

Achieving Business Agility with SAFe® 5.0

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Introduction

Welcome to the software age—an interconnected, real-time world in which every industry depends on technology and every organization (at least in part) is a software company. To remain competitive, enterprises will need to digitally transform their operations, business solutions, and customer experience. The larger challenge in many enterprises is that their current business models, organizational hierarchy, and technology infrastructure can't keep pace with the rapid change required.

Agile development has provided significant improvements to many organizations. By itself, however, even Agile development is not enough. What began in software development must now expand to encompass the entire enterprise, changing how people work and how every aspect of the business operates. Put simply, enterprises need *business agility*, the determining factor that will decide the winners and losers in the digital economy.

By empowering people to make quick decisions, including allocating resources and aligning the right people around the right work, business agility permits companies to capitalize on emerging opportunities. However, achieving this level of agility requires mastering not one but two business operating systems (Figure 1).

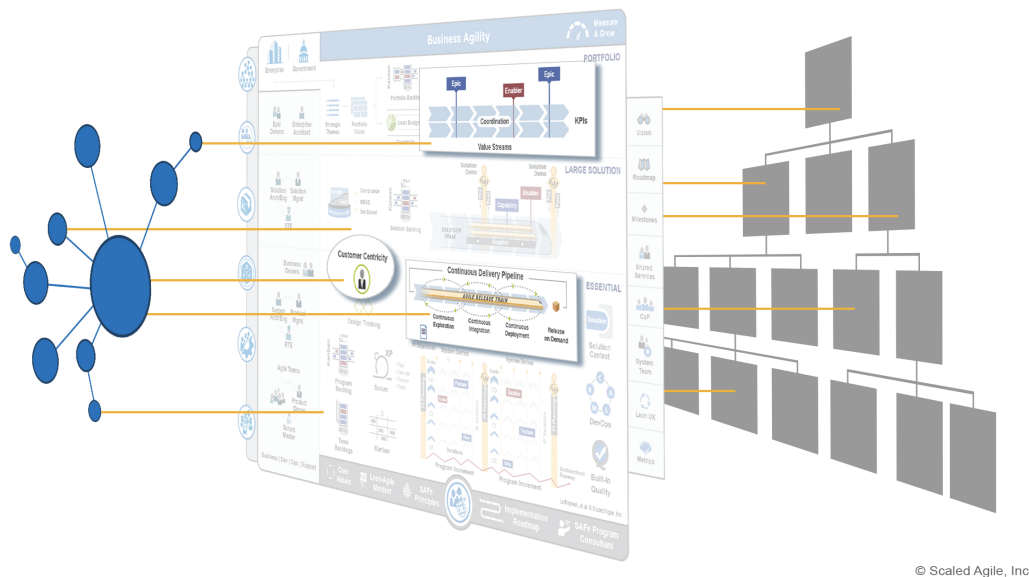


Figure 1. A dual operating system offers efficiency and stability with the speed of innovation

- The first system is chiefly *hierarchical* and is common to most enterprises. It provides the necessary efficiency, stability, and other scalable aspects needed to deliver the current mission (e.g., people operations, financial and business services, and compliance).

- The second system is a *customer-centric network*, which is vital to quickly delivering innovative solutions to a faster-moving marketplace.

With guidance from SAFe® 5.0, you can implement this second operating system and enable your enterprise to:

- Quickly adapt and respond to emerging competitive threats
- Efficiently identify and deliver incremental customer value
- Maintain quality in an evolving product and solution portfolio

Moreover, you will be able to optimally organize teams to create value and mobilize quickly in response to changing business needs. The result: Your company will achieve the business agility needed to survive and thrive in the digital age.

SAFe can help your enterprise improve business outcomes by accelerating productivity, time-to-market, quality, employee engagement, and more. The results can be extraordinary, as illustrated in the benefits from case studies summarized in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The business benefits of SAFe

This white paper provides an overview of SAFe, the Big Picture graphic, the core competencies, and the values, mindset, principles, and practices that help your enterprise achieve true business agility.

Overview

The Scaled Agile Framework® (SAFe) is an online knowledge base of proven, integrated principles, practices, and competencies to implement Lean, Agile, and DevOps at scale.

The Big Picture graphic (Figure 3) on scaledagileframework.com offers direct access to SAFe's extensive library of content. Each icon on this graphic links to a supporting article and related resources. The SAFe website also includes a variety of additional advanced-topic articles, downloads, presentations, videos, and a glossary translated into many languages.

