COTS Usage Risk Evaluation^{SM} (CURE^{SM})

Participant's Overview

Version 3.2

Description

The COTS Usage Risk Evaluation (CURE) assumes that an organization is at some stage of acquiring a COTS-based software system, to be created under contract by another organization. In the most familiar scenario, the former organization would be some part of the Federal Government and the latter some large industrial contractor. However, there is no assumption that the acquiring organization is necessarily a Government agency: the questionnaire is equally applicable to any acquiring organization. Ideally, both the acquiring and the contracting organizations will participate in separate evaluations, and a program-wide result will be obtained. However, this is not absolutely necessary.

This document is intended for those personnel participating in the COTS Usage Risk Evaluation (CURE). It provides an overview of the three steps of CURE that involve participation by the program's team members. For each step, both the activity and the personnel expected to perform it are discussed. Finally, it is assumed that the decision to perform CURE has already been made, thus no rationale for a program's participation in the CURE is provided.

Initial questionnaire

Four weeks before the scheduled onsite visit, the evaluation team sends the initial questionnaire to the program's point of contact (PPOC). The completed questionnaire must be returned to the evaluation team no later than one week before the onsite visit.

The questions are general in nature and it is likely that any member of the program office could answer them. The answers to the questionnaire are used to inform the evaluation team about the program.

Onsite visit

About one week before the onsite visit, the evaluation team furnishes the PPOC with the discussion document. This document guides the discussions during the visit and is provided in advance so that program personnel may understand better the nature of the onsite visit.

The normal model of the onsite visit is that the evaluation team meets with the program participants on Monday of the evaluation week. After an initial inbrief by the evaluation team, the discussion document is used to guide the dialog between both teams. The discussion of some topics will perforce take longer than others, but each topic is intended to be roughly at the same level of granularity. Some times it is desirable to extend the discussion into Tuesday morning, but it is unlikely that the discussion would be any longer.

The onsite interviews are with key personnel from the organization. For a Contractor, the interviews are divided between the Lead Engineer, the Project Manager, and possibly the organization's Contracts Officer. For an Acquisition organization, the Program Manager is the main person to be interviewed. Any supporting persons (e.g., the program's Contracts Officer) may be added as deemed appropriate, but no more than five people should be interviewed.

There is no need for individual interviews, thus it is expected that all personnel will be present for the duration of the onsite visit. Indeed, the joint interview occasionally surfaces differences of opinion between team members; resolving such ambiguities is an important step.

The data gathered during the first day(s) is analyzed for risks and forms the basis of the outbrief.

Outbrief

On Friday of the same week as the onsite visit, the evaluation team returns with an outbrief listing the observed COTS-based risks for the program. Each risk is presented with potential consequences and possible mitigations. The outbrief takes one to two hours, depending on the results of the evaluation team's analysis. The outbrief may generate discussions, these are encouraged by the evaluation team – such discussions may illuminate or clarify issues raised during the evaluation.

The outbrief is intended for the PM, but the PM should feel free (and is encouraged) to invite other appropriate personnel. The only caveat being that if CURE is to be subsequently applied to the contractor, that contractor personnel not be present during the acquirer's outbrief[1].

In all cases, the evaluation team considers the content of the outbrief to be confidential and **never** shares the information with any other party. This restriction only applies to the evaluation team, the program office may distribute the outbrief as circumstances dictate.

[1] Such attendance leads to bias in the contractor evaluation and reduces the value of the second evaluation.