

Generating Confidence Under Agile Leadership: Evidence from Malaysia Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT: Agile leadership has emerged as a critical framework for navigating complexity and rapid change in educational environments. However, limited research has isolated how specific agile leadership dimensions function as psychological mechanisms shaping school climates. This study focuses on the Generate Confidence dimension of principal agile leadership and examines its prevalence as a foundational element of confidence-building in schools. Drawing on social cognitive theory and psychological empowerment literature, Generate Confidence is conceptualized as a leadership process that fosters trust, reassurance, and perceived professional competence among teachers. A quantitative descriptive design was employed using survey data from 461 secondary school teachers across a nationwide sample. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed a high level of Generative Confidence practices, with strong consensus among respondents regarding principals' fairness, relational support, and attention to staff well-being. These findings indicate that confidence-generating leadership behaviours are consistently embedded in school leadership practice and function as psychological infrastructure supporting adaptive and change-ready environments. By isolating this leadership dimension, the study contributes to a more refined understanding of agile leadership and underscores the strategic importance of confidence-building in school leadership development. Implications for leadership training and educational policy are discussed.

Kepemimpinan agile telah muncul sebagai kerangka kerja kritis untuk menghadapi kompleksitas dan perubahan cepat dalam lingkungan pendidikan. Namun, penelitian yang terbatas belum mengidentifikasi bagaimana dimensi-dimensi spesifik kepemimpinan agile berfungsi sebagai mekanisme psikologis yang membentuk iklim sekolah. Studi ini berfokus pada dimensi Generate Confidence dalam kepemimpinan agile kepala sekolah dan mengeksplorasi prevalensinya sebagai elemen dasar dalam pembentukan kepercayaan di sekolah. Mengacu pada teori kognitif sosial dan literatur pemberdayaan psikologis, Generate Confidence didefinisikan sebagai proses kepemimpinan yang memupuk kepercayaan, ketenangan, dan persepsi kompetensi profesional di kalangan guru. Desain deskriptif kuantitatif digunakan dengan data survei dari 461 guru sekolah menengah di seluruh sampel nasional. Analisis statistik deskriptif menunjukkan tingkat praktik Generate Confidence yang tinggi, dengan konsensus yang kuat di antara responden mengenai keadilan kepala sekolah, dukungan relasional, dan

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perhatian terhadap kesejahteraan staf. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa perilaku kepemimpinan yang membangun kepercayaan secara konsisten tertanam dalam praktik kepemimpinan sekolah dan berfungsi sebagai infrastruktur psikologis yang mendukung lingkungan adaptif dan siap berubah. Dengan mengisolasi dimensi kepemimpinan ini, studi ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang kepemimpinan agile dan menyoroti pentingnya membangun kepercayaan dalam pengembangan kepemimpinan sekolah. Implikasi bagi pelatihan kepemimpinan dan kebijakan pendidikan dibahas.

Keywords: *Agile Leadership, Generate Confidence, Psychological Empowerment, School Leadership, Teacher Confidence.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational systems worldwide are operating in environments characterized by rapid technological advancement, policy reform, and increasing expectations for adaptive teaching practices. Schools are no longer static institutions; they are dynamic organizations required to respond continuously to change (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021). In such contexts, leadership plays a critical role in shaping school climates that are psychologically safe, supportive, and capable of sustaining professional growth. While traditional leadership models emphasize control and compliance, contemporary educational challenges demand leadership approaches that prioritize flexibility, empowerment, and relational trust.

Agile leadership has emerged as a promising framework for navigating complexity in uncertain environments (Barrett-Maitland et al., 2025). Originating in organisational and technology sectors, agile leadership emphasises adaptability, responsiveness, and collaborative decision-making (Aftab et al., 2022). Within educational settings, agile leaders are increasingly viewed as facilitators of professional Confidence and psychological safety rather than mere administrators of policy (Syamsir et al., 2025). A central yet underexplored dimension of agile leadership is Generate Confidence, the leader's ability to instil reassurance, trust, and belief in teachers' professional competence (Remandaban et al., 2026). Confidence-building leadership is particularly important in schools, where teachers must continuously experiment with new pedagogical approaches, technologies, and instructional strategies.

