OFICINA NACIONAL DE EMPRENDIMIENTO

MONOGRAPH

September 2026

Sustainable growth for *startups*: How to scale without losing culture, focus or efficiency

Financiado por la Unión Europea NextGenerationEU

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA · MINISTERIO PARA LA TRANSFORMACIÓN DIGITAL Y DE LA FUNCIÓN PÚBLICA · SECRETARÍA DE ESTADO DE DIGITALIZACIÓN E INTELIGENCIA ARTIFICIAL

red.es

Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 | Executive Summary

02 | Introduction

03 | People and culture as the basis for growth

04 | Strategy and metrics for sustainable growth

05 | Operations, Processes, and Impact

06 | Real cases and lessons learned

07 | Conclusions and future

08 | Glossary

09 | Bibliography

01 Executive Summary

Growth in *startups* can no longer be read only in terms of speed, funding, or business expansion. In an environment that is more demanding in terms of productivity, professionalisation and sustainability**, scaling well implies growing without weakening the foundations that support the project.**

This monograph is based on a central idea: a *startup* grows sustainably when its expansion does not compromise its future ability to create value. From this perspective, sustainability is not limited to environmental criteria or explicit impact, but acts as a framework for thinking about the quality of growth, organisational coherence and the soundness of the business model.

The **paper discusses three key dimensions**. The first is human, where talent, culture and leadership function as an infrastructure for growth. The second is **strategic**, in which focus, metrics, sequence of decisions and financial discipline allow us to distinguish between robust expansion and fragile growth. The third is operational, linked to processes, efficiency, coordination and technological integration as conditions for absorbing complexity without losing execution capacity.

The analysis shows that many of the main risks of scaling appear within the organisation: team overload, strategic dispersion, dependence on key people, weak processes, or funding that masks mismatches. Faced with this, growing sustainably requires prioritisation, gradually professionalising the structure and strengthening the capacity for execution.

The conclusion is clear: sustainability does not limit entrepreneurial ambition, but contributes to consistency and continuity.

| 02 | Introduction

In recent years, the debate around startup growth has undergone a significant shift in focus. For a long time, much of the entrepreneurial ecosystem assumed that growing quickly was the main factor in a *startup*' **s success: anticipating the competition, reaching scale quickly, and postponing professionalisation to later stages**. However, the experience accumulated by the ecosystem itself, coupled with an increasingly demanding environment in terms of financing, productivity and execution capacity, has shifted the conversation to a more complex question: **how to grow without compromising the strength of the organisation or its ability to generate value in the long term.**

This shift in focus is closely related to the evolution of the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship. Although it is usually associated with environmental issues or the development of social impact initiatives, the specialised literature proposes a broader vision. From this perspective, sustainability is part of the way a company creates value, makes decisions and relates to its stakeholders. Applied to business growth, this implies expanding the activity without jeopardising the future viability of the business or deteriorating the elements that make it possible, such as its culture, its organisational model or its ability to adapt.

In this context, the article "Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development Goals: A Bibliometric Analysis" provides a useful reference for understanding the growing relevance of this approach. Based on the review of 102 studies published between 2015 and 2020, its authors conclude that academic interest in the relationship between sustainable entrepreneurship and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has intensified since 2018. Among its main contributions, a particularly relevant idea stands out: **sustainability should not be understood as an element that is incorporated when the company has already reached a certain size, but as a principle that must be part of the entrepreneurial culture from its early stages.**

This reflection is especially pertinent in the case of *startups*. Unlike consolidated companies, a *startup* simultaneously develops its product, market, team, brand and organisational model. In other words, it does not grow on a stable structure, but as it builds that structure. Therefore, each expansion decision has implications in multiple areas of the organisation. Accelerating hiring can boost business growth, but also generate cultural tensions; Entering new markets can increase traction, even if it introduces operational complexity that is difficult to manage; and raising finance can provide room for growth, but also hide inefficiencies if there is not adequate execution discipline.

In addition, this debate takes place in a context marked by the challenges of competitiveness, innovation and productive transformation both in Spain and in Europe. In recent years, the Spanish entrepreneurial ecosystem has gained relevance and maturity, while European policies increasingly place innovative entrepreneurship within an agenda that connects business growth, digital transition, sustainability and long-term value creation. In this scenario, scaling is no longer interpreted only as a sign of business ambition, but also as an indicator of organisational maturity and the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem itself.

This monograph analyses how *startups* can sustain their growth without compromising their ability to adapt, execute and create value in the medium and long term. Analyzing this challenge requires looking at growth from several complementary dimensions:

- The first is human, related to talent, leadership and organisational culture.
- The second is strategic, linked to focus, metrics, and growth sequence.
- The third is operational, which encompasses processes, efficiency and technological integration.

Understanding the balance between these dimensions is essential to building organisations capable of growing in a solid, resilient and sustainable way.

To delve deeper into these issues, this monograph has the contributions of experts with extensive experience in different key areas of business growth:

Rodrigo Rosso, Operations, Scalability and Organizational Efficiency Specialist. Throughout his career, he has accompanied *startups* and growing companies in the design and implementation of systems, processes and structures that allow them to scale sustainably. His expertise is focused on turning operational complexity into a competitive advantage, helping organisations grow without losing agility, efficiency, or ability to execute.

Andrea Amaro Gómez, co-founder of Avantis and specialist in People & Culture, with an entrepreneurial career focused on the strategic transformation of organisations through talent, innovation and purpose. Its approach places people at the centre of change, promoting organisational cultures that are more human, autonomous and oriented towards co-creation.

David Muñoz Lucas, founder and CEO of FromZeroToTen, is a professional with a strategic and entrepreneurial profile, focused on accompanying organisations in processes of growth, innovation and transformation. His track record reflects a combination of business vision, collaborative leadership, and ability to generate impact through projects aimed at change and value creation.

Adriana Mata, founder and CEO of Agile Impacts, a specialist in impact measurement, financing and technology applied to social impact, with more than 17 years of experience accompanying social and environmental organisations in 26 countries. Founder of Agile Impacts, a social enterprise that uses artificial intelligence to simplify impact measurement and connect organisations with capital.

2.1. The challenge of sustainable growth in *startups*

Sustainable growth in a *startup* can be defined as the **ability to expand its activity, structure and presence in the market without deteriorating the internal coherence** of the project or compromising its future viability. This definition forces us to go beyond a purely quantitative view of growth. It is not enough to analyse indicators such as turnover, investment attracted or geographical expansion. It is also necessary to evaluate the quality of that growth: if it generates value consistently, if it maintains the strategic focus and if it avoids transferring hidden costs to the organisation.

