What Is SAFe?

The Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe®) is an enterprise operating model that helps businesses address the significant challenges of today's Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) operating environments. SAFe comprises proven principles, behaviors, practices and patterns of working that enable organizations adapt and value innovate[1] in respect of both running and changing the business. It is a publicly available, freely revealed knowledge base.

Scalable and configurable, SAFe allows each organization to adapt it to its own business needs. It supports smaller-scale com[paniess/solutions employing 50 – 125 practitioners, as well as large scale organizations/complex systems that require thousands of people.

An extensive body of knowledge, SAFe describes the roles, responsibilities, artifacts, and activities necessary to implement Lean-Agile practices. The SAFe website features an interactive 'Big Picture' graphic, which is a visual overview of the Framework and is the primary user interface to the knowledge base. Each icon of the image is clickable, offering access to an article on that topic, as well as links to related information.

1 Value Innovate: Achieving differentiation and low costs

Improving Organizational and Solution Development Outcomes

Developed in the field, in addition to SAFe for running the business, it has evolved as a proven approach for developing complex systems and software in a Lean-Agile manner and draws from three primary bodies of knowledge: Agile development, systems thinking, and Lean product development. It helps enterprises answer the following types of questions:

- How do we align the company toward its business and technical goals? How do we make better decisions to improve our economic outcomes?
- How do we deliver new value on a predictable schedule so that the rest of the business can plan and execute? How do we improve the quality of our solutions and delight our customers?
- How do we scale Agile practices from the team to the program and business unit, and across the enterprise, to deliver better results? How do we organize people around value so that our programs deliver it effectively and avoid the delays and bureaucracy inherent in a traditional, hierarchical structure? How do we manage and minimize dependencies between teams, programs, and Value Streams?
- How do we create an environment that fosters collaboration, innovation, and relentless improvement? How do we unlock the intrinsic motivation of the people who do this work? How can we change our culture so that it tolerates failure and rewards risk-taking

and continuous learning? How can we help our teams improve without getting in the way?

- How do we know what our Agile teams are doing and measure how well they're performing?

By adopting SAFe—and applying its well-described set of values, principles, and practices—the enterprise can address these questions and realize greater business and individual benefits.

SAFe Configurations

SAFe supports the full range of development environments with four out-the-box configurations, as illustrated in Figure 1.

