



DIAGNOSING DYSFUNCTION

Causes and remedies
for broken Agile
ways of working



Teams and their methods of collaboration form the backbone of organisations and industries.

A shift to Agile ways of working has completely transformed software delivery in modern organisations.

While its benefits are well-studied and understood, realising them in practice remains elusive for various teams and organisations.

Within teams, we can achieve much more than even the most competent individuals.

Collaboration is complex. Ways of working was established to facilitate collaboration. These are a set of standards that can guide teams to achieve common goals and outcomes.

As various ways of working are tried and implemented, specific environmental pressures may arise, and problems emerge:

I’m done, your turn

Things are thrown over the fence after being built in isolation or with little input from other teams. Teams work in silos and struggle to reach people outside to obtain crucial information for their projects.

“Us vs them” mentality

Blame is shifted to other teams for unmet commitments, such as, “We’re late because you were late. It’s not our system that’s the problem; it’s yours.”

The concept of *ways of working* was introduced to emphasise that we’re all in this together.

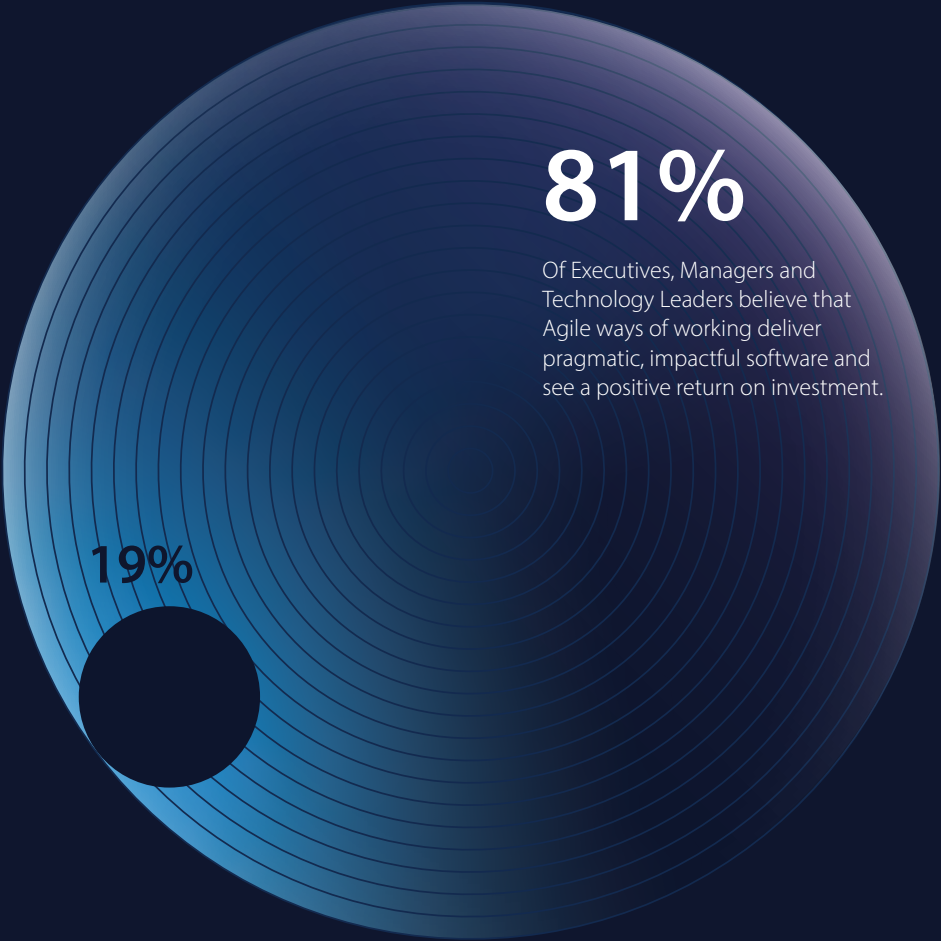
Ways of working aims to establish a shared understanding of how we would like to work with each other in a sustainable, transparent, and respectful way.

We present lessons and insights on effective ways to introduce, transform, and enhance ways of working in organisations, drawn from our experience of working with local and international blue-chip organisations for over 20 years.

Ways of working survey

In 2023, we conducted a survey across our teams and clients, to better understand their sentiment around their ways of working.

Executives, Managers and Technology leaders shared their experience across industries, and the results of this survey are shown throughout this publication.

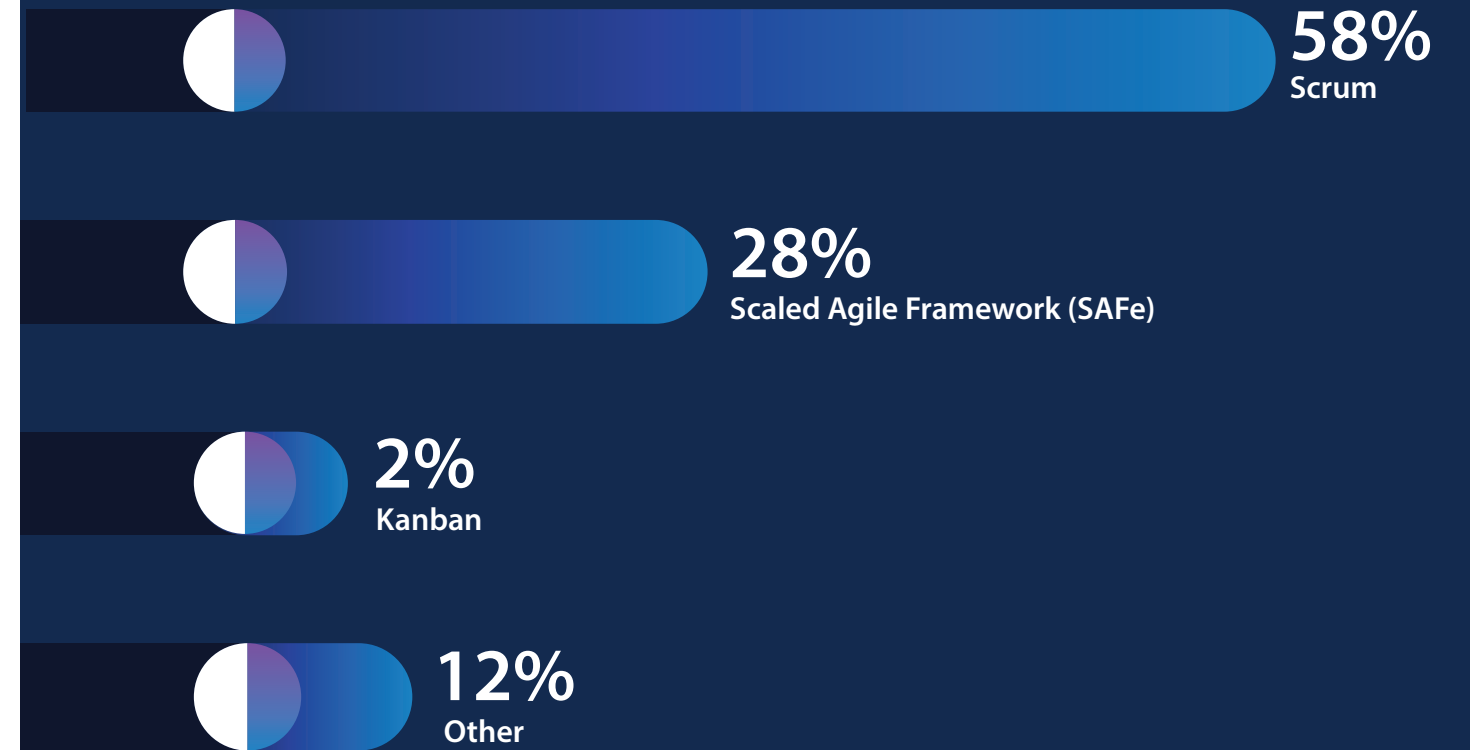


CHAPTER 1

THE COSTLY SUPERFICIAL ADOPTION OF AGILE

Twenty years on, the terms Agile and Scrum are still often used interchangeably. This confusion about the difference between the two concepts highlights how, despite our best intentions, we ended up more 'fragile' than Agile.

Ranking of Agile methodologies according to popularity among surveyed organisations.



