



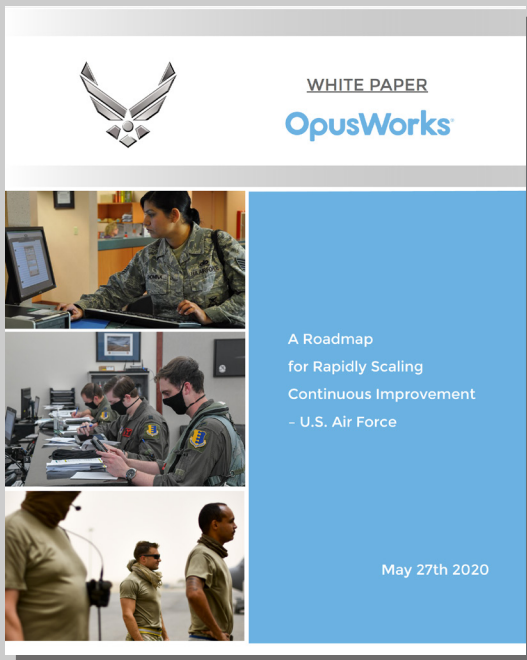
USAF WHITE PAPER UPDATE 2024

OpusWorks®



USAF
Continuous Process
Improvement Program:
Evolution and Impact
(2024 Update)

January 2024



The original USAF/OpusWorks White Paper, written in 2020, outlines the transformative journey of the US Air Force (USAF) with its Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) initiative. Recognizing problem-solving and process improvement as critical competencies, the USAF, under the banner of “every airman a problem solver”, embarked on a mission to train its vast workforce, consisting of nearly 650,000 airmen, in CPI methodologies. The then CPI training program, characterized by non-scalable approaches, high variability, and inconsistent training experiences, necessitated a complete overhaul.

2020 White Paper Summary:

The USAF collaborated with OpusWorks®, a pioneer in blended learning, to design a training system that combined self-paced e-Learning with instructor-led training. This approach aimed to standardize the learning experience and ensure consistent knowledge application across the force. The new training process was envisioned to not only reduce the variation in training but also to equip airmen with a common language and understanding of CPI principles.

A pilot project launched in 2018 confirmed the effectiveness of the new blended learning model. The formal rollout began in 2019 with clearly defined objectives and comprehensive planning. The overarching goals included training a significant portion of the workforce to the Green Belt level, standardizing the Body of Knowledge (BOK), automating the student registration and stakeholder reporting processes, making the learning accessible to all, integrating learning with project tracking, and identifying high-potential CPI talent within the Air Force.

The implementation faced several challenges at the beginning, including network bandwidth limitations and resistance to change from instructors and students. By leveraging data-driven insights and implementing innovative solutions, these obstacles were systematically addressed. The program also had to navigate the complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, paradoxically, highlighted the strengths of the virtual learning model being implemented.

The training redesign has led to significant cultural shifts within the Air Force. It has fostered a culture of continuous improvement and problem-solving, that is increasingly aligned with the strategic priorities of the force. The initiative's success is evident in its ability to rapidly scale and adapt, as it meets the growing and evolving needs of the Air Force. With this transformation, the USAF is well-positioned to continue its journey toward operational excellence, leveraging continuous improvement and innovation as key drivers.

Introduction

Since the 2020 White Paper, the United States Air Force (USAF), in continued partnership with OpusWorks, has advanced quickly on its journey to improve processes, embrace innovation, expand reach to all Commands, and embed a culture of continuous improvement across the USAF. This white paper delves deeply into the “every airman a problem solver” journey since 2020, unveiling remarkable accomplishments, widespread benefits, insightful success statistics, and exciting future opportunities, despite the ever-present challenge of changing a culture. The USAF CPI journey serves as both a testament to the USAF's commitment to excellence and a blueprint for others aiming to rapidly scale their own CPI initiative.

Accomplishments since 2020

Since launching the all-Virtual CPI program in 2019, the USAF has notably:

- Expanded the Green Belt cadre, primarily through word-of-mouth. Students and stakeholders clearly recognize the program's high value, effectiveness, and relevance. Positive behavior changes are occurring that others desire to emulate.
- Transitioned to an e-Learning/blended learning format for the Black Belt class that leverages modern training technologies, more closely aligns with industry standards, and makes it possible to double the number of Black Belts trained each year.
- Positioned the USAF to evolve to a CPI competency-building approach that offers just-in-time skill development, recognizes achievements through badges, and integrates training more closely with job performance and project work.
- Prepared for wide-range use of the OpusWorks Project Tracker to facilitate Competency learning, increase transparency and standardization in project execution, and provide insights into ongoing projects and their impact across the Air Force.