Confidence is closely linked to psychological empowerment and self-efficacy, constructs that explain how individuals develop belief in their capability to perform complex tasks. Social cognitive theory posits that individuals who perceive themselves as competent are more likely to engage in challenging and adaptive behaviour (Basileo et al., 2023). In educational contexts, teachers who experience leadership as supportive and fair are more likely to develop professional Confidence, which strengthens resilience and openness to change (Zhang et al., 2025). Despite its theoretical importance, empirical research isolating Generate Confidence as a distinct leadership mechanism remains limited. Most studies examine agile leadership as a composite construct, leaving individual dimensions insufficiently explored (Porkodi, 2024).

This study addresses that gap by focusing specifically on the Generate Confidence dimension of principal agile leadership. Rather than treating agile leadership as a broad abstraction, the present research isolates confidence-building behaviours to examine their prevalence within a national school context. By doing so, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of agile leadership and highlights the psychological foundations that support adaptive and change-ready educational environments. Understanding how principals generate Confidence is essential for informing leadership development programs and strengthening school systems in periods of rapid transformation. Therefore, examining the Generate Confidence dimension empirically provides insight into how agile leadership operates as a psychological mechanism in real school settings.

1. Agile Leadership and Psychological Empowerment

Agile leadership and psychological empowerment have emerged as critical constructs in contemporary organizational research, particularly in sectors experiencing rapid transformation such as education, healthcare, and technology. Together, these concepts explain how leadership practices influence employees' internal psychological states, which in turn shape adaptive and change-oriented behaviour. Within educational contexts, agile leadership provides a framework for understanding how principals cultivate teacher confidence, trust, and professional empowerment. Leadership that strengthens psychological readiness is increasingly recognized as essential for sustaining resilient school environments.

2. Understanding Agile Leadership

Agile leadership is conceptualized in the AGILE model developed by Horney & O'Shea (2015), which identifies five core leadership drivers: Anticipate Change, Generate Confidence, Initiate Action, Liberate Thinking, and Evaluate Results. The model frames agility as a behavioural capacity that enables organizations to respond effectively to uncertainty and complexity. Among these dimensions, Generate Confidence is particularly critical because it focuses on building trust, alignment, and psychological assurance among stakeholders. In educational contexts, this dimension translates into leadership behaviours that strengthen teachers' professional Confidence and readiness to engage with change.

Agile leadership is characterized by flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness to complex and evolving environments. Agile leaders promote iterative problem-solving, collaboration, and shared ownership of change, enabling organizations to respond effectively to uncertainty. Empirical evidence demonstrates that agile leadership strengthens employees' sense of competence and autonomy (Bayram & Öztürk, 2023). Agile practices have also been shown to enhance team motivation and cohesion (Rangavittal, n.d.), illustrating the capacity of agile leadership to cultivate psychologically secure environments.

In educational settings, these characteristics translate into leadership behaviours that emphasize relational trust and reassurance. Such behaviours align closely with the Generate Confidence dimension, which highlights leaders' ability to cultivate belief in teachers' professional capabilities and readiness to navigate change.

3. Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment refers to individuals' perceptions of autonomy, competence, and meaningful control over their work. It strengthens self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, enabling creative problem-solving and adaptive professional

behaviour. Research consistently positions psychological empowerment as a mediator between leadership and innovation. Bao (2024) demonstrated that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and teachers' innovative behaviour. When teachers perceive leadership as supportive, their professional Confidence increases, enhancing their willingness to experiment and adapt. Empowerment, therefore, operates as a psychological mechanism that translates leadership practices into innovation readiness.

4. Leadership Styles and Empowerment in Innovation

Transformational and empowering leadership styles influence innovation both directly and indirectly through psychological empowerment. Lee et al. (2007) found that transformational leadership enhances innovative behaviour by strengthening employees' sense of empowerment. Evidence from healthcare contexts further confirms that empowering leadership promotes adaptive responses under high-pressure conditions (Zhang B.S et al., 2022). Within schools, distributed leadership enhances teacher self-efficacy and sustained professional growth (Choi, 2023). These findings reinforce the idea that empowering leadership not only enhances individual teacher confidence but also contributes to a collective efficacy within educational institutions.

5. Contextual Challenges and Opportunities

The effectiveness of agile and empowering leadership is shaped by contextual conditions, including school culture, institutional structures, and resource availability. Leadership strategies must therefore be responsive to local organizational realities. (Choi, 2023) cautions that empowerment initiatives require structural coherence to avoid superficial implementation. Adaptive leadership that balances empowerment with accountability strengthens sustainable change and reinforces professional trust.

