

Uncle Sam's Recipe

Agile Product Management

Elizabeth Ayer
@ElizAyer
May 29, 2019



CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE™ · 12

YOU'RE THE STAR OF THE STORY!
CHOOSE FROM 30 POSSIBLE ENDINGS.

**INSIDE
UFO 54-40**

BY EDWARD PACKARD



ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL GRANGER

201972 * \$1.75 * A BANTAM BOOK

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Agile Product Management

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18F

**18F partners with
agencies to improve the
user experience of
government**

Developer



Product Manager



Portfolio Manager



“Innovation Specialist”



The punch-line: Government agile transformation takes #fierce practitioners, but it is possible. Methods are evolving.

Agenda

- The landscape for Agile in government
- Overall approach
- Vision and Roadmapping
- Things we've learned
- Results

Ingredients



A challenging hand... **Working in Gov't.**

Cross-functional teams are difficult to compose and maintain...

And all work is
cross-functional!



A challenging hand... Working in Gov't.

Hiring in missing skills is very difficult



A challenging hand... Working in Gov't.

Contracting (Procurement)
“best practice” is not
something Agile people
recognize as best practice.



A challenging hand... Working in Gov't.

So many regulations, most workers don't know whether the conventions are in law or not.



A challenging hand...
Working in Gov't.

Teams are under very heavy scrutiny.



Politics

GSA chief resigns amid reports of excessive spending

By **Lisa Rein** and **Joe Davidson**

April 2, 2012

The chief of the General Services Administration resigned, two of her top deputies were fired and four managers were placed on leave Monday amid reports of lavish spending at a conference off the Las Vegas Strip that featured a clown, a mind reader and a \$31,208 reception.

The media does not conduct blameless retrospectives.

**A common result of following
conventions is long, slow, expensive
failure.**

A black and white portrait of Warren Buffett, an elderly man with glasses, wearing a suit and tie, looking slightly to the right.

How do you beat Bobby Fischer?
You play him at any game but
chess.

— *Warren Buffett* —

AZ QUOTES

**Our hand is not an obstacle...
It's a set of facts.**

**Our ace
Working in Gov't.**

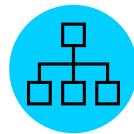
Federal workers are typically
very passionate about their
agency's mission.



Key observations



Mission-oriented
people



Hierarchical



Regulated



High scrutiny

Use mission-orientation to engage people

Use high-profile failures as motivation for change

Use the hierarchy to obtain and spread information

Use the regulations to drive their intent

18F

**18F is a civic consultancy for government,
inside the U.S. government.**

We're federal employees.



1800 F St



Remote-first

We work with agencies to:

- 1. Build or buy exceptional digital services**
- 2. Strengthen technology practices**
- 3. Succeed without us**

We have views

Welcome

Product Management at
18F

We do Product Well

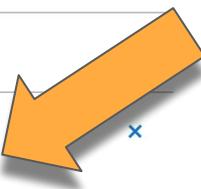
Working in a way that
reflects our values

Working in the Open

Agile/Iterative Development

User-centered Design

Continuous Delivery



Working in the Open

We [work in the open](#) to improve security, accountability, and sustainability of the product. Working in the open allows for more eyes on the code and helps generate more feedback and support from partners. Just like a blameless retrospective, this allows us to iteratively and constantly continue to get better.

We are transparent because we want to build trust and be more efficient. By being open about the work we do and releasing it publicly, we are able to build trust with our partners, the public, and our leaders because we're communicating and sharing our resources every step of the way.

We are paid by the American taxpayers and should be accountable to them by reporting our progress by working in the open and constant communication. All of our work is subject to FOIA requests, so proactively being open about it helps drive this accountability.

Working in the open avoids unnecessary costs to the government. Using open source software



FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

Easy-to-use campaign data

Rethinking how the Federal Election Commission provides data, instructions, and legal resources to the public.

[Read more >](#)

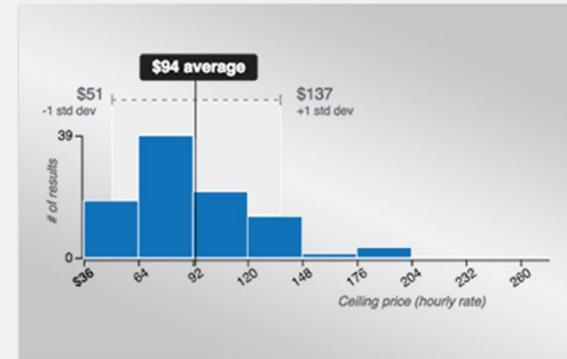


DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Implementing a government-wide law

Implementing the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act with one of the largest government-wide agile projects ever undertaken.

