

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL**VILNIUS UNIVERSITY****(International Project Management)****ESTHER ADEFOLUKE OLUFUWA****MASTERS THESIS**

LYDERYSTĖ AGILE KOMANDOSE IR JOS POVEIKIS KOMANDOS VEIKLOS REZULTATAMS	LEADERSHIP IN AGILE TEAMS AND ITS IMPACT ON TEAM PERFORMANCE
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SUMMARY

The impact of servant leadership on team performance in Agile environment is investigated with leadership behaviours among which are empathy, active listening, and coaching. Agile working methods, Scrum and Kanban in particular, rely on key principles, including self-organisation, continuous improvement and flexibility, meaning that effective leadership is a key element for team success. The aim of the research is to discover whether servant leadership can improve on these principles in terms of encouraging collaboration, innovation, goal attainment, adaptability and team morale. Five Agile professionals from different industries were qualitatively approached using semi structured interviews. Both Agile team leaders and members were participants in order to give a broader outlook of the impact of servant leadership on team performance. The result reveals that servant leadership has a positive relation to team performance because it creates a psychologically safe environment. The results are that the atmosphere allows team members to feel valued and it encourages them to be active, to participate and to be creative. In particular, leadership behaviours like empathy and coaching proved effective in building collaborative environments leading to greater team success. This showed that servant leadership resulted in greater goal alignment and the possibility for teams to adapt to changing project demands while keeping morale high during challenging project cycles. It is concluded that servant leadership fits well with Agile principles, and provides a strong means to enhance team performance. Organisations using Agile methodology need to focus on developing their servant leadership for their teams to perform collaboratively, innovatively, and adaptively. Companies that invest in creating a collaborative and enabling leadership culture not only build better team dynamics but also better project outcomes.

Keywords:

Servant leadership, Agile teams, Team performance, Collaboration, Innovation, Goal attainment, Adaptability, Team morale, Scrum, Kanban, Leadership behaviours, Empathy, Active listening, Coaching, Psychological safety, Agile methodologies.

SANTRAUKA

Tarnaujančios lyderystės poveikis komandos veiklos rezultatams „Agile“ aplinkoje tiriamas pasitelkiant lyderio elgseną, tarp kurių yra empatija, aktyvus klausymasis ir koučingas. Judrūs darbo metodai, ypač „Scrum“ ir „Kanban“, grindžiami pagrindiniais principais, įskaitant saviorganizaciją, nuolatinį tobulinimą ir lankstumą, o tai reiškia, kad veiksmingas vadovavimas yra esminis komandos sėkmės elementas. Tyrimo tikslas - išsiaiškinti, ar tarnaujančioji lyderystė gali pagerinti šiuos principus skatinant bendradarbiavimą, inovacijas, tikslų siekimą, gebėjimą prisitaikyti ir komandos moralę. Naudojant pusiau struktūruotus interviu buvo kokybiškai apklausti penki judrūs skirtingų pramonės šakų specialistai. Pokalbyje dalyvavo ir Agile komandos vadovai, ir nariai, kad būtų galima plačiau pažvelgti į tarnaujančios lyderystės poveikį komandos veiklai. Rezultatai atskleidė, kad tarnaujančioji lyderystė turi teigiamą ryšį su komandos veiklos rezultatais, nes sukuria psichologiškai saugią aplinką. Rezultatai rodo, kad tokia atmosfera leidžia komandos nariams jaustis vertinamiems, skatina juos būti aktyvius, dalyvauti ir būti kūrybingus. Ypač toks vadovavimo elgesys, kaip empatija ir instruktavimas, pasirodė esąs veiksmingas kuriant bendradarbiavimo aplinką, lemiančią didesnę komandos sėkmę. Tai parodė, kad tarnaujančioji lyderystė lėmė didesnę tikslų suderinamumą ir galimybę komandoms prisitaikyti prie besikeičiančių projekto poreikių, išlaikant aukštą moralę sudėtingais projekto ciklais. Daroma išvada, kad tarnaujančioji lyderystė puikiai dera su „Agile“ principais ir yra stipri priemonė, padedanti pagerinti komandos veiklos rezultatus. Organizacijos, taikančios „Agile“ metodiką, turi sutelkti dėmesį į tarnaujančios lyderystės ugdymą, kad jų komandos galėtų dirbti bendradarbiaudamos, novatoriškai ir prisitaikydamos. Įmonės, investuojančios į bendradarbiaujančios ir įgalinančios lyderystės kultūros kūrimą, ne tik sukuria geresnę komandos dinamiką, bet ir geresnius projektų rezultatus.

Reikšminiai žodžiai:

Komanda, bendradarbiavimas, inovacijos, tikslų siekimas, prisitaikymas, komandos moralė, Scrum, Kanban, lyderio elgesys, empatija, aktyvus klausymasis, koučingas, psichologinis saugumas, Agile metodikos.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary leadership research has been focused on the rapid evolution of organisational structures and the increasing trend toward flexible, adaptive and collaborative work environments. Originally developed and used primarily in the software development industry, agile methodologies have started being adopted in most other industries to provide a strong solution to handle complex projects within a highly uncertain and dynamic world (Dikert, Paasivaara, & Lassenius, 2016). These tenets, such as iterative development, customer collaboration and enablement of self-organising teams, directly correlate with the servant leadership style which focuses on the needs of the team and the growth of the individual and the team more broadly (Denning, 2018). With this intersection of Agile methodologies with servant leadership, there is a fertile research ground to provide insights into how leadership styles can support team performance in Agile frameworks.

In several respects this research is novel because it proposes a less explored question, exploring the interplay of servant leadership and team performance within Agile frameworks of Scrum and Kanban. There is plenty of studies on servant leadership and Agile methodologies separately, but very few studies looking at their combined impact on team performance (Lindsjörn et al., 2016). Secondly, though, its application of existing research methods into a new area extends the research of servant leadership beyond traditional hierarchical organisational structures into the more dynamic Agile environments. Here, we can achieve a more sophisticated understanding of what leadership adaptation across new work paradigms looks like. Secondly, a mixed method approach – synthesis of scientific literature using systematic methods, expert evaluation and thematic analysis – is employed to provide originally derived, confirming, deepening or challenging data that expands on the present theories on the relationship between leadership and team performance in Agile settings.

This research is highly relevant because of the increasing widespread adoption of Agile methodologies in different industries such as software development, marketing and many more. Understanding how leadership styles like servant leadership can support organisations in becoming more adaptive and responsive to market changes is becoming more and more important as organisations look to become more adaptive and to respond to market changes. Addressing a large research gap in literature, this research aims to uncover how the kinds of behaviours manifested in

servant leadership like empathy, listening, and coaching can impact key team performance metrics of collaboration, innovation, productivity, and increase goal achievement, within Agile frameworks. In light of the rising complexity of projects and the necessity of more optimal leadership approach, this research offers critical insights on a relevant topic that is timely and useful for the discourse in the academia and the applications in the modern organisations.

This research seeks to solve the primary problem of the lack of clarity on the effect of servant leadership on team performance in Agile frameworks. Although servant leadership has been well researched in traditional organisational contexts, its transfer to, and empowerment in, Agile environments—such as fast-changing environments with iterative processes and where autonomy contributes to teams doing more—have not been extensively researched. Therefore, the subject matter of this research is the relationship between servant leadership behaviours and team performance in Agile frameworks, especially Scrum and Kanban.

To explore this relationship, the research will focus on the following key questions:

1. To what extent do servant leadership practices contribute to improved team collaboration in Agile environments?
2. How does servant leadership impact team innovation within the Scrum framework?
3. Is there a correlation between servant leadership behaviours and meeting project goals in Agile teams?
4. How do servant leadership practices influence the responsiveness and adaptability of Agile teams?
5. What are the effects of servant leadership on team morale and engagement in Agile settings?

The aim of this research is to uncover and analyse the effectiveness of servant leadership on performance, collaboration, innovation, and overall effectiveness of Agile Teams. This objective is in line with increasing interest for the determining leadership styles that can improve the responsiveness and adaptability of teams in dynamic and fast changing environments.

To achieve the stated objective, the following tasks have been set:

1. **Examine** the key characteristics of servant leadership and Agile methodologies, particularly Scrum and Kanban, to establish a theoretical foundation for the research.

2. **Systematise** existing research on the relationship between leadership styles and team performance, with a focus on servant leadership within Agile frameworks.
3. **Identify** the specific servant leadership behaviours that most significantly impact team performance metrics in Agile teams.
4. **Evaluate** the effectiveness of servant leadership in enhancing team collaboration, innovation, productivity, and goal achievement in Agile settings.
5. **Present** a comprehensive analysis of the contextual factors that may influence the relationship between servant leadership and team performance, such as team size, diversity, organisational culture, and industry type.

In this research, a mixed methods methodology is used to investigate the relationship between servant leadership and team performance in Agile environments. To this end, the primary methods used are: Systematic Analysis of Scientific Literature which consists of a thorough review of available literature on the topic of servant leadership, Agile methodologies, and team performance to build a theoretical framework, and identify key variables for our study; and Qualitative Research where expert evaluations and thematic analysis are used to collect practitioner and scholar perceptions of Agile frameworks and leadership.

The core of the research is divided into several key sections woven together to produce a complete analysis of the subject matter. It reviews literature on servant leadership and Agile methodologies, such as gaps and main attributes to investigate. The research design, data collection methods and analysis techniques, are elaborated upon in the methodology section. The results first consist of findings from empirical research, and a discussion follows that interprets the findings in the context of the research questions and objectives. At last, the conclusion synthesises the main insights, elaborates on the research limitations and proposes topics for further research.

Also, the research process was faced with several challenges. A major challenge had to do with the scarcity of empirical studies that explicitly treat the convergence of servant leadership and Agile methodology. While much research exists, most of it is focused on one aspect of this relationship, such as leadership style or the Agile team performance without considering this convergent factor. Because of this lack of comprehensive studies, it was difficult to make some direct comparisons and had to draw some conclusions about some research areas from other research areas. One limitation is that the qualitative data used, from this study and other studies, is

self-reported which can introduce bias. Expert evaluations and thematic analysis can certainly reveal interesting information, but they are inherently subjective and it isn't always possible to get a full picture of how servant leadership and team performance relate in Agile, which is where the psychological measures come in. Longitudinal studies are also challenged by the dynamic nature of Agile environments where projects are made from continuous iteration and continuous adaptation. Often times, team composition and the constantly changing project conditions make it difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the effects of servant leadership over time.

Scientifically, and practically, this research provides contributions. Scientifically, it fills the under-researched small area of servant leadership within the Agile frameworks. The study investigates how servant leadership behaviours influence the performance of teams in Agile settings, and provides new insights that can help guide future research and the development of more useful leadership theories for the modern, dynamic work environment. The practical implication of these findings for organisations that are either adopting or already practicing Agile methodologies is meaningful. This study provides insights that enable leaders to know how to better support and empower teams to generate better performance outcomes. More specifically, the research demonstrates the vital significance of empathy, listening, and coaching (servant leadership traits) in nurturing a team culture of collaboration and innovation that is fundamental for success within Agile environments.

The research results are practically applicable and they may provide the ability to help guide organisations that use Agile methodologies. The results from the study can help inform leadership development programs in terms of helping leaders grow the servant leadership behaviours that resonate the most in Agile settings. Furthermore, the research offers several important perspectives to team managers and project leaders on how they can improve team collaboration, innovation and overall performance. The use of a rigorous methodological approach provided a reliable research result. Systematic literature analysis combined with qualitative research guarantees systematic and comprehensive balanced examination of the research tasks. The study admits to the self-reported data challenges and restrictiveness of researching in the dynamic Agile environment.

1. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP IN AGILE TEAMS

1.1 Historical Evolution of Leadership Theory

Over the years, leadership theory has undergone great change, from the early models such as transactional leadership to more people-centred leadership like transformational and servant leadership. First conceptualised by Max Weber and later expanded by James MacGregor Burns, Transactional leadership is founded on a system of rewards and punishments. This model is emphasised by a leader-follower exchange, employees are motivated by external rewards and discipline, not intrinsic motivation. Transactional leadership may excel at keeping order and getting things done in the short run. Still, it relies heavily on control and hierarchical structures, whereas Agile teams are more characterised by fluidity, a form of self-organisation, and an interest in collaboration and innovation. The opposite is transformational leadership which, initiated by Burns, and later developed by Bernard Bass, attempts to convince the employees to work towards more than what is already expected of them and encourages them towards higher performance with the application of intrinsic motivators. Transformational leaders connect with their followers through emotionally charged relationships, and personal development, which resonates with Agile empowerment, continuous improvement, and working together as a team. Also, transformational leadership which fosters creativity and innovation is important for Agile teams in dynamic and high volatility and high complexity environments (Rigby et al., 2016).

The foundations have been built upon, servant leadership, formulated by Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s, moving from leading through authority to leading by service for others. They focus on building up the team members' growth and well-being and creating places that empower and value them. Therefore, this leadership style is similar to Agile frameworks, like Scrum and Kanban, that also insist on team autonomy, self-organisation, and team decision making (Nauman et al., 2021). Servant leadership complements the Agile ethos of people being at the centre of any process and through the emphasis on empathy, listening and coaching it is an ideal match with any modern-day, dynamically changing workplace that lives and thrives on being adaptable and innovative.

1.2 Agile Methodologies and Team Performance

Out in front are several core principles that underpin agile methodologies and are essential for operation in the world of modern business environments. The key fundamentals are flexibility, iteration, collaboration, and customer focus; all of which the teams need to function by so that they can respond to change and deliver quality products. Teams can use flexibility to adapt to anything that happens in evolving requirements and dynamically changing market conditions to make sure the final product can meet the changing needs of the customer. It's not only about changing scope but also changing the process and approaches based on feedback and learning, making teams resilient and responsive to uncertainty. The second is iteration, a cyclical process between planning (deciding what you want to do), executing (actually doing it), and reviewing (checking your work) in short cycles. These are often referred to as sprints in Scrum or iterations in others, and allow teams to deliver incrementally better products. Through iterative development, continuous progress is made thereby ensuring the continuous integration of feedback, refinement of the outputs, and little risk of losing control over complexity (Altbach & Knight, 2016). Another key tenet of Agile Methods, along with iteration, is collaboration. Agile methods require a commitment to teamwork and good communication. Active and integrated collaboration among team members, stakeholders, and customers, working together in a common understanding of project goals, promotes collective problem solving and more innovative, more effective design. These core principles are followed by customer focus, prioritising customer needs and expectations, and how the development process should fit in with the delivery of value to the end user. Agile teams check in customer feedback into each iteration, hence able to alter their work continuously to meet customer demand hence improving satisfaction and loyalty (Sharma & Mullick, 2021). However, these principles are manifested differently throughout different Agile frameworks that have been built to respond to different project needs and contexts.

Of all these frameworks, Scrum is one of the most popular, and it is characterised by the way of the structure of work management. Scrum breaks work into fixed length iterations called sprints that last between 2 – 4 weeks. Teams within a single sprint have the objective of finishing a specified set of deliverables. Important players with Scrum include the Product Owner who prioritises work, the Scrum Master who facilitates the process, and the Development Team who performs the work. It also contains several ceremonies such as sprint planning, daily stand-ups, sprint review, and retrospectives that keep the focus, monitor the progress, and support continuous

improvement (Sharma & Mullick, 2021). On the flip side, Kanban views work to be visualised and worked out. It represents tasks through its stages, from inception to completion, using a Kanban board. The visual aspect of this helps teams discover the bottlenecks or inefficiencies in their process and opportunities for continuous improvement. Unlike Scrum, Kanban does not impose fixed iterations and delivers work just in time at this point based on capacity and demand. Because of this flexibility, Kanban is suitable for both environments with varying priorities and also unpredictable workflow (Fragouli, 2020). Another Agile framework, Extreme Programming (XP), stresses agile responsiveness and technical excellence, especially for software development. They offer the practice of better quality code, collaboration, and changeability to satisfy the customer requirements rapidly. Technical practices and frequent delivery cycles have enabled XP teams to keep high standards of quality and at the same time to remain responsive to feedback (Marginson, 2016).

Organisation performance and competitiveness are enhanced by Agile methodologies. Increased adaptability is one of the greatest benefits of Agile methodologies. This is possible because Agile projects use an iterative approach and continuous feedback mechanisms which allow a team to quickly modify to changing requirements and business conditions (Szadkowski, 2018). Another important advantage of Agile is improved product quality. Continuous integration, automated testing, and frequent reviews are some ways of agile practice where a team constantly fixes the defects at the early development stage. Because of the proactive aspects of this approach to quality management, products of higher quality that better reflect customer expectations are produced. Agile methodologies also promote an environment of continuous improvement – teams work on refining their processes and their outputs to better deliver. Agile also makes the products be delivered faster. Agile is iterative, which means the team can deliver functional increments of the product frequently and in a short time to give early and continuous value to the customers. However, this frequent delivery is also a positive feature due to its capacity to accelerate the realisation of benefits and the ability to collect customer feedback more frequently for further refinements of the product to meet market needs better (Achike et al., 2022). Agile methodologies specifically focus on team performance enhancing Collaboration, Innovation, and much more Productivity. An agile framework creates an environment where the team members, stakeholders, and customers work closely together to collaborate and help communicate and align outcomes towards common goals and to take advantage of multiple perspectives to unblock the system in

more effective ways. The focus for Agile environments is on flexibility and continuous improvement, which is why these environments are great for innovation. Teams must experiment, take risks, and learn from them inside agile practices. The idea of iterative development also allows for the team to adapt and innovate quickly to provide a better and more creative and effective solution. Agile methodologies push productivity because they allow work to be done in increments and with progress that can continue unimpeded. Small, functional pieces of work are delivered – not big, complex deliveries at a later date – and this focus on small pieces allows teams to stay productive and motivated, and avoid burnout that is typically incurred with traditional project management approaches.

