

The Business Case for Spiral Development in Heavy-Lift Launch Vehicle Systems

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Performance capabilities of a specific combination of the Space Shuttle external tank and various liquid engines in an in-line configuration, two-stage core vehicle with multiple redesigned solid rocket motor strap-ons are reexamined. This concept proposes using existing assets, hardware, and capabilities that are already crew-rated, flight certified, being manufactured under existing contracts, have a long history of component and system ground testing, and have been flown for over 20 yr. This paper goes beyond describing potential performance capabilities of specific components to discuss the overall system feasibility—from end to end, start to finish—describing the inherent cost advantages of the Spiral Development concept, which builds on existing capabilities and assets, as opposed to starting up a “fresh sheet” heavy-lift launch vehicle program from scratch.

I. Introduction

IN February 2004, the NASA Vision for Space Exploration called “for a “building block” strategy of human and robotic missions to achieve new exploration goals Robotic missions to the Moon would begin no later than 2008, followed by an extended human expedition as early as 2015. Lunar exploration would lay the groundwork for future exploration of Mars and other destinations. A new spacecraft to support these journeys—the crew exploration vehicle—would be tested before the end of this decade,” 5 yr from now.

Mission scenarios underscore the need for a heavy-lift capability significantly greater than anything available today. To design and fly a viable crew exploration vehicle within 5 yr and a long-term Lunar Transportation System within 10 yr in the current budget environment will be a challenging task to say the least. Hope of success can come only from considering the overall system feasibility—from end to end, cradle to grave—and the inherent costs of development, long-term operations, maintenance, and upgrades from the very beginning of the effort.

In today’s budgetary environment and with the target dates described above, key assets to leverage for success are existing capabilities used in a “building block” approach. In this paper, the authors provide a conceptual design of a large chemical rocket that uses available technology and hardware and is a part of a larger transportation system, incorporating a wide range of capabilities whose management and growth are based on Spiral Development principles. This concept is in agreement with studies that propose development of expendable vehicles for both crew transport and unmanned, very heavy lift cargo transport.¹

The Spiral Development process is now being widely used for large Government program acquisitions and lends itself to the project described here. The main advantage of this concept is that it builds on existing capabilities and

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assets, as opposed to starting up a “new sheet” vehicle program from scratch. Spiral Development designs recombine existing assets in new configurations to function in extrapolated operating conditions.

This particular description of a very large space cargo carrier is provided as an example of what could be accomplished using existing space transportation system elements—solid rocket motors (SRMs), tanks/tooling, liquid rocket engines, facilities—and the organizations, industries, vendor base, and qualified personnel already involved in closely related activities.

Certain modifications will be required to adapt new propulsion modules, such as liquid oxygen (lox)/kerosene (RP-1) rocket engines—Lockheed Martin Atlas 5 RD-180 are baselined—to the base of a propellant tank which could use available Space Shuttle external tank (ET) tooling. Likewise, the ET lox tank would be reconfigured and an interstage structure incorporated to accommodate a large upper stage and the dynamic loading needed for the very large payloads that could be launched with this axisymmetrical design. Also, new attachments will be incorporated into the redesigned ET-based tank structure, or core stage, to accommodate a cluster of up to six Space Shuttle SRMs (designated as the RSRM by NASA). Some modification of the Space Shuttle main engines (SSMEs) or the Boeing Delta 4 RS-68 engine will likewise be required to use these flight-qualified propulsion systems on a large (ET based) upper stage, particularly to allow starting the engines at upper altitudes (not currently practiced on the Space Shuttle or Delta rocket systems).

The “NOVA Class” described in this paper is considered to be large enough—with over twice the gross liftoff weight of the Saturn 5—to be near an “end of growth” level of maturity and capable of a number of future mission/payload needs. It could be downsized for certain missions by reducing the number of RSRMs, as is currently done with the “building block” approach of using various numbers of SRMs on the Atlas and Delta Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle (EELV) programs.

A number of trades, assessment of issues, and design considerations are still required to achieve the functional and operational capabilities, performance, safety, dependability, and life cycle affordability needed for the success of this ambitious concept.

II. What is “Spiral Development”?

The concept of Spiral Development, as applied to software development efforts, was described by Barry Boehm.² Figure 1 is a redrawing of the original spiral model diagram published by Boehm.² It captures the major spiral model features: cyclic concurrent engineering, risk-driven determination of process and product, growing a system via risk-driven experimentation and elaboration, and lowering development cost by early elimination of nonviable alternatives and rework avoidance. As a result of planning and risk analysis, different projects may choose different processes. That is, the spiral model is actually a risk-driven process model generator in which different risk patterns can lead to choosing incremental, waterfall, evolutionary prototyping, or other subsets of the process elements in the spiral model diagram. In proceedings from a February 2000 workshop at the University of Southern California, Boehm further defined Spiral Development as follows: “The spiral development model is a *risk-driven process model* generator. It is used to guide multi-stakeholder concurrent engineering of software-intensive systems. It has two main distinguishing features. One is a *cyclic* approach for incrementally growing a system’s degree of definition and implementation while decreasing its degree of risk. The other is a set of *anchor point milestones* for ensuring stakeholder commitment to feasible and mutually satisfactory system solutions.”³

He goes on to provide the following definitions of *risk*, *process model*, *cyclic*, and *anchor point milestones*:

“*Risks* are situations or possible events that can cause a project to fail to meet its goals. They range in impact from trivial to fatal and in likelihood from certain to improbable. A risk management plan enumerates the risks and prioritizes them in degree of importance, as measured by a combination of the impact and likelihood of each. For each risk the plan also states a mitigation strategy to deal with the risk. For instance, the risk that technology is unready may be mitigated by an appropriate prototype implementation in an early spiral cycle.

