AGILE PRACTICES IN ACTIVATING CUSTOMERS TO CO-CREATE THE OFFER

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Purpose: The article aims to understand how agile organizational practices affect customer engagement in the processes of co-creating the offer. It responds to the growing needs of the market, which require companies not only to provide high-quality products, but also to be committed and open to cooperation with customers.

Design/methodology/approach: The study uses a quantitative approach, including an extensive survey of 303 companies. The results were statistically analysed, which made it possible to generate a correlation table showing the relationships between individual practices.

Findings: Most companies are positive about customer engagement in product/service testing, designing new offerings, and using customer feedback to improve existing products/services. The high correlation rates between different agile practices suggest that the realization of one practice often entails the implementation of others.

Research limitations/implications: Limitations of the study include the homogeneity of a sample focused mainly on downstream employees in small and micro enterprises, which may limit the generalization of results.

Practical implications: Companies can use the results of surveys to increase customer engagement by implementing real-time feedback systems, intensifying collaboration on new product development, and conducting regular satisfaction surveys.

Social implications: Increased customer engagement in value creation processes can lead to greater customer satisfaction and loyalty, which contributes to building lasting relationships and a better brand reputation.

Originality/value: The article offers a new perspective on the application of agile practices in the context of customer engagement, showing how customers can be effectively integrated into business processes, which is crucial to increasing the agility of organizations and their long-term success in the market.

Keywords: agile practices, client, e-commerce, company, organizational agility.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

In today's business reality, the role of customers and their involvement in the company's creative processes is of particular importance. This is not a new phenomenon, but in the context of rapid technological development and changing consumer expectations, its importance is growing. The groundbreaking nature of this approach, based on the co-creation of value by customers, is redefining the way companies plan their strategies and manage innovation. In this context, agile practices, known for their adaptability and flexibility, turn out to be not only a response to dynamic market changes, but also an effective tool in engaging customers in creating an offer. Introducing agile practices into business processes enables companies to respond faster to changing consumer needs and better adapt products and services to individual expectations (Kocot, Kwasek, 2022). It is not without reason that agile practices have gained popularity not only in tech industries, but also in sectors as diverse as health, finance, and education (Almusharraf, Alfawaz, Hajli, 2022). The increased interest in these methods is a response to the growing demands of the market, which increasingly requires companies not only to provide high-quality products, but also to be committed and open to cooperation with customers (Prieto, Talukder, 2023).

At the same time, co-creating the offer with customers opens up new opportunities for innovation. Customers, as end users, can provide invaluable feedback that is crucial in the product improvement process. It's worth noting that agile practices naturally promote such interactions, thanks to short development cycles and continuous evaluation of progress, allowing for rapid change and adaptation to market expectations (Kt, Sivasubramanian, 2023). This makes the topic of customer involvement in creating an offer and the role of agile methodologies in this process not only topical, but even necessary to understand contemporary trends in management and business development.

Taking up the topic in this article results from the need for a deeper understanding of these mechanisms and presenting how the practical application of agile methods can contribute to increasing competitiveness, innovation and customer satisfaction. These considerations are aimed not only at presenting the theoretical foundations of agile practices, but also at demonstrating their practical value on the examples of specific organizations that effectively implement these methodologies in their daily operations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of agile practices used by modern organizations

Agile, or agile project management methods, has gained popularity in recent years as an effective tool in running a variety of projects, especially in the IT industry (He, Harris, 2021; Jones, Adam, 2023; Sajdak, 2021; Torres, 2023). Agile practices are characterized by adaptability, flexibility, and a focus on continuous improvement of processes and the final product. Organizations use various agile methodologies, including Scrum, Kanban, and Lean, which help to respond efficiently to changing requirements and optimize work processes. Scrum, one of the most widespread agile methodologies, is a structured approach that divides projects into cycles called sprints. Each sprint ends with a review that allows the team to evaluate progress and adjust the strategy for the next steps (Schwaber, Sutherland, 2020). Kanban, on the other hand, focuses on optimizing workflow and minimizing the time that tasks spend in the "in-process" phase (Ladas, 2009). The Lean method focuses on maximizing customer value while minimizing waste (Womack, Jones, 2003).

