



Research Paper

# Agile Change Management Approaches and Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigerian Organizations

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## Abstract

The study explored the use of agile change management approaches in combating COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria organizations. The rationale for this study was based on the fact that the outbreak of COVID-19 affected most organizations that were unprepared and lacked adequate human resource management policies to tackle the pandemic. COVID-19 requires quick, efficient, and responsive agile approaches to drive sustainable business performance. Government and businesses now have the responsibility of bringing unique resources to fight the pandemic through coordination and innovative collaboration across all sectors in Nigeria. Qualitative research methodology was adopted in eliciting relevant information on the role of resilience leadership and stakeholders' partnership in combating COVID-19 base on principles of sustainable business performance. The study therefore concludes that resilience leadership and stakeholders' partnership is driven by agile principles which help in developing policies for workers' health, safety and overcoming uncertainty imposed by COVID-19

**Keyword:** COVID-19, Agile change management, Resilient leadership, Stakeholders' participation, Agile management project, economic impact of Covid 19.

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## I. Introduction

The emergence of COVID-19 has cut across over 200 nations and territories with approximation of 28 million people have been infected and over 899,916 dead on health crisis. Countries have resolved to lockdown order as measure to prevent physical interaction which enhances the spread of the virus (Ojo, Fawehinmi & Yussli, 2021; Aiyedun & Ogunode, 2020). In both public and private work environment, the restriction has disrupted academic activities, production/supply of essential goods and services, transport companies, as well as administrative operations in corporate organizations compelling individuals and institutions to adapt new morals, strategies, and policies in operating and managing their respective services effectively. For instance, before the pandemic, Nigeria has over the years been involved in managing educational crisis which needed serious attention and with the spread of COVID-19, the country suffered double crisis which almost crippled the education system and the economy at large. This resulted to mandatory closure of schools on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020. This was because the ecosystem of the economic activities was anticipated to be a playground for further spread of the virus and the implication of staying in proximity in an environment was unethical based on COVID-19 protocol.

Gupta and Goplani (2020) noted that pandemic brought extraordinary worry among diverse stakeholders in health sector (Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria Center for Disease Control, and Federal Ministry of Environment) which proposed a lockdown that result in the suspension of economic and educational activities. Major disruption in health care delivery is caused by COVID-19 with significant impact on the education sector. It therefore, requires laid down protocols for managing it for safe environment (Nomikos, 2020). Efforts to curtail the spread of the virus emanates when it was declared pandemic by WHO and many sectors in Nigeria where shutdown and academic activities were cancelled. This affirms that COVID-19 has compounding effect on economy, health, education amongst others and also restricts social and economic activities across the world. The socioeconomic effect of COVID-19 has made many organizations to proactively develop sustainable human resource policies to address health crisis (Elsafty & Ragheb, 2020). The spillover has caused untold suffering and inhibits economic activities of many nations. Fear of contacting COVID-19 has

made economic agents to be unwilling to engage in strategic economic activities. Therefore the emergence of COVID-19 has made HRM to face environmental challenges which organizational agents now seek to cope or adapt to radical changes such as working in remote environments as alternative workspace (Chawla, MacGowan, Gabriel & Podsakoff, 2020).

The rationale for this study is based on the notion that with the outbreak of COVID-19, most organizations are taken by surprise due to lack of adequate human resource management policies to tackle the pandemic for safety of employee and organization at large. COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant reduction in socioeconomic activities, and this has made organizational leaders to be seamlessly responsive and adaptive in managing workforce. The drastic shift in work culture on how to keep workers engaged has posed a challenge to organizational leaders due to absent of resilient leadership and stakeholders' participation. Though the wellbeing of workers has become a major concern to organizational leaders, transition to agile change management is not seamless to overcome the effect of COVID-19 pandemic. This paper is therefore a resource aimed at identifying resilience leadership and stakeholders' participation in combating the scourge of COVID-19 for sustainable business practices in all the sectors of the Nigerian economy

