



Agile at Scale

A Closer Look

How to best move from agile to Agile at Scale



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Introduction

Times are constantly changing. This is an obvious statement to anyone who studies history. The industrial revolution brought about new manufacturing processes in the US and Europe. The birth of nanotechnology allowed scientists to improve various industries throughout the world significantly. Closer to the present day, the dawn of the internet-enabled endlessly available information at the tip of our fingers and constant communication across borders.

Most of these changes are most evident in technology and, more specifically, software. The tools we are building now look drastically different than the tools we created at the turn of the century, ten years ago, and even last year. The rate of this change is astounding.

As industry standards and processes continue to change, the emergence of new frameworks helps us enable those changes. Waterfall is one of the frameworks that has been around for a long time and was typically seen as the status quo. Waterfall is a linear approach where initially, requirements are gathered and rarely change throughout the development.

As times change, the age of detailed, static requirements, fixed costs, and stable technology is behind us. We are now moving into an era dominated by more dynamic methodologies such as Scrum or Kanban - or Agile methodologies. The process of developing software with Agile methodologies involves cross-functional teams and close collaboration with the customer. Agile includes a discovery of requirements and advocates for early delivery and continuous improvement.

Over time, the benefits of more agile methodologies have proven unavoidable. More nimble startups easily outperform their legacy competitors. These competitors are usually larger, more stable organizations. Thus, there began a need for agile at scale.

Times are changing in tech, but you didn't need us to tell you that, right?

Challenges to agile at scale

Agile is better than waterfall in most situations, so why isn't everyone using it? The answer to this question generally lies in the size of the organization. Like many other frameworks, Agile can prove to be much more of a challenge for enterprise organizations to adapt. Typically, teams at scale struggle with:

- Cross-functional and cross-team dependencies
- A solid understanding of agile principles and
- Management commitment and getting the entire organization to commit
- Unrealistic expectations with regards to speed of delivery

The challenges don't stop here, though. Once teams adopt agile at scale and have a handle on the above difficulties, they will need to find a way to maintain the principles and changes.

In the end, this is a significant change in working ways, work culture, and collaboration. It does not happen fast, and determining your organization's success metrics is imperative. Before taking on agile at scale, you should decide if it is even suitable for your organization.¹

Is it right for us?

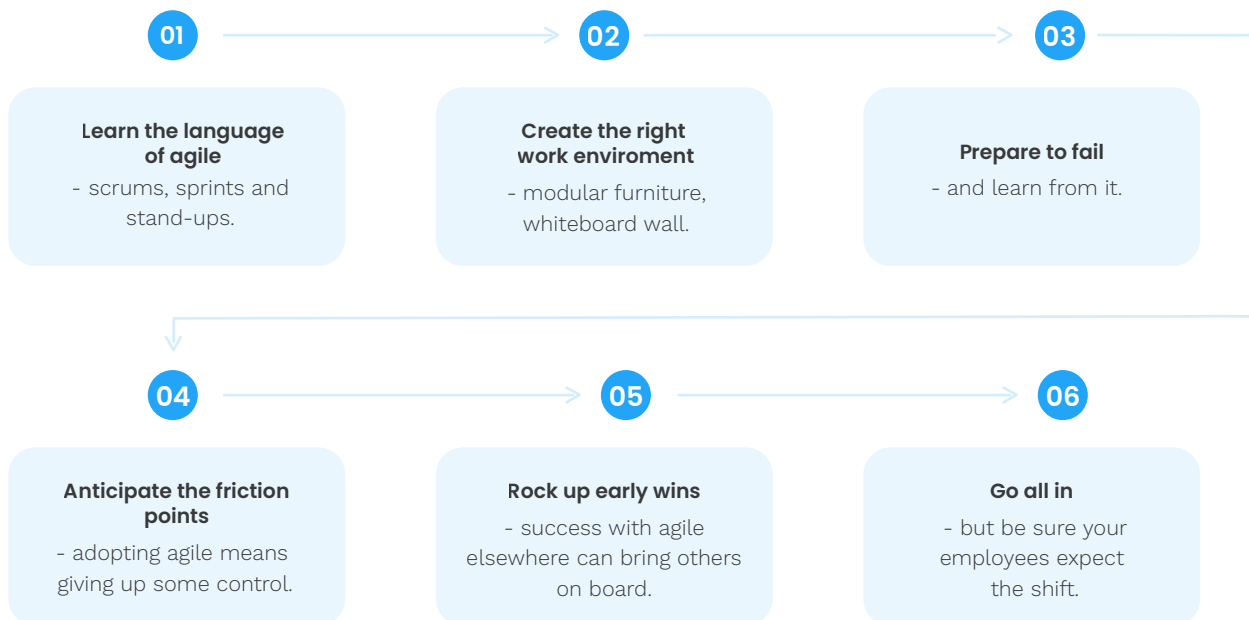
Determining if agile at scale is a good fit for your organization is vital. After all, as with any significant change, applying agile at scale is a time-consuming and costly task. If done correctly with the right organization-fit, the company will reap benefits for years to come. If done incorrectly, it may simply show up as a loss on the company's annual profit/loss report.

