

ERP Systems

Development Laboratory

Team Charter



C&P Systems Development Laboratory Team Charter

Team Goal: To better serve our nations veterans and their families by assisting our organization in expediting the creation of Information Technology/ Business solutions

Lab History/ Rationale

VBA is creating a virtual laboratory environment in order to aid in the testing and rapid development of Virtual VBA and other information technology solutions. The virtual laboratory will be located in a closed, secure environment at 1120 Vermont Avenue and will be staffed solely by C&P Service employees and contract support. The laboratory will be completed by the end of October 1999 in order to accommodate the FY00 schedule for Virtual VBA.

The laboratory has been a recognized need for some time. As C&P Service has developed several information technology initiatives, end users from across the nation are regularly brought in to evaluate each application and certify functional acceptance. While end user perspectives are a must, individual talent pools change as field employees are promoted or needed at their regional office. The end result is an ever-changing talent pool, with ever changing perspectives of how each application should function. This often creates extreme programming challenges for system developers, and often extends product deployment by months if not years.

C&P Service recently hired eight employees with exceptional claims processing abilities and computer knowledge from regional offices across the country. These employees will serve as subject matter experts in the development of Virtual VBA. While field expertise will still be utilized at every given opportunity, the C&P laboratory team will provide a consistent voice from a functional perspective, and guarantee the availability of experienced end users for vendors completing software development.

While the laboratory team's primary responsibility will be to further develop Virtual VBA, they will also test all other C&P information technology solutions simultaneously, identifying areas of functional duplication and documenting best practices. Other IT applications and initiatives being considered for the laboratory include:

- MAP (Modern Awards Process including Case Management and Rules-Based Development)
- RBA 2000
- Benefits Replacement System
- Voice Recognition Software

The Laboratory team will also analyze and document best practices for incorporating each application into each regional office's work environment. In many cases, the group may make recommendations for procedural changes and other business process changes in developing and processing claims.

Contract support for creating the prototype for FY01 will be mandated to develop the national solution in the laboratory environment. By providing contractors with access to C&P experts full-time, we anticipate a large reduction in application development time.

VBA Computer technicians will use the laboratory to gauge the effect of various systems on workstation performance. While each end-user will be equipped with high-end machines, the laboratory will also test applications on other processors such as Pentium 300, 250, and 133Mhz processors.

Field Operations will utilize the laboratory to test the effectiveness of different furniture designs against new business processes. Historically, Regional Offices have planned their physical workforce around paper claims folders. As the goal of the information age is to create a paperless government, the impact of spacing requirements must also be analyzed.

The laboratory will also provide a state of the art, visually appealing, demonstration area for showcasing our IT and business innovations to VBA's stakeholders. A dedicated presentation/ conference room will provide a space for PowerPoint demonstrations and other computer innovations, in addition to serving as a meeting location for team building, and strategic planning sessions.

Secure, keycard access to the laboratory will help to ensure that the dynamic development process does not interfere with the mission of other businesses at the laboratory's location.

Most importantly, this environment will ensure that the laboratory team will maintain an always-needed "field" perspective and keep their claims processing skills efficient and effective by processing real claims while developing various IT solutions. Working these claims will also assist the rebuilding mission of the Washington Regional Office.

Laboratory Protocols

Laboratory protocols are forms of etiquette observed by laboratory associates. As the laboratory environment will be utilized to expedite the development of cutting edge technology and to test the feasibility of new furniture concepts, the environment will often be in a public spotlight. A high visible environment requires us to follow a different set of "norms" than the typical regional office environment.

Laboratory protocols will also allow us to enhance our interaction, support our privacy needs, and teach us to respect the privacy needs of others.

Team Member Responsibilities (General Definition)

- **Attends Meetings**
- **Participates in all invited discussions**
- **Voices opinions on issues or topics**
- **Completes assignments on time**
- **Tries to improve team quality**
- **Remains proactive when things aren't going right for the team**
- **Does whatever it takes to ensure the team meets or exceeds goals**
- **Helps monitor effective of team mission**
- **Facilitates meetings when necessary**
- **Accepts and supports consensus decision of the team**
- **Provides full backing of managerial decisions, despite personal beliefs or feelings.**

Work Schedule/ Leave Requests

Keeping the Supervisor/ Project Manager apprised of your work and leave schedule is important. This will assist us in assessing when team members are available to participate in meetings with vendors, C&P Project Managers, and VBA management. Your supervisor should approve all requests for leave. The actual input of your leave request will be completed through the ETA system (training will follow).

If associates choose to work a compressed workweek, they must first clear their selected day off with their supervisor.

Law of Effect/ Having Fun

Perhaps the most important protocol for the laboratory team to adhere to. The law of effect simply states that people learn best in pleasant surroundings. This is the environment that we hope to create. In order to have fun, the C&P Systems development laboratory will practice several "out of the box" techniques in stimulating creative energy to meet or exceed management expectations. So what are the benefits of a fun environment?

