

Agile Culture, Agile and Non-Agile Minded Employees' Interrelations in the Context of Agile-Minded Leader Paradox

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Abstract: This study follows previous research indicating that leaders with an agile mindset are essential for establishing an agile organization. They directly influence the creation of such an organization, support agile-minded employees, and motivate non-agile staff to change their attitudes and behaviors. This study examines the relationships between agile and non-agile employees in environments characterized by agile culture and those without it, while excluding the impact of agile-minded leaders from the analysis. The results indicate that a firm or robust agile culture within an organization leads to a negative perception of non-agile-minded employees, while the opposite relationship is not significant. Thus, addressing the research question to which this study is dedicated—whether agile culture mitigates tensions between agile and non-agile staff—the answer is no; it does not. Consequently, the Agile-Minded Paradox remains one of the biggest challenges agile-minded leaders face when building or managing agile organizations. So, this constant tension caused the Agile Minded Leader Paradox to remain unsolved, but with awareness of it, agile-minded leaders can manage these tensions more effectively. Furthermore, this study provides insights into this complex situation. Specifically, in an agile culture where high standards are established, agile-minded staff (the minority) are not victims of non-agile-minded employees (the majority). Thus, even as a minority, agile-minded staff are very efficient and influential when working in a company dominated by agile culture.

Keywords: Agile-Minded leader paradox, Agile mindset, Agile culture, Agile mindset leader, Agile mindset follower, Non-Agile mindset follower

1. Introduction

The essence of the Agile-Minded Leader Paradox is a tension stemming from the fact that agile organizations cannot exist without agile-minded leaders, who support agile-minded employees and organizations but are perceived by non-agile employees as severe stressors. Since agile-minded employees are typically a minority and non-agile employees constitute the majority, the authors view this situation as a curious managerial paradox (Kucharska et al., 2025a). Agile leaders must navigate the daily challenge of managing a company where critical agile mindsets are in the minority. At the same time, the non-agile-minded majority operates under continuous pressure from the agile culture, viewing agile leaders as “stressors” (Kucharska et al., 2025b). On one hand, this scenario may motivate non-agile followers to leave their ‘comfort zone’ (McCauley and Yost, 2021) and adapt. On the other hand, the intense pressure from the contradictory climate can hinder their capabilities. Recent studies indicate that agile culture can help mitigate this tension. Specifically, Kucharska et al.’s (2025b) cross-country study confirmed the presence of the agile-minded leadership paradox. This paradox arises from the tension created because agile organizations depend on both agile leaders and agile staff. However, friction often occurs between agile leaders and staff (who are in the minority) and non-agile staff (who make up the majority). Non-agile staff perceive agile leaders, culture, and colleagues as stressors. The authors of this study demonstrated that an agile culture could help alleviate the challenges posed by this paradox. Nonetheless, it also revealed varied perceptions regarding the effectiveness of implementing an agile culture. To ease this tension, it is essential to adopt balanced, diverse, and multi-level shared leadership, all supported by the agile culture, to foster agility. The authors emphasized that tailoring the influence of agile leaders to the mindsets of their followers—applying a direct approach for those with an agile mindset and a mediated approach through agile culture for those with a non-agile mindset—appears to be best practice.

Thus, agile culture, when used as an agile leadership practice, can significantly mediate between agile leaders and their followers to achieve an agile organization (Kucharska et al., 2025b). Following this line of research, this study aims to explore the interrelations between agile and non-agile employees under the condition that agile culture dominates and without it, and when the power of the agile-minded leader is ignored (excluded from the investigation). Therefore, the research question to which this study is dedicated is:

RQ: How does an agile culture moderate the relation between agile and non-agile co-workers?

2. Conceptual Framework

In a rapidly changing world, adaptability and flexibility skills are essential for survival (Jussila and Suominen, 2009). Organizational agility allows businesses to respond quickly and efficiently, thus improving performance during volatile times, which is vital today (Tanushree-Sahoo and Chaubey, 2024). As a result, leadership must be as dynamic as the business environment itself. Agile-minded leaders have recently been proven to be a key influencing power in the development of dynamic capabilities (Kucharski et al., 2025) and in the overall agility of organizations (Kucharska et al., 2025a,b; Kumar and Ray, 2023; Tarken and Hart, 2023). Therefore, agile-minded leadership is of high interest today.

