agile methods are becoming increasingly well-liked because of their adaptability, rapidity, and customer-centricity. Therefore, effective leadership is essential to the success of agile. The alignment of different leadership philosophies—transformational, transactional, servant, and autocratic—with agile principles and their effects on outcomes such as responsiveness, team performance, and innovation are examined in this article. The study provides a theoretical framework for determining the best leadership philosophies for agile situations by drawing on organizational and leadership theories. Despite the lack of primary data, the study employs Snyder's (2019) structured narrative literature review methodology and suggests qualitative research for further investigation. Global CEOs could enhance their agility and innovation in dynamic IT environments with the help of the insights that result.

Keywords: *Agile Project Management, Leadership Styles, Global IT Teams, Transformational Leadership, Hybrid Leadership Model.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the international IT industry, agile project management has become a crucial tactic for managing software development projects. Agile methods, which offer flexibility and iterative delivery, satisfy the modern IT industry's demands for quick innovation. According to the 15th State of Agile Report (Digital.ai, 2021), approximately 94% of organisations report using Agile approaches demonstrating substantial acceptance rates, according to a recent industry poll. Its widespread adoption is being driven by proven benefits like faster time-to-market, more customer happiness, and more effective teamwork. These advantages enable teams to deliver continuous value and swiftly adjust to changing needs (Amajyuogi et al., 2024). Over the past decade, Agile project

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management has seen a substantial rise in global adoption, particularly due to its adaptability and responsiveness to change. Recent industry data suggest that methodologies like Scrum are now widely used across teams and have been scaled to organisational levels in many firms (Prakash et al., 2024). Academic research supports these trends, showing that Agile-oriented leadership contributes significantly to outcomes such as trust among team members, improved performance, and increased innovation (Kadenic and Tambo, 2023). Additionally, authentic leadership has been positively linked to strategic alignment and sustainability in Agile-driven organisations (Marnada et al., 2022). These insights highlight a growing need to rethink leadership models that can effectively support the evolving demands of Agile practices—an area this paper seeks to explore through a hybrid conceptual approach. Recent advancements like remote work and digital transformation have further demonstrated the importance of agile in IT. Agile approaches for virtual environments have to evolve because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has accelerated the shift to remote and distributed teams (Shams et al., 2021).

Distributed agile approaches are growing in popularity with the use of digital collaboration tools and adjusted processes. Agile frameworks emphasise agility as a critical element of successful innovation and are also utilised by enterprise digital transformation projects to manage complex, iterative change processes. Leadership is another essential component of Agile project success (Udin, 2025). Strong leadership is required to determine the direction, remove barriers, and foster a flexible culture, even though agile teams are capable of self-organization. Agile adoption is sometimes hampered by a lack of dedicated leadership, but new study indicates that agile leadership improves team effectiveness and innovative outcomes (Zulham & Nurhayati, 2025). Given the significance of leadership, it is imperative to investigate how different leadership philosophies impact Agile project management performance.

1.2 Problem Statement

Even after Agile methodologies have been widely implemented in the global IT market, the uneven success rates of Agile projects remain an issue. Agile frameworks emphasise flexibility, teamwork, and continuous delivery, but these benefits are often only experienced when there is strong leadership. However, the fundamental ideas of Agile could not be well suited to conventional leadership styles. This imbalance can impede team autonomy and innovation and risk the project's outcomes (Benchea & Ilie, 2023). The research that is currently accessible mostly focusses on leadership ideologies or geographically limited settings, even though it is widely understood that leadership is essential in Agile situations. There is a dearth of thorough, theory-based research on how different leadership philosophies—such as transformational, transactional, servant, and authoritarian—affect the efficacy of Agile projects around the globe (Claro & Silva, 2025).

Furthermore, a greater comprehension of which leadership philosophies are most suited for heterogeneous Agile teams working in quickly changing technology contexts is required, given the dynamic and multicultural nature of today's IT firms (Alsalman & Chyad, 2025). Because there are no defined criteria, there is a gap between industry usage of best practices for leadership in Agile environments and academic study. Fixing this problem is essential to improving Agile project performance and developing globally applicable leadership practices that encourage innovation, collaboration, and flexibility in the IT sector.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this conceptual study is to explore the relationship between leadership styles and the effectiveness of Agile project management within international IT contexts. Recognising that leadership is a pivotal factor in Agile success, the study critically examines how established leadership approaches can support or hinder Agile practices in diverse, dynamic environments.

1. To analyse the theoretical characteristics of four predominant leadership styles—**autocratic, servant, transactional, and transformational**—with reference to their applicability in Agile settings.
2. To evaluate the degree to which these leadership styles align with the **principles and methods underpinning Agile project management**, such as adaptability, team autonomy, and iterative delivery.
3. To assess the influence of different leadership styles on **key Agile outcomes**, including team performance, innovation, responsiveness, and delivery efficiency.
4. To propose a **conceptual hybrid leadership model** that selectively integrates beneficial elements from each of the four styles, creating a **flexible and context-responsive framework** tailored to the needs of global Agile teams.