10 Characteristics of Fun

1. Humor often follows fun, which is scientifically proven to alleviate stress and tension.
2. Fun improves communication
3. Fun eases conflict
4. Fun helps teams to survive.
5. Fun is the ability to laugh at yourself
6. Laughter has a medically proven healing power.
7. Fun helps makes things easier
8. Fun unites people
9. Fun breaks up boredom and fatigue
10. Fun creates energy.

The laboratory team will have tremendous responsibility. This will require hard work and dedication. In order to achieve our goals, we will have to balance deadlines and stress with fun. Fun will hopefully be achieved through team meetings, building, and working scenarios.

Work Days

Supervisors and the Project Manager will make every effort to ensure that team members work within their scheduled tour of duty. Hopefully this will be the norm. Creative, innovative thinkers need fairly consistent schedules to maintain a balance between their personal and professional lives. However, at times the nature of our business may require us to work beyond normal business hours. Every effort will be made to ensure that this remains the exception as opposed to the norm.

As we are a dynamic team, there will be a variety of tasks expected of us, ranging from highly concentrated, to highly social. While many of our responsibilities are predictable, the time at which tasks must be completed is not always the same. Productive work is conducted in many modes. It is also conducted through strong relationships with other people. Acting as a functioning team is considered essential. Therefore, all work time, whether spent on team building or working claims is considered "time in" the office. Team members should focus on open, effective communication with one another, and should handle all challenges, whether personal or professional, in an assertive manner.

Effective Communication

Team members are expected to strive for effective communication when dealing with one another. Honest, straightforward opinions are always expected in order to build an environment based on trust. Effective communication is clear and concise, getting to the heart of the issue quickly. Effective communication is a two-way street where a message is clearly given, and a confirmation of the message is clearly received.

Do Not Disturb/ "Red Light"

At certain times during each workday, most associates will require some degree of privacy. This is an important component of the everyday laboratory environment.

- Providing team exercises and/or meetings are not taking place, each associate has the authority to request privacy in their workstation.
- The privacy request should be designated by the placement of a "do not disturb" sign at a visible location in the cubicle.
- Team members need to respect the privacy sign and refrain from interrupting the individual at their workstation, unless there is an emergency.

Team Decisions

Where possible, decisions regarding business processes and team practices will be made by the team through consensus. After a team decision is made, all team members are expected to give the decision their full support.

Consensus Guidelines:

1. The project supervisor/ project manager will decide if consensus is possible for an issue.
2. If so, the issue will be placed on the table for discussion.
3. The issue is discussed, concerns are raised, and solutions are presented.
4. Differences and similarities are explored and encouraged.
5. A solution(s) to the issue is proposed.
6. The project manager/ meeting facilitator checks for consensus, looking for non-verbal cues of someone's disagreement. "Silence also indicates consensus must also be declared."
7. If the team fails to reach consensus, the group shall modify the proposal and check for consensus again.
8. If one team member is struggling, the team will ask the individual to try the plan for a specified period of time.
9. Once consensus is reached, the entire team is expected to support the plan.

If the team fails to reach consensus with a particular issue or suggestion, the project supervisor or manager will make a final determination as to how the issue will be resolved.

Conflicts/ Resolution

Inevitably, an ever-evolving team will encounter a "bump" in the road or "conflict" from time to time with one another. Team members are expected to handle conflicts in an assertive or "win-win" manner. Group conflict can not be "shoved" under the rug. It must be addressed immediately.

"Stamp collecting," or holding little injustices in a passive-aggressive manner for a prolonged period of time, is not allowed. Conflicts can undermine a team's success if they are not dealt with immediately. Team members are expected to handle conflicts as they occur with the individual or individuals. If they can not find resolution they are encouraged to seek assistance from the team in a structured meeting format. If the conflict still can't be resolved, then the supervisor should be notified.

Expected Behaviors by Team Members Regarding Conflict Situations:

- A willingness to listen and to focus on the problem or issue at hand, rather than on the person.
- A willingness to openly and clearly define the problem in plain English.
- Willingness to allow others/and or self to exhibit some anger and or frustration during conversation.
- A willingness to “perception check,” questioning may I be the cause of this problem?
- A willingness to attempt a change in behavior.

Dress/ Personal Appearance

Unless otherwise specified, team members are expected to dress in accordance with the Central Office (C&P Service) dress code policy. When demonstrations for high level dignitaries take place, male associates are expected to wear a sport jacket. The project manager will make every effort to supply at least a one-day notice when “dress-up” is required or appropriate.

General Appearance of Laboratory

Associates should make every effort to ensure that in addition to their individual workspace, all public/team areas remain clean. We must remember IMPRESSIONS are everything.

- Spills and other accidents should be cleaned immediately.
- Food and Beverages should not be in public view when they are not being consumed.
- With the exception of the scanning/ preparation area, excessive paper should be kept to a minimum in the individual workspace. The purpose of the laboratory is to promote a paperless environment. Excessive paper in plain view would conflict with the mission of the environment.
- Unless otherwise specified, hardcopy claims folders should not be utilized to process claims.