Leadership is seen as “the process through which an individual becomes influential to relevant others in a manner that involves the implicit or explicit granting of the leader role” (Badura et al., 2022, p. 2070). Therefore, leadership is a dynamic process of social influence (Day and Antonakis, 2013; Kumar and Ray, 2023). Effective leadership today requires an understanding of and respect for diverse cultural norms and values, along with the ability to adapt leadership styles to various contexts (Jain and Ovais, 2025). Furthermore, the adaptive power of culture, both internal and external, highlights its significant role in supporting organizational adaptability, survival, and growth, as emphasized by Dwairy (2019). Consequently, this study proposes an agile culture as an effective tool influencing social processes within agile organizations. What is pioneering, in comparison to former studies, is that this research explores how the relationships between agile and non-agile employees, as well as agile organizations, change when facilitated or not by agile culture, notably if the agile-minded leader is excluded from the model.

Agile organizations and their agile and non-agile mindset employees

Agile thinking and acting are key to establishing a successful agile enterprise that prioritizes customers and society, empowers employees, and boosts productivity by 20% to 40% through enhanced engagement (Rigby et al., 2020). Thus, the development of such organizations is currently an object of desire. At the heart of any organization are the people (employees) and their smooth cooperation, knowledge sharing, and learning, which enhance its collective intelligence and serve as the root of organizational agility (Kucharska, 2025). Since organizations are composed of people, employee agility rooted in their mindset is the focus of this study.

So, employees' mindsets' agility directly impacts an agile organization (Bablo et al., 2023; Eilers et al., 2022; Ozkan et al., 2023). Employees' agility is rooted in their mindset. According to Kucharska et al. (2025a) agile mindset is defined as “a state of mind that positively evaluates change as intellectual stimuli and sees it as a challenge; next, channels this challenge into opportunity; finally, smoothly adapts own actions to win the maximum advantage of this opportunity, thanks to critical thinking, risk analyzing, smooth learning and unlearning with special attention to contextual (tacit) knowledge gathering from experience, fluently operating on paradoxes and taking decisions timely and accurately.” Moreover, these authors define the agile organization as “an efficient, comprehensive adaptive system that encompasses the coordination of people, processes, technology, culture, and resources; which critically depends on its agile-minded leadership and agile minded employees'; technology adoption, agile management methods application; and also firmly on its culture, structure, and strategic resource identification and security; and where all of those elements combination is synergically oriented toward sustaining a long-term competitive strategy. Moreover, it is clear that employees' mindsets directly impact organizational performance (Murphy and Reeves, 2019). Therefore, this study aims to explore in more depth the relationship between agile and non-agile staff's potential options for cooperation to support agile organization achievement.

Kucharska et al. (2025a,b) examined the impact of agile and non-agile-minded employees on agile organizations [AO]. They found that agile-minded employees impact AO positively, whereas non-agile-minded employees negatively, and that both groups cannot cooperate without friction (Figure 1). Therefore, as stated in the introduction section, this study aims to check if agile culture can mitigate this friction. However, in contrast to the previous studies, this paper focuses only on the relation between agile and non-agile employees, excluding leaders' power. Such an approach is necessary to understand the nature of relations between these two groups fully. Ambituuni et al. (2021) clearly stated that some employees are agile (minority), whereas others are not (majority) and probably never will be. Both groups must co-exist and cooperate. Therefore, it is important to find out the best options for how these groups can not only co-exist but also cooperate. Agile culture conditions can matter. So, this study aims to find out.

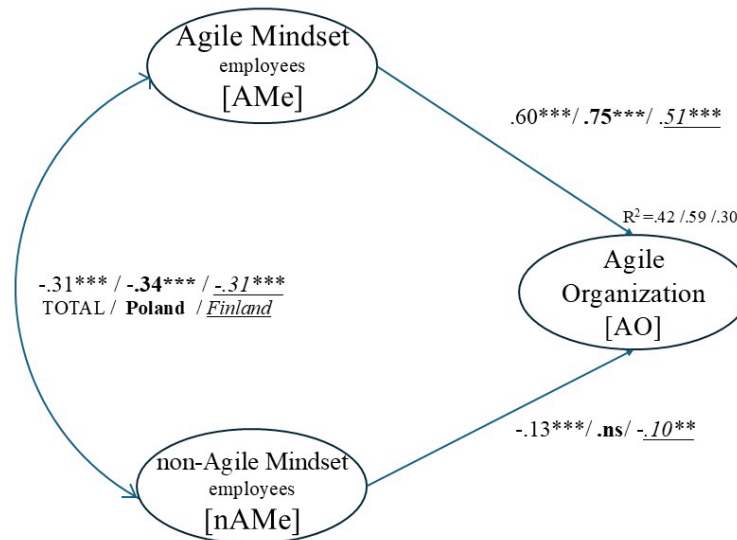


Figure 1: Agile and non-agile-minded employees' impact on the agile organization (this study's inspiration)

