Infosys®
Navigate your next

VIEWPOINT

HYBRID SCALING OF AGILE: A NEW WAY OF WORKING

Often in Agile transformations, firms use off-the-shelf scaling frameworks. But these frameworks have limited success when deployed as-is and should be customized to cater for varying needs across people, processes, and technology. A hybrid scaling of agile approach, evolved and deployed iteratively, helps in adapting to these needs — informing how practices, teams, interactions, and value streams should be designed.

Infosys® | Knowledge Institute

Accelerating outcomes in large organizations is difficult. Bureaucracy, command-and-control hierarchies reduce the ability to respond dynamically to market forces. Conversely, too little structure and governance results in a free-for all, reducing organizational effectiveness, speed, growth and the ability to satisfy a wide range of stakeholders.

For this reason, many firms are spreading Agile across the organization, attempting to find the right balance between speed and consistency of outcomes. Our research shows that by following the core tenets of successful Agile programs, including customer-focus and a sense of shared purpose, businesses of all sizes can grow quickly and get considerable uplift in business performance. However, care should be taken when scaling Agile. Many are using off-the-shelf approaches without customizing them to the problem at hand. In this way, a single business unit scales agile without considering the wider business impact, or a "big bang" approach is taken without a clearly defined vision for change.

To scale Agile ways of working effectively, a careful analysis is needed of the as-is state of the organization across structures, culture, system interdependencies, and operating models.

This initial analysis should look at the following six factors, which have been inferred from our own work in transforming big business.

- Organizational structure — How do silos and hierarchical structures impact decision-making? How well are team networks aligned to product goals and organizational objectives? And, how do structures promote learning across the organization?
- Leadership styles and management — Is purpose-driven leadership in place, wherein all teams are working toward a North Star vision for the firm? Is leadership delegated and are teams working in a responsible and transparent manner with ownership of results?
- Development approach — Is the business focused on projects or products? Is waterfall methodology the defining characteristic of development, or are products built quickly within cross-functional teams — in product streams — with measurable impacts in the market? If project-based work is dominant, how much change is needed to achieve Agile — across ways of working, tooling, and DevOps? Further, if the business and operating model needs both project- and product-based ways of working, how much customization is required for scaling Agile constructs?
- Flow analysis — How efficiently do work items flow upstream (exploration-design) and downstream (feature build-deployment)?
- Funding and governance structures — Is the budgeting process aligned to market rhythms and iteratively adjusted based on lessons learnt in product development?
- Continuous learning and culture of innovation — How well does the firm conduct improvement management processes, competence development, knowledge sharing, and innovation practices?

By asking these questions, current business agility can be assessed, and a change vision document created that sets out a theme for future business impact. Once the change vision is formulated, stakeholders, or "agents of change," are chosen before deciding on an Agile scaling framework. This step is often the most difficult. A deep understanding of the frameworks' elements is needed, along with clear-eyed appreciation for how it can be adapted to implement the change vision. Often, instead of conducting this analysis, firms simply choose the most popular framework. Or even worse, they use an off-the-shelf solution without further customization.

The hybrid scaling of agile approach

Different Agile scaling frameworks/patterns have different elements or attributes. Choosing the right framework requires an understanding of its elements, along with an analysis of its alignment with the organizational ethos and market in which it operates. Further, choosing the right framework depends on whether predictable outcomes are required, or conversely, whether adapting quickly to market forces is the most critical business outcome. Table 1 lists the most popular scaling frameworks/patterns and their respective elements (derived based on our experience in scaling Agile across organizations).

> Choosing the right Agile framework depends on how its elements align with the organizational ethos and market

For any scaling framework or pattern to be successfully implemented, these elements should be matured through an evolutionary approach.

Table 1. Agile scaling frameworks and their different elements

Framework/Pattern	Elements
SAFe[1]	• Organizational agility • Lean portfolio management • Enterprise solution delivery • Agile product delivery • Team and technical agility • Continuous learning
Spotify-inspired Agile [2 3 4]	• Structures supporting autonomy and cross-pollination • Embracing a lean startup culture • Mature Agile practices • Purpose-driven leadership and minimum viable bureaucracy • Speed enabled through technology • Autonomy with alignment and lean governance
Scrum@Scale[5]	• Values-driven culture • Installing an Agile operating system • Scaling the teams • The team process • Scrum of Scrums • Scaling in larger organizations • Scaling the events and roles • Scrum master and product owner cycles
Large-Scale Scrum (LESS)[6]	• Systems thinking • Lean thinking • Whole-product focus • Empirical process control • Continuous improvement • Technical excellence • Large-scale scrum

Considering the complexity of organizational processes and existing operating models, a given framework's elements often need to be customized.

