Software Best Practices Clearinghouse

Promoting Adoption and Effective Implementation

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Presentation Objectives

• **Share** with you our thinking on why we believe programs face challenges implementing best practices and how we overcome those challenges

• **Inform** you about the Best Practices Clearinghouse Initiative

• **Encourage** you to think about your experiences with considering or implementing best practices

• **Request** your feedback and motivate you to get involved
How Do We Encourage Broader Use of Best Practices?

Through the **Best Practices Clearinghouse**

- Promote and assist in the adoption and effective utilization of “best practices”
- Provide central access to validated, actionable practice information
- Target the needs of the Department of Defense software acquisition and development community
Implementation Barriers

- Programs are aware of “best practices,” but they don’t often choose to implement them
  - Too many lists to choose from
  - No basis for selecting specific practices
  - Proof of effectiveness is not generally available
  - Not easy to see connection between practices and specific program risks or issues
  - Practice’s success factors not well understood
  - Resources are limited and the return on practice investment is unknown
  - Implementation guidance is inadequate
Traditional Best Practices

- Are disciplines rather than specific practices (e.g., Risk Management)
- Have problematic descriptions
  - If descriptions too generic or abstract, hard to apply; if too context specific, don’t seem relevant
  - Implementation directions insufficient, ineffective, imprecise
  - Rarely supported by data
- Take energy and resources to implement, but benefits may come (much) later or are hard to quantify
- Implementation does not always work
  - Often depend on other practices
  - Are not implemented as designed
  - Depend on project context (size, complexity, life-cycle phase)
What Do We Mean By ‘Supported By Data’?

- **Example: NASA Software Engineering Laboratory Ground Support Systems Software Development**
  - Used experiments and data to evaluate, select, implement and track the impact of development practices
  - By feeding back actual performance data into their work, and using only practices their data showed effective, they:

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  **Decreased Development Defect rates by**

  **Reduced Cost by**

  **Improved Reuse by**

  **Increased Functionality five-fold** (1976 - 1992)
Best practice: Smaller modules have less defects
- Reality: Observation and analysis showed sweet spot

Best Practice: Early detection of defects
- Initial experience: late detection >100X more expensive
- New data showed
  - 100X still valid for severe defects
  - However, only 2X more expensive for less severe defects
  - Business model drives acceptance of late costs
The Clearinghouse Vision

- *The best practice resource* for the Department of Defense
- Based on empirical evidence
- Validated practice information provides level of confidence
- Leverages existing best practices and centralizes access to them
- Captures cost, benefits, context, latency
- Supports user-driven selection of relevant practices
- Provides step-wise implementation guidance and expert assistance
- Tracks and measures results
Key Strategies to Overcome Challenges

- **User-focused** access and information infrastructure
- **Empirically based** Information in the repository
- The building block of each practice or set of practices is a “story”
- A set of stories are synthesized into a profile
- Details of the practice are provided on demand
- A type of color code scheme provides a quick and easy way of understanding the level at which the practice is well-proven or robust
Delivery Infrastructure Focused on Users

- Easy to use, informative tools for best practices selection and implementation support
  - Practices suggested by goal, risk, phase, program size
  - Implementation ordering for multiple practices
  - Evolution from basic through advanced practices
  - Flexible search mechanisms

- Active community involvement and links to expertise
  - Acquisition Community Connection (nee PM CoP)

- Dissemination of Clearinghouse latest information through widely-used venues: courses, workshops, articles, conference tutorials
Exploiting Sources of Information

• **Identify and utilize what we already know**
  - Mine best practices and lessons learned repositories (from the Services, Agencies, FFRDCs, DAU, Academic Institutions, DACS Gold Practices, Industry, literature, etc.)
  - Cultivate relationships with practice experts and researchers
  - Gather experiences on specific programs

• **Make it readily accessible**
  - One central entry point to organized information
  - Not re-publish what is already there, but provide links

• **Make it easy to use**
  - Extract key information from more detailed sources
  - Provide visual cues and progressively more detailed information

• **Keep it current**
  - E-workshops support practice identification and validation
  - User feedback
  - Ongoing study, conferences, workshops, symposia
## Best Practices Vetting Process

Each cycle allows more experience to be gathered and processed, leading to better characterization of the practice, improved recommendations, and more dependable implementation guidance.