A *process model* answers two main questions:

- What should be done next?
- For how long should it continue?

Under the spiral model, the answers to these questions are driven by risk considerations and vary from project to project and sometimes from one spiral cycle to the next. Each choice of answers generates a different process model. At the start of a cycle, all of the project’s success-critical stakeholders must participate concurrently in reviewing risks and choosing the project’s process model accordingly. (Risk considerations also apply toward ensuring that progress is not impeded by stakeholders’ overparticipation.) The *cyclic* nature of the spiral model [is] illustrated in Figure 1. *Anchor point milestones* drive the spiral to progress toward completion and offer a means to compare progress between one spiral project and another.”

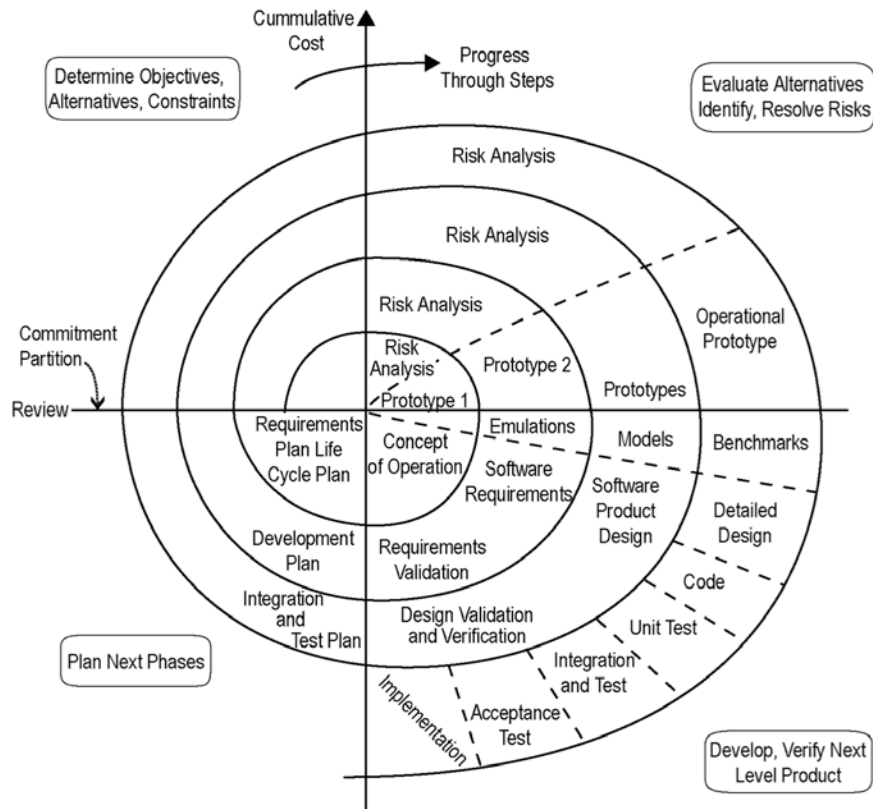


Figure 1. Original diagram of Spiral Development.

In summary, “Spiral Development” is an evolutionary concept of a constantly evolving software system, with each “build” or software version being an extrapolation and an improvement of the previous one reused. In software development, it is customary to have several “builds” or “baselines” in various stages of development underway simultaneously. Typically, there will be a minimum of three software baselines, termed “developmental” (dev), “acceptance test” (acctest), or “integration” and “operations” (ops). These “environments” or “baselines” have ever-increasing degrees of configuration management (CM) and complexity, with the simplest and most lax requirements being found in the earliest stages, while the final operational product is strictly controlled or “frozen” and changes are made to it only after rigorous testing.

Like all complex systems, software is extremely sensitive to variabilities at interfaces. It is for this reason that changes must be made only within a particular baseline with a well-understood level of CM, and the groups participating in the software project must all adhere to the same interface requirements and CM standards for that particular baseline where they are changing code.

Lessons learned in the use of the final product are fed back into the system via the developers who then implement changes. Changes flow through the baselines in the system and are tested at ever-increasing levels of complexity until there is enough confidence to promote the change to the operational baseline and release it to the users.

Boehm states that software projects that successfully follow the spiral model find that their development cycles invariably display six characteristics. It is interesting to note how well these six characteristics map from the software paradigm to the hardware world:

- (1) Concurrent rather than sequential determination of deliverables, such as operations concept, requirements, plans, and designs. Sequential consideration of these “artifacts” will prematurely overconstrain or even kill the design.
- (2) Repeated consideration in each spiral cycle of the main spiral elements, such as critical stakeholder objectives and constraints and continual risk mitigation.

(3) Using risk considerations to determine the level of effort to be devoted to each activity within each spiral cycle, whether it be prototyping, testing, or CM to answer the question “how much is enough”?

(4) Using risk considerations to determine the degree of detail of each deliverable produced in each spiral cycle. That is, if it is risky to not specify precisely, DO specify. If it is risky to specify precisely, DO NOT specify.