Introducing agile practices in organizations has a number of benefits, including increased efficiency, better product quality, faster change implementation, and greater team engagement (Zou, Cheshmehzangi, 2022). Companies that have implemented these methods often report improved communication within teams and better collaboration between departments, which directly translates into higher customer satisfaction (VersionOne, 2020).

An example of an organization that has successfully applied agile methods is Spotify, which has developed its own model based on the ideas of Scrum and Kanban, emphasizing team autonomy and continuous value delivery (Kniberg, Ivarsson, 2012). As a result, Spotify is able to quickly adapt to the changing needs of the music market and user expectations (Žitkienė, Deksnys, 2018).

Applying agile practices requires an organization to be willing to constantly learn and adapt (Sedej, Justinek, 2021). An organizational culture based on openness, cooperation, and continuous improvement is crucial for the success of implementing these methodologies (Denning, 2018). The implementation of agile practices is not limited to the technology industry. Organizations across a variety of sectors, including health, finance, and education, are also adopting agile principles to increase their operational efficiency and better respond to their customers' needs (Kocot, Kwasek, 2022; Kt, Sivasubramanian, 2023; Prieto, Talukder, 2023; Ramadhana, 2021). For example, in the financial sector, banks use agile methods to accelerate the development of financial products and streamline internal processes, which is crucial in the face of increasing competition and regulation (Ambler, Lines, 2012).

Education, on the other hand, uses agile methodologies to transform pedagogical approaches, enabling teachers and students to better adapt the pace of learning to individual needs and preferences (Edmonds, 2011). In healthcare, agility helps manage healthcare and

research projects, which contributes to more effective and faster medical innovation (Cohen et al., 2004).

However, agile methodologies may face challenges related to organizational culture and resistance to change (Akkaya, 2021; Attar, Almusharraf, Alfawaz, Hajli, 2022). Adapting to agile methods requires organizations to make not only procedural but also cultural changes, including the development of competencies such as self-organization of teams, continuous adaptation, and acceptance of uncertainty as part of the work (Cockburn, Highsmith, 2001). Implementing such a transformation requires strong leadership and commitment at all levels of the organization (Leffingwell, 2011; Lambri, Sironi, Teti, 2024; Kurnia, Chien, 2020).

2.2. The role of the modern customer as a co-creator of the offer

The role of today's customers as co-creators of the offer has evolved significantly in recent decades, reflecting changes in technologies, market dynamics, and customer expectations (Chen, Li, 2021). More and more often, the customer is no longer just a passive recipient of products and services, but an active participant in their creation, which is crucial for the innovation and competitiveness of companies. This change is due to several reasons. First of all, the development of digital technologies has enabled customers to access tools that allow them to express their opinions and preferences directly and effectively. Social media platforms, feedback apps, and crowdfunding tools are just some of the options that enable customers to actively participate in the value creation process (Kozinets et al., 2010).

Co-creation of an offer by customers, known as co-creation, is a process in which value is created jointly by the company and customers. The customer participates in this process not only by providing feedback on the products, but also by participating in their design and modification. This approach translates into products and services that better meet the individual needs and preferences of users, which in turn can lead to increased user satisfaction and loyalty (Prahalad, Ramaswamy, 2004).

Co-creation also has a direct impact on innovation. The client, as a co-creator, often brings new perspectives and ideas that may be beyond the reach of traditional market research methods. The Lego Company is an example of an organization that uses co-creation platforms such as Lego Ideas to invite customers to propose and vote on new sets that can then become part of the official product line (Antorini et al., 2012).

In the socio-economic context, the customer as a co-creator of the offer also influences the way brands build their position on the market. Brands that effectively integrate customers into the value creation process often gain a competitive advantage by building deeper and more personal relationships with customers, which can translate into greater engagement and improved brand reputation (Füller, 2010).

