Boeing Achieves Premiere Software Certification

A vital software certification is acknowledging Boeing is staying razor sharp on the cutting edge of technology.

Two business units of The Boeing Company were recently certified with a Level 5 rating, the highest rating possible in software engineering as defined by the Software Engineering Institute (SEI).

The SEI is a federally funded research and development center. Its Capability Maturity Model for judging the maturity of the software processes of an organization and identifying the key practices that are required to increase the maturity of these processes has established standards of excellence (Levels 1-5) for software engineering.

To date, only 1 percent of all organizations assessed have achieved a Level 5 rating. The certification elevates Boeing Reusable Space Systems and Boeing Information and Communications Systems to an elite rank held by only 12 other software engineering organizations in the world, two of which are also Boeing business units. SEI has assessed a total of 1,036 organizations.

Software engineering can make up 25 percent of the overall cost of product development. The Boeing Company's certification increases the likelihood that the software development efforts on two vital taxpayer-supported products - the NASA Space Shuttle and the Air Force's Global Positioning System (GPS) - have significantly fewer defects and are more cost-effective.

Boeing Reusable Space Systems is a major subcontractor to United Space Alliance (USA) for Space Shuttle Orbiter maintenance, modifications/upgrades, operations, ongoing engineering support and overall Shuttle system and payload integration services -- with additional responsibility for launch and mission support. Ongoing shuttle software upgrade efforts focus on the Backup Flight System, which protects the Shuttle in the event of a failure in the primary flight system; and the Multifunction Electronic Display System, known as a "glass cockpit."

"This certification recognizes our exceptional capability in software development and world-class status," said Stan Albrecht, Shuttle Program Director. "Not only does it show added value to our customers on current programs, the certification indicates we are capable of initiating Shuttle Upgrades with exceptional performance using mature processes."

Boeing Information and Communications Systems is designing and manufacturing up to 33 GPS Block IIF satellites. The business unit is the prime contractor responsible for ongoing development of the ground-based GPS control segment. With delivery slated to begin in late 2001, the Block IIF satellites will sustain the GPS constellation, which provides signals for continuous day and night, all weather, three-dimensional positioning for worldwide navigation.

"While this rating is specific to the work we are accomplishing on the GPS program, it shows we have the skills and tools in place to compete in an increasingly competitive global market," said Ken Medlin, vice president and general manager, Information and Communications Systems. "We have not only met a requirement of our Department of Defense customers, we have surpassed it by far, entering the top tier of software development organizations in the world."

Quality software that is produced on schedule and within budget has been recognized as critical by the U.S. government. Recently, the Department of Defense stipulated that all prospective development contractors tasked with significant software development programs in two of its largest acquisition categories will require compliance with SEI Level 3 or its equivalent.

All Boeing business segments have begun the steps required for certification under SEI. The other Boeing units which have earned a Level 5 rating are the Inertial Upper Stage team in Kent, Wash., and a Phantom Works team in Long Beach, Calif.

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