1.3 Servant Leadership: A Foundation for Agile Teams

Servant leadership is where one's leadership philosophy is set to serve others. In contrast to this, traditional leadership has entailed the acquisition and use of power by one at the 'top of the pyramid.' Servant leadership is the type of leadership where a leader focuses on the development and well-being of his or her team members and their community. Empathy, service orientation along with empowerment are important core attributes in this model to help support the forming of dynamic and effective Agile teams. A cornerstone of servant leadership is called empathy. It means being compassionate and supportive and having an understanding and sharing of each other's feelings at work. Empathetic leaders are highly vocal and attentive in listening to their team members, and they give their team members the emotional support they want and need to succeed. However, this practice fosters trust and pipelining to discuss feedback openly, which is incredibly important in Agile teams with real-time collaboration and rapid feedback cycles. Greenleaf (1970) believes that leaders having empathy will understand the perspectives of their team members, and thus make more effective and humane decision making.

Another basic characteristic of servant leadership is that it is service-oriented. A servant leader keeps the wants of his team members before him and is devoted to the development of his team members, professionally and personally. This style of leadership is completely different from those that are based on a traditional leadership style where organisational goals are considered greater than individual issues. Servant leaders nurture their team members by putting them first, thus cultivating engagement and loyalty to the organisation, high performance and overall creating a winning environment. Servant leaders in particular, as Spears (1998) points out, go beyond

serving themselves; rather, they try to serve others and look to create mutual respect. Servant leadership is in question, too. Empowered leaders allow their team members to share in the power, take ownership of their work, and make decisions independently. It enables a feeling of autonomy and responsibility which in turn provides motivation and job satisfaction. According to Liden et al. (2008), empowerment is critical in an Agile team, as the team member must frequently make fast decisions and cope with fast-changing situations. Servant leaders can enable creativity, innovation, and therefore better outcomes for the organisation simply by empowering their teams. The other core characteristics of servant leadership are humility, stewardship and a commitment to the growth of people. Humility means accepting oneself for what one is as opposed to what you should be, acknowledging the limits of oneself, and therefore valuing the contributions of others. This trait makes the business more collaborative, and all members of the team feel that they are each part of the team and are valued and respected. The leader is responsible for resources and the collective good. Stewardship is about the management of those resources. Servant leaders consider themselves stewards of their organisation and apply their efforts to leave the organisation better off than before they arrived. Commitment to the growth of people means investing in the talent of team members and in their development giving them the necessary skills and adequate resources to be successful.

Servant leadership also fits very nicely into the world of Agile teams. Servant leadership is the emphasis in the Agile methodologies, with collaboration, continuous improvement and emphasis on customer focus, values supported by the servant leadership. For example, servant leaders facilitate Agile practices by prioritising team cohesion and good communication. Servant leaders develop a love of learning and personal growth thereby supporting the focus on continuous improvement. Servant leaders help customers by looking for high-quality products to supply customers' needs (Fragouli, 2020). The results of research suggest that servant leadership influences positively on employee outcomes (motivation, satisfaction, engagement, and many other factors). Liden et al., (2008) state that servant leadership leads to enhanced employees' intrinsic motivation through the creation of a supportive and empowering working environment. Agile teams succeed based on the levels of job satisfaction and engagement and this increased motivation drives the two up. What's more, servant leadership has been associated with enhanced team results, as well as organisational effectiveness. Servant leaders prioritise the needs of their

team members and create a positive work culture thereby their leaders can drill down to better performance and outcomes (Sharma & Mullick, 2021).

1.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Servant Leadership

The leadership philosophy of servant leadership has been expressed through many theoretical frameworks. There are two well-known theories about servant leadership providing a bundled explanation: Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory and Spears' Ten Characteristics of Servant Leadership. Both approaches are enlightening on what servant leadership is and how it works for individuals and organisations.

1.4.1 Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory

The Servant Leadership Theory introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf through his 1970 essay entitled 'The Servant as Leader', emphasised service over power to redefine traditional leadership. He (Greenleaf) instead maintained that real leaders ought to be serving others, especially their team members. The principle of this approach consists in delivering a caring environment where people feel encouraged and appreciated, thus highlighting an important distinction with old leadership models characterised by the use and inversion of power. Greenleaf's theory is based on a key principle of service first. Servant leaders are different from conventional leaders who rather tend to prioritise organisational goals instead. It encourages the team members' development and well-being. For instance, in a corporate environment, a servant leader will concentrate on his team's professional growth and work/life in balance, as opposed to thrusting financial performance. For him, being a good leader comes from serving the team in which organisational success will come naturally.

Greenleaf's theory also includes listening and empathy. Servant leaders listen to their team members and work to understand their concerns, challenges, and what they need. However, this approach sets a culture of respect and trust. For example, a servant leader might devote time to having regular one-on-one meetings with employees and would create space to address their concerns, encouraging open communication. He also stressed stewardship — leaders who see themselves as caretakers of the organisation and the community. Their job is one of managing resources well and seeing that their actions are also for the good of the whole. We can even see this applied to the personal growth of team members as servant leaders encourage and steer team

members to fulfil their full potential. By practicing servant leadership, a positive, empowering culture that is oriented around the well-being and development of people, is created.

Both Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory and Agile teams, Agile frameworks, and team performance, align closely because they emphasise collaboration, empowerment, and the well-being of the people involved. As it is, team members in Agile frameworks such as Scrum and Kanban are given the freedom to make their own decisions using Greenleaf's idea of empowering individuals (Denning, 2018). Self-organising agile teams don't follow the lead of the same old 'command and control' model of leadership. It's more of guiding and serving the team to deliver group success. On the other hand, the role of a servant leader is to support and nurture team members to fulfil their potential (Dikert, Paasivaara, & Lassenius, 2016), which coincides with the idea stated above. Servant leadership provides a good foundation for team performance by creating an atmosphere of trust and empathy and using active listening, all of these being core to both servant leadership and Agile. Agile teams work iteratively, for example, and must continuously receive feedback and adapt. This is also true because a servant leader's emphasis on listening significantly supports this process by making sure that every team's input is valued and is being incorporated into the teamwork, hence giving the team more collaboration and innovativeness (Lindsjörn et al., 2016). The collaborative nature of such an approach makes Agile teams more responsive to changes, which is a prerequisite to the achievement of excellence in dynamic environments. Additionally, any Agile framework makes working together in a team as central as Greenleaf's Servant Leadership theory. Servant leading is for supporting a continuous improvement mind-set as it pushes team members to reflect on how they have done and learn from experience. It's also helpful for teams to increase their productivity and fulfil their goals over time. Consequently, the servant leader's concentration on growth, stewardship, and service serves as a natural complement to Agile principles, which allows for high-performing teams that thrive in the changes in project need (Denning, 2018).

1.4.2 Spears' Ten Characteristics of Servant Leadership

Upon further developing Greenleaf's work, in his book, entitled "Insights on Leadership" (1998), Larry C. Spears then identified and elaborated on the ten main components of the concept of servant leadership. These are then coupled with a detailed framework of description that will aid in the understanding of the eminent characteristics of servant leaders, and the implication of

servanthood/leadership, particularly in the development of efficient leaders. **Listening** is at the heart of Spears' framework, as leaders need to listen to what team members need and are concerned about, to enable areas of openness and trust. Next is **empathy**, where leaders attempt to link with the emotions and the experiences of their followers. They create a work environment that is supportive and caring for the follower. Additionally, **healing** is considered, describing how leaders contribute to curing the emotional and psychological wounds of team members while creating an emotional balance and fortifying resilience. **Awareness** is another critical element, where servant leaders are highly likely to be self-aware of themselves and the situation. That awareness helps them to make informed, empathetic decisions. This is complemented by **persuasion** which is utilising influence instead of authority to build consensus and encourage collaboration. A good servant leader convinces their team with compelling arguments and mutual respect to lead them well.

Spears also talks about **conceptualisation**, that to lead well, you should be able to think outside day today and also visualise long term and how it excites the team, dream within them, and give them a vision for a better future. **Foresight**, the forward-thinking of leaders who anticipate tomorrow's challenges and opportunities and make well-considered decisions in light of their insights, supports this way of thinking. **Stewardship** is an important characteristic reflected in Greenleaf's concept and incorporated in the definition of leadership put forward by Spears where leaders manage resources in such a manner as to promote the best for the organisation and community. It also emphasises the commitment to the growth of people, as servant leaders commit to the development of their people's personal and professional development. So it is vitally important that we don't fall short when it comes to helping others to achieve their full potential. Finally, it is important to emphasise the aspect of building community, as servant leaders contribute to creating the community and collaboration as well as an inclusive and supportive environment of the team, which corresponds to the principles of servant leadership.

It is important to see how these attributes complement the dynamics of the Agile environments to connect Spears' 10 Characteristics of Servant Leader within Agile teams and frameworks. Agile teams, where open communication, trust, and collaboration are key to success (Denning, 2018), emphasise listening and empathy perfectly in alignment with Spears. Placing a high value on self-organising teams, Scrum and Kanban for example, require leaders who will

listen to team members' concerns, and empathise with their struggles, building trust that benefits the team and its work. The idea of healing (where healing means developing emotional well-being) is very helpful in Agile, which is not rare for its fast pace and stress-inducing due to the iterative way of developing a project. So, servant leaders try to address the emotional and psychological needs of a team and can keep the motivation and resilience of the Agile team members. This focus on well-being facilitates teams to adapt and be agile in the presence of change (Lindsjörn et al, 2016). Conceptualisation and foresight are viably aligned with the long-term vision and flexibility implicit in Agile environments. Servant leaders empower teams to think beyond second and third tasks, to align to the larger project goals. Agile frameworks, where flexibility and responsiveness to change are vital, need this forward-looking approach. Furthermore, stewardship in Agile teams is also responsible for responsibly handling resources to bring the highest value to customers, consistent with Agile principles of collaboration with customers and carrying out work for the sake of value. Continuous learning and skills development are important in Agile teams always aiming to maintain high performance and innovation (Dikert et al., 2016), a principle which can only be met if the leaders of the agile teams are committed to the growth of their team members. Servant leaders create a community-oriented mind-set that facilitates collaboration and allows teams working in Agile frameworks to become more productive, creative, and to achieve more goals.

Table 1.1: Key Aspects of Servant Leadership: Greenleaf vs. Spears

	Greenleaf's Theory	Spears' Theory
Core Concept	Servant leaders prioritise serving others, focusing on their needs and development.	Servant leaders serve their followers and help them grow, emphasising key characteristics.
Key Characteristics	<p>Empathy</p> <p>Listening</p> <p>Healing</p> <p>Awareness</p>	<p>Listening</p> <p>Empathy</p> <p>Healing</p> <p>Awareness</p>

	Persuasion Conceptualisation Foresight Stewardship Commitment to the growth of people Building community.	Persuasion Conceptualisation Foresight Stewardship Commitment to the growth of people Building community.
Theoretical Basis	Emphasis on leaders being servants first and leaders second (Greenleaf, 1970).	Identification of ten characteristics essential for effective servant leadership (Spears, 2004).
Focus	Development and empowerment of followers.	Characteristics that servant leaders must embody.
Practical Outcomes	Increased employee motivation, job satisfaction, and organisational performance.	Enhanced employee engagement, satisfaction, and organisational performance.
Application in Agile Environments	Effective for Agile teams due to the focus on empowerment, collaboration, and adaptability.	Applicable across various organisational contexts, including Agile teams, due to the emphasis on empathy, growth, and community.

1.5 Research Questions Explored Through Existing Studies

RQ1: To what extent do servant leadership practices contribute to improved team collaboration in Agile environments?

The results of servant leadership practices have been evidenced to enhance team collaboration across a range of organisational settings including Agile environments. Key servant leadership traits, including active listening, empathy and coaching, lead to an open communication

culture and a high level of trust that are the key enablers of success in collaborative working environments (Lindsj rn et al., 2016). Servant leadership promotes inclusivity and makes sure that each team member is heard and valued so that teams work in cohesion. It works exceptionally well in Agile frameworks such as Scrum and Kanban, which are very reliant on constructive collaboration to promote self-organisation and adaptability (Nauman et al., 2021). Servant leadership fits well in an Agile context, where processes are iterative and where there are lots of communication cycles. Empathy and listening can help Agile teams practice empathy and listening in communication, and collaboration can help the team rise above issues proactively and collaboratively (Modi and Strode, 2020). This further enables the servant leader to concurrently create a culture of psychological safety which empowers team members to be more open in discussions, enabling increased collaboration.

Nevertheless, evidence of servant leadership contributing to team dynamics other than in traditional contexts is abundant, but there is a dearth of research focused on the application of servant leadership within Agile frameworks. While servant leadership has shown benefits in general organisational settings, the unique demands of collaboration in Agile methodologies like Scrum (i.e., rapid, decentralised decision-making, task fluidity), have received little direct examination in terms of how servant leadership influences these demands (Dikert et al., 2016). This study addresses this gap. These aims seek to expand the established understanding of servant leadership to exercise its consistent impact on improving collaboration in Agile teams, which are characterized by frequent interactions and continuous adaptation to progress.

RQ2: How does servant leadership impact team innovation within the Scrum framework?

Innovation in the context of servant leadership creates creativity and autonomy in different organisational settings. In Agile environments especially in the context of Scrum framework, they fit well with the iterative and problem-seeking nature of team dynamics (Modi & Strode, 2020). Servant leaders help create an environment for their team members to take risks, play, and think beyond the box, which is necessary to prompt innovation. Being an agile environment where fairly frequent reassessments of tasks take place makes Scrum teams a perfect context for using servant leadership to boost innovation by allowing teams to try out new approaches without being afraid to fail (Nauman et al., 2021). Listening and empathy are a focus of servant leadership and allow

one to recognise and use the strength and creative ideas of team members. The Scrum understanding helps generate diverse and novel solutions, which is also central to Scrum, in that problem-solving and continuous improvement are essential for the teams' success (Ren & Shen, 2024). Servant leadership improves a team's ability to innovate by creating a culture of trust and collaboration. In Scrum, the teams operate in short iterative cycles, innovation is not only encouraged but required because the teams need to adapt to the changing project demands and the product development process needs refinement.

However, research concerning the exact effects of servant leadership related to innovation in the framework of Scrum in practice remains unknown. While much of the existing literature about leadership styles about innovation is at a general level, little focus exists on how servant leadership especially impacts innovation in the structured yet flexible environment of Scrum. Scrum is a high-paced, iterative methodology, which has yet to be fully explored as to how that might interact uniquely with servant leadership practices. To fill in these gaps, this study investigates how the servant leadership approach affects innovation and how it affects Scrum teams, providing added knowledge about the role that leadership plays in instigating innovation for Agile development environments.

RQ3: Is there a correlation between servant leadership behaviours and meeting project goals in Agile teams?

Specifically, servant leadership has been known to positively correlate with project success and goal achievement in different organisational settings, but its potential and application in Agile environments are under-explored. Active listening, empathy and empowerment are crucial behaviours to build a collaborative atmosphere where teams can align with project objectives (Nauman et al., 2021). We see how servant leaders are vital in Agile frameworks like Scrum and Kanban because project goals are frequently revisited and amended so that every team member stays focused on common aims. Open communication between team members helps them keep agility while being brought in sync with moving goals (Modi & Strode, 2020). Additionally, servant leadership places a huge emphasis on empowering team members to take greater ownership of the project outcomes. Agile teams are especially fond of this because they need to be agile and self-organise to meet their project goals. Servant leaders create teams that feel supported to take it upon themselves to create proactive steps to ensure project success. The work

of servant leaders serves to create an environment in which team members are encouraged to take on their responsibility for roles in achieving project milestone outcomes in such a way that leads to better performance and greater goal attainment (Lindsjörn et al., 2016).

Despite this, there is a large research gap concerning the connection between servant leadership behaviours and project goal achievement, specifically in the context of Agile frameworks. Studies have described leadership styles that lead to project success, but few have concentrated exclusively on how servant leadership, with its emphasis on service and support, affects project goal attainment among Agile teams. Agile is iterative, which makes it flexible, and this poses challenges for leadership that differ from conventional project management; further studies are justified, and how servant leaders can drive goal alignment and adaptability in Agile teams (Nauman et al, 2021). This work aims to fill these gaps by investigating the impact of servant leadership on achieving goals in Agile environments.

RQ4: How do servant leadership practices influence the responsiveness and adaptability of Agile teams?

Agile methodologies strive to respond immediately and adapt immediately to any changing requirement and unanticipated challenge. However, the role of servant leadership in developing these qualities is not well explored. With this focus on serving team needs and empowering individuals, servant leadership may be a powerful tool in a team's ability to adapt. Through its promotion of a supportive setting, servant leaders empower staff to have a good feeling in making flexible choices and speedy modifications, which are significant conditions of Agile frameworks (Nauman et al., 2021). Servant leadership research has revealed that it is related to positive team dynamics, which mirror those inherent in the Agile process: higher empowerment and autonomy, for example. Agile teams, in frameworks such as Scrum or Kanban, have to be self-organized and be able to adapt to changes in real-time. For example, Modi & Strode 2020 explain how servant leadership enables teams and results in better adaptability and response to changing project requirements. Even then, however, little research has been performed specifically focused on how servant leadership influences immediate responsiveness and adaptability in Agile environments.

Where current literature falls short is the failure to concentrate on the effect of servant leadership on these Agile principles. Despite much evidence of the impact of servant leadership on long-term outcomes such as team cohesion and innovation (Lindsjörn et al., 2016), how servant

leadership helps to create responsiveness and adaptability in dynamic Agile settings remains understudied. This work attempts to bridge this gap by investigating the relationship between how;

- i. empowering team members and
- ii. fostering a service-oriented culture as these mean being more responsive and adaptable as Agile teams.

This research offers insights that could enable organisations to refine leadership approaches for Agile teams, resulting in improvements to their performance within fast-changing and continuous project environments.

RQ5: What are the effects of servant leadership on team morale and engagement in Agile settings?