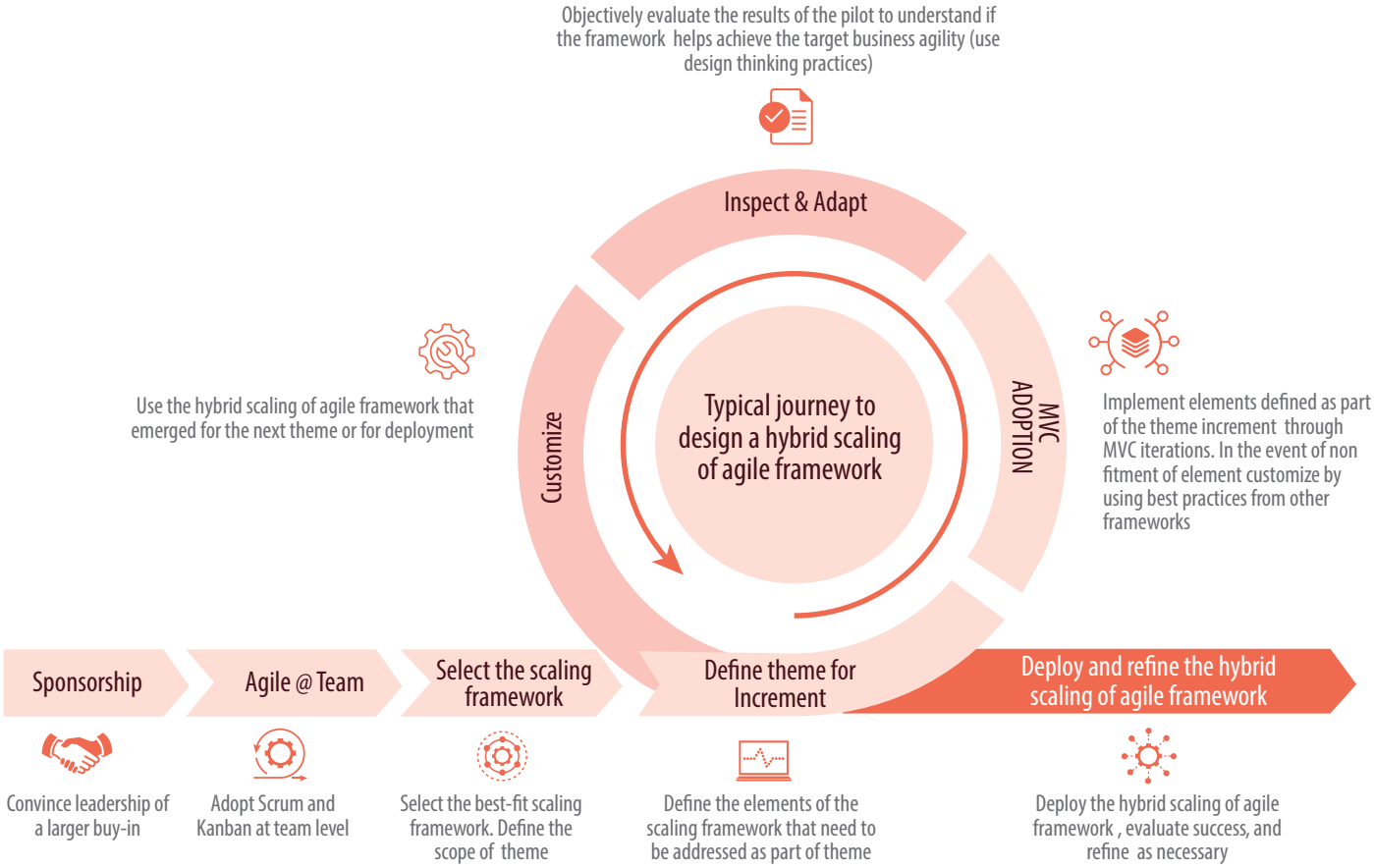
The hybrid scaling of agile therefore provides a way for significant customization of these elements. This customization is an evolutionary process wherein implementation occurs in successive cycles, adapting the elements within each "theme" increment and refining until true fitment occurs (Figure 1).

The result of this evolutionary process is an optimized hybrid framework for the scaling of agile, one that gets better through each successive minimum viable change (MVC) iteration or theme increment. Each stage is discussed below.

Step 1: Sponsorship — The C-suite should drive the initiative, and selecting the right transformation partner is a key to success. This partner sets the vision and then designs a road map in collaboration with key stakeholders, including CXOs, business leads, vertical leads, enterprise architecture experts, and so on.

Step 2: Agile @ Teams — The Agile journey starts out through the building of capabilities at the team level. This requires coaching and training in Scrum, XP and Kanban practices, with these practices matured in the organization before embarking on the Agile scaling journey.