From this perspective, speed is no longer a sufficient criterion to evaluate the progress of a *startup*. Growing fast may be desirable and even necessary in certain phases, but it loses meaning when it is sustained by the continuous wear and tear of the team, structural improvisation or dependence on dynamics that are difficult to replicate.

Truly solid growth is one that combines ambition with consistency, capable of generating traction without compromising the organisation's ability to consolidate what has been built and project itself in the medium and long term. As David Muñoz, founder and CEO of FromZeroToTen, points out: *"Scaling a startup has a very emotional component. It forces you to endure high tension for quite some time: pressure, workload, uncertainty and the need to keep moving forward before you have all the resources you would like to have."*

At this point, one of the most common tensions in any scaling process appears: the balance between speed and stability. Startups need to move quickly because they operate in uncertain environments, with limited resources and often reduced windows of opportunity. At the same time, they need to build structures, processes, and dynamics that provide stability and allow growth to be absorbed. The question is not to choose between speed or stability, but to find the right balance between the two.

2.2 The new context of entrepreneurial scaling

Entrepreneurial scaling no longer occurs in the same context as it did a few years ago. Today, *startups* must respond to increasingly broad demands related to the professionalisation of management, the traceability of decisions, sustainability and the generation of long-term value.

In Europe, this trend is particularly visible. Strategies linked to competitiveness, innovation and the digital transition increasingly place innovative entrepreneurship within an agenda that combines growth, sustainability and long-term value creation. Thus, aspects such as governance, operational efficiency or the impact generated are becoming increasingly important in the evaluation of business projects.

For the Spanish entrepreneurial ecosystem, this change has concrete implications. Scaling should no longer be understood solely as a matter of business ambition or increasing size. It is also a test of organisational maturity.

Startups that aspire to **sustained growth will need to align talent, processes, financing, technology, and impact within a coherent and integrated strategy.**

| 03 | People and culture as the basis for growth

3.1 Building resilient teams

People are the basis on which any growth process is sustained. In a *startup*, teams don't just execute tasks; they also interpret context, solve problems, compensate for the absence of consolidated processes, and keep organisational culture alive. Therefore, when a company enters an expansion phase**, building resilient teams is no longer an issue exclusively linked to human resources and becomes a strategic priority.**

Organizational resilience does not depend solely on individual talent. It arises from the combination of skills, leadership, culture and work context. Consequently, attracting talent in a growth stage requires more than just filling vacancies. It requires **identifying what capabilities the organisation needs at any given time** and which profiles can provide greater value depending on the phase in which the company finds itself.

It is not the same to hire to explore a market as it is to optimise an already consolidated operation. Nor is it the same to incorporate generalist profiles during the early stages as it is to incorporate functional managers when specialised teams and more defined objectives begin to appear. One of the most frequent mistakes during scaling is to hire guided by urgency or professional prestige without assessing whether the person fits into an environment characterised by uncertainty, autonomy and continuous construction.

Resilience also means preventing growth from relying on the extraordinary effort of a few people. When an organisation moves forward because certain team members are constantly compensating for gaps in structure or coordination, it can appear to be working well. However, it is actually accumulating vulnerabilities that will end up limiting its development. From this perspective, resilience is not only built by incorporating the right talent, but also by creating the conditions so that this talent can sustain its performance over time. Along these lines, Andrea Amaro, co-founder of Avantis and a specialist in People & Culture, points out that *"many startups think that scaling is hiring talent. I think scaling up is getting all those people to work with a shared way of thinking, even if they're not in the same room."*

Similarly, a team needs shared priorities, coordination mechanisms, and reasonably clear criteria for deciding. Without this common base, growth in the number of people or in commercial capacity does not automatically translate into greater operational capacity. For example, if a company doubles its commercial capacity but does not define how information is transferred to product and operations, the organisation begins to absorb frictions that slow down execution, hinder decision-making, and end up generating organisational debt. David Muñoz sums it up this way*: "The first key decision is to try not to always reach the limit. If possible, I think it is advisable to have a slight oversizing of the equipment or structure at critical points. I'm not talking about growing irresponsibly, but about preventing the team from permanently drowning. When that happens, operational debt is generated: improvised processes, reactive and dynamic decisions that are then difficult to correct."*

Finally, talent retention is closely linked to the credibility of the project. People tend to stay in organisations where they perceive coherence between discourse, priorities, and way of working. A *startup* that promises autonomy, learning, and impact, but operates from constant improvisation and permanent overload, risks eroding that trust.

Therefore, building resilient teams is not only about attracting talent, but also about creating the necessary conditions so that this talent can develop, contribute and remain in the organisation as it grows. As Andrea Amaro concludes, *"startups do not stop growing because they lose speed. They stop growing when complexity increases faster than their ability to organise."*

3.2 Scaling of organisational culture

In the early stages, a *startup*'s culture is often passed on naturally and informally. It is present in the way they solve problems, in the relationship with customers, in the leadership style of the founders and in everyday decisions that are rarely documented. While the team is small, this dynamic can be enough. However, as the organisation grows, proximity ceases to be an effective mechanism for transmitting behaviours, values, and ways of working. As Andrea Amaro explains: *"In the beginning, culture travels by osmosis. You're all sitting around the same table, you listen to conversations, you see how the founders act, and you learn almost without realising it. The challenge comes when you are no longer ten people, but fifty or a hundred. There, culture stops travelling alone. We have to help her."*

