Case Study 1 – Financial Services Company

The Problem

The client lacks any contingency in its daily work to handle and process several billions of dollars worth of trades and transactions for major pension and 401K providers. The goal was to find contingency in the processes, reduce manual intervention in them and mitigate the client's exposure to risk.

Root Cause Analysis

I performed root cause analysis and I discovered the following:

1. Standards for processing trades, transactions, files and file transfers varied across multiple systems and operator teams and there was no understanding of end-to-end transaction and file processing between systems and operator teams.
2. On a regular basis, fire drills broke out because there was never enough time in the morning hours to prepare bulk orders to be sent to the market in time for daily trading.
3. The fire drills required many individuals to stop their normal course of work to fix problems with files and transactions prior to the afternoon trade submission cut off time.
4. While putting DollarUniverse on top of these processes would reduce headcount, it would not contribute to increasing overall quality of production and a reduction in exposure to SLA violations.

Recommended Solution & Countermeasures

Based upon root cause analysis, I recommended the following:

1. Working with subject matter experts to help them establish new job descriptions where they took on "process ownership" roles allowing them to look at processes in critical ways.
2. Developing visual "standard work" descriptions across all systems and teams and mapping that "standard work".
3. Evaluating the new, end-to-end, "standard work" maps with subject matter experts to find and eliminate redundant and arcane processes.
4. Developing agile, behavior-based user stories and manage backlog for implementing DollarUniverse.

The Results and Benefits

The new countermeasures were tested over a period of a few months with computer operators and analysts. Reductions in nearly 6 hours of processes over each 24-hour period were discovered which gave the teams a 25% contingency vastly mitigating the afternoon fire drill to make the bulk order trade cut-off deadline and reducing the client's risk exposure to SLA violations nearly ten-fold. These countermeasures also lead to completion of the first phase of DollarUniverse across a system that processes mutual fund orders and transactions.

Overall, the project allowed the client to solve its problem and create contingency to avoid extreme exposure to SLA violations while setting into place a plan to improve and automate processes.

Case Study 2 – Software Company

The Problem

The client application development process takes over a year to deliver a usable and "revenue-producing" application when customers are asking for functionality within a few months. The goal was to get revenue-producing software stood-up at the client within 6 months.

Root Cause Analysis

I performed root cause analysis and discovered the following:

1. Software development team was too involved in the implementation process.
2. The implementation team had little control over the day to day involvement of the software development team.
3. There were no actual requirements driving either development of the product or customization of it at the customer site.
4. There was no control over the third-part vendors in setting API standards for integration.
5. Software developers over-ruled the testing teams and forced bad code into production.

Recommended Solution & Countermeasures

Based upon root cause analysis, I recommended the following:

1. Separating software development from implementation, restricting the software development teams' involvement with implementation.
2. Requiring test team certification before code could be released to Staging.
3. Requiring implementation team certification before code could be released to production.
4. Enforcing prioritization of defect fixes.
5. Coordinating a set release time on a specific day of the week and reducing production releases to once a week (down from several times a day) so that the implementation team would be minimally impacted.
6. Managing the customer's expectations on functionality and better defining both software and implementation requirements.
7. Modularizing the application and developing configuration templates for each module.
8. Strengthening SLAs with vendors to force compliance to set API standards.

The Results and Benefits

The new countermeasures were tested over a period of 4-5 months with the existing customer given its analysts greater confidence in the effectiveness of the application. Subsequently, the new methods were tested with a new client in Europe, which posed an additional challenge of dealing with multiple currencies. A baseline product, stood-up and usable by the customer's portfolio analysts, was completed in the UK within 3 months.

Overall, the project allowed the client to solve its problem and reduce time-to-delivery on its application from over a year to 3 months.

Case Study 3 – HR Services Organization

The Problem

The client takes nearly 6 months to provide national, state and local compensation and benefits data when members subscribing to the data are complaining about both the accuracy and timeliness of the data. The goal is to distribute accurate survey results in a matter of a few weeks.

Root Cause Analysis

I performed root cause analysis and discovered the following:

1. The questionnaires and their media were cumbersome to use.
2. Members complained that the time it took to create questionnaires and to compile and publish data (4-6 months) made the data too stale.
3. The long process of developing, capturing, testing, verifying and publishing survey data forced survey teams to constantly adjust and fix discrepancies rather than help members complete questionnaires and understand survey data.

Recommended Solution & Countermeasures

Based upon root cause analysis, I recommended the following:

1. Setting up a questionnaire "first response" team (comprised of a few members and representatives from the client's survey teams) to develop, pilot and test questionnaires with very short turn around times (a few days).
2. Providing an online tool for members to use to complete questionnaires and offering incentives to them for completing them in a timely manner.
3. Using sample data from the "first response" team to vet questionnaires from the larger membership reducing the amount of vetting and error handling the survey team needed to do.
4. Transitioning survey teams' focus on helping members complete questionnaires and understand survey results rather than fixing errors.
5. Using web-based tools already available to store, publish and disseminate survey data.

The Results and Benefits

The new countermeasures were tested over the course of a year with existing and new members as well as the survey teams. Overall time from questionnaire creation to survey data results dissemination was reduced to 30-45 days (from 4-6 months).

Additionally, leaders determined that an automated solution they had been investigating would not work. This determination drove a complete reevaluation of the RFPs and saved the client several hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Overall, the project allowed the client to solve its problem and develop a survey process that was both accurate and timely, thereby improving membership subscription to the survey service. Additionally, it prevented the client from spending several thousands of dollars on an inadequate software solution.