



## Increase your impact with both Scrum and SAFe

There's been plenty of discussion over the years comparing and contrasting Scrum and Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe), which has set up a premise that you must choose one or the other. But in actuality, Scrum and SAFe can be friends and work well together.

Scrum and SAFe both function under Agile values and principles: Scrum as a framework focuses at a team level while SAFe scales to an enterprise level. The way you handle work within Scrum is to organize small teams, while SAFe is used to govern and organize an enterprise, partly made up of these small teams. They're complementary and together they can deliver greater value.

This paper tackles the following questions:

1. What is your organization trying to address by moving toward Agile?
2. How do you use Scrum and SAFe together on your journey?
3. How can you benefit by using Scrum and SAFe together?
4. How has Avanade used Scrum and SAFe together?

Scrum and SAFe are complementary and together they can deliver greater value.



## What is your organization trying to address by moving toward Agile?

One question we ask all our clients is why do you want to become Agile? It may sound obvious, but asking this question early helps you identify the challenges you're looking to address and can help with clearer decision-making.

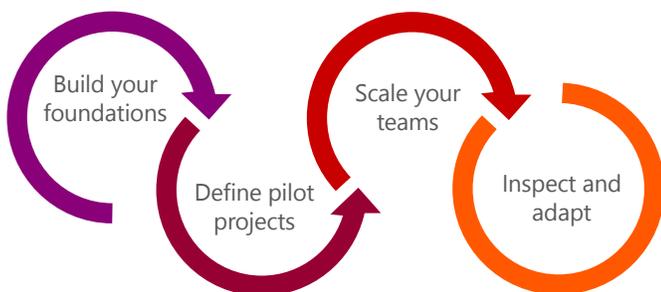
Common answers to this question include:

- Faster time to market
- Flexibility
- Transparency
- Cost saving
- Higher quality

While all of these have merit, we navigate the discussions around the following areas:



Understanding these areas helps identify the right approach to agility, whether that's focusing at the team level or enterprise level across your organization. Whatever your objective, your Agile journey will involve four core steps:



**Build your foundations:** This is a pivotal first step. You need to have the right organization, mindset and key leaders to help drive the change toward agility. This will help you create a strategy and deliver this transformation by having the right people to mentor, guide and develop your organization toward this change.

**Define pilot projects:** Typically we start with one or two Scrum Teams as part of any pilot project. Depending on the maturity of your organization, we look to deploy an Agile Coach who will work with both your organization and Scrum Team to help develop the right behaviors. Some Scrum Teams need and want very little guidance, while others need more support. Some are happy figuring out what will work for them (embracing empiricism: inspect and adapt loops) and others want more direction and management.

**Scale your teams:** At Avanade, our default position is to use Scrum as a team framework and, depending on your preference, either use a scaling framework that your organization has already invested in or recommend a scaling approach such as Nexus or SAFe.

**Inspect and adapt:** The final part of the journey is the constant evolution through inspection and adaptation. Driving this from a foundation perspective will help you inspect, thus improving delivery of value and the environment in which work is conducted. The use of adaptation supports making change and can help you develop a competitive advantage and continually improve.

You need to have the right organization, mindset and key enablers to help drive the change toward agility.

## How do you use Scrum and SAFe together on your journey?

Taking the above into account, if you're considering expanding organizational agility and have chosen SAFe, we recommend first focusing on the Essential Layer in SAFe and using Scrum as its foundation in the first instance for how the individual teams function and work. Yes, the SAFe Implementation Roadmap talks about starting with one value stream, but we suggest starting with one product. This approach can help you avoid additional complexities or overhead and get your Agile teams talking and thinking the same way. These become your enablers for the rest of the organization. If you're already using Scrum you should be able to retain much of the current behavior.

Using Scrum at the team level as the underpinning framework for your organization will help provide focus and consistent thinking. Scrum also brings Agile teams a set of values and empirical process thinking to help drive ongoing process improvement. The Scrum Values are commitment, courage, focus, openness and respect. These values don't conflict with SAFe and will complement the success of Scrum Teams as they give direction on how people work with each other, behave, make decisions, plan and execute their tasks.

## Understanding the importance of empiricism

The [Scrum Guide](#) considers empiricism (the three pillars being transparency, inspection and adaptation) to be the foundation of Scrum. This enables Scrum Teams to make decisions in a fact-based, experience-based and evidence-based manner.

Scrum prescribes at least one done increment per Sprint, the maximum duration of a given Sprint is one month and the Sprint is driven by a common Sprint Goal set by the Scrum Team. Our view is that you can use empiricism better when the increments are shorter periods, and you can absolutely deliver more than one product increment per Sprint.

SAFe conducts its inspect and adapt event at the end of each Program Increment. This reflects over the previous increment in preparation for planning the next. Using Scrum at the team level greatly increases the frequency of these feedback loops, which support agility and your team's ability to inspect and adapt through Sprints. This, in turn, helps your organization increase its delivery value.

