Breaking News –
SAFe Implementation De-Railed:
The impact of language and societal culture on your distributed SAFe Implementation
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A failed SAFe implementation can be costly and disruptive!

Today we concentrate on leadership, lean-agile values, principles and practices. But, could a lack of Cultural Intelligence be your Achilles heel.
A Successful SAFe Implementation…

Requires a Lean-Agile Competence. But, we must also build SAFe sense of Cultural Intelligence if you want improved:

- ART delivery and cost effectiveness
- Communication and understanding between ART members
- Motivation and morale across ART Teams
- Decision making and execution
- Engagement and commitment of leadership
Most SAFe implementations have Solution Trains (ST) or Agile Release Trains (ART) and Teams that are globally distributed.
Cultural Dimensions

1. Communicating
2. Evaluating
3. Persuading
4. Leading (Authority)
5. Deciding
6. Trusting
7. Disagreeing
8. Scheduling
The discussion today will focus on how:

Language
Relationship with Authority
Communicating the message
Making Decisions

can impact SAFe Implementations,
And how building Cultural Intelligence can help avoid this.
“Lost in Translation”

Differences in language limit relationship growth and undermine effectiveness
The difference between the right word and the almost right word is really a large matter — it’s the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”

- Mark Twain
Language…Going Beyond the Obvious

- Language is a very visible part of culture; conveys information and meaning

- Language is simple but complex:
  - You cannot understand each other. (You speak English, they speak Chinese)
  - Complex paraverbal forms
  - A shared language, but limited vocabulary and or proficiency
Language Differences Undermine Conversation

Language differences undermine the ability of individuals to communicate and work effectively within or across groups:

- Less information exchanged
- Disconnects on understanding theory or application of theory
- Misunderstanding of roles, responsibilities, and how to interact
- Reduced conversation
- Harder to build informal networks
- It can create sense of remoteness
“Say what you mean, mean what you say!”

Inherent communication style influences how we see and treat each other
Chinese culture, children are taught not to just hear the explicit words but also to focus on how something is said, and on what is not said.”

Reading Between the Lines

“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn’t said.”
- Peter Drucker

Reading between the lines requires an understanding that:

- How cultures communicate is influenced by history, language categorization, and diversity or homogeneity
- Cultures not only speak different languages, but also communicate messages differently.
**Message Communication is Culturally Different**

![Chart showing low-context and high-context communication]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low-Context Communication</th>
<th>High-Context Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is precise, simple and clear</td>
<td>Is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages are expressed in detail and receiver is expected to understand at face value</td>
<td>Message expression is more limited and receiver is expected to read between the lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition or follow-up are used for clarification</td>
<td>Receiver is trusted to have understood the message</td>
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In Japan, we implicitly learn, as we are growing up, to communicate between the lines and to listen between the lines when others are speaking.”

The cultural style of communication will influence how individuals or groups will perceive the messenger

**Low-Context Example**

**Scenario:** An American VP of Sales for a large food company that travels the world negotiating deals with suppliers in Asia and Europe.

“I have always believed that people say what they mean and mean what they say, and if they don’t they are lying”

**High-Context Example**

**Scenario:** An American consultant, Erin, working with an Italian colleague, Paolo, on an engagement. Erin has little time and needs Paolo to take on the majority of the work. Paolo acknowledges this. During the conversation, but Erin still worries about time and commitment and restates the time commitment expectation to Paolo repeatedly.

“Erin, I am not a child. I was not born yesterday. I understand what your point is.”

“They call me Mr. President”

Perception of authority influences our behavior
In China, the boss is always right,” says Steve Henning, reflecting on his years of managing in Beijing. “And even when the boss is very wrong, he is still right.”

It’s all about Power Distance and Leadership

“…the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.”

– Hofstede, 1971

Power Distance considers how degrees of inequality between individuals and leadership drive perceptions of authority, for example:

- Respect or deference given to an authority figure.
- Adhering to hierarchy or skipping levels.
- Aura of authority.

Perception on authority differs depending on the leadership style, for example:

- Egalitarian leadership, authority is acting as part of the team.
- Hierarchical leadership, authority is setting yourself apart.
Leadership Style Influences the Perception of Authority


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Egalitarian Leadership</th>
<th>Hierarchal Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority positioned as more equivalent with subordinates</td>
<td>Authority positioned as not equal with subordinates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat organizational structures</td>
<td>Fixed hierarchical structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders facilitate more than direct</td>
<td>Leaders are strong directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication do not follow chain of authority</td>
<td>Communications follow chain of authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The style of leadership culture will have an impact on how an individual or group will behave in relationship to their boss

**Egalitarian Example**

**Scenario:** Australian executive that rode his bike to work everyday, which his Australian staff thought was great. When transferred to Beijing, China, he chooses to continue this practice, and so rode his bike to work every day.