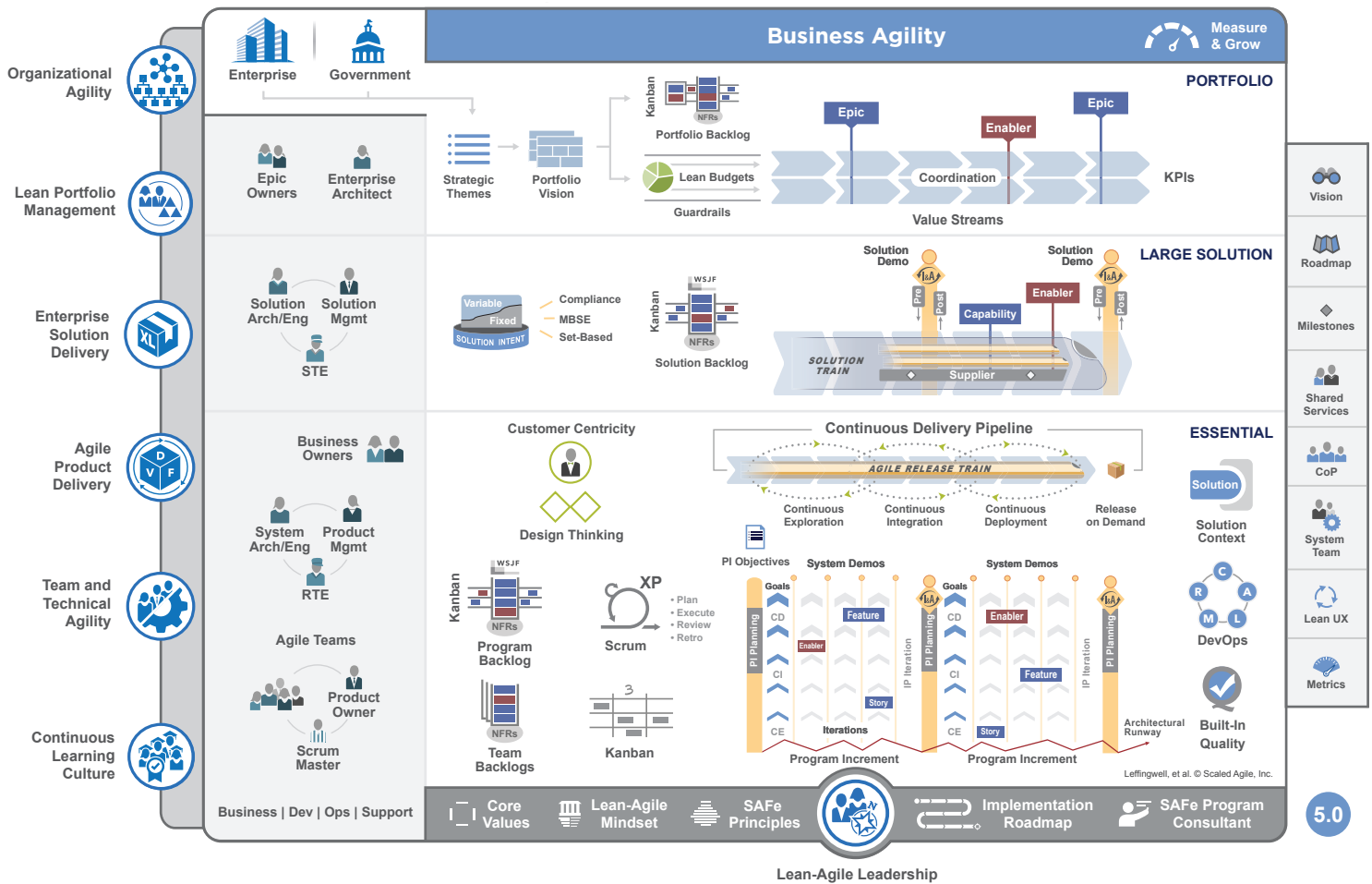


Figure 3. Full SAFe configuration

The SAFe 5.0 overview (Figure 4) introduces the *seven core competencies required for business agility*. Each competency has three dimensions and is a set of related knowledge, skills, and behaviors. By mastering SAFe’s competencies, enterprises can achieve business agility to quickly respond to volatile market conditions, changing customer needs, and emerging technologies. Measure and Grow, at the top right, explains how portfolios evaluate their progress on the competencies and determine next steps to improve.

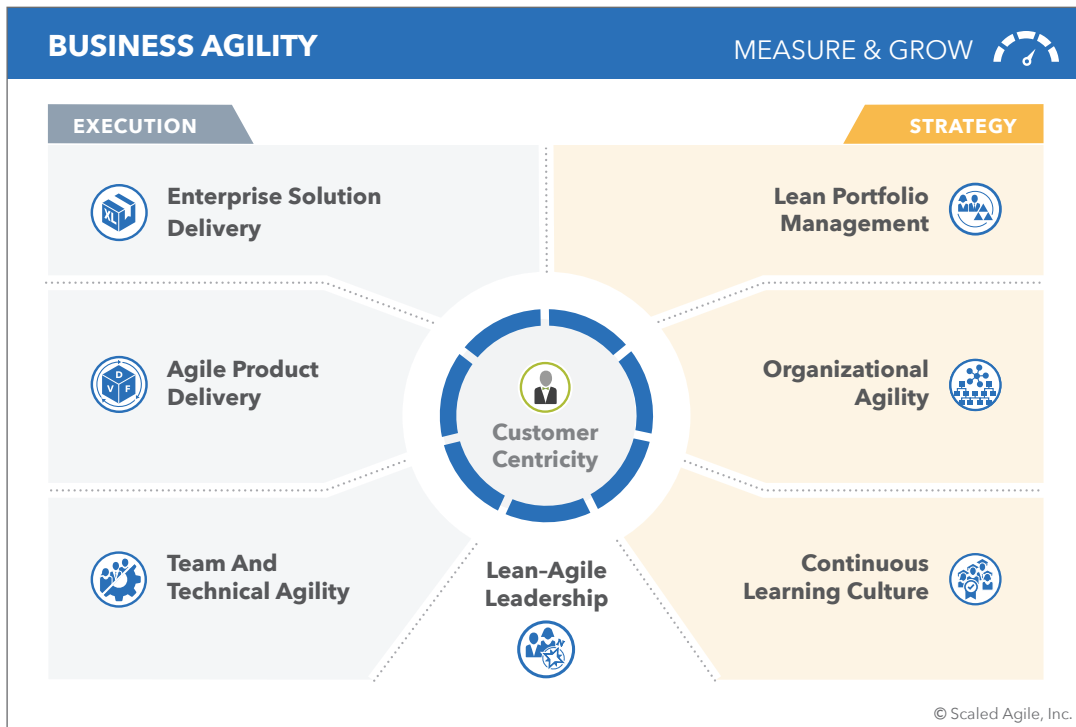


Figure 4. SAFe overview of the seven core competencies required for business agility

Each competency is described in the following sections.

Lean-Agile Leadership

An organization's managers, executives, and other leaders provide the foundation for the adoption and success of Lean-Agile development and mastery of the competencies that lead to business agility. Only leaders have the authority to change and continuously improve the systems that govern the performance of work. Only leaders can create an environment that fosters high-performing Agile teams. By helping leaders develop along the three dimensions illustrated in Figure 5, organizations can establish the core competency of *Lean-Agile Leadership*.



Figure 5. Three dimensions of Lean-Agile Leadership

Leading by Example

By internalizing and modeling leaner ways of thinking and operating, leaders can help people learn from their example, coaching, and encouragement. Ways leaders can accomplish this include:

- **Authenticity.** Leaders exhibit professional and ethical behaviors, acting with honesty, integrity, and transparency. Such leaders are true to themselves and their beliefs.

- **Emotional intelligence.** Leaders identify and manage their emotions and those of others through self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.
- **Lifelong learning.** Self-motivated leaders engage in the ongoing pursuit of knowledge and growth and encourage and support others to do the same.
- **Growing others.** Leaders offer their guidance and resources to help individuals assume increasing levels of responsibility and decision-making.
- **Decentralized decision-making.** Decision-making authority moves to the people closest to the information. Achieving this autonomy requires investing in technical competence and by providing organizational clarity via a simple, decision-making framework.

Mindset and Principles

Cultivating a growth mindset (Figure 6) influences leaders' ability to grow, enabling them to believe and demonstrate that people can learn new behaviors. By embracing the Lean-Agile mindset and applying the SAFe principles in their decisions and actions, leaders consistently model the new norms throughout the organization.



