VELOCITY

Insights for Federal Innovators

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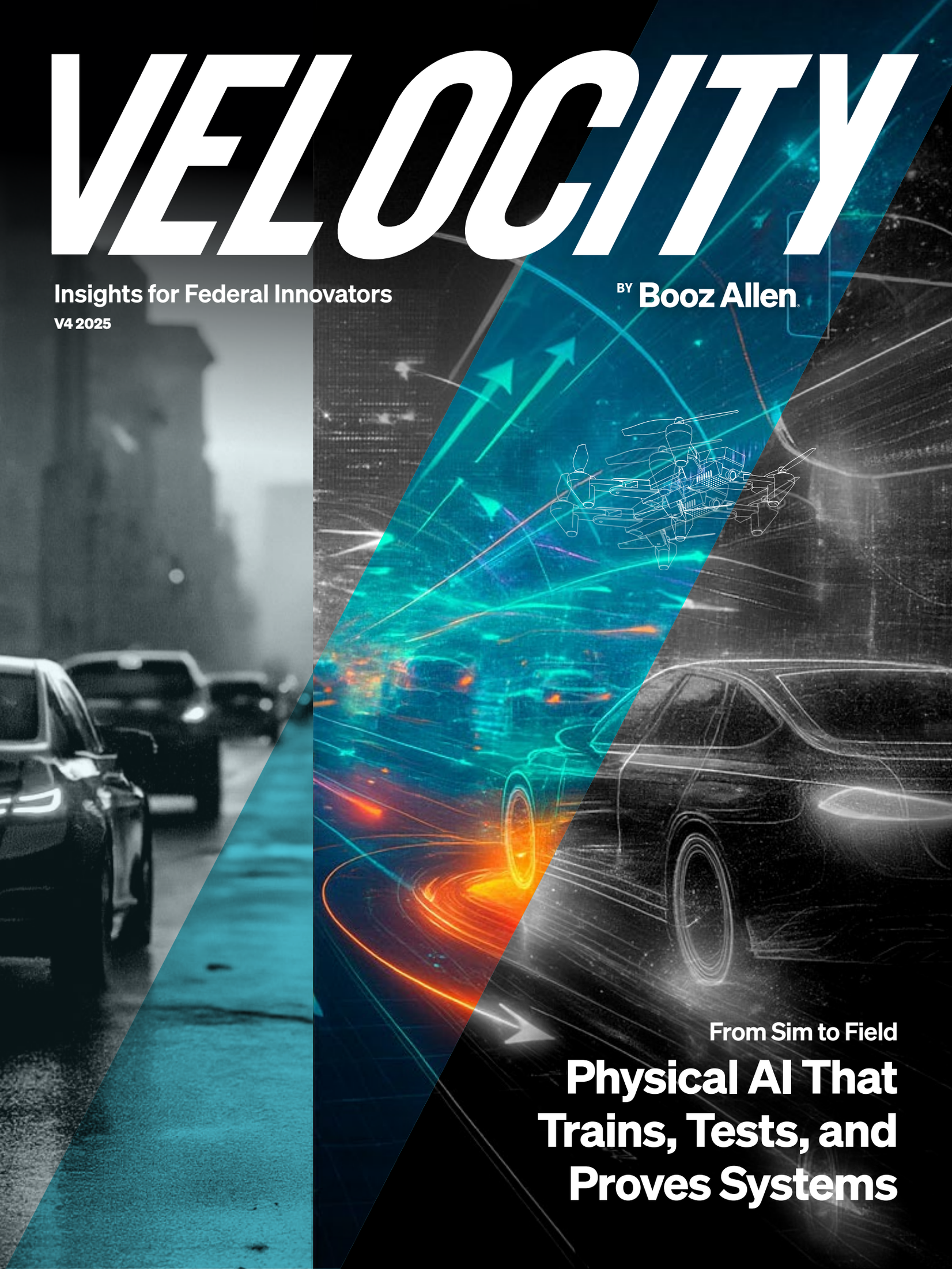
BY Booz Allen