6. Synthesis

The literature converges on a central conclusion that agile leadership enhances psychological empowerment, and empowerment strengthens adaptive professional behaviour. Generate Confidence functions as a catalytic bridge linking leadership to psychological readiness for change. By fostering autonomy, competence, and relational trust, principals enable teachers to perceive professional challenges as manageable rather than threatening. This synthesis positions Generate Confidence as a foundational leadership mechanism that supports adaptive and resilient school environments, providing a theoretical lens for examining its prevalence in contemporary educational leadership. Despite growing interest in agile leadership, empirical research isolating the Generate Confidence dimension remains limited, particularly within national school contexts. The present study responds to this gap by examining the prevalence of the Generate Confidence dimension within a national secondary school context.

II. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design (Miles et al., 2014) to examine teachers' perceptions of the Generate Confidence dimension of principal agile leadership in secondary schools. A survey approach was selected to capture large-scale teacher perceptions within a national educational context. The sample consisted of 461 secondary school teachers representing diverse school settings across the country, ensuring variation in institutional background and professional experience.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measuring the Generate Confidence dimension through six items assessing principals' relational, supportive, and confidence-building behaviours. Responses were recorded on a five-point frequency scale indicating the extent to which these leadership behaviours were practised. The instrument was designed to capture teachers' perceptions of leadership practices related to trust-building, fairness, and professional reassurance.

Descriptive statistical analyses, including mean scores, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were conducted to determine the level and distribution of Generate Confidence practices. These statistics provided an overview of the prevalence and consistency of confidence-generating leadership behaviours in secondary school leadership.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis examined teachers' perceptions of the Generate Confidence dimension of principal agile leadership in secondary schools based on responses from 461 participants nationwide. The overall mean score for the Generate Confidence dimension was 4.4346 (SD = 0.3480), indicating a high level of practice. The relatively low standard deviation suggests strong consensus among respondents, reflecting consistent perceptions that principals actively demonstrate confidence-building behaviours. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of responses for each Generate Confidence item.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of Generate Confidence items (n = 461)

Item	Construct Generate Confidence	Frequency and Percentage				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
GC1	The principal builds positive relationships with stakeholders	-	-	5 (1.1%)	245 (53.1%)	211 (45.8%)
GC2	The principal demonstrates tolerance toward individuals with differing viewpoints.	-	-	6 (1.3%)	265 (57.5%)	190 (41.2%)
GC3	The principal ensures harmony among stakeholders	-	-	9 (1.9%)	236 (51.1%)	216 (47%)
GC4	The principal aligns school objectives with stakeholder needs	-	-	2 (0.4%)	231 (50.1%)	228 (49.5%)
GC5	The principal treats others fairly	-	-	8 (1.7%)	242 (52.5%)	211 (45.8%)
GC6	The principal shows concern for staff needs beyond formal duties	-	1 (0.2%)	9 (1.9%)	264 (57.3%)	187 (40.6%)
Level of the Generate Confidence Dimension						
Overall mean: 4.4346 Standard Deviation: .34804			Level: High			

At the item level, the findings reveal a strong concentration of ratings in the "often" and "very often" categories across all six indicators. More than 97% of teachers reported

exposure to leadership behaviours associated with generating Confidence at these higher frequency levels. Principals were widely perceived as fair, tolerant of differing viewpoints, relationship-oriented, and attentive to staff well-being. The highest endorsement was observed for the item relating to aligning school objectives with stakeholder needs, which recorded 99.6% of responses in the upper frequency categories, indicating a strong perception of inclusive and responsive leadership practices.

Collectively, these findings suggest that confidence-generating leadership behaviours are consistently embedded in secondary school leadership. The distribution pattern indicates that Generate Confidence reflects a widely embedded leadership practice within the national secondary school context rather than isolated instances of effective leadership. Overall, the response pattern confirms that Generate Confidence represents a stable and consistently practised leadership dimension within secondary schools. Figure 1 visually demonstrates the dominance of responses in the upper frequency categories.

