

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION



RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY ORGANIZATION

BP 25, 7 RUE ANCELLE, F-92201 NEUILLY-SUR-SEINE CEDEX, FRANCE

RTO MEETING PROCEEDINGS 48

Commercial Off-the-Shelf Products in Defence Applications “The Ruthless Pursuit of COTS”

(l’Utilisation des produits vendus sur étagères dans les applications militaires de défense “l’Exploitation sans merci des produits commerciaux”)

Papers presented at the Information Systems Technology Panel (IST) Symposium held in Brussels, Belgium, 3-5 April 2000.



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- SET Sensors and Electronics Technology
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- AVT Applied Vehicle Technology
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- MSG Modelling and Simulation

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Commercial Off-the-Shelf Products in Defence Applications “The Ruthless Pursuit of COTS”

(RTO MP-048)

Executive Summary

Commercial Off The Shelf (COTS) software packages have been proposed for many military applications, including embedded systems, communication systems, operating systems, and in some cases critical military applications. A primary reason for proposing COTS for military applications is an assumption that software lifecycle costs would be substantially reduced. Such a mandate has major implications for acquisition, design, production, evaluation, and testing of systems that must maintain high levels of assurance.

Verified and validated levels of software quality, safety, reliability, sustainability, and survivability can be difficult to obtain and are often expensive to achieve. However, critical military applications demand levels of software assurance that most vendors do not apply to their commercial products. Although the cost saving benefits of COTS packages for non-critical applications is undisputed, there continues to be an on-going debate on the cost benefits of COTS software for critical applications (military or commercial).

Various approaches have been proposed for COTS utilization for military systems. One approach is to adopt COTS software for non-critical military applications, where an organization's operations concept is modified to be consistent with the commerciality properties of a COTS software package. A second approach is to adapt COTS software for military applications, where the original source is modified to be consistent with unique operational requirements. A third approach is to modify COTS software for critical military applications, where an independent testing organization obtains the original vendor source code for assurance testing. Modified COTS software generally requires a substantial change to vendor source code. A fourth approach assumes that COTS software packages cannot be adequately evaluated or verified, and should not be used for any critical military systems.

In order to address procurement, design, evaluation, testing, verification, validation, adoption, adaptation, and modification issues associated with the acquisition and utilization of COTS software packages for military systems, NATO hosted a three-day symposium in Brussels, Belgium. The symposium consisted of two keynote speakers, and six technical sessions consisting of twenty-four presentations.

The symposium treated the subject with rigor that is characteristic of a mature engineering discipline. This symposium and its products will be a standard by which COTS software evaluation and certification is measured for years to come. Presentations were thorough, accurate, and current. Several presentations actually anticipated results that have yet to appear in archival journals.

L'Utilisation des produits vendus sur étagères dans les applications militaires de défense “l'Exploitation sans merci des produits commerciaux” (RTO MP-048)

Synthèse

Des progiciels disponibles sur étagère (COTS) ont été proposés pour de nombreuses applications militaires, y compris pour des logiciels intégrés, des systèmes de communication, des systèmes d'exploitation et, dans certains cas, des applications militaires indispensables à la mission. L'une des principales raisons pour laquelle le matériel COTS est proposé pour des applications militaires réside dans le fait que son achat permettrait de réduire considérablement les coûts globaux de possession des logiciels. Une telle proposition a des conséquences majeures pour l'acquisition, la conception, la fabrication, l'évaluation et les essais de systèmes censés garantir des hauts niveaux de fiabilité militaires.

Des niveaux vérifiés et validés de qualité, de sécurité, de fiabilité, de soutenabilité et de survivabilité des logiciels peuvent être difficiles et coûteux à obtenir. Cependant, les logiciels demandés pour les applications militaires indispensables à la mission exigent des niveaux de fiabilité qui sont rarement rencontrés dans le commerce. Bien que les économies de coûts résultant des achats COTS pour des applications non-décisives soient indiscutables, le débat sur les coûts-avantages des logiciels COTS pour des applications indispensables à la mission (militaires ou commerciales), reste d'actualité.