Revisiting the origins of Agile

To address this misunderstanding between Agile and Scrum and fix our current predicament, we need to revisit the origins and rediscover Agile's intent. In 2001 a group of software practitioners, enthusiastic about software and its development, gathered and defined the Agile manifesto.

These people saw the need to define a new way of working, one that understands the environment we operate in where change is inevitable, and uncertainty is prominent.

Agile is particular method of collaboration and working: a project management philosophy with a core set of values and

principles. Scrum, on the other hand, is a framework to assist us in practically implementing these intangible values and principles that underpin Agile.

Adopting an Agile way of working is demanding. All of us, good intentioned, productivity addicts of the software industry, took this philosophy and tried to apply it without opening our hearts and minds to the change it requires.

We only adopted superficial actions the framework suggests: We have daily status updates, and we make plans for every two weeks, but we still have not fully embraced the change. We don't see the magical, high-quality output resulting in valuable outcomes that Agile promises.

We have forgotten that Agile is the mindset we should adopt and not the framework that makes it happen.

The mindset creates a genuine belief that you and your teams can deliver valuable output resulting in useful outcomes that have actual impact, achieve goals and lead to a successful product.

Collaboration, delivering value and making an impact are elements that should be perceived as connected to one another.

You'll have a radically different daily huddle when everyone is convinced their participation in the discussion ultimately has an impact on the customers interacting with their output. Suddenly they are invested in it being a productive and useful discussion.

The Agile Industrial Complex

The commercialisation and potential misdirection of Agile practices, often focusing on processes and certifications rather than the Agile mindset and values.

Cargo Cult Agile

The superficial adoption of Agile activities without embodying Agile values and principles.



The dilution of Agile practices

Agile implementation has slipped away from us. Many organisations are deeply engaged in it, but opportunism and a desire for quick results have diluted the practice.

The primary focus is often on process adherence and credentialism, rather than championing the Agile values and principles that drive true success.

We still find Agile practices being applied on top of old ways of working and thinking, reinforcing the superficial practice of “doing Agile things”. Old ways of working are

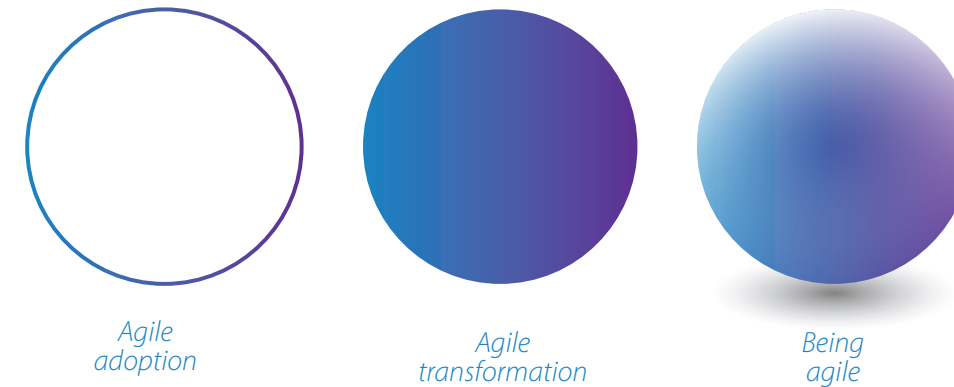
supplemented with Agile practices intending to gain the benefits of Agile without the required transformation.

The results are still focused on projects instead of products and on output instead of value.

It is the equivalent of changing the Project Manager’s title to Scrum Master and

expecting the person to suddenly inspire everyone to believe in “The Cause” and take ownership of products (projects) they don’t own. People can’t own what they have no influence on: what gets built or why it gets built, and in most extreme cases, how it gets built. Teams are blindly producing output without consideration for the outcomes and impact of their output.

Stop “doing” Agile and start being agile



Shallow Agile adoption does not suddenly help organisations respond to change and navigate it effectively.

Moving from the misdirected doing of Agile to being, has two steps. Most organisations cover step 1, the “doing” early on through training of key individuals. Often the more daunting second step is neglected.

Step 1
Agile adoption

The practical endeavour of making the conscious choice to embrace the new Agile ways, and allocating time, people, and money to learn its tools and practices.

Step 2
Agile transformation
Entrenching Agile into the core of the organisation’s operations, processes and systems.

Step 3
Being agile

In addition to training and execution, organisations need to instil the Agile mindset and values. Being agile follows from this. Champions who believe in agile help teams to implement it and demonstrate its effectiveness. Additionally, they correct misconceptions, answer questions and neutralise anti-patterns. Over time, more people in the organisation at all levels come to understand and rely on the framework and the organisation becomes agile.

What are your options?

Step 1

Diagnose the problem.
Start by answering a simple set of questions to understand where you are.

Agile beliefs	Yes or No
The term 'Empirical' is well understood in my organisation	
Estimates are treated as rough targets rather than commitments	
Quality assurance is integrated into the delivery process	
Software is delivered in iterations shorter than a month	
Work in progress is visualised	
The team decides on the set of functionality to be delivered in a given sprint, and no external deadlines are imposed	
Moments of planning and reflection are prioritised over producing an output	
There is a clear indication of team capacity and productivity	
Responding to new insights or changes is considered more important than adhering to the planned course	
Change is welcomed in our projects and teams	
Collaboration with customers/users of your product informs what is built	
Multiple teams working on one product, collaborating and communicating dependencies with each other	
Only one or a maximum of three items are classified as top priorities	

The answers given to the questions are an indication of the effectiveness and maturity of Agile ways of working in your organisation.

3 or fewer nos

High chance that your chosen ways of working are delivering value and effectively facilitating the process of software development.

5 or fewer nos

Moderate chance that your chosen ways of working are delivering value and effectively facilitating the process of software development.

7 or more nos

Low chance that your chosen ways of working are delivering value and effectively facilitating the process of software development.



Step 2
What is the goal?
Find out what it looks like and
start working towards it.

Characteristics of agile organisations
to use as a benchmark

- Understanding that **plans made need to be inherently flexible** to adapt to inevitable changes that take place in the environment or context of a given project.
- Acknowledgment of **the reality of limited time** compared to required features and avoidance of classifying many or all requirements as important.
- Transparency** and respect.
- Embracing change** by adjusting scope and active reprioritisation.
- Asking “why” a lot, and **understanding the overall purpose** of a task.
- Continuous **improvement**.

Mindsets and frameworks

Shifting to an adaptive approach.

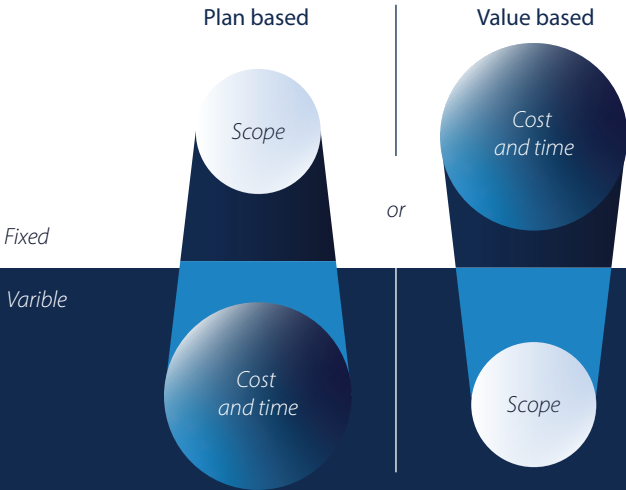
There are several frameworks out there to support you in your journey to agility, but ultimately it requires that you embrace an agile mindset and shift to an adaptive approach.

Being adaptive means understanding that it is unrealistic to fix both the scope and the timeline for a project or sprint.

Therefore, with a fixed scope, you’re going to need to adapt timelines or with a fixed timeline, you’ll have to negotiate scope, while considering cost and quality.

This avoids the fallacy (and its disastrous consequences) that it is possible to predict cost and timelines while fixing scope and required features. The background environment and its variables are constantly changing; therefore, certainty is unattainable.

In the coming chapters, we take you through some ways of working we commonly encounter. Specifically, how these Agile frameworks help structure your ways of working to support collaboration and alignment (these two implying solid communication), relentless improvement, responding to change and optimising flow to deliver working solutions.



CHAPTER 2

DISENTANGLING SCRUM



The three most effective agile methodologies that deliver impactful software, drive positive user adoption, and create real returns.