- Essential SAFe
- Portfolio SAFe
- Large Solution SAFe
- Full SAFe

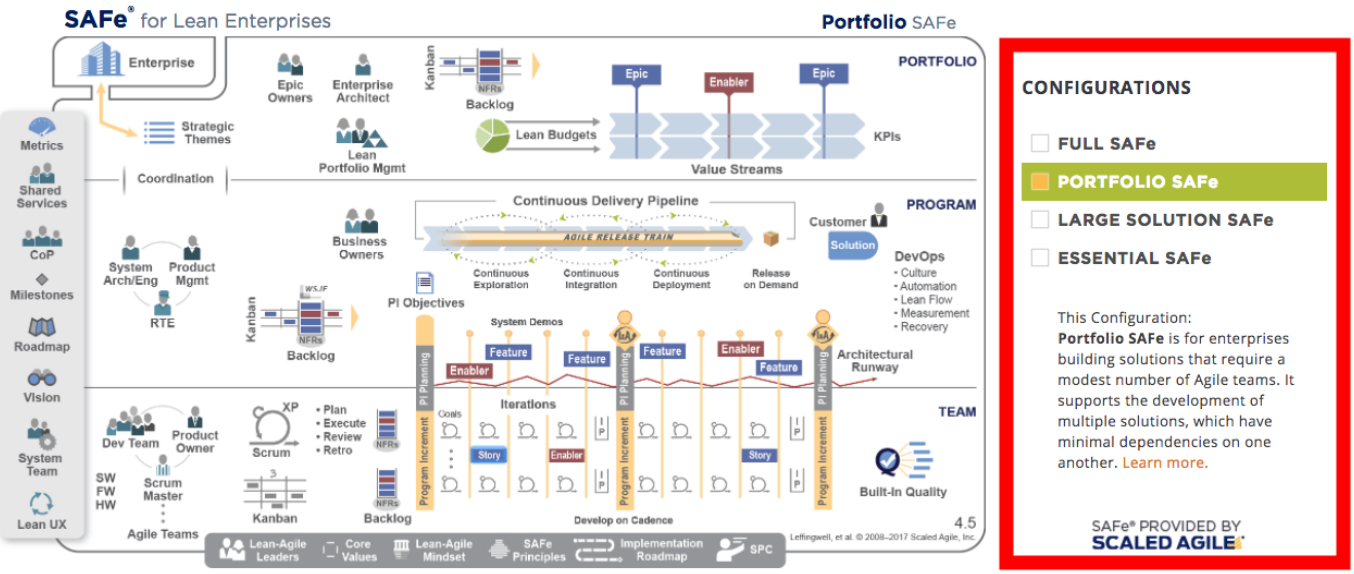

Figure1: Configurable SAFe

Essential SAFe

The Essential SAFe configuration is the heart of the Framework and is the simplest starting point for adoption. It's the basic building block for all other SAFe configurations and describes the most critical elements needed to realize the majority of the Framework's benefits.

Together, the Team and Program Levels form an organizational structure called the Agile Release Train (ART), where Agile teams, key stakeholders, and other resources are dedicated to an important, ongoing solution mission.

Essential SAFe consists of both the team and program levels, as shown in Figure 2.

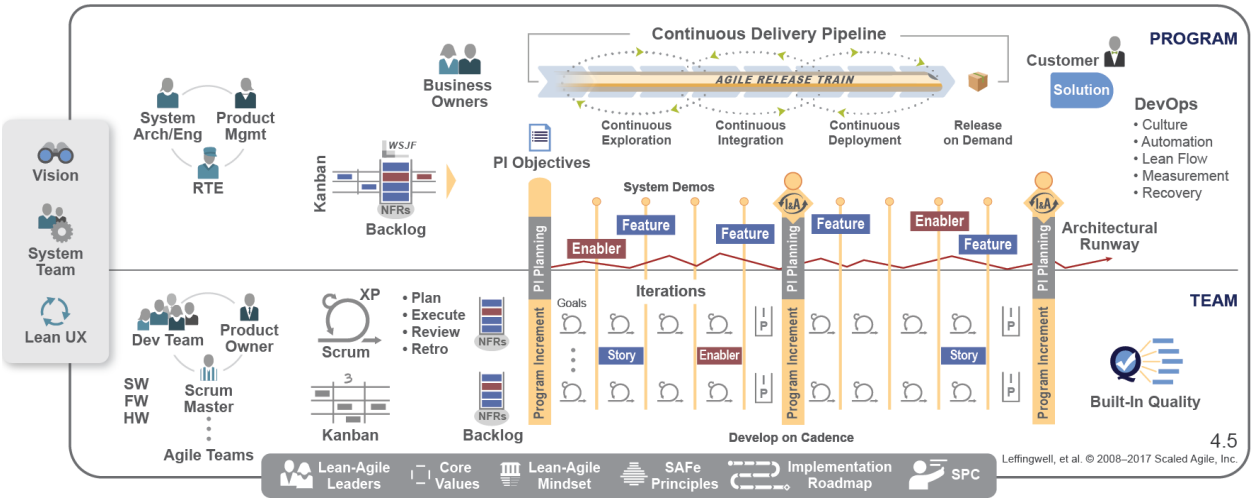

Figure 2: Essential SAFe Configuration

Large Solution SAFe

The Large Solution SAFe configuration is for developing the largest and most complex solutions that typically require multiple Agile release trains and Suppliers, but do not require portfolio-level considerations. This is common for industries like aerospace and defense, automotive, and government, where the large solution—not portfolio governance—is the primary concern.

The Solution Train organizational construct of the Large Solution Level helps enterprises that face the biggest challenges—building large-scale, multidisciplinary software, hardware, and complex IT systems. Building these solutions requires additional roles, artifacts, events, and coordination. Enterprises that build largely independent systems or those that can be built with a few hundred practitioners may not need this configuration.

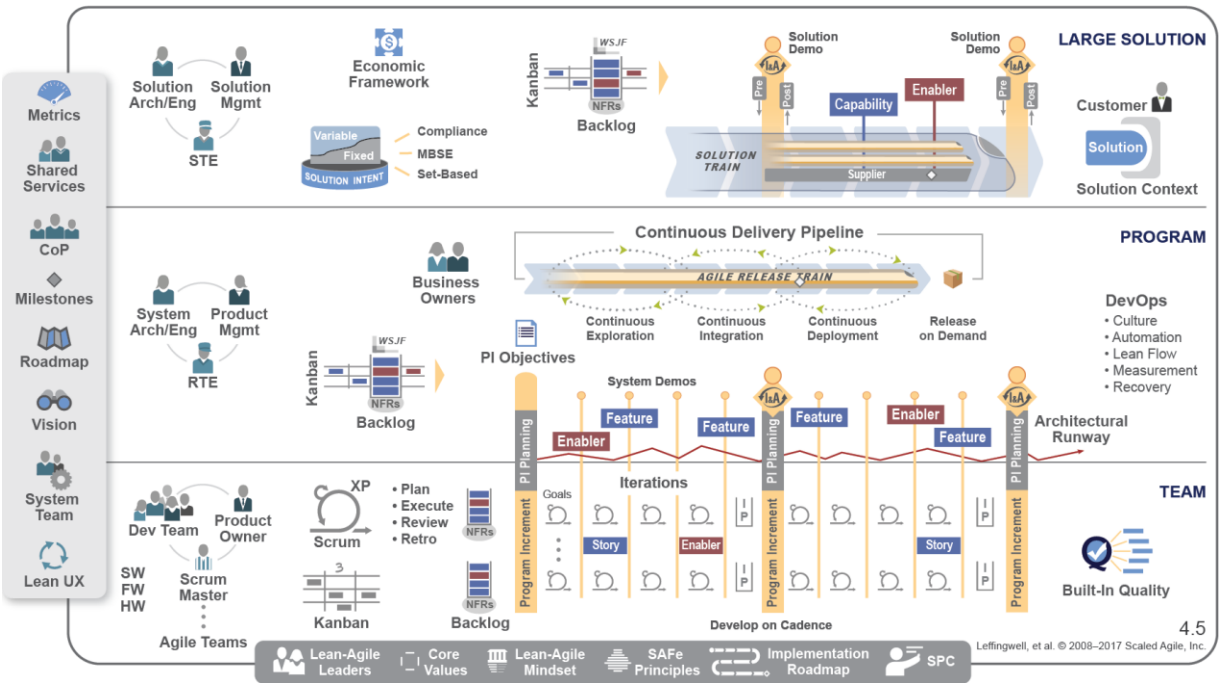

Figure 3: Large Solution SAFe Configuration

Portfolio SAFe

The Portfolio SAFe configuration helps align portfolio execution to the enterprise strategy, by organizing Agile delivery around the flow of value, through one or more value streams. It provides business agility through principles and practices for portfolio strategy and investment funding, Agile portfolio operations, and Lean governance.

In the large Enterprise, there may be multiple SAFe portfolios.