2.3. Agile practices in stimulating customer activity in the field of co-creation of the offer

In the context of co-creating an offer, agile practices play a key role in stimulating consumer activity and engaging customers in the process of creating and improving products and services (Joiner, 2019). Agile enables organizations to quickly test new concepts with direct user input, which fosters a better understanding of their needs and expectations (Harraf, Wanasika, Tate, Talbott, 2015). Involving customers in testing products and services is an important element of agile methodologies. Agile companies often implement iterative development cycles in which products are prototyped, tested, and modified based on direct feedback from customers. This not only accelerates product development, but also ensures that the final product better meets market needs (Hoyer et al., 2010).

Partnering with customers to design new products and services is another area where agile practices demonstrate their value. Through tools such as co-design workshops and crowdsourcing platforms, companies can benefit from the creativity and innovation of their users. Methods such as Design Thinking integrate with agile, offering a framework that promotes co-creation and rapid adaptation to changing customer preferences (Brown, 2009).

Using customer feedback to improve existing products and services is another key component of agile practices. By collecting and analyzing feedback, organizations can iteratively improve their offerings, which increases customer satisfaction and loyalty. Tools such as Agile CRM or real-time feedback systems enable organizations to constantly monitor and respond to customer feedback (Fitzgerald, Stol, 2017).

Regular customer satisfaction and preference surveys are equally important. Agile emphasizes the need to constantly study and understand changes in customer behavior and expectations. Techniques such as Lean Startup, where a 'minimum viable product' (MVP) serves as a tool to test hypotheses in the market, directly fit into these needs (Ries, 2011).

The implementation of real-time customer feedback systems is possible thanks to digital technologies and online tools that integrate feedback as an integral part of the product lifecycle. An example is the use of mobile apps to collect real-time feedback, which allows companies to respond immediately to customer needs and make changes to their offerings faster (Kohavi et al., 2009).

The implementation of real-time feedback systems allows not only for quick collection and analysis of opinions, but also for dynamic adaptation to changing market conditions. Organizations can thus conduct continuous A/B research that allows different versions of products or services to be tested in direct contact with users, minimizing the risks and costs associated with inefficient solutions (Kohavi et al., 2009). As part of agile, it is particularly valuable to involve customers in the product development process through the so-called user stories and feedback loops. User stories allow development teams to better understand user needs and adjust product functionality in a way that best meets their expectations. Feedback

loops ensure a constant flow of feedback from clients to project teams, allowing you to adjust the course of projects and make improvements to the offer on an ongoing basis (Cohn, 2004).

A key aspect of using agile methods in the context of co-creating an offer is also the transparency of processes (Mrugalska, Ahmed, 2021). Companies that communicate openly with customers about product development stages and provide insight into decision-making processes gain greater trust and better collaboration from customers (Rosário, Raimundo, 2021). Transparency can also lead to greater innovation, as customers feel part of the process and are more likely to share their ideas and suggestions (Morgan, Liker, 2006). Implementing agile practices in the process of co-creating the offer requires the organization to be flexible, open to change and ready to experiment. Appropriate technological infrastructure is also necessary to enable effective communication and collaboration with clients at different stages of the project (Highsmith, 2009). The above considerations are presented in the author's model showing the mutual relations between agile practices and stimulating customer activity (Fig. 1).

