Agile Leadership and Employee Engagement Among Convenience Stores

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Abstract

This study examined the association between perceived agile leadership and employee engagement among convenience-store employees in Batangas. A descriptive, cross-sectional survey design was employed, with data collected from 201 store-level employees in franchised and independent convenience stores. A structured questionnaire, subjected to expert validation and pilot testing, was administered using a four-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics (weighted mean and ranking) were used to summarize agile leadership dimensions and engagement indicators, while Spearman's rho was used to test relationships. Overall assessments indicated favorable perceptions of agile leadership (overall mean = 3.32) and employee engagement (overall mean = 3.37). Within agile leadership, vision and purpose-driven leadership obtained the highest mean, whereas empowerment and self-organizing teams obtained the lowest. Within engagement, relationship and teamwork ranked highest, while autonomy and empowerment ranked lowest. Correlational results revealed strong, positive, and highly significant associations between agile leadership dimensions and engagement indicators (ρ = 0.659–0.840; p < .001), with particularly strong linkages involving continuous improvement and learning. Based on the findings, a plan of action was proposed emphasizing decentralized decision-making, leadership and problem-solving capacity building, and structured feedback and suggestion mechanisms. The results underscore the practical alignment between agile leadership practices and employee engagement in the convenience-store context.

Keywords: *Agile leadership; employee engagement; convenience stores; retail employees; Batangas; Spearman's rho; servant leadership; self-determination theory*

1. Introduction

Convenience stores are among the most visible and labor-intensive segments of retail, operating under extended hours, standardized service expectations, and continuous customer traffic. These conditions create a work environment where service speed, transaction accuracy, product availability, and courteous interaction are not occasional requirements but routine performance standards. In commercially active localities such as Batangas, store operations are shaped by high transaction volumes, time pressure, inventory replenishment cycles, and periodic surges in demand linked to commuting patterns, school schedules, and local events. The frontline work unit must therefore balance strict adherence to operating standards with the capacity to respond quickly to service disruptions and customer requests.

Employee engagement is consequently a practical operational concern rather than a purely attitudinal outcome. In this study, engagement is treated as a work-related state reflected in employees' perceived autonomy and empowerment in routine tasks, their sense of growth and development opportunities, and the quality of relationship and teamwork in the workplace. When engagement is low, service environments commonly experience declines in attentiveness, initiative, and cooperation, which can manifest in avoidable errors, delayed service recovery, and weaker coordination. Conversely, when engagement is supported, employees are more likely to sustain consistent service behavior, contribute to operational improvement, and collaborate effectively during peak periods.

Leadership practices are a central organizational lever that can strengthen or weaken engagement in high-velocity service contexts. Although convenience stores rely on scripted processes and clear reporting lines, frontline realities frequently require adaptive responses: staff members must interpret customer needs, manage competing priorities, and resolve routine operational issues quickly without undermining service standards. Agile leadership has been discussed as an approach aligned with such demands. In this study, agile leadership is operationalized in four dimensions: customer centricity and responsiveness,

empowerment and self-organizing teams, continuous improvement and learning, and vision and purpose-driven leadership. These dimensions reflect a leadership orientation that prioritizes rapid service response, delegated problem-solving, continuous learning from operational experience, and alignment of daily work with shared purpose.

The linkage between agile leadership and employee engagement can be justified through complementary theoretical perspectives. Servant Leadership theory highlights leaders' responsibility to support employees, remove barriers to performance, and cultivate empowerment, trust, and growth. Self-Determination theory explains sustained motivation through the satisfaction of three core psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Leadership practices that promote meaningful discretion in work, develop problem-solving competence through coaching and feedback, and strengthen team connection through supportive relationships are expected to be associated with higher engagement. In convenience-store settings, agile leadership practices may provide these enabling conditions by giving staff appropriate latitude for routine decisions, reinforcing learning from operational challenges, and ensuring that service goals are communicated with clarity and consistency.

Despite this conceptual fit, empirical research that explicitly examines agile leadership in convenience-store operations remains limited, particularly in local Philippine contexts and in provincial retail environments where staffing patterns, customer flows, and managerial bandwidth can differ from metropolitan branches. Leadership studies in retail have often emphasized broad leadership styles without consistently translating them into specific practices that match the rapid and routine nature of convenience-store work. In addition, engagement research is frequently treated as a general organizational outcome rather than a construct linked to concrete leadership behaviors such as empowerment, learning orientation, and customer responsiveness. These limitations reduce the practical specificity of evidence available to store managers and operations leaders who seek to strengthen frontline engagement under everyday service constraints.