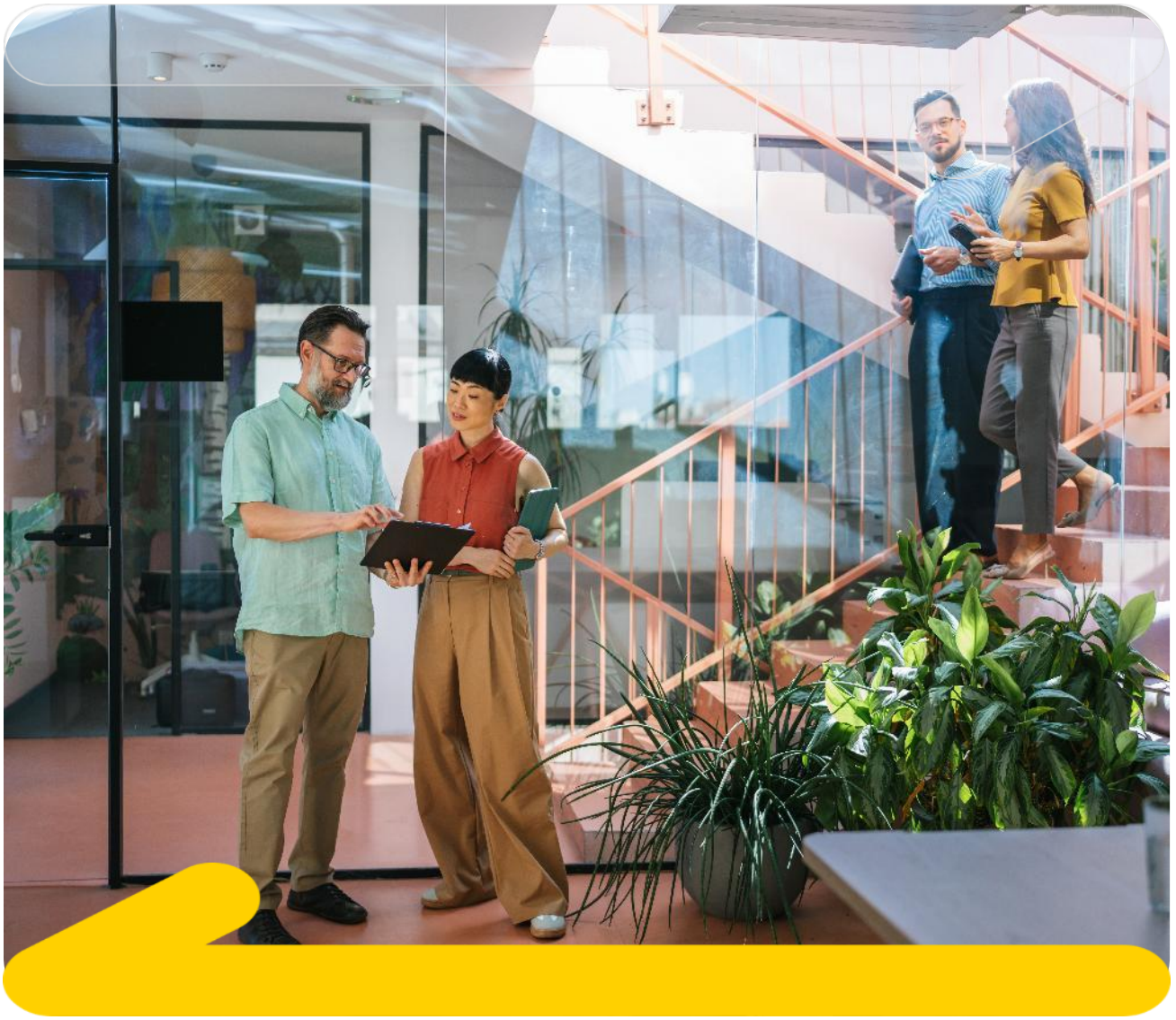
In this context, **scaling culture means making explicit what was previously implicitly transmitted**. It is not about writing a list of corporate securities or creating excessive documentation. It involves clearly defining how decisions are made, what behaviours are expected of people, and how autonomy, responsibility, and collaboration are balanced. As Andrea Amaro points out , *"explain why certain decisions are made, share information with transparency, generate frequent conversations and give autonomy with confidence. I also think there's something very important: people learn a lot more by watching their leaders than by reading any document about values. Culture is built by seeing how leaders react when something goes right, when something goes wrong, or when a difficult decision has to be made."*

These practices allow culture to ground itself in observable behaviours; the next step is to make them explicit without turning them into organisational rigidity. In addition, he stresses *that "this does not mean bureaucratising the company or filling everything with processes. It means making explicit things that were previously implicit. How do we give feedback? How do we make decisions? What do we expect from a manager? What behaviours do we really value?"* From the logic of sustainable entrepreneurship, this issue is central because culture is not only an internal climate: it is a mechanism for alignment between purpose, behaviour and value creation.

Culture plays a critical role in any growth process because it acts as an alignment mechanism. It helps maintain a shared understanding of priorities, facilitates coordination between teams, and allows decisions to be consistent even when founders are no longer directly involved in all of them.

A strong culture also reduces coordination costs, accelerates the integration of new hires, and helps preserve the organisation's identity as it becomes more complex. For example, if a company claims that it values learning, it must reflect that principle in specific aspects: how it handles errors, how it shares learning, or how it evaluates experimentation and continuous improvement.

In this process, it is advisable to avoid two common risks. The first is to idealise the initial culture and reject any level of formalisation for fear of losing agility. The second is to turn culture into an aspirational narrative disconnected from the actual experience of work. Culture only scales when it translates into observable behaviours and consistent practices. Otherwise, growth favours the emergence of disconnected subcultures and increases internal friction.



3.3 Sustainable leadership

Leadership is one of the areas that is most transformed during the growth of a *startup*. Many companies are born with management models that are strongly supported by proximity, intensity and speed in decision-making. This type of leadership usually works well during the validation phase, when the organisation needs to learn quickly, adapt continuously, and take advantage of opportunities in environments of high uncertainty.

However, as the company grows, that same model can become a constraint. When all decisions depend on a few people, the organisation's ability to scale ends up finding a ceiling.

Therefore, sustainable leadership is not only about maintaining a clear vision of the company's direction, but also about building the necessary conditions so that responsibility and decision-making capacity are progressively distributed within the organisation.

From this perspective, **leading implies much more than leading**. It means creating context, facilitating coordination, and building capacity within the team. As the *startup* grows, the main contribution of leaders is no longer in solving all problems and begins to focus on helping the organisation solve them collectively.

This change is especially relevant during scaling. A company can multiply its customers, markets or lines of business in a few years, but it will hardly be able to sustain that growth if it maintains a structure in which all strategic and operational decisions converge on the same people. **Sustainable growth requires generating autonomy without losing alignment and delegating without renouncing a shared vision**. As Rodrigo Rosso, an operations and efficiency specialist, points out, *"sustainable growth does not depend only on selling more, but on building systems capable of absorbing that growth without deteriorating operational quality."*

In this sense, organisational maturity is not measured by the number of people who are part of the company, but by their ability to make coherent decisions without constantly depending on the intervention of those who founded it.

Therefore, sustainable leadership **does not imply reducing the demand or giving up ambition. It involves building an organisation capable of developing new capabilities as it grows**.