The model highlights the relationship between customer involvement in the process of co-creating and improving products and services and the use of iterative development cycles in Agile methodologies, which enable prototyping, testing, and modifying products based on direct customer feedback. Harnessing users' creativity and innovation, and collaborating with customers to design new products and services through tools such as co-design workshops and crowdsourcing platforms, were highlighted as critical to quickly adapting to changing customer preferences. Integrating methods such as Design Thinking with Agile supports the co-creation process, and collecting and analyzing customer feedback allows organizations to iteratively improve their offerings, which increases customer satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, regular customer satisfaction and preference surveys, as well as the implementation of real-time feedback systems, are essential elements of Agile, emphasizing the continuous study and understanding of changes in customer behavior and expectations, which enables effective testing of hypotheses in the market and the introduction of rapid changes to the offer.
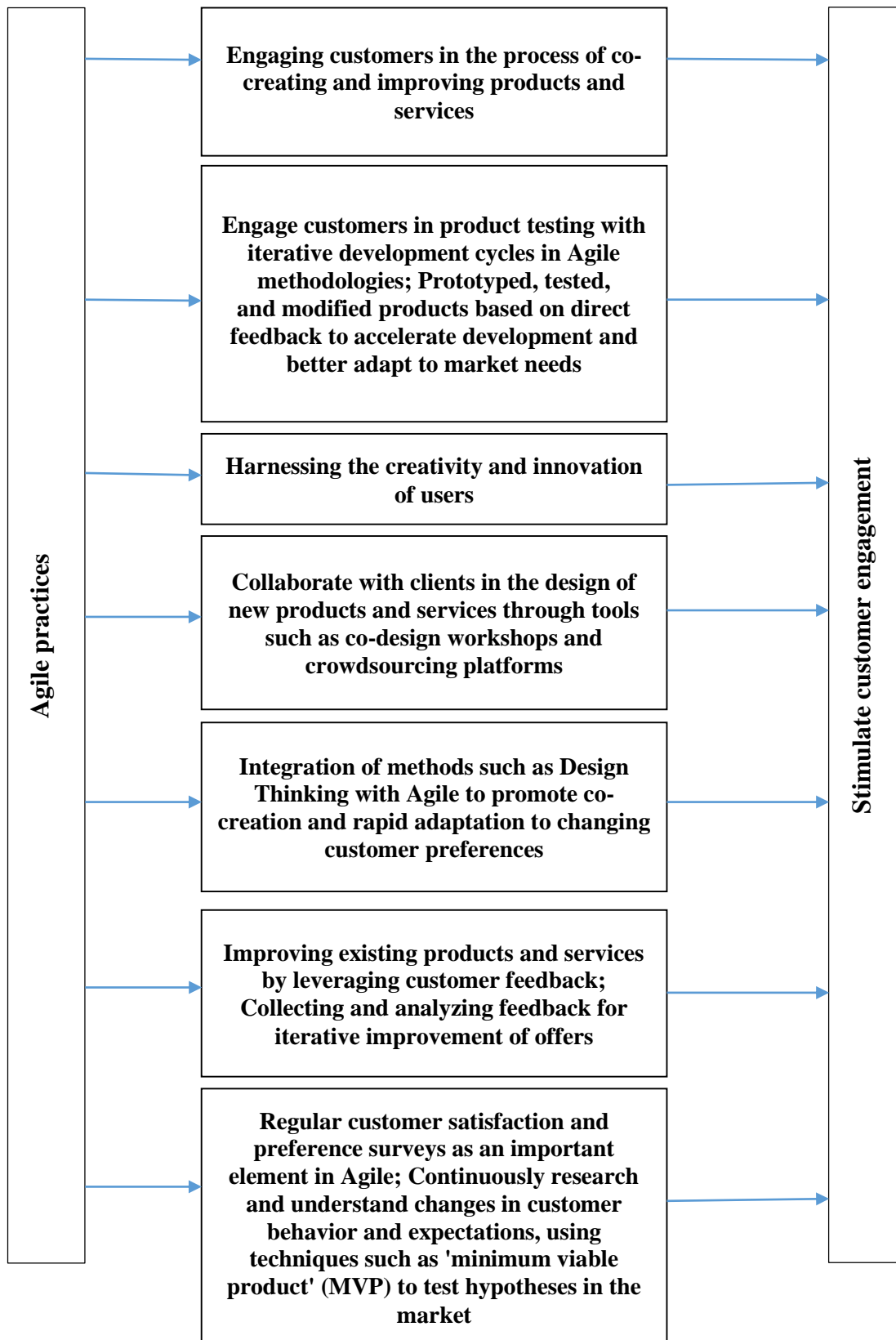
Figure 1. Agile practices and stimulating customer activity in a relational approach.
Source: Own study.

