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Structuring experimentation: Implementing Growth Hacking in new ventures

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ABSTRACT

Recent academic and managerial literature has paid significant attention to experimentation methods employed at different stages of a new venture's lifecycle. Alongside the widely popularized Lean Startup method, Growth Hacking has emerged as an effective approach for supporting venture growth. While previous studies have examined experimentation from the process and individual perspectives, research on the integration of these methods within increasingly complex organizational structures remains limited. This article presents a comparative case study of two new ventures that adopted Growth Hacking while scaling. The findings reveal two approaches to the organizational implementation of Growth Hacking—either *bridging* or *permeating* experimentation throughout the organization—and explore their characteristics in terms of organizational configuration, the structure of marketing and product units, key roles, governance of experimentation, and associated benefits and shortcomings. These findings contribute to the literature on structuring experimentation and scaling in new ventures.

1. Introduction

> *"No company today has any reason* not *to establish a growth team—or multiple teams as the case may be—and doing so doesn't require abandoning traditional organizational structures or traditional marketing strategies."*
>
> (Ellis & Brown, 2017, p. 16)

Experimentation has become a new mantra in entrepreneurship. A growing body of studies advocates for the use of experimentation in new ventures to both validate business viability in the early stages (e.g., Blank & Eckhardt, 2023; Camuffo et al., 2020; Leatherbee & Katila, 2020), and to ensure business continuity and sustainability as the venture grows (e.g., Eisenmann, 2021; Paluch et al., 2020; Sanasi et al., 2023).

Over the past decade, numerous managerial books and popular press articles have highlighted various experimentation-based methods that have proven effective at different stages of a new venture's lifecycle. Among the most popular methods are the Lean Startup approach (Ries, 2011), which supports new venture creation, and Growth Hacking (Ellis & Brown, 2017; Holiday, 2014), which focuses on venture growth. Growth Hacking involves rapid testing and iteration to expand a venture's customer base quickly through data-driven decision-making (Bargoni et al., 2024b; Conway & Hemphill, 2019; Cristofaro et al., 2025).

Unlike the Lean Startup method, which emphasizes long-term business model validation (Ghezzi & Cavallo, 2020), Growth Hacking entails shorter, faster experiments to identify growth mechanisms with minimal resource commitment (Troisi et al., 2020). This makes it particularly useful in the scaling phase, where ventures aim to expand their customer base without proportionally increasing the resources deployed (Sanasi et al., 2023). Growth Hacking is widely adopted by digital ventures in particular, due to their ability to scale "efficiently and effectively" (Santoro et al., 2024, p. 75) by leveraging the affordances of digital infrastructures (Huang et al., 2017; Giustiziero et al., 2023).

Despite its growing application, research on Growth Hacking is limited compared to the Lean Startup method (Contigiani & Levinthal, 2019; Zahra et al., 2024). While prior studies have explored its role in business model innovation and scaling (Cavallo et al., 2023; Sanasi et al., 2023), defined its core principles (Troisi et al., 2020), and highlighted its practical applications (Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019; Feiz et al., 2021), there remains a gap in understanding how Growth Hacking can be integrated into an organization's structure.

Recent studies have called for research on how experimentation is structured within organizations (Sanasi, 2023). While experimentation methods like Growth Hacking are often viewed as a link between strategy formulation and implementation (Bargoni et al., 2024b), most

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studies have adopted a process-level (Contigiani & Levinthal, 2019; Felin et al., 2020; Sanasi & Ghezzi, 2024) or individual-level perspective (Felin & Zenger, 2009; Grimes, 2018; Zellweger & Zenger, 2023). Organizational structuration remains a key challenge in new venture development (Burton et al., 2019; Piaskowska et al., 2021), requiring the definition of governance structures, roles and responsibilities, resource allocation, and process standardization (Alexy et al., 2021; DeSantola et al., 2023; Greiner, 1998; Picken, 2017; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2022). This need is even more prominent during scaling, when ventures face significant challenges to match organizational structuration and growth (DeSantola & Gulati, 2017; Moedt et al., 2024; Sanasi et al., 2023; Van Lancker et al., 2023).

The importance of organizational structuration has also been emphasized in the strategic management literature. Building on Giddens's (1984) structuration theory, studies have argued that structuring work within an organization is essential for the enactment of strategy and to shape and enhance individual agency (Pozzebon, 2004; Whittington, 2015). Thus, investigating the implementation of Growth Hacking within ventures can deepen the current understanding of how experimentation can be structured within organizations. Based on these considerations, this study aims to answer the following research question: *How can organizations implement Growth Hacking within their organizational structure?*

To address this gap, this article presents a comparative case study of two new ventures that implemented Growth Hacking and examines how they embedded it into their organizational structure. The study draws on interviews with key informants from the ventures and expert Growth Hacking consultants who supported them in the process, supplemented by archival data provided by the informants and gathered from public sources.

This study's findings reveal two distinct organizational configurations: *bridging* and *permeating* Growth Hacking into the organization. Specifically, ventures can create a dedicated Growth unit responsible for governing all experimentation activities, acting as a bridge between marketing and product units. Alternatively, ventures can make Growth Hacking structural by integrating a Growth expert within each division to permeate experimentation across the entire organization. The findings of this study delve into the characteristics of these two approaches to implementing Growth Hacking, including organizational configurations, structure of marketing and product units, key roles, governance of experimentation, and the respective benefits and shortcomings of each approach.

Building on these findings, this study makes three key contributions. First, it advances the growing literature on Growth Hacking (Bargoni et al., 2024b; Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019; Santoro et al., 2024; Troisi et al., 2020), bridging the current gaps in understanding how to implement Growth Hacking within organizations. Second, it extends the understanding of entrepreneurial experimentation (e.g., Felin & Zenger, 2009; Gans et al., 2019) by responding to recent calls for research on structuring experimentation within growing organizations (Sanasi, 2023). Specifically, this study sheds light on how to facilitate the enactment of experimentation through the structuration of activities within an organization (Whittington, 2015), linking Growth Hacking with organization theory (Giddens, 1984). Third, it enriches research on organizing for scaling (Alexy et al., 2021; DeSantola & Gulati, 2017; Piaskowska et al., 2021) by providing an empirical account of how growing new ventures can organize to enact their growth strategy through Growth Hacking as they scale. These findings also offer valuable insights for entrepreneurs and managers, providing actionable guidelines on how to structure an organization to effectively integrate experimentation.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Growth Hacking

Growth Hacking is a managerial approach that originated from digital marketing, first introduced by Ryan Holiday in his book *Growth Hacker Marketing* (Holiday, 2014) as "anything that gets or keeps customers" (Holiday, 2017), and later conceptualized by Sean Ellis and Morgan Brown in their book *Hacking Growth* (2017). It has also been defined as "a new way of scaling businesses" (Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019, p. 62), intended to help entrepreneurs and managers identify the most promising strategies for promoting growth (Conway & Hemphill, 2019). The approach involves a series of structured steps, including hypothesis formulation, testing, and iteration, aimed at scaling the organization's business model once product-market fit is achieved and the focus shifts to growing the customer base (Holiday, 2014).

Growth Hacking contrasts with traditional marketing methods that often require significant resource investments (Bargoni et al., 2024b; Santoro et al., 2024), instead favoring a leaner process that seeks to identify the key drivers of exponential growth (Conway & Hemphill, 2019; Ellis & Brown, 2017). According to Bargoni et al. (2024c), Growth Hacking involves a "process of rapid experimentation and implementation of resource-light and cost-effective digital marketing tactics to help acquire and retain an active user base, sell products, and scale the business efficiently and effectively. It uses traceable marketing tools, so that data from individual and specific stages of the customer journey or funnel can be analyzed to assist in making decisions" (p. 2).