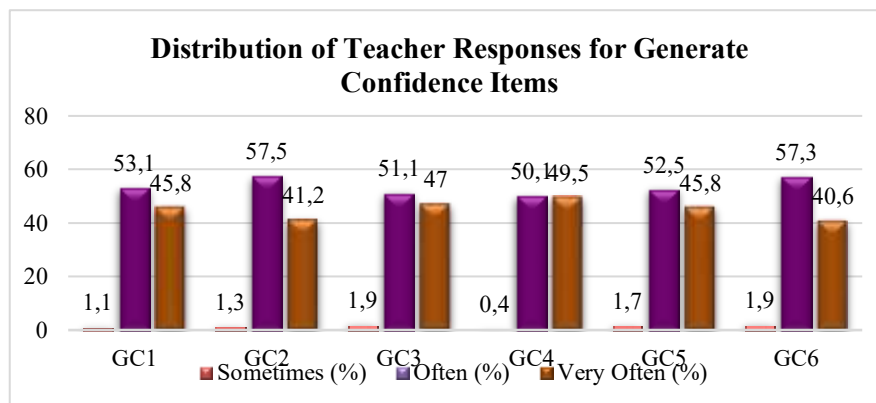


Figure 1. *Distribution of Teacher Responses for Generating Confidence Items*

Figure 1 highlights the dominance of upper-frequency responses, further supporting the interpretation that Generate Confidence is a stable leadership practice within secondary schools. The consistency of these findings invites deeper discussion of how Generate Confidence functions as a psychological leadership mechanism shaping school environments.

Generate Confidence as an Embedded Leadership Practice

The findings of this study indicate that the Generate Confidence dimension of principal agile leadership is practised at a consistently high level in secondary schools. Teachers overwhelmingly perceived their principals as fair, supportive, tolerant of differing viewpoints, and attentive to relational harmony. These perceptions suggest that confidence-building leadership is embedded within everyday school practice rather than confined to isolated leadership excellence. From an agile leadership perspective, such behaviours reflect a shift from authority-driven leadership toward psychologically supportive leadership that prioritizes trust and professional reassurance.

This pattern aligns with emerging research that positions agile leadership as a catalyst for professional Confidence. Özdemir (2023) found that principals demonstrating agile characteristics strengthen teachers' perceptions of innovation competence and institutional readiness for change. Similarly, Baydar (2023) reported that teachers working under agile leaders exhibit greater willingness to experiment and collaborate,

suggesting that leadership behaviours that normalize risk-taking indirectly strengthen professional Confidence. The present findings reinforce this argument by showing that teachers experience confidence-building behaviours as a routine leadership norm.

Organisational Justice, Fairness, and Relational Trust

A key insight from the item-level results is the importance of fairness and relational trust. Teachers strongly endorsed statements related to harmony, tolerance, and alignment of institutional goals with stakeholder needs. These behaviours reflect principles of organizational justice and psychological empowerment. Özgenel (2022) demonstrated that agile leadership enhances job satisfaction through perceptions of fairness, while Yazıcı et al. (2022) linked agile leadership to stronger affective commitment through open communication and team member voice. When teachers perceive leadership as equitable and transparent, they interpret the work environment as psychologically safe, which strengthens professional Confidence.

Confidence generation is particularly important in educational systems characterized by uncertainty and reform. Agile leaders who communicate clearly, listen actively, and validate teacher perspectives reduce fear associated with change (Aftab et al., 2022). This study's findings suggest that principals are already enacting many of these behaviours at scale. Rather than viewing Generate Confidence as an abstract leadership trait, the results position it as a practical leadership infrastructure that stabilizes school environments during periods of transformation.

The discussion also highlights the role of autonomy in sustaining professional Confidence. Distributed and collaborative leadership structures enable teachers to exercise judgment and contribute to decision-making (Choi, 2023; Lin, 2022). When teachers experience autonomy within supportive leadership frameworks, they develop stronger self-efficacy and professional ownership. The high endorsement of confidence-generating behaviours in this study suggests that principals are fostering conditions that allow teachers to engage with change without undermining professional stability.

Generate Confidence as a Psychological Foundation for Adaptive Schools

Importantly, while this study does not measure innovation outcomes directly, the literature consistently associates confidence-building leadership with psychological empowerment and adaptive professional behaviour. Empowered teachers are more resilient, more collaborative, and more open to change. Thus, Generate Confidence functions as a foundational mechanism that supports adaptive school cultures. The nationwide consistency of responses indicates that this leadership pattern may represent an emerging norm in contemporary secondary education.

