

Marrying Agile Project Management and Museum Curation

Processes: match made in heaven or an unlikely pair?

How are agile working methods, explicitly and consciously or implicitly and unconsciously, applied in the cultural sector, and specifically into the curating process in museums?



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- Mauritshuis
- Rijksmuseum
- Stedelijk Museum
- Teylers Museum
- Van Gogh Museum

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I hope that whoever reads this thesis will find it insightful, interesting and fun.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I have opted to include an executive summary, explaining the research in a concise though attractive manner, as all my respondents have indicated to be interested in the results of this thesis. This provides a quick insight into the research, the research method, results, and practical recommendations that I have developed for curators and museums.

Agile working is a way of doing project management. As I was interested in agile working methods, which are mainly developed and applied in contexts other than the cultural sector, I decided to investigate what agile could mean for the museum sector, specifically curation departments. I looked at the curation departments because I suspected that agile working is either already going on there (consciously or unconsciously) or that curating can benefit from (explicitly) applying agile working methods.

In the early phase of the research process, the questions I asked myself were: Is agile working already applied in the museum curation process? To what extent can agile working methods be applied, and if so, to what extent are they already applied? What is needed for these departments to adopt agile working methods to their practices? To find out, first, I occupied myself with becoming an expert on agile project management and the twelve principles that belong to agile working. After a period of immersing myself into academic and non-academic literature on agile working, the next step for me was to research museum curation processes. After exploring and comparing different museum curation models, reading museum handbooks and reports, I felt comfortable turning my academic, theoretical knowledge into practice.

I drafted an interview guide, contacted over 20 curators, of which 13 were so kind to be interviewed, and started my data collection phase. These thirteen interviews led to 744 minutes worth of interviews, recorded and transcribed, to sufficiently analyze this treasure of information. To facilitate my data collection (semi-structured interviews), I developed a thematic framework based on the 12 principles and three sets of propositions. This thematic framework can be found in table 2. Based on this framework, I have analyzed the empirical results that emerged from the interviews, which has led to the following conclusions.

The museum curation process still shows much semblance with the traditional project management format. However, most museums work project-based, and there are important agile enablers present that can facilitate the application of agile working in the museum sector. Also, some agile practices have already been adopted in the museum curation processes, though unconsciously. Especially within the themes of customer collaboration and responding to change, and partly the way teams collaborate, the museum curation processes already exercise agile practices. On the other hand, there is still work to do in terms of the internal processes in order to become more agile.

Throughout this research, I have noticed several challenges and trends in the sector. Challenges are lack of resources (time, personnel and money), neglected evaluation, and trying to

attract a more inclusive audience. Trends that I noted are the professionalization of the museum, a critical attitude towards blockbusters, and an increased audience focus. Several solutions to the challenges can be found within agile working. For example, lack of time and money could be partly resolved by making the curation processes more efficient, which agile working could facilitate. Also, several organizations indicated that they have the desire to reflect and evaluate more and have evaluation more institutionalized within their organization. As evaluation is an important part of agile working, agile project management could facilitate the wish for more evaluation among employees. Also, the customer-centricity of agile working could be convenient in museums' process of attracting a more diverse audience and becoming more inclusive.

My thesis is of practical relevance because I want to make agile working methods find an entry in the curatorial process, and of academic relevance, because I bring together a practice from the management literature with the systematic curatorial process (other literature). My recommendation to museums seeking to improve their curation processes is to seriously consider adopting agile working to their organization. Museums should not become 100% agile, but create their own way of doing agile project management, tailor-made to the sector.

ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, the concept of agile working has been gaining ground in a multitude of sectors, for example, banking, IT, healthcare and engineering. It is a project management method founded by seventeen software developers that works according to the Agile Manifesto, which entails twelve principles that guide teams in becoming more agile in their practices. Working agile has been successful in these different industries by improving flexibility, efficiency and customer satisfaction. Further interests arise as to how agile working can lend itself to the cultural sector. Specifically, the museum sector was opted to be studied in light of agile working, as museums are traditional, unwieldy institutions with few incentives for innovation, often resistant to change. Agile working, which enables flexibility and adaptation to change, could help museums become more adaptive to the challenges that are brought about by external shocks.

This research employs a qualitative research method, with the main research question as follows: *How are agile working methods, explicitly and consciously or implicitly and unconsciously, applied in the cultural sector, and specifically into the curating process in museums?* First, elaborate theoretical research on agile project management and the museum curation process has been conducted. From this research, a theoretical framework was developed, consisting of four themes - “customer collaboration”, “teamwork”, “internal processes” and “responding to change” - that aids in identifying agile enablers and agile principles within the museum curation process. In the next step, 13 semi-structured in-depth interviews were held with Dutch museum curators. The interviews were then analyzed via deductive coding according to the themes in the theoretical framework. The key results of this research are that even though museum curation processes still resemble much of the traditional project management method as described by Salameh (2014), there are several aspects of agile working to be noted in the museum curation process. Important enablers that facilitate the adoption of agile working to the curation process, such as multidisciplinary teams and the involvement of customers and stakeholders in the process, are present. Also, though unconsciously, several agile principles are already currently applied within the curation process, such as stakeholder collaboration and project teams being multidisciplinary. Furthermore, agile working could help museums handle some of the major challenges that they face.

Keywords: Agile, museums, curation process, exhibitions, customer collaboration, teamwork, internal processes, responding to change.

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Introduction

“... the Agile movement in software is part of a larger movement towards more humane and dynamic workplaces in the 21st century.”

(Hanouille et al., 2020).

In 2001, a group of seventeen scientists from different IT-related backgrounds gathered for a conference in Utah with the goal of elaborating a new method of developing IT (Beck et al., 2001). From this conference, the Agile Manifesto originated, explaining a new way of developing IT systems, including twelve principles to which organizations must adhere in order to be agile, or dexterous. These twelve principles outlined a number of values, centralizing the human perspective in the way projects should be managed (Beck et al., 2001).

‘Agile’ quickly became a way of doing project management, as agile methods are not just applicable in the IT sector, but they can be applied to all types of sectors and projects (Stare, 2013). Agile working is defined as a repetitive project management method that, in accordance with the twelve agile principles, enables teams to faster track and make changes in people, technology, and business (Cockburn, 2005). Customers across industries increasingly demand continuous innovation, and as a result, innovation and creativity are of high importance for organizational performance. Thus, companies are constantly searching for tools to facilitate innovation, speed and flexibility (Shin, Kim, Lee, & Bian, 2012; Highsmith, 2009). An agile way of working enables this flexibility, adaptability, and a quicker response to changes (Chong, Handscomb, Williams, Hall & Rooney, 2020). Research by McKinsey points out that agile working has served as a valuable method for a large number of organizations globally to withstand crises, such as the global pandemic of COVID-19 (Chong et al., 2020). Some even say that agile working is crucial for success in the 21st century (Bowles Jackson, 2012). An agile way of working has proven to result in more long-term operational resilience for organizations. This resilience enables faster decision-making capacities for the concerned organizations, making for a quicker adaptation to challenges (Chong et al., 2020).

During the past twenty years, agile working has been gaining ground in numerous sectors, from software to banking and from healthcare to aerospace engineering (Glazer, Dalton, Anderson, Konrad, & Shrum, 2008). This raises the question if agile working can be of importance in the cultural sector as well. While agile working methods have not been explicitly related to organizations and management in the cultural field, many practices in the curation process resemble the agile principles. Also, it is interesting to investigate the change-enabling practice of agile working in relation to the museum sector, a sector that is known to be traditional and relatively ‘slow’ to adapt (Simon, 2013). Recently, the pandemic has led to museums having to adapt to large changes, such as exhibitions that had to be postponed or developed in different (digital) formats. Also, museums had to rethink the way they handle their audience during the pandemic. This has gravely influenced the curation of these museum exhibitions, which form the core business of museums. Agile working,

enabling flexibility, and adaptation to change could help curators adapt to the challenges that radical external shocks, as well as less impactful external influences, bring about.

Studying agile working within the museum sector and specifically its curation departments is therefore of *practical relevance*, because this will provide insights into what agile working could mean for this field, whether the method brings opportunities or benefits to the sector, and whether cultural institutions should apply the method in their daily practices. Also, agile working enables a rather circular way of doing project management, while the current exhibition curation process shows resemblance with traditional project management, which is mostly linear (Salameh, 2014). The linearity of the curation process sometimes leads to a decreased ability to adapt to change, because in linear processes, an extensive and detailed planning is made before starting the project, from which deviation is difficult or undesired (Salameh, 2014). If museums gain insights into agile working methods, this could provoke a fundamental change in the current curation practice, as agile working could have museums better equipped to deal with expected changes and trends, such as those of digitization in museums, and new movements towards inclusive and sustainable offerings, which are expected after cultural life is re-launched in post-pandemic times. As agile working has proven to enable innovation in multiple sectors, this research could lead to interesting insights concerning innovation processes in museums.

This research is of *economic relevance* as well. The museum sector is of great importance, both culturally and economically. Economically, the Dutch museum sector turned over 1,1 billion euros in 2019, employing 42,000 people. The sector received 528 million euros in funding from the Dutch government in 2019 (Museumvereniging, 2020). There is thus common interest in the financial wellbeing of these institutions, and the efficient working with available budgets. The *academic relevance* of this research can be found in bringing the concept of agile working, which originates mostly in management and for-profit contexts, into the non-profit literature, and specifically that of museum management and curation, as there is limited research into agile working in the cultural sector, let alone in museums' curation practices.

Consequently, the main research question of this thesis is the following:

How are agile working methods, explicitly and consciously or implicitly and unconsciously, applied in the cultural sector, and specifically into the curating process in museums?

This thesis intends to explore curators' points of view on adopting agile practices to their working methods and the opportunities that agile working could bring to the museum sector, specifically related to the ways in which museum exhibitions are currently curated. In order to answer this research question, three sub-questions have been developed:

- I. *Which perceived enablers of agile project management are currently present in the curation practices?*

II. In which ways are the current curation practices in Dutch museums agile?

III. How can agile practices contribute to the curation process of Dutch museums?

For this research, a qualitative methodology has been chosen. An inductive approach was deemed most suitable, since the goal of this research is to build new insights and possibly theory on agile methods in the museum curation field. Thus, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 Dutch museum curators. The size of the research population was limited, and curators can be fairly difficult to reach out to due to their time constraints, but the amount of 13 curators - all of established museums - that were willing to be interviewed for this thesis indicates the interest or curiosity in the subject of agile working in the field of museum curation.

The thesis is structured as follows. In the theoretical framework, a literature review of the important concepts is provided. Agile working and museum curation processes are explained in this chapter, with help of theories on agile project management by Conforto, Salum, Amaral, da Silva and Manganine de Almeida (2014) and Highsmith (2004), and on curation processes by Dean (2002). I develop a framework for assessing the agility in curation processes, by structuring the agile principles into four themes - “customer collaboration”, “responding to change”, “internal processes”, and “responding to change” - that are relevant to museum curation processes. This framework is based on several propositions that form the foundation of the qualitative study. Also, I developed this structure to make the extensive work of literature surrounding the concept of agile more comprehensible. The methodology section is presented in chapter three, in which the research design, encompassing the research sample, data collection and data analysis methods are explained. Chapter four will elaborate on the empirical results, followed by the discussion of the findings in chapter five. This chapter will also present the limitations, implications of the results and recommendations for future research. Finally, the conclusion of this research can be found in chapter six.

2. Theoretical Framework

In order to address the research question, clarifying the concepts related to it is important. The key themes of this thesis are agile working and museum curation. In the following chapter, first, Agile Project Management is explained mostly on the basis of the work of Conforto *et al.* (2014) and Highsmith (2004). The twelve principles of ‘agility’ (Beck *et al.*, 2001) are structured into four themes: “customer collaboration”, “teamwork”, “internal processes”, and “responding to change”. Second, museum curation is explained in paragraph 2.2., making use of Dean’s (2002) model of the exhibition development stages, among other literature. Finally, in paragraph 2.3., the propositions that I developed are listed and explained.

2.1. Agile project management

Many different interpretations and definitions of agile exist, mainly in IT and in Project Management contexts. Agile practices can be applied to all types of sectors and projects, and should be used in any situation in which uncertainty is faced (Stare, 2013). They enable teams to deliver value to a firm’s customers in a quick and easy manner (The Agile Coach, 2020). As this thesis is focused on the managerial and organizational implications of agile working, it will consider agile from the perspective of project management in general, rather than the IT software development perspective. Jim Highsmith, one of the seventeen developers of the Agile Manifesto, defines agility as “the ability to both create and respond to change in order to profit in a turbulent business environment. Agility is the ability to balance flexibility and stability” (Highsmith, 2002, p. XXIII). Project management is defined by Kerzner (2003) as a process in which a company’s resources are planned, organized, directed and controlled, in order to achieve certain goals that are specifically defined for the concerned project. Agile Project Management is the application of the agile principles to the process of project management (Highsmith, 2009).

The process of agile product development is often described as a circular or iterative way of doing project management (Salameh, 2014; Borgman, 2017; Thesing, Feldmann, & Burchardt, 2021). In an agile way of working, the work is delivered in small bits, or sprints, which allows for more consumable steps in the process. The process involves continuous evaluation, enabling a faster response and adaptation to change (The Agile Coach, 2020). The contrary way of project management is a more traditional, linear, so-called waterfall-model with frequently high levels of bureaucracy and a focus on control (Salameh, 2014; Serrador & Pinto, 2015; Borgman, 2017). Salameh (2014) explains that in traditional project management, five phases are followed: initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, which makes it a linear process in which a detailed planning is drafted up-front. Conforto *et al.* (2014) have researched the applicableness of Agile Project Management to industries other than software development. In this research, a conceptual framework

that identifies enablers that are related to the agile project management approach is presented (Conforto et al., 2014).

Enablers, which are favorable conditions that allow for the effective application of agile project management practices, are identified in this framework (Conforto et al., 2014). Some of the enablers of agile project management identified by Conforto *et al.* (2014) that are deemed important for this research are included in table 1. The researcher has opted to include these specific enablers according to two criteria: they were among the ten enablers identified by Conforto *et al.* (2014) to be most frequently mentioned in the literature, and they are also best applicable to museum curation departments.

Enablers
Organizational structure type
Multidisciplinary project teams
Customer/stakeholder involvement in the product development process
Project team dedication
Project team size

Table 1: Agile Project Enablers identified by Conforto *et al.* (2014).

One of these enablers is “organizational structure type”, in which a project-oriented organizational structure is most suitable for the application of agile project management (Conforto et al., 2014). Within project-oriented organizations, most of the business is organized and carried out in projects (Hobday, 2000). “Multidisciplinary project teams” is another enabler for agile project management. According to Conforto *et al.* (2014), project teams are multidisciplinary if there are team members from (most of) the key departments in each team. “Customer/stakeholder involvement in the product development process” is another enabler, which is perceived to have positive effects such as an increased rate of innovation and time and cost reduction of the product development. Furthermore, “project team dedication” is an enabler that concerns the need for complete dedication of a project team on a certain project, and these team members not having to split their time over other projects. Conforto *et al.* (2014) designated that at least 76% of team members’ time should be dedicated to the concerned project, in order to enable agile project management, as this increases concentration and focus on the project, and improves creativity and interaction within the team. Lastly, “team size” is an important enabler to agile project management, as agile working prefers smaller teams, ranging from two to eight persons preferably (Conforto et al., 2014). Conforto *et al.* (2014) claim that the presence of some agile project management enablers indicates that there are opportunities for companies other than software or IT companies to adapt agile project management

to their processes. Therefore, the research by Conforto *et al.* (2014) connects well to the goal of this thesis of exploring possibilities of agile working for the museum sector.