The process follows four phases: (i) analyzing and observing the context using both qualitative and quantitative data, (ii) ideating and generating hypotheses for growth experiments, (iii) prioritizing experiments to determine which should be executed first, and (iv) testing these hypotheses against empirical data (Ellis & Brown, 2017). This process is highly iterative, as "driving growth is a process that is never fully done" (Ellis & Brown, 2017, p. 508). The reliance on empirical data, continuous testing, and learning from experiments to inform decision-making (Bargoni et al., 2024c) demonstrates a strong conceptual alignment between Growth Hacking and established entrepreneurial experimentation theory (Cristofaro et al., 2025), which emphasizes hypothesis-driven testing, adaptive learning, and resource efficiency (e.g., Felin & Zenger, 2009; Murray & Tripsas, 2004).

Initially conceived to support managers and entrepreneurs in scaling businesses (Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019), Growth Hacking has been linked to business model innovation (Cavallo et al., 2023), continuous learning, customer relationship improvement (Troisi et al., 2020), learning from failure (Bargoni et al., 2024c), and the integration of AI into organizational decision-making processes (Santoro et al., 2024). It has also been proposed as a method for aligning strategy formulation with implementation (Bargoni et al. 2024b), especially during scaling (Sanasi et al., 2023). However, beyond monitoring growth metrics as KPIs for experiments (Bargoni et al. 2024c; Sanasi et al., 2023), studies have highlighted that successful implementation of Growth Hacking depends on its integration into the organization (Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019).

Yet, despite its widespread use in the entrepreneurial community (Ellis & Brown, 2017; Holiday, 2014), research has paid limited attention to Growth Hacking (Bargoni et al., 2024b, 2024c), particularly regarding the important aspect of its integration into organizational structures. To bridge this gap, research should explore how new ventures can effectively implement Growth Hacking, and experimentation-based methods more generally, by integrating them within organizational structures.

2.2. Structuring experimentation within the organization

Although interest in entrepreneurial experimentation has grown in recent years (Zellweger & Zenger, 2023), the understanding of experimentation in entrepreneurship has primarily focused on the process (e.

g., Contigiani & Levinthal, 2019; Felin et al., 2020; Liedtka et al., 2024) and individual experiences connected (e.g., Felin & Zenger, 2009; Grimes, 2018). In contrast, the understanding of how organizations implement experimentation within their structure is still limited (Sanasi, 2023).

According to organization theory, structures provide guiding principles for resource control and establish the rules that govern the organization. Giddens (1984) argued that structures play an important role in enabling (and constraining) individual agency by defining organizational members' tasks, activities, roles and responsibilities. In strategic management, this idea has been extended to suggest that, by enabling and constraining individual action, structures facilitate strategy enactment (Pozzebon, 2004). Since strategy is a socially accomplished and situated activity, structure shapes the possibilities for strategic action available to organizational actors (Whittington, 2015) and thereby influences the entire organization's strategy (Golsorkhi et al., 2015).

Unlike established organizations, new ventures are inherently oriented toward growth, change, and innovation (Carland et al., 1984), requiring them to scale their organizational structure to sustain customer base growth (DeSantola & Gulati, 2017; Bohan et al., 2024)—a particularly challenging task (Moedt et al., 2024; Picken, 2017; Piaskowska et al., 2021) while also ensuring profitability (Varga et al., 2023). Challenges include defining the division of labor and reallocating resources (Alexy et al., 2021), reorganizing roles and responsibilities, especially among top management (Van Lancker et al., 2023), managing knowledge (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2022), and onboarding new employees throughout the process (Snihur & Clarysse, 2022) to prevent negative experiences and burnout (Genedy et al., 2024). Scaling ventures must also balance the flexibility that allows them to seize new opportunities with the structure needed to grow into sustainable organizations (Burton et al., 2019; DeSantola & Gulati, 2017).

At the same time, experimentation is vital to venture survival and development (Camuffo et al., 2020; Murray & Tripsas, 2004) and continues to be during scaling (Sanasi et al., 2023). Even after achieving product-market fit (Eisenmann & Wagonfeld, 2014), ventures must continue to pursue learning and experimentation (Jones & Schou, 2023), albeit focusing on different aspects of their business model (Sanasi et al., 2023). Yet, the lack of clarity on how experimentation can be structured within the organization (Sanasi, 2023), particularly during scaling (DeSantola & Gulati, 2017; Piaskowska et al., 2021), leaves an important gap in understanding how experimentation fits into organizational structuration.

Drawing on the relationship between structure and strategy (Whittington, 2015), structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) offers a theoretical lens to explore how experimentation activities are structured within organizations and how new ventures use these structures to achieve their strategic goals. In particular, little attention has been paid to the role of organizational structures—such as governance, resource allocation, process standardization, roles and responsibilities (Alexy et al., 2021; Moedt et al., 2024; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2022; Van Lancker et al., 2023)—in enabling or constraining employee actions and decisions related to a venture's growth strategy. By leveraging organizational structuration for strategy enactment and enhancing individual agency, ventures can design structures that integrate experimentation and empower employees to innovate, take risks, and drive growth.

Growth Hacking embodies a set of organizational practices (Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019) that allow ventures to test and implement changes in their business model to grow their customer base (Sanasi et al., 2023; Varga et al., 2023). Studies have suggested that Growth Hacking bridges strategy formulation—including strategic decisions driving growth in a certain direction or toward a given target—and strategy implementation, i.e., the actions undertaken to enact those decisions (Bargoni et al., 2024b). Therefore, creating structures dedicated to Growth Hacking is crucial for enabling the enactment of a venture's growth strategy and to enhance individual agency in its implementation.

In summary, although prior studies have examined the entrepreneurial experimentation process and individual experiences, little is known about how experimentation-based methods like Growth Hacking are structured within organizations, particularly in the context of scaling. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of how specific organizational structures—such as governance, standardized processes, roles and responsibilities, and resource allocation—can support the integration of experimentation and drive strategy enactment is essential for organizations, especially new ventures. Addressing these gaps is crucial not only for advancing theoretical insights but also for providing practical guidance to organizations navigating the complexities of growth. Based on these considerations, this study investigates how organizations can integrate experimentation-based approaches, such as Growth Hacking, into their organizational structure.

3. Method

The scarcity of existing research on the organizational structuration of experimentation, especially Growth Hacking, makes the case study approach particularly suitable for this research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Specifically, this study employs a comparative case study design (Eisenhardt, 2021) to analyze two digital ventures (e.g., McDonald and Gao, 2019). This approach allows to balance an in-depth examination of each case with the opportunities for comparison of multiple-case studies (Eisenhardt, 1991, 2021).

At the time of investigation, the ventures were growing rapidly and facing a similar moment of their lifecycle, maximizing comparability. These characteristics made the ventures ideal for observing how they organized around the implementation of Growth Hacking when rapidly scaling. Both ventures had just received Series B equity funding from VC investors—a proxy for venture quality and the beginning of the scaling process (Eisenmann, 2021). Following the capital injection from the Series B round, the ventures were preparing for scaling (Van Lancker et al., 2023) and beginning to internationalize (Tippmann et al., 2023). At the start of the scaling process, the ventures decided to employ Growth Hacking as a method to scale their user base, restructure their organizations accordingly, and sought the support of external consultants specialized in Growth Hacking.

Hence, this study focuses on the similarities and differences in the implementation of Growth Hacking within a venture's organizational structure. The investigation is based on primary data collected through two rounds of interviews with key informants, including venture founders, managers, employees, and external consultants who supported the ventures in implementing the approach. The primary data collected are supplemented by secondary sources provided by the informants or gathered independently. This study is part of a broader project conducted by the author over several years, examining experimentation in new and established organizations.

The current study examines two of the organizations, enriched with additional data collection to deepen the understanding of Growth Hacking and its organizational implementation within the ventures. For confidentiality reasons, the two cases are presented under the pseudonyms of *Gimli* and *Legolas*.

3.1. Case selection

The selection of the ventures followed a three-step process. Given the challenge of determining upfront whether startups use Growth Hacking and whether they would restructure their organization for its implementation, in January 2019, I consulted with three highly experienced Growth Hacking consultants. These consultants had worked with numerous digital ventures across various industries in Italy, supporting them through their scaling process, advising on Growth Hacking strategies, and overseeing their integration within organizations. Additionally, two of the three consultants have authored books on Growth

Hacking, documenting their extensive experience with scaling ventures and the practical application of Growth Hacking within organizations. Given their expertise, I consulted them to identify the most representative ventures for observing the implementation of Growth Hacking during the scaling process.