Overall, the findings position Generate Confidence as a central pillar of agile leadership in schools. By embedding fairness, relational trust, and professional reassurance into daily leadership practice, principals create psychologically secure environments that support sustained professional engagement. This contributes to a more refined understanding of agile leadership by highlighting confidence-building not as a peripheral interpersonal skill, but as a strategic leadership competency essential for navigating educational complexity. Beyond its descriptive findings, this study contributes to leadership research by empirically isolating the Generate Confidence dimension as a measurable and observable leadership practice within secondary school systems. While agile leadership is often examined as a composite construct, the present study demonstrates the value of analyzing individual dimensions to understand how

specific leadership behaviours shape professional environments. By focusing on confidence-building as a distinct mechanism, the study extends agile leadership theory and highlights the psychological foundations that support adaptive school cultures. This dimension-focused approach offers a more granular framework for future leadership research and provides a practical lens for examining how relational leadership competencies operate in everyday educational settings. This study, therefore, contributes to leadership research by empirically isolating Generate Confidence as a measurable and observable leadership practice within secondary school systems.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the research employed a quantitative descriptive design based on self-reported teacher perceptions. While perception data provide valuable insight into leadership experience, they may not fully capture the complexity of principals' behaviours in practice. Future research may adopt a sequential explanatory mixed-method design to extend the findings by combining large-scale survey data with qualitative interviews. Such an approach would allow researchers to explore how confidence-generating leadership behaviours are enacted in practice and how teachers interpret these behaviours within their specific school contexts.

Second, the study focused exclusively on the Generate Confidence dimension without examining other dimensions of agile leadership or measuring direct behavioural outcomes. Although this focused approach allowed for detailed examination of confidence-building practices, it limits broader generalization regarding the full agile leadership framework. Longitudinal and mixed-method research could extend the findings by exploring how confidence-generating leadership evolves over time and interacts with other leadership dimensions.

Finally, although the sample was nationally representative, contextual differences between schools, such as size, governance structure, and regional variation, were not examined in detail. Future research should investigate how contextual factors influence the enactment of Generate Confidence in diverse educational environments.

Implications for Leadership Development, Policy, and Practice

The findings of this study carry important implications for educational leadership development, policy, and practice. First, leadership preparation and professional development programs should explicitly prioritize confidence-building competencies as core components of agile leadership. Skills such as relational trust-building, fairness, active listening, and psychological reassurance should be treated as strategic leadership capabilities rather than secondary interpersonal traits. Embedding these competencies into leadership training can strengthen principals' capacity to cultivate psychologically secure school environments.

Second, the results suggest that adaptive school systems depend not only on structural reform but also on leadership behaviours that sustain teacher confidence. Educational policies that promote collaborative leadership cultures, open communication channels, and distributed decision-making structures can reinforce Generate Confidence at an institutional level. When systems formally recognize the importance of psychological empowerment, they create conditions that support long-term professional resilience.

Third, leadership evaluation frameworks may benefit from incorporating indicators related to relational leadership and psychological empowerment. Traditional evaluation

systems often emphasize administrative efficiency and performance metrics, while overlooking the psychological dimensions of leadership that sustain professional engagement. Recognizing confidence-building behaviours as measurable leadership standards can encourage principals to prioritize trust, fairness, and teacher well-being as part of their professional responsibilities.

Finally, the study highlights the need for systemic alignment between leadership development and school culture. Confidence-generating leadership cannot operate in isolation, but it must be supported by organizational structures that value teacher voice and professional autonomy. Policymakers and educational authorities should therefore consider leadership reform as both a behavioural and cultural transformation process.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study establishes that the Generate Confidence dimension of principal agile leadership is consistently and deeply embedded in secondary school practice, with teachers broadly perceiving their principals as fair, supportive, and psychologically attentive. By isolating this dimension, the study advances a more nuanced understanding of agile leadership, positioning Generate Confidence not as a peripheral interpersonal trait but as a foundational psychological mechanism that stabilizes school climates, sustains professional resilience, and cultivates adaptive, change-ready educational environments. These findings underscore a critical insight for contemporary educational systems: in an era of accelerating complexity and reform, leadership that actively generates Confidence is not supplementary but indispensable, offering a practical and evidence-based pathway toward schools that are more resilient, empowering, and professionally secure.

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