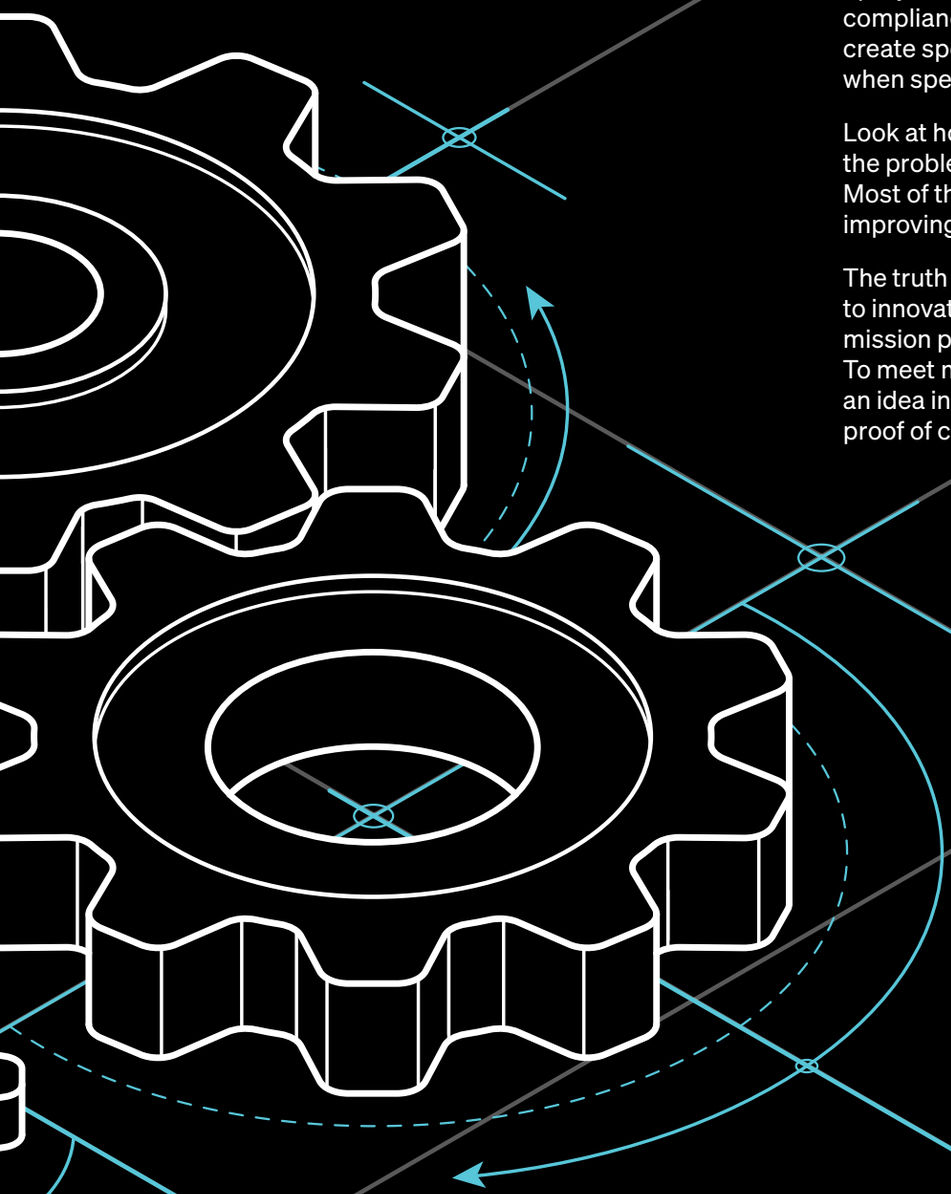


From Sim to Field

Physical AI That Trains, Tests, and Proves Systems

How We Built a Better Innovation Factory

Haluk Saker



Recent directives have made it clear: Government buyers want solutions that are ready now.

Easier said than done.

Developing software in secure environments is slow work. Weeks are lost provisioning the right cloud accounts, months disappear while teams stitch together security controls, and help desk tickets pile up just to get developers up and running. Security and compliance layers exist for good reason, but they also create speed bumps and sometimes land mines when speed matters most.

Look at how DevOps support teams spend their time, and the problem becomes obvious: they're buried in tickets. Most of their energy goes to triaging requests instead of improving the platform.

The truth is, developers don't need another blank slate to innovate. They need the freedom to focus on solving mission problems protected by guardrails they trust. To meet mission requirements, we need people to have an idea in the morning and a secure, production ready proof of concept by the afternoon.

In this first "Lessons From the Edge" column, Haluk Saker shares how we built a trusted cloud platform and what we learned along the way.