In response, the present study examines perceived agile leadership and employee engagement among convenience-store employees in Batangas and tests the associations between agile

leadership dimensions and engagement indicators using Spearman's rank-order correlation. Beyond describing perceptions, the study provides an applied contribution by proposing a plan of action that targets operationally consequential areas, including decentralized decision-making, leadership and problem-solving capacity building, and structured channels for employee input and suggestion consideration. The overall intent is to produce findings that are both analytically defensible and directly usable in store-level leadership improvement efforts.

Accordingly, this study aimed to:

1. Describe the level of agile leadership as perceived by convenience-store employees in terms of customer centricity and responsiveness, empowerment and self-organizing teams, continuous improvement and learning, and vision and purpose-driven leadership;

2. Determine the level of employee engagement in terms of autonomy and empowerment, growth and development opportunities, and relationship and teamwork;

3. Test the relationship between agile leadership dimensions and employee engagement indicators using Spearman's rho; and

4. Propose a plan of action to strengthen agile leadership practices and employee engagement based on the empirical results.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Agile Leadership for Customer-Centric Responsiveness

Agile leadership is frequently framed as a leadership approach that prioritizes rapid sensing-and-responding, short decision cycles, and continuous adjustment in environments where customer expectations and operational conditions shift quickly. A meta-analysis integrating 74 studies reported positive associations between agile leadership and operational outcomes, organizational effectiveness, innovation management, and interpersonal trust (Porkodi, 2023). Rialti and Filieri (2024) describe agile leaders as applying fast decision loops, continuous participation, small teams, and a customer-oriented approach during digital transformation, strengthening responsiveness and operational efficiency. Customer value orientation is likewise emphasized in agile

leadership, with timely responses to market demand supported by autonomy, rapid decision-making, and openness to change (Espelita et al, 2025; Ncube et al., 2024). The need for adaptive, value-driven leadership is echoed where strategic adaptation to shifting expectations is critical for sustainability (Bermido et al., 2025) In convenience-store settings, customer satisfaction and revisit intention are consistently linked to service quality and perceived value, including trust and product/service attributes (Gibson et al., 2022; Jaafri & Mansor, 2024). Finally, employee motivation practices centered on purpose, mastery, and autonomy have been associated with service quality dimensions such as responsiveness and reliability (Flores & Caballero, 2025), suggesting that leadership-driven empowerment can translate into customer-facing benefits. Complementary work argues that combining agile leadership principles with marketing agility can increase responsiveness to shifting customer needs (Onditi, 2025), while retail-sector agility also supports resilience when supply or demand disruptions occur (Wairimu et al., 2022).

2.2 Empowerment and Self-Organizing Teams

Empowerment and self-organizing teams are often treated as mechanisms through which agile leadership converts responsiveness goals into frontline action. Team-level empowerment can reduce escalation and bureaucratic delay; empowered work teams have been shown to make decisions more quickly, strengthening operational responsiveness (Rabhi et al., 2024). Autonomy also matters for employee experience, as increases in team autonomy have been linked to higher work engagement and job satisfaction (Suárez-Albanchez et al., 2022). Distributed or shared leadership is commonly identified as a practical route to empowerment: distributing leadership authority can strengthen psychological empowerment and stimulate innovative behavior among employees (Dongxian & Batool, 2024). Evidence from self-organizing teams further indicates associations with higher job satisfaction and lower intention to quit (Ruotsalainen et al., 2023). Systematic reviews on self-managed organizations similarly report that autonomous work groups tend to exhibit higher job satisfaction, commitment, performance, and experienced autonomy (Malik et al., 2025). Leadership behaviors that emphasize supportive conduct and emotional intelligence are reported to strengthen team cohesion and performance, which can reinforce the effectiveness of self-organizing

teams (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). Contemporary reviews also emphasize that shared leadership, rather than rigid hierarchy, is a defining feature of effective self-managed organizations (Klasmeier et al., 2025).

2.3 Continuous Improvement and Organizational Learning

Continuous improvement and organizational learning are repeatedly positioned as core competencies under agile leadership because they operationalize adaptability through disciplined routines of reflection, experimentation, and incremental enhancement. A scoping review of continuous quality improvement identified common models and tools and highlighted recurring implementation barriers, implying that improvement capability requires structured yet flexible approaches rather than ad hoc initiatives (Endalamaw et al., 2024). Leadership behaviors aligned with lean and agile principles have been linked to higher continuous improvement maturity by supporting experimentation, participation in improvement work, and the embedding of learning routines in day-to-day operations (Hilverda & Dijkstra, 2023). Practical guidance highlights specific routines that are feasible in fast-paced service environments, such as brief team huddles, short improvement cycles, structured reflection, and problem-solving workshops (Lameijer & Boon, 2023). Evidence from food service contexts indicates that continuous improvement initiatives can strengthen operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and responsiveness, offering a close operational parallel for convenience-store work (Monteiro et al, 2024). As retail operations increasingly rely on digital data, integrating continuous improvement with simple analytics can reinforce rapid monitoring and adjustment (Bernard et al., 2025). Organizational learning theory likewise emphasizes that improvement outcomes depend on cultivating a learning culture where knowledge sharing and reflective practice are normalized (Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2025). Review evidence further points to coaching, mentoring, and data-driven feedback routines as catalysts for building sustained improvement capability (Löfqvist, 2024). In addition, structured methodologies such as Six Sigma and total quality management provide disciplined measurement and problem-solving routines that can be adapted to smaller-scale operational settings (Sabtu et al., 2023).

