ATTRIBUTES OF AN AGILE ORGANIZATION LEADER IN THE LIGHT OF OWN RESEARCH

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Purpose: The purpose of this article is to identify and analyze the key attributes of leaders of agile organizations and to examine the extent to which these characteristics affect management effectiveness in a dynamic business environment. The survey aims to provide knowledge that can be used to develop the competencies of leaders in agile organizations.

Design/methodology/approach: The research was conducted in 2023 on a sample of 632 respondents, including leaders and managers from various industries. A survey methodology was used in which respondents rated eight key characteristics of an agile organization leader on a five-point scale. Sociodemographic data of respondents, such as gender, place of residence, professional activity, and type and year of study, were included in the analysis to provide a broad cross-section of data.

Findings: Research has shown that the most important attributes of leaders of agile organizations are: constantly looking for new ideas, taking advantage of opportunities, initiating new projects, creativity in action, speed in decision-making, willingness to take risks, quick adaptation to changing conditions, and extensive knowledge. The high correlation between these traits suggests that the presence of one trait favors the presence of others, confirming their interaction and importance for effective leadership.

Research limitations/implications: Research was limited to a single group of respondents, which may not fully represent the leadership population of agile organizations. In addition, the self-assessment method may have affected the subjectivity of the results. The lack of additional verification methods, such as in-depth interviews, may have limited the full understanding of the attributes studied.

Practical implications: The results of the research can be used to shape training programs and talent management strategies that promote the development of key leadership attributes of agile organizations. Organizations should focus on fostering creativity, quick decision-making, and a willingness to take risks.

Social implications: Agile leadership has the potential to significantly impact an organization's effectiveness and their ability to adapt in a changing business environment, which can help to improve market competitiveness.

Originality/value: The article provides new insight into the key attributes of leaders of agile organizations, highlighting their interconnectedness and importance for effective management. The research provides practical guidance for organizations seeking to increase their agility and competitiveness.
Keywords: organizational leader, agile organization, leadership attributes, organization, organizational agility.
Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

In a rapidly changing business environment, organizations need to be agile and able to respond quickly to change to stay competitive. Agile management methods such as Scrum or Kanban have become standard in many industries, especially in the IT sector, where variability and speed of action are crucial for success. In such conditions, leaders play the role of not only managers, but also mentors and coaches who support the development of teams and promote a culture of innovation and continuous improvement (Kurnia, Chien, 2020).

Therefore, it is important to understand what qualities and skills are necessary for leaders to function effectively in agile organizations. Research on the attributes of leaders of agile organizations provides valuable information that can be used to shape training programs and talent management strategies. Understanding these attributes is crucial for creating effective teams that can quickly adapt to new challenges and take advantage of opportunities.

The literature emphasizes that leaders of agile organizations must be creative, willing to take risks, and able to make decisions quickly and adapt to changing conditions (Akkaya, 2021). Examples from companies like Google and Spotify show that agile leadership can lead to a significant competitive advantage. These leaders must also have the broad knowledge and competencies that allow them to effectively manage teams and projects in a dynamic work environment (Rigby, Sutherland, Takeuchi, 2016; Denning, 2018).

The purpose of this article is to identify and understand the key attributes of an agile organization leader and to determine to what extent these characteristics are related. The research allows us to identify the key features that are necessary for effective leadership in agile organizations, and to understand how these features complement each other and affect management effectiveness. The analysis of the results allows for the formulation of recommendations for management practitioners, which can be used to develop the competencies of leaders in agile organizations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Agile organization and its determinants

An agile organization is characterized by flexibility, adaptability, and quick response to changing market conditions (Kocot, Kwasek, 2022). The literature emphasizes that the essence of organizational agility is the ability to quickly adapt to new circumstances by shortening decision-making and operational cycles (Rigby, Sutherland, Takeuchi, 2016). Agile organizations are customer-centric, meaning they focus on delivering value and satisfaction to customers, which is accomplished through continuous and iterative processes to improve products and services (Denning, 2018).