Cubicles/ Work Stations

All work in the laboratory is heavily team-oriented. Evolving into an electronic work environment will require us to not only evaluate what practices and procedures, but the space in which work will be completed as well. Team spaces have been developed to encourage this sort of interaction, while ensuring that each individual has privacy. There are initially two different furniture concepts that lab associates will be testing. Your cubicle/workstation will likely rotate every six months in order to give you the opportunity to properly evaluate how conducive each furniture design is to our mission.

- Team members are welcome to give their cubicle a “personal” touch (pictures of family, significant others, dogs/cats, pet rocks, etc). However, team members should avoid hanging any posters, signs, toys, etc. that may be perceived as offensive or unprofessional by others.
- Team members should avoid hanging papers, calendars, etc. into the workstation fabric with any tool other than thumbtacks, or push pins. No modified paper clips, super glue, etc.
- Team members are expected to apply the general appearance of the laboratory rules to their individual workstations.
- A limited number of privacy screens are available to further seclude individual workstations when an associate requires privacy. They are available on a “first come/ first serve” basis and should be returned to the designated area when they are not being used.
- Team members are provided with additional security by being supplied with lockable file cabinets in each workstation. All cabinets are supplied with two keys. Each team member may keep one and the project manager should be given the other upon occupying the lab.

Personal Harbors/ Private Enclaves

All team members may require extra privacy at certain times. The two personal harbors support individual work or one-on-one interaction. Each harbor is equipped with telephone service and a personal computer. One harbor will primarily be utilized as a workspace for project sponsors and other visiting C&P supervisors.

- A closed door indicates “do not disturb” unless there is an emergency.
- Team members should refrain from using the harbors on a full-time basis, even if other team members seldom utilize them.
- Fans and auxiliary lighting should be turned off after use is completed.
- The keys controlling the environment should be left in the lock at all times.

Presentation/ Conference Room

The Presentation/ Conference room may be used for a variety of reasons. It was designed to host presentations to our stakeholders, and VBA management. A secondary purpose is to support our conference, meeting, and team collaboration needs. When available, associates may use this space for issues requiring privacy such as personal phone calls, and team conflict resolution.

- A closed door indicates “do not disturb” unless there is an emergency. An open door indicates interruptions may be permitted.
- The room should be cleaned and the furniture returned to its original layout when use is completed.
- Prints should be removed from tackable surfaces and marker boards should be erased.

Teaming Areas

The entire laboratory environment has been designed to promote a highly team oriented atmosphere. At times, associates may require a less-formal environment to conduct impromptu meetings, strategy meetings, or to just take a mental break. Team areas are designed to provide a professional, yet relaxing atmosphere to accommodate the objectives stated above.

- The team spaces are on a non-reserved “first come” basis.
- There is no time constrain on use.
- Team members should observe the “General Appearance of the Laboratory” rules with teaming areas.
- Interruptions are allowed and encouraged in these informal areas.
- Team members should remain conscious of noise and other disruptions to adjacent workstation areas. Associates being disturbed should not hesitate to assertively bring disturbances to the user’s attention.

Workstation Computers

Each team member will be provided with a state-of-the-art computer in order to develop Virtual VBA and to test other innovative technologies such as video conferencing and multimedia training. As the computers will be utilized to answer a variety of performance-based questions, employees are asked adhere to the protocol dictated below.

- Team members should not load any personal or *off the shelf* software onto PC without the approval of the project or technical manager (this includes special screen savers, anti-virus program, and educational games).
- When utilizing the multimedia (sound) functions the computer, team members are reminded to remain conscious of the individuals around them. If available, headphone use is encouraged. Associates being disturbed should not hesitate to assertively bring disturbances to the user's attention.
- Associates are free to utilize the multimedia function to listen to music, providing they practice the protocol stated above.
- Computer problems should be reported to the technical manager. Despite individual credentials, team members should not troubleshoot any hardware deficiency by physically attempting to disassemble a computer or any of the accompanying equipment.

Laptop Computers

The C&P Systems development laboratory has one laptop computer that is available for use by laboratory team members during meetings and for professional use when on travel.

- The laptop can be signed out through the project manager. A return date must also be provided.
- Once signed out, the laptop becomes the responsibility of the individual.
- All file storage must be accomplished on individual/ floppy disks. The PM is not responsible for any lost or deleted files that were stored on the hard-drive.
- Additional software shall not be installed on the laptop without the approval of the Project/ Technical Manager

Voice Mail

Each team member's telephone provides secondary telephone backup answering coverage. Use of a personalized outgoing message is encouraged, especially to indicate extended absences and anticipated returns.

Demonstrations/ Lab Tours

The C&P Service Systems development laboratory will be the avenue to showcase innovations in information technology, and workspace design. We anticipate this location to attract the attention of everyone from members of congress to regional office employees. As the laboratory is a marketing venue for our organization, C&P management will make every effort to accommodate requests for laboratory tours and demonstrations of the technologies being developed. It may sometimes be challenging to balance these requests while staying in focus with the team's mission. Whenever possible, all tours and presentations will be scheduled through the Project Manager and/or Project Sponsors. From time to time, team members may be asked to participate in presentations. Advance notice will be given at every possible opportunity.