2.1.1. Agile principles

The Agile Manifesto entails twelve agile principles that characterize agile project management, listed below (Beck et al., 2001).

1. *Satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery*
2. *Welcome changing requirements even late in the project*
3. *Deliver value frequently*
4. *Stakeholders and developers need to collaborate closely*
5. *Build projects around motivated individuals*
6. *Face-to-face meetings are the most effective way of communication*
7. *A final working product is the primary measure of progress/success*
8. *Maintain a sustainable working pace*
9. *Continuous excellence enhances agility*
10. *Simplicity is essential*
11. *Self-organizing teams generate most value*
12. *Regularly reflect and adjust your way of work to boost effectiveness*

(Stare, 2013).

Based on the literature, I developed a framework consisting of four themes under which the principles are categorized and logically ordered in table 2. These themes are: “customer collaboration”, “responding to change”, “internal processes”, and “responding to change”.

Theme	Agile Principle (Beck et al., 2001)	Keywords
1. Customer Collaboration	Satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery (1)	Customer satisfaction, continuous delivery, evaluation
	Stakeholders and developers need to collaborate closely (4)	Collaboration, stakeholders, involvement

	The final product is the primary measure of progress/success (7)	Customer satisfaction, measures of success, evaluation
2. Teamwork	Build projects around motivated individuals (5)	Motivation, team, individuals
	Face-to-face meetings are the most effective way of communication (6)	Communication, team, collaboration
	Self-organizing teams generate most value (11)	Self-organizing, autonomy, team, value, customer
	Regularly reflect and adjust your way of work to boost effectiveness (12)	Reflection, Evaluation, team, efficiency, effectiveness
3. Internal processes	Deliver value frequently (3)	Planning
	Maintain a sustainable working pace (8)	Working pace, workload, pressure
	Continuous excellence enhances agility (9)	Technical excellence, quality
	Simplicity is essential (10)	Simplicity, shorter cycles, sprints
4. Responsiveness to change	Welcome changing requirements even late in the project (2)	Change, adaptation, change management, reactivity

Table 2: The four themes developed by the researcher, with the belonging principles and keywords for identification. Between brackets are the numbers of the principles according to the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001).

The first theme that I identified is “customer collaboration” and entails the agile principles initially labeled one, four, and seven in the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001). This theme is focused on customer orientation and collaboration with the organization’s stakeholders, such as customers or funders. The first principle that belongs to this theme is **customer satisfaction**, which is one of the key priorities within agile project development (Buresh, 2008). Within agile practices, there is a constant focus on creating value for the customer and thus achieving customer satisfaction (Salameh, 2014; Beck et al., 2001). Customer satisfaction is defined as the total of affective evaluations that each customer showcases towards a certain product or service (Wicks & Roethlein, 2009). It is part of a

modern approach to doing business that aims for quality in business life, which serves the advancement of a customer-oriented culture and management, and it is an important performance indicator that helps in becoming more customer-oriented (Cengiz, 2010). As mentioned, early and continuous delivery adds to customer satisfaction. Hence this is important for companies when adopting agile practices. The second principle in the theme of customer collaboration is number four, which concerns the **need for collaboration between stakeholders and developers**. Customers are also stakeholders. Conforto *et al.* (2014) emphasize the fact that the active involvement of customers and stakeholders plays a key role in an agile management approach, as it increases the speed of innovation and ensures that no resources are unnecessarily invested in phenomena that are not desired by stakeholders. Collaboration can be defined as “a process of joint decision making among key stakeholders of a problem domain about the future of that domain” (Gray, 1989, p. 11). This definition of collaboration already incorporates stakeholders, which rules the definition applicable to this research. The essence of collaboration is that multiple parties share information and develop ideas together in order to produce a product or service (McKenna-Cress & Kamien, 2013). As McKenna-Cress and Kamien (2013) put it, collaboration demands a mutual commitment in which every person in the team pushes him or herself continually in order to develop their thinking, all working towards common goals. The seventh principle highlights the **final product as the measure of success**. This indicates that agile working entails a focus on results rather than on the process. The customer plays a key role in this because if the final product is not as expected by the customer, this can be seen as failure.

The second theme that I discern is “teamwork”, which concerns the people in the team and the way that teams work together. The Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001) states the importance of individuals and interaction over processes and tools, centralizing the human aspect and collaboration. Agile principles numbers five, six, eleven, and twelve belong to this theme. The fifth principle regards the building of projects around **motivated individuals**. Motivation within the workplace is defined as an array of both internal and external drivers that launch certain behavior and is seen as one of the related effects of commitment (Klein, Molloy, & Cooper, 2009). Conforto *et al.* (2014) also state team dedication to be an enabler of applying agile methods to a project. Within the cultural industries, there is considered to be a higher internal motivation among people to do their work (Frey, 2003). The presence of motivation is also important for the eleventh principle to be applied, which requires teams to be **self-organizing**. Hoda, Noble and Marshall (2010) state that a team is self-organizing if team members manage their own work and organize around the specifics of their tasks. This supposedly increases the team’s effectiveness, as a motivated team that organizes itself supposedly creates the most value for the customer (Hoda et al., 2010; Conforto et al., 2014). There often exist misconceptions on the concept of self-organization and the role of management in self-organized teams, such as that self-organized teams are uncontrolled. This needs to be nuanced, as Hoda *et al.* (2010) state that in self-organizing teams, management provides subtle control and direction, opposed

to centralized management that is seen in traditional project management methods. Autonomy is a keyword in self-organizing teams (Takeuchi & Nonaka, 1986). The sixth principle regards the communication method within the team, specifically the efficiency of **face-to-face communication** and its preference over other communication methods. Salis and Williams (2010) have found a positive association between face-to-face communication and labour productivity, resulting in increased efficiency due to face-to-face communication. The twelfth and final principle is the required regular **reflection and evaluation** (Beck et al., 2001). This reflection and evaluation takes place both within the team as with the customers, which in this research are visitors of the museums.

The third theme that I developed concerns the “internal processes” of the project development. I - Under the umbrella of this theme - brought together several preconditions to sufficient agile practices. Agile principles three, eight, nine, and ten belong to this theme. The third principle centralizes **frequent value delivery**. While frequent is a relative term, within agile working, shorter timeframes are always preferred over longer ones. This can differ from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, depending on the organization and what it has agreed on (Beck et al., 2001). The goal of this principle is to diminish the size of a batch of work, which enables teams to adapt to sudden changes more easily. The eighth principle stresses the importance of maintaining a **sustainable working pace**. This principle articulates the importance of working pace instead of working hours. Working pace and working hours are both quantitative demands, the first measuring the intensity of work and the second one measuring the number of working hours (Kristensen, Bjorner, Christensen & Borg, 2004). Within agile working, it is believed that working longer hours does not necessarily lead to more productivity, but that a working pace needs to be found that employees can sustain (Beck et al., 2001). Principle nine concerns the continuous **technical excellence** that enhances agility, meaning that on the one hand, the technical support systems should be in order at all times to ensure agility, and on the other hand that team members should be continuously focused on improving and achieving excellence (Highsmith, 2004). Principle ten centralizes **simplicity**. Practically, this comes down to a desire for simple approaches, as these are perceived to be easier to change and to add to (Beck et al., 2001).

The final theme consists of the important concept of change. Responding to change is one of the main goals of agile working. The second principle, **welcoming changing requirements even late in the project**, can be applied in several situations, such as changing needs by customers or when a shift in the competitive landscape occurs. Highsmith (2009) claims that an agile leader focuses on adjusting to change, while the more traditional project managers focus mainly on adhering to a preset plan, incorporating as few changes as possible. Berstene (2014) calls resiliency the key to embracing change and defines resiliency as “the ability to deal with large amounts of disruptive change while remaining effective and productive” (Berstene, 2014, p. 39). Therefore, responsiveness to change was designated a separate theme within the framework that was developed in this research.

The researcher overarched all of the twelve principles into these four umbrella themes that structure them in a more comprehensible manner. This was desired as the largest part of the literature on agile is written by and for software developers, which means that jargon is an issue (Denning, 2018). A much-heard difficulty in adapting agile project management in non-software industries is the exceptional amount of jargon and ‘management terms’, such as ‘scrum’, ‘value delivery’ and the term ‘agile’ itself, that might seem incomprehensible, confusing, or overwhelming for those people that are not in the IT or management business (Denning, 2018). Therefore, overarching the twelve principles into four themes will make the reading of this research more productive and pleasant.

2.2. Museum curation

As this thesis seeks to investigate agile working in relation to the museum curation process, the following paragraphs explain what curatorship is, particularly in the context of museums.

2.2.1. Museums and curatorship

Museums are permanent, public and educational institutions that systematically care for and display collections (Burcaw, 1975). They are highly dominant flagship institutions within our cultural landscape, constructing our presumptions of the past and of ourselves (Marstine, 2008). The ICOM Statutes have defined museums as follows: “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM, 2017, p. 3). Museums collect, preserve and research objects and display them publicly, which is a conception of the museum that is historically Western and is widely adopted around the world (Dean, 2002; Campbell & Baars, 2019). However, no two museums are the same and this is why Frey and Meier (2006) categorize museums based on four criteria: content, size, age, and institutional form. In terms of content, museums may accommodate art, historical artifacts, scientific objects or other specific artifacts. The size and age of museums vary greatly, also in the Dutch museum landscape. Furthermore, the institutional form may vary, though the largest part of European museums is public, corresponding with the make-up of the Dutch museum landscape (Frey & Meier, 2006). The role of museums has developed over the years: from the second half of the twentieth century, museums have evolved into versatile organizations with multiple facets, dimensions and purposes (Dean, 2002). For the last two decades, museums are in competition with other leisure activities, as museum visiting is an optional activity for the largest part of people in society (Dean, 2002; Frey & Meier, 2006).

According to Simon (2013), museums are relatively slow to adapt and not always keen on changing their processes and activities. There are several reasons for museums to be resistant to change. For one, most museums are non-profit, which leads to a lack of incentives for innovation

(Simon, 2013). This lack of incentives for innovation is explained by Frey (2000): public museums receive a large amount of funding, and any possible profits are absorbed while deficits are often financed. Moreover, museums often deal with a large amount of bureaucracy which could possibly hinder plans for change (Frey, 2000). Also, there is little call from the public for the museum to achieve its mission, and they often find themselves in monopolistic environments (Simon, 2013). Furthermore, Frey (2000) has criticized the museum culture for being too much focused on its own staff instead of on the public. These characteristics have contributed to a so-called “deficiency for innovation” in museums (Simon, 2013).

Museum exhibitions, permanent or temporary, are the end product of an often lengthy process in which a large variety of linked activities and procedures are executed (Herreman, 2004). Herreman (2004) adds to this that it is important for exhibitions to be thoroughly planned, scheduled and budgeted. These activities are equally important as the design of the exhibition itself. Exhibition development teams often consist of, but are not confined to, several key players, such as project managers, designers, exhibition developers and curators (Herreman, 2004; Smithsonian, 2018). A traditional definition of curators is provided by Horie (1986), who states that curators are “the custodians and officers in charge of a museum” (Horie, 1986, p. 267). Horie (1986) has identified the most important roles of curators as those of a scientist and a scholar, which should come even before caring for the museum collection. The caring aspect is entwined into curation practices, as the term “curator” originated from the Latin verb *curare*, which translates into “to care” (Marstine, 2008). Curators make decisions on a large variety of aspects, such as mission statements, architecture, acquisitions, cataloguing, exhibitions, conservation, education, security and reproduction (Marstine, 2008). They are learned people, often experts in a specific area and/or museum studies and curatorship (Campbell & Baars, 2019). In the development of a curation strategy, the local contexts and needs of the museum collection are taken into account (Campbell & Baars, 2019). All of the curators’ decisions influence the way objects are understood by the public. According to Marstine (2008), this leads to the invalidation of the neutral role that some might assume museums to play, as their narrative is formed by an institutional, authoritative tone. The curators can be seen as part of this non-neutral narrative, as their decisions are subjective (Marstine, 2008).

However, the scope of a curator’s responsibilities varies per institution, depending on the size and organization of the museum. In the past, museum directors were often also scholars and curated exhibitions themselves. Nowadays, the director of the museum is in charge of the business affairs of the museum, and he or she is above the curator(s); curators often report directly to the director (Hewison, 2017). Also, in museums, traditionally, curation is the practice of doing research, managing collections of art and/or artifacts, and developing the exhibitions (Horie, 1986; The Art Career, n.d.). It is clear that there is a distinction between the theoretical research tasks and the more practical managerial tasks, between the scholar-curator and the manager-curator. Curation practices have seen considerable changes over the past decades, as many of the managing tasks within traditional museum

curation - manager-curator tasks - have been taken over by project managers and administrators. Now, many museums assign the managerial tasks of museum curation practices to professional project managers instead of assigning the full project to the curator (Viau-Courville & Roethlein, 2017). However, there are still some museums that have retained the traditional task distribution in which the curator is in charge of the full spectrum of both managerial and scholarly tasks.

The definition of what a curator is and what his or her tasks are is thus context-dependent and will be unique for each organization that is studied in this research. However, the general working definition that I apply here in this research is that curators are *the caretakers of collections and developers of exhibitions, with or without a broader scope of responsibilities on the organizational level.*

2.2.2. Exhibition Development

Museums have embraced a business methodology to plan the creation of an exhibition, outlining the process with phases and subordinate phases (Dean, 2002). Typical of these projects is the limited timeframe to plan, develop and execute the exhibition, and their cyclical nature. The latter means that the projects start from the emergence of ideas generated from past activities, and at the end, the project generates new approaches and ideas for future projects.

The preparation and development of museum exhibitions, which are main curation tasks, is a complicated discipline in which multiple skills are required to facilitate each phase (Dean, 2002). There are several exhibition development models. The Smithsonian Museum has developed an exhibition development process model with certain phases, being the interpretive masterplan, followed by the concept design, schematic design, design development and the final design (Smithsonian, 2018). Dean (2002) has also developed a model for exhibition development. This order is as follows: a conceptual phase in which the gathering of ideas takes place, a developmental phase which consists of a planning stage and a production stage, a functional phase consisting of an operational stage and a terminating stage, and finally, an assessment phase in which evaluation and assessment of the exhibition and process takes place (figure 1). Dean (2002) states that this order of events and efforts that are followed for the production of an exhibition has become widely accepted and universal. Dean's (2002) model resembles the Smithsonian's model (2018) but is more elaborate. Also, Dean's (2002) model, although almost two decades old, has been affirmed to still be a relevant source of information on the museum exhibition process (Spock, 2015). Therefore, I will use Dean's (2002) model in this thesis.