Based on their recommendations, I identified six digital ventures and conducted preliminary interviews with the founders. I prioritized ventures that had reached Series B funding, a key indicator of entering the scaling phase, where Growth Hacking becomes particularly important for driving growth (Eisenmann, 2021). I also focused on ventures that were actively restructuring their internal organization to embed Growth Hacking as a core component of their growth strategy. This included changes such as team restructuring, resource reallocation, and the formalization of Growth Hacking practices within their operations. Lastly, I considered the size of the ventures, selecting those with between 30 and 100 employees, as this range allowed for the observation of Growth Hacking implementation in ventures of sufficient dimension to observe organizational changes within the venture.

Based on these criteria, four ventures were excluded as they did not align with the study's focus: they were either too small or had not yet structured their organization to fully implement Growth Hacking for scaling. Ultimately, only two of the ventures—*Gimli* and *Legolas*—made significant organizational changes to integrate Growth Hacking, making them the focus of this study.

The choice of these two ventures allowed for a deeper exploration of Growth Hacking implementation within an organization, while also incorporating the consultants' expert perspectives on its organizational integration and potential for generalizability. By comparing the different approaches taken by each venture, the study provides insights into how Growth Hacking can be embedded within a venture's growing organizational structure. Observing two cases also ensured the depth typical of single-case studies (Siggelkow, 2007), while enabling the comparison opportunities offered by multiple-case designs (Eisenhardt, 1991). In this sense, adopting a "matched pair" research design (Eisenhardt, 2021) reflected the necessity of observing cases with a common antecedent—in this case, the decision to scale and implement Growth Hacking within their organization—and allowed for the comparison of different possible outcomes.

3.2. Research context

Both ventures operate in the fintech industry, which has experienced rapid growth, supported by substantial equity investments from venture capital (VC) funds that provide significant opportunities for ventures operating in this domain (Gauthier et al., 2020). In Europe, fintech ranks as one of the top industries for producing scaleups, second only to biotech (Gauthier et al., 2023), driven by fintech ventures' ability to secure large Series B funding rounds (Gauthier et al., 2022)—a key indicator of ventures preparing to scale (Eisenmann, 2021; Gauthier et al., 2023). Fintech ventures not only rank high in terms of funding but also in exit values, averaging $400 million per exit in 2022, outperforming many traditional industries (Gauthier et al., 2023), especially when compared to more resource-intensive industries like manufacturing, retail, or transportation. These dynamics make fintech a compelling industry for observing the organizational implementation of Growth Hacking as ventures scale up and structure their organization (Greiner, 1998).

The two ventures examined in this study, *Gimli* and *Legolas,* were founded about five years prior to the time of investigation and had since received significant capital injections from professional investors, reaching Series B rounds in preparation for scaling. Both ventures operate digital platforms that provide financial services to business customers and consumers, thereby offering significant opportunities for rapid customer base growth. At the time of investigation, both ventures were ready to leverage the capital raised to prepare for scaling.

Founded in Italy, *Gimli* and *Legolas* decided to internationalize to support their scaling process by expanding their operations to the UK, one of the world's most vibrant fintech ecosystems (Khalifa, 2021). The UK ecosystem is the highest-valued ecosystem in Europe in terms of VC investments, with London ranking as the world's second-largest startup ecosystem. Between 2021 and 2023, London-based ventures raised $510 billion in venture capital (Gauthier et al., 2024), supported by a network of over 1,370 VC firms and an increasing number of unicorns each year (Gauthier et al., 2023).

Consistent with literature that identifies Growth Hacking as a key method for ventures scaling internationally (Holiday, 2014; Bargoni et al., 2024a), this context suited the investigation of Growth Hacking in scaling ventures particularly well. Based on these considerations, setting this research within the fintech domain and observing these ventures as they expanded into one of the world's fastest-growing entrepreneurial ecosystems provided a unique opportunity for in-depth analysis of Growth Hacking implementation in an extreme context.

Gimli's core business is providing businesses with prepaid cards for corporate expenses. The venture has been operational since 2015 and, at the time of investigation, had received Series B funding, which triggered a process of scaling, accompanied by organizational restructuring and internationalization. This enabled *Gimli* to expand to 100 employees within one year and significantly grow its customer base. *Legolas,* a B2C digital wallet provider, was founded in 2016 and similarly received Series B funding, which led to a process of scaling and internationalization. As it scaled, *Legolas* employed around 40 employees and was later acquired by a private equity fund for an undisclosed amount.

With the guidance of the specialized external consultants, both ventures implemented Growth Hacking to increase their customer base—the primary goal of scaling—while seeking to balance customer acquisition potential with limited resource commitments (Huang et al., 2017). To ensure the entire team was aligned with their growth objectives, both ventures structured their organizations to embed Growth Hacking into daily operations. This setting provided a relevant and rich context for investigating the organizational dynamics behind the implementation of Growth Hacking in fast-growing fintech ventures, offering insights not only from the ventures themselves but also from the external consultants involved in the process.

3.3. Data collection

To address the research question, the data collection process involved multiple sources of information, including a series of semi-structured interviews with selected informants, informal conversations, public presentations, and additional case data gathered from secondary sources (Yin, 2014). This approach ensured data triangulation and helped mitigate observer and recollection biases.

The two ventures had decided to approach scaling and implement Growth Hacking within their organizations one year prior to the start of data collection. Before conducting the semi-structured interviews, I began gathering information about the cases from secondary sources to reduce the risk of bias introduced by the informants' personal opinions. The case studies were built from twenty-two semi-structured interviews with key informants (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019)—including the ventures' founders, managers, and employees who were involved in Growth Hacking. External consultants were also interviewed to supplement the perspectives of founders, managers and employees. Their views helped to generalize the findings, drawing on their experience across multiple ventures.

The interviews focused on how the ventures were structured, why they decided to use Growth Hacking, who was responsible for conducting Growth Hacking experiments, and how these experiments were deployed within their organization. The interviews with external consultants were instrumental in understanding how organizing took place around the Growth Hacking method and the organizational choices made for its implementation. Appendix A offers an overview of the questions that guided the semi-structured interviews in each round.

The interviews were conducted over two rounds, held between March 2019 and September 2020. The data gathering process concluded when no new insights were gained from additional interviews, achieving theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The semi-structured interviews were supplemented by informal conversations and email exchanges to coordinate the meetings and, where necessary, clarify responses given during the interviews. In some cases, I followed up with the informants to explore specific aspects of Growth Hacking implementation in greater depth.

To enhance robustness and mitigate potential biases, I continually complemented the data from interviews with secondary sources throughout the research process —from before the first round of interviews (early 2019) through to 2021. Secondary data sources included public and closed-door presentations by the informants and other venture members, public and internal reports, public interviews (e.g., video interviews, podcasts featuring the informants), websites, and other reports produced by and about the ventures during and after scaling. This triangulation ensured a balanced and comprehensive understanding of Growth Hacking implementation and its outcomes. Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the sources of information used in the data collection process.

3.4. Data analysis

Each interview was recorded and transcribed, and so were the secondary-data sources that allowed for it (e.g., audio sources, videos). The transcripts and textual information were analyzed by interpreting the informants' statements by performing axial coding on the transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The aim of this analysis was to identify common themes within the data from both cases and compare their different outcomes (Eisenhardt, 2021). Although this task should be performed starting from a clean slate, it is virtually impossible to interpret results with no preconception of related theoretical concepts (Eisenhardt et al., 2016).

Once coded, I organized the data collected into a table (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021), structuring the table by themes (rows) and by case (columns) to facilitate comparison. Following Eisenhardt (1989, 2021), I compared the two cases looking for similarities and differences in the findings, so as to identify patterns and differences. This way, I could draw a precise picture of the different configurational elements that characterize each of the ventures' organizational structure in implementing Growth Hacking. The following sections follow a conceptual composition (Berends & Deken, 2021) to illustrate the findings of this study based on the main analytical dimensions that emerged from the data.