2.4 Vision and Purpose-Driven Leadership

Vision and purpose-driven leadership refers to leaders' capacity to translate organizational direction into clear, meaningful, and operationally usable priorities that guide decentralized action. In agile service contexts, purpose functions as a coordination mechanism: when employees understand the "why" behind standards and service recovery rules, they can make faster, higher-quality micro-decisions without waiting for repeated managerial approval. Purpose clarity also supports engagement by linking routine tasks to a coherent narrative of value creation, thereby strengthening role ownership and persistence under time pressure (Ribeiro et al., 2024; Tafuro & Piccaluga, 2025). Communication quality becomes essential in this dimension because vision and purpose must be continuously reinforced through transparent internal communication and consistent leader messaging. Evidence indicates that internal communication systems and leadership communication influence engagement and organizational sustainability outcomes (Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020; Yin, 2022). In operational teams, clear purpose communication can also stabilize teamwork and collective learning climates, supporting the relational conditions that sustain engagement (Zhao et al., 2025).

2.5 Employee Engagement Drivers in Frontline Service Work

Autonomy and empowerment. Autonomy and empowerment are prominent drivers of engagement because they support ownership, self-efficacy, and psychological investment in work. Empowering leader behaviors have been shown to increase psychological empowerment, which in turn supports work engagement (Hashemi et al., 2025). Scoping evidence similarly underscores that autonomy, decision latitude, and participatory practices are closely associated with job satisfaction, a recognized antecedent of engagement (Sulistio & Darmastuti, 2024). Systematic review evidence also indicates that autonomy-supportive and empowering HR practices are increasingly important for engagement and retention (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024). Perceived organizational support, including supportive relationships and managerial backing, has also been linked to higher work engagement and creative behavior (Evitananda et al., 2025).

Growth and development. Growth and development opportunities reinforce engagement by building competence and signaling organizational support. Career development opportunities, including skill development and advancement pathways, have been linked to higher engagement and reduced turnover intention (Aziedjo, 2024), and meta-analytic evidence indicates that development-oriented interventions can reduce turnover intention (Özdemir, 2024). Evidence from small and medium-sized enterprise contexts highlights that participatory HR strategies, supportive culture, and leadership jointly shape engagement, providing relevant guidance for smaller-scale retail settings (Sangapan et al., 2021).

Relationships and teamwork. Relationships and teamwork are also central because they create a supportive social climate that enables coordination and shared responsibility under peak workload. Systematic review evidence indicates that effective teamwork characterized by coordination and communication supports performance and engagement (McGuier et al., 2024). Team-level practices such as collaborative job redesign (team job crafting) have also been associated with higher work engagement (Iida et al., 2024). During disruptions, peer support and cooperative climates can buffer stress and help sustain engagement (Andrlić et al., 2023), and cooperative goals and cohesive teams are linked to more positive emotional climates that support vitality and learning (Zhao et al., 2025).

2.6 Synthesis and Research Gap

Taken together, the literature suggests a coherent linkage between agile leadership practices and employee engagement in customer-facing retail. Agile leadership emphasizes customer value, rapid decision cycles, empowerment, and learning-oriented routines, while engagement is reinforced when employees experience discretion, competence development, and supportive team climates. Convenience-store evidence further indicates that customer satisfaction and repeat patronage depend strongly on service quality and perceived value, implying that responsiveness and reliability are operationally consequential. Despite the expanding evidence base, fewer studies appear to concentrate specifically on convenience-store employees and localized service realities, and prior work often treats leadership and engagement using broad labels rather than examining how distinct agile leadership dimensions align with specific engagement indicators in frontline settings. The present study addresses this gap by examining associations between perceived agile leadership and employee

engagement among convenience-store employees in Batangas City using a nonparametric correlation approach (Spearman rho), thereby providing context-specific evidence to inform operational leadership practices.

3. Methods

3.1 Research design

The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive–correlational design to (a) describe perceived agile leadership practices and employee engagement among convenience-store personnel and (b) examine the association between these constructs using a nonparametric correlation approach. The design was appropriate because the variables were measured as naturally occurring workplace perceptions without manipulation, and the primary analytic objective was to estimate the direction and strength of association rather than causal effect.