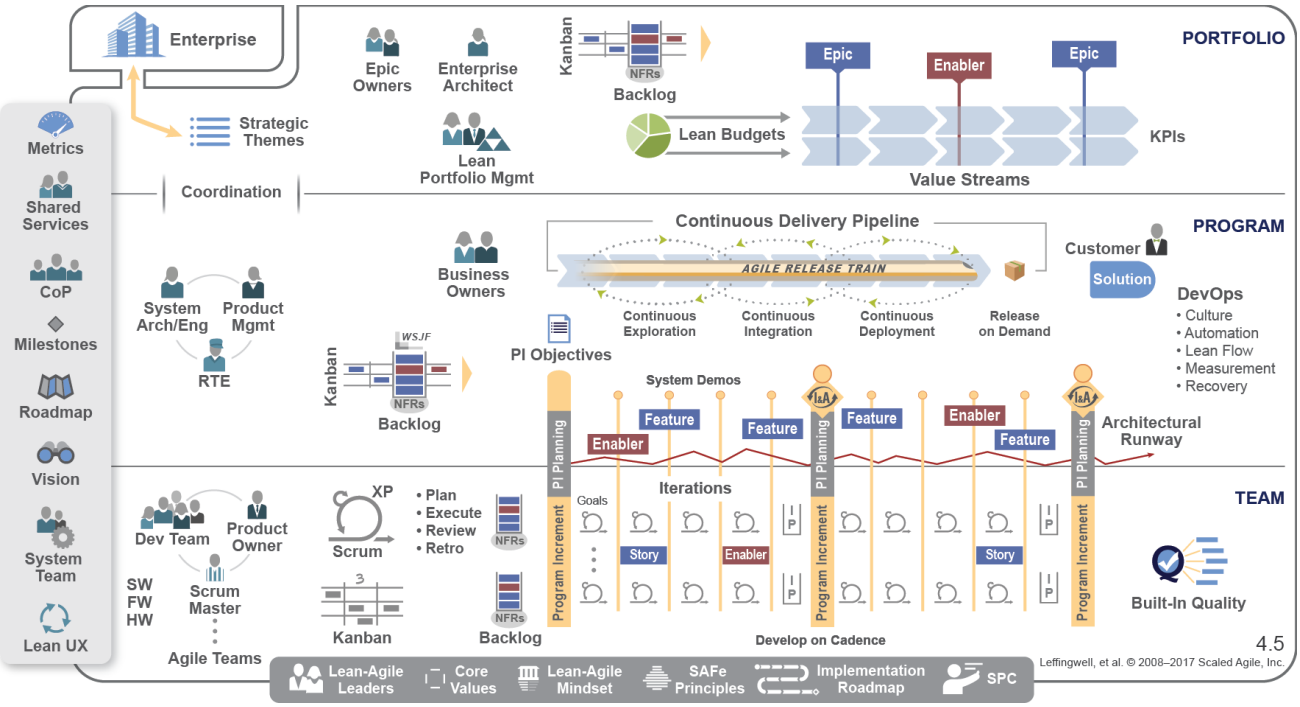

Figure 4: Portfolio SAFe Configuration

Full SAFe

The Full SAFe configuration is the most comprehensive version of the Framework. It supports enterprises that build and maintain large integrated solutions, which require hundreds of people or more, and includes all levels of SAFe: team, program, large solution, and portfolio. In the largest enterprises, multiple instances of various SAFe configurations may be required.