4. Findings

This study's findings shed light on how new ventures implement Growth Hacking into their organizational structure. By analyzing the similarities and differences between the two cases—*Gimli* and *Legolas*—this research uncovers the key elements underlying the organizational choices ventures make to structure experimentation within their organization. In particular, the findings illustrate the ventures' choices in terms of governance structures, roles and responsibilities, process standardization, and resource allocation, and how they support strategy enactment and enhance individual agency. The findings reveal two distinct approaches to implementing experimentation within an organization, which are characterized by emerging differences in: (i) the organizational configuration adopted, (ii) the structure of marketing and product units, (iii) the key roles, representing people responsible for Growth Hacking within the organization, (iv) the governance of experimentation activities, and (v) the respective benefits and shortcomings of each approach. Considering these dimensions, the following sections explore the similarities and differences between the *bridging* and *permeating* approaches to the organizational implementation of Growth Hacking (summarized in Table 2).

4.1. Organizational configuration

Gimli is the larger of the two ventures, reaching 100 employees throughout its scaling process. The organization grew organically since its foundation, specializing within separate organizational units dedicated to a specific function—i.e., Marketing, Product, After-sales, and Legal—and thereby organized following a relatively traditional functional organizational structure. Even when setting out to scale and implementing Growth Hacking, *Gimli* decided to maintain its functional organizational configuration.

Gimli's management, with support from consultants, was seeking to introduce Growth Hacking as an engine for growth without sacrificing the synergies and efficiencies of having its employees specialize and collaborate with other subject experts within dedicated functional teams. To combine this logic with their efforts toward growing the venture, *Gimli* established a dedicated Growth unit as soon as it set out to scale. The Growth unit reported directly to the C-level and was placed alongside the other organizational functions. Its task was to orchestrate Growth Hacking experiments to grow the customer base through new customer acquisition, as well as the activation, retention, and better monetization of existing customers. As *Gimli*'s CEO explained:

> *"Our organization is becoming more and more established. As we grow in size and employees, we are developing a bit of inertia, and we need to start pushing the accelerator on growth while also remaining efficient in what we do in the day-to-day."*

Thus, growth efforts would not directly impact the venture's day-to-day activities, which needed to ensure service continuity and efficiency for core business customers. Instead, with the establishment of a dedicated Growth unit, *Gimli* assigned growth responsibilities to a dedicated

Table 1
Sources of data.

Source	**Data collected**	**Use in the analysis**
Semi-structured interviews	22 semi-structured interviews with key informants from *Gimli* and *Legolas* (i.e., founders, managers, employees, expert consultants involved in Growth Hacking)	Interviews were the primary source of data for the study, employed to gather information about how the ventures structured their organization for implementing Growth Hacking.
Informal communication	13 informal conversations 31 email exchanges	Informal communication with the informants served as a means of coordination and validation for the interpretation of the data collected through interviews and secondary sources.
Secondary sources	6 presentations (e.g., lectures, networking events) 4 internal documents 18 news articles 5 podcast episodes 11 online videos 2 official websites 8 financial statements 2x funding information	Secondary-source information was employed to triangulate the information gathered from the primary sources and gather additional information about the evolution of the cases over time.

Table 2
Key characteristics of the two approaches to the organizational implementation of Growth Hacking.

Approach	**Bridging**	**Permeating**
Organizational configuration	Functional configuration, organized around organizational functions (e.g., Marketing, After-sales, Product, Legal)	Matrix configuration, organized in cross-functional teams dedicated to different products or features; members of the team also report to their functional chief (e.g., Chief Marketing Officer)
Structure of marketing and product units	The organizational functions of Marketing and Product are linked through a specialized Growth unit, which holds both accountable for the activities needed to reach the venture's growth objectives	Representatives of the Marketing and Product units co-exist and collaborate within cross-functional teams and hold the entire team accountable for reaching the venture's growth objectives
Key roles	Growth Manager, in charge of the Growth unit, is accountable for the attainment of the venture's growth objectives by coordinating Marketing and Product employees	Marketing representatives are accountable for reaching growth objectives. They are embedded within cross-functional teams composed of back-end developers, front-end developers, and product designers
Governance of experimentation	Top-down approach to experimentation. The Growth unit orchestrates experiments and is responsible for translating data gathered by Marketing into decisions for the Product team, acting as a bridge between the two functions; specific experiments are suggested by Marketing or the C-level and coordinated by the Growth unit	Bottom-up approach to experimentation. Marketing representatives within each cross-functional team carry out experiments and permeate the insights coming from the experiments to the rest of the cross-functional team (e.g., developers) using their results to make decisions about the product
Benefits	• Facilitate flow of information between Marketing and Product • Exploit economies of scale of a functional organizational structure • "Plug-and-play" solution that facilitates implementation • Clear responsibility for experiments and implementation of their result • Strong autonomy, accountability, and authority over the experimentation process • Enhanced control over strategy enactment with a single point of contact	• Easy and rapid coordination between Marketing and the rest of the team, especially Product • Allows quick integration of market insights into the product • Enhanced individual agency for the attainment of strategy • Increased informality and job enlargement for Marketing representatives, leading to better acceptance of organizational changes and higher commitment to experimentation activities
Shortcomings	• Creation of an additional layer of intermediation that could introduce process inertia and complexity • Possible authority and acceptance issues, especially when introducing new hires • Capital-intensive and higher risk	• Possible duplication of efforts and inefficiencies from the replication of the functional structure and the experiments • May encumber alignment between cross-functional teams • Difficult setup due to the need of organizational restructuring

team tasked with charting the venture's growth direction and pursuing growth objectives for the entire organization.

Legolas, by contrast, decided to restructure its organization, which was previously informal and had undefined hierarchies and spontaneous cross-functional collaborations, with the help of a specialized Growth Hacking consultant. The restructuring followed a matrix organizational configuration based on two dimensions. *Legolas*'s management decided to preserve the functional teams—Marketing and Support, Product Design, Front-end Development, and Back-end Development—while also establishing three cross-functional teams focused on customer lifecycle phases and product complexity: (i) customer onboarding and acquisition, (ii) the existing online platform, and (iii) the newly launched banking product. Each team included members from Marketing, Design, Back-end, and Front-end Development, who reported to both their functional leader and their cross-functional team. As *Legolas*'s CEO noted:

> "*We have a very distributed structure. However, having one expert in each team enables them to have all the knowledge they need to deploy the needed experiments.*"

This approach allowed *Legolas* to better accommodate its need for high flexibility and product expertise, while also aligning all employees with the venture's growth goals, increasing their individual accountability, and supporting a distributed agency over the execution of the growth strategy.

Organizing in cross-functional teams was driven by the need to (i) grow the customer base, requiring a cross-functional team dedicated to acquisition and activation, and (ii) divide efforts between established and new products that could attract new customers. By matching specialization in a customer lifecycle phase or product with functional expertise, Legolas's employees could delve deeply into growth drivers in their specific areas and maintain full control and agency over their processes.

Although configured differently, both cases highlight how these ventures organized to scale, choosing approaches that best achieved their growth objectives. *Gimli* maintained its functional structure while adding a dedicated Growth Team, whereas *Legolas* restructured the organization entirely to ensure everyone was aligned with growth goals and give the entire organization agency to work toward attaining them.

4.2. Structure of marketing and product units

The organizational restructuring in both ventures was focused on customer base growth. Accordingly, both ventures prioritized the roles of Marketing and Product unit employees. More specifically, given that Marketing and Product employees play an important part in, respectively, gathering insights from the market and translating potential changes into the product offered by the venture, both *Gimli* and *Legolas* centered their organizational design choices about how these teams and their members would interact with each other and how they would relate to the venture's growth objectives.