[Read more >](#)



GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Better tools for better research

An efficient way for contracting officers to search past government contracts for fair hourly rates.

[Read more >](#)

**I'm not going to tell you how *you* should
do anything**

Method



18F Top Product Topics:

- 1. Framing the problem**
- 2. Constructing a roadmap**
- 3. Leading a team**
- 4. Ongoing communication**
- 5. Measuring progress and iterating**

18F Top Product Topics:

- 1. **Framing the problem**
- 2. **Constructing a roadmap**
- 3. **Leading a team**
- 4. **Ongoing communication**
- 5. **Measuring progress and iterating**

1. Framing and Vision

With this level of difficulty, we need to go all in to support courage.

Core components of framing

1

Why does this
problem/
opportunity
matter?

2

How will your
solution change
someone's life?

3

What does
success look like?

Vision Statement

noun

A short ‘elevator pitch’ of the vision that the team and others can use to quickly explain the product and galvanize support

**Vision statements should be clear,
concise, informative and
inspirational**

Vision statements address what constituents care about

**Vision statements should be devoid
of specific implementation details**

Example (CA Child Welfare)

We're helping social workers find great places for kids to go when their parents can't take care of them.

Who's affected?

We're helping **social workers** find
great places for **kids** to go when
their parents can't take care of them.

What's the problem?

We're helping social workers find
great places for kids to go when
their parents can't take care of them.

What's the outcome?

We're helping social workers find great places for kids to go when their parents can't take care of them.

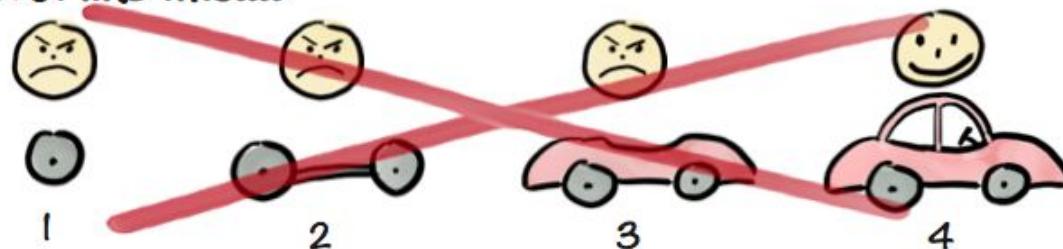
How do we form a vision statement?

1. Interview stakeholders and find what motivates them
2. Project lead(s) craft a short statement
3. Reflect back to people
4. Use it everywhere

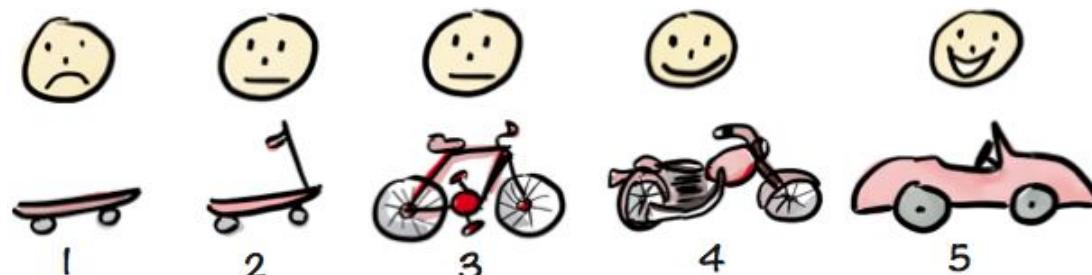
2. Roadmap

Increasing delivered value

Not like this....



Like this!



(from [Crisp Consultants](#))

Solve a problem for **someone**

All increments should solve a whole problem for someone.

The roadmap represents these increments.

