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Key Strategies to Improve A Collaborative Agile Work Environment Through Employee Engagement: A Case of Corporate Banking Workplace in Myanmar

Eain Dray Moe Thone Thann*, Marrisa Fernando

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Abstract

Purpose of the research: This study aims to come up with key strategies that will improve employee engagement at an upcoming and growing corporate bank in Myanmar banking industry by introducing collaborative and agile working habits in the workplace. **Data, materials, and methodology:** Mixed method of both quantitative and qualitative research is conducted based on five variables, employee empowerment, management leadership, organizational support, organizational agility, and employee engagement. 300 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 166 responses for quantitative data. Qualitative data was collected via structured interview questionnaire from 33 respondents. Linear Regression, Cronbach's Alpha and Descriptive Analysis with SPSS software was used for quantitative data analysis and content analysis was used for qualitative data. **Results:** The results show that all variables have significant effects in their pairings. Furthermore, organizational support has the strongest effect on organizational agility. All hypotheses are supported in this study. **Major findings:** The study found that organizational agility rooted in factors such as employee empowerment, management leadership and organizational support has a significant influence on employee engagement.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Organizational Agility, Organizational Support, Management Leadership, Employee Empowerment.

JEL Classification Code: G21, L21, L25

1.1 Introduction

Employee Engagement is a critical factor for the success of modern organizations. Engaged employees are more productive, more committed to their work, and more likely to stay with the organization long-term. According to Richman (2006), employees' engagement is a passionate and intelligent commitment to the organization. Robinson et al. (2004) reported employees' engagement as a collection of positive opinions towards the organization's administration and benefits. Employee engagement can bring out higher levels of output and quality due to increased commitment and positive impacts on the organization as well as contribute to overall well-being. Kahn (1990) has developed a model of engagement to understand and enhance employee

engagement that focuses on the psychological experiences of individuals in their work roles. According to the model, employee engagement is not just about the level of commitment or satisfaction an employee has towards their job, but it also involves a deep emotional and cognitive connection to the work itself. Therefore, organizations will need to invest in ways to innovate their workspaces into becoming the driving force of engaged employees. One of the best-proven approaches is to encourage the workforce to be more collaborative and agile.

Several studies have shown that creating a collaborative and agile work environment for employees has numerous benefits for both employees and organizations. A significant benefit of a collaborative and agile work environment is the increase of productivity. Agile work practices can create a

1* Eain Dray Moe Thone Thann, Associate, Andaman Capital Partners, Graduate School of Business and Advanced Technology Management (GS-BATM), Assumption University, Thailand. Email: eaindraythann@gmail.com

2 Marrisa Fernando, Assistant Professor and Program Director, MMOD & PhDOD Programs, Graduate School of Business and Advanced Technology Management (GS-BATM), Assumption University, Thailand. Email: mlfernando@gmail.com

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positive relationship on team performance through proactive behaviour (Junker et al., 2021). When sharing of ideas, knowledge, and abilities is encouraged among members in collaborative work environments in turns create more effective and efficient work procedures. Agile techniques place a strong emphasis on quick iteration and continuous feedback, leading to more frequent and higher-quality output. Another benefit is increased creativity and performance innovation as stated by Petermann and Zacher (2022). Collaborative and agile work settings provide opportunities for employees to explore new ideas and approaches and to experiment with different ways of working. Organizations can create new goods and services and enhance current ones by dismantling silos and promoting cross-functional cooperation. Furthermore, collaborative and agile work environments can also lead to improved employee engagement and job satisfaction through occupational well-being (Rietze & Zacher, 2022). Fostering a sense of shared ownership will increase employees' likelihood of feeling invested in their work and the success of the organization. Agile approaches, which emphasize autonomy and empowerment, can also lead to greater job satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment.

Organizations these days are facing a fast-paced, competitive and complex environment, thus requiring them to be responsive to such changes in the market. Companies wishing to foster speed, innovation and adaptability will need to train their workforce to be agile to face such challenges. Agile workforces lead to seamless and swift work as well as increased productivity and engagement levels. Hence, the organizations need to clearly understand the drivers of collaborative and agile work environments for their working culture to elevate the workforce and foster higher employee engagement that will result in an increase in job performance as well as productivity. Despite the considerable influence of the workforce agility, it is important to note that empirical research is still lacking, particularly within the context of banking organizations. This study results from a theoretical gap in the importance of organizational collaboration and agility with employee engagement. The focus of this study is to realize the strategies to be implemented and explored for the workforce to improve employee engagement through collaboration and agility. This is a case study of a top leading corporate bank in Myanmar currently and its employees.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To determine the driving factors for the organization to improve employee engagement in the workplace.
- To determine the drivers for implementing a collaborative and agile workforce in the organization.