So, where do we start in assessing this? First of all, look at the size of your organization. Are you a small company with only one agile team? You probably don't need agile at scale then. Typically, for agile at scale, we are looking at 75-100 employees working in various departments or sectors of the organization.

¹ N/A (2018, September 30). Typical Challenges when scaling agile. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://safejourney.dk/typical-challenges-when-scaling-agile/>

The next question you should ask yourself is if you have proven this on a small scale. You should have some empirical evidence that agile is currently working at this stage for at least one of your teams. If you have this, you are at least part of the way ready for agile at scale. Finally, is the one agile team overwhelmed with work? Is there too much demand for what they can bring to the table? Are other parts of your organization needing that high level of delivery that the initial team has? If so, it's likely that you are ready to scale agile but proceed with caution.

Your next task is to develop a strategy. We won't dive into scaled agile development strategies in this white paper, but please feel free to reach out if you are interested. ²



² N/A Hone and Dekkinga (2019, June 18). How do you know when to Scale. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://www.excella.com/insights/how-do-you-know-when-to-scale>

Why is agile at scale important?

So far, we have given a background of agile at scale and brought forward some questions that adopters should ask before they begin their change process. But why are we doing this in the first place? Why is agile at scale so important right now?

The first reason is business competition. Larger organizations are finding it difficult to keep up with new market entrants. These startups and smaller companies take advantage of their agility and skill to pivot quickly when market conditions call for it. Larger organizations, built on principles of stability and control, cannot do this nearly as well. Thus, enterprise organizations are losing market share, profits, and customers because of their shortcomings.

Another reason for scaling agile is establishing a culture of agility. While agile practices in their entirety might not be a perfect fit for every team in your organization, the agile mindset can help everyone. If HR, finance, and marketing all start thinking like the scrum masters in your agile teams, everyone will be in a better place.



Overview of available frameworks

So how do we “do” agile at scale? How do we practice it every working day? What are some of the most popular frameworks used to carry out agile at scale? There are many frameworks and models that have emerged in the last ten years. Let’s take a look at some of the most popular frameworks and models individually.

