

*Larry Lawhead*

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# A SAFe Skeptic's Journey

Discovering what's  
important



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# My Journey

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- ❖ Two Conversations
- ❖ Checking my values
- ❖ Adapting a balanced mindset
- ❖ Dealing with my prejudice — Appreciating Jazz
- ❖ Dealing with my fear — Appreciating SAFe
- ❖ Don't be a fundamentalist



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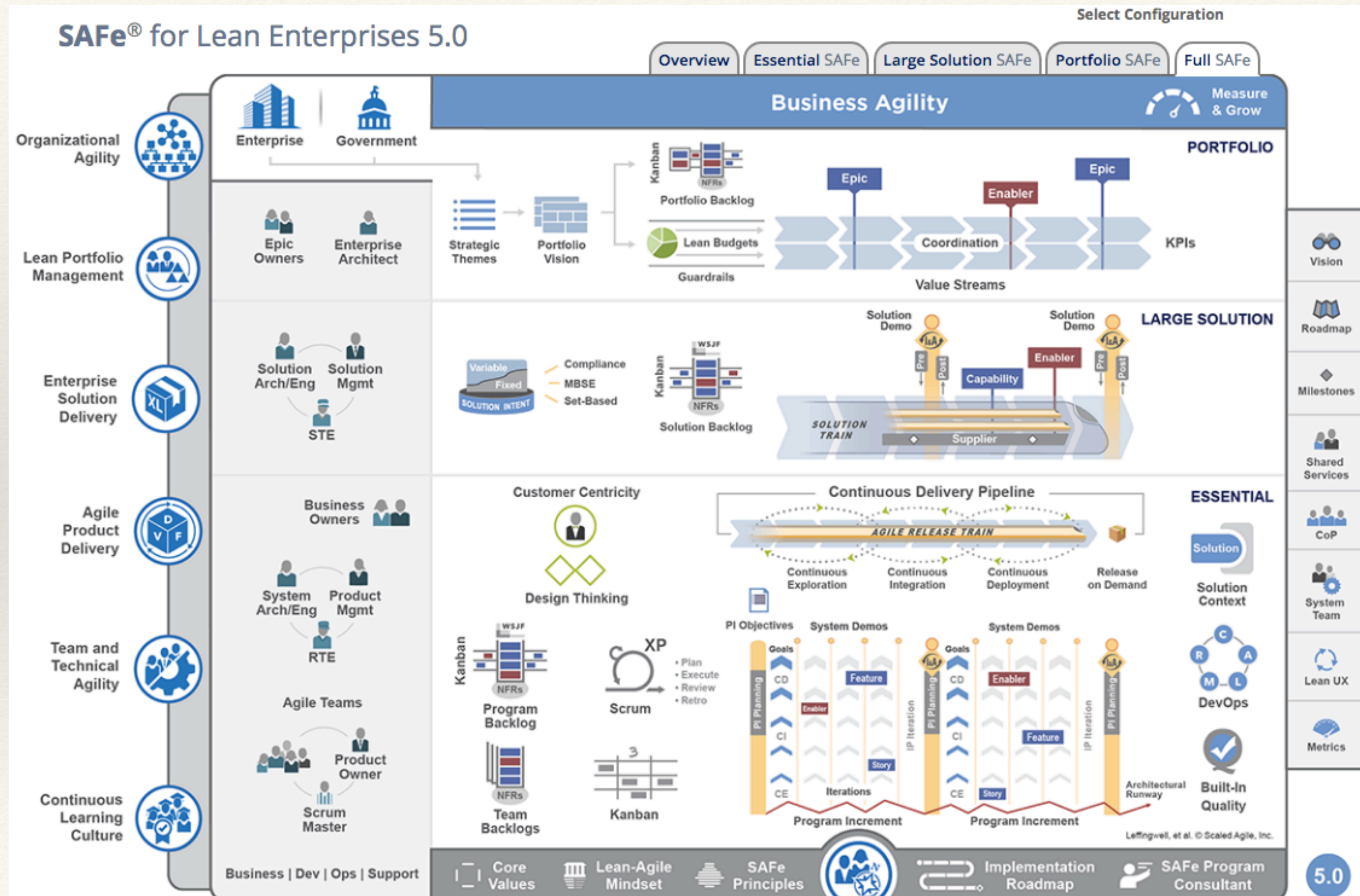
# Two Conversations

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- ❖ Digital Transformation & the pool cleaning company
- ❖ If the shoe doesn't fit, find one that does



But the complexity blows my mind!