- To identify the challenges faced by the organizations to implement agility in the workplace.
- To recommend key strategies based on the findings.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment is defined as the ways in which organizations give their employees a certain degree of autonomy and control over their daily tasks which involves managing smaller departments with less supervision from higher-level management, being involved in continuous improvement, and contributing to the creation and management of new systems and strategies. In this regard, according to Fini and Fini (2016); Deksnys (2018), job empowerment is granting the authority and the right of decision-making to employees and effective communication to increase their efficiency and encourage them to play a useful role in the organization. Stated by Athamneh and Jais (2021), when organizations offer job empowerment to their employees, the employees are able to achieve organization goals with greater adaptability and will result in higher job satisfaction.

Employee empowerment is based on the concepts of job enlargement and job enrichment. Job enlargement is adding additional activities to the existing scope of the job within the same level. In the modern workplace, employees seek roles that are highly versatile and challenging so that they will help them advance professionally (Jiang et al., 2009). Job enrichment can be explained as increasing the depth of the job by including additional responsibilities and giving autonomy to the employees. Some studies have proven that enriching the work experience of employees improves their motivation and job commitment (Ali et al., 2010). While job enlargement focuses horizontal span of professional responsibilities, job enrichment allows vertical expansion of professional levels provided to the organizational employees. In terms, employee empowerment in terms of job enlargement and job enrichment will bring a significantly positive effect on one's self-control, self-actualization, and self-respect (Dost & Khan, 1970).

H1: Employee Empowerment has a significant influence on organizational agility.

2.2 Management Leadership

Management leadership is an important aspect to foster success in the organization. Effective leadership can help inspire employees, create innovation, and drive the achievement of organizational goals. Through proper leadership from the management, it will provide the employees with direction and inspiration. Additionally, it is vital for the organization to have a better understanding of

the role of leadership styles in management within organizational agility, especially in competitive markets. As stated by Nicholas and Erakovich (2013); leaders who are authentic will help inspire and influence the engagement of the employees within the organization. As a leader, it is required to create a balance between two critical components: moral perspective and interpersonal relationships. A leader who acts in accordance with ethical and moral standards as well as builds strong relationships with their employees can be the one to lead through organizational flexibility. Not only that, said leader can also inspire a healthy leadership-employee relationship that fosters trust, respect, and mutual understanding, ultimately leading to higher levels of employee motivation and performance. The type of leadership will greatly affect on the organization's performance going through organizational changes (Akkaya & Tabak, 2020). All in all, effective leadership provides vision and direction for employee development (Souba, 2011).

H2: Management Leadership has a significant influence on organizational agility.

2.3 Organizational Support

Perceived Organizational Support is a critical construct in organizational behaviour and refers to an employee's understanding of the affirmation and assistance services offered by their organization. When the organization can create the employee's perception that the organization truly values the contribution coming from their employee and cares about their welfare, the employees are more likely to be committed to their work responsibilities and them being with the organization (Esienberger et al., 2020). Organizational support can also be defined as the degree of support the top management is able to offer to its employees and organizational readiness for offering the needed support to achieve the goals and create value. Based on this, the dimensions of organizational support for this research will include rewards and recognition, and the organization's communication with its employee regarding their visions, missions, and goals.

H3: Organizational Support has a significant influence on organizational agility.

2.4 Organizational Agility

It is essential in this competitive time and age for an organization to be flexible and responsive to internal and external changes to create impactful results. An agile workforce can adapt to the swift and seamless work that generates increased productivity and engagement levels (Rabha, 2022). For the organization to create agile workforces to sustain their high performance, they will need

to be flexible, responsive, and adaptable. Organizational agility offers companies opportunities to be more flexible, to adapt and respond quickly to the market's uncertainty and risk (Sherehiy et al., 2007).

