



Big project in a rut, adopt “shake the box” strategy to unblock the team.

Tactical Guide



Problem

An engineering project can sometimes get stuck as the pace of innovation slows down to a crawl, all the while people continue to work overtime due to "organizational pressure". I have observed this fairly often at larger organizations. Does not really matter whom or what is to blame, bottom line is that the energy levels have degraded, organizational paralysis takes hold and team members become increasingly frustrated as they struggle to see a way out.

What if you could turn this situation around?

Would you be willing to re-energize these team members, and in the process rescue the project?

How do you then approach such a situation to improve the outcomes without working everyone to death and drive people insane in the process?



Solution

Let me share with you some tactics to :

- enable the team
- “shake the box”
- accelerate outcomes

The key to success is to :

- identify 3 goals for team members that can be an easy win in a very short timeframe (two weeks or less)
- look for opportunities that relate to revenue growth, risk mitigation, or cost savings, preferably one of each
- achieve these goals and then help to define the new "moonshot" for the team, be ambitious
- apply Pareto principle, focus early on the 20% of the work that delivers 80% of the value
- adopt an accelerated delivery timeframe for the most impactful 20% of the work to set the momentum



Outcomes

Your mindful approach and focused effort to enable the team to rapidly deliver observable results will energize people. The initial momentum created will help to unblock the team and as the entire team learns to move forward again, the pace of work should accelerate.

The ambitious “moonshot” goal combined with practical application of the 80/20 rule, and the pivot to immediate focus on the most impactful work will sustain team’s momentum. This process naturally creates inertia that propels the team forward. The system works best when observable accomplishments are combined with public recognition.

These tactics work equally well for leaders at all levels and individual contributors.



Enable your team to move faster!

Teams effectiveness often defaults to the lowest common denominator, entropy creeps in and work slows down gradually over time. You can combat this by providing transparency around all the tasks that need to get done. Structure the work so that next set of tasks is identified the week prior, set expectations that they must be done each week, towards the end of the week conduct weekly task status review with all team members participating.

Such work cadence combined with everyone's bias towards action will soon lead to an increased team momentum.

Find ways to enable the team to move faster, it could be as simple as some white board sessions to share knowledge. Look for bottlenecks that slow everything down, ask which activities could be avoided, automated or outsourced and understand root cause of overtime work, pain points and gripes. Apply Pareto principle (80/20 rule) to identify the activities that deliver the most value to the team so that they can be tackled first.

These tactics do not conflict with agile or scrum, but they tend to become the go to methodology in fast paced and highly productive engineering teams.

LEARN

ANALYZE

IMPLEMENT

PARETO
PRINCIPLE

REVENUE GENERATION

RISK MITIGATION

COST SAVINGS

PEOPLE

PROCESS

TECHNOLOGY

Guiding Principles

Identify 3 easy to win goals for your team

- Engineering team in place
- Products exist
- Existing products issues
- Technical debt growing
- Cross team dependencies
- Disenfranchised team members
- Leadership has doubts
- Reorganization in flight
- Ask everyone for low hanging fruit opportunities, seek out product enhancements, process bottlenecks, common customer complaints, classify them in accordance to which of these categories (revenue generation / risk mitigation / cost savings) do they impact and to what degree
- Identify ideas with most impact (preferably all three classifications are touched), consider how each idea impacts people, process and technology in the organization, each area needs to have risks identified in addition to the benefits, rank the risks and benefits as you see fit
- Consider what components of each of the ideas can be delivered quickly to deliver majority of the benefit, focus on the 20% of the work that delivers 80% of the value
- Map the activities related to the highest impact ideas in accordance of delivery schedule, 30/60/90 should be thought of as immediate/soon/later, consider existing product roadmap



Shake the box!

Shake the box is a metaphor for a set of tactics to unblock the team with a two step approach, first help the team believe that they can again move fast with small observable wins, then follow with an ambitious “moonshot” proposal to leverage the newly energized team members.

Inspiring future vision is an effective tool to refocus the team and provide a vital shot of optimism. Help the team to embrace a thought process where nothing is impossible. Let the “moonshot” be the ultimate software product that the team rallies around. The vision will be refined with actual input from clients, business partners and realities of software development and product delivery schedule.

Design “moonshot” architecture with the entire team. Include everyone in the design phase, as having full team participation provides everyone with an open forum to contribute and address their concerns. It is a simple and effective method of developing individual buy in and an opportunity to address any architectural weakness in front of everyone. This approach delivers decision making transparency and implements an inclusive design approach.

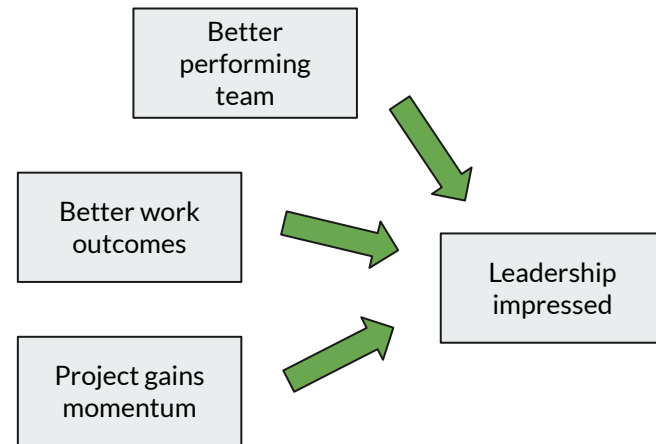


Now we celebrate!

How does this help me?

This approach brings about a WIN-WIN-WIN situation for the product team, management and you.

- The team levels up and is enabled to produce work that rapidly delivers meaningful impact.
- Management can observe beneficial impact of your work across the team and the organization.
- Your strategic approach to identify issues to focus on (priority based on outcomes value), filtered through the lens of the 80/20 rule results in massive value improvement to the outcomes as the project gains momentum.



Questions?

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