This model is grounded in a comprehensive synthesis of leadership theory and Agile literature and aims to offer practical insights for enhancing leadership practice within culturally diverse and technologically evolving project environments.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Understanding the role of leadership in Agile project management has grown increasingly crucial in a time when agility is essential for competitiveness and survival, particularly in the global IT sector. Agile frameworks place a strong emphasis on iterative delivery and self-organising teams, but the effectiveness of these approaches frequently depends on having supportive, flexible leadership. However, a lot of organizations find it difficult to determine which leadership philosophies best support Agile principles and improve project results (Savandha & Fitriyani, 2025). There are various reasons why this study is

important. By providing a comparative conceptual study of the four predominant leadership philosophies in Agile environments—transformational, transactional, servant, and autocratic—it first fills a vacuum in the existing literature. Second, the study develops a systematic methodology for evaluating how leadership styles affect important Agile success measures like innovation, delivery speed, and team happiness by referencing well-established leadership theories. Additionally, by considering cultural differences in team dynamics and leadership expectations, the study adds worldwide relevance and broadens its applicability across various IT organizations. Lastly, the suggested hybrid leadership paradigm offers a starting point for upcoming empirical studies and useful leadership development programs. The study's key contribution is a hybrid leadership paradigm designed specifically for Agile environments, addressing both benefits and practical challenges in global IT contexts.

1.5 Structure of the Paper

The structure of this paper is arranged into six core sections. Following the introductory chapter, the second section presents a review of the literature, offering a critical synthesis of studies related to Agile project practices and leadership approaches. The third section sets out the theoretical framework, detailing the leadership theories that support the development of the conceptual model. Section four outlines the proposed methodology, suggesting a qualitative design to guide prospective empirical inquiry. The fifth section comprises a discussion of how different leadership styles align with Agile practices in international IT settings. The final section concludes the study, highlighting key findings, practical relevance, and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

This chapter adopts a structured narrative literature review approach, drawing on a combination of empirical studies, theoretical models, and conceptual frameworks related to leadership and Agile practices. The review is organized thematically around four key leadership paradigms—transformational, servant, transactional, and autocratic and their alignment with Agile values.

Literature review Methodology

This conceptual study adopts a structured narrative literature review approach, guided by the methodology articulated by Snyder (2019). This method is particularly suitable for synthesising theoretical insights and identifying research gaps within complex interdisciplinary topics where empirical consensus is still evolving. It allows for critical evaluation and integration of diverse perspectives, which is essential when exploring the interplay between leadership styles and Agile project management in global IT contexts.

Search Process

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across four major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, and Google Scholar. The search terms used in combination included: “Agile project management,” “leadership styles,” “transformational leadership,” “transactional leadership,” “servant leadership,” “autocratic leadership,” and “global IT teams.”

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they were:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, or systematic reviews
- Published between 2015 and 2025
- Theoretically grounded and focused on leadership within Agile project environments.

Studies were excluded if they constituted:

- Grey literature or non-peer-reviewed sources;
- Articles without explicit links to either Agile methodologies or leadership theory.

Screening and Synthesis

An initial pool of 100 documents was narrowed down to 79 after title, abstract, and full-text screening. The selected works were then organised thematically, aligned with the four leadership styles central to this study—transformational, transactional, servant, and autocratic. Analysis focused on identifying patterns in leadership influence on Agile outcomes, such as innovation, delivery efficiency, team satisfaction, and adaptability.

Theoretical Foundation

To ensure conceptual depth, the review was interpreted through the lens of established theories, including the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM), Servant Leadership Theory, Contingency Theory, and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. These frameworks provided structure and explanatory power to the synthesis process. This methodology strengthens the academic credibility of the review, ensuring transparency, replicability, and relevance to both scholarly and practitioner audiences in project management.

2.1 Agile Project Management: Principles and Practices

Agile Project Management (APM) is an approach that delivers value to consumers through iterative planning, empowered teams, and adaptable decision-making. Unlike

traditional project management approaches, which prioritise strict scope control and linear planning, agile places more value on flexibility, teamwork, and client input (Porkodi, 2024). The Agile Manifesto's four guiding principles (Bremer et al., 2025) served as the foundation for this methodology: functional software over copious documentation, customer collaboration over contract negotiation, adapting to change over sticking to a plan, and people and interactions over procedures and tools. Frameworks that incorporate agile ideas and offer precise guidance on roles, ceremonies, and deliverables include Scrum, Kanban, and Extreme Programming (XP) (Azonuche et al., 2025). Scrum, the most widely used methodology, divides work into predetermined iterations called sprints, which promote continuous delivery and adaptation (Kakumanu, 2024). Kanban, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on visualising workflows and reducing work-in-progress to increase efficiency and transparency. Agile's application in the IT sector has significantly improved time-to-market, flexibility in adapting to changing requirements, and stakeholder satisfaction (Maroukian, 2022). But just as crucial to Agile success as process adoption is leadership that promotes team autonomy, continuous learning, and customer focus. This leadership quality is essential for creating a culture that supports Agile principles and enables sustained success (Steinhart, 2025).