2.4. Research Methodology

The subject of research in this article was to understand how agile organizational practices affect customer engagement in the processes of co-creating the offer. The study focused on evaluating five key practices: engaging customers in product/service testing, collaborating with customers in designing new products/services, using customer feedback to improve existing products/services, conducting regular customer satisfaction and preference surveys, and implementing real-time feedback systems from customers.

The aim of the research was twofold. First, the intention was to identify and evaluate how often companies use these agile organizational practices in the context of customer engagement. Second, the aim was to investigate the interrelationships between these practices in order to understand whether there is a mutual support of these activities in organizational practices.

The research hypothesis was based on the assumption that individual agile organizational practices are strongly interrelated and that their joint application can lead to synergistic effects in customer engagement. The researchers speculated that companies with one practice are likely to pursue others as well, suggesting the integration of strategies for engaging customers in business processes.

The research method involved a quantitative analytical approach, which involved an extensive survey of 303 companies. The results were then statistically analysed, which allowed the generation of a correlation table showing the relationships between individual practices.

The data collected in this way allowed for a deep understanding of how agile organizational practices are implemented and how they interact with each other, which provided the basis for further analyses and conclusions regarding the effectiveness of customer involvement in business processes. In the course of the study, sociodemographic data were compiled.

The survey was mainly attended by lower-level employees, who accounted for 57.4% of respondents. Middle managers represented 25.2% of participants, lower management 11.1%, and the highest level of management included 6.4%. In terms of professional experience, almost half of the respondents (47.7%) had up to 5 years of work in their industry, and another 33.4% had between 6 and 10 years of experience. People with 11 to 15 years of experience accounted for 13.6%, 16 to 20 years of work accounted for 3.6%, and 1.7% of respondents with more than 20 years of professional experience.

Respondents mostly worked in small companies, which accounted for 37.5% of the total, while micro-enterprises included 26.4%, medium-sized enterprises 20.1%, and large enterprises 16.1%. The companies where respondents worked were often relatively young, with 34.9% operating between 1 and 3 years and 27.1% between 4 and 7 years. Companies with more than 8 years of experience represented 26.1%, and those younger than a year – 11.9%.

The majority of respondents were employed in the retail sector, which accounted for 54.8% of participants. The rest worked in other sectors (26.4%), education (10.4%), automotive (5.4%) and health (3%). In terms of the range of these companies, 32.5% were regional, 31.5% national, 18.3% international and 17.6% local. Assessments of the financial situation of companies indicated that the majority (55.6%) perceived it as good, 19.9% as very good, 16.9% had difficulties in assessing it, 4.6% assessed the situation as bad, and 3% as very bad.

2.5. Presentation of Research Findings

The research sought to understand how organizations use agile practices in customer engagement to co-create the offer (Table 1). An analysis of the responses of 303 respondents reveals a variety of approaches to integrating customers into product and service development processes.

The data collected illustrates how companies are implementing agile working methods, engaging customers in various stages of business processes, from product testing to creating strategies based on real feedback.

The first issue examined concerned customer involvement in product/service testing. The results show that the majority of respondents (225 out of 303) are positive about such activities, with 130 strongly supporting this approach and 95 rather supporting it. In contrast, a minority, a total of 45 people, express negative opinions (20 definitely not, 25 rather not), and 33 do not have a clear opinion on the subject.

Another aspect was cooperation with clients in designing new products/services. Here, too, positive assessments prevail (218 out of 303), of which 113 people definitely assess this practice in this way, and 105 rather so. 45 respondents have a negative approach to this issue (15 definitely not, 30 rather not), and 40 remain neutral.

The study of using customer feedback to improve existing products/services also received mostly positive responses. 238 people assessed it positively, of which 128 definitely yes, and 110 rather yes. Negative opinions were expressed by 30 people (10 definitely not, 20 rather not), and 35 people did not have an opinion.