A *startup* scales sustainably when growth stops depending exclusively on a few people and begins to rely on systems, teams and leaderships capable of sustaining it over time.

| 04 | Strategy and metrics for sustainable growth

4.1 Key Metrics for Scaling

A *startup* does not scale better by measuring more, but by measuring what really allows it to distinguish between solid growth and fragile growth. Useful metrics are not only financial or exclusively commercial. They should help answer a more important question: If the company were to double in size in the next twelve months, would its model get stronger, stay stable, or start to show signs of strain? To answer this question, it is necessary to look at several dimensions simultaneously.

The first is **market traction**, reflected in indicators such as revenue, recurrence, retention or repeat purchases, depending on the business model. The second is **economic sustainability**, which includes aspects such as gross income, the ability to generate cash or the degree of dependence on external financing. The third is **organisational health**, where indicators related to turnover, coverage of critical positions or the ability to coordinate between teams can be analysed. Finally, the fourth dimension is **operational quality**, visible in metrics such as incidents, delivery times, rework or customer satisfaction.

Some metrics also allow you to connect different dimensions of the business. Rodrigo Rosso highlights the value of *churn* or customer churn rate as an indicator of the internal health of the organisation*: "When a company begins to have bottlenecks, those who often pay for it are the customers. Therefore, churn rate says a lot about operational health."*

In a similar vein, Adriana Mata, Founder and CEO of Agile Impacts, warns of the importance of prioritising really relevant indicators*: "A startup does not need 40 indicators: it needs 5 that it can measure consistently, that are feasible to sustain and that tell a coherent story to different audiences. Outputs must be separated from outcomes: many startups measure what they produce, but not the change generated in people or systems. That distinction is what separates superficial reporting from the evidence of impact that serious investors demand."*

The value of this approach lies in the fact that it avoids confusing expansion with solidity. A company can increase its sales while worsening its acquisition costs, customer satisfaction, or the workload of its team. In that case there is growth, but not necessarily sustainable growth.

Consider a SaaS company that is constantly increasing its recurring revenue. At first glance, the evolution seems positive. However, if each new implementation requires a high manual effort on the part of the team, the business metric is hiding an operational fragility. Analyzing both dimensions together allows you to make better decisions about when to accelerate and when to consolidate.

4.2 Sustainable growth strategies

Every sustainable growth strategy starts from a simple idea: **not everything that can grow should be scaled at the same time.**

In many *startups*, the main risk is not a lack of opportunities, but dispersion. The constant emergence of new markets, products, channels, or collaborations can create a sense that everything deserves immediate attention. However, trying to take advantage of all the opportunities simultaneously often results in a loss of focus and greater operational complexity. David Muñoz sums it up clearly: *"It is essential to keep a lot of focus on the objective, without falling in love with any specific initiative. Along the way, many ideas appear that seem like opportunities, and some probably are. But not all of them can be done at once. Scaling is also about deciding what not to do."*

For this reason, growing sustainably implies sequencing priorities. It means deciding which capabilities to strengthen first, which market to consolidate, which channel to develop or which product to optimise before opening new fronts.

It also means differentiating between one-off results and repeatable patterns. A sales spike from a particular campaign doesn't necessarily mean that the model is scalable. Similarly, a successful alliance or a large customer alone does not guarantee the existence of a sustainable advantage. **Sustainable growth pays less attention to isolated successes and more to the ability to reproduce them consistently.**

In practice, this logic translates into decisions such as consolidating a segment before starting an international expansion, strengthening the operation before accelerating sales or postponing new lines of business until the main proposal has reached sufficient stability.

In this sense, the *startups* that scale best are not necessarily those that pursue the most opportunities, but those that are able to focus their resources on the right opportunities at the right time.

4.3 Financing and financial sustainability

Financing is one of the main levers of growth for a *startup*. However, **having more resources does not in itself guarantee sustainable growth**. In fact, when capital is abundant, some structural problems may go unnoticed for longer.

Financial sustainability should not be understood solely as the ability to generate short-term returns. It also involves mobilising resources in a way that is compatible with the real evolution of the business, avoiding dependencies that could compromise its future continuity.

From this perspective, it is essential to align the financial strategy with the company's stage of development, the business model and its growth rate.

David Muñoz highlights the importance of preserving room for manoeuvre: *"Good financial planning. Having enough runway completely changes the quality of decisions. When the financial situation becomes too tight, you can end up making decisions from urgency. To me, if you can't look for investment or measured leverage, sometimes it's worth reducing ambition in exchange for securing cash for a reasonable period."*

Not all *startups* require the same type of funding. In some cases, foreign investment is key to capturing a market opportunity. In others, it may be more coherent to combine progressive growth, public aid, non-dilutive financing or specific instruments linked to innovation and impact.

From this perspective, diversifying sources of financing is a strategy to strengthen the financial sustainability of the company, reduce its vulnerability to market changes and reduce dependence on a single channel of income or capital. An example of this is access to financing mechanisms associated with impact and sustainability. As he explains : *"Startups that measure impact from the beginning have access to impact funding, European grants and contracts with public bodies that have sustainability criteria. That diversifies revenue streams and reduces reliance on a single monetisation pathway, which is a real competitive advantage in early stages."*

The question is not to determine which source of funding is best in absolute terms, but **to identify which one best fits the reality of each project**. When financial logic completely replaces business logic, growth risks losing sustainability.

A common example is when a *startup* expands its team and structure before it has sufficiently validated the repeatability of its sales. In the short term, financing can sustain that bet. However, if demand does not evolve at the expected rate or fixed costs increase too quickly, the company may be forced to adopt a defensive position. Therefore, financial sustainability does not depend only on access to capital, but also on the ability to use it judiciously, anticipate its limits and make decisions consistent with the real maturity of the business.