Différentes approches ont été proposées pour la mise en œuvre de produits COTS dans les systèmes militaires. L'une d'entre elles consiste à adopter les logiciels COTS pour des applications militaires non-critiques, où le concept d'opérations d'une organisation est modifié pour être compatible avec les caractéristiques commerciales d'un progiciel COTS. Une deuxième approche consiste à adapter les logiciels COTS aux applications militaires, où la source est modifiée pour la rendre compatible avec des besoins opérationnels spécifiques. Une troisième approche consiste à modifier des logiciels COTS destinés à des applications militaires, où une organisation d'essais indépendante obtient le code source du fournisseur afin de réaliser des essais de fiabilité. En général, la modification des logiciels COTS entraîne, à son tour, des modifications considérables au niveau du code source du fournisseur. Dans une quatrième approche, il est supposé que les progiciels COTS ne peuvent être ni évalués ni vérifiés de façon satisfaisante, et que par conséquent, ils ne doivent pas être utilisés dans des systèmes militaires indispensables à la mission.

L'OTAN a organisé un symposium de trois jours à Bruxelles en Belgique, afin d'examiner l'approvisionnement, la conception, l'évaluation, les essais, la validation, l'adoption, l'adaptation et la modification dans le cadre de l'acquisition et la mise en œuvre de progiciels COTS pour applications militaires. Le programme du symposium a comporté deux discours d'ouverture et six sessions techniques, qui ont permis la présentation de vingt-quatre communications.

Le sujet a été traité avec la rigueur caractéristique d'une discipline d'ingénierie déjà au point. Ce symposium et les documents associés vont représenter une norme pour l'évaluation et la certification des logiciels COTS pendant de nombreuses années. Les présentations étaient complètes, précises et d'actualité. Dans certains cas, elles ont même fait état de résultats qui ne sont pas encore apparus dans la presse spécialisée.

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Theme

Industrial and commercial-grade information technology (IT) products such as workstations, networking products, and databases have long been employed by the military. While these are clearly commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) information technology products, the term COTS now commonly includes commodity personal computers, operating systems and productivity tools designed for the consumer market. Commercial office automation suites, electronic mail, databases, and similar business-oriented software are often directly applicable to military needs and can be run effectively on inexpensive personal computers. The appropriate use of personal computers, networks and off-the-shelf software products for military applications is an effective way to improve efficiency while coping with limited budgets and reduced staff. Recently it has been proposed that these same products be employed as mandated platforms, operating systems and major software elements for all but the most specialised defence applications. Such a mandate has major implications for design, production and employment of systems able to maintain military levels of assurance. This symposium will address NATO interests and issues in employing COTS hardware and software while maintaining required levels of system assurance.

TOPICS TO BE COVERED:

- 1) Standards and standardisation
- 2) Consumer, commercial, and industrial COTS availability and assurance properties
- 3) Methods for providing high assurance while employing low assurance products
- 4) Interoperability and software product migration
- 5) Obsolescence and upgrade policy
- 6) Integration with legacy systems
- 7) Interoperability with coalition systems

Thème

Des produits informatiques (IT) industriels et du commerce tels que postes de travail, produits conçus pour le travail en réseau et bases de données, sont en service dans les armées depuis longtemps. Bien qu'il s'agisse évidemment de produits informatiques du commerce (COTS), le terme COTS s'utilise aussi aujourd'hui pour les ordinateurs personnels, les systèmes d'exploitation et les outils de productivité destinés au grand public. Les programmes de bureautique, le courrier électronique, les bases de données et autres logiciels de bureau sont, en effet, souvent utilisables directement pour les tâches militaires et peuvent être exploités de façon satisfaisante sur des ordinateurs personnels de coût modique. La mise en œuvre judicieuse d'ordinateurs personnels, de réseaux et de logiciels du commerce pour des applications militaires devrait ainsi permettre de travailler plus efficacement dans un contexte de réduction d'effectifs et de restrictions budgétaires. Il a été proposé récemment d'utiliser ces produits comme plates-formes, systèmes d'exploitation et logiciels autorisés pour toutes les applications militaires, à l'exception des plus sensibles. Une telle orientation a des conséquences majeures pour la conception, la fabrication et la mise en œuvre de systèmes devant garantir des niveaux de sécurité compatibles avec les missions. Ce symposium examinera à la fois les avantages possibles pour l'OTAN et la compatibilité entre la mise en œuvre de matériels et de logiciels COTS et le maintien des niveaux de sécurité des systèmes requis par ces missions.

SUJETS A TRAITER :

- 1) Normes et normalisation
- 2) Disponibilité et fiabilité des produits COTS grand public, commerciaux et industriels
- 3) Méthodes susceptibles d'assurer un haut niveau de sécurité de fonctionnement avec des produits de niveau élémentaire
- 4) Interopérabilité et migration des logiciels
- 5) Obsolescence et politiques de modernisation
- 6) Intégration dans des systèmes existants
- 7) Interopérabilité entre systèmes au sein d'une coalition.

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