3.2 Setting and participants

The study was conducted among employees of franchised and independently operated convenience stores in Batangas (including Batangas City), Philippines. The final sample comprised 201 store-level personnel involved in day-to-day retail operations, including cashiers, store clerks, shift supervisors, team leaders, and store managers. These roles were included because they routinely experience store-level leadership practices and operational demands that may shape engagement.

3.3 Sampling and inclusion criteria

Convenience–purposive sampling was used. Convenience sampling enabled recruitment of employees who were available during the data-collection period given shift-based staffing constraints in retail operations. Purposive criteria were applied to ensure respondents had adequate exposure to store leadership practices. Inclusion criteria were: (a) current employment in a convenience store and (b) at least three to six months of continuous tenure in the current role. Participation required voluntary informed consent.

3.4 Measures and operationalization

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed to align with the study variables. The instrument contained two major sections.

The first section measured agile leadership across four indicators: (1) customer-centricity and responsiveness, (2) empowerment and self-organizing teams, (3) continuous improvement and learning, and (4) vision and purpose-driven leadership. The second section measured employee engagement across three indicators: (1) autonomy and empowerment, (2) growth and development opportunities, and (3) relationships and teamwork.

All items were rated using a 4-point Likert scale (4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree). For interpretation of weighted means, the following cut-offs were applied: 3.50–4.00 (strongly agree), 2.50–3.49 (agree), 1.50–2.49 (disagree), and 1.00–1.49 (strongly disagree).

3.5 Instrument quality

The questionnaire underwent expert review for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the intended constructs. A pilot test was conducted with a small group of convenience-store employees who were excluded from the final sample to evaluate item clarity and preliminary measurement performance.

Internal consistency reliability for each indicator was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The resulting coefficients indicated acceptable to good reliability across indicators: customer-centricity and responsiveness ($\alpha = 0.734$), empowerment and self-organizing teams ($\alpha = 0.734$), continuous improvement and learning ($\alpha = 0.753$), vision and purpose-driven leadership ($\alpha = 0.708$), autonomy and empowerment ($\alpha = 0.798$), growth and development opportunities ($\alpha = 0.720$), and relationships and teamwork ($\alpha = 0.868$). Using common interpretation thresholds ($\geqslant$ 0.70 acceptable; $\geqslant$ 0.80 good; $\geqslant$ 0.90 excellent), these values supported the internal consistency of the indicator scales for use in the full study.

3.6 Data collection procedure

Permission to conduct the study was requested from store management and/or relevant administrative officers prior to survey administration. After permissions were secured, the researcher administered the questionnaire to eligible employees during agreed-upon times to minimize disruption to store operations.

Participation was voluntary. Respondents were informed of the study purpose and procedures and were given the option to decline participation, omit items, or withdraw without penalty. Completed questionnaires were retrieved by the researcher and prepared for data encoding and analysis. Only complete and usable responses were included in the final dataset.

3.7 Data analysis

Data were analyzed using PASW/SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (weighted mean and ranking) were used to summarize respondents' assessments of each agile leadership and employee engagement indicator.

Normality of the primary variables was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test. Because the test indicated non-normal distributions for the main variables ($p < 0.05$), Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (Spearman's rho) was used to examine the association between perceived agile leadership and employee engagement based on ranked data. Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = 0.05$, with results also interpreted at $\alpha = 0.01$ where applicable.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical safeguards were implemented to protect participant welfare, privacy, and confidentiality. Prior approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review and/or ethics body. Respondents received an informed consent statement describing the study purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and data privacy protections.

No personally identifiable information was collected through the questionnaire. Responses were kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Access to the dataset was restricted to the researcher and adviser. Results were reported in aggregate to prevent identification of specific stores or individual participants, and participation involved no known risks beyond ordinary survey response.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Perceived Agile Leadership

Respondents reported favorable perceptions of agile leadership practices in their stores (overall mean = 3.32, interpreted as Agree). Among the four dimensions, vision and purpose-driven leadership obtained the highest composite mean (3.36), while empowerment and self-organizing teams obtained the lowest (3.24). These results suggest that direction-setting and purpose communication are relatively strong, whereas frontline empowerment for independent initiative remains comparatively

Table 3. Spearman's rho correlations between agile leadership dimensions and employee engagement indicators (n = 201)

Agile leadership dimension	Autonomy & empowerment (ρ)	Growth & development (ρ)	Relationship & teamwork (ρ)
Customer centricity and responsiveness	0.733	0.736	0.734
Empowerment and self-organizing teams	0.776	0.711	0.659
Continuous improvement and learning	0.757	0.840	0.806
Vision and purpose-driven leadership	0.811	0.828	0.810
Overall	0.871	0.885	0.837

Note. All correlations are significant at $p < .001$.