(5) Managing stakeholder life cycle commitments with three anchor point milestones to serve as commitment points and progress checkpoints. These are life cycle objectives (LCOs), life cycle architecture (LCA), and initial operational capacity (IOC), where LCOs are the stakeholder’s commitment to support the system’s overall objectives, LCA is the stakeholders’ commitment to support full life cycle system architecture, and IOC is the stakeholders’ commitment to accept and support initial operations capabilities.

(6) Emphasis is placed not just on software construction and development aspects, but also on the overall system and life cycle processes and concerns. Do not just solve a technical problem for the problem’s sake without understanding how it relates to the overall system design and operability issues. A bad process automated is just a faster bad process.

In the software development world, constant, rapid change is a given. The evolution of highly complex systems occurs at a much accelerated rate, possibly 5 to 10 times as quickly as equally complex hardware components and systems. It is important to note, for purposes of this discussion, that commercial (operational) software products that do not change and/or keep up with technology and user demand are not on the market for very long. Spiral Development principles of doing business have evolved in the software industry as a survival strategy.

III. Hazardous Spiral Look-Alikes

Boehm writes, “Many processes are adopted which may seem to be instances of the spiral model, but lack essential invariants and thus risk failure. Each invariant excludes one or more such process models, which we call ‘hazardous spiral look-alikes.’” The reader is encouraged to see reference 3 for several real-world examples of Spiral Development look-alikes and how they doomed several projects.

Dangerous assumptions can arise when managers base decisions on processes that are called Spiral Development but are in fact not. For instance, Boehm states, “All too often, a project will be started on an evolutionary development approach based on a statement such as, ‘We’re not sure what to build, so let’s throw together a prototype and evolve it until the users are satisfied.’ This approach is insensitive to several risks corresponding to the set of assumptions for a successful evolutionary.”

Boehm’s list of dangerous assumptions, rephrased here to apply to a launch system, is as follows:

Bad Assumption No. 1: The initial design is sufficiently satisfactory to key stakeholders that they will continue to participate in its evolution. In other words, if close attention is not paid to end-user requirements from the very beginning, even the prototype design may be so far from the users’ needs that they consider it a waste of time to continue past Preliminary Design Review.

Bad Assumption No. 2: The architecture of the initial design is scalable to accommodate the full set of system life cycle requirements from the beginning, such as operation, performance, safety, security, testability, transportability, maintainability, etc.

Bad Assumption No. 3: The operator organization is sufficiently flexible to adapt to the pace of vehicle system evolution. It is risky to proceed without a life cycle end-to-end architecture, including appropriate contract management infrastructure that supports evolution.

Bad Assumption No. 4: The dimensions of system evolution are compatible with the dimensions of evolving out the legacy system it is replacing. Legacy system elements are often too inflexible or limited in capability to be adapted to desired directions of evolution. In such cases, it is often more cost effective to incrementally design new system elements from scratch rather than adapt and/or recombine older components in a new way.

A particular example of this would be the X-33 composite hydrogen tank design. Based on new materials technology, the lightweight tank was a critical structural design element for the vehicle and the rest of the vehicle was built around the assumption that the tank design would be adequate to structurally support the rest of the vehicle.

When the tank ruptured during cryogenic ground testing, it became apparent it would have to be greatly reinforced in order to satisfy the structural loads expected of it. Since the overall vehicle system design was incapable of absorbing this additional weight, this tank materials’ failure doomed the entire project.

IV. What Spiral Development is NOT

Above all, Spiral Development is NOT a series of quantum leap changes created by introduction of a series of large, complex, self-contained, but totally unrelated, stand-alone systems, where requirements are “thrown over the

fence” and the initiator expects no further interaction with the contractor until the final “working” product is delivered. This development approach is known in the software world as the “big bang delivery”—for good reason. Richard Brooksby, Ravenbrook Limited, defines a big bang delivery as follows: “Attempting to meet all the requirements at once is called the big bang delivery The development group goes into hyperspace and hopes to come out somewhere near the desired result. The product is dismantled, and nothing works until the whole thing is done. A wasteful ‘code freeze’ is needed to put things back together and ‘get it working.’ Furthermore, the product goes untried until near the end of the cycle, so that errors in requirements, design, or coding are not discovered until it’s too late to do anything about them. It’s an extremely risky strategy. Errors in requirements are most costly.”⁴

There are numerous examples of huge, costly “big bang” software development projects in recent years where this approach failed miserably, at great cost to the Government. In most cases, the initial requirements stated by well-meaning but uninformed Government representatives were technically challenging, if not unattainable, by the software developers and depended on immature or nonexistent technologies for success.

Another characteristic of these failed large software projects was severe “requirements creep,” where the requirements were constantly changing during the course of these projects, requiring much rework and costly modifications in midstream. Large software projects have a history of repeated failures. Watts S. Humphrey of the Carnegie Mellon University Software Engineering Institute writes, “The definition of a successful project is one that completed within 10 percent or so of its committed cost and schedule and delivered all of its intended functions. Challenged projects are ones that were seriously late or over costs or had reduced functions. Failed projects never delivered anything . . . half of the smallest projects succeeded, while none of the largest projects did. Since large projects still do not succeed even with all of the project management improvements of the last several years, one begins to wonder if large-scale software projects are inherently unmanageable.”⁵

He then gives two counter examples of two large projects that were actually successful, noting that these successful software projects “placed heavy emphasis on planning, and both adopted an evolutionary development strategy with multiple releases and phased specifications.”

