

Avoiding Scaled Agile Compromises that Create “FrankenSAFe”

An organization's transformation to adopt the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe®) is a significant undertaking that requires a commitment to change culture and processes at every level. Some leaders are inclined to customize SAFe to cut corners or to cling to existing processes. Known as “FrankenSAFe”, compromise may create a monster that jeopardizes the entire transformation. A few key principles can help guard the effort.

1

Executives can not be supportive without also investing their own time

A successful SAFe transformation requires a complete shift in mindset at every level of the organization. This mindset can only be fully achieved if leadership adopts and champions this way of thinking. Executives must invest the time to fully understand SAFe and the work required for the transformation.

2

Yes, SAFe requires *that* much time invested in training and planning

A common objection to the SAFe model is the seemingly disproportionate amount of time dedicated to activities outside of the "real work" of development. Adding up the prescribed hours for training, PI Planning, IP Iterations, and Inspect & Adapt activities can raise concerns. In reality, organizations have found that SAFe offers the tools to operate with singular focus and without disruption. The investment is required. The return is proven.

3

Understand success measurements: Prioritize product demos

In a Waterfall model, teams only realize value at the end of a project or program phase. The Waterfall definition of success is to deliver the documented requirements on time and on budget. Agile, more realistically, proposes that success should be measured in working software only. To that end, planned working demos should never be optional for teams. In addition, leadership should align metrics and reporting with this definition of success.

4

Partial Waterfall does not add value

It is tempting to retain some elements of the existing model that are difficult to change. However, SAFe is an interconnected framework, and partial adoption undermines its effectiveness. A hybrid model disrupts the flow of coordinated events and breaks the singular focus of value delivery at the end of each increment. To realize full value, SAFe can and should stand on its own.

5

Start with one Agile Release Train (ART) designed correctly

The benefits of SAFe can convince some leaders to initiate an "all at once" transformation. While this approach may establish urgency and commitment, the recommended transition is to begin with one carefully designed ART. Experience shows that organizations will learn many valuable lessons during the initial ART, without delaying the full transformation benefits. Risk is reduced by refining the applied model before scaling.

6

The full benefits of SAFe are realized with broad enterprise engagement

As SAFe is scaled beyond an initial Agile Release Train (ART), more support from the enterprise is required. Finance, along with the funding business functions, must understand the benefits, support the transformation, and potentially redefine funding models from project-based to funding value streams. HR must understand the shift in roles throughout the organization and help transition HR processes to support these roles.

7

A re-org is not a prerequisite, but roles must be clearly defined

One potentially confusing aspect of SAFe is the prescribed roles within the framework. An ART is a virtual organization, and it is not necessary to revise job titles and line management to fit SAFe. The greater importance is an individual's fit for SAFe role responsibilities. It is also critical that every role is given the dedicated, often full-time, capacity needed for SAFe. Line management must also understand that their oversight may no longer influence the specific work execution of an individual or team. This work is set and managed by the Agile Teams.

About the Author

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