



# Bellwether Consulting

*Bellwether Consulting Presents*  
Software R&D Management Series

## **A Framework for the Software R&D Leader**

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A culture of excellent performance grows out of a sincere desire to deliver the best we're capable of. With your leadership, your team will be willing. Start with these core objectives.

## **Foundation**

To remind us of the obvious, in business it is our objective to increase revenue and decrease costs, and thereby to increase profits. In leading the development function, we fulfill our duty to our shareholders by maximizing the return on the investment we've been entrusted with.

## **Core Objectives**

In leading your product development team, these four objectives provide all the strategic guidance you need. Every aspect of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling is moving in the right direction when it seeks to improve on these attributes, whether tactical or strategic. Most of your management decisions will affect more than one.

These objectives guide us in both increasing revenues and in reducing costs, satisfying our obligation to our shareholders.

**Quality.** Quality is both the presence of customer-perceived value and the absence of defects in a product. Presence of quality drives customer satisfaction. Quality drives costs more profoundly than any other factor. Defect-related rework drains resources that might otherwise be spent increasing value.

Strategically, it's useful to approach these two aspects of quality with separate activities. Maximizing customer value requires determining what customers' care about and how to deliver it to them. Eliminating defects requires ensuring that whatever is constructed does not deviate from what's intended. This is the difference in validation and verification in our traditional quality practices.

From an execution perspective, quality has a third component: timeliness. Any given product or service is much more valuable at some times than at others. A product incomplete, or complete and undelivered, provides value to no one.

**Accountability.** Accountability is delivering what is committed, when it's committed. Said another way, it is the development team's reliability. How well can the parent organization rely on the development team to accomplish agreed-upon output?

It is fairly common practice in software development to reduce content of a given software deliverable when the project deadline approaches. This accountability definition says that's not good enough, both what-committed and when-committed are equally important. Stakeholders rely on what is committed as much as when committed, sometimes more. Delays and rework by customers or other functions of the parent organization are costly and wasteful.

**Agility.** Agility means the ability to be responsive to the needs of the business and its customers. By this broad definition, it simply means the development team is able to react quickly when new direction is required.

What is “quickly” varies according to the context, but in any business context, quicker is better. The objective of the development team is to make it possible to respond faster in any context, and make this capability available to the business to create profitable advantage. Faster time to market, for example, might be the positive business outcome.

**Sustainability.** Sustainability simply means being able to accomplish the same performance over time. It is not sufficient to be able to reach a given level of performance just once. To fulfill our purpose to the business, we need to be able to reach that level repetitively, reliably. Further, we have an obligation to continuously improve our routine and our peak performance, consistent with maximizing return on our shareholders’ investment.

Strategically, we can look separately at sustainability of the process and sustainability of the human resource. Process is collectively the tools, methods, infrastructure, organization structure, practices, etc, that contribute to developing our products. As resources, people have their own unique requirements for sustenance, both as individuals and as a collected set of capabilities.

## **Summary**

A complete system of managing product development includes many details in many subject areas. Embracing these objectives is not in itself enough to ensure success, but will point you down the right road. Instill a culture of striving for Quality, Accountability, Agility, and Sustainability, and watch your measures of success climb.

In all of these objectives, thoughtful prioritization is necessary. Perfection in accomplishing any objective has to be weighed against the costs, and unfortunately incremental investments do have diminishing returns. However, most of us are far from perfection in any of these objectives. It will be a happy day when we have to decline further investment because it no longer improves enough to be worth it.

## **Contact the Author**

For discussion on core R&D objectives, or assistance in developing your team’s culture of excellence, contact Bellwether Consulting at [info@bellwethermgt.com](mailto:info@bellwethermgt.com) or the author directly at [stan.bell@bellwethermgt.com](mailto:stan.bell@bellwethermgt.com).



*Software Development from Art to Science*