more constrained in routine operations. *See Table 1 below.*

4.2 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was likewise rated favorably (overall mean = 3.37, interpreted as Agree). Relationship and teamwork ranked highest (3.41), followed by growth and development opportunities (3.38), while autonomy and empowerment ranked lowest (3.31). The pattern indicates that supportive peer relations and collaboration are perceived as strengths, while greater discretion in resolving customer concerns and handling work decisions may be an area for improvement. *See Table 2 below*

4.3 Association Between Agile Leadership and Employee Engagement

Spearman's rho correlation analysis (n = 201) indicated strong, positive, and statistically significant associations between perceived agile leadership dimensions and employee engagement indicators. All correlations were significant at p < .001. Across the dimension-to-indicator comparisons, correlation coefficients ranged from $\rho = 0.659$ to 0.840, demonstrating consistent alignment between agile leadership practices and engagement conditions in convenience-store operations.

At the dimension level, continuous improvement and learning showed the strongest association with growth and development ($\rho = 0.840$), followed by vision and purpose-driven leadership with growth and development ($\rho = 0.828$) and continuous improvement and learning with relationship and teamwork ($\rho = 0.806$). The lowest (yet still strong) relationship was between empowerment and self-organizing teams and relationship and teamwork ($\rho = 0.659$).

At the aggregate level, overall agile leadership exhibited very strong associations with all engagement indicators ($\rho = 0.837$–0.885), with the highest correlation observed with growth and development ($\rho = 0.885$), followed by autonomy and empowerment ($\rho = 0.871$) and relationship and teamwork ($\rho = 0.837$).

4.4 Discussion

This section interprets the findings in relation to the study objectives and the literature on agile leadership and employee engagement in frontline service contexts. Because the design is cross-sectional and correlational, the discussion is framed in terms of alignment and association rather than causal influence. Particular attention is given to the pattern that (a) both constructs were rated favorably overall, yet (b) empowerment-related dimensions remained comparatively lower, and (c) correlations between agile leadership dimensions and engagement indicators were strong and highly significant across all tested pairings.

4.4.1 Perceived Agile Leadership in Convenience-Store Operations

Employees generally assessed agile leadership practices at an "Agree" level across dimensions. In practical terms, this suggests that respondents commonly experienced leadership behaviors that emphasize responsiveness, service orientation, and purposeful direction in daily store operations. The comparatively higher rating for vision and purpose-driven leadership is consistent with the argument that clear direction and meaning can stabilize performance in high-transaction settings by providing staff with an interpretive "north star" for routine decisions and service recovery. Purpose-driven leadership frameworks highlight that when day-to-day tasks are anchored to a coherent purpose, employees can interpret role demands as meaningful rather than merely repetitive, which supports sustained effort and role ownership (Ribeiro et al., 2024; Tafuro & Piccaluga, 2025). Although the present results are descriptive, the pattern is consistent with the view that purpose and direction may be experienced as salient in convenience-store settings where rapid micro-decisions are frequent and customer expectations are immediate.

At the same time, empowerment and self-organizing teams obtained the lowest mean among the agile leadership dimensions. This pattern is plausible in convenience-store environments, where standard operating procedures, loss-prevention controls, and compliance requirements can structurally constrain decision latitude. Even when leaders are supportive, operational design may require staff to follow prescribed steps for pricing, returns, inventory handling, or escalation, leaving less room for discretionary choices. Empirical and review evidence suggests that empowerment and shared decision-making tend to be most effective when autonomy is supported by clear decision rules, role clarity, and training that reduces the risk of errors under decentralization (Rabhi et al., 2024; Malik et al., 2025). In a retail context, this implies

that empowerment is not only a leadership attitude but also an operational architecture: autonomy must be deliberately engineered through guidelines, coaching, and boundary conditions that allow safe initiative without compromising consistency.

The findings therefore suggest a nuanced portrait of "agility" in frontline operations. Responsiveness and purpose can be highly visible to employees through daily priorities, customer-facing norms, and quick managerial intervention. In contrast, empowerment may be less visible if decision rights remain centralized or if staff perceive that autonomy is limited to minor choices. The literature on self-managed and self-organizing teams emphasizes that shared leadership, supportive behavior, and emotional intelligence can strengthen cohesion and performance (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Klasmeier et al., 2025), but the translation of these behaviors into felt autonomy depends on whether work systems permit staff to act on judgment rather than merely follow instructions.

4.4.2 Employee Engagement Levels and Their Operational Meaning

Employee engagement was also rated at an "Agree" level overall, indicating generally favorable motivational and relational conditions among the sampled store employees. Relationship and teamwork ranked highest among the engagement indicators. This pattern aligns with evidence that effective teamwork—characterized by coordination, communication, and shared responsibility—supports both performance and engagement, especially under variable workloads (McGuier et al., 2024). Convenience-store operations are inherently interdependent: shift transitions, peak-hour customer flow, and inventory tasks require rapid coordination. In such settings, teamwork can function as a practical buffer against stress by distributing load, creating informal support, and improving perceived fairness in task allocation. Prior evidence also suggests that cooperative goals and cohesive teams contribute to positive emotional climates that foster vitality and learning (Zhao et al., 2025), which is consistent with the present finding that relational engagement is particularly salient.