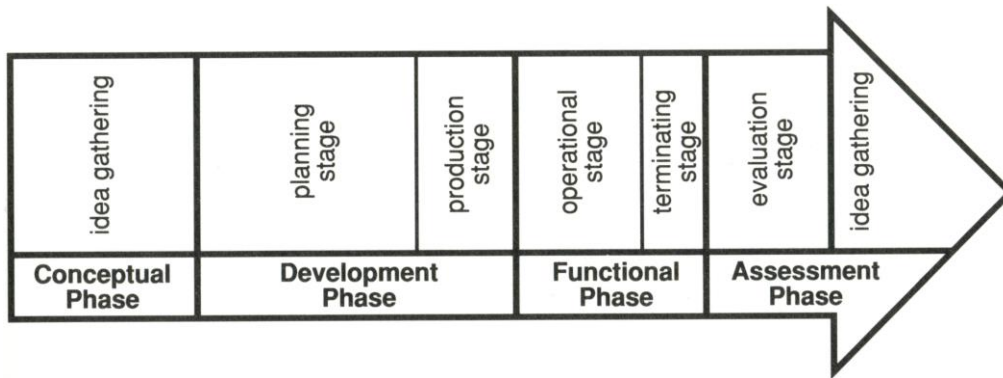


Figure 1: The Museum exhibition development model by Dean (2002)

2.3. Propositions

Based on the literature review, I developed a number of propositions, which serve as the basis for the qualitative study. A series of propositions will address the expected similarities between agile working and Dean's (2002) exhibition development model. A second set of propositions regards the expected differences between agile working and the exhibition development model. A third set of propositions concerns the enablers of agile project management expected to be found in empirical results.

2.3.1. Proposition set I: expected similarities between agile working and museum curation

What can be observed by studying the literature on both agile working and museum curatorship is that the museum exhibition process already seems to require some aspects of agile working. For example, agile working is a project management method, and the creation of exhibitions lends itself eminently for project-based working. Therefore, the first set of propositions to be derived from the literature is about several aspects of agile working that are naturally incorporated in the curating process of exhibitions. Thus, the following propositions have been developed below. Proposition 1a., which assumes that collaboration with stakeholders occurs within the curation process, arose from the fact that there are many different stakeholders that need to be included and/or collaborated with in the exhibition process (Garcia, 2017). Proposition 1b., proposing that in museum departments, highly motivated individuals are employed, came from literature by Frey (2003), who stated that employees in the cultural sector are strongly intrinsically motivated for their profession. Proposition 1c., assuming that final exhibitions are the main measure of success, originated from the statement by Zorloni (2010) that artistic quality and the quality of the collection and exhibition are the most important measures of success for museums.

1a. Within the curating process, collaboration with stakeholders takes place.

1b. Within the curating department, highly motivated individuals are at work.

1c. The final exhibition is the prime measure of success for the museum.

The empirical research will focus on retrieving information of respondents on whether these agile working principles are incorporated in their, and in more general, museum curation practice.

2.3.2. Proposition set II: expected differences between agile and museum curation

Dean (2002) describes the museum exhibition process as linear, with clear beginnings that emerged from ideas that emanated from previous activities. This shows similarities with the traditional project management approach described by Salameh (2014), opposed to agile working, which has been identified as a more circular process in which continuous reflection and evaluation “fade out” the beginnings and endings of the project (Denning, 2018). Therefore, the second set of propositions to be derived from the literature is that the museum exhibition development process lacks several of the criteria for agile working that are posed in the twelve principles. This set of propositions also originated after comparing the twelve principles to the curating practices described in the literature. Based on Horie’s (1986) description of the main role of a curator being a scientist or scholar, proposition 2a., on customer satisfaction as not being the main motivation for curators, came to be. It can be assumed that museum curation practices, the artistic practices, the artistic content, the personal style or ambitions of the curator, and/or the mission of a museum predominate customers’ satisfaction, though. Furthermore, the fact that museums are slow and even resistant to change, as for example Simon (2013) describes, gave rise to proposition 2b., on change not being welcomed continuously throughout the curating process. Proposition 2c., denying frequent value delivery during the curation process, came from Dean’s (2002) exhibition model, in which a preset order is presented in drafting exhibitions. Marstine’s (2008) reference to the authoritative, institutional way in which many museums communicate with their audience, which does not seem to allow for opinions from laymen, gave rise to proposition 2d. on evaluation. Proposition 2e., on a non-sustainable working pace in curating departments, has been drafted on the basis of reports of the Dutch Museum Association that highlight that museum employees experience high pressure at work (Museumvereniging, 2018).

2a. Customer satisfaction is not the main driver of the curators.

2b. Change is not particularly welcomed throughout the curating process.

2c. Frequent value delivery does not take place during the curation process: instead, the finished exhibition is shown in the end.

2d. Evaluation takes place mostly within the team, rather than with and by the public.

2e. Curators do not experience a sustainable working pace.

The empirical research will focus on retrieving information of interviewees on whether these agile working principles are incorporated in museum practices.

2.3.3. Proposition set III: Agile project management enablers

The third set of propositions that the researcher has identified revolves around the enablers of agile project management, which originated from the literature by Conforto *et al.* (2014). Several of the enablers mentioned by Conforto *et al.* (2014) showed resemblance with the literature on museum curation processes. Therefore, the following propositions were developed. Exhibition teams often exist of people from different departments, and these project teams are often multidisciplinary, as supported by Herreman (2004) and the Smithsonian (2018). This gave rise to proposition 3a., on exhibition teams being multidisciplinary. Proposition 3b., on customer and stakeholder involvement, is supported by literature by Marstine (2008) and ICOM (2017), which established the important role museums play in our cultural landscape and to the public. A side note needs to be placed here though, as within the arts, and also the museum sector, autonomy is highly valued, and any suggestions that could compromise autonomy are often critically viewed by the cultural sector (Abbing, 2008). Proposition 3c., on the organizational structure of museums being project-oriented, is endorsed in literature by Dean (2002), which designates museums to work project-based, in accordance with Hobday's (2000) definition of project-based organizations. Proposition 3d. builds onto that, assuming that because of the project-based structure of museums, teams are able to dedicate most of their time to one project. Finally, proposition 3e., on team size, is supported by the Dutch Museum Association, which outlined the number of people that work at museums, giving rise to the assumption that museums occupy small teams in drafting their exhibitions (Museumvereniging, 2018). This is also preferred by the agile literature.

3a. Exhibition project teams are multidisciplinary teams.

3b. Customers and/or stakeholders are involved in the development of exhibitions.

3c. The organizational structure of museums is project-oriented.

3d. Exhibition project teams dedicate most of their time to one project.

3e. The team size of exhibition project teams enables agile working.

The empirical results will indicate whether these agile project management enablers are indeed present within the Dutch museum curation departments.

3. Methods

In the third chapter, the methodology of this thesis is presented. The structure of this chapter is as follows: first, the chosen research approach will be defined and explained. Second, the choice of the research sample is justified. Then, the manner of data collection is discussed, followed by the development of the interview guide. Section 3.4 explains the data analysis, accompanied by the coding framework used. Furthermore, the validity and reliability of this thesis are argued for.

3.1 Research approach and design

In this thesis, the opinions of and experiences with agile working of Dutch museum curators are researched. As agile working comes with a complex set of definitions, interpreted in various ways and applied to a diversity of sectors, albeit not the cultural sector, it demands a design that offers the opportunity to discuss a broad range of topics in-depth. The interview questions are focused on rather complicated and refined themes such as inter-team collaboration, motivation and evaluation, which are all social processes that are best analyzed through qualitative research methods (Neuman, 2011). Therefore, it was decided that a qualitative research method is appropriate. This allows the researcher to conduct inductive research and to develop a theory on agile working in relation to curation practices. Qualitative research allows for a more in-depth understanding of the topic through the eyes of curators, which will aid in answering the main research question (Bryman, 2016).

The qualitative data collection method that was opted for is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to explore respondents' lived experience in relation to the theoretical variables of interest (Galletta, 2013). This allows for the collection of specific, in-depth information. Also, semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in posing questions and possible follow-up questions and ensure a natural conversational flow in the interview. The downside of semi-structured interviewing though, is that this reduces comparability, as no interview is exactly the same (Bryman, 2016). Reliability and validity are of vital importance in qualitative research, as the researcher's subjectivity can possibly distort data interpretation (Brink, 1993). The role of the researcher is crucial within this qualitative research, as, among other things, her art historical background could influence the way questions are asked or answers are analyzed, but also provided a firm knowledge base to ask pertinent questions.

Within these interviews, the four themes that are developed by the researcher are discussed. The combination and comparison of these themes will lead to an answer to the research question. The main research question is as follows: *How are agile working methods, explicitly and consciously, or implicitly and unconsciously, applied in the cultural sector, and specifically the curating process in museums?*

3.2. Research sample

This thesis employs a qualitative research method, and thus it is necessary to investigate a specific research sample in order to meet the standards for qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). The units of analysis are curators of Dutch museums, which have been targeted through purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling enables the selection of units of analysis that are directly related to the main research question (Bryman, 2016). Purposive sampling is a non-probability type of sampling in which participants are gathered in such a way that they are relevant to the research question. This sampling method aids in having the research questions answered. The downside of purposive sampling though is that it does not allow for the generalization of the research to a broader population (Bryman, 2016). The inclusion criteria that were chosen for the research sample were that participants must be curator by profession and/or have experience in exhibition curation within a Dutch museum. This makes them “experts” in the field of museum curation, and therefore this professional scope was deemed the most relevant source of information on museum curation. The geographical scope of one country (the Netherlands) has been opted for as this simplifies the comparison of insights and experiences by the participants in the sample, which will allow for higher reliability of the results (Brink, 1993). Also, the researcher’s familiarity with the Dutch museum sector due to her art historical background from another Dutch university is convenient for the research. The researcher has further employed snowball sampling in order to gain more participants, by asking participants whether they knew other curators with interest to participate in this research. The advantage of this technique is that it is highly convenient and efficient in gathering respondents (Bryman, 2016). The disadvantage of snowball sampling though is that its representativeness of the population is questionable (Bryman, 2016). However, as this research is solely focused on interviewing experts in the field of museum curation, and considering that the entire population of professional Dutch curators is fairly small, as even larger museums only have a few curators each, and potential respondents were expected to be rather difficult to reach out to due to their limited available time, snowball sampling was ruled admissible by the researcher. Note well, the Rijksmuseum is an exception to the rule, employing approximately 30 curators (Respondent 5, personal communication, May 5, 2021).

In terms of the museums that these curators work for - the list can be found in table 3 - or have their work experience with, only not-for-profit Dutch museums were selected in order to make the answers of the interviewees more comparable.

Institution	Location
Boijmans van Beuningen	Rotterdam
Bonnefantenmuseum	Maastricht
De Lakenhal	Leiden
Fries Museum	Leeuwarden
Hermitage	Amsterdam
Kunsthal	Rotterdam
Kunstmuseum	The Hague
Mauritshuis	The Hague
Rijksmuseum*	Amsterdam
Stedelijk Museum	Amsterdam
Teylers Museum	Haarlem
Van Gogh Museum	Amsterdam

Table 3: The museums studied in this research, alphabetically ordered. For privacy reasons, the researcher has opted not to have the order coincide with the respondent numbers in table 4. The Rijksmuseum is provided with an asterisk (*), as two of the respondents interviewed are currently employed there.

A deliberate distinction was made by the researcher between not-for-profit and for-profit museums, as these organizations serve different purposes and differ in incentives for innovation. The decision to only research not-for-profit museums emerged from the research objective of finding out what agile working could mean for the not-for-profit sector because of the earlier-mentioned lack of knowledge that exists on agile working in the non-profit, cultural sector. Also, the fact that not-for-profit museums have fewer incentive for innovation played a role in this decision, as the comparison with the innovative practice of agile project management could result in highly interesting outcomes and more relevant recommendations for practice. Further criteria for the selection of museums proposed by Frey and Meier (2006) are size and content. Size has been taken into account, as only medium to large-sized museums are studied in this research, in order to increase comparability of the empirical results. However, size is not a distinguishing variable in this research because most curating departments of museums, small or large, consist of no more than ten people. Lastly, content was considered less relevant because it is assumed to not be of such great influence in the practical side of the curation process, besides that an important criterion is that they need to make or have made temporary exhibitions (which does not mean that I will not take these distinctions into account during the phase of data analysis). The actual sample eventually existed mainly out of art and crafts museums, which is unintentional but suspected to have resulted from the snowball sampling method. There is a minor distinction to be made between modern art museums and more art historically

oriented museums since each topic deals with different stakeholders, as discussed in the theoretical framework.

Respondent	Function	Years experience (approximation)
Respondent 1	Curator in Training	1 year
Respondent 2	Senior Curator	10 years
Respondent 3	Curator	30 years
Respondent 4	Curator	34 years
Respondent 5	Curator, head of exhibitions	29 years
Respondent 6	Curator	12 years
Respondent 7	Assistant Curator	2 years
Respondent 8	Curator	7 years
Respondent 9	Curator, head of a department	34 years
Respondent 10	Curator	20 years
Respondent 11	Curator	24 years
Respondent 12	Head curator	12,5 years
Respondent 13	Curator	18 years

Table 4: Respondent information

3.3 Data collection

The data collection method in this thesis is the semi-structured interview. For conducting semi-structured interviews, an interview protocol was developed. This included open-ended interview questions, holding in mind the possibility of asking additional clarifying questions during the actual interview. A number of at least ten interviews is needed in order to derive valid and reliable results, according to the methodological guidelines set by the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (Fokkema & De Vries, 2020). In total, 13 semi-structured interviews have been conducted between April 10th, 2021, and May 25th, 2021. All respondents but two were (senior) curators, the other two were junior curators, and their experience ranged from at least one year to 34 years. Eight curators were female, and the other five were male. All respondents were Dutch and had an educational background in the arts and cultural field, such as art history or museum studies. The curators all but two worked for different museums, with annual visitor numbers ranging from 65.000

to 2.700.000 (2019), all medium to large-sized museums, according to the Dutch museum landscape (Museumvereniging, 2020).

Ten interviews took place via Zoom, two via Microsoft Teams, and one through telephone, according to the preference of the interviewee. Though there are inconveniences related to solely conducting interviews online or through phone, such as the possibility of being interrupted by connection problems and information getting lost by lack of “real-life” contact, the COVID-19-related restrictions did not allow for in-person meetings. The advantages of conducting these interviews online however were, for example, that travel expenses decreased and a more efficient, less time-consuming data collection period was possible. Every interview was conducted in Dutch, as all respondents were Dutch or Dutch-speaking, so information would not go lost in translation. Each respondent was contacted through email, either via the personal network of the researcher or via museum websites and LinkedIn messages sent by the researcher. Appointments were scheduled for each interview, and the upfront estimated time of each interview is 45 minutes to an hour, depending on the availability of the interviewees. Before starting the interview, respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the research and that their answers would be anonymized. Also, respondents were notified of the Informed Consent form for agreeing with the research procedure and treatment of their data on recordings, that each respondent was asked to sign.

