

weekly build are typically found in the sanity testing. If an engineer introduces a showstopper, the build receives an *F* (in our case, we used the letter grade *E* since some may be overly sensitive to an *F*). If

PERSPECTIVE

No More End-Game Blues

How did software manufacturer Micros handle the shift to having the test team drive end-game management? Dave Hoffman, a product manager at Micros, shares his perspective on the new scheme of product delivery.

Hoffman came into his role just as Micros was transitioning from a more traditional way of doing things, "traditional" meaning that engineering writes code and drives the project to completion, and QA tests it. Now, when a project enters its final phase, the test team is in charge. Witnessing this shift from the beginning, he's convinced it's the right tack to take.

"Giving the reins over to the QA group at the end of a project was a difficult feat for engineering... at first," says Hoffman. "But from the developers' perspectives, it ultimately improved things. It put an end to the tendency to fix the easy stuff first. Instead, it gave them definite deliverables, deadlines, and priorities—which in most organizations are very unclear. It's a very product-centric way of building software—one that works. I've seen the results."

When asked how the whole thing got started, Hoffman was on the level.

"We went through a lot of culture pains," Hoffman admits. "You can't force a new development process if your culture doesn't accept what you're doing; fortunately, ours did. But our test manager had to make it clear that no matter who was driving the process, it wasn't about control, it was about the fact that the end result had to be a quality product. Once the process change took hold, people saw the effort we were putting into defect-free software."

In the beginning, control remained an issue in the sense that once a



Product manager Dave Hoffman stands behind putting end-game management in QA's hands.

project neared completion, the QA group suddenly had a say in the daily tasks of engineering. Roles were still intact—the development team was still writing

code—but now they were doing it based on the feedback of QA. This change took some getting used to.

"The toughest part was the grading process," Hoffman continues. "We had to reach common understanding about what the grades meant. These things aren't arbitrary; they have algorithms to back them up. And now that the algorithms are in place, the concept of grades can be transferred to different projects."

Overall, it took about six to nine months of continual work and adjustment-making to get the process up and running smoothly. However, during the conversion, and since its implementation, one particularly unexpected thing happened: There was no employee turnover in the development groups. This is an achievement whether you're trying something new or you're at status quo. Hoffman thinks he understands why.

"Allowing every member of the team—from development to QA to product management—to have input improves the overall product development lifecycle. It also contributes to employee satisfaction because employees feel involved." In Hoffman's view, their unconventional end-game strategy has been a true win-win.

—A.S.