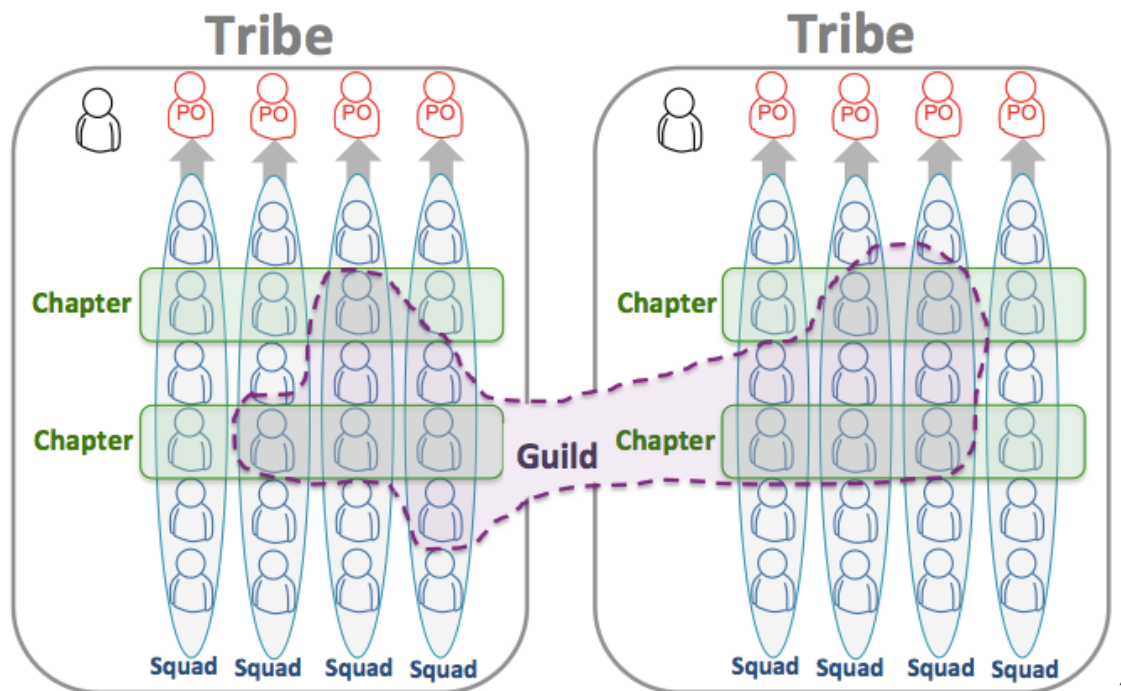
Spotify

Spotify provides music streaming services, right? Yes, but that is not the entirety of who they are. As it’s commonly referred to, the Spotify model is a people-driven, autonomous approach to scaling agile that emphasizes culture and networks. Since it includes culture, the Spotify team has deemed that this is not a framework that follows a set of practices but rather a model that focuses on work.

If your organization prefers team autonomy, then this could be the model for you. Spotify enables teams to choose their own agile methodology, be it Scrum, Kanban, Scrumban, or something else. The Spotify model centers around squads, tribes, chapters, trios, and guilds.

- ✓ A squad is like a scrum team, made up of 6-12 individuals. They are cross-functional and autonomous.
- ✓ When multiple squads work together on a feature area or part of your product, they form a tribe. Tribes typically consist of 40-150 people.
- ✓ Chapters are more about specialists. Squads are autonomous and cross-functional, but there should be a specialist for that discipline within each squad. That specialist will belong to a chapter related to their specialty (i.e., React Chapter). A chapter is typically led by someone who has a tighter area of focus or specialty in one area. Chapters generally belong to one tribe.
- ✓ A trio is more straightforward; it’s a combination of a tribe lead, product lead, and design lead. Each tribe must have a trio to ensure the tribe aligns these three perspectives with their work.
- ✓ Employees who are passionate about one particular discipline can form a Guild. These are communities of interest similar to chapters but can span across multiple tribes.

Spotify set out to scale agile with less overhead. They hypothesized that cutting out many of the ceremonies and processes involved in agile at scale would lead to better results. This would prove to be successful for them. They also realized the benefit of more autonomous work. They empowered squads to make decisions typically endowed upon management. Since the squads are the experts in their product areas, this worked well for them.³