An important determinant of an agile organization is an organizational culture that supports innovation, collaboration, and learning. These organizations promote open communication and transparency, which enables quick problem solving and decision-making at all levels of the organizational structure (Schein, 2010). In addition, agile organizations often use project management methodologies such as Scrum or Kanban, which enable effective management of the work of teams and rapid delivery of value (Schwaber, Sutherland, 2017).

Technology plays a key role in agile organizations, enabling process automation, better data analytics, and faster decision-making. Information systems and digital tools support collaboration and facilitate knowledge and innovation management (Westerman, Bonnet, McAfee, 2014). Examples of agile organizations such as Spotify or Google show that agility can lead to a significant competitive advantage in the market (Kniberg, Ivarsson, 2012).

In the context of an agile organization, leadership and change management are also crucial (Mycka, 2023). Leaders in agile organizations act as mentors and coaches, supporting team development and promoting an approach based on experimentation and learning from mistakes (Kotter, 1996). Agility also requires an organization to be able to continuously improve and adapt, which is accomplished through regular retrospections and performance analyses (Beck et al., 2001).

2.2. Attributes of agile workers

Agile employees are key elements of the success of agile organizations (Fiddler, 2017; He, Harris, 2021; Rahimi, Mansouri, 2019). They are characterized by a number of qualities and skills that allow them to function effectively in a dynamic and unpredictable work environment. One of the primary attributes of agile workers is cognitive flexibility, which allows them to quickly adapt to new information and changing circumstances (DeRue, Ashford, Myers, 2012). These employees are open to change and can adapt quickly to new roles and tasks, which is crucial in an environment that requires constant adaptation (Seifollahi, Shirazian, 2021).

Another important attribute is the ability to cooperate and work as a team. Agile employees communicate effectively with others, both inside and outside the team, which allows them to effectively solve problems and achieve goals together (Edmondson, 2012). The ability to listen and openness to feedback are key in the process of iterative improvement, which is the foundation of agile work methodologies. In addition, agile employees have a high level of self-organization, which means that they can manage their time and tasks without the need for constant supervision (Hacker, 2018).

Innovation and creativity are other attributes that distinguish agile employees. They are able to generate new ideas and take initiatives (Chen, Li, 2021) that contribute to the continuous development of the organization (Amabile, 1996). As a result, they are able to quickly respond to customer needs and adapt products and services to changing market conditions. Agile workers often adopt an experimental mindset, where setbacks are treated as valuable lessons rather than obstacles (Carmeli, Gittell, 2009).

Agile employees also possess strong analytical skills. They are able to collect and analyze data, which allows them to make decisions based on facts rather than intuition (Davenport, Harris, 2007). This allows them to better predict the effects of their actions and adjust strategies in real time. Data analysis also allows you to identify trends and patterns that can be used to optimize processes and increase efficiency (Skyrius, Valentukevič, 2020).

An important attribute of agile employees is also a high level of commitment and motivation. These employees are determined to perform at high performance and constantly strive to improve their skills and knowledge (Ryan, Deci, 2000). The high level of autonomy and responsibility that is characteristic of agile working methods promotes intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (Pink, 2009). Leadership skills cannot be forgotten either, which are important even at lower organizational levels. Agile employees often take on leadership roles in their teams, inspiring others and fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration (Goleman, 2000). The ability to influence others and manage conflict effectively is crucial in maintaining harmony and productivity within a team (Prieto, Talukder, 2023).

Agile employees also have a proactive approach to problem solving. Instead of waiting for problems to arise, they take the initiative to anticipate them and act preventively, which allows them to respond quickly to challenges and minimize their impact on the organization (Crant, 2000). This proactivity is associated with a willingness to continuously learn and develop, which is essential in a rapidly changing work environment (Sedej, Justinek, 2021).

In summary, the attributes of agile workers include cognitive flexibility, collaborative skills, self-organization, innovation, analytical skills, commitment, leadership, and proactivity. These qualities allow them to function effectively in agile organizations and contribute to their success.

