File 20091009.0500: Weekly activity report 0105:

weekly activity report 105 (loughry)
Joe Loughry
Sent: 09 October 2009 05:00
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Attachments:
Weekly activity report no. 20091008.2000 (GMT-7) sequence no. 0105, noughth week MT

I met with Dr Martin yesterday after Reading Group. We discussed progress
on the Air Force request-for-information (RFI), the response to which is
due 16th October. Right after our supervisor meeting, I met with a former
Project Manager (PM) of the project described in my first case study at a
coffee shop; he and I talked about the RFI (more so than about the case
study which was my original purpose in getting together). As soon as I
got back from that meeting, I had a telephone message from the PM who is
coordinating the RFI response. She said Lockheed management have become
interested and asked for a summary. I have not written anything down
yet, but while I was talking with her on the phone, it crystallised and
I knew what to say. The RFI asks for a solution to the DIACAP problem
(the US DoD's latest certification and accreditation (C&A) standard).
Nothing like that currently exists, which is part of the reason why C&A
is so unaccountably expensive. The UK Ministry of Defence, via CESG and
reporting through Whitehall, almost certainly have such a system already.
The British way of doing C&A has historically been different from how the
US does it---more risk-driven than testing-based; therefore, I conclude,
MoD must have a process like the RFI is asking for already in-house.
It might not be automated to a very great extent, though. I don't have
any knowledge of that UK system. Its existence is merely a logical
deduction. (Deduction or inference? I need to sort out my terminology.)

Potential competitors: IBM will undoubtedly pitch a Lotus Notes-type
workflow solution to the RFI. That's their consulting bread and butter.
Microsoft will say they can do it all with SharePoint. Both of those
efforts will tie up buildings full of software developers and systems
engineers for years working on it. But it's not what the RFI is really
asking for.

DoD needs something now. The RFI asks for an Air Force tool to handle
accreditations under their AFI33-210 process (a tailored DIACAP).
It simply can't be only the Air Mobility Command that needs it.
Reading between the lines, Air Mobility Command got stuck with the RFI
because nobody else wanted to do it. They brainstormed up 86 requirements
with no functional framework, but obviously representing the specific,
immediate needs of a small group of C&A practitioners who are buried up
to their eyebrows in past-due work.

This is not just the US Air Force. DIACAP is DoD-wide; every combatant
command has got the same problem. Unlike the intelligence community,
DoD pushes responsibility for C&A risk acceptance down to the individual
combatant commands. Solve this, and every combatant command will
want one.

I figure conservatively 4 to 7 times (a purposely low number) of that many
accreditations across DoD---based on the relative size of the services
and their current activity---as were called out in the RFI. Fortunately,
I think I can architect it to handle 10 000 simultaneous accreditations
as easily as 200. (That is historical as well as current accreditations.)

I have been thinking about this exact problem---although from a Common

Criteria perspective instead of DIACAP---since 2007. I have a year to
demonstrate a working prototype before I have to write my dissertation and
defend it. Coincidentally, that matches exactly with Fiscal Year 2010,
so there is a possibility of funding to develop it. An excellent response
to the RFI is a necessary but not sufficient condition for that funding.
I will describe a software system achievable in the next year by my own
effort that nevertheless is fast, reliable, and future-proof. We can
stream in an update in a couple of years, firmly based on observed and
measured usage metrics, without disrupting the users who by then will
be depending on the continued smooth operation of the system.

Plan for this week: I must concentrate on writing the RFI response.
Today, I finished a quarterly status report that I owed to another
project, but now that that's done I can focus on the RFI response.
A slightly modified version will also be submitted to Crosstalk as
an article.

Finally, I described what I've been reading over the past week. I am
trying out a method called 'Getting Things Done' for organising tasks.
I have the book and an empty stack of file folders; I will report the
level of efficacy later.

Next meeting: Monday, 19th October at 7:00 a.m. Oxford time.

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End of WAR 0105.

References