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The Benefits of Agile HR for a Company

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Abstract

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The business world has changed a lot in the last two decades. To address current issues, businesses must adopt innovative ways, particularly in the HR department. One of these new ways is the Agile principle, which is creating business value beyond only technology production. In Agile HR for example, the customer is invited to participate in the product development process. The human component of digital transformation necessitates a company's employee experience to be realigned. Change enablers are people within a company who are intrinsically motivated to reach a new goal.

The aim of this study was to investigate the meaning of Agile HR and the benefits it can bring to a company and to discover how Agile HR can support and improve a company's operations. The theoretical part provides an overview on what Agile and Agile HR mean. In the theory, Agile mindset, Agile HR tools, traditional and Agile HR approaches and differences between Agile and traditional HR were discussed. This study used conceptual research as well as empirical research to confirm if the existing theories and concepts are used in real business world. For the research, telephone interviews and netnographic research were used.

Based on the results of the research, it was seen that Agile HR can be a leading factor behind a company's success. A company's transition from traditional to Agile HR changes the culture and management system of the company. Agile mindset, customer prioritization, and employees were acknowledged as the most important elements of Agile HR. Agile mindset teaches HR to put the customers and employees at the heart of the company.

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Silo/siloed   Divisions of a company that function independently and do not share information and are isolated from other departments.

Sprint   A sprint is a short period of time during which a scrum team works to complete a specific amount of work.

VUCA   Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. It refers to the situation in which constant, unpredictable change has become the norm in particular industries and business sectors.

1   Introduction

During the last few years, the business world has changed dramatically. Digitalization, automation, technological advancements, globalization, improved communication methods, and new generations with different perspectives on work have all combined to create a new corporate environment. In correlation, customer expectations, as well as global competition, are accelerating. (Perkin, 2019.)

However, many businesses' strategy remains unrevised and inflexible. Several companies still prioritize the latest technology rather than empowering their employees thriving for longer lasting change. (Perkin 2019, 12.)

Many companies pay for services which provide techniques or technologies or systems that do not measurably transform how the company performs or builds a culture that may support positive change. Lately, the Agile principle is creating business value beyond only technology production. This fact has been acknowledged by a multitude of companies helping them create a path to greater company agility. However, in some cases these concepts remain unrecognized, undervalued, or not fully implemented. In some businesses, the word 'Agile', has become over-used to a point where it does no longer create value and where it does not convey its true potential. These companies do not commit fully to Agile, not yet grasping the level of change that needs to be done to see positive results. (Perkin 2019, 14.)

To deal with current problems, companies must embrace new approaches especially in the HR departments: encourage the employees as well as create friendly and welcoming work environments. These new approaches could also increase the speed of deliverables fulfilling the needs of internal (the employees) as well as external customers, thus creating value. The human factor of digital transformation requires a company to realign its employee experience. Employees who are intrinsically motivated to achieve a new goal are effective change enablers. Employee experience refers to everything that employee encounters at work, including interactions with their superior, software, teams, and a variety of other. It is a broad concept that encompasses all employee's experiences during their time with the company. (Perkin, 2020.)

Agile supports the attempts of designing, understanding, and advancing the employee experience. It is about transforming the process of how companies engage, manage, and develop their hired employees. Agile HR stresses its customer's prioritization by ensuring that they receive

the goods and services they expect and how they gain better customer value. (Thoren, 2017.) In Agile HR, the customer becomes a part of the journey of product making. For example, the company divides the product creation into small parts. Customers can see the sample product and see if the company does what is expected. Customers can also give feedback on each step until the outcome is complete. (Dank and Hellström, 2020.)

According to a Deloitte report from 2017, 94 percent of companies believe agility and cooperation are critical to their success, and 80 per cent of all global managers see Agile performance management as a high organizational priority. (Deloitte, 2017)

1.1   Background

The words "Agile" and "agility" have various definitions depending on who is asked and what the context is. Agile is not only a term describing support techniques for a group of numerous management practices but is also used to define a particular way of operating and thinking (Cooney, 2019). It should be stated that there is a lack of consensus if the word "Agile" ought to be used with a capital "A" or a small "a", so in this thesis, the researcher chose to write "Agile" with capital "A" to prevent confusion.

Agile HR means translating human resource concepts into people operations that lead Agile, automated, and networked organizations. Its goal is to create a shared value between the customer, the company, and the employees. (Dank and Hellström, 2020.) Agile, according to Bersin (2019), is more of a mindset. It is about motivating the employees, experimenting, making test driven decisions, and co-creating with customers. Agile HR can use various tools in its processes. Scrum, KanBan, and hybrid approach are some Agile tools/approaches/methods that enhance Agile HR. However, Agile HR goes deeper than that as it is a human approach that attempts to focus on humans in the workplace. An increasing proportion of employees tend to perceive their workplace situation as increasingly stressful and over time that might feel inhuman due to increased competition and demands. (Stranks 2005, 17.) This is explained further in this research.

1.2 Research Problem, Goal, and Research Questions

The goal of the thesis is to showcase the key benefits of Agile HR and how companies can benefit from them. It provides a better understanding of what Agile in HR means and what other elements are required to complete the process of Agile HR, such as Agile mindset and Agile approaches.

The research problem of this thesis is the assumption that many business entities do not seem to know about the benefits Agile HR can bring. To answer this question, this thesis clarifies what Agile HR means. The research will explain how Agile HR differs from traditional HR, for example, what kind of benefits the Agile style carries within itself compared with the Waterfall approach (traditional HR). It will also study or discover via open-end interviews, if the chosen Agile companies use Agile in HR practices and what benefits they have achieved. In addition, it will help the researcher to find the reasoning behind the approach, both from a theoretical and practical perspective.

The research strategy of this thesis is based on a qualitative research approach and the research is based on understanding concepts, thoughts, and experiences. The data is collected from the field by investigating posts in social media communities and YouTube posts and podcasts where experts discuss and comment Agile HR. This is a netnographic research approach. The purpose of collecting data from the social media posts, podcasts, and YouTube videos is to discover what the speakers from different companies working in the Agile HR department find in common about Agile HR and clarify their elaborated opinions and thoughts about the approach. In addition, and in order to gain more profound knowledge on Agile HR, open-ended thematic interviews are conducted where the interviewees are chosen from companies that state to be Agile. The online data will be analyzed by the thematic analysis method to better understand the interviewed data.

The main research question is: What are the benefits of Agile HR?

- In what way can Agile improve companies' processes?

- How can Agile HR support people management?

- What benefits can tools such as Scrum and KanBan bring along?

The theoretical part (Chapter 2) offers background to the research questions based on current research, whereas the employee experiences in the empirical part (Chapter 4 and 5) help to

answer the research questions. In the conclusion, the purpose is to map out the benefits of Agile HR in a company.

The theoretical work of the thesis is built on Agile HR concepts and approaches, Agile mentality, traditional and Agile HR distinctions, traditional and Agile methodologies, and Agile HR tools (Scrum and KanBan).

2   Agile HR over Traditional HR

In this chapter, the complexities of the changing market environment and the decision factors of companies starting to identify Agile as a potential approach to their needs are explored. This chapter also provides theories that show how Agile HR and Agile experts see Agile and innovative ways of working that the mindset provides as more than just a short-lived trend. Furthermore, it looks at how Agile approaches of working help businesses adapt to complexity while also providing HR with the approaches and resources they need to modernize their processes and prepare for the future.

Organizations worldwide are forced to reconsider how they function and compete in the new marketplace to cope with fundamental technological transition and an ever-increasing degree of complexity. (Dank and Hellström, 2020.) Only some seem to know that: agility is not a new concept, but it has been highlighted in all industries since the 1950s. Looking at the multitude of publications on the topic, it becomes clear that there are different concepts. While some primarily understand it to mean approaches and instruments for the effective handling of projects (Peffer, 2020), others speak of a new way in which companies and institutions must organize themselves. (Schwarz, 2020.) Still others emphasize that agility instead calls for a fundamental adaptation of organizations (Berger, 2019). This diversity makes the discussion and application of Agile concepts challenging. Subsequently, this elaboration is primarily dedicated to the Agile design of intra-administrative development projects and collaboration that take place outside of public services and administrative services and are usually implemented in the form of projects.

Agile HR can help companies reach new goals of success by making employees more efficient by creating an enjoyable workplace. This can open opportunities such as an ideal collaboration environment. That means that each member of the HR team has a clear responsibility making a collective effort in making HR Agile resulting in the expected outcome or a continued consideration of customer feedback and delivering product at a fast rate. (Dank and Hellström, 2020.)

2.1   Understanding the Concept of Agile HR

Defining Agile HR requires preemptively to define the word Agile itself. The term Agile derives from the Latin word "agilis", meaning "dexterous" and "nimble." It is also used as a synonym for "flexible," as both terms imply "adaptability" at their core. Accordingly, agility refers to the ability to adapt flexibly and deftly to unpredictable changes. In fact, the type of adaptation, i.e., the distinction between proactive and reactive action, allows for differentiation and even an extension of flexibility. According to this thought, flexible would be a purely reactive adaptation, while Agile working would also be proactive, anticipatory, and proactive action. In management, one speaks of an innovative form of work organization and reorganization of previous, classic structures, enabling a more efficient way of working. (Laier, 2020.)

The concept of Agile started in the early 2000s, when a group of software developers decided to develop a method to help their software succeed in the market. Some of these developers were Jim Highsmith, Bob Martin, Kenschwacber, et.al. (Lynn, 2019). Agile has since been adapted for a variety of industries outside the pure technology domain. Agile can also be the basis to design, comprehend, and advance employee experience. How companies hire, manage, and develop their employees constantly transforms. As the business world developed and the need to reinvent and redesign, HR also started and transformed the definition of traditional HR.

Agile HR is about making human resources and the workplace for people again by making it welcoming and comfortable. Agile HR changes human resource (HR) principles and makes it people management by making organizations Agile, networked, and digital. Agile HR aims to build a shared value between customers, employees, and businesses by critical factors such as Agile mindset, co-creation, human-centric, evidence-based and Agile leadership, and transformation. (Agilehrcommunity, 2018.)

To become Agile does not mean to stop using the traditional way of management; it means using Agile approaches as well as applying an Agile mindset to traditional ways. However, the Agile HR concept can be perceived to be confusing and challenging, especially for people used to working with traditional HR approaches. (Miller, 2013.) Some managers, fearful of change, refuse to adopt Agile and are in the position to prevent any Agile initiative. (Rubio, 2018.)

Agile Manifesto

Even though the Agile Manifesto (Agile Manifesto Organization, 2001) was written for software development, the words strongly resonate with non-tech areas of the market. Every Agilist should be familiar with the Agile Manifesto and think about what it means. While some of these terms can seem technical, the Agile Manifesto has a lot to offer to HR. Much of the work may become excessively focused on processes and tools rather than the value of the HR products and services provided to the company and its employees. (Agile Manifesto Organization, 2001.) In HR there is a precedence to write policies or detailed reports first when the actual need is to solve real-world problems first and only write the supporting documents after the solution has been shown to work. (Thorén, 2015.)