Scrum has evolved into one of the most renowned and widely used Agile frameworks today.

Scrum originated in 1986 through a pioneering white paper titled *The New New Product Development Game*. This innovative approach, often referred to as “holistic” or “rugby” style, revolves around a team working cohesively as a unit, akin to passing a ball back and forth on a rugby field, to effectively tackle today’s competitive demands.

The inception of the Scrum framework dates back approximately 38 years, preceding the creation of the Agile manifesto by 15 years, highlighting the independent legacy of Scrum within the realm of Agile frameworks.

Given Scrum’s popularity and widespread adoption, it’s hardly surprising that Scrum is the most “commonly used / commonly misused framework.”

With so many organisations and teams jumping on the Scrum bandwagon it’s no surprise that implementations of Scrum are riddled with misconceptions and anti-

patterns. If it were not for the tangible value that teams are realising despite a suboptimal implementation of Scrum, most would have probably moved onto different ways of working.

Understanding and addressing these misconceptions and anti-patterns can help organisations and teams work towards a more effective implementation of Scrum.



Prevalent misconceptions about Scrum

Misconception

Scrum is a silver bullet

Truth

It is not a one size fits all

Understanding the context and adapting Scrum to meet specific needs and constraints is crucial. If intended benefits of the framework are not realised it might be a sign of misalignment between the framework and the target environment.

The beauty of Agile ways of working is that there are other frameworks, founded on Agile values and principles that could be better suited to your projects and teams.

Misconception

Scrum is rigid and prescriptive

Truth

It's not a methodology

Scrum is often thought of as a methodology instead of a framework.

Where a methodology is systematic with detailed and defined steps, **a framework is a structured approach to a problem** and allows for more flexibility based on the problem being solved.

This can be seen clearly with the latest update to the Scrum guide where it states that: "The Scrum framework only sets the goalposts for an empirical approach and trusts in the experience and creativity of the players to decide how to best play the game."

The framework has become less normative over the years, giving teams and organisations greater autonomy to define their own approaches to fit the context of their work.

Misconception

Scrum guarantees immediate results

Truth

It takes time

The transformation to Scrum is a journey, and results may take time. While **it brings many benefits if implemented correctly**, it requires time, effort, and continuous refinement to realise its potential.

A vertical decorative bar on the left side of the page, featuring a series of overlapping circles in white, blue, and purple. The circles vary in size and are arranged in a vertical sequence.

Prevalent anti-patterns in Scrum

Recognising and addressing anti-patterns can help improve the framework's effectiveness.

Anti-Pattern

Proxy Product Owner

Having someone other than the real Product Owner making decisions or interacting with the team can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunication.

Remedy

Regular communication

For optimal outcomes, it is crucial to ensure that the real Product Owner actively engages with the team, stakeholders and customers, and participates in their Scrum events.

This active involvement and direct communication enables swift decision-making, empowering teams to prioritise product features and respond promptly to changing requirements. It establishes faster feedback loops, facilitating iterative improvements and maintaining alignment with user needs.

Acknowledging that ideal circumstances may not always prevail, it becomes crucial to foster effective alignment between the Product Owner and Proxy Product Owner to minimise misalignment and avoid delays in feedback and decision-making.

Proactive communication ensures a shared understanding of priorities and requirements, reducing the risk of miscommunication and creating a smoother process.

Anti-Pattern

Product goals

Teams and organisations are not aware of the product goal or do not have defined product goals.

Remedy

Inform your teams about the product goal

Working with the Product Owner to define the higher-level goals that the sprints are working towards and showing how these goals bring you closer to your product vision should be transparent to the team.

Defining purpose and outcome
Understand why the goal matters and the outcome you want to achieve.

Stakeholders involvement
Get input from relevant people to help shape the goal and create alignment.

SMART criteria
Craft a concise, specific statement with measurable outcomes.

Communicate and adapt
Share the goal and remain open to adjust your product goals as required.

Anti-Pattern

Estimations and predictability

The team consistently over commits and underestimates the amount of work they can deliver within a sprint.

Remedy

Establish a sustainable pace

One of Scrum's key value drivers is using empirical data to make decisions, this is often overlooked in efforts to get more work done, or slot in more tickets to meet a business deadline.

Velocity demonstrates the team's ability to complete work over a period, usually calculated over 3 months. It provides the team with historical data to help drive future decisions and plan for delivery.

Sprint planning should be realistic and consider historical velocity when setting commitments. **A sustainable pace should be prioritised during sprint planning** and discussions about upcoming work should be open and honest to counteract the anti-pattern.

Anti-Pattern

Technical debt

The team ignores technical debt and allows it to accumulate, compromising quality over time.

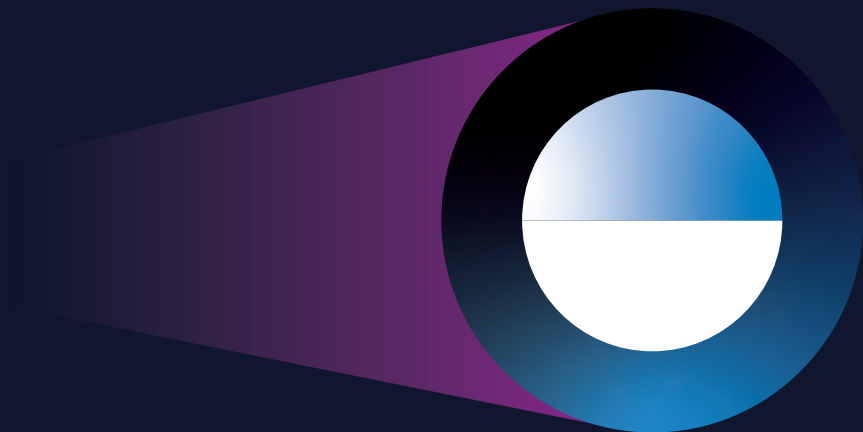
Remedy

Allocate time for technical debt

Technical debt should be recognised and addressed as part of the team's regular work. Time to refactor, upgrade the development environment, and improve code quality needs to be allocated.

Balancing the delivery of new features and maintaining the health of the system is essential for sustainability.

Speaking to the Product Owner and stakeholders to make technical debt visible to **ensure that planning for future sprint work includes time allocation for it** needs to be a common practice.



Has Scrum evolved?

Like its principle of iterative and incremental delivery of value, the Scrum framework has gone through various iterations to get us to where it is today, with the latest Scrum Guide being published in 2020.

Two key changes
were made in the framework's pursuit
of improvement.

1. Making Scrum less prescriptive

Over the years, the guide had become increasingly prescriptive, e.g. there were recommended questions to ask at the daily stand up. The latest iteration aimed to bring Scrum back to being a minimally sufficient framework by removing or softening prescriptive language.

The reason for the update was to encourage people to follow an Agile mindset and be adaptable in applying the guide to their specific contexts and environments rather than simply following strictly prescribed elements that might not fit their context.