With *Gimli's* choice to adopt a functional organizational configuration, Marketing and Product are distinct functional units within the organization. To support higher specialization in target customer groups, the Marketing unit is organized as a matrix. On the one hand, the unit is structured by businesses segment (i.e., small businesses, mid-market, and large enterprises). On the other hand, members are dedicated to a specific stage of the customer's lifecycle: customer acquisition—i.e., the first contact with the customer and their onboarding through the purchase of the product—and customer activation—i.e., the actual use of the product by the user once it has been acquired. The customer acquisition team is further split into online and offline customer acquisition, reflecting the online and offline channels that *Gimli* uses to reach and onboard new customers. Meanwhile, *Gimli*'s Product unit encompasses both back-end and front-end developers working collectively on both desktop and mobile platforms, as well as back-end infrastructure.

At the time of investigation, *Gimli*'s Marketing unit was working with an external consulting company to better define roles and responsibilities within Marketing and support the creation of the Growth unit. Thus, *Gimli* established the dedicated Growth unit as a bridge

between the Product unit and the Marketing teams focused on online and offline customer acquisition and activation. As explained by their CMO:

> *"We felt the need to increase the emphasis we placed on Growth within the organization, by establishing a dedicated unit that complements our existing organizational units and can focus on growing."*

In summary, *Gimli* decided to establish the Growth unit to meet an emerging need for growth and to enhance accountability for the venture's growth objectives. With a complex Marketing unit designed to guarantee customer orientation and strong connection with the market and a cohesive Product unit, *Gimli* maintained the structures, roles and responsibilities of both units while bridging them through the Growth Team, which also holds them accountable for the attainment of growth objectives.

Legolas, instead, invested in the close collaboration of Marketing and Product experts embedded within cross-functional teams. Every cross-functional team consists of a Marketing employee responsible for collecting customer data and suggesting product or customer acquisition experiments, a front-end developer, a back-end developer, and a product designer, who collaborate on developing and modifying the product and its features. Consequently, *Legolas*'s Marketing and Product departments were distributed across the different cross-functional teams and worked jointly to attain the growth objectives set by the management. As the Customer Acquisition Manager (part of Marketing) at *Legolas* explained,

> "*Each of the teams is very heterogeneous. This allows us to combine our competencies in the best possible way, ensuring the dialogue is always open. At the same time, we ensure each of us has a full overview on what the customers are going through, as well as their pain points*."

Legolas also collaborated extensively with two external consultants specializing in Growth Hacking, who supported them in defining the matrix structure, emphasizing customer acquisition and activation, and training employees about the Growth Hacking method, its governance, and implementation.

4.3. Key roles

Both ventures appointed a specific set of people to play a pivotal role in the organizational implementation of Growth Hacking. In *Gimli,* the organizational structure was enriched with a Growth Manager, in charge of overseeing all Growth Hacking activities and managing a small team of two people. *Gimli* hired the Growth Manager from outside the venture. The selection focused on someone who had developed experience in experimentation in other digital new ventures and could thus transfer some of that expertise to *Gimli*. The Growth Manager was hired with the mandate to create a small team by hiring junior resources and establishing the Growth unit.

Gimli's Growth Manager was tasked with transferring information between the Marketing and Product units and was given full responsibility for the Growth Hacking process within the venture. The Growth Manager's main objective was to gather insights coming from other units, especially from Product, and convey them to Marketing, which would design and execute experiments based on them, and vice versa. In the words of the Growth Manager,

> *"I am the point of contact between the Marketing and Product teams. My job is to make sure all insights coming from product usage are addressed to the Marketing team, so that they can do something about it."*

The Growth Manager and team mediated communication between Marketing and Product regarding the experiments and make sure that the insights gathered by Marketing were acted on and integrated into the end product by Product. The junior members of the Growth unit supported the Growth Manager in experiment administration, sometimes in collaboration with Marketing specialists, and analyzing the data collected. This way, the Growth Manager and team exerted agency over Growth Hacking at *Gimli*, being directly responsible for enacting *Gimli*'s growth strategy and accountable for meeting the venture's growth objectives.

In *Legolas,* on the other hand, the Marketing representatives were integrated within each cross-functional team and had similar competences and responsibilities regarding experimentation. Within their cross-functional team, the Marketing experts carried out experiments on different phases of the customer lifecycle and different product features, ensuring that the scaling potential of each product is fully exploited. As one of the consultants who supported *Legolas* in implementing Growth Hacking reported,

> *"If the venture is small, everyone has to do a bit of everything. So, the 'Growth master' has to get down to operations and be hybrid, instead of having a mere strategic role."*

In fact, Marketing experts in *Legolas* wore two different hats: on one hand, they followed day-to-day operations, while on the other, they led experiments aimed at growth objectives. Thanks to this dual role, the Marketing experts in each team could exert agency over the Growth Hacking process within smaller, more manageable cross-functional teams. This role helped ensure that each team contributed to enacting *Legolas*'s growth strategy and achieving its growth objectives. Additionally, the other members of cross-functional teams (e.g., back-end and front-end developers) were awarded significant individual agency in enacting the Growth Hacking process, making *Legolas* particularly flexible in facilitating communication between experts in different areas.

4.4. Governance of experimentation

These organizational choices led the two ventures to develop very different ways of structuring Growth Hacking within their organization, although both were aimed at ensuring the effective enactment of the venture's strategy and enhancing individual agency. Given their independence from the Marketing and Product units within *Gimli*'s functional organizational configuration, the Growth team had significant autonomy, authority, and accountability in terms of growth objectives. In governing the experimentation process, the Growth team's autonomy, authority and accountability allowed it to play a coordinating role between Marketing and Product and exert significant agency over the Growth Hacking process. In this sense, the Growth Manager and team orchestrated experimentation, collaborating with Marketing to identify appropriate experiments to grow the customer base, monitoring and executing them, and ultimately translating the data gathered by Marketing into actionable product decisions for Product to implement.

Initially, most acquisition and activation efforts were devoted to the small business market segment. In particular, the venture recognized that this customer type is especially responsive to online marketing and can make decisions quickly without complex corporate processes requiring direct sales interaction. Activating customers also took less time, enabling the venture to experiment more with this customer type. Thus, *Gimli*'s Marketing unit found that smaller businesses were less affected by unsuccessful experiments. Consequently, most experiments at *Gimli* focused on acquiring and activating small business customers.

Gimli's Growth unit was a key contributor in the creation of experiments for customer acquisition and activation, suggesting tools and timing for their execution and then analyzing the results with Marketing, before passing them over to Product for actionable changes. Within Marketing, experiments were often initiated by the Head of Acquisition, when they involved minor adjustments to the onboarding experience. Higher-risk experiments, such as those affecting the venture's business model (e.g., launch of new products), might come from the venture's C-level—e.g., the CMO or even the CEO. These experiments required greater effort and the collaboration of both Marketing and Product, while being coordinated by Growth. The external consultants in Growth Hacking were deeply involved in the process, working closely with

Gimli's Growth unit to develop an experimentation roadmap aimed at meeting growth targets. As *Gimli's* CMO highlighted,

> "*Every decision we make first needs to go through an experiment. We base all our decision-making on market feedback*."

In general, experiments at *Gimli* were conducted without a rigid protocol. Many experiments involved short tests related to acquisition and activation strategies, such as A/B tests on the platform. These experiments were supervised by the Growth Manager, administered directly by the Acquisition team, and lasted only for a few weeks. More significant experiments, such as changes or expansions to the core offering, were typically led by the CMO and coordinated by the Growth Manager. These experiments often required monitoring results over several consecutive months or at different times of the year.

The Growth Manager was accountable for reaching growth targets, thus ensuring that the Growth unit's incentives were aligned with the venture's needs and expectations. To achieve these goals, *Gimli*'s Growth unit maintained constant contact with Product, Sales, and After-sales teams, gathering insights from them and designing tests that could address actual customer needs. In this role, *Gimli*'s Growth unit served as a bridge between the rest of the organization and the teams dedicated to expanding the customer base, ensuring alignment with the venture's strategy and core values and effectively steering strategy enactment to drive growth.

In *Legolas*, instead, the representatives of Marketing within each cross-functional team were entirely responsible for identifying and conducting experiments. After gathering experiment results, they analyzed the data and shared insights with the rest of the cross-functional team for potential action. These insights informed decision-making about product adjustments. For example, an experiment might involve A/B testing on different landing page layout. When the A/B test data showed that one layout outperformed the other in customer acquisition, the Marketing expert consulted with the cross-functional team to implement changes on the landing page to improve customer acquisition rates.