Figure 6. Growth versus fixed mindsets

Lean-Agile Mindset

The SAFe Lean-Agile mindset (Figure 7) combines the beliefs, assumptions, and actions of leaders and practitioners who embrace the concepts in the SAFe House of Lean and the Agile Manifesto's 4 values and 12 principles.

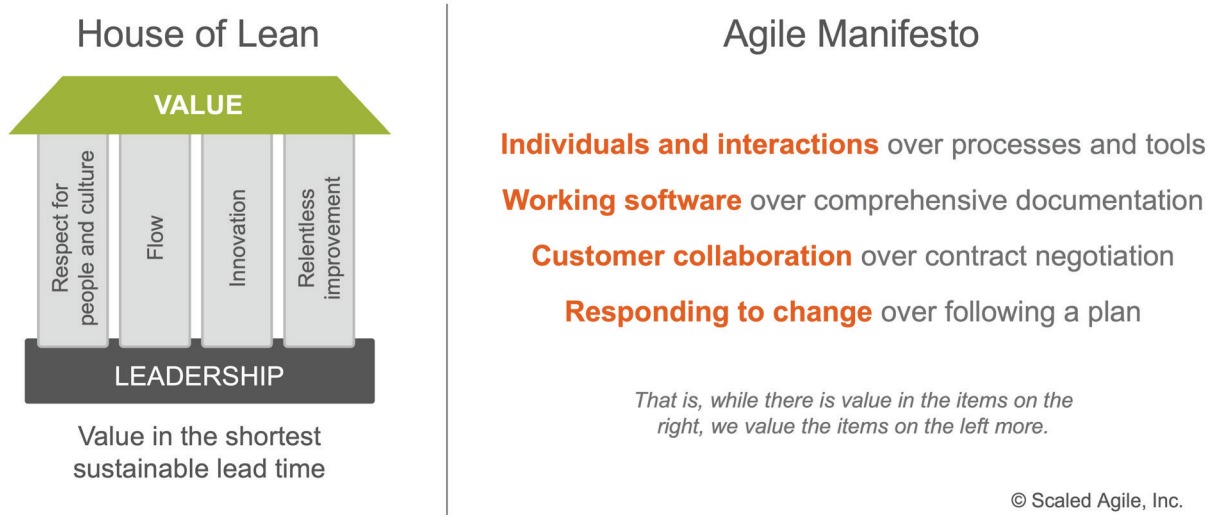


Figure 7. The SAFe House of Lean and the Agile Manifesto

SAFe Core Values

The four core values that define SAFe's essential ideals and beliefs play a critical role in leaders' behavior and communication. Here are some ways leaders can reinforce these values:

1. **Alignment.** Leaders communicate the mission by establishing and expressing the portfolio strategy and solution vision, determining business value during planning, and guiding the adjustment of scope to ensure that demand matches capacity.
2. **Built-in quality.** Leaders change the system and demonstrate commitment by creating an environment where built-in quality becomes the standard.
3. **Transparency.** Leaders foster the visualization of all relevant work and create an environment where "... the facts are always friendly, every bit of evidence one can acquire, in any area, leads one that much closer to what is true."¹
4. **Program execution.** Leaders participate as Business Owners in Program Increment (PI) planning and execution, celebrating high-quality PIs while aggressively removing impediments and demotivators.

¹ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/carl_rogers_147475

SAFe Principles

In addition to the Lean-Agile mindset, SAFe is based on 10 immutable, underlying principles (Figure 8) that guide and inform the roles and practices of SAFe, influencing leadership behaviors and decision-making.

- #1 Take an economic view
- #2 Apply systems thinking
- #3 Assume variability; preserve options
- #4 Build incrementally with fast, integrated learning cycles
- #5 Base milestones on objective evaluation of working systems
- #6 Visualize and limit WIP, reduce batch sizes, and manage queue lengths
- #7 Apply cadence, synchronize with cross-domain planning
- #8 Unlock the intrinsic motivation of knowledge workers
- #9 Decentralize decision-making
- #10 Organize around value

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Figure 8. The 10 SAFe principles

Leading Change

As Lean-thinking manager-teachers, leaders have the thought processes and practical tools to start building the Lean enterprise and achieving business agility. This new way of working represents a significant shift in culture and practices and requires a substantial organizational change effort.

- **Change vision happens when leaders communicate** *why change is needed and do so in ways that inspire, motivate, and engage people.*
- **Change leadership** reflects the leader's own personal advocacy and drive in positively influencing and motivating others to engage in organizational change.
- **A powerful coalition for change** forms when individuals from multiple levels and across silos are empowered and have the influence to effectively lead the change.

- **Psychological safety** occurs when leaders create an environment for risk-taking that supports change without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career.
- **Training in the new way of working** involves teaching the values, principles, and practices of Agile and Lean; leaders set an example by attending training too.

The SAFe Implementation Roadmap

Our 12-article series describes the SAFe Implementation Roadmap (Figure 9) and how it aligns with John Kotter’s 8-step model for implementing successful change. As leaders strive for successful change, this roadmap helps them ‘know the way.’