| 05 | Operations, Processes, and Impact

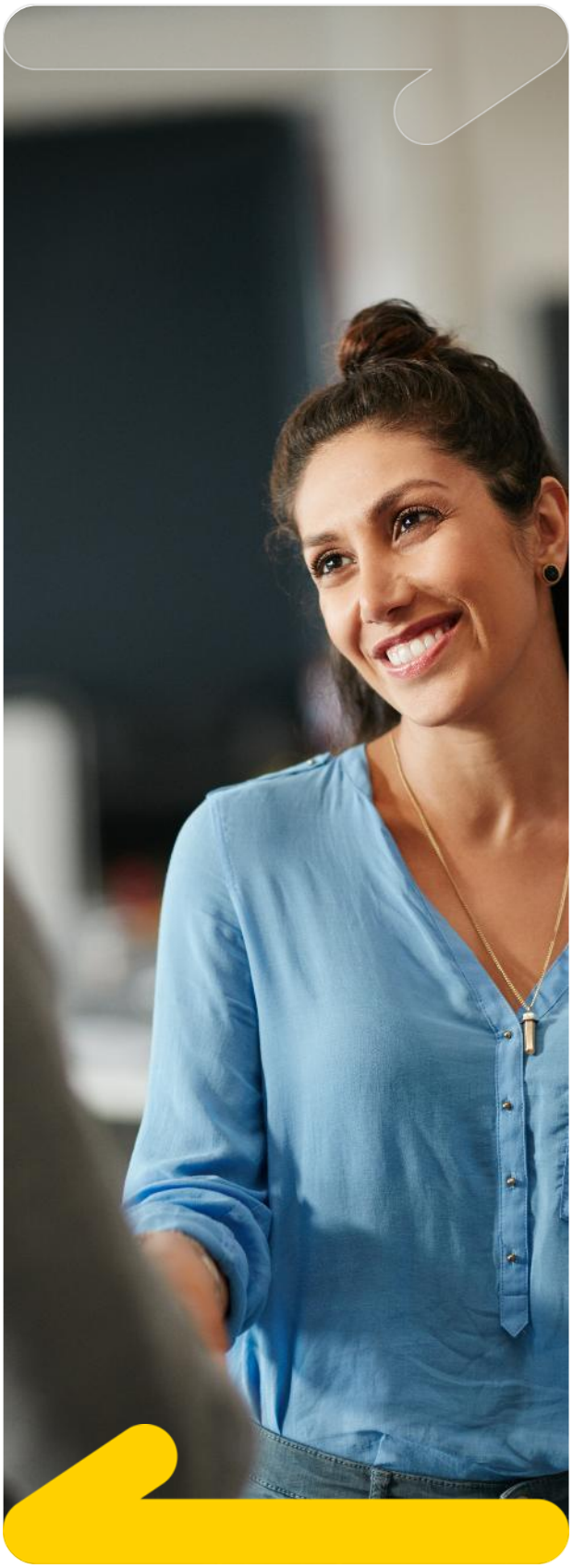
5.1 Scalable Process Design

If people are the first infrastructure for growth, processes represent the second. During the early stages, a *startup* can function thanks to flexibility, closeness between teams, and a certain dose of improvisation. However, as customers, operations, and numbers increase, that improvisation begins to generate costs in the form of repeated errors, informal dependencies, delays, or difficulties in transmitting knowledge.

David Muñoz explains it like this: *"The first is that climbing forces you to procedural. But proceduralizing can create a feeling of slowness, especially in teams accustomed to moving very fast. The key is that processes are agile, adherent, and constantly iterated until they settle. It is not a question of bureaucratising, but of creating a way of working that allows us to grow without always depending on the same people."*

Designing scalable processes doesn't mean adding unnecessary layers of control. It means identifying which critical activities can no longer depend exclusively on the memory, intuition or availability of certain people. The goal is to ensure that what works can be consistently repeated as the organisation grows.

This need appears especially when the company begins to manage more volume and more specialisation. Rodrigo Rosso points out the lack of task managers as one of the most common problems*: "Many times the wheel stops at some point without the previous or the next being aware that they have to act to achieve a quick start-up of a product, a timely response to the customer or after-sales management that validates our reputation and credibility".*



His reflection highlights a frequent reality: what works through informal coordination in small teams is no longer enough when multiple areas and responsibilities are involved. In this context, processes allow work to be organised, dependencies to be reduced and collaboration to be facilitated.

As Andrea Amaro points out, *"a common mistake is to hire before you have built a clear way of working. If each person understands the company in a different way, growth begins to generate friction. Nor is it worth trying to solve every problem by creating a new process. Little by little, meetings, approvals and layers of management appear that make a startup stop looking like a startup."*

Therefore, the challenge is not to create more processes, but to design those that really provide clarity. A well-defined business process, a methodology for onboarding new people or customers (*onboarding*) or a stable dynamic of coordination between product and customer service do not necessarily limit agility. On the contrary, they can become mechanisms that allow it to be preserved.

Finally, scaling processes means finding the balance between order and flexibility. Formalize enough to sustain growth, but without turning the organisation into a rigid and slow structure.

5.2 Impact and sustainability as a competitive advantage

More and more *startups* are discovering that sustainability and impact are not just reputational issues. They can also become sources of differentiation, access to opportunities and long-term value generation.

The value generated by a company is not limited to economic results, but also includes its contribution to customers, workers, communities and the environment. For a *startup*, this does not necessarily imply defining itself as an impact company, but it does mean reflecting on how it creates value and what effects it generates beyond the income statement.

Integrating impact into the strategy means asking what problem is being solved, for whom and through what mechanisms. This contribution can be reflected in a wide range of areas: more accessible products, inclusive business models, quality job creation, resource efficiency, and the generation of social and environmental benefits.

Adriana Mata highlights the importance of addressing this issue from the beginning: *"The most frequent mistake is to treat the impact as a subsequent addition, something that is documented once the business is already up and running. The impact has to be in the logic of the product from day one. Concretely, that means defining a theory of change before launching, not after. When impact is integrated into the value proposition, it is a lever for growth"*

When sustainability is part of the model from the earliest stages, it can translate into tangible benefits. It facilitates access to certain sources of financing, strengthens the confidence of customers and investors and prepares the company to respond to future regulatory and market demands.

Beyond trends or regulatory obligations, the true value of impact lies in its ability to strengthen the value proposition and increase the organisation's resilience over the long term.

5.3 Operational efficiency in *scaleups*

As a *startup* evolves into a *scaleup*, operational efficiency is no longer an exclusively technical matter but a strategic factor. The organisation needs to increase its activity without proportionally increasing complexity, coordination times or dependence on centralised decisions.

In practical terms, operational efficiency can be understood as the ability to transform resources into results while minimising unnecessary friction. This includes not only financial resources, but also time, attention, managerial energy, and coordination skills.

An organisation can lose efficiency even as its revenue grows. It happens, for example, when each new advance generates problems in another part of the system, when coordination consumes more time than execution or when leaders become permanent bottlenecks.

From the perspective of sustainable growth, efficiency is not about doing more with less at any price. It is, rather, about managing complexity without losing responsiveness. An efficient *scaleup* is not necessarily one that operates with fewer resources, but one that gets teams, processes, and priorities to work in alignment.

