Booz Allen Hamilton Provides an Innovative Approach to Overcome Process Improvement Burnout

Company Background

Booz Allen Hamilton is a leading consulting, technology, and engineering firm whose core business is to provide management, technology, and security services to civilian U.S. government agencies in the defense, intelligence, and civil markets. Founded in 1914, it is one of the world's oldest management consulting firms. Booz Allen Hamilton is headquartered in McLean, Va., and has more than 80 offices across the United States, as well as locations in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. With its 22,000-plus employees, Booz Allen Hamilton generated $5.27 million in revenue during 2015 and has earned a CMMI-DEV maturity level 5 rating.

THE BUSINESS NEED

An internal software engineering agency with the U.S. Department of Defense was given a goal by its parent organization to achieve CMMI®-DEV maturity level 3. While the agency was responsible for maintaining software and software baselines for field systems, its process improvement initiatives at that point were not seeing traction, and burnout was evident. The agency's senior leadership turned to Booz Allen, asking for an innovative solution, one where they could quickly see tangible results.

"Things weren't being done as effectively and productively as possible," said Kileen Harrison, chief technologist from Booz Allen's San Diego office. "Basic communication and coordination were much more complicated than they needed to be."

Even though the CMMI-DEV maturity level 3 goal was identified from the parent organization, teams did not fully understand what they were trying to do or why they were doing it, so improvement had stagnated. "They had action items open for eight, nine months, even a year," Harrison said. "The agency wanted to see something tangible that had improved or impacted its business."

THE SOLUTION

To deliver results, employee buy-in was crucial. Harrison and her team established a new strategy by building a "Business Process Innovation" roadmap. The underlying premise of the roadmap was based on the CMMI framework. Harrison and her team leveraged the generic practices from CMMI (GP 2.1 through GP 3.2), and broke down the traditional alignment of CMMI process areas into specific and generic practices. Rather, the generic practices were applied against each of the defined service areas of the agency.

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BUSINESS BENEFITS

Understanding the CMMI framework was crucial for Booz Allen Hamilton, but a successful rollout also required buy-in on the employee level. Once the company developed workable plans, both senior leadership and employees were able to effectively communicate improvements to process development and quality assurance.

The assessment of the current environment included reviewing work products and interviewing individuals within each service area. The Business Process Innovation roadmap was developed to include the following primary phases:

1. Assess the current environment.

2. Prioritize focal areas for improvement.

3. Design templates and techniques for defining and documenting processes.

4. Develop processes.

5. Deploy processes.

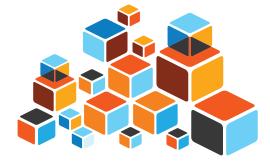6. Verify integration with all aspects of business operations.

The team leveraged survey input from each service area to prioritize the identified improvements. Service area reference guides—which included basic documentation from each service area, such as primary functions, points of contact, products, and services, and the accompanying user or consumer of each product or service—were first on the list of improvements. Throughout the time that the company as a whole was improving, Harrison and her team identified needs, and potential solutions, based on the analysis of each service area's business environment.

RESULTS

The service area reference guides were well received, and the workforce within each service area contributed to their development with energy and excitement.

- Guides were completed in a reasonable time frame, approximately one-third faster than prior initiatives.

- By completing the guides, Booz Allen could immediately realize redundancies both in work responsibilities and process gaps.

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- The workforce was able to see direct value to daily work. "One of the comments we got from someone who had been working in a particular area for a long time was, 'Wow. Now I understand what my service area is all about,'" Harrison said. "The service area reference guides were very positively received and paved the way for further improvements."

Another key element to Booz Allen's successful implementation of the CMMI framework came from senior management.

- With direct buy-in from the leadership, the innovative process received the flexibility and customization it required.

- Senior management, trusting the process and the teams, saw employees actively contribute to improvement activities.

> The most critical factor behind the success of the Business Process Innovation roadmap was the ability to shift the workforce's understanding.

Instead of "implementation for the sake of CMMI," the agency was able to establish a process that ultimately made employees' jobs easier. CMMI compliance was still critical to success, but just moved from the forefront to the behind-the-scenes details.

> **"We were able to get the basic capabilities on paper in a format that the workforce could understand and digest. The service area reference guides were very positively received and paved the way for further improvements. "**
>
> –KILEEN HARRISON, CHIEF TECHNOLOGIST, BOOZ ALLEN HAMILTON

About CMMI® Institute

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