### **1.2 Impact of COVID-19 in organizations**

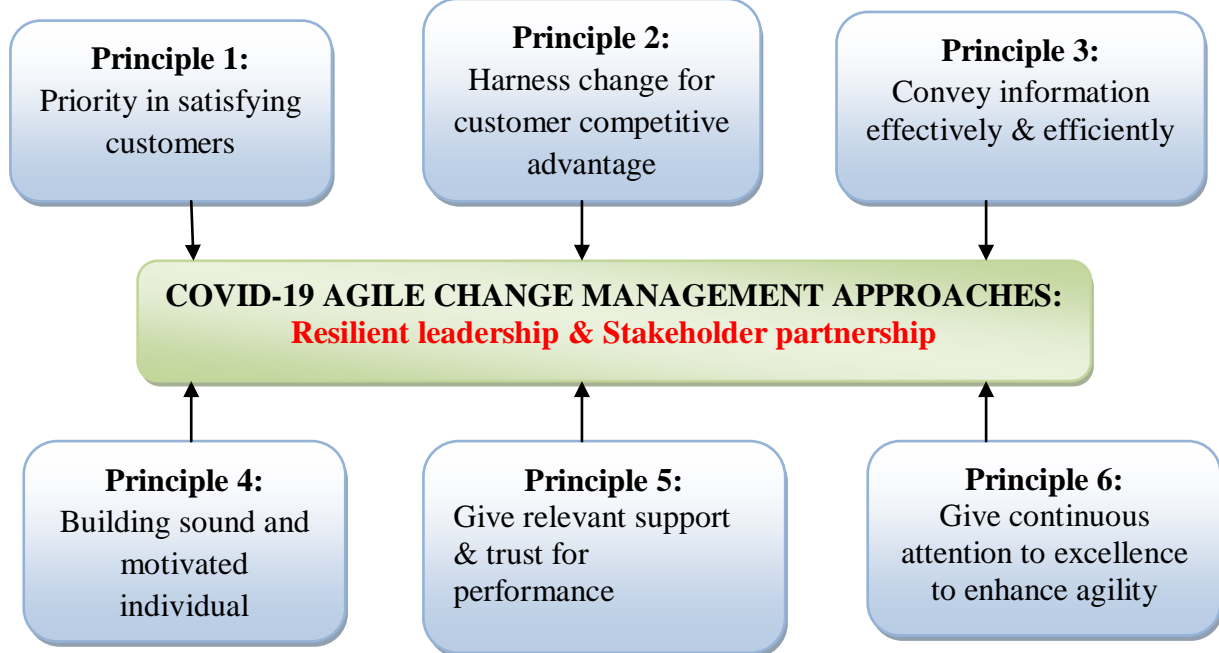
COVID-19 is referred to as people-based crisis which poses a challenge on strategic human talent. Human resource management on the other hand specializes in management of people in workplace (Obikoya 2002). It requires using resources for effective management of business, individual and society. This affirms the notion of Cole (2004) that human resource manages people at work in line with their relationship with the organization for achievement of set objective. Though COVID-19 pandemic has affected organizational practice adversely, experts and professionals are faced with the issue of how people work from home in Nigeria. HR policies or guidelines would have to promote a climate of calm while engaging in clear, timely, assertive, and consistent communication across the organization for sustained productivity. For instance, just as the capabilities of Chief Financial Officers were highlighted in handling the financial crisis of 2007-2009 towards sustaining the financing of corporate organizations; it is the same way that COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the role of heads of human resources in corporate organizations toward creating enabling safety workspace (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke & Zimmermann, 2020). Heads of human resources are saddled with the function of keeping employee healthy, maintaining their morale, overseeing the need for remote working, and workers lay off. This indicate that to manage employees' health and safety constitute a challenge to organization which is challenged by COVID-19.

Organization needs a hardheaded HR officer with strategic human resilient talent to align positive policies to address present work dynamics for socioeconomic sustainability of the organization. Report by WHO (2020) indicates that COVID-19 pandemic has created significant novelty which has affected the mental health of people across the globe. This is sequel to the fact that with the low possibility of having vaccine coupled with recession in Nigeria, working remotely has been a sustained measure by organizations because of uncertainty. As a result of inadequate plan by government to combat COVID-19 in Nigeria, the impact has significantly affected the performance of business organizations. However, public awareness on contingency plan of government such as social distancing is suggested to limit and control the spread of the virus. This is to affirm that the saddled responsibility of Nigerian Centre for Disease Control is to recommend guidelines for controlling the virus (Anyanwu, Festus, Nwobi, Jaja, & Oguttu, (2020), A study by Owusu-Fordjour, Koomson & Hanson (2019) showed that with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, all sectors of Nigeria economic is affected and only resilient organization can survive alarming situations. Ubi, Iqwe, & Inyang (2017) note that, strategic organisations need well qualified human resources to effectively deliver quality health care services to the masses, for unqualified nurses and doctors attending to patients can result to complications and increase in morbidity rate.