In other words, the large successful projects followed Boehm’s Spiral Development model.

Three Notable Software “Big Bang Delivery” Case Study Examples

(1) NASA’s Mission to Planet Earth, Earth Observing System Data and Information System (EOSDIS) Core System (ECS)

Report to the Chairman, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, House of Representatives, February 1992 states, “Given the significant technological risks inherent in the EOSDIS concept, GAO recommends that the NASA Administrator not award the planned EOSDIS Core System contract until specific plans have been developed and resources identified for (1) prototyping the full range of critical system elements and (2) guiding and accelerating research into key advanced technologies that will be essential for the system’s ultimate success.”

“NASA Finds Problems in EOSDIS Flight Operations Software Development,” April 10, 1998, NASA NEWS RELEASE: 98-60: “Prior to the March 31 delivery, there were three previous incremental deliveries of the software in August 1997, December 1997 and February 1998. Previous versions of the software successfully demonstrated real-time commanding functions with the AM-1 spacecraft. In the new version, however, a number of problems identified in the previous software deliveries were not corrected as expected, and significant problems were found in the new capabilities. Problems include unacceptable response time in developing spacecraft schedules, poor performance in analyzing spacecraft status and trends from telemetry data, and improper implementation of decision rules in the control language used by the flight team to automate operations.”

(2) Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board’s (OPM) Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) Automated System

07/07/04, http://www.gcn.com/vol1_no1/daily-updates/26516-1.html: “A failed attempt to develop an electronic record keeping system for the federal Thrift Savings Plan wasted about \$36 million in federal retirement assets, according to the investigation results released today by the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee. . . . AMS worked on the project under a four-year, \$29.7 million contract, but after four years and \$65 million in spending, the system didn’t work To pay for the contract, \$36 million was taken out of the retirement accounts of TSP plan participants and their beneficiaries.”

(3) The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Virtual Case File System

Reuters, January 13, 2005, <http://news.zdnet.com/2100-3513-5534809.html>: “The [*Los Angeles Times*] said the FBI recently commissioned independent studies to determine if any part of the Virtual Case File software could be salvaged. A decision to proceed with new software would add tens of millions of dollars to development costs and render worthless much of a \$170 million contract, according to the report The FBI could seek requests for proposals for a new system this spring, the officials were quoted as saying. The *Times* said the FBI was no longer saying when the project, originally set to be completed by the end of 2003, might be finished.”

V. Applying Spiral Development to the Next NASA Launch System

Now what does all of this software development discussion have to do with spacecraft systems design? Spiral Development has been employed by the U.S. Air Force (USAF) for several years and is now being embraced by NASA. However, the USAF has demonstrated that this change in engineering approach must also be supported by business paradigms and changes in the way contracts are let and managed for success of the approach.⁶

NASA will face a similar problem in implementing Spiral Development to launch vehicle systems. Rogers et al. all write: “Spiral development offers the possibility of avoiding technology obsolescence by continually allowing technology insertion into long-term programs . . . to achieve this benefit, the program systems integrator must have the flexibility contractually to make the block changes that allow for appropriate technology insertions. Long term, highly specified performance based contracts may be detrimental to the spiral development concept because they disincentivize prime contractors from collecting and managing project knowledge and from sharing it with potentially competitive partners.”⁷

Obviously, launch vehicles are not software, so the suggested approach, as implemented by the USAF, is slightly modified from the original software development strategy.

In this case, the Spiral Development of a new NASA launch system would logically leverage some existing Space Transportation System (STS) and expendable launch vehicle assets to develop a new, heavy-lift launch vehicle to support the above-stated lunar mission goals. These existing STS and EELV assets and elements, some slightly modified, are capable of being recombined in new configurations with astounding potential performance capabilities.

The authors understand that use or derivation of existing rocket elements is not a new idea. Readers will recall that the use of RSRM, SSME, and ET combinations were explored as a heavy-lift launch vehicle called Shuttle-C in the late 1980s.⁸ Additional “Shuttle derived” studies were done more recently under the program “Magnum,” to be used as a heavy-lift vehicle by NASA and the Department of Defense. The heavy-lift capabilities and potential versatility of these configurations has been shown in numerous ways and study combinations.

VI. A Specific Design Example of a Heavy-Lift Vehicle

A total systems engineering approach will be required to address all aspects of the proposed large space transportation system. Particular attention should be applied to minimizing all interfaces, applying the use of fail-safe design principles and also putting to practice the available lessons that have been learned over the past half century of rocket and space vehicle operational experience. A functional system breakdown structure has been developed by the Space Propulsion Synergy Team, a group of veteran space engineers and managers, that should be applied to the overall system.⁹

In addition, a detailed “concept of operations” should be prepared and other essential analyses performed to help ensure that all life cycle elements, including costs, are carefully addressed. References 10–12 support this recommendation.

