

Notes from the Blogosphere

AsktheCMMIAppraiser.blogspot.com

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About “Ask the CMMI Appraiser”

- Went live in 2005
- Over One-Thousand hits per month
- Question from Twenty-Seven Countries
- Questions from SQA, SEPG, Process Engineers, Agile Developers, Executives, and Consultants
- New Content added daily
- Specializing in Agile



Does the PPQA Team need to be the pain-in-the- $\&\%*\%$ Team?

Well, if you what just fill out the darn artifact there wouldn't be a problem!

Seriously though, compliance is only a means to an end – and PPQA should not be about “compliance.” It's about “insight.” And it is the best way for us to learn whether we did a good job rolling out the process. Whoa! Hold on a minute.

What was that you say? After we did a perfect job designing and rolling out the process now some PPQA puke wants to tell me something I already know! Darn PPQA zealots!

If we did a perfect job designing the process, communicating the process, and educating about the process, people would probably use it. If we over-engineered it, designed it poorly, announced it with an email, and said "go forth and be process focused," then we did a poor job.

And only PPQA can tell us that.

What kind of notes can be kept after a SCAMPI Appraisal?

Take only memories, leave only footprints oh, that's the National Forest!

Any SCAMPI Appraisal generates a large amount of written documentation including interview questions, answers, practice characterizations, findings, and observations.

Any notes or written documents that identify the source of the information, for example an answer to an interview question, should be destroyed in order to maintain the "non-attribution" policy that exists within the method. A violation cast doubt on the reliability of the responses to the questions. This includes spreadsheets and files that identify which project team information was derived from.

I usually recommend destroying everything that is not part of the formal appraisal record.

Can Appraisal Team Members use laptops during SCAMPI Interviews?

I have heard LA's articulate "rules" for an against this practice. This is wrong! There is no rule in the MDD regarding laptops.

I also usually ask the Appraisal Team Members to NOT use laptops during interviews because it is distracting to the interviewees, and often makes them more nervous than they already are (some suffer from high stress as it is!). I have also seen ATM's surfing the web and playing with email when they should be listening and taking notes, so it is also a distraction to them.

Call me old-fashioned, but a yellow pad and pen is the best tool for this job.

Can the Quality Manager be on a SCAMPI Appraisal Team? Our LA says NO!

The SCAMPI MDD outlines the requirements for ATM's, and it doesn't speak to whether ANY particular job function is excluded. It does instruct us to avoid conflicts of interest, and specifically to avoid "chain of command" conflicts.

The two questions that the LA should be concerned with are: 1) will you be interviewing people who work for you? (not recommended); and 2) will you be in a position to evaluate your own work? (also not recommended)

If the answer to both of these questions is "no" then I don't see a problem with it as long as you can show that objectivity is maintained. And the SCAMPI MDD has no issue with it either.

I need learn about PPQA FAST!

How do I do it?

How to get smart fast? OK, first get some #8 AWG/3 wire and a plasma welder

Start by reading the PPQA PA – make sure to read the informative material. PPQA has multiple purposes – first "are we using the process?" and "is the process appropriate?" Second, "what insight can we gain by understanding these two things?" Is the process useable? Is it helping people? How can we make it better?

Good luck! And don't hurt yourself!

Where can I find the question bank for SCAMPI Appraisals?

I could tell you, but I'd have to kill you!

There is no “official” question bank for CMMI SCAMPI Appraisals. Client's often ask this and reason that such a question bank would help to standardize the appraisal method, however the specific context of each appraisal (organization, industry, product types, culture, et al) make it virtually impossible to make standardization effective. It's far more informative to design the questions around the organization than to try to get them to answer unfamiliar questions.

Here at Broadsword we have a database of several hundred potential questions worded in many different ways that are mapped to the practices in the CMMI. Some questions map to multiple practices or even multiple Process Areas. We select the appropriate question set after spending some time getting to know our client and then modify the high-context words to better suit the language of their culture. This seems to produce the best results.

Is there really any difference between Agile and Waterfall?

