

*A Gladwell Academy
Whitepaper*

WHAT IS SAFE?

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SIZE MATTERS

The Fourth industrial revolution was voiced most poignantly in Marc Andreessen's 2011 essay that 'software is eating the world'. Amid all the excitement, scores of large established market leading organizations run the risk of being overtaken left and right by smaller, faster firms. Better able to innovate. Responding to changing consumer demand more quickly. Providing better services or better products. More Agile, in short.

The heavyweights are having a hard time adapting to the change they see around them, because administrative bureaucracies and managerial overhead detract from their ability to focus on customer value. Alignment between strategy and execution is thus the burning platform for businesses at scale.

To unlock the competitive advantages of an Business Agility the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) is the result of an ongoing harvest of proven practices from all corners of business management synthesized as a solid framework. It's a library of many smaller and larger 'good practices' from all layers of business, along with a highly intelligent attempt to roll them into one coherent approach to running an innovative business at scale.

A KNOWLEDGE BASE TO IMPROVE YOUR ORGANIZATION

SAFe calls itself a framework; a collection of tools, methods, principles, and approaches to address the problems a large organization may encounter when implementing Agile ways of



framework best suited to larger organizations. Taking what works from each of these models, blending them together to make something new that is useful and relevant to any modern-day organizations.

SIZE MATTERS

As a framework, SAFe is highly *modular*. It can be implemented piece by piece, gradually over a period of time as the organization becomes more comfortable with Agile ways of thinking. You and your organization have multiple options to apply only as much of the framework as works for you.

First launched in 2011 by its creator Dean Leffingwell, SAFe has been under a constant process of scrutiny and development in its short life: already arriving at version 5.0 in late 2019, published by Scaled Agile. With each edition, the framework has been continually refined, improved based on user and organizational feedback, in addition to expanding based on changing conditions and techniques over time.

WHAT CAN SAFE OFFERS ORGANIZATIONS

With SAFe you can set any large organization, in pretty much any industry or marketplace, on its way to embrace a degree of flexibility and adaptability that approaches that of a startup, while safeguarding the quality standards and predictability that comes with organizational scale and product depth.

In SAFe, conventional command-and-control management are complemented by a relatively high degree of team responsibility and motivation. By favoring communication of intent over instructions, SAFe brings adaptability to backlog governance even for the largest of business ambitions, while still allowing for an efficient capacity allocation and with regular opportunities for evaluative, feedback and adaptation to consumer demands and market conditions.

A LONG LINEAGE OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

SAFe didn't spontaneously appear one day. It draws on a long history of techniques and developments to fundamentally improve how we work and continues to grow and adapt as new methods are discovered.

A HYBRID OF AGILE AND LEAN

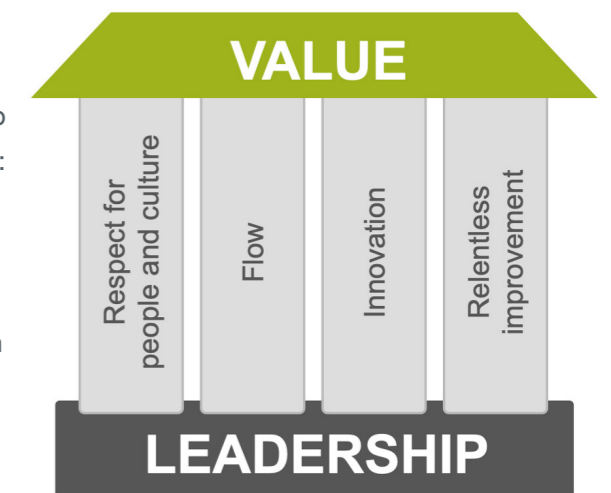
The origins of business management wisdom can be traced all the way back in the 1880's and 90's with Frederick Taylor, who sought to improve labor and work efficiency by incorporating scientific theory and engineering principles into management processes. Taylor focused on analyzing workflows to achieve efficiency, particularly when it came to job effectiveness. His ideas are known today as 'Scientific Management' or 'Taylorism'.