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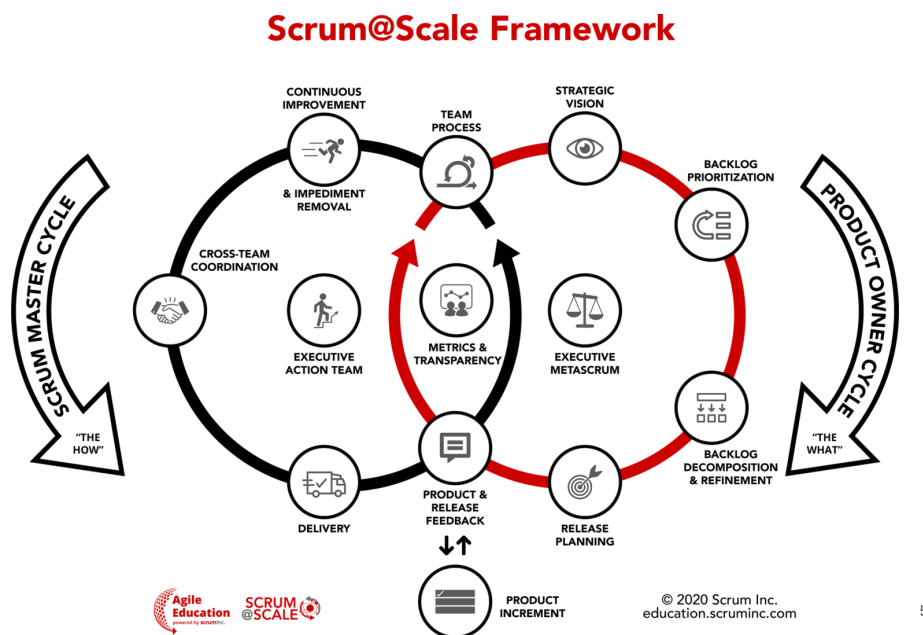
³ Cruth, Mark (N/A). Agile at Scale – Discover the Spotify model. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://www.atlassian.com/agile/agile-at-scale/spotify>

⁴ Kniberg and Ivarsson (2012, October). Scaling Agile @Spotify. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://blog.crisp.se/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/SpotifyScaling.pdf>

Scrum@Scale

Scrum@Scale builds on the same value-driven culture as Scrum. Everyone is part of a Scrum team, and groups of scrum teams can come together to achieve a goal. The creators of Scrum@Scale aimed to create an architecture-free way to scale agile, similar to Spotify.

The Scrum@Scale methodology focuses on two different cycles; the scrum master cycle which looks at the how, and the product owner cycle, which looks at the what.



The scaling then comes when the scrum teams self form into a team of teams, a network of teams, and even more. The scaling depends a lot on the famous “scrum of scrums” concept, where multiple teams are shipping a coordinated, fully functional piece of software at the end of each sprint.

Scrum@Scale introduces two new roles to scrum: The scrum of scrums master and the chief product owner. The events are the same as scrum: daily scrum, sprint retrospective, sprint planning, and sprint review are all vital.

One of the benefits to Scrum@Scale is that it allows the organization to grow organically at its own pace. It relies heavily on individual scrum teams, so if your company is built on scrum teams, this could be the perfect methodology for you.⁶

⁵ Spanner, Chris (N/A). Organizational agility with Scrum@Scale. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://www.atlassian.com/agile/agile-at-scale/scrums-at-scale>

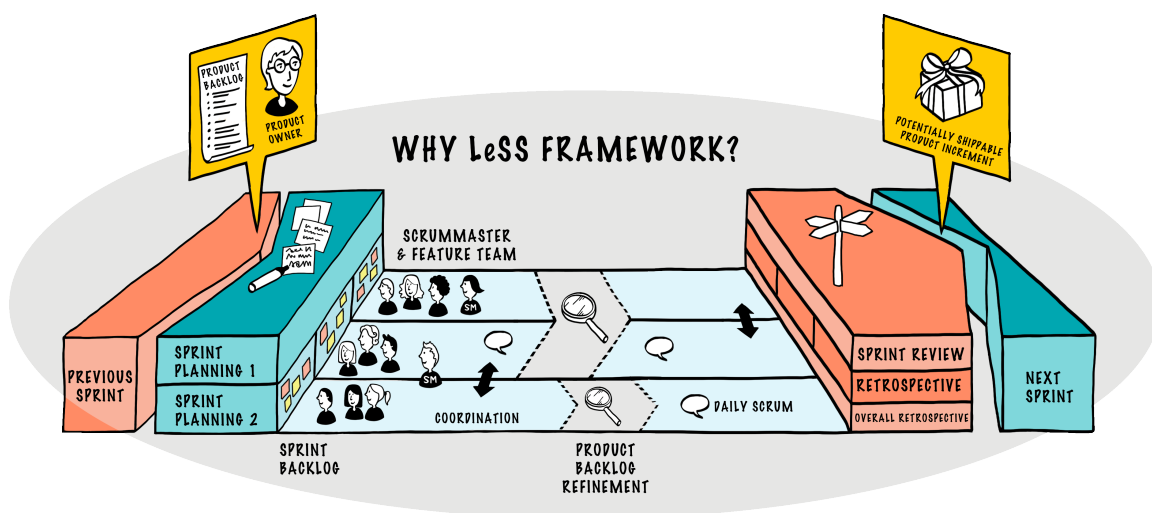
⁶ Spanner, Chris (N/A). Organizational agility with Scrum@Scale. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://www.atlassian.com/agile/agile-at-scale/scrums-at-scale>