Agile HR Manifesto focuses on individuals and interactions over processes and tools. It believes in inspiring and engaging the employees rather than management and retention. Agile HR Manifesto puts employees first and creates a collaborative network over hierarchical structures. It is about adding value to the company and the employees. Most importantly, it does not keep secrets and has transparency in the processes of the company. (Agilehrmanifesto, 2017.)

2.2   Agile Mindset

Working Agile means continuously looking for ways to develop and achieve the aim of delivering value more quickly. Handovers, delayed decisions and stakeholder approvals are some examples issues that slow the process down. (Dank and Hellström, 2020.) Agile instead advocates for small, multi-skilled teams that can make their own decisions and prioritize their work following the changing strategy. All available information must be accessible and freely communicated to make this possible, and the team must have all the expertise needed to complete the task. Validating consumer satisfaction when working with end-customer reviews often allows HR to adjust and pivot along the way. To accomplish this, rather than waiting until the end of the project, as in Waterfall, it is essential to release something of value early and often to gather feedback and reassess the plan continuously. Agile looks at how to deliver value step by step, or incrementally, sometimes in smaller bits at first, to gradually build up the solution. (Dank, 2018.)

Dank (2018) states that Agile HR consists of various elements; however, changing mindset is the most essential factor, as Agile mindset teaches to unlearning and letting go old habits and make

space for new ones. For example, failing is accepted within a controlled time period, and one will use the failure as a chance to discover new problem solving.

Agile is a way of thinking. Agile begins with recognizing that everything HR does is focused on and prioritized by the value provided to the customers. A company can only build goods and services that customers want to embrace, use, give their input, and pay for if they consistently validate the consumer value. An Agile advocate understands that little can be done in advance and that change will naturally shape their work. To create products and services that optimize end-customer value, HR needs a plenty of input and validation to ensure they give the consumer exactly what they want. (Dweck, 2006.) A common theme among companies that have successfully transitioned to Agile is that it requires a change of mindset. Instead of a "controlling" mindset, in which people's performance is highly controlled and supervised, Agile techniques embody an "enabling" perspective, with explicit trust in the talents and capabilities of the individuals who do the work, along with the concept that if the organization creates a good atmosphere, beliefs, and goals, employees doing the work will usually bring constant importance and revolution to the end users and consumers. This type of an enabling mindset is customer-centric, with profits considered as a result rather than a goal. (Denning, 2016.)
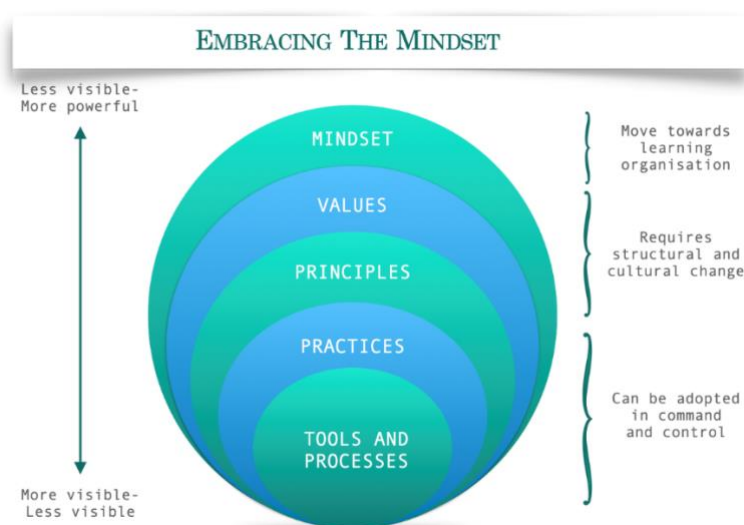
Figure 1 Agile Onion (own representation modified from Agilehrcommunity, 2018)

Figure 1 shows all the important layers of the Agile and is called Agile onion. The layer consists of mindset, values, practices, and tools and processes. The figure illustrates this concept of Agile. Agile ways of working will thrive no matter what technologies and techniques are used within an organization if the belief system is in place. When Agile approaches are implemented without a

corresponding transformation in management thinking and organizational structure, there is a risk of failure.

However, a purposeful shift in how people behave and interact is required for an Agile mentality to take root. (Dank and Hellström, 2020.) Agile mindset cannot be embraced if all the factors are not embraced. To be precise, one's mindset is the most important factor in becoming Agile. The more Agile is introduced, used, and understood in the organization, the more efficient it becomes. It is simple to use visible resources and procedures, but they do not add much value on their own. Over everything, Agile is a mentality. (Powers 2016.)

There are numerous tools and processes available in an Agile setting. Hygger, SpiraTeam, and Atlassian Jira are some of the most common tools (Software Testing Help 2019). Scrum, XP, Lean, and KanBan are examples of management tools. Scrum and KanBan will be discussed shortly in the chapter 2.3 (10). Standups, iterations, and minor releases, both of which are Scrum features, are examples of practices or how work is performed. These are essential aspects of Agile management, but they do not provide a company with the full power and value. (Powers, 2016.)

The guidelines agreed upon are called principles, and they include statements such as "The work scheduled for a sprint will be done on time" and " Teams must be able to organize themselves". By eliminating decisions such as having a separate database team these principles permit the team and companies to enhance their values. (Powers, 2016.)

Values that are well-defined and widely shared tie the team and the company together. The essence of a company's identity, beliefs, and how it conducts its values define a business. (Powers 2016.)

Growth Mindset

Success is determined not only by one's ability and talent, but also by one's perspective. (Dweck 2017.) Dweck (2016) divided mindsets into two categories: fixed mindset and growth mindset. According to Dweck, people may have acquired a so-called fixed mindset or a growth mindset, which is also known as an Agile mindset. It is important to note that "pure" growth mindset or a "pure" fixed mindset don't exist.
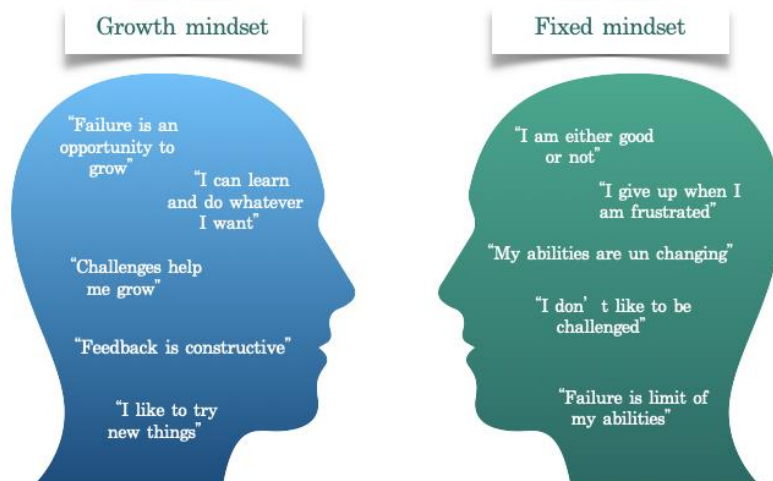
Figure 2 Growth mindset vs. fixed mindset (own representation modified from Dweck, 2015)

Fixed mindset people believe intellect is something you either have or don't have. They think that everybody can learn new abilities and put them into practice, but that some people are born with more intelligence and talent than others. They believe that effort and hard work are just for those who are unable to thrive through talent alone because they believe in intelligence. They do not see the need to study or be challenged since they believe they are smarter than non-smart individuals. While people who have a growth mentality, or an Agile mindset, consider intelligence as something that can expand as you study and develop yourself. It is possible to develop skills. These individuals are willing to put in the effort and feel that skill may be developed through hard work. The growth mindset acknowledges that some people are born with more natural skill than others, but it emphasizes the importance of deliberate work. Failures are viewed as valuable learning opportunities. (Dweck 2015.)

2.3   Agile HR Tools

Since the advent of the Agile philosophy, many different Agile frameworks or approaches have been created. In recent years, most scholarly research on Agile frameworks has concentrated on two Agile frameworks: Scrum and XP. Professional societies, Agile consultants, Agile tool providers, and industry analysts manage a multitude of Agile systems daily. The differences between Agile systems can be seen in how the Agile concepts are implemented. Many of the frameworks share characteristics, with some also adding and adopting features from other frameworks to form new ones entirely, but they all have their distinct concepts and processes.

The following are the most common Agile frameworks today: Scrum, KanBan, ScrumBan, Lean, Extreme Programming (XP), and Scrum/XP. (Litchmore, 2016.)

Although there are numerous Agile tools and techniques available, these two frameworks are instrumental in assisting HR teams in putting the Agile mindset into practice. Scrum and KanBan activities can transform HR outcomes by prioritizing, designing, and delivering value to the internal customers. It is also crucial for teams in HR to consider these constructs from the perspective of organizational design to serve Agile teams in the workplace best. HR managers will only fully understand the design needs of their people and build goods and services that support Agile ways of working if they embrace the same frameworks used within the enterprise. (Dank and Hellström 2020, 183.)

2.3.1   Scrum

Scrum is a well-known Agile system and is sometimes jokingly referred to as the art of doing twice the work half the time (Sutherland, 2015.) Scrum is a system to utilize when delivering a project which requires continuous integration. It is a method that addresses complex problem while producing and delivering high-value products in a productive and creative manner. Scrum initiated in software development and had a definite set of defined functions, events, and artefacts. Around 70% of all software development teams use Scrum (Sutherland, 2019). It is viewed as a key system to assist teams in managing changing requirements, helping with cross-team alignment, and fastening the delivery process. (VersionOne, 2019.)

Since 2005, the developers Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland, both signatories of the Agile Manifesto, have viewed Scrum not only as a stand-alone process or concrete technique, but rather as a framework in which various processes and techniques, including the KanBan board, are applied (Böhm, 2019, 10). The Scrum framework serves as its "body of knowledge." This framework is individually extended through situation-specific tools and therefore requires the specific "know-how" of practical experience in its application. (Verheyen, 2020.)

"Scrum is primarily a change management approach and a way for the departmental, team, and organizational management. The rules and elements of Scrum can be used to manage projects and lead departments or (entire organizations) to success." (Gloger, 2016, 2.)

The Scrum team essentially consists of three roles, specific ways of coming together, and other artefacts (Hanser 2010, 61), which are detailed below:

- The product owner has the task to precisely know the interests of the users and stakeholders (user stories) and represent them consistently. Scrum is responsible for maximizing the product's value and acts as a link between the market and the customer by focusing exclusively on the requirements to be implemented in development.

- The development team, usually consisting of five to ten project members, is self-organized and interdisciplinary. Specific hierarchies between the individual areas of competence are not envisaged. During the sprints, the team realizes the product or at least product increments and is accountable for the results.

- The Scrum Master acts as a moderator, service provider, and organizer within the team. It is responsible for monitoring compliance with the values and rules of a project. This includes removing any obstacles such as a lack of technical competence and mediation between the product owner and the development team. Thus, the primary goal is to help the team succeed as a neutral service provider, understood here as an external advisory and management role without authority to issue directives.

