



Appraisal Diaries

*An Appraiser's Perspective in Changing
and in Being Changed by the Process*

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Objectives

- **Convey the Do's and Don'ts, pitfalls, and remedial actions observed or experienced from the appraisal trenches**
- **Prepare the prospective appraiser to what can go wrong, while providing the means of making his or her appraisals go right**
- **Provide the Senior Manager sponsoring an appraisal in his or her organization with insight on what should be discussed with the appraiser**



This presentation ...

- ... Summarizes Lessons Learned from over 200 appraisals conducted with various methods
 - *Software Process Assessments (SPAs)*
 - *CMM-Based Appraisals for Internal Process Improvement (CBA IPIs)*
 - *Standard Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) Appraisal Method for Process Improvement (SCAMPI) A, SCAMPI B, and SCAMPI C*
 - *Software & Systems: Probabilistic Risk Identification, Mapping and Evaluation (S:PRIME)*



Topics

➤ ***On the subject of appraisals and appraisers***

Before conducting appraisals

The 10 most common appraisal sins

Conclusion



Why do organizations perform CMMI-based appraisals ?

- Others do
- Many do not want to miss out on anything, especially if it can result in a competitive advantage
- Some are convinced that the CMMI offers concrete benefits
- Others have recognized that one way to make people perform at their best is to have someone regularly look at the way the organization's products are developed and services delivered
- A few truly want to find out what and how they can improve



On appraisals ...

- Organizations tend to delay the conduct of a SCAMPI A until it is felt that the risk of not achieving the targeted maturity or capability level is low
 - *Resistance to change prevails, and Software Process Improvement (SPI) is no exception*
 - *Several appraisals (e.g. Health Checks, Self-Assessments, SCAMPI Bs and Cs) are conducted to maximize the chances of success*
- This brings about the concept of conducting internal appraisals ...
- ... and of being aware of what can go wrong



On internal appraisals ...

- **Internal appraisers**
 - *Know their organization well*
 - *Can interpret the information they collect faster than an appraiser from an external organization*
 - *Know their way around*
 - *Know with whom to talk to obtain that appropriate actions be taken*
- **A higher level of proficiency in conducting appraisals internally will necessarily result in a higher likelihood that subsequent SCAMPI A appraisals are conclusive**



However ...

- **Internal appraisers**
 - *Have their own biases*
 - *Must deal with staff members' perceptions of the appraisers' capabilities*
- **Conducting appraisals is not an easy job**
 - *It requires special skills, such as being able to communicate with people who have widely different responsibilities*
 - *Often the reason why an external appraiser is called to the rescue*



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Preconditions to a successful appraisal

- **Senior management is committed to improving processes and therefore supports the conduct of appraisals to find out what needs to be improved**
- **Personnel generally recognize that they could benefit from changing the way they work**
- **Managers generally support (or at least live with) SPI initiatives that have been planned or are currently in progress**



Beware ...

- If one of these preconditions is not satisfied, appraisal results will be challenged
- It is more convenient to sacrifice the appraiser than to deal with open resistance in the organization
- Appraisals are often perceived as a threat because they entail change
 - *And change often implies that there will be winners and losers*



Before starting

- **Approach appraisals with the conviction that everyone in a project or in an organization wishes to do a good job and to perform up to his or her potential**
 - *Very few people, if any, come to work with the intent of wreaking havoc in their organization*
 - *If they do cause problems, it is usually unintentional, and likely be the consequence of not having all the information required, lacking experience and/or training, or lacking adequate support*



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Poor understanding of expectations

- Clarify business objectives and the appraisal outcome with senior management before proceeding
- Discuss any constraints that would make an appraisal unwise at this point in time
 - *Remember that Senior Managers are normally busy and typically have to dedicate a limited amount of time to a large number of issues*



Lack of familiarity with the model

- **Conduct awareness sessions to explain the model to appraisal participants**
- **Ensure that participants understand the intent of CMMI practices before you start the appraisal**
 - *Keep in mind that some CMMI practices are probably less useful than others, given the operational context of the organization*
 - *Find out how these apparently less useful practices could be implemented in ways that add value to the organization*



Lack of familiarity with the appraisal method

- Ensure that participants understand how the appraisal will be conducted
- If the appraisal is conducted with a team, team members must understand in detail how the appraisal will be conducted, and their role in the appraisal
- Address the fact that the appraisal is neither a test nor an initiative to identify scapegoats
 - *It is an opportunity given to participants to provide their opinion on what should be improved in order to make their job easier*



Underestimating apprehension on the use of collected information

- Stress that only consolidated results will be presented, and that no findings will be traced back to appraisal participants
- Have senior management introduce the awareness sessions and the appraisal to alleviate some of those concerns
- Tightly control what comes out of the appraisal, either in written or verbal form
- Better be safe than sorry
 - *Draft a confidentiality agreement signed by appraisal team members and acknowledged by the appraisal sponsor*



Exclusion of participants

- **Keep in mind that those who do not participate in the awareness sessions or in the appraisal are probably wondering why they have not been invited**
- **Do not underestimate the might of the rumor mill and the detrimental effects it may have in the organization**
- **Consider the use of surveys**
 - *Very inexpensive and efficient way of collecting information from a large number of people*



Inappropriate selection of participants

- **Participants should include opinion leaders to add credibility to the appraisal**
- **Avoid a poor mix of participants in the same information gathering session**
 - *Participants who are at different levels of hierarchy*
 - *Participants who are unable to work together or who have personality conflicts*



Skipping validation of appraisal results

- Do not assume that your findings are right
 - *Verify them with appraisal participants to correct misinterpretations and misunderstandings*
- Get buy-in by the same token



Keeping results under wrap

- Invite the appraisal participants to the presentation of appraisal results
 - *Make sure you have cleared that with senior management first*
- Remember that senior managers don't like surprises
 - *Tell them that if sensitive issues come up, you will notify them before the final presentation*
 - *However, ensure that confidentiality clauses are respected*



Lack of planning

- **Make sure the appraisal scope has been precisely defined**
- **Do not improvise execution of the appraisal**
- **Don't let the appraisal drag on**
 - *People will lose interest quickly*
- **Follow the agreed upon schedule**
- **Logistics (or lack of) will do you in!**



Missing opportunities offered by the appraisal

- **Ensure appraisal findings are addressed**
 - *Remedial action planning should come soon after the appraisal has been completed*
- **If not, expect that it will be difficult to interest individuals in further participating in what appears to be a futile exercise**
- **Involve senior management in the appraisal to demonstrate commitment to addressing appraisal findings**



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ROI



- **Every dollar invested in improving organizational processes will generate, on average**
 - *A return between 4 and 5 dollars ...*
 - *Over a period of 3.5 years ...*
 - *With a likelihood of 70%*



Conclusion

- Many of the solutions that can improve efficiency are somewhere in your organization
- You need only find them!
- That's why appraisals are performed