LeSS

The Large-Scale Scrum framework (LeSS) is a framework used to deliver value while reducing complexity and waste. Since it focuses so much on reducing waste and excessive work, the LeSS framework has earned the nickname of “barely sufficient,” which might sound negative, but in fact, it is not.

Fittingly, the team that founded LeSS built it after over 600 experiments of scaling Scrum teams. Before LeSS, followers of Scrum thought it was only possible to use for small and collocated teams. The principles they discovered are as follows:

- ✓ Large-Scale Scrum is Scrum
- ✓ Empirical process control
- ✓ Transparency
- ✓ More with less
- ✓ Whole product focus
- ✓ Customer-centric
- ✓ Continuous improvement towards perfection
- ✓ Systems thinking
- ✓ Lean thinking
- ✓ Queuing theory



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There are two sub frameworks of LeSS. Basic LeSS for two to eight scrum teams and LeSS Huge for organizations with more than eight scrum teams. LeSS also comes with guides on best practices that their founders created. Within these guides and frameworks, there is a significant emphasis on experiments that some organizations should try.^{8,9}

⁷ N/A, (N/A). LeSS framework. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://less.works/less/framework/index>

⁸ N/A, (N/A). Principles overview. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://less.works/less/principles/overview>

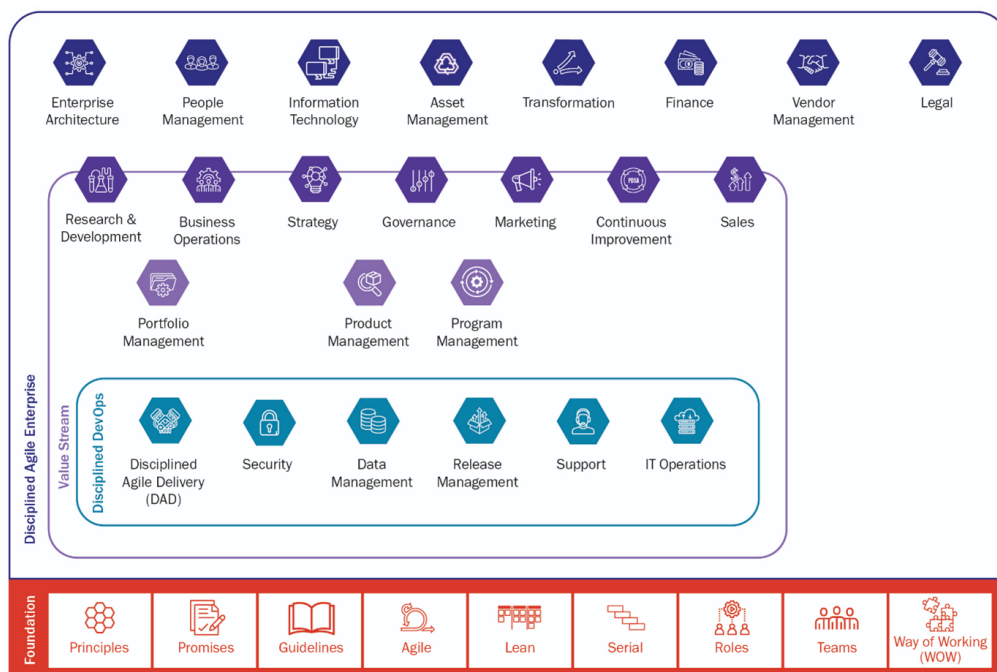
⁹ Oconor, Thomas (N/A). The Large-Scrum Scale (LeSS) framework. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://www.atlassian.com/agile/agile-at-scale/less>