Nafei (2017) stated that job engagement is a key factor on achieving agility in the organization and the employees who believe their organization have agile practices are more engaged in their workplace. As the economy is rapidly changing and becoming more competitive, businesses are facing the evolving need to be agile to navigate their workforce and succeed in a competitive and diverse world. Agile companies have the ability to quickly learn the changes in the market, plan to take advantage and adapt to those changes, and alter their firms' products accordingly from external changes into more opportunities for them (Kumkale, 1970; Shin et al., 2015; Braunscheidel & Suresh, 2008).

H4: Organizational Agility has a significant influence on employee engagement.

2.5 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is one of the key contributions to an organization's competitiveness, and thus also significant to its potential to succeed (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The first definition of employee engagement was presented by Kahn in 1990, where he described engagement as a state of harmonization with one's role at an organization: a state in which an employee can express themselves physically and emotionally, and cognitively while working (Saks & Gruman, 2014). In other words, engaged employees commit wholeheartedly to performing their work role, displaying their full capabilities at work; engagement is a multidimensional construct built on the full investment of an individual in their performance (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Therefore, employee engagement can simply be defined as the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace.

2.6 Collaborative and Agile Work Environment

Collaboration and agility are two critical elements for the success of modern organizations. The rise of agile methodologies in software development and other fields has led to an increased emphasis on collaboration and teamwork. Collaboration emphasizes that it entails such activities as sharing of information, jointly creating strategic planning, and utilising vertical integration to find effective ways of working within the organization. Agility is the successful use of competitive principles such as speed, flexibility, innovation, and quality to deliver customer-driven goods and services in a rapidly changing environment by integrating reconfigurable resources and best practices from a knowledge-rich environment (Yusuf et al., 1999).

Flexibility in the organization represents the capacity of such an organization to adjust its internal structures and processes in pre-set responses to the changes in the environment. Therefore, as defined by Janssen, 2010; agility is an organizational ability to react quickly and effectively to an environment which can change radically. Moreover, Sherehiy, et al., (2007) stated that to get human resource agility, the organization needs individuals to have the ability to participate in information, experience, skills, the effectiveness of cooperation, speed of developing new skills, and responsiveness to changing customer needs.

3. Research Methods and Materials

3.1 Research Framework

The conceptual framework is constructed in mind of employee empowerment, management leadership and organizational support as independent variable, organizational agility as intervening variable and employee engagement as dependent variable. This study tested the influence of variables such as employee empowerment, management leadership and organizational support on organizational agility and the influence of organizational agility on employee engagement.

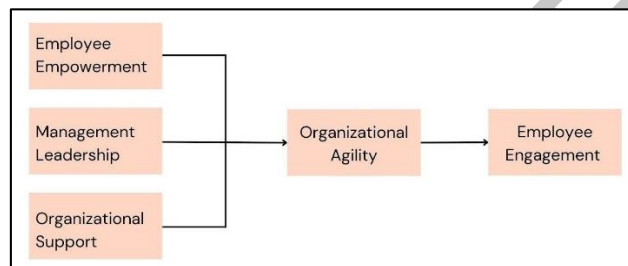


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

In this conceptual framework, the researcher concentrates on the following dimensions;

1. Employee empowerment (EMP): how much the employees are involved and in control of decision making and task execution.
2. Management leadership (MGT): the level of support from the managers employees feel in their work responsibilities as well as growth personally and professionally.
3. Organizational support (OS): the employee support that the organization can provide to increase workplace satisfaction.
4. Organizational agility (OA): measures on how quickly the organization can adapt to market changes and transform its workforce based on those changes.

5. Employment engagement (ENG): the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace.

H1: Employee Empowerment has a significant influence on organizational agility.

H2: Management Leadership has a significant influence on organizational agility.

H3: Organizational Support has a significant influence on organizational agility.

H4: Organizational Agility has a significant influence on employee engagement.

3.2 Research Sample and Methodology

Upon defining the targeted population for the study, a sampling procedure of probability sampling method was used. The sampling size was selected via a stratified sampling method by dividing the population into subpopulations based on their position and job location. Then, the researcher used random sampling to select from each subgroup. The questionnaires were distributed online through the Human Resource Department of the bank to the employees at the headquarter and the branches in the Yangon area. The survey was distributed to more than 300 employees at the manager level, supervisor level and associate level as the sample size dictated as best for this population level. In determining the sample size needed for the given population, the researcher referred to the method of determining the sample size.