Regular surveys of customer satisfaction and preferences were also met with great approval, with 230 people positively evaluating these activities (131 definitely yes, 99 rather yes), while 25 people expressed a negative opinion (8 definitely not, 17 rather not), and 48 people remained neutral.

The last aspect examined was the implementation of real-time feedback systems from customers. The results show that the majority (223 out of 303) assessed it positively (125 definitely yes, 98 rather yes), compared to 30 people expressing negative opinions (12 definitely not, 18 rather not), and 50 people did not have a clear opinion.

Table 1.

Agile Organizational Practices in Engaging Customers in Co-creating the Offer, N = 303

	Definitely NOT	Rather NOT	No opinion	Rather YES	Definitely YES
Customer engagement in product/service testing (1)	20	25	33	95	130
Collaboration with customers in designing new products/services (2)	15	30	40	105	113
Utilizing customer feedback to improve existing products/services (3)	10	20	35	110	128
Regularly conducting customer satisfaction and preference surveys (4)	8	17	48	99	131
Implementation of real-time customer feedback systems (5)	12	18	50	98	125

Source: Own study based on research.

Based on the research conducted and the data collected, the correlation table (Table 2) presents the relationships between various aspects of customer involvement in value creation processes in organizations. Analyzing the data, very high values of correlation coefficients between different organizational agility practices can be observed. All correlation values range from 0.97 to 0.99, indicating strong and very close relationships between the variables analyzed.

Customer involvement in product/service testing shows a very high correlation with all other practices, with values ranging from 0.97 to 0.98. This means that organizations that actively engage customers in testing also collaborate extensively with them to design new products, use their feedback to improve existing products, conduct regular satisfaction and preference surveys, and implement real-time feedback systems.

Similarly, collaborating with customers to design new products/services and using their feedback to improve products shows very high correlation values of 0.99, suggesting that these practices are strongly related and often implemented in parallel.

Regular surveys of customer satisfaction and preferences and the implementation of real-time feedback systems from customers are also strongly correlated with other surveyed practices, with correlation values ranging from 0.97 to 0.99. This demonstrates the organization's consistent approach to engaging customers in different stages of the product's life, from design to later phases of product use.

Table 2.

Correlation Table, N = 303

	1	2	3	4	5
1	1				
2	0,97	1			
3	0,98	0,99	1		
4	0,98	0,97	0,98	1	
5	0,97	0,97	0,98	0,99	1

Source: Own study based on research.

These strong correlation relationships confirm that agile practices in customer engagement are closely related and often coexist within a single organizational strategy, resulting in increased efficiency of business processes and better adaptation of products and services to the needs and expectations of customers.

3. Discussion

Based on the research conducted, conclusions can be drawn regarding the use of agile organizational practices in the involvement of customers in value creation processes. Data analysis shows that companies that intensively and consistently engage customers at various stages of product and service development achieve significant benefits from this cooperation. The use of customer feedback, their involvement in product testing and co-design of new solutions are practices that not only improve the quality and innovation of the products offered, but also increase customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The high correlation coefficients between different agility practices indicate that the implementation of one often entails the implementation of others, creating synergistic effects within the organization. For example, companies that engage customers in product testing typically also use their feedback heavily to improve existing products and services. Such integration of activities not only contributes to shortening the product life cycle, but also allows for a more flexible and effective response to changing market needs.

In the context of knowledge management, the study shows how important it is to systematically collect and analyse customer feedback. Real-time feedback systems, which have won a lot of approval among respondents, allow organizations to monitor and respond to customer feedback on an ongoing basis, which leads to continuous improvement of offers. The use of such systems can significantly contribute to increasing the company's competitiveness on the market.

In summary, agile practices in customer engagement bring numerous benefits to organizations, including better product customization, increased innovation, and building lasting relationships with customers. The presented research confirms that the integration of customers into business processes is a key element of increasing the agility of organizations, which in turn translates into their long-term success on the market.

The conducted research allows us to formulate several recommendations for companies, which can contribute to the better use of agile organizational practices in the involvement of customers in value creation processes. The first recommendation is the systematic implementation of customer feedback mechanisms. Companies should focus on building effective systems for collecting and analyzing customer feedback in real time, which will allow for faster adaptation of products and services to current market expectations.