The authors understand that the use or derivation of existing rocket elements is not a new idea. The capabilities of these recombined STS components have been shown in numerous studies and white papers and is not questioned.¹⁰ Likewise, the aerospace community has very effectively developed the systems engineering approach for most of the large-scale programs introduced over the past half century. In fact, it was the basis for quickly reacting to the launch of Sputnik 1 in 1957 and responding with the rapid development of the Saturn 1 space launch vehicle. This design used the available propellant tank tooling from the U.S. Army Redstone and Jupiter ballistic missiles and clustering eight liquid rocket engines—based on modifying and simplifying the Jupiter/Thor propulsion system—which provided an early operation of a 1.5M-lb thrust booster.¹³

But this is not why they should be used. Many other existing and planned components could yield similar, even better performance capabilities. The reader is reminded that the launch vehicle itself is just a part of the equation and should not be designed in a vacuum without considering the rest of the system, specifically how it will be manufactured, maintained, and operated in the long run. In addition to achieving certain flight performance goals, systems designers must also optimize ground and flight operations, manufacturing, test, and maintainability costs in any successful long-term flight project. Table 1 shows a list of tasks—neither complete nor sequential—that must be performed in the creation of any large launch vehicle system. These tasks are often illustrated in a “Systems Engineering V Diagram.” From this list, it can be seen that the design of the launch vehicle(s) is only part of the overall task.

Table 1. Tasks to be performed in creation of any large launch vehicle system.

<p>Define Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Missions • Ranges of performance • Payload mass, volume, destination • Environmental constraints <p>Establish Design Rules, Plan Systems Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use available, proven technologies • U.S., other flight-proven elements • Proven chemical propulsion • Tanks, tooling, valves, lines, electronics, software etc. • Design, develop, test, and evaluation • End-to-end life cycle approach <p>Develop Preliminary Designs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modular • Adaptable • Growth potential • Flexibility to meet changing payload and mission requirements• Easier to maintain and service • Long-term operations scenarios; i.e., 50 yr of Soyuz • Conducive to Spiral Development, continuous improvement of components • Perform Preliminary Design Review (PDR) <p>Perform Engineering Technical Analyses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trajectories • Safety • Aerodynamics • Thermal • Loads and structural dynamics • Navigation and control dynamics • Stress • Mass properties • Communications systems • Guidance and targeting • Propulsion performance and verification • Electrical systems • Perform Critical Design Review (CDR) <p>Manufacture Components</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine roadmap • Allocate adequate fiscal resources • Implement appropriate contracting mechanisms• Maintain technical oversight of manufacturing processes • Orchestrate correct delivery of components <p>Perform Systems Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Payloads • Physical and software interfaces • Fabrication and launch facilities limitations and requirements• Test and engineering support infrastructure • Configuration management • System-of-systems integration approach • Perform Operations Readiness Review (ORR) <p>Perform Systems Verification and Flight Qualifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Components • Subsystems • Systems • Systems of Systems • Perform Flight Readiness Review (FRR) <p>Perform Operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accommodate changes and improvements • Track costs and losses • Improve system performance• Incorporate new capabilities • Feed operational information back to developmental areas • Generate new requirements • Retire obsolete capabilities and hardware
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It is useful to merge Boehm's Spiral Development software model with the W. Edwards Deming "Plan, Do, Check, Act" cycle, also known as the "Deming Wheel," and the Systems Engineering "V Diagram." This results in a planning model that is a synthesis of all three, wherein advances in technology are routinely fed back into the operational system and capacity to accept changes and evolve new capabilities is "built in" to the management structure. Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of this combined model.

VII. Systems Engineering and Cost Advantages

Any new launch vehicle system design would have to recreate all of the above capabilities and assets from scratch. Starting out with components that have already established these characteristics can greatly reduce overall system development costs and delivery times. From this perspective, there are several significant cost advantages, from a systems engineering point of view, to redeploying existing hardware and capabilities, since these components are based on existing technologies already being manufactured under existing contracts; use existing manufacturing processes, tooling, transport, assembly, and launch facilities located across the country; and carry with them an associated engineering knowledge base that has been acquired over the past 24 yr of Shuttle flights.

As a case in point, we examine here a two-stage core vehicle with multiple RSRM strap-on boosters where the stage one core is a redesigned ET carrying lox-RP-1 in the same envelope (4,493,423 lb of propellant). This yields a much lower overall vehicle structural mass fraction that more than compensates for the reduced specific impulse resulting from using RP-1 versus hydrogen. Reduced complexity, associated with handling RP-1 versus liquid hydrogen, provides additional operational cost benefits

Specifically, the following configuration, which we term the Mars Express (MAX) to signify its intended prime mission, would yield astounding heavy-lift performance of nearly 340,000 lb to a trans-lunar injection trajectory, enough to soft land almost 130,000 lb onto the lunar surface.

This large space cargo carrier is designed to accommodate direct missions to the surface of the Moon and Mars. MAX could also launch large payloads to a variety of orbital locations and throughout the solar system. Propellant depots, command stations, and other key elements are needed for our in-space infrastructure. MAX could greatly help to enable this objective and open the space frontier for many civil, military, and commercial applications.