Early industrialists like Henry Ford took the principles of Taylorism and applied them to a wide variety of factories and manufacturing plants. They organized work such that each worker specialized in a single skill to repetitively produce standardized parts. These changes reduced process times for such production processes from twelve hours to under three. Industrialists like Ford took the concepts developed by Taylor and brought them to a world stage.

ENTER LEAN PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

During the post-WWII reconstruction period 'Lean' found its origins in Japan with Taiichi Ohno and Shigeo Shingo. They developed the Lean work culture around:

- specifying where value is generated
- identifying the value stream of each product or service
- allowing that value to flow with as little interruption as possible
- letting the consumer demands define value
- continuously seeking improvement.



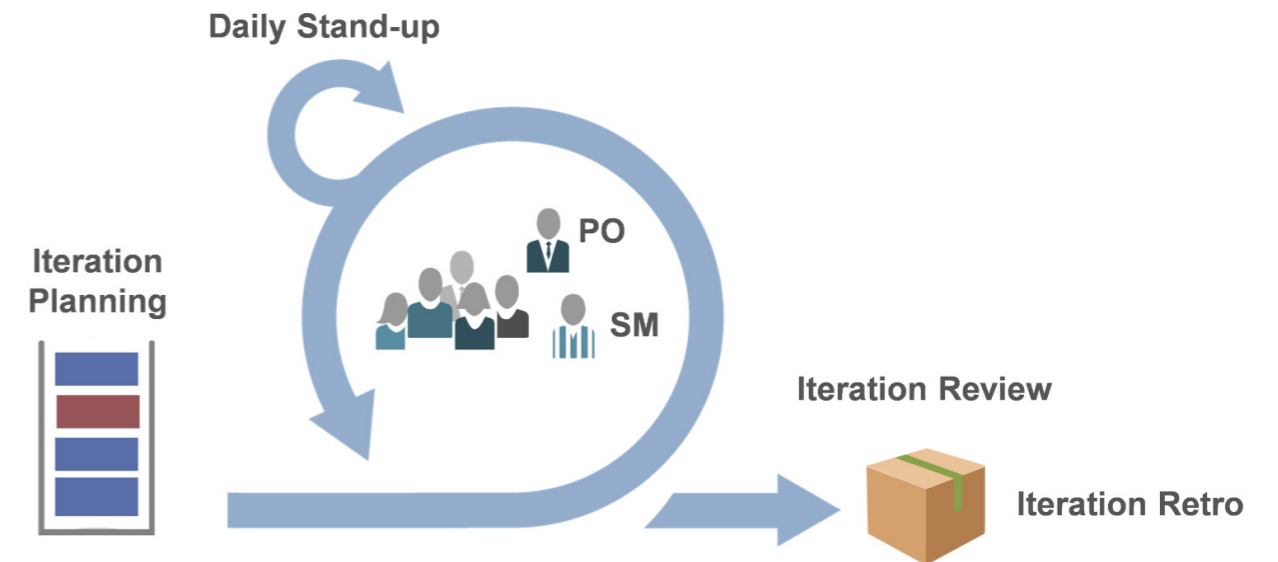
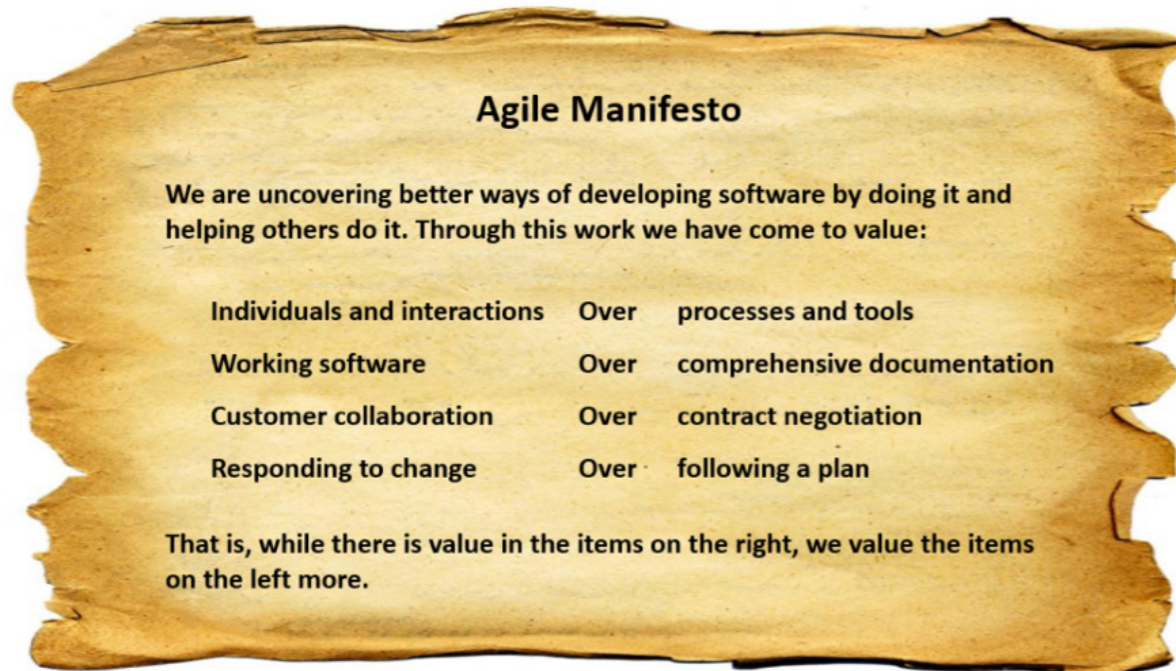
A LONG LINEAGE OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