2.3. The role of a leader in an agile organization and his attributes

The role of a leader in an agile organization is crucial to its success. Leaders in such organizations not only lead teams, but also act as mentors and coaches, supporting employee development and promoting a culture of innovation and cooperation. Leaders must possess a number of specific attributes that enable them to function effectively in a dynamic and unpredictable work environment (The First Pillar, 2020).

One of the most important attributes of a leader in an agile organization is the willingness to constantly look for new ideas and take advantage of opportunities. Leaders must be open to innovation and constantly monitor the environment for opportunities that can benefit the organization (Rigby, Sutherland, Takeuchi, 2016). Leaders who can initiate new projects and respond quickly to changing market conditions contribute to the competitiveness of their companies (Denning, 2018).

Creativity in action is another key attribute of an agile organization leader. Research on organizational agility indicates that leaders who can think outside the box and implement innovative solutions are more effective in achieving organizational goals (Amabile, 1996). However, this creativity must be supported by extensive knowledge and competencies that allow leaders to effectively manage teams and projects (Westerman, Bonnet, McAfee, 2014).

Speed in action and decision-making is another important attribute of leaders in agile organizations (Chen, Siau, 2020; Ramadhana, 2021; Routledge, 2020). Efficiency in decision-making is essential in a dynamic environment where delays can lead to a loss of competitiveness (Schwaber, Sutherland, 2017). Leaders must be willing to take risks and adapt more quickly to changing conditions, which requires both courage and the ability to learn quickly from mistakes (Kotter, 1996).

The literature on the subject also emphasizes the importance of the broad knowledge and competences of leaders, which enable them to effectively manage teams and projects (Hacker, 2018). Leaders must not only be experts in their field, but also have interpersonal skills that allow them to communicate effectively with employees and build trust within the team (Goleman, 2000). Listening skills and openness to feedback are key to creating a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement.

Willingness to take risks is also an essential attribute of leaders in agile organizations. Leaders must be able to respond quickly to changing market conditions and make decisions that may involve some risk but at the same time bring significant benefits to the organization (Carmeli, Gittell, 2009). Examples of leaders who can adapt quickly to new challenges show that this approach can lead to success even in the most unpredictable conditions (Kt, Sivasubramanian, 2023).

In conclusion, the role of a leader in an agile organization is extremely complex and requires many specific attributes, such as constant search for new ideas, creativity, speed in action, willingness to take risks, and extensive knowledge and competence. These qualities enable leaders to effectively manage teams and contribute to the success of agile organizations.

2.4. Research Methodology

This article presents the results of research that was conducted in 2023. The aim of the research was to identify and understand the key attributes of an agile organization leader and to determine to what extent these traits are related. The research was aimed at verifying which of the above-mentioned attributes are the most important for effective leadership in dynamically changing conditions and how these attributes interact with each other in management practice.

The research hypothesis assumed that leaders of agile organizations are characterized by a high level of creativity, willingness to take risks, quick adaptation to changing conditions and constant search for new ideas, and these characteristics are closely related. Research questions were formulated: Which of the attributes of a leader are most often considered key in the context of an agile organization? How strong are the correlations between the individual characteristics of a leader and what are the most important characteristics of an agile organization leader according to the respondents? The research methodology involved surveying 632 respondents who rated eight key characteristics of a leader on a five-point scale.

The research conducted on a group of 632 respondents took into account a variety of sociodemographic data. The research sample consisted of 380 women and 252 men. The respondents lived in different types of towns: 161 people lived in cities with a population of 51 to 200 thousand, 56 people came from cities with more than 200 thousand inhabitants, 69 people lived in cities with a population of 21 to 50 thousand, 57 people lived in cities with a population of up to 20 thousand, and 289 people came from rural areas.

The economic activity of the respondents varied: 66 people were not employed, 434 people were permanently employed, 96 people were casual workers, 25 people were self-employed, 19 people were running a farm, and 10 people were combining permanent work with running a business. The type of study also differentiated the research group: 124 people studied full-time (full-time) and 508 part-time (part-time). As for the year of study, 286 people were in the second year, 218 in the fifth year, 51 in the third year, 19 in the fourth year, 59 in the first year.