### **1.3 Effect of agile change management**

The uncertainty associated with the pandemic is one that requires agile change management as approach to combating the effect of COVID-19 in business environment. Agile change management is an initiative-led approach for managing COVID-19 in a dynamic business environment. It enables organization to drive competitive growth and efficiency by improve business agility to react to uncertainty. In contemporary organizational landscape, agile change management has become an alternative as innovations become constant with evolving markets in consumers and technologies. Leaders require agile approach in combating COVID-19 with better result. The uncertainty brought by COVID-19 requires organizational leader to adopt agile change management to explore new ways of working for business continuity. This perspective provides change management insights and best practices to assist organizations in minimizing the COVID-19 impact on people, operations, and businesses. Agile change management enhances achievement of incremental results from people, and environment. it requires critical awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement for

effective application aimed at optimizing organizational productivity in a disturbing environment. Strategic principles required by organizational leaders in aligning business with the COVID-19 disruption in an environment. However, adherence to the principles is aimed at achieving measurable goals based on stipulated timeframe; and collaborating and integrating workflow in organization.



**Figure 1:** COVID-19 agile change management approaches in organization

**Source:** Researcher, 2021

#### 1.4 Resilient leadership role in combating COVID-19

Resilience is a concept that support adaptation to adverse situation, and it reflects individual or organizational capacity to recover from negative emotions while adapting flexibly to changing demand of the environment. In the context of organization, leaders in organization are expected to have capacity in managing resources effectively and adapt to challenges (Ojo, Fawehinmi & Yussliza, 2021). Leadership sustainable capacity in handling COVID-19 setbacks, adversities, traumas etc with quick recovery connote resilience. In both private and public organizations, the style of leadership adopted must be resilience driven to show that leaders have the anticipated ability in sustaining energy under a given situation or pressure. This is an agile approach for managing COVID-19 encountered by organizations. It is used in responding to crisis of any nature faced by organizations to overcome disruptive change and pressure arising from the pandemic (Eliot, 2020).

A growing organization must develop resilient leaders to align the objective of the organization towards goal attainment. The dynamic of today's environment is one with a disruptive change which a leader or management of any organization has to consider resilience as a agile change management approach in combating eventuality for sustainability of organization performance from chaos arising from COVID-19 pandemic. Resilience as an approach enables leadership of organization to overcome difficulties in repositioning organization without engaging in dysfunctional behaviour which could be harmful to people. Staying in balance during COVID-19 pandemic requires resilience to cope with stress which involves identifying risk factors and developing sustainable tactics to ease the adverse psychological impact of COVID-19. In a disruptive environment, resilience is a crucial characteristic for handling the existence of COVID-19 and it is a determinant factor of a high-performance leader through policies and strategies required to address or response to COVID-19 effect in business organizations. It is imperative for leaders to cultivate resilience to thrive in eradicating or controlling health issues imposed by COVID-19 to protect workers and others within the environment. This support the notion of Kohlrieser, Orlick, & Perrinjaquet, (2017) that leadership is effectively sustainable when there are consistently recovering from disruptions with high energy level. This affirms that COVID-19 pandemic is a health issue that should not be compromised based on laid down protocols in combating it, therefore, organizational leaders are saddled with the responsibility of sustaining healthier environment and human dynamics for business continuity

The need to build resilience in workers who are saddled with daily responsibility of policy making and implementation is very necessary for safety in organizations. Resilience is a critical component of effective leadership which has to be built to achieve goals, but this requires examining the individual, organizational and

professional roles to identify imbalance against the success of running a healthy free COVID-19 environment for effect productivity in organization. With the present pandemic, organizational leaders are now encountering increasing pressure of combating COVID-19 from many sources. For instance, social distancing, Nose mask, sanitizer, COVID-19 test vaccines, are controlling measures but resilience capacity is developed through learning and experience where it is applied in variety of organizations to achieve peak performance while reframing pressure and challenges into opportunities for organizational growth in a disruptive environment. COVID-19 pandemic is today's crisis that has affected economies and societies. Efforts by government and civil society are geared toward managing and addressing the socio-economic consequence imposed by the crisis. Containing the crisis requires provision of essential services and resilient leadership to develop sustainable policies to promote health resilience in organizations through an agile change management approach where effective collaboration and coordination are sustained to curtailing the existence of the virus. Strategic reinvention of leadership in organization is a measure for responding to COVID-19 pandemic. This is by stepping up to the challenges and adapting to the environment to protect the human factor and ensure that effective health priorities are continuously carried out in line with laid down protocols. Though the COVID-19 pandemic exposes the weaknesses in organizations, resilient leaders in organizations have ensured that medical examination is carried out on employees (Djedrich, Northcote, Roder, Saurer-Sidor, 2021). However, the preparedness for post COVID-19 pandemic requires developing organizational model to widen the gap on best and worst performance in a turbulent work environment caused by COVID-19, the action of leaders is to be geared toward leading and inspiring workers. While focusing on the internal environment than the external, leaders can lead the mind and heart of employees and take the organization through the crisis. Leadership action must be clear and decisive for effective management and transition during the pandemic. The response of leaders must be safety driven on employees who are critical contributors to the growth of the organization. Other contributors such as vendors, regulatory bodies, customers, and partners must be involved in the plan of ensuring a safe work environment. Business leaders must be exemplary in COVID-19 crisis by having the following qualities:

- i. Empathy: Resilient leader in organization must show empathy by being involved in what affect the workers, customers and the entire ecosystem and must be effectively connected in communicating with them
- ii. Skilled at triage: A leader must stabilize organization by way of arresting the crisis using COVID-19 protocols and also examining new opportunities within the constraint.
- iii. Decisive action: Resilience leaders are driven by decisions and courage where there is imperfect information. Actions are taken to ensure that financial security, physical and emotional are made for the worker
- iv. Seizing narrative enables resilience leadership to be transparent with current realities as they have the duty of unfolding attractive future to inspire others.

It must be noted that the sheer uncertainty which has made it difficult for leaders to respond to the outbreak of COVID-19 demands leaders to be guided in their strategic, operational, logistical and legal issues during the pandemic. Hence quick actions for handling the challenges for survival of organization are by responding first to the mind of people; building a cross functional team for response with experts in area of HR, IT, Admin, Legal etc; developing crisis response strategy to align stakeholder in focus; activating business continuity plan and mechanism for disaster discovery; assessment and procurement of information technology tools and infrastructures; reviewing performance metrics of the organization; and preparing effective succession plan on key organizational position.

### **1.5 Stakeholders' partnership role in Combating COVID-19**

Stakeholders entail actors either a persons or organizations that has enormous or vested interest in promoting COVID-19 policy. They are interested parties which are grouped in various categories such as donors, labour unions, ministry of health, NGOs, profit organizations, security agencies, among other (Schmeer, n.d.). Partnering is central to sustainable development goal of organization as it enables the collaboration of infrastructure to overcome environmental challenges. The important of stakeholder partnership in combating COVID-19 is pertinent. Stakeholders to business organization such as lenders, investors, suppliers, customers, staff board of directors, and government agencies are vital in reducing the adverse impact of COVID-19. The need for stakeholder partners is for the organization to be able to sustain control and secure supports to move the organization forward to convey confidence for improve performance of the organization. The need to identify and partner with stakeholder is a critical mission for management of any organization where the major priority is to protect people and devise new ways of serving customers despite the pandemic.

Stakeholders' partnership as an agile change management approach requires researching ways to reach out for collaboration with stakeholders while leveraging alternative measures through online for effective service delivery. The achievement of this requires collaborating internally with various business units and



informing them on the importance of business continuity plan to help as one source of truth for partners, customers, regulatory bodies, and employees. At this time, leadership in an organization has to set up board of governance to have guidance in confronting the uncertainty of pandemic at hand. Business has to be in touch with clients who also have their own customers amidst COVID-19 crisis and client must receive communication to have positive audience on the state of business performance. Business has to evaluate ways of supporting client and new way of partnering for stronger relationship. In addition, Unionized employers require collaboration to address the concern on COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, collaboration and supports of contractors and vendor are helpful because they are the extended workforce of an organization, and their protection or well-being is of critical important to organization. Some of the strategic ways of leveraging partnership with stakeholders to respond to their needs include:

- i. Identifying stakeholders: This requires possible understanding of the effect of COVID-19 on employees and partners of the organization. This may require setting up help lines for communication by employees and their families on the challenges imposed by COVID-19
- ii. Providing support: This requires supporting employees or contractors who are affected by the impact of the pandemic. This may be by way of organization taking up responsibility in providing sufficient food and medical care/welfare to workers.
- iii. Developing solution: Tailored solution must be created to aid in resolving needs of groups of people being affected or infected by COVID-19 pandemic. This could be by providing awareness drive for partners, free medical consultation being provided to partners, and financial support for self-quarantine to partners

From the above notions, it is obvious that collaboration and effective partnership with stakeholders is an important mechanism for combating COVID-19 as organization begins to partner with government and stakeholders in building resilient, sustainable, and inclusive environment to promote business activities

## **II. CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE**

### **2.1 THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON CITIZENS**

Many countries across the global community are facing unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nigeria and her people are no exception. It is now, more than ever, that leadership which can unite the spirit of Nigerians and rouse collective action is needed. Nigeria is tested today, as it has been in the past and, it has the ability and opportunity to mobilize its people to turn the tide against the coronavirus. But time is of the essence and immediate decisive action is imperative. The question in the minds of national and global leaders in the midst of the evolving pandemic is how affected communities will bounce back and in a sustainable manner recover from the crisis. The economic distress associated with the pandemic, health implications to those affected especially the most vulnerable in the community, strain on service delivery infrastructure and the societal cost in terms of well-being could be enormous.