2. The product goal

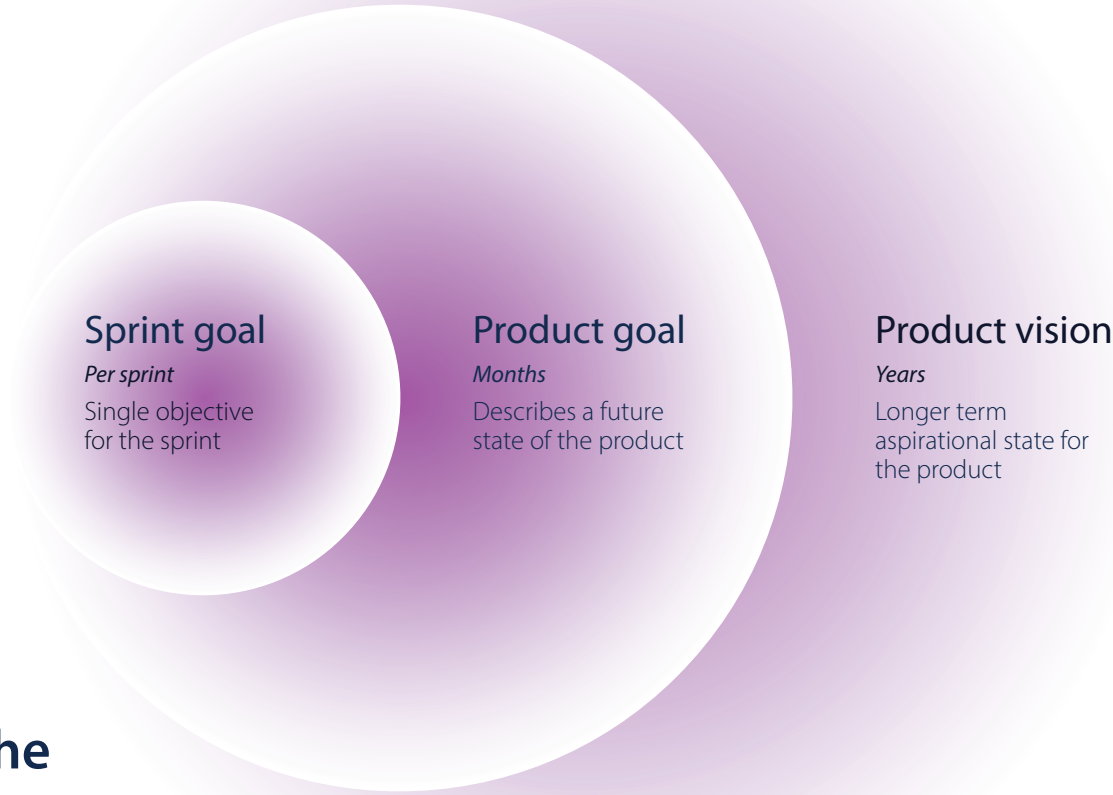
The product goal was introduced as a concrete and actionable target that outlines the scrum team's aspirations for their upcoming work. It is a medium-term goal and acts as a bridge between the product vision (long-term goal) and sprint goals (short-term goals).

Why is the product goal important?

It provides focus to the scrum team by creating an objective that is clear, measurable and close.

It puts focus on the work that the team picks up and deprioritises work that does not help the team meet the product goal.

With correct implementation, it is possible to build motivated teams who relentlessly pursue the delivery of lasting product value and prioritise long-term impact over sprint-to-sprint gains.



Where to start with implementing Scrum

All-in approach

A commonly held opinion is that Scrum transformation can be initiated through a “delicate” Scrum-lite version and morphed into something grand over time.

Scrum demands an all-in approach right out the gate, embracing the revolutionary and intentional path in order to make it work.

Step 1

Vision and commitment

Transformation will not be successful without this.

Commitment from key stakeholders and leadership is crucial to support and embrace the transformation. **Scrum transformation is not easy.** When things get tough, when processes don’t appear to be working, or there is pressure stemming from issues, **it is important that key stakeholders and leadership stick to their commitment** and not revert to old ways of working because it feels easier and is more familiar.

Step 2

Education and training

Change requires education and training.

Educate and train leadership, stakeholders and teams regarding the Scrum framework – its values, principles and practices.

Be intentional about using the correct terminology and references to the framework. Trying to implement a change using incorrect terminology or terms desensitises people to the change that you are implementing. Be deliberate, be intentional. **Ensure that everyone understands the benefits and expectations** that come with the changes required to implement the framework.

Step 3

A transformation team

Choose a team or a champion.

Assemble a team or a champion dedicated to driving the transformation. This can include Agile Coaches, Scrum Masters or any people with experience in the framework who can guide the organisation and teams.

Often people from other roles end up as Scrum Masters and/or transformation champions. To effectively support the team in their transformation, **it is important that your champion lives and breathes the way of working required of the transformation, rather than simply doing it because their role has been changed.** Commitment to the underlying philosophy of collaboration, transparency and adaptation is necessary versus solely focusing on output.

Step 4

Pilot project

Identify projects or teams to serve as the initial focus.

Choose projects suitable for Scrum and that can adequately highlight the benefits and impact of the framework.

Start small and focus on adopting it correctly rather than adopting a “delicate” Scrum-lite version organisation-wide. **Starting small can also help determine if the framework is being utilised on the right projects,** context and culture to facilitate an effective transition.

Step 5

Inspect and adapt

Review your implementation with your vision, then adapt.

Identify what works and celebrate and share it to inspire other teams. Assess what does not work and take active steps to improve it. Assessment of the initial initiatives provide guidance on suitable projects and environments to focus future transformation efforts on.

As the process suggests, this is a journey of intention. **Skipping parts of the journey only undermines the importance of that part of the process.** To achieve a successful transformation, adherence all the steps is essential.



Measuring the impact of Scrum

Leaders have a responsibility to ensure that Scrum is being used to it’s full potential to maximise its benefits.

The impact of Scrum can vary based on the environment. It hinges on factors such as willingness to embrace the empirical process for tackling uncertainty and complexity, support for experimentation and learning, and the demand for consistent, incremental value delivery.

Many organisations and teams are satisfied with marginal gains achieved in implanting Scrum (any improvement in ways of working is better than none after all).

However, the resulting lack of optimisation and complacency limits the upside, leaving further gains on the table and possibly putting a lid on the return on investment from enhanced ways of working.

Use the assessment criteria to evaluate if these values are being realised in your organisation and identify areas for improvement.

Efficient, Effective Scrum Events

Are all Scrum events being held regularly and with the appropriate timebox?
Sprint planning, daily scrum, sprint review and sprint retrospective.

Is the team actively participating and contributing during these events?

Empowered and Engaged Product Ownership

Is the Product Owner actively engaged with the team throughout the sprint?

Does the Product Owner provide clear priorities and requirements to the team?

Is the product backlog well-maintained and consistently prioritised based on value?

Does the team have a well defined product goal?

Effective Communication and Collaboration

Is the team effectively communicating?

Are stakeholders and the Product Owner engaged and involved in the team’s process?

Increased Adaptability and Flexibility

How well does the team respond to changes in requirements and priorities during a sprint?

Is the team open to adjusting plans based on new information or customer feedback?

Value Focused Sprint Execution

Are sprints consistently delivering potentially shippable increments?

Is the team able to meet the sprint goals and complete the planned work within the sprint?

Ability to Plan

What is the team’s historical sprint velocity and how predictable is it?

Is the team able to forecast and meet its commitments reliably?

Increased Stakeholder Satisfaction

Are stakeholders providing timely and valuable feedback on the product?

How satisfied are stakeholders with the team’s performance and the product’s progress?

CHAPTER 3

AN ADAPTABLE APPROACH TO AGILE

With their origins firmly rooted in the traditional manufacturing industry, Kanban and Lean are often seen as outsiders when it comes to Agile project management practices.

Kanban is not explicitly an Agile framework, however, the concepts do overlap as Kanban promotes a mindset of rapid delivery of value and responding effectively to change.

In Agile environments, Kanban helps teams by managing and visualising their work, limiting work-in-progress and maximising efficiency.

One of the differences between Kanban and traditional Agile is that Kanban acknowledges the need for change management when

change is introduced to an environment. Like Agile, Kanban is not a framework, it is centred around a set of four principles and six practices, which are focused on change management and service delivery.

The fact that Kanban is not overtly prescriptive in nature is one of the key differences and benefits over other Agile methodologies which often require strictly defined implementations. Kanban assists in creating something that is fit for purpose. In fact, the principles and practices of Kanban can be applied to other Agile methodologies.



Prevalent misconceptions about Kanban

With the fast and loose definition of the Kanban framework, there are various misconceptions and anti-patterns pertaining to it.

Like with all methodologies and frameworks, the most prevalent is that it is a silver bullet which will solve all problems overnight. However, Kanban's more pragmatic approach, in terms of gradual change introduction as well as its fit-for-purpose nature assists in building lasting change if there is commitment to it.

Misconception

Kanban is for manufacturing only

Truth

It works across industries

While Kanban originated in the manufacturing sector, it's not limited to this field. Kanban can be and is effectively used across various knowledge-work industries, including software development, marketing and human resources.

Misconception

Kanban doesn't require discipline

Truth

Effectiveness requires discipline

Some believe that Kanban is a more relaxed or less disciplined method because it doesn't use time-boxed sprints or rigid roles like other frameworks.

However, Kanban requires a high level of discipline, to be effective in achieving its purpose such as limiting work-in-progress and consistently improving the system.

