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Executive redirection to agile IT methods: A proposed pilot effort to radically improve time to value. A credible way to move DoD forward from its traditional and failing IT ways



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EXECUTIVE REDIRECTION TO AGILE IT METHODS:
A PROPOSED PILOT EFFORT TO RADICALLY IMPROVE TIME TO VALUE

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SUMMARY:

A decade after DOD began its focus on Information Superiority and tens of billions of dollars later, the evidence shows we have negligible results. Worse, our processes are so slow and complex, we are falling behind at ever faster rates. Nothing short of a fundamental change will address our failure mode. The single most important success factor is the cycle time for delivery of increased value. For many reasons, we believe the time is right for DOD to transform IT-related processes to a maximum 18-month cycle time for time to value. This is 1.5 to 3 times slower than industry, but a reasonable and appropriate first step. We propose OSD lead this transformation through a pilot effort.

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM:

Throughout the services and other defense agencies, one pattern is clear. Our deliberate planning processes for Information Technology (IT) take many years and usually deliver little value relative to cost and time. While IT has always been challenging, over the last decade the rate of technology change has accelerated and commercial and open source communities have increasingly controlled the environment. The world in which DOD operates is driven by organizations operating on 6 to 12-month development cycles and technology generations of 12 to 24 months. Furthermore, over the last decade, DOD has recognized the importance of joint and coalition operations, yet we still fail to acquire systems in any way effective for the collaborative enterprise. We are not driven by end-user value delivery chains, and we don't implement these chains nearly fast enough.

OPPORTUNITY AND PROPOSED PLAN:

In most businesses today, IT or information contributes well more than half of the value added of products and services. DOD needs to adopt and implement best methods of those companies to harness the opportunities IT presents. In a nutshell, DOD needs to adopt processes that focus on time to value for development and delivery of products and services. Those products and services must be part of clearly defined value-delivery chains that end with improved operator outcomes. The cycle time for delivery must be no more than 18 months. The good news is that best practices throughout industry already exist to show how this can be done. DOD has created at least one organization (w2cog.org) that teaches and practices these methods. OSD can lead a performance-oriented transformation that applies these methods through a series of pilot programs. Eventually, defense enterprise architecture, SOA, and information architecture projects will need to be redirected toward harvesting and capitalizing the incremental, proven results from these fast cycle-time pilots. In the end, DOD must be a leader in implementing agile methods for IT. This approach produces assured ROI at low risk and guarantees incremental improvements in value delivered to operators. The approach also constitutes the only credible alternative to address and turn around our losing streak.