Economic impacts are assessed in terms of their effects on national gross domestic product (GDP), agri-food system GDP, and the number of people living below the international US\$1.90-a-day poverty line. We estimate that national GDP declined sharply during the country's lockdown period, and that Nigeria will experience recession during 2020. More specifically, the lockdown policies reduced Nigerian GDP by US\$11 billion or 23% during the 8-week period. Depending on the nature of economic recovery in the second half of 2020, we estimate that GDP will be between 6% and 9% lower compared to the levels of GDP there were expected during 2020 prior to the onset of COVID-19. Our estimated contraction of the economy is consistent with global projections, although these tend to fall close to our more optimistic scenarios. Despite being exempted from many of the government's lockdown policies, we estimate an 11% decline in agri-food system GDP (US\$1.6 billion). We also estimate a temporary 9% point increase in the national poverty headcount rate, implying that there were 17 million more people living below the poverty line during the 8-week lockdown period—some of whom remain poor at the end of 2020.

In addition to posing a major health challenge for developing countries, COVID-19 is having severe socioeconomic impacts. For Nigeria's economy, an immediate concern was the sharp drop in oil prices, which threatened to undo years of moderate economic growth in Nigeria and many other oil-dependent African countries. Nigeria's economy continues to suffer from oil dependence and vulnerability to oil price volatility. The economy recently emerged from a 2016 recession driven by a 2014–15 fall in oil prices. The 2016 recession was the first in 25 years, and while painful, it amounted to a relatively manageable contraction of about 1.6% of GDP. An economic slowdown from the plunge in oil prices alone would have been damaging, but it is now clear that the continued spread of the pandemic and the associated policy responses across the globe, and within Nigeria, are likely to have severe consequences for Nigeria's economy and population.

The media houses were not left out, one out of many is the Punch newspapers that laid off about 40 staff at the end of May because adverts were not coming as it used to maintain staff overhead cost. Most hotels that closed counted losses for maintenance, while staff, most of whom are breadwinners, were laid off since

March 2020. The effect will no doubt have a great impact on paying their bills and managing their family. Aside from this, people's purchasing power has drastically dropped due to no money in circulation. In addition, the price of goods has skyrocketed. Many essential products like water and food items doubled in price due to panic buying and hoarding as supplies cannot meet the demand. For instance A loaf of bread which is for the common man, formerly sold between 300-350 Naira is now sold for 400-450 Naira. A basket of tomatoes that was sold for 500-600 Naira before the coronavirus pandemic now ranges between 1,700 and 1,800 Naira. Likewise, a kilo of meat increased in cost from 1000 to 1,500 Naira on the average. A bag of pure water sachet that is essential in every home doubled in price from N100 naira to N150 to N200. Furthermore, Before the coronavirus epidemic, 100 ml of hand sanitizer was sold at 350 Naira but now are sold at triple its initial cost.

The cost of transportation also increased. As a result of the social distancing measures, it became mandatory for public vehicles to reduce the number of passengers carried at a time. Due to this requirement, few commercial drivers plying the road increased the fare cost to meet the shortfall of the limited numbers it conveys per time. Business owners, especially small businesses that survive on daily sales, can no longer meet their daily family needs due to the lockdown that led to the closure of shops and businesses that do not provide essential services.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a wake-up call to policymakers as the unusual and unprecedented nature of the crisis has made it impossible for citizens to rely on foreign health care services and more difficult to solicit for international support given the competing demand for medical supplies and equipment. A more integrated response spanning several sectors—including the health, finance, and trade sectors is required to address structural issues that make the country less resilient to shocks and limit its range of policy responses. In the long term, tougher decisions need to be made, including but not limited to diversifying the country's revenue base away from oil exports and improving investments in the health care sector in ensuring that the economy is able to recover quickly from difficult conditions in the future.