Sure, Agile guys are super laid back, and waterfall folks are really uptight :) No, that's not true, I know lot's of uptight agile guys too! Here are the talking points:

- with Agile budget and time are fixed and scope (within each iteration and release is negotiable.
- with waterfall scope is generally fixed and both budget and schedule are negotiable
- with Agile a complete lifecycle is executed incrementally and iteratively against a subset of requirements enabling both the business customer and the development staff to learn along the way. These small sets are delivered to customer in useable chunks.
- with waterfall requirements are fixed, extensive planning is done, and all changes are managed through a change control process. The entire set of requirements is completed, the code is designed, built, and tested, and then delivered.

There a many other points and caveats, but this should get the conversation started!

Should we receive a “Partially Implemented” if we don’t estimate using historical data?

In general, I’m reluctant to require any prescriptive method as the only way to satisfy a practice. In other words, a project can very easily estimate properly without specifically taking actual estimates from the prior year and using them with a multiplier as you have described. I agree with your assessment, the absence of a specific piece of written data should not stop you from achieving a goal as long as you are achieving it in some other way.

The suggested work products in the book are just that, suggestions. There's no need to take them literally – but they often do lead to the right answer.

How long do we have to wait to be Re-Appraised?

If you're asking how long a successful appraisal is "good for" the answer is three years. If you've had an unsuccessful appraisal then the answer is less clear. The SEI does not provide any formal guidelines for this, as every organization is different.

It really comes down to the depth of the weaknesses identified during your appraisal, and whether or not you can credibly make the corrections, build up some maturity, and show results on a reasonable amount of projects.

In some companies this could be six months - in others it could be six years. It just depends on your situation.

The bottom line is that there is no formal requirement from the SEI on this but you will need to ensure that your Lead Appraiser is comfortable with your progress from the last appraisal before you conduct a second one.

We want to buy a tool to do CMMI. Which is the best one?

Excuse me while I take a tool to my head. . . oh, sorry, I thought I was in the wood shop!

By far the best tool to use for CMMI is the one between your ears.

Applying logic and sound business judgment in selecting your approach, who should be involved, and how success is defined will be the single most important “tool” in your arsenal.

I worked with a client once who spent millions on a “tool” to “do CMMI” but they gave a blank stare when asked about their business goals and objectives.

That said, you'll likely end up with more than one new toy to play with if you decide to go ahead and buy something.

How many processes is the right amount?

- A lot, or, a little.

We don't use DAR – should we just fill out the forms anyway?

Hmmmm, should you fill out a form only for the purpose of "satisfying" CMMI even though it may not be needed? My good friend and colleague Hillel might say this type of behavior "enraged him" in response to this non-value added activity. I'll stop short of being enraged and settle on perplexed. Why add the overhead?

I would never ask you to fill out a form just for the CMMI. There are projects that just don't perform any DAR practices, nor do they have a need to. If that is the case then DAR evidence just wouldn't be available for that project. Of course, it's not a free pass to ignore DAR either. Someone with appropriate authority should want to know WHY DAR wasn't needed, and a process for tailoring would need to be demonstrated, but that's another subject.

Bottom line? Don't do things "just for the CMMI." Do things that make sense for you and your business - and have an appropriate process for tailoring.

I hear Agile companies cannot make ML4. Is that right?

As my mother in law would say: "I'd agree with you if you were right." Many think Agile means "no documentation" and that is just wrong.

Conversely, there are too many people that think the CMMI means "lots of documents" and that ML4/5 need even more. This too is untrue.

I think ML4/5 will lead you to be MORE Agile, not less. One reason for this is that at ML4 we have good data to tell us how we can minimize and optimize our process. Agile proponents always talk about "just enough" (and I think that's great) but until you reach ML4 and have collected the right data to perform OPP (statistical analysis) how do you KNOW what "just enough" is? The answer is "you don't."

So, there is no truth to what you've heard . . . plenty of "agile" organizations adopt ML4 and ML5. The question I would ask first is, are the companies you're hearing about really "agile" or are they that other, new-fangled methodology: "lazy?"