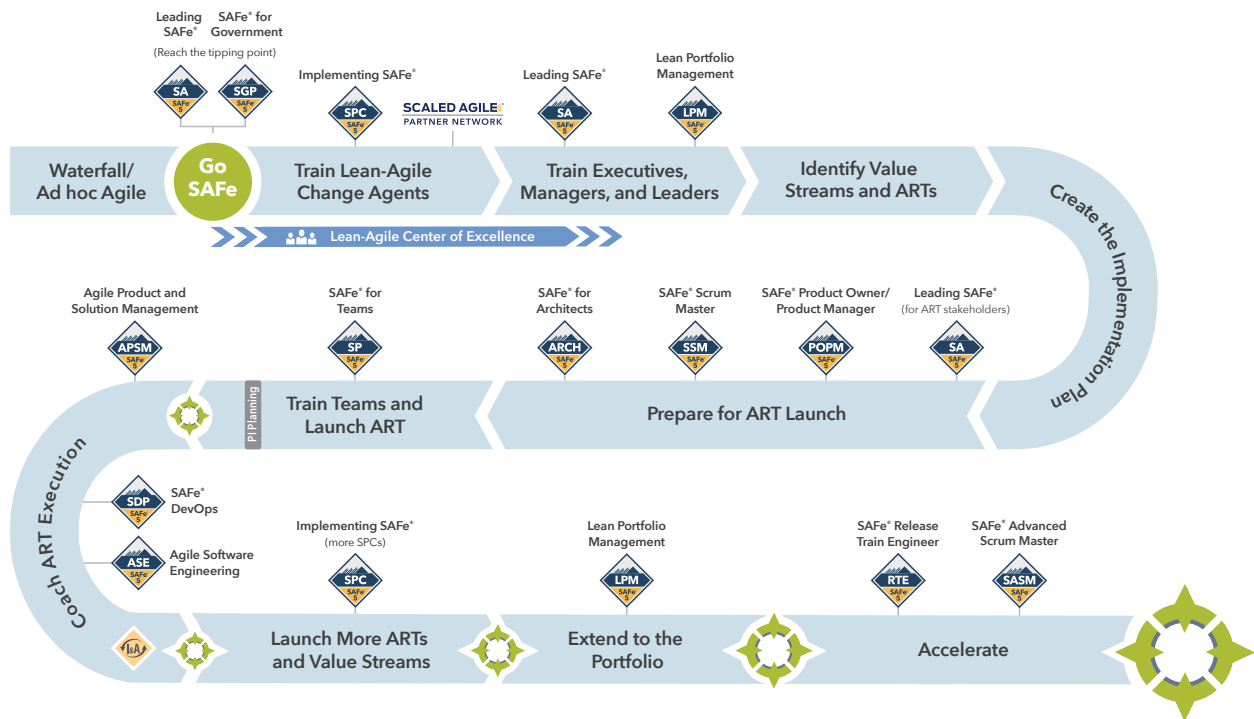


Figure 9. The SAFe Implementation Roadmap

While no two SAFe adoptions are identical, and they rarely follow a perfectly sequential step-by-step process, businesses typically get the best results when they follow a path similar to that shown in the Implementation Roadmap, which includes the following 12 steps:

1. Reaching the tipping point
2. Train Lean-Agile change agents
3. Train executives, managers, and leaders
4. Create a Lean-Agile Center of Excellence
5. Identify value streams and Agile Release Trains (ARTs)
6. Create the implementation plan
7. Prepare for ART launch
8. Train teams and launch the ART
9. Coach ART execution
10. Launch more ARTs and value streams
11. Extend to the portfolio
12. Accelerate

Team and Technical Agility

Agile teams are the cornerstone of business agility. The Team and Technical Agility competency, which describes the Lean-Agile skills, principles, and practices that high-performing Agile teams use to create high-quality solutions for their customers, consists of three dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 10.

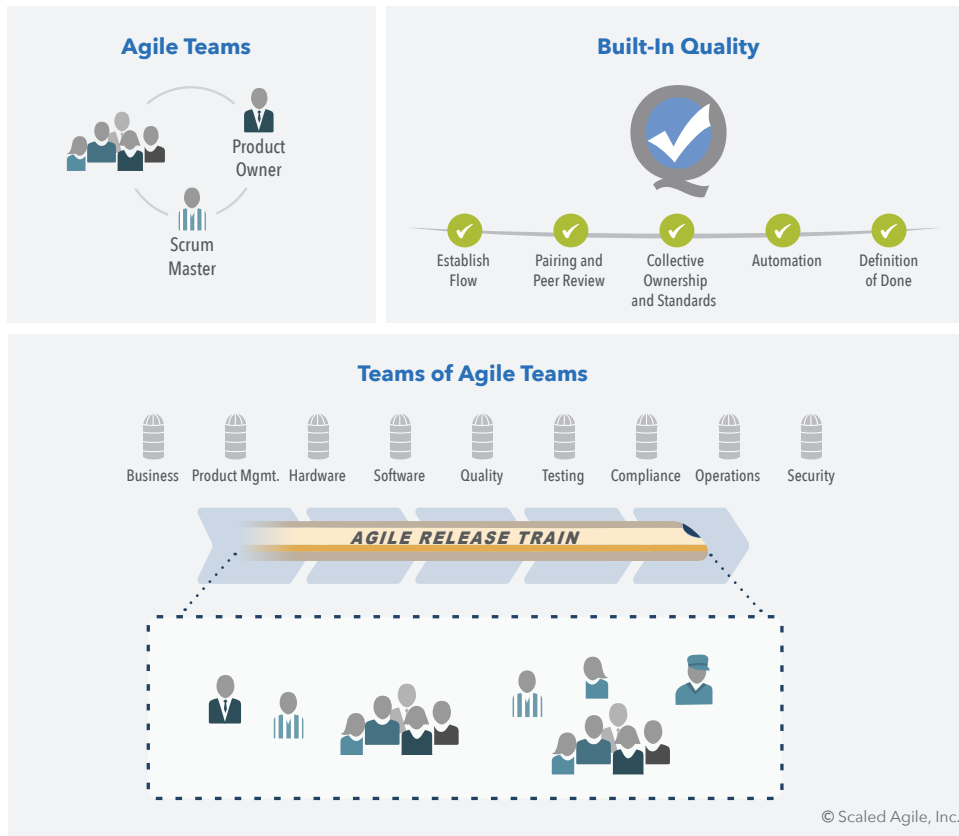


Figure 10. The three dimensions of Team and Technical Agility

Agile Teams

High-performing, cross-functional teams anchor the competency by applying effective Agile principles and practices. Agile teams have all the skills necessary to define, build, test, and deploy value in short iterations. They are empowered, collaborative, and focused on shared goals. To deliver and sustain value to customers, they can be software teams, hardware teams, business teams, operations teams, support teams, or a cross-cutting team of multiple disciplines.

Team of Agile Teams

Building enterprise-class solutions typically requires more scope and breadth of skills than a single Agile team can provide. It typically needs a broad range of specialty skills that cannot be contained within a single Agile team. Therefore, multiple Agile teams must collaborate. SAFe's Agile Release Train (ART) is a long-lived team-of-Agile-teams (Figure 11), which—along with other stakeholders—incrementally develops, delivers, and where applicable, operates one or more solutions.