Autonomy and empowerment ranked lowest among engagement indicators, mirroring the lowest-rated agile leadership dimension of empowerment and self-organizing teams. The convergence of these two "lowest" domains strengthens the interpretive argument that, within this context, empowerment is

the primary constraint on both leadership agility and engagement. Autonomy-supportive conditions—decision latitude, participatory practices, and perceived discretion—are consistently linked to job satisfaction and engagement in multiple settings (Sulistio & Darmastuti, 2024; Hashemi et al., 2025). When employees perceive limited discretion, they may still remain engaged through relational supports and clear purpose, but the depth of engagement may be bounded by reduced ownership. This is particularly relevant in routine-intensive retail roles where task variety is limited and motivation depends more heavily on social climate, leadership trust, and the experience of competence.

Growth and development opportunities were also rated favorably. In practice, this indicates that employees perceived at least some access to learning, skill development, or progression—whether through informal coaching, on-the-job training, or exposure to varied tasks. Development-oriented practices are frequently associated with engagement and reduced turnover intention (Aziedjo, 2024; Özdemir, 2024). For convenience-store operations, the relevance is direct: cross-training improves scheduling flexibility, reduces bottlenecks, and supports service continuity. However, development opportunities must be visible and credible to sustain engagement over time, especially for employees who may otherwise perceive limited career pathways in retail settings.

4.4.3 Interpreting the Strong Associations Between Agile Leadership and Engagement

The correlation results indicate strong positive and highly significant associations between agile leadership and employee engagement indicators (ρ = 0.659–0.840, $p < .001$). At the aggregate level, overall agile leadership also demonstrated very strong associations with engagement indicators (ρ = 0.837–0.885), with the strongest overall association observed with growth and development ($\rho = 0.885$). This pattern supports the interpretation that agile leadership is closely aligned with multiple motivational and relational conditions that characterize engagement in frontline service roles.

A notable feature of the results is the particularly strong linkage between continuous improvement and learning and engagement, especially with growth and development ($\rho = 0.840$) and relationship and teamwork ($\rho = 0.806$). In practical terms, leadership practices that institutionalize improvement routines (e.g.,

reflection, experimentation, structured problem-solving) may be perceived by employees as concrete opportunities for competence-building, skill progression, and shared coordination. This is consistent with the general view that learning-oriented leadership and improvement cultures strengthen engagement by raising perceived competence, reinforcing collaboration, and creating visible pathways for participation in better ways of working.

In addition, vision and purpose-driven leadership exhibited uniformly strong correlations with all engagement indicators ($\rho = 0.810$–0.828), suggesting that purpose clarity functions as a stable engagement anchor in routine-intensive settings. When purpose is translated into simple, repeatable operational expectations, employees may interpret their work as coherent and meaningful, which supports sustained motivation even under time pressure and peak workload.

The empowerment linkage is also theoretically coherent. Empowerment and self-organizing teams correlated strongly with autonomy and empowerment ($\rho = 0.776$), suggesting that empowerment-related leadership is reflected in the very engagement domain most sensitive to decision latitude and perceived discretion. This supports the practical argument that empowerment cannot remain rhetorical: it must be operationalized through decision rules, training, and delegated authority that allow staff to act within defined boundaries.

Interpretation should remain disciplined. These are correlational findings and do not establish causal direction. It remains plausible that more engaged employees evaluate leadership more favorably (halo effects), or that better-resourced stores produce both stronger leadership perceptions and stronger engagement. Nonetheless, the magnitude and consistency of associations provide context-specific evidence that agile leadership practices are a substantive correlational marker of engagement conditions among convenience-store employees in Batangas City.

4.4.4 Practical Implications and Alignment With the Proposed Plan of Action

The descriptive pattern (high overall ratings with empowerment-related dimensions as the lowest) and the correlation results jointly imply a practical priority: interventions should strengthen empowerment architecture rather than only reinforce customer orientation at the level of slogans or reminders. The proposed plan of action emphasizes decentralized decision-making through decision-making workshops, a decision guideline/manual, delegated operational authority, and leadership/problem-solving training. These strategies correspond to empirical arguments that empowerment is most effective when teams have clear decision rules and training that supports rapid, competent decisions (Rabhi et al., 2024; Malik et al., 2025).