These principles presented a strong deviation from Taylorism – and they would become the foundation of Lean thinking. The Lean ideas continue to influence organizational improvement models all over the world, eventually finding their way into the Agile principles as well. There are some areas where Lean thinking may conflict with Agile reasoning, but many more where they rhyme.

This is why SAFe calls itself an ‘Agile Framework for Lean Enterprise’. Just because you want to embrace Agility, doesn’t mean you have to ditch the Lean principles – quite the contrary.

EVOLVING INTO AGILE

Back to the history lesson. It wasn’t until 2001 that Agile was formalized. Seventeen individuals working in senior positions in software development came together at an informal venue and found each other in the conclusion that the way they worked was up for improvement. They wrote their rallying cry in what became known as the Agile Manifesto:



Using the Agile Manifesto, they attempted to overhaul software development to better meet the needs of their customers and prioritizing what works over traditional ways of working.

FROM SCRUM TO SAFe

The most well-known embodiment of the Agile principles is known as Scrum. Scrum introduces a cyclical, iterative rhythm of several-week Sprints, with a moment to harvest meaningful stakeholder feedback at the end of every Sprint. In Scrum, all decisions on how to build features are made by small, self-organizing teams, the sole authority on what to build lies with a single member of that team, the product owner. He or she bases their decisions on the harvested stakeholder feedback.

This very high degree of local team autonomy is hugely refreshing for any organization stifled by analysis paralysis, CxO micromanagement and Waterfall rigor. It was and is still hugely successful for many small and medium-sized organizations. For organization of larger scale though, having hundreds of product owners all claiming authority over architecture and such deep-impact areas, the nightmare of chaos and confusion was soon clear and present.

A LONG LINEAGE OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

SYNTHESIZING BOTH BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE INTO SAFe 1.0

In 2011 the SAFe framework was introduced to address the shortcomings of Scrum when applied on a large scale. Originally referred to as the Agile Enterprise Big Picture in Dean Leffingwell's bestseller Agile Software Requirements, it has since grown and advanced becoming one of the most popular Agile frameworks applicable in virtually any organization, not just software development.

Here you can see how this structure is prepared and broken down, and who exactly plays what role at each level. Many people see this diagram when they first learn about SAFe and without proper explanation it can be a little overwhelming. Just remember two things:

- SAFe is a knowledge base, a library if you will. You don't need to read all the books and incorporate every level of SAFe into your organization's structure, or you can choose to gradually adopt different levels.
- The SAFe Big Picture shows a lot of information because SAFe has a lot of information. Without its volume, it wouldn't have much use for large organizations. It takes a big framework to run a big enterprise. The fact that it's big, is actually an advantage.