The structure of the interview guide is as follows: first, practical matters are discussed, such as the informed consent form issued by Erasmus University, permission to record, and the use of collected data, followed by a short introduction of first the researcher and then the interviewee; who they are, their education, previous experience and current occupation were discussed here. Then, the topic of agile working was shortly introduced by the researcher. After that, the researcher posed questions on the curation process, asking, for example, how curators generally start a curation project, how many people are involved and how much time goes into planning an exhibition. The next part of the interview guide was developed by the researcher in such a way that the twelve principles, explained in the theoretical framework, are categorized into four themes. Explaining these concepts helps gaining insights into them, and structuring them has helped in translating them to interview questions that can extract valuable information from the interviewees. The twelve principles and the themes they were assigned to have thus functioned as a starting point for the interview guide. For example, for the theme “customer collaboration”, the researcher asked about whether and how the stakeholders generally are involved in creating an exhibition, the role of customers in this process, and the way evaluation is done. Then, the theme “teamwork” involved questions concerning the preferred communication style and the motivation of the individuals in the team. The theme “internal processes” was addressed by asking questions on interim disclosures of the exhibition and on possible problems that the curators often face in the process. The final theme, “responding to change”, entailed the question of how curators handle certain changes within the process. Furthermore, the framework provided by Conforto *et al.* (2014), including the enablers and practices of agile project management

in non-software industries, has been used to develop questions in order to find out what enablers are present in curation practices. Questions on these enablers were, for example, the make-up of the teams in which curators work: whether they are generally multidisciplinary and how many people are in the team.

The interview guide was developed in an iterative way: after a first draft of the interview guide was developed, an exploratory interview was conducted with a curator-in-training from the researcher's personal network in order to test the interview questions and to explore whether there were any flaws, vagueness or ambiguity in the questions. After this interview, the interview guide was slightly adapted in terms of structure, and more questions were added to the list. The final interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

The upfront-determined structure of the interview guide has allowed the researcher to ask questions in a structured manner while retaining a conversational flow to the interviews. Respondents indicated to have found the interviews pleasant and interesting, which confirms the interview guide's suitability for the sample group. However, some respondents initially encountered difficulties with some of the questions, specifically when talking about concepts such as 'stakeholders'. The researcher has attempted to dissolve these difficulties by translating these concepts into Dutch and providing a small explanation while making sure not to influence the answers of respondents.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data for this research consists of qualitative content collected through the semi-structured interviews conducted with 13 curators. Each interview was, with the permission of the interviewee, recorded. This recording was then manually transcribed verbatim, using transcription software Transcribe by Wreally, allowing for thorough analysis. In order to analyze all the empirical data that was collected from the interviews, thematic analysis is conducted. This allowed the researcher to go through the gathered data in a structured manner while determining patterns and recurring themes. Thematic analysis is concerned with identifying and analyzing themes and is considered an extensively suitable method for analyzing data in exploratory research (Herzog, Handke, & Hitters, 2019). Furthermore, thematic analysis is useful in the analysis of experiences, perceptions and understandings and was therefore deemed highly applicable to this research (Herzog et al., 2019). The themes that were analyzed are: "customer collaboration", "teamwork", "internal processes", and "responding to change", each described in the theoretical framework. Also, within the empirical data, the researcher has searched for indications for the presence of Conforto *et al.*'s (2014) enablers.

Braun and Clarke (2006) developed a six-step plan for thematic analysis, which is adopted within this research. These six steps entail familiarization with the data, coding, the generation of initial themes, reviewing these themes, defining and naming these themes, and writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, conducting the interviews and transcribing them manually made the

immersion in the data collected possible. Then, coding, a central tool in thematic analysis, took place (Herzog et al., 2019). The researcher has opted for a deductive, or concept-driven coding approach, which allows for basing the applied codes on previous knowledge (Scott, Sims, Degeling, Carter, & Thomas, 2018). The decision for deductive coding has been made as this allowed for the predefining of codes belonging to the developed themes of “customer collaboration”, “teamwork”, “internal processes”, and “responding to change”. The deductive coding framework developed for this research was based on a deductive coding framework that Scott *et al.* (2018) used. The coding framework can be found in table 5 below. The structure of this coding framework is according to the agile framework that was developed within the theoretical framework and is as follows: each theme and the elements that belong to them are listed. Then, the column ‘explanation’ entails the researcher’s explanation of the concerning agile element when adopted to the museum curation process, based on the well-informed judgement of the researcher. Columns 4 and 5 entail the operationalization of the element and example quotes to indicate how the researcher has identified the elements in the empirical results.

Theme	Element	Explanation	Operationalization	Example quote
Customer collaboration	Customer satisfaction	Do the curators take customer satisfaction into account when making their exhibitions, and to what extent do the opinions of the public matter.	<i>Kunt u mij vertellen over hoe klanttevredenheid in gedachten wordt gehouden bij het maken van tentoonstellingen?</i>	<i>“What has now penetrated museums is the ideas of adapting to circumstances, taking stakeholders into account, listening to visitors and connected partners are something positive.” (Respondent 11)</i>
	Stakeholder collaboration	Which are the important stakeholders involved in the process and what role do they have; active or passive.	<i>Kunt u mij vertellen over de stakeholders waar jullie mee te maken hebben bij het maken van tentoonstellingen?</i>	<i>“You may have a particular exhibition being funded by a private individual, for example, but they have no input into the content. Stakeholders are the lenders, who may have requirements for how their work is presented or treated” (Respondent 7)</i>
	Final product as the measure of success	What decides the successfulness of an exhibition.	<i>Is dat ook een maatstaf om het succes van een tentoonstelling mee te meten?</i>	<i>Not the only thing, but if you invest very much in a very big exhibition, with a lot of money, and people don't come, that is obviously a problem. So goals are set for that though. (Respondent 11)</i>

Teamwork	Motivation	How motivated are museum employees, and what is their motivation.	<i>Wat is de motivatie van uw collega's?</i>	<i>"Yeah, that is always really high. People are super happy that they get to work there. Everyone is hugely motivated."</i> (Respondent 11)
	Face-to-face communication	What is the preferred communication method within the organization.	<i>Wat is de geprefereerde communicatiemethode?</i>	<i>"Preferably, in any way, I think 1-to-1, face-to-face, not through Teams or Zoom."</i> (Respondent 12)
	Self-organizing teams	Who is in charge of the decision-making within the project team, or is there a lot of influence from outside or higher up.	<i>Hoe worden de planningen opgesteld? Wie bepaalt de doelen? Wie is betrokken bij het bedenken van een onderwerp?</i>	<i>"So as a curator you actually work for the project manager. So you also listen to what that person says, who also determines the planning, who determines the budget, and who therefore also manages it."</i> (Respondent 1)
	Regular reflection	Do teams evaluate, how often, when do they evaluate, and do they want to evaluate more.	<i>Kunt u mij wat meer vertellen over de evaluatie binnen uw team?</i>	<i>"But we do have, when the exhibition is running, after the first weekend, after the first week, and then after a month, an evaluation about the logistics but also about the content."</i> (Respondent 5)
Internal processes	Deliver value frequently	Is value delivered frequently or only at the end of the creation process.	<i>Worden tussentijds al delen/elementen van de tentoonstellingen onthuld/opengesteld?</i>	<i>"In fact, they are often very strict, you also often sign, at least I had to actually sign a consent form as a curator in training. So no, they're very strict on, you're not actually allowed to bring anything out."</i> (Respondent 1)
	Sustainable working pace	Do the respondents experience a lot of working pressure, how many hours do they work, what do they think of the hours.	<i>Wat vindt u van de werkdruk?</i>	<i>"Pretty high, high workload. The curator puts in by far the most hours."</i> (Respondent 7)
	Continuous excellence	What can be improved in the organization.	<i>Als u kijkt naar het curatieproces van tentoonstellingen, wat zou</i>	<i>"I think that can, that can be better. Undeniably, that could be better."</i>

			<i>dan nog beter kunnen?</i>	(Respondent 9)
	Simplicity	Are the steps in the process simplified into smaller, more feasible steps.	<i>Binnen agile werken wordt werk verdeeld in kortere sprints, klinkt dat bekend?</i>	<i>“I once made that [sheet] for the largest, most complicated, most extensive exhibition, I also did it in steps”</i> (Respondent 2)
Responsive-ness to change	Welcome changing requirements	What changes do respondents come across during the creation process of exhibitions and how do they handle them.	<i>Hoe gaan jullie om met veranderingen die langskomen tijdens het proces?</i>	<i>“Again, because we make so many of them [exhibitions], it's not possible for us to have an exhibition completely fixed from A-Z months in advance. I notice that this is becoming more and more the standard.”</i> (Respondent 8)

Table 5: Deductive coding framework

Then, the final phase of thematic analysis entails the actual writing of the results, after all preceding steps are completed. During this writing phase, the researcher translated each Dutch interview quote into English and inserted these translations into the body of text.

4. Findings

In this chapter, the findings of the interviews are presented. In total, 13 museum curators were interviewed, which led to an amount of 744 minutes in interviews. The interview duration ranges from 42 to 75 minutes, with an average of approximately 57 minutes per respondent. All interviews are transcribed manually and then thematically analyzed by the researcher. The results chapter is structured per theme, starting with agile, followed by the enablers of agile project management, after which the four themes of “customer collaboration”, “teamwork”, “internal processes”, and “responding to change” come.

4.1. Curation process

Dean (2002) developed an exhibition development model which, though almost twenty years old, still applies to museum curation practices today. The empirical evidence found in this research supports this. The process of museum curation mirrors, in line with what was expected based on the literature, the format of Traditional Project Management as provided by Salameh (2014). This can be concluded considering the linearity of museum curation processes, which is described by all of the respondents, the separate phases that are passed through according to the model, and the fact that at the beginning of the process, often, extensive and elaborate plannings are made. The phases of Dean’s (2002) model resemble the phases of Salameh’s (2014) model, which is illustrated in table 7, comparing the two models.

Dean (2002)	Salameh (2014)
Conceptual phase	Initiating phase
Development phase (planning stage and production stage)	Planning phase
Functional phase (operational stage and terminating stage)	Executing phase
Assessment phase (evaluation stage and idea gathering)	Monitoring phase and controlling phase

Table 7: similarities between Dean’s (2002) exhibition development model and Salameh’s (2014) Traditional Project Management model

This however does not mean that there are no agile enablers present or agile principles incorporated in the museum curation process. For this reason, the framework I developed in order to identify agile enablers and the agile principles within the museum curation process will be used in the following paragraphs to identify these.

4.2. Agile

As this research revolves around agile working in the museum sector, and agile is one of the main concepts treated in the theoretical framework, first, the researcher wanted to explore the respondents' familiarity with the notion and its meaning. Therefore, the researcher has asked each of the respondents whether they are familiar with the term agile before proceeding to the interview questions. Respondents 4 and 13 were the only respondents that claimed to have actually practiced agile working. Respondent 4 has received training in Scrum, which is an agile framework, and respondent 13 explained to have received a month-long part-time training on agile working by a consultancy firm, at the initiative of the museum direction. However, when asked if they work agile now, the respondent denied this. Respondent 13 explained: "the idea arose that we would start working agile and that there would be a pilot project, which would give substance to the new digital strategy." This sounded promising; however, the training did not turn out as expected, and the museum decided to end the training after one month. Respondents 2, 3, 4, 9 and 13 claimed to be familiar with the term, and interviewee 2 said: "I'm familiar with it in concept, but I don't have any practical experience with it." Respondents 5 and 8 stated that if they work agile in their organizations, this has not been opted for consciously or intentionally, as respondent 8 explains: "No, not consciously, if we're doing it at all it's unconsciously." All but one respondent stated that they do not work agile in their museum. The final eight respondents stated that they were not familiar with the concept at all, and respondents 5 and 6 both said that they even looked up the definition before the interview.

Thus, it can be stated that the Dutch museums and the curators interviewed generally have limited knowledge on agile working and that the practice has not been adopted by the museums, at least not consciously. While the real experience with agile working was limited, six curators indicated that they were interested to learn what the concept of agile working could mean to their organization though. Two of the curators that indicated an interest in agile working were also those that already had experience with agile in their organizations. This implies that they are (still) curious to learn more about what agile could mean for their organization. Respondent 8 indicated: "So I'm curious to hear your agile working strategy explanation, so I can see if we can indeed benefit from that." Respondent 12 stated:

I do think there is a kind of power in that kind of organization that makes you very agile. If you know how to exploit that well then that gives you a lot of power. And that also seems to me as the quality of this way of working that you are investigating.

A minority of two museums have attempted to adopt agile practices to their organizations. For reasons that are unclear, the organization of respondent 4, who received the scrum training, did not

follow through with it. The reasons that respondent 13 provided for the failed attempt at adopting agile working to their organization were largely practical: because of the work-from-home restrictions due to COVID-19, the training did not land sufficiently with the partakers, and the firm that led the training did not seem to have sufficient knowledge on the museum sector specifically and how to adopt agile working to this sector, which emphasizes the importance of this research once again.

4.3. Perceived enablers of agile project management present in curation practices

As discussed in the theoretical framework, enablers, conditions that are beneficial in the potential application of agile working can be identified within organizations. Even though the largest part of museums studied work according to a traditional project management format, there is interest in the application of agile working. Also, the literature has shown the potential presence of agile enablers in the museum curation process. Therefore, the following paragraphs are focused on the identification of these enablers within the empirical results, as the presence of these enablers could indicate that agile project management could be implemented in these museums. The structure of this paragraph is as follows: The findings on the enablers which' presence is most supported by empirical results are discussed first, followed by those that are less supported but still mentioned.

Multidisciplinary teams

“Multidisciplinary teams” is an enabler of agile project management. All of the respondents indicated to work in multidisciplinary teams, with team members in positions varying from registrars to logistics employees and from curators to project leaders and people from education and development departments. Respondent 5 explained this:

We are mixing two or three different teams, which I think is, you know, agile. We are making the exhibition together with our communication and marketing department. Because the audience needs to be centralized, and us curators can be inclined to focus too much on the content of the exhibition. (...) That is why we have been working together with the communication, marketing and education departments for ten years now. (Respondent 5)

The fact that every respondent indicated that the key departments of the museum are involved in the exhibition teams has thus led to the conclusion that these teams are multidisciplinary. These empirical results are in line with the literature by Herreman (2004) and the Smithsonian (2018) on museums and with proposition 3a. - Museum exhibition project teams are multidisciplinary teams -, which is an enabler of the possible application of agile project management to the curation process.

Customer/stakeholder involvement

“Customer/stakeholder involvement in the development process” is also an enabler of agile project management supported by empirical evidence. Several stakeholders have been mentioned. First of all, all of the respondents stressed the importance of the audience to their museums. When asked about important stakeholders, customers or visitors have been mentioned by nine respondents to be important stakeholders, out of which four respondents even mention them to be the most important stakeholders. Six museums take a step further and have been stated to involve customers in the development process. This happens in several ways. For example, respondent five explains:

When we have an idea for an exhibition, we engage in conversations with the audience: “we are planning to do this exhibition, what would you expect, what would you want to see, and would you like to come?”, and if we are a step further into the process, we test what we have come up with, and whether they like it. (Respondent 5)

Respondents 1, 6, and 7 also said to work with focus groups when drafting their exhibitions, while respondent 4 indicated that they would be interested in pursuing the use of focus groups in the future. Museum 4 has even arranged a competition, or ‘open call’ for makers, creatives and people who want to contribute to the content of the museum, therefore allowing the audience to have a say in the exhibitions and even work on the exhibitions itself.