Misconception

Kanban is only about visualisation

Truth

Kanban involves many principles

While visualisation of work is a key element of Kanban, it's not the only thing. Kanban involves various principles and practices such as limiting work-in-progress, managing flow, making policies explicit, implementing feedback loops and improving collaboratively.

Misconception

Kanban means no planning

Truth

It works across industries

While Kanban operates on a pull-based system and work is pulled as capacity allows, rather than being planned out in time-boxed sprints, it doesn't mean there's no planning involved. Forecasting and planning are done based on metrics like cycle time and throughput.

Misconception

Kanban equates to chaos

Truth

It provides transparency and order

Due to its emphasis on flexibility and continuous flow, there is a belief that Kanban can lead to chaos. However, when implemented correctly, Kanban brings order and transparency to the workflow, reduces overburdening and helps teams focus on the most important tasks.

Misconception

Kanban is a project management methodology

Truth

Effectiveness requires discipline

Kanban is a workflow management method. It's a way to visualise work, limit work-in-progress (WIP) and maximise efficiency and flow. Whilst it assists with project management, it is not a project management methodology in itself.



Anti-patterns that impact adoption

Many implementations of Agile methodologies are prone to anti-patterns that impede adoption. Kanban isn't immune to these either.

Anti patterns lead to significant challenges in the implementation, which could mean that the value of the endeavour may be lost. These incomplete implementations of Kanban are called proto-Kanban, ignoring work-in-progress (WIP) limits or just visualising your workflow are some examples of proto-Kanban.

Anti-Pattern

Starting with a different process

The mistake is often made to implement another methodology first before "migrating" to Kanban.

Remedy

Make smaller changes immediately

With Kanban there is no need to introduce another layer of change first. **You can start by understanding your current process**, followed by a visualisation of that process.

An organisation may go directly to applying relevant tools, such as a value stream map, and assessing the nature of the work their teams are doing and then making incremental changes from there.

Anti-Pattern

Not limiting WIP

Teams often treat their WIP limits as "optional" or "guidelines". Not respecting WIP limits leads to bottlenecks and inefficiencies.

Remedy

Enforce WIP limits strictly

Clearly make WIP limits visible and strictly enforce them. Some digital boards can be configured to prevent work from flowing when a WIP limit has been reached. **Use daily sync sessions to review current work in progress and discuss limits** in those sessions to check if they are at risk of being violated.

Anti-Pattern

Boards that don't evolve

Kanban boards that remain static may be an indication that the team isn't adapting and improving its processes over time.

Remedy

Constantly revise your processes

Kanban boards should evolve as the team and its processes mature. **Have regular reflect and adapt sessions as a team to understand if the processes used are still suitable** for how they work. Then implement changes based on the outcomes of those sessions. Changing the team's retrospective session to discuss processes is an opportunity to introduce change.

Anti-Pattern

Complicating the team's board

The mistake of complicating the team's board by adding too many columns or stages to it.

Remedy

Simplify for accuracy

This high granular view may lead to an ineffective holistic process. Keep it simple. **Only map out what is necessary**. A board should be as simple as possible, while accurately visualising the team's process.

Anti-Pattern

Ignoring metrics

Kanban provides useful metrics such as lead time and cycle time, which assist the team in keeping their processes predictable.

Remedy

Let metrics inform your process

Review metrics regularly as part of your process to help the team **understand what they are, what they mean and how they can assist them**. Make them talking points during inspect and adapt sessions such as retrospectives. This helps the team to identify process improvement opportunities, as they could track if their changes led to positive outcomes.



Effectiveness and impact

Kanban limits the amount of work that is allowed to be in progress.

A team can then focus on a limited number of items at a time and only take in more work once the current WIP is completed.

By limiting the work in progress, Kanban promotes flow in a team's process and allows them to focus on the task at hand.

This is different to Scrum, for example, which uses a timebox mechanism to create focus.

Focus, predictability and sustainability are just three of the benefits of utilising a Kanban system. There are however, other benefits to making use of a Kanban system.

Kanban is more than just a methodology or framework, as change management is baked into its principles.

Agile transformations are taxing on organisations as they are often met with resistance at all levels.

Using a more pragmatic approach to drive change, such as Kanban in conjunction with Lean, leads to transformations which are more evolutionary instead of revolutionary. Change is introduced incrementally and

continuously. This in turn leads to greater buy-in as there is less friction.

The fact that Kanban is relatively less prescriptive in nature is one of the key differences and benefits over other Agile methodologies which often demand specific implementations. Kanban assists in creating something that is fit for purpose. In fact, the principles and practices of Kanban can be applied to other Agile frameworks, making it a great add on to whatever you are already doing.

The benefits of Kanban

1. Improved visibility

By visualising the workflow, everyone involved in the process can track the status of tasks and the overall project.

2. Increased productivity

Limiting work-in-progress reduces multitasking, improving focus and speed of task completion.

3. More flexibility

Kanban enables changes to be made on the fly, responding swiftly to the changing demands of the project.

4. Reduced waste

By aligning with Lean principles, Kanban aids in identifying and eliminating waste, resulting in more efficient processes and better resource use.



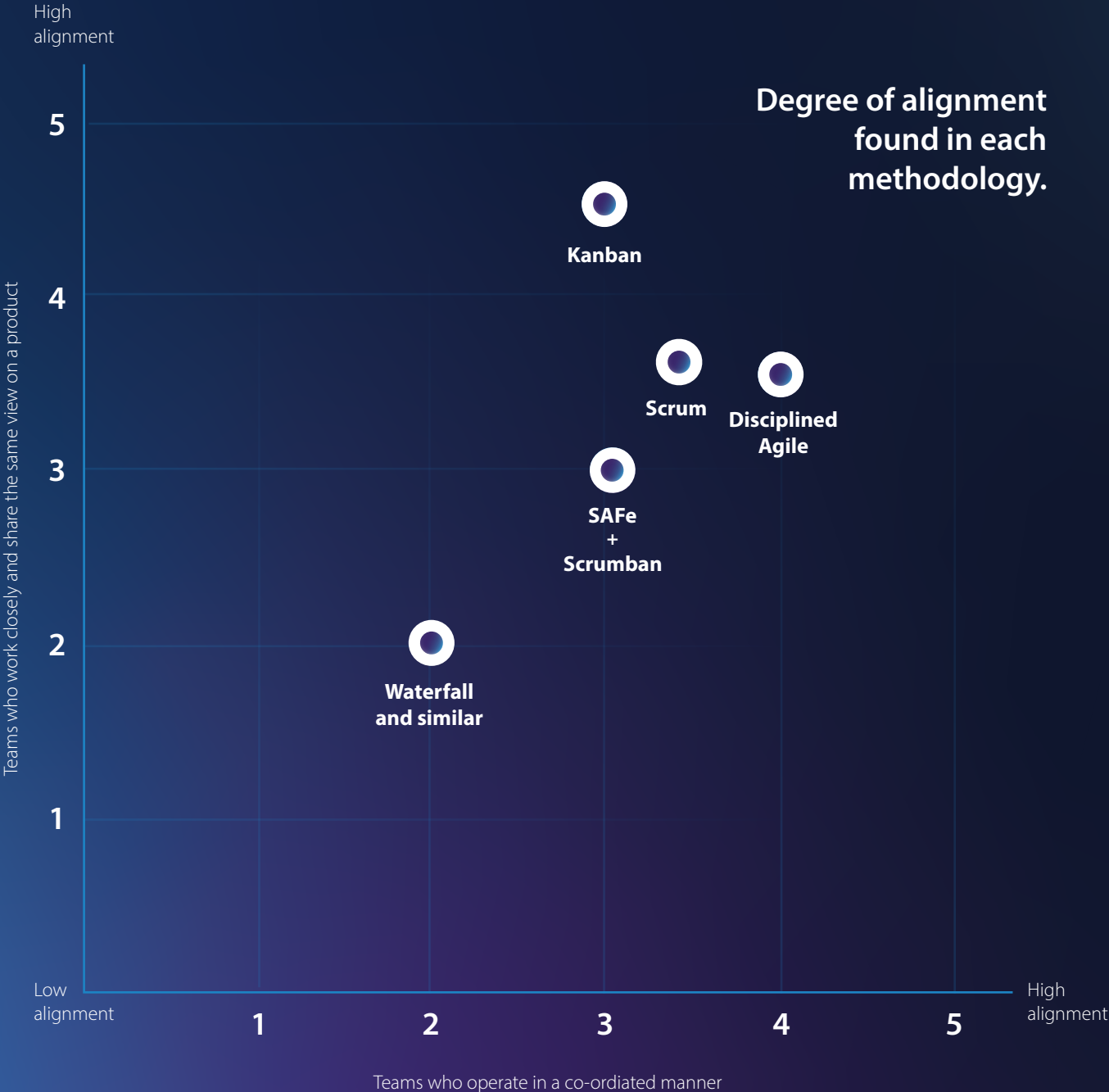
CHAPTER 4

KNOW WHEN TO SCALE

And avoid scaling chaos

The thought of scaling Agile practices commonly arises after organisations believe they have successfully implemented Agile practices.