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# Does SAFe benefit my clients?

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- ❖ If no other framework fits my customer's needs better, why not SAFe?
- ❖ Because I don't want to mess with its complexity



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# Let's Talk

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- ❖ How have you dealt with a client's bad idea?



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# Checking my values

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- ❖ If bringing value to my customer is paramount...
- ❖ And if for some clients, SAFe is the best option between alternatives such as
  - ❖ Scrum@Scale
  - ❖ LeSS
  - ❖ Custom solution...
- ❖ Then I need to be able to bring them SAFe



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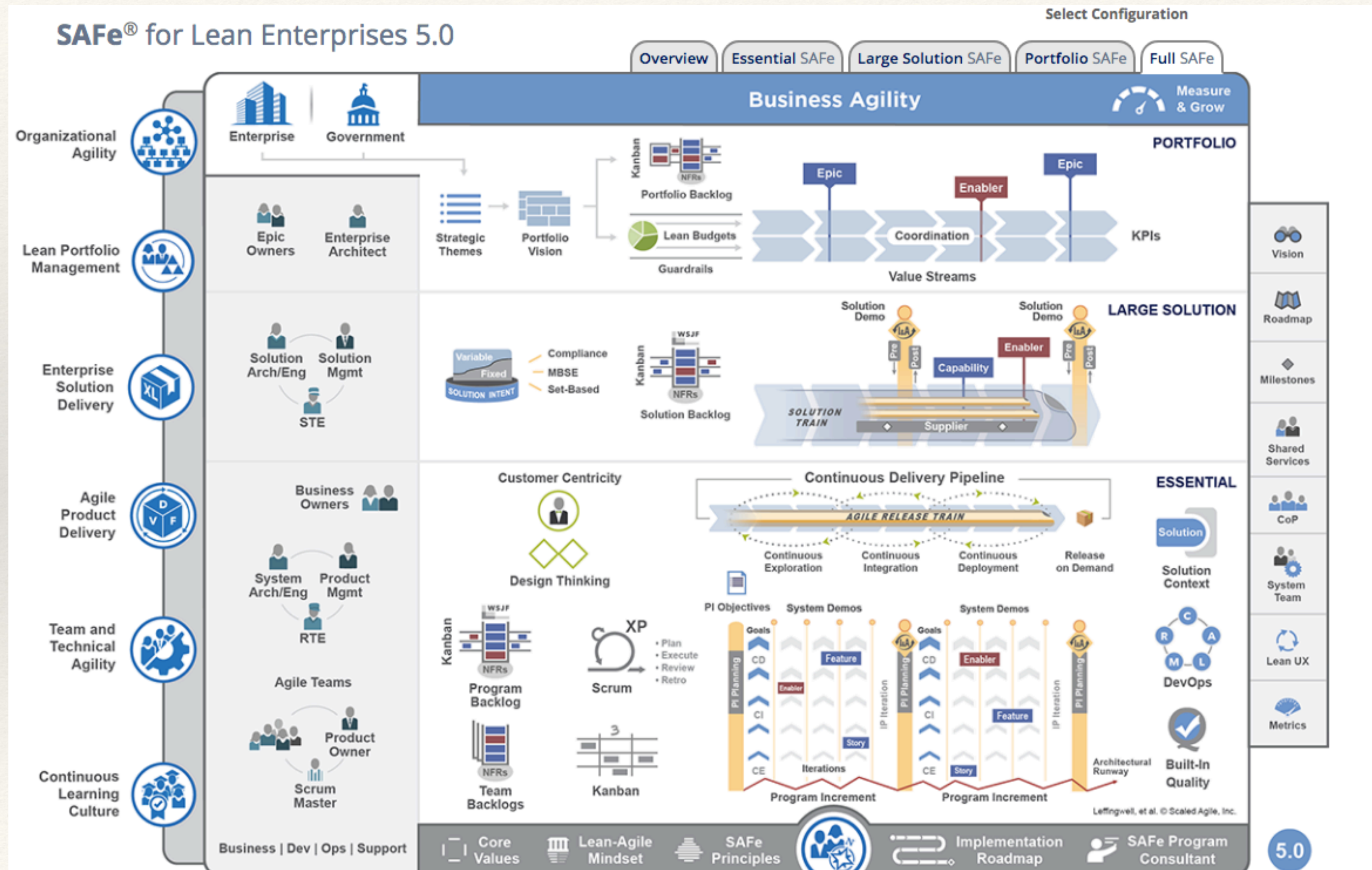
# Adapting a balanced mindset