Compared to *Gimli*, *Legolas* embedded experimentation more fluidly within the organization through a more informal experimentation process. Each cross-functional team had a Marketing representative, with full agency over Growth Hacking experiments, eliminating the need for C-level authorization. The cross-functional teams were accountable for meeting a 5-year strategic and product roadmap defined by the C-level. Within this roadmap, each team independently conceived and prioritized experiments related to different aspects of the product or customer acquisition process. Coordinated by Marketing experts, the cross-functional teams designed and executed several experiments aimed at growing the customer base. As explained by a consultant who collaborated with *Legolas* on Growth Hacking implementation,

> *"A common misconception of Growth Hacking is the necessity to identify one main element, the so-called 'Growth Hack', that is able to trigger exponential growth, but this happens once in a while and in very peculiar cases. In reality, growth derives from a combination of many small-scale increases in the user base, a combination of minor experiments that show positive results."*

By gathering data and observing user behaviors, each Marketing representative proposed tests to their cross-functional team. Once a set of experiments was identified, the Marketing representative prioritized them based on which experiments were more likely to yield significant results, drawing on historical data from previous experiments. This process allowed the Marketing representative to create an experimentation roadmap to share with the rest of the cross-functional team. After agreeing on the roadmap, the team executed the experiments and evaluated the outcomes to gather performance data.

Most experiments at *Legolas* were conducted in two-week sprints, allowing each team to structure its workflow around these iterative cycles. However, the duration and nature of experiments varied based on their scope: simpler experiments could be concluded in as little as three days, while more complex experiments could span up to four sprints. As a Customer Acquisition Specialist explained,

> *"In my team, we sometimes test different landing page layouts to see if they make a difference, or run bigger tests. (…) We once tried adding videos where users could understand how the mobile app worked, and we saw it increased conversion to activation by 10 %."*

This flexibility in running diverse types of experiments enhanced the Marketing experts' individual agency over experimentation, enabling them to tailor their approach based on the experiments' scope and impact. This adaptability also suited the informal and low-hierarchy approach *Legolas* took in implementing Growth Hacking, which afforded the venture significant flexibility in deploying experiments to achieve growth objectives.

In summary, both *Gimli* and *Legolas* established clear and defined governance structures for experimentation, either by creating a dedicated Growth unit to oversee experiments, or by embedding trained employees within cross-functional teams. Those responsible for experimentation gathered data from functional experts, coordinated relevant experiments, and contributed to the venture's growth efforts. Both ventures appointed a dedicated team to manage experimentation, fulfilling an infrastructural role within the organization. This structuring of experimentation provided clear roles and responsibilities, ensuring accountability for enacting the venture's growth strategy and enhancing individual agency in the experimentation process. As a consultant working with *Gimli* on organizational structuration noted,

> *"Bigger startups can dedicate resources full time and have people focused on experimentation all day."*

Indeed, *Gimli* was able to hire a Growth Manager and dedicate resources exclusively to growth-oriented experimentation. In contrast, *Legolas*, with a smaller and leaner structure, could not afford a team solely focused on experimentation. To streamline the process from market information to product adjustments, *Legolas* opted to permeate Growth Hacking experts throughout the organization in a distributed model.

4.5. Benefits and shortcomings

Although both ventures established clear governance of the experimentation process, this study's findings have shown that their respective approaches to the implementation of Growth Hacking within the organization differ in terms of choices in organizational configuration, structure of marketing and product units, key roles, and governance of the experimentation activities. Given these differences, the two different approaches have distinct benefits that allow the ventures to fully leverage their specificities, while also carrying specific shortcomings.

On the one hand, *Gimli*'s *bridging* approach to implementing Growth Hacking within the organizational structure allowed the venture to centralize experimentation efforts and make communication between Marketing and Product units more efficient. The presence of a dedicated Growth unit facilitates the flow of information between Marketing and Product, better conveying the market insights gathered by the different teams from Marketing—spanning online and offline customer acquisition, activation, and retention—into Product. In this way, *Gimli* also took advantage of the economies of scale inherent in a functional organizational structure, where specialized teams can easily and quickly coordinate during day-to-day activities, while a dedicated team—i.e., the Growth Manager and team—takes responsibility for orchestrating and conducting essential experiments to drive the venture's growth. In this sense, the establishment of the Growth team provided its members with the authority, autonomy, and accountability needed to govern experimentation activities, ensuring proper enactment of *Gimli*'s growth strategy. For example, giving the Growth unit full agency over the deployment of the experiments increased the likelihood that

experiments would be conducted rigorously and that their results will be integrated into the product.

Another advantage of the *bridging* approach is that it is immediately accessible to the organization, like a 'plug-and-play' option. Given *Gimli*'s size of 100 employees, it was easier for management to create a new unit within the existing organizational configuration than to restructure the entire organization in pursuit of growth. Adding a new unit could be accomplished without a full reorganization, especially when external hires, such as *Gimli*'s Growth Manager and team, are brought in without impacting the existing structure or employees.

However, establishing a specialized *bridging* unit focused on experimentation, as embodied by *Gimli*'s Growth unit, inevitably creates an additional layer of intermediation between Marketing and Product units. Besides its advantages, as highlighted above, the presence of an intermediary could slow communication related to experimentation, limit the implementation of learnings within the end product, and increase coordination costs between different units. Units might also resist following directions provided by a new organizational unit and, in cases involving external hires as with *Gimli*, new members of the organization. Indeed, this could lead existing employees to feel that the change is imposed "top down" rather than helping them align to the venture's growth strategy. Finally, establishing a new unit through external hires, depending on its size, requires a significant capital commitment and can involve a tradeoff between increasing the venture's customer base and the investment needed to do so.

On the other hand, *Legolas*'s choice to *permeate* the Growth Hacking approach and experimentation within each cross-functional team offered the venture the opportunity to achieve seamless coordination between Marketing experts and experts in other domains, such as product developers and designers. This close connection allows the venture to swiftly gather insights from the market and integrate them into the product with minimal organizational friction, making experimentation highly embedded within the organizational structure and culture and promoting the use of experimentation as a mindset rather than purely as a process. As a Product Manager at *Legolas* explained,

> "*If the experiments conducted by Marketing do not return positive results, the feedback comes immediately back to the team and to the experts in Product*".

In contrast to the *bridging* approach, the *permeating* approach promotes a "bottom up" attitude toward implementing Growth Hacking, enhancing Marketing employees' agency over enacting the venture's growth strategy and ensuring high flexibility to capture growth opportunities identified through direct contact with the market. This informal structure also encourages higher employee engagement in Growth Hacking activities, possibly leading to a better overall experience despite significant organizational changes and the challenges that characterize the scaling process. As an expert Growth Hacking consultant supporting *Legolas* noted,

> "[*Legolas*]'s core strength is the ability to immediately capture new customer needs or fix what is not working. Everybody is very engaged and enjoying this moment of high 'elasticity' in terms of what you can experiment with."

Yet, despite the benefit of high speed, flexibility, and increased individual agency over the experimentation process, having multiple people conduct similar and independent tasks in parallel results in a multiplication of efforts devoted to experimentation. This can hinder alignment between teams and lead to redundant experiments, making it harder to leverage knowledge generated by other teams. Additionally, increased individual agency and accountability in the *permeating* approach might overload certain individuals who have multiple roles in the organization, balancing day-to-day responsibilities with accountability for experimentation and growth efforts.

Another potential disadvantage of the *permeating* approach is its relation to venture size. *Legolas* restructured to adopt a *permeating* approach to Growth Hacking when the venture was still relatively small. Larger ventures like *Gimli* might find it difficult to completely restructure around cross-functional teams, resulting in longer setup times to establish teams in the new configuration. As *Gimli*'s experience demonstrates, larger ventures might favor a "plug-and-play" approach, such as a dedicated experimentation unit that can be introduced into the existing organizational structure.