Another recommendation is to intensify cooperation with customers at the stage of designing new products and services. Co-creation with customers not only increases innovation and accuracy of solutions introduced to the market, but also builds bonds and loyalty of customers who feel that they have a real impact on the company's offer. Companies should also pay attention to regular customer satisfaction and preference surveys. Such research provides valuable information about market trends and changing expectations, which enables better planning of product and marketing strategies. It is also worth noting that the involvement of different levels of the organization in data collection and analysis processes increases awareness of customer importance throughout the company. The importance of training and educating employees in agile methods of working with customers should also be emphasized. Investing in the development of employee competencies at all levels of the organization contributes to a better understanding and use of customer feedback, which is crucial for the dynamic development of the company.

In conclusion, companies that successfully integrate agile customer engagement practices into their operations can significantly increase their competitiveness in the market. These recommendations are aimed at supporting companies in building a sustainable competitive advantage through efficient and effective involvement of customers in the processes of creating and developing their offer.

Certainly, several limitations of the conducted research can be identified, which may affect the interpretation of the results and define potential directions for future research. One of the main limitations is the homogeneity of the sample, which focused mainly on lower-level employees in small and micro enterprises. This may limit the generalization of results to companies of larger scale and with different management profiles. In addition, the research was mainly based on the self-assessment of respondents, which can introduce subjectivity and cognitive biases, such as social conformity bias or attribution errors.

In the context of future research directions, it is worth considering conducting similar studies on a larger and more diverse sample covering different industries and countries, which would allow for a better understanding of the universality and effectiveness of agile customer engagement practices. Future research could also apply more diverse data collection methods, including deep interviews, focus groups, and multi-level analysis, which would allow for a deeper understanding of the dynamics and mechanisms of customer engagement across organisational and cultural contexts. Additionally, future research may focus on analyzing the impact of digital technologies on customer engagement, especially in the context of the growing role of social media and digital tools in customer interactions. The long-term impact of customer engagement on companies' bottom lines and competitiveness could also be examined, which would provide data to prove the ROI (return on investment) associated with agile practices.

In conclusion, while the study provides valuable insights into agile customer engagement practices, its limitations suggest the need for further research that would help solidify and expand the findings obtained, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how organizations can effectively co-create value with customers.

4. Conclusions

The results of the research should be compared with the works of other authors to deepen the understanding of the importance and impact of agile practices in engaging customers to co-create the offer. In their article, the authors point out that agile practices can significantly affect customer engagement, which translates into better adaptation of products to market needs and increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. The authors emphasize that this approach allows for continuous improvement of the offer and faster response to market changes, which is crucial in the dynamically changing business world.

Similar conclusions can be found in the literature on the subject. Akkaya (2021) points out that organizational agility is crucial for leaders who want to respond effectively to rapidly changing external conditions, which has a direct impact on the company's adaptability. Sattler et al. (2022) also emphasize that the future of customer service lies in a fast, agile way of responding to customer needs, which is possible thanks to operational agility and appropriate feedback tools.

Importantly, research by Chen and Siau (2020) and He and Harris (2021) also points to the importance of agile practices in building fast-adapting organizations that are able to effectively manage crises and improve financial performance. In addition, given the research of Kurnia and Chien (2020), it is clear that agility can be enhanced by strategic accounting management, which allows for more flexible and effective decision-making.

With regard to co-creation of value with customers, the work of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) suggests that the customer as a co-creator of the product influences innovation processes and shapes the company's offer in a way that increases customer satisfaction and benefits both parties. These conclusions are consistent with the observations of the authors of this article, which indicate the synergy between customer engagement and organizational agility in new product development processes.

Analyzing the above, it is clear that the results of the research presented in this article correlate with the trends observed in the global literature and emphasize the universality and effectiveness of agile practices in customer engagement, which can be used by companies of all sizes in different sectors.

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