2.5. Presentation of Research Findings

As part of the research conducted on the agile attributes of an organizational leader, data was collected from 632 respondents. Table 1 presents the results of the assessment of various characteristics of a leader on a five-point scale: Definitely NO, Rather NO, I have no opinion, Rather YES, Definitely YES.

Table 1.

Agile Attributes of an Organizational Leader, N = 632

	Definitely NOT	Rather NOT	No opinion	Rather YES	Definitely YES
Constantly seeking new ideas (1)	12	48	79	326	167
Utilizing arising opportunities (2)	9	41	91	329	162
Initiating new projects (3)	16	94	169	261	92
Creativity in action (4)	8	37	92	308	187
Speed in action and decision making (5)	18	106	121	271	116
Willingness to take risks (6)	35	153	133	221	90
Quick adaptation to changing conditions (7)	7	35	82	346	162
Broad knowledge (8)	12	40	118	317	145

Source: Own work based on conducted research.

In the category "Constantly looking for new ideas", 12 respondents indicated "Definitely NO", 48 "Rather NO", 79 "I have no opinion", 326 "Rather YES" and 167 "Definitely YES". In terms of "Taking advantage of opportunities", 9 people rated this trait as "Definitely NO", 41 as "Rather NO", 91 as "I have no opinion", 329 as "Rather YES", and 162 as "Definitely YES".

For the "Initiating new projects" feature, 16 respondents chose "Definitely NO", 94 "Rather NO", 169 "I have no opinion", 261 "Rather YES", and 92 "Definitely YES". Creativity in action was rated as "Definitely NO" by 8 respondents, "Rather NO" by 37, "I have no opinion" by 92, "Rather YES" by 308, and "Definitely YES" by 187 respondents.

Speed in action and decision-making was rated as "Definitely NO" by 18 respondents, "Rather NO" by 106, "I have no opinion" by 121, "Rather YES" by 271, and "Definitely YES" by 116 people. Willingness to take risks was rated as "Definitely NO" by 35 respondents, "Rather NO" by 153, "Not in my opinion" by 133, "Rather YES" by 221 and "Definitely YES" by 90 people.

In the category "Quick adaptation to changing conditions", 7 respondents indicated "Definitely NO", 35 "Rather NO", 82 "I have no opinion", 346 "Rather YES" and 162 "Definitely YES". On the other hand, the leader's broad knowledge was rated as "Definitely NO" by 12 respondents, "Rather NO" by 40, "I have no opinion" by 118, "Rather YES" by 317, and "Definitely YES" by 145 people.

In the context of the research conducted on the agile attributes of an organizational leader, the correlation table (Table 2) shows the degree of interdependence between various characteristics of a leader. All attributes show a high correlation with each other, suggesting that these traits are strongly related.

Table 2.
Correlation Table, N = 632

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*
1	1							
2	0,99	1						
3	0,83	0,85	1					
4	0,99	0,99	0,81	1				
5	0,93	0,94	0,95	0,90	1			
6	0,72	0,73	0,91	0,68	0,92	1		
7	0,99	0,99	0,84	0,98	0,93	0,73	1	
8	0,98	0,99	0,90	0,97	0,95	0,76	0,98	1

Source: Own work based on conducted research.

"Constantly looking for new ideas" (1) shows a very high correlation with "seizing opportunities" (2) and "creativity in action" (4), suggesting that leaders who seek out new ideas are often also creative and willing to take advantage of opportunities. The correlation between these traits is 0.99 and 0.99, respectively. Similarly, there is a high correlation between "seizing opportunities" (2) and "creativity in action" (4) and "adapting quickly to changing conditions" (7), at 0.99 and 0.99.

"Initiating new projects" (3) is strongly associated with "creativity in action" (4) and "speed in action and decision-making" (5), as evidenced by correlations of 0.81 and 0.95. This suggests that leaders initiating new projects are often creative and quick to act. "Speed in action and decision-making" (5) also has a high correlation with "willingness to take risks" (6) and "broad knowledge" (8), amounting to 0.92 and 0.95, respectively.