"Implementing SAFe brought us closer to working on products again, rather than deliverables." - Arjan Martens, ASML

WHO WORKS SAFe?

If you need any more reassurance that SAFe is a model which promises success you just need to look at some of the organizations which are already using SAFe:

- Aeronautical organizations: Airbus, Lockheed Martin, and even NASA and The United States Department of Defense.
- Technology firms: AT&T, Vodafone, FitBit, Sony. The largest bank in the Netherlands (ING) is also applying SAFe.
- SAFe can deliver value in virtually any market or industry like oil (Chevron), food production (Pepsi), pharmaceuticals (Pfizer), and manufacturing (Nike).

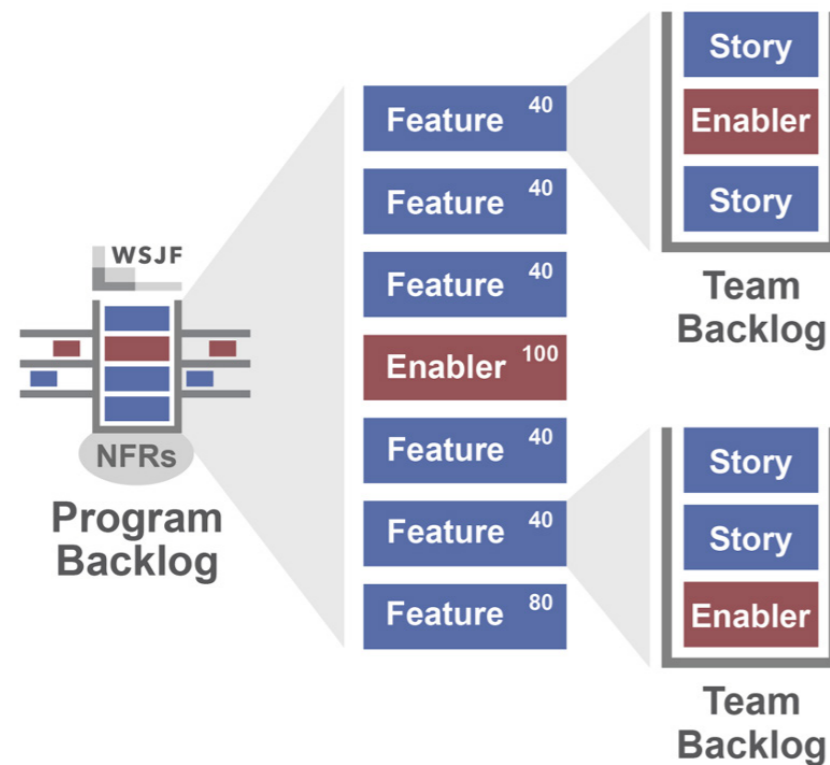
SAFe has been tried and proven to work with many organizations, in many industries and under a wide range of market conditions.



WHY YOUR ORGANIZATION MIGHT CONSIDER IMPLEMENTING SAFe

ORGANIZE TEAMS AND GOALS COHESIVELY

Starting from the nucleus framework of Scrum – with its small Development Team, a Product Owner and a Scrum Master – you can imagine SAFe as something of a russian doll: the small teams of Scrum fit into larger teams of teams, which fit into even bigger teams of teams of teams, and so on all the way through the development organization.



In SAFe, teams are banded together as ‘carriages’ in an Agile Release Train, which is facilitated by an RTE as a Chief Scrum Master. The RTE in essence fulfills the same role that a Scrum Master would, coordinating and managing their ART’s tasks and ensuring they progress coherently. The ART also has its own variation of the Product Owner, now upscaled to Product Management that defines the Release Train’s Program Backlog. Each team is ‘linked’ behind one another because they all work on some coherent (piece of) product or service; they all have a reason to work together, and often have various inter-team dependencies.