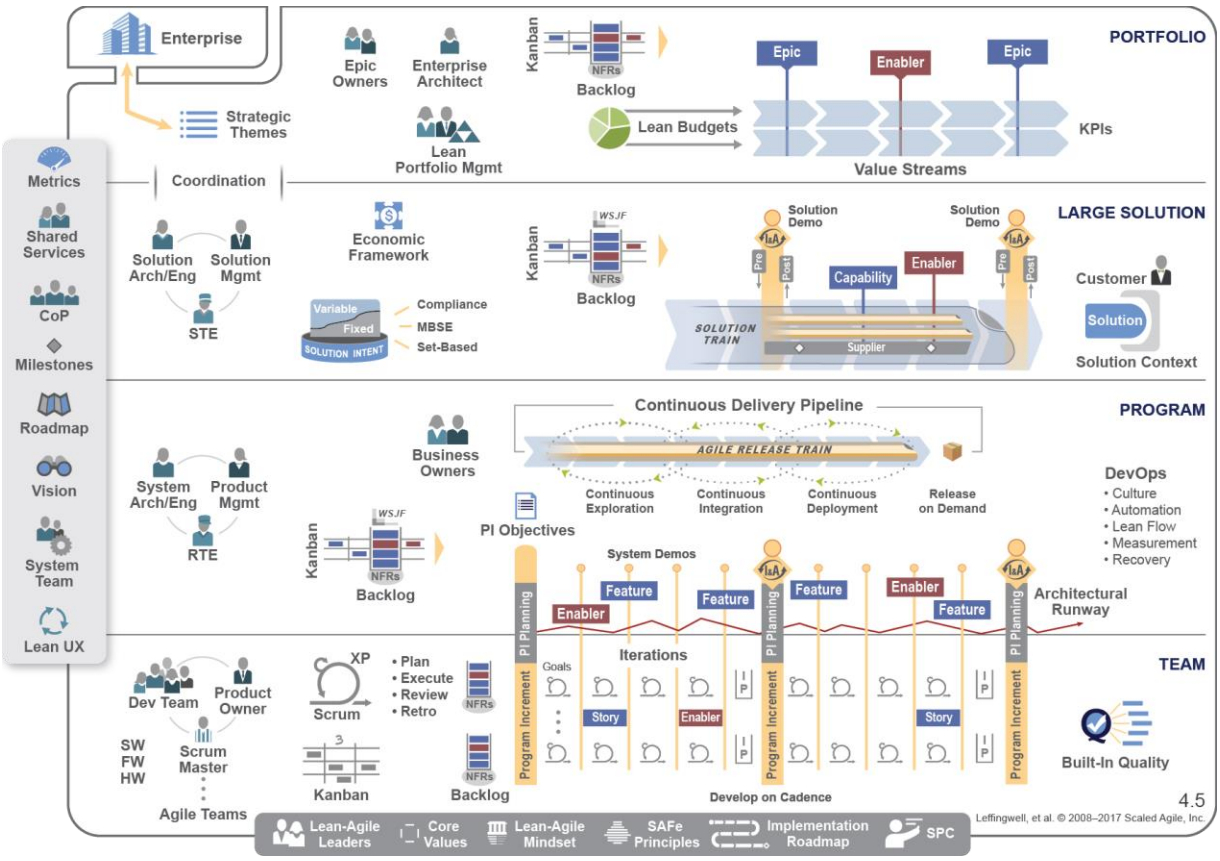

Figure 5: Full SAFe Configuration

The Spanning Palette

The Spanning Palette contains various roles and artifacts that may be applicable to a specific team, program, large solution, or portfolio context. A key element of SAFe's flexibility and configurability, the spanning palette permits organizations to apply only the elements needed for their configuration.

Figure 6 illustrates two versions of the spanning palette.

Figure 6: Spanning Palette

The figure on the left is used for the Essential SAFe configuration, and the one on the right is for all other configurations. However, since SAFe is a framework, enterprises can apply any of the elements from the larger spanning palette to Essential SAFe.

Below is a brief description of each spanning palette element:

- **Metrics** – The primary measure in SAFe is the objective measurement of working solutions. Moreover, SAFe defines some additional intermediate and long-term measures as well, metrics that teams, programs, and portfolios can use to measure progress.

- **Shared Services** – Represents the specialty roles that are necessary for the success of an ART or value stream, but that cannot be dedicated full time to any specific train.

- **Community of Practice (CoP)** – A community of practice is an informal group of team members and other experts, acting within the context of a program or enterprise, that has a mission of sharing practical knowledge in one or more relevant domains.

- **Milestones** – A milestone is used to track progress toward a specific goal or event. These include fixed-date, Program Increment (PI) and learning milestones.

- **Roadmap** – The roadmap communicates planned ART and value stream deliverables and milestones over a timeline.

- **Vision** – The vision describes a future view of the solution to be developed, reflecting customer and stakeholder needs, as well as Features and Capabilities, which are proposed to address those needs.

- **System Team** – This a special Agile team that provides assistance in building and using the Agile development environment, including Continuous Integration and test automation and automating the delivery pipeline.

- **Lean User Experience (UX)** – Lean UX is the application of Lean principles to user experience design. It uses an iterative, hypothesis-driven approach to product development, through constant measurement and learning loops (build-measure-learn). In SAFe, Lean UX is applied at scale, with the right combination of centralized and decentralized UX design and implementation.

The Foundation

The Foundation contains the supporting principles, values, mindset, implementation guidance, and leadership roles needed to deliver value successfully at scale.

Figure 7: SAFe Foundation

- **Lean-Agile Leaders** – Management has the ultimate responsibility for business outcomes. Leaders must be trained, and then become trainers of, these leaner ways of thinking and operating. To this end, SAFe describes a new style of leadership exhibited by the enterprise's leaders.

- **Core Values** – Four core values define the belief system for SAFe: Alignment, Built-In Quality, Transparency, and Program Execution.

- **Lean-Agile Mindset** – Lean-Agile Leaders are lifelong learners and teachers. They understand and embrace Lean and Agile principles and practices.

- **SAFe Principles** – SAFe practices are grounded in nine principles that synthesize Agile methods, Lean product development, systems thinking, and decades of field experience.

- **Implementation Roadmap** – Implementing the changes necessary to become a Lean-Agile technology enterprise is a substantial change for most companies. SAFe provides an implementation roadmap to help guide organizations on this journey.

- **SAFe Program Consultants (SPCs)** – SPCs are change agents who combine their technical knowledge of SAFe with an intrinsic motivation to improve their company's change and operational working processes.