"Willingness to take risks" (6) correlates highly with "rapid adaptation to changing conditions" (7), which means a correlation of 0.73. This is important because risk-taking leaders tend to adapt quickly to change.

"Broad knowledge" (8) has a high correlation with most traits, especially "creativity in action" (4) and "rapid adaptation to changing conditions" (7), as evidenced by correlations of 0.97 and 0.98. These results indicate that knowledgeable leaders are also creative and adaptable.

Thus, Table 2 indicates that the agile attributes of a leader are closely related, which may suggest that the presence of one trait favors the presence of others. All attributes show a very high correlation with each other, which confirms the complexity and interplay of the characteristics of an agile organization leader.

Scientific research has shown that the agile attributes of an organizational leader are closely related, suggesting that these qualities complement and support each other. Leaders who are constantly looking for new ideas also show high creativity in action and a tendency to take advantage of opportunities. The high correlation between these traits indicates their synergistic effect, which is crucial for effective leadership in dynamically changing conditions.

2.6. Discussion

The analysis of the research allowed us to specify the attributes of a leader that are of key importance for achieving market success in agile organizations. Figure 1 illustrates these attributes in the context of their impact on effective team management and ultimately achieving success in the market. The identified characteristics, such as constant search for new ideas, taking advantage of opportunities, initiating new projects, creativity in action, speed in decision-making, willingness to take risks, quick adaptation to changing conditions and extensive knowledge, complement and support each other.

Figure 1 highlights that effective team and project management in a dynamic business environment is closely related to the presence and development of these attributes. The effectiveness of a leader in an agile organization depends on his or her ability to integrate these qualities into daily management practice. The high correlation between the individual attributes suggests that leaders who can effectively use these traits are better equipped to meet challenges and take advantage of emerging market opportunities.

The research has shown that initiating new projects is strongly associated with creativity and speed in decision-making. This suggests that leaders who are proactive and take new initiatives are also quick to act and make decisions. This speed is also linked to risk readiness, highlighting the importance of flexibility and adaptability in agile organizations. A willingness to take risks has a high correlation with rapid adaptation to changing conditions, indicating that leaders who are willing to take risks also have the ability to adapt quickly in the face of change. Leaders' broad knowledge is also closely linked to creativity and adaptability, which highlights the importance of comprehensive competencies in effective management.

The high mutual correlation of all the examined attributes of an agile organization leader confirms that these traits are crucial for effective leadership and management in a dynamic environment. The presence of one trait promotes the presence of others, suggesting that developing these traits can bring significant benefits to the organization. Research highlights the complexity and interplay of leader attributes, which is essential for understanding how to create and support effective leaders in agile organizations.