In recent times servant leadership has been recognised to have a positive influence on team morale and engagement in different organisational contexts such as the Agile environment. Therefore, servant leaders put the well-being and development of team members at the core of the leader's work, through this, they build a culture that is founded on trust, respect and empowering of members which in turn drives morale and active involvement. Nauman et al (2021) have conducted studies and shown that servant leadership is connected to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover, as individuals feel worth and support. Because Agile is about self-organising and collaborative teams, servant leadership is about empowering individuals to work in the context of high engagement and morale (Denning, 2018). If you have an agile team, keep in mind that they involve continuous collaboration and communication; servant leaders need to listen and empathise so they can build an environment they can share their ideas and concerns without being nervous about it. Psychological safety to this level is needed for maintaining high morale and engagement in Agile, especially in those that are dynamically progressing with iterative feedback like Scrum (Modi & Strode, 2020).

While research has shown a strong relationship between servant leadership and positive workplace outcomes, there is a major lack of empirical evidence examining any correlation between servant leadership and morale and engagement in Agile teams. Existing research has explored the broader effects of leadership styles on team performance and team engagement but

provides little holistic understanding of the unique environment of Agile teams, whose structure and workflow vary considerably from traditional dynamics (Gren et al., 2015). Exploring how specifically servant leadership impacts team morale and engagement in Agile settings is the aim of this research to fill a gap towards understanding how leadership styles might be fit to better performance in these dynamic frameworks.

1.6 Servant Leadership in Agile Environments

Because of the special challenges of leading Agile teams, one needs a different leadership approach. Agile methodologies strongly push for self-organisation, building things in a short development cycle and being able to rapidly respond to changes in priorities. While traditional hierarchical teams rely on leaders to control their work, in Agile teams autonomy and responsibility for the work are traits that necessitate the leaders shed the mantle of control and do more of facilitating and supporting the team. For leaders used to traditional top-down management styles, making this shift can be quite a challenge, as they learn to, with trust, give their teams the required resources and support to do their best (Achike et al, 2022). The biggest problem with self-organisation is fostering it in an Agile environment. They are self-managing, with no one person managing them, and team members are responsible for doing the planning, doing the work, and delivering the work. This demands the tight collaboration and communication of the team members, which is not so simple if there is no strong leadership. In Agile environments, leaders have to foster an environment of empowerment where team members are enabled to make decisions and run with things. It is to set clear goals and boundaries with the teams but give the members the liberty to choose how they can complete their work (Sharma & Mullick, 2021). Another hallmark of Agile methodologies is short development cycles, sprints. Teams work intensively on specific tasks in a limited amount of time, and under much defined timelines, even under tight deadlines. Unfortunately, this can create a high-pressure busyness where the risk of burnout is high. Hence the leaders must be good enough at controlling stress and boosting the team's morale so that team members stay motivated and engage with the latest sprint. Consequently, this means holding regular check-ins, giving constructive feedback, and noticing and celebrating achievements to maintain high levels of motivation and productivity (Altbach & Knight, 2016). In Agile projects, it's common that changing priorities happen – teams need to be reactive to changing customer needs and market conditions. This means being able to quickly adapt to new information and new directions, all with a flexible leadership style that is not stubborn

or defined by one way of thinking. First, leaders need to be adept at leading change, assisting their team with traversing through these transitions, and helping to keep the proverbial eye on the ball of project objectives. This includes efficient communication, defining clear expectations, and creating a continuous improvement culture (Fragouli, 2020).

The evidence on the effect of servant leadership on the key performance metrics of the Agile teams is supported by empirical evidence. Researchers have found that empathy, active listening and coaching, all of which are grunt features of highly productive servant leadership behaviours, impact innovation, productivity, and team satisfaction the most. To illustrate, Nauman et al (2021) observed that groups that were popular under servant leadership showed high rates of collaboration that eventually spoke to higher productivity. In Agile environments where teams are asked to work more closely together and to adapt fast to changes, servant leadership's stress on building trust and open communication will strengthen teamwork and improve efficiency. Servant leadership has had a very pronounced effect in one key area—promoting innovation in teams. Also, the research conducted by Rigby et al. (2016) argued that servant leaders who promote psychological safety, enable team members to take risks, and experiment by introducing new ideas, without fear of failure. It is this openness that is critical to Agile frameworks such as Scrum which centre themselves on continuous improvement and iterative design. When under a servant leader, people found that teams enjoyed greater innovative solutions during sprints because servant leaders created an environment where it was allowed to promote creativity and support. With the fear of negative repercussions decreased and risk tolerance increased, servant leaders encourage teams to adopt new styles of problem-solving from which more innovative outcomes can be achieved. Furthermore, empirical connections have been made between servant leadership, increased job satisfaction and decreased turnover. In the recent work of Neubert et al., (2022) it was exhibited that servant leaders who prioritise developing their team members both personally and professionally promote higher levels of employee engagement and motivation. In Agile settings such as this, high-pressure environments can sometimes contribute to burnout. Offering continuous coaching and emotional support, servant leaders serve to alleviate the stress inherent in rapid project cycles so teams maintain high morale and can stay focused on long-term goals.

Servant leadership fits closely within the heart of Agile values and can work exceptionally well in Agile environments. Within the servant leadership philosophy, as defined by Robert

Greenleaf, serving others, growing and well-being of the team members, and creating a community and common purpose come into play. They connect with the Agile tenets of collaboration, flexibility, and enablement. For instance, a servant leader will direct their sights on empowering his team members, by giving them the support and resources they need to succeed, as well as creating a workplace in which each employee feels valued and motivated to contribute (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leadership, by its focus on collaboration, is also a means of supporting Agile principles. Servant leaders work to foster unity within a team, offering the understanding that the teamwork involved will create much more than the individual effort would. Such organisations cultivate an environment that fosters the encouragement of diverse thoughts and feedback and allows open communication. Together, these collaborative efforts enable Agile teams to tap into expertise and creativity as a team and thus come up with more innovative solutions and work towards better solutions (Szadkowski, 2018). Another aspect of servant leadership and an Agile methodology: is flexibility. Servant leaders must be able to adapt to ever-changing circumstances quickly, be flexible in their approach, and respond based on the needs of their team members. Attuned to the dynamics of the team and the project context roundly, they adjust what needs to be adjusted to keep the team focused and productive. This can involve rerouting resources, changing timelines, or making more training and support available for team members to get around difficulties (Spears, 2010). The core of servant leadership is empowerment and it is a key enabler of Agile team success. Servant leaders focus on the personal and professional growth of their team members and offer opportunities for growth as well as encourage the employees to take ownership of the work being done. This empowers the team members with a sense of accountability and it keeps them committed to the success of the project. Servant leadership helps to build a culture of trust and mutual respect, an important ingredient for effective collaboration and innovation (Liden et al., 2008), by empowering their teams.

Other leadership styles than servant leadership have been explored in the context of Agile environments. For instance, transformational leadership concentrates on inspiring and motivating team members to reach their greatest possible potential and to outperform their performance objectives. Visionary, charismatic, and able to provoke a strong sense of purpose and commitment in their teams; transformational leaders fulfil all these qualities. This style can be very effective in driving high performance and innovation, but it does not necessarily align as closely with the collaborative and egalitarian ethos of Agile methodologies (Marginson, 2016). Another popular

Agile environment model is shared leadership. This one would share leadership responsibilities across the team, so that at different times different people lead the team, depending on their expertise and where the project is in its life cycle. In addition, shared leadership enhances collective ownership and accountability of making decisions in a manner that is more democratic and inclusive, which is not present in the leadership hierarchy. As such, it requires high maturity and self-discipline of team members to be effective and a thick foundation of trust and communication (Sharma & Mullick, 2021). Although transformational and shared leadership may offer certain benefits, servant leadership fits Agile environments even more due to its affinity to Agile values and principles. Agile teams do well behind servant leadership's outlined dependence on flexibility, collaboration and empowerment. Servant leaders foster an environment where their team members can feel motivated, supported, and able to produce their optimal work, all by prioritising the growth and well-being of their team members. By doing this, you increase team performance, enhance innovation, and help make Agile projects successful (Szadkowski, 2018).

1.7 Servant Leadership and Team Performance in Agile Frameworks

Servant leadership relationship to team performance in Agile frameworks has recently been subject to much research. Existing studies explore several factors, primarily examining servant leadership behaviours, like empathy, listening, and coaching; team performance measures, like collaboration, innovation, productivity and goal achievement; and specific Agile frameworks, like Scrum and Kanban, which can potentially act as moderators of these relationships. Behaviours of Servant leadership are inherent in the philosophy of servant leadership and play a vital role in Agile environments. Having the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes (or empathize) is key to having a team that works together and is inclusive. Active listening, a core behaviour of a servant leader, embodies the goal of seeking and having an open mind for what team members have to offer, and what they have to say. What it means is coaching, which is meant to help develop the personal and professional side of a team member's life, in terms of building their skills and their confidence. These behaviours develop conditions of trust and respect, conditions that are crucial to the effectiveness of collaboration and high team morale (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 2010).

Agile frameworks measure team performance from a multiplicity of perspectives including collaboration, innovation, productivity, and goal achievement. Team members working together toward common goals is collaboration. Innovation consists of generating and implementing new

ideas and solutions. Productivity tells us how efficient and how much output the team can deliver, while achievement of goals tells us how much the team was able to achieve relative to the set goals. These performance measures are vital indicators of Agile teams' success and effectiveness and are affected by the type of leadership affected by the team leader (Altbach & Knight, 2016). Scrum and Kanban frameworks are agile frameworks that help us structure how we execute projects and manage them. Scrum uses time-boxed iterations called sprints, cross-functional teams and their roles, Scrum Master, and Product Owner. However, Kanban visualises work, limits work in progress and manages flow. These frameworks stress flexibility, continuous improvement and responsiveness to change. An Agile framework itself can mediate the relationship between servant leadership and team performance, as a framework can shape the team's process and practices (Fragouli, 2020).

Servant leadership and team performance in the frameworks of Agile have been investigated in many studies. According to research, servant leadership promotes an atmosphere of trust and open communication contributing to a positive team collaboration. For example, leaders who maintain active listening and empathy are more likely to create a psychologically safe environment for their team members to feel safe to open up and share their ideas and concerns. In return, it helps with collaboration, and teamwork, which are key factors of successful Agile projects (Sharma and Mullick, 2021). Servant leadership can also make a great impact on ongoing innovation. Servant leaders who use coaching and empowering their team members for continuous learning and experimentation create a learning culture. It is an environment that furthers the Agile principle of welcoming change and constantly seeking the best way to solve a complex problem. Individuals within teams that are managed by servant leaders are more prone (than those led by other types of leaders) to engage in creative problem-solving and to create new products and processes that build the organisation's success (Spears, 2010). Servant leadership behaviours also impact productivity and goal achievement. Good servant leaders who look after their team and help them grow will motivate and engage more. With a team of motivated and engaged members, there is a greater chance of having them being productive and accomplishing their goals. Furthermore, servant leadership is supportive and empowering and eliminates bottlenecks to the provision of resources for the team being led to deliver at their best. It is subsequently consistent with the principles of Agile, in that it focuses on the delivery of value to the customer as analysis and design are divided into short iterations and delivered in small increments (Liden et al., 2008).

The effects of servant leadership on team performance can be moderated by the specific Agile framework adapted by a team. For example, in Scrum, the role of the Scrum Master fits naturally with the principles of servant leadership. As a servant leader, the Scrum Master helps the team through its processes, clears impediments, and helps the team be successful in its goals. It can reinforce the positive effect of servant leadership on team performance. Likewise, servant leadership behaviours aimed at promoting collaboration and empowerment and providing an emphasis on continuous improvement and managing flow are tolerable and, in fact, beneficial to the balance of Kanban principles (Szadkowski, 2018).

1.8 Servant Leadership and Improved Team Collaboration in Agile Environments

In Agile environment, team collaboration is essential, and it is a must to choose a highly effective leadership style like servant leadership. The fundamental tenets of servant leadership are a mirror image of the principles of Agile methodologies and ultimately lead to the creation of a good team environment that provides better collective and individual performance. Aligning around this is crucial for working through the complexity and constantly moving nature that is inherent in Agile projects that necessitate high amounts of coordination and support for one another on the team. The base concept for servant leadership is leading with empathy, active listening, and enabling others in their development to meet the needs of the team within it. A cornerstone of servant leadership is empathy, which allows leaders to understand and share their feelings with the team members as other beings. This understanding leads to a supportive environment where there is significantly high value and respect for the members of the team. Showing that leaders care about their team's well-being, for example, builds trust and improves the team's bond. As we discussed, trust is imperative for collaboration to work, and trust emphasises the feeling of open communication and sharing ideas without fear of judgement or retaliation (1977, Greenleaf).

Another big aspect of servant leadership is active listening, you'll want to actively listen to people on your team providing feedback and input. By doing this practice, team members feel valued that their voices are being heard, and that diverse voices are kept present in decision-making. In Agile environments such as where continuous feedback is the norm and the process is iterative, the ability for a leader to listen to and integrate her team's input and insight is a must. It is a good part to identify any issue beforehand and also it promotes collaborative problem-solving.

As a result, it also helps the team to respond better to change and develop more innovative approaches (Spears, 2010). The defining characteristic of servant leadership that positively contributes to team collaboration is empowerment. Servant leaders delegate authority and allow team members to make decisions themselves. In agile teams that are completely self-organised and make decisions distributedly, this empowerment matters the most. With empowered team members, team members will take more ownership over their work, as well as be more proactive in engaging with others to get things accomplished. A critical factor for the successful outcome of Agile projects is the perception from every team member that their work constitutes an integral part of what they contribute towards the success of the project (Liden et al., 2008).

Furthermore, servant leadership, or more generally any set of behaviours and attitudes in the Leader of the team, is aligned with and thus supports the Agile principle of establishing a collaborative culture; the leadership with an aim of empowering the team members, giving them more autonomy and acting as a servant to them on the task. Scrum and Kanban are examples of Agile frameworks that encourage teamwork and shared responsibility and are very much dependent on working in teams working together across functions. By the means of promoting a service and support culture, servant leaders help create a collaborative order within which people can contribute their specific skills and knowledge. The positive development of this type of collaborative culture improves both team cohesion and the team's creative capabilities and ability to create high-quality products (Fragouli, 2020). Additionally, servant leaders take an interest in personal and professional growth, which is a feature of Agile that focuses on continuous improvement. Servant leaders invest in the development of those on their team and seek to coach and mentor team members so that they can grow their skills and increase their ability to live out their core competencies. Growth investment enhances the life of not only an individual team member but the whole team as well. The more you get skilled and have confidence in the team, the better you will collaborate by tackling complex problems. In Agile environments, teams must continually adapt their process and deliverables as they work to meet evolving customer needs (Sharma & Mullick, 2021). In known literature, the benefits of servant leadership to team collaboration are well documented. Servant leadership studies have demonstrated a positive effect on team cohesion and communication as well as on overall performance. For example, Liden et al. (2008) found that where servant leadership has been practiced, team identification and cohesion increased, which increases team performance. Similarly, Spears (2010) has made it clear that with

their supportive, empowering behaviours, servant leaders foster environments that make team members more likely to collaborate and share their knowledge.

Embedded in its principles are the same things that are embedded in servant leadership; empowerment, collaboration and wanting to constantly improve. Both frameworks put individual and team development in the first place by creating a space where people can be autonomous, creative and trust each other. While those are agile principles, irrespective of whether you call them so, the core behaviours of servant leadership synchronously work with the iterative processes of agile by supporting agility. Agile methodologies like Scrum and Kanban are based on principles of self-organisation, where teams must self-organise to manage their work without dependence on direct top-down control. The principle would of course fit naturally with servant leadership, moving leadership away from authority to support. In an Agile environment, the role of the leader is not to set tasks, but to create the conditions in which teams can self-manage well. According to Greenleaf's servant leadership theory, the leader's role is to meet the needs of their team; to guide and move out of their way anything that may prevent them from organising and coordinating (Greenleaf, 1970). It helps Agile teams to work in a more empowered and self-directed fashion, where team members become an integral part of the process.

Another Agile principle is iterative development, feedback, and refinement in continuous cycles. Servant leadership behaviours such as active listening and coaching underpinned this process. Readily available at all times, Agile frameworks encourage leaders to listen to their members and use the team members' insights and feedback to facilitate the more iterative approach to Agile, ensuring that all voices are heard and taken into consideration during retrospectives and planning meetings. This encourages teams to improve their workflows, getting ever better and evermore able to handle new challenges as they come along and to innovate and ship value steadily. The coaching aspect of servant leadership —as Gren et al. (2015) argue, strengthens the iterative process of continual improvement, arming teams with the skills and confidence to engage with new challenges, and refine their work every step of the way. Servant leadership's emphasis on empathy and emotional intelligence also supports the Agile focus on collaboration and cross-functional teamwork. The empathetic leaders' values subject the members of their teams to a sustainable work environment founded on trust and psychological safety that facilitates open communication and collaborative problem-solving. In this, it directly supports the Agile

requirement of teams working together across multiple roles and throughout the various disciplines, making sure that all the specialties and optics within the team are fully used. According to Rigby et al. (2016) servant leadership's potential to offer strong relationships and an open dialogue crucially contributes to positive collaboration in Agile environments.

More generally, servant leadership behaviours like empathy, active listening, and coaching complement Agile principles, plus actively support them. Servant leadership is a powerful tool to drive success in Agile settings because it enables teams to self-organise themselves; allows continuous improvement via iterative processes and creates a collaborative and trusted environment.

1.9 Servant Leadership and Team Innovation within Agile Frameworks

Servant leadership has great potential in helping teams innovate when it is applied within Agile frameworks, like Scrum and Kanban. In the 21st century, the essence of servant leadership, which focuses on nurturing the growth and well-being of team members, fits like a glove with the collaborative and iterative nature of Agile methodologies, with the result being the kind of environment where innovation thrives. It aligns the whole team in a culture where creativity and problem-solving can flourish and opens us up to provide innovative solutions. The reason for this is that the emphasis in servant leadership on empathy and active listening contribute to a complete development of the innovative mind-set within the Agile teams. Servant leaders show empathy which grows a team-friendly environment where employees feel understood and respected. This certainly lends the team emotional support, which is key in motivating team members to take risks on novel ideas, confident that those ideas will be treated objectively and at least be given proper consideration. Active listening perpetuates this environment, since no voice is left unheard, and no divergent perspective of the problems at hand is left unincorporated into the decision-making process. In the Agile environment, the environment must be inclusive as the rapid iteration and feedback cycles require an incessant flow of new ideas and solutions (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 2010).

In terms of Scrum, servant leadership perfectly fits in the framework of team empowerment and self-organisation. Scrum teams work in iterative cycles called sprints during which they plan, execute and review sprints on a regular basis. Mostly, true servant leaders are effective at empowering team members and enabling the Scrum team to be dedicated to their duties and to be

able to make autonomous decisions. It is this empowerment that develops a sense of responsibility, a motivation among team members to come up with innovative solutions to reach sprint goals, to improve processes. Scrum Master is then the servant leader, removing impediments and helping out the team according to their needs, which leads to their ability to innovate (Fragouli, 2020). Like Kanban, servant leadership helps continuously improve and maintain flow efficiency as well. Kanban teams use visual boards to coordinate the management of work items to optimize flow and remove bottlenecks. Kanban teams take advantage of the continuous learning and adaptation culture of servant leaders because they promote experimenting with different ways and refining processes with iterations. A primary motivator of innovation is this iterative improvement; teams are always looking for better ways of doing things, to get to their objective and improve productivity. A safe experimental environment, encouraged by servant leaders, allows Kanban teams to innovate and readiness to adapt based on rapid demands (Sharma & Mullick, 2021).

There is enough existing literature that is able to prove the positive impact of servant leadership on team innovation. According to Liden et al. (2008), servant leadership increases team creativity by encouraging a supportive and empowering environment. Here they are free to think differently, to suggest different solutions and the environment favours it without fear of failure. Moreover, Spears's (2010) research, on the other hand, points out that servant leaders, by being committed to the growth and development of their team members, create a culture of continuous improvement and innovation. The importance of servant leadership in fostering innovation within Agile frameworks cannot be overstated by these findings. In addition, the emphasis on establishing a collaborative team culture to boost innovation in further by servant leadership. Scrum and Kanban agile frameworks are alive and well on this because they rely heavily on collaboration and group problem-solving. Servant leaders strengthen interpersonal relationships and open communication that foster healthy cohesive team interactions where the flow of ideas and the reality of their interpretation can freely be exchanged and refined. Finally, in order to innovate, team members must collaborate to take advantage of their entire network of competence and experience to arrive at unconventional answers to pragmatic intricacies. With Agile methodologies, all these factors are further accentuated because the teams continue to develop on each other's ideas and acquire knowledge from their experiences to help propel innovation (Altbach & Knight, 2016).

Furthermore, the part served by servant leadership in encouraging psychological safety cannot be ignored. Psychological safety, the idea that fear of taking risks cannot come into play is a critical enabler of innovation. Empathic and support-oriented servant leaders set the stage for a psychologically safe environment exemplified by team members who have sufficient confidence to let their voices be heard and to question the status quo. In the speed and flexibility of Agile environments, innovation requires rapid experimentation and iteration – thus the need for this safety net is especially acute. If team members feel secure to fail and learn from their mistakes, Sharon and Mullick (2021) contend, they are more inclined to devise innovative frameworks or build on ideas for the team’s creative output. That also aligns servant leadership with the Agile framework values and has given a strong ground for the implementation of innovative practices and tools. For example, in Scrum, servant leaders will encourage team members to use retrospectives to reflect on what the team has done, and what to improve upon. At these retrospectives team members get a chance to pitch and try out new ideas, resulting in continuous product innovation. Servant leaders in Kanban help to use metrics and feedback loops to monitor and optimise performance using metrics and feedback loops. Servant leaders encourage a culture of data-driven decision-making and constant improvement that helps Kanban teams innovate and improve their workflow efficiency (Marginson, 2016).

1.10 Correlations between Servant Leadership Behaviours and Meeting Project Goals in Agile Teams

Servant leadership behaviours and their relationship with the accomplishment of project goals in Agile teams have attracted considerable interest in leadership and project management research. It is of great importance that servant leadership and Agile principles are strongly aligned to come up with an environment that is conducive to efficiency, collaboration and adaptability which are required to satisfy the project’s objectives. Servant leadership behaviours can greatly affect the team’s ability to accomplish their objectives, especially in Agile frameworks, like Scrum and Kanban which are all about teamwork, adaptability, and iterative progress.

Empathy is one of the most crucial servant leadership behaviours and has been repeatedly shown to correlate with meeting project goals. Empathic leaders comprehend and meet the particular needs and worries of their team, generating a supportive surrounding which supports trust, involvement, and motivation. Empathetic leadership is found to significantly increase the

morale and commitment of team members which ultimately matters for a high performance (Nauman et al., 2021). Empathy leads to the reduction of conflicts and increases communication and collaboration, which Agile teams need for proper concentration on the project goals. For instance, at Scrum, which requires teamwork and cohesion to succeed, empathy as a leadership style allows leaders to identify and solve interpersonal problems that may prevent the team from delivering on project goals (Rigby et al., 2016). In Agile environments, empathetic leaders can help team members when times are extra stressful or uncertain to ensure high motivation. Consequently, the team members remain engaged, productive and focused on hitting the incremental project goals throughout the sprint cycle.

Another cornerstone of servant leadership is listening. Listening is directly linked to a team reaching its project goals. In a culture of inclusiveness and respect, leaders listen not only to new ideas but to feedback and concerns of their team members. Being in this environment creates a higher ownership and responsibility among team members because they believe that they work on very important things and are accountable for them (Neubert et al., 2022). One thing I can't stress enough about in Agile environments is the importance of feedback loops. For example, in Kanban, active listening is vitally important to the continuous improvement process where teams rely on real-time feedback to find the bottlenecks and make necessary adjustments to stay on course with the project (Dikert et al., 2016). A listening culture empowers servant leaders to help teams understand how to respond to challenges and changes better so that the project stays on course. In addition to raising team morale, this responsiveness increases a team's ability to deliver project goals efficiently and creatively.

Servant leadership is characterized by a key behaviour, coaching, which impacts significantly the development of team members and their chance of fulfilling project goals. Next, coaching empowers leaders to assist team members in developing their skills as they work through challenges and reach their peak (Saruchera, 2021). Since in the Agile environment, continuous improvement and adaptability are core principles, coaching is critical to ensure that the teams are able to tackle constantly changing project demands. Scrum includes coaching within the framework, starting with retrospectives, when teams reflect on how they performed, and find areas to improve. However, facilitating servant leaders who coach the team through a retrospective helps steer the team's learning and their ability to make and integrate improvements with their project

goals that are in line with the organisation's objectives (Gren et al., 2015). Not only does this practice push team development and practices, continuous learning breeds adaptability two key Agile tenets used to meet tight deadlines and achieve lofty project goals.

Agile frameworks moderate the effects on meeting project goals of servant leadership behaviours themselves. With its prescriptive roles, ceremonies, and cycles, Scrum is a structure in which to apply servant leadership principles. These structures can be used by several leaders in Scrum to ensure that teams concentrate on delivering incremental value and reaching project milestones (Rigby et al. 2018). Scrum's three main points of sprint planning, daily stand-ups, and sprint reviews allow the Servant Leader to coach, listen, to empathise, which reinforces team cohesion and that the team stays on track in getting to the desired goal. Also, Kanban, which is concerned with visualisation of the workflow, and continuous delivery, suits servant leadership as it exposes workers' responsibility. Kanban's visual boards can monitor progress, find bottlenecks, and make time to adjust projects otherwise they will deviate from their original track (Dikert et al., 2016). These tools can be used by servant leaders in the Kanban environment to create space for collaboration in which team members work together to solve problems and meet project milestones.

Servant leadership behaviours add to transparency and accountability, two factors that are so important in a successful Agile project. In addition, servant leaders can promote a thriving culture of open communication and trust by encouraging team members to be more transparent about their progress, challenges, and possible roadblocks. Consequently, teams can get ahead of any issues, and make appropriate adjustments when required to remain in line with project goals. As servant leaders in Agile retrospectives, they foster honest conversations about what worked and what did not work and make sure team members are accountable for what they contribute with support to fill in the gaps in their contributions (Gren et al., 2015). Furthermore, servant leadership engenders transparency in the decision-making process that streamlines effective team engagement by empowering team members to contribute ideas and participate in team problem-solving. This participatory approach ensures a wide variety of viewpoints are taken into account generating a diverse set of innovative, effective solutions that will keep the project on track.

For Agile teams, innovation and agility are among the most important factors for succeeding with their fluid project objectives. Servant leadership allows team members to take

risks and explore new ideas without feeling like real risks are being taken since colleagues feel supported in sharing risks. Creating a safe space to experiment is paramount for those scrum teams moving fast and adapting to changing project requirements (Saruchera, 2021), and leaders who coach and actively listen foster this environment. In Kanban, servant leadership plays a similar role, as it increases the team's capability to be adaptive and quick to respond to changing project priorities (Dikert et al., 2016).

1.11 Analysing the Influence of Specific Conditions on the Relationship between Servant Leadership and Team Performance in Agile Contexts

Servant leadership effectiveness in improving team performance in Agile contexts is not static; it depends on individual contextual factors. These include team size, composition, diversity, organisational culture, industry dynamics, and project types. Knowing these influences is essential for improving the use of servant leadership in various Agile environments, for they can enhance or counterbalance what servant leadership contributes to enhancing Agile efforts.

1. **Team Size, Composition, and Diversity:** The presence of servant leadership behaviours in Agile environments is highly dependent on the size of the team. Because the leaders can pay more focused attention and support for each team member, small teams usually have more benefits from servant leadership. In those environments, practicing servant leadership behaviours like empathy, listening and coaching is much easier. Team members feel more supported and valued and, therefore, are more strongly bound together in their team and able to perform better. What Nauman et al. (2021) suggest about smaller teams is that the leader's capacity to relate to and meet the individual needs of the team members usually raises the morale and productivity of the whole team. Alternatively, since in larger teams, it becomes difficult for a servant leader to relate personally to all the members of the team, the overall effectiveness of servant leadership may also be diminished. With growing size, there are barriers between effective communication and individualised support, and leaders can no longer provide the same level of personal engagement and influence. Thus the influence of servant leadership on team performance may be less pronounced in larger teams.

Also, the composition and diversity of the team matter a great deal in affecting the impact of servant leadership. Diverse teams composed of individuals with different skills,

experience and backgrounds are more innovative and flexible, which are concepts that fit well with the tenets of servant leadership. Servant leadership is more inclusive and accepts diverse perspectives thus diverse teams profit from it. Inclusivity encourages a collaborative state in which creativity and problem solving are increased, leading to better performance. According to Neubert et al. (2022), varied membership and servant leadership can spur the flow of multiple viewpoints and the utilisation of expertise at the disposal of the team, leading to innovative solutions and high team performance. By contrast, homogenous teams may not enjoy the same degrees of innovation and adaptability that can come from servant leadership. Having a similar group of people in a team can result in groupthink and creativity reduction, as the same perspectives dominate the team. As a consequence, servant leadership is particularly beneficial in teams where there is high diversity because it taps on different insights, and at the same time promotes a culture of mutual respect and collaboration.

2. **Organisational Culture:** The relationship between servant leadership and team performance is impacted heavily by organisation culture. Servant leadership flourishes in supportive cultures where teams are encouraged to collaborate and share, and where there's a very strong culture of continuous improvement. These are cultures that line up nicely with the principles of servant leadership and Agile process, making it easy for team members to give it their all and work to their greatest potential. Denning (2018) suggests that, in supportive cultures, the organisational ethos and values physically reflect these values of empathy, listening, and coaching in servant leadership and so do reinforcements with these behaviours and more so efficiency. At the same time, servant leadership faces limitations in hierarchical cultures emphasising control and authority. In such an environment, top top-down approach is not consistent with the servant leader's philosophy of empowering and supporting team members. When a team responds with resistance or disengagement, team performance will suffer. They believe that in hierarchical cultures, the rigidity of the structure and the lack of autonomy can bury the positive effects of servant leadership as team members don't feel confident enough or empowered to take initiative or innovate (Hoda et al., 2011).

So in order for servant leadership to be truly effective in an Agile context, the organisational culture should espouse servant leadership's values and behaviours. It is

more likely that the positive impact of servant leadership on team performance will be seen in organisations that have supportive cultures, which promote collaboration and continuous improvement.

3. **Industry Dynamics and Project Types:** Servant leadership effects on team performance significantly depend on the nature of the industry. When the industry is fast changing and being innovative like in software development, servant leadership becomes quite beneficial. These industries are rife with Agile methodologies and the flexibility and agility they require dovetail nicely with servant leadership principles. In such settings, servant leaders can build a culture of continuous learning and improvement which in turn delivers very high levels of innovation and performance. According to Lindsjörn et al. (2016), in such dynamic industries, an environment of collaboration and support by servant leadership helps strengthen team agility and helps to sustain the response and workability of changes which produces better project results. The effect of servant leadership is likely to be less notable, however, in more traditional and regulated industries. However, the flexibility and empowerment servant leadership instils in the minds of the employees may not be welcomed by industries with rigid processes and structures. Nevertheless, servant leadership can provide some increases in these areas that ultimately influence team performance despite these situations. In industries like healthcare or finance, with extensive rules to follow and a wide range of sides to cover, servant leadership can offer a platform to build a supportive and collaborative team atmosphere, improving the performance per constituent as well as job satisfaction (Rigby et al., 2016).

The effect of servant leadership on team performance also depends on different project types. Agile methodologies for software development projects lend themselves well for servant leaders to be able to effectively support teams to drive high performance through the iterative and collaborative nature. Agile principles, including continuous feedback and iterative development, are naturally aligned with servant leadership behaviours and enable an environment of innovation and continuous improvement. For instance, Gren et al. (2015) indicate that in such projects, servant leaders can use regular sprint reviews and retrospectives to engage with the team, offer feedback, and direct continuous improvements increasing team effectiveness (Gren, Van Rooyen and Lefrancois, 2015). However, in marketing campaigns where there might be many more

tasks to do in less predictable ways, servant leadership's adaptability and flexibility in squads can assist them navigate changing requirements to generate successful outcomes. Many marketing projects need to be quickly adapted to market trends and customer feedback and servant leadership can help teams respond as quickly as necessary. According to Dikert et al. (2016), in dynamic project environments, such as these, servant leaders can create a culture of collaboration and creativity within a project team that develops innovative solutions to achieve project goals.

The benefits of the innovative and collaborative environment this creates are not restricted to development or product design project types—innovative and collaborative environments can also enhance the performance and outcomes of other project types, such as R&D and product design. As such, these projects also work well with the continuous learning and testing that happens in these projects in the name of servant leadership. Saruchera (2021) hypothesises that servant leaders are particularly critical in influencing the project success of research and development projects by, amongst others, supporting the exploration of novel concepts and technologies by team members, thereby fostering innovation.

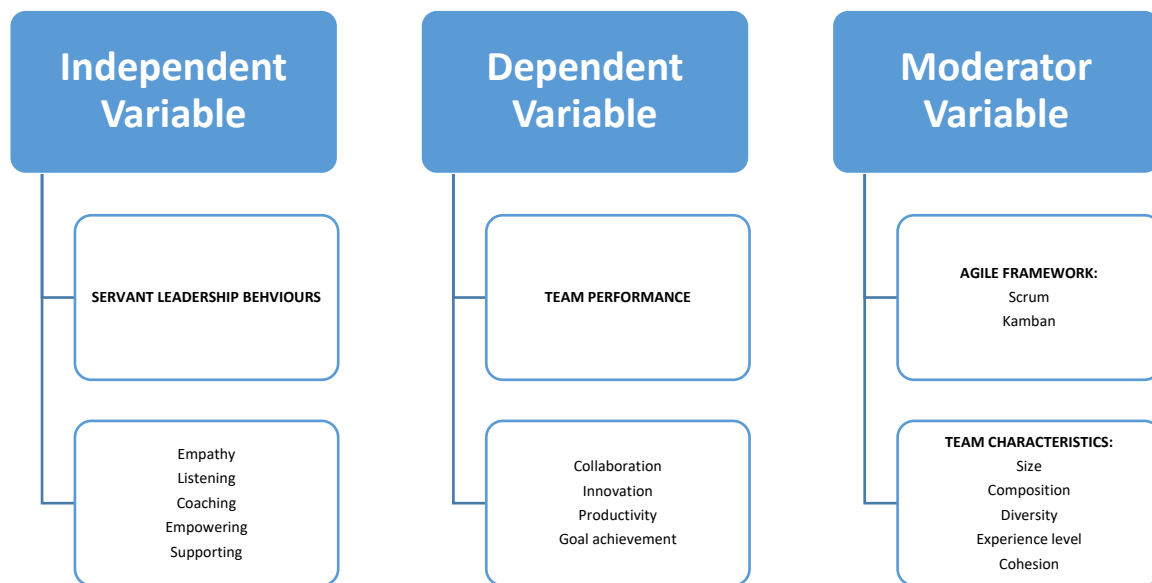
1.12 Summary and Synthesis

We performed a thorough literature review regarding the interaction of Agile methodologies, servant leadership and team performance. We find that servant leadership behaviours like empathy, listening, and coaching, contribute to boosting team performance metrics like collaboration, innovation, productivity and goal achievement. As listening brings forth trust and respect, these leadership qualities help cultivate a friendly and all-inclusive setting which is in sync with Agile frameworks such as Scrum and Kanban where there is constant feedback. Each process is taken up step by step, and the team functions independently. Agile principles and servant leadership complement one another and through them, communication flows clearly, the team becomes cohesive and the core team performance improves. However, several research gaps have been identified. However, many such studies have been limited by small sample sizes or narrow industry-specific contexts calling into question the generality of their conclusions. However, literature on servant leadership in Agile settings has not examined critical contextual factors—such as team size, diversity, organisational culture, and industry-specific variables—at adequate depth. These factors could considerably influence the effectiveness of servant leadership, though

the literature has generally failed to explore them. Moreover, longitudinal data is rarely found in existing literature, leaving this question for understanding of sustained long-term impacts of servant leadership on Agile team performance unanswered. Because these studies lack extended timelines, limited insight is gained regarding how servant leadership behaviours influence team dynamics and outcomes beyond the events observed.

2. METHODOLOGY

The core aim of this research is investigation to assess the effects servant leadership practices have on team performance within Agile contexts. Since they are central to the management of complex projects in different industries, Scrum and Kanban agile frameworks become critical, and understanding leadership styles that can improve team dynamics and project results in those conditions is important. In particular, it shows how servant leadership behaviours (empathy, listening and coaching) impact key performance metrics in the collaboration, innovation, productivity, and achievement of project goals. Agile environments that are based on team empowerment and self-organisation make servant leadership, which is centred on how to meet the needs of team members and how to have them grow as individuals and professionals, particularly well-matched. Empathy allows leaders to identify and attend to each team member's unique concerns and create an environment where people feel trusted and engaged. This dynamic is amplified through listening because they add a dimension of inclusiveness in which you are more open to welcoming the ideas and thoughts of others and valuing ideas and thoughts brought by others will help in better decision-making and problem-solving innovatively. On the other side, coaching creates the ability of team members to continuously improve over time with skills and confidence to meet the changing demands of the project. This research investigated how these servant leadership behaviours help agile teams achieve better collaboration among members, increase innovation, boost productivity, and keep them focused on what they are supposed to be doing. The study aims to fill the gaps in the literature by examining the relationship between servant leadership and team performance in Agile settings in a holistic manner.

Figure 2.1: Summary of Variables

Existing literature has already extolled the relationship between servant leadership behaviours and team performance in Agile environments and how behaviours like empathy, listening, coaching... etc. improve other key performance metrics like collaboration, innovation, productivity, and goal achievement. Based on this research, it is hypothesised that servant leadership will have a positive impact on team performance in Agile frameworks and that certain moderating variables (Agile framework type, Scrum or Kanban; team characteristics such as size and composition) may moderate the strength of this relationship.

Servant leadership behaviours as the independent variable are expected to make a significant contribution towards team performance in Agile environments. Empathising leaders, who genuinely understand each team member's individual needs, help create a safe, trustworthy environment and hence, facilitate collaboration and productivity (Nauman et al., 2021). As collaboration is one of the Agile frameworks' essences (Scrum), empathy becomes a crucial function in solving conflict and supporting team cohesion (Rigby et al., 2016.). Moreover, it is expected to promote team accountability and greater innovation. Active listening to feedback and concerns from leaders helps widen the pool of perspectives being considered at any time and, hence, creates more innovative solutions that yield better decision-making (Neubert et al., 2022).

Listening in Agile environments is vital to feedback loops, helping speed up responses to challenges and confirming that the team is still running in line with project goals (Dikert et al. 2016). Another expected impact of servant leadership on team performance is coaching. According to Saruchera (2021), both the productive and problem-solving skills of the team members are enhanced through effective coaching that ensures team members develop the skills needed to handle complex challenges. Agile frameworks, including Scrum, highlight the importance of continuous improvement through retrospectives during which coaching action ensures that the team action is in concert with project goals (Gren et al., 2015).

This research proposes that the degree to which servant leadership behaviours affect team performance will be moderated by these variables, including the Agile framework (Scrum or Kanban), and team characteristics (size and composition). Scrum offers an environment where it is easy for servant leadership to take place, team members work together, and focus on the continuous delivery of value in increments, (roles and regular ceremonies, sprint planning and daily stand-ups) (Rigby et al., 2018). However, unlike Scrum, Kanban focuses on transparency using visual workflow management. This enables the servant leaders to easily keep track of team progress and quickly handle bottlenecks, leading to accountability and responsiveness of team members (Dikert et al., 2016). The relation between servant leadership, and team performance may also be moderated by team characteristics like team size and composition. For example, in Nauman et al.'s (2021) case, they state that servant leadership behaviours (such as listening and empathy) will be even more important in larger or more diverse teams to keep the team together and make sure all voices are heard. These behaviours may have a smaller and less directly observable impact in smaller, more homogeneous teams, but in these teams, the value of setting the environment for trust and continuous improvement is perhaps even greater.

The guiding research questions of this study aim to provide an understanding of the effect of servant leadership behaviours on the performance of Agile teams. Given the nature of Agile frameworks like Scrum and Kanban, where team collaboration, innovation, and adaptability are critical, the following questions focus on understanding how empathy, listening, and coaching contribute to the success of these teams:

1. To what extent do servant leadership practices contribute to improved team collaboration in Agile environments?

2. How does servant leadership impact team innovation within the Scrum framework?
3. Is there a correlation between servant leadership behaviours and meeting project goals in Agile teams?
4. How do servant leadership practices influence the responsiveness and adaptability of Agile teams?
5. What are the effects of servant leadership on team morale and engagement in Agile settings?

An exploratory qualitative research approach was employed to investigate the effects of servant leadership behaviours on team performance within Agile environments. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with both distributed leaders and team members from Agile teams in a variety of industries that have put Agile methodologies (Scrum and Kanban) in action. In this approach, the researcher goes through rich insights concerning how servant leadership behaviours such as empathy, listening, and coaching affect collaboration, innovation, goal accomplishment and team morale. The semi-structured interview format is used since it is flexible; the interviewer can lead it while participants have the freedom to explain themselves and their experiences on the subject matter. Through this method, a deeper understanding of how servant leadership is serving in Agile teams and how it affects team dynamics as well as project outcomes is obtained.

Interview questions were designed to explore the core themes of the study, including:

- The extent to which servant leadership behaviours foster collaboration within Agile teams.
- How servant leadership impacts team innovation, particularly within the Scrum framework.
- The role of servant leadership in helping teams meet project goals.
- The influence of servant leadership on responsiveness and adaptability in fast-paced Agile environments.
- The effects of servant leadership on team morale and engagement.

Five individuals were interviewed. Agile team leaders and team members participated, from industries like IT, software development, marketing, and manufacturing. Purposive sampling

was used in order to select these participants to achieve a balance between perspectives, holding both those of the leaders practising servant leadership and those team members who are experiencing these behaviours.

This study further used professional networks and organisational referrals to contact the respondents. Potential participants were first identified through LinkedIn by reaching out to individuals with experience working in Agile environments and in particular those who had leadership or team member roles in software development, FinTech, and healthcare IT. We then contacted suitable candidates through LinkedIn to learn more about them and provide them with an overview of the purpose of the study, measures that we are going to take to ensure that their information remains confidential, and their expected involvement in the interview process. In addition, we reached out to Agile professionals through organisational referrals about people who were recommended by their friends or managers for having experience with Agile frameworks such as Scrum and Kanban, and servicing leadership. Of the 12 people contacted, five (approximately 42%) agreed to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interview and each participant was briefed that their responses would be kept confidential. By using a selection process, Agile practitioners working in various environments, across different countries and of diverse ages and genders were gathered to explore the extent to which servant leadership behaviours and their influence on Agile team performance varied.

All interviews were conducted remotely and were between 30 to 45 minutes. Participants gave their consent for the interviews to be audio recorded to capture accurate data and field notes were kept meticulously during the interviews to record any non-verbal cues and interesting observations. The interview guide was developed using a combination of open and targeted probes to cover all important topics, but allowing participants to respond in detail to those questions that were most interesting to them. The data were then transcribed and made ready for thematic analysis, which analysed the data to find patterns, themes, and insights about servant leadership and its effects on team performance.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were the key instrument for data collection with Agile team members and leaders in various industries. The complexity and subjectivity of servant leadership behaviours are ideal for this method of exploration, letting knowledge emerge from a detailed understanding of the effects on team performance of the behaviours within an Agile

context. The research used semi-structured interviews to pursue an open-ended approach of exploration but at the same time directed inquiry by ensuring the key themes were consistently covered but flexibility was applied with respect to participant responses.

An interview guide was developed to maintain focus and allow the research questions to be addressed (see appendix). The guide was adapted with key themes around servant leadership and its effect on collaboration, productivity, and innovation within Agile teams. To ensure rich, narrative responses from the questions, yet permits in-depth probing of particular elements of leadership behaviour, the questions were formulated.

The semi-structured interview used a flexible format to let the interviewees provide as much detail as possible but included core questions to guarantee consistency for all interviews. By taking this approach, the researcher was able to explore unexpected areas that surfaced in the course of the conversation while guaranteeing that all themes were covered.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim upon completion to be used in thematic analysis. This approach led to the data staying accurate and that key insights didn't get lost during interpretation. I used thematic analysis to find the patterns, themes, and relationships across interviews focused on recurring patterns around how servant leadership impacts team collaboration, productivity, and innovation in Agile environments.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were the instrument that would best deliver the data because they allow exploring complex and detailed behaviours of leadership in the Agile environments. Drawing from an interview guide containing both open-ended questions and opportunities for probing, the researcher collected rich, qualitative data that reflected the participants' lived experiences and also allowed the researcher to answer the key research questions. Moreover, this method worked with the diversity of Agile teams. They all had different experiences and execution of servant leadership behaviours across industries and team compositions. Semi-structured interviews were very flexible, so I was able to adapt to each person's individual story while still keeping the same focus on servant leadership and how it affects a team's performance.

Agile teams from different industries where project execution is performed by the utilization of Agile Frameworks like Scrum or Kanban are the target population for this study.

Some of these industries include IT, Software development, Manufacturing, and Marketing to mention a few making sure that there is a diversity of experience and perspectives on Agile environments. We then randomly selected a sample of five participants from these industries so that a balanced and diverse set of viewpoints is assured. Leadership behaviours and their effects on team dynamics are observed across both team leaders and team members, hence the participants. By making sure that the process of selection is random, no bias might or might not represent the dynamics that exist in Agile team environments.

The inclusion criteria for selecting respondents focused on individuals who met the following conditions:

- **Experience working within Agile teams:** Participants must have direct experience in an Agile team, either as a leader or a team member, to provide insights into the functioning of servant leadership within Agile frameworks.
- **Active involvement in Agile project execution:** Respondents must be involved in ongoing Agile projects, allowing them to provide current, relevant experiences regarding servant leadership behaviours and team performance.

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, a widely used method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. This approach is well-suited to capturing the complexities and subtleties of the participants' experiences with servant leadership behaviours and their influence on team performance in Agile environments.

Thematic analysis involves several key steps:

1. **Familiarisation with Data:** After each interview was conducted and transcribed, the researcher carefully reviewed the transcripts to become familiar with the content. This step includes reading and re-reading the transcripts and making initial notes on recurring ideas or themes related to servant leadership and Agile team dynamics.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** The data were coded, meaning that specific segments of the interview transcripts were highlighted and labelled with short phrases or terms that summarise their content. These codes represented meaningful aspects of the data, such as

descriptions of servant leadership behaviours (e.g., empathy, listening, coaching) and how they influence team collaboration, innovation, productivity, or goal achievement.

3. **Searching for Themes:** Once all the data had been coded, the next step was to group the codes into broader themes.
4. **Reviewing and Refining Themes:** The themes identified were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflect the patterns found in the data. This involves checking the coherence of each theme and cross-referencing them with the interview data to ensure no significant information was overlooked. Themes that are too broad were split, and those that overlap were combined.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** After reviewing, each theme were clearly defined and named to reflect its content and significance. For example, themes related to how servant leadership behaviours improve team adaptability or responsiveness in Agile teams were distinctly labelled and explained.
6. **Writing the Report:** Finally, the identified themes were incorporated into the study's findings, providing a detailed and coherent narrative of how servant leadership influences various aspects of team performance in Agile environments.

Throughout the thematic analysis, the data were coded and categorised based on recurring themes that emerge from the interview transcripts. The coding process paid close attention to specific servant leadership behaviours (such as empathy, listening, and coaching) and how they affect different aspects of team dynamics in Agile settings. For example:

- **Collaboration:** Codes related to team members discussing open communication and shared decision-making as influenced by servant leadership behaviours.
- **Innovation:** Instances where participants describe how servant leadership fosters creativity or problem-solving within Agile teams.
- **Goal Achievement:** Descriptions of how servant leadership helps Agile teams meet their project goals through support and accountability.

The scope of this research was designed to encompass a diverse range of Agile teams and contexts, ensuring that the findings are applicable across multiple industries and regions where Agile methodologies are utilised for project management and team collaboration.

The study deals with Agile teams that run in different industries, with a special focus on those industries where projects are run according to Agile frameworks such as Scrum and Kanban. Information Technology (IT), Software Development, Manufacturing, Marketing, and Digital Services are some of these Industries. Including participants from varying sectors within these teams enabled the research to capture industry-specific details on which servant leadership behaviours impact team performance and to highlight commonalities across the different Agile environments examined.

The participants of the study came from different geographic regions, owing to the global nature in which Agile is adopted. Agile methodologies have gained popularity throughout the world, and this research guaranteed equal representation of other environments in which Agile frameworks are used. It took a geographic scope based on regions of known Agile practitioners, including (but not limited to) North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. This research in combination with participants from diverse geographic regions brought breadth to how servant leadership affects Agile team performance across diverse cultural and organisational contexts, thereby increasing the generalizability of the research findings. Due to the diversity of industries and regions, the results can be leveraged effectively everywhere across the globe to infer the global adoption of servant leadership in Agile frameworks.

In order to protect and safeguard the confidentiality of all respondents included in this study, this study adhered to ethical research practices. To keep to the highest standards of integrity and responsibility throughout the whole research process some key ethical principles were followed.

Prior to participation, all participants were provided with clear and detailed information about the purpose of the study, its objectives, and their role within it. This was presented in a consent form, outlining:

- The purpose of the research and its potential benefits.
- A description of the semi-structured interview and what it entails.
- The voluntary nature of participation, ensuring that participants understand they can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

- An explanation of the anonymity and confidentiality protocols in place to protect their privacy.

Participants either gave their written informed consent or provided their verbal (if conducted remotely) informed consent agreeing to participate in the study and understanding what the study was. Furthermore, before the data collection began, consent to record interviews was obtained.

All data collected in the interviews was maintained under strict confidentiality. During transcription participants' names and any other identifiable information were anonymised to ensure no identification of any participant. Participant identification (e.g. name) was removed, and each was given a unique ID or code, which was never included in any published findings or reports.

To protect the identities of study participants, by the ethical guidelines for this research, they were given unique codes, R1 to R5. To ensure that no identifying information would be included in transcripts, analysis, or the final report, this approach was taken. These codes were used to maintain the confidentiality of participants, all data was anonymised before analysis to protect their privacy. Throughout the study strict measures were taken to prevent the participants' privacy and anonymity compromise, and consistent with ethical standards of research.

To further protect participants' privacy:

- All audio recordings, transcriptions, and field notes were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher.
- Data were anonymised before analysis, and any information that could potentially identify individuals or their organisations were excluded from the final report.

The participants' experiences of leadership behaviours and team dynamics, which sometimes included their sensitive information, were the subject of study. Among the ethical considerations present was the participant's knowledge that they are permitted to skip any question they prefer not to answer. To avoid offending any of the participants, the researcher ensured that all the questions were phrased sensitively and that the well-being of the participants was a priority during the interview process.

The research process was designed to ensure that no one felt unsafe or was not respected. The interviews took place in such a way that leads to honest, open discussions with subjects while also avoiding the subject of stress and pressure. Along with that, the researcher was aware of their own biases and attempted to be objective throughout data collection and analysis.

3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Research Objectives and Approach

The body of this chapter is a presentation of the analysis and findings of the research effort to investigate the effect of servant leadership behaviours on teams' performance in Agile environments. This study was primarily concerned with examining how servant leadership traits, namely empathy, active listening, and coaching, influence certain key Agile team outcomes, including collaboration, innovation, project goal achievement, adaptability, and team morale. Due to the dynamic nature of Agile methodologies, this research aimed at knowing how servant leadership shapes the team environment for self-organisation and continuous improvement of Agile principles. All respondents in this section adhere to the confidentiality protocols of the methodology and hence the names are not used but replaced with unique codes (R1 to R5) to ensure they are anonymised throughout this study. A qualitative research design was adopted to achieve the research objectives using semi-structured interviews with Agile professionals in different industries. Five participants, both Agile team leaders and members, were interviewed to acquire in-depth data about their experiences with servant leadership in the Agile teams. The semi-structured format led to rich, detailed responses that painted a picture of the subtle complexities of leadership behaviours and their impact on team dynamics.

The analysis in this chapter is guided by several key research questions:

1. To what extent do servant leadership practices contribute to improved team collaboration in Agile environments?
2. How does servant leadership impact team innovation, particularly within the Scrum framework?
3. Is there a correlation between servant leadership behaviours and meeting project goals in Agile teams?
4. How do servant leadership practices influence the responsiveness and adaptability of Agile teams?

5. What are the effects of servant leadership on team morale and engagement in Agile settings?

This chapter aims to provide the key findings from the semi-structured interviews and to give a detailed analysis of the impact of servant leadership behaviours on Agile team performance. Given this, we attempt to answer the research questions that drive this study through insights drawn from the shared experiences of Agile team leaders and members during interviews. This chapter investigates the leadership behaviours of empathy, active listening, and coaching in relation to their influence on the collaboration, innovation, attainment of project goals, adaptability, and morale of the Agile team.

The reflexive thematic analysis of interview data generated major themes around which the analysis was organised. These themes: Servant Leadership and Team Collaboration, Innovation, Project Goal Attainment, Responsiveness and Adaptability, and Team Morale and Engagement, were then analysed in depth with examples directly provided and quotes from participants used to present the findings. This chapter also presents the themes in a structure that allows for a clear, evidence-based exploration of how servant leadership behaviours feed into the team dynamics and outcomes observed in Agile settings. It is intended to provide a clear understanding of servant leadership's contribution to Agile team success by identifying patterns or insight shared across the discussions.

3.1.1 Theme 1: Servant Leadership and Team Collaboration

Key Findings

In agile environments, servant leadership has played an important role in furthering (team) collaboration. When asked to list behaviours that foster trust and open communication, as well as help to form a team, the behaviours most commonly cited by participants—empathy, active listening, and coaching—were critical in these interactions. By their very nature, agile teams need to work close together and work cohesively across multiple cross-functional roles, and servant-leader behaviour directly supports this dynamic. These leadership practices were consistently observed to help block communication barriers, make team goals match, and make everyone responsible. As an example, R1, an Agile Team Leader, indicated coaching as one of the best ways of bringing collaboration. Coaching junior team members helped them get more confident in saying their ideas and adding more to team discussion, he shared. These, in turn, made for better

problem-solving in sprints and retrospectives. R5, an Agile Team member also spoke about the importance of active listening and shared that having his team leader listen actively during sprint planning and daily stand-up meetings as it built trust in the team and pushed them to delve deeper into the topic under discussion. He said: “When our leader hears us, then we have trust and collaboration is much easier.” These behaviours show how servant leadership helps to create a setting in which team members feel appreciated and work better together.

Several participants were able to offer concrete examples of how servant leadership behaviours directly led to improved team collaboration. R4, an Agile Team Member, explained how the understanding and empathy of her team leader helped the team to work efficiently even in tough situations. The leader explained how an empathetic approach helped the team to support each other better when the team was under much pressure because of tight deadlines. The leader would always check in with us and ask us how we were, not necessarily how work was going but how we were as a person. And empathy is what fostered a cooperative environment: It made us feel like we could trust one another. Another example was related by R3, an Agile Team Leader, in which a lack of collaboration was remedied that way: through active listening and transparent communication. However, during a sprint, he said, the friction was between the development and the testing team over miscommunicated requirements. The leader brought both teams together and advised them to share their fears. During the act of listening and the facilitation of open dialogue between the teams, this conflict was resolved and teams were able to work with one another more frequently. Likewise, R2, an Agile Team Leader, shared that coaching aided her team’s ability to think more in alignment with their Scrum retrospectives, allowing individual team members to express their issues and gain feedback, resulting in more powerful collective problem-solving for the team.

One key message that came out across all interviews is that servant leaders can create spaces for open communication and safe dialogue. The various teams that have used these behaviours have found it instrumental in building trust, opening to each other, and collaborating across industries. Among the leaders who had these traits communication improved daily, and a foundation for stronger and more meaningful work teams was created, in order to reach shared objectives more effectively. The results from these interviews inform how servant leadership creates collaboration across Agile teams. Agile methodologies like Scrum and Kanban are built

around collaboration, as those are the methods that self-organising teams work in a team effort to complete tasks, overcome challenges, and create high-quality products. These Agile principles are supported by servant leadership in favour of team empowerment, open communication, creating an environment of listening and valuing each individual.

Rather than controlling or dictating, empowering the individuals creates a fertile ground for self-organisation, another one of the agile principles. Indeed, certain elements of this principle can be seen in the interviews, such as the way that servant leadership behaviours of active listening and empathy facilitate team members to own their roles and contribute to the team's success. His leader was also open to feedback, and R5 said this allowed the team to take more of an initiative over the daily tasks — a hallmark of effective self-organisation. Moreover, Agile teams' collaboration usually includes successful cross-functional teamwork where people of different roles (for example developers, designers, testers) need to do work in harmony. R3's experience using active listening to resolve inter-team conflict is an example of how servant leadership also serves to break down silos and cultivate mutual understanding to facilitate collaboration in a more complex manner that provides value to both the client and the company. Servant leaders foster a conversation with openness and inclusivity of all voices to foster cross-functioning collaboration.

3.1.2 Theme 2: Servant Leadership and Innovation

Key Findings

Agile frameworks like Scrum are greatly boosted by servant leadership in terms of fostering innovation, as an environment where psychological safety is encouraged, and where risk-taking and creative problem-solving are supported is created. It should be no surprise that Agile methodologies focus on constant improvement and agility, and servant leadership behaviours create and promote these goals by allowing team members to explore new ideas, try new ways of doing things, and learn from their mistakes. A common thread that I found throughout the interviews was that participants mentioned that servant leadership traits such as empathy, active listening, and coaching are necessary to create an innovation culture in their teams.

Psychological safety was identified as a key ingredient needed to facilitate innovation. Team members who aren't afraid to make a suggestion and know it won't draw the ire of their co-workers are more likely to take risks and think creatively. Another Agile Team Leader, R3, talked about the need to take risks to promote innovation. He said that he encouraged the team to 'think

outside the box’ and would lead them into uncharted territory if needed. This willingness to push through failure and embrace the learning element of it allowed the team to try multiple solutions and to break through to new solutions that improved the outcomes of the overall project. In addition, coaching as servant leadership behaviour significantly contributed to innovation nurture. An Agile Team Leader R1 points out that his coaching encouraged team members to think about problems critically and to come up with new ideas. He left a space for team members to develop their skills and be innovative whenever possible.

Examples from the interview respondents gave clear instances of how servant leadership behaviours fostered innovation in the team. To R2, psychological safety was seen to be of great importance. It allowed her team to use new avenues to solve technical issues, effectively resulting in better product design processes. R3 also had a similar story — ‘As a leader, I always inspire members to break free from the norms, even if it means they fail once or twice’, he added. As a result of this mind-set of embracing experimentation, his team expanded to consider new cloud infrastructural options, which lowered their deployment times and enhanced system efficiency. Since it’s clear that these are good examples of how risk and experimentation are encouraged and enhance innovation, it goes without saying that servant leadership helps in the adoption of innovation. An Agile Team Member, R4 contributed to understanding with an example of how innovation was encouraged by servant leadership on her team. She then explained how because the team leader encouraged it, a new JavaScript framework was adopted, and load times of web pages significantly increased. Without her leader’s support and willingness to try new things, the very same team could have stayed with traditional approaches and not found a more innovative solution, she added.

These interview findings imply that servant leadership is critical in supporting the innovation practices in Agile teams. Within this safe harbour of psychological safety, the servant leadership behaviours like empathy, active listening and coaching create an environment where team members are willing to offer creative ideas and take risks. In an Agile environment, it is important to have psychological safety: that is, teams feel safe to promote and experiment with new ideas. Servant leadership is important in Agile frameworks like Scrum because it focuses on creating an open and supportive environment that an iterative sprint and retrospective processes like those often found in Scrum provide frequent opportunities for reassessment and adjustment.

As for instance of R3, they do the job by motivating their team to take risks, which resonates well with Scrum's concept of continuous improvement through experimentation and learning from failure. Also, servant leadership allows team members to become more creative in solving problems because they engage in critical and process-centric thinking. Servant leadership creates a culture of coaching and empowerment (R1, R2); by empowering the team to innovate continuously. Besides this, the solution enables the team to adjust to changing project requirements & enhance the quality of solutions during Agile sprints.

3.1.3 Theme 3: Servant Leadership and Project Goal Attainment

Key Findings

Servant leadership is a key enabler of successful alignment and attainment of project goals where teams are Agile. Among the behaviours most frequently mentioned by participants, coaching, removing barriers, and active support were found by participants to be essential contributors to keeping teams focused, meeting challenges, and achieving results on time. This is true in Agile frameworks such as Scrum and Kanban which rely on an organisation's ability to adapt and iteratively improve; servant leaders who place their teams' needs first offer the leadership required to steer the teams towards achieving both sprint goals and broader goals.

For example, R1, an Agile Team Leader, reported that coaching kept his team on track when they found themselves facing very difficult challenges. He said he often coached team members to hone the skills necessary to overcome obstacles and stay focused on delivering high-quality results. He said, "I guided team members across complex challenges as a leader, delivering on time." This case study demonstrates how servant leadership behaviours like coaching can result in attaining the intended project objectives, despite the technical or organisational constraints. Likewise, R2, another Agile Team Leader, pointed out that removing barriers for the team was an important aspect of her leadership. Usually, she told me, she spent her time dealing with external obstacles to the team's progress—stakeholder conflicts, resource constraints, etc.—that would also get in the way of the team accomplishing its goals. In that vein, R2 took measures to proactively remove such barriers that did not let her team divert from their task and run into problems that would have resulted in them missing their project deadlines.

In addition to examples of the ways servant leadership behaviours supported the attainment of project goals, the interview participants offered clear concrete examples. Agile Team Member

R5 told us how his leader's support assisted the team in staying on track during a difficult sprint. He pointed out that the team was kept aligned with project comments by the leaders focusing on prioritising and addressing the team's concerns during daily stand-ups. R5 answers, "Our leader was always there to make sure we had what we needed, including getting the requirements or prioritising tasks." This proactive mind allowed the team to still stay on track during the hard times. Another Agile Team Member, R4, stressed the value of listening to get the team to work on project goals. Her team leader would open up to hearing any feedback and the team would make adjustments if needed, when they were having retrospectives. This meant the team was open to feedback so they could make all the changes and improve as they went along. "Our leader was willing to listen, and I think that allowed (us) to streamline our process and not get too distracted by the unimportant things," she said. As the examples demonstrate, servant leadership behaviours (coaching, removing barriers, and providing support) guarantee that Agile teams remain focused and aligned to the project goals amid the obstacles.

Interview findings indicate that servant leadership is highly responsible for project goals success in Agile teams. Servant leaders create an environment that encourages team members to be supported and put themselves in a position to accomplish both short-term and long-term targets. Servant leadership in Agile frameworks like Scrum is important because the goals are known to be refined and revisited during the course of the project cycle; hence there is a need for servant leadership to maintain the alignment that exists between the team's effort and the goal of the project as it is changing. Team members are also supported through servant leadership behaviours, like coaching and removing barriers, to develop the skills and confidence needed to surmount obstacles for the successful delivery of project outcomes. Servant leaders act as facilitators, not bossy leaders, which empowers the team to self-manage and make their own decisions on how to solve problems and reach the project's goal.

3.1.4 Theme 4: Servant Leadership, Responsiveness, and Adaptability

Key Findings

The role of Servant leadership in increasing the Agile team's responsiveness to change as well as adaptability in a dynamic project environment is key. Teams in Agile frameworks, such as Scrum and Kanban can face quickly changing priorities and ever-changing requirements of their projects. Interviews revealed that servant leaders, by concentrating their efforts on helping the

team, eliminating challenges for the team, and pursuing open communication, play a very important role for the team to respond and adjust rapidly to such changes. Empathy, active listening, and coaching under servant leadership behaviours enable teams to feel empowered, make decisions, change strategy, and fight off unforeseen challenges with confidence.

As participants, such as R2 (Agile Team Leader), stressed, servant leadership fostered an environment of flexibility and openness to change. She said. “As a leader, I want to create an environment where the team can adjust and be in any situation without the fear of failing or the backlash,” she said. All this is what R2 encouraged, allowing her team to maintain a responsive attitude to project needs as the changing environment introduced challenges that impeded progress. R5 (Agile Team Member) echoed that the leader’s guidance and support to the team enabled the team to adapt to the changing project requirements. What he said was that we had last-minute changes of requirements from the client during one sprint. When the team was uprooted for the better, the leader entered to manage the team through the transitions. “Our leader helped guide us through the chaos and it was better for us to adapt to changes,” he said. This brings out the need for servant leadership in order to keep the team cohesive and in a direction during times of disruption.

Some participants offered several examples specifically describing how servant leadership allowed their team to be more adaptable. Agile Team Member R4 indicated that her team leader’s active listening was important at the point where the project scope had to be changed because of external constraints. By listening to the team’s concerns and suggesting they direct the leader to transition smoothly into the new project focus, she explained. R4 added, “Our leader gave us a chance to express our opinions and we were able to shape the decision together and to adapt more quickly.” Servant leaders play a big role in this, keeping their team members in the loop and feeling heard and involved, which is essential for every rapid adaptation. Then, Agile Team Leader (R3) gave an example of how coaching helped with adaptability. During another related project, an unexpected change in technology got into the development cycle, and R3 was successful in coaching his team to up-skill quickly and learn new tools. He said, “Coaching my team through this transition was key. I provided them the resources and time to configure with the new technology, and that kept us on track.” Coaching also ensures groups are ready to take on

challenges and be flexible. This demonstrates how servant leadership behaviours such as coaching the team prepare them to handle challenges and remain flexible.

The interview findings are that servant leadership is required in agile environments where responsiveness and agility are the main principles. Requiring agile teams to continuously respond to changes in project scope, market demands, or customer requirements and to do so smoothly is frequently what defines a successful project. Servant leaders enable this responsiveness through the empowerment of team members, removal of barriers, and open conversation, all of which are very consistent with Agile principles of flexibility and self-organisation. Servant leadership behaviours like active listening, and empathy, promote the ability to remain agile and proactive in Agile frameworks, like Scrum and Kanban where teams work in iterative cycles and adapt as they receive feedback continuously. R5 (team member) and all those who must constantly adapt to last-minute project changes will gladly testify to the fact that servant leadership is the only way to ensure that you and your team stay focused, make quick decisions and maintain your performance when the going is tough.

3.1.5 Theme 5: Servant Leadership and Team Morale and Engagement

Key Findings

The impact of servant leadership on team morale and especially engagement in the Agile environment has a very positive and deep effect. Servant leaders maintain a healthy, motivated and engaged team through behaviours such as emotional support, empathy, creating a supportive environment, and are great mentors. Agile teams function in the context of continuous iterations, short deadlines and enormous pressure where leaders who give importance to their team members' well-being allow space to sustain high performance. Almost all the interviews showed that the morale was boosted greatly through the servant leadership behaviours above especially in times of stress.

Emphasising that team morale during a particularly difficult sprint was saved by her leader's empathy, R4 (Agile Team Member) told us. She said a leader took the time to stop and check in with team members one-on-one on a personal and professional level. R4 noted that when our leader demonstrated empathy during a tough sprint, that pumped morale. An example of how a leader's emotional support can alleviate stress is especially important for keeping team members focused and energised in pressurised work settings. Likewise, R3 (Agile Team Leader) indicated

that creating a supportive environment supported the team morale over periods of long and demanding product development cycles. This allowed him to keep high engagement even in the event of an extremely intensive workload, by allowing the team enough freedom to share their concerns when he opened a space for them to do so. That support kept us motivated and focused, R3 noted: “Our team always knew they could speak with me about any challenges.” What this shows is that servant leaders who promote openness and support create a sense of belonging which, over time, leads to long-term engagement.

For its part, participants gave some examples of how these servant leadership behaviours affected their team’s morale and engagement. R5 (Agile Team Member) described his leader who would constantly encourage members of the team while doing daily stand-ups and retrospectives to keep motivated despite the problems they encountered. “We would always have tough deadlines, but our leader always had a way of staying in shape and getting us motivated,” he added. “That positive energy made a big difference.” This is evidence of how servant leadership behaviours like encouragement and positive reinforcement allow for motivation of the team even while going through laborious agile processes. The emotional support provided by R2 (Agile Team Leader), was crucial to get the team through the burnout times. She said she was able to keep morale high by addressing the mental well-being of her team herself, offering breaks or even adjusting workloads to prevent disengagement. Showing actual care for his team’s well-being (especially during long sprints) led to more trust and a team that worked much more effectively together (R1, Agile Team Leader). The examples presented above examine how it develops an environment of support to create a greater sense of engagement and resilience in the face of adversity.

The results from the interviews find servant leadership to greatly improve team dynamics by raising morale, increasing engagement, and providing a sense of belonging. For those in Agile teams with tight deadlines and constant pressure, servant leaders who focus on emotional support and empathy serve a great purpose. Minimising job burnout, enhancing job satisfaction and boosting motivation are essentials for sustained performance over time in the long term, and servant leaders do this by prioritising team well-being. In Agile settings where teamwork is so important, morale and focus have a direct impact on team cohesion. This way, teams feel supported and valued, hence are more engaged and committed to the project goals leading to better

performance outcomes. Servant leadership behaviours fostered the escalating morale at R4 because her leader displayed empathy during a difficult sprint, demonstrating how team members feel inspired to put in their best efforts no matter the pressure. Additionally, R3 highlights an open and supportive environment, which is a significant aspect of servant leadership that encourages trust and a sense of shared responsibility which in turn improves team cohesion. Because positive team dynamics and the principles of Agile teams require continuous improvement and flexibility, this could lead to better collaboration, higher productivity and ultimately greater success.

3.2 Summary of Key Findings

With this study and analysis, key insights into the effect of servant leadership behaviours—empathy, active listening, and coaching—on Agile team performance have been shown. Thematic analysis of five interviews with Agile professionals revealed important patterns about how Agile leadership behaviours promote collaboration, stimulate innovation, assist in achieving project goals, increase responsiveness and adaptability, and influence team morale and level of engagement. In addition to addressing the primary research questions, these findings provide a more in-depth understanding of the role of servant leadership in Agile environments especially within Scrum and Kanban frameworks.

The major finding of the study is that servant leadership plays an important role in fostering team collaboration in Agile teams. Through the interviews, participants consistently stressed that servant leadership behaviours, particularly empathy and active listening, enabled them to create a trusting and open environment. For instance, R5 said, “it built trust and made it easier to collaborate.” As R1 said, coaching his team through many of these challenges ended up making his team's collaborative efforts significantly stronger. Servant leaders actively listen to members' concerns and give guidance, which creates a safe and supportive environment where team members feel attached to the team and empowered to contribute to the success of the whole team (Nauman et al., 2021). The importance of collaboration in this process matches with the principles adopted by Agile methodologies, such as Scrum, in which self-organisation and cross-functional teamwork are essential (Denning, 2018). Collaboration is essential in Agile teams who want to create high-quality products by way of iterative processes and never-ending feedback. This study found that the Agile principles would best be supported by servant leadership, in order to create communication and help sweep away barriers to collaboration. Such software facilitates work

among teams as it facilitates sharing knowledge and solving problems together, thus allowing the effective and efficient completion of tasks (Hoda et al., 2011). By focusing on empowering and supporting team members, servant leadership improves the collaborative spirit that is key to the success of Agile.