Table 1: Total Employee Distribution (Source: the bank's Human Resources records)

Manpower Distribution	Number of Employees
Headquarters	834
Branches (40 Branches: Yangon Region, Mandalay Region and Others)	993

For the purpose of this research study, it was decided to use the mixed method which is both quantitative and qualitative research as the best approach to the research design. To conduct the quantitative survey, the researcher used a structured google-form survey consisting of two parts, demographic characteristics and interval survey questions related to the research variables. With the aim to compare the individual's scores with the distribution score, a six-point Likert scale (1 being strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 slightly disagree, 4 slightly agree, 5 agree and 6 being strongly agree) was used.

The qualitative data was collected via structured interview questionnaire with substantial open comments for

the respondents to freely provide detailed responses. The questionnaire is set as four open-ended questions on the same online survey which later will be used for content analysis. The survey was distributed as google form to the target sample group with the help of the Human Resources department of the organization internally. The researcher's decision to include the 33 participants in the qualitative questionnaire was based in the practical constraints of the study and the aim to find a balance between data richness and resource limitations.

Both quantitative and qualitative questionnaires were developed by the researcher and adopted from previous studies' sources of academic journals, articles, and research papers as well as the researcher's own knowledge to be relevant to the case study organization. The survey was prepared in English and then later translated into Burmese, the official language to offer clearance and transparency to the respondents as well as to reduce measurement errors by inability to comprehend questions as intended (Sha & Immerwahr, 2018). The translation was done by the researcher and then later reviewed and edited by an expert who is proficient in both English and Burmese. For the validity of the survey, the researcher used Item Objective Congruence (IOC) method by asking three experts with doctoral degrees with appropriate knowledge in organizational change to examine the questions to check for congruence of the questionnaire items to the research objectives, with all scores above 0.6. The twenty-five questions set by the researcher were congruent and acceptable to use for the pilot testing. A selection of 30 respondents from the banking industry were in the initial pilot testing by using Cronbach's Alpha for the reliability of the survey. All values score above 0.7 for Cronbach's Alpha which deem acceptable (Grienthuisen et al., 2014).

As this research is designed to use mix method approach, the researcher wished to conduct an in-depth analysis by linking the results of both quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher bridged quantitative and qualitative research using sequential explanatory analysis. This approach collects and analyzes quantitative data first, then qualitative data, and ultimately compares the two sets of data (Creswell, 2003). For the analysis of the quantitative data, the researcher used the Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS) program by using Cronbach's Alpha, Descriptive Analysis, and Inferential Analysis Linear Regression to find the relationship exists among variables. Analysing the qualitative data, the researcher used the content analysis method to identify the patterns emerging from the data received from the survey respondents.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Data

Due to some constraints, the researcher was only able to get responses from a total of 166 respondents for quantitative section. As for qualitative respondents, there were a total of 33 respondents. However, all the respondents are from associate, supervisor and manager levels at the bank, and the collected demographic characteristics information is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the participants

Demographic Data (N=166)			Frequency	Percentage
Quantitative Respondents	Gender	Male	60	36.1%
		Female	106	63.9%
	Staff Position	Manager level	48	28.9%
		Supervisor level	58	34.9%
		Associate level	60	36.1%
	Department	Headquarters	107	64.5%
		Branch	59	35.5%
Qualitative Respondents	Gender	Male	23	69.7%
		Female	10	30.3%
	Staff Position	Manager level	8	24.2%
		Supervisor level	10	30.3%
		Associate level	15	45.5%
	Department	Headquarters	18	54.5%
		Branch	15	45.5%

4.2 Research Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 3: Hypothesis Results of Linear Regression Models

Variables	B	SE	β	t-ratio	p	F	R ²
Organizational Agility							
EMP	.247	.068	.237	3.606	<.001	221.041	.804
MGT	.310	.052	.324	5.933	<.001		
OS	.407	.055	.426	7.394	<.001		
Employee Engagement							
OA	.827	.046	.815	17.982	<.001	323.370	.663

Note: EMP= employee empowerment, MGT= management leadership, OS= organizational support, OA= organizational agility

Hypothesis 1, 2 and 3 predicted that organizational agility is influenced by employee empowerment, management leadership and organizational support. These hypotheses received support as we found a significant regression equation ($F(3,162)= 221.041$, $p < .001$, with an R-square of .804. We can conclude that employee empowerment ($B= .247$, $SE= .068$, $p= <.001$), management leadership ($B= .310$, $SE= .052$, $p= <.001$), and organizational support ($B= .407$, $SE= .055$, $p= <.001$) are significant predictors of organizational agility. Finally, hypothesis 4 predicted that organizational agility influence employee engagement and received support as a significant regression equation was found ($F(1,164)= 323.370$, $p < .001$, with an R-square of .663. We can conclude that organizational agility ($B= .827$, $SE= .046$, $p= <.001$) is a significant predictor of employee engagement.