Breaking the Innovation Bottleneck

Like many companies, Booz Allen has embraced a DevSecOps approach for years. I even co-wrote the Enterprise DevOps Playbook back in 2016. We built centers of excellence across the company that improved quality and productivity. But we still struggled to move innovations seamlessly and readily into client production environments at the accelerated pace we wanted.

We tried being "cloud-agnostic." That was impractical. Government projects struggled to capitalize on the native features of a single cloud—let alone multiple environments—and ended up with the worst of all worlds. We tried DevSecOps factories. They delivered quick wins, but only for one team or one program and couldn't be reused. We tried finding "unicorn engineers" who knew cloud, security, and DevOps end to end. That wasn't sustainable or economical.

We built dozens of effective tools that solved specific problems. But getting them to work together often took more effort than it saved. We needed to scale both horizontally across the company and vertically across delivery.

Finally, we realized: more tools weren't the answer. Sometimes you don't need better tools—you need a better environment.

A New Platform for Innovation

We stopped treating the platform like a backdrop and started treating it like a product.

The vision was simple. We imagined a pre-vetted environment developers could step into: controls pre-mapped, tools vetted, pathways cleared. We wanted pre-loaded templates and reusable modules for authorization, data handling, and monitoring to eliminate redundant work. We imagined that developers could stop submitting tickets for setup and instead start coding immediately.

Nobody thought it would work.

Every team had its own portals, contracts, and silos. They were tied to their own ways of doing things. People said, "One size doesn't fit all."

And they were right, but we weren't building a one-size tool. We were building one framework. One that could support many sizes—in our case, defense, national security, civil, and commercial—while still inheriting the same foundation.

Instead of focusing on small differences buried deep in requirements, we designed our platform around shared expectations like our security posture. We all asked, "What does every developer need? And how can we get it to them faster?"

Self-Service Speeds Innovation

Shared platforms don't happen by decree. We had to build bridges across silos and give people a framework to contribute. For us, that meant creating a marketplace model, like an internal app store. Teams could grab what they needed—or add their own modules—as long as they passed our compliance standards.

For developers, the change was night and day. Onboarding that once took three weeks can now be done in 70 minutes. Developers can be coding in a new, fully stocked environment faster than you can bake a loaf of bread. And they can focus on solving mission problems—not configuring buckets or rebuilding the basics.

There are no shortcuts. Compliance is built in, with documentation that makes integration into client environments smoother, safer, and faster. We're talking about production deployments in days, not months, and with far lower risk.

This isn't just theory. We proved it with Booz Allen Vellox Reverser™, an AI-first product to reverse-engineer malware. Our timeline from concept to production was about six months—with no ATO delay.

Because the Vellox Reverser product's components—authorization modules, data-handling blueprints, and monitoring frameworks—now live inside the platform, they can be reused by other teams. Its success didn't just deliver one product; it accelerated the next wave of innovation.

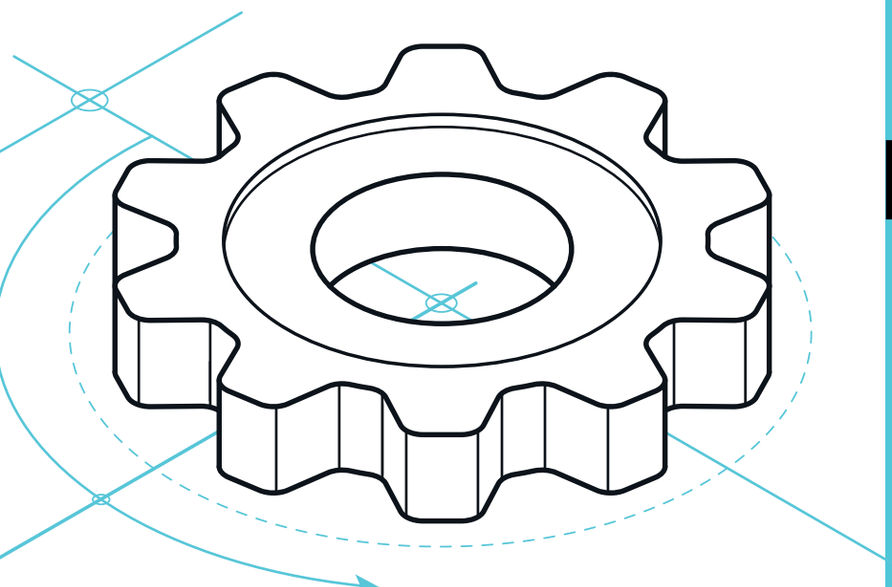
For agencies under pressure to deliver more capabilities, more quickly, and with fewer resources, this approach changes the equation. It clears compliance and infrastructure bottlenecks so breakthrough ideas can move at mission speed. When new AI tools and dev accelerators are being released weekly, waiting six months to start writing code isn't an option.