In the end, there are many benefits to LeSS. For starters, there will be a lower cost to implementing LeSS because it is designed for organizations that are already using scrum. LeSS also does not add more people and overhead. There are only a few new roles to fill, and those can usually come from internal people. Another benefit is that it puts the teams in direct contact with the customer and business stakeholders. This allows the team to see the real value they are adding instantly. Finally, much like scrum and other frameworks, continuous improvement is a fundamental principle that the teams practice through retrospectives and self-reflection.

Discipline Agile

Disciplined Agile (DA) is a learning-oriented, process-driven framework used for technology solution delivery. The framework uses lightweight methodologies and puts the individual first to optimize the process unique to each project. The founders designed DA to be a hybrid model of XP, Scrum, Kanban, and other methodologies.

Most of the benefits of DA fall into its hybrid nature of pulling only the most tried and true practices from different agile disciplines. It allows teams to follow an agile methodology while also adapting that methodology to fit their unique needs.¹⁰



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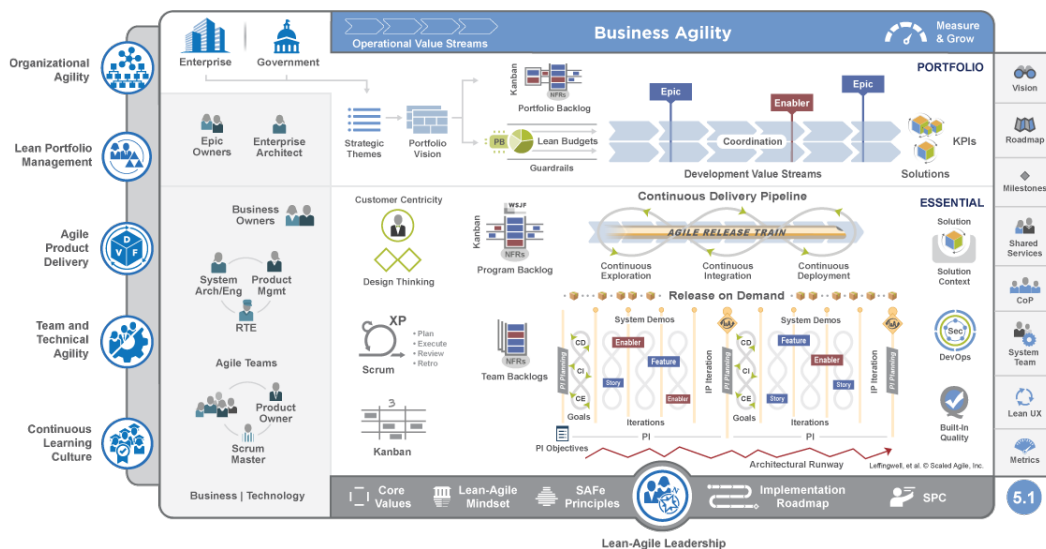
¹⁰ N/A, (N/A). Introduction to disciplined Agile (DA). accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://www.pmi.org/disciplined-agile/introduction-to-disciplined-agile>

¹¹ N/A, (N/A). Introduction to disciplined Agile (DA). accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://www.pmi.org/disciplined-agile/introduction-to-disciplined-agile>

SAFe

The Scaled Agile Framework is easily the most popular of all scaled agile frameworks and methodologies. The founders of scaled agile created SAFe in 2011 and have released five different versions of it since. One of the main principles of SAFe is continuous improvement, and we can see that shine through in their relentless effort to adapt and improve the framework.

SAFe focuses on value streams and agile release trains within those value streams. A value stream is a way you add value to any of your products or services. This usually involves several teams from different departments who organize into an Agile Release Train (ART). SAFe helps companies manage their priorities from the portfolio level down, giving teams a clear idea of where their effort must go.