We can also see that organizational support has a higher influence on organizational agility ($\beta=.426$) than employee empowerment ($\beta=.237$) and management leadership ($\beta=.324$). Additionally, organizational agility has a significant influence on employee engagement ($\beta=.815$).

4.3 Summary of Qualitative Results

The researcher used content analysis of 3 coders for the qualitative questions asked in the survey. There are a total of 33 responses on the qualitative part of the questionnaire out of 166 respondents. However, the results prove quite helpful towards drawing better conclusions for the entire research. The researcher used the relational content analysis approach to each qualitative question to quantify and analyze the presence of a collective common theme from all respondents. Table 4 shows the frequency distribution for coding these variables.

The respondents were asked these following questions about their current experience and expectation with their workplace agility.

What is one thing about your work experience at this bank that is positive?

If you can suggest to the top management about implementing agility, what would you say to them?

One of the responses to the first question as below:

"My positive work experience since I began working at this bank is that I am able to learn from my own peers who came from different banking backgrounds in the industry. I am also able to interact closely with my manager and learn from their leadership. I believe this allows me to develop my skills quickly and make me confident in the work I produce."

In terms of suggestion to the top management on implementing agility, the responses included:

"The top management should listen and allow employees to make decision swiftly and empowered them to use their skills. The work process can be much quicker in some areas if we were to not go through so much hierarchal steps."

"Providing good support in activities as well as creating guidance to promote more teamwork among employees."

According to the responses, the respondents seek workplace agility in their organization and favour for an agile environment through employee empowerment such as allowing employees to be more autonomous with their roles, and organization support in promoting teamwork to create a much flexible working approach. We can also see that the support of management leadership plays a role in the perception of the employees in terms of mentoring and teaching the peers to perform better in the workplace.

Additionally, the respondents were asked the following questions to determine the areas to improve on employee engagement:

"What do you see yourself contributing to becoming a more engaged employee in terms of collaboration and agility?"

"What areas does your organization need to focus on to make employees more engaged in the workplace?"

In response, one of the respondents answered as below for both questions:

"I try to increase my work speed and knowledge sharing to my colleagues. I think that if the organization as a whole, can improve our skills together, we can be more confident to finish our tasks with our own decisions. Since I'm in a good department, I am motivated to support this department grow in all means, and I want to carry this mindset to other departments too. The organization should focus on employee training since onboarding process to make the work process swift. I also see that employees are happy with the workplace because they feel like the organization care for their welfare in terms of having good benefit programs and appreciation as well as good reward and appraisal systems. Happy employees equal involved employees."

From this response, the key to having engaged employees at this organization is through fostering a workplace that promotes learning and support within the members. This justification demonstrates the need for competent staff members who are empowered by their abilities to contribute to the development of flexibility in the workplace. To make agility sustaining in the firm, the organization also needs to

have support structures in place such as employee training programs, benefits for employee welfare and so on.

Table 4: Frequency of Codes

Codes	N(Frequency)	Percentage
Employee empowerment	21	16.8%
Management leadership	27	21.8%
Organizational support	34	27.4%
Organizational agility	27	21.8%
Employee engagement	15	12.2%
Total	124	100%

5. Conclusions and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusions and Discussion

- To determine the driving factors for the organization to improve employee engagement in the workplace.
- To determine the drivers for implementing a collaborative and agile workforce in the organization.
- To identify the challenges faced by the organizations to implement agility in the workplace.
- To recommend key strategies based on the findings.