Agile Release Trains come together once every five Sprints – or Iterations, as they are called in SAFe because the word ‘Sprint’ carries the connotation of ‘run to exhaustion and then go home’. Every five Iterations is called a Program Increment (PI), and each PI is preceded by a Program Increment Planning Event. This is a larger version of the Sprint Planning Meeting in Scrum. The train aligns its work objectives for the five Iterations ahead, much like a single Scrum team would for a single Sprint.

Large Solution SAFe

Agile Release Trains can even be organized into a ‘train-of-trains’, known as an Agile Solution Train. The Solution Train has its own specialized roles of Solution Train Engineer (STE) and the Solution Management - once again fulfilling those two essential guiding roles.

Another Way SAFe is a Russian doll is how it uses this same basic structure to organize the workflow starting with the team, all the way through the organization’s portfolio. The team backlog will ‘fit’ into the Release Train’s program backlog, which fits into the Solutions backlog, which fits into the Portfolio backlog.

“How do you do Scrum with 200+ teams? You do it SAFe. Pure pragmatism.” - Eelco Rustenburg, SPCT

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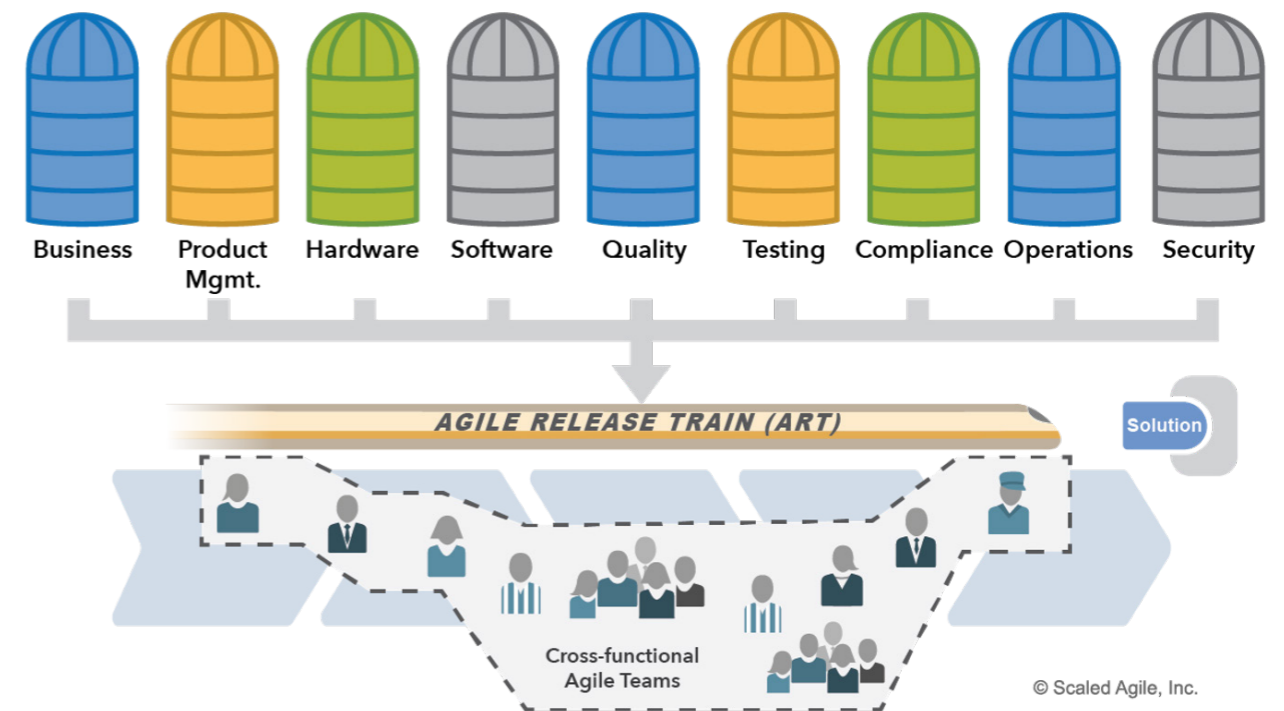
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Core value: Alignment

SAFe is built on this basic structure, with each level being organized the same way, and



WHY YOUR ORGANIZATION MIGHT CONSIDER IMPLEMENTING SAFe

comprised by multiple units of previous tier. At any given time, an individual, at any level of the organization, will know exactly how their work plays into not only producing value, but into the entire organization's strategic goals. Everyone is clearly and cohesively organized together towards clear distinct goals, with clear distinct tasks to achieve those goals.

