

Organisations Scaling Agile in Denmark 2021

Majken Vildrik Thougaard

M.Sc., Ph.D.

Independent Agile Consultant & Advisor at VILMA Consulting



Introduction

Curiosity started this article in 2019. Well, actually it started the version of the paper from in 2019 and the answers provided pushed for an update and added further to the curiosity. For were the answers universally valid, at least for Denmark? Or had we only seen a glimpse of a timelapse?

Knowing what I know not, and you are about to read, then it's fair to conclude that the Danish scene for organisations scaling agile has not converged on neither number, members nor preferred framework.

We collected data for the survey from September to November 2021, so that organisations had returned to office after the Covid-19 related lockdown and limited access to offices. We used the same questions and data collection method as for the 2019 and 2020 survey, to make the numbers comparable across the three years.

I hope you find it worth reading.

And his paper would not have been possible without all the people delivering insights on their organisation and hints on other relevant organisations to include.

Thank you all!

Frameworks for Scaling Agile

Scaling agile is not about doing stuff faster. It's about being able to deliver stuff at all.

There are basically three ways to scale an agile organisation:

- Apply a well-defined framework for scaling agile
- Define your own structure for scaling agile, -or
- Form a hybrid of the two.

And in addition, we have the seemingly simple alternative to descale rather than (or before) scaling. For many this option only appears after a period of working towards scaling or even after time implementing a scaling framework.

The four major and well-defined frameworks for scaling agile are SAFe, Nexus, Scrum@Scale and LeSS. They are all well-defined with detailed descriptions, applied elsewhere in practise and have a formal learning/ certification path. But additional frameworks/ concepts are described and applied in and outside Denmark.¹

[Scrum@Scale](https://scrumatscale.com) (scrumatscale.com) and [Nexus](https://scrum.org/resources/nexus-guide) (scrum.org/resources/nexus-guide) are both further developments of the well-known agile framework [Scrum](https://scrum.org) (scrum.org), and are formed around repeating the structures of Scrum at multiple levels of the organisation. Scrum@Scale has been developed by Jeff Sutherland (one of the two co-founders of Scrum) while Nexus was co-created by Ken Schwaber (the other of the two co-founders of Scrum). In other words, they are both based on the condition that the structure that works for teams, can work for teams of teams and all the way up to the portfolio level, although there are clear differences in how to address the two.

[SAFe](https://scaledagileframework.com) (scaledagileframework.com) was the first of the scaling agile framework to be well-described and learning/ certifications programs. SAFe has a very clear focus on the organisation's overall level and how overall priorities descends to manageable items at team level. SAFe is inspired by Lean Portfolio Management. One objective is to have a lean enterprise with a clear description of roles and responsibilities. SAFe is not directly linked to neither Scrum nor Kanban, as teams are free chose their own operating structure although within boundaries, like iterations. However, SAFe is by many regarded as applying scrum or Kanban at the team level.

[LeSS](https://less.works) (less.works) is the framework which put most emphasis on the complexity induced by bringing larger number of peoples together to work on the same thing. And therefore, LeSS is most insisting on *simplifying* rather that *adding to* an organisation. 'LeSS is more' or simplify the organisational complexity (descale), prior to scaling the organisation. When the amount of complexity, internal constraints and dependencies has been reduced, and thereby that the scaled setup also becomes less complex, only then scaling should be added. LeSS is also a further development of scrum.

Further, a number of organisations has been inspired by the structure formerly applied at Spotify. That has not been described to the same extent as the above-mentioned frameworks, but a number of videos can be found e.g. on YouTube².

The hybrids – which are combinations of frameworks and/or own developed structures - often combine one structure for the team level with one or more structures for the portfolio level. In some cases, different structures are applied for different (business) areas at the team level. The common

¹ Spotify, DSDM, MVB, FAST, Crystal etc.

² Two examples are https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FuYyX27GKk&ab_channel=greg81805 and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ddpm4lObKeA>

denominator for these is that they are built around the people, the product and the business they operate in. Therefore, none of these are identical across organisations although they share patterns.