Scaling practices are considered a natural progression if the teams, software and organisation are ramping up. However, if your product scope is relatively unchanged, barring the addition of a new team or two, scaling is probably not the answer.



It is possible to master your Agile practices and not scale

It is far too easy to argue the need for new frameworks and methods to 10x your business.

You've probably heard it: "company A hired this coach, trained up their team and now they are running Agile at scale – we should also optimise and improve, we should scale...". This is tempting, but not the answer.

Scaling Agile practices means to take your current "pretty decent Agile practices" and scale up to meet the demands of new

budget, product scope, new teams and the never-ending list of dependencies. When scaling your way of working, teams organise themselves around value, align to the same cadence, schedule, ceremonies and introduce new roles and hierarchies to manage the scale. With this comes new challenges, the need for training and substantial change management.



So when should I scale my operations?

Not to sound like every consulting business to ever exist but “it depends”. You need to ask yourself if scaling is really your next move. These questions should shape how the conversation in scaling is approached. If the answers are not positive, it could be an indication that your Agile practice and principles need improvement.

If you scale too soon, or without a strong foundation, you will scale chaos.

Questions to consider

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| What does my current way of working look like? | Is my current way of working optimal? | How many teams contribute to a feature release? |
| Are my teams organised around features, projects or otherwise? | How large are my teams and how many teams are there? | What are the team's sentiments to the way of working? |
| Are these teams working towards the same goal and supporting one another? | Is there a need for alignment, transparency and coordination? | |



Prevalent misconceptions about SAFe

SAFe was the pioneer and remains the strongest framework in the market today for scaling. This is not without cause.

The framework is intelligently crafted, closely aligned to Agile software development principles, based on Lean-Agile practices and tested across multiple industries.

SAFe is a complex framework that must be applied and moulded to your context. Cherry picking specific aspects of it doesn't lead to good outcomes. This and other misconceptions diminish its effectiveness and in some cases undermine it completely.

Misconception

The Spotify Model can be used by any organisation to scale their Agile practices

Truth

It isn't a framework

The Spotify Model (squads, tribes, guilds, etc.) is not a framework, nor is it a version of SAFe. It worked for a time but failed aggressively, as it tried to take the elements it liked of scaling Agile but did not take all the elements that enable agility. **It wasn't designed for longevity and sustainability and was eventually phased out.**

The Spotify team did not intend for their application of scaling Agile to serve as a framework for other organisations; they were merely experimenting with a new way of working.

When considering the scaling of practices, a set of principles must be observed and implemented to establish a robust scaled framework that can be sustained and adapted to meet customer needs and accommodate the size of your Agile teams.

Misconception

Scaling Agile equates to increased speed of output

Truth

It enhances quality, not speed

When scaling, new processes, ceremonies, roles, and levels of approval and review are introduced. Therefore, **SAFe will not magically "10x" the speed of delivery.** Instead, it will enhance the consistency of output, the quality of work, and the sustainability and support of the product.



Prevalent anti-patterns in SAFe

Anti-Pattern

Not involving all the teams

Remedy

Visibility creates buy-in

It is common when implementing a new framework, to start small and run a proof of concept (PoC) before involving more teams. Unfortunately, this is detrimental to the process. SAFe requires everyone to know the vision, the calendar and commitments.

Lack of visibility creates resistance to the change from the teams not involved, as this transformation is likely to impact them and their planning.

Anti-Pattern

Sharing members across teams

Remedy

Ensure dedicated teams

Dedicated cross-functional teams are a cornerstone of SAFe's success. **When team members function as shared resources across teams, they essentially become free agents.**

Managing tasks, commitments, and priorities becomes increasingly challenging, especially when complexity increases such as in changes of plans or dealing with sick or annual leave. Trying to plan for two teams simultaneously isn't impossible, but it is as close to impossible as it can get.

Anti-Pattern

Not assigning new roles and responsibilities

Remedy

Assign roles intentionally

SAFe entails more than introducing new meetings and terminology; most notably, it includes specific roles necessary at team, product, and leadership levels to ensure the support and maintenance of the new way of working.

These roles do not have a one-to-one correspondence with traditional team roles. Business Analysts do not automatically become Product Owners, Managers of teams are not automatically Product Managers, and, importantly, it should not be assumed that Project/Program Managers are equivalent to Scrum Masters and Release Train Engineers. It depends on the responsibilities the individual was fulfilling and where their strengths lie.

Anti-Pattern

Lack of training

Remedy

Everyone should receive training

Not providing training or offering training selectively creates challenges. In general, if you are investing in SAFe, **everyone should at least undergo training in SAFe fundamentals**, and key roles like Release Train Engineer (RTE) and Scrum Masters (SM) should attend dedicated training sessions.

Increasingly, we observe that organisations are adopting the "train the trainer" approach, which proves effective and is strongly recommended. Alongside this approach, there is usually a need for dedicated SAFe coaches who can provide support at all role levels within the Agile Release Train (ART).

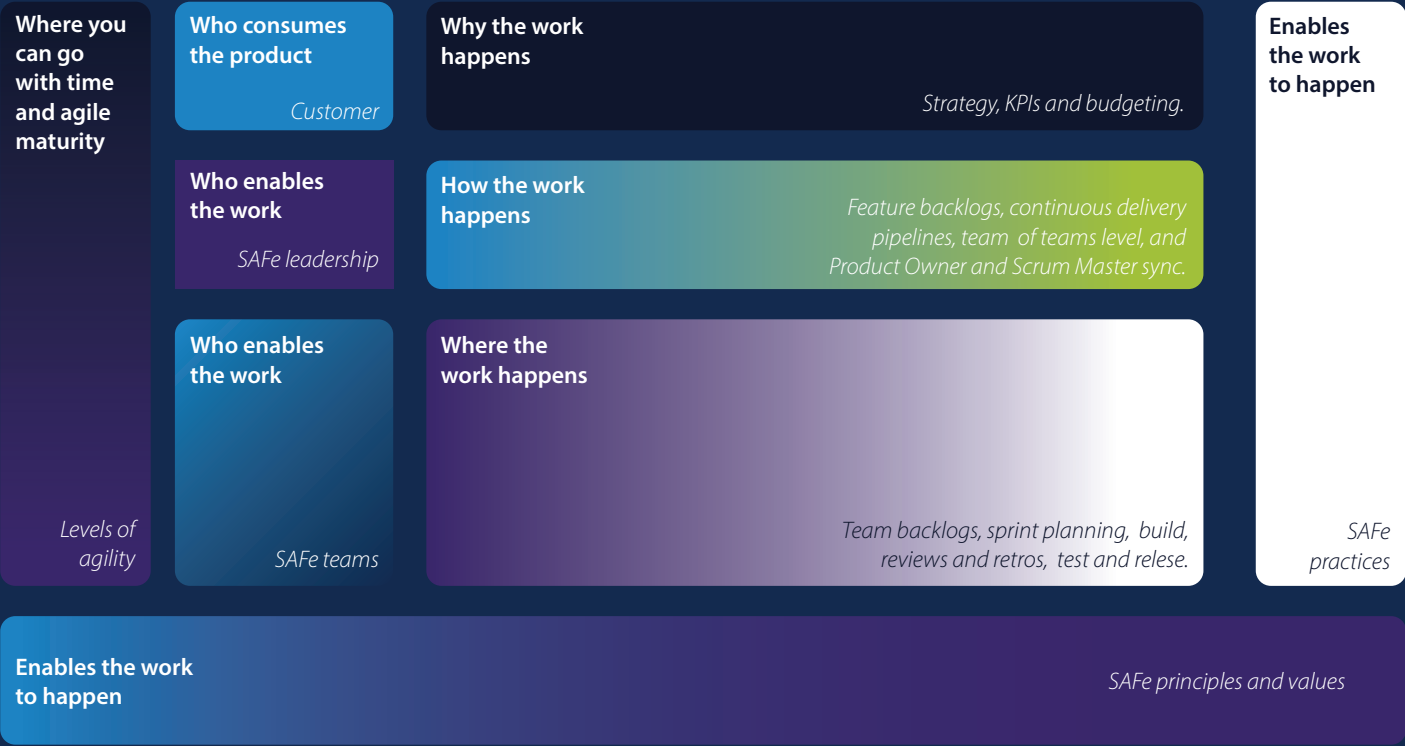
Features of SAFe

Despite its complexity, SAFe offers significant features and benefits for large-scale Agile transformations.