In essence, Scrum is based on two concepts: "Lean as continuous improvement in self-organized teams (and) empiricism as an empirical, measurable approach in a transparent context." (Böhm 2019, 30.)
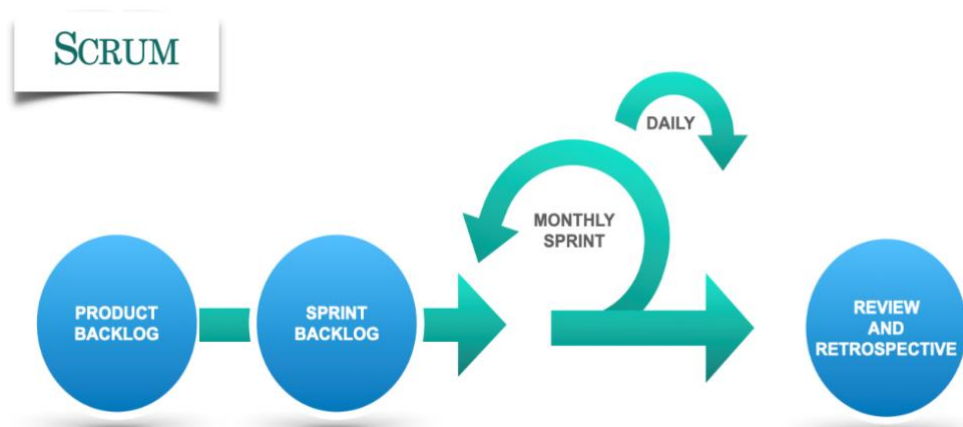

Figure 3 Scrum (own representation modified from Steffen, 2019)

Starting with the vision in the so-called product backlog, this is completed in the process and is thus considered a living artefact. Accordingly, it is not requirements catalog defined in advance, nor is it a concrete description of results. The requirements, user stories are characteristically implemented iteratively. The processing takes place in sprints, which aim for a maximum processing time of one month. The partial results and the current implementation status are communicated in advance in daily scrum meetings. The results are presented, recorded, and integrated into the overall objective as a completed sub-product in a review. The current status of the sprint backlog is concretized and prioritized through the ongoing and regular integration of stakeholders. Finally, in retrospectives, the team's basic working approaches, communication, and collaboration are discussed, creating space for self-reflection and self-organization. This develops the necessary flexibility and adaptability to respond to internal and external changes. (Steffen, 2019.)

Scrum is ideal for product development and helps HR teams produce new products or services quickly described Dank (2020). It is beneficial when part-releases are possible, and the internal customer may participate in routine testing and validation activities. Scrum uses timed events, which clearly outlines the tasks and procedures that teams should use. According to Scrum, all work committed in a sprint must be completed by the end of the timeboxed duration to produce a potentially releasable product increment. Teams decide what new work needs to be considered and prioritize for the next sprint only at the end of the sprint.

2.3.2   KanBan

KanBan is referred to within Agile project management as a method of production control and word creation. KanBan is an Agile methodology which translates to "visual card" or "billboard" from Japanese. KanBan was originated in Japan by Taiichi Ohno when he was working with lean principles and Toyota production system in the 1970s (Ohno, 1988). David J Anderson (2000) started applying these principles within software development and published KanBan approaches in 2010 (KanBan University, 2020). If the work's nature is continuous and does not fit in timeboxed sprints as in Scrum, then KanBan is another alternative. KanBan supports the continuous workflow and helps in focusing on the most critical tasks and helps improve their way of working. (Dank and Hellström 2020, 196.)

In the intended application of KanBan, the representative visualization aspect is crucial: the introduction of a KanBan board (Figure 4). This can be created and managed digitally using the software. Practical experiences, especially in HR, show that the analog board seems to be sufficient or even more suitable for introducing this method. Implementation options such as posters, pinboards, or whiteboards are examples of this.
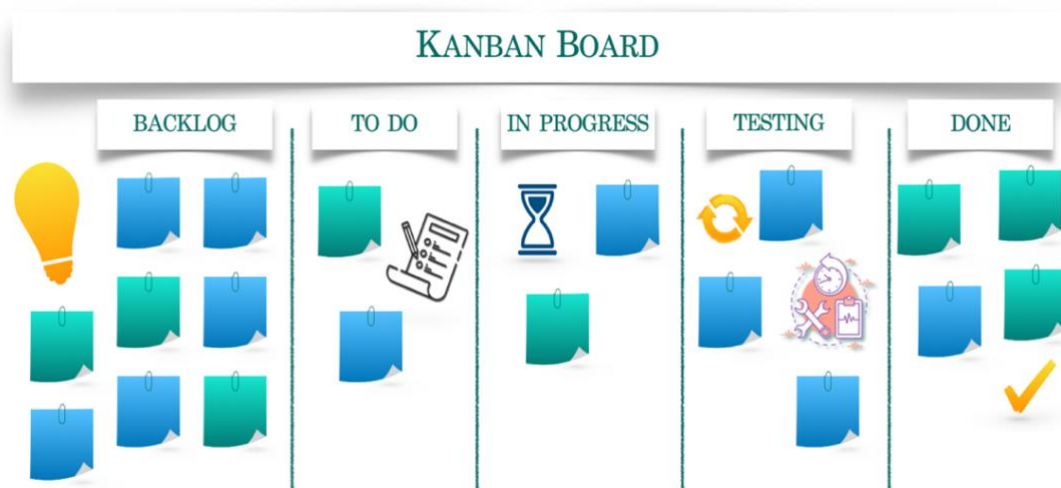
Figure 4 KanBan (own representation modified from Schnegas, 2019)

The board is divided into individual, variable columns tailored to the specific purpose, such as ideas (backlog), task memory (to do), creative phase (in progress), testing phase (testing), and concept ideas (done). Also, with KanBan, the fundamental, methodical approach is divided into as small as possible work packages. The procedure is always identical, individual differences can be found in the granularity of the steps, their respective tasks, and work content, as well as in their criteria. A characteristic feature is that the individual work packages (for example, individual tasks or user stories) are recorded on a map and run through the value creation process from left to right as so-called tickets. Regular brief meetings ensure that tasks are prioritized and updated daily while at the same time preventing potential bottlenecks. More extensive team meetings are held at longer intervals to evaluate past processing periods and promote the upcoming ones. This procedure reflects Scrum at its core, which is why both approaches are implemented in parallel in practice. Visualization by the board causes continuous monitoring and creates an awareness of one's successes, which can directly promote team-internal acceptance of the method. (Schnegas, 2019.)

KanBan is based on visualizing work on a board and allows teams to manage their workflow in a variety of ways. The KanBan structure is well suited to continuous activity, such as HR services,

operations, or recruitment teams. It's particularly handy if the team has a lot of external dependencies or needs to wait for responses from other departments. The key is to keep WIP (work in progress) to a minimum at any given time and then look for ways to boost the flow and productivity of the work as it progresses from beginning to end. It is often seen that KanBan teams incorporating some Scrum activities, such as evaluations and retrospectives, to improve the process and establish an efficient work cadence. (Dank and Hellström, 2020.)

2.4   The Waterfall Approach

Traditional HR, in which workers are seen as resources to be used and costs to be lowered in order to increase the efficiency of a top-down strategy, is becoming increasingly inefficient. Traditionally companies often turned to offshore and downsizing as competition in a global scale became more intense in the latter half of the twentieth century. Employees were frequently treated as "resources" with the primary purpose of maximizing profits. HR's main goal was to carry out top management's directions in order to increase efficiency, which typically meant cutting personnel. (Denning, 2018.)

In the 1970s, a project management system known as the Waterfall model became widely popular. There are many variations of this approach, but in HR, progress is measured in sequential stages (Thoren, 2017.) It is a "heavyweight" software development technique in which all process phases (initiating, planning, executing, controlling and monitoring, and closing) are carried out in a sequential order. Only after the preceding phase has ended can the next one begins. It is possible to review a completed phase, but not change a previous step in the process, for example, to accommodate a significant change in requirements. This methodology necessitates the formulation of a solid set of requirements only during the requirements planning stage, and feedback to prior stages is difficult to implement. (Cocco, Mannaro, Concas and Marchesi, 2011.) Therefore, there is little room for flexibility or error. In this model people consider the end of each step as having been successfully completed. However, the problem is that the Waterfall method is estimated that the world is predictable. (Thoren, 2017.)

In the 1990s, developers decided to shift away from traditional hierarchical, segmented, bureaucratic approaches to software development and towards a more flexible development techniques, resulting in the Agile model approach (McCornimick, 2012). The Waterfall model could not keep up with the rapid evolution of technology and the desire for new features and

products that followed the internet's birth. IT products were no longer relevant at the end of extended development cycles, and investment budgets were too rigid, hence a new strategy was needed.
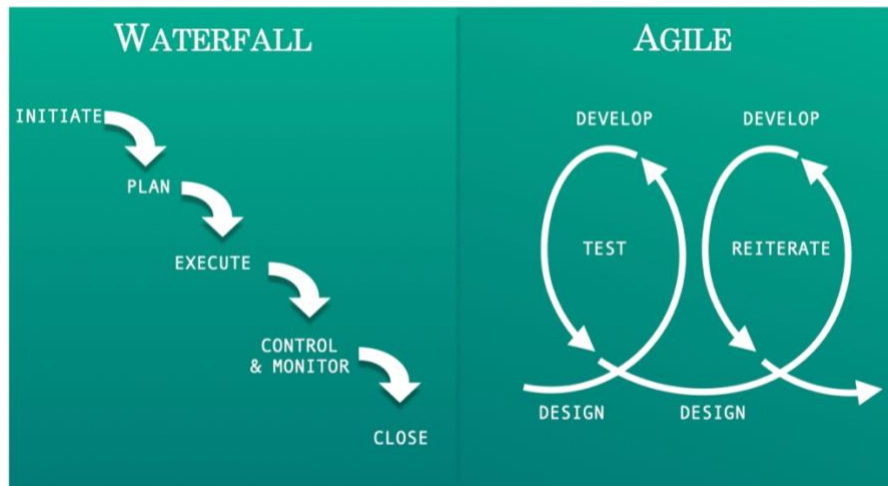
Figure 5 Waterfall vs. Agile approach (own representation modified from Agilehrcommunity, 2018)

Figure 5 shows what the steps of Waterfall approach and Agile approach look like. The Waterfall approach consists of one big bang, where the final product is produced without taking any feedback from customers or employees. The Waterfall approach (PM Institute, 2020) consists of five steps, i.e., Initiate, plan, execute, control and monitor, and close. This approach focuses on launching the final product in one go, without testing or experimentation. In contrast, the Agile approach divides the process into smaller parts. It is experimented and tested in each step, with continuous feedback from customers to reduce the risks of failure. (Hellström, 2020).

In Waterfall approach the work is not split, but all the features to build a product are grouped together in "Selected Requirements," with a stock of requirements for each step of the entire project. (Cocco, et al., 2011.)