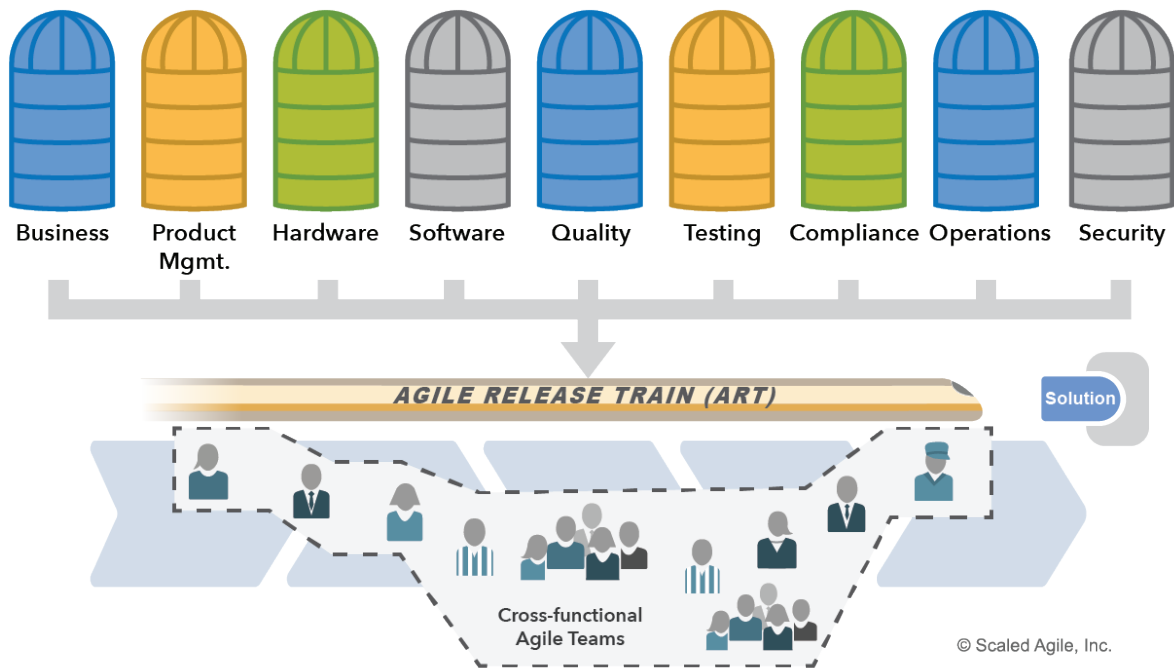


Figure 11. Agile Release Trains are fully cross-functional

Built-in Quality

Built-in quality powers the Lean goal of delivering value in the shortest sustainable lead time, allowing enterprises to continually respond to market changes. Agile teams adhere to quality standards and processes to support 'collective ownership' of artifacts, code, and other content. They also continuously improve their product quality through refactoring and by reducing technical debt.

Agile Product Delivery

Agile Product Delivery is a customer-centric approach to defining, building, and releasing a continuous flow of valuable products and services to customers and users. These capabilities are mutually supportive and create opportunities for sustained market and service leadership. There are three dimensions to Agile Product Delivery, as illustrated in Figure 12.

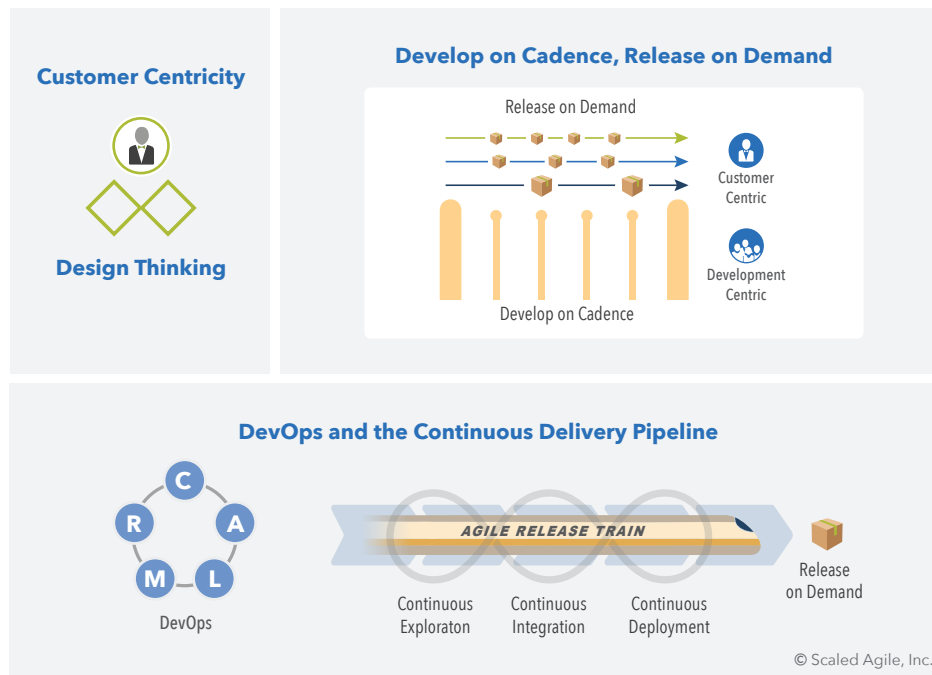


Figure 12. Three dimensions of Agile Product Delivery

Customer Centricity and Design Thinking

Customer centricity is a mindset that places the customer at the heart of every decision. Using design thinking, organizations can confirm that the solution is desirable, viable, feasible, and sustainable. This motivates us to:

- Focus on the customer
- Understand the customer's needs
- Think and feel like the customer
- Build whole-product solutions
- Know customer lifetime value

Develop on Cadence, Release on Demand

Developing solutions in SAFe is done on a fixed cadence. Cadence assures that important events, such as Program Increment (PI) Planning, System and Solution Demos, and Inspect & Adapt, happen on a regular, predictable schedule.

Customer-centric enterprises seek to create a continuous flow of value to their customers. Decoupling the release of value from the development schedule allows customers to get what they need, when they need it. The timing of these releases is determined by market and customer needs, and the enterprise's own motivation to provide value.

DevOps and the Continuous Delivery Pipeline

DevOps and the continuous delivery pipeline enable enterprises to release value on demand and are significant elements of Agile Product Delivery. *DevOps* is a mindset, a culture, and a set of technical practices. It provides communication, integration, automation, and the close cooperation needed to plan, develop, test, deploy, release, and maintain a solution.

The *continuous delivery pipeline* represents the workflows, activities, and automation needed to shepherd a new piece of functionality from ideation to the release of value. It consists of four aspects: continuous exploration, continuous integration, continuous deployment, and release on demand. Each ART builds and maintains a pipeline to deliver solution value as independently as possible.

Enterprise Solution Delivery

Building and evolving large, cyber-physical systems and enterprise-class software solutions is a significant undertaking. Many such systems require hundreds or thousands of engineers, demanding sophisticated, rigorous practices for engineering, operations, and support. That calls for continuously delivering new capabilities, along with technology upgrades, security patches, and other enhancements.

The *Enterprise Solution Delivery* competency describes how to apply Lean-Agile principles and practices to specify, develop, deploy, operate, and evolve the world's largest and most sophisticated software applications, networks, and cyber-physical systems. This competency consists of three dimensions (Figure 13).