Now we can build as fast as clients and developers can dream.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

Giving up some individual control was uncomfortable at first, but it unlocked a much richer and more sustainable platform. Solutions don't live and die within a single project, so breakthroughs stop being one-offs—they become repeatable.

Every component built in our environment is available in our marketplace for the next project, creating an innovation flywheel. The more we build, the faster innovation spins.



What Makes Our Platform Different

Compliant by design

Our platform is designed in accordance with the NIST 800-53, 800-171 and other security control families and accredited standards. Security and compliance are built in from the start, so developers can generate code, troubleshoot, and deploy without worrying about compliance.

Built for developers

Instead of a blank cloud account, developers step into a curated workbench with pre-vetted tools, available through a self-service portal. If a developer needs to open a help desk ticket to get a tool, we consider it a failure. Their time should be spent innovating.

Reusable

Pre-approved golden paths, reusable services, and shared components cut costs and time from every project. Monitoring, alerting, and scaling come standard. Rapid prototyping blueprints let teams spin up experiments quickly—without compromising compliance, even in highly regulated production environments.

AI-enabled

AI works two ways in our trusted platform: developers benefit from AI-assisted coding, pre-configured CI/CD pipelines, and faster troubleshooting. At the same time, embedded AI makes the platform itself smarter and more efficient with every use.

Innovation in Action

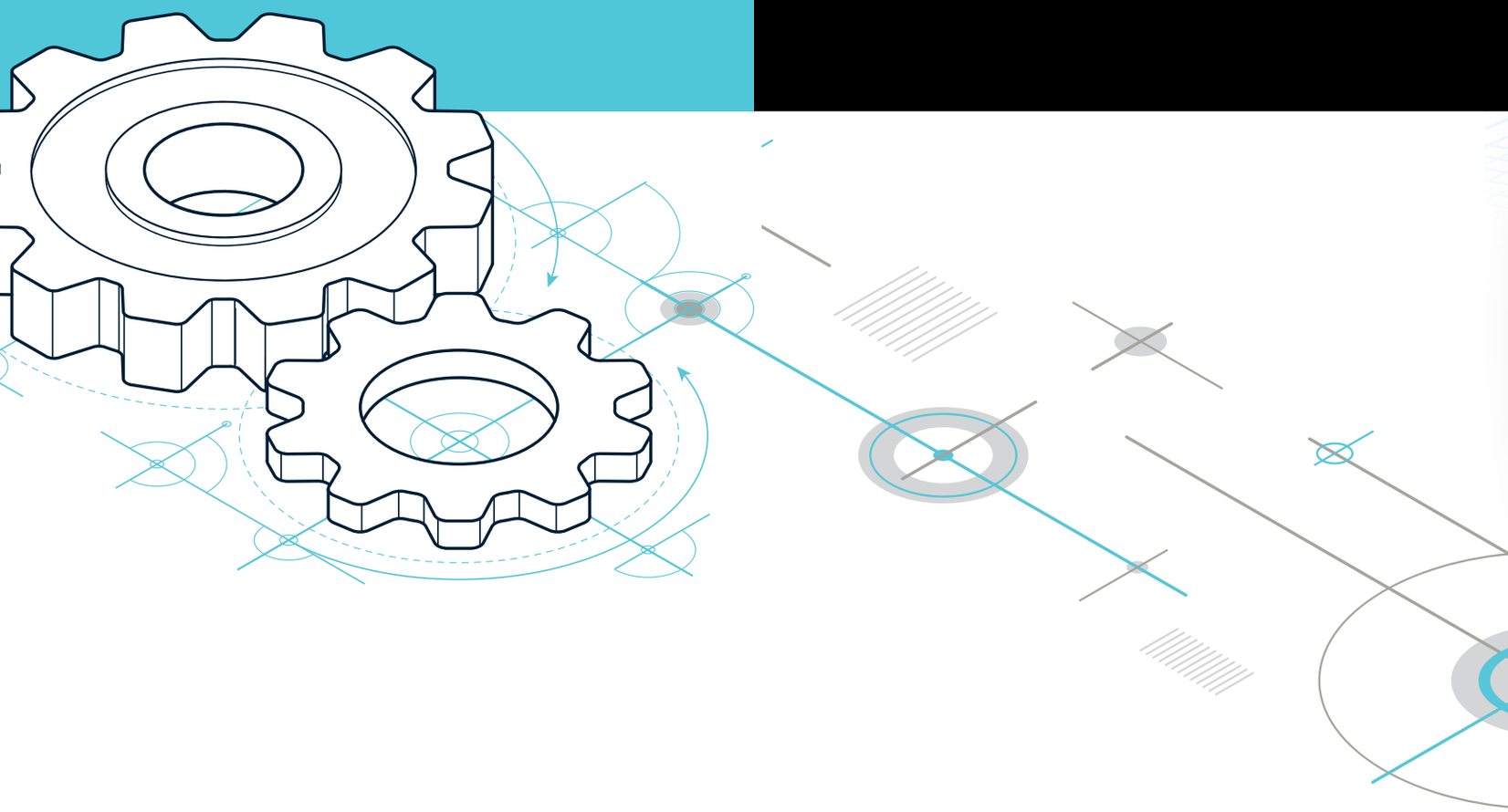
Sound too good to be true? It's not. We used this approach to build and launch **Vellox Reverser**, an AI-first tool that reverse-engineers malware. And the results speak for themselves:

- **Deployed in 6 months**
  From idea to mission-ready deployment
- **Zero Authority-to-Operate delays**
  Continuous compliance eliminated lead time
- **Accelerated reuse**
  Marketplace makes code reuse real
- **Endless possibilities**
  Every innovation seeds the next

About the Author

Haluk Saker has spent over three decades modernizing digital systems for government clients. He led the redesign of Recreation.gov, transforming it into one of the federal government's most-used platforms, and now heads innovation efforts at Booz Allen.

The author wishes to recognize Shums Hoda, Steven Terrana, Stephen Mao, Matt Lisco, Andrew Smallwood, Martin Folkoff, Madhu Ravi, Lizzie Salita, Goran Osim, and Regina Trapilo—whose contributions were invaluable to this effort.



SPEED READ

The platform is the product. Once we treated the platform like a core product—with its own roadmap, support team, and governance—we gained the discipline to keep it secure, modern, and optimized for every project.

Quality isn't negotiable—it's engineered. Moving fast doesn't mean cutting corners. Our marketplace model ensures every contribution is security-reviewed and compliance-tested before it's available. That lets developers move quickly without sacrificing any rigor.

The platform's marketplace model fosters collaboration across teams, enabling code reuse and creating an innovation flywheel, which accelerates the delivery of mission-critical solutions like the AI-first Vellox Reverser.

ABOUT BOOZ ALLEN

Booz Allen is the advanced technology company delivering outcomes with speed for America's most critical defense, civil, and national security priorities. We build technology solutions using AI, cyber, and other cutting-edge technologies to advance and protect the nation and its citizens. By focusing on outcomes, we enable our people, customers, and their missions to succeed, accelerating the nation to realize our purpose: **Empower People to Change the World®**.

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IN THIS COUNTRY, WE DON'T FOLLOW. WE LEAD. WE DON'T WAIT. WE MOVE FIRST. WE DON'T WATCH HISTORY HAPPEN. WE MAKE IT. WHILE OTHERS TALK ABOUT AI...WE PUT IT UNDER THE OCEAN. ON THE FRONTLINES. AND UP IN SPACE. THAT'S RIGHT—SPACE. HOW DO WE SOLVE OUR NATION'S BIGGEST CHALLENGES? SPEED. PRECISION. HONOR. NO MANUAL. NO ROAD MAP. NO PROBLEM. DEVELOPING 5G VR MILITARY TRAINING. SECURING BORDERS WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND TRAILBLAZING TECH. BECAUSE REAL LEADERSHIP? IT'S ABOUT BUILDING WHAT NOBODY ELSE CAN AND CODING SO WE CAN'T LOSE. ENGINEERS. CODERS. SPECIAL OPS. WINNING EVERY TIME. AND MAKING AMERICA STRONGER. SAFER. FASTER. IT'S WHO WE ARE. IT'S WHAT WE STAND FOR. IT'S WHAT WE'RE MADE OF. BOOZ ALLEN <ITS_IN_OUR_CODE>

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