Waterfall Failure

Sticking to the plan is the foundation of waterfall. The precarious part of the Waterfall approach is that issues can be discovered beyond the point of change. A late alteration can have a significant influence on the scope, time, and cost of the project. It can also result in a huge sunk cost, where a project team spends a significant amount of time and money on a delivery that is not required due to a late adjustment. These inefficiencies make Waterfall less relevant for large-scale projects or product creation. However, most of the corporate sector remains committed to the Waterfall

model, with many older businesses still reflecting these working practices. (Dank and Hellström, 2020.)

In the Waterfall model, the board of directors is directly responsible for the company's long-term success and lays out a one- to five-year strategy to achieve this goal. In many businesses, everything must be planned, budgeted, and projected in advance, with quarterly or annual reporting to back it up. In many of these situations, waterfall-style planning provides a perception of certainty and control, which is swiftly eroded once unanticipated market shocks hit (Dank and Hellström, 2020). When it comes to HR practices, the majority still use the Waterfall approach. These solutions typically require a one-size-fits-all design, with all employees receiving the same identical service or experience, regardless of who they are or what they do. It is time for HR departments to acknowledge that they face more complex business problems and a rapidly changing workplace. HR also needs to innovate its speed of delivery and to better demonstrate how HR adds value to the company. Just like the developmental and production side of business, it is time for HR to embrace the Agile approach and evolve its operating model. (Dank and Hellström, 2020.)

2.4.1   Hybrid Approach

A hybrid approach is a combination of Agile and traditional HR approaches. (Hellström, 2020.) The goal is not "doing Agile techniques"; instead, the goal is to use a mixture of both Agile and traditional HR techniques for the best business outcomes. (Agile Alliance, 2019.) Many teams are unable to make the transition to Agile working practices overnight. The more moving parts there are in a big company, the longer it will take to move. Agile approaches can appear and feel very different because of spending a long time in a Plan-Driven environment. As a result, the journey of transitioning into the Agile environment gets messy and confusing.

Hybrid = non-Agile + Agile = something in between that makes sense
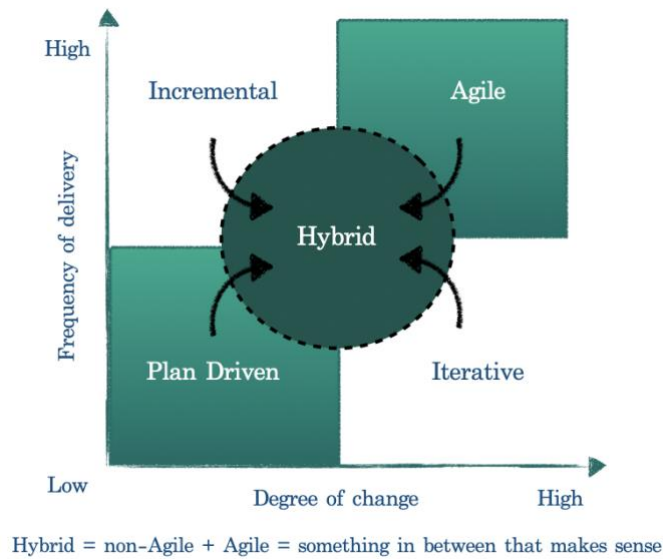
Figure 6 Hybrid approach (own representation modified from Agile Alliance, 2019)

Every project has its own set of requirements. A hybrid approach can move to adaptability and execution for those who find themselves in a primarily plan-driven world. Blending some new strategies will lift the bar even higher for those already delivering and adapting vigorously. However, companies cannot declare they are fully Agile if they are still in the transitioning process, as there exists some combination of different approaches. Hence, the hybrid approach fits best for many companies as they choose the most appropriate techniques depending on the company's requirement. (Agile Alliance, 2019.)

2.5   Difference Between Traditional HR and Agile HR

"Work has changed in the sense that one person cannot do the job without other people's help. Very few of us can sit in a room by ourselves and get our work done without more and more networking, more and more communication with other people, and more and more collaboration." – Riina (Thoren 2017, 22.)

Research demonstrates that Agile approaches outperform traditional ones in terms of product quality and development time. (Serrador and Pinto, 2015.) The essential success elements of the Agile approaches are how well it fits the structure, procedures, and other features of the company. (Leybourne, 2009.) Several studies have shown that having employee engagement at the core of their enterprise Agile strategy, companies can see significant revenue growth, reduced

costs due to elimination of waste, and innovative product launches from a highly motivated, collaborative teams. Agile companies are managed differently than traditional companies. (North, 2020.)
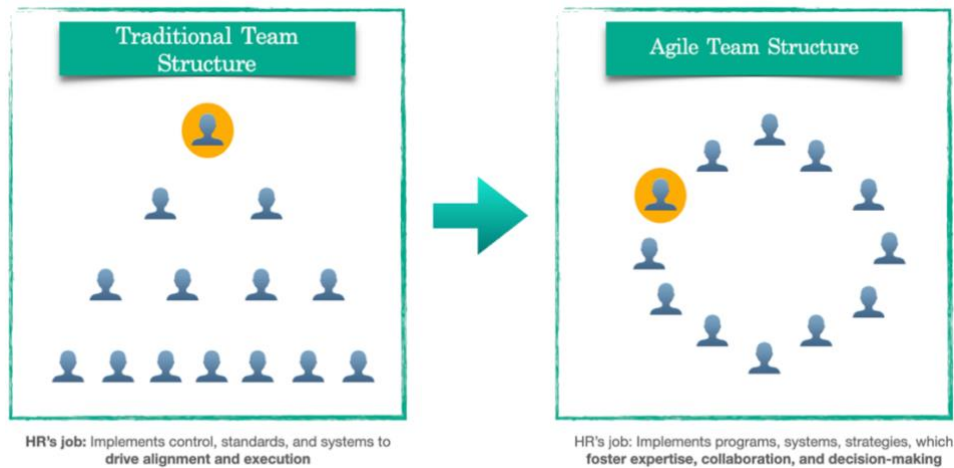
Figure 7 Traditional and Agile team structures (own representation modified from Ann Shaffner,2016)

Figure 7 shows how differently traditional management and Agile management work. Shaffner (2016) states that whereas traditional HR management focuses on control and alignment, Agile HR management focuses on speed and customer.

Traditional HR is concerned with implementing standards, rules, and controls. One of the issues with traditional HR is that it is built on a preconceived notion of how things should be done. It's stuck in a structure that can't keep up with the rate of change in today's marketplace or provide the flexibility needed to stay competitive. Traditional HR terminology includes words like "implementation," "cascade," and "roll-out," with the goal of hundreds, if not thousands, of employees embracing a new product or process at once. (Thoren, 2017.)

Agile companies are also learning companies. "A learning organization is one that learns continuously and transforms itself" (Marsick and Watkins 2003, 129), which brings the analogy of both concepts to bear. Employee engagement and an Agile workforce are mutually reinforcing concepts that multiply the impact of businesses. Employee agility is a necessary requirement for business agility in today's complicated and dynamic world. To counter the dynamic business environment, a highly engaged and Agile team takes an incremental and iterative approach to projects. (Mani and Mishra, 2020.) Sarkar (2019) states that more flexibility, co-operation,

continuous improvement, and better adaptability between employees, processes, and projects to assign final resources responsible are important part of Agile HR.

The age of digital disruption stumbles in a radical change in the way companies perceive human resources, talents, and hierarchy. In Lean methodology, the traditional, slow, and unidimensional processes are replaced with a more flexible framework that mainly focuses on continuous improvement and increasing productivity. Agile teams have a strong tendency for action and make rapid progress toward their objectives. In the present VUCA business environment, this is the ideal posture for companies. Teams here work in an iterative approach, making small increments in continuous delivery towards defined targets. Team members build on each other's skills, collaborate in a spirit of fellowship, and work toward a common goal. (Mani and Mishra, 2020.)

3 Research Strategy and Research Methods

In this chapter, the research method used in this thesis work is explained. In addition, the research methods and the analysis methods chosen are defined and clarified.

Conceptual Work

Conceptual research is an approach for conducting research that involves examining and interpreting existing knowledge on a certain topic. There are no practical experiments involved in conceptual research. Conceptual work has connection with abstract concepts or ideas. Philosophers have long relied on conceptual inquiry to build new theories or to reinterpret current ones. (Kothari, 2009.)

Empirical Research

Empirical research relies on experience or observation alone, often without due regard for system and theory. It is data-based research, coming up with conclusions which are capable of being verified by observation or experiment. It can also be called an experimental type of research. It is data-driven study that results in findings that can be confirmed by observation or experiment. It is sometimes referred to as experimental testing. It is important to obtain facts firsthand, at their source, and to actively go about doing such things in order to promote the development of desired information in such a study. (Kothari, 2009.)

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research focuses on analyzing and explaining a specific phenomenon, attitudes, thoughts, and events to produce new research theories. Qualitative research approach is inductive and context-specific in its nature. Qualitative research aims at providing a concise narrative explanation and holistic analysis of attitudes, experiences, and events in natural settings. Qualitative research is an inductive research method in which data is gathered by observations, records, physical objects, interviews, and focus groups. This leads to general conclusions or hypotheses about the phenomenon. (Lavrakas, 2008.) Interviews are used in qualitative research to investigate attitudes, behavior, and experiences. It seeks to obtain detailed responses from participants. Fewer people participate in the research because attitudes, behavior, and experiences are important, but the contact with these people tends to remain

much longer. There are numerous approaches that fall under the category of qualitative research. (Dawson, 2002.)

Primary Data

Primary data can be obtained through observation, direct contact with respondents in various forms, or telephone interviews in experimental research. Whether the conduct is descriptive research and surveys, whether sample surveys or census surveys, the data obtained can be primary data through observation, direct communication with respondents in various forms, or telephone interviews.

3.1   The Research Methods

When deciding on the data collection method for the analysis, the researcher should bear in mind that there are two types of data: primary and secondary data. Primary data are those that are obtained for the first time and therefore have a unique character. (Kothari, 2009.)

Ethnographic Research

Ethnography has its origins in anthropology, and it was a prominent mode of inquiry around the turn of the century, when anthropologists explored the globe seeking distant tribes. In ethnography, the emphasis is placed on describing and interpreting cultural behavior. Ethnographers immerse themselves in the lives and cultures of the people they are studying, frequently spending months with them. This is known as fieldwork or participant observation, and it involves researchers participating in a group's activities while observing its behavior, taking notes, conducting interviews, analyzing, reflecting, and writing reports. Ethnographers emphasize the value of the written word since it is through it that they convey the culture they research. (Dawson, 2002.)

Netnographic Research

Netnography is a qualitative research approach that uses ethnographic research performed online to investigate digital tribes and consumer behavior, considering the growing contributions in this field. (Kozinets, 2009.) Simply, netnography is online ethnography research, or ethnography research conducted over the internet. Netnography applies ethnographic analysis

methods to the study of online cultures in order to uncover normal internet consumer activity trends.

Netnographic Research = ethnography + internet (Kozinets, 2009.)

