Software Deployment in the Field: Technical Debt and Data-Ops

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NCAR
Stories from the Field
(and a big mistake from my past)
TOGA-COARE in Honiara, Solomon Islands
Mobile Sounding Launch at VORTEX-II
R/V Knorr in CLIMODE
Coding Can Happen Anywhere

Sea Containers

Rental Trailers

Ship Labs
Integrated Sounding System

The ISS is a platform for hosting a collection of boundary-layer instruments which can be configured for each field project site while sharing a common deployment and data management infrastructure, comprised of networking, computer systems, and software.
ISS at DYNAMO, Diego Garcia

Photo and diagram credit: Bill Brown
Mobile ISS at T-REX

Photo and diagram credit: Bill Brown
ISS at DYNAMO, R/V Revelle

Photo and diagram credit: Bill Brown
Technical Debt

Shipping first time code is like going into debt. A little debt speeds development so long as it is paid back promptly with a rewrite. ... The danger occurs when the debt is not repaid.

- Ward Cunningham
Technical Debt

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All field project deployments are like shipping first time code.

- Me
Technical Debt

Every minute spent on not-quite-right code counts as interest on that debt. Entire engineering organizations can be brought to a stand-still under the debt load of an unconsolidated implementation, object-oriented or otherwise.

- Ward Cunningham
Technical Debt Pressures in the Field

- **Mission Creep**
  - Since we're so close already...

- **Live Testing**
  - Now that we've got everything all together

- **User Interaction**
  - By the way, now I understand what I really need...

- **Thrill and Excitement**
  - What's more fun than real-time coding under pressure?
SABL LIDAR on the C-130
Other Technical Debt in the Field

- **Instrument Data**
  - If you record it, you own it

- **System Configuration**
  - Once you tweak it, you have to keep tweaking it

- **Issue Documentation**
  - “Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.”

- **Users never forget a feature**
  - Adding a feature in the field is never a one-time thing

- **Outside instruments and software**
  - Paying interest on debt someone else accumulated
ISS as a Test Case

(Putting Debt Reduction into Practice)
Reducing Technical Debt in the Field (1)

• Design to Deploy
  – Software is not working until it is deployable
  – Python classes wrap external, third-party programs

• Test Deployments
  – Deploy tests and run them on targets
  – Script installation and confirmation of dependencies
Reducing Technical Debt in the Field (2)

• Consolidate and deploy the configuration
  – Single access point
  – No redundant configuration
  – Keep it in revision control
  – Beware overlooked configuration sources like crontabs, BIOS settings, routers, web devices

• Use the configuration for devops also
System Configuration

- Bare metal installs and restores with kickstart files and bash scripts
- Modular bash scripts for configuring every instrument data flow (slowly migrating to python)
- JSON configuration file for each site kept in revision control
- Scripts can be re-run at any time to update the system as the configuration changes
Reducing Technical Debt in the Field (3)

- Automate failure detection
  - Whatever checks you do manually, script the ones that can be scripted for monitoring tools like Nagios
  - For ISS, custom python scripts check USB backups, data broadcasts, missing data
Applying Devops to Data: Data-Ops

- Treat data streams like devops servers
  - Easy to deploy from one field project to the next
  - Easy to add and manage new data streams
- Automate deployment of the tools needed to process each data stream
- Continuously generate deliverable data products from the raw data streams and a single project configuration
  - Like continuous integration for software, but for data
ISS Python Catalog

- Scan: filename patterns, simple format parsing including netcdf and SPC, read data samples
- Catalog: query by name, time, category, size, checksums, and more complicated
- Check: gaps, latency, sample density, custom, nagios reports, email alerts
- Archive: ISO image with metadata from catalog query, integrity checks, transfers to EOL
- Derive: Run processing when inputs have changed
ISS_Catalog Class Diagram

**DataProcess**
- run()
- setInput()

**DataFile**
- begin : datetime
- end : datetime
- nsamples : int
- pattern : string
- scan()

**DataFileQuery**

**Database**
- query()
- store()

**DataFileCategory**
- sample_interval : seconds
- sample_latency : seconds

**ProfilerWinds**

**ProfilerSpectra**

**Surface**

**DataFileScanner**
Python Helps

- Parsing of custom data files, text and binary
- Scipy.io.netcdf and numpy
- Built-in sqlite
- Built-in JSON
- py.test and pylint
- Potential evolution into a web app
Dev and Data Ops

Goals for ISS:

- Configure an entire project deployment, all of its sites, instruments, data streams, derivations, and monitoring, with just the JSON parameter database and a python customization script.

- Implement the real-time and post-project data processing like a continuously running build process, where all derived data products are regenerated and updated as the raw data files are filled in or as project parameters change.
Conclusion

Technical debt is a useful metaphor for software engineers and maybe even managers.

Consolidate and deploy the project configuration.

Automate field deployments using devops and based on the project configuration.

Automate data processing with parameters from the project configuration.

Integrate and automate with python. (rsync is awesome too.)