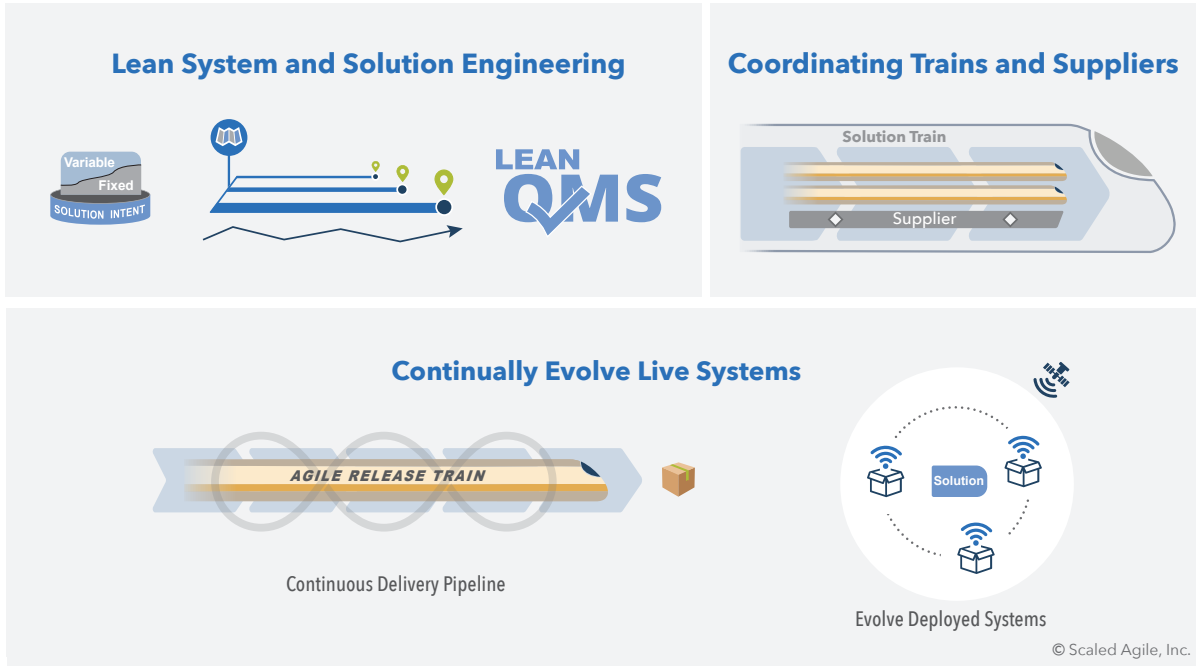


Figure 13. Three dimensions of Enterprise Solution Delivery

Lean Systems and Solution Engineering

Lean systems and solution engineering applies Lean-Agile practices to align and coordinate all the activities necessary to specify, architect, design, implement, test, deploy, evolve, and ultimately decommission these systems. Aspects of this dimension include continually refining the fixed/variable solution intent; applying multiple planning horizons; architecting for scale, modularity, releasability, and serviceability; and continuously addressing compliance concerns.

Coordinating Trains and Suppliers

Coordinating trains and suppliers aligns and directs the extended set of value streams to a shared business and technology mission. This element includes the coordinated vision, backlogs, and roadmaps with common Program Increment (PI) and synchronization points.

Continually Evolve Live Systems

A fast, economical continuous delivery pipeline means a minimum viable system can be released early and evolve after release into the field. This allows enterprises to learn much earlier with less investment and possibly even begin generating revenue sooner. The goal is to get into the operational environment quickly to learn, gain feedback, deliver value, and get to market before the competition. These systems must therefore be architected to support continuous deployment and release on demand.

Lean Portfolio Management

The three previously mentioned competencies provide the technical practices to build and deploy significant business solutions. But none of them address the larger issue of what solutions *should* be built and *why*. For that, we need to address portfolio concerns. However, traditional approaches to portfolio management were not designed to handle the impact of a global economy or digital disruption. These factors put pressure on enterprises to work under a higher degree of uncertainty and yet deliver innovative solutions much faster. Accordingly, portfolio management approaches must be modernized to support the new, Lean-Agile way of working.

The *Lean Portfolio Management* (LPM) competency aligns strategy and execution by applying Lean, Agile, and systems thinking. As Figure 14 illustrates, accomplishing this requires three collaborations—strategy and investment funding, Agile portfolio operations, and Lean governance.



Figure 14. Lean Portfolio Management responsibilities

Strategy and Investment Funding

Strategy and investment funding ensures that the entire portfolio is aligned and funded to create and maintain the solutions needed to meet business targets. After all, only by allocating the 'right investments' to building the 'right things' can an enterprise accomplish its ultimate business objectives. However, portfolio strategy is much more than prioritization and selection of the best investments. The portfolio team must understand its role in achieving the enterprise strategy. Therefore, leaders should apply LPM to understand the portfolio's current state and develop a purposeful plan to continuously evolve to a better, differentiated future state.

Agile Portfolio Operations

Agile portfolio operations coordinates and supports decentralized program execution, enabling operational excellence. Success requires the cooperation of the Agile Program Management Office (APMO) or a Lean-Agile Center of Excellence (LACE) and Communities of Practice for Release Train Engineers, Scrum Masters, and evolving technical disciplines.

SAFe principles and the Lean-Agile mindset foster the decentralization of strategy execution to empowered ARTs and Solution Trains. Even then, however, systems thinking must be applied to ensure that ARTs and Solution Trains are aligned and operate within the broader enterprise context.

Lean Governance

Lean governance provides oversight of spending, audit and compliance, expense forecasting, and measurement. Governance of a portfolio requires collaboration among the APMO/LACE, Business Owners, and Enterprise Architects to forecast and budget dynamically, coordinate continuous compliance, and measure portfolio performance using Lean metrics.

Organizational Agility

In addition to mastering the previously described competencies, enterprises must be able to respond quickly to handle the challenges and opportunities that today's rapidly changing markets present. This new reality demands more flexibility and adaptability than traditional hierarchical operating systems can provide. Again, the second and more flexible operating system comes to the rescue. SAFe helps businesses address these challenges with *Organizational Agility*, expressed in three dimensions (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Three dimensions of Organizational Agility

Lean-Thinking People and Agile Teams

Everyone involved in business solution delivery must be trained in both Lean and Agile methods, and embrace the values, principles, and practices. This includes business and technology leaders, development, operations, legal, marketing, finance, support, security, and others. Once the business side of the organization is trained in Lean-Agile principles, they recognize the benefits of the new way of working and typically start creating cross-functional Agile teams within their domain.