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- ❖ Value simplicity
- ❖ Without rejecting complexity



# Breaking Down SAFe Complexity





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# SAFe is not a methodology

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- ❖ Start where the organization is ready for change
- ❖ Introduce elements of SAFe as areas in the organization open up
- ❖ Nothing in SAFe if required
- ❖ Respect current structures through a “dual operating system”



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# Thoughts from John Kotter's Accelerate

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- ❖ If the organization is big, then they've done something right
- ❖ Respect current structures and culture, because most of the time they still pay the bills
- ❖ Introduce a “dual operating system” that respects current structures, but allows Agile teams to innovate
- ❖ Connect each side by identifying, managing and funding value streams



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# Dealing with my prejudiced – Appreciating Jazz

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My musical transformation story...

- ❖ Grew up loving Classical Music
  - ❖ Story telling ability of the Romantic Period
  - ❖ Grand structure of the Baroque Period
  - ❖ Rich history behind the artists and their compositions



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# Dealing with my prejudiced – Appreciating Jazz

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- ❖ Learned to love Jazz
  - ❖ Spontaneity
  - ❖ Iterative composition
  - ❖ Unity required to capture the moment
  - ❖ Focus on the audience's energy
  - ❖ “Feeling” the music being played by each of member of the band



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# Dealing with my prejudiced – Appreciating Jazz

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- ❖ My lessons...
- ❖ My life would be a little empty without Jazz music
- ❖ Don't be trapped in a fixed mindset
- ❖ “Searching is its own reward, and sometimes that's all you need.”
- ❖ If you believe you've arrived, you've accomplished nothing



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# Let's Talk

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- ❖ How have you identified that you harbored prejudice against something?
- ❖ How did you deal with it?



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# Understanding the Game

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## **The Infinite Game** by Simon Sinek

Two types of games

- ❖ Finite Game
- ❖ Infinite Game
- ❖ The “Agile” game is a classic Infinite Game



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# Understanding the Game

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## The Finite Game

- ❖ Players are known
- ❖ Rules are fixed
- ❖ Agreed upon objective that ends the game with a winner often being declared
- ❖ Objective: be declared the winner



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# Understanding the Game

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## The Infinite Game

- ❖ Played by known and unknown players
- ❖ No exact rules
- ❖ Length of play is infinite
- ❖ No winners
- ❖ Objective: keep playing the game



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# Dealing with my fear — Appreciating SAFe

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**There is a lot of stuff SAFe we can use**

- ❖ How to recognize an organization's tipping point
- ❖ Linking value streams to the teams which are responsible for delivering that value
- ❖ Defining epics with a value hypotheses and tracking the success or failure of the hypothesis against a MVP



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# More stuff I like

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- ❖ Guiding Investments by Horizon & Lean Budgets
- ❖ Managing the Product Lifecycle & Technology Adaption Curve
- ❖ Learning Culture - Pivot without mercy or guilt
- ❖ Lean Portfolio management
- ❖ Lean Budget Guardrails

*Visit the Scaled Agile Framework site, and search using these terms*



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# Dealing with my fear — Appreciating SAFe

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There is a lot in SAFe we can use...

or maybe not

- ❖ Its too complicated
- ❖ Its too “un-Agile”
- ❖ SAFe is like a vacuum cleaner - it sucks up ideas from everywhere and adds them to the framework
- ❖ Are these arguments more important than **bringing value to your customer?**



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# Dealing with my fear — Appreciating SAFe

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## Additional thoughts...