Spiral Development Systems Engineering Model

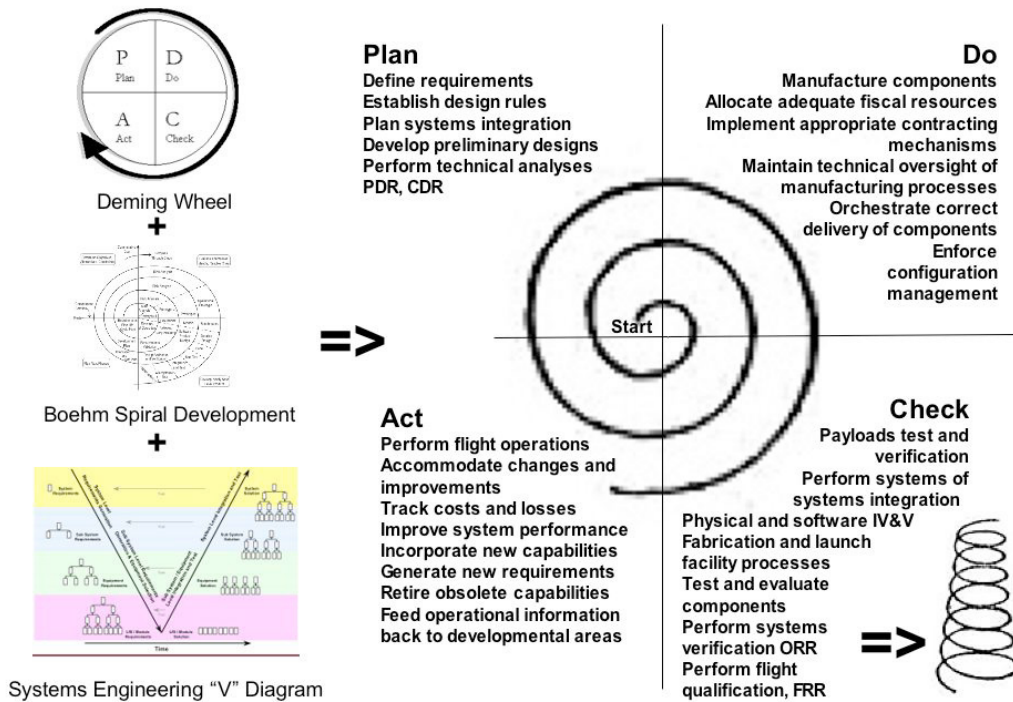


Figure 2. Spiral Development Systems Engineering Model.

MAX could also provide needed capabilities to launch large, fully integrated, and self-contained space stations (larger than *Skylab*). To date, it has taken some 20 Space Shuttle launches to assemble the *International Space Station (ISS)* in Earth orbit. MAX could exceed this mass in one launch, saving considerable time and money in the process.

MAX specifications:

Thrust: 21,065,000 lb at liftoff

Total weight: 14,432,000 lb at liftoff

Elements used are ET, modified ET, RD-180 engines, and RSRMs, as described below:

<p>Stage 1</p> <p>Lox-RP-1 modified ET</p> <p>Six RSRMs</p> <p>Six in-line axisymmetric RD-180 engines</p>	<p>Stage 2</p> <p>Lox-hydrogen</p> <p>ET: 59,500 lb</p> <p>Main engines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three SSMEs (1M-lb total thrust) or two RS-68s (1.2M-lb total thrust) <p>Fairing (TBD)</p> <p>Lunar soft lander</p> <p>Propellant (storable): 185,000 lb</p> <p>Dry weight: ≈18,500 lb</p> <p>Payload container weight: 136,500 lb</p>
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MAX description: An ET-like propellant tank system with the lox tank stretched and the fuel tank shortened, powered by six RD-180 engines (Figs. 3 and 4). A possible engine cluster configuration is shown in Figure 3. The RD-180 is a two-chamber derivative of the four-chamber RD-170 that was used on Russian vehicles and was rated



Figure 3. Pratt & Whitney RD-180 engine (image courtesy of Pratt & Whitney).

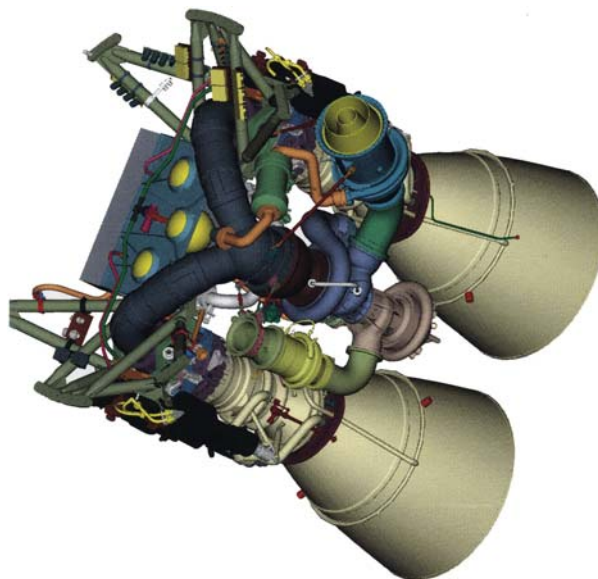


Figure 4. RD-180 CAD drawing (image courtesy of D. Christensen).

for crewed flight. This engine produces over 800,000 lb of thrust. This reusable lox-RP-1-fueled engine has been flight proven on the Lockheed Martin Atlas III and V and provides an environmentally clean operation while featuring an integrated propulsion package with hydraulics for control valve actuation and thrust vector gimbaling, pneumatics for valve actuation and system purging, and a thrust frame to distribute loads.