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The founders of SAFe consider their framework more of a knowledge base than a set of rules to follow. SAFe is built on the seven core competencies of a lean enterprise. The seven competencies are as follows:

- ✓ Lean-agile Leadership
- ✓ Lean Portfolio Management
- ✓ Team and Technical Agility
- ✓ Organizational Agility
- ✓ Agile Product Delivery
- ✓ Continuous Learning Culture
- ✓ Enterprise Solution Delivery

¹² N/A, (N/A).SAFe 5 for lean enterprises. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://www.scaledagileframework.com/>

At its core, SAFe’s mission is to “enable the business agility that is required for enterprises to compete and thrive in the digital age.” They do this by adding several roles and ceremonies to a framework that is quite similar to scrum. Most of these roles and ceremonies are at the portfolio level, helping link the scrum teams throughout the organization. The main benefits of SAFe are faster time to market, an increase in productivity and quality, and higher customer engagement.¹³

To help guide your decision of frameworks and models, we’ve included this handy table which shows the common aspects of agile at scale and their inclusion in each popular framework or model.

	SAFe (Scaled Agile Framework)	LeSS (Large Scale Scrum) & LeSS Huge	Spotify	DA (Disciplined Agile)	Scrum @Scale
Long term planning and strategy	●	●	●	●	●
Multi agile teams	●	●	●	●	●
Team of Teams	Agile Release Train (ART)	Area	Tribes	●	Scrum of Scrums
PM/PO	●	●	●	●	●
Scrum Master / Agile Coach	●	●	●	●	●
Release Engineer / Group Manager	●	●	●	●	●
Agile practice (scrum, kanban, etc.)	●	●	●	●	●
Demo	●	●	●	●	●
Retros	●	●	●	●	●
Customer driven / value focused	●	●	●	●	●
Dependency management	●	●	●	●	●
Strategy transparency	●	●	●	●	●
Portfolio management	●	●	●	●	●
Release on demand	●	●	●	●	●
Risk Management	●	●	●	●	●
DevOps	●	●	●	●	●

Processes: ● Defined and prescribed ● Defined with recommendations ● Not clearly defined

Now that we have a general overview of the popular methodologies, the next step will be to find a tool that can help us implement these methodologies. Agile teams tend to choose Jira Software as their tool, but just Jira Software doesn’t usually cut it for agile at scale.

¹³ N/A, (2021, February 10).Welcome to Scaled Agile Framework 5. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://www.scaledagileframework.com/about>

What tool helps agile at scale?

To effectively implement any of the above frameworks and methodologies for agile at scale, you will need a tool. According to Gartner, Atlassian is a leader in Enterprise Agile Planning tools. A big part of the reason for that is Jira Align allows for a symbiosis with Jira - the core issue tracking tool that allows you to practice agile while maintaining the balance between transparency and autonomy.



But Jira Align doesn't just work seamlessly with Jira, it also works well with other tools, making it a great addition to your tool stack.

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Why do you need a tool?

First, it's essential to know that tools and processes alone cannot do the work. In order to implement agile at scale, people within your organization will have to have the right mindset. With that said, tools are important because they allow us to communicate, track, adapt, and automate. The best part of this is that all the information concerning our work will be in one place. This is referred to as the "single source of truth."

¹⁴ Mann et al., (2021, April 20). Magic Quadrant for enterprise agile planning tools. accessed 4th of May 2021, <https://www.gartner.com/doc/reprints?id=1-25SRWZ04&ct=210414>

So why is Jira Align the right fit here?