2.2 Global Adoption of Agile Methods

Particularly in the information technology (IT) sector, agile project management approaches are now widely accepted. Originally designed to improve the responsiveness and flexibility of software development, agile frameworks are now used by companies across many industries and geographical areas. According to the 15th State of Agile Report (Scholz et al., 2025), more than 90% of organisations worldwide reported putting Agile principles into practice, indicating the discipline's broad appeal in managing complex, dynamic projects. Agile adoption is increasing on a worldwide scale for several reasons. Above all, agile improves delivery cycles, stakeholder participation, and customer response. Second, Agile methodologies assist in addressing the increasing demand for rapid innovation and iterative delivery, which is a result of digital transformation initiatives. Third, Agile has proven to be effective at adjusting to unprecedented disruptions, such the COVID-19 pandemic (Kaniz et al., 2025). Virtual stand-ups and remote collaboration tools allowed distributed Agile teams to remain productive and interact over this period despite their physical distance (Leong et al, 2023). However, there are unique challenges associated with global adoption as well.

Cross-cultural differences may affect how Agile values—such as self-organization, openness, and collaboration—are perceived and implemented. High power-distance cultures may require different leadership philosophies than egalitarian societies (Gomes & Romao, 2025). Furthermore, scaling Agile in large, geographically dispersed teams often requires not just leaders who can manage complexity and cultural diversity, but also

specific frameworks like SAFe or LeSS. The need for effective, context-sensitive leadership is growing as more companies around the world implement Agile. Therefore, understanding how different leadership philosophies function in many organizational and cultural situations is a crucial component of Agile success (Jimenez et al., 2020).

2.3 Overview of Leadership Styles

Leadership is particularly crucial in Agile project environments for shaping team dynamics, influencing performance, and coordinating corporate goals. To promote decentralized decision-making and empower groups, leadership must shift from old prescriptive techniques in Agile contexts, where flexibility, cooperation, and self-control are essential virtues (Hullmann et al.,2025). This section discusses the four primary leadership philosophies—transformational, transactional, servant, and autocratic—and their theoretical foundations, characteristics, and potential implications for Agile project management.

2.3.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership, is characterised by a leader's ability to inspire and intellectually challenge followers, promote personal development, and bring team members together around an inspiring objective. Intellectual stimulation, individualized thoughtfulness, motivating inspiration, and idealised influence are the four primary behaviours of transformational leaders. Because transformational leaders emphasise creativity, freedom, and internal drive, they are particularly effective in Agile organisations. They create environments that are psychologically safe and encourage experimentation and feedback—qualities that are important to Agile culture (Santosa et al., 2025). According to research, transformational leadership enhances team performance, adaptability, and project innovation. By empowering teams and embodying Agile principles, transformational leaders promote customer-centric delivery and continuous improvement (Tasneem et al., 2025). However, the effectiveness of this approach in Agile teams may be influenced by the cultural context. In collectivist or high power-distance cultures, inspiring leadership may need to be combined with more formal coaching to meet team expectations (Rebuglio et al., 2025).

2.3.2 Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership places a strong emphasis on clearly defined roles, clear expectations, and completing tasks via a system of incentives and sanctions. Transactional leaders prioritise contingent compensation and management by exception, only intervening when performance deviates from predefined benchmarks, according to (Simard & Aubry, 2025). Even though they are occasionally compared to transformational leadership, transactional traits can be helpful in Agile organisations. In terms of

maintaining discipline, ensuring accountability, and encouraging consistent performance, this is particularly true. For instance, the regular cycle of Agile activities (like sprint reviews and retrospectives) can be aided by transactional clarity in roles and deliverables (Mahmud et al., 2025). However, Agile's adaptable, team-based approach might not be compatible with a purely transactional approach. An excessive focus on top-down management or performance-based incentives can stifle innovation and deter team ownership (Ismail & Salama, 2025). If the leadership is perceived as being overly strict or authoritative, it may jeopardise the shared accountability and mutual trust that agile teams depend on. A balanced use of transactional leadership, which is focused on maintaining structure while allowing for autonomy, may be beneficial for Agile projects, especially in the early stages of Agile adoption or in hybrid team contexts (Gangaraju et al., 2025).