Now listen, children to a story about the old days....

| Product / Project / Feature | Brief Description | User Value | Time Criticality | Risk Reducer / Opportunity Enabler | | Value | (Effort) | Cost (Effort) | WSJF |
|-----------------------------|--|------------|------------------|------------------------------------|-------|-------|----------|---------------|------|
| | | | | Enabler | Value | | | | |
| Proin elementum ante et | Nulla eleifend nunc sit | 5 | 3 | 8 | 16 | 55 | 0.291 | | |
| Morbi imperdiet dui a | In eget eleifend mauris. Integer tellus. | 13 | 13 | 3 | 29 | 89 | 0.326 | | |
| Proin facilisis lacus | Nunc fringilla quam ut laoreet congue. | 21 | 8 | 13 | 42 | 233 | 0.180 | | |
| Ut eu purus rhoncus | Nulla luctus nisl quis gravida laciniat. | 13 | 3 | 2 | 18 | 144 | 0.125 | | |
| Morbi non nunc | Pellentesque convallis leo molestie. | 3 | 13 | 13 | 29 | 233 | 0.124 | | |
| Aenean a elit nec | Vestibulum egestas turpis vehicula. | 13 | 8 | 8 | 29 | 55 | 0.527 | | |
| Nullam sit amet | Suspendisse eu eros sagittis tortor. | 8 | 13 | 5 | 26 | 89 | 0.292 | | |
| Vivamus at ligula | Sed vulputate ligula ac pulvinar cur. | 21 | 5 | 13 | 39 | 13 | 3.000 | | |
| Nullam eget tortor | Ut ac tellus at augue maximus ele. | 2 | 13 | 8 | 23 | 13 | 1.769 | | |
| Donec quis ante nec | Etiam suscipit mi ut commodo pell. | 3 | 21 | 5 | 29 | 34 | 0.853 | | |
| Phasellus nec enim eu | Duis blandit arcu ac nisi cursus, sit. | 8 | 3 | 5 | 16 | 55 | 0.291 | | |
| Donec varius purus eget | Nunc posuere mauris sit amet fauc. | 13 | 3 | 8 | 24 | 89 | 0.270 | | |
| Duis ac neque elementum | Maecenas lobortis eros pharetra fri. | 13 | 13 | 13 | 39 | 21 | 1.857 | | |
| Nam a dui egestas | Pellentesque nec arcu ut ligula pos. | 21 | 3 | 13 | 37 | 8 | 4.625 | | |
| Donec at nunc quis | Suspendisse posuere erat nec lacu. | 8 | 5 | 21 | 34 | 233 | 0.146 | | |
| Praesent pretium dui | Vestibulum id justo condimentum, t. | 5 | 8 | 13 | 26 | 55 | 0.473 | | |
| Etiam sollicitudin dui | Cras et turpis vel libero malesuada. | 13 | 21 | 13 | 47 | 89 | 0.528 | | |
| Duis nec ex ultricies | Etiam fringilla ipsum sit amet vulpu. | 13 | 13 | 1 | 27 | 13 | 2.077 | | |
| Donec sed erat ultricies | Morbi dapibus mauris non leo aliqu. | 8 | 21 | 8 | 37 | 34 | 1.088 | | |
| | Sed tincidunt nisi at libero aliquam, | 3 | 13 | 13 | 29 | 55 | 0.527 | | |

... and then we'd publish an ordered list with timescales.



We thought spelling out a full, scientific-looking plan would help

- Stakeholders and users trust us
- The team operate better

Incorrect. That kind of roadmap generally decreased trust, decreased user-centricity, and obscured intent.

A good roadmap will...

1

Align teams

Ensure the team
is focused on the
same problem at
the same time!

2

Communicate
priorities

Display the
team's thinking --
without
overpromising

3

Invite participation

Help those with
insight come to
you.



L. David Marquet @ldavidmarquet · May 26



In order to reduce the barrier to act, we need to give up our urge to know everything at the outset. We only need to know where we are going and where to place the next foot



5



89



187

L. DAVID MARQUET

CAPTAIN, U.S. NAVY (RETIRED)

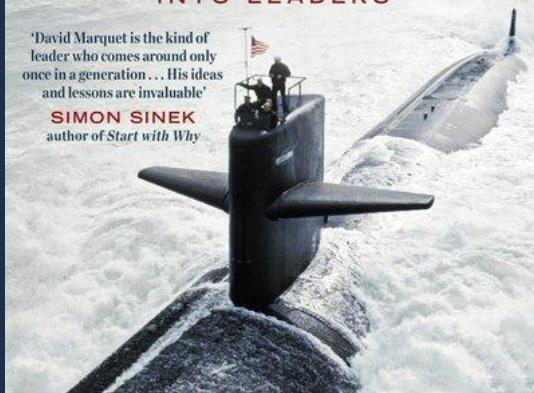
FOREWORD BY STEPHEN R. COVEY

Turn the Ship Around!

