Managing the Portfolio Backlog in Large Organizations
Organization and Business Agility

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With special thanks to

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&

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Three factors shape patterns and form the conditions for self-organization in human systems.
Structure of the challenges in the paper

- Context
- Problem and impact
- Cynefin domain
- Countermeasures
- Action taken
- Intervention type
- Resulting benefits
- Signals of success or failure

Summary of challenges in portfolio management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Nature of the Problem</th>
<th>Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Choosing a focus when structuring the portfolio</td>
<td>Large organizations have multiple lines of business, multiple business units, different sub-organizations, multiple target markets, multiple customers, devices, platforms, geographic. How do we decide the right level of focus for the portfolio backing?</td>
<td>Complicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Defining the backing context</td>
<td>What things, from the myriad of things we need to consider in order to run the business, do we choose to manage through the backing?</td>
<td>Complicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Enabling flow through the organization</td>
<td>Diverse teams work simultaneously on a single program. This scenario is repeated multiple times across an organization, ensuring potentially hundreds of teams working on multiple programs in parallel. There are synchronization and coordination challenges in addition. From a portfolio perspective, a portfolio team can quickly become a bottleneck for development teams.</td>
<td>Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Portfolio backing management meeting</td>
<td>What forum, and at what cadence, do we use to manage the backing? How should the portfolio team react?</td>
<td>Complicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The relationship between product managers, architects and product owners</td>
<td>Many organizations (mistakenly) equate the role of product managers with product owners. They are different roles with a different focus. In very large systems and organizations, the product owner role tends to work more closely with development teams, while the product manager role tends to work more closely with customers and the market. Architects are responsible for ensuring the architectural integrity of the systems and solutions, across multiple teams and products.</td>
<td>Complex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Choosing a focus when structuring the portfolio
Defining the backlog content

Enabling flow through the organization
Portfolio backlog management meeting

The relationship between product manager, architects and product owners
Lessons learned for solving (portfolio) problems

- Understand the nature of the problem. The **Cynefin** framework helps with this.
- Solve actual problems and causes, not just symptoms. **A3** helps with this.
- Create a balance between agility, self-organization and coherence. **CDE** helps with this.
- Focus on the end-to-end flow of value through your organization, and on actively removing anything that impedes the flow of work. **Lean** thinking helps with this.
- Understand what success and failure could look like before running your **experiments**. This will help you pay be selective about the **patterns** you pay attention to.

Lessons learned for portfolio management

- Define the **focus** of your portfolio.
- Understand what **content** goes on the portfolio backlog.
- Focus on the **flow** of work from portfolio to teams.
- The portfolio backlog management approach is an **enabler of flow**.
- Set up a **portfolio backlog management meeting** at a regular cadence with the right participants.
- Create a **Definition of Ready for portfolio items**.
- **Create conditions** that encourage a strong **relationship between product managers, engineering leaders and architects**. Together they bring multiple important perspectives to creating the portfolio backlog items.
CISCO  TOMORROW starts here.

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