2.3.3 Servant Leadership

The needs of team members come first under servant leadership, which emphasises empathy, listening, stewardship, and community building. Helping, supporting, and developing others while fostering a culture that values people is the responsibility of the servant leader. Most people concur that servant leadership and Agile principles work well together. Agile teams benefit from leaders that break down barriers, encourage teamwork, and allow individuals to take ownership of their work (Roberts, 2025). Two crucial elements of Agile success are team cohesion and creativity, which are fostered by servant leaders' psychological safety (Kinelski, 2020). Servant leadership promotes inclusivity and a shared objective in distributed or multicultural Agile teams, which facilitates close communication and breaks down hierarchical boundaries. Additionally, building trust is essential to the success of Agile teams, and servant leadership is excellent at this. However, servant leadership can also be seen as inactive in the absence of clear direction (Zavits et al., 2021). To keep staff focused on the company's goals, agile executives need to find a balance between strategic control and service. Servant leadership is a helpful tactic in modern Agile environments since, when implemented properly, it promotes long-term success and employee satisfaction (Siddique et al., 2023).

2.3.4 Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leadership is characterised by centralized decision-making, strict control, and minimal team member input. Traditionally associated with traditional project management methods, this approach is characterised by the leader making decisions alone and anticipating collaboration without seeking input from others (Lui, 2024). Autocratic leadership is seen as incompatible with core values like flexibility, empowerment, and teamwork in most Agile organisations. Agile systems, which encourage decentralised

decision-making, team autonomy, and iterative feedback, are incompatible with authoritarian control. However, there are some circumstances in which autocratic leadership may not be very helpful. In high-stakes situations, emergency situations, or early-phase Agile transitions where teams lack maturity, decisive leadership could offer momentary clarity and control (Kalyani & Thampi, 2025). Additionally, in hierarchical cultures with high power gap, team members may first expect directive leadership and find flat team structures uncomfortable. On the other hand, prolonged use of authoritarian leadership in Agile teams can hinder innovation, reduce engagement, and reduce flexibility. Companies aiming for Agile maturity must engage in leadership development if they want to shift from command-and-control paradigms to inclusive, flexible approaches (Green, 2024).

2.4 Linking Leadership to Agile Success Metrics

It is essential to distinguish between project success and project management success. The former typically refers to tangible outcomes, delivering a project on time, within budget, and meeting stakeholder expectations (Busco et al., 2025). In contrast, project management success focuses on the internal processes that enable effective delivery, including leadership, communication, adaptability, and team collaboration. This paper is primarily concerned with the latter, exploring how different leadership styles influence the efficiency and adaptability of Agile project management, particularly in global IT environments. This distinction ensures the analysis remains centred on team dynamics and management practices rather than solely on end results. Within the Agile context, project management success is often evaluated through performance indicators such as innovation, team morale, product quality, and delivery velocity (Silva et al., 2023).

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping these outcomes, not merely by overseeing processes but by actively fostering trust, responsiveness, and continuous learning. While technical tools and Agile practices provide structure, it is effective leadership that drives meaningful collaboration and adaptive delivery (Shah, 2024). As Alsalman and Chyad (2025) argue, the ability of leaders to translate Agile principles into team behaviour is critical for success. This section therefore examines how distinct leadership paradigms influence core Agile performance criteria.

2.4.1 Delivery Speed

Continuous integration and short sprints for rapid, iterative delivery are highly valued in agile methodologies. Leadership plays a major role in either facilitating or impeding delivery pace. By removing resistance to change and articulating a compelling vision, transformational leaders may guarantee alignment towards shared goals and increase team momentum (Akkaya et al., 2021). In addition to facilitating faster teamwork by

removing barriers and streamlining communication, servant leaders also relieve teams of administrative responsibilities so they can focus on producing outcomes (Sanjaya et al,2024). However, the Agile paradigm may be hampered by centralized decision-making and delayed approvals brought on by authoritarian or overly bureaucratic leadership.

2.4.2 Project Quality

Agile settings employ several techniques to guarantee quality at every stage of development, including test-driven development, peer reviews, and continuous feedback. Leadership that fosters a culture of excellence, responsibility, and continuous learning improves these habits. Servant leadership fosters quality by prioritising ethical responsibility and team development, which frequently leads to enhanced craftsmanship and stakeholder care (Muthuswamy, 2022). By placing a strong emphasis on compliance and performance monitoring, transactional leaders can improve technical rigour and process adherence. An overly transactional approach, however, inhibit innovation or risk-taking in dynamic project situations, which may indirectly affect quality (Roh et al., 2023).

2.4.3 Team Satisfaction

Outstanding work Agile teams are often characterised by high levels of cohesiveness, trust, and engagement. Leadership style has a big impact on team members' motivation and psychological safety. Transformational leaders inspire and challenge people, which fosters personal growth and a sense of direction (Sary et al., 2024). Servant leaders prioritise empathy and support to create inclusive work environments where team members feel valued and empowered. This leads to lesser turnover and more work satisfaction. However, teams may become demotivated under authoritarian leadership if autonomy is restricted and team input is ignored. In the absence of relational leadership practices, even transactional leadership, which maintains structure, may not be able to satisfy more profound motivational needs (Munawar et al., 2024).