The two cases illustrate two distinct approaches to implementing Growth Hacking within an organization (see Fig. 1 for a visual summary) to support organizational structuration in favor of the enactment of the ventures' growth strategy and the definition of individual agency in this process. Although both approaches show similarities and unique characteristics in their organizational configuration, the structure of marketing and product units, key roles, and governance of experimentation, each approach has benefits and shortcomings and emphasizes structuring experimentation within the organization to achieve the ventures' growth objectives. By *bridging* and *permeating* experimentation within their organizational structure, *Gimli* and *Legolas* have developed ways of implementing Growth Hacking within their organization—not just as a standardized process for experimenting with how to grow their customer base, but by making experimentation a structural component and laying the groundwork for strategically harnessing it to grow.

5. Discussion

This study illustrates how ventures can implement Growth Hacking within their organizational structure by following two distinct approaches: either *bridging* Marketing and Product units by establishing an organizational unit dedicated to experimentation, or *permeating* experimentation across the fabric of the organization. Specifically, these findings highlight the key characteristics of each approach to Growth Hacking implementation (summarized in Table 2), in terms of (i) the choice of organizational configuration, (ii) the structure of marketing and product units, (iii) the definition of key roles, (iv) the governance of experimentation activities, and the respective (v) benefits and shortcomings of the two approaches.

This study's findings connect with previous literature that identified Growth Hacking as a means to bridge strategy formulation—in this case, the definition of the growth strategy the venture aims to pursue—and strategy implementation—i.e., the activities the venture undertakes to achieve its growth objectives (Bargoni et al., 2024b)—particularly for ventures in the critical phase of scaling (Sanasi et al., 2023). As shown in the cases of *Gimli* and *Legolas*, both ventures were actively scaling, having secured Series B funding and initiated the process of restructuring their organizations to support customer base growth and international expansion. These cases reveal how Growth Hacking, when embedded in the organizational structure, facilitates not only the strategic decision-making necessary for scaling but also the continuous experimentation required to adapt to new market conditions and growth opportunities. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which suggested that new ventures do not stop experimenting after achieving product-market fit (Sanasi et al., 2023) but continue to innovate their business model to facilitate scaling (Cavallo et al., 2023).

These findings also emphasize the role of organizational structures in enabling strategy enactment and individual agency (Whittington, 2015), which is crucial for ventures in the scaling phase. As ventures expand, the cases suggest that the structuration of Growth Hacking helps ensure that growth initiatives are aligned with the venture's strategic objectives, while also empowering employees to experiment and drive growth through clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This reflects the principles of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), where structures act as catalysts for the successful exercise of individual agency in strategy implementation. Aligned with Pozzebon (2004), these findings also highlight the importance of structuring Growth Hacking to provide the necessary organizational scaffolding that enables both the venture as a whole and its individual members to navigate the complexities of

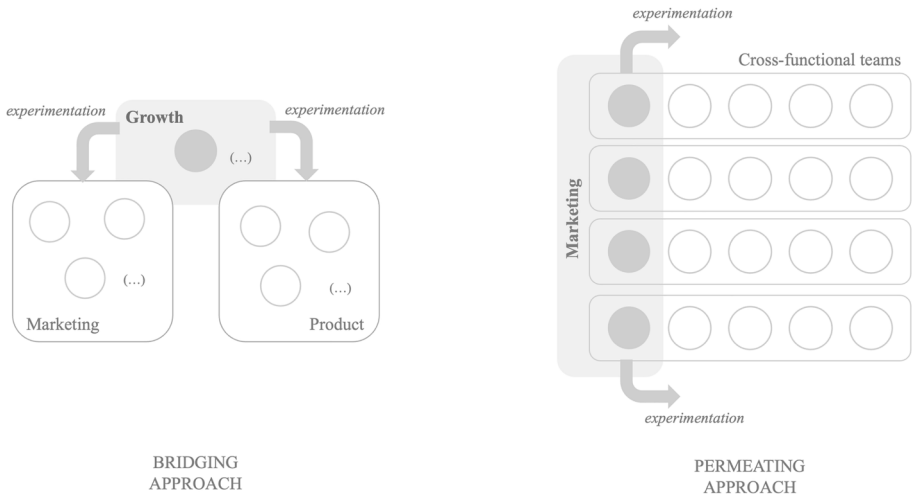

Fig. 1. Two approaches to the organizational implementation of Growth Hacking.

scaling, while also providing solid grounds for preventing employees' negative experiences (Genedy et al., 2024).

Furthermore, these findings respond to recent calls for research on structuring experimentation within organizations (Sanasi, 2023), demonstrating how the appropriate organizational integration of experimentation practices, such as Growth Hacking, is critical for their success (Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019), particularly during scaling. This research underscores the importance of embedding Growth Hacking into the fabric of the organization during scaling to enhance both strategy enactment and the scalability of the venture's operations. In this way, the structuring of Growth Hacking within scaling ventures not only supports strategy implementation but also ensures that the organization is equipped to grow sustainably while maintaining the flexibility needed to adapt to new growth challenges.

Additionally, as shown in the findings, the different configurations—*bridging* and *permeating*—*have* distinct characteristics with their respective benefits and shortcomings, depending on the ventures' specific needs and approach to growth. The *bridging* configuration represents a more top-down approach to the implementation of Growth Hacking, which can be implemented without extensive organizational restructuring, while the *permeating* approach promotes a bottom-up implementation that involves restructuring the venture's entire organization. In particular, the two approaches offer different solutions for addressing the trade-off between efficiency and flexibility of organizational structures that entrepreneurial ventures face, as identified in the existing literature (Burton et al., 2019; Davis et al., 2009). This trade-off is especially prominent in new ventures attempting to scale, which need to retain the flexibility and informality that supports an entrepreneurial opportunity-seeking behavior, while simultaneously structuring the organization to manage growth (Cardinal et al., 2004; DeSantola & Gulati, 2017; Flamholtz & Randle, 2012).

This study's findings also add to previous studies that argued that the influence of the marketing unit on firm-level strategic decision-making can positively impact firm performance (Wirtz et al., 2014). In fact, although *Gimli* established a specific Growth unit within the organization, the team collaborated closely with Marketing, enhancing Marketing's strategic influence over product development. Previous studies also argued that firms should promote a market orientation within the organization (Loveland et al., 2015), as a stronger market orientation is correlated with improved firm performance (Wirtz et al., 2014). In this respect, this study suggests that the integration of Growth Hacking within the organizational structure of the ventures inherently leads them to adopt a more market-oriented approach by basing decisions on insights derived from prospective and existing users.

These observations are consistent with earlier research recognizing marketing as a critical source of information to share across the organization due to its proximity to the market and ability to detect signals directly from customers (Lovelock & Wright, 2011). Previous studies also highlighted the importance of aligning insights from marketing and operations units for both product and service development (e.g., Dixon et al., 2014; Sanasi et al., 2024). Indeed, existing literature views marketing capabilities as a cultural asset distributed across the organization (Slater & Narver, 2000), fostering the cross-functional dispersion of marketing activities (Auh & Merlo, 2012), consistent with an activity-based approach rather than a functionally siloed view of marketing (Workman et al., 1998).

Building on these considerations, these findings support Ellis and Brown's (2017) claim about the importance of establishing a dedicated Growth team within the organization. These findings also highlight two different ways to structure experimentation, shedding light on how to implement Growth Hacking within the organizational structure to bridge strategy formulation and implementation (Bargoni et al., 2024b), and ultimately enabling strategy enactment (Whittington, 2015). In this sense, the introduction of structure enables employee agency (Pozzebon, 2004) for the enactment of the venture's growth strategy through experimentation. Specifically, creating a dedicated Growth unit in *Gimli* created the conditions for assigning responsibility to a specific team—the Growth unit—to attain the venture's growth objectives and enact *Gimli*'s growth strategy through Growth Hacking. The unit also enhanced individual agency in the experimentation process by enabling team members to control the experiments conducted, their results, and how the learnings were implemented into the product.