A second key finding from the study is the role servant leadership plays in promoting innovation within Agile teams. Continuous improvement and creative problem-solving are the kind of agile, adaptation-oriented environments that thrive on physical and psychological safety supported by risk-taking leaders (Rigby et al., 2016). R2 and R3 participants also explained how servant leadership gave their teams the freedom to experiment with new ideas without fear of failure. 'I always urged the team to push the boundaries of what was possible, to fail once or twice, as is common when one is first trying something unknown,' R3 said. In this, we see the ideal environment for servant leaders to foster for their team members to feel safe to experiment and innovate, an important ingredient when teams are expected to iterate and improve upon solutions (as in Agile frameworks like Scrum). Additionally, the study found the importance of coaching and supportive leadership behaviours in driving innovation. Servant leaders encourage team members to take ownership of the ideas they bring to the proverbial table but they also provide the resources and direction to explore new ways of thinking. This also matches the Scrum framework as sprints are iterative, so innovation and adaptation is ever present (Lindsjörn et al., 2016). This is how servant leadership adds to the team's capacity to remain agile and innovative, in this fast-paced environment.

The findings also showed a strong association between servant leadership behaviours and project goal achievement. Throughout the study, participants emphasised that servant leadership behaviours, coaching and removing obstacles, kept the team focused on achieving their goals. R1 exemplified one of the benefits of leadership coaching. From his inputs, he reported that his coaching expedited the team's ability to resolve complex project challenges which saw the timely delivery of project milestones. However, a good servant leader aligns the team's effort with project goals through their actions, including supporting the team members to achieve success by being available to them and providing them with resources (Saruchera, 2021). They found that servant leaders whose leadership was focused on team development helped teams keep sight of their objectives and remain committed to delivering results. This is especially true in Agile teams as

self-management and continuous goal alignment are critical (Gren et al., 2015). Servant leaders can keep a team motivated and keep everyone on track with short and long-term project objectives through regular coaching and emotional and technical support. This reiteration in Agile frameworks is yet another way in which the goals are reinforced so that a team stays on track and keeps delivering value to the customer throughout the journey.

The study also suggested how servant leadership helps a team to be adaptable and responsive, both of which are important factors in an Agile environment. Agile teams are made for responding quickly to changed requirements and for adapting to new challenges appearing in their way. “The team was helped by the fact that we quickly adapted to the changes of project requirements, as our leader helped us make our way through this chaos,” R5 says. However, this makes clear that the spirit of servant leadership is the backbone of a flexible and adaptable team culture (Dikert et al., 2016). Through servant leadership creating an environment of continuous feedback and open communication, a team acquires the capacity to be responsive. They can change their work processes based on moving project needs without the fear of consequences. Servant leaders are important in Scrum and Kanban frameworks because they make sure teams have what they need to make fast decisions and adapt quickly to stay on track (Rigby et al., 2016).

Lastly, the study shows that there is a positive correlation between servant leadership team morale, and team engagement. Emotional support and psychological safety were the most important aspects in preserving team morale throughout, they clarified, especially in sprints or project deadlines with a combative atmosphere. According to R4, team morale got a big boost when her leader showed empathy during a tough sprint. It shows how leaders' behaviours based on servant leadership such as empathy and emotional support are contributing factors to maintaining high levels of engagement of the team members and maintaining their motivation (Neubert et al., 2022). The findings suggest that creating a supportive team environment, one where team members feel loved has resulted in improving morale and ultimately better team cohesion. In the context of Agile settings, teams are often under tight pressure to deliver quickly and remain agile to successive changes; this is where it is especially important. Servant leaders help teams stay motivated and engaged through emotional support and creating a positive team culture and ultimately contribute to the improved team's performance and the success of the project (Denning, 2018).

3.3 Cross-Theme Analysis

Various themes related to team collaboration, innovation, project goal attainment, responsiveness and adaptability, and team morale and engagement are found to be interconnected with servant behaviours as a central thread connecting the dimension of Agile team performance. The reflexive thematic analysis yields one of the key findings – enhancing team collaboration via servant leadership behaviours like empathy, listening attentively, and coaching support innovation. As team members feel valued and heard, they will be more willing to bring more ideas to the table, take risks, and yet explore creative modes of solving problems. For example, R2 described how her empathetic leadership allowed for open communication among her team and helped them work together as they brainstormed during Scrum sprints. Collaboration establishes a fertile environment for innovation when team members are comfortable with new approaches because of the trust that collaboration builds. It is similar to the improvement of team collaboration as it directly impacts project goal attainment. Teams that communicate well and work well together are better placed to stay in tune with project goals and complete projects on time. According to R1, coaching his team improved their collaborative problem-solving skills, and even with complex challenges, they were able to reach project goals. Here we see that the same leadership behaviours that promote collaboration (for example, active listening and removing obstacles) are just as important to ensure the team stays on track and is successful in its efforts.

Similarly, the same servant leadership behaviours that serve to increase the responsiveness and adaptability of the team are frequently the ones that also increase team morale and engagement. If leaders put the wellness of their teams first by creating supportive environments, teams will adapt much better to changes in requirements. With the story, R5 shared how his leader's emotional support and encouragement helped the team cope extremely well with changes to the project's needs never getting their morale down. As a result, team morale is, in turn, both an outcome of emotional support and a driver of the team's flexibility and responsiveness.

Recurring patterns emerged across the interviews with participants frequently repeating and emphasising similar servant leadership behaviours that improved aspects of performance across teams. Participants found that empathy, active listening, coaching, and other servant leadership behaviours happened frequently, which improved collaboration, innovation, and goal attainment. R3, R2, and R4 showed that these behaviours created an open and supportive

environment that helped to give rise to both trust and creativity. For instance, R4's experience of empathy being a morale booster during a hard sprint points to the same contention that active listening allowed R3's team to stay focused and adapt to challenges better. Through servant leadership behaviours, these common themes demonstrate far-reaching impact on many other aspects of Agile team performance.

Interestingly, psychological safety also kept reappearing as the enabler of innovation and adaptability. But R2 and R5 mentioned that under leaders who created a psychologically safe environment (where ideas can be expressed freely and without fear of judgment), they engaged in more creative problem-solving—and the team felt better able to pivot on project changes. This further emphasises links between the requirement for psychological safety and team innovation and adaptability, which are core Agile, principal beliefs.

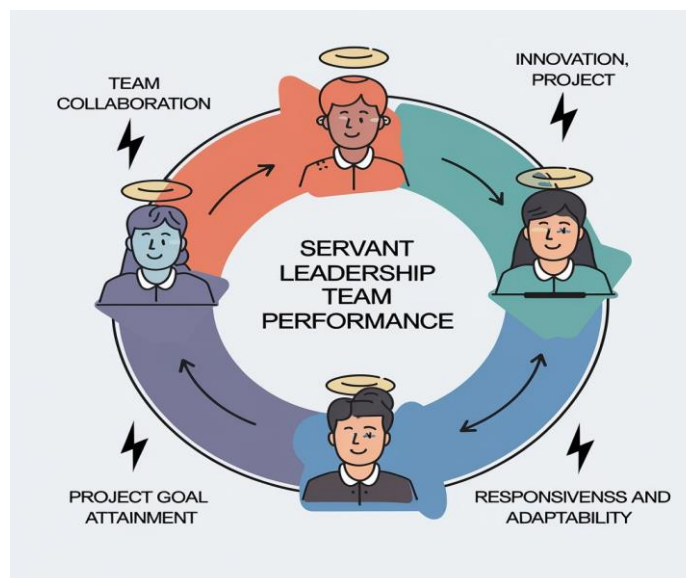
An interesting insight coming out of the interviews was that servant leadership behaviour, universally applauded for its positive influence, also created tensions in striking a balance between meeting tight output deadlines and making decisions quickly. Servant leadership created a collaborative and flexible work environment which, however, slowed decision-making from time to time — when too many 'servants' needed to have a voice in an area where decisions had to be made quickly, R3 added. This implies that servant leadership is generally a successful approach to working in Agile, but in particular cases, a direct type of leadership must be integrated or balanced with the more indirect to make fast decisions within tight timeframes.

Table 3.1: Summary of Servant Leadership Behaviours and Their Impact on Agile Team Performance across Key Themes

THEME	SERVANT LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR	IMPACT ON AGILE TEAM PERFORMANCE
TEAM COLLABORATION	Empathy, Active Listening, Coaching	Encourages open communication, trust, and stronger team cohesion, which aligns with Agile's focus on self-organizing teams.

INNOVATION	Psychological Safety, Risk-Taking	Fosters an environment where creative problem-solving and innovation thrive, especially within the Scrum framework.
PROJECT GOAL ATTAINMENT	Coaching, Removing Barriers	Helps the team stay focused and overcome obstacles, aligning efforts with project goals for successful delivery.
RESPONSIVENESS AND ADAPTABILITY	Emotional Support, Empowerment	Enables teams to quickly adapt to changing requirements, fostering agility and responsiveness in dynamic environments.
TEAM MORALE AND ENGAGEMENT	Empathy, Emotional Support	Boosts team motivation and morale, leading to higher engagement and sustained performance in high-pressure situations.

Figure 1: Visual Representation of Themes



3.4 Discussion, Implications and Limitations

The interviews with five Agile professionals R1 through R5 were analysed to answer the research questions. The findings provide a rich understanding of how servant leadership impacts Agile team performance by analysing themes around collaboration, innovation, responsiveness, adaptability, team morale, and engagement as they relate to project goal achievement.

Findings strongly indicate servant leadership practices have a tremendous influence on team collaboration in Agile environments. Empathy, active listening, and coaching bring up positive behaviours that keep the team and encourage a supportive and inclusive space that allows team members to feel their voice is heard and valued. As an Agile Team Leader, R1 stated that “we coached our team through challenges and watched collaboration improve as each person felt more capable and confident at sharing ideas and solving problems together.” R5 said the same thing, that his leader's active listening during the daily stand-ups of his team improved communication and alignment of the team, which was helpful to have a smooth synchronisation of the team sprints. Servant leadership behaviours are directly related to Agile principles of self-organisation, cross-functional teamwork, and collaboration are essential to delivering incremental high-quality results. Given this, preserving an effective collaboration in Agile teams depends on servant leadership.

Team innovation is also partially due to serving leadership, especially in the context of Scrum. We found in interviews that psychological safety, risk-taking, and creative problem-solving encourage innovation in the environment in servant leaders who help foster it. For instance, R3 told of how his team could experiment with new solutions within sprints as part of his servant leadership approach, even if that sometimes meant failing occasionally. His leadership backed this risk-taking attitude, which led to considerable innovation breakthroughs in the project. R2 also mentioned the empathy this leadership led to in feeling safe to propose creative ideas during Scrum retrospectives because trust was established with team members. An emphasis on continuous improvement, a key Agile principle is closely connected to the servant leader being in charge of pushing an innovative mind-set. The results indicate that servant leadership behaviours are crucial for motivating innovation within Scrum teams and ensuring an environment of safety and support for experimentation.

The analysis also demonstrates a clear relationship between the servant leaders' behaviours with the dedication to project goals in Agile teams. Participants mentioned again and again how coaching and removing obstacles kept teams on task and delivering work on time. R1 pointed out that his coaching style of shepherding team members through obstacles and encouraging them to learn problem-solving skills was credited for meeting project deadlines. R4 echoed this sentiment, saying that with her project leader's empathy, and his wanting to listen during the sprint retrospectives, the entire team would be on point with the project goals and make adjustments as they needed to, based on feedback. In Agile settings where project goals are continuously revisited, this alignment between servant leadership strategy and the project objective in unison is vital to producing the results. Consequently, findings indicate that within Agile teams, servant leadership behaviours like coaching and active support have a major role to play in hitting project goals.

The interviews also show that servant leadership practices help to improve the responsiveness and adaptability of Agile teams. R2 also discussed how her servant leadership style created a psychologically safe environment in which team members believed they had a hand in their own decision-making and were quickly able to adapt to external challenges. In Agile frameworks such as Scrum, where continuous improvement and iterative progress are inevitable, servant leaders facilitate responsiveness through their ability to create an environment that promotes quick decision making and flexibility. The findings show how servant leadership promotes the agility needed to adapt to changes, embrace Agile principles, and sustain project momentum.

Another critical finding is the impact of this type of leadership on team morale and engagement. During the interviews, we found that participants emphasised that servant leadership behaviours like empathy and emotional support had a positive impact on their motivation and engagement. With her leader, R4 explained that his empathy during a tense sprint made morale remain high during the pressure. R3 also said that keeping morale high in the face of challenging product development cycles involved maintaining open lines of communication with and providing emotional support for the team members. These findings support the centrality of servant leadership in keeping team motivation and engagement high which in turn keeps the performance of the team high and sustained in Agile environments.

The results have important implications for the academic study of leadership, as well as for leadership in practice among Agile teams. As an academic contribution, the research contributes to a growing body of literature on servant leadership by delivering empirical evidence of the positive effects of servant leadership on team collaboration, innovation, goal attainment, responsiveness, and morale in Agile settings. The findings lead to an expansion in our understanding of how to adapt leadership behaviours to meet the specific needs of Agile frameworks like Scrum and Kanban. The findings are practically useful for informing leadership development programs in organisations that adopt Agile methodologies. Organisations that utilise servant leadership principles within their leadership training are better able to create teams that exemplify collaboration, innovation, and responsiveness to change, leading to a project being completed that reaches its goals. Furthermore, highlighting empathy and emotional support as the main leadership behaviours are found to be essential for resilient leadership in terms of maintaining high morale and engagement critical to long-term success in Agile environments. Given this, the findings can be widely applied to enable better leadership practices for Agile teams in different industries.

This study, however, also has weaknesses. Given the small sample size of only five participants, it restricts the generalizability of the findings to different industries and cultures. Furthermore, this was based on Agile teams in specific industries i.e., FinTech, Healthcare IT, Mobile App Development, etc. which might not fully depict the diversity of Agile practices in other industries. Limitations of this research could be addressed in the future by looking at servant leadership in a wider area of Agile frameworks than Scrum and Kanban (such as Extreme Programming (XP) or Lean Agile). Additionally, extending the study to comprise individuals from various cultural backgrounds and dwelling in other geographic areas, would extend the knowledge of the application of servant leadership in other than cultural Agile environments. Furthermore, longitudinal studies where the effects of servant leadership on team performance are tracked over the long term could give more understanding of its long-lasting effect on Agile teams.

3.5 Summary of Key Insights on Servant Leadership in Agile Environments

The outcome of this study demonstrates the importance of servant leadership behaviours in Agile team dynamics. Through the analysis, servant leadership practices such as empathy, active listening, and coaching were found to greatly increase team collaboration, innovation,

responsiveness and adaptability, and morale for Agile teams. Repeatedly, participants highlighted servant leadership's ability to create a supportive, empowering, and valuing environment that can enhance the engaged use of team processes and goal attainment by the team. I found that emotional support and psychological safety, when applied in servant leadership applied directly to enhance team performance and engagement which was further found to be profound during stressful sprints and complex project cycles.

This research contributes valuable insights to the understanding of leadership styles within Agile environments. The study is a contribution to leadership theory and Agile practice, focusing on servant leadership, and presenting leadership behaviours generally associated with supportive and empathetic leadership as not only relevant but crucially effective, in Agile methods like Scrum and Kanban. The research demonstrates how servant leadership fits within Agile principles such as self-organisation, collaboration, and continuous improvements, and how it plays a part in creating team dynamics necessary for Agile success. Therefore, this study extends the body of knowledge on leadership in Agile settings by demonstrating that servant leadership can be a significant driver of both team performance and project success. In practical terms, the results of this study suggest that organisations that implement Agile methodologies can also and should invest in developing servant leadership practices for their leaders. Those leaders who focus on empathy, active support, and coaching are more likely to build innovative teams that collaborate and adjust to change quickly and sustain high levels of engagement. As a servant leader, you can create an environment that promotes the Agile team through the difficulties presented by continuous iteration, tight deadlines, and changing project requirements. Agile teams benefit from training programs with a focus on servant leadership behaviours because those behaviours have been proven to enhance collaboration, innovation, and goal attainment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, we explored the impact of servant leadership behaviours – empathy, active listening, and coaching – on Agile team dynamics and their contributions to Agile teams' performance. The Agile methodology, Scrum and Kanban, focuses on collaboration, innovation, achievement of goals, and responsiveness as well as team morale. While this topic has garnered much previous research into Agile practices itself, little focus has been devoted to how servant leadership further facilitates these factors. This study aimed to fill that gap and explore how servant leadership behaviours matched with and supported the core principles of Agile. As a result, servant leadership encourages the flourishing of the people on the team, and that philosophy very much is aligned with Agile principles like self-organising, continuous feedback, adaptability, etc. It sought to address questions regarding how servant leadership enhances response and adaptability; improves team morale and engagement; fosters innovation; positively impacts collaboration among team members; and determines its impact on the achievement of the project goal.

The study collected in-depth data through semi-structured interviews with five Agile professionals from across different industries by way of qualitative research. Next, the analysis of servant leadership behaviours that are commonly present during Agile teams is carried out through thematic analysis of the interview data, identified as recurring servant leadership behaviours that help positively increase Agile team performance. Empathy and active listening fostered collaboration in teams, coaching kept teams moving forward and tackling the challenges to focus on delivering high-quality results. In addition, we demonstrated how servant leadership predisposes the team to be more responsive and adaptable, which is essential for teams working in a dynamic context. These leadership behaviours also encouraged psychological safety, allowing teams to engage in risk-taking and innovation. Finally, there was evidence that servant leadership supported team morale, especially during high-pressure times, such as project sprints.