Dean Leffingwell, Chief Methodologist and co-founder of the Scaled Agile Framework, is a world leader in Lean-Agile practices and foremost expert on scaling Agile practices. Dean and his collaborators saw the need to help organisations adopt Agile practices at scale. As organisations grew, so did their software development teams and expectations to meet customer demand.

The SAFe knowledge base is regularly updated and made publicly available on their website (scaledagileframework.com), the latest release being SAFe 6.0 (2023), which focuses heavily on the overall transformation to reach Business Agility.

SAFe is a mammoth framework. This makes it nearly impossible to describe succinctly. So instead, we will highlight its main features and benefits.

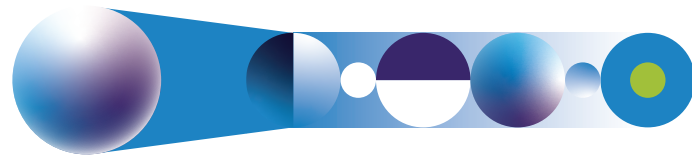


SAFe requires teams to:

- Move from projects to products approach.
- Focus on business agility and ways of working, not just software development.
- Align to the market and customer needs.
- Understand the customer needs and why they exist.
- Create a flexible plan that offers structure and direction for teams, establishing realistic expectations for both the business and customers.



Agile transformation is not trivial



Scaling Agile and transforming ways of working, whether it is following SAFe or another framework, is not a trivial undertaking.

SAFe has aimed to facilitate this transition by designing an implementation roadmap, outlining the roles to introduce, specifying who should be trained and when, and providing guidance on scaling operations and tool selection.

When implementing a framework like SAFe, the effort required to prepare the organisation for building up its resiliency and attitude towards change should not be underestimated.

Transformation requires a cultural shift; this cannot be achieved through a marketing campaign and a few events.

Transformation cannot be rushed. It requires being adjustable and flexibility. However, you can incrementally and sustainably implement changes. Start the journey and bring everyone with you.

It can be tempting to demand change, but this can create further dissonance and can leading to the scaling of chaos.

Entelect's reading list for leaders implementing SAFe

Team Topologies: Organising Business and Technology Teams for Fast Flow

by Manuel Pais and Matthew Skelton

A recent collaboration that compiles a comprehensive guide on curating teams and structuring them within a team-of-teams approach.

From Project to Product: How to Survive and Thrive in the Age of Digital Disruption with the Flow Framework

by Mik Kersten

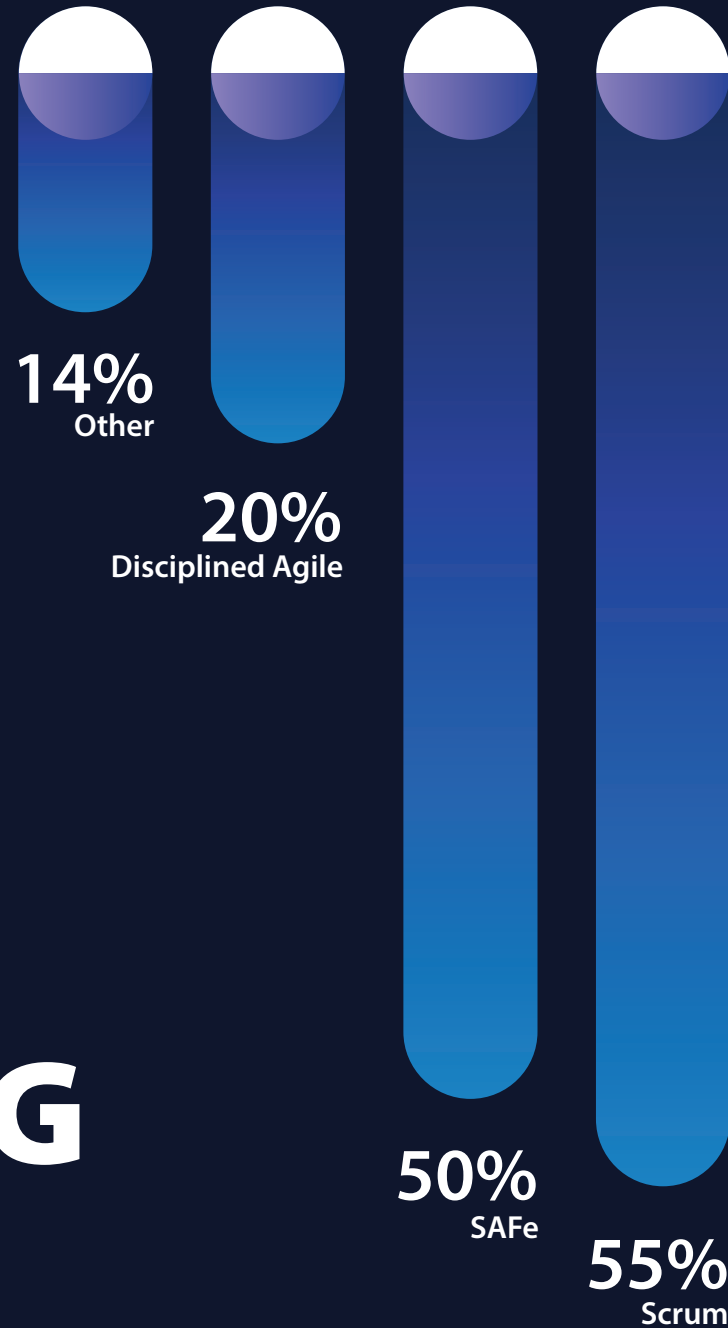
This encourages leadership to move away from typical project focused outlooks, to long lived incrementally improved products – a cornerstone of the SAFe.



Percentage of users who agree that their chosen framework is mature and well understood by all teams involved.

CHAPTER 5

FUTURE WAYS OF WORKING



As digitisation propels us towards the next industrial revolution, the need for organisations to unlock true business agility has never been more crucial.

Yet, some still perceive this as purely hypothetical, a mere pipe dream. However, achieving business agility is possible and can contribute to the creation of strong organisations - rooted in innovation, built on a network of agile teams, supported by actively involved leadership, and employing innovative technology, it adapts to market changes and seizes opportunities as they arise.

Where to start?

A first crucial step is to pause and reflect on current ways of working.

A sober analysis of the current state lays the foundation of work that comes later to create effective ways of working. Furthermore, it reveals critical characteristics of the organisation that need to be considered when improved ways of working are being

designed. The characteristics include culture, strategy and the company's offering. With this foundation, organisations are ready to take the first steps toward improvement.

We have been uncovering better ways of developing since we first started, let's not stop now. We should continue being guided by Agile values and principles as we endeavour to realise business value sooner.

What else should be considered?

The value of Agile is universal

An Agile way of working needs to be adopted throughout an organisation for it to realise true business agility. It is not just for the development teams; It's for the business teams, the executive teams, all other teams, and collectively, the team composed of these teams

We should value Agile throughout the organisation more than just Agile development teams.

Agility can be applied profitably in all departments of an organisation to achieve business agility. Agile marketing, inspired by agile software development, enables swifter response to market changes through a more flexible and iterative approach to marketing. Similarly, Agile human resourcing is an approach that enables greater dynamism and responsiveness in solving skills and capacity related problems.