A TRUE STORY OF
TURNING FOLLOWERS
INTO LEADERS

'David Marquet is the kind of leader who comes around only once in a generation... His ideas and lessons are invaluable.'

SIMON SINEK
author of *Start with Why*





L. David Marquet @ldavidmarquet · May 26



In order to reduce the barrier to act, we need to give up our urge to know everything at the outset. We only need to know where we are going and where to place the next foot



Eligibility example: We will give timely answers to benefits applicants so that they no longer face extreme financial hardship.

Now

We are speeding up decisions by giving eligibility technicians a unified search.

Researching

We are investigating what it would take to decrease incorrect determinations.

Future

We expect to study the throughput of the system and anomalous cases to find the next biggest gains.

Pick one thing to do now and agree what to research next (1-3 things)

How do we form a roadmap?

1. Ground discussion in user research - *mandatory*.
2. Product team AND sponsors categorize the problems and narrow down
3. Score them, map them (e.g. importance x difficulty),
any approach can do the job
4. Use the “answer” to catalyze the right discussion.
5. Scope down. And down. And down.
6. Decide and communicate

“But don’t your stakeholders need more than that?”

“We prefer to show working software and make our decision-making transparent.”

3. Ongoing Communication

Example: Weekly Ship Report

**Standardized on a weekly communication,
suitable for time-poor readers. It shows what's
happened, what's next and highlights the
team's critical challenges.**

Initial intended audience: We started using this framework for weekly update emails at the inception of Foundation Engagements, which became Path Analyses. Weekly ship emails are most useful when you don't yet have working code to demo — or when the work isn't fully visible in demo (for instance, transition/training work). They can also be useful to share beyond the folks who attend demos, when you want to reach a wider group of stakeholders.

The origin story

Status 12/28/18: In use

How to use: Copy into your project folder and get shipping!

README

The Weekly Ship has three roles.

- 1) If they can swoop and poop, they should get the scoop.
- 2) Digestible summary for primary sponsor's connections across partner organization.
- 3) Keeping cadence. Building a rhythm with our partner and our own internal team.

The template below is designed to help craft your own weekly ship. The basic rules follow:

Product Management - Key points

1

Lead with vision,
but stay true to
users.