Another important stakeholder involved are artists and/or foundations. For example, when exhibitions concern a living artist or an artist that is represented by a foundation, these parties have a large influence on the way the objects are presented. As stated by respondent 1, “As a curator, you must take the stakes of artists and foundations into account”, and also, artists can put restrictions on what happens with their objects. Respondent 9 provides an example:

The museum was gifted a collection from this foundation, a wealthy foundation. And they said: “Well, we would like to do something with this collection, so we will make a sculpture exhibition.” So in consultation you definitely come to topics. I do not know if a sculpture exhibition would have been created if the foundation had not been there, with their awful amount of money. So those things come into play.

Furthermore, lenders of exhibition objects to the museum, such as other museums, are important and are involved in the exhibition process, as mentioned by seven out of thirteen respondents, as these can also have a say in what can and cannot happen with lent objects.

Other important stakeholders are sponsors of museums, as explained by respondent 1: “What I also noticed is that another stakeholder are the sponsors, and the funds. They also expect certain things and of course also, certain money only comes with certain ideas or certain actions so to speak.” Respondent 5 added: “Sponsors and subsidizers, of course. Because we do not get any subsidies from

the government, so we also have to keep our lenders happy.” Sponsors can have either such direct influence or indirectly through representation by the Development department of the museum. Development departments of museums are often involved in the project team and thus practice influence on the exhibition project. However, not in every museum, sponsors have influence. For example, respondent 8 said:

This is still a sensitive issue in the cultural sector, everyone is very careful to ensure that this does not cause any cloudiness. Giving money never means that something happens in an exhibition or in a collection, that would not have happened if that money had not been given.

Moreover, respondent 7 stated that private sponsors do not have any input in the contents.

Then there is the municipality, region or country that functions in many museums as an important stakeholder. Respondents 2 and 4 mention the city to be an important stakeholder, and both these respondents claim to engage in collaboration with the city their museums are situated in. Respondents 5, 6, and 10 mention their region or province to be an important stakeholder, and respondents 7, 9, and 11 mention The Netherlands and the Dutch institutional context as an important stakeholder. Neither one of these respondents mentions that the region or country are involved, have any influence, or are collaborated with in the creation process of exhibitions. Three respondents stated that there are no stakeholders that have any influence in the development of an exhibition, and that the museum works autonomously, but that they do listen to different stakeholders and take wishes into account. For example, respondent 8 explains: “Well, interested parties, not too much. But actually, it is pretty autonomous, the way the museum works.”

The empirical results show that it is context-dependent which stakeholders practice influence in which museum, differing per museum. However, it has become clear that each museum has stakeholders, be it the audience, funders, or the city, that have an influence in the curation process. This coincides with the literature and with proposition 3b.: Customers and/or stakeholders are involved in the development of exhibitions, which is an important enabler for applying agile project management.

Organizational structure type

Another enabler for agile project management is the kind of organizational structure type that the organization operationalizes, namely, the project-based structure. The literature by Conforto *et al.* (2014) provides that agile project management is more easily applied in an organization that mainly works project-based. The researcher has concluded that all 13 respondents either work project-based, or are evolving towards a more project-based organization. Respondent 3 already works project-based: “we work project-based, with project groups, and we've actually been doing that for a long time”, while respondent 12 expresses their ambition to work more project-based:

Well, we just have to start learning how to do that. Really start working in a project-based way officially. So now we still have some kind of projects, but those roles are still a little unclear. So just with a clear project leader, for example, because there isn't one at the moment (Respondent 12).

As museums widely apply project-based working and thus are eminently suitable for project-based working, it can be concluded that the enabler of organizational structure type is present in the Dutch museum sector. Therefore, the literature and the empirical results concord and proposition 3c.: The organizational structure of museums is project-oriented.

Team size

In search for another enabler of agile project management, namely team size, the researcher has asked respondents about the number of people involved in the project. It became clear that most museums work with project teams on the exhibition, though under different names, such as 'core group' (Respondent 2), 'project group' (Respondent 3), and 'concept team' (Respondent 5). Two museums do not work in fixed project teams: in these museums, the curator is in charge of the project and calls on the different departments for the exhibition when needed. Conforto *et al.* (2014) provided that agile project management is more easily applied in teams that consist of 8 people or less. The empirical results pointed out that project teams of the museums vary in size, ranging from 3 to 16 people: One respondent works in an exhibition team of 3-4 people, four respondents generally work in project teams of 6-7 people, seven respondents in project teams of 8-12 people, and one of the respondents' project teams consist of around 15 to 16 people. According to Conforto *et al.* (2014), teams of 12-20 people only moderately enable agile project management, and teams consisting of eight people or less are preferred when applying agile project management. Nonetheless, all of the museums have small or smaller project teams, which is in line with what I proposed in proposition 3e.: The team size of exhibition project teams enables agile working.

Dedication of project team

Another important enabler is the dedication of the project team in terms of the amount of time dedicated to the project. When project teams spend approximately three-quarters of their time working on a particular project, this is considered to be enabling agile project management (Conforto *et al.*, 2014). The interviews indicated that it differs per function and organization how much time people attribute to a project. For example, some curators work on multiple exhibitions at once, like respondent 2: "So yes, you can be occupied working on four exhibitions at the same time; two of which are already in production, and the others in the development stage." Also, the division between tasks for curators differs: some curators only make exhibitions, and some also take care of the

collection and do research. However, considering that the literature presented most museums to work project-based, and the empirical results broadly confirming this, it can be assumed that project teams dedicate most of their time to specific projects. This was already proposed in proposition 3d.:

Exhibition project teams dedicate most of their time to one project.

Summarized, all of the enablers that were identified within the theoretical framework have been, as expected, found in the empirical results. Therefore, there are certainly opportunities for museum curation departments to apply agile project management to their practices. In the following paragraphs, the empirical results on the four themes that were identified in the theoretical framework will each be discussed. It will then be considered according to which agile principles the museums studied work.

4.4. “Customer Collaboration”

The first theme that was identified and discussed in the theoretical framework is that of “customer collaboration”, to which principles 1, 4, and 7 belong. These principles have been logically ordered, with the most recognized principles coming first, followed by those less recognized within the empirical results.

Stakeholder collaboration

In accordance with principle 4, the collaboration between stakeholders and curators is important for the theme of customer collaboration. This has been elaborately discussed in paragraph 4.3.. Most museums collaborate with their stakeholders in some sort of way, specifically with either visitors, cities or funders, which is in line with the literature. Therefore, I recognized what was proposed in the literature and proposition 1a., namely that within the curation process, collaboration with stakeholders takes place.

Customer satisfaction

Principle 1, on customer satisfaction, was also recognized within the empirical results. During the interviews, the role of the customer, or in the case of museums, visitor, has been elaborately discussed. It quickly became clear that customer satisfaction is highly and increasingly important to museums. “What has now penetrated museums are the ideas of adapting to circumstances, taking stakeholders into account, and that listening to visitors and connected partners is something positive.” (Respondent 11). Customer satisfaction is being taken care of in every museum but in different ways. Respondent 8, for example, mentions: “As soon as there is one complaint, to my own frustration, often things need to change. But sometimes I think: one complaint, come on, do we always need to listen to that?” Respondent 11 stated that customer satisfaction is mostly handled by the education

department, as they have conducted research on this: “Customer satisfaction is also, sometimes it is measured. Not always though, that is not always the case. We do have, at the end, one of those button series of: ‘how satisfied are you with the visit?’” As discussed in the previous paragraph on customer/stakeholder involvement, several museums did not just recognize the importance of the visitor to the museum, but they also worked together, collaborated, with the visitors in developing the exhibition.

Final product as measure of success

Connected to principle 1 on customer satisfaction, and also belonging to the theme of customer collaboration, is principle 7, of the final product being the measure of success. The literature designates that the customer’s satisfaction with the final product is leading in ruling an exhibition successful. A benchmark for customer’s satisfaction with an exhibition can be visitor numbers or attitude towards the exhibition after visiting. However, in the empirical results, the researcher has noticed two measures of success for museums: the quality of the exhibition - specifically its (art)historian/scientific/academic value and content - and the number of visitors. Respondent 11 illustrates this bifurcation: “It doesn't have to be that every exhibition has to attract 250,000 people; it can also be the case that a museum likes to create an exhibition from its content.” For example, some exhibitions are created to discuss a societal topic, as provided by respondent 9. Respondent 5 confirms this claim in their organization. Other exhibitions, such as the ‘blockbusters’¹, are set up specifically to draw large crowds of audience. Therefore, the researcher noticed ambiguity in the empirical results and concluded that proposition 1c. - The final exhibition is the prime measure of success for the museum - can be recognized within the exhibition process of some cases, and in other cases, this does not hold true. Therefore, it is context-dependent whether the exhibition is the measure of success.

Overall, the researcher has noted that there is a strongly increasing focus on the customer. As respondent 11 says about this: “Now it is actually that, the idea that the museum is a bastion in itself that has nothing else to do with the outside world, that has been gone for a long time.” Respondent 4 also noticed this change:

That is all in development; there has also been some shift in functions within the Public Affairs Department and what really is a big difference, ‘Museum X’ has a good example of that, is that the role of the Public Affairs Department is and becomes much more than: oh there is a project and we are going to come up with publicity for it. They have been involved from the very beginning in the general policy for projects and exhibitions, they are always there from phase one.

¹ Within museums, blockbuster exhibitions are seen as the main acts. Large exhibitions that capture the attention of the audience, which smaller exhibitions are considered to be less capable of (Museumnext, 2020).

However, several curators warned of the phenomenon of focusing too much on the customer. They value autonomy over the customer's wishes and think the customer should not be the only motive.

Respondent 7 explains:

A lot of the exhibitions that we program stem more from art historical research and then certain... Then you look at the field as an art historian and you look for what hasn't been done yet and what would be an interesting angle, for example, for the oeuvre of the painter or his contemporaries. And with that, to make that interesting, you also make it interesting for the audience. So we program mainly on the basis of content and then of course the challenge for a marketing department is to communicate that well so that it is attractive to people and interesting for people to come and see.

Respondent 3 expressed a similar opinion, that the focus should remain on the quality of what they produce and the publications. This is supported by literature by Abbing (2008). This illustrates the tension fields that exist in the missions of museums and curators: some curators encourage the increasing focus on the audience, and others are more hesitant to do so. Therefore, the empirical results are in line with proposition 2a. - Customer satisfaction is not the main driver of the curators -, as the content of the exhibition remains the main focus, with an increased fixation on the customer.

The researcher has thus noticed that even though there is an increasing focus on customer satisfaction within curation departments, this is currently, in most museums, not the main driver or measure of success. This opposes agile principles 1 and 7 belonging to the theme "customer collaboration". Principle 4, on collaboration with stakeholders, is largely recognized within the empirical results though, which hints at agile practices.

4.5. "Teamwork"

The second theme identified and discussed in the theoretical framework focused on teamwork. The researcher has asked respondents elaborately about the way they work together, the communication styles and on the composition of the teams. This paragraph is also logically structured, ranked from most recognized principles of agile working within this theme to least recognized principles, starting with principle 6, face-to-face meetings.

Face-to-face meetings

The Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001) states that face-to-face meetings are the most efficient and effective way of communication within a project team. Therefore, the researcher has

posed questions on the preferred communication method within exhibition project teams. Face-to-face communication has unanimously been mentioned as the preferred communication method: “Normally there used to be many meetings, you could say a typical Dutch meeting culture. So lots of group meetings, with the core team but also the education team, for example. So lots of meetings, all face-to-face in meeting rooms.” (Respondent 1, transcript). Respondents 5 and 6 add that specifically in the creative phase, it is highly important to have face-to-face meetings, for example, when information on colors or floor plans need to be conveyed. In line with that it is very common within most museums to informally walk in at each other’s offices in an informal way to discuss certain matters.

Motivation

According to the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001), it is important for all of the project team members to have high levels of motivation, and the manifesto requires building projects around motivated and dedicated individuals. As discussed in the previous paragraph concerning the enablers, there exists an extremely high motivation among museum curators and the project groups. In order to learn more about the exhibition project teams, their motivation and dedication, the researcher posed questions on the amount of motivation of each individual. To this question, all of the respondents gave corresponding answers. The intrinsic motivation of each project team member is extremely high. Respondent 5 and 6 both stated that they would reward their and their team’s motivation with a 9 or 10 out of 10. Respondent 11 stated: “The motivation is always really high. People are super happy to work here. Everyone is hugely motivated. But not just the curators, everyone is incredibly involved, also the guards in the room, for example, everyone feels that the museum should do well.” Respondent 8 also indicated that it is not just the curators that are extremely motivated to do their job well.

And that goes at all levels: from a carpenter who knows: I could have made something better if I had had more time, to the curator who also thinks that, if he had had more time. But there is always one, the common goal, from left to right and from top to bottom, of simply making the best exhibition possible (Respondent 8).

Respondent 1 explained: “You notice that everyone really shares a passion for having an exhibition run smoothly, which is very nice.” A side note placed by respondents though is that this exceptional amount of motivation is needed for working in the museum sector, as there are several disadvantages attached to working in this sector. For example, respondent 6 explains: “There is definitely workload, I mean it is, it is just a lot, there is a lot of administrative stuff coming through as well. So yes, it is quite, it is quite a lot.” Respondent 12 also stated that there is not much financial reward in the sector and that this also contributes to the fact that high motivation is necessary. This shows a similarity between the literature (Frey, 2003) and empirical findings. Concluding, the literature, proposition and

empirical results all coincide, leading to the conclusion that within museum curation departments, generally, there are highly motivated individuals at work. Additionally, this high level of motivation applies not only to the curation departments but to the whole museum in general, according to the respondents.

Self-organizing teams

In order for teams to work in an agile manner, it is important that they are self-organizing. There exists some ambiguity in the amount of self-organization of the curation teams, as some teams experience more external pressure than others. On the one hand, some choose their own approach in accomplishing their goals instead of being directed by people from outside the team. For example, respondent 5 explains that their team decides on their own measures of success:

Then we think about what our success factors are, what we judge the exhibition by. And that is not always just the visitor numbers, that can be other things as well. And then we decide whether our exhibition will be a success and whether there are elements that are so good that we want to take them to the next one, or things that we are never going to do again because they don't work (Respondent 5).