FLEXIBILITY NOT RIGIDITY

Not only this but there is no obligation to begin using the entire framework from the very beginning. An organization can begin simply at the basic team-of-teams Essential level, building its first Agile Release Train to band several interdependent teams together in a coherent shared ambition. Gradually you may then incorporate more and more of the larger structures as it become more versed and knowledgeable with the framework. Whether a large corporation means a large office and extensive team, or a multi-national conglomerate with hundreds of offices, SAFe offers just the right number of tools that the organization needs.

WHAT SAFe MEANS FOR YOU AND YOUR TEAM

You've heard about what SAFe can bring to an organization, but what does it mean for you? For your fellow team members? For your people?

IMPROVE YOUR WORK/LIFE: IMPROVE YOUR WORK, IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

All the aforementioned changes (help coordinate organizational goals, or reduce time-to-market, or develop more successful products and services) eventually affect the very DNA of an organization.

Aside from organizational effects, SAFe also impacts how team members - so, people - live and work. SAFe can help everyone feel that they are an essential part of a team whose contributions matter. SAFe may well improve working conditions for the people who are devoting their time, energy, and passion to your organization. This improvement is not only good for team members, but the organization as well; as happier more satisfied people results in a stronger more cohesive group.

Team autonomy...

A SAFe transformation will soon lead to have decisions made 'there where the knowledge is'. For one thing, this brings teams to enjoy more autonomy to decide what they work on, when they work on it, and how they will complete it - without causing chaos. The sense of creativity and freedom brought to teams and individuals creates opportunities for autonomy, mastery and purpose for individuals.

...along with clearer governance

SAFe also brings a defined framework of how, and who organizes the management of tasks and goals. When applied correctly, the framework can make a huge difference in mitigating the infamous barrage of meetings, emails, and phone calls needed to decide who's supposed to sign off on what. When applied correctly, everyone can know exactly what they need to do, managing expectations on when it should be done, and who they need to work with to do it.

"No general is going to dictate from afar how a given soldier navigates a minefield. SAFe (...) fully recognizes the need for Scrum teams to operate autonomously." - Eelco Rustenburg, SPCT



LEAN PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT

Building of multiple Agile Release Trains and even Agile Solution Trains eventually results in a development organization that is capable of coherently breaking down even the largest ambitions into ‘features’ and ‘user stories’ to be taken on by each team. Those largest ambitions are called ‘Epics’ in SAFe, and they naturally need to be identified and allocated at the strategic level.

Lean Portfolio Management is SAFe’s answer to the tendency for such strategic initiative planning to be overly intuitive, overly political and overly personal. Deciding what you’re going to focus on for years to come is hard; and it’s even harder to base it on rational analysis and with the confidence of evidence. Yet Lean Portfolio Management synthesizes a number of proven methods to help you arrive at a validated roadmap for the Solutions in your portfolio.

Using processes such as the Lean Start-up cycle, SWOT and TOWS analysis, Strategic Themes identification and many more, LPM challenges you to chart a genuine roadmap to navigate epic development by. It also helps connect your strategic choices to your program execution via the Portfolio Kanban, assuring that everyone in the organization knows how their work contributed to the larger whole.

In the words of SAFe Program Consultant Trainer (SPCT) Ali Hajou “SAFe is all about cutting the BS, and letting people focus on the **good stuff**: the real work that makes a job worthwhile and that brings that sense of satisfaction and fulfillment to people’s careers.”