N=1871/953/918 (TOTAL/Poland/Finland); Cmin/df=3.87/2.61/3.05 CFI=.969/.967/.953 TLI=.966/.965/.949 RMSEA=.039(.037-.041)/.041(.038-.044)/.047(.044-.050); ML-maximum likelihood, standardized estimates; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; ns—not significant result. Source: Kucharska et al. (2025b)

Agile culture

The concept of agile culture and the principles of agility have ignited a vibrant interest among both scholars and practitioners, highlighting their remarkable potential to drive innovation and elevate performance (Magistretti and Trabucchi, 2025; Uwasomba et al., 2025; Zeitoun, 2023). As described by Payol (2022), an agile culture thrives in an environment free from bureaucracy, control, and fear. In this dynamic landscape, an agile leader stands out, embodying qualities such as energy, resilience, unwavering motivation, a growth mindset, courage, and vulnerability. Company culture greatly influences member behavior (Edmonds, 2014; Steers and Sánchez-Runde, 2017). Therefore, fostering an agile culture is invaluable, positively impacting both agile and non-agile staff. Following Kucharska et al. (2025b), we define an agile culture as one characterized by an open mind and a strong collective spirit oriented towards continual improvement, viewing change simultaneously as a norm and as an opportunity. Moreover, Kucharska et al. (2025b) empirically proved that the impact of agile leadership on both agile and non-agile-minded staff is mitigated by agile culture and confirmed that agile leadership is an agile-cultural practice. Since this study focuses on the relations between agile and non-agile staff, it aims to determine whether the agile culture mitigates the negative relationship between agile and non-agile workmates. Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H1a: Agile culture positively facilitates (mitigates) the negative impact of agile-minded employees on non-agile-minded employees

H1b: Agile culture positively facilitates (mitigates) the negative impact of non-agile-minded employees on agile-minded employees

All the above assumptions are summarized in Figure 2.

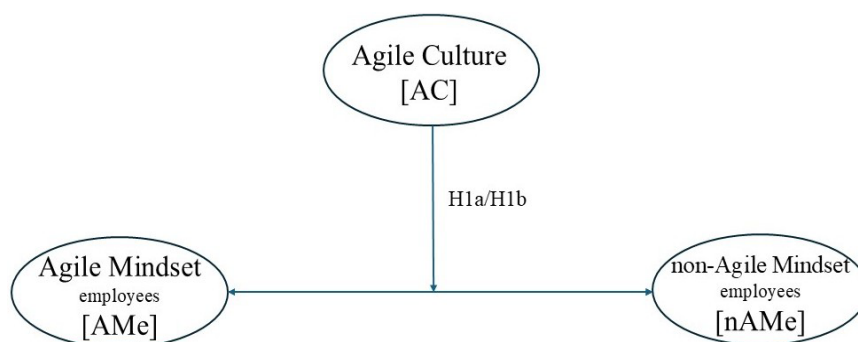


Figure 2: Theoretical model (serves this study's purpose)

3. Methodology

The models reflect the perceptions of the participants: male and female, specialists and leaders from Poland and Finland. Data were collected in March 2025 using the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) method. The total sample size is 1871 cases (country input and gender balance are secured). Respondents provided their subjective opinions and observations regarding their working environments by answering the statements (Appendix 1) on a 7-point Likert scale (1- totally disagree; 7- perfectly agree). The cross-loading matrix (Appendix 2) proves good quality of the measures taken (loadings exceed 0,5, and scales do not overlap). Moreover, the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) test of adequacy yielded a result of 0.971, and the CMV was 68%, indicating good quality of the measures (Byrne, 2016). Table 1 below presents the details of the measurement scales, their sources, and the measure quality metrics. Next, the OLS regression using SPSS PROCESS was conducted to verify the theoretical model shown in Figure 1.