“*My team was humiliated that their boss rode a bike to work everyday like a common person*”

**Hierarchical Example**

**Scenario:** A Mexican VP, transfers from a subsidiary company to head office in Amsterdam to manage operations there. During a meeting with his team to roll out his new approach, they challenge him.

…”I will schedule a meeting in order to roll out a new process, and during the meeting my team starts challenging the Process...ignoring my process altogether, and paying no attention to the fact that they work for me. Sometimes I just watch them astounded. Where is the respect?”
“Great we have a decision”

Our perception of a ‘decision’, biases our action and opinion.
"After much grief and frustration, we have concluded that for Americans, a ‘decision’ is simply an agreement to continue discussions…but for a German, who sees a decision as a final commitment to march forward on a plan”
Great we have a decision! ... umm not so fast!

“...consensus is a four letter word! Consensus fails to satisfy anyone’s desires, but does so equally, and so it’s accepted. It is through seeking consensus we get mediocrity”


- Perceptions of authority can be misleading.
  - We assume Egalitarian cultures are consensus decision makers, and hierarchical are unilateral.
  - However, American authority is egalitarian, but decisions are unilateral. While the Japanese and Germans are hierarchical, but decisions are consensual.

- Doing business across cultures you can’t assume.
  - You need to understand their perceptions of authority and how decisions are made.
### Decision Making is Top-Down or Consensus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consensual</th>
<th>Top-Down</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision made in groups through unanimous agreement</td>
<td>Decisions made by individual, usually the boss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision are commitments, fixed, and inflexible</td>
<td>Decision are just agreements on a direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow the plan</td>
<td>Allow for flexibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The style of decision making impacts how an individuals or groups will decide, and their perceptions of the other side

**Consensual Example**

**Scenario:** A Japanese pharmaceutical is considering discontinuing a new product. A UK expert who's team is impacted is invited to Tokyo to present his counter arguments. Despite good counter arguments the Japanese executives still decide to discontinue the product.

“What I learned from the experience, is that, if I need to influence the executives in Tokyo, I need to get involved early in the discussion…”

**Top-down Example**

**Scenario:** A merger between a German and American company. The German and Americans come to a decision in first meeting, “Great we have a decision”. The Germans spend time diligently implementing. Weeks later the Americans change their mind.

“…for us this is a commitment”.

“After much grief and frustration, we have concluded that for Americans, a ‘decision’ is simply an agreement to continue discussions.”

SAFe is global, so is Culture!

Language and Societal Culture can impact Implementing and Executing SAFe
Culture eats strategy for breakfast.”

- Peter Drucker
SAFe Implementations are Typically Globally Distributed

In SAFe, the concept of the team is extended to teams-of-teams. The global nature for the ARTs and teams can be inter-team.
The impacts of language and societal culture will not be unique to any single event when implementing or executing SAFe…

They are ubiquitous!
Deciding to take the Train, which Train?

- Getting through the tipping point
- Initial training of leaders and SPCs
  - LSAFe / SAFe for Government
  - Implementing SAFe
- Determining Value Streams
  - Global distribution of Development Value Stream
- Transformation team / LACE
Choosing the Right Train

Choosing to take the right train is important. Language and societal cultural differences can impact the tipping point, training, and Value Stream / ART selection.

- **Language**
  - Less information exchanged
  - Disconnects on SAFe
  - Difficult to build relationship
  - Create sense of remoteness

- **Communication**
  - Distrust from perception of secrecy or being condescended
  - Miscommunication, message not understood

- **Authority**
  - Defer to the boss or open disagreement
  - Take action or needs boss’s permission
  - Meeting with people at the wrong level, sitting in the right spot

- **Decision Making**
  - Decision made. Big “D” or little “d”
  - Did the right person make the decision
Lunching an ART requires training key roles and local leadership
- SA, POPM, SSM, SP, ARCH

Significant preparation to launch

PI Planning
Any new teams / groups go through a number of development stages and develop Shared Mental Models (SMM)

- **Task-Specific**
- **Task-Related**
- **Team**
- **Attitude**

**Form** - Getting to know each other and understanding the work

**Storm** - Focus on work and roles, conflicts and misunderstandings surface

**Norm** - Conflicts abate, doing the work, developing unity and social norms

**Perform** - Normalized behavior and stability, self-managing differences and proficiency


SMs are mental representations of knowledge that team members share by team members. SMMs include:

- **Task-Specific**: Focuses on knowledge acquisition about procedures and courses of action
- **Task-Related**: Focuses on understanding and agreeing on team roles, responsibilities, and interactions
- **Team**: Focuses on knowledge of others' preferences, strengths, and weaknesses
- **Attitude**: Focuses on knowledge of teammates attitudes

© Bruce Tuckman 1965 original 'Forming-storming-norming-performing' concept
Knowledge and preparation are key to launching an ART. Language and societal culture can have a significant impact on training and PI Planning.