Data collection method

Data has been collected during fall in 2021³ via LinkedIn, mail, Statistics Denmark (The National Bureau of Statistics), public presentations, www, and other public sources.

The same questions have been asked to all organisations and these are:

1. Name of organisation:
2. Which variant of scaling framework (or hybrid) is used:
3. Size of the scaling, i.e. number of people, teams, trains, tribes, guilds that currently work in the scaled agile setup:
4. Any other information on your way of working that may be relevant for other organisations to learn about

We have collected all answers and merged the data with data from other sources.

We reached out to more than 140 screened and selected organisations which, has given a fine overview of the diversity of the agile environment in Denmark. Few of these organisations have chosen to not be listed for 2021 due to various reasons. We hope to see them reappearing on the list for 2022.

A number of the contacted organisations have actively chosen not to scale agile/ not to use a scaling agile framework, or even descale prior to scaling, which is quite consistent with *Individuals and interactions over processes and tools* from the agile manifesto.

Number of organisations scaling agile in Denmark

We have identified 49 Danish organisations scaling agile. Of these 12 are new on the list for 2021.

Drilling down into the numbers, we see that if we combine the 30% (15) of the organisations scaling agile operate within the financial and insurance domain, with the 10% (5) organisations in the IT domain, we see that almost half of the organisations scaling agile are within the first areas to embark on a scaling agile journey. However, that also reveals that more than half are from other business domains and therefore represents a spread to new areas.

Healthcare, Public sector and Production related organisations each amount to 12% (6) for each. The numbers can be seen in Table 1 below.

³ Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, we aimed for normalisation of the workplaces before collection of data, to improve the response rate and the validity of the responses given.

Domain	Organisations (number)
Retail	5
Energy	3
Financial	9
Insurance	5
Healthcare	6
IT	5
Media	2
Public sector	6
Production	6
Transportation	2
Total	49

Table 1: Number of organisations scaling agile in Denmark by domains

The geographical distribution of organisations scaling agile in Denmark

A natural question to ask is where the organisations scaling agile are located. And whether they are all in the same area or spread across Denmark.

In order to scale agile, your organisation is likely larger than 100 employees and often counted in thousands. Some of these are placed in on more than one location in Denmark, but for the overview here we count organisations only by the headquarters address.

Organisations scaling agile are to a very high degree located in the biggest cities in Denmark, with 2/3 (33) in the Capital Region, and almost half in central Copenhagen (Copenhagen and Frederiksberg Kommune).

The Central Jutland Region covering the second largest city in Denmark, accounts for 14% (7) of the organisations scaling agile. The Southern Denmark Region has 6 organisations while 3 have been identified in the Zealand Region. Again in 2021, no organisations scaling agile are identified in the Northern Jutland Region, despite 6% of all organisations with more than 250 employees are located there. The distribution is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