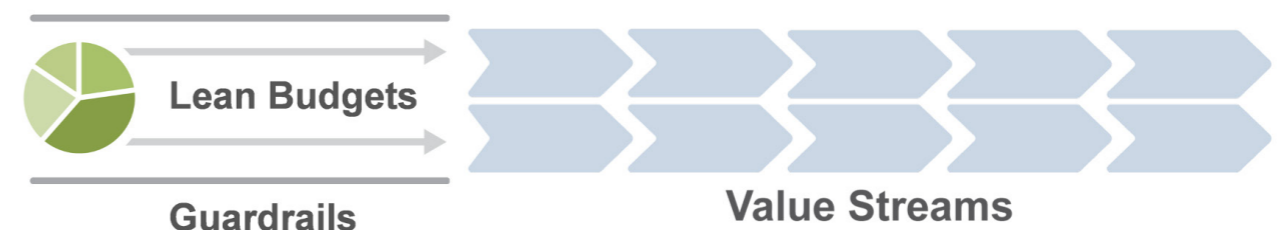
Emphasis should be put on the phrase ‘when applied correctly’, though. Learning how to apply SAFe’s Agile Product Management governance structure comes with a learning curve, and it can take several tries to find the right solution.

‘ENABLERS’ GIVE NON-BUSINESS CONCERNS THEIR DUE

The larger an organization becomes, the more work goes into ‘keeping the business running’. Architecture, infrastructure and IT-for-IT development; maintenance, compliance, quality assurance, refactoring, research and development.

SAFe gives such kinds of activities a deserved stage as ‘enablers’ and formally includes their contributions into its work breakdown structure (WBS). These are all considered of potentially equal importance under SAFe as those that produce more immediate business or user or customer value.

SAFe creates the checks and balances to prevent large organizations from ‘buying new animals for the zoo without investing in cages’ or ‘purchasing new airplanes for the airport before laying down the runway tarmac’. and includes the contributions of these enablers into its capacity allocation.



START YOUR SAFe JOURNEY HERE...!

There is much more to tell about SAFe: what it means for your development organization, for your organization as a whole, and for your personal career. For now, this is enough to describe the basic concepts that have been in the framework since its first version. The most effective way to get an overview of the framework in its entirety is to sign up for a Leading SAFe course.

A SAFe implementation is undoubtedly difficult, but the benefits much outweigh the investment. Gladwell Academy is there to offer you training and guidance for every step of the way. If you are going to be the Lean-Agile leader who brings the framework to your organization, SAFe Program Consultant is the course for you.

If you are coming from a Scrum organization and your role is that of Product Owner, Scrum Master or even as a Developer, SAFe has tailored training courses for each of these roles.

If you think your organization stands to benefit from implementing SAFe, Gladwell Academy has the experience and the network to help you overcome the inevitable hurdles and initial orienting phases. If you're just curious about what SAFe has to offer your enterprise, Gladwell Academy has the specialist knowledge and personal professional attention you'll need.

"Without a competent trainer, delivery remains dull and theoretical."

- Paul van Sonsbeek, De Volksbank

'Reinventing development' at your organization with SAFe might seem intimidating, maybe even overwhelming. Remember though, that taking a step back to 'reinvent the wheel' may feel like a major investment, but it's better than watching the competition pull ahead.

Any money, time, or effort invested in SAFe now, will pay dividends back down the line. Through its Lean Portfolio Management competence, SAFe will even increase the confidence for your subsequent investments, making them more worthwhile as well.

In short, you have little to lose and much to gain.





ABOUT GLADWELL ACADEMY

Gladwell Academy trains professionals at the intersection of management, IT and innovation. Data and technology have a growing impact on all aspects of working life; Gladwell Academy teaches people to master each of these and get the best their position, passions and roles.

At Gladwell Academy we've observed that the impact of technology and data powers an increase in people's ability to self-organise, in all layers of professional life. Everyone is, in principle, directly and holographically connected, both to each other and to any relevant information. This removes much of the necessity for hierarchic structures and chains of command. The result ought to be a more self-starting and self-governing workforce, along with more joy and satisfaction from work. We wholeheartedly embrace and advance these developments, and we teach people to take charge actively and proficiently.

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