Table 1: Scales and their reliabilities

Scale	Statements	Reliabilities based on CFA models
Agile mindset employee [AMe] Kucharska et al. (2025a)	About workmates perceived as an agile mindset: a. they quickly adapt to new conditions b. they usually achieve their aims c. they never give up d. they learn, unlearn, and relearn smoothly e. they can work in unpredictable environments (they accept uncertainty) f. they act dynamically g. they see change as an opportunity h. they are passionate, enthusiastic, and engaged at work (all conditions met) i. they can follow schemes but also can act creatively beyond schemes (both conditions met) j. they accept the challenge k. they are open to change l. they accept risk m. they learn from mistakes	Cronbach alpha = .90 AVE = 0.64 CR = 0.92 Cmin/df = 4.6 CFI = .960 TLI = .952 RMSEA = .062
Non-agile mindset employee [nAMe] Kucharska et al. (2025a)	About workmates perceived by you as a non-agile mindset: a. they quickly adapt to new conditions b. they usually achieve their aims (deliver) c. they never give up/ they easily give up d. they learn, unlearn, and relearn smoothly e. they can work in unpredictable environments (they accept uncertainty) f. they act dynamically g. they see change as an opportunity h. they are passionate, enthusiastic, and engaged at work (all conditions met) i. they can follow schemes but also can act creatively beyond schemes (both conditions met) j. they accept the challenge k. they are open to change l. they accept risk m. they learn from mistakes	Cronbach alpha = .97 AVE = .76 CR = .96 Cmin/df = 4.4 CFI = .979 TLI = .972 RMSEA = .078

Scale	Statements	Reliabilities based on CFA models
	ATTENTION: Participants responded to the same statements as they did for agile mindsets but usually responded negatively or oppositely (disagreed with statements given).	
Agile culture [AC] Kucharska et al. (2025b)	About company's culture orientation towards agility: a. we have common goals, vision, and values concerning constant development b. we have a common willingness to learn and improve our work methods so that we can achieve more and more together c. we are inclusive (we care that everyone feels part of the team) d. we communicate openly and solve problems on an ongoing basis e. together we are very efficient f. we constantly search for the best solutions, so we are ready to be wrong g. change is a norm h. nothing is set-up forever i. we accept ambiguity (not everything looks as it seems – so, we stay open-minded)	Cronbach alpha = .87 AVE = .55 CR = .80 Cmin/df = 4.0 CFI = .979 TLI = .972 RMSEA = .058

Note: statements included in final measures securing AVE> 0.5 are bolded

4. Results

Results showed that an agile culture makes the negative perception of non-agile-minded employees even stricter (H1a). The opposite relationship is not significant (H1b). Thus, a strong agile culture establishes agile thinking and acting as a company standard. Consequently, those who do not fit this standard are perceived as much less agile (Figure 3; AC-7 very strong AC) compared to when the standard is lower (Figure 3; AC-6 or AC-4).

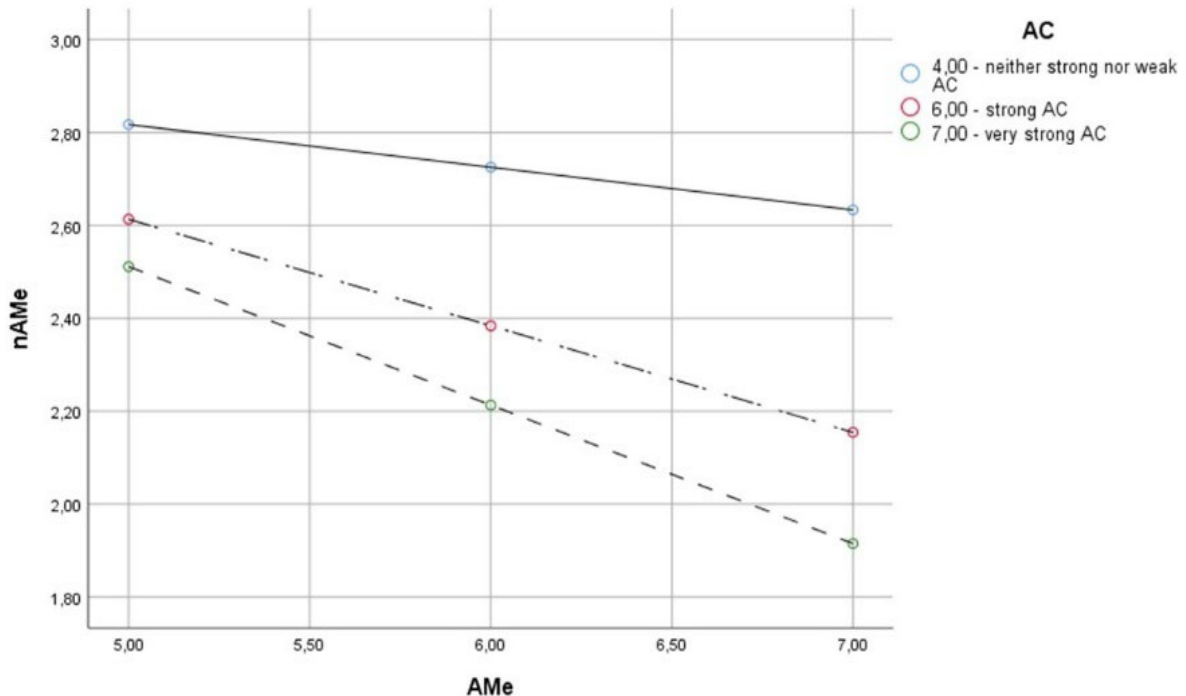


Figure 3: Moderation effect of AMe*AC on nAMe [H1a]

H1a verification – OLS regression by SPSS PROCESS

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Run MATRIX procedure:
***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 *****
Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3
*****
    
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Model : 1
Y : nAme X : AMe W : AC
Sample Size: 1871
*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE: nAme
Model Summary
    R          R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
,2308      ,0533      2,1468    35,0083    3,0000    1867,0000    ,0000
Model
    coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant    2,3072    ,5403    4,2706    ,0000    1,2476    3,3667
AMe         ,1835    ,0973    1,8859    ,0495    -,0073    ,3743
AC         ,2421    ,1069    2,2642    ,0237    ,0324    ,4519
Int_1      -,0688    ,0184   -3,7439    ,0002    -,1049    -,0328
Product terms key: Int_1 : AMe x AC
Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:
    constant    AMe    AC    Int_1
constant    ,2919    -,0505    -,0547    ,0093
AMe         -,0505    ,0095    ,0092    -,0017
AC         -,0547    ,0092    ,0114    -,0019
Int_1      ,0093    -,0017    -,0019    ,0003
Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
    R2-chng      F      df1      df2      p
X*W      ,0071    14,0166    1,0000    1867,0000    ,0002
Focal predict: AMe (X) Mod var: AC (W)
Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):
    AC      Effect      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
4,0000    -,0918    ,0359    -2,5560    ,0107    -,1622    -,0214
6,0000    -,2294    ,0354    -6,4752    ,0000    -,2988    -,1599
7,0000    -,2982    ,0474    -6,2847    ,0000    -,3912    -,2051
***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****
Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output: 95,0000
W values in conditional tables are the 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles.
----- END MATRIX -----

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H1b verification – OLS regression by SPSS PROCESS

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Run MATRIX procedure:
***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 *****
    Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
    Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3
*****
Model : 1 Y : A1_11 X : A2_4 W : A4_6
Sample Size: 1871
*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE: AMe
Model Summary
    R          R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      p
,3951      ,1561      1,2130    115,1309    3,0000    1867,0000    ,0000
Model
    coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant    4,2797    ,2154    19,8711    ,0000    3,8573    4,7021
nAme       -,1124    ,0751    -1,4974    ,1345    -,2597    ,0348
AC         ,3101    ,0371    8,3490    ,0000    ,2373    ,3830
Int_1      ,0040    ,0135    ,2930    ,7695    -,0225    ,0304
Product terms key: Int_1 : NAME x AC
Covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates:
    constant    nAme    AC    Int_1
constant    ,0464    -,0140    -,0078    ,0024
nAme       -,0140    ,0056    ,0024    -,0010
AC         -,0078    ,0024    ,0014    -,0004
Int_1      ,0024    -,0010    -,0004    ,0002
Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
    R2-chng      F      df1      df2      p
X*W      ,0000    ,0859    1,0000    1867,0000    ,7695
***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****
Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output: 95,0000
----- END MATRIX -----

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5. Discussion, Limitations, and Further Study Directions

The results show that a strong or very strong level of agile culture within the organization leads to a negative perception of employees who do not have an agile mindset. The opposite relationship is not significant. Therefore, a strong agile culture encourages agile thinking and establishes a company standard. As a result, those who do not adhere to this standard are perceived as significantly less agile compared to a situation where the agile culture standard in the company is lower.

