



## Performance Measurement and Metrics

An agile planning and operations framework

Damon Jaggars, DeEtta Jones,

### Article information:

To cite this document:

Damon Jaggars, DeEtta Jones, (2018) "An agile planning and operations framework", Performance Measurement and Metrics, <https://doi.org/10.1108/PMM-11-2017-0057>

Permanent link to this document:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/PMM-11-2017-0057>

Downloaded on: 03 April 2018, At: 05:42 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 5 other documents.

To copy this document: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by

Token: Eprints:W5ZYSRIZRMRX8ZUFQAXM:

### For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit [www.emeraldinsight.com/authors](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/authors) for more information.

### About Emerald [www.emeraldinsight.com](http://www.emeraldinsight.com)

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

\*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

# An agile planning and operations framework

Damon Jaggars

*The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA, and*

DeEtta Jones

*DeEtta Jones and Associates, Buffalo Grove, Illinois, USA*

An agile  
planning and  
operations  
framework

Received 21 November 2017  
Accepted 1 February 2018

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to describe the design and implementation of an agile planning and operations framework for an academic research library, designed to facilitate an ongoing organizational conversation about the organization's strategic intent and how it plans to move from intention to reality. The goals motivating the implementation of such a framework include creating iterative, open-ended planning and management processes that enable increased flexibility and openness to unforeseen opportunities, as well as the ongoing integration of library faculty, staff, and external stakeholder voices into planning, management, and assessment discussions.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The framework seeks to harmonize planning, management, and assessment processes over 18-24-month rolling time horizons, during which organizational efforts and investments would be reviewed and revised in an iterative fashion.

**Findings** – The authors share results and analyses from stakeholder assessments used to develop foundational mission, vision, values, and strategic directions documentation and discuss the structural, cultural, and organizational development challenges confronted and gains experienced in implementing the framework.

**Originality/value** – Many academic libraries are exploring new approaches to strategic planning, ways to enhance organizational health, and manage change. The authors are unaware of an academic or research library that has attempted to design and implement a similar approach to strategic planning and its assessment. The agile planning framework provides an alternative to traditional "waterfall" approaches to strategic planning for libraries.

**Keywords** Library management, Organizational development, Change management, Strategic planning, Participatory management, Agile operations

**Paper type** Case study

## Introduction

Following a transition in executive leadership in 2016, the Ohio State University Libraries embarked on an ambitious project to re-envision and renew its strategic directions. Prior to designing a planning process, library administrators reflected on past experiences with strategic planning, focusing on what was and was not successful. This reflection on past planning efforts exposed a common experience characterized as a muddled conflation of the strategic with the operational. The planning documents resulting from past efforts often obscured statements about strategic intent with over-designed implementation plans, which buried attempts to provide a clear articulation of where a library would place its strategic effort within overstuffed inventories of everything that library should be doing, defined strategically or not. Library administrators also reflected on how traditional strategic planning processes often consume libraries in extended, burdensome planning activities, which often result in static three- to five-year plans based on rapidly aging assumptions that can push organizations into collective psychologies of task list completion, undermining flexibility and openness to engaging unforeseen opportunities.

So, instead of traveling this well-worn path, the libraries chose to design and implement an agile planning and operations framework (henceforth agile framework) designed to facilitate an ongoing organizational conversation about its strategic intent and how



---

it will move from intention to reality. Loosely inspired by agile software development and project management concepts (EDUCAUSE, 2010), an agile framework would entail lighter-weight, open-ended planning, evaluation, and decision-making processes, allowing for increased flexibility and openness to unanticipated opportunities in its implementation. If realized successfully, such an approach would ensure the continuing integration of library faculty, staff, and external stakeholder voices into planning, management, and assessment discussions because the framework itself is conceived as an ongoing conversation with and between these groups. DeEtta Jones and Associates, a consulting firm with deep experience in organizational transformation, was contracted to help facilitate the overall design process and initial stakeholder engagement activities. The following describes the design and implementation processes through the lenses of both an academic research library director and a process consultant, sharing the methods utilized, early results, and some practical considerations.

### **Confronting organizational challenges**

North American academic research libraries are experiencing high turnover at the executive leadership level, and new deans and directors are often utilizing more participatory management processes that actively engage people at all levels of the organization. A move toward the participatory shifts emphasis from “my way” to “the best way” and draws upon a broader chorus of voices to contribute to ongoing ideation, evaluation, and decision making. A participatory leadership approach can also set the stage for more active feedback, iteration, and change at shorter intervals than can be seen in more traditional management environments where planning and decision-making activities are often seen as the purview of a few at the top and occur at longer intervals (Allison and Kaye, 2015).

Initiating a participatory approach can be challenging for organizations that have relied on more traditional, command-and-control management structures (Gottlieb, 2003). Many working in such environments assume that their work is dictated by a position description reflecting a core set of task-related responsibilities, with little to do with managerial process or the potential for significant change over time. In a participatory structure, employees at all levels are asked to take on, and must be accountable for, a broader set of strategic and shared leadership roles. When a new leader introduces a participatory approach, staff and managers alike can struggle to shift their behaviors to support the new approach, with its new expectations. The goal of the agile framework is to provide structure for a participatory management approach in ways that clarify expectations and support the learning necessary to create behavior change at individual and organizational levels.

In the case of Ohio State, the university libraries had operated within a relatively flat organizational structure but with decision making highly concentrated within the executive management team. Over time, operating in this way created hierarchical mindsets for people across the organization about decision making and authority that tend to hinder the development of a broad sense of shared leadership, engagement, and individual accountability for action. To advance a more engaged, accountable, risk-taking culture, several new activities and structures were instituted to reset expectations and learned behaviors across the organization.

Various formal and informal listening activities were initiated, as is common practice with leaders in the their first three to six months in their new roles, including skip-level listening sessions with the library faculty and staff in all departments, all-staff meetings, and informal small-group “coffees” open to all – each organized to elicit contributions and feedback rather than provide one-way information sharing. The executive team – the director and associate directors – participated in a series of activities designed to jumpstart team building, confront individual change resistance, and reset managerial, leadership, and communications expectations for the organization. A new middle managers group was

created with the goals of broadening the voices engaged in strategic management and ongoing organizational development and to provide a forum to discuss and debate priorities and opportunities, as well as resource and learning needs. To facilitate the behavioral change necessary to operate effectively in a more participatory structure, a learning curriculum was designed for executive and middle managers with the goals of growing the individual and collective communications and metacognitive capacities necessary to increase engagement, accountability for decision making, and risk taking. Topics covered within this curriculum include emotional and social intelligence, difficult conversations and constructive criticism, understanding decision making, and effective meeting management, among others.

### **Constructing the context**

DeEtta Jones and Associates designed and facilitated focus groups for internal and external stakeholders with the intention of identifying thematic areas for consideration in planning. Focus group sessions included faculty and students (undergraduate and graduate) from across the disciplines, academic and administrative leaders, donors, and libraries' faculty and staff. Many of the themes that emerged from the focus groups were not unique to Ohio State but nonetheless valuable for developing the values, mission, and vision statements that underpin the organization's new strategic directions. Stakeholders communicated the following through these context-building activities:

- The libraries are well-respected and valued, particularly for the provision of content and for unique expertise.
- Stakeholders appreciate the changing operating environment, both changes happening within the university's strategy and culture and those in research libraries. They both expect and signal support for the transformation of research library work and its position on campus and in the community.
- Stakeholders are able to enthusiastically articulate contemporary and forward-looking ideas about how the libraries can be an active partner on key university initiatives and in the research and learning processes. A heightened expectation for partnership and leadership by the libraries is built on an expectation that libraries' faculty and staff have unique skills with interdisciplinary applications.
- Being outwardly directed and transcending boundaries through collaboration, within and outside of the libraries, will better align the organization with stakeholder expectations and cultural and societal changes.
- External stakeholders' expectations are more far-reaching and focused on new roles than those shared by internal faculty and staff.
- Higher education is changing, and the university's culture is moving increasingly toward collaboration and interdependence, as are best practices in research, pedagogy, and resource sharing. Most future strategies will not be unique to the libraries – they will be collaborative in nature, highly aligned with university and community expectations, which will require new mindsets for libraries' faculty and staff and increased attention to organizational practices that emphasize shared leadership and continuous growth.

From this context, seven high-level planning themes were identified focusing on:

- (1) the visibility and positioning of the libraries within the university and community;
- (2) specialized skill development to support collaborative initiatives aligned with university priorities;

- (3) scalable and sustainable methods for engaging library services and expertise;
- (4) content and access, including digital and print resources, access tools, and physical facilities;
- (5) communications and marketing to strengthen financial and programmatic support;
- (6) culture shifts at the university and in higher education; and
- (7) developing a culture that empowers libraries' faculty and staff at all levels, aligns organizational effort, and embraces learning and growth.

### Designing the framework

From these high-level planning themes, a concise statement of the libraries' strategic intent was developed, which includes foundational articulations of who we are, what we value, and our vision for the organization, along with directional statements and areas of focus flowing from this context (Ohio State University Libraries, 2017). Like many traditional strategic plan implementation efforts, the libraries' strategic directions are operationalized through more detailed action plans at the divisional and unit levels, clearly mapped to projects and initiatives emanating from these high-level directional statements and focus areas.

What differs from traditional implementation processes is the agile framework itself: an operational structure designed to harmonize planning, management, and assessment processes over 12-18-month rolling time horizons during which organizational efforts and investments are reviewed and revised in an ongoing, iterative fashion. This structure is conceived as a relatively lightweight, ongoing organizational conversation, facilitated within management committee, a group comprised of the libraries' executive team and middle managers, with periodic input from other internal and external stakeholders through typical feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. This framework provides a platform for a broad discussion about changing user needs, emerging opportunities, and other evolving contextual factors through a series of structured processes for assessing current activities, evaluating proposed initiatives and investments, and regular environmental scanning. Agile planning and operations is, practically speaking, the combination of standard planning and project management activities implemented within an iterative framework designed to measure success on a rolling basis, make right-sized adjustments, and actively feed new information into the process to inform future decision making and organizational learning.