Field Research

According to Kothari (2009), there are three different types of field studies 1) library research, 2) field research, and 3) laboratory research. Field research has, many different methods to conduct research such as participant observation, mass observation, mail questionnaire, opinionnaire, personal interview, focused interview, group interview and telephone survey/interviews. (Kothari 2009, 9.)

Field research is concerned with the production and collection of actual and authentic data by field of activity in any organization. The process involves determining what specific work is important and where this information should be gathered from. After this information has been decided, data is collected. As a result, this study technique is considered as the primary research approach since the determined data is specific to the purpose of collecting the data. Field research is usually done in person, over the phone, or through electronic means like teleconferencing, online meetings, and emails. (Kothari, 2009.)

Interview

An interview is, at its most basic level, a conversation, a series of questions and answers between two people who have agreed that one will act as the interviewer and the other as the interviewee or respondent. The only difference between an online interview and a face-to-face interview is that an online interview is conducted with the use of technology. That, however, is a significant distinction. (Chapple, 1999.)

Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews are clearly faster and less expensive than face-to-face interviews, particularly when respondents are dispersed across the world. Before locating a respondent willing to be interviewed at a specific time, the researcher will have to prepare for several interviews and make several phone calls. If the respondent is busy, make an appointment to call back later; it is important that the respondent has enough time to answer questions thoroughly and thoughtfully, as well as focus on the points posed. (Chapple, 1999.)

Semi-structured

Within a flexible setting, semi-structured interviews enable all participants to be asked the same questions. All participants are asked questions from the same loose collection, but the questions are not arranged in any order. Participants are encouraged to speak about their experiences through open-end questions, and their answers are dictated the order of subsequent questions. (Deranley, 2005.) The researcher wants to know information that can be compared and contrasted with information gathered in other interviews in this type of interview. To accomplish this, each interview must ask the identical questions. The researcher, on the other hand, wants the interview to be flexible so that additional significant facts can emerge. (Dawson, 2002.)

3.2 Data Analysis Methods

The practice of systematically applying statistical and/or logical approaches to explain and demonstrate, condense and recap, and assess data is known as data analysis. Various analytic processes "provide a technique of generating inductive inferences from data and differentiating the signal (the phenomena of int) from the noise (statistical fluctuations) contained in the data," according to Shamoo and Resnik. (2003.)

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method of evaluating qualitative data collected from the interviews (which is the first part of data collection for the research). It is typically used to describe a group of texts, such as interview transcripts. The researcher analyses the data carefully to recognize recurring themes – subjects, concepts, and trends of significance. Thematic analysis is a technique for locating, analyzing, and interpreting context patterns ('themes') in qualitative data. (Clarke and Braun, 2016.) Thematic analysis is the process of analyzing data by theme. This form of analysis is very inductive, which means that the themes emerge naturally from the data rather than being imposed by the researcher. The data gathering and analysis are conducted at the same time in this form of analysis. (Dawson, 2002.)

4   Data Collection and Analysis

In this chapter, the results are identified by using the research methodology this work is based on. The research conducted was a combination of empirical as well as conceptual work. The research was a combination of conceptual work elements used in netnography to observe and analyze current online sources on the topic, as well as experimental work (i.e., field research), making it also empirical. The research is based on the interpretation of concepts, thoughts, and experiences, so the research design used is a qualitative research design. In this study, primary data was obtained from first-hand sources by the researcher, using open-ended interviews and online observations.
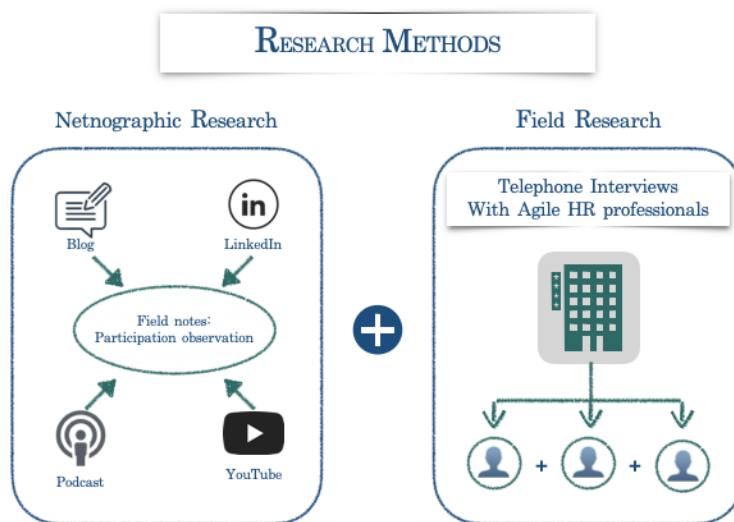
Figure 8 Research methods for data collection (own representation based in Kozinets (2009), Kothari (2009) and Chapple (1999))

Figure 8 shows the two data collection methods used in this research paper. Netnographic research was used to observe the data present online. The reason behind choosing netnography was that people in online resources did not censure themselves concerning their views and opinions on Agile HR, allowing for a sounder discussion on the topic. The second data collection method was via open-end telephone interviews. The results from both methods were then combined in the attempt to find the answer to the research questions of this study, as well as link it to the existing theories and concepts. The process of collecting data from both research methods, their analysis and results are expanded on in the following chapter.

4.1   Conducting Interviews

The empirical method used for the research was open-ended telephone interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, as statements outside the guidelines were also considered. The open-ended interview thus offered the opportunity to obtain and evaluate further contextual information. The aim was to obtain as much data on the benefits enhancing Agile HR.

The first step was to create a questionnaire that would cover all the aspects required to answer the research question as thoroughly as possible. The questionnaire used for these interviews can be found in appendix. The questions were created to focus on Agile HR, limiting the scope to reduce unrequired input. They were divided into seven categories:

- General questions on the participant's understanding on Agile HR

- Challenges faced when implementing Agile in HR

- Differences between traditional and Agile HR

- Customer engagement and employee experience

- Agile mindset

- Agile tools and traditional approaches

- Benefits of Agile HR

The first category covered the understanding of HR and company representatives' definition of Agile HR and how it helps the company's environment according to them. Additionally, some of the questions also covered whether the company had been using Agile HR from its beginning (especially if it was a relevantly new company), or if it implemented Agile HR later. This first category helped process to the next which was about the challenges their companies faced while applying Agile in HR. Thus, if employees accepted the transition or resisted it.

To better understand how traditional HR varies from Agile HR, the researcher asked the interviewees the question which differences they found between both traditional HR and Agile HR from their experiences, which was the third category. Since this research paper focuses on customer prioritization and employee experience, category four consisted of asking a question regarding internal and external customers. The fifth category focused on questions related to

Agile mindset, as the previous categories indicated that the most important part of Agile HR is Agile mindset. Agile mindset being a crucial part of Agile HR, the researcher attempted to gain an in-dept knowledge with the help of Agile HR and company representatives. The sixth category dealt with the Agile HR tools (Scrum, KanBan), Waterfall, and hybrid approach. Finally, the last category was about the most important questions that were going to help the researcher find answers for the main research question.

The interviewees chosen for the open-end interviews was Agile HRs from different countries, so the choices were based on the background of the participant as it suited best to the research itself. It also helped the researcher to not limit the research to just one country but get information from different parts of the world. However, the challenging part was to convince HRs to take a part in the interview. The researcher had to contact 29 companies before getting five Agile HRs (from both big and small-medium sized companies) to accept the offer.

Figure 9 Participants and their countries (own representation based on interviews)

Figure 9 shows the countries and how the participants are referred by, as the participants wanted to keep their company names and identities anonymous. The participants come from a variety of industries including gaming, finance and software development. The proposed dates were accepted by all interviewees. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes to complete. A record was made using the voice recording function on the smartphone. The consent of the interviewees was obtained at the beginning, and it was pointed out that the results and details of the interview would be used for scientific purposes only. They were also assured that the voice recordings would not be made public. The recordings were then used to transcribe the interviews.

The transcribed data was then used to report the data and analyze it, as presented in sub-chapter 4.3.1 (29).

4.2   Collecting Online Information by Netnographic Approach

Netnography as explained in Chapter 3 (21) is ethnographic research performed online to observe digital communities and consumer behavior. The researcher then proceeded to look for any interviews related to Agile HR, its benefits and elements. After finding a variety of sources of information, the researcher decided to use it as second research method. The information gathered by netnographic research was by observing participants through posts on social media communities such as LinkedIn, Blogs, YouTube videos, and podcasts where experts debate and comment on Agile HR.
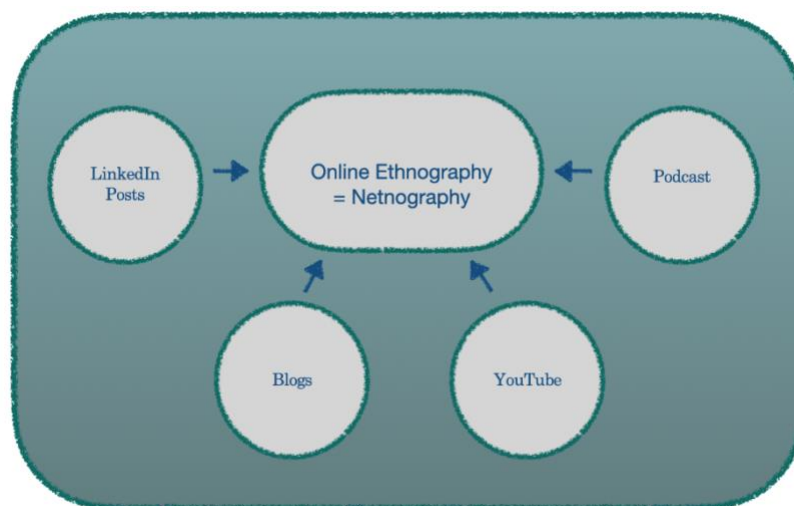
Figure 10 Netnographic research approach (own representation based on netnographic research)

The figure above illustrates how the information from internet was collected step-by-step. In order to find information on social media platforms such as LinkedIn, the researcher started by finding as many Agile HRs as possible and then searched for the content they had posted related to Agile HR (both posts and Blogs were taken into consideration). Blogs were also found from other internet websites such as LinkedIn, AgileHRCommunity, Xing, etc. The second platform used in this data collection method was YouTube where the aim was to find videos related to Agile HR from either Agile experts sharing their experiences or new HRs who recently started using Agile

in HR. The third approach was using podcast interviews on Agile HR where the speakers shared their thoughts and experiences about Agile HR.

The aim of collecting data from social media posts, podcasts, and YouTube videos was to discover what speakers from various companies who work in Agile HR departments or Agile HRs had in common about the Agile approaches and explained their elaborated opinions and thoughts on the topic. They were familiar with Agile approach as they worked in an Agile environment or in the HR department applying Agile approaches daily. Since, they also use social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn to share their personal experiences and knowledge of Agile HR, it helped the researcher to collect that information. This information helped the researcher to enhance her understanding of the thesis topic and provide useful sources.