Benefits

The quality improvement and cost saving benefits of transitioning the CPI program to virtual learning have been substantial and multifaceted. Time savings, simply due to the reduced need for instructors, are estimated at \$3.4 million. Add the savings from eliminating travel, discontinuing use of classroom facilities, and becoming both more flexible for students and less disruptive to workplaces, and it becomes clear that the USAF has orchestrated a complete shift with its cost paradigm for CPI training.

This cost-effectiveness, coupled with the expanded reach of the training program, demonstrates the program's scalability and efficiency. The high-quality and standardized nature of the training, infeasible with traditional methods, is enhancing the skills and capabilities of Airmen across the entire USAF.

Due to the flexibility of the OpusWorks system, the USAF can easily adapt the delivery model as desired, in order to meet learners on their terms. Existing courses may be modified to suit special circumstances or needs while maintaining consistency with standard e-Learning modules.

The data available from the OpusWorks system demonstrates overwhelmingly positive feedback from Airmen, with a vast majority recommending the training to others. The push reporting function enables stakeholders across the Air Force to be kept informed and involved. Process Managers now have visibility into the capabilities gained by their personnel through course completions, exam scores, and projects. Data may be easily accessed at the Wing level or base location, or it can be rolled up to Command levels.

Perhaps most exciting is the ability, at long last, to both ask and answer the question – ‘what is the data telling us?’ The USAF has truly become data-driven with its CPI initiative decision-making.

Statistics of Deployment

The deployment of the virtual CPI program has seen impressive engagement. So far,

- More than 12,000 Airmen have completed Green Belt Training.
- More than 2,600 Airmen have completed Foundational CPI Training.
- More than 37,500 Airmen have registered into the USAF CPI Deployment Portal.
- More than 785,000 e-Learning modules have been completed.
- Over 83% surveyed recommend the training to others and only 3% say they would not.

The large number of completed e-Learning modules and the significant numbers of Airmen completing the Green Belt and Foundational Training classes reflect the program's wide reach and acceptance. The high recommendation rate from participants highlights the program's effectiveness and the value perceived by its users. These statistics not only demonstrate the program's success, but also indicate its potential for continued growth and impact within the USAF.

Priorities Moving Forward

Looking to the future, two specific near-term priorities are (i) grow the number of trained Black Belts and (ii) better align the activities of CPI practitioners with the strategic objectives of senior leaders. The goal is to create a more targeted, integrated, and value-laden approach to CPI implementation.

Regarding the transition from a belt-centric training mindset to a more competency-based approach, the USAF priority is to ensure that the right learning is applied in the right way and amount, to the right people, at the right time, to solve the right problem. One size fits all training must take a back seat to the needs of the work environment.

Greatly improving the end-to-end mentoring process, including mentor-mentee matching, is another focus item.

Challenges

Despite the successes of the new model, fully supported by data, some still hold on to the perception that traditional classroom learning is superior. Similarly, many resist including statistics in Green and Black Belt training because they are unconvinced that statistics is essential for effective higher-level problem solving. It is anticipated that over time, the accumulation of compelling data will eventually convert the naysayers.

Tips for Scaling CPI

As organizations look to the USAF for advice on how to rapidly and effectively scale CPI, the following are offered:

1. Start small, with a focused approach. Before expanding, ensure that your program capacity can keep up.
2. Build a robust deployment support infrastructure with properly trained and capable mentors.
3. Create positive word-of-mouth momentum. Carefully select the right participants during the early stages of your program.
4. Engage leaders to gain traction by being successful with initial projects that are well-aligned with organizational goals.
5. Focus on the right problems. Be sure to use data to monitor every aspect of your program, model the way for others, and guide your decision-making.

These strategies have proven effective for the USAF and can provide a roadmap for other organizations seeking to implement and scale their own CPI programs.

Conclusion

The USAF's CPI program stands today as a beacon of transformational success, exemplifying how strategic vision, combined with effective execution, can lead to remarkable organizational change. Since its inception in 2019, the Air Force has not only successfully trained more than 30,000 airman who are streamlining processes and enhancing operational efficiency, but a culture of innovation and continuous improvement is taking root that bodes well for its future as the world's premier fighting force.

As this paper has described, the USAF CPI journey-- marked by significant accomplishments, measurable benefits, and overcoming challenges--- underscores the USAF's **dedication to operational excellence** and progress toward its goal of "every airman a problem solver." Looking forward, the program is poised to continue its path of innovation, setting new standards in military operational efficiency.

The lessons learned and strategies developed offer invaluable insights for other organizations aspiring to embark on a similar journey of continuous improvement. The USAF CPI program is more than a series of initiatives; it is a testament to the transformative power of commitment, innovation, and strategic foresight in achieving organizational excellence.



GOAL:
"EVERY AIRMAN
A PROBLEM
SOLVER."