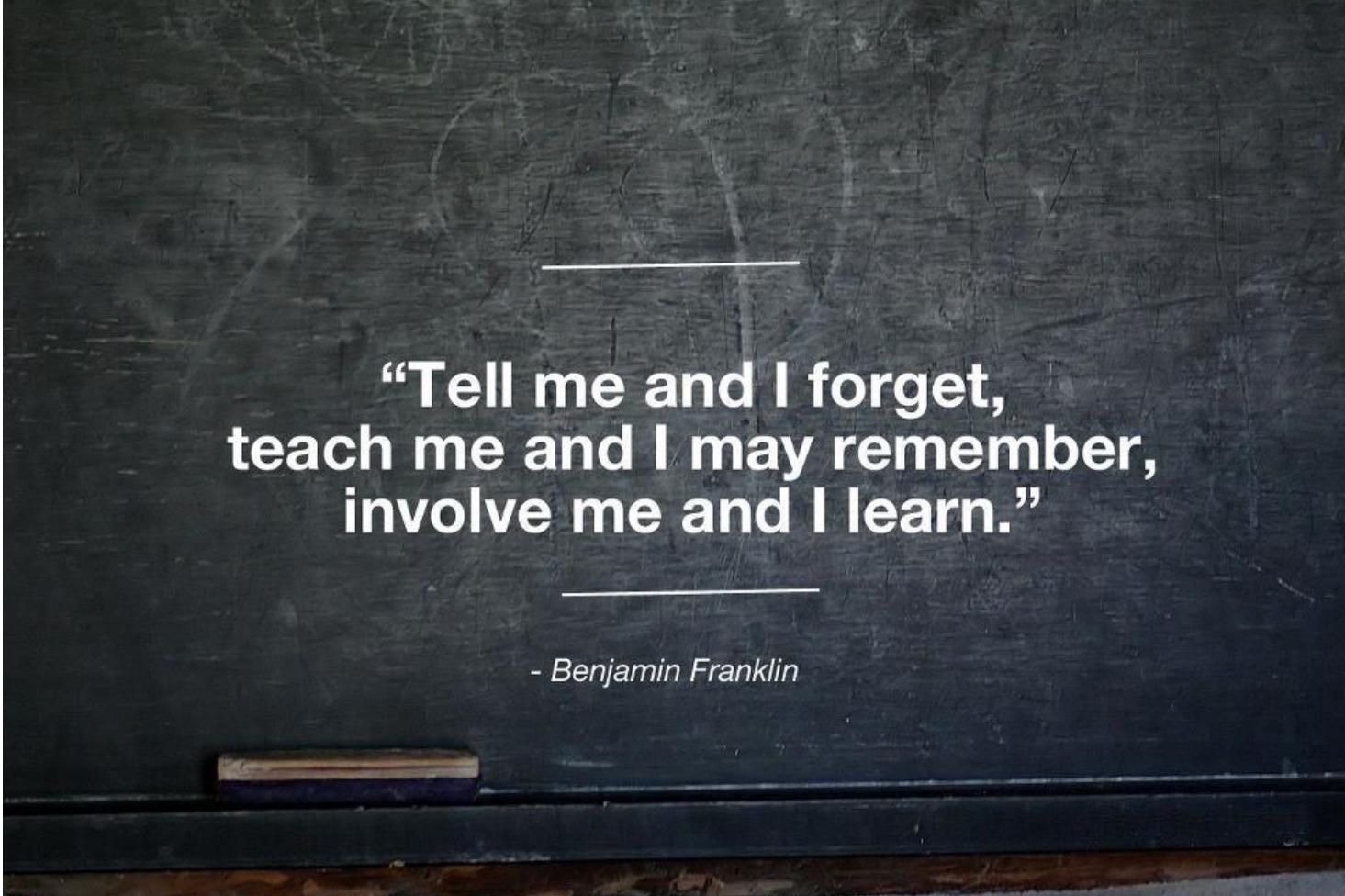
2

Start small. No,
even smaller.

3

Constantly
communicate vision
and progress.

3. Coaching vs doing



**“Tell me and I forget,
teach me and I may remember,
involve me and I learn.”**

- Benjamin Franklin



“Tell me and I will forget.
Show me and I will remember.
Involve me and I will understand.
Step back and I will act.”

Chinese Proverb

Model, pair and fade

Typical Engagement

Trigger on partner site, and they approach us

We filter out very poor fits (lengthy requirements spec, staff aug)

We start an initial engagement 8 wks, 2 people on each side for problem definition.

If both sides are happy, we start a larger, longer engagement to “Experiment and Iterate.” 6 months 4-6 consultants.

We agree milestones to signal 18F disengagement.

Partner flies solo!

Current internal discussion over maturity models vs. bespoke framing

**Some things we've
changed**

Improved filtering criteria

No Go if Partner

- Will not allow for remote work.
- Does not have empowered leadership (business owner, product lead)
- Does not buy into the need for user research
- Isn't open to being open
- Has final deliverable firmly in mind
- ...etc

**We've become more opinionated about
having an empowered product owner.**

**But we've stopped *always* pushing
smaller, especially contracting.**

Results

**We don't measure our success rate, but
we believe it is working and our
customers are recommending us.**

Rarely fails outright. Programs do sometimes stall, generally with people changes or other organizational priorities.

In conclusion,

**18F is catalyzing culture change,
bottom-up, through the medium of
software.**

**Talk to me! About methods, judging
transformation success, sustainable
change: @ElizAyer on**



Time for questions?

**18F has projects to kick-start a partner
on their product**

We aim to develop high-quality product capability in the partner agency

Products Over Projects

Software projects are a popular way of funding and organizing software development. They organize work into temporary, build-only teams and are funded with specific benefits projected in a business case. Product-mode instead uses durable, ideate-build-run teams working on a persistent business issue. Product-mode allows teams to reorient quickly, reduces their end-to-end cycle time, and allows validation of actual benefits by using short-cycle iterations while maintaining the architectural integrity of their software to preserve their long-term effectiveness.

20 February 2018



Sriram Narayan

Sriram is a Digital-IT Management Consultant at ThoughtWorks. He [blogs about](#) his experiences.

Contents

- What is Product-Mode?
- Benefits of Operating in Product-Mode
 - Ability to Reorient Quickly
 - Reduced End-to-End Cycle Time
 - Ability to Truly Iterate