Figure 1. An evolutionary approach for hybrid scaling of agile



Source: Infosys

The approach should be implemented "bottom-up" and driven from the "top-down".

Step 3: Select scaling framework and pilot — The pros and cons of each scaling framework are analyzed. The amount of change needed to fit existing elements to the current organization is determined, and the business outcomes of each are used to select the appropriate scaling framework. Then a pilot project is chosen with buy-in from leadership, considering factors such as Agile maturity, current culture, technology, and the nature of work for the product, program or portfolio. To go ahead with the pilot requires setting up product or program teams, additional roles, ways of working, and tools required for the given scaling framework/pattern and target business agility. From this work, a change management plan is created, driven in an incremental and iterative approach.

Step 4: Define the increment theme to mature — Once a pilot is identified, the elements of the scaling framework that are to be implemented and matured are then defined.

Step 5: MVC adoption for maturing the theme — For each theme increment, the elements that need to be matured are implemented through MVC iterations. If an element doesn't fit, it is customized using practices from other frameworks and blended into the chosen framework through an MVC iteration, known as hybrid scaling of agile. Pivoting out of the increment theme cycle only occurs once all elements of the theme are matured.

Step 6: Inspect and adapt — The next set of elements that need to be matured to achieve the target business agility is defined. This occurs through a workshop, where teams discuss lessons from the last increment theme implementation and use design thinking to discover roadblocks on the path to full element maturity.

Step 7: Define the increment theme to mature — The next increment theme is decided upon, and the set of elements that need to be implemented and matured is defined.

Step 8: Deploy and refine —

Once all themes are matured and the pilot is working in a truly Agile manner, the hybrid scaling of agile framework can be used in other program transformations taking the same evolutionary approach. We thus have a process of continuous improvement, with the framework adapting to achieve true business agility at scale.

One large European bank used this evolutionary hybrid-scaling of agile process. Strategic goals for transformation included:

- Accelerated go-to-market
- Focus on increased customer value
- Higher responsiveness to client and business needs
- Reduced costs while maintaining throughput

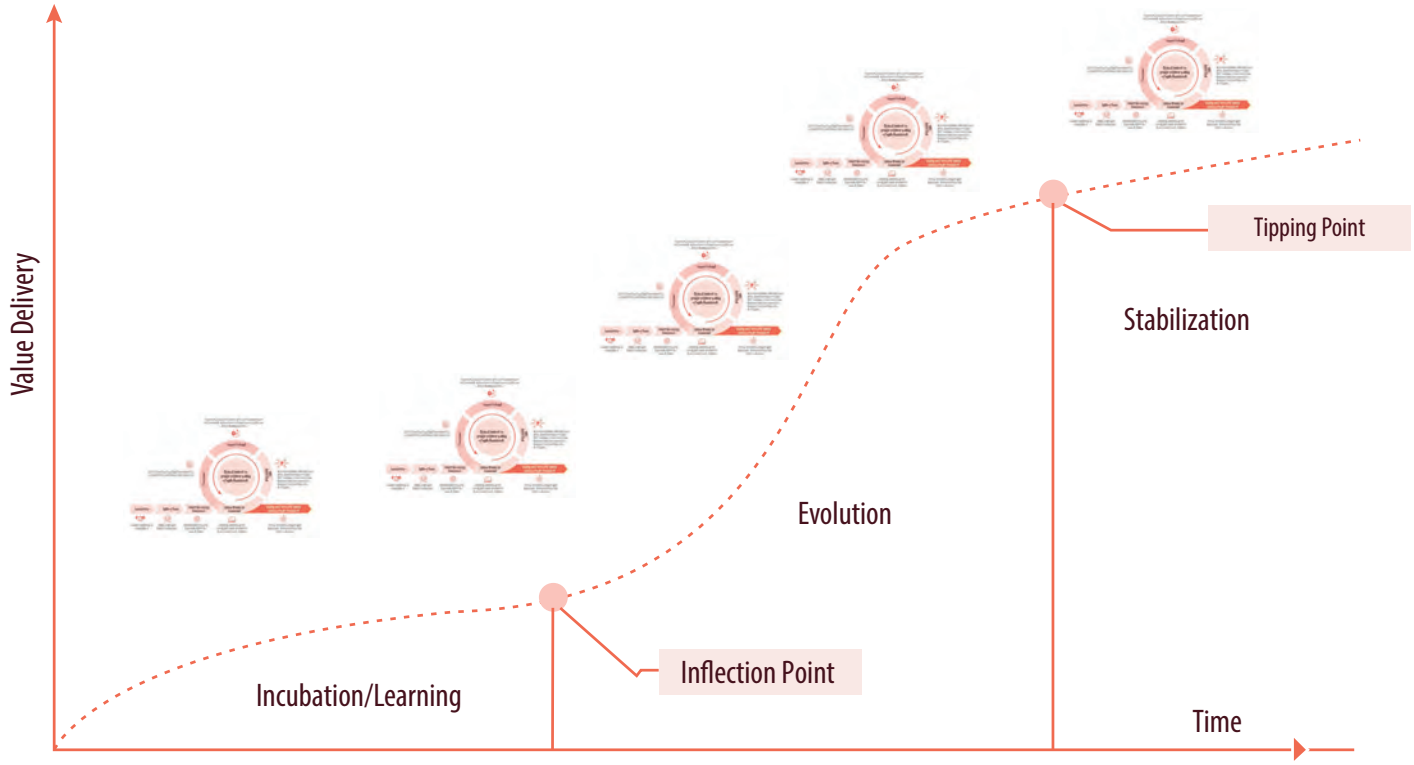
Challenges to these goals were identified; they included siloed teams with multiple handovers; inadequate focus on customer needs; and limited emphasis in the business on value delivery and innovation. The Spotify-inspired agile was adopted, due to its emphasis on lean culture and autonomous Agile teams that could stay close to the customer. For each theme increment, the elements were matured through MVC iterations. However, it was found that business outcomes would only be met if the governance mechanism from SAFe was overlaid on the Spotify pattern, increasing impediment resolution and promoting seamless customer value delivery.