Moreover, these business teams are 'on the train' and participate in delivering and supporting innovative business solutions using Lean-Agile principles and practices. In turn, this new operating model requires 'Agile HR' to bring the Agile mindset, values, and principles to hiring, engaging, and retaining people.

Lean Business Operations

Teams apply Lean principles to understand, map, and continuously improve business processes that support the company's products and services. Educating everyone in Lean-Agile provides the enterprise with the mindset, principles, and thinking tools individuals and teams need to relentlessly improve business processes. One such thinking tool is the construct of 'value streams.' It is a fundamental concept in Lean thinking and a cornerstone of Organizational Agility in SAFe. Once identified, value stream mapping is applied to analyze and improve the flow of work and business operations (Figure 16).

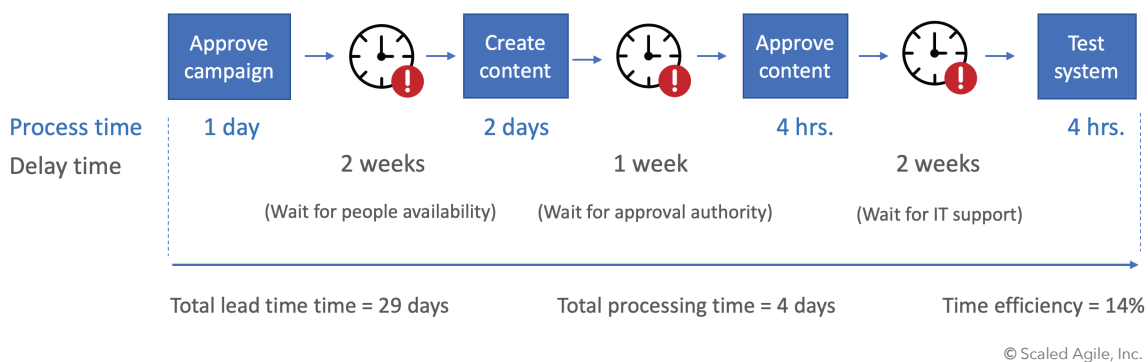


Figure 16. Value stream mapping showing processing time, total lead time, and time efficiency of a process

Strategy Agility

Strategy Agility occurs when the enterprise can continuously probe and sense market changes and quickly adapt its strategy. As strategy changes, strategy agility allows the enterprise to reorganize Agile teams and ARTs to better address new opportunities. The traditional hierarchy is no longer the hindrance.

Continuous Learning Culture

Even after mastering all the other competencies, principles and practices, enterprises will likely experience volatility as the norm. Startup companies are continuing to challenge the status quo, while tech giants like Amazon and Google are entering entirely new markets such as banking and healthcare. The expectations of next-generation workers, customers, and society as a whole challenges companies to think and act beyond balance sheets and quarterly earnings reports.

To address the demand for continuous learning, personal growth, and process improvement, the *Continuous Learning Culture* competency describes values and practices that encourage individuals—and the entire enterprise—to continually increase knowledge, competence, performance, and innovation. This is expressed in three dimensions, as shown in Figure 17.



Figure 17. The three dimensions of a continuous learning culture

Learning Organization

For the organization to transform and adapt to an ever-changing world, employees at every level must keep learning and growing. Learning organizations invest in and facilitate the ongoing growth of

their employees. When everyone in the organization is continuously learning, it fuels the enterprise's ability to dynamically transform itself as needed to anticipate and exploit opportunities that create a competitive advantage.

Learning organizations are proficient in creating, obtaining, and sharing knowledge, while evolving practices to include the new insights. Such organizations understand and unlock the intrinsic motivation of people to learn and gain mastery for the benefit of the enterprise.

Innovation Culture

Innovation is one of the four pillars of the SAFe House of Lean. But the kind of change needed to compete in the digital age requires an innovation culture, where leaders create an environment that supports creative thinking, curiosity, and challenging the status quo. When an organization has an innovation culture, employees are encouraged and enabled to explore ideas for enhancements to existing products, experiment with ideas for new products, pursue fixes to chronic defects, create process improvements to reduce waste, and remove impediments to productivity.

Relentless Improvement

To remain competitive, every part of the enterprise must focus on relentlessly improving its solutions, products, and processes. The Lean model for continuous improvement is based on a series of small, iterative, and incremental improvements and experiments that enable the organization to learn its way to the most promising answer to a problem. There are five key aspects of relentless improvement:

- **Constant sense of competitive danger.** Continually anticipating competitive threats drives the company to aggressively pursue improvement opportunities.
- **Optimize the whole.** Optimizing the whole suggests that improvements should be designed to increase the effectiveness of the entire system that produces the sustainable flow of value, as opposed to local optimizations.
- **Problem-solving culture.** Iterative Plan-Do-Check-Adjust (PDCA) cycles provide the process for iterative problem solving by making small adjustments as well as breakthrough innovations.
- **Reflect at key milestones.** Improvement activities are often deferred in favor of more-urgent work such as new feature development and fixing defects. Relentless improvement requires a disciplined structure to avoid neglecting this critical activity.
- **Fact-based improvement.** Fact-based improvement leads to changes guided by the data surrounding the problem and informed solutions, not by opinions and conjecture.

Measure and Grow

The road to business agility is a journey, not a destination. Using the SAFe business agility assessment, enterprises can understand where they are on their journey, identify next steps, and remember to celebrate successes along the way. The high-level summary (Figure 18) measures the enterprise's achievements around the seven core competencies. A more detailed assessment illustrates progress along the 21 dimensions. Periodically applying the assessment, contemplating the results, and following the recommendations will help ensure the best possible business outcomes.