In this context, technological tools can play an important role as facilitators of order and coordination. Rodrigo Rosso shares an example from his professional experience*: "The launch of Rocketlane in a past experience was decisive. This task and project management tool reduced, in some cases, the implementation of products such as CRM or websites by several weeks. It also helped in the purification of responsibilities and reduced friction between colleagues from the same or different departments when the specialisation of work is increasing and each one has to take care of different tasks to achieve a common result"*

However, **technology alone does not solve growth problems**. No tool can compensate for a lack of clear priorities, ill-defined responsibilities, or non-existent processes. Its true value appears when it is integrated into a coherent way of working.

In short, operational efficiency is not only about optimising resources. It's about building an organisation that can absorb complexity, coordinate better, and continue to deliver quality results as it scales up. This is where operations cease to be a support area and become an essential condition to sustain growth over time.

| 06 | Real cases and lessons learned

6.1. Success stories in sustainable growth

Throughout this monograph, the main elements that allow a startup to grow sustainably have been addressed : people, strategy and operational capacity. However, these concepts acquire their full meaning when they are observed applied in real situations.

The following cases, shared by the experts who have participated in this monograph, show different challenges associated with growth and the decisions that allowed them to be addressed. Although they belong to different contexts and sectors, they all share a common idea: sustainable growth does not depend only on increasing incomes or size, but on building capacities that allow this growth to be sustained over time.

Case 1 - SciPhage: from clinical rigor to the language of impact.

SciPhage, a Colombian biotechnology startup, is developing bacteriophages aimed at reducing the use of antibiotics in the poultry industry. In its early stages, the company had strong clinical outcomes, but it had not yet translated that evidence into impact language: it lacked metrics on protected consumers, had not quantified the reduction in antimicrobial resistance, and had not connected its proposal to the relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

Building an impact framework from scratch – 23 million birds treated, reductions of up to 70 percentage points in Salmonella, 2.87 million consumers with reduced antibiotic exposure and a producer ROI of up to 8x – allowed the company to reposition. It ceased to be perceived as a supplier of agricultural inputs to consolidate itself as a public health solution with potential on a global scale.

This narrative twist opened up dialogues with international calls, including the Cartier Women's Initiative, and completely transformed the profile of the actors willing to evaluate the project seriously.

The lesson is clear: impact must not only be generated, it must also be measured, articulated and communicated in the right language so that it is recognised by the ecosystem.

Case 2 - Rocketlane: operational standardisation to scale without losing quality.

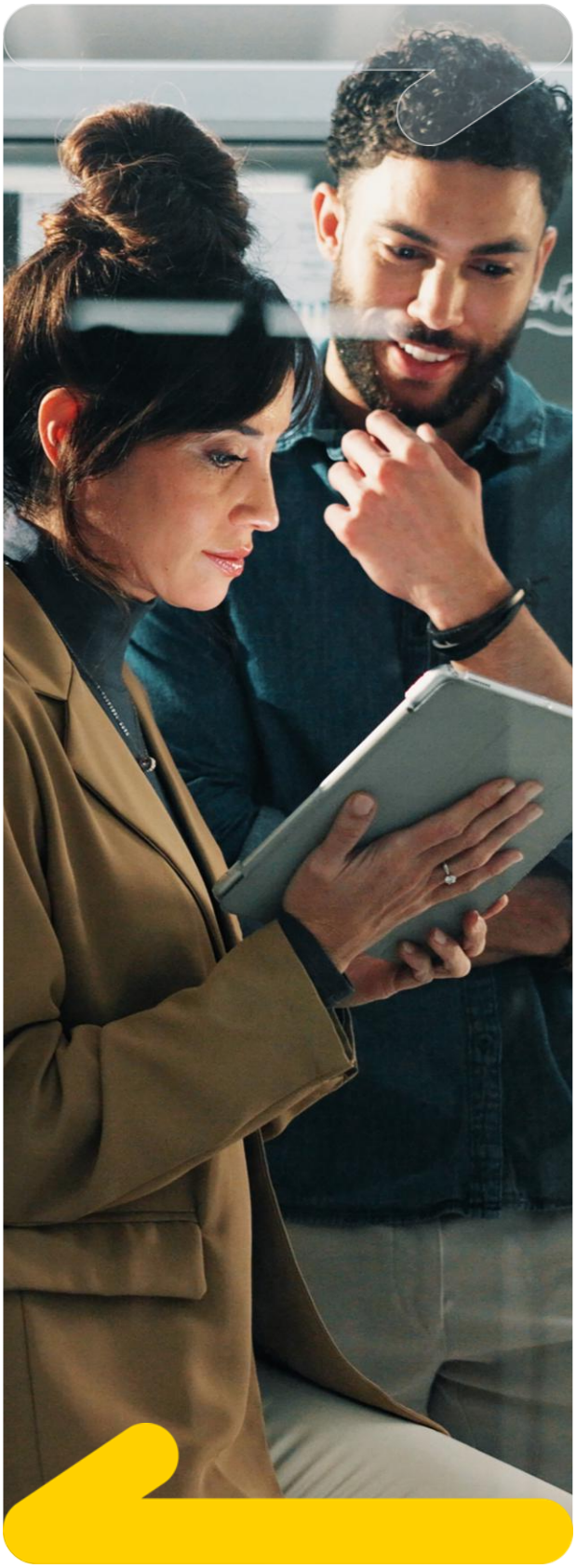
The implementation of Rocketlane – a platform specialised in implementation project management and *customer onboarding* – in a B2B company illustrates a common challenge in many *scaleups*: how to sustain commercial growth without internal operations becoming more fragile, slower and dependent on improvised solutions.

As with many scaleups in the growth phase, commercial expansion was faster than the maturity of internal processes. Deployments were managed in a non-homogeneous manner, with a high reliance on manual tasks and fragmented coordination across departments. The lack of a common system made it difficult to trace projects, led to operational inefficiencies, and increased the risk of customer start-up delays.

From that need, Rocketlane acted as a facilitator of broader change. The practical decision was to concentrate onboarding and implementation management in the same environment , and build on that basis reusable *playbooks*, with common milestones, defined managers, automations and shared flows between sales, operations and *customer success*.

The tool provided structure, but the real change was in turning a dispersed operation into a common execution system. This transformation resulted in shorter implementation times, better coordination between departments, less reliance on manual follow-up, and a more professional customer experience, helping to accelerate *time-to-value*.

The lesson is clear: sustainable growth depends not only on trade capacity, but on building systems capable of absorbing that growth without deteriorating operational quality; Standardizing does not imply losing flexibility, but rather allowing the organisation to grow in a predictable way.



Case 3 - A well-focused business decision opened the way to more sustainable growth. (Anonymized).

