Is There Progress in Process?

CMMI: Getting a Handle on Process is easier said than done. The constant barrage of variables interacting with the human component makes following a repeatable process model a challenge in any industry—but extremely difficult in software. Building assembly line-type products makes process easier, but the defense software industry doesn't typically make assembly line software. In fact, our jobs are anything but repeatable as we strive to meet the challenges of an ever-changing enemy with its own evolving technological advances, cyberterrorism strategies, and constant countermeasures taken to defeat our latest technology.

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So why put forth the effort to follow a process model when the products change so rapidly? The reason is simple: There are huge benefits accompanying process. Our software team, the 309th Software Maintenance Group (SMXG) at Hill AFB, has teamed in an enterprise fashion with two other AFB SMXGs—the 76th at Tinker and the 402nd at Robins—committing to process improvement in an effort to further progress down the process road on which we embarked many years ago. We continue because past efforts have significantly reduced defects and increased productivity. Process can do that in a way no other process improvement effort can.

Process should not be misconstrued as a substitute for people, individuality, creativity, and ingenuity—essential elements that are collectively known as agility. These are unique factors that must harmoniously remain inside process, enhancing within the nonrestrictive parameters of a good process model. After all, it is only a model.

I've heard the many arguments made in defense of agility versus process. This issue of CrossTalk will explore the virtues of both, also discussing the transformation and incorporation of process with other concepts, ideas, and process improvement efforts.

We begin with Jeffrey L. Dutton's *An Integrated Framework for Performance Excellence*, which addresses emerging value from CMMI and the associated principles for implementation. Mike Phillips and Sandy Shrum continue the CMMI topic with their article *Process Improvement for All: What to Expect from CMMI Version 1.3*. They detail changes to CMMI for Development, Acquisition, and Services—as well to appraisal and training methods—found in the new version, scheduled to arrive in late 2010.

Anyone battling project control issues will want to read *Scope Management: 12 Steps for ICT Program Recovery*, where Carol Dekkers and Pekka Forselius describe a process designed to control project parameters. Ron Abler and Ted Warren discuss the other side of the process coin by looking at how advancements in organizations occur by focusing on work products—not just processes—in *Stealth CPI: Managing Work Products to Achieve Continuous Process Improvement*. Darrell Corbin's *CMMI, Swiss Cheese, and Pareto* comes to us from an appraiser's point of view, sharing a case study describing creative techniques used to achieve 100 percent CMMI compliance in a virtual environment.

Finally, in this issue's Open Forum section, Hillel Glazer explains the puzzle piece matching relationship he discovered between process and non-process in *Love and Marriage: CMMI and Agile Need Each Other*.

This issue offers something for everyone, regardless of what side of the aisle you sit on in the process debate. Getting a handle on process may not be easy, but it's worth it. We hope that this issue assists you and your organization in building, incorporating, integrating, optimizing, and managing your process efforts.

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