Taking this further, Scrum Values and empiricism help support the Scrum Team to constantly inspect and adapt during the Sprint through the Daily Scrum. It doesn't limit this to the end of a Sprint, and those are the behaviors you should be looking to adopt within the Scrum Team – let them learn through experiences throughout Sprints.

When you look to bring in agility across the organization, start off at the team level and then look to introduce this to the program and portfolio levels.

The Scrum Team is self-managing, allowing the team to be free to determine the best way for them to work in order to deliver value while upholding the Scrum Values and empiricism. SAFe uses the House of Lean principles in a prescriptive fashion. In particular, the roof of the house helps focus on getting to the shortest sustainable lead time, thus getting Agile teams to focus on value and embracing an Agile mindset.

### A SAFe approach: Dual operating system

A good aspect of SAFe is that it focuses on a dual operating system, where it looks to make the most of the existing stability of an organization. This means it doesn't break the organizational structure but focuses on organizing around the flow of value, rather than creating traditional silos, and it supports innovation and growth of delivery, operations and existing solutions.

So we recommend that you build processes around business agility and focus on how your organization can implement agility across the organization. This will allow everyone to collectively develop the right mindset.

SAFe targets enterprises and while a lot of the processes and governance lend themselves well to agility, we recommend you question whether your organization needs all the additional controls that SAFe suggests. Think about your organization and focus on the core values of agility and what works for you. When you look to bring in agility across the organization, start off at the team level and then look to introduce this to the program and portfolio levels if your organization has these.



## How can you benefit by using Scrum and SAFe together?

Both Scrum and SAFe offer benefits but using them together will enable you to impact your organization in a number of key ways.

**Quality** – In Scrum you have timeboxed Sprints and this allows the Scrum Team to show the product to the customers and stakeholders earlier and more frequently. This enables customers and stakeholders to quickly determine whether the product matches their needs. If it doesn't, the team can inspect and adapt quicker to enable changes. SAFe has built-in quality practices to enable a fast flow across all levels and teams. This is often needed for large organizations, but without quality assurance being in place it will often lead to rework.

**Team centric** – Both Scrum and SAFe focus on the Agile team. Agile teams are cross-functional, self-organizing and work toward delivering value. Having a clear vision enables an Agile team to understand what they're required to accomplish, and both frameworks focus on collaboration by communicating and being transparent.

**Productivity** – Both frameworks focus on the product and continually collaborating with the customer. Having this alignment enables the team to understand what needs to be delivered. Because you're working together more effectively through collaboration in Scrum/SAFe, Agile teams are more focused. In addition, you'll see reduced risk to the project and increased productivity by continually delivering.

**Shorter time to market** – With Scrum, developers have smaller loops with a tighter focus to get a smaller set of features to done. This allows for flexibility and can be changeable during the project. SAFe focuses on aligning cross-functional Agile teams around value to meet customer needs faster. Using the framework helps you make decisions faster, communicate them effectively and enables you to stay focused on the customer.

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## From theory to reality: How has Avanade used Scrum and SAFe together?

As we've made clear, transitioning your organization toward Agile is a journey, but using Scrum and SAFe together can make that journey a little easier. You'll see what that can look like with the following example. In this case, the company is a longstanding Avanade client that previously used a traditional delivery approach.

The organization was going through internal changes and the new business owner wanted to review the current delivery approach. We were already embedded in an existing project involving the migration of 600 functional areas to a new technology stack. The project had 70 people engaged from the client and Avanade and was planned to take 12 months. After six months of using the client's preferred traditional delivery approach, the team had only migrated 30 functional areas.

The client needed to address issues like faster time to market and flexibility and wanted to use this project to see if we could transform this engagement from traditional to Agile delivery.

One of our Agile Coaches was brought in to help support this transformation. The coach brought their previous experiences with similar teams, clients and products to the engagement. We developed a plan to take three of the current teams (all independent) and have them work using the Scrum framework for the next three months. The aim was to see how work was being completed using two contrasting delivery approaches and help the client determine if going down the new route would help deliver value quicker.

The Agile Coach immediately focused on the following areas:

- **Advisory** – Worked as an adviser to the client and helped adapt the process to the given situation to shift the existing delivery from traditional to Agile
- **Product Owner involvement** – Worked with the client's leadership to ensure support was being provided to the organization
- **Motivation** – Helped change the mindset of the team about Agile adoption within the project
- **Leadership** – Helped the [Product Owner](#) build a Product Backlog and communicated it to the team, prioritized in terms of value
- **Support** – Brought in three Scrum Masters to join each of the Scrum Teams

### Agile approach delivers greater value

Fast forward three months and by going through a series of Sprints and getting feedback on work during Sprint Reviews, the business owner concluded that Agile was delivering more value, more quickly, compared with the project teams that were still using the traditional delivery approach. At this stage, the business owner wanted to convert the entire project to Agile.

However, this brought a challenge regarding scaling the current teams. At this point, the coach decided to scale Scrum using the Nexus Framework. The Nexus Framework doesn't change Scrum, rather it embraces Scrum by helping multiple Scrum Teams working on the same product handle dependencies across them. Seven Scrum Teams were created, each focused on different functional areas of the same product. As part of this process, short training sessions were held to explain the new framework and how each team member would interact within this new way of working.