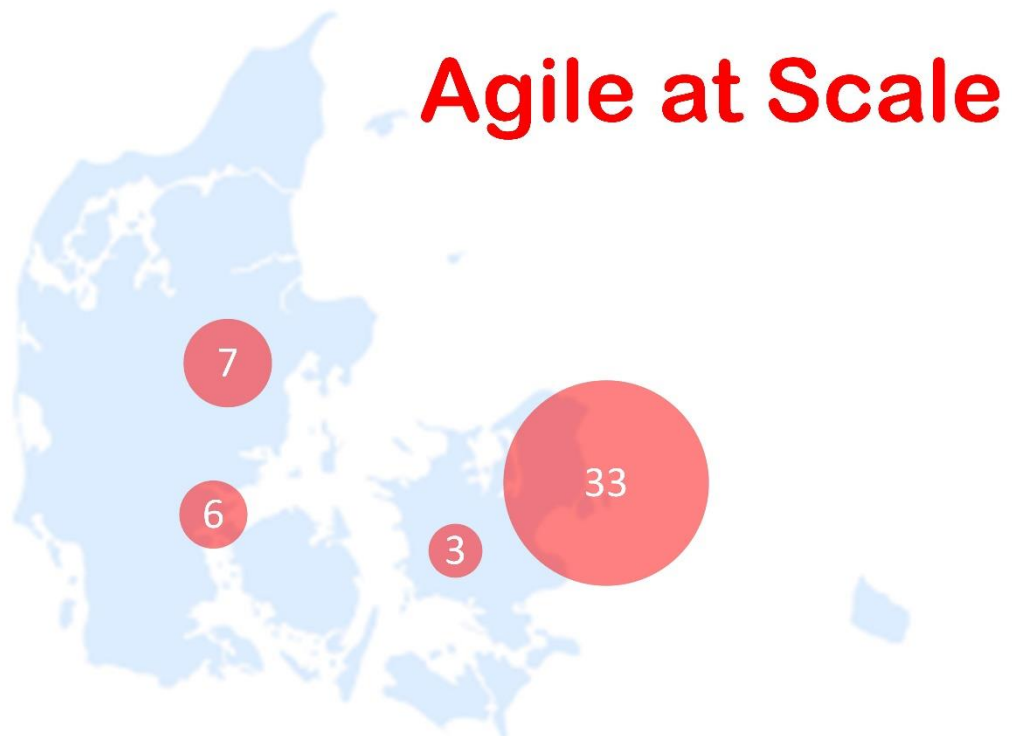


Figure 1: Geographical distribution of organisations scaling agile in Denmark

The distribution across regions can be seen in Table 2 below. In addition, the number of organisations with 50-249 and 250+ employees have been added⁴, so that the relative number of scaled agile organisations in each region may be compared. Not surprisingly, there are most medium sized (50-249 employees) and large (250+ employees) organisations in the Capital region by 39% (1482) and 51% (435) respectively. However, Central Jutland and Southern Denmark regions each total up to 22% respectively 20% of the medium sized organisations and 19% respective 17% of the larger organisations.

Despite that the Capital Regions has half (51%) of the larger organisations it still accounts for 2/3 (67%) of the scaled agile organisations in Denmark. At the opposite end of the scale is the Northern Jutland Region accounting for 6% of the larger organisations but with the first organisation scaling agile yet to be identified. All the numbers can be found in Table 2 below.

⁴ Number of organisations are for 2019, the most recent year available from Statistics Denmark. We do not expect numbers to have changed significantly since then.

Organisations (number)	50-249 employees	250 employees or more	Organisations with more than 50 employees	Scaling agile	Fraction % (50+ employees)	Fraction % (250+ employees)
Denmark total	3813	855	4668	49	1,0%	5,7%
Capital	1482	435	1917	33	1,7%	7,6%
Zealand	360	66	426	3	0,7%	4,5%
Southern Denmark	776	145	921	6	0,7%	4,1%
Central Jutland	827	160	987	7	0,7%	4,4%
Northern Jutland	368	49	417	0	0,0%	0,0%

Table 2: Number of organisations scaling agile in Denmark distributed on regions

Number of persons working in a scaling agile setup in Denmark

As more and more organisations chose to apply agile or scaling agile ways of working, more and more people become experienced in agile ways of working; either directly as part of an agile development team or as ScrumMaster, Product Owner or in any other role supporting the agile organisation.

More agile certifications in frameworks as well as in specific roles emerge via the established frameworks, and this has further caused that the number of local people able to certify others is rising as well.

The number of persons that are part of an agile setup is computed via direct reporting (number of persons), in combination with number of scaled groups (e.g. teams or agile release trains) 'guestimated' to be 8 respective 80 persons, on average.

We have calculated the total number of people currently working in a scaling agile organisation in Denmark as at least 23,000 people, for the organisations on the list. However, to total number of people in Denmark who is or has worked in a scaling agile organisation, is significantly higher. This is partly due to people who previously but not currently are employed in a scaling agile organisation.

Further, there is a substantial number of people working agile (but not in an organisation scaling agile). Therefore, recruiting experienced scaling agile employees is steadily becoming easier as supply increases.