The stage 1 liquid core described above would be augmented with six RSRMs. The gross liftoff weight of the vehicle in this configuration is a little over 14M lb. With six RSRMs ground lit and six RD-180 engines igniting at liftoff, it has a liftoff thrust-to-weight (T/W) ratio of 1.46, increasing to 3.37 just before RSRM jettison. After the RSRMs are jettisoned, the T/W decreases to 1.1.

Stage 2 is a modified ET powered by three in-line lox-hydrogen SSME-derivative engines, or similar engines such as the RS-68. The payload, including a lunar soft landing stage and a payload module, is carried above stage 2 in a fairing with a weight TBD.

While the payload for this specific configuration could conceivably be as high as 850,000 lb to low-Earth orbit, this vehicle is specifically configured with a fairing that matches the mission of placing large payloads into high-energy paths like trans-lunar or trans-Mars trajectories. Payloads to trans-lunar or trans-Mars trajectories must include a significant mass in a soft lander stage to deliver the required cargo safely to the correct final location. The vehicle is designed to deliver total payload masses of 250,000 lb to a Martian transfer orbit or placing 340,000 lb on a trans-lunar trajectory.

Figure 5 is a scale drawing of the base of the MAX showing relative orientation and spacing of the RD-180 engines, main tank, and RSRM components. Figure 6 shows the entire vehicle, assembled, and Figure 7 is a side-by-side comparison of the MAX with some other launch vehicles, comparing physical dimensions and performance statistics. There are several possible configurations based on these particular components. We have shown just one specific example here. High modularity of design, allowing a wide range of vehicle capabilities, greatly increases its versatility.

It is important to note that the components mentioned above include the RSRM, ET, and the SSME. The Shuttle orbiter itself—a winged lifting body, complex to build, fly, and maintain—is not included in this scenario. Since the requirement for controlled atmospheric reentry and return to launch site has been abandoned in favor of a simple reentry capsule, there is no need to implement the added complexity a winged lifting body brings to such a system.

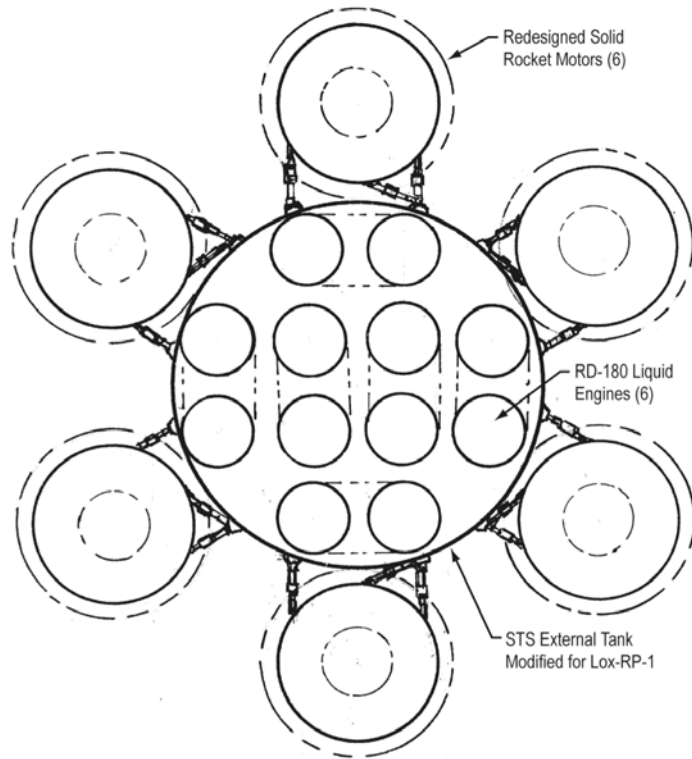


Figure 5. Footprint of MAX, showing core ET with six RD-180 liquid engines and six RSRM strap-on boosters.



Figure 6. Entire MAX, assembled.

VIII. Pitfalls of Extrapolations

The basic design described above incorporates launch system elements in configuration, assembly, and operations. However, it is no simple matter to extrapolate their design to a much larger scale. One cannot simply scale up an existing system to MAX without doing a great deal of engineering analysis work and testing. Analysis on systems integration, complex interactions of the various structural and dynamic elements, and the new induced environments created by a new configuration flying in new flight regime conditions must all be done for each new configuration.

It cannot be understated that recombination of understood elements does not imply or result in well-understood performance of the new configuration. Nonlinear interaction of parts, aerodynamics, new performance capabilities, and resulting flight-induced environments should be expected. Existing analysis tools must be expanded and benchmarked for the new applications by extensive ground testing and analysis.