A B2B company specialising in professional services to companies concentrated a large part of its turnover on a single large client. The model worked, but it had the risk that growth would not be sustainable enough if it remained concentrated in so few customers.

The challenge was to find a way to monetise that knowledge in other contexts and generate short-term returns.

Initially, more financial avenues were explored, but they did not end up fitting in. The practical decision was to refocus the proposal towards consolidated companies in more traditional sectors, which did not necessarily seek to "innovate" in the abstract, but to launch new services, open revenue streams or start working in a more structured and agile way.

The change was in adjusting the commercial discourse: going from selling innovation as a concept to connecting it with specific business problems. This made it possible to diversify customers, reduce dependency and turn an internal capacity into a monetizable line of business.

The main learning was that sustainable growth doesn't always come from doing something new, but from better packaging what you already know how to do, finding the right customer, and translating your value into the language of the market.

Case 4 – Avantis: building organisation so as not to slow down growth

AlinaAt Avantis, one of the most relevant decisions to sustain growth was not to hire more people, but to review the organisational design itself.

For one stage, the founders were involved in virtually every major decision, a formula that allowed quality and speed to be maintained in early stages, but made it difficult for the model to scale as projects and complexity increased.

The answer was not to add structure indiscriminately, but to build organisation, not just a team. That implied making explicit criteria that until then resided in the direct experience of the founders: how decisions are made, how a customer is accompanied, what behaviours are expected of the team or what it means to do an excellent job. This process allowed people to gain autonomy without losing coherence.

The lesson is clear: *startups* don't stop growing just because of a lack of speed, but when complexity increases faster than their ability to organise. In that sense, shared culture and decision principles act as a silent infrastructure for scaling.

All four cases show that **there is no single formula for sustainable growth**. However, common patterns do appear. Organizations that scale more robustly typically combine three elements:

- a clear value proposition,
- systems capable of sustaining growth and
- an organisational structure that evolves at the same pace as the business.

In short, sustainable growth is not only about growing more, but also about developing the necessary capacities so that this growth can be sustained over time.

6.2 Lessons learned from the ecosystem

The cases presented throughout this chapter show that sustainable growth does not depend on a single decision or a universal formula. However, they do allow us to identify some common learnings that appear recurrently in organisations that have managed to scale successfully.

The first lesson is that sustainable growth forces us to change the question. Rather than focusing exclusively on how much a company can grow, it is more useful to ask **how much of that growth can be sustained without compromising the future of the project**. This shift in perspective shifts the focus from speed to the organisation's actual absorptive capacity.

The second lesson is **that culture, processes, and organisational structure are not automatic consequences of growth**. They must be built deliberately. When these issues are systematically postponed, they often recur later in the form of bottlenecks, coordination problems, or difficulties in maintaining quality as the volume of activity increases.

The third lesson is that **sustainable growth requires balance**. Companies need to combine ambition with discipline, speed with stability, and autonomy with alignment. Scaling is not only about doing more, but about developing the necessary capabilities to continue growing without multiplying the complexity or vulnerability of the organisation.

Finally, the cases analysed show that **sustainability does not limit growth**, but contributes to making it more robust. Whether it's through better talent management, more replicable processes, a more focused strategy, or early integration of impact, organisations that build strong foundations are better prepared to take advantage of long-term growth opportunities.

Taken together, the cases and reflections collected in this paper show that sustainable growth depends on a set of complementary capacities. The following table summarises the main dimensions involved in this process, the questions that every *startup* should ask itself and the risks that should be anticipated during scaling.

Table 1: Key dimensions of sustainable growth

Key	Question the startup should ask itself	Usual risk	Good practice
Resilient people	Can our team absorb growth without burning out?	Overload, dependence on key people and talent turnover	Incorporate adequate capacities at each stage, strengthen coordination and prevent growth from depending on permanent overexertion.
Organizational culture	Is the way of working consistent and scalable?	Loss of alignment, emergence of subcultures, and inconsistent decisions	Make explicit values, behaviours and decision criteria.
Sustainable leadership	Can the organisation make decisions without constantly relying on founders?	Bottlenecks, centralisation and loss of autonomy	Delegate progressively, distribute responsibilities and develop new leadership skills.
Strategy and focus	Are we growing in the right priorities?	Dispersion, excess of initiatives and loss of focus	Sequencing opportunities, concentrating resources and prioritising what generates the most value.
Financial sustainability	Does the financing keep pace with the real pace of business growth?	Over-reliance on external financing, lack of runway, or growth artificially sustained by available capital	Maintain financial discipline, diversify sources of funding and align resources with the actual maturity of the project.
Scalable operations	Can we absorb more activity without uncontrollably increasing complexity?	Bottlenecks, dependence on specific people, recurring errors and improvised processes	Design replicable processes, clarify responsibilities, and continuously improve operational efficiency.
Impact and sustainability	Is the value we generate integrated into the business model?	Treating impact as an accessory or exclusively reputational element	Incorporate sustainability and impact from the design of the product and measure its results.

| 07 | Conclusions and future

Sustainable **growth has established itself as a useful approach to rethink startup scaling** in an increasingly complex and competitive environment. Its main contribution is not to moderate entrepreneurial ambition, but to improve its quality. It forces us to understand that a company does not grow only when it increases its sales, expands its team or raises financing, but when it simultaneously strengthens its capacity to generate value on an ongoing basis.

Throughout this monograph, it has become clear that sustainable growth rests on three main pillars: people, strategy and operational capacity. Organizations that manage to scale successfully are those that manage to attract and develop talent, keep the focus on their priorities, build processes that reduce complexity, and use financial resources as a tool at the service of a clear business vision.

Likewise, the review of the literature on sustainable entrepreneurship shows that **sustainability should not be understood as an added element** once growth has been achieved, but as a logic of operation that accompanies the project from its early stages. In the same way, the experience of the participating experts shows that many of the difficulties associated with scaling do not arise due to a lack of opportunities, but due **to the inability to adapt the organisation to the pace of business growth** .

For the Spanish entrepreneurial ecosystem, this challenge poses a double agenda. On the one hand, it is necessary to continue strengthening the support mechanisms that allow *startups* to move from initial validation to more solid and professionalised growth models. On the other hand, it is necessary to consolidate an environment capable of connecting talent, innovation, financing and execution capacity to promote the emergence of more companies with sustained growth potential.

Ultimately, growing sustainably does not mean growing more slowly. It means growing with intention, building the capabilities, systems and organisational dynamics necessary so that the success achieved today does not compromise the opportunities of tomorrow. This is probably one of the main keys to building *more* resilient, competitive startups that are prepared to generate value in the long term.