Scaling agile frameworks applied in Denmark

In Denmark, all well-established frameworks for scaling agile are applied, either in the pure form, or in hybrids with other frameworks.

The most frequently used framework by organisations is SAFe by 71% (35 of 49), while 57% (28) use a hybrid of more than one framework and/or other elements (e.g. Lean Portfolio Management).

Important to notice here, is that the use of a hybrid approach has more than doubled since 2019, both in terms of fraction and absolute number of organisations. This indicate that organisations are more willing to experiment with the applied method and that one-size-fits-all may be up for debate.

SAFe is still the scaling agile framework used by most organisations when we consider both pure SAFe and SAFe-in-hybrids use of it. More than half of the organisations using SAFe are as SAFe-in-hybrids.

Figure 2 below, the show to which extent each scaled agile organisation use each scaling variant. As an example, 8% of the scaling agile organisations have included LeSS in their setup. Note, that the total number of scaling frameworks applied is far over 100% as some hybrids make use of other scaling agile frameworks and some even of 2 or more.

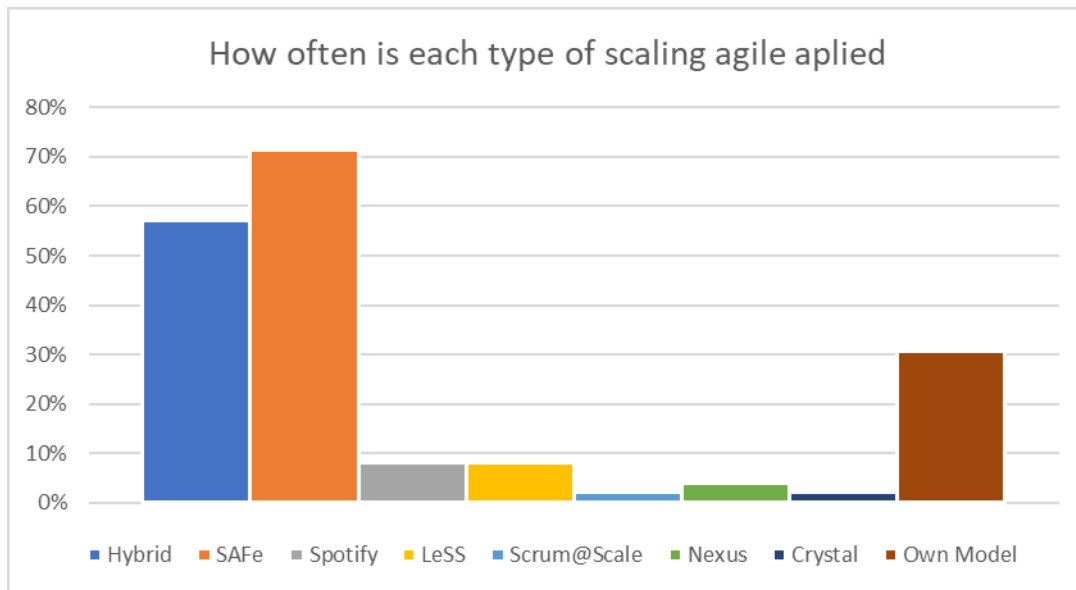


Figure 2 Distribution across types of scaled agile frameworks applied – across ‘pure’ implementations and hybrids

Among the organisations who scale agile by use of a hybrid approach, SAFe is by far the preferred source of building blocks. This is due to two reasons; first organisations who used to be pure-SAFE who have now evolved to a hybrid approach. And secondly, new scaling agile organisations who look for inspiration in the SAFe framework.

Further observations

The silver bullet, the one-size-that-fits-all within scaling agile in Denmark, is not a picture painted by the data we have. Rather, we have found support for renewed appetite for experimenting and trusting the people in the organisations in finding their new agile ways of working, as the spread across frameworks and in particular the traction gained by hybrid models has increased.

