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Why most digital transformations fail and how agility at scale can reverse this scenario.

Why most digital transformations fail and how scaled agility can reverse this scenario
Why the majority of digital transformations fail and how agile the scale can reverse this scenario

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformations have become a strategic priority for organizations in different sectors, but the literature and research with executives indicate that most of these initiatives do not achieve their proposed objectives. This article examines, through an integrative literature review of a qualitative and exploratory nature, the causes of this unsatisfactory performance and the potential of agile scale models to address them. The corpus includes studies published up to December 2024 in the fields of information systems, software engineering, change management, and strategy. The analysis shows that the frequently cited 70% failure rate lacks rigorous empirical evidence, although recent surveys confirm low and convergent success rates. It also shows that the predominant causes are organizational, not technological, involving leadership, coordination between areas, resistance to change, and the absence of learning mechanisms. The theoretical foundations of agility, systematic reviews on large-scale agile transformations, and the theory of dynamic capabilities support the argument that agility at scale directly addresses these issues, provided it is adapted to the context, supported by senior management, and extended beyond technology teams. It is concluded that agility at scale is not an automatic solution, but offers structural mechanisms for coordination, learning, and resource reallocation capable of increasing the probability of success of digital transformations.

Keywords: Digital transformation. Agility at scale. Agile methods. Change management.
Dynamic capabilities.

ABSTRACT

Digital transformations have become a strategic priority for organizations across industries, yet the literature and executive surveys indicate that most of these initiatives do not achieve their intended objectives. This article examines, through a qualitative and exploratory integrative literature review, the causes of this unsatisfactory performance and the potential of scaled agile models to address them. The corpus brings together studies published up to December 2024 in the fields of information systems, software engineering, change management and strategy. The analysis shows that the frequently cited 70% failure rate lacks rigorous empirical support, although recent surveys confirm low and converging success rates. It also shows that the prevailing causes are organizational rather than technological, involving leadership, cross-functional coordination, resistance to change and the absence of learning mechanisms. The theoretical foundations of agility, systematic reviews of large-scale agile transformations and dynamic capabilities theory support the argument that scaled agility directly addresses these causes, provided it is adapted to the context, supported by top management and extended beyond technology teams. The article concludes that scaled agility is not an automatic solution, but it offers structural mechanisms of coordination, learning and resource reallocation capable of increasing the likelihood of success of digital transformations.

Keywords: Digital transformation. Scaled agility. Agile methods. Change management. Dynamic capabilities.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, digital transformation has become one of the central themes of...
Strategic agenda of organizations. The spread of mobile technologies, cloud computing, and
Data analysis and digital platforms have altered consumer behavior and dynamics.
competitiveness and the way value is created and captured in virtually all economic sectors.
(VIAL, 2019). In light of these changes, traditional companies began to invest volumes
significant resources invested in programs designed to modernize systems, redesign processes and
Develop new business models. The literature, however, has reiterated that technology is only
part of the challenge. Kane et al. (2015) argued that it is strategy, not technology, that
drives digital transformation, while Westerman, Bonnet, and McAfee (2014) showed that the
Superior performance depends on the combination of digital capability and leadership ability.
Despite the volume of investment, the results rarely meet expectations.
A McKinsey & Company survey of 1,793 participants found that only 16% of
Respondents stated that their organizations' digital transformations improved performance and sustained those
gains over time (DE LA BOUTETIÈRE;
(MONTAGNER; REICH, 2018). A study by the Boston Consulting Group, in turn, estimated that approximately
70% of digital transformations fall short of their objectives (FORTH et al., 2020). At the same time
Over time, Hughes (2011) demonstrated that the recurring claim that 70% of change initiatives
The idea that organizational failures lack valid and reliable empirical support. The phenomenon, therefore,
It requires careful interpretation, as it combines consistent evidence of poor performance with the use
insufficient rigor in failure statistics.
In this context, this article seeks to answer the following question: why do most of the
Digital transformations are not achieving their objectives, and to what extent are agile models failing to achieve their goals?
Could scale reverse this situation? The hypothesis is that the predominant causes of failure
These are organizational aspects, and agility at scale offers structural mechanisms capable of...
to confront them, provided it is adapted to the context and supported by leadership. The overall objective consists of
to examine, in light of the scientific literature published up to December 2024, the theoretical foundations
and the empirical evidence that supports this hypothesis. The text is organized into six sections, which
They address the nature of digital transformation, the critique of failure rates, and the fundamentals of...
Agility, scaling models, the challenges of agile transformations, and agility as...
dynamic capability.