Based on the findings of the research conducted, it is recommended that agile organizations focus on developing the key attributes of their leaders. Above all, organizations should promote a culture of constant search for new ideas, fostering creativity and innovation in action. It is worth investing in training and development programs that emphasize developing the ability to take advantage of opportunities, which will allow leaders to more effectively manage change and adapt to a dynamically changing environment.
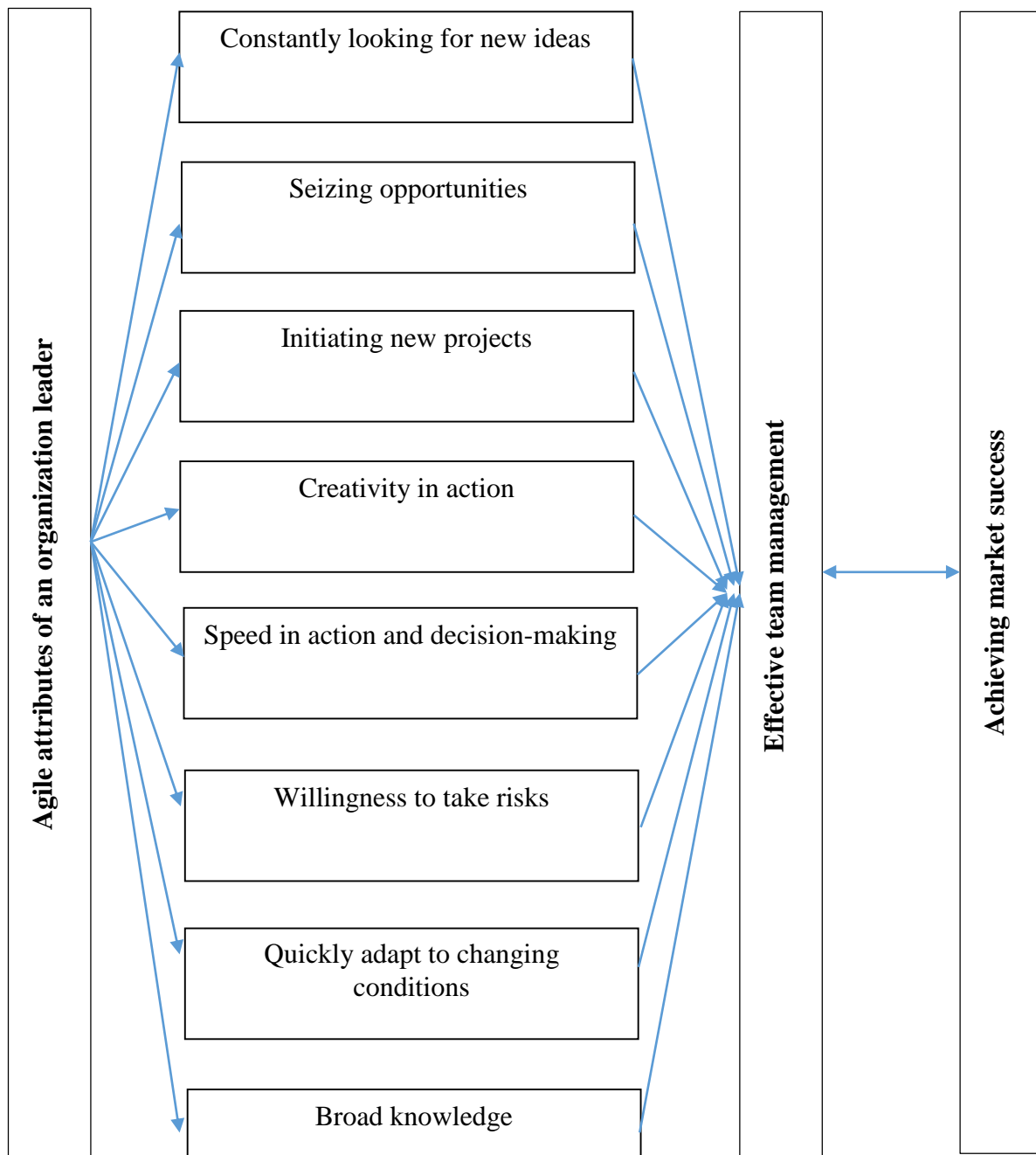
Figure 1. Agile attributes of an organizational leader and achieving market success.
Source: Own study.

It is also important to promote broad knowledge and continuous education of leaders so that they are able to adapt quickly to changing conditions. Organisations should provide access to a variety of sources of knowledge and encourage participation in training and industry conferences. Fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and exchange of experiences can further strengthen leaders' ability to solve problems creatively.

In summary, agile organizations should strive to create an environment that fosters the development and enhancement of key leadership attributes such as creativity, quick decision-making, risk appetite, and broad knowledge. Investing in these areas will benefit from more effective leadership and better adaptation to changing market conditions.

There were some limitations in the studies that could affect the results and their interpretation. First of all, the research was limited to one group of respondents, consisting of 632 people, which may not fully represent the population of leaders of agile organizations. In addition, the demographic structure of respondents, including their place of residence, professional activity, and type and year of study, may have influenced the perception and rating of a leader's attributes.