4.3   Data Report

This part of the research focuses on reporting the findings from the telephone interviews as well as the netnographic research. The report is an extract from the data obtained originally to avoid the repetition of words and sentences as many participants had the same view regarding some topics of Agile HR.

4.3.1   Interview Report

Each interview was divided into seven categories to make it is easier to cover all the different aspects related to Agile HR, each category consisting of one to three questions. In this part of the research, the abstract from each category was reported.

Participant's Understanding on Agile HR

"An Agile HR function enables the organization to shift from its mindset from compliance to commitment, drive organizational capabilities that create value for long term, and fosters an environment of collaboration and speed" – Participant 5

Agile HR is a method of service delivery, based on design thinking. It can be seen in two ways; HR for Agile and Agile for HR, where Agile for HR is referred to adopting an Agile approach internally,

while HR for Agile is referred to having an advisory function for specialist departments within a company. It allows HR to adapt its approaches into small steps, so it does not overwhelm the customers (both internal and external), allowing it to adapt its offering in a more real time way. Agile HR can be also described as a smooth, systematic and clear process that lets the HR focus on the most important business part, i.e., its internal and external customers.

Challenges Faced When Implementing Agile in HR

When asked what the most challenging aspects were for a company to apply Agile in HR, all the participants had similar responses: legacy thinking and mindset, lack of willingness, and not wanting to step out of their comfort zone. Participant 5 said that in her company there were four big challenges which were 1) outdated thinking and mindset, 2) siloed departments, 3) lack of capability to carry out the transformation, and 4) not enough support from senior management.

Participant 2 said, "In my opinion the older generation at work were more challenging and it was hard to change their mindset. It was not impossible to implement Agile HR, but not all employees were comfortable with the change that was happening and were reluctant to step out of their comfort zone. It took me some coaching sessions and meetings to help them understand the concept behind Agile HR and how it was for their better work experience. However, the newer generation was more open-minded about the change compared to the older generation".

The challenges were outside the HR team as well, said participant 3, as the people outside the HR team expected them to design a perfect solution from the beginning of the process, rather than building it as the process evolved. Some of the HR employees were also concerned that HR received credibility through detailed processes and solutions for everything, but Agile does not always need that. There was also a fear of behavior change among the company and the need to inform the stakeholders that the operations were going to be somewhat different.

Differences Between Traditional and Agile HR

When asked about differences between traditional and Agile HR, two participants (4 and 5) said that there is not much difference between traditional HR and Agile HR. They said that it depends on the definition of 'traditional' HR. According to participant 5, for HR to embrace agility it needs to uncover better ways of developing an engaging workplace with specific focus on people

processes. Their company decided to focus on the mindset for agility rather than on routines and ceremonies. On the other hand, the rest of the participants (1, 2 and 3) listed a few differences between traditional HR and Agile HR, which will be listed in the following table:

Traditional HR	Agile HR

o Outdated, fixed mindset
 	
o Standardized policies and rules
 	
o Avoids risks and failures
 	
    • No mistakes allowed
 	
o Hierarchal management
 	
    • Command and control culture
 	
o Employee life cycle management
 	
    • Hiring, providing, benefits and exit
 	
o Not all teams work together
 	
o Profit-centered design to maximize shareholder's profit
 	
o No transparency in processes
 	
o Stressed environment
	o Design thinking and growth mindset
	
	o Flexible and adaptive processes; digital driven
	
	o Experiments and takes risks
	
	    • Celebrates mistakes
	
	o Cross-functional teams
	
	    • coaching culture
	
	o Focus on individual competence and organizational capabilities
	
	o T-shaped capabilities (working with different teams)
	
	o Creating value for customers through human-centered design (internal and external)
	
	o Transparency in processes
	
	o More enjoyable and comfortable environment

Table 1 List of Differences between Traditional HR and Agile HR by participant 1,2 and 3

The table above is an abstract of the differences mentioned between both HR styles by the participants. Also, the words 'change in mindset', 'open-minded' and 'boarder thinking' were mentioned many times while taking about the differences between these two HR styles.

Agile Mindset

"Agile mindset it the most important part of transformation of the company towards Agile or to become Agile HR. The company can change its structure and approaches, but if the mindset is not changing them that's a problem. Agile HR is about personal development and change in mindset." – Participant 2.

It was also said by the participants that the employees need to understand, that they need to learn to self-manage, and Agile HR is not about managing with control but managing with trust. According to participant 1 and 4, Agile mindset is about growth mindset rather than fixed mindset.

Agile is not about being scared of feeling that HR is not in control. It is about understanding that by co-creating work with customers it makes the process or role of HR more relevant. There are many other important elements in Agile HR, yet mindset is considered as the most important element. HRs must leave their old thinking behind and keep their mind open for new approaches or ways of working. Despite the fact that people may be reluctant to accept new approaches, it is clear that companies who have implemented Agile in one way or another have seen an increase in business value, which should be incentive enough to change old business habits.

Customer Prioritization and Employee Experience

Customer Prioritization

Through co-creation of product and solutions, giving the customers the freedom to make as many changes as they want and keeping transparency in the process of making the product allows a company to prioritize. "The focus of Agile HR is to keep clients at the center and engage them as people processes are adapted for reducing friction. We have now shifted our approach to engage with employees across the organization as we develop HR policies and refine the decisions as we develop them", said participant 5.

One other participant said that although customers are important to the company, especially to HR, the customer is not in direct contact with the HR or other HR team members. This company was a game developer whose developer team is in constant contact with the client. It can be observed that the Agile approach is used there, as continuous feedback is taken from the client. Feedback is submitted to the HR to keep a check in progress and if there is any part of the project where they need to be involved then clients are free to contact them.

People Management

"We should strive to capitalize on everyone's strength", said participant 4 when asked about how the employees can be motivated. She also said Agile HR makes the environment of the company much more comfortable and welcoming and added "Agile HR condenses the work community".

Participant 5 said, "My management style is inclusive and focused on driving innovation. I am constantly trying to upskill the team and get them to develop solutions for the future challenges, rather than the challenge today. Leaders need to make efforts to remove friction from the processes, create a balanced team with complementary skills that helps move the function forward."

If the Agile HR processes are applied properly in a company, then they can help enhance employee experience. The employees should be motivated and inspired from time to time and the HR should be compassionate and caring towards their collogues. One of the participants said that motivating people to work in an Agile way is a challenge onto itself, as a shift in mindset is needed and one cannot be taught how to change their mindset, it comes from career experience and expectations on how things can be done better.

Participant 2, on the other hand when asked about people management said, "In my case I do a lot of caching to develop their soft skills as that is very important. We arrange a meeting each month, where we sit together and criticize each other and accept criticism. It helps us to grow and become better in my opinion. We are very transparent when it comes to salary, numbers of the company, problems, etc. The employees are free to and talk to me at any time they want to. They can share personal and private problems as well as I like to understand why they are not feeling well or not as active at work as they usually are". When asked about motivating the employees she (participant 2) said that because of covid-19, motivating the employees is more complicated as everyone is working remotely. However, she still tries to motivate through emotional salary such as working at flexible hours, restaurant tickets, gym membership, and coaching.

Waterfall and Agile Approaches as well as Agile Tools

Waterfall and Agile Approach

Three companies out of all five which were interviewed, still use Waterfall approach in HR, however the approach was mixed with Agile ways of working. This means that unlike traditional Waterfall approach, it is possible for the employees to go to the previous step and make changes if required. Participant 3 said, "there may be something in whether HR can be Agile in its customers facing work, but depending on what needs to be done, maybe a more traditional approach is more relevant. I am not convinced it is one or the other, but more of a blend. I am not a purist in Agile, I take a more blended approach as I have mentioned."

"We thrive to implement Agile in every aspect of HR." said Participant 4. The other participants said that they do not use any traditional methods. Agile ways of working are used in talent acquisition and performance management which ultimately helps with employee experience and creates long term value for the company.

Agile Tools

When the participants were asked if they use tools, especially Scrum and KanBan, three participants said yes. The said that the tools play an important role in transforming their traditional HR to Agile HR. The tools helped in building confidence in how to work in an Agile way. A few things that the tools helped the HR with are:

- More agility

- Less confusion also meaning

- Less meetings

- More prediction which means less mistakes

- Less stress and better environment

- More production

However, two participants mentioned that although their employees were given a training for both KanBan and Scrum, they did not insist the employees to use them. Most important was to focus on transparency, collaboration, engagement and motivation.

Benefits of Agile HR for a Company Both Externally and Internally

At the end of the interview each participant asked to tell all the benefits Agile HR brought to their companies. The participants said that Agile HR allowed for adaptability, innovation and creativity. It helped putting both internal and external customers of the company at focus. Agile HR helps companies to create long term value by adapting Agile people practices. Agile HR helps identify the potential in people, instead if keeping them in the same lane forever. It asks HR and the employees to embrace challenges and improve from continuous feedback. Flexibility, co-creation and cross-function are important when it comes to Agile HR, and it helps enhancing the employee experience. It clarifies responsibility and areas of activities cool stop when people know clear ways to act it also affects the overall well-being, instead of solving fewer pressing problems you have time for important tasks. In Agile HR, intrinsic motivated people foster a self-organizing culture and empowerment. All employees working with a HR team are working with the same mindset and right experience. Agile HR demands to be more transparent and there are more frequent collaborations. Finally, there are less written and formal communications and more oral communications.

4.3.2   Netnography Report

The same interview categories were utilized in the netnographic research so that the responses to the study questions could be compared.

General Understanding on Agile HR

Human resource agility explores different ways HR to use an Agile mindset. It also finds new working practices inside HRs' own projects and teams. The Agile mentality has the potential to help modernize HR by reinventing the operational model. It is about realizing that everything revolves around and is prioritized by the value provided to the customer. (Sara, 2021). It promotes collaborative and Agile techniques so the company can produce product solutions in incremental steps, allowing teams to test ideas and concepts as they go and adjust swiftly to changes. For

example, Agile management, when used correctly, leads to more innovation, faster implementation (or product delivery), and more efficiency. Customers' value may be validated by creating products and services that they desire to adopt, utilize, suggest, and pay for. (Lucidcharts, 2020.) Agile brings facts to the table and builds solutions based on real-world input. Agile HR attempts to create a sense of shared value among your customers, employees, and business partners. (Rawat, 2021).

Differences Between Traditional and Agile HR

Traditional HR approaches place a stronger focus on rules and standards within a hierarchical organization. Agile HR is a paradigm change that stresses cooperation, feedback, and innovation in favor of a simpler and faster method. (Lucidcharts, 2020.) There were many more differences mentioned on blogs, posts, and in videos related to Agile HR, so the easier way to list all the differences a table was used.