### Practice/packaging maturation cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Characterization</th>
<th>Analysis &amp; Synthesis</th>
<th>Validation</th>
<th>Packaging &amp; Dissemination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inputs:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inputs:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inputs:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inputs:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inputs:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads to practices</td>
<td>Set of candidate practices and rationale for consideration</td>
<td>Detailed set of candidate practices</td>
<td>Sets of practice data; validation criteria</td>
<td>Sets of practice data; validation criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Activities:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Activities:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Activities:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Activities:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect</td>
<td>Aggregate stories, create profile of practice</td>
<td>Check outputs from previous phases</td>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>Packaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categorize</td>
<td>Populate the repository</td>
<td>Color Code practices</td>
<td>Publishing</td>
<td>Publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filter</td>
<td>Identify/define Interrelationships</td>
<td>Approve practices via panel of experts</td>
<td>Promoting</td>
<td>Promoting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesize</td>
<td>Outputs:</td>
<td>Outputs:</td>
<td>Providing user help</td>
<td>Discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritize</td>
<td>Candidate set of practices</td>
<td>More detailed set of candidate practices with “stories”</td>
<td>Validated practices</td>
<td>Outputs:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outputs:</strong></td>
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<td>Repository update</td>
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<tr>
<td>Candidate set of practices</td>
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<td>Papers &amp; conference presentations</td>
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<td>Course materials/updates</td>
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</tbody>
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![Possible practice validation coding](image)

- Proven
- Consistent results
- Initial validation
- Nominated

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Experience data

Case Study #24

Best practice
Formal inspections

Theory/Expectation
The use of software inspections will ensure a high level of system quality.

Lesson Learned
Attention must be paid that inspections are practiced correctly, with appropriate formality, to ensure defect removal benefits.

Breakdown in the use of inspections:
- Contrary to typical practice, there was not a requirement for a navigation (end-user) representative to be present at any of the walkthroughs or the acceptance test.
- The Smforces software was considered non-mission critical, which reduced the number of reviews done on the software compared to mission critical.

BP Interrelationships

Phase 1: Planning
Inspectors should have vested interests in work product
Inspectors should invest no more than 15% of their time in inspections (don’t overwork good inspectors!)

Phase 2: Preparation
Inspectors should spend at least as much time in preparing as is required for the inspection meeting.
Provide adequate lead time for inspectors to perform preparation (3 - 5 work days)
Example Tool for Practice Selection & Investigation

- **Support**
- **Production & Deployment**
- **System Development & Demonstration**
- **Concept & Technology Development**

**Life Cycle Phase: CTD**
**Risks/Issues:** Limited SW productivity
**Validation Coding:** Proven
**Mitigation:** Architect SW for parallel development

- Adaptable to change
- Complex SW integration
- Cross cutting performance trade-offs
- Inflexible subcontracting
- Inter-systems compound issues
- Limited SW productivity
- Out of synch SW upgrades
DACS Gold Practices

• Initiative began in early-2002, extending previous best practice research

• Objectives:
  – Disseminate consistent, easy-to-understand, value-added best practice information
  – Gather user experience on best practice information

• 35 practices identified; 4 currently described

• Relationship to Clearinghouse
  – Initial information source for Clearinghouse
  – Clearinghouse activities will inform and improve Gold Practice products
How Can You Get Involved?

• Let us know your needs by
  - Identifying your best practices lists and sources of guidance for their use
  - Sharing your experiences & lessons learned in implementing best practices
  - Volunteering to help us define the services and capabilities of the Clearinghouse
  - Participating in surveys, e-workshops and other events - See http://iac.dtic.mil/dacs for more information

• Participate in the next session, “Software Acquisition Best Practices Workshop”
The Best Practices Clearinghouse - In Summary

- Centralized resource
- Lessons learned in application of practices
- Empirically based, Experiences provided
- Acquisition and development practices
- Repository of vetted practices
- Important insight
- Not just another list; Not just a website
- Guidance on selection
- Help provided through multiple services
- Outreach to user community
- Useful information
- Search capabilities
- Easy to use & informative tools
Contact Information

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