These measures of success are decided by the project team and then communicated to the management team. Respondent 10 explains that their team decides on its own plans. On the other hand, several curators indicated that this is not the case at their organization. Respondent 11, for example, indicated otherwise, that the director decides the goals for the exhibition. Seven respondents indicated that the director has a lot of influence on the exhibition development processes. Respondent 8 explains: "So you have the director, he always has the final say on what happens to the museum. He is very present. But the curators create their own story and the director can indicate that he wants it differently, but this is not the standard." Respondent 6 expressed something in accordance with this, and respondent 7 explained that the exhibition programming is decided by the management team, the team of directors, which the respondent expressed some criticism on: "I do not think that is a very good development because then the curators themselves are not present at the sessions where it is decided what the programming is going to be, while it's coming from them, and while they're implementing the program." Also, respondents 9, 10, and 11 experience a lot of bureaucracy when wanting to implement new ideas, which could lead to frustrations at times: "If you want to be happy in 'Museum X', you shouldn't mind, or be able to adapt to it. And I can well imagine that some people can't do that, you know. Because in large organizations, there are always things that don't go as you would like." Respondent 11 thus blames the size of the museum for the amount of hierarchy present. The researcher noticed that those respondents that work less in self-organizing teams and deal

with more influence from “above” talk more negatively about their experience. Respondent 10 illustrates this:

When people are not given autonomy and have to have the signature of the boss on everything. If you feel that you are not heard, things are decided over your head, people don't get sick from working too hard, they get sick from that. If you actually hire all professionals but don't treat them that way, but as employees who need to be told what to do, then things go wrong (Respondent 10).

The researcher has noted ambiguity here, as seven out of thirteen respondents indicated that they are not (fully) self-organizing and experience a lot of pressure or influence from the management. On the other hand, others have indicated that they have a lot of autonomy. Therefore, it can neither be confirmed nor denied that curation departments generally have self-organizing teams, as this is context-dependent.

Regular reflection & evaluation

The third component of teamwork is regular reflection and evaluation within the team. On inter-team reflection and evaluation, the museums perform quite diversified. For example, respondents 1, 4, 6, and 12 only evaluate after the exhibition is closed, but claim that because of circumstances such as Covid-19, evaluation has been put off or has been cancelled. Respondent 2 explains that there is only evaluation when things have gone really wrong, and respondent 8 claims that their organization is extremely bad at evaluation:

The challenge, or where it often goes wrong, because we make so many exhibitions, and sometimes finish it just in time, and then already have to move on to the next one, is that evaluation, for example, never happens very well. People think: we actually have to evaluate this, but we also have to get together again for the next project.

On the other hand, five out of thirteen respondents, respondents 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11, always evaluate after an exhibition has opened:

We evaluate the first weekend, more logistical: “don't signs fall off, or do people walk the right route, or does that audio tour work well?”, and then after a week, and at some point when the exhibition is running, and then of course we evaluate afterwards: was the exhibition a success?

Respondent 7 also claims to evaluate during the exhibition: “There is also a mid-term evaluation. And then the figures from the audience are also included; visitor numbers. With the whole team. They also look at whether certain things can be adjusted. For example, if not enough people know how to find an exhibition.” Respondent 9 agrees that evaluation is useful and that it is best done a week after opening, as otherwise, no adaptations can be made to the exhibition. Seven respondents indicate that evaluation and reflection is not a priority after the exhibition is finished and that all team members just move forward to the next project. Respondent 9 explains: “It is, everybody, you do see kind of a huge focus towards an opening, and then it is gone. So then you can have another week, and then everyone is actually like, I want to go on vacation, and I'm going to do something else.” Respondent 12 builds on that:

Well, I think that is maybe the thing about evaluation, you never really actively need it, in my opinion. But I do think it is very important. To pause for a moment, to look at what we have learned, what can we do differently, what do we want to do better, what went well and what can be improved?

What struck the researcher is that all of the respondents only evaluate within their teams after the exhibition is ready for opening to the audience, so when the final product is finished, instead of during the creation process of the exhibition. What also became clear is that most respondents value evaluation with the public over evaluation with the project team. Therefore, I do not recognize proposition 2d. - Evaluation takes place mostly within the team, rather than with and by the public - within the empirical results. While most museums evaluate with customers in the form of audience research or focus groups, half of the museums neglect or do not do inter-team evaluation.

4.6. “Internal Processes”

The third theme is internal processes and focuses on several topics regarding the way the museums are internally organized. The researcher has asked questions concerning the planning, working pace and the challenges in maintaining quality in the curation processes. The following paragraph is also logically structured, ranked from most recognized principles of agile working within the theme of “internal processes” to least recognized principles, starting with principle 9, continuous excellence.

Continuous excellence

Another element of the theme of “internal processes” is continuous excellence, which enhances agility due to team members’ continuous focus on improving and achieving excellence (Highsmith, 2004). The researcher has noted that all respondents are highly driven to achieve

excellence in their work. Respondent 11 illustrated this: “If it is not going well, then it has to be better. It should not only be high quality, everything you do should be very good. But it should also, if possible, be innovative.” Respondent 12 adds: “I think we are very much a quality-driven organization. So that is actually woven into everything, so we do try to do very good things in terms of content. But in such a way that it is interesting and attractive to a wide audience.” Respondent 7 said: “it is... look, the bar is pretty high at the museum, these are always very ambitious projects, expensive projects, (...).” However, there was one respondent that indicated that sometimes, due to time pressure, compromises need to be made: “Sometimes you just really have to accept that it is 80% instead of 100, while we all also have the ambition to make it totally super, sometimes that is just not possible” (Respondent 2, transcript), though this quote stresses the ambition to achieve excellence. Respondent 8 also expressed that this drive for excellence can lead to frustration, as everyone in the organization is very driven to do the best they can. Concluding, the researcher noted that, which might be related to the high levels of motivation present within museum departments, curators, in general, strive for continuous excellence.

Simplicity

Then, simplicity, an aspect of agile working, emerges from the agile literature but is not widely endorsed by empirical findings. One respondent, however, respondent 10, claimed to have adopted a new structure in the plannings for exhibition-making, in which the full planning has been chopped into shorter batches, “sprints”, which is part of an agile approach. The researcher however found this principle to generally not be applicable to the museum curation process.

Frequent value delivery

Another agile principle that has been studied within the processes of exhibition curation is delivery of value frequently. The goal of frequent value delivery to the customer is to create customer value quickly and to be able to receive feedback intermediately in the process. The researcher has come to the conclusion that the frequent delivery of value, for example, opening up parts of the exhibition during its creation process is quite rare. For example, respondent 3 said about this:

Installing the exhibition is concentrated in a short period of 2 or 3 weeks: then the loans come in, they are hung up, checks are done, then as few people as possible are allowed in. Then, the exhibition technicians spend a few days getting it all right and getting the lighting right so no, there will be no public, there is nothing to see.

Respondent 1 added to this: “In fact, they are often very strict on that; you also often have to sign a consent form as a curator in training. So no, they’re very strict, you are not actually allowed to reveal anything.” Respondent 6 explained, though, that parts of the exhibition are shared with the rest of the

museum in Teams meetings during the process, with the goal of involving the entire museum. Also, respondent 6 mentioned that sometimes pictures of the building phase of the exhibition are shared on social media. However, all of the exhibitions have a grand opening on a set date, in which the exhibition is opened to the public and colleagues. Also, exhibition curation has shown to be a lengthy process of at least one year. In sum, the empirical results coincide with what was proposed in proposition 2c.: Frequent value delivery does not take place during the curation process: instead, the finished exhibition is shown in the end. The exhibition curation processes do not lend themselves easily for frequent value delivery due to practical reasons such as confidentiality of lenders, and efficiency reasons, and the researcher expects few possibilities to adopt this in the future.

Sustainable working pace

Finally, principle 9, on a sustainable working pace, is the least recognized principle belonging to the theme of “internal processes”. A sustainable working pace is an important precondition to agile working, as this retains productivity within employees. Therefore, the researcher has asked the respondents questions on the working pace, workload and work pressure that they experience in their jobs. A striking phenomenon that becomes apparent in this phase is that all respondents unanimously agreed that the workload and working pressure is extremely high. Respondent 8 explains:

In the past I really worked a lot of overtime, because I did a lot of exhibitions. So you knew that one was opening now, and the next one would be opening in three months, and it needed a catalog, and you had many, many large exhibitions for the general public, so the public aspect was added. And that you can still give lectures about it, and evenings for patrons, give tours, so that is also something that they are just trying to get more curators so we do not have to work as much overtime. Because indeed that overtime was always also a problem.

This museum has now hired two more curators in order to cope with the working pressure, showing that it is trying to improve this. Respondent 5 also stated to not have enough people in their team for the number of exhibitions that are produced: “But I think normally, we work 38 hours, at least according to our contract, but in reality, we always work 60 hours a week, in the normal situation.” Respondent 1 also mentions the high working pressure related to a lack of assistance. The number of exhibitions that are produced, and connected to that, the shortage of personnel in museums, are not the only explanation for the high working pace. Another reason is the amount of academic or scientific research that curators need to execute for exhibitions or just for the regular collection, as explained by respondent 11: “I never have time to read a book. Most curators write their articles and research in evening hours and on weekends.” and respondent 6 explains: “When you also have to publish an article, you don’t track your hours anymore, because you do that all in the evenings and on the weekends. When there is a publication, you always exceed your established working hours. That is

just the way it is.” Furthermore, some curators also function as project leaders and need to organize the practical aspects on top of their substantive tasks, explained by respondent 7: “The curator puts in by far the most hours. (...) He is the hub of the project and has to maintain a huge number of contacts, write documents, and request loans. You could almost call that a full-time job.” These empirical results concur with the literature and what was proposed in proposition 2e. - Curators do not experience a sustainable working pace - by the researcher. Though curators experience high levels of motivation to sustain their working pace, workload remains extremely high, which is disadvantageous for agile working.

4.7. “Responding to Change”

The fourth theme is responding to change, which focuses on the way museums respond to changes both internally and externally. The researcher asked questions on what changes and obstacles museums face and how museums deal with changing circumstances and requirements. Nine respondents stated that they respond to changes even late into the exhibition process. For example, respondent 7 explains: “Yes. Then we also look at whether certain things can be adjusted. For example, if too few people know how to find an exhibition or can do something.” Respondent 12 even takes this a step further by consciously taking into account new changes:

So we still have to go back and forth, and think how we are going to deal with this and then make a choice. And I don't know if that is quite how you would do it according to agile theory, so to speak. But I do think that at least we are agile.

Respondent 2 also shows an iterative process, in which customers are involved, in adapting to changes: “We actually open up our exhibition pretty quickly, while we realize that often it is not yet, that it is simply not perfect yet, that we also only discover that the moment we have visitors.” Respondent 1 showcased a similar, iterative process, in which external factors are allowed, and certain phases are passed through, after which will be returned to the first phase. Respondent 1 expresses a positive attitude towards this:

I also think it is very important, as a curator, to allow external factors to change your exhibition plan, you know, policy for example, or if something is happening in society that your exhibition actually touches upon, that you anticipate this and that you respond. Because you have been working on an exhibition for so long, it is very difficult, you are actually constantly running a little behind, and you can't be very flexible, so to speak, in these current events, and I think that if you then see a process like this where external factors can still have an influence, then it is a more dynamic process.

Examples of the possible changes that these museums generally face are listed below. Respondent 1 states that their specific museum is very changeable, volatile, as for example, it happens that large sponsors retreat, which causes financial distress. Other changes that museums face are management-related changes, such as the advent of a new director, or policy changes, changes related to the physical exhibition, such as lighting changes, text signs that need to be altered. Or sometimes, external factors incite changes, such as cancelled loans of exhibition objects or the audience demanding certain things or elements from the museum or in the exhibition. The general attitude among curators towards adapting to changes is that it is perceived as necessary or inevitable within the curation process to react to changes, and some curators even perceive it as something positive. It is seen as part of the dynamics of the job to take possible changes into account.

However, the constant occurrence of changes in the process also has its downsides. Respondents 3, 6, and 9, on the other hand, expressed a negative attitude towards embracing change, as for example respondent 5 explains: “Yes, of course, that is always possible, but we try to avoid it because if you still have to make changes two months in advance, then it just costs money.” Respondent 3, when asked whether it ever happens that when exhibitions are finished, alterations need to be made, replied: “No, that is really not possible. That is really... It would take a terrible catastrophe for that to happen. If a painting... would have to be different... no, that really should not happen.” Also, unexpected changes can cause distress for curators, who are already heavily occupied.

The researcher has thus observed an ambiguous attitude towards embracing change in the curation process by the respondents because even though the largest part of the respondents claims to respond to changes, they are often undesired. Therefore, proposition 2b. - Change is not particularly welcomed throughout the curating process - is, in line with what was expected based on the literature, recognized within the empirical results.

4.8. Summarized results

Table 6 below summarizes the empirical findings by the researcher and provides a clear overview in which agile elements - enablers or principles - are present in the empirical results. The elements are logically ordered, within the themes, from most recognized (score of 5 out of 5) in the empirical results to least recognized (score of 1 out of 5) in the empirical, based on the well-informed judgement of the researcher.












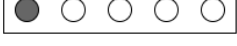


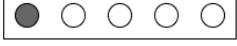


Umbrella term	Enabler/principle	Recognized in the empirical results not at all - very much
Enablers	Project teams are multidisciplinary	
	Customers/stakeholders are involved in the process	
	Organizational structure is project-oriented	
	Teams dedicate most of their time to the project	
	Project team size ranges between 2 and 8	
“Customer collaboration”	Stakeholder Collaboration	
	Customer satisfaction	
	Final product as a measure of success	
“Teamwork”	Motivation	
	Face-to-face communication	
	Self-organizing teams	
	Regular reflection and evaluation	
“Internal processes”	Continuous excellence	
	Sustainable working pace	
	Simplicity	
	Deliver value frequently	
“Responding to change”	Welcome changing circumstances	

Table 6: Summary of the empirical results

The empirical results have shown varying results when it comes to agile working, some of which were already anticipated in the literature, and some that were more unexpected. For example, in line with our expectations, the five important enablers of agile project management are present within most of the museums, to a large or moderate extent. These results are important, as the enablers provide opportunities for the possible application of agile project management in the museum sector. Opposing our expectations, on the other hand, is that, for example, reflection happens mostly with customers instead of with the project exhibition team.

4.9. Agile opportunities for the museum sector

As the researcher is interested in finding out if, and if so, how, agile working can contribute to the curation process, respondents were asked about the biggest challenges they face and the trends they notice in the museum sector. A broad range of answers resulted from this. In paragraph 4.9.1., the challenges that emerged from the empirical results and in paragraph 4.9.2., the trends that surfaced in the empirical results are discussed.

4.9.1. Challenges

When asked about the challenges respondents face, over 20 different challenges were mentioned by the 13 respondents. A few challenges stood out though, due to their frequent mention, such as lack of resources, and inclusivity and diversity within the museum.

Lack of resources

The first often-mentioned challenge is a lack of resources. The first resource that is often lacking within the museums is time, mentioned by five respondents. Respondent 8 explains:

Then when there's not enough time, it just leads to frustration and irritation. Because, yes, they know: "it could have been this, and now it is this, and I can do better". And that goes for all levels: from a carpenter, who knows: "I could have made something better if I had had more time", to the curator who also thinks that if he had more time.

