An Experiment in Investment Decision-Making

Agile Portfolio Management in a Research Library

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Strategic landscape

• We serve a knowledge organization

• Competitive environment for information services delivery

• Institutional presumption of our value is not assured

• Grow non-commodity offerings
What does that call for?

• To understand our customers’ evolving needs

• To provide responsive services aligned with organizational goals

• To understand the evolving information and scholarly ecosystems

• To innovate, and sustain that innovation, across all of our portfolio

“Merge” by peter scott thomas under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
Strategic plan(ning)

• Five-year strategic planning in 2021

• Facilitated, with full group participation

• Key elements: goal → strategy → action
hierarchy, mission, vision, values

• Revised goals + values in 2023

• Intend ongoing full group quarterly review

“Rocket Factory - Credit to http://homedust.com/”
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Mission

We amplify the Laboratory’s mission-driven research by enabling LANL researchers to learn powerful skills and access expertise and scholarly information, developing new methods for managing data and information, and connecting researchers with colleagues and the broader scientific ecosystem.
Vision

We are shaping the future of research libraries: **digital-first** institutions with a **seamless user experience** and services that evolve with the **open and classified information** ecosystem, and where **collaboration and open scientific research** are integral.

*NASA’s SpaceX Crew-6 Launch (NHQ202303020015)*
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**Goals (or, well, priorities)**

1. Develop and enhance strategic partnerships
2. Steward Laboratory STI
3. Enable access for humans and machines to relevant research content
4. Cultivate and foster an inclusive environment
5. Advance open science

“Nets” by ~jard~ under CC BY 2.0
The Agile turn

• Strategic plan(ning) necessary but not sufficient

• Need the foundation of mission, vision, values

• Need to be able to discover what’s most important

• Need to be a learning and “leaderful” organization
Agile mindset + practice

- Core tenets: experimentation, adaptation, customer-centricity, iterative development

- Depends on self-organizing teams, peer accountability, role-based authority

- May be operationalized in practice via Scrum, Kanban, other frameworks

- A simple idea, at its core: try something → learn (repeat)

*Agile Product Management* by Diverse Stock Photos under CC BY-NC 2.0
Agile transformation

• Engage external coach, assemble Agile Transformation Team, assess Agile maturity

• Group-wide Scrum training + leadership development curriculum, topical workshops

• Scrum Master-supported practice of Agile frameworks for projects

• Portfolio management framework

“bridge-15” by Michael Prados under CC BY 2.0
Agile portfolio management

- *Portfolio* is conceptual scope of services

- *Portfolio management* is a framework for surfacing, evaluating, electing investments

- Foster participatory + transparent decision-making, distributed leadership, collective accountability

- Structured process to cultivate best ideas
Epics

• Fundamental unit of the portfolio management framework

• Investment idea conceived of as an experiment

• Specified in an *epic hypothesis statement* to start; elaborated in *lean business case*

• Includes related strategic goals, leading indicators, elevator pitch
Epic owners

• Key actor in the portfolio management framework

• Potentially anyone, with an investment idea they want to develop + champion

• Develop epics through consultation with users, colleagues, implementation team, stakeholders, Portfolio Advisory Team

• Work with implementation team to realize MVP
Portfolio Sync + related roles

- *Portfolio sync* is monthly meeting to take up new + advance existing epics
- Meant to be action-oriented + strategic rather than info sharing
- Supported by a *Facilitator*
- Epics evaluated by *Advisory Team*
Signs of progress

• Epics proposed by line staff

• Epics having progress all the way through implementation

• Improved socialization + engagement for single team-originated projects

• Mechanism to quantize investment in + progress on strategic priorities
Outstanding challenges

• Balancing Agile self-organization with Scrum or portfolio management practice

• Overcoming reflexive aversion and adapting frameworks to library work

• Knowing enough to try something else

• Change management fatigue

• Ensuring representation of entire portfolio

“Don’t fence me in...” by David Ingram
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New experiments

• Lean(er) portfolio management

• Shrink Advisory Team to a more action-oriented + accountable size (9 → 6)

• Rotate, charge, onboard new Advisory Team members

• Simplify supporting artifacts + processes

• Instrument + retrospect

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Thank you!