**Language**
- Misunderstanding theory
- Less exchange of ideas
- Reduced building of relationships
- Individuals might feel isolated

**Communication**
- Messages misinterpreted during discussions and interactive work
- Delays / frustrations - controlling verbose discussion

**Authority**
- Individuals might not interact if boss is present
- Discord if open discussion or disagreement with boss present
- Take action or needs boss’s permission

**Decision Making**
- Decision made. Big “D” or little “d”
- Did the right person make the decision
Keeping the Train on Schedule and Healthy

- Training (DevOps, APSM, and ASE)
- PI Planning
- Sync (PO, SoS, ART)
- System and PI System Demo
- I&A
- Program Backlog Review and Prioritization
- Daily intra and inter Program collaboration
Keeping the Train on Schedule and Healthy

- Training (DevOps, APSM, and ASE)
- Daily Stand-up
- PI Planning
- Iteration Reviews
- Sync (PO, SoS, ART)
- Retrospectives
- System and PI System Demo
- BA Collaboration
- Program Backlog Review and Prioritization
- Daily intra and inter Program collaboration
Disrupting Behavioral Norms and Social Maturity

As the train travels, behavioral normalization continues, but challenges with language and communication specifically can inhibit development of Intra and Inter team behavioral norms and social maturity.
Collaborative planning and learning make the journey smoother. Language and societal cultural differences can be disruptive to ART and Team events.

- **Language**
  - Misunderstanding information / directions
  - Less exchange of ideas
  - Reduced building of relationships
  - Teams / Individuals might feel isolated

- **Communication**
  - Distrust from perception of secrecy or being condescended
  - Miscommunication, message not understood

- **Authority**
  - Individuals might not interact if boss is present
  - Discord if open discussion or disagreement with boss present
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- **Decision Making**
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Next Station. Do we change Trains?

- Advanced training
  - SASM, RTE
  - Implementing SAFe

- More Development Value Streams or ARTs

- Extending to a Portfolio that has distributed members
Extending the Journey or a Different Journey

Extending across the Portfolio brings a higher degree of complexity. Language and societal cultural differences will be exacerbated in more intensive political environments.

### Extending to portfolio
- Transforming the portfolio to Lean
- Development VS and launching more ARTS.

Impacts still relevant for all the dimensions, impacting:
- Training, VS Workshops, Launch Preparations, etc.

### Authority
- The boss will be present! Will the all challenges be discussed
- Will you have to worry about who's in the room, where they sit, who they can talk to
- Transparency or Opacity

### Decision Making
- Decision made. Big “D” or little ”d"
- Did the right person make the decision
- Can decentralized decision making really be achieved
What does a cultural derailment look like?

Nobody really knows!

You really can’t see it. It surfaces as delays, distrust, disharmony, poor delivery, etc.
Building Cultural Intelligence into your SAFe Implementation Requires:
Everything begins with an education!

- Educate critical roles on the importance of language and societal culture
  - Stakeholders
  - RTE
  - Scrum Masters
  - Product Management
  - System Architecture
  - SPCs
  - Transformation Team / LACE
- Hire with cultural diversity in mind
- Engage a cultural consultant
Discover Cultural Diversity

The tipping point is your first clue

Research the company your transforming
Understand the cultural global nature of the organization
Understand the cultural characteristic of the executives
Know some of their language, in China try: "Hello, I am very happy to meet you"
Be prepared for the global nature of training and workshops

也许Dean Leffingwell 将会进行一个三分钟的中文演讲。不是今天我所认为的

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The Development Value Stream is a direct indicator of potential cultural diversity:
- Here you can see how global the Development Value Stream and ARTs will be
- Consider culturally homogenous ARTs
Minimize Cultural Diversity (if you can)

- **Role Assignment during ART launch preparations**
  - Here you can choose how cultural diversity will interact within the ART

- **Consider**
  - Culturally homogenous teams
  - Foreign language trainers or interpreters
Map relative cultural positions across Cultural Dimensions

Comparison of countries correlating Authority and Decision Making

Comparison of countries across 8 dimensions of culture

https://www.erinmeyer.com/tools/

Discuss your different cultural perspectives

“Conversation isn't about proving a point; true conversation is about going on a journey with the people you are speaking with.” - Ricky Maye
A failed SAFe implementation can be costly and disruptive!

We want to focus on leadership, lean-agile values, principles and practices. But, you need to focus on cultural intelligence as well!
Get Started!

Build your Cultural Intelligence into your Development Value Streams and ARTs:

1. Get educated… build the foundation for cultural intelligence
2. Explore your client’s cultural diversity
3. Understand the cultural distribution
4. Ensure cultural awareness and balance
5. Map and analyze the relative cultural makeup
6. Employ experts to help guide you
Having Cultural Intelligence in a SAFe implementation can:

- Improve communication, understanding and execution between ART members.
- Improve motivation and morale of cross cultural ART Teams.
- Enable decision making that is better understood and more equitable.
- Enlighten leadership about cultural characteristics influencing the ART.
- Improve the cost / benefit of the ARTs as teams and teams-of-teams are more effective and harmonious.
Questions
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