Implications for Leadership Theory and Agile Practice

This research adds to leadership theory by illustrating how servant leadership is an appropriate fit for Agile environments. Traditional leadership theories, such as transactional or transformational leadership, centre on the leader as the person who makes the decision.

Conversely, servant leadership reduces authority to support and empower team members. So, consequently, this approach fits better with the principles of Agile, as they prefer self-organisation, collaboration, and flexibility. Findings indicated that servant leadership behaviours like empathy, coaching, and active listening enhance team performance but with the complement of agile principles where assurance of trust and openness are created. For example, it is understood that servant leaders create a psychologically safe culture where team members feel empowered to share ideas and take risks, constantly improving and innovating. The role of servant leadership supports not only Agile team members working better together, but indeed reaching the goal. Teams coached and barriers removed by leaders allow teams to complete projects and deliver results. The research clarifies that servant leadership makes a team more responsive and adaptive than other styles, both of which are critical properties of teams operating in environments characterized by rapid change of project requirements. As a servant leader offers emotional support and enables team members to exercise their power of decision by themselves, team morale and motivation remain highly motivated even when the team is under stress.

Practical Recommendations for Organisations

To harness the benefits of servant leadership in Agile environments, organisations should consider the following actionable recommendations:

- i. **Develop Leadership Training Programs Focused on Servant Leadership:** Leadership development programs should be a place where organisations invest in and teach key servant leadership behaviours such as empathy, active listening, and coaching. Adopting these practices will allow leaders to train their teams to be more collaborative, more innovative, and better aligned to the goal – particularly in Agile environments where flexibility, team drivers and decisions count.
- ii. **Encourage the Use of Servant Leadership Practices in Agile Frameworks:** In sync with Agile frameworks such as Scrum and Kanban, servant leadership naturally resonates with self-organisation, incremental delivery, and a continuous improvement approach. Within these frameworks, organisations should promote servant leadership and utilise servant leaders that employ collaborative and supportive leadership styles. For example, the utilization of sprint retrospectives can help Scrum Masters cultivate open dialogue and creative problem-solving to increase team productivity and innovation.

- iii. **Create a Supportive Leadership Culture to Maintain High Team Morale and Engagement:** Organisations must build a leadership culture that values emotional support, empathy and positive reinforcement. In the Agile world, for instance, teams work under pressure conditions and have a very short deadline. If leaders are caring enough to care about how their team members are doing, it prevents burnout and keeps that engagement high. Comprising regular check-ins, emotional support when stressed, and making the workplace psychologically safe are practices that organisations should allow.

Limitations of the Study

This study brings forward valuable findings regarding the influence of servant leadership on Agile teams, but it is important to recognise the limitations. First, the sample size is too small; there are only five interview participants. Although the observational data yielded rich and detailed insights, extrapolating the results to all Agile teams and industries is limited, given the small number of participants. Also, the study's investigation of certain industries, such as FinTech and Healthcare IT, further limits the generalizability of the results to other sectors where other leadership styles or team dynamics may be present. Moreover, the study works in qualitative settings which limits quantitative validation. However, although the interviews indicated the main patterns and themes of these cases, the study lacks empirical data to measure with how much precision servant leadership contributes to team performance. Although further research utilizing quantitative methods would be necessary to offer more concrete evidence of a correlation of servant leadership to Agile team success, this study shows evidence of the validity of servant leadership in an Agile environment.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is future research that could build on the findings of this study as it looks into agile frameworks other than Scrum to explore servant leadership; i.e. Extreme Programming (XP) or Lean Agile. Agile frameworks each have their principles and practices and how best you employ servant leadership behaviours may differ in each. Examining these interactions could give a broader picture of the impact of servant leadership on other team dynamics along with project results as they occur in different Methodologies. Cross-cultural studies is another area for exploration in the future. As such, we observe that cultural norms and values often shape leadership styles, and an exploration of how servant leadership is adapted and applied in different cultural

and geographical situations would be enlightening. The effectiveness of servant leadership behaviours such as empathy and coaching could be explored through cross-cultural research, to determine whether such behaviours are universally successful, or whether their impact is moderated by cultural factors to affect team performance. Future studies could also include the incorporation of quantitative research to measure the impact of servant leadership on a few of those team performance metrics, especially on productivity rates, innovation rates, and project success rates. It would be better to get harder, measurable evidence through surveys or performance metrics regarding the relationship between servant leaders and Agile team outcomes. Moreover, longitudinal studies could evaluate the long-term leadership effects of servant leadership on Agile teams by following the evolution of leadership behaviours among the team over multiple project cycles and measuring the longitudinal implied leadership effects on teams' performance.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Introduction:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome the participant, thank them for their time, and explain the purpose of the interview. 2. Briefly describe the research topic: investigating the impact of servant leadership on team performance within Agile environments. 3. Explain that the interview will take approximately 30 minutes, and their responses will remain confidential and anonymous. 4. Obtain consent to record the interview (if applicable). 5. Start with general questions to ease the participant into the discussion.
General Questions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you briefly describe your role in the Agile team? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Follow-up: How long have you been working in an Agile environment? b. Follow-up: Which Agile framework(s) (e.g., Scrum, Kanban) does your team primarily use?
Research Question 1: Servant Leadership and Team Collaboration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. In your experience, how do leadership practices influence team collaboration in your Agile team? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Follow-up: What specific leadership behaviours have contributed most to enhancing collaboration among team members? b. Follow-up: Can you provide examples of how a leader's behaviour has improved or hindered team collaboration? 3. Have you observed any servant leadership behaviours (such as empathy, listening, or coaching) from your team leader or yourself? How have these behaviours impacted team collaboration?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Follow-up: How do these leadership behaviours align with the Agile principles of team empowerment and self-organization?
Research Question 2: Servant Leadership and Innovation in Scrum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How does your team foster innovation, particularly within the Scrum framework? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Follow-up: How do leadership behaviours encourage or discourage innovation in your Agile team? b. Follow-up: Can you share any specific instances where servant leadership behaviours (like encouraging others, or creating a supportive environment) led to innovative ideas? 5. In your opinion, how does servant leadership contribute to the team's ability to innovate during Scrum sprints or in product development cycles? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Follow-up: What challenges or barriers, if any, have you encountered in promoting innovation under Agile leadership?
Research Question 3: Servant Leadership and Project Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. In your experience, is there a connection between servant leadership practices and your team's ability to meet project goals? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Follow-up: Can you share examples of how servant leadership has helped or hindered the team in achieving specific goals? b. Follow-up: How do you feel these leadership behaviours influence the efficiency or speed of goal attainment in Agile settings? 7. How do leaders in your Agile team balance servant leadership practices with meeting tight project deadlines or goals?

<p>Research Question 4: Servant Leadership, Responsiveness, and Adaptability</p>	<p>8. Agile teams are known for their adaptability and responsiveness to change. How do you think servant leadership influences your team's ability to adapt to new challenges or changing requirements?</p> <p>a. Follow-up: Can you recall any specific situations where servant leadership behaviours helped your team respond quickly to changes?</p> <p>9. In your view, do servant leadership practices enhance your team's flexibility, or do they sometimes slow decision-making processes?</p>
<p>Research Question 5: Servant Leadership, Team Morale, and Engagement</p>	<p>10. What effect do you think servant leadership has on team morale and engagement in your Agile team?</p> <p>a. Follow-up: How do you see servant leadership behaviours (e.g., active listening, empathy) contributing to team members feeling more engaged and motivated?</p> <p>b. Follow-up: Can you share any examples where leadership behaviour had a significant positive or negative impact on team morale?</p> <p>11. In Agile environments, where there is often high pressure, how do leaders support the mental and emotional well-being of their teams?</p> <p>a. Follow-up: Do you feel servant leadership behaviours help create a more supportive environment, particularly during stressful periods?</p>
<p>Closing Questions:</p>	<p>12. From your perspective, what leadership qualities are most important for a leader working in Agile environments?</p> <p>a. Follow-up: Based on your experience, do you believe that servant leadership is an effective style in Agile teams? Why or why not?</p>

	13. Is there anything else you'd like to add about leadership in Agile environments or how it affects your team's performance?
Conclusion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">i. Thank the participant for their time and valuable insights.ii. Reiterate the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.iii. Ask if they would like to receive a summary of the study's findings once completed.

Appendix B: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

PARTICIPANT CODE	ROLE	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	INDUSTRY EXPERTISE	CERTIFICATIONS	LOCATION
R1	Agile Team Leader	18 years	FinTech, Software Development	Certified ScrumMaster (CSM), PMP	Lagos, Nigeria
R2	Agile Team Leader	15 years	Healthcare IT, Data Analytics	Certified Agile Leader (ICP-LEA)	Bangalore, India
R3	Agile Team Leader	20 years	E-commerce, Cloud Computing	Certified Scrum Product Owner (CSPO)	Austin, USA
R4	Agile Team Member	7 years	Web Development, UX/UI Design	SAFe Practitioner (SP)	Abuja, Nigeria
R5	Agile Team Member	5 years	Mobile App Development	Certified Scrum Developer (CSD)	Abuja, Nigeria

Appendix C: SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (Excerpt)

Interview with R1 - Agile Team Leader (18 years of experience in FinTech and Software Development)

Interviewer	Thank you for joining this interview. To start, could you briefly describe your role in the Agile team?
R1 (Agile Team Leader)	Certainly! I'm an Agile Team Leader working primarily in the FinTech industry. I lead a cross-functional team where we handle various software development projects, usually within the Scrum framework. My responsibilities include facilitating sprints, ensuring team alignment with project goals, and offering coaching to my team members to develop their skills.
Interviewer	Great! How long have you been working in an Agile environment, and which Agile framework does your team primarily use?
R1	I've been working in Agile environments for about 18 years now. Most of the projects I manage follow the Scrum framework, although we occasionally adopt elements of Kanban for workflow management.
Interviewer	In your experience, how do leadership practices, particularly servant leadership, influence team collaboration in your Agile team?
R1	In my experience, servant leadership has a significant positive impact on team collaboration. I focus heavily on coaching and fostering open communication. When I coach my team members, I see that they become more confident in sharing their ideas, which improves problem-solving during our sprints. For instance, a few months ago, we were facing a challenging technical issue, and I made sure everyone's input was valued during our discussions. It led to a collaborative solution that we wouldn't have achieved otherwise.

Interviewer	You mentioned coaching as a key practice. Can you elaborate on how it specifically improves team collaboration?
R1	Coaching allows team members to grow in their roles. When I coach them through challenges, they develop problem-solving skills and a better understanding of the project, which boosts their confidence. This confidence, in turn, leads to more open discussions during our Scrum ceremonies. For example, when someone knows their input will be heard and considered, they're more likely to actively participate, which strengthens collaboration.
Interviewer	That makes a lot of sense. Have you observed any other servant leadership behaviours, like empathy or active listening, contributing to collaboration?
R1	Definitely. Active listening is crucial. During our daily stand-ups, I make a conscious effort to listen attentively to each team member's concerns. This builds trust because the team knows their voices are heard. Empathy plays a big role too—especially when the team is under pressure. I've had situations where deadlines were tight, and some team members were stressed. By checking in with them and acknowledging their challenges, I've been able to create a supportive atmosphere where they feel more motivated and less overwhelmed.

Appendix D: CODING FRAMEWORK

This appendix provides a detailed explanation of the coding framework used in the thematic analysis of the interview data. The coding framework was developed based on an iterative process, allowing for the identification of key patterns, themes, and sub-themes that emerged from the interview transcripts. Below is an outline of the major themes, codes, and sub-codes derived from the data.

	Team Collaboration
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Theme 1	Description: This theme explores how servant leadership behaviours impact collaboration within Agile teams.	
	Code 1.1	Empathy
	Sub-code 1.1.1	Empathetic listening during team meetings
	Sub-code 1.1.2	Understanding personal challenges and their impact on work performance
	Code 1.2	Coaching
	Sub-code 1.2.1	Leader guidance during difficult tasks
	Sub-code 1.2.2	Fostering a safe space for sharing ideas
	Code 1.3	Trust Building
	Sub-code 1.3.1	Open communication through regular feedback
	Sub-code 1.3.2	Creating a sense of shared responsibility
Theme 2	Innovation	
	Description: This theme focuses on how servant leadership promotes innovation in Agile environments by fostering psychological safety and encouraging risk-taking.	
	Code 2.1	Encouraging Risk-Taking
	Sub-code 2.1.1	Leader's openness to experimentation
	Sub-code 2.1.2	Allowing failure as part of the learning process
	Code 2.2	Psychological Safety
	Sub-code 2.2.1	Creating a non-judgmental environment for idea sharing
	Sub-code 2.2.2	Empowering team members to propose creative solutions
	Code 2.3	Continuous Improvement
	Sub-code 2.3.1	Iterative feedback loops in Scrum and Kanban
	Sub-code 2.3.2	Leader support during innovation retrospectives
Theme 3	Project Goal Attainment	
	Description: This theme examines how servant leadership behaviours contribute to meeting project goals by removing obstacles and providing coaching support.	
	Code 3.1	Coaching for Goal Alignment
	Sub-code 3.1.1	Leader's role in clarifying project objectives
	Sub-code 3.1.2	Supporting team problem-solving to meet deadlines

	Code 3.2	Removing Barriers
	Sub-code 3.2.1	Resolving resource or stakeholder conflicts
	Sub-code 3.2.2	Facilitating smooth communication between teams
	Code 3.3	Supporting Self-Management
	Sub-code 3.3.1	Encouraging autonomous decision-making
	Sub-code 3.3.2	Empowering team members to resolve issues independently
Theme 4	Responsiveness and Adaptability Description: This theme highlights how servant leadership enables Agile teams to remain adaptable and responsive to changes in project requirements or external factors.	
	Code 4.1	Rapid Adaptation
	Sub-code 4.1.1	Leader's support during changing client demands
	Sub-code 4.1.2	Facilitating team decision-making under pressure
	Code 4.2	Flexibility in Roles
	Sub-code 4.2.1	Encouraging cross-functional collaboration
	Sub-code 4.2.2	Reassigning tasks based on evolving project needs
	Code 4.3	Communication Channels
	Sub-code 4.3.1	Maintaining open communication during project pivots
	Sub-code 4.3.2	Adjusting team processes in response to feedback
Theme 5	Team Morale and Engagement Description: This theme focuses on how servant leadership behaviours, such as emotional support and empathy, improve team morale and engagement, particularly in high-pressure environments.	
	Code 5.1	Emotional Support
	Sub-code 5.1.1	Checking in on team members' well-being during sprints
	Sub-code 5.1.2	Addressing personal concerns that affect work
	Code 5.2	Motivation and Encouragement
	Sub-code 5.2.1	Leaders providing positive reinforcement
	Sub-code 5.2.2	Encouraging teams during challenging deadlines

	Code 5.3	Fostering Engagement
	Sub-code 5.3.1	Creating opportunities for team member recognition
	Sub-code 5.3.2	Promoting a culture of shared ownership and involvement

Coding Process Overview

The coding framework was developed through the following steps:

1. **Familiarisation with the Data:** Interview transcripts were thoroughly reviewed to identify recurring patterns and behaviours related to servant leadership.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** A set of initial codes was developed based on key behaviours, including empathy, coaching, and active listening.
3. **Reviewing and Refining Codes:** The initial codes were reviewed and grouped into broader categories, forming the five major themes identified above.
4. **Defining Themes:** The themes were clearly defined to ensure they accurately captured the essence of the interview data.
5. **Application of Codes:** Each interview transcript was coded according to this framework, with examples from the data assigned to specific codes and sub-codes.

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY

Title of Study:

Leadership in Agile Teams and its Impact on Team Performance

Principal Investigator:

Name:

Position:

Institution

Contact Information:

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to explore the impact of servant leadership behaviours, such as empathy, active listening, and coaching, on Agile team performance. This study seeks to understand how these leadership practices influence key Agile outcomes such as team collaboration, innovation, project goal attainment, adaptability, and team morale.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview, which will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences with leadership behaviours and their influence on your team's performance within Agile frameworks such as Scrum or Kanban. Your responses will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes, and anonymised data will be used in the analysis and reporting of the study's findings.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part or to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequence or penalty. You may also choose not to answer specific questions during the interview.

Confidentiality

All information collected during the study will remain confidential. Pseudonyms (or participant codes) will be used to protect your identity, and no personally identifiable information will be included in any publications or reports. The data collected, including interview recordings and transcripts, will be securely stored and only accessible to the research team. Once the study is completed, all identifying data will be permanently deleted.

Potential Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. Your participation will help provide valuable insights into leadership practices in Agile environments and contribute to academic knowledge on leadership theory and Agile team dynamics.

Right to Withdraw

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. If you choose to withdraw, all data collected from you will be removed from the study and destroyed.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact the principal investigator at [Contact Information]. If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant, you may also contact [Institution's Ethics Board Contact Information].

Consent

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided in this consent form. You agree to participate in the study under the terms outlined above.

You will receive a copy of this signed consent form for your records.

Participant Name (Print)	Principal Investigator Signature
Participant Signature	Date
Date	

Appendix F: PSEUDONYM ASSIGNMENT TABLE

This table provides the pseudonym assignments (coded as R1 to R5) used to ensure the confidentiality of the interview participants during the presentation of findings. The table corresponds to each participant's role, years of experience, and assigned code.

Pseudonym/Code	Role	Years of Experience	Industry Expertise
R1	Agile Team Leader	18 years	FinTech, Software Development
R2	Agile Team Leader	15 years	Healthcare IT, Data Analytics
R3	Agile Team Leader	20 years	E-commerce, Cloud Computing
R4	Agile Team Member	7 years	Web Development, UX/UI Design
R5	Agile Team Member	5 years	Mobile App Development

This pseudonym assignment table ensures that participants' identities are protected, and no personal information is disclosed in the study findings. The assigned codes (R1 to R5) correspond to each participant's contributions during the data collection and analysis process.