



Department of Business and Management

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The Agile model as a driver of sustainability in fashion: the Patagonia case, a symbol of change

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*“The economy and the environment are two sides of the same coin.
If we cannot sustain the environment, we cannot sustain ourselves”*

– Wangari Maathai

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INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen the rapid advancement of the Agile organisational model, which has established itself as one of the most innovative and flexible approaches to meet the challenges of the modern environment. Originating in the technology sector, Agile is now extending into other areas, thanks to its ability to promote factors such as adaptability, collaboration, and efficiency (Abbas et al., 2008). What will be analysed is the Agile model in all its complexity, exploring its roots, fundamental principles and various applications in organisational contexts.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the Literature Review will first provide an in-depth analysis of the Agile model. Its main methodologies, such as SCRUM and SAFe, will also be explored, with a specific focus on the concept of Business Agility, which represents a synthesis between the technical adoption of the model and the cultural transformation required to be truly agile. Furthermore, the chapter will examine the convergence between Agile organisation and sustainability, investigating how Agile principles can accelerate the transition to sustainable business models (Sigrist et al., 2024).

Through the application of the Agile model, is it possible to foster the adoption of sustainable strategies within organisations, with particular reference to the fashion industry?

At this point, it is essential to address an issue of increasing urgency: “*environmental sustainability*” (He & Wang, 2023). The fashion industry is one of the sectors most affected by this challenge, as it is responsible for significant environmental impacts. This sector is particularly relevant to the topic under analysis, as, while significantly contributing to global emissions and excessive resource consumption, it represents an opportunity to apply the Agile model to transform business practices, making them more sustainable and innovative.

Fast fashion (Dzhengiz et al., 2023), with its very rapid and low-cost production and consumption model, has exacerbated problems such as greenwashing (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020), excessive resource consumption and textile waste management. However, we are in a period in which new trends are emerging, aiming at a circular economy, digitisation and thus, also greater environmental awareness (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2023; European Parliament, 2023). What we want to achieve is to explore how the Agile model can enable improvements in the transition to more sustainable strategies by demonstrating the possibility of aligning its core principles with sustainability goals (Alghamdi, 2025).

In Chapter 2, in order to demonstrate this synergy, a central part of the discussion becomes the *Patagonia* case study. Patagonia stands out as a pioneering company in combining sustainable practices with revolutionary organisational approaches (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2024; Smarttalks, 2020). Through its philosophy, its various initiatives, and its ability to position itself in stark contrast to fast fashion, it is possible to demonstrate how leadership and culture can be mutually reinforcing (FasterCapital, 2024; Sigma Earth, 2023).

Finally, the paper aims to provide a critical reflection based on the empirical analysis and processing of the data collected. A comparison will be made between the theoretical and practical parts, identifying what can be considered good practice and areas for improvement. The aim is to make a significant contribution to understanding the potential of the Agile model as a lever for sustainability, suggesting how it can be an effective strategy to address the environmental, social and economic challenges that characterise the current context. With its concrete example, Patagonia becomes a true beacon for organisations seeking to combine innovation, agility and environmental responsibility, offering valuable insights for the fashion industry and beyond.

In an era where change is no longer an option but a necessity, this thesis aims to demonstrate that a different future is possible: a future in which agility and sustainability are not separate worlds, but rather complementary forces capable of guiding organizations towards a positive and lasting impact.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Agile model

1.1.1 History and evolution of the Agile model

In recent decades, organisations have been faced with an increasingly uncertain and dynamic environment characterised by continuous technological innovations, changing markets and new consumer demands. In such a context, traditional management models, which are rigid and highly planned, have begun to show their limits, pushing companies to seek different, more flexible and efficient approaches. That is where the Agile model comes in, designed as a response to the need to adapt and innovate.

The Agile model emerged as an iterative and collaborative approach, designed to make software development more efficient. It was initially conceived as a framework for managing complex projects with dynamic and unpredictable characteristics. It soon became a true philosophy, consisting of a set of well-articulated values and principles (Malakar, 2021). The Agile philosophy, in fact, originates from the software industry, and constitutes a way of thinking and acting quite different from traditional development logic. It promotes fast and effective communication between the various actors, and an organisational culture that allows proactive learning to achieve continuous improvement (Lugnet et al., 2021).

In particular, the term “Agile” has emerged over the last two decades with the aim of being able to increase the relevance, quality, flexibility and business value of software solutions. Although a wide range of Agile methodologies exist in the IT sector, ranging from software development and project delivery approaches to software maintenance strategies, they all share the same basic objectives:

- Replace initial planning with incremental planning that can adapt to the most up-to-date information available;
- Build quality in advance and then confirm the integrity of the solution throughout the process;

- Address the various technical risks in the process as quickly as possible to reduce the potential for these to result in cost and schedule overruns;
- Minimise the impact of changing requirements by providing a low overhead structure to accommodate changes in requirements originally identified during the project;
- Deliver continuous business value to the organisation by focusing staff on the regular delivery of those capabilities deemed of highest priority;
- Empower staff to continuously deliver high business value results;
- Encourage continuous communication between the various business areas and project team members to increase the quality and acceptance of the solutions provided (Cooke, 2012).

With increased globalization and technological advancements, this adaptability has turned out to be a necessity in the more complicated and uncertain global scenario today. While change has always been a part of business history, what makes change so challenging today is its pace and magnitude. Worlds affairs are occurring at a breakneck pace, technologies change day by day, and all industries are changing, to a great extent rendering the successful practices of the past obsolete. Organisational change is becoming widespread, systemic and fast-paced, with highly unpredictable outcomes caused by constant turbulence that companies must be able to manage promptly. Precisely for these reasons, it is not surprising that more and more leaders are committed to making their organisation Agile, so that they can quickly adapt strategies, structures and working methods.

The evolution of the concept of organisational agility is recent, because until recently it was regarded more as a managerial fad. However, it was *Peter Drucker*, considered one of the most influential management philosophers and a world-renowned economist, who anticipated this concept (Roi Edizioni, 2021). As early as the 1990s, Drucker anticipated that, against the backdrop of the possibility of a sharp collapse of economic integration in the EU and the continued rise of China's power, the emergence of a new economic order based on a knowledge society, where technologies would transform companies and their operations, was likely. According to his vision, only companies capable of innovation, entrepreneurship and the ability to work in partnership with other companies (all of which relate to agility) could survive and stand out. Years later, it can be argued that his prediction proved to be incredibly accurate.

Today, the world has changed dramatically and the need for business agility has never been more apparent. More economic and geopolitical disruption, coupled with technology change, has guaranteed flexibility on short notice to be the requirement. Multiple causes of disruption, from pandemics to global events such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, political turmoil and lack of resources, have demonstrated the impossibility of being able to plan. When confronted with all these disruptions, visionary companies are rethinking their business models. Agility should not only be understood as a method to develop more efficient software, but constitutes a real organisational mindset that enables companies to innovate, create new business models and find new strategies to generate value.

Thanks to globalisation and the continuous evolution of technology, new competitors can emerge at any time, rewriting the laws of competition through innovation. This is because in the digital era everything is interconnected, with accelerated product development and execution.

Agility rethinks the organisation as a set of high-performance teams, each with its own purpose and expertise. Agile organisations stand out because they are: *obsessed with delivering customer value*, they make great efforts to satisfy the customer, they put the customer first. They are also *continuously adaptive*, managing to change the ways of working to provide more value to the customer. In addition, they are *dynamically networked*, organisations gather knowledge and use skills effectively. Agile organisations are *focused on new learning and value creation through knowledge*. Lastly, they are *very decisive*, which means being ready to eliminate parts of the organisation that no longer add value (Holbeche, 2018).

The element that unites an Agile organisation is a shared purpose. Companies that adopt this approach put customer value at the centre, using innovation and knowledge as key tools to achieve this goal. They are prepared to make significant efforts to understand customers' wishes and needs, considering them a top priority. They operate dynamically, gathering and harnessing knowledge and expertise to create innovative solutions and promote experimentation and continuous learning. In this process, collaboration with customers leads to the co-creation of new products and services (Holbeche, 2019).

Agility, as defines by Mike Beedle (2001), an American theoretical physicist and software developer, and one of the signers of the Agile Manifesto, is simply the ability of an organisation to be capable of responding to new situations, and to be capable to altering direction, while producing maximum value and experience for the customer simultaneously. According to this definition, the concept of agility can be approached from two aspects: one side, on the organisational

level, towards flexibility allowing chances to be taken; the other, on the adaptability level of products or services.

However, to be most agile, it is not enough to know how to change, but one also needs to know where and when to deviate. To implement the above, one must have an organisational design that optimises the following: *learning about the value stream*, i.e. the various customer needs, market trends; *knowing the organisation of the product*; *fostering adaptability*, which means being able to use both types of learning in order to be able to change direction at the product group level, moving quickly from one job to another, while at the same time creating maximum value (Ramos & Pavlichenko, 2022).

The Agile organisation is a type of organisation that can proactively exploit opportunities, react appropriately in the face of threats and implement effective and sustainable changes that leverage its ecosystem. This can only be achieved if the system as a whole is able to adapt. Without profound change, the underlying informal system will continue to function according to the old logic, thwarting transformation efforts.

Agility poses a challenge to the traditionally accepted paradigms of managing an effective organisation. However, given the increasing demands and complexity of today's business environment, more and more traditional organisations need to adopt an open and flexible vision. This underlines how complicated, yet necessary, it is to transform in order to remain competitive (Holbeche, 2019).

1.1.2 Different maturity levels of Agility

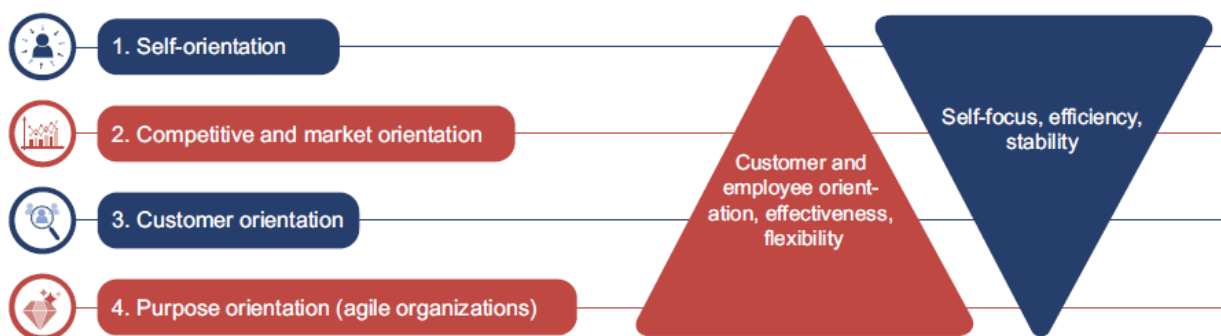
Evolving towards an Agile organisation is a major challenge for modern companies. Agility involves reconsidering organisational culture, decision-making and strategic objectives. A key aspect in doing this is the definition of the Agile maturity level of the organisation, i.e. the degree of maturity the business desires to achieve based on its requirements.

One of the models to apply is that of the “*four levels of agility maturity*”, which gives a structure for being able to identify the various levels and best support organisations on their journey towards agility. Each individual level refers to a progressive stage of evolution. This becomes an essential approach for a business organization, which allows it to customize its change journey, choosing the degree of agility most appropriate to its potential and strategic ambitions. With this

approach, the model not just enables good and sustainable transformation, but also ensures that the tenet of agility finds expression in concrete terms and value realized for all concerned parties.

For this reason, the introduction of the four maturity levels becomes an essential step for all companies wishing to embark on an Agile transformation in a conscious manner. Going into more detail now, the different levels will be analysed:

Figure 1: Efficiency and effectiveness at the various maturity levels



Source: L. Kahra, 2022, page 11

1. *Self-Oriented Companies*

First-level companies are characterized by a very high internal orientation, which focuses on optimizing efficiency and maintaining the status quo. At this stage, the emphasis is mainly to enhance working practice with a focus on maximising output with resources. Even so, this vision has low innovative capacity, low resilience and also limited responsiveness to external changes. One is faced with hierarchical and decision-making leadership, where employees have little decision-making autonomy, and consequently, there is a lack of trust. Here, business processes are standardised and designed for long-term goals, which, however, do not adapt much to emerging needs. At this level, transparency and innovation are hampered;

2. *Competitive and Market-Oriented Companies*

In this second level, the organisation's focus on the market and competitors grows, with an increasing emphasis on competitive positioning. It is in this second phase that the first agile

roles begin to emerge, although still with rather limited skills and with a reduced distribution. Employee motivation begins to grow, but confusion over skills persists. From a structural point of view, companies adopt an organisational matrix, thus allowing more exchange between departments and projects. It can therefore be deduced how, despite greater openness to the market, the organisation still remains tied to rigid structures and traditional processes. It is necessary to wait for the next levels to achieve greater flexibility and customer focus;

3. *Customer-Oriented Companies*

This stage is an essential turning point for companies towards agility, because it represents a shift of strategic and operational focus to the objective of maximising customer value.

It is at this stage that future needs begin to be anticipated. The focus here is both on efficiency, i.e., products that are right for customers, and on effectiveness, i.e., that processes are optimized as much as possible.

Organisational culture at this level is extremely cooperative and goal-driven and based on reciprocal trust.

Furthermore, the corporate strategy aims at the maximization of customer value, who are indeed involved in every single step of product development. Unlike before, communication becomes transparent and accessible to all levels of the organisation.

4. *Purpose-Oriented Companies*

This last level represents the culmination of the Agile transformation, in which companies adopt an approach firmly rooted in agility and oriented towards a higher purpose. These organisations are referred to as either Purpose-oriented or Agile Organisations, which do not simply maximise profit, but aim to generate the highest possible value for society. This approach is a combination of flexibility, creativity and speed. Leadership is decentralised, decision-making responsibility is no longer limited to disciplinary roles, but involves the teams themselves, promoting self-organisation and the ability of each employee to take an active role in defining company objectives.

This is a phase in which there is a strong propensity for innovation, experimentation and constant learning. While this model can contribute to the realization of great benefits, at the same time it presents significant challenges for large companies, where the absence of a central structure can lead to coordination problems and even overload for employees (Kahra, 2024).

1.1.3 Strengths and limitations of the Agile Implementation

It is the aspiration of most companies to be more agile, but agility is a complicated and challenge-filled journey. Implementation of Agile Organisation is hindered by numerous structural, cultural and operational barriers. Rigid, bureaucratic structures with complex governance limit experimentation and learning, while traditional ‘siloe’d’ models restrict collaboration and knowledge sharing. These challenges are compounded by the poor implementation of Agile initiatives, often accompanied by limited investment and a lack of synchronisation between different levels of the company, with the risk of generating frustration and duplication of processes.

Another significant challenge is related to the traditional mindset of managers, often focused on short-term goals and not very risk averse. Agility, on the other hand, requires an experimental approach, based on continuous learning cycles. However, many companies hesitate to embark on this path if the benefits are not immediately tangible. Also, change has been misinterpreted as being technologically driven and excluding people involvement and the need for motivation in employees. When Agile practices are introduced in a superficial way, without a true adherence to the underlying principles, the organisation risks maintaining old habits, hindering the transformation process. To effectively build organisational agility, it is essential to adopt a systemic approach and creative problem-solving thinking. Focusing exclusively on agility at the individual or team level is insufficient if the organisation does not develop a solid foundation; under such circumstances, even the best individual or team efforts are doomed to failure (Holbeche, 2019).

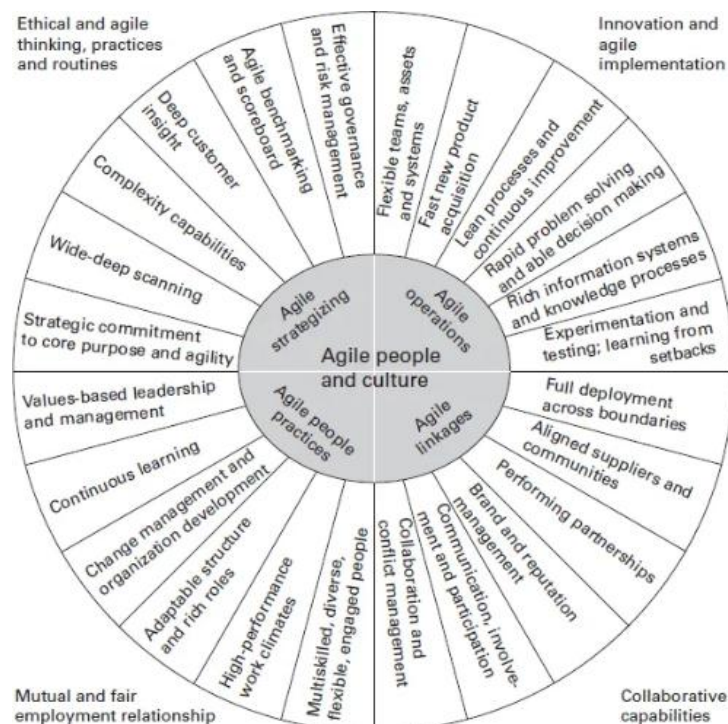
Many Agile transformations fail because companies fail to change hierarchical structures and internal processes consistently. If company divisions remain rigid and the organisational culture is resistant to change, even the best Agile practices prove ineffective. It becomes crucial, in order to prevent failures, to adopt a clear vision of what it really means to be agile.

As outlined by Kahra (2024), another common misunderstanding is the idea that every company must necessarily transform itself into a fully agile organisation. This is a goal that is not achievable for many companies and is therefore unrealistic, as companies have different characteristics, contexts and needs. The main objective should be to increase flexibility and customer orientation by implementing Agile methodologies in a targeted manner, in those areas of the company where one can really make a difference. Only through a systemic and conscious approach can organisations realise the tangible benefits of agility, thus going beyond appearances and building a solid foundation for lasting transformation.

Organisational agility is founded on resilience, which is the ability of a business to respond, adapt and reinvent itself when confronted with unforeseen changes or new challenges. To be resilient means to accept mistakes and adversity as part of learning and to have an experimentation-driven strategy. To be resilient means being able to recover from failure, from volatile situations, with determination. Because of this, resilience and agility are two complementary elements, which are necessary for organisations and individuals. One of the key characteristics of resilience is anticipation. An organisation can be said to be resilient when it is able to cope with major events that are affecting the business, as it has a perspective of and anticipation of internal and environmental change. This capacity allows it to act in a prompt and responsive way, using its resilience optimally and avoiding the risks.

According to Holbeche (2019), organisational resilience is constructed by the integration of a number of key elements, including the anticipation of change; the clear definition and sharing of objectives; the active involvement of staff; constant renewal; the enhancement of skills and networks; the support of calculated risk. These elements, when accompanied by effective leadership and an appropriate level of autonomy for employees, create the ideal conditions for facing challenges and adapting to change. The combination of agility and resilience provides a solid basis for building a sustainable and future-oriented organisation.

Figure 2: Component activities of organizational agility and resilience



Source: L. Holbeche, 2023, page 7

Figure 2 illustrates the activities that make up organisational agility and resilience. This model outlines essential inputs, such as capacity, resources and enablers, activities or interventions, that are fundamental to building agility and resilience. However, it not only describes the necessary inputs, but also highlights the outputs and effects generated in the short, medium and long term. These include improved decision-making speed, innovation, sustainable financial performance, a strong corporate reputation and a healthy, balanced working environment.

People and organisational culture are at the heart of this model, as they are the true drivers of Agile transformation. Traditionally, strategy is developed at the top and then implemented by the rest of the organisation. The classic strategic management cycle - *plan, do, check and adapt* - does not always work well; in fact, it is not surprising that there is a gap between strategic intent (planning) and implementation (doing). Agile and resilient organisations have a learning-based approach, where participation is stimulated at all levels and where strategy development is an ongoing process.

In a more competitive and dynamic marketplace, it is essential to balance business requirements with employee well-being. Indeed, business success can often translate into a high personal cost for employees, with negative consequences for their motivation and productivity. For this reason, working in an Agile environment requires resilience at contextual, cognitive and behavioural levels, along with a change in the mindset and skills of all members of the organisation.

In fact, a truly agile and resilient organisation is distinguished by three fundamental characteristics: a *culture and organisational structure that facilitate change* in the context of the situation being faced; *people who are aware and able to act in a sustainable manner*; and a *learning mindset* in the mainstream business and underlying lean and agile processes and routines to drive innovation (Holbeche, 2018).

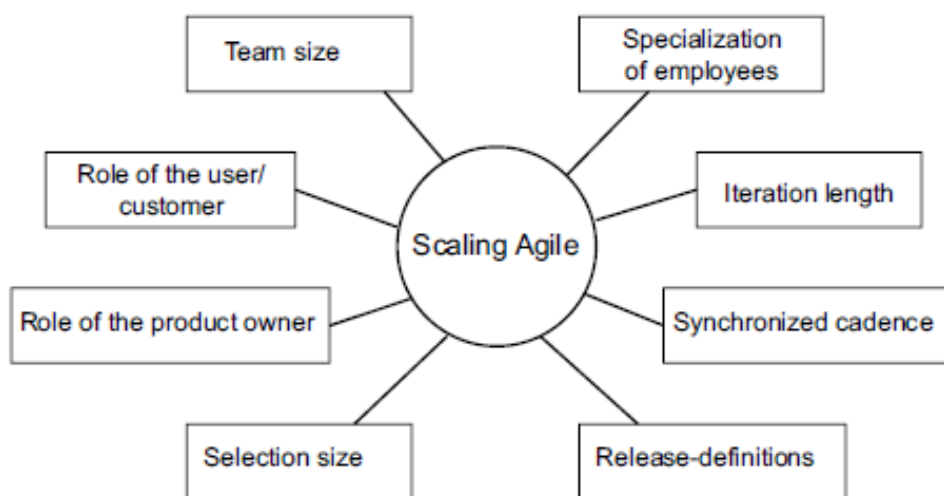
1.1.4 Agile scaling

The term “*Scaling Agile*” refers to a set of frameworks designed to bring Agile principles and practices to apply them at the organisational level. Rather than a single technique, it is more of a genre comprising multiple techniques with the same purpose: to make organisations more flexible and innovate. The adoption of these frameworks usually occurs gradually. Initially, teams gain experience with specific Agile methodologies, learning to optimise their work through iterations and continuous improvements. Only later are Agile practices extended to the entire organisation, ensuring a more effective and sustainable transition.

In concrete terms, Scaling Agile means creating an organisation capable of continuous learning and adapting quickly to change. This process is based on the ability to learn from every available source, such as past mistakes, unforeseen events and future scenarios, thus fostering proactive and resilient development.

As stated by Hayes et al. (2016), researcher and author of numerous studies on Agile Scaling, there are eight key factors that must be taken into consideration for an organisation to successfully configure itself according to the principles of Agile Scaling:

Figure 3: Principles of Scaling Agile



Source: Meissner, Heike, Sigrist, 2023, page 57

1.1.5 Eight factors that make an organization successful

1. Team size

In the case of small teams, it is more likely that all team members have at their disposal the necessary information. In this situation, communication is facilitated. If the work becomes too complex for a small team, multiple teams can be formed, or the work can be divided into iterations (iterations consist of work cycles repeated regularly). In this first factor, the advantage is that small-sized teams promote better coordination (a fundamental principle of agile scaling);

2. Specialization of employees

Workers, in addition to possessing in-depth specialized skills, must also have cross-functional knowledge. This is a type of worker defined as a "versatilist," who easily adapts to different contexts. In the context of agile management, specialization very often integrates with a continuous learning approach in different areas;

3. Iteration length

Through the division of work into smaller parts and short cycles, feedback can be received very quickly, and the quality of work can be improved. These represent benefits, as shorter iterations allow errors to be identified and corrected before they have a significant impact on the project;

4. Synchronized cadence

In order to avoid coordination issues, it is useful to synchronize the completion times of iterations among various teams, also because, if the teams' results arrive at different times, unnecessary review cycles may be created. The purpose of synchronization is precisely to avoid these inefficiencies;

5. Release definitions

A release usually includes between 4 and 6 iterations. It is useful to align releases with business cycles, such as quarterly reporting, in order to optimize resources and respect external dependencies;

6. Section size

Through the division of work into small sections, rapid feedback reception is facilitated. This has a high priority. Work sections must be ordered by importance and require timely feedback to improve efficiency;

7. Role of the product owner

The role of the product owner is to define priorities and coordinate the team's work. The objective is to ensure the project's success by aligning employees' efforts with business goals;

8. Role of the user/customer

In agile scaling, users or customers actively participate in development, helping to clarify specific requirements. The advantages consist in involving customers from the beginning, ensuring that the product better meets their needs, improving the final value.

After analysing the eight key factors, it can therefore be noted that the effective implementation of agile scaling requires a structured approach that optimizes every single aspect of the process. Overall, these elements create a synergy that makes agile scaling an extremely powerful tool for managing complex projects, improving their efficiency, quality, and final value (Sigrist et al., 2024).

1.1.6 SCRUM and SAFe methods

Considering the growing applicability of the Agile model, it is noteworthy the existence of various Agile methodologies actively used in organizations. The most widely used approaches are *Scrum* and *SAFe*, which will be explained below in detail.

The term Scrum was taken from an article titled: “*The new product development game*”, written by Hirotaka Takeuchi and Ikujiro Nonaka. These authors, after evaluating some of the world's most successful companies, determined that the most successful firms had abandoned the traditional sequential linear life cycle development processes based on plans. Instead, teamwork was beginning to emerge. Scrum is the leading framework in the software industry as a lightweight and agile methodology. It has evolved to implement the value and principles of Agile in software development projects. The method follows a small-team development approach, where management focus is always centred on products rather than functional departments or projects.

Scrum is therefore a framework designed to solve complex problems, allowing for the development of high-quality products in an innovative, incremental, and collaborative manner. Scrum has become a revolutionary project management method, combating traditional hierarchical approaches. It is based on the principles of continuous iteration, constant improvement, and self-organizing teams with the intention of creating a work environment where responsibility is shared, and transparency is a top priority.

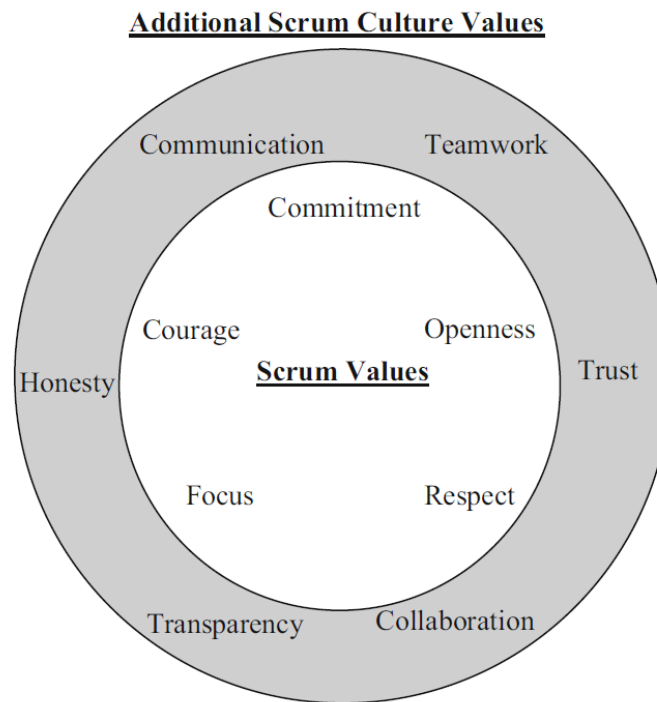
Scrum includes three main roles: *Product owner*, who establishes priorities and product value. The role of the product owner is to assess unmet market needs, which are a business opportunity;

Scrum master, this role is responsible for the successful implementation of the Scrum process and the overall success of the team; *Development team*, who is responsible for the realisation of product increments (Rupp, 2020).

Among the various approaches available, Scrum is the most widely used and accounts for a vast majority of Agile implementations in corporations. However, corporate culture plays a significant role in the successful implementation of Scrum because cultural incompatibilities or differences are one of the main causes of Agile project failures. As opposed to traditional linear organizations with their strict hierarchies and vertical divisions, this model suggests a “meta-organizational” form, one that stresses self-organizing. One of the distinctive features of this form is the constant process of feedback and adaptation. This means that focus is laid not only on results but also on process enhancement and skill enhancement for teams.

Another key principle of Scrum is the enhancement of work sustainability. The focus in this case is on a sustainable development rhythm with no overtime at the cost of employees' well-being. Also critical is the acceptance of uncertainty as an inherent part of the work process, developing an iterative approach in which mistakes and challenges are opportunities for learning. When well-integrated, Scrum can transform an organization into a more agile, innovative, and customer-centric work environment.

Figure 4: Scrum culture values



Source: D. Maximini, 2018, page 59

In the image above, the fundamental values of Scrum Culture are illustrated, emphasizing the principles that govern the Scrum framework and its impact on corporate culture. These include, for example, *Openness*, a principle that fosters an environment in which people freely share their ideas, or even *Communication*, which allows for open and clear communications that ensure that everyone is aligned on goals and expectations.

The circular representation illustrates that these values are connected and constitute the centrepiece of Scrum culture. Each value supports the other, and collectively they offer a holistic system of behavioural and decision-making guidance for a Scrum team. These values stand above individual roles, governing all actions and interactions within the team.

In conclusion, Scrum is not just a work methodology but a true philosophy that transforms how organizations approach complex projects and foster innovation. It redefines the notion of leadership and calls for an organizational culture that is based on trust, openness, and shared commitment to business goals (Maximini, 2018).

The other Agile methodology to discuss due to its relevance is the *Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe)*, a Lean-Agile approach to constructing large-scale products and solutions that involves both IT and

physical components. SAFe enables companies to utilize current resources to achieve greater economies of scale while implementing solid portfolio management practices. This framework helps to define and prioritize, aligning business strategies and investment opportunities across multiple planning horizons.

In summary, SAFe is an agility scaling framework at the enterprise level. Further, in comparison to the Scrum approach, SAFe is a more prescriptive approach to scaling Agile practices. This makes it a more comprehensive development framework, which is based on four core values: *alignment*, *built-in quality*, *transparency*, *program execution* (Anantatmula & Kloppenborg, 2020).

Beyond these fundamental values, the seven SAFe competencies are also crucial, as outlined by Rupp (2020). They represent the skills and capabilities that an organization must develop and maintain to correctly operate systems, achieve business agility, and thrive in the digital era. Through these seven competencies, SAFe introduces twenty-one specific dimensions that enable business agility:

Figure 5: List of SAFe's 7 core competencies and the 21 dimensions of business agility

Team and Technical Agility • High-performing cross-functional, Agile teams • Business and technical teams build business solutions • Quality business solutions delight customers	Agile Product Delivery • The customer is the center of your product strategy • Develop on cadence, release on demand • Continuously explore, integrate, deploy, and innovate
Enterprise Solution Delivery • Apply Lean systems engineering • Coordinate and align the value chain • Continually evolve live systems	Continuous Learning Culture • Everyone learns and grows together • Exploration and creativity are part of the organization's DNA • Everyone is responsible for continuously improving solutions, services, and processes
Lean Portfolio Management • Align strategy, funding, and execution • Optimize operations around the portfolio • Lightweight governance empowers decentralized decision making	Organizational Agility • Create an enterprise-wide, Lean-Agile mindset • Lean out business operations • Respond quickly to opportunities and threats
Lean-Agile Leadership • Inspire others by modeling behaviors • Align mindset, words, and action to Lean-Agile values and principles • Actively lead the change and guide others to the new way of working	

Source: C. G. Rupp, 2020, chapter 12

In conclusion, though both frameworks share values and principles, Scrum or SAFe adoption is a function of the organizational context and each business's particular objectives. Scrum is a better fit for leaner organizations and teams requiring immediate operational agility, whereas SAFe is a better fit for larger enterprises requiring Agile integration at scale. Knowing the differences is essential in order to be capable of adapting the most appropriate model to a specific reality, reaching an agile evolution compatible with business and market demands.

1.2 Agile Manifesto

During the late 1990s, software development teams began adopting new approaches to working with the aim of improving programming procedures by making them more continuous and incremental. The most significant aspects on which they were based include adaptability, autonomy of teams and individuals, modularity, and self-collaboration.

In the early 2000s, seventeen industry professionals published the "Agile Manifesto" with the goal to improve software development. This manifesto remains the foundation for modern software development processes, unchanged in its essence.

These professionals had a clear understanding of the limitations of traditional IT project management, particularly the waterfall method. This approach involves creating a detailed plan before execution and strictly managing changes. It is an approach that works well for many industrial projects, where the final results can be fully understood from the beginning during the construction phase. However, for many knowledge-based projects, such as creating new concepts, conducting research, or developing software, clients do not always know exactly what they want, and conditions change rapidly, as a result, old methods fail to improve these projects (Anantatmula & Kloppenborg, 2021).

Agile project management represents a profound shift from previous ways of thinking. In fact, since the Agile Manifesto was published, the Agile approach to managing projects has evolved over the years. Today, it is a consistent set of methods, tools, and practices, with the objective of improving project performance by fostering agility. This implies the ability to plan within short timeframes and actively engage customers (Da Silva & Pacagnella, 2023).

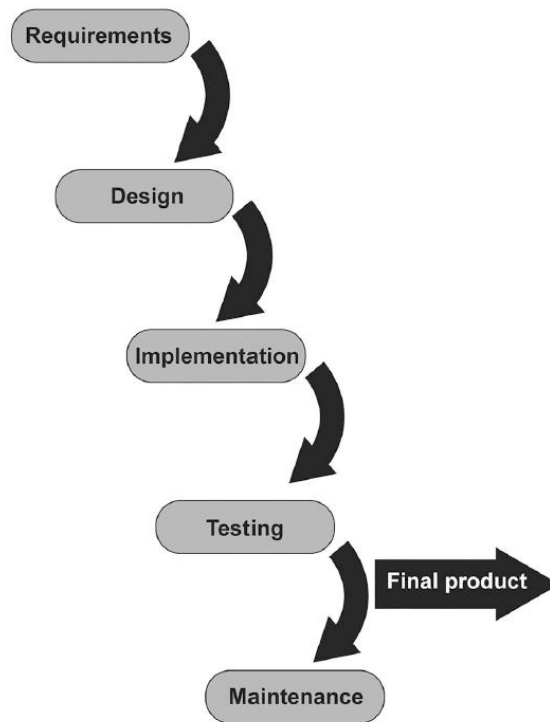
The Agile Manifesto places particular emphasis on responsiveness to change and working products, focusing on the people involved and their collaboration. Software is now developed almost everywhere according to these values, and the influence of Agile is extending beyond software development, impacting other areas of project management and product development.

1.2.1 Cascade process vs Agile process

The meaning of the Agile Manifesto becomes clear through an analysis of what was mainstream in software development before its publication, that is, before 2001. The process that was used is known as the "*waterfall process*" and refers to software development processes structured as follows: first,

requirements were recorded, then the design was created, after which the code was written, subsequently, the software was developed and tested, and as the final step, the finished product was delivered.

Figure 6: Illustration of the waterfall process



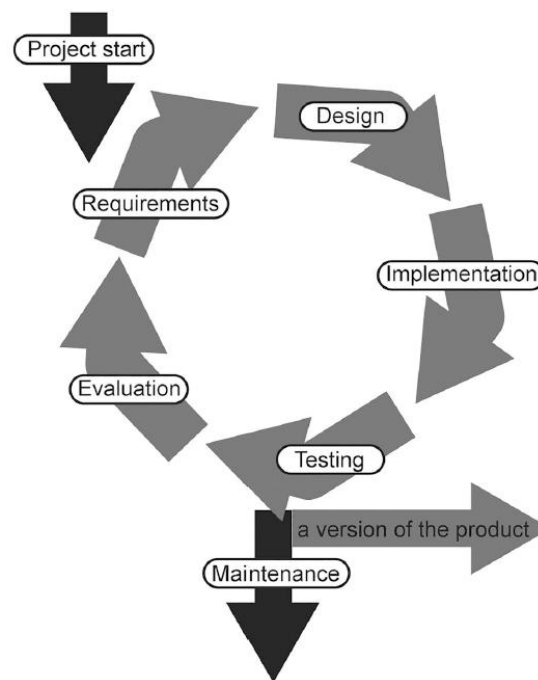
Source: M. Nyce, 2017, page 76

As is also evident from the image, there was no contact with the customer throughout the entire process.

The waterfall project management approach follows a linear formula and is adopted for tasks that involve predictable and recurring processes. The problem, however, is that this can leave development teams unprepared and unable to adapt faster than a competitor. This approach presents several issues, including difficulties in obtaining user feedback. Additionally, users do not have the opportunity to interact with the product until it is completed. This means that all design and product-related problems are not discovered until their release. Furthermore, delays and setbacks can occur during transitions between phases. As a result, this waterfall process can no longer be considered the only approach to achieving convincing results.

Unlike the waterfall model, when referring to an Agile process, such as the one derived from the Agile Manifesto, the described phases are carried out repeatedly. This means that the product is developed in many short cycles and that after each cycle, a working version of the product is available, which can be compared with customer needs and, in turn, integrated into the planning of the next cycle (Sigrist et al., 2024).

Figure 7: Illustration of agile process



Source: M. Nyce, 2017, page 77

From this analysis, the main differences between Agile management and the Waterfall process emerge, highlighting how Agile project management adopts an iterative approach to development, creating multiple incremental phases with regular feedback intervals. Teams are given the ability to adapt throughout the entire product development process, and thanks to the overlapping skills within the team, flexibility is added to the work across all areas. This allows for timely identification of issues, increased customer satisfaction potential, and improved visibility.

The Agile Manifesto has led to a massive revolution in the world of software and beyond. Its impact has been so significant that today, the number of Waterfall processes has drastically decreased (Atlassian, n.d.).

1.2.2 Four pillars and twelve principles

The Agile Manifesto has introduced a new approach to project management. It is a document based on four fundamental values and twelve guiding principles that drive agile practices.

The twelve principles of the Agile Manifesto include:

1. *Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.*
2. *Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage.*
3. *Deliver working software frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.*
4. *Businesspeople and developers must work together daily throughout the project.*
5. *Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need and trust them to get the job done.*
6. *The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.*
7. *Working software is the primary measure of progress.*
8. *Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.*
9. *Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.*
10. *Simplicity—the art of maximizing the amount of work not done—is essential.*
11. *The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.*
12. *At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behaviour accordingly.*

The above principles are an essential introduction to adopting a strategy that truly can be defined as flexible, collaborative, and continuous improvement based. It is a working philosophy that enables organizations to tackle complexity with nimbleness, react to changes at a moment's notice, and deliver value to customers. By equal application of these values, operational effectiveness is increased, and a dynamic and innovative working culture is promoted that is well capable of meeting the challenges of today's marketplace.

Below are the four fundamental values of the Agile Manifesto:

1. *Individuals and interactions over processes and tools*

This initial value is regarding trusting people more than processes. Out of open and honest communication can emerge new ideas, new thoughts, and new possibilities. Individuals are more valuable than processes.

2. *Working software over comprehensive documentation*

This means placing greater value on things that work rather than on those that merely describe what could exist in a perfect world. It indicates a tendency toward action. The reason for undertaking a project is to create something valuable. Given that changes may be implemented, extensive documentation from the beginning can lead to significant rework later. Therefore, it is better to start with minimal documentation and add to it as decisions are made.

3. *Customer collaboration over contract negotiation*

The work carried out serves others. Productive collaboration requires positive relationships, which in turn become a source of strength, allowing organizations to evolve and adapt. This is because people focus on their work and a common goal, and they are willing to do whatever it takes not to disappoint others. In the terms of the Manifesto, this means prioritizing others over oneself. Collaboration along the supply chain with suppliers and customers is useful for discovering the best ways to work and solving problems effectively.

4. *Responding to change over following a plan*

An effective leader involves their team in responding to change. Adaptability and flexibility in the face of change are encouraged rather than rigid adherence to predetermined plans. Responding to change can often be more useful than sticking to a plan. An Agile approach is, in fact, a change-driven approach, where planning evolves as more is understood.

These four values provide a solid foundation upon which to build a truly adaptable and innovative organization, and together with the twelve principles, they transform Agile from a simple operational framework into a true corporate culture. When these elements are properly integrated, organizations can successfully navigate market challenges while fostering a dynamic work environment.

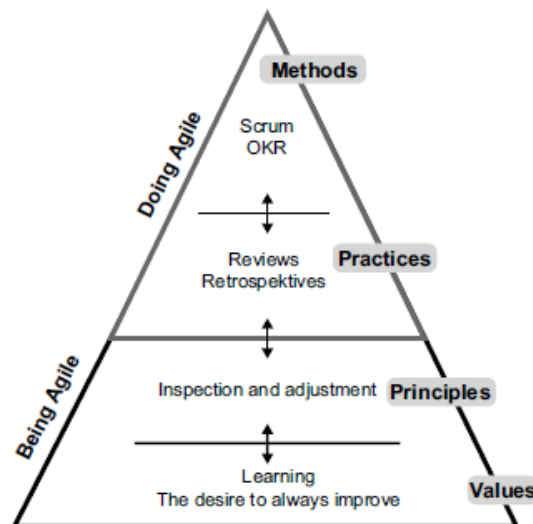
Furthermore, the emphasis on transparency, the centrality of people, and the ability to respond to change promotes the development of more ethical organizations capable of integrating economic, environmental, and social objectives. For these reasons, understanding and correctly applying Agile

principles does not only mean optimizing productivity but also building more conscious, sustainable, and competitive organizations in the long term (Lowell, 2023).

1.2.3 BEING Agile and DOING Agile

Being agile and doing agile are two different concepts. The main challenge is to ensure that fundamental values and principles truly guide organizational processes. From a practical perspective, it is not about which agile method is the most suitable, but rather about which value or principle should define collaboration.

Figure 8: Being Agile Doing Agile



Source: Diehl, 2020, page 79

As shown in this image, doing agile refers to the implementation of Agile practices and methods without necessarily internalizing the underlying values and principles. However, this approach risks failing to generate a real change in corporate culture.

Being agile, on the other hand, implies a much deeper adoption, where Agile values and principles guide the mindset and behaviour of people within the organization. As illustrated in Diehl's Pyramid, the path to achieving true agility follows a well-defined progression: it begins with a reflection on

fundamental values, followed by the adoption of shared principles, their translation into operational practices, and finally, the implementation of specific methods.

According to Sigrist et al. (2024), this progression is essential because, if it does not occur, companies risk adopting Agile tools without gaining the real benefits of an Agile transformation.

1.3 Convergence between Agile organization and Sustainability

1.3.1 What does sustainability mean?

Sustainability represents the compatibility between development and resource management, respecting a balanced distribution between the needs of the present and those of future generations. To achieve it, it is therefore necessary to act both on the front of technical initiatives and on that of lifestyle models (Treccani, 2008).

Sustainability is a complex term that goes beyond safeguarding the environmental and involves economic and social concerns too. In general terms, it can be defined as an ability to satisfy the current generation's needs without compromising the ability of the future generations to satisfy their own needs. Therefore, in an industrial and business context, sustainability is the balancing among economic growth, social responsibility, and the utilization of natural resources in a responsible way.

In recent years, Sustainability has acquired an increasingly strategic role for companies, not least for the growing attention awarded to it by the United Nations with the establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These 17 goals, as outlined by the United Nations (2023), represent a significant framework of guidelines for companies, steering them towards more responsible and sustainable practices.

Growing numbers of companies attempt to reduce their environmental impact, improve their environmental performance, and contribute to sustainable development. The adoption of sustainable business practices, such as reducing emissions, integrating sustainability-oriented personnel management policies, and innovating production processes, not only allows companies to lower their environmental impact but also offers an opportunity to increase their competitiveness in the market.

The most common mistake is to consider sustainability as a limitation or an additional cost. On the contrary, it needs to be thought as a driver of innovation to improve long-term profitability, strengthen

corporate reputation, and synchronizing business strategies with global sustainable development goals. In fact, a growing number of companies have incorporated sustainable practices to minimize their negative influence on the planet. To become more ecologically effective, they have realized that environmental responsibility can also serve as a source of economic advantage.

Ultimately, sustainability calls for a systemic transformation whereby companies are committed to responsible corporate governance and the efficient management of resources and are intent on creating a corporate culture in which environmental awareness and business ethics are primary. Because of its significance for the long-term success of all organizations, environmental sustainability should be seen as an organization-first priority. An integrated approach that incorporates the three dimensions of economic, social, and environmental goals will ensure that future generations progress down the path of fairness and sustainability (He & Wang, 2023).

1.3.2 How the Agile model can accelerate the transition to sustainability

According to the Agile Business Consortium (2024), companies have become more adaptable and responsive, but at the same time, a parallel challenge has arisen: sustainability. It is no longer just a backdrop for business strategies, but now forms the core of contemporary business. The rise of agility coincides with the increasingly disruptive emergence of sustainability. It is important to explain how inherent agility within organisations can offer a promising path to embedding sustainability into the corporate DNA.

Building sustainability into business operations is one of the biggest challenges for contemporary organizational management. Teams must succeed in reconciling creative freedom with compliance with increasingly stringent sustainability regulations, such as regulations for the environment or the corporate image that companies aim to project in terms of corporate social responsibility.

In this circumstance, a crucial role becomes that of the project manager, who assumes a key position in sustainability decisions, directly influencing the effectiveness of company strategies oriented towards reducing environmental impact and optimising resources. As a result of its adaptive and iterative approach, this model fills the gap by establishing the essential competencies for sustainability. In order to effectively integrate sustainability into business projects, leaders must develop skills such as: system thinking competencies, anticipatory competencies, normative competencies, strategic competencies, interpersonal competencies (Soltysik & Piwowski-Sulej, 2024).

Thus, adaptability is particularly relevant, considering that sustainability itself is a dynamic field. It requires solutions that are capable of evolving according to the knowledge and needs of the environment. This continuous improvement is a pillar of agility that encourages teams and organisations to continuously look for ways to improve results. This logic aligns perfectly with the iterative nature of sustainable practices, where incremental changes accumulate to create positive impacts. By improving approaches and ways of delivering value, agile organisations can dramatically improve operational efficiency and resource utilisation, thereby contributing to a reduced ecological footprint.

Not only that, *stakeholder satisfaction* must also be considered, as this is deeply rooted in agility. It ensures that products and services meet current needs, and more importantly, that they do so with future environmental and social implications in mind. Indeed, by engaging with stakeholders, agile teams can understand and integrate sustainability considerations into their designs. Again, the result is a benefit not only for the company, but more broadly for society and the ecosystem.

In this context, the concept of *innovation* is placed at the heart of both the Agile model and sustainability. Agile's iterative approach to development means that ideas can be tested and refined in rapid cycles, thus enabling innovative solutions to emerge that meet sustainability goals in ways that were previously unimaginable. So, when we talk about continuous feedback loops and improvements, it means that sustainable innovation is not a one-time achievement, but a persistent pursuit.

The agile mindset, in light of the above, is essential for sustainability, as it prepares organisations to operate in a world where the only real constant is *change* (Agile Business Consortium, 2024).

In order to effectively integrate sustainability into business projects, leaders must develop skills such as: systemic thinking skills; anticipatory skills; normative skills; strategic and interpersonal skills.

With the current industrial world being extremely competitive, the market is very demanding and spreads wide. Customers seek products and services that meet their needs and values. In this situation, Agile practices are becoming increasingly relevant; however, companies are under pressure to adopt more sustainable methodologies. Green regulations and consumers' consciousness regarding sustainability have made environmental responsibility a key factor for competitiveness. Adopting sustainability has become a global necessity, driven by the urgency to address climate change and environmental concerns.

The Agile method can promote environmental sustainability through various mechanisms:

- *Waste reduction*

Through effective resource management and cutting out wasteful activities, companies could reduce their consumption of material and energy.

- *Adaptability to environmental regulations*

The iterative nature of Agile methodologies allows for quick reaction to regulatory changes, avoiding companies from paying fines and adapting to new regulations. Dynamic project management allows businesses to modify production processes to meet environmental standards without impacting productivity negatively.

- *Sustainability in production processes*

Agile practices enable to change towards more sustainable production processes. For instance, integrating eco-design and circular economy practices into development cycles enables companies to reduce the use of natural resources and increase energy efficiency.

Corporate sustainability is enhanced by Agile practices from social, economic, and environmental perspectives. More in detail:

From a *social standpoint*, Agile management fosters communication, collaboration, and trust among team members, thereby offering an inclusive as well as participatory atmosphere. In addition, stakeholder engagement promotes a very relevant aspect, that is the transparency in decision-making processes.

From an *economic level*, Agile management helps optimize costs, improve operational efficiency, and increase a company's competitiveness. Through an iterative approach, businesses can respond to changes and reduce the risk of project failures.

Regarding the third and final pillar, the *environmental aspect*, Agile contributes to waste reduction, the adoption of more sustainable production practices, and compliance with environmental regulations (Gomes Silva et al. 2022).

Nowadays, a company's success depends not only on financial gains, but also on the value it imparts to its community, environment and economy. This is a highly strategic shift, as companies that decide to adapt to incorporate sustainable practices not only experience an increase in goodwill, but also

discover efficiencies, promote innovation and secure their position within an increasingly aware market. In a time of transformation, the measure of corporate value is intrinsically linked to its contribution to the health and vitality of the world. In fact, this shift to a value creation model is not an incremental change, it is rather a reinvention, a re-imagining of products, processes and policies, all through the lens of sustainability. The goal for companies becomes to be able to integrate ecological and social considerations into the heart of their strategies, thus ensuring both mitigation of damage and the possibility to proactively benefit the environment and society.

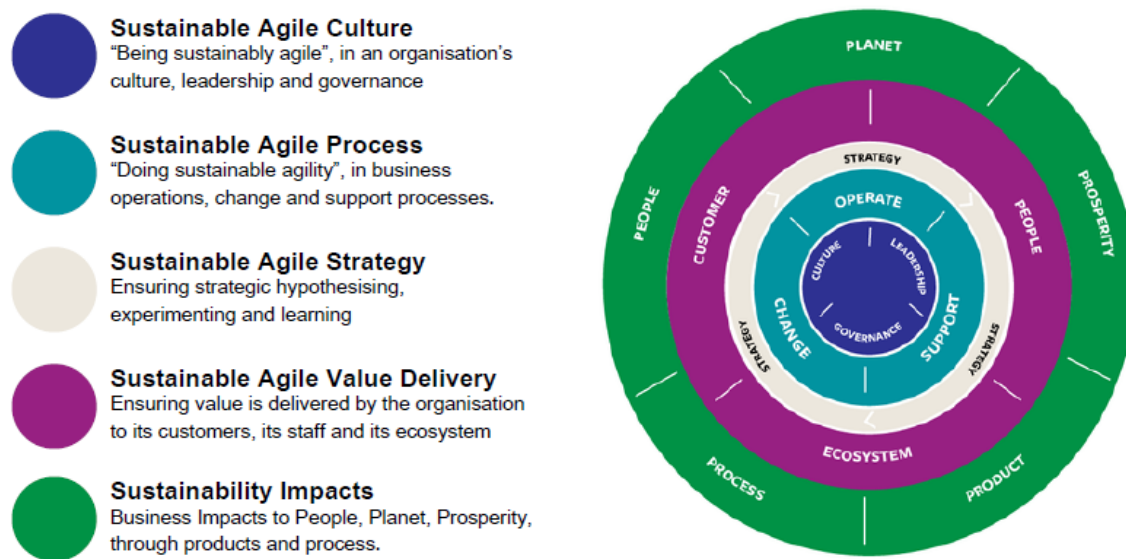
This represents the new frontier of competitive advantage, in which companies are judged on their foresight and fortitude in supporting sustainable practices. This landscape appears to be quite complex, but at the same time, if a company really wants to grow, it must necessarily move forward in a sustainable manner (Agile Business Consortium, 2024).

1.3.3 Achieving sustainable goals through agile principles

As evidenced by the Agile Business Consortium (2024), the principles of the Agile model offer an extra gear for creating robust, adaptable solutions that thrive in the face of environmental and social change. By embedding the principles at their core, organisations can align their growth and, consequently, their success with the health and well-being of the planet. Indeed, Agile is based on principles that are closely linked to the core values of sustainability.

It is now crucial to be able to integrate sustainability into business practices, and to do so, one must understand how Agile principles can align with sustainability goals:

Figure 9: The Agile Business Consortium Business Agility Framework



Source: Agile Business Consortium (2024), page 5

As clarified by Oyedele et al. (2024), the integration of sustainability into Agile development requires an effort on the part of companies, which must adapt processes and metrics that can assess environmental and social impacts in real time. In this context, the Agile Business Consortium (2024) offers a framework for “business agility” that emphasises how Agile principles can be used to promote resilience and adaptability in business strategies, thus succeeding in encouraging a culture of continuous improvement.

With reference to the need to look in the long term, a crucial element is the ability of organisations to be able to overcome the short-term mentality that, in many cases, still dominates traditional management. Rather, one must seek to move towards a systemic and anticipatory vision, consistent with the principles of sustainable governance (UNESCO, 2017).

Despite this, the link between Agile and sustainability is not yet well defined in the academic literature. As the latter shows, the Agile Manifesto and its twelve principles can be interpreted from a sustainability perspective, demonstrating the approach's ability to support sustainable development in its three dimensions: social, economic and environmental. The ability to foster change becomes an essential aspect in a sustainable context, as companies often have to adapt quickly to new environmental regulations, changing consumer expectations and technological innovations that

promote a reduction in environmental impact. To effectively combine sustainability and the Agile model, companies must overcome challenges related to impact measurement, short-term thinking and organisational transformation (Melo & Eckstein, 2021).

In addition, companies must be able to maintain a sustainable pace, i.e. they must be able to work at a speed that can be maintained indefinitely without leading to drops in quality or burnout. In the sustainable sphere, this means conducting business in an environmentally and socially responsible manner over the long term, avoiding the traditional rush and pressure associated with project deadlines. Agile practices encourage work rhythms that align with human and environmental capacities, leading to a better work-life balance, reduced turnover and significantly less wasted resources (Agile Business Consortium, 2024).

Finally, for organisations to adopt sustainable Agile practices, a cultural change is required. Eckstein and de O. Melo (2021) point out how important it is to promote a sustainability-oriented mindset that values collaboration, transparency and learning. This leads to greater empowerment of teams and individual responsibility, all of which are key elements in addressing contemporary environmental and social challenges.

In light of what has emerged regarding the integration between the Agile model and sustainability, it is now necessary to analyse how these dynamics are reflected in an impactful and articulated sector such as fashion. In the following chapter, the main environmental and social challenges that characterise the textile industry will be explored, and then focus specifically on the Patagonia case study.

CHAPTER 2

CASE STUDY: PATAGONIA AND THE AGILE MODEL FOR SUSTAINABILITY

2.1 The fashion industry and sustainability issues

2.1.1 Fast fashion and Greenwashing

So far, we have dealt with the Agile model in a broad sense, with a focus on how it can contribute positively to the introduction of sustainability. In this section we want to explore two concepts in detail, the fashion industry and sustainability, and then continue with a specific focus on the fashion company Patagonia.

To get to the heart of the matter, we have to start with the two main issues: *Fast fashion* and *Greenwashing*.

Joy et al. (2012) assert that fast fashion evolved when the rising trend of the fashion industry promoted the idea of low pricing and throwaway fashion. Fast fashion, as a concept, was coined in the early 2000s as the demand for inexpensive and fast-on-the-spot fashion got momentum. This makes fashion a reality for the people; it developed through an aggressive marketing strategy of international retailers like Zara and H&M, which have played a pretty fast turnover of trendy products, mainly focusing on the youth market. Large retailers nowadays are always trying to follow trends that stimulate consumers' desire to continuously buy new items from week to week.

Through the introduction of fast fashion, all consumers, even those from lower socio-economic brackets, were able to consume and discard fashionable clothes on a regular basis. Thus, on the one hand, greater equality among consumers was achieved, but on the other hand, a serious phenomenon of unsustainable consumption dynamics was initiated (Financial Times, 2023).

The fast fashion industry is an industry of short lead times, greatly reduced product life cycles, instability, volatility and also increased predictability, with manufacturers primarily focused on achieving profit maximisation. This model being analysed constitutes a fast response system that promotes immediate product availability and focuses on large-scale production. In fact, fast fashion

is based on a very reactive supply chain that manages to provide the latest fashion trends at lower prices, while at the same time entailing serious social and environmental consequences.

The main requirement the model set out to achieve was to be able to satisfy the high consumer demand, which led the industry to adopt a type of business that aimed to reproduce styles inspired by haute couture fashion shows, but at a much lower cost, in a shorter time frame and consequently, with lower quality materials. Demand increased considerably from 2000 onwards, so much so that retailers had an incentive to offer more and more collections. This situation has necessarily brought complications, because maintaining high levels of responsiveness generates ethical, environmental and employment issues. Firstly, because the fashion industry generates enormous amounts of waste, creating a catastrophic impact on the environment, so much so that it is considered the second most polluting industry in the world (Papasolomou et al. 2023).

According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017), the fashion industry produces significant amounts of textile waste. Consequently, it has become necessary to look for more sustainable production models, thus, trying to rethink the fashion system from an innovative perspective.

Regarding greenwashing, this refers to a term used by companies as a communication or marketing strategy, which present their activities as environmentally sustainable, trying to hide the real negative environmental impact (Treccani, 2012).

Following the perspective of Vollero (2022), international organisations are increasingly tempted to present an image of environmental responsibility to their customers, even in circumstances where their concrete actions do not respect the natural environment and resource use at all. Greenwashing is a phenomenon where the motivations behind green initiatives are not always explicitly stated by organisations, and the focus on one sustainable environmental project acts as a distractor from other questionable practices.

Over time, greenwashing has been considered as any unethical environmental practice, and the focus has been on the various risks to society and future generations. Not only that, over the past two decades, the definition of this phenomenon has taken on many nuances. Here they are in the table below:

Figure 10: Main definitions of Greenwashing

Source	Definition
Kangun et al. (1991)	Environmental claims that are trivial, misleading, or deceptive to consumers
Concise Oxford Dictionary (1999)	Disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image
Laufer (2003)	Disinformation from organisations [...] so as to hide deviance, deflect attributions of fault, obscure the nature of the problem [...] and, finally, seek to appear in a leadership position
Terra Choice (2007)	The act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service
Gillespie (2008)	Advertising or marketing that misleads the public by stressing the supposed environmental credentials of a person, company or product
Lyon and Maxwell (2011)	Selective disclosure of positive information without full disclosure of negative information so as to create an overly positive corporate image
Delmas and Burbano (2011)	The intersection of two firm behaviours: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance
Walker and Wan (2012)	A strategy that companies adopt to engage in symbolic communication of environmental issues without substantially addressing them in actions. The difference between symbolic and substantive actions.
Bowen (2014)	Greenwashing is a deliberate communication strategy by firms that, by definition, is disconnected from substantive greening [...] Greenwashing focuses attention on highly visible green initiatives or criteria, thereby deflecting attention from a more comprehensive analysis.
Lyon and Montgomery (2015)	The word greenwash is used to cover any communication that misleads people into adopting overly positive beliefs about an organisation's environmental performance, practices, or products
Seele and Gatti (2017)	Greenwashing is a co-creation of an external accusation toward an organisation with regard to presenting a misleading green message

	sustainability communication engenders a deliberate manipulation of business practices [...]
Guo, Zhang, Wang, Li, and Tao (2018)	The action occurring when companies break their environmental protection promises by misleading customers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service
Torelli et al. (2020)	Variety of different misleading communications that aim to form overly positive beliefs among stakeholders about a company's environmental practices
de Freitas Netto et al. (2020)	Deliberate corporate action with the presence of misleading elements, focused on the deception of stakeholders

Source: A. Voller (2022), page 8-9

Besides an ethical issue, greenwashing also has other negative impacts. Consumers are often inclined to choose products that they perceive to be “good” for the environment when in fact they are not. Moreover, more and more people are looking for a working environment that presents a valid purpose other than profit. And greenwashing certainly does not help, as it undermines employee motivation (Padon, 2023).

In order to successfully counter this phenomenon, more transparency and accountability should be promoted. Only through a collective awareness and more careful demand from consumers and stakeholders will companies be motivated to engage in truly more sustainable practices.

2.1.2 Problems related to the textile industry

The Financial Times (2024) wants to raise awareness of how the global fashion industry is profoundly damaging the planet, and dystopian images of textile waste being unsold and moved directly from factories to landfills are increasingly common. This, as already pointed out, is due to the rise of fast fashion.

Waste is only one of the many ways in which fashion harms the environment. In particular, one must dwell on the size of the industry and its chemical-intensive processes, along with its dependence on non-renewable energy sources. An estimate by the European Environment Agency found that the fashion industry contributes up to 10% of the world's total carbon emissions.

According to Hancock and Indivik (2023), a major problem with this business has been the rise of ultra-fast online retailers, which has led to an unprecedented volume of cheap, low-quality clothes

made from virgin polyester material and other types of synthetic fabrics derived from fossil fuels. These garments have little or no resale value and consequently present two options, either they are incinerated, or they end up in landfills for hundreds of years, usually in developing countries.

The European Environment Agency, regarding global textile production, states that 81% of this production is used by the clothing industry, and between 2000 and 2015 this production almost doubled. Moreover, this consumption of clothing and footwear is expected to grow by a further 63% until 2030, reaching even 102 million tonnes.

The staggering reduction in the price of clothing has led to a culture in which consumers consider them almost “disposable”, in fact, it is no coincidence that more than half of all fast fashion lasts less than a year. This is because, if the price becomes so cheap, the consumer enters into the view that, rather than repairing an existing garment or buying a second-hand one, he considers it more appropriate to buy an entirely new product directly. The main reason for the situation we live in today is the fact that the fashion industry has been allowed to regulate itself, even though there are style and industry groups that required more government intervention. Of all the EU member states, only France, Sweden, and recently the Netherlands have decided to implement proper programmes to make manufacturers financially responsible for the waste they create. Not only that, even more serious is the situation whereby the brands that really try to improve are precisely those that are then placed at a competitive disadvantage.

Several companies consider the EU's push for sustainability to be overpriced, and these considerations are triggered by rising inflation and tensions on global trade. Achieving the required 2030 targets will take considerable effort, and perhaps not enough time to implement real change.

2.1.3 New trends in sustainable fashion: circular economy and digitisation

The *circular economy* is the future of the planet (Financial Times, 2023). Within the EU, more than 2.2 billion tonnes of waste are produced every year. This figure is extremely alarming, and a consequence of this is the action taken by the EU to update waste management legislation to try to promote an effective transition to a circular economy. An action plan for a new circular economy has been presented that addresses the design of more sustainable products and waste reduction (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2023).

According to the European Parliament (2023), through the circular economy, i.e. this model of production and consumption focused on sharing, lending, repairing and recycling, the aim is to extend

the life cycle of products and to significantly reduce waste. In fact, when a product ends its function, its materials are not discarded, but reintroduced through recycling, thus allowing new value to be generated. As can be seen from the figure below, the circular economy aims to promote the sharing, repair and recycling of products in order to better prolong their existence:

Figure 11: The circular economy model: less raw materials, less waste, less emissions



Source: European Parliament Research Service (2023)

The benefits are high, for example, through the transition to this type of economy, a reduction in the loss of biodiversity can be achieved, this is due to the reuse and recycling of products, and, as far as the fashion industry is concerned, the reuse and recycling of garments. A further benefit is the reduction of annual greenhouse gas emissions. By creating products that are more efficient and sustainable from the outset, there would be a reduction in energy consumption and resources used, not least because as much as 80% of the environmental impact that occurs during the design phase. Among the benefits brought by this green transition are reduced environmental pressure, greater certainty regarding the availability of raw materials, enhanced competitiveness, a boost in innovation and economic growth, and increased employment.

As analysed by Okechukwu et al. (2018), alongside the circular economy, *digitisation* has emerged in recent years as another powerful agent of transformation in the sustainable fashion industry. Indeed, advanced digital technologies enable brands to monitor, optimise and innovate along the entire fashion value chain, from design to the post-consumer stage.

One of the most talked-about areas of digitisation in sustainable fashion concerns real-time product tracking and digital twin technology, which enables brands to monitor the life cycle of items and extend their use.

Digitalisation is also transforming consumer involvement in sustainable fashion. The growth of augmented reality (AR) and virtual try-on booths reduce the return of purchased products, resulting in fewer transport emissions and waste. In addition, second-hand fashion platforms and AI marketplaces promote reuse, therefore enabling the circular economy in fashion.

2.1.4 Three levels of analysis of the fashion system: product, industry, and socio-ecological system

The fashion industry, as highlighted above, is known to have environmental and social problems within it. To solve them, a systemic view of the industry is needed in order to be able to minimise the input of natural resources into the system and also the production of waste.

One must examine the fashion system based on three different levels: product, industry and socio-ecological system:

- Regarding the *product level*, the quality of fabrics has been significantly reduced in recent decades, and this is due to the new commercial logic of fast fashion. In addition to the materials that constitute an obstacle at the product level preventing a long-life span, there are also the ever-changing fashion cycles. In addition to the increasingly rapid waste transformation, textiles are becoming less and less recyclable, made from a mix of cotton and synthetics. Simplistic product solutions have been introduced, for example, with the introduction of theoretically less harmful textile materials. Even so, a simple substitution of materials cannot bring about a beneficial change in systems. However, new environmentally friendly materials such as textile fibres do not lead to prolonged use of materials or greater environmental sustainability.

If product longevity is really to be achieved, solutions need to be adopted that lead to co-evolution with other actors and behavioural patterns, for example through the formation of

new partnerships between commercial ecosystems and the creation of new modes of fashion consumption. We need to start adopting different practices during the design and end-of-life phases of the product. In the design phase, to achieve *longevity*, special attention must be paid to physical aspects, i.e. durable materials and high-quality assembly. In addition to longevity, attention must also be paid to the psychological aspect. Understanding the decision-making process of consumers is crucial in order to be able to make timeless products, which are therefore not abandoned after just one use.

While for the end-of-life phase of the product, one must speak of circularity, even if the high presence of non-separable materials complicates matters. Furthermore, textile waste, even before the recycling phase, should be sorted according to the materials it contains.

- On the *industrial level*, however, there are other issues related to the durability of products, such as short fashion cycles and increasingly complex global supply chains. With fast fashion, the speed to market has increased. In addition, with rising wages, improved infrastructure and changing trade agreements, there has been a shift of production to countries with lower wages. However, consumers are becoming more aware and are beginning to demand more sustainability, which is why brands have started to make their garments more environmentally friendly. Although, this solution is somewhat limited.

In order to effect real change, companies need to change their business models.

- The third level is the *socio-ecological system*. The paradigm on which contemporary society lays its foundations is economic growth as the primary objective of national policy, and shareholder profit maximisation as the organising principle of business systems on an international level. In the textile sector in particular, this short-term profit maximisation has led the system to the use of truly unsustainable practices. A number of different economic paradigms compared to the current growth-at-all-costs model have been considered, including the circular economy and its goals of eliminating waste, maintaining products and materials at their maximum value throughout biological cycles. And also succeeding in shifting from the extensive extraction of natural resources to the regeneration of nature. One solution is therefore the adoption of a circular economy based on sufficiency, which means being satisfied with fewer material goods than are consumed today (Sahimaa et al., 2023).

2.2 Case study “Patagonia”

2.2.1 Company overview

According to the book “*Let my people go surfing*”, by Patagonia founder *Yvon Chouinard* (2018), much of entrepreneurship can succeed in enriching our lives. In fact, Patagonia exists precisely to question the status quo, and to try to bring about a new style of commerce that can truly be called responsible. So, doing the right thing can also bring significant benefits and can be commercially sensible and profitable.

Yvon Chouinard's fortune came about thanks to his passion for mountaineering, and more generally, for outdoor sports, and he managed to make his way in this business thanks to his original ideas. A strong point was the focus on significant investments in research and design and the introduction of unique looks compared to other companies. In the short term, Patagonia was included in the list of the fastest growing private companies. In fact, as early as the late 1980s it grew considerably, even choosing to become a billionaire company, but this meant expanding sales to large chains and department stores, a mentality that was incompatible with the design principles set.

Although, in 1991, this disruptive growth suffered a major setback due to a recession that significantly reduced sales, forcing the company to lay off 20 % of its workforce. It was at this stage that Chouinard realised the need to reflect on the type of company he wanted to take forward. From the outset, Patagonia began to devote a good deal of time to the environmental crisis, regularly donating to small groups working to save or restore the habitat, and since 1986 has donated 10% of its profits to these same groups every year. Then, in the following years, it increased the amount donated to 1% of sales, profit or not. As early as 1988, the first national environmental campaign was launched, and from there, a whole series of other revolutionary initiatives.

According to Patagonia's official website, in 2012 it is recognised as the first Californian company to become a charitable company, and just the following year Chouinard announces the creation of a venture capital fund to help start-ups that consider social and environmental returns on the same level as financial ones, thus enabling the most far-sighted entrepreneurs to act in the long term. Subsequently, a change is also made to the corporate purpose to reflect the change advocated by the company: “*we are a business to save our planet*”.

From 2022, the only shareholder considered by Patagonia is therefore the planet. The company is transferred to two new entities: the *Patagonia Purpose Trust* and the non-profit organisation *Holdfast Collective*. The special feature is that every dollar that is not reinvested in Patagonia will be

distributed as a dividend to protect the planet. Thus, in addition to donating 1% of sales each year, Patagonia has also become a B Corp and a certified Benefit Corporation in California.

Among the various alternatives to combat the climate crisis, solutions were sought that would allow more resources to be allocated to the fight. Several options were considered. One option was to sell Patagonia and donate all the proceeds, but with the risk that perhaps the new ownership would change the company's principles. Another alternative considered was a stock market listing. This option proved to be ineffective, as even the best-intentioned and best-valued listed companies are under pressure to generate profits in the short term, and therefore less and less regard the importance of the long term. After realising that there were in fact no really good solutions, the company decided to invent new ones. Instead of “going public”, they moved rather towards “going purpose”. This means that instead of extracting value from nature and then making profit for investors, the prosperity generated by Patagonia is used to protect real wealth.

Consequently, it was decided that 100% of the voting shares would be transferred to the Patagonia Purpose Trust created to best protect the company values, while 100% of the non-voting shares went to the Holdfast Collective. The funding comes directly from Patagonia, and each year its profits are reinvested internally and then redistributed in the form of dividends, thus contributing to the fight against climate change.

Chouinard, in his book (2018), emphasises how Patagonia bases its ecological commitment on several core values, as follows:

- The company makes all decisions in the context of an environmental crisis. All actions are constantly reviewed and improved;
- Emphasis is placed on product quality with regard to durability, minimal use of natural resources, and versatility. The company's values completely exclude the possibility of following ephemeral fashions;
- The board of directors and the management board are aware of the importance for the community to achieve success, as this is indispensable for achieving sustainability. Furthermore, it is company policy to recruit staff who share the company's values;
- Although, growth and expansion are not values on which the company is based, they are not a priority;

- The company encourages a spirit of initiative that reflects the values at all operational levels;
- With regard to internal operations, top management works as a team and with extreme transparency, trying to encourage open communication and a collaborative atmosphere at all levels.

According to Rose Marcario, former CEO of Patagonia, the greatest favour a consumer can do the planet is to use things as long as possible. This simple act of extending the life of clothes reduces the need to buy new products in the long run, while having a much smaller impact on the environment. The main problem is that we live in a culture of substitution, we can speak of a society of consumers instead of owners. There is a clear difference, as owners feel responsible for the purchases they make, while consumers take, use, discard and then start this cycle again, causing ecological bankruptcy. Therefore, in order to really succeed in reducing the impact of consumption, both manufacturers and consumer customers must start sharing responsibility. This trend of hyper-consumption must be reversed.

2.2.2 Sustainable impacts and initiatives: “Worn wear” and “Don’t buy this jacket”

To increase its positive impact on the environment, Patagonia carries out several initiatives. In 2015, a winter tour of the “Worn Wear” team was announced, which provides free repairs to clothing. Specifically, mobile repair stations are set up in various ski areas. The aim of this project is to offer ski resort visitors the possibility of repairing or replacing any part of their garment that has been damaged, while also teaching them how to repair it themselves for the future. This is an initiative aimed not only at those who wear the Patagonia brand, but any brand, so that a product can be given a second life. It is a particularly original decision to repair the products of competitors as well, a decision that is not unrelated to the values that the company upholds. Competitive barriers are thus overcome in order to reflect what is the company mantra: “If it's Broke, Fix It!” (Casadei, 2024).

In 2011, Patagonia also launched another campaign: “Don't Buy This Jacket”. The brand's idea was to illustrate their most successful jacket in a picture with a sentence inviting people not to buy it. In a context where companies were lowering the prices of their products to encourage customers to buy, Patagonia was asking its consumers to do the opposite, i.e. not to buy the product unless absolutely necessary. This initiative is a clear example of the commitment to environmental protection and the fight against consumerism. The image obviously generated a lot of astonishment, but was particularly impactful:

Figure 12 - Patagonia advertisement

DON'T BUY THIS JACKET



It's Black Friday, the day in the year retail turns from red to black and starts to make real money. But Black Friday, and the culture of consumption it reflects, puts the economy of natural systems that support all life firmly in the red. We're now using the resources of one-and-a-half planets on our one and only planet.

Because Patagonia wants to be in business for a good long time – and leave a world inhabitable for our kids – we want to do the opposite of every other business today. We ask you to buy less and to reflect before you spend a dime on this jacket or anything else.

Environmental bankruptcy, as with corporate bankruptcy, can happen very slowly, then all of a sudden. This is what we face unless we slow down, then reverse the damage. We're running short on fresh water, topsoil, fisheries, wetlands – all our planet's natural systems and resources that support business, and life, including our own.

The environmental cost of everything we make is astonishing. Consider the R2® Jacket shown, one of our best sellers. To make it required 135 liters of

COMMON THREADS INITIATIVE

REDUCE

WE make useful gear that lasts a long time
YOU don't buy what you don't need

REPAIR

WE help you repair your Patagonia gear
YOU pledge to fix what's broken

REUSE

WE help find a home for Patagonia gear you no longer need
YOU sell or pass it on*

RECYCLE

WE will take back your Patagonia gear that is worn out
YOU pledge to keep your stuff out of the landfill and incinerator



REIMAGINE

TOGETHER we reimagine a world where we take only what nature can replace

water, enough to meet the daily needs (three glasses a day) of 45 people. Its journey from its origin as 60% recycled polyester to our Reno warehouse generated nearly 20 pounds of carbon dioxide, 24 times the weight of the finished product. This jacket left behind, on its way to Reno, two-thirds its weight in waste.

And this is a 60% recycled polyester jacket, knit and sewn to a high standard; it is exceptionally durable, so you won't have to replace it as often. And when it comes to the end of its useful life we'll take it back to recycle into a product of equal value. But, as is true of all the things we can make and you can buy, this jacket comes with an environmental cost higher than its price.

There is much to be done and plenty for us all to do. Don't buy what you don't need. Think twice before you buy anything. Go to patagonia.com/CommonThreads or scan the QR code below. Take the Common Threads Initiative pledge, and join us in the fifth "R," to reimagine a world where we take only what nature can replace.

patagonia®
patagonia.com



TAKE THE PLEDGE

* If you sell your used Patagonia product on eBay® and take the Common Threads Initiative pledge, we will co-list your product on patagonia.com for no additional charge.

Source: New York Times edition (2011)

These initiatives clearly show that the Californian company has a clear brand identity, which is based on two main aspects: product quality and environmental sustainability (Smartalks, 2022).

2.2.3 Patagonia vs Fast fashion

According to the Financial Times (2024), the fashion industry has created and continues to create a strong environmental impact, with an annual production of more than 150 billion pieces. We are talking about data that is very worrying.

Some luxury brands are working to try and become more sustainable, for example by using alternative materials such as plant-based synthetic fur, or by using virgin leather, reducing emissions while maintaining sales. However, the problems that should really be solved and that are very often still a taboo are overproduction and excessive consumption.

In light of this situation, a transformation is needed in this sector, seeking to promote more sustainable consumption patterns and reduce the environmental impact of fashion.

Unfortunately, we do not realize the importance and at the same time the gravity of this phenomenon, yet in northern Chile, and more precisely in the Atacama Desert, the landscape has undergone a particular variation, Today consists of real mountains of discarded clothes. These mountains are so large that they can be seen from space. The same is true in Ghana and other African countries, where unwanted items are invading landfills and even choking watercourses. Much of this frightening situation is due to fast fashion.

Patagonia has been carrying out its responsible business experiment for over 50 years, continuing to grow in this aspect and improving more and more. His idea is that, in order to hope for a planet which can still be considered healthy in the future, it is essential that all companies do their best with the resources currently available. This is because the limits have already been exceeded, we must therefore try to reduce the use of resources, since they are not infinite. Only through a constant commitment can we hope to achieve positive and concrete results (Patagonia, official website, Ownership).

2.2.4 Connection of the company's sustainable results to the agile practices

Agile companies are called upon to adopt a systemic view and understand the impact of their actions and the products they produce. As a result, organizations intending to implement agility on an enterprise scale must have a broad perspective, with goals focused on humanity and sustainability.

Among the companies that have achieved significant progress in implementing agility, mention must necessarily be made of Patagonia. Nowadays his brand stands for a conscious business and high-quality clothing. Given its commitment, in 2019 it received the "Champions of the Earth" award from the United Nations, recognition for placing sustainability at the heart of its business model. This award is the highest environmental recognition of the United Nations for a dynamic policy mix that has placed sustainability at the heart of its successful business model (United Nations Environmental Programme, 2022).

Furthermore, as pointed out by Eckstein & de O. Melo (2021), Patagonia is often taken as an example of agile organization, not only because it adopts agile teams, but also in reference to the fact that the entire company recognizes the abundance of resources and opportunities and promotes the creation of shared value with all stakeholders. In fact, the brand encouraged customers to always think before making a purchase or replacing items already in their possession.

There are key concepts to consider, such as continuous improvement, interdisciplinary collaboration, simplicity and even focus on effectiveness, all of which can be important to minimising negative impacts on the environment and society. Agility is a tool to combat complex problems and adapt in dynamic contexts. This is exactly what Patagonia has been trying to achieve for decades. Through its initiatives, ideals and objectives, it continues to approach these concepts. Patagonia acts in the interest of society and the environment, going beyond the concept of mere profit.

2.3 Methodology

This section describes the methodology used to best meet the research demand. This study adopts a qualitative and inductive research approach, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted as a data collection tool.

In particular, when referring to inductive analysis, we refer to those approaches that are based on the reading of raw data, from which then arise concepts, themes or models, all by means of the formulation of interpretations (Thomas, 2006). The description is perfectly in line with what Strauss

& Corbin (1998) argue, who believe that the researcher starts from a certain area of study, then let the theory emerge from the data collected. Thus, coding and analysis are guided by a flexible and iterative process.

The qualitative approach is based on texts, words and speeches to be able to develop ideas and concepts that can lead to a better understanding of social phenomena (Gephart, 2004; Yauch & Steudel, 2003). In addition, the participants' voices become central to the analysis and are particularly valued (Ebbs, 1996). This approach allows all participants to express themselves freely, in a way that brings out unexpected elements and delves deeper into the still little explored dimensions. In fact, as also pointed out by Creswell (2014), qualitative research is perfect when one wants to arrive at a detailed understanding of a given phenomenon, with the opportunity to listen to the voices of the participants during their natural context, avoiding embarrassing situations or too pre-defined structures, instead trying to promote an open dialogue.

In the study carried out for this thesis, it was decided to use a methodology that perfectly reflects the above mentioned, which allows the analytical path to be clearly structured. The methodology that reflects this logic is the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013), widely recognized in the field of organizational research for its ability to combine analytical rigor and fidelity to the voices of respondents. As also argued by Creswell (2014), the qualitative approach used does not have as its starting point already predefined hypotheses, but is formed from flexible and open questions that mature throughout the course of data collection, allowing the study to be adapted based on information obtained in the field.

The research design, data collection methods and analysis procedures are described in detail below. In addition, the research strategy focuses on the analysis of a specific case study. The decision I made was to carry out semi-structured interviews aimed at people working within the company Patagonia, taken precisely as a case study, as knowledge of organizational practices and sustainability, which allow me to move from raw data to aggregate data sizes. All this is done by means of a rigorous coding method. This allows the reader to reconstruct how I carried out my work, and explains how I obtained the results that will be presented in the following paragraphs (Linneberg, M. J. & Korsgaard, S. 2019).

2.3.1 Research design

This thesis aims to answer the following research question:

“Through the application of the Agile model, is it possible to foster the adoption of sustainable strategies within organisations, with particular reference to the fashion industry?”

The research I am conducting is both descriptive and qualitative, as I seek to understand whether it is possible, as implemented by Patagonia, to focus more and more on the Agile model as the main model, enabling not only corporate but also sustainable and environmental growth.

The qualitative study conducted, as outlined above, is based on semi-structured interviews. These interviews are particularly effective, as they allow complex questions to be navigated and also allow for adaptation according to the dynamic at that particular moment (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Not only that, according to Saunders et al. (2015), thanks to the possibility of interviewing people one-to-one, thus through direct confrontation, it is possible for respondents to ask certain questions aloud, thus bringing out further elements of organisational culture that could be highly relevant for the study. In fact, with this type of interview, respondents are given more freedom of expression, while at the same time ensuring the focus on the objectives of the study.

According to Creswell (2014), through qualitative research, intensive data collection and an analysis of the meanings that the individual interviewee attributes to his or her experience is carried out. This makes conducted semi-structured interviews an excellent tool for understanding the complexity and richness of organisational practices related to sustainability.

Through the use of qualitative methods, different perspectives and interpretations arising from the actors involved can be captured. In addition, multiple complex factors can be explored with respect to a central phenomenon, so as to represent the different perspectives of the actors experiencing that particular phenomenon. This makes it possible to understand new theories that could be highly relevant to better explain the phenomenon, also allowing the emergence of innovative perspectives (Kozinets, 2010).

2.3.2 Data Collection

Following the interviews, the best application of the Gioia methodology can begin (Gioia et al., 2013). Going into more detail, such interviews were held at the time frame: March and April 2025, with a total of nine interviews, all approximating about 30 minutes. Some of them were conducted remotely,

while others were conducted in person, and in both cases, before taking part in the interview, each interviewee was informed about the study I was conducting and asked for consent to record, so that transcripts could be made later.

There were five main questions posed to the interviewees, which were essential to better explore how the agile model can be a facilitator for the adoption of sustainable practices in companies. Two probing questions were also asked, where necessary, to further explore the content, or in the circumstance that the respondent had difficulty answering the previous questions. The questions covered topics such as agile practices, team autonomy, company mission, environmental sustainability, and customer relations.

In particular, the first question investigated how employees perceive and implement agile principles in their daily lives, in order to understand how agility is really experienced within teams and more generally within the company. The second question aimed at a closer analysis of the link between agility and the integration of sustainable practices. The third question collected examples of initiatives and projects where agile practices have played an important role in fostering greater sustainable impact. The fourth question aimed at analysing the importance of corporate purpose and the possible link with sustainability. The fifth question, on the other hand, concerned the company's ability to distinguish itself from those models that are clearly dominant in the fashion industry, with a particular focus on the contrast between fast fashion and the adoption of degrowth logic. It was investigated whether employees recognise Patagonia as a company that offers a different model of sustainable innovation. Two probing questions were then added to these main questions and used when deemed necessary. The first investigated how Patagonia manages to distinguish itself from other companies in terms of environmental awareness, while the second focused on which dynamics or methods the respondent considers most useful.

In general, the questions were conducted in an open manner, with the aim of obtaining authentic narratives that could best investigate how respondents experience the link between organisational agility and sustainable strategies.

The table below shows the general data of the interviewees. A total of 3 women and 6 men, who occupy different roles within Patagonia, took part in the interviews:

Figure 13 - Profile of the interviewees

Interview	Gender	Age	Role
1	Female	40-50	Store manager
2	Male	25-35	Employee
3	Male	30-40	Store manager
4	Female	25-35	Inventory accountant
5	Female	25-35	Employee
6	Male	30-40	Employee
7	Male	30-40	Employee
8	Male	25-35	Employee
9	Male	25-35	Employee

2.3.3 Empirical analysis

To explore the phenomenon, the Gioia methodology was used for qualitative analysis (Gioia et al., 2013). In order to carry out the coding part, three different phases are analysed due to the approach used:

1. *First-order concepts*: in this first step, words or portions of text deemed relevant are extracted, which were spoken directly by the interviewees;
2. *Second-order themes*: in the second step, we start from the sentences first extracted and identify the theoretical concepts that have arisen. These are in fact theoretical interpretations emerging from the first-order concepts;
3. *Aggregate dimensions*: finally, the third step concerns the definition of the macro-categories that synthesise and integrate the second-order themes into coherent constructs.

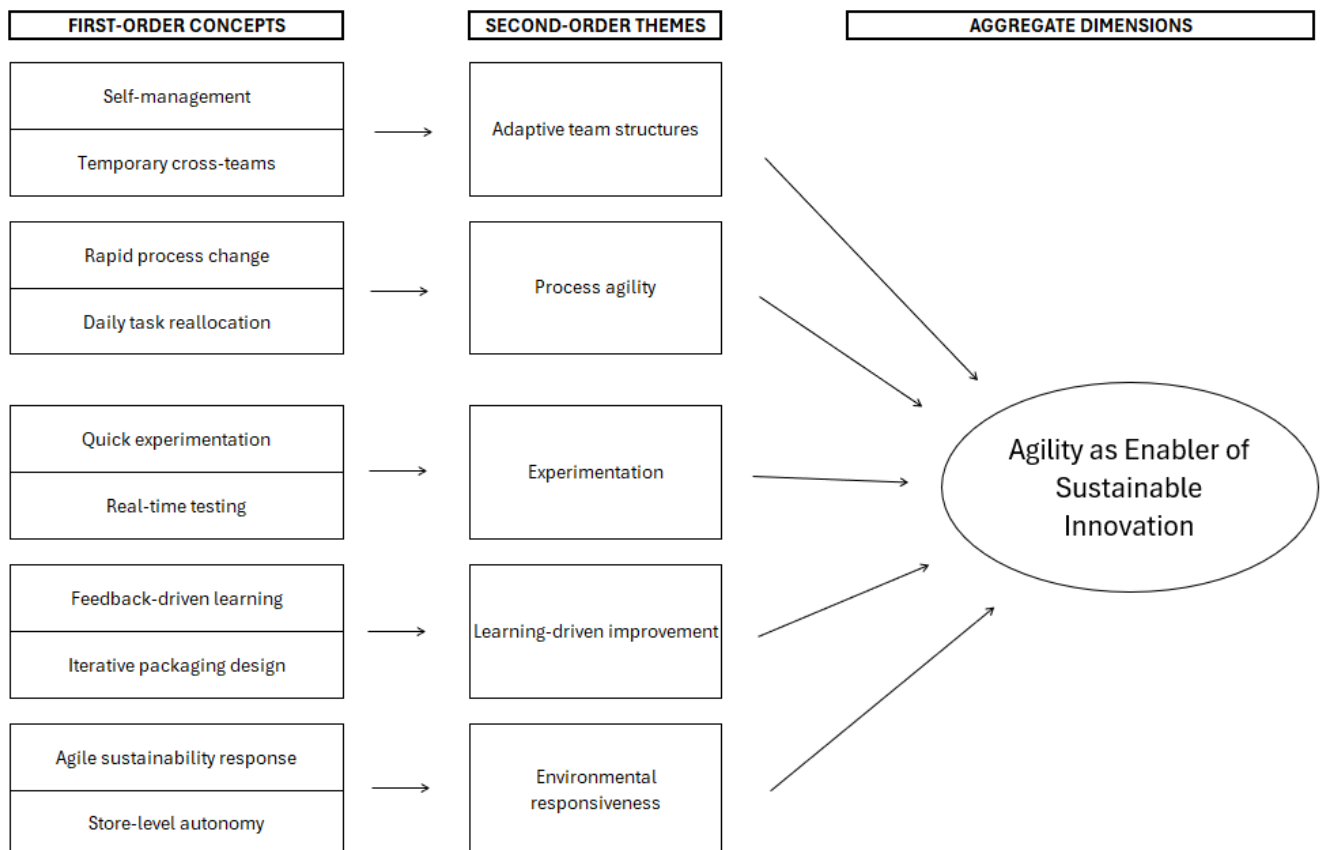
Through a faithful application of this method and then, thanks to a careful analysis of all the material collected, the transcripts were analysed to identify the units considered most significant to focus on.

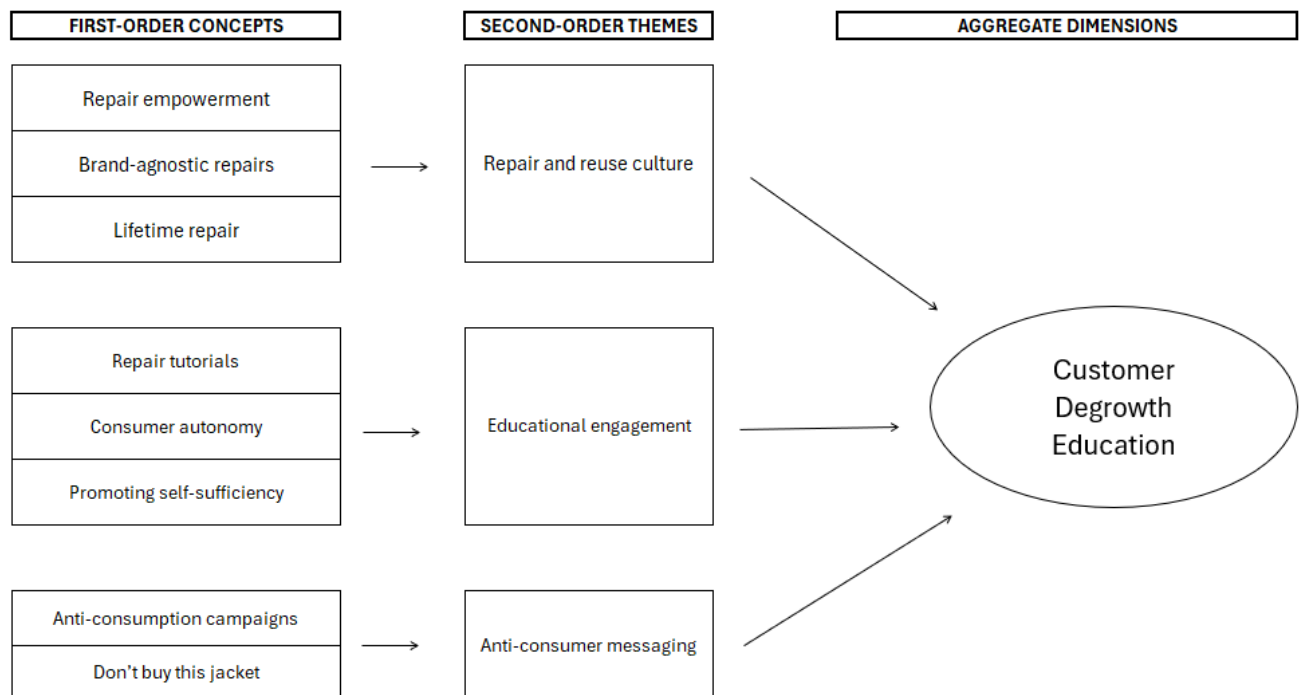
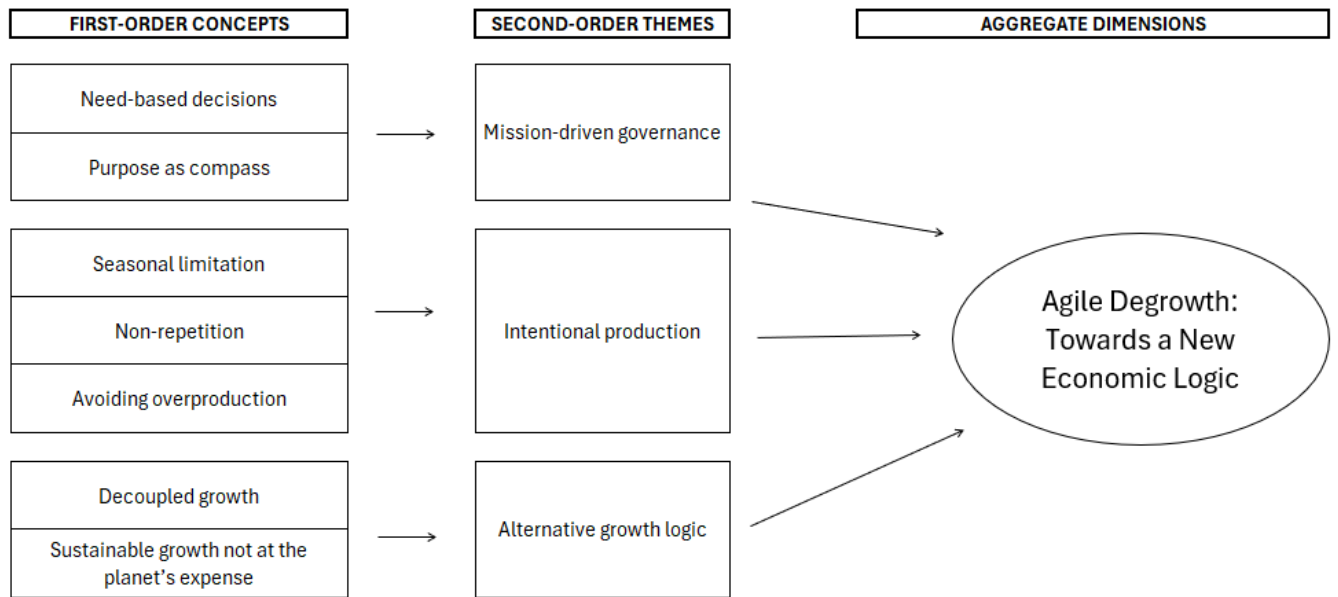
The material was then segmented, and as pointed out by Schreier (2012), this is an excellent method of action. Furthermore, when similar coding units emerged, they were classified under the same theme. Whereas, if the coding unit cannot be linked to any of the existing themes, then it is treated as a new theme (Kao et al. 2016).

At this point, it is possible to realise the *Gioia Data Structure*, i.e. a clear representation that shows the path of transformation of the raw data into much more abstract theoretical insights. From the analysis conducted, it was possible to arrive at the identification of three aggregate dimensions.

The coding work carried out was done manually, through careful analysis of the interviews.

Figure 14 - Gioia Data Structure





The structure illustrated above allows for a clearer view, showing the various categories and themes that underlie the results obtained.

In order to guarantee transparency, all first-order concepts are accompanied by a textual quotation taken directly from the interviews, clearly illustrated in the following paragraph, which serves as

documentary support and allows the proposed theoretical construction to be justified. By means of the Gioia Data Structure above, created using Excel, it is possible to visually analyse the coding process carried out, starting from the simple raw data up to the theoretical abstraction.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 RESULTS

Within this paragraph, it is clearly and objectively presented which results emerged through the in-depth analysis of the interviews and through the coding carried out. On the basis of the Gioia methodology, it was possible to divide the results into three aggregate dimensions, each of which consists of several second-order themes and first-order concepts.

These three aggregate dimensions are: *Agility as enabler of sustainable innovation*; *Agile degrowth - Towards a new economic logic*; *Customer degrowth education*.

On the basis of the results obtained from the analysis, the following dimensions, together with the relevant citations to which they refer, are given in more detail below from the transcripts:

- Aggregate dimension 1:

SECOND-ORDER THEMES	FIRST-ORDER CATEGORIES	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES
Aggregate dimensions: <i>Agility as enabler of sustainable innovation</i> ↓		
Adaptive team structures	1. Self-management	“In the store, the agile approach translates into a high degree of operational autonomy.” “The agile approach is part of how we work every day. We don’t have a rigid structure: we self-manage in small teams.”
	2. Temporary cross-teams	“We set up a dedicated temporary team.” “Each local team proposes ideas, tests solutions, and adapts the day in real time.”
Process agility	3. Rapid process change	“We change processes in real time based on what customers bring us.” “We were able to quickly adapt our way of working when Patagonia decided to reduce the use of plastic packaging.”
	4. Daily task reallocation	“Every morning we have short operational meetings.” “We reassign tasks based on priorities.”

Experimentation	5. Quick experimentation	“We tested reusable foldable containers.” “We introduced modular packaging made from recycled cardboard.”
	6. Real-time testing	“The whole change started from a shared idea, tested on a small scale.” “It was immediately tested on small shipments, then applied to the entire process.”
	7. Feedback-driven learning	“After a period of internal testing and feedback.” “Thanks to the feedback from participants and the collection team.”
Learning-driven improvement	8. Iterative packaging design	“We created a new system... through continuous trial and error.”
	9. Agile sustainability response	“We responded quickly with the campaigns.” “We can modify logistics in real time.”
Environmental responsiveness	10. Store-level autonomy	“We can quickly adapt the product display.” “We adapted the store display to local needs.”

- Aggregate dimension 2:

SECOND-ORDER THEMES	FIRST-ORDER CATEGORIES	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES
<i>Aggregate dimension:</i> <i>Agile degrowth - towards a new economic logic</i> ↓		
Mission-driven governance	11. Need-based decisions	“Every decision starts with: do we really need this?” “We always try to do less, but better.”
	12. Purpose as compass	“Patagonia’s purpose guides everything.” “We always ask ourselves if what we’re doing aligns with the mission.”
	14. Seasonal limitation	“We do two collections a year, no more.”
Intentional production	15. Non-repetition	“When a product sells out, we don’t always bring it back.” “We don’t produce in excess.”
	16. Avoiding overproduction	“We produce only what is needed.”
Alternative growth logic	17. Decoupled growth	“For us, growth is not tied to volume, but to quality.”
	18. Sustainable growth not at the planet’s expense	“Growth, yes—but not at the planet’s expense.”

- Aggregate dimension 3:

SECOND-ORDER THEMES	FIRST-ORDER CATEGORIES	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES
<i>Aggregate dimension:</i> Customer degrowth education ↓		
Repair and reuse culture	19. Repair empowerment	"We also teach them how to repair things on their own for the future."
	20. Brand-agnostic repairs	"We also repair products that aren't Patagonia."
	21. Lifetime repair	"We offer free lifetime repairs."
Educational engagement	22. Repair tutorials	"We have online tutorials on how to repair garments."
	23. Consumer autonomy	"The idea is to make customers independent."
	24. Promoting self-sufficiency	"Sustainability also comes through self-sufficiency."
Anti-consumer messaging	25. Anti-consumption campaigns	"Patagonia clearly encourages people to buy less."
	26. Don't buy this jacket	"The 'Don't Buy This Jacket' campaign is a strong message."

The structure is based on the model proposed by Gioia et al. (2013), which ensures transparency in the realisation and development of the extrapolated conceptual categories. Among the three aggregate dimensions obtained, *Agile degrowth - Towards a new economic logic* and *Customer degrowth education* emerge as innovative or countercultural, thus offering different perspectives to the existing

literature. In this way, theoretical understanding regarding the relationship between agility and sustainability can be expanded.

The results obtained confirm the previously analysed theories on the potential of organisational agility as a lever for the development of sustainability, and also point to completely innovative practices that should be highlighted, as they have not yet been explored in depth in the current literature.

From the analysis carried out through the interviews, these three aggregate dimensions emerged. Let us now analyse them in detail:

Aggregate dimension 1: agility as an enabler of sustainable innovation

Agility is not only synonymous with flexibility but represents the ability of companies to succeed in environments of uncertainty and constant change. According to Teece et al. (2016), agility should be understood as a strategic response to uncertainty, especially in those contexts where there is continuous innovation.

This first aggregate dimension provides insight into how organisational agility is a catalyst for sustainable innovation. Through iterative practices, collaboration and adaptability, Patagonia can constantly refine its environmental strategies.

Of course, agility requires a cost that not all companies can bear. However, companies with strong dynamic capabilities manage to overcome the trade-off between agility and efficiency in a truly cost-effective and beneficial manner. Indeed, in Patagonia's case, agility is built through self-organised teams, rapid experimentation and iterative learning. For example, as claimed by some interviewees:

“One concrete example was the improvement of our collection system for used garments during events. At first we used standard cardboard boxes, then, thanks to feedback from participants and the collection team, we tested reusable folding containers made of recycled material. This reduced waste and also simplified transport logistics. The whole change stemmed from a shared idea, tested in a small way, improved with experience and then applied across Europe.”

The interviews also revealed the strong operational autonomy given to the teams, thus offering flexible and responsible management of the activities to be carried out. In fact, the interviews revealed the following:

“In the shop, the agile approach translates into great operational autonomy. We can quickly adapt product displays, organise local events and respond to customer feedback without

waiting for lengthy approvals. For example, if we notice a growing interest in recycled or repaired garments, we can change the layout to better highlight them."

"We set up a dedicated temporary team to give quick responses and relieve other flows. Even during travelling Worn Wear events, such as Repair Tours in Europe, we change processes in real time based on what customers bring us."

This dimension redefines agility beyond efficiency, highlighting its potential as a strategic lever for sustainable and adaptive innovation.

From what has emerged, the importance of bringing about change that can be considered sustainable is now clear. What, however, has not yet been explored in depth in the literature, and which has instead emerged from the analysis carried out, is a different economic vision, which is completely detached from the usual belief in the need for unlimited growth. This relates to what will be explored further in the second aggregate dimension.

Aggregate dimension 2: agile degrowth - towards a new economic logic

Unlike the previous one, this second dimension constitutes an anomalous definition of agility. The objective is not to scale but rather to intentionally reduce production and the resulting environmental impact. Patagonia adopts the agile model to pursue sufficiency and ecological justice.

For degrowth to take place within a business context, a radical change in decision-making structures, and consequently also in organisational culture, must take place (Sahimaa et al. 2023). Degrowth cannot be seen merely as a linear reduction, rather it must be enabled by agile dynamics, which favour constant adaptation to real needs. Thus, the agile model can also be understood in reverse, i.e. as an instrument of sustainable degrowth.

Through careful analysis of the interviews, it emerged that Patagonia has a strong vision of production focused on producing as little as possible, thus moving away from fast fashion. In fact, one of the interviewees stated that:

"From this point of view, Patagonia only has two collections and not six like the main fashion houses. So less is produced, and everything that is produced is strictly controlled and the materials used are almost all recycled. Also, here earnings and sales do not increase so much from one year to the next, because that would mean having to produce more, and therefore waste more."

The desire for redemption towards the planet, and the will to effect change is evident from many of the moves made by founder Yvon Chouinard, who has in fact decided to renounce the classic logic of profit maximisation. He tried and still tries to behave responsibly by reducing his impact on the environment. The interviewees are enthusiastic about Chouinard's endeavours and highlight some of the many actions taken:

“The recent decision by founder Yvon Chouinard to transfer ownership of the company to the Patagonia Purpose Trust and the Holdfast Collective further reinforces this commitment, ensuring that profits are allocated to protecting the environment and combating the climate crisis.”

From these interviews it is easy to deduce that we are not talking about a rigidly imposed type of degrowth, but rather a degrowth that is matured over time and maintained through continuous learning.

We are dealing here with an original definition of agility, perhaps in the coming years we will speak more firmly of “*agile degrowth*” instead of the now familiar “growth-agility” combination. This agile degrowth promotes greater responsibility towards the environment and also offers organisational dynamism, which is still very difficult to find in companies today.

Aggregate dimension 3: customer degrowth education

In this third and final aggregate dimension obtained, the company assumes an educational role, promotes consumer autonomy and promotes anti-consumer behaviour. Patagonia aims to reduce dependence on the new, preferring to educate its customers to make only necessary purchases.

This dimension is important because it is not only necessary to focus on what companies produce, but also to educate consumers to be aware. Patagonia is particularly committed to this.

Various initiatives were discussed in the interviews, among them Worn Wear, a free repair programme that aims to promote the sharing of technical knowledge and conscious reuse, in fact:

“Two particularly popular initiatives are “Worn Wear” and “Don't Buy This Jacket”. Regarding Worn Wear, it is a tool that works very well. These are events in which Patagonia repairs any brand, free of charge, in order to give it a second life. When a product is no longer repairable, then the product can be returned so that the company can use parts of the product to create a new one.”

This raises customer awareness considerably and shows Patagonia's keen interest in extending the concept of agility beyond the internal organisation. An attempt is made to involve the customer and educate them in responsible and sustainable behaviour. Through this approach, the company wants to redefine the role of its consumers, teaching them the importance of saving and recycling.

An analysis of these three aggregate dimensions shows how Patagonia embodies an agile organisation focused on sustainability. In particular, the last two innovative dimensions further enrich the existing theoretical framework and suggest that agility can indeed support processes of deceleration and behavioural transformation. These dimensions challenge conventional interpretations and provide a solid basis for relevant theoretical insights.

CHAPTER 4

4.1 DISCUSSION

In this section we provide an interpretation of the results previously obtained through a comparison with the theoretical framework discussed in detail in chapter one. The aim is to understand whether or not the research question we started with finds a positive response. The comparison that will be made is not only limited to theoretical confirmation, but also intends to emphasise the new insights obtained, the contradictions that have arisen and the possibility of extending existing models. The aim is therefore to reflect on whether the agile model can really foster the adoption of sustainable practices in the fashion industry, and whether it can thus act as a strategic driver of sustainable change.

From the qualitative analysis conducted (Gioia et al., 2013), three aggregate dimensions were identified, which allowed for a careful analysis of the case examined. In particular, it was possible to examine in detail the importance of the Agile model in situations where change is to be implemented in the organisation.

Regarding the first aggregated dimension, namely “Agility as an enabler of sustainable innovation”, it relates directly to the principles of the Agile Manifesto, which promote collaboration, continuous feedback and adaptability. Furthermore, the company focuses on interactions between individuals and the active involvement of people to create shared value, an approach that perfectly reflects one of the four core values of the Agile Manifesto: individuals and interactions over processes and tools. Patagonia clearly demonstrates how agility is to be understood in a broad sense, and perfectly embodies what is referred to in the literature as “Being Agile” instead of “Doing Agile”: agility is not adopted as a mere methodology, but rather as a true guiding principle firmly rooted in the organisational culture.

Thanks to the interviewees' willingness and time, it was possible to learn how Patagonia demonstrates a high capacity to adapt to its environment, and above all, how it even manages to anticipate and internalise change through rapid learning cycles and also by means of transparent communication. From a critical point of view, Patagonia demonstrates how agility, if it is truly lived, can be considered a lever of strategic coherence, where mission, values and operational practices are aligned.

Secondly, another dimension emerges from the analysis, “Agile degrowth - towards a new economic logic”, which constitutes the most innovative element arising from the study conducted. Usually, in the literature, agility and growth are considered as two associated concepts, as it is assumed that an

agile organisation can expand quickly and scale rapidly. In spite of the well-known classical definition, Patagonia uses agile principles to carry out a manoeuvre completely opposite to these theories: voluntarily and consciously reducing production, increasing the quality of products and services, and minimising the resulting environmental impact. These actions are in line with the most advanced level of the agile model, i.e. the Purpose-oriented companies, referring to all those companies that want to place a social or environmental objective at the centre of their identity.

Thus, the concept of agile degrowth clearly emerges, overturning the dominant logic and prompting a focus and reflection on the transformative potential of the agile model. Although, rather than understanding it as a model for competitiveness, it should be understood as a tool for systemic regeneration.

At the theoretical level, there is a gap in the existing literature: very often agility is analysed in terms of speed and efficiency and is therefore very rarely treated as a critical reduction device. Patagonia, on the other hand, extends the concept of agility, suggesting that true sustainable change also lies in being able to “do less but better”.

From a critical point of view, however, it must be emphasised that this type of model is difficult to replicate in less “value-driven” contexts. This is because the corporate culture, the market niche and the surprising history of the company examined make it unique, highlighting how it points to a different managerial vision, focused on regeneration and not on unlimited growth. However, Patagonia and its strategic logic can certainly be taken as transformational inspiration for other brands in the same sector.

The third dimension, “Customer Degrowth Education”, is of extreme theoretical relevance, and also not enough explored in the literature. Patagonia not only transforms itself when necessary, but also acts as an external educational agent, with the aim of positively transforming customer behaviour. The company tries to promote conscious consumption and challenges the logic of obsolescence and the disposable fashion, all thanks to important and well-known campaigns such as Worn Wear and Don't Buy This Jacket.

According to Porter and Kramer (2011), companies can create shared value, and can contribute to solving social and environmental problems, redefining the concept of business success. Thus, companies can contribute to solving social and environmental problems by integrating them into their strategy. Agile organisations involve consumers and stakeholders in a collaborative process of learning and innovation. Patagonia, in fact, aims to involve consumers during the process through various ways, including, sharing technical know-how, promoting anti-consumer practices. It does not

limit itself to simply satisfying existing demand, but seeks to steer its nature, promoting sustainable and ethical consumption. From a critical point of view, what has just been considered is quite different from the classical customer-oriented model, and rather seeks to achieve a collaborative learning process.

A particularly relevant reflection can thus emerge: can an organisation only be defined as agile if it changes itself, or is it also considered agile when it manages to stimulate change in others? The Patagonia case study shows how a purpose-oriented company manages to integrate agility and sustainability in a shared mission of cultural transformation.

The comparison between theory and practice reveals a solid coherence between agile principles and the sustainable practices adopted by Patagonia, and also highlights the possibility of focusing on important theoretical extensions: agility can be understood not only as economic growth, but also as a tool for containment and regeneration; furthermore, for a company to be sustainable, a profound cultural alignment must be sought.

In light of what has been analysed, it can therefore be argued that the agile model can be seen not only as an effective approach to achieving sustainability, but also as a transformative force capable of rewriting business logic and market values.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis was to investigate and analyse whether or not the agile model can help the adoption of sustainable strategies within organisations, particularly with reference to companies working in the fashion industry.

The idea to deal with this topic was born from the curiosity to find out if the agile model can really allow to implement important changes from a sustainable point of view. I had the curiosity to investigate a particularly complicated sector such as fashion, which is known to be characterised by dynamics such as overproduction and excessive consumption. As for the choice of company, Patagonia is widely known thanks to its initiatives and thanks to its many communication channels, and it is known above all by young people and by all those people who, in their own small way, want to contribute to a better future.

In fact, the qualitative approach adopted and the analysis of the Patagonia case study explained how agility can allow for a real sustainable transformation of the company, a goal that can only be achieved if the agile model is understood as an organisational culture and not just a method. Indeed, Patagonia is a perfect example of how agile models rooted in corporate values can integrate a strategic vision and environmental and social impact, and also demonstrates how agility can merge with values in the long term.

Three distinctive elements emerged from the analysis. Firstly, the ability to quickly adapt thanks to the agile model. Secondly, a new dimension was analysed regarding agile degrowth, an approach that completely overturns the logic of infinite growth, rather promoting quality, durability and sufficiency. And finally, the role of the company as an educational agent towards stakeholders and customers was explored.

Fashion companies wishing to imitate what Patagonia has achieved should rethink their organisational culture and mission. Therefore, change cannot be partial, changes should be implemented at all levels of the organisation.

From the analysis conducted, it was also possible to note the presence of certain limitations, which are inevitable when dealing with such innovative and sensitive issues. These limitations, however, on the one hand suggest caution in generalising the results obtained, and on the other open up new

possible investigations to analyse future paths of transition towards more agile and sustainable organisational forms.

In conclusion, the work carried out has made it possible to analyse and reflect a different view of the relationship between business and sustainability. The case study shows how the agile model and sustainability can be mutually reinforcing, giving rise to new business models that are useful in tackling contemporary challenges. The goal now is to be able to make this vision more accessible to all, supporting companies in such a transition.

Only companies that manage to operate with a sense of urgency, always on the edge, constantly evolving and open to diversity and novelty will still be here in a hundred years. Unlimited growth on a limited planet can no longer continue.

5.1.1 Limitations and prospects for the future

The analysis conducted revealed certain limitations but also interesting perspectives for future studies.

First of all, it must be recognised that Patagonia is a particularly original fashion company, it could be described as almost unique. It has an incredibly environmentally and socially oriented corporate culture. There is also a strong internal coherence between mission, processes and people. It is independent of classical growth logics. These aspects make it very difficult for companies in the fast fashion sector to imitate it.

This sector is very complex; in fact, most fashion companies struggle to pursue sustainable and agile logics. The difficulty is due to business models focused on quite different values, such as high turnover, speed, continuous production. This means that, to try to imitate the Patagonia model, companies should implement a systemic change on several fronts: strategic, organisational and cultural.

Building on these reflections, it would be very interesting, in the future, to have the opportunity to understand to what extent the concept of agile degrowth can be applied, especially in more difficult contexts, such as fledgling companies or listed companies.

The research conducted could present new directions for future studies. For example, one could analyse the conditions that favour the adoption of this sustainability-oriented model of agile degrowth for those companies that are less inclined to integrate it. Or one could investigate how less predisposed

companies can implement the progressive transition to agile and sustainable models, also because not all companies have the possibility of implementing a radical transformation.

Ultimately, this study provides a solid basis for future investigations oriented towards the implementation of agile and sustainable models, offering concrete guidelines for all those companies willing to start a responsible transformation process. The ambition is to be able to contribute to the realisation of a new paradigm, where agility and sustainability are not seen as alternatives, but rather as allies for the future of the company.

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