Lack of time not only forms a significant challenge in the exhibition development but also in writing and researching. Respondents 7 and 9 indicated this. Respondent 9 elaborates:

Nobody delivers on time. So those are huge moments of tension. (...) So that brings a kind of tension and uncertainty that is hard to plan for. You can, of course, set the deadline a month

earlier than it really is. But all those writers actually know that already, so nobody turns it in on time.

A second lacking resource often mentioned is money, named by six respondents to be problematic. Respondent 12: “Money is always a problem, of course, or an issue. You are limited by budgets, so not everything you would like is always possible. So where do you get the money from?”, which is confirmed by respondent 10, who responded when asked what the biggest challenge is: “Budget. Just like in brokerage: budget, budget, budget.” This is problematic, as respondent 9 elaborates on the importance of museums being financially healthy: “No, it is obvious. The museums that are doing well financially are also doing well in terms of content.”

Inclusivity and diversity

Furthermore, an often-mentioned challenge is for museums to become more inclusive, which is mentioned by five respondents. Respondent 3 explains:

For the museum, the greatest challenge is to be inclusive, that is really the magic word, to bring in more diverse audiences, in a general sense, and also for me to create appealing exhibitions but also to keep the scientific content up to standard and not throw them out with the bathwater.

This aim of museums to become more inclusive and draw a more diverse audience has also emerged from the academic literature as well as other relevant sources. As endorsed by empirical results, museums increasingly feel the responsibility to address a broader audience and speak to the whole society.

Finally, there were some challenges that emerged from the empirical results that were mentioned fewer times but still deemed relevant. For example, four respondents mentioned experiencing team-related challenges within their organization, for example, miscommunication and aligning with team members. Other challenges mentioned can be categorized as mission-related, for example, determining the museum’s identity towards the customer, keeping up with high standards, and staying innovative.

4.9.2. Trends

Next to challenges, the researcher has identified several trends in the empirical results, such as the professionalization of the museum sector (Respondents 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, & 12), a change in attitude towards blockbuster exhibitions (Respondents 6, 8, & 10), and an increased audience-focus (Respondents 10, 11, & 12), which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Professionalization

First, the professionalization of the museum sector is a trend that arose from the empirical results as it was mentioned by six respondents, which is in line with the literature. This professionalization involves, for example, the rise of junior curators. The literature on museums already indicated this professionalization as a trend in the way museums are organized, such as the division between the scholarly tasks and the managerial tasks of the curator. The empirical results pointed out that six out of 13 respondents think the professionalization of the museum sector is an important trend. Respondent 8 explains: “Nowadays, you see museums professionalize. Visitors matter, money matters. You see that, even though museums are non-commercial organizations, they are professionalizing and commercializing.” Part of this professionalization trend is the division between tasks for the curator. Where the curator used to be both researcher, exhibition maker, and project leader, he or she is now in most (10 out of 12 organizations studied) cases “just” exhibition maker and researcher. Now, professional project leaders are hired to keep track of deadlines, budgets, and tasks, as a “guard” of the process. Respondent 12: “but I myself am still in favor of keeping the two sports [project leader and curator] separate because they are two métiers that, by keeping each other sharp, achieve more than from one hand.”

Attitude towards blockbusters

Second, another trend that the researcher has noticed is the more critical attitude towards blockbusters. Respondents indicated that for quite some time, museums needed to organize so-called Blockbuster exhibitions for a larger audience. This had to do with the increased pressure on museums to earn their own money as subsidies decreased. The creation of a blockbuster exhibition is however a highly costly process, which often puts a lot of financial restraint on the museum. Therefore, as respondents 6 and 8 indicated, museums have started searching for other, cheaper ways to produce exhibitions. For example, respondent 8 explained that their museum increasingly searches for ways to create exhibitions with Dutch lends and their own collection.

Increased audience-focus

Third is the trend of the increased audience-focus that the researcher has noted among respondents. As respondent 10 indicated: “Those were different times. They [directors] didn’t think about the audience. They thought: ‘that will come automatically’” This has changed over the past years, as museums are increasingly occupied with their audience and ask themselves questions, such as: “How many visitors do we want to attract?”, “What kind of visitors do we want to attract?” and “What is our reputation with the audience?”

Extending the increased audience-focus is the trend of museums’ goal to become more inclusive and attract a broader audience. Diversity and inclusivity as a trend within museums emerged

from both the academic literature as from the empirical results, as six respondents indicated to be occupied with inclusivity in their organization.

5. Discussion of findings

In this final chapter, the main research question and the sub-questions are discussed. In the previous chapters, the topic of agile working in relation to the museum sector has been researched thoroughly by the examination of relevant literature and the evaluation of empirical results that emerged from the thirteen interviews conducted. In this chapter, the empirical findings of this research are elaborately discussed. As the findings point out, in accordance with the literature, the museum curation process has many resemblances with the traditional project management model mentioned by Salameh (2014). However, this does not rule out the presence of agile principles and enablers within the museum curation process. In the following paragraphs, the results concerning these are discussed. Furthermore, practical recommendations for the application of agile project management in the museum sector are provided, as well as limitations of the research and recommendations for further research.

5.1. Answers to the sub-questions

Which perceived enablers of agile project management are currently present in the curation practices?

The findings of this research show that there are multiple agile project management enablers present in the curation practices of Dutch museums. Two enablers that were eminently present in all of the museums studied, unanimously agreed on by all respondents, are: “multidisciplinary teams”, and “customer/stakeholder involvement in the exhibition development process”. Both the literature and empirical results indicated that project teams in museums are built multidisciplinary, with team members with different functions from different departments. The fact that these curation teams are multidisciplinary allows for a gathering of multiple competences, which contributes to the team’s performance and is beneficial to the agile working process. Also, empirical results have shown that in each organization studied, stakeholders, be they the audience, funders or artists, are involved in the creation of exhibitions. This ensures efficiency within museums, as stakeholders’ expectations and desires are taken into account upfront. I suspect that the strong presence of these two enablers cannot be seen as separate, as the multidisciplinary nature of the exhibition teams enables the involvement of different stakeholders. For example, most exhibition teams also consist of museum development employees, who represent an important stakeholder, namely, the funders.

The other three enablers that were identified upfront by the researcher - “team dedication”, “team size”, and “organizational structure” - have also, though less unanimously than the first two enablers, delivered sufficient empirical evidence that they are present within the Dutch curation practices. This is in line with what was expected based on the studied literature. However, the team size of museum exhibition teams is often not a deliberate choice, as many of the respondents have indicated that their teams are understaffed due to budget restrictions. Between the enablers of

organizational structure and team dedication, some overlap can be identified: were it not for the organizational structure of museums being project-oriented, then curators would not be able to work most of their time on these projects. It seems that the existence of one enabler facilitates the existence of the other. Also, it has become clear that some of the enablers come from conscious decisions, and others are present out of necessity. In sum, “multidisciplinary teams” and “customer/stakeholder involvement in the exhibition development process” act as key enablers, and “team dedication”, “team size”, and “organizational structure” function as secondary enablers for the application of agile working to the organization.

In which ways are the current curation practices in Dutch museums agile?

After having researched the four agile themes - “customer collaboration”, “teamwork”, “internal process”, and “responding to change” - theoretically, and then having collected empirical evidence, the researcher has come to the following conclusions. Within the separate themes, ambiguous results have been found, and none of the themes complies with all of the agile principles. There are however important indications that lead to believe that this could still be developed.

First, in terms of “customer collaboration”, the current Dutch museum practices are predominantly agile due to the stakeholder collaboration that takes place and the (growing) focus on customers, or visitors. Though the way museums deal with customers and stakeholders does not currently comply with all of the agile principles, a development favourable to agile working can be noticed here. This development concerns the increasing focus on the customer and museums transforming from elitist institutions to more approachable and accessible organizations, in which the customer is increasingly important and feedback is increasingly taken into account.

Second, in terms of teamwork, Dutch museums practice several of the agile criteria. Within the way the museum exhibition teams work together, high levels of motivation of employees can be identified, and the preferred communication style in these teams is face-to-face, which are both agile principles. Though the pandemic led to compromises that needed to be made in terms of inter-team communication, all of the respondents indicated to be going back to face-to-face communication post-pandemic. The fact that some teams are self-organizing and many teams would like to have more autonomy sparks optimism for agile working in this theme. On the other hand, the lack of regular reflection and evaluation inter-team sows some doubts on whether the Dutch museum sector is agile in terms of teamwork. Therefore, in order to become predominantly agile, the sector needs to work on evaluation, as also indicated by several respondents, and the role of the directors in some organizations needs to become more subtle, if these organizations want to adopt agile working to their practices. Reflection and evaluation should become more fixed elements within the curation processes, as prescribed by the literature on exhibition development and agile working. The responsibility of encouraging reflection and evaluation could be taken on by the project leaders of the teams, as they are the “guards” of the exhibition development process. In order for teams to become

more self-organizing, museum directors need to take a step back and give more autonomy to the exhibition development teams. Summarized, though reflection and evaluation and the extent to which the teams are self-organizing have proven insufficient for now, respondents have shown to be willing to and motivated to improve in these respects in the future.

Third, considering the theme of “internal processes”, the curation process still lacks several important elements, such as frequent value delivery and sustainable working pace within the museum. The latter is not entirely within the curators’ own circles of influence, but is due to budget restraints and, subsequently, personnel shortages, within museums. Frequent value delivery barely takes place within museums due to reasons of confidentiality and practicality. Also, on the principle of simplicity, no empirical results have been found. On the other hand, the principle of continuously striving for excellence has shown significant empirical results. This drive for excellence is also related to the high levels of motivation of museum curation employees. Lastly, the sustainable working pace that belongs to agile working has proven to be almost non-existent. The fact that every curator has indicated the working pressure to be too high and unsustainable leads the researcher to believe that in order for the internal processes of museum curation to become fully agile, this is a pressing problem that needs to be solved.

Fourth, the theme of responding to change has also provided varying answers. Though changes are responded to and sometimes welcomed by curation departments, there exists some negativity towards embracing change that should not be neglected. However, also looking at the reaction of museums during the pandemic and them having to substantially change the way they looked at their audience, overall, it can be concluded that the Dutch museum sector responds to changes, even though sometimes reluctantly. This has sparked optimism for the future of agile working within the museum curation departments.

How can agile practices contribute to the curation process of Dutch museums?

In order to see where improvements are needed in the museum curation process, the challenges and trends in the field have been researched both theoretically and empirically. I developed several insights into the greatest challenges that Dutch curators face in their work. The most often mentioned challenges were lack of resources (time, personnel and money), as well as including new audiences, and the most often mentioned trends were the professionalization of the museum sector, critical attitude towards blockbusters, and the increasing audience focus. The literature has shown that agile working can help organizations to become more flexible, efficient and customer-focused. As these qualities are welcome in most organizations and sectors, in this paragraph, the possibilities of the method for the museum curation process are discussed in relation to the challenges and trends that emerged from the empirical results.

The first challenge that is discussed is the lack of resources. When time is scarce, efficiency is key. As agile working is a way of making organizations more flexible, time-efficient and cost-

efficient, the researcher sees potential in looking for different ways of organizing the museum, and agile working could play an important role in this. Lack of time and money could be partly alleviated by making the curation processes more efficient, which agile working could facilitate.

The second challenge that emerges from the empirical results is the challenge of museums to become more inclusive and attract a more diverse audience. Diversity, accessibility and inclusivity have become more and more rooted in the cultural sector over the last years, and museums are not exempt from wanting to adhere to this. The agile theme of “Customer collaboration”, which focuses on customer satisfaction, stakeholder collaboration, and the final product as a measure of success, could provide some important tools that aid museums in becoming more inclusive. Agile working centralizes the customer, and if museums increase their focus on and listen more to the customer and the target group they want to reach, agile practices could help them reach their goal of becoming more inclusive. In sum, the customer-centricity of agile working could be convenient in museums’ process of attracting a more diverse audience and becoming more inclusive.

Nonetheless, it is important for museums to find a certain balance between the customer focus and the museum’s mission. There were several trends to be noticed in the empirical results, one of which is the ‘blockbuster’ trend, with museums only organizing large, expensive exhibitions mainly to draw huge crowds. This is something that these museums are now slowly returning from, as more and more criticism on this way of working arose. This critical attitude towards blockbusters emerged from the empirical results. This is important for this research, as this indicates that the desire to solely focus on the customer is not carried widely within the museum sector, which is important to keep in mind when adopting agile to the organizations.

The second trend is the increased audience focus, which builds on this. It is clear that museums have evolved or are evolving from authoritarian towards more customer-oriented institutes. This is a remarkable trend, as it seems to fit in well with agile working, which centralizes the customer and therefore important to this research.

The third trend is the professionalization of the museum sector that can be noticed within both the literature and the empirical results. This professionalization includes, for example, the division of curating tasks, with the managerial tasks being assigned to professional project leaders instead of executed by the curators. This professionalization provides some challenges to the sector. Several organizations indicated that they have the desire to reflect and evaluate more, and have evaluation more institutionalized within their organization. As evaluation is an important part of agile working, the adoption of agile project management could facilitate the wish for more evaluation among employees.

5.2. Answers to the main research question

How are agile working methods, explicitly and consciously or implicitly and unconsciously, applied in the cultural sector, and specifically the curating process in museums?

In order to answer the main research question of this thesis, first, the current organization of the Dutch museum sector was studied. The literature and empirical results have pointed out that this sector works project-based, according to a traditional, linear, waterfall approach to project management. Also, museums are traditional institutions with few incentives for innovation, which renders it more difficult to apply new approaches to project management. This however does not automatically mean that Dutch museums do not contain agile enablers or incorporate agile practices into their processes. The contrary is true and will be elaborated on further.

It can be concluded that all curation departments in the Dutch museums studied within this research incorporate bits and principles of agile working in their processes. They are thus partly working agile, despite the traditional project management format that most of them still employ. The empirical results of this study have pointed out that museums apply several aspects of agile working to their curating processes, though this often happens unconsciously. Neither of the museums studied work consciously or explicitly on the basis of the agile principles, and the knowledge of curators on the topic of agile working is extremely limited. Some museums have consciously attempted to adopt agile working or adopt some aspects of agile to their organization but have only done so to a limited extent or terminated this after a short period of time.

However, as discussed while answering the sub-questions of this thesis, most aspects of museum curation processes and exhibition development are suited for an agile approach. The fact that the museums studied already work project-based in developing their exhibitions provides important chances for the application of agile working. Also, the presence of several enablers leaves room for optimism in the possibility of adopting agile practices to museums. In terms of customer collaboration, the researcher has noted a strong(ly increasing) customer focus and involvement, which is an indication that the museums are already working (partly) agile. Also, how the teams work together implies aspects of agility and the museums' responsiveness to change show opportunities for agile working.

Nonetheless, there are also some areas in the current museum curation departments that do not (currently) lend themselves for agile working. This has largely to do with the empirical results that emerged on the theme of "internal processes". This theme lacks several aspects of agile working, as value is not delivered frequently, curators do not experience a sustainable working pace, and there has been no proof of museums trying to simplify their processes. However, the continuous drive for excellence voices the researcher's optimism. In the following paragraphs, suggestions for the possible actions that museums can undertake in order to become more agile will be discussed.