Traditional HR	Agile HR
o Focus on rules and standards • Hierarchal structure o Remedial approach to learning o "Recruiting" mindset o Siloed Objectives o Implementing systems o Opaque processes o Higher ups are the discission maker o Fixed mindset o Profit-centered o Annual performance review and all-size-fit-one reward system o 9-5 fixed working hours	o Simple and faster approach o Continuous learning o Talent acquisition o Unified mission and value o Piloting small initiatives o Transparent processes o Decision made is test driven o Open and design thinking o Human-centered o Continuous feedback on employee performance and rewards depending on individual o Flexible working hours

o Spends hours on collecting, reporting and analyzing numbers o Command and control culture o Has the "HR recipe", i.e., no experiments o Individual work	o Value delivered to customers is most important o Co-creation and cross-functional teams o Experiments and testing o T-shaped teams

Table 2 Differences between Traditional and Agile HR (Sara 2021; Grace, 2021 and Murphy, 2020)

Differences were collected and merged to create a clear understanding from the various posts and blogs from social media platform i.e., LinkedIn. Agile HR is all about making processes and work easier and faster for employees and customers, while traditional HR follows the rules strictly. Table 2 presents the differences that were mentioned more frequently and are more common between traditional and Agile HR.

Challenges Faced when Implementing Agile in HR

Traditional, outdated thinkers who stick to hierarchical or old systems must contend with an Agile transformation initiative. These HR traditional thinkers are frequently in "managerial" roles, and as a result, they have the capacity to either block or make any Agile endeavor fail by rejecting resources. When multiple teams at the bottom of the corporate hierarchy adopt Agile, only to find stiffness and rigidity in the top levels trying to maintain their power intact, any new endeavor is doomed to fail. Creating Agile teams within HR and then having them clash with the old organization can be disastrous for the key values of Agile approach. It can also become discouraging and demotivating, resulting in serious problems that threaten the transformation initiative. (Rubio, 2018.)

Agile Mindset

"To develop your ability to be Agile in your daily lives then exercise in terms of neurological capacity must be undertaken daily. Things are only perceived to be hard because our brains are not used to learning, unlearning and development of new ideas"- Macdonald, 2021.

Agile means delivering value to the customers and the company. In HR, it is often talked about the need to "bring value," but to measure and explain what that value is, may be difficult. Most HR plans include major, complicated themes like creating a personalized employee experience for a multi-generational, varied workforce. (Sara, 2021.)

HR can use Agile to break down these large, complex subjects into manageable pieces of value. It allows the companies to prioritize work based on value and clearly communicate what is being delivered to the business and why it is being done. The Agile mindset is a way of working that not only helps HRs collaborate and produce value more effectively, but it's also a methodology for inventing or rethinking people practices that puts the employee first. This results in HR becoming more human-centered, with the goal of creating user-friendly solutions that are driven by their employees' needs and input. (Sara and Rawat, 2021.)

Growth mindset	Fixed mindset
o Believes that talents, skills, and intelligence are natural	o Everyone has the capacity to learn and develop their skills
o Failure can be seen as shameful	o Failure is seen as a valuable lesson
o Is afraid of challenges	o Embraces challenges
o Avoids mistakes	o Makes mistakes to learn from them

Table 3 Difference between Growth and Fixed mindset (Flynn, 2020)

It does not affect which tools and processes a company uses if the HR has the correct mindset; the Agile attitude makes everything work out. In contrast, if HR does not have an Agile mindset, it does not matter if they follow every tool, procedure, and system to the letter; no advantages can occur. Not to mention Agile is a way of thinking. (Denning, 2016.)

Customer Engagement and People Management

Customer engagement

Agile HR is an iterative method that helps teams deliver value to clients faster and with fewer issues. The ability to accelerate speed to market, innovate solutions to compete, and satisfy new customer needs is referred to as agility. Developing new organizational skills is not a reactionary response. Agility is a strategy for bringing innovation, breaking down functional silos, and empowering diverse teams to manage themselves with a customer-centric focus while speeding

profitable growth. Agile HR Provides client satisfaction and engagement. Companies must respond quickly to fulfill customer expectations, developing products and services that offer a positive customer experience that leads to long-term growth. (Bellwood, White and Fairbairn, 2019.)

People Management

Collaborate with the employee to discover what works and what does not. Workstyles should be redesigned in collaboration with employees. Co-creation is a powerful concept that also transforms the concept of change management. HR is quick to draw conclusions and believe they know the answer, therefore co-creation emphasizes the significance of discovery work. The employee's performance management should be handled in an Agile, iterative way. Instead of annual appraisal, do continuous feedback and development. (Fairbairn, 2019.)

Agile HR is a human-centered strategy. The employees are also customers and users of the employee experience; thus, mindset is important. Which means that value represents customer satisfaction and supports the employee's job success. It also involves the development of human-centric people practices that are validated by direct user feedback. (White, 2019 and Sara, 2021.)

Traditional Approaches and Agile Tools

Waterfall approach: The waterfall method produces a big bang analysis and planning without the need to test or change the plan. It can lead to late services and deliveries that do not match business goals or employee expectations. (Dank, 2018.)

Agile approach: For HR, moving away from a waterfall approach to incrementally delivering value is transformational. The traditional approach was to design entire HR systems and processes in advance and then release them into the business in a one-size-fits-all, big bang deployment.

Instead, Agile encourages HR to test a concept or hypothesis first, then start the project only once HR has established what works and what doesn't. (Dank, 2018.)

Agile Tools

Instead of waiting to implement projects or programs, HR can foster a mindset shift by developing customer-centric solutions. This is a fantastic chance for HR to give solutions using practical tools. Scrum and KanBan are the most common utilized tools. (Tavis, 2018.)

Benefits of Agile HR for a Company Both Externally and Internally

List of Benefits of Agile HR (Based on Tavis (2020), Flynn (2020), White (2019), Fairbairn (2019), and Bellwood (2019))

- IT is working with HR processes reduces the time spent on these processes from days to minutes.

- Superior quality product and customer satisfaction.

- Better control, improved project predictability and reduced risks.

- Increased flexibility and continuous improvement in product development.

- Developing leaders at all levels and managing a younger workforce with new and different demands.

- Agile HR approaches enable businesses to adapt to the changing business and employment environment while also attracting, retaining, and developing top talent.

4.4 Data Analysis

The sub-chapter covers the analysis of both data reports covered in 4.3 (29). The analysis, as mentioned before, was conducted with a thematic analysis. For this analysis six steps were followed for both interviews and netnographic research analysis.

The first step of the thematic analysis was to become familiar with the data and read and re-read the data until it was understood completely. The next step was coding, where the repetitive and important words or phrases of the content were highlighted since they were most relevant to answer the research question for this study. The third step was to generate potential themes with the phrases and words that were highlighted. This was helpful in dividing the themes into various categories. In the fourth step, the temporary themes were reviewed and refined. The themes that were most relevant to the study were kept and the rest was eliminated. The next step was to give a name to these codes and phases. And the last step was to put them together in the most cohesive way possible.

4.4.1   Interview Analysis

The figure below was the result of the thematic analysis of the interviews conducted with the Agile HRs and company representatives.

Codes and phrases	Themes generated	Why?
- Change in mindset - Growth mindset - Open and broad mindset - Trying new approaches - Challenges - Willingness to learn - Experimenting - Design thinking - Upskilling the team - Step out of comfort zone	Agile mindset	Themes are related to or are a part of mindset. In general, so the fit under the theme "Agile mindset" the most.
- Friendly environment - Co-creating - Cross-functional teams - Transparency - Trust - Performance management - Talent acquisition - Not afraid of failures - Involvement in decision making - Collaboration - Motivation and rewards	employee experience	These codes fit best for the internal customers, i.e., the employees.
- Delivering value - Focus on speed - Co-creation - Creating solutions		Customers are considered the heart of the company. If the customers are not

	customer prioritization /engagement	happy then the company cannot succeed.
- Transparency - Customer satisfaction - Flexibility - Customers are center of focus - Open communication		

Table 4 Codes and Themes Generated from Interviews

After carefully using thematic analysis, the repeated codes and phrases fit best under the generated theme which, as shown in the table above are, Agile mindset, employee experience and customer prioritization. As listed in the figure, Agile mindset was mentioned more than customer prioritization and employee experience, which is why it is mentioned first.

The word behaviors change, and challenges faced in applying Agile HR were mentioned frequently in the interviews as well. However, this study focuses on benefits of Agile HR, so these topics were not elaborated in this research but can be explored in further studies.

4.4.2   Netnography Analysis

The netnographic research proved to be challenging to analyze as there was a lot of data available on Agile HR online. Therefore, only the codes that connect the research questions were used to generate themes.

Codes and phrases	Themes generated	Why?
➢ Agile ways of working ➢ Scrum and KanBan ➢ Unlearn old habits ➢ Learn from mistakes and improve ➢ Growth mindset ➢ Design thinking ➢ Creative thinking ➢ Taking risks ➢ Change in mindset	Agile mindset	Themes are related to or are a part of mindset in general so the fit under the theme "Agile mindset" the most.
➢ End to end people experience ➢ Performance management ➢ Transparency ➢ Trust ➢ Co-creation ➢ Cross-functional teams ➢ Data driven decisions	employee experience	These codes fit best for the internal customers, i.e., the employees.

➢ Self-management ➢ Better work environment and rewards ➢ Human-centric approach ➢ Innovation and creativity ➢ Motivation and inspiration		
➢ Customer centric approach ➢ Delivering value ➢ Co-creating solutions ➢ Collaboration ➢ Transparency ➢ Open communication ➢ Speed ➢ Satisfaction ➢ Superior quality ➢ Continuous feedback	customer prioritization/ engagement	Customers are considered the heart of the company. If the customers are not happy then the company cannot succeed.

Table 5 Codes and Themes Generated from Netnography

Table 5 illustrates the key themes generated with the help of the repetitive codes and phrases using thematic analysis were same as interview analysis. As mentioned above, these themes help to connect the findings with the research questions as well as the theories used in this research paper.

However, a few other themes that were also generated, but were not explained in this study, such as user experience, Agile leadership, and organizational transformation. Although the phrase "company transformation" or "organizational transformation had been used in this research, it does not just focus on the transformation process.

4.5   Summary of the Analysis

This chapter combines both telephone interview analysis and netnographic analysis to achieve a clearer and simpler outcome for the study. From the research analysis, three common themes were generated in order to get answers to the research question of this study. The themes were Agile mindset, Employee experience and customer prioritization.
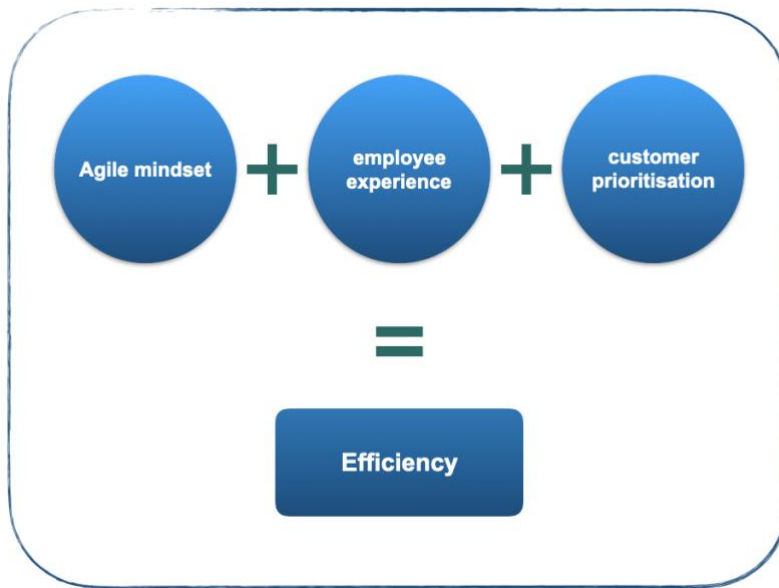
Figure 11 Illustration of three Themes equal Company Efficiency

Figure 11 shows that when these three themes are combined, they result into the making the company work efficiently from both inside and outside. The analysis was able to point out the benefits of Agile HR, as that was the aim of this study. The list of benefits is mentioned below:

- Companies can deliver greater value to its clients through continuous innovation.

- Products and services delivered at a faster rate.

- Culture change with more positive, friendly and comfortable environment.

- Employees are happy, thus more productivity, creativity, willingness to work.

- Rewards for employees depending on individuals, such as emotional salary.

- There is greater trust, engagement and teamwork across the organization.

- People practice and processes minimize friction and enhance staff experiences with HR services.

- Employees with right mindset and right experiences.

- Closer relations with other teams.

- The HR trusts the employees with the processes and self-management, which give the employee a sense of power, which results into better work performance.

- Helps change legacy mindset and align the workforce to greater priorities of the company.

- People practices and processes minimize friction and enhance staff experience with HR services.

- There is greater trust, engagement, and teamwork across the organization.

As mentioned in 4.4.1 (40) and 4.4.2 (41), there were a few other themes that were also generated while analyzing the data. The themes generated were user experience, Agile leadership, organizational transformation, challenges and downfalls of Agile HR and behavioral changes. Nevertheless, these themes were not explained in this study since these themes are not relevant to this research. Even though the phrases "company transformation" or "organizational transformation had been used in this research, it still does not just focus on the transformation process itself. These themes can be used in further studies.

5   Interpretation

From the findings of this research and the information collected from existing theories, Agile HR has become an important part of the business world. Agile tools started as a part of software development teams to make their work life easier, but quickly became a part of other teams' companies. Agile has especially become an important part of human resources.

Th result of this study shows that Agile mindset is highly valued as one of the aspects related to Agile HR or when generally talking about Agile. It is believed to play a big role in employee experience, customer engagement and prioritization, which are two other most valued parts of any company. Companies who want to become Agile or are planning to implement Agile in HR, should be very open minded, as the Agile ways are very different from traditional ways of thinking. Agile HR does not follow strict rule and standards as in traditional HR, giving its users chance to make mistakes, learn from it, step out of their comfort zone, be creative, and learn some roles of HR for self-management. The next most important thing in agile HR is its customers, both external and internal (employees). HR must unlearn old habit in order to make space for new thinking. With Agile mindset the company can deliver great value to its customers through constant innovation and creativity.

The results imply that if HR and the employees are open to adapt an Agile mindset and iterative ways of working and Agile approaches, then the employee experience can be enhanced, and the employees are not treated as resources but people. Enhanced employee experience creates a positive environment for the company, which can improve the performance of the employees. Co-creation seems to be the most important part in enhancing employee experience, as the HR works with its employee on the same level and creates solutions together. The HR aims to keep its employees motivated and inspired with the help of constant coaching, rewards based on individual's performance and emotional salary. It was also found in the results that Agile HR promotes cross-functional capabilities, letting all teams merge and create a T-shaped team. Different teams working together make processes within a company simpler and easier and it avoids communications problems between different departments/teams. The HR focuses on the well-being and health of the employees, cares for them and helps them grow with positive attitude. In Agile HR the employees are taught and trained for the Agile approaches such as KanBan, Scrum or Jira, however they are given a choice whether they want to use these tools and are not forced to use them. Overall, Agile HR focuses on people practice and processes. It creates

transparency and trust between the HR and the rest of the company. This basically means that Agile HR is a human-centric approach and puts its employees at heart unlike traditional HR.

Agile HR is also a customer-centric approach. The importance of co-creating products and solutions with customers, giving them an opportunity to give continuous feedback on the process of a product or service for an external client was discovered in this research. The customer is involved throughout the development and production journey of a good or service. The reason is that Agile HR ensures that the customer can give continuous feed-back on the product until the desired outcome. While the product is still in making, the employees test and experiment the product several times after each step to be sure that the quality of the product is not compromised or there are not late surprises. Agile HR also provides transparency to the customers and believes in having open communication with them. The main goal is to deliver the product as faster rate and capture customers value and satisfaction.

From the netnographic research, it was observed that companies are already using design thinking and have an experimental or risk-taking approach. However, these companies have not labeled their company as Agile using. It was also apparent a company cannot implement Agile in HR overnight, since it takes time to make it fully Agile, especially when of people within the company or HR are reluctant to shift their mindset from fixed to growth. However, it was said that there is no right or wrong way in implementing Agile in HR, the HR must just find the right way that suits their teams the best. Agile HR does not always mean to eliminate traditional approaches from the company, but to use more agility in those methods.

These results are built on existing evidence on Agile HR. Fortunately, the answers to the research questions were successfully obtained via the experimental and conceptual research conducted. When the three themes, Agile mindset, employee experience and customer prioritization are combined in Agile HR, it turns out to bring benefits to the company.

6   Conclusion

This research aimed to study what Agile HR means and what are its benefits to companies. It also aimed to discover how it supports its employees and customers. The research expected to find different tools used in Agile HR, their benefits, and how Agile helped improving a company's process. In the beginning of the research, it was expected that Agile HR, which is portrayed as a positive change in many companies according to Agile HR experts, just existed in theory or was not entirely true. The reason for that was that there were not many reports or articles published by Agile companies revealing their success stories after applying Agile in HR.

In Chapter 4 (24) it was explained how the research was conducted using two methods: online observation (netnography) from posts and videos, and open-ended telephone interviews. As the study focused on Agile HR, the chosen interviewees were individuals who could provide valuable insights into Agile HR. In addition, the online information was also collected from Agile experts and HR posts and videos. Thus, the validity of the research was ensured by choosing appropriate research methods. To ensure the reliability of this study, the research questions were divided into seven categories and these categories were used for both research types to make sure all the data collected from the interviews and online observations was relevant to the study.

The videos, podcasts and interviews were then transcribed and used for reporting and discussion in chapter 4.3 (28). The reports were then analyzed with the help of thematic analysis. For the outcome, the common themes generated from both data analysis, Agile mindset, employees' experience, and customer prioritization, were found most relevant to this study. The outcome is based on how these three themes play a role in Agile HR and what benefits they bring to a company. It was interpreted that these three elements can help a company deliver greater value to its customers and employees. They make processes more effective, reduce stress, challenges the company to be more innovative and creative, have a strong structure inside and outside the company, make employees a part of every decision, and put customers at the center. From the results of this study (Chapter 4, 24), it can be confirmed that the results were successfully able to find the answers to the main research question: what the benefits of Agile HR for a company are.

Agile HR is described in different terms in the theoretical chapter and in the findings, although they still convey the same meaning, which is delivering value to end customer with great speed, creating a great workplace with a positive environment for its employees to enhance employee experience, changing mindset from fixed to growth mindset, and driving organizational

capabilities. Based on the qualitative research and its analysis, the findings were successfully linked back to the theories used in this research paper. To elaborate, in both the theory and the result Chapter, Agile mindset, employee experience and customer prioritization are considered as the most important factors of Agile HR.

However, in the existing theories, it was observed that Agile tools such as Scrum and KanBan play an important role in Agile HR, but the results of the empirical and conceptual research showed that while these tools can bring transparency in the processes of product creation or solution, they are still not the most important element in Agile HR. The employees and HR can also work without these tools and can choose other approaches or tools, such as weekly meetings among the HR and the employees.

A company which is considering implementing Agile HR for the first time should start with small initiatives and slowly move away from traditional HR. The best introductory approach is to educate a small number of interested employees who are willing to take part in an experimental group. Then use their experiences in a small test project, giving the team the chance to refine their Agile approach in order to adapt it to their company's specific situation. Once they have completed at least one small Agile pilot project successfully (which may not be the first attempt), they can act as multiplicators (teachers) for most of their colleagues to foster a wider adoption of the concept. The next step is to take people from different departments and form a new Agile team. This will help to obtain the rest of the teams on board.

In conclusion, Agile HR can be very beneficial for companies and help them grow more efficiently if used in a right way with a right mindset. It does not have to be followed strictly, but everyone needs to put equal effort and keep an open mind to adapt to changes. To better understand the suggestions of these results, future studies could address Agile leadership, organizational transformation, challenges and downfalls of Agile HR and behavioral changes.

The researcher was able to expand her knowledge on the topic in-depth. As the researcher has strong interest in Agile and HR, this topic has helped her see various aspects when these both combined together. The researcher will advocate and implement Agile HR in whichever company she works. Hopefully this research will provide clear understanding on the topic to its readers as well.

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Appendices

Questionnaire for open-end interview

About Agile HR and its benefits

1. How would you shortly describe Agile HR with your own words?

    a. How do you think Agile HR improves the overall process of the company?

    b. E.g., what are the effects of Agile HR the environment of the company and the staff?

    c. According to the research till now, Agile in HR can be beneficial for the company. What are your thoughts on this statement? How can it be beneficial?

2. Just basic info about when the company started using Agile approaches in HR

    a. Has the company been Agile since you joined? If not, then when did the organization or HR decided to implement Agile in HR?

    b. What challenges did your company face while implementing Agile in HR? What was the most challenging part?

    c. How did the staff react, and did all departments agree with the decision?

3. Traditional and Agile HR

    a. What is the most significant difference between traditional and Agile HR from your own perspective and experience?

    b. Is your organization still using any traditional HR approaches along with Agile approaches?

    c. Waterfall approach is known to be one of the most famous approaches used in traditional HR, however, is it used in Agile HR as well?

    d. Is there any other hybrid approach combining Agile and traditional approaches?

4. Customer Prioritization

a. How does Agile HR stress its customer's prioritization in your company?

b. How much customer involvement is there in the journey of product making? (For product development-oriented companies only).

c. When a product is in the making, is it launched in one big go like waterfall approach, or is it broken down to smaller pieces and tested after each step involving the customer to check if its according to their desire? (For product development-oriented companies only).

5. People Management

a. Can you define your management style and how you engage with your team in more Agile way?

b. How can the employees be motivated in speeding the final product delivery or the tasks? Are there different ways to motivate different employee?

c. Does Agile HR make the office environment more welcoming and comfortable for the employee?

d. Are the conflicts between team members handled different in Agile HR than traditional HR?

6. Agile tools

a. How have you implemented tools like scrum and KanBan in Agile HR? What is the benefit of these tools?

7. Closing

a. In what ways do you think Agile in HR can help companies to succeed (key benefits)?

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