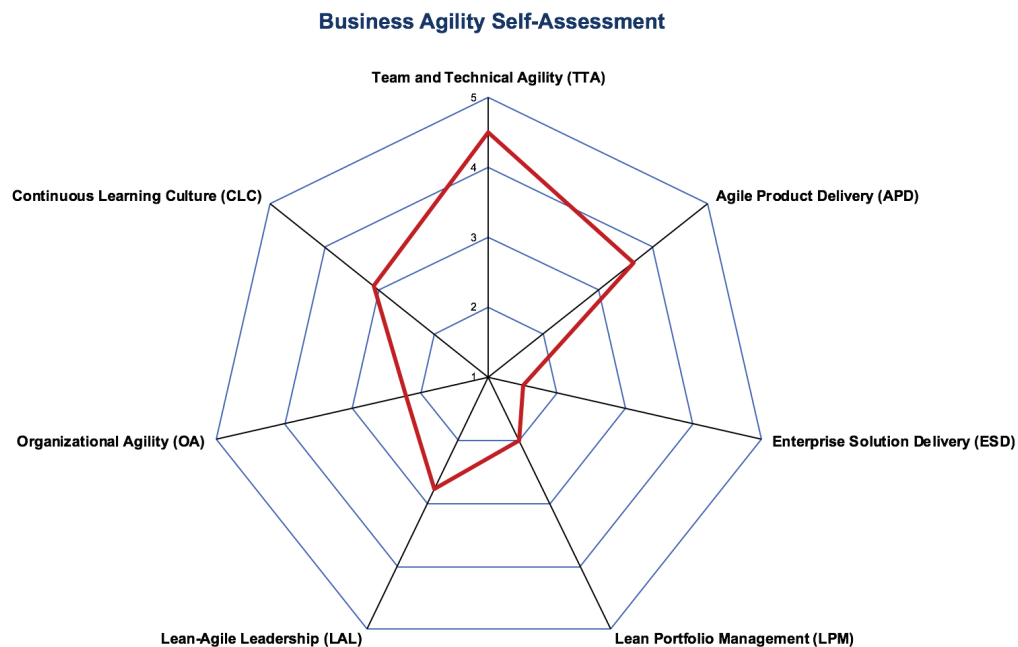


Figure 18. SAFe business agility self-assessment

There are six steps in the measure and grow process:

1. Conduct a self-assessment of business agility
2. Analyze the results
3. Identify growth opportunities
4. Prioritize and take action
5. Integrate learning
6. Celebrate success

Configure SAFe

Configurable and scalable, SAFe allows each organization to adapt the Framework to its own business needs (Figure 19). With four, out-the-box configurations, SAFe supports the full spectrum of solutions, from those requiring a small number of teams to those complex systems that require hundreds—and even thousands—of people to build and deliver.

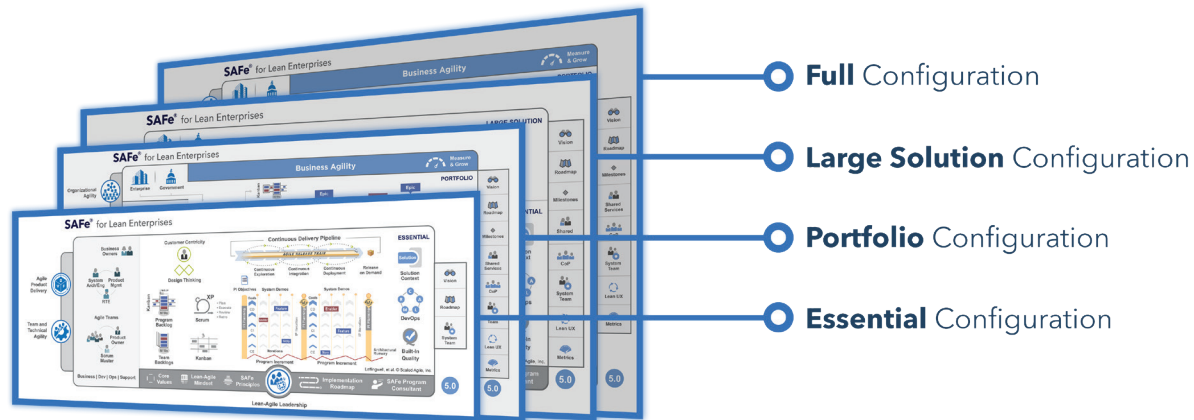


Figure 19. The SAFe configurations

- **Essential SAFe** is the building block for all the other configurations and is the simplest starting point for implementation. Essential SAFe delivers the core competencies of Lean-Agile Leadership, Team and Technical Agility, and Agile Product Delivery to the enterprise.
- **Large Solution SAFe** brings the Enterprise Solution Delivery competency to organizations building the largest and most complex solutions. This configuration offers increased focus on coordinating multiple ARTs and suppliers, and meeting compliance and regulatory standards.
- **Portfolio SAFe** incorporates the Lean Portfolio Management competency to align portfolio execution to enterprise strategy. This configuration also organizes development around the flow of value through one or more value streams. Moreover, Portfolio SAFe is the simplest configuration designed to help organizations achieve business agility.
- **Full SAFe** is the most comprehensive version, integrating all seven core competencies to support enterprises that build and maintain a portfolio of large, integrated solutions.

Summary

Welcome to the age of software—an era where business agility will decide the winners and losers of the new economy.

- Lean-Agile *commercial* businesses will create greater profits, grow market share, increase employee engagement, and better satisfy customer needs.
- Lean-Agile *nonprofits* will create resilience, sustainability, and alignment to better fulfill their mission.
- Lean-Agile *government* agencies will deliver solutions that better assure the safety, economy, and welfare of the general public.

All of these segments depend on the ability to deliver innovative business solutions faster and more efficiently than ever before. Each will need to employ a dual operating system: an existing, more hierarchical model intended for efficiency and scale, and a second, customer-centric network operating system that delivers innovative solutions. The seven core competencies of SAFe embody this critical second operating system. Those who master these competencies will conquer the digital age.

Next Steps

This white paper provided an overview of the Scaled Agile Framework 5.0, the seven core competencies to achieve business agility, and the values, mindset, principles, and practices that guide teams to build more effective business solutions.

The core competencies are the primary lens for understanding and succeeding with SAFe and how to approach its adoption. The SAFe website at scaledagileframework.com provides additional information on all the topics covered here (and more). To extend your knowledge of SAFe beyond this white paper, we suggest that you:

- Read about real-world implementations at scaledagile.com/case-studies
- Browse the Framework at scaledagileframework.com
- Find role-based SAFe training and certification at scaledagile.com/learning
- View SAFe presentations and videos at scaledagileframework.com/videos-and-presentations
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About Scaled Agile, Inc.

Scaled Agile, Inc. is the provider of SAFe®, the world's leading framework for business agility. Through learning and certification, a global partner network, and a growing community of over 500,000 trained professionals, Scaled Agile helps organizations build agility into their culture so they can quickly identify and deliver customer value, capitalize on emerging opportunities, and improve business outcomes. Scaled Agile is a contributing member of the Pledge 1% corporate philanthropy and community service movement. Learn more at scaledagile.com.



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SAFe® curriculum

The extensive and evolving Scaled Agile curriculum is a cornerstone for implementation success and a key part of an overall transformation. Our full portfolio of world-class courseware helps organizations unlock business results, retain teams, and attract new talent. And our in-demand certifications help individuals thrive as key players within a SAFe organization and advance throughout their career in practicing, consulting, or training others in the Framework.



SAFe courses and certifications include:

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- **Leading SAFe®**
with SAFe® 5 Agilist certification
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