2.4.4 Innovation and Responsiveness

Innovation is highly valued in the Agile process, which encourages rapid feedback loops, continuous experimentation, and customer-driven improvements. Transformational leadership is particularly well-suited to generating innovation since it encourages creative problem-solving and intellectual stimulation (Peng et al., 2022). These leaders challenge assumptions and push team members to experiment with different approaches. Similarly, to improve responsiveness, servant leaders support candid communication and adaptable decision-making. However, rigid, dictatorial leadership can hinder innovation by suppressing dissent and limiting team freedom. Although transactional leadership might keep things running smoothly, it usually doesn't encourage the kind of creative thinking that leads to revolutionary discoveries (Hossain, 2023).

3. Theoretical Framework for a Hybrid Agile leadership model.

This section builds on the literature review by framing the influence of leadership within Agile environments through four established theoretical frameworks: the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM), Servant Leadership Theory, Contingency Theory, and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. These perspectives provide valuable insight into how leadership behaviours influence team dynamics, decision-making, innovation, and adaptability—elements that are central to Agile success (Khan et al., 2025). The interplay between Agile principles and leadership styles calls for an adaptive framework that draws selectively from existing models. Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the **proposed hybrid leadership model**, which integrates key characteristics of transformational, servant, transactional, and autocratic leadership styles within the core values of Agile. This model guides the theoretical discussion that follows.

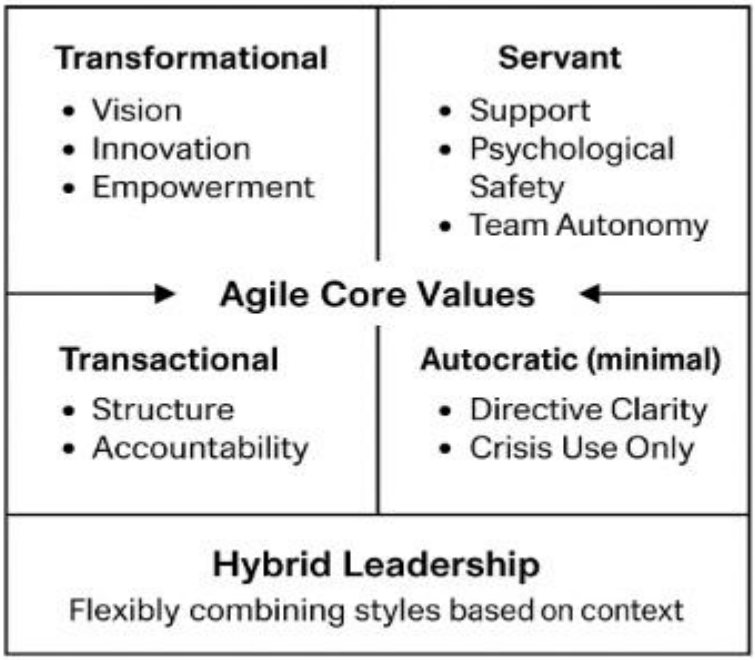

Figure 1: Conceptual Hybrid Leadership Model for Agile Environments

To explain the rationale behind this hybrid model, four foundational leadership theories are reviewed in the following subsections

3.1 Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM)

The Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM), introduced by Bass and Avolio (1994), offers a conceptual foundation for this study by outlining transformational and transactional leadership behaviours. These two dimensions are integral to the proposed Hybrid Leadership Model, as they reflect the need for both flexibility and procedural clarity within

Agile project environments (Theobald et al., 2025). Intellectual stimulation, individualised care, inspirational motivation, and idealised influence are the four traits of transformational leadership, according to the FRLM. According to (Rehan et al., 2025), these traits—which include adaptability, inventiveness, and team empowerment—are quite compatible with Agile principles. To encourage change, this kind of agile leader engages team members on an intellectual and emotional level. Conversely, transactional leadership prioritises performance monitoring, incentive-based motivation, and work completion. Transactional components are crucial for maintaining delivery discipline and guaranteeing accountability, even though they are less consistent with Agile principles. This is especially true in hybrid environments or in the early phases of Agile adoption (Ali et al., 2025). Laissez-faire leadership, or really no leadership at all, is often viewed as ineffective. It is more detrimental in Agile settings, though, when feedback loops, teamwork, and active guidance are essential. To adjust to shifting conditions, Agile leaders must possess a flexible toolkit of leadership approaches that blend transformational and transactional behaviours, according to FRLM. It is relevant because it highlights how leadership changes as Agile teams grow and face new challenges (Jayalakshmi, 2025). These insights from the FRLM inform the hybrid model by supporting the inclusion of transformational elements (such as vision and team empowerment) and select transactional mechanisms for accountability within Agile delivery cycles.

3.2 Servant Leadership Theory

Servant Leadership Theory, originally formulated by Greenleaf (1977), underpins the human-centred approach to leadership explored in this study. Its emphasis on empathy, support, and the development of others closely aligns with Agile values such as collaboration, trust, and self-organising teams—making it a crucial component of the proposed Hybrid Leadership Model (Lundmark, 2025). This idea is especially pertinent in Agile settings, where the emphasis on psychological safety and self-organising teams is consistent with the servant-leader concept. In Agile teams, servant leaders assist rather than dictate. They remove obstacles, promote inclusive decision-making, and aid in the professional and personal growth of team members (Hoque, 2025). These actions directly support agile values like teamwork, empowerment, and trust. By fostering high-trust environments, servant leaders foster team creativity, accountability, and open feedback—all of which are critical components of Agile delivery cycles (Masenya & Ngoepa, 2025). Additionally, servant leadership is culturally adaptable. In cross-cultural Agile teams, where communication styles and power-distance presumptions may differ, servant leadership provides a generally recognised, people-centered paradigm that may transcend a variety of beliefs and expectations. The servant leadership perspective contributes to the hybrid model by promoting psychological safety, inclusive decision-

making, and leader–team trust—elements that are particularly important in distributed or cross-cultural Agile settings (Abbasi et al., 2025).

3.3 Contingency Theory

Contingency Theory, developed by Fiedler (1967), challenges the notion of a universally effective leadership style by asserting that leadership effectiveness depends on situational alignment. This theoretical lens supports the adaptive nature of the Hybrid Leadership Model, which recognises the contextual diversity present in global Agile teams. The idea of a single, "best" leadership style is contested by this theory, which places more emphasis on the alignment of team dynamics, task structure, and leader traits (Pahlefy et al., 2025). Contingency theory is highly useful in the Agile context since Agile teams operate in dynamic environments where no two projects are the same. While a transformational approach might be suitable for initiating Agile transformation or fostering innovation in mature teams, a more transactional style might be needed when teams need structure during early Agile adoption or in regulated situations (Ochieng et al., 2025). Additionally, Contingency Theory acknowledges that external factors like project complexity, organisational maturity, cultural diversity, and customer involvement have an impact on leadership outcomes. Situational awareness is a crucial leadership skill since these variables are always shifting in global IT situations (Khudhair et al., 2025). Agile leaders are encouraged to use Contingency Theory to assess the needs of their team, organisational constraints, and the nature of the project before deciding on a leadership style. By emphasising the fit between leadership behaviour and organisational conditions, Contingency Theory strengthens the justification for a flexible, hybrid leadership framework that can evolve alongside Agile team maturity and environmental complexity (Gamble et al., 2025).

3.4 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovation Theory offers valuable insight into how new ideas, such as Agile practices and leadership approaches, are adopted within organisations. This framework supports the Hybrid Leadership Model by illustrating how leaders can facilitate behavioural change and Agile adoption across varying levels of organisational readiness. It categorizes adopters into innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards and highlights key factors that influence adoption, including trialability, observability, perceived advantage, compatibility, and complexity (Kulugomba et al., 2025). This concept is helpful in Agile project management since it clarifies how leadership philosophies may either support or undermine teams' and organisations' adoption of Agile. Teams need leaders to guide them through the innovation adoption process, reduce opposition to change, and promote Agile as a useful and realistic approach (Karampour et al., 2021).The theory highlights the leader's role in guiding

innovation uptake, reinforcing the hybrid model's emphasis on adaptability, communication, and the ability to influence team adoption of Agile values over time.

3.5 Justification for a Hybrid Leadership Approach

Drawing on the four theoretical models discussed above, this study contends that no single leadership style can fully meet the demands of Agile project environments—especially in global and multicultural settings. As a result, a hybrid approach, selectively combining complementary aspects of each theory, is proposed. This approach acknowledges both the complexity of Agile team dynamics and the necessity for situational flexibility in leadership.

4. Discussion

This section evaluates how leadership styles can positively or negatively impact Agile effectiveness in multicultural and international contexts by fusing theoretical ideas with Agile practice.

4.1 Evaluating Leadership Fit in Agile Environments

The dynamic, cooperative, and highly adaptive nature of agile project environments calls for leadership philosophies that foster adaptability, creativity, and self-organization. Transformational and servant leadership are frequently cited as the leadership philosophies that are best compatible with Agile principles. Agile teams can accept change and pursue continuous improvement when transformational leaders inspire them, challenge the status quo, and provide vision (Haider et al., 2025). Conversely, servant leaders prioritise individual and team empowerment, cultivating the trust and unity necessary for productive Agile cooperation (Rauniar & Cao, 2025).