The plan also targets engagement by establishing suggestion and feedback systems, implementing recognition for valuable contributions, conducting regular feedback meetings, and providing training in problem-solving and innovation. These actions align with internal communication evidence emphasizing two-way dialogue and visible follow-through as mechanisms that build trust and collaboration (Santos et al., 2023; Verčič et al., 2024). In practical terms, the organization can frame these initiatives as a cycle: (a) clarify decision boundaries, (b) train staff to decide within those boundaries, (c) create routines where staff propose improvements, and (d) visibly recognize and implement a subset of suggestions to reinforce participation. Such a design treats agility as structured responsiveness rather than unbounded discretion.

Because relationship and teamwork were the strongest engagement indicator, interventions should preserve and leverage this asset. Delegation and empowerment should be implemented alongside brief huddles and standardized information flows to prevent inconsistent customer experiences across shifts. Reviews of collaboration barriers emphasize the importance of clear responsibilities, standardized information flows, and explicit decision protocols for maintaining transparency and coordination (Yin et al., 2023). In high-transaction stores, even short, consistent communication routines can function as a "backbone" that supports agile coordination while protecting service consistency.

4.4.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations should be considered. First, the design was cross-sectional; temporal ordering and causal pathways cannot be inferred. Second, self-report measures may introduce common-method bias and social desirability effects, potentially inflating observed correlations. Third,

the use of convenience–purposive sampling limits generalizability beyond the sampled stores and geographic context. Fourth, the study relied on employee perceptions rather than objective operational outcomes (e.g., customer satisfaction metrics, queue times, complaint rates, absenteeism, turnover), which limits triangulation between perceived leadership practices and observed performance.

Future research may address these limitations through multi-site sampling across different provinces or retail chains, longitudinal designs that examine whether changes in leadership practices are followed by changes in engagement, and mixed methods approaches that combine surveys with interviews or observation to clarify how empowerment is enacted under operational constraints. Linking leadership and engagement measures to objective store outcomes (e.g., customer complaint rates, service-time indicators, shrinkage rates, turnover intention and actual turnover) would strengthen practical inference. Finally, intervention studies may test whether empowerment-focused initiatives—such as decision manuals, delegated authority, and structured feedback systems—produce measurable improvements in engagement and customer-facing service indicators over time.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study examined (a) employees' assessments of agile leadership practices and employee engagement in convenience stores in Batangas City and (b) the association between agile leadership dimensions and engagement indicators using Spearman's rho (n = 201). Overall, the findings indicate that both agile leadership and employee engagement were rated favorably at an "Agree" level, suggesting generally supportive leadership and motivational conditions in the sampled stores.

In terms of agile leadership, vision and purpose-driven leadership obtained the highest descriptive rating, implying that employees tend to perceive clearer direction and purpose alignment in daily store operations. However, empowerment and self-organizing teams obtained the lowest rating, indicating that decision latitude and team autonomy

remain comparatively more constrained. In operational terms, the results suggest that agility is experienced more strongly through direction-setting and responsiveness than through decentralized frontline decision-making.

For employee engagement, relationship and teamwork ranked highest, indicating that social climate and cooperative coordination function as key engagement resources in frontline retail work. Autonomy and empowerment ranked lowest, mirroring the lowest-rated agile leadership dimension. This convergence suggests that empowerment-related constraints may be a central limiting condition for deepening engagement, even when teamwork and other supports are present.

Correlation results demonstrate that perceived agile leadership is strongly and positively associated with employee engagement. All dimension-to-indicator relationships were statistically significant at $p < .001$, with coefficients ranging from $\rho = 0.659$ to $\rho = 0.840$. At the aggregate level, overall agile leadership was very strongly associated with engagement indicators ($\rho = 0.837$–0.885), with the strongest association observed with growth and development ($\rho = 0.885$). These results support the conclusion that, within this context, agile leadership practices are closely aligned with engagement conditions—particularly those connected to learning, capability-building, and developmental opportunities.

Because the study employed a cross-sectional correlational design and self-report measures, the conclusions are appropriately limited to association rather than causal influence. Nevertheless, the consistency and magnitude of the correlations provide context-specific evidence that strengthening agile leadership—especially empowerment architecture and continuous improvement routines—is likely to be strategically relevant for sustaining and improving employee engagement in convenience-store operations.

5.2 Recommendations

Recommendations are aligned to the descriptive results and the observed correlation pattern. Priority is given to interventions that (a) strengthen empowerment and autonomy within operational guardrails, (b) institutionalize continuous improvement and learning, and (c) sustain the existing teamwork asset.

Strengthen empowerment through defined decision rights and competence support

Convenience-store management should formalize a decision-rights structure that clarifies which decisions can be made at the frontline, supervisor, and manager levels (e.g., service recovery gestures, product substitution, minor pricing/returns exceptions, inventory discrepancy handling). This can be implemented through a brief decision guideline/manual supplemented by scenario-based workshops. The goal is to expand empowerment safely by pairing autonomy with clear boundaries and training.