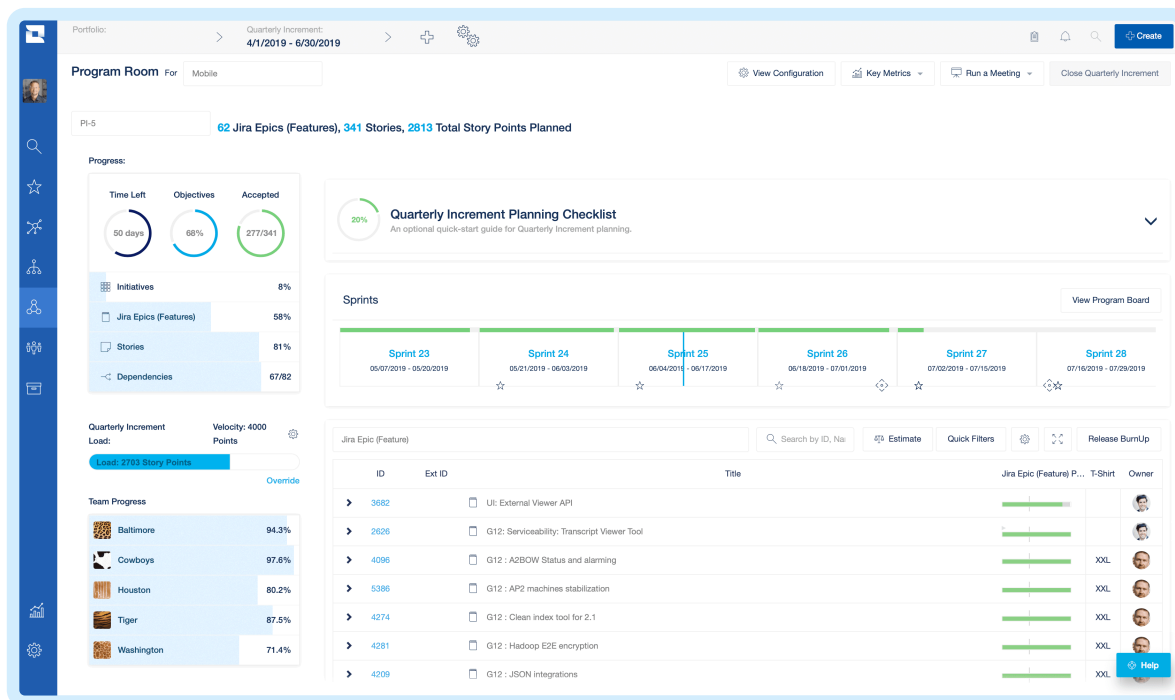
Jira Align is customizable, which means that Jira Align can adapt regardless of the method or framework. For example, each methodology varies in the terminology that it uses. Jira Align allows the organization to customize the different names for each item in the tool. If your team uses the term sprint or iteration, it doesn't make a difference when choosing Jira Align.

Additionally, Jira Align comes with templates available for some of the most popular methodologies. If you are concerned about time to set up, don't be because ready-made configurations are available when you start using the tool.

With Jira Align, all your organization's work is in one place. This makes things transparent for your entire team. Everyone will know what they are working on and how that work aligns with the company's goals and targets.

You can also take advantage of immediate feedback, whether it's from the customer or internally from teams. The flexibility to adapt to changing situations, ensures successful product delivery that matches customer demands.

Jira Align provides over 100 different reports so that you and your team can empirically analyze your processes and decisions to improve your working ways continually. Continuous improvement is one of the most critical aspects of all agile at scale frameworks and models. Therefore, built-in reporting is vital.



Conclusion

Scaling is difficult. You cannot overlook the challenges that you will face when you try to scale your agile practices. Everything might be working perfectly now, but if there is any small issue in your current agile practices, scaling will multiply the size of that issue exponentially. Much of the heavy lifting comes in the early stages of implementation, where you will discover and plan for your execution.

In the end, the choice is yours for which framework and methodology you use to scale agile. If few ceremonies and little control over teams is something you're interested in, then perhaps the Spotify model is good for you. If you like a bit more control with a more defined framework, SAFe might be your choice. There are arguments and counterpoints for each methodology, and there is certainly not a one size fits all answer for this.

However, if you are looking for the perfect tool to scale agile no matter the framework, you should look to Jira Align. Jira Align allows you to balance the autonomy of the teams with the transparency that stakeholders demand.

Overall, if you have any needs regarding your agile at scale journey, please don't hesitate to contact us. Even if you are well past the planning and discovery phase, it's never too late to get an expert's opinion on how to best move from agile to agile at scale.



**You want to start the agile transformation
of your company?**

Let's talk!



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