Even though transactional leadership is more conventional and control-oriented, it can still be helpful in Agile settings, especially when it comes to promoting accountability and structure. For instance, transactional components are useful for maintaining discipline over sprint cycles and controlling performance expectations (Fore, 2023). Two important Agile qualities, creativity and autonomy, could be hampered by an over-reliance on transactional procedures. Even though autocratic leadership is typically at odds with Agile ideals, it might nevertheless be useful in certain situations (Santos et al., 2025). Directive leadership may aid in establishing clarity and momentum in teams that are immature during early stages of Agile transformations or high-pressure, time-sensitive projects. But long-term usage of authoritarian techniques can jeopardise psychological safety, lower participation, and impede Agile's iterative learning process (Matsunaga, 2024). Overall, leadership in Agile environments must be dynamic and context sensitive.

Leaders must balance authority with empathy, direction with autonomy, and outcomes with learning. The ability to switch leadership modes in response to team maturity, project complexity, and cultural expectations is therefore a critical success factor in Agile project management (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022).

4.2 Cross-Cultural and Global Leadership Considerations

The relationship between leadership and culture has grown in significance as Agile approaches spread throughout the world, various cultural contexts have various interpretations of leadership behaviours, which affect how Agile values are expressed and embraced. The cultural factors identified by Hofstede (2001), including power distance, individuality versus collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance, provide information about regional differences in preferred leadership styles (Faluyi & Mboga, 2024). Teams in high power-distance cultures—such as many Asian or Middle Eastern nations could be more used to hierarchical decision-making and may react more favourably at first to directive leadership philosophies. Participatory leadership and team autonomy, on the other hand, are typically expected and respected in low power-distance cultures (such as those seen in Scandinavia and the Netherlands) (Badada et al., 2025). Therefore, in these contexts, transformative or servant leadership may be more effective.

Risk tolerance, conflict resolution, and feedback methods are also influenced by cultural norms. To preserve cohesiveness and productivity, agile teams operating internationally must negotiate these subtleties. For example, cultures that value indirection and harmony may need to moderate the open and direct communication that Agile promotes (Mathew, 2025). As a result, global leaders need to be culturally aware and ready to modify their approach to leadership to meet team demands while maintaining the fundamentals of Agile. This entails recognising their own cultural prejudices, aggressively soliciting feedback from a range of viewpoints, and cultivating inclusive work environments that empower team members from all backgrounds (Nazarian et al., 2025). Further complication is added by distributed Agile teams, which are typical in multinational IT companies. High degrees of digital literacy and communication skills are necessary for leaders who must coordinate across time zones, languages, and virtual platforms. Effective leadership in these situations requires not only technical direction but also empathy and clarity. Establishing trust becomes crucial, and leaders need to be intentional about fostering connections and team unity (Mohammad et al., 2025).

4.3 The Case for a Hybrid Leadership Model

A hybrid leadership paradigm seems to work best given the diverse demands of Agile environments and the worldwide diversity of team composition. Agile leaders benefit from utilising a variety of leadership philosophies, depending on the circumstance, stage of

the project, and level of team maturity, rather than strictly following only one. A combination of servant leadership and transformative leadership has promise (Gowrishankar et al., 2025). Teams are inspired to surpass expectations and innovate constantly by transformational leadership's strategic vision and motivating power. In contrast, servant leadership prioritizes team needs, builds trust, and promotes psychological safety—all of which are necessary for great performance in Agile environments (Nasrun et al., 2025).

In practice, a hybrid model could involve:

- Beginning a project or Agile transformation with **transformational behaviors** to set a compelling direction, build momentum, and address resistance to change (Vapiwala et al., 2025).
- Sustaining delivery and engagement through **servant leadership**, focusing on removing impediments, facilitating learning, and promoting shared ownership (Horak et al., 2025).
- Employing **transactional leadership** as needed to enforce critical deadlines, ensure compliance, or manage performance in high-pressure iterations (Sehgal et al., 2025).
- Using **autocratic leadership** sparingly, during crisis moments or in immature Agile teams needing firm guidance (Haiderzai et al., 2025).

Contingency Theory, which emphasises that a leader's performance depends on matching style to context, is in line with this adaptive leadership approach. Additionally, it embodies the Agile concept of responsiveness in team management and leadership conduct in addition to product delivery. To cultivate hybrid leadership skills, deliberate training and introspective practice are necessary (Yoo et al., 2025). Agile leaders need to be self-aware, receptive to criticism, and dedicated to changing with their teams. Fostering this adaptation requires organisational assistance in the form of coaching, cross-cultural training, and leadership development programs (Abid and Polo, 2025).

4.4 Challenges and Limitations

Although there is a compelling theoretical argument for flexible, hybrid leadership in Agile environments, there are still several obstacles to overcome. First, it is not a given that leadership will automatically shift to Agile compatibility. Traditional, command-and-control-trained leaders could find it difficult to trust self-organising teams, give up control, or adopt iterative planning cycles. These patterns are frequently reinforced by organisational culture and legacy systems, making behavioural change challenging (Sharma et al., 2025). Second, there is still a lack of empirical study on leadership in

Agile situations, particularly when it comes to a global and cross-cultural viewpoint (Amoozegar et al., 2025).