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2 METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a qualitative approach, is basic in nature, and has an exploratory objective, and is conducted through bibliographic and documentary procedures. According to Gil (2017), the research Exploratory research is indicated when the aim is to deepen the understanding of a problem and make it... more explicit, favoring the formulation of well-founded hypotheses. The relationship between transformation Digital and agile at scale meets this condition, because the topic is distributed across fields that They rarely engage in dialogue, such as software engineering, information systems, and change management. and business strategy. Each of these fields has produced relevant contributions, but with Distinct vocabularies, methods, and units of analysis justify an effort to articulate them.

A theoretical framework capable of bringing these perspectives together into a coherent interpretative framework.

The chosen procedure was the integrative review, which, according to Snyder (2019), aims to

To evaluate, critique, and synthesize the literature on a topic in order to allow for the emergence of new [research/research]. theoretical frameworks, allowing for the combination of studies with varied methodological designs.

The recommendation of Webster and Watson (2002) to structure the review around concepts was followed. and not by authors, so the contributions were grouped according to the analytical categories that They explain the phenomenon. Six categories were defined, corresponding to the sections of The development of this article, and each selected work, was examined regarding its argument. central to its methodological design and its contribution to the research question.

The searches were conducted in the Scopus, Web of Science, ACM Digital Library, and IEEE Xplore databases. SpringerLink, supplemented by Google Scholar and publications from research centers. business methodology with a declared methodology. English-language descriptors related to were used. digital transformation, transformation failure, change management, agile methods, agility in large scale, scaling models like SAFe and LeSS, organizational agility and capabilities dynamics. Priority was given to articles published in peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings. recognized conferences in the field of software engineering, reference books written by proponents of the main models and systematic reviews, because they offer a higher degree of Consolidation of available evidence.

The cutoff date adopted was December 2024, and published sources were not considered. after that date. The inclusion criteria involved direct adherence to the research question, the possibility of tracking the publication by verifiable identifiers and the relevance of the work in its field. Promotional materials from consulting or certification companies, texts were excluded. Opinion pieces lacking foundation and publications without identifiable authorship. Consulting reports.

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They were used only as supplementary evidence and were always compared with the literature.
academic. A limitation is noted in the fact that much of the research on agility at scale...
consisting of experience reports, a characteristic recognized by the systematic reviews themselves.
area and considered in the interpretation of the results.

3. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL PHENOMENON AND STRATEGIC

The definition of digital transformation is still the subject of debate in the literature. Vial (2019), in review
From 282 academic and professional works, it was proposed to understand it as a process that seeks
to improve an entity by causing significant changes in its properties through
Combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies. The author
He organized the phenomenon into a model that relates digital technologies and disruptions in the environment.
competitive, strategic responses, changes in value creation pathways, alterations
structural, organizational barriers, and impacts. A crucial aspect of this model is the finding...
that technologies do not produce effects on their own. Their results depend on changes.
Structural factors within the organization, such as culture, leadership, and employee roles, are frequently...
limited by inertia and resistance.
Verhoef et al. (2021) contributed to refining the concept by distinguishing three successive stages. A
Digitization refers to the conversion of analog information into digital format.
This refers to the use of digital technologies to change existing business processes. Transformation
Ultimately, digital transformation involves changes in the company's own business logic, with effects on the...
value creation model and organizational boundaries. The authors emphasize that each
Internships require different resources, organizational structures, and metrics. This distinction is useful.
because many initiatives are presented as transformative when, in practice, they are limited to
Digitizing processes contributes to the frustration of expectations and the difficulty of evaluation.
results with appropriate criteria.
Westerman, Bonnet, and McAfee (2014) investigated large companies from various sectors and
They identified two dimensions that distinguish the most successful organizations, according to them.
referred to as digital masters. The first is digital capability, related to the use of technology.
to transform the customer experience, operational processes, and business models. A
The second is leadership ability, which involves vision, engaging people, governance, and...
Integration between business and technology areas. The authors observed that companies with

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Significant technological investments, but with weak leadership, did not yield superior results.
This finding brings digital transformation closer to the classic literature on change.
organizational structure, in which the quality of leadership and coordination plays a central role.
Kane et al. (2015), in research conducted by the MIT Sloan Management Review in partnership with
Deloitte reinforced this interpretation by concluding that an organization's digital maturity is...
associated primarily with the existence of a clear digital strategy and the ability to transform the
Culture and work methods, not the isolated adoption of specific technologies. The authors
They observed that digitally mature organizations tend to cultivate cultures of experimentation.
collaboration and risk tolerance. In a complementary perspective, Warner and Wäger (2019) analyzed
Established companies from traditional sectors described digital transformation as a
A continuous process of strategic renewal, supported by the ability to perceive opportunities.
digital technologies, leveraging them and transforming the organization, which anticipates the discussion about capabilities.
dynamics developed further.

From this set of contributions emerges a synthesis relevant to the issue of this article. A
Digital transformation is essentially a large-scale organizational change process.
which cuts across functional areas, alters roles and responsibilities, and requires continuous learning in
A highly uncertain environment. The expected results are not fully known at the outset, the
Technologies evolve during implementation, and customer needs change along the way.
These characteristics make management models based on planning unsuitable.
Detailed, upfront planning, fixed scope, and centralized hierarchical control. Understanding the reasons.
The reasons why so many initiatives fail therefore require examining the available evidence on the
Performance of transformations and the explanations offered by the change management literature.

4. THE FAILURE RATE OF TRANSFORMATIONS FROM A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Concern about the failure of change initiatives predates digital transformation. Kotter
(1995), after following more than one hundred companies that tried to reinvent themselves, observed that few
Some achieved complete success, some failed completely, and most were somewhere in between.
Intermediate position, with a clear tendency towards lower results. The author systematized eight errors.
recurring problems include a lack of sufficient sense of urgency and a lack of coalition.
powerful guiding principle, the lack of a clear vision, insufficient communication of that vision, and the
premature declaration of victory. Beer and Nohria (2000), in turn, stated that approximately 70% of
Initiatives for change fail, and they attributed part of the problem to the choice of approaches.

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excessively focused on immediate economic results or, at the opposite extreme, only on
organizational capabilities.

The 70% figure became widely disseminated in management literature and began to be repeated as fact.
established. Hughes (2011) examined five published occurrences of this statistic and concluded that,
Although the narrative is popular, there is no valid and reliable empirical evidence to support it.
The author showed that none of the analyzed occurrences presented an explicit empirical basis capable of...
to allow verification of the number, despite the authority with which statistics are usually invoked.
This criticism is relevant to academic research because the repetition of unverified statistics
This can lead to misdiagnoses and poorly calibrated solutions. At the same time, the absence
The lack of verification of the exact number does not authorize the conclusion that the transformations are
Mostly successful, a question that depends on more recent evidence.

Surveys conducted with a declared methodology offer a more accurate picture. The research
A McKinsey & Company survey conducted in 2018 with 1,793 participants indicated that only 16% of
Respondents reported sustained performance improvement over time, while another 7% reported improvement
that did not last (DE LA BOUTETIÈRE; MONTAGNER; REICH, 2018).
The study tested 83 practices and identified 21 of them as determinants of success, grouped into five categories.
categories, namely, leadership with digital competence, workforce capabilities development
work, empowering people to work in new ways, updating the tools of
day-to-day and frequent communication. Neither of these categories relates to the choice of a
specific technology, which reinforces the organizational nature of the problem.

The study, published by the Boston Consulting Group in 2020, is based on work with 70 companies.
And in a survey of 825 executives, it was estimated that about 70% of digital transformations are
falling short of its objectives (FORTH et al., 2020). The authors identified six factors associated with
Success, which is an integrated strategy with clear goals, requires commitment from leadership from the top down.
executive to middle management, allocation of high-level professionals, a mindset of
Agile governance that promotes broad adoption and effective monitoring of progress towards...
Defined results and a modular, business-driven technology and data platform.
According to the study, companies that meet six factors increase their probability of success by about
From 30% to 80%, whereas those that meet only three or four factors do not succeed.

Reading these sources together allows for three conclusions. The first is that the 70% figure should be...
treated with caution, as an order of magnitude suggested by business surveys, and not as
a consolidated scientific parameter. The second is that, despite methodological differences, the studies
They converge in indicating that a minority of transformations achieve sustainable results.

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Third, and most importantly for this article, is that the factors associated with success are...
predominantly organizational, involving leadership, coordination, training,
Continuous monitoring and forms of governance capable of adapting. The explicit reference to
Boston Consulting Group's emphasis on agile governance, as well as McKinsey's emphasis on new forms...
This work process leads directly to an examination of the theoretical foundations of agility.

5 Theoretical Foundations and Empirical Evidence of Agility

The conceptual roots of agility predate software development. Takeuchi and Nonaka
(1986), when studying Japanese and American companies recognized for their speed and
Flexibility in new product development contrasted with the sequential approach.
compared to a relay race, to an integrated approach, compared to a match of
rugby. The authors identified six characteristics of this approach, namely, instability
embedded, self-organized project teams, overlapping development phases,
Multi-level learning, subtle control, and organizational transfer of learning. This
This work directly inspired the creation of Scrum and demonstrates that agility was born as a response.
Organizational issues are geared towards uncertainty, and not simply as a set of programming techniques.
In 2001, a group of software development professionals published the Manifesto for Agile Software Development,
which established four values and twelve principles (BECK et al.,
2001). The values prioritize individuals and interactions over processes and tools, software in
Operation based on comprehensive documentation, collaboration with the client on negotiation of
contracts and responding to changes regarding the follow-up to a plan, recognizing that the items on the right
They also have value. The Scrum Guide, in its 2020 version, defines the method as a
a lightweight framework grounded in empiricism, whose pillars are transparency, inspection, and adaptation, and
in lean thinking (SCHWABER; SUTHERLAND, 2020). The emphasis is on short cycles, delivery
Incrementalism and frequent revision directly address the uncertainty inherent in transformations.
Academic research has sought to provide greater precision to the concept. Conboy (2009) reconstructed the notion.
Agility, based on its theoretical foundations, was defined as the continuous readiness of a
A method for creating change quickly, embracing change proactively or reactively, and learning.
with them, contributing to the value perceived by the customer. The author showed that many practices
Methodologies labeled as agile do not meet these criteria, which highlights the risk of superficial adoptions.
Boehm and Turner (2003), in turn, argued that agile methods and methods oriented by
Plans have distinct natural territories, defined by factors such as project size,

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criticality, dynamism of the environment, competence of people and organizational culture, and that
Complex contexts often require balanced combinations of both.

On an empirical level, Dybå and Dingsøyr (2008) conducted one of the first systematic reviews on
Agile development, and from among 1,996 studies initially identified, they selected 36 studies.
empirical. The authors found evidence of benefits in aspects such as collaboration with the
customer, defect handling processes and estimates, but pointed out serious limitations in
The quality of the studies was assessed, and they observed that 76% of them dealt with Extreme Programming and that 73%
involved professionals with less than one year of experience in agile methodologies. More evidence
Robust ones emerged later. Serrador and Pinto (2015), in a quantitative analysis of 1,002 projects
From different sectors and countries, they found that the use of agile approaches had a positive effect on the
The efficiency of the projects and the overall satisfaction of the stakeholders, and the quality of the vision and
The project's objectives acted as a marginally significant moderator of this relationship.

These results are relevant to the discussion on digital transformation for two reasons. In
First, they indicate that the benefits of agility depend on context and a clear vision.
of objectives, which relates to the importance of strategy pointed out by Kane et al. (2015) and to the
The first success factor identified by Forth et al. (2020). Secondly, they reveal that the greatest
Some of the evidence refers to individual teams, while digital transformations involve...
Hundreds or thousands of people distributed across different areas. The transposition of agile practices.
Moving from the team level to the organizational level therefore constitutes both a theoretical and practical problem.
specifically, this gave rise to the scaled agility models examined in the next section.

6. FROM TEAM TO ORGANIZATION: AGILITY MODELS AT SCALE

The application of agile methods in large organizations faces a problem that the methods
The original solutions had not resolved, namely, the coordination between many interdependent teams.
Dingsøyr and Moe (2014), in summarizing the research agenda on the topic, highlighted that the methods
Agile methodologies were designed for small teams, and their expansion to large-scale programs is expected.
This raises specific issues, among which coordination between teams is a priority.
investigation. Conway (1968) had already formulated the proposition that organizations that
Those who design systems tend to produce structures that replicate their own structures.
communication. This observation, known as Conway's Law, explains why agility at scale...
It requires changes in how teams are organized and communicate, not just replication.
of individual practices in greater numbers.

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The Scaled Agile Framework, known by the acronym SAFe, has become one of the most widely used models.
widespread. Knaster and Leffingwell (2020) describe the framework as a knowledge system.
which integrates agile, lean, and systems thinking principles, organized into configurations that
They range from the essential level to the portfolio level. Its central structure is the agile delivery train, which brings together
five to twelve teams, totaling approximately 50 to 125 people, aligned with the same
mission and synchronized by a program increment, typically eight to twelve weeks,
Initiated by a joint planning event, the model also incorporates portfolio management.
A lean approach that connects strategy to implemented initiatives and aligns budgetary logic with...
Value chains, an aspect that is especially relevant for digital transformations.
Other models adopt distinct philosophies. The Large-Scale Scrum, or LeSS, proposed by Larman and
Vodde (2016) starts from the principle that scale should be achieved with the minimum of additional structure,
by maintaining a single person responsible for the product and a single backlog for multiple teams, and proposes to
Reducing roles and management layers instead of multiplying them. Disciplined Agile Delivery,
formulated by Ambler and Lines (2012), it presents itself as a process decision framework,
A hybrid, goal-oriented model that considers the entire delivery cycle. This model was popularized by...
Spotify, as described by Kniberg and Ivarsson (2012), organizes autonomous teams into tribes, chapters, and
Guilds. Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of these models, along with SAFe.

Table 1 – Characteristics of the main agility models at scale

Model	Reference	Central structure	Main emphasis
SAFe (Scaled Agile Framework)	Knaster and Leffingwell (2020)	Agile delivery trains with five to twelve teams, synchronized by program increments of eight to twelve weeks.	Strategic alignment, lean portfolio management, and configurations that vary according to size.
LeSS (Large-Scaled Scrum	Larman and Vodde (2016)	A single person responsible for the product and a single backlog shared by multiple teams. Goal-	Structural simplicity, with a reduction in roles and management layers.
DAD (Disciplined Agile Delivery)	Ambler and Lines (2012)	oriented process decision framework, covering the entire delivery cycle. Autonomous teams	Contextual choice of practices and hybrid combination of approaches
Model Spotify	Kniberg and Ivarsson (2012)	grouped into tribes, articulated by chapters and guilds. **Source: Prepared by the**	Autonomy of cross-functional teams and communities of practice

author based on Knaster and Leffingwell (2020), Larman and Vodde (2016), Ambler and Lines (2012), Kniberg and Ivarsson (2012) and Edison, Wang and Conboy (2022).

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The diversity of models raises the question of which one is most suitable. Edison, Wang and Conboy (2022), in a systematic review that compared SAFe, LeSS, Scrum at Scale, Disciplined Agile Delivery and the Spotify model, they found that research on each method was scattered and that There was no empirical comparison between them. The authors analyzed principles, practices, tools, and Standardized metrics for each model were used, and they documented that many companies, such as Nokia, did the same. Ericsson and other technologies utilize adapted or internally developed versions. According to the authors, the The results allow each organization to choose the method, or components of different methods. most suitable for your needs, which indicates the non-existence of a universally applicable model. superior and converges with the argument of Boehm and Turner (2003).

Scaling models should therefore be understood as repertoires of mechanisms of coordination, and not like ready-made recipes. Rigby, Sutherland, and Takeuchi (2016) warned that the Agility is not suitable for all of a company's activities, and its indiscriminate application... This can generate unnecessary costs, so it is recommended to focus it on innovation activities in which The conditions of uncertainty favor it. In a later article, Rigby, Sutherland and Noble (2018) They observed that organizations that achieve better results by scaling agility tend to... starting with the leadership team itself, which begins to work according to agile principles before... to demand this change from other areas. These observations shift the focus from the models themselves to the organizational conditions for its adoption, a topic that systematic reviews on transformations Large-scale operations allow for deeper exploration.

7 Challenges and Success Factors of Large-Scale Agile Transformations SCALE

The systematic review conducted by Dikert, Paasivaara, and Lassenius (2016) constitutes a central reference. on the topic. From 1,875 publications initially identified, the authors selected 52 The studies, which described 42 distinct industrial cases, identified 35 challenges grouped into nine categories and 29 success factors grouped into eleven categories. The most challenging categories Frequent challenges included the difficulty of implementing agility and integrating functions that did not... These belong to development, resistance to change, requirements engineering, and management. hierarchical with rigid organizational boundaries. The most frequently cited individual challenge was reluctance. from areas such as marketing, human resources and sales to change their own practices, present in 31% of the cases analyzed.

The success factors identified in this review are directly related to the causes of failure in

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Digital transformations. The most salient categories were the choice and adaptation of the approach.
Adaptability to the context, present in 48% of cases, alignment of mindset, present in 40%, the
Management support, present in 38%, and team training and guidance, present in 36%.
The most frequently cited individual factors were the monitoring of teams while they learn on the job.
and the guarantee of managerial support. The authors warn, however, that 46 of the 52 studies were reports of
experience and only six were case studies with an explicit method, so the frequency
The mere mention of a factor does not equate to proof of its causal importance.
In-depth case studies help to understand these factors in concrete contexts.
Paasivaara et al. (2018) analyzed the introduction of agility in a research program and
Ericsson's development, distributed across five locations on two continents, based on 45
Semi-structured interviews and observation sessions. The program experimented with different...
team configurations, from virtual teams organized by components to teams
multifunctional and responsible for complete functionalities. The authors recommended treating the
transformation as an experiment, implementing it gradually in complex environments and
to accept some degree of specialization when the product requires it. They also noted that the
The absence of a common framework, coupled with insufficient training and guidance, compromised the...
shared sense of direction.
Dingsøyr et al. (2018) examined one of the largest software development programs in
Norway, which involved 12 teams and 175 people over four years. The study showed that the
Agile methods were adapted and combined with traditional practices, and three areas were identified.
Especially challenging at a very large scale are customer engagement,
Software architecture and coordination between teams. In the specific case of SAFe, Putta, Paasivaara
and Lassenius (2018), in a multivocal review that combined academic literature and professional reports,
They identified 52 organizations that adopted the framework and grouped the reported benefits into
categories such as transparency, alignment, productivity, predictability, and time to arrival.
market. Among the most frequently mentioned challenges are resistance to change and difficulties.
from the first planning event for program enhancement and the risk of alienation of the participants themselves
Agile principles.
This body of evidence reveals a remarkable correlation with the success factors.
as highlighted by surveys on digital transformation. Resistance to change, lack of
Support from leadership, the difficulty of involving non-technological areas, and the lack of training.
These elements appear in both agile transformations and digital transformations in general. This suggests
That agility at scale does not eliminate the classic challenges of organizational change, but offers...

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tools for tackling them in a structured way, such as joint planning cadences,
dedicated guidance roles, short inspection and adaptation cycles, and explicit mechanisms for
coordination between teams. The effectiveness of these instruments, however, depends on their extension to the entire...
organization, which relates to agility as an organizational capability.

8. Organizational Agility as a Dynamic Capability of TRANSFORMATION

The theory of dynamic capabilities offers the most appropriate framework for understanding the
Agility at the organizational level. Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) defined dynamic capabilities.
such as a company's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies.
to respond to rapidly changing environments. Unlike operational capabilities,
which allow for the efficient execution of current activities, dynamic capabilities allow for changes
the organization's own resource base. Warner and Wäger (2019) applied this theory to
digital transformation and identified micro-fundamentals associated with perceiving opportunities.
digital technologies, leverage them through experimentation and agile strategic decision-making, and transform the
organizing, redesigning structures, expanding collaboration, and developing digital maturity.
of people.
Sambamurthy, Bharadwaj and Grover (2003) had already argued that information technology
It contributes to business performance by creating digital options and strengthening agility.
understood by the authors in three dimensions: agility with customers, agility with partners, and...
Operational agility. Doz and Kosonen (2010) proposed the concept of strategic agility.
supported by three meta-capabilities, which are strategic sensitivity, leadership unity and
Resource fluidity. Resource fluidity, that is, the ability to reallocate people and investments.
Rapidly switching between initiatives is particularly relevant for digital transformation. Models of
Scales that incorporate lean portfolio management and value chain budgeting can be
interpreted as attempts to institutionalize this fluidity.
Digital transformation also requires balancing exploration and exploitation. Tushman and O'Reilly (1996)
They described ambidextrous organizations as those capable of improving existing businesses.
while exploring potentially disruptive innovations, warning that success
The past can generate structural and cultural inertia. This tension is clearly evident in the adoption of
agility, since the areas responsible for stable operations, such as finance, human resources and
Conformity tends to operate according to logics of predictability and control. Dikert's findings,

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Paasivaara and Lassenius (2016) on the resistance of these areas show that agile transformation
It fails when it remains restricted to technology teams, and they reinforce the need to extend it.
Agility in governance, financing, and people management mechanisms.
The human dimension of agility completes this theoretical framework. Edmondson (1999), in a study with
51 work teams from an industrial company demonstrated that psychological safety, understood
such as the shared belief that the team is a safe environment for taking interpersonal risks,
It is associated with learning behaviors that, in turn, influence performance.
Agile inspection and adaptation cycles depend on people reporting problems and admitting mistakes.
and propose changes without fear of punishment. Forsgren, Humble, and Kim (2018), in research by
Several years of experience in software delivery performance have been linked to an organizational culture oriented towards...
to the generation and sharing of information leading to better delivery and performance results.
organizational, which confirms the link between culture, learning, and results.
The articulation of these perspectives helps to understand why agility at scale can reverse...
The poor performance of digital transformations. The causes of failure identified by
literature, such as misaligned leadership, silos between areas, resistance to change, unclear goals and
The absence of continuous learning corresponds to deficiencies in dynamic abilities.
Agile models at scale offer concrete mechanisms for developing these capabilities.
such as joint planning on a regular basis, cross-functional teams organized around
Value chains, adaptive portfolio management, and frequent inspection cycles. These mechanisms
However, they only produce an effect when leadership adopts them, when they are adapted to the context and
when the organizational culture allows learning to actually take place.

9 CONCLUSION

This article investigated why most digital transformations fail to achieve their objectives and in
To what extent can agility at scale reverse this scenario? Based on literature published up to
In December 2024, the analysis made it possible to answer the research question and support the initial hypothesis.
according to which the predominant causes of failure are organizational and agility at scale.
It offers structural mechanisms capable of addressing them. This conclusion, however, comes with...
important factors relate to adaptation to the context, the role of leadership, and...
Extending agility beyond the technology sector.
The review showed that digital transformation is, first and foremost, a process of change.
Large-scale organizational. Digital technologies act as catalysts, but the

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Results depend on structural, cultural, and leadership changes. This understanding shifts the focus.
The focus of selecting tools is to build organizational conditions that enable...
A company learns and adapts continuously during its own transformation. Ultimately, it's about...
analysis, to understand digital transformation as a process of organizational learning,
and not as the implementation of a technological project with a pre-defined beginning, middle, and end.
Regarding failure rates, critical analysis indicated that the rate of 70%, although widely...
Repeated, it lacks rigorous empirical evidence. Recent surveys with methodology
However, the stated findings converge in indicating that only a minority of the transformations produce gains.
sustainable. The appropriate conclusion, therefore, is not that the problem has been exaggerated, but that
It must be measured with greater precision and interpreted with caution. Researchers and managers should...
Avoid the uncritical repetition of statistics without verifiable origin, lest decisions be based on such information.
Strategic decisions based on fragile premises.
The success factors identified by these surveys are predominantly organizational.
involving committed leadership, training, new ways of working, and continuous monitoring.
and adaptive governance. Neither of them refers to choosing a specific technology. This
This finding brings the literature on digital transformation closer to the classic literature on management.
Change and the literature on agility, which essentially deal with coordination and learning.
The convergence between these three theoretical traditions constitutes one of the main findings of this review.
and justifies the search for answers of an organizational nature.
The theoretical foundations of agility reveal that it emerged as an organizational response to
Uncertainty, based on empiricism, short cycles, and self-organized teams. Empirical evidence.
They indicate positive effects on efficiency and stakeholder satisfaction, but they also show
that these effects depend on the context and clarity of the objectives, which prevents addressing agility.
as a universal solution. The transposition of practices from the team level to the organizational level.
It requires additional coordination mechanisms that are not present in the original methods.
Scaled agility models, such as SAFe, LeSS, Disciplined Agile Delivery, and the model of
Spotify offers distinct repertoires of coordination mechanisms. The literature does not point to this.
The universal superiority of none of them is not recognized, and adaptation to context is recommended. The reviews
Systematic studies show that the main challenges of these transformations coincide with those of
Digital transformations in general, such as resistance, involvement of non-technological areas, and support.
managerial. The choice of model, therefore, matters less than the quality of its adaptation and the
The degree of commitment of the organization to its adoption.
The theory of dynamic capabilities allows us to interpret agility at scale as a means of...

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to develop the skills to perceive, leverage, and transform the digital transformations
They require fluidity of resources, ambidexterity, and psychological safety, which emerge as conditions.
indispensable for agile mechanisms to produce effective learning, and not just new knowledge.
rituals superimposed on old hierarchical structures. Without these conditions, agility tends to...
to reduce it to a set of ceremonies, incapable of altering how the organization decides and allocates.
resources and learn.
As a practical implication, it is recommended that organizations begin adopting agility at scale.
Through leadership, extend it to support areas and adapt the chosen model to your reality. How
Despite this limitation, it is acknowledged that experience reports and business surveys predominate.
in the literature reviewed. Future research could investigate this further with longitudinal studies and
comparative studies, the causal relationship between scaling models and the outcomes of digital transformations, as well
such as the role of moderating variables like sector, size, and prior digital maturity.

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