Further studies should examine the consequences of strong and very strong agile cultures on agile organizations, especially concerning non-agile-minded staff, which is the most controversial aspect. Previous studies by Kucharska et al. (2025b) highlighted the potential of agile culture when employed as a leadership practice. What conditions must be met to mobilize non-agile-minded staff through agile culture, and what factors contribute to non-agile-minded staff becoming paralyzed under agile culture conditions? Additional research is needed to

address these questions. So far, in addressing whether agile culture mitigates the tensions between agile and non-agile staff, the answer is: it does not. Therefore, the Agile-Minded Paradox remains one of the biggest challenges agile-minded leaders must face when building or managing agile organizations.

Ambituuni et al. (2021) previously emphasized the existence of tensions in the cooperation between agile and non-agile staff. Kucharska et al. (2025a,b) examined this issue more thoroughly through empirical research. They uncovered the nature of this tension, which was analyzed within the broader context of agile-minded leaders, culture, and agile organizations. Their findings specifically revealed the phenomenon referred to as the Agile Minded Leader Paradox. The essence of this paradox lies in the necessity of maintaining a constant balance between two contradictory and somewhat controversial scenarios:

Scenario 1: An agile-minded leader (AML) acknowledges their role as a stressor for non-agile-minded employees (nAMe), which can create pressure and lead to a hostile work environment. This situation may negatively impact their performance and is not advantageous for the organization in any respect.

or

Scenario 2: Allowing a non-agile-minded employee to remain non-agile as they are (the majority), by simply assigning them non-agile responsibilities (routines) and providing a secure environment in which they can excel under predictable working conditions, while risking the mental well-being of the agile-minded staff (minority) due to the ongoing friction between agile and non-agile personnel. This situation endangers organizational efficiency due to the friction.

None of these scenarios seems permanently acceptable. Therefore, this constant tension has caused the Agile Minded Leader Paradox to remain unresolved. However, aware of it, agile-minded leaders can manage these tensions more wisely. The study findings shed light on this challenging situation. Specifically, working in a company with an agile culture and high standards, agile-minded staff (the minority) are not victims of non-agile-minded employees (the majority). This study showed that the impact of non-agile-minded employees on agile-minded employees is not significant. Conversely, the opposite effect is significant and strong. Thus, even as a minority in an agile culture-dominated company, agile-minded staff are highly efficient and powerful.

Earlier, Vilas-Boas et al. (2018) introduced leadership as a cultural practice. Regarding agile organizations, agile-minded leaders, and agile culture, Kucharska et al. (2025b) confirmed this. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that an agile culture has the power to empower agile-minded staff. In short, it revealed that agile-minded individuals are extremely valuable for organizations aiming to be agile.

The key limitation of this study is that it is based on the perception of the phenomenon by 1871 employees. On one hand, this is quite a large sample; on the other hand, the self-awareness and honesty of respondents are always more critical than the number of answers. Since we examined only knowledge workers (probably the most self-aware respondents), we consider the results worthy of attention from both science and practice.

6. Practical Implications

The research has significant practical implications for building an agile organization. First, and most importantly, is a strong agile culture and agile-minded leaders. Next, it involves wisely managing the Agile Leadership Paradox, which can be achieved by separating employees with agile and non-agile mindsets, allowing non-agile-minded employees to remain non-agile and dedicating them to non-agile duties (routines). This should enable them to feel safe and perform at their best in very predictable working conditions. To avoid the friction between the agile-minded staff (minority) and the non-agile-minded staff (majority), a special bridge role is required. As indicated by Kucharska et al. (2025b), female agile-minded leaders can work with both agile and non-agile-minded staff, preventing any friction. However, further studies in this matter can be beneficial.

7. Conclusion

The answer to the research question of whether agile culture mitigates tensions between agile and non-agile staff is that it does not. Therefore, the Agile-Minded Paradox remains one of the biggest challenges agile-minded leaders must confront when building or managing agile organizations. This ongoing tension has left the Agile Minded Leader Paradox unresolved, but by being aware of it, agile-minded leaders can navigate these tensions more wisely. However, the findings of this study illuminate this challenging situation. Specifically, within a company that fosters an agile culture with high standards, agile-minded staff (the minority) are not victims of non-agile-minded employees (the majority). This study demonstrated that non-agile-minded employees have a nonsignificant impact on agile-minded employees. Conversely, the influence is significant and strong in the

opposite direction. Thus, even as a minority, when working in a company dominated by agile culture, agile-minded staff are highly efficient, and their contributions are powerful.

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AI usage declaration: We used Grammarly to make language corrections.

Ethics statement: Respondents voluntarily participated in the research, and their anonymity was fully respected and secured.

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