Most of the research restricts generalisability by concentrating on individual case studies or Western-centric theories. Future studies must examine the effectiveness of different leadership philosophies in various organisational, cultural, and geographic contexts. Third, there are significant differences in Agile maturity within organizations. Companies in the start of their Agile journey may find that leadership styles that work well in highly experienced Agile teams do not translate well to them (John et al., 2025). Applying any leadership strategy could result in resistance or misunderstanding if team dynamics and readiness are not well understood. Fourth, hybrid leadership poses real-world difficulties. High levels of situational awareness, interpersonal skills, and emotional intelligence are necessary for continuously changing leadership philosophies. Not every leader is equally capable of handling this complexity, and teams may become uncertain because of inconsistent leadership behaviour (Hou & Sing, 2025).

Finally, informal leadership behaviours like observation, impromptu coaching, and on-the-spot help are diminished by virtual and remote team arrangements, which are now typical in multinational IT companies. New approaches to performance management, mentoring, and engagement are needed for leaders in digital environments. To overcome these constraints, more thorough empirical research, long-term studies, and a more robust incorporation of leadership development within Agile transformation projects are required. Organizations can only create flexible and successful leadership models that promote worldwide Agile success by recognising these difficulties (Vergara et al., 2025).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Key Insights

This conceptual paper offers a theoretically based perspective on Agile project management leadership and suggests a hybrid model that can be adjusted to different organisational and cultural circumstances. It draws attention to the necessity of additional empirical research to confirm the results. Agile principles, team dynamics, and project performance measures were examined in respect to four leadership philosophies: transformational, transactional, servant, and autocratic. This investigation was organised using the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM), Servant Leadership Theory, Contingency Theory, and Diffusion of Innovation Theory. According to key findings, Agile cultures are best suited for transformational and servant leadership philosophies. In the fast-paced, iterative environment of Agile, transformational leaders foster creativity, motivate teamwork, and encourage adaptable thinking. Agile's basic principles are closely aligned with servant leadership's enhancement of psychological safety, support

for team autonomy, and reinforcement of collaboration. Transactional leadership is useful yet limiting, especially when it comes to managing accountability, establishing expectations, and enforcing structure. Even though it is generally at odds with Agile, autocratic leadership can be useful in high-stakes or emergency scenarios. To meet the varied and changing needs of Agile teams around the world, the study promotes a hybrid leadership model that incorporates aspects of several styles.

5.2 Practical Implications for Global Agile Leaders

The results highlight the significance of culturally sensitive and flexible leadership for practitioners. Global Agile executives need to adopt a more facilitative, people-centered approach and get rid of their old command-and-control mentalities. Emotional intelligence, cultural competency, and situational flexibility should be given top priority in leadership development programs. Businesses putting Agile into practice on a large scale should spend money on leadership development based on Agile concepts. This involves teaching leaders how to assess team maturity, adapt to changing circumstances, and strike a balance between empowerment and structure.

Agile leadership frameworks should incorporate servant leadership techniques including creating trust, assisting with professional development, and removing obstacles. Leaders in multicultural or dispersed teams need to be inclusive and sensitive to cultural differences. In global Agile situations, a one-size-fits-all leadership strategy is inadequate. To ensure consistency with Agile values without enforcing strict standards, leaders must learn to modify their approach in response to team expectations, organisational maturity, and cultural norms. Assessments of leadership should also consider relational efficacy, communication abilities, and emotional intelligence in addition to technical measurements. To improve their leadership skills, agile leaders should also be encouraged to participate in community learning, peer mentoring, and reflective practices.

5.3 Future Research Directions

Although this paper offers a strong conceptual foundation, empirical research is necessary to validate and expand upon the proposed ideas. Future studies should adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs to explore the real-world application of leadership styles across diverse Agile contexts. Specific research directions may include:

- Comparative studies assessing the impact of leadership styles on Agile performance metrics such as velocity, customer satisfaction, and innovation rate across different industries and regions.

- Cross-cultural investigations to identify how leadership preferences and effectiveness vary in Agile teams in Europe, Asia, North America, and other regions.
- Exploratory research on hybrid leadership models, examining how Agile leaders successfully combine multiple leadership approaches in different project phases.
- Case studies of Agile transformations within multinational organizations to understand leadership challenges and best practices during enterprise-level Agile adoption.
- Analysis of leadership development interventions (e.g., training, coaching, mentorship) and their influence on Agile team maturity and project outcomes.

Future studies should also investigate how leadership dynamics are changing in Agile environments because of digital technology, remote collaboration tools, and AI-driven platforms. It will be essential to comprehend how leadership changes in digital settings as remote work becomes more common. Agile leadership is a dynamic, ever-evolving skill that must adapt to shifting organisational priorities, cultural norms, and technological advancements. Agile leaders may more successfully manage teams to provide value, innovate continuously, and prosper in a world that is becoming more complicated by firmly establishing their leadership practices in theoretical understanding and practical data.

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