Any initiative proposed in support of one or more of the strategic focus areas is initially evaluated using a set of principles to guide decision making and prioritization within the agile framework:

- How would the activity align with libraries' strategic objectives and university-level priorities?
- Is the activity scalable, sustainable, and programmatically focused?
- How would the activity increase or decrease organizational efficiency or impact?
- How would the activity advance organizational equity goals?

Each proposed activity or initiative is also interrogated in terms of resource needs and cross-organizational interdependencies in an effort to expose any potential hidden costs or downstream consequences of taking a particular path. All proposals must also suggest high-level success metrics in the form of an impact narrative. Such a narrative describes how a proposed activity will positively impact the libraries' ability to execute on its strategic intent. Impact narratives normally focus on how an activity will advance or enable

some aspect of the university's research, teaching and learning, or outreach and engagement missions, as reflected in the libraries' strategic directions and focus areas. The emphasis on impact to mission is critical for maintaining alignment with institutional priorities, rather than those of the library in isolation. In addition, this sort of aligning activity stimulates a fundamental motivator for knowledge workers – purpose (Pink, 2009). It also provides an important channel for managers to communicate and reinforce the connection between an individual's work and broader organizational objectives.

Once an initiative is approved, project leaders produce an implementation road map using standard project management concepts and tools (timelines, milestones, etc.). At this point, more granular quantitative or qualitative metrics are developed for ongoing evaluation purposes. These are all used as the basis for routine reports to management committee, where project leaders discuss successes, failures, and challenges overcome for the initiative. Once implemented, each initiative is reviewed for continuation, revision, or cessation on a regular basis utilizing a lightweight assessment tool that measures success in meeting project goals, as reflected in the initial proposal and more fully articulated success metrics.

The academic research library operating environment changes quickly, so a lightweight environmental scanning process was designed to be conducted annually for each strategic focus area, with the twin goals of identifying emerging opportunities and providing a reality check on earlier planning assumptions. An emerging opportunity identified in this process might result in a proposal for a new initiative or an alteration to a current one. This scanning process also provides an opportunity for the organization to update its understanding of the current and projected contexts underlying each strategic focus area and to determine to what extent current activities remain aligned with university-level priorities.

### **Moving forward**

Motivating the design and implementation of an agile planning and operations framework is a desire to construct an architecture for iterative strategic thinking and action that obviates the need for the libraries to drop everything every three to five years and consume itself for an extended period to build out a new, static strategic plan. In implementing the agile framework, we aspire to develop an effective planning and operations environment more inclusive of internal and external voices and more sensitive and open to unforeseen opportunities. If successful, the libraries' strategic intent and the operational work done to support it should evolve in a more organic fashion through meaningful, ongoing dialog about organizational priorities, informed by engaged interaction with users, internal and external stakeholders, and university-level planning efforts. The libraries would be more adept in responding to emerging opportunities and recognizing when to move on from unsuccessful or ineffective activities because the mechanisms for detection and analysis are built into the framework and instantiated in organizational structures and processes.

Development and implementation of the agile framework is ongoing, but there are some early indicators of potential success. The initial set of proposed projects and initiatives supporting the libraries' new strategic directions and focus areas are moving through a freshly designed proposal evaluation process; and a rolling calendar detailing timelines for the activities that comprise the agile framework (proposal deadlines, project updates, evaluation discussions, environmental scans, etc.) is near completion. Engagement throughout the planning process, both by libraries' faculty and staff and external stakeholder groups, has been very high. There is a strong sense of ownership of the libraries' new strategic directions and growing buy-in for a new approach to planning and management. And while happening more slowly than anyone would like, the organization's culture is beginning to change. Middle and executive managers have embraced an ambitious learning curriculum and are doing the hard work to integrate what they learn into

their leadership practice. As a result, structural and cultural barriers to shared leadership, increased risk taking, and accountability for action are being openly identified and solutions for overcoming them sought. Ultimately, success will be determined by the organization's ability to positively alter its culture and sustain that change through individual and collective action. It is relatively easy to change structure and process. It is much harder to change culture and the behaviors it manifests.

---

### References

- Allison, M. and Kaye, J. (2015), *Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide for Dynamic Times*, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ.
- EDUCAUSE (2010), "7 things you should know about agile development", available at: <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2010/12/7-things-you-should-know-about-agile-development> (accessed July 8, 2017).
- Gottlieb, M. (2003), *Managing Group Process*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT.
- Ohio State University Libraries (2017), "Strategic directions", available at: <http://go.osu.edu/osulstrategy> (accessed July 21, 2017).
- Pink, D. (2009), *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Riverhead Books, New York, NY.

### Corresponding author

Damon Jaggars can be contacted at: [jaggars.1@osu.edu](mailto:jaggars.1@osu.edu)

---

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

[www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)

Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)