Leading Initiatives

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Sherry’s Work Context

LBNL
- ~4500 employees, ~500 postdocs
- Basic and applied research and development; no classified work
- Many science areas: computing sciences, chemistry, physics, materials, energy research, life science, ...

My division – Applied Math and Computational Research
- Work mode in between academia and industry
  - Research new algorithms → software → apps domains
- “soft” funding; projects come from proposals; primary sponsor is DOE
- Most software is public domain
- Annual performance rating highly correlated with:
  - publication, software release/use, funding
- It is critical to keep updating knowledge
Kathryn’s Current Work Context

Google

- ~140,000 employees spread across Search, Ads, Maps, Cloud, ML, Other Bets, etc.
- Cloud vs the rest of Google

My job

- Cloud Efficiency Programs: Metrics!
  - Engineering efficiency
  - Inventory efficiency
  - Use Google’s and the planet’s resources wisely
- Organizational alignment between multiple large (~1000 people) organizations
- End to end thinking from node performance, bin packing, to how much we buy for locations and individual customers
Leading New Initiatives

• Initiatives are non-permanent activities that may or may not become institutionalized
  • Workshops on new topics, new research directions, grants, meetup/employee resource group, interview process, university outreach initiation, improves community, job, etc.

• Why would you want to lead one?
  • To get something done you believe in

CONTRIBUTES TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT
Leading Initiatives: Key Elements

• Your passion for it
• Clear Statement of Objective
• Determine & Obtain needed Resources
• Desire to make progress and iterate on tasks
• Persist
Building New Programs

• Programs/projects are semi-permanent and embedded in the organizational structure
  • Both political and technical components
  • Requires leadership – one or more committed advocates who are willing to do the work
  • The results may take much longer than you think they should

• Why would you want to build one?
  • To get something done you believe in!
Exercise

15 minutes: Get in pairs of 2 & 5 minutes per person

• What new initiative are you thinking about?
• Who would be good on your team & why?
• Who would be interested in sponsoring it and why?
• What is your next step to get to launch your initiative?

5 minutes for reporting out
Sherry’s lessons learned leading initiatives/programs

• Good idea!
• The team: putting together an enthusiastic team with the right skill sets
  • Communicating across different disciplines
• Who is your potential sponsor?
  • What are the open problems your sponsor cares about?
• Writing the proposal
  • If you are an expert, highlight that!
  • Prepare well if you are not already an expert in this area (and often you are not with new initiatives!)
Kathryn’s lessons learned leading initiatives/programs

• Passion for the idea

• The Team
  • Working with people I learn from and that give me joy
  • Upskilling, coaching, & empowering junior team members

• Socializing ideas with trusted peers and senior leadership
  • Takes time and effort to influence large organizations

• Institutionalizing initiative
  • Make the initiative succeed even if you leave it
Dealing with Setbacks & Failure

• Define scope & timeline before you start
  • Example, you submit a proposal
    • Make a plan before the decision for both acceptance/rejection
• Somethings do not work out … & are out of your control
• When it happens … take a deep breath and do not take it personally
  • Recent ‘Hidden Brain’ episode suggests you will learn more from your failures if you put them in a wider context vs it was all your fault
  • What is under your control or not?
  • What can you do differently?
• Don’t let FEAR of Failure keep you from trying
Resources from prior speakers

- Babcock, L. & Laschever, S. *Women Don’t Ask*.
- Rock, D. *Quiet Leadership*.
- W. Ury, *Getting Past No: Negotiating in Difficult Situations*
- Fisher and Ury, *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*

  - https://hbr.org/2015/11/be-your-own-best-advocate
Q & A