Similarly, this study's findings illustrate how *Legolas*'s *permeating* approach allowed the venture to ensure that Marketing representatives within each cross-functional team could monitor the attainment of growth objectives and set up experiments to drive growth. This configuration also enhanced employees' individual agency in the experimentation process, as individual Marketing experts could direct the experimentation roadmap and resulting decision-making while holding team members accountable for implementing product changes. Overall, these findings show how the ventures' organizational structuration around growth through either approach—helped enact their growth strategy and enhance employees' agency over Growth Hacking experiments, consistent with arguments in the literature about the role that organizational structures play in enabling structure and agency (Giddens, 1984; Pozzebon, 2004; Whittington, 2015).

5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study's contribution to the existing literature is threefold. First,

the findings enrich the growing literature on Growth Hacking, a method that is increasingly popular among practitioners for business growth (Bargoni et al., 2024a; Bargoni et al., 2024c; Santoro et al., 2024; Troisi et al., 2020). They expand the current theoretical understanding (Bargoni et al., 2024b) with an empirical account of two new ventures that structured Growth Hacking within their organizations as part of their scaling efforts. This understanding complements the existing body of literature on Growth Hacking within new ventures (Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019; Conway & Hemphill, 2019), particularly in the context of scaling (Cavallo et al., 2023; Sanasi et al., 2023). By identifying two distinct approaches—*bridging* and *permeating*—and their features, this study provides actionable insights for organizations looking to structure Growth Hacking and aligns with the broader understanding of organizational structuration as the foundation for strategy enactment (Whittington, 2015). Specifically, these findings identify both how to implement Growth Hacking within a new venture as it prepares to scale, and also highlight the benefits and shortcomings of two different approaches to organizational structuration around experimentation. Thus, this study bridges the current gaps in the understanding of how to implement Growth Hacking within an existing and changing organization, responding to recent calls for moving beyond the process view of Growth Hacking often promoted by existing accounts of the approach (Bargoni et al., 2024b).

Second, this study extends the current understanding of entrepreneurial experimentation (e.g., Felin & Zenger, 2009; Gans et al., 2019) by addressing recent calls for research on structuring experimentation within growing organizations (Sanasi, 2023) and established organization theory (Giddens, 1984). The findings shed light on how organizational structuration facilitates experimentation enactment and enhances individual agency over experimentation activities (Whittington, 2015). This study taps into the growth orientation inherent in new ventures (Carland et al., 1984) and the organizational challenges they face in managing it (Piaskowska et al., 2021) and establishing organizational structures that can support growth (DeSantola & Gulati, 2017; Picken, 2017). This study advances the understanding of how experimentation can be made structural within an organization, proposing alternative configurations to do so and elaborating on their distinctive features.

Third, this study responds to calls for empirical research on organizing for scaling (DeSantola & Gulati, 2017; Piaskowska et al., 2021) by providing an account of how growing new ventures might make choices to restructure their organization to control the enactment of their growth strategy and enhance individual agency during scaling (Van Lancker et al., 2023). New ventures face the need to define the division of labor, resource allocation (Alexy et al., 2021) and coordination (Jones & Schou, 2023) to keep pace with a growing organization (Picken, 2017), requiring them to consolidate or establish new organizational structures (Alexy et al., 2021; Burton et al., 2019). In this context, Growth Hacking offers a structured approach to support ventures after reaching market validation (Sanasi et al., 2023), helping them promote business growth (Bargoni et al., 2024b) and scaling (Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019). By highlighting the *bridging* and *permeating* approaches, this study advances the understanding of how ventures structure their organization for scaling (DeSantola & Gulati, 2017; Eisenmann & Wagonfeld, 2014; Van Lancker et al., 2023) and emphasizes the importance of intentional organizational structuration. Additionally, the study contributes to the ongoing debate on employee alignment and identification with an evolving organization (Genedy et al., 2024; Snihur & Clarysse, 2022).

5.2. Practical implications

This study provides valuable insights for managers and entrepreneurs navigating the complexities of implementing experimentation-based approaches, such as Growth Hacking, within their organizations. Specifically, it offers actionable guidelines for overseeing experimentation efforts aimed at implementing a growth strategy, including customer acquisition, activation, and retention. The findings highlight the importance of establishing a dedicated Growth unit or appointing a team of Growth experts within new ventures that are preparing to scale. These roles serve as an infrastructural entity responsible for designing, executing, and ensuring accountability for experimentation efforts aligned with the venture's growth targets. Finally, this study emphasizes the significance of organizing experimentation early in the structuration process of a new venture, providing managers with guidance on integrating it into the organizational (re)configuration of the venture to support sustainable growth.

5.3. Limitations and future research avenues

This study is not free from limitations. First, it presents a limited account of the possible organizational configurations that new ventures might employ to implement Growth Hacking. Specifically, the study compares two ventures in their organizational implementation of Growth Hacking. Although the limited number of cases analyzed allowed for an in-depth examination of the two ventures, combining the positives of single-case studies with the comparability afforded by multiple-case studies (Eisenhardt, 2021; e.g., McDonald and Gao, 2019), future studies might extend this sample to evaluate alternative configurations. For example, studies could also examine ventures that experienced significant challenges, or even failures in the implementation of Growth Hacking at the organizational level, to produce more nuanced results. Additionally, future research could compare the organizational implementation of Growth Hacking with other experimentation-based approaches, such as the Lean Startup method (Ries, 2011), at different stages of a new venture's lifecycle.

Second, the geographical location of the two ventures analyzed offers valuable insights but could limit the generalizability of the findings. While the ventures expanded to a highly dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem and encompassed international teams, this study cannot rule out the possibility of being affected by local market dynamics or cultural factors. Future research could examine the differences in Growth Hacking implementation in ventures from different countries or contexts to explore how geographic factors might shape the organizational structuration of experimentation-based methods. Additionally, this research focuses on the fintech industry, particularly ventures focused on digital solutions, which may hinder the generalizability of the findings to other industries characterized by lower flexibility and slower growth. Further research could extend this study's findings by investigating Growth Hacking implementation in more traditional and resource-intensive industries. Moreover, while this study focuses on Growth Hacking during the scaling phase, the investigation of structuring experimentation activities could be extended to other approaches and different stages in a venture's lifecycle, as well as within established organizations.

Third, while the two organizational configurations supported successful scaling in the cases analyzed, this study does not elaborate on the specific performance implications of adopting either configuration. To address this limitation, future studies could employ larger-scale samples of organizations and quantitative research designs to evaluate the effectiveness of each configuration on venture growth and financial performance, providing more detailed insights into the best contexts and boundary conditions for each approach.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated how two new ventures integrated Growth Hacking within their organizational structure. The findings highlight two distinct approaches for embedding experimentation within the organization—either *bridging* experimentation or *permeating* it across the organization's structure. These approaches differ in terms of organizational configuration, the structure of marketing and product units, key roles, governance of experimentation, and their respective benefits and

shortcomings. Building on these findings, this study addresses recent calls for research on the implementation of Growth Hacking, the organizational structuration of experimentation, and organizing for scaling. Moreover, it offers valuable guidelines for practitioners on how to implement experimentation-based approaches, particularly Growth Hacking, within new or growing organizations.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Silvia Sanasi: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Interview Protocol

Interview round	Sample questions	Scope
First round	• How do you use Growth Hacking within [your venture]? • Why have you decided to use Growth Hacking within [your venture]? • Who is in charge of Growth Hacking experiments within [your venture]? • What is your role in the deployment of Growth Hacking? • Who analyzes the insights coming from the experiments and how do you use them? • How did you identify [your venture]'s organizational structure?	Understanding the use of Growth Hacking within each venture and the reasons behind it; understanding the governance of Growth Hacking activities; understanding the key people in the organization for the implementation of Growth Hacking.
Second round	• How is [your venture] structured? • How do Marketing and Product units communicate? • Why did [your venture] decide to organize this way? • What are the pros and cons of adopting this organizational structure for [your venture]? • What are some specificities of your approach to Growth Hacking?	Understanding the organizational structure of each of the ventures more in detail, identify the benefits and shortcomings of their organizational configurations.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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