As part of using Nexus, the teams continued improving their performance and, through future Sprints, they continued to deliver value. As part of the business review, the business owner wanted to focus on how the migration was going and the value the teams were delivering. As a result, the Product Backlog was updated, with the Product Owner focusing on functional areas based on value to the organization. As time moved on, the business wanted to focus on certain functional areas, and the Product Owner decided to reprioritize the Product Backlog to accommodate this focus based on stakeholder input. Over the next five months the teams worked within the Nexus framework and continued to deliver against the Product Backlog.

### Bringing Scrum and SAFe together

From a delivery perspective, the business owner developed expectations to deliver more in less time and wanted to increase the amount of team members to more than 150 people. To accomplish this, more controls and prescription would be needed. In another part of the organization SAFe was being piloted in the IT department. Working with that team, the Avande Agile Coach observed how that project was being run. An Agile Release Train was being used where they were working alongside stakeholders incrementally developing against a value stream. Based on the review and feedback from the coach, the business owner wanted to

invest in this approach and wanted us to continue to provide key roles such as Agile Coaches and Scrum Masters.

The client wanted to continue showing the value of Scrum as its team-level framework. In addition, an investment was made to train specific people within the client organization on the SAFe Release Train Engineer role.

Working through the implementation roadmap that was created using SAFe, the project went through a journey of delivering using Scrum at the team level, with Nexus at the team-of-teams level and SAFe across them all at the portfolio level. Positive results continued as the team delivered value continually through increments. As confidence grew with the new method, additional projects and products were added as part of the SAFe portfolio. One example was a call center migration where over a period of 14 months incremental delivery occurred every month based on business value, with 120 people involved in the Agile Release Train. Having the Release Train Engineers and Scrum Masters supporting the organization was a key success factor.

As with many types of change, this was a journey. After two years the client's IT organization migrated to SAFe and continued to use the combination of Scrum, Nexus and SAFe for any new projects being run within the organization.

Transitioning your organization toward Agile is a journey, but using Scrum and SAFe together can make that journey a little easier.

# Takeaways to help you successfully combine Scrum and SAFe

In this paper we've explored how organizations can move toward agility using both Scrum and SAFe to support the journey. Below are a few takeaways and considerations to help you on your journey:

- It's important to build your foundations. Identify the right people to help guide your organization toward agility. These people will continue to propel the right messaging and become change agents.
- Don't be afraid to ask for external help if you need to seed Agile experience and guide your adoption. Most organizations need this.
- From an Agile perspective, because it is enacted and affects people at the team level, Scrum will help retain behaviors around value and empiricism, which are important aspects to adopt the right mindset.
- Define pilot projects for your organization. If people in the organization are able to see the value and quality that's being delivered, they can help drive an organization toward agility.

- Start off with one or two Scrum Teams, get the Scrum Values embedded and encourage the teams to learn and grow together. This becomes your starting point for scaling your teams.
- New teams always need support to prevent them from falling back to old behaviors. The first few Sprints are the hardest and this is when most Agile initiatives fail.
- As you scale toward organizational agility, you can look to use a framework like SAFe to help organize the portfolio and have a set of workflow patterns to implement Agile practices at enterprise scale.
- Don't over-promise. Agile won't, in itself, make things cheaper or faster, but it will help you get to a better product that can start generating value sooner.
- Use the [SAFe Implementation Roadmap](#) and [Scrum Guide](#) as your starting point and an identified path to support your Product Goal.

If you have any thoughts or would like to share your experience, we'd like to hear from you. Please [contact us](#). For more information, please visit: <https://www.avanade.com/en/technologies/agile> or [scrum.org](http://scrum.org).

## About Avanade

Avanade is the leading provider of innovative digital and cloud services, business solutions and design-led experiences on the Microsoft ecosystem. Our professionals bring bold, fresh thinking combined with technology, business and industry expertise to help make a genuine human impact for our clients, their customers and their employees. We are the power behind the Accenture Microsoft Business Group, helping companies to engage customers, empower employees, optimize operations and transform products, leveraging the Microsoft platform. Avanade has 50,000 professionals in 26 countries, bringing clients our best thinking through a collaborative culture that honors diversity and reflects the communities in which we operate. Majority owned by Accenture, Avanade was founded in 2000 by Accenture LLP and Microsoft Corporation. Learn more at [www.avanade.com](http://www.avanade.com).

## About Scrum.org

Based on the principles of Scrum, Scrum.org, the Home of Scrum, provides comprehensive [training, resources](#), assessments and [certifications](#) to help people and teams solve complex problems. Throughout the world, our solutions and community of more than 340 Professional Scrum Trainers teach the same content empowering people and organizations to achieve agility through Scrum. [Ken Schwaber](#), the co-creator of Scrum, founded Scrum.org in 2009 as a global organization, dedicating himself to improving professionalism.

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