Supervisors and managers should be trained in empowerment-consistent coaching practices, including how to delegate decisions, provide rapid feedback, and reinforce appropriate initiative. Progress may be monitored using operational indicators such as the proportion of routine issues resolved without escalation, response time to store issues, and internal service quality feedback from staff.

Treat growth and development as a core engagement lever

Given the strongest overall association between agile leadership and growth and development, training and capability-building should be positioned as central rather than peripheral. Stores should adopt structured cross-training plans (e.g., cashiering, replenishment, basic inventory checks, customer complaint handling) to broaden competence and improve operational flexibility. Micro-learning modules delivered in short intervals (10–15 minutes) are recommended to fit retail shift constraints.

Recognition and progression mechanisms should be made visible and credible. Examples include skill badges, competency checklists, and documented pathways for advancement (e.g., clerk → senior clerk → shift supervisor). These mechanisms can enhance perceived development opportunities and reinforce retention in a sector where employees may perceive limited career movement.

Institutionalize continuous improvement routines

To leverage the strong linkage between continuous improvement and engagement, management should institutionalize lightweight improvement routines such as brief shift huddles, structured reflection after peak periods, and monthly problem-solving sessions focusing on recurring operational bottlenecks (e.g., queue congestion, stock-outs, planogram compliance, waste). Improvements should be documented in simple logs to ensure follow-through and learning continuity across shifts.

Suggestion systems should be redesigned to ensure closed-loop feedback. Employees should see which suggestions are adopted, which are deferred, and why. Recognition for implementable suggestions should be explicitly tied to operational outcomes (e.g., reduced wastage, faster service time, fewer customer complaints) to build a credible participation culture.

Preserve and leverage teamwork as an engagement asset

Because relationship and teamwork ranked highest, empowerment and delegation should be implemented in a way that preserves coordinated norms. Standardized information flows should be adopted across shifts (handover checklists; brief updates on stock issues, promotions, and service incidents). Team-based targets for service quality and process compliance can be used to reinforce cooperative goals while minimizing unhealthy competition.

Monitoring and evaluation of the action plan

Implementation should include a monitoring plan that links activities to measurable indicators. Recommended indicators include: (a) engagement scores by indicator (autonomy/empowerment; growth/development; teamwork), (b) frequency and resolution time of operational escalations, (c) volume and adoption rate of staff suggestions, (d) training completion and cross-training coverage, and (e) proxy service outcomes (e.g., customer complaint counts, service recovery documentation, queue-time estimates where available). Where feasible, a pre–post assessment design is recommended to evaluate changes after action-plan rollout.

5.3 Implications of Research Findings

Practical implications for convenience-store leadership

The results imply that convenience-store agility is not only a matter of being customer-oriented; it also depends on whether frontline

employees are enabled to decide and improve processes within safe operational boundaries. Leadership interventions that focus on empowerment architecture and learning routines are likely to be high-yield because they align with both the lowest-rated domains (empowerment) and the strongest association pattern (growth and development; continuous improvement).

Human resource and capability implications

The strong linkage between agile leadership and growth and development suggests that engagement in frontline retail is closely tied to perceived learning and progression opportunities. HR functions supporting retail operations should therefore treat training design, cross-training systems, and coaching routines as core engagement infrastructure, not merely compliance or onboarding requirements.

Methodological and research implications

The study demonstrates the utility of nonparametric correlation (Spearman's rho) for examining leadership–engagement associations when data are ordinal and non-normally distributed. Future studies may strengthen inference through longitudinal designs, multi-source measurement (e.g., supervisor ratings, operational metrics), and mixed-method approaches that clarify how empowerment is enacted under convenience-store constraints. Intervention studies assessing the effects of decision manuals, delegated authority, and closed-loop feedback systems on engagement and service outcomes would be particularly valuable.

Organizational implications for implementation

Finally, the findings suggest that stores may achieve near-term gains by formalizing empowerment boundaries and improving communication routines, while longer-term gains are more likely when development pathways and continuous improvement practices are institutionalized. In multi-store networks, these interventions can be scaled through standardized toolkits (decision guides, huddle templates, training micro-modules) while still allowing local adaptation to customer flow patterns and store-specific constraints.

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7. Tables

Table 1. Perceived agile leadership practices (composite means)

Dimension	Composite Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Customer Centricity and Responsiveness	3.34	Agree	2.5
Empowerment and Self Organizing Teams	3.24	Agree	4
Continuous Improvement and Learning	3.34	Agree	2.5
Vision and Purpose Driven Leadership	3.36	Agree	1
Overall	3.32	Agree	

Table 2. Employee engagement indicators (composite means)

Indicator	Composite Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Autonomy and Empowerment	3.31	Agree	3
Growth and Development Opportunities	3.38	Agree	2
Relationship and Teamwork	3.41	Agree	1
Overall	3.37	Agree	