## **2.2 POLICY RESPONSES BY THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT**

Given the size and scope of the economic impact of the pandemic, there is the need to implement other recovery strategies to stimulate demand. Thus, we recommend the following fiscal and monetary policy measures. Although there is a cash transfer program in place, the federal government should improve efforts towards enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the distributive mechanisms to reach households that are worst-hit by the pandemic. The Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) as well as State Inland Revenue Services (SIRS) should waive payments on personal and corporate income tax for the second quarter of 2020, considering that the shock has affected the income and profits of households and businesses. The CBN's decision to increase the cash reserve ratio (CRR) from 22.5 percent to 27.5 percent in January 2020 should be revisited to provide liquidity for banks so that banks can, in turn, create credit to the private sector.

FIRS and SIRS should delay tax collection for the worse-hit sectors including tourism, the airline industry, and hoteliers in order to enable them recover from the steep decline in demand. To provide additional liquidity in the forex market, the CBN should establish a swap facility with the U.S. Federal Reserve and/or the People's Bank of China, as was done in 2018, to provide dollar and yen liquidity to financial institutions, investors, and exporters. This move would ease up forex shortage in the financial market and economy.

Also, the president in a Nationwide message on Sunday, March 29th, 2020, announced some stimulus package for small businesses which are two months arrears for those benefiting from small grants for small businesses, which are the 'Trader Moni and Farmer Moni' to further cushion the effect of the hardship as a result of the pandemic on small businesses.

## **2.3 COVID 19 AND THE ROLE OF AGILE PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

Agile project management refers to a set of project management frameworks that share principles identified by Fernandez and Fernandez (2009) and Dybå, Dingsøy and Moe (2014). According to Koch and Schermuly (2021), those principles may be organized into three meta-principles. (1) Autonomy: the project team has sole discretion to make decisions and organize their work. (2) Equality: all team members work together on an equal footing. (3) Iterative delivery: without rigid objectives set out at the beginning of a project, partial objectives are regularly defined and evaluated at short project intervals (i.e. iterations) while customer feedback is integrated.

Three lines of argument support this notion for agile project management, based on the definition proposed above.

**a. Autonomy:** The team work-design literature permits us to suggest that the project team's autonomy serves as a job resource (Handke, 2020), mitigating the effects of COVID-19 demands on proximal unfinished tasks. Conceptually, team autonomy may comprise decision control (i.e. the degree of influence that team members have on central decisions) and process control (i.e. the degree of influence that team member recommendations have on the process; Handke, 2020). By taking into account task complexity and team

velocity (i.e. the number of deliverables that can be handled by the team in a given iteration), the project team itself manages task allocation among team members, and thereby autonomously balances the individual's workload (Lin, 2014). In agile teams with high collective autonomy to make decisions about task allocation (i.e. decision control), the relationship between COVID-19 demands and unfinished tasks should be weaker. At the same time, agile teams may be better equipped to quickly adapt processes and procedures (i.e. process control) in light of COVID-19 demands, because they are accustomed to reflect on their collective efforts and autonomously adapt to necessary changes.

**b. Equality:** Agile project management methodologies institutionalize social interactions in regular, structured meetings (one very popular approach is called 'daily stand-ups'). In those meetings, all participants have equal speaking time. Team members share information about previous and current tasks, thereby allowing other members to become aware of what each and every one is doing (Stray, Moe and Sjoberg 2020). Where traditional meetings devolve into status updates and reports to the leader, agile stand-up meetings can help all team members to identify and resolve COVID-19 demands while meeting at eye level. We propose that such opportunities help employees to deal with COVID-19 demands and therefore mitigate their impact on unfinished tasks.

**c. Iterative delivery:** In agile project management methodologies, projects are structured into a series of iterations, usually lasting from 1 to 4 weeks (Grapenthin, 2015). At the beginning of each iteration, project team members decide which functional requirement(s) of the final product (often called backlog item) should be implemented and subsequently define all tasks that need to be performed to design and test these selected functional requirement(s) (Grapenthin, 2015). At the end of each iteration, a working product is delivered to the customer (hence 'iterative delivery'). This iterative approach to task completion seems especially helpful at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic places additional demands on teams. Planning behaviours and implementation intentions specify where, when and how a behavioural goal will be pursued (Gollwitzer, 1999). By breaking down COVID-19 demands and functional requirements into specific tasks, individuals may therefore create cognitive resolutions that can counteract directing attention towards incomplete goals (Smit and Barber, 2016). Although those goals have not all been accomplished, there is an accepted pathway for completing them in the future. Regarding agile project management methodologies, we argue that the planning behaviours imminent in iterative delivery work in the same way: those behaviours help team members to redirect attention away from COVID-19 demands, allowing for primary tasks to be completed. Furthermore, the modification of primary tasks, processes and procedures in light of COVID-19 demands might be easier for individuals who successfully manage iterative approaches and regular change. Therefore, iterative elements of agile project management methodologies should weaken the relationship between COVID-19 demands and unfinished tasks.