Digital transformation about people

To succeed in this digital age and the next, we need to get better at innovating. An organisation that aligns around a purpose (why and what they do) is more likely to experience breakthrough innovation than one that aligns around a vision (where they are going). In these organisations, vision evolves organically. The reality is, no one can see the future until it arrives.

Leading innovation is therefore about working with others to co-create the future, not about defining it for others to follow.

For you to lead the transformation, you need to understand how others experience the new way of working. Then, adapt the narrative to receive constant feedback and input from the teams, to gain as much authority as possible organically. This will avoid the "carrot and stick" approach which can be demotivating.

Prioritising outcomes improves ROI

It is organic to humans to think in terms of "projects" when it comes to organising work. Thus, it is not surprising that Project Management has been around for as long as it has. However, applying traditional project thinking to the delivery of a software product is risky. Inflexibility around change makes it difficult to accurately predict timelines – yet it requires upfront investments based on these predictions and promised ROI. It is akin to guaranteeing a pay-out on a bet.

Ultimately, it is the value of a product that determines ROI.

Using the value to drive investment is less risky, but it requires a significant mindset shift.

Value driven mindsets



Maximise the value
Focusing efforts on maximising the value of the product itself rather than the outputs.



Foster sustainability
Creating a sustainable environment with long-living teams.



Focus on continuous value
Delivering continuous value instead of a specific scope within a fixed time and budget.



Provide context for success
Expanding on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) by using Objective Key Results (OKR) to add direction and context to your measures of success.



How are ways of working evolving?

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic turned our world upside down and directly impacted our tried and tested ways of living and working.

It necessitated an almost instant transition to remote work; a grand experiment which we had no choice but to participate in.

We adapted, continued to deliver working software and over time even experienced an increase in productivity. At face value, it may have seemed that a purely remote way of working was the future for software development, but it was not to be.

While collaboration tools such as Zoom and Teams enabled virtual face-to-face interaction, something was lost in the process. Even with

high definition, interacting in 2-dimension is simply not as real as the in-the-flesh 3-dimensional interaction we are accustomed to. Existing relationships were not the same and establishing new relationships proved much more difficult.

Once again, we are uncovering better ways of developing software, with hybrid ways of working becoming the “new norm”. Striving for better collaboration when in person, while striving for heightened productivity when not.

How does agility help businesses compete?

Agility creates alignment and focus

High quality code is not enough to provide a competitive edge in the market.

The realisation that teams do not practice agility for its own sake appears obvious. However, some teams can be myopic - focusing on building high quality code with little attention given to the ultimate purpose it serves. Pride comes from technical excellence, on-time delivery and creating a high-output environment. This value system is admirable, but without aligning it with an organisation's overall strategic objectives, it can result in excellent software that doesn't help the business enhance its competitiveness in the market.

In addition, you get other key participants in the development life cycle focusing on their own narrow goals at the cost of the overall project: Product Owners are often pressured to prioritise features that please decision makers rather than customers. Scrum Masters often become Project Managers instead of custodians of Agile that maximise the productivity of the development team by helping it build software effectively.

Creating alignment between development goals, strategic goals and effective implementation of Agile is the desired state. It can help businesses create a competitive edge and empower them to become industry leaders.

Teams need to understand how their projects and initiatives contribute to the overall strategic priorities.

The Product Owner should ensure that the focus is on features that help users and the Scrum Master should be an effective custodian of Agile. These points look simple in theory, but real-life complexities, incentives and constraints confound the people involved and undermine the development and delivery of useful and user-friendly software.

Important elements of the DNA of Agile organisations are shared across them and are understood to be part of the reason they succeed.

AI enhanced ways of working

A future with Artificial Intelligence (AI) is here, but maybe not the one anticipated.

AI is here to empower us to be better humans, not eliminate our jobs. There are already numerous generative AI tools available to enhance ways of working. Some can assist developers by translating English comments into code, code

into English and other programming languages and auto-completing repetitive or boilerplate sections of code. Others can assist designers with prototyping user interfaces to support the creative process.

Virtual ways of working

Virtual reality (VR) technology is maturing rapidly and is likely to change the way in which we live and work.

VR collaboration platforms enable teams to meet up in a virtual office environment and interact with each other “in-avatar”. These virtual environments embed the necessary tooling to collaborate as well as manage work then and there, while immersed.

As VR headsets become more widely used and cost effective, they could further enhance the virtual experience and provide a more realistic face-to-face experience; remote collaboration with all the same benefits as in-person collaboration.

Agility creates adaptability and flexibility

Scaling often creates red tape, which results in slow innovation and long time to market.

Big organisations who’ve faced problems of scale increase red-tape as they go, to create standard processes across the organisation and maintain identity, culture and product coherence. It results in slow innovation and relatively long time to market.

The many layers of decision-making and key decision makers (such as executives) not being on the ground can result in sluggish development, dilution of requirements and missing the most important user needs in addition to the aforementioned red-tape.

Increased adaptability enables a timely response to changing market conditions and allows for flexibility in strategy execution. Furthermore, it ensures the delivery of working software to customers incrementally and frequently. Therefore, organisations can get to the market faster, potentially beating the competition.

Agility creates customer-centricity

Incorporating customer feedback into development cycles gives users what they need.

Organisations losing their touch is all too common. One observes rapid growth and high customer satisfaction early on and a plateau as the layers between the development team and customers increase.

User Experience Designers, Business Analysts and Product Owners strive to bring back customer-centricity, but they are often limited

by ways of working, bad incentives and bloating of the core products.

Effective Agile practice emphasises customer feedback and incorporates it into development cycles. Developing in this way increases the chances of giving users what they need instead of developing based on educated speculation.



Agility creates cross-functional collaboration

Empower shared understanding, decision making and communication across teams.

Organisations play whack-a-mole with silos. As soon as they bring down one silo, another appears in its place. Slow communication, inadequate requirements and delivery issues are all too common and point to a failure: ineffective collaboration and lack of alignment among stakeholders.

Cross-functional collaboration is desired and preached but is seldom ever achieved in

the face of competing priorities such as cost reduction and faster time to market.

A collaborative approach is valuable when planning and executing strategic initiatives that involve multiple departments or business units. It encourages shared understanding, collective decision-making and effective communication across teams.

Agility creates empirical decision-making

Minimise guess working and implement change when necessary.

Experience, expertise and knowledge can sometimes undermine effective product development. As useful as they are most times, there are moments when they lead to confident assumptions being made about user needs instead of testing, learning and experimentation.

The past doesn't always resemble the future and conditions change, which means experience, expertise and knowledge can fall short.

Agile methods encourage feedback loops and the continual assessment of team success periodically. This monitoring enables

organisations to make data-driven decisions and change when necessary.

In addition, feedback loops and retrospectives shield against problems such as being stuck with bad practices, poor delivery and negative team dynamics, by surfacing areas of improvement and pushing teams to get better over time.

This continual gathering of information on quality of features, effect of development on the product and team dynamic brings empiricism to the process of software development, thereby minimising assumption-making and guesswork.

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It is possible to maximise the benefits of Agile ways of working for your organisation's strategy, culture and processes.

Agile is demonstrably effective at improving software delivery, but its practice is fraught with poor execution or a failure to reap its full benefits. Many organisations implement it without a good grasp of its values and principles. Implementation then becomes a set of hollow rituals and practices that only incidentally produce the intended results.

Anti-patterns are common in most environments where Agile is practiced. They emerge for various reasons, some practical, like proxy Product Owners, while others emerge from the aforementioned shallow understanding of its values and principles e.g. scaling Agile for its own sake. Misconceptions about the nature of Agile are also common and affect the effectiveness of its implementation. An example is the widespread perception of Agile as silver bullet that guarantees success.

It is possible to escape from the current state of stasis and mixed results in the

implementation of Agile ways of working. Organisations looking to maximise the benefits of Agile, given their environment, need to commit to several identifiable and quantifiable actions. Some of the most important ones are: a commitment from key people to champion, support, and enable the transformation of effective ways of working, and a sincere analysis of the current position, providing a picture of what is failing and what works. Besides surfacing weaknesses, this provides means to develop the best approach given an organisation's strategy, culture, and engineering processes.

The rapid evolution and steady improvement of knowledge on how to develop software effectively and implement ways of working well promise an exciting future where organisations can design products and services customers want, on time, using sophisticated development approaches that are enabled by technology.

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