5.3. Actions to be undertaken by museums to become more agile

Museum curation processes should not aim to become fully agile, as some of the principles are simply not applicable to the practice of museum curation. According to the agile principles, museums need to deliver value more frequently, search for simplicity in their tasks, and the working pressure and hours need to be decreased. The museum curation process has shown to not lend itself to adopting all of the agile principles, as can be concluded when looking at the results per theme, with for example the theme of internal processes significantly lacking in adopting agile working. Frequent value delivery, such as opening up the exhibition intermittently during the curation process, does not seem possible. Also, simplicity was not endorsed by empirical findings within this research.

There are however some aspects of agile working that can be further applied within the museum curation process that can improve efficiency and flexibility. First, it would be beneficial for the museums to improve their inter-team reflection and evaluation. Reflection and evaluation should become a more permanent element in the curation process. Teams have indicated to feel like they lack the time to evaluate as they are “running” to the next project after finishing the previous one. However, curators are aware of the fact that it would be beneficial for the process to reflect and evaluate more. The project leader, being the “guard” of the process, should initiate more reflection.

Second, working pressure should be relieved according to the agile principles. Improving museums’ financial situations could aid in this, as this allows for the hiring of extra personnel. Also, if the museums were to improve their efficiency within their current processes, this could alleviate the workload and decrease the number of working hours.

Third, teams would become more agile when they were to reduce the influence of the director and become more self-organizing. Considering the fact that most curators indicated to value team autonomy or want to become more autonomous, applying this aspect of agile working could be highly valuable to the organization. Concretely, museum directors must therefore cede some of their power and authority to the curators and let teams decide on their own plannings and objectives, as the museum exhibition teams together, in their multidisciplinaryity, dispose of all of the competencies needed to create exhibitions. Extending this, if museums were to consciously apply agile working to their organization, it is important that this is supported throughout the whole organization, instead of commissioned top-down by the director.

The much-discussed increasing audience-focus in museums is an important indicator for a possible future of agile working within the museum sector. This research has pointed out that the agile principles and methods should not just be blindly applied to the museum sector, but a tailor-made agile approach, organization-specific, to museum exhibition development might provide important opportunities. Marrying agile project management and museum exhibition processes has proven to come with its difficulties, but it can be concluded that there are opportunities for the two of them to become the perfect pair.

5.4. Limitations

Within every research, limitations exist, and this one is not exempt from this. However, by acknowledging the limitations of this study, the reliability and validity of its results increases. Therefore, the limitations of this research are listed below, as well as the discussion on how these limitations have been minimalized by the researcher. In conducting qualitative research, the role of the researcher and their previous experience and knowledge are important. Qualitative research often raises questions on potential researcher bias, which could gravely influence the integrity of the results (Brink, 1993). However, the researcher has attempted to minimize the risk of researcher bias by verifying found data with the literature.

When the decision for the current research sample was made, it was consciously decided that curators of Dutch museums would be interviewed. The researcher was well aware that for interviews on the curation processes, interviewing project leaders of curation teams was also a viable option. This is because project leaders might have more experience in the operational processes of museum curation practices. However, taking into account that not all museums work with a project leader and that curators are still highly important figures and often called the “spider in the web” of curation teams, the researcher deemed curators to have enough knowledge on the topic. Furthermore, it has been decided to only interview curators occupied in Dutch museums, as this increased comparability of answers between the respondents.

What can also be seen as a limitation is the number of respondents: thirteen curators have been interviewed. The reliability of the results of this study would increase if more respondents were to be added to the research sample. Also, the fact that all of the interviews were conducted through Zoom and Teams can be considered a limitation, as this could influence the quality of non-verbal communication between the interviewer and the respondents. The researcher attempted to decrease these limitations by frequently shortly summarizing the answers by respondents to see whether the researcher has correctly understood the contents of what was being said. Another limitation is the amount of “management speak” (in the words of respondent 11), and the large amount of jargon that comes with the topic of agile working, which curators are often unfamiliar or inexperienced with, and some even implied that they get uncomfortable talking with “management speak” terms such as stakeholders, agile working and customer satisfaction. In order to battle this feeling of unease, the researcher has made an effort to make the curators feel as comfortable as possible by taking the time to get to know one another, explaining difficult concepts and translating them as accurately as possible.

5.5. Future research

The researcher proposes several recommendations for future research. First of all, many of the museums studied implicated that they are at a “crossroad” in their organization, trying to

professionalize their processes and the whole organization and work more efficiently, and also increase their customer focus. This has led the researcher to believe that maybe this research took place prematurely. The museum sector is evolving, and the researcher expects this evolution to continue in the upcoming years, especially with external disruptors such as COVID-19 forcing museums to make large changes. Therefore, it would be interesting to execute a similar study in the future, for example in 5 or 10 years, and make this into a longitudinal study. However, the advantage of having executed this research now, in 2021, is exactly the “crossroad” that these organizations are at, as this provides interesting insights into the process of and attitude towards change within this still fairly traditional sector.

Also, it would be interesting to execute this research with another research sample. The researcher has two ideas for this. The first is to have a research sample consisting of the project leaders of Dutch museum exhibition development teams. The researcher expects that comparing the experiences and opinions of these project leaders, who are often trained in the domain of (arts) management, would lead to interesting insights that might differ from those provided by the curators. This is suspected because several of the curators interviewed mentioned the tension field that is sometimes present between curators and project team leaders. This research could then contribute to the knowledge on collaboration between both parties, which is of practical relevance for the sector. The second suggestion of a different research sample is to interview American curators and then compare results with the Dutch study. This idea emerged from the interviews with respondents, in which some claimed that in the United States, curators have different time plans and seem to struggle less with high time pressure. Also, as curators in large American museums are democratically appointed, it would be interesting to see how this democratization seeps into the curation practices.

Finally, for further research, the researcher proposes an action research study. It would be interesting to study a museum that is adopting agile principles to their curation practices on the basis of the findings of this research. The researcher would then be provided practical insights on the application of agile project management into the sector. For example, the possible problems that these teams face in adopting agile to their practices, the experience and behavior of team members in this process, and inter-team interaction can be observed. This would contribute to agile practices becoming more widely adopted in the museum world.

6. Conclusion

Agile working is a project management method that originated in the software development domain but has been applied in many other sectors. This has led to successful results; companies adopting agile working well have achieved more efficiency, higher levels of customer satisfaction, and increased flexibility in adapting to changes. Despite these success stories, there exists a lack of knowledge on agile working in the creative and cultural industries, and even more so in the museum sector. Therefore, this research intended to fill this gap and add to the knowledge on agile in the not-for-profit literature, specifically for museum curation processes. Consequently, the main research question of this thesis is as follows: *In which ways are the current curation practices in Dutch museums agile?* In order to provide an answer to the main research question, three sub-questions were drafted: *I. Which perceived enablers of agile project management are currently present in the curation practices?*, *II. In which ways are the current curation practices in Dutch museums agile?*, and *III. How can agile practices contribute to the curation process of Dutch museums?* The research was conducted as follows. First, an elaborate theoretical framework was developed, using literature on agile project management by Highsmith (2004) and Conforto *et al.* (2014) and the Agile Manifesto (Beck *et al.*, 2001), as well as theory by Salameh (2014) on traditional project management methods. Furthermore, literature on museum curation processes by Dean (2002), Frey (2000), and the Smithsonian (2018) were used. With this literature, a framework was developed in order to bring together agile literature and museum curation literature, allowing for the identification of agile enablers and agile principles within museum curation processes.

For this research, it was opted to conduct a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews, as this allowed for the collection of in-depth knowledge on the topic and the development of new theory. The research sample consisted of 13 Dutch museum curators; all sampled through purposive and snowball sampling. The semi-structured interviews focused on retrieving information on the themes that were identified in the framework, namely: “customer collaboration”, “teamwork”, “internal processes”, and “responding to change”. This has allowed for a pleasant flow in the interviews, structured data collection and simplified comparisons.

Based on the empirical results that this study produced, the main research question can be answered as follows: agile working is not consciously applied within the Dutch museum curation process and this process has much resemblance with traditional, linear project management rather than agile project management. However, there are several opportunities to be identified for agile working in the museum sector, as multiple agile enablers are present in the current Dutch museum curation practices. Also, several aspects of museum curation allow for an agile approach. To several challenges that museums face - for example, lack of resources, poor evaluation, and the highly present trend of becoming more diverse and inclusive - solutions can be found within agile working. Increased efficiency, as a result of applying agile working to the curation process, could (partly) solve

the problem of lacking resources, and the customer focus inherent with agile working could become a tool in understanding and attracting a more diverse, inclusive audience. Furthermore, agile working could facilitate the evaluation process that is desired by the museum curation departments.

Concluding, this research produced several hopeful indications to the possible adoption of agile working to the museum curation process, hinting at a possibly successful marriage between the two. Further research in this respect is desirable, in the form of action research, for example, to facilitate more practical knowledge on the application of agile working in the museum curation process.

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Appendix A - List of curators interviewed

Name	Institution	Profession	Date
Respondent 1	Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam	Curator in Training	14-04-2021
Respondent 2	Kunsthall, Rotterdam	Senior Curator	20-04-2021
Respondent 3	Mauritshuis, Den Haag	Curator	22-04-2021
Respondent 4	De Lakenhal, Leiden	Curator	28-04-2021
Respondent 5	Hermitage, Amsterdam	Curator	28-04-2021
Respondent 6	Fries Museum, Leeuwarden	Curator	28-04-2021
Respondent 7	Van Gogh Museum	Junior Curator	29-04-2021
Respondent 8	Kunstmuseum, Den Haag	Curator	29-04-2021
Respondent 9	Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam	Curator	05-05-2021
Respondent 10	Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht	Curator	06-05-2021
Respondent 11	Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam	Curator	12-05-2021
Respondent 12	Teylers Museum, Haarlem	Curator	04-05-2021
Respondent 13	Boijmans van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam	Curator	25-05-2021

Appendix B - Interview Guide

Introductory questions:

Praktisch:

- Mag dit interview opgenomen worden?
- Wilt u het consent form tekenen en na afloop terugmailen?

Allereerst, hartelijk dank dat u dit interview met mij wilt doen. Dit wordt erg gewaardeerd! Vindt u het fijn als ik eerst een stukje over mezelf vertel, dan u een stukje over uzelf en dat we daarna door gaan naar de interview vragen?

- Ik ben Romée Langenhuijzen, 24 jaar en ik woon in Amsterdam. Ik heb kunstgeschiedenis gestudeerd in Leiden, grote passie voor de kunst altijd al gehad en me nu verder aan het verdiepen in de business/management kant van kunst en cultuur. Momenteel rond ik mijn master Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship af aan de Erasmus Universiteit in Rotterdam. In deze master heb ik mij beziggehouden met de bedrijfskundige/management kant van de kunst- en cultuursector. Hierbinnen ligt mijn interesse voornamelijk in de museumwereld, vandaar dat ik besloot mijn masterscriptie over een organisatorisch vraagstuk binnen het museum wilde doen. Specifiek gaat mijn scriptie over "agile werken", bent u daar bekend mee?
 - Ja: maakt u hier zelf gebruik van? Kunt u me meer vertellen hierover?
 - Nee: ik kan het wel uitleggen: "Agile werken" is een Project Management-methode die al veel wordt toegepast in andere sectoren (bancaire wereld, gezondheidszorg, ICT), maar nog weinig in de kunstwereld. Vandaar dat ik wilde onderzoeken of en wat de rol van agile betekent in musea. Aan agile hangen bepaalde voorwaarden voldaan moet worden: werk wordt verdeeld in korte sprints, er komt veel samenwerking met klanten bij kijken, veel evaluatie en teams bepalen hun eigen planning en doelen. Het is in veel sectoren al toegepast: banken, zorg, maar officieel een software term. Het stelt organisaties in staat om flexibeler, wendbaarder, "meer agile" te zijn. En nu ga ik uitzoeken, of daar een begin aan maken, hoe dit in de museumsector en dan specifiek in tentoonstelling ontwikkeling toegepast kan worden. Is dat helder voor u?
- Kunt u mij wat meer vertellen over uzelf en hoe u terecht bent gekomen op deze functie?

Nu we wat meer van elkaar weten zou ik graag willen bespreken waar ik het vandaag over wil hebben. Ik wil het vandaag hebben over de werkwijze van conservatoren bij het opstellen van tentoonstellingen, zoals ik al vertelde in mijn mail: ik schrijf namelijk mijn scriptie over agile werkmethode in het maken van tentoonstellingen.

Context: proces

- Kunt u mij vertellen hoe het opzetten van een tentoonstelling in zijn werk gaat?
 - Gaat dit altijd op dezelfde manier?
 - Hoeveel mensen zijn erbij betrokken ongeveer?
 - Hoe lang zijn jullie bezig met het opzetten van een tentoonstelling?
 - In hoeverre werkt u in dit proces met planningen? En kunt u me vertellen hoe deze planningen worden opgesteld? (door manager of door hele team?)
 - Waarom gaat dit zo? En gaat het al lang op deze manier?
 - En als u nu kijkt naar de flow van het curatieproces, zou u dat dan meer lineair noemen, dus van A-Z, of circulair/in delen opgedeeld? → watervalmodel vs agile

Customer Collaboration

- Kunt u mij meer vertellen over de stakeholders met wie jullie te maken hebben bij het opzetten van de tentoonstelling?
 - Wordt er ook met deze stakeholders samengewerkt?
 - Ik ben even benieuwd naar de rol van het publiek, in hoeverre is het publiek een stakeholder? Kunt u mij hier wat meer over vertellen?
- Kunt u mij meer vertellen over hoe klanttevredenheid in gedachten gehouden wordt tijdens het maken van een tentoonstelling en erna?
- Kan je me [el2] wat meer vertellen over jullie evaluatieproces? Evalueren jullie met je team? Wanneer en hoe vindt dit plaats?
- Evalueren jullie ook bijvoorbeeld met het publiek (tussendoor)?
 - Hoe gaat dat in zijn werk?
 - Zouden jullie daarin geïnteresseerd zijn?

Teamwork

- Op welke manier communiceren jullie het liefst? → face-to-face of anders?
- Kunt u mij wat meer vertellen over uw team?
 - Wat voor mensen werkt u mee, wat is de motivatie[el3] ?
 - Hoe gemotiveerd zou u uw collega's noemen?
- Wat vindt u van de werkdruk en het aantal uren dat conservatoren werken?

Internal processes

- Worden tussentijds al delen/elementen van de tentoonstellingen onthuld/opengesteld of vindt de grote onthulling pas aan het einde plaats?
- Wat zijn nou bepaalde uitdagingen die u en uw collega curatoren vaak tegenkomen? Gebeurt dat vaker? Wat is de oorzaak van... heb je zelf nog ideeën van hoe dat opgelost moet worden? Zo ja, op welke manier?

- Als u kijkt naar het curatie proces van tentoonstellingen, wat zou dan nog beter kunnen?

Responding to change

- Hoe gaan jullie om met veranderingen die langskomen tijdens het proces?

Afsluitende vragen

- Heeft u nog vragen voor mij?
- heeft u nog contacten van conservatoren van andere musea die ik kan spreken?