## 2.4 KEY CONCEPTS TO AGILE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Agility can be a huge asset for a team—and not just in sports. When it comes to project management, the agile methodology means that products often get to market faster and meet with more success than with more traditional approaches.

**a. Adaptability:** Project paths rarely line up in a linear way; they're incremental. The iterative approach to the entire life cycle of a project means on-the-go adjustments. One advantage of this approach is that benefits are delivered throughout the timeline of the project, not all at once at the end. That pays off not just for the customer, but for the team's morale and confidence. Alternately, if the process takes a turn for the worse, you find out more quickly and can change course rather than slogging through to an unsatisfactory conclusion. The software industry originally embraced this sort of adaptability, in the 1990s, when many software development projects imploded—or simply took too long to complete. Industry leaders knew they needed an approach other than aiming at a target and hoping the target doesn't move. With agile, you zoom out to start, looking through a wide lens, and then adapt as you learn about new conditions and parameters. You home in on the target incrementally, break requirements down into pieces, and then prioritize them.

**b. Efficiency:** In a related way, anyone working on the agile project management team as well as the client or customer is empowered to identify and respond to changing requirements or goals at that moment so that the product ultimately hits the market faster. Given these conditions, agile project management has been described as continuous sprints, where planning and execution happen in ongoing waves.

**c. Collaboration:** In agile project management, all parties are empowered to contribute to the end goal. Collaboration builds trust and accountability and helps ensure that one faulty idea won't go unchallenged, potentially derailing the entire process.

**d. Disruption:** Disruption for disruption's sake isn't worth much. But challenging the traditional culture to improve customer satisfaction and deliver better value is what has made agile project management the methodology of choice for many kinds of companies. Becoming agile means change: changing culture,

changing priorities, changing goals. And that can be hard. But with all stakeholders on board, managing actually becomes easier. Expectations evolve, norms get shaken up and in the end—you deliver.

e. **Simplicity:** Finally, from the “Manifesto for Agile Software Development”: Simplicity is essential.

## 2.4 COVID’S IMPACT ON AGILE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Since the Agile Manifesto was published in 2001 to radically change the way software was developed and delivered, its methodologies have spread beyond the software world into other managed projects with a specialist-client structure. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the way all of us work changed dramatically, Agile has transformed traditional project management with its focus on iterant, concrete deliverables and frequent communication about challenges and scope changes. Read on to learn more about how COVID has impacted Agile project management practices and how they continue to spread and evolve in new industries.

a. **Virtual Meetings Over Onsite Visits:** Agile and the Agile Manifesto traditionally prize face-to-face meetings for brainstorming and determining the next iterations in an Agile project. The face-to-face approach is still preferred, but the interface has gotten an upgrade, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person meetings became near-impossible. More screen sharing, video demonstrations, and virtual libraries will be used to communicate what’s happening at each stage of software development. The switch to more virtual meetings came as an emergency measure in 2020, but many organizations have quickly discovered the benefits of a flexible meeting format. Because they can work from home and travel less, many team members on both sides of a transaction are more willing to collaborate with each other after traditional business hours.

b. **Stronger Data Management Practices:** Although Agile project management is all about delivering a major project in smaller iterations along the way, many practitioners of Agile have discovered the value of gathering and organizing all of their client’s relevant data at the start of the project. Especially when in-person discovery sessions weren’t possible during COVID lockdowns, it became even more important that Agile project managers ask the right data questions and that Agile clients know how to retrieve and deliver the needed data for the project. These data management best practices are becoming increasingly common in Agile project management, helping both the vendor and the client to reach deliverables along the way by informing early goals with accurate data:

c. **Growing Involvement in Change Management:** The Agile philosophy is based on regular, segmented delivery of product features to the client, so several iterations of project development are necessary. But with so many companies simply working to stay afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic and likely during the aftermath, several Agile clients want and need direction on change management strategies too. Agile already encourages flexibility, feedback, and collaboration at every stage, so the PM style naturally fits with and assists with change management needs. Project leaders are now expected to work beyond the parameters of the project and assist their clients with bigger picture thinking and business intelligence, so that their projects can be sustained in a supporting business infrastructure. As businesses continue to recover and figure out how they can support their operations post-pandemic.

## 2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theories which this is anchored on are: the stakeholder theory, and Resilient leadership theory

a. **Stakeholder theory:** stakeholder theory is found to be a particularly useful perspective for addressing some of the important issues in management, economics, public administration, finance, philosophy, marketing, as well as law from an international perspective. It also offers an opportunity to reinterpret a variety of concepts, models, and phenomena across many different disciplines (Robert, 2003). Freeman (2004) conceptualizes stakeholder as “any individual or group that can affect the firm’s/organization’s performance or that is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” or “those groups which are vital to the survival and success of the organization” They are also described as groups or individuals who have an interest in the actions of an organization and the ability to influence it. **The relevance of stakeholder theory to this study:** as a theory of organization, stakeholder theory helps to nourish a relational model of organization by revisiting questions like “who” is practically working with the organization (Pesqueux, & Damak-Ayadi 2005). Stakeholder theory is part of a comprehensive project that views the organization- group relationship as both a foundation and a norm. Therefore, the relevance of the theory to this study cannot be overemphasized as it recognizes and identifies ministry of health, labour unions, international donors, NGO’s security agencies, community leaders, religious organizations, families as well as government, that are all working in one way or other to control the further spread of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

b. **Resilient Leadership Theory:** The Resilient Leadership model emphasizes that how a leader is present to the emotional system he/she is a part of, is far more important than the leader's personality, any management techniques he or she may employ, or how well he /she functions as a role model to be imitated by others. Everly, & Lating (2013). The theory argues that it's not the nature of adversity that is most important, but



how we deal with it. When we face adversity, misfortune, or frustration, resilience helps us bounce back. It helps us survive, recover, and even thrive in the face and wake of misfortune. **The relevance of resilient leadership theory:** resilient leadership theory is relevant to this study as it depicts an individual, family, community, organization as well as government's attitude in the face of adversity, misfortune, frustration, any form of disaster, and pandemic which is the focus of this study.

**c. Organizational Resilience Theory:** Just as people can develop their resilience, organizations can learn to rebound from and adapt after facing challenges. Organizational resilience can be thought of as "a 'culture of resilience,' which manifests itself as a form of 'psychological immunity'" to incremental and transformational changes. With a host of factors contributing to a dynamic and sometimes turbulent business environment, organizational resilience has gained incredible salience in recent years. And at the heart of it, Everly argues, are optimism and perceived self-efficacy.

**d. Community Resilience Theory:** Magis (2010, p. 401) defined community resilience as the "existence, development and engagement of community resources by community members to thrive in an environment characterized by change, uncertainty, unpredictability, and surprise." In other words, one approach to defining community resilience emphasizes the importance of individual mental health and personal development on a social system's capacity to unite and collaborate toward a shared goal or objective (Berkes & Ross, 2013). The key focus of community resilience is on identifying and developing both individual and community strengths and establishing the processes that underpin resilience-promoting factors. Its goals also include understanding how communities leverage these strengths together to facilitate self-organization and agency, which then contributes to a collective process of overcoming challenges and adversity. Community resilience is considered an ongoing process of personal development in dealing with adversity through adaptation and understandably plays a vital role in social work contexts.

**d. Family Resilience Theory:** family resilience has been defined in several ways. Jonker & Greeff (2009). viewed the construct as the "characteristics, dimensions, and properties of families which help families to be resistant to disruption in the face of change and adaptive in the face of crisis situations" Walsh (2016), describes it as the "capacity of the family as a functional system, to withstand and rebound from stressful life challenges, emerging strengthened and more resourceful" Both of these definitions take the concept of individual psychological or emotional resilience and apply it at a broader level; one of the key areas that interests researchers is how families respond immediately when faced with challenges over a longer period.

### III. CONCLUSION

Combating COVID-19 with agile approach is critical for sustainability of organization. It has enabled HR of organizations to develop policies for workers' welfare in a pandemic environment. The reason is that combating COVID-19 is an organizational project to promote safety of the employee. Agile change management approach demands organizational alignment with COVID-19 realities and to improve productivity through safety environment that the organization operates. In addition, agile change is championed with adequate commitment of the organization where leaders are resilient in word and action to contain the spread of the virus inhibiting the performance efficiency of the organization. Resilience enables organization to overcome the sheer uncertainty of goal attainment as leaders become active and swift their response and are guided by principles that guide safety of employee and the organization. With stakeholder participation, it is envisaged that combating COVID-19 is a collective effort of government, labour union, civil society among others geared toward controlling the disruption and to sustained business environment for business operation. However, achieving agile change management, success must be guided with principles for sustainable goal attainment.

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