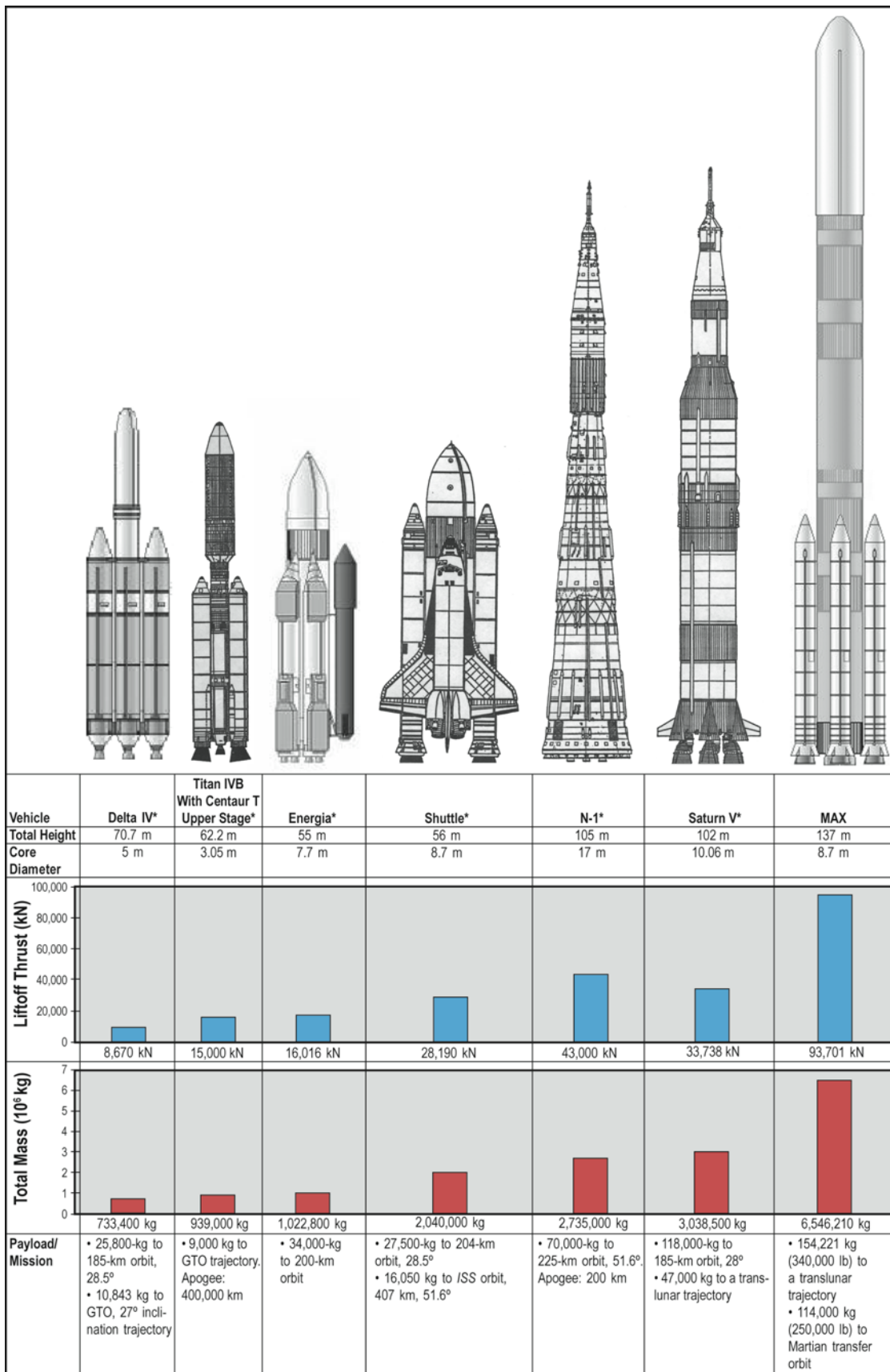


Figure 7. Side-by-side comparison of MAX with various launch vehicles.

IX. Conclusions

In conclusion, from a systems engineering point of view, a “modular building block” management approach is desired in designing the new lunar and Mars transportation system. This would be best initiated by using existing hardware, engineering, software, contractual, and operational assets in the first vehicle designs and then introducing new methods and technologies over time in a well-planned “Spiral Development” approach.

Whether one is dealing with software development or flight hardware manufacture, unreasonable or unattainable initial requirements, lack of indepth technical oversight, depending on unproven or nonexistent technologies, lack of thorough system planning, abrupt design changes, and constantly changing requirements are a recipe for project failure and should be avoided.

Cost and schedule modelers know that it is faster and less costly to design a system around existing hardware, technology, and industrial processes than to develop a new system from a truly clean sheet. A heavy-lift launch vehicle of the Saturn V class or larger requires a very large infrastructure system. It is important for policymakers to realize that, even allowing for the great deal of work that would be necessary to understand the new dynamic-induced environments during ascent of a new configuration vehicle and set up all of the other infrastructure using existing assets and capabilities as a “jump start” is the only way to achieve first flight of a new heavy-lift, crew-rated vehicle within the targeted 5 yr.

The configuration described herein represents a viable solution that uses large and existing hardware elements to achieve a launch capability that meets the heavy-lift requirements envisioned for future manned lunar missions within 5 yr. The wide capability range that can be achieved by this modular approach will likewise meet a very wide range of mission requirements for many years to come.

Finally, NASA leadership must view this as a long-term effort made up of continuously evolving system of systems, rather than concentrating on any one vehicle concept to the exclusion of all others, while also attempting to make that one concept satisfy all possible requirements. Too many times in the past we have spent all our efforts on delivering a particular highly complex but limited-capability vehicle, then stopped all development efforts on anything beyond that to apply all available resources to the near-term needs of operating that one vehicle. True leadership requires a long-range view of the ultimate goals. All of the skills, technologies, resources, and political support in the world will not guarantee success without good leadership.

Developing this first vehicle is only the first step in the Journey, it is not our final destination. Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it, while those who learn from the past, *evolve*.

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