- ❖ “People don’t resist change, they resist being forced to change.”
- ❖ SAFe has a lot of rich ideas which bring value to the entire Agile community
- ❖ Let's not write-off those ideas, because of fear and prejudice



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# Don't be a fundamentalist

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My dark past...

I was raised a Christian Fundamentalist, we were...

- ❖ Isolated
- ❖ Lonely
- ❖ Fearful
- ❖ Angry



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# Don't be a fundamentalist

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We believed...

- ❖ Lutherans had one foot in hell
- ❖ Catholics were full on idol worshipers
- ❖ Methodists were heretics
- ❖ Pentecostals were demon possessed
- ❖ Politics was corrupt
- ❖ Russia and Communism was going to take over the world



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# Don't be a fundamentalist

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We had ...

- ❖ Very little influence on society (until they found their voice by joining “popular conservatism”)



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# Don't be a fundamentalist

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We must avoid being “Agile Fundamentalists”

- ❖ We can't reject ideas we don't like
- ❖ We should investigate everything
- ❖ Accept what is useful
- ❖ Put everything else in the “parking lot”
- ❖ The moment we've “found the truth”, is the moment we stop searching
- ❖ We cannot “Transform the World of Work” with a closed mind



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# Don't be a fundamentalist

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Fundamentalism is usually “off the ranch” because it does not tolerate diversity of opinion. Thus, the wisdom of crowds cannot apply.

As James Surowiecki explains, the following must be true to glean wisdom from the crowd.

- ❖ Questions must be specific
- ❖ **Group just be diverse**
- ❖ Must act independently



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# Don't be a fundamentalist

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Our Agile community must not go down this dark path

- ❖ Avoid fundamentalism by embracing diversity at every opportunity
- ❖ Apply critical thinking to our conversations and beliefs
- ❖ Speak your mind respectfully



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# SAFe Conclusion

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- ❖ Some clients can benefit from SAFe
- ❖ SAFe is complex, but can be phased in as the organization is ready
- ❖ Enabling customer success is my highest commission
- ❖ Be open for new ideas, even if you don't like the content or messenger
- ❖ Don't be a fundamentalist
  - ❖ Always on the defensive
  - ❖ Without a message or influence



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# Personal Conclusion

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- ❖ Face your prejudice and get honest with yourself
- ❖ Understand we're playing an Infinite Game (no winners or losers)
- ❖ If you believe you've arrived, you've accomplished nothing
- ❖ If we want impact the world of work, we must
  - ❖ Celebrate differences of opinion
  - ❖ Leverage the wisdom of our whole diverse Agile community



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# Contact Informaiton

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- ❖ LinkedIn (send a message)
- ❖ Twitter (@larrylawhead)
- ❖ Email [lawhead5@gmail.com](mailto:lawhead5@gmail.com)



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# Source Material

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Today's organizations are under a lot of pressure

- ❖ The New Geography of Jobs by Enrico Moretti
- ❖ Accelerate by John P. Lottery
- ❖ Project to Product by Mik Kirsten
- ❖ Crossing the Chasm by Geoffrey A. Moore
- ❖ Escape Velocity by Geoffrey A. Moore
- ❖ Linchpin by Seth Godin



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# Source Material

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We need diversity to change the world

- ❖ The Wisdom of Crowds by James Surowiecki
- ❖ The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell
- ❖ Tribes by Seth Godin

*All these books are in audible format*