

Planning and Preparing Activities and Requirements

Clarification of responsibilities in Phase 1 (Plan and Prepare for Appraisal) and throughout an appraisal

The activities that take place during Phase 2 (Conduct Appraisal) of a CMMI appraisal often receive the most attention. However, the activities of Phase 1 (Plan and Prepare for Appraisal) are equally important as they lay the foundation for the success of the appraisal. However, Quality Management has encountered various issues involving understanding of the planning and preparation activities.

One area of concern centers around the amount of time dedicated to planning the appraisal. The majority of Lead Appraisers (LAs) spend six or more weeks on Phase 1 of a Benchmark Appraisal to ensure that they are prepared for the complicated task of appraising an Organizational Unit's (OU's) processes. However, in numerous instances LAs have entered incorrect dates for this phase in the CMMI Appraisal System (CAS). As a result, CAS records may incorrectly imply that insufficient appraisal planning has been performed. After discussions with the LA, Quality Management discovered that either:

- the identified start date was too late in the appraisal process, or
- the LA had identified a Phase 1 end date that came well before the actual end of the planning and preparation activities.

Phase 1 begins the day that the LA first meets with the Appraisal Sponsor (or someone acting on behalf of the Sponsor) to discuss the appraisal delivery, and it ends once a go/no-go decision is made by the LA. Accurately entering this information in the CAS record helps Quality Management evaluate the time an LA has devoted to planning for the appraisal.

Unfortunately, there have been occasions where quality review has determined that an LA has done an insufficient job of planning. The catalyst for this error is often pressure from the Appraisal Sponsor (or a consultant acting on behalf of the Sponsor) who wants a quick turnaround. For example, a handful of LAs have shared emails they received from consultants who wanted Maturity Level 3 appraisals on their clients but asked that only three days be spent onsite. While this scheduling alone would be problematic, the issue was compounded when the LAs pressed the consultants for requirements related to Phase 1; they appeared to casually disregard these activities, suggesting that time spent preparing is unimportant.

It is the responsibility of the LA to ensure that an appropriate amount of time is given to the completion of Phase 1 activities. Each action should be executed carefully to verify that the team and organization are ready for Phase 2. These actions include, but are not limited to:

- meeting with the Sponsor to gain a thorough understanding of the Organization and OU
- performing sampling analysis to determine how and why processes differ between the OU's projects
- creating a detailed data collection plan
- scheduling the appraisal activities
- meeting, vetting, and finalizing the selection of Appraisal Team Members (ATMs)
- writing and baselining the appraisal plan
- performing one or more readiness reviews
- delivering Appraisal Team Training

In situations where a Sponsor and/or consultant asks that Phase 1 activities be rushed, it is imperative that the LA explain to them the importance of robust planning and readiness activities. If it is decided that insufficient planning and preparation has invalidated an appraisal's results, the appraisal can be rejected by ISACA.

Other planning issues that have been uncovered during quality review tend to be less impactful in singular occurrences but can build to a much greater concern when multiplied. These are areas where appraisal plans have been flagged for future improvement, such as risk management, plan updates, and ATM responsibilities.

- **Risk management:** Quality reviews have often uncovered plans that list only one or two risks, or "generic" risks that are reused from appraisal to appraisal without consideration for the specific context of a given delivery. Planning for an appraisal requires the careful consideration of potential obstacles and challenges relevant to that individual delivery, and documenting the actions that will be taken to mitigate their impact on its successful completion. When writing a plan, an LA should document both potential risks and any that they have already acted to mitigate.
- **Plan updates:** When notified of discrepancies between their plan and CAS record, some LAs have stated that they do not update their baseline plans when changes to appraisal data occur prior to or during the onsite. It is imperative to remember that Section 1.5 of the MDD states that an LA "update the plan to account for information acquired and unexpected developments." This includes revisions prompted by updated data learned during Phase 2.
- **ATM responsibilities:** The role of each team member in data collection activities should be plainly spelled out in the plan. ATMs should not be assigned to multiple mini-teams, and assignments should avoid conflicts of interest for internal team members. When asked about situations where an ATM was on a mini-team whose list of process areas (PAs) included work they performed in the OU, LAs have often stated that the team member in question did not review the PAs specific to their work. However, when ATMs are assigned to a mini-team, they are expected to thoroughly review evidence for each PA delegated to the mini-team. If an ATM is not reviewing the full set of PAs for which their mini-team is responsible, then the ATM is not effectively acting as part of that mini-team.

Questions regarding this Quality Tip can be sent to quality@cmmiinstitute.com.