Looking only at the new organisations on the list, then 75% of them are scaling agile by use of a hybrid approach, while only 25% employ a well-defined scaling framework. Drilling into the business domains, we see that a hybrid approach is being used in all domains, although the extend varies.

Among the non-new organisation on the list, 54% apply a hybrid approach.

Focusing on the scaling agile organisations who use one approach, the strongest pattern is that 71% of them apply SAFe. So SAFe is still a key player among the organisations scaling agile in Denmark although there is a slight move from ‘pure-SAFE’ to ‘pure-and-hybrid-with-SAFE’ dominance.

Pandemic impact

Needless to say, the world has changes during the past 2 years. And so has the collaboration patterns, with extensive use of distributed teams (in reality as distributed individuals) working from home has pushed the need for coordination and slicing work to manageable sizes. However, we do not see in the data, that Covid-19 has been added as reason for initiating, changing nor terminating the path for the scaling agile journey.

Advice from the organisations scaling agile

Advice often comes in more forms; those explicitly stated and those revealed from current and/or changed behaviour.

The pieces of advice passed on from other organisations are *to consider what your need is* and *assess how much of a scaling agile framework you need*. The next advice is to *support experimentation*, by supporting that there is one-size-fits-all solution, not even within an organisation.

Looking across the actual behaviour across the organisations, we see that more organisations have started experimentation and now support multiple paradigms, although generally these are anchored in core agile values for the organisation.

Organisations scaling agile in Denmark

We have listed the organisations alphabetically in each category below.

Hybrids

- Bankdata
- BESTSELLER IT
- DANFOSS A/S
- Danske Bank
- DXC Technology
- Energinet
- e-nettet
- Forca
- Grundfos A/S
- IBM Danmark ApS
- Industriens Pension
- JYSK
- Kriminalforsorgen
- Lego Group
- Maersk
- Nordea
- NOVO NORDISK A/S
- Pandora
- RADIOMETER
- Sampension
- Seges
- SimCorp A/S

- Sitecore A/S
- TV 2 DANMARK
- Udviklings- og Forenklingsstyrelsen
- Universal Robots A/S
- Velliv
- WS Audiology

SAFe

- Arbejdstilsynet
- Arla
- ATP
- BEC
- Demant
- DSB
- GN Hearing A/S
- GN Jabra
- Københavns Kommune - Koncern IT
- Landbrugsstyrelsen
- Nets Denmark A/S
- Ørsted
- PFA
- Sundhedsplatformen⁵
- Tryg Forsikring

'Spotify'

- VP Securities
- YouTv

Other

- Nemlig.com
- Salling Group A/S
- SGRE
- Planday

What about the future

Can we, solely based on this, reason about the natural level for organisations scaling agile in Denmark? The brief answer is no.

But could we make a forecast? Well yes. A simple forecast is to assume organisations in all regions scale agile to the same extend as the Capital Region. Then there would be 80 (+60%) scaling agile organisations in Denmark, in total employing 35,000+ people in a scaling agile setup.

Currently, there is no reason to anticipate that the full level of organisations scaling agile has been reached in the Capital Region, wherefore there is also reason to anticipate an even larger level for Denmark as a whole. However, the unrealised potential here cannot readily be assessed.

⁵ Sundhedsplatformen is a collaboration across Capital Region and Region Zealand.

Conclusion

In 2021 we see that scaling agile is a practise being applied in Denmark among the large organisations, and not only as a *let's try this for a quarter*-experiment but as a lasting approach for a substantial part of the organisation.

We have seen a substantial number of new organisations on the list indicating scaling agile was not an idea of the past, but also a relevant to approach the challenges of tomorrow.

In the data we see a shift in how new organisations approach agile and focus on a hybrid approach to a larger extend than earlier. We also see that hybrids are used across business domains and not only by some.

With the inflow of new organisations on the list in 2021 it is fair to expect that new organisations may also be added to the list for 2022. We hope that these may find inspiration among those already listed not only within their domain but also within their geographical region.

Good luck with your agile journey!

Majken Vildrik Thougard

Independent Agile Catalyst & Owner of VILMA Consulting ApS