The aim of this study is to explore the impact of improving employee engagement through an agile work environment that is supportive of its employees in regards of empowerment, leadership, and organizational support. Creating a collaborative and agile work environment can help create a high-performance workspace that will drive higher employee engagement. Our findings support that the previous literature about innovating the workplace to be more collaborative and agile can be a driving force of engaged employees. As hypothesized, organizational agility influences employee engagement. The results show that the organizational agility has a significant influence on employee engagement ($\beta=.815, p=<.001$). The qualitative data also revealed support to this quantitative result.

In this rapidly evolving and competitive economy, the organizations need to be adaptable and responsive to navigate their workforces to be agile. Therefore, the organizations need to be able to identify the driving forces for organizational agility which then in turns create engaged employees of high performance. As hypothesized, employee empowerment, management leadership, and organizational support were all found to be related to workforce agility. The results show that employee empowerment ($B=.247, p=<.001$), management leadership ($B=.310, p=<.001$), and organizational support ($B=.407, p=<.001$) have significance influence on organizational agility. The results of the qualitative analysis also support these quantitative results.

Additionally, this research now provides insights into the

relation of organizational agility with employee engagement through identifying both drivers and challengers of agile workforce. In recognizing the challenges of organizational agility, there needs to be consideration of creating a supportive work environment that will effectively and uniquely cater to the needs of the employees at a collective level, team level and to the individual level. There needs to be systems in place to response to what the employees may seek from the organization for them to be able to perform better.

The findings of this study may also have implications for further theory development in such ways. This research contributes to the literature by determination of the influence of organizational agility on employee engagement, particularly in the banking industry - a significant gap in the existing prior research and consolidating existing theoretical concepts. Moreover, it offers insights in terms of the relationship of organizational agility with supportive work environment driving factors such employee empowerment, management leadership, and organizational support. With this research, it might inspire future studies that could advance the understanding of the relation between organizational agility and employee engagement further by considering employee engagement as an outcome of agile workforce.

5.2 Recommendations

As for the recommendations based on the results of perception of organizational agility to employee engagement, the researcher would like to recommend as following;

1. Foster a culture of agility through enhancing teamwork in the workplace.
2. Provide learning opportunities that are aligned with employee aspirations.
3. Provide opportunities for skill development in the workforce.
4. Establish an inclusive reward system that is based on performance and merit.

In this study, the researcher suggested four areas to improve according to the research results which are teamwork, workplace learning, employee development, and employee welfare to create a supportive work environment. Therefore, the researcher provided recommendations based on these factors to create more engaged employees in the collaborative and agile workplace.

The bank should promote and embed an organizational culture of teamwork that allows collaboration and cooperation in the workplace which will foster agility. The organization should allow more cross-departmental work projects where employees from different departments will have a chance to work together frequently.

Additionally, the organization should also provide employee learning programs that are aligned with employees' career aspirations and personal development goals including on-the-job training, workshops, seminars, conferences, and external certifications. There should be frequent discussions between employees and managers to meet both individual and team learning needs.

The management should also offer learning and development opportunities that cater to building agile capabilities and skills. Such trainings can concentrate on agile procedures for workspace, creativity and problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and adaptability. These trainings should also translate to day-to-day working culture to be successfully implemented.

As part of the organization's aspiration itself, there should be a fair and transparent rewarding system that is based on performance and merit to rightfully compensate well-performing employees. Rewarding innovative and results-driven individuals and teams can motivate employees to use flexible and adaptable approaches in the workspace. By having a transparent and inclusive system of recognizing and appreciating the employees' contributions can not only show the supportive behaviour of the organizational culture but also motivates employees to involve themselves more in the organization's well-being.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

This research is designed to study the impact of employee empowerment, management leadership and organizational support on employee engagement through organizational agility. The results of the variability in this research can be used for future study to explore more variables that affect organizational agility and employee engagement, respectively. Such as employee well-being, employee rewards, job performance and job satisfaction can be used to explore the effect on employee engagement through organizational agility for future studies.

The future research can also include more respondents to create higher response rate by expanding to more levels of employees and employees from other branch locations. Such changes may influence on the results to vary and create different dynamics among the proposed variables. As the qualitative part of the research is conducted via the survey form, the research also suggests pursuing in-person interviews such as face-to-face interviews or focus group interview so that the respondents can further elaborate their meanings and opinions on the research topic. This can give the researcher more in-depth point of view from the respondents' side which will help research with more insights to consider. Creating said additions and changes to the research topic may allow more clarity to the future studies.

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