The Infosys Knowledge Institute paper, "Making Spotify-inspired Agile Work," provides another case study for how an insurance company hybridized Spotify-inspired Agile.

In both case study scenarios, and based on experience and learnings from other Agile scaling journeys, a pattern exists that can be applied to other initiatives, as shown in Figure 2.

- Elements are implemented in the incubation stage. Impacts are assessed through themes and suitable MVCs are implemented

Figure 2. Stages on the way to hybrid scaling of agile maturity



Source: Infosys

to address gaps. The inflection point is the stage where significant customizations are identified.

- In the evolution stage, elements of the scaling framework are suitably customized and evolved to fit the gaps identified at the inflection point, enabling continuous discovery and delivery. At the stage of evolution before the tipping point, the framework starts to stabilize and show predictable outcomes.
- Beyond the tipping point, the framework stabilizes and develops consistency, achieving optimal business agility.

Agile at scale is not easy. From our research, we have found that legacy culture gets in the way of scaling Agile initiatives. To grow quickly and find improved outcomes across both business and IT, we've found that organizations need to work on bringing business and IT together, foster a shared sense of purpose across the business, and stay close to the customer.

> Hybrid scaling of Agile takes a firm's major capability and blends it into the chosen framework, achieving better business outcomes

Luckily, Infosys has been here before and knows how to do this at scale. This viewpoint builds on our research, distilling many hours of client work into a summary of how different Agile patterns can coexist with vastly different ways of working, team structures, and value streams.

A critical feature of hybrid scaling of Agile is the ability to take what the current enterprise does really well (its major capability) and blend it into the chosen framework. The final result is an organization that delivers measurable business value as defined by profit, speed to market, and overall growth — not something to consider lightly.

References

1. SAFe 5 for Lean Enterprises, SAFe
2. Scaling Agile @ Spotify with Tribes, Squads, Chapters & Guilds, Henrik Kniberg & Anders Ivarsson, October 2012
3. Spotify Rhythm: How we create focus, Henrik Kniberg, June 1, 2016, Agile Sverige
4. Making Spotify-inspired Agile Work, Tisni Kurian & Dinesh Patwardhan & Harry Keir Hughes, April 2021, Infosys Knowledge Institute
5. How Scrum Scales: Scrum@Scale Framework, Scrum@Scale
6. LeSS Framework, LESS

Authors

Parag Palshikar

Principal Consultant – Infosys
parag_palshikar@infosys.com

Tisni Kurian

Principal Consultant – Infosys
tisni.kurian@infosys.com

Dinesh Patwardhan

Industry Principal – Infosys
dinesh_p05@infosys.com

Harry Keir Hughes

Senior Consultant – Infosys Knowledge Institute
harrykeir.hughes@infosys.com

Producer

Jeff Mosier

Senior Consultant – Infosys Knowledge Institute
jeff.mosier@infosys.com

About Infosys Knowledge Institute

The Infosys Knowledge Institute helps industry leaders develop a deeper understanding of business and technology trends through compelling thought leadership. Our researchers and subject matter experts provide a fact base that aids decision making on critical business and technology issues.
To view our research, visit Infosys Knowledge Institute at infosys.com/IKI

For more information, contact askus@infosys.com

Infosys®
Navigate your next