A methodology based on respondents' self-assessment can lead to subjective assessments that do not always reflect the actual characteristics of leaders. This effect could have been intensified by the lack of additional verification methods, such as in-depth interviews or observations in a professional context. Additionally, the focus on eight specific attributes may have limited the scope of the study, excluding other potentially relevant characteristics of leaders of agile organizations. The correlations between the studied traits, although high, do not provide a complete answer to the question of how these traits affect the success of the organization in different contexts.

3. Conclusions

The results of the research presented in this article should be compared with those of other researchers to gain a broader context and understanding of the attributes of leaders of agile organizations. Research by Rigby, Sutherland, and Takeuchi (2016) highlights the importance of adaptability and speed in decision-making as key characteristics of leaders in agile organizations. Their research has shown that organizations that adopt agile management methods perform better when leaders are able to respond quickly to changing market conditions. These results are consistent with the findings of this paper, where velocity of action and decision-making have also been identified as key attributes of leaders.

Denning's research (2018) also confirms the importance of creativity and innovation in agile organizations. Denning notes that leaders who promote a culture of innovation and are open to experimentation contribute to greater flexibility in the organization and better adaptation to market challenges. These results are consistent with the findings of this paper, in which creativity in action and the constant search for new ideas were recognized as key attributes of leaders.

Cappelli and Tavis (2018) in their research on agility in human resource management emphasize the importance of risk-taking readiness and the ability to quickly adapt to changing conditions. The authors point out that leaders who can make bold decisions and adapt quickly to new situations are more effective in running agile organizations. These results correlate with the results of this study, which also identify risk-taking readiness and rapid adaptation as important characteristics of leaders.

Davenport and Harris (2007) in their research on business analytics point to the importance of analytical skills as a key attribute of leaders of agile organizations. The ability to collect and analyze data allows leaders to make fact-based decisions, which increases management efficiency. These results are consistent with the findings of this paper, where analytical skills have also been identified as crucial for effective leadership.

Similarly, Goleman's (2000) research on emotional leadership points to the importance of interpersonal skills and building trust in a team. Goleman emphasizes that leaders who can communicate effectively with employees and promote an open organizational culture perform better. These results are consistent with the findings of this paper, in which the ability to collaborate and openness to feedback were identified as key attributes of leaders.

In conclusion, the research results presented in this article are consistent with the findings of other researchers, which confirms their credibility and importance for understanding the attributes of leaders of agile organizations. In the future, it is worth focusing on further developing and deepening the understanding of the attributes of leaders of agile organizations, especially in the context of dynamically changing market and technological conditions. It will be important to study how different leadership styles affect the effectiveness of agile teams in different industries. In addition, future research may focus on the relationship between leadership attributes and organizational innovation, including the mechanisms that foster the creation and implementation of new ideas.

An interesting direction of research may also be the analysis of the impact of organizational culture on the development and effectiveness of leaders of agile organizations. Understanding what elements of organizational culture support the development of key leadership attributes can help create a more conducive environment for agility in organizations. Additionally, research can focus on the role of digital technologies and analytics tools in supporting leaders of agile organizations, especially in the context of collecting and analyzing real-time data.

Another important aspect to study is the impact of agile leadership on an organization's long-term performance, including their ability to survive and adapt in the face of crises. Research may also include an analysis of how agile leadership affects employee satisfaction, talent retention, and career development. It's also worth exploring how different demographic and sociocultural backgrounds of leaders affect their ability to lead agile organizations, which can provide valuable insights into diversity in leadership.

Another future direction of research could be to analyze the effectiveness of various training and development programs that are designed to develop the key attributes of leaders of agile organizations. Understanding which training methods are most effective can help organizations better prepare leaders for agility challenges. In addition, research may focus on the role of mentoring and coaching in developing leadership capabilities and best practices in this area.

In conclusion, future research should seek a better understanding of the complexity and interrelationships between the different attributes of agile leaders and their impact on organizational effectiveness. This will enable the development of more comprehensive and effective management strategies that will contribute to increasing the agility and competitiveness of the organization in a dynamically changing business environment.

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