GLOSSARY

Dilutive financing
Financing that involves giving up a part of the company's ownership in exchange for resources, as is usually the case with the entry of investors. Its main effect is not only to provide capital, but also to modify the shareholder structure and, sometimes, the decision-making dynamics.

Non-dilutive financing
Financing that provides resources without requiring the transfer of shares. It may include grants, loans, or public instruments. It is usually especially useful when the company needs financial margin without altering the distribution of ownership in early stages.

Churn
Cancellation rate or churn in a given period. It is a useful metric to know if business growth is sustained or if a relevant part of customers abandon the service.

Customer onboarding
Process of onboarding a new customer after the sale. It includes the steps necessary to activate the service, implement the product and ensure that the client person or company begins to obtain value effectively.

Impact metrics
Indicators that allow measuring the social or environmental change associated with a company's activity. They differ from purely operational or commercial indicators because they seek to demonstrate transformation, not just volume of activity.

SDGs
Sustainable Development Goals promoted by the United Nations within the 2030 Agenda. They function as a global framework to guide policies, investments and business strategies on issues such as climate, health, equality or responsible production.

Outputs
Immediate results of an activity, usually expressed in volume of execution: number of sessions, products delivered, people attended or actions carried out. They report on what is being done, but not necessarily on the change achieved.

Outcomes
Changes or effects produced as a result of an intervention or activity. Unlike outputs, they allow us to observe whether what has been done has generated a real improvement in people, organisations or systems.

Playbook
Documents or operational guides that include steps, criteria, good practices and sequences of action to repeat tasks consistently. They help standardise processes without relying exclusively on the memory or experience of a few people.

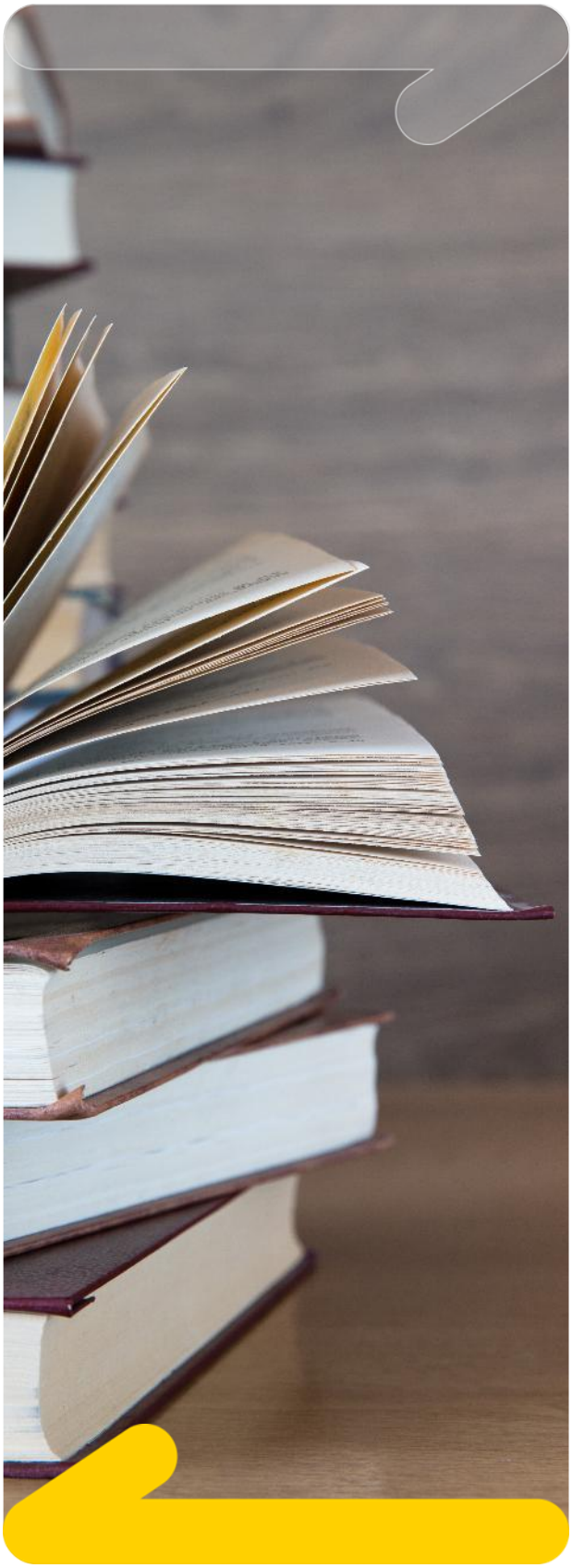
Reporting
The process of collecting, ordering, and communicating relevant information about a company's performance. It can include financial results, operational metrics, or impact indicators. Its value depends on the data being consistent, comparable, and useful to different audiences.

ROI (Return on Investment)
Return on investment. It measures the relationship between what is invested and the economic value obtained.

Runway
How long a company can continue to operate with available cash before needing new revenue or new financing. It is a critical indicator in startups because it conditions the real margin to experiment, correct or sustain decisions without entering into financial urgency.

SaaS (Software as a service)
Software model offered as a service, usually on a subscription basis, rather than a one-time sale. These are usually businesses where recurrence, retention, and *churn* are especially important to understanding growth health.

Time to value
The time that elapses from the time a person or company starts using a product until they get a clear value from it. Reducing it usually improves experience, adoption and perception of usefulness, especially in implementation processes.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. (2023*). European innovation scoreboard 2023: Performance of the European startup and innovation ecosystem*. Publications Office of the European Union.

- Garofalo, V., & Argüello, A. (2024). Analysis of the factors that influence sustainable entrepreneurship: A bibliographic study. *Reincisol, 3(6),* 3853-3879. https://doi.org/10.59282/reincisol.V3(63853-3879)

- Sánchez-Torné, I., Pérez-Suárez, M., & Sianes, A. (2022). Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development Goals: A Bibliometric Analysis. *Revista Nacional de Administración, 13(1*), e3954.

ONE

OFICINA NACIONAL DE EMPRENDIMIENTO

Sign up **for one.gob.es**!

Financiado por la Unión Europea
NextGenerationEU

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO PARA LA TRANSFORMACIÓN DIGITAL Y DE LA FUNCIÓN PÚBLICA
SECRETARÍA DE ESTADO DE DIGITALIZACIÓN E INTELIGENCIA ARTIFICIAL

red.es

Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia