

# SUSTAINABILITY ASPECTS INSIDE THE AGILE FRAMEWORK

An exploratory study of the fit between sustainability and agile way of working in ING

By Chiara Rusconi

## BACKGROUND

Nowadays' companies are requested to take a pledge in favour of sustainability and integrate sustainable practices inside their strategies. Doing so is influenced by the organizational culture and structure of the company. This study focuses on understanding the agile way of working culture and structure. These enable companies to be flexible and adaptable to changes occurring in the external environment, while empowering employees by giving them maximum flexibility and minimum constraints. However, it is based on short iterations on a continuous delivery schedule.

## OBJECTIVE

Given the contrast between short-term iterations and a sustainable long-term orientation, this research aims to investigate the fit between the agile way of working and the implementation of sustainable strategies. Answering to the following question:

*“How does the agile way of working fit ING's sustainability goals?”*

This paper extends current insights into the interplay between agile' short term direction, and sustainability's long term goal orientation.

## INTRODUCTION

Here, relevant literature is examined, in order to provide an understanding of the following concepts: organizational culture and structure, agile way of working and their relationship with sustainability.

## METHODS

To answer to this study's research question, a **qualitative approach** was chosen, using semi-structured interviews to collect data on ING employees's perception of the agile way of working. The research focuses on ING Bank, treated as intrinsic case study. Collected data were analysed manually following an abduction approach.

## RESULTS

**Agile culture at ING** is based on the values and behaviors of the Orange Code. Internally, it enhances open communication and flexibility. Externally, openness to innovation, adaptability and change.

**Agile structure at ING** is highly influenced by agile rituals and rites. The structure is organized in tribes, squads and chapters. These teams work following rituals, i.e. daily stand-ups and 2-week sprints.



**Sustainability in ING** is implemented both internally and externally. The first consists of training programs and sustainable activities. The second of reporting, partnerships with NGOs and various sustainable projects.

**Perceived contribution of Agile on Sustainability in ING.** Flexibility and responsiveness allow the company to react to the needs of external environment, i.e. Paris Climate Agreement. Short-term projects allow a precise track of sustainable activities progress, and together with freedom given to employees allow the implementation of sustainable activities inside their work tasks.

## CONCLUSIONS

In general, the findings obtained from the case study show that with an **agile way of working**, the culture and the structure that are developed inside the company are a **positive fit** for its **sustainable strategic decisions**. However, there are also shown some weaknesses in the analyzed relationship:

- Employees who implement sustainability inside their tasks are those who have an already-existing personal interest in the topic.
- These activities would be only on individual projects, therefore not really contributing to the company-level sustainability strategy.