

## MATURITY MODELS

### **Why should an organisation seek a formal independent assessment of their processes when they could do it themselves for free?**

Maturity Models have been around for many years. They are used by a wide range of organisations or departments which want to build credible programme and project improvement plan. Organisations wanting to improve may be tempted to apply the model internally as it will take them through a pre-defined set of steps assessing their competency.

This temptation is one best avoided advises Sue Vowler, an independent registered consultant who has a great deal of experience with maturity assessments. She says internal maturity model reviews are often ineffective for a number of reasons. "Sometimes internal assessments are driven by enthusiasts who can lack credibility with senior management," she says. "Internal staff have to come up to speed with the model and understand how to apply it - which takes time. They can also be too close to the problems to be able to prioritise improvement plans effectively."

External registered consultants, on the other hand, are already up to speed with the model, and are experienced enough to assess an organisation's status in days. They can bring industry best practice approaches from a variety of organisations to fastrack improvement plans.

"They can quickly recognise any cultural or political barriers to change and can advise on prioritising changes to engage key stakeholders," she says.

In her six years as an APMG Registered Consultant, Sue's official role has been to help organisations identify their programme and project delivery problems through reviews and healthchecks (specific programme or project reviews or P3M3 / P2MM assessments) and work with them to deliver better projects through a focused improvement plan.

"In reality what I do is listen to people and give individual and group concerns a credible voice. I rarely uncover something an organisation is not aware of. The value I bring is to put the problems and concerns in context and articulate a stepped improvement plan that suits the organisation's culture and its appetite for change."

A critical success factor is establishing a working partnership with a registered consultant who inspires respect within the organisation.

One of the clients Sue has been working with recently is Jan Smith, IT Quality Manager of Yell IT department. Jan says: "We use external consultants to carry out assessments because they have knowledge of the Standard and a wider understanding of what is going on within the industry."

"We based our improvement plan on findings and recommendations from our assessment which helped us to prioritise and focus on what can be delivered and where the maximum benefit would be gained. Timescales for the assessment have also provided a focus to ensure that changes are communicated and delivered on time," Jan says.

Apart from the obvious outputs of a maturity model review like a maturity model assessment level, a formal report with findings and recommendations and a prioritised action plan to move forward, there are other less tangible outputs. These less tangible outputs and outcomes can add real value to an organisation, Sue says.

"The interview process encourages honesty and engagement of individuals. Interviewees often tell me that being invited to get issues off their chest including frustrations with the

process, senior management direction (or lack of it) or supplier relationships can be very cathartic and stress relieving. They often exit the interview with renewed optimism about their roles and what can be changed to make life better. “

Individuals often come out of the experience of a maturity model review feeling that something might finally get done about the issues and concerns they have. “A key strategy is to harness this new found optimism and engagement and build on it before cynicism arises again (just another initiative that went nowhere) – again this is where the relationship with the registered consultant is invaluable,” she says.

Of course, the biggest successes are when senior management don't just carry out the review as a tick in the box exercise but are really committed to do things differently. The review often creates a ground swell of support for things that have been on individuals' wish lists for years.

Sue recalls: “In one company a key finding was that they had no Programme Office and without the functions it would carry out they would struggle to get to level 3 of the maturity model. The lack of any administration level staff also put an unreasonable burden on senior Project Managers. The report's conclusion to create a Programme Office was initially met with scepticism but quickly had a groundswell of support from across the company. I'd given a voice to a key concern and the organisation is now setting up a programme office as a result of my recommendation.”

“Maturity assessments should not be viewed as just another badge or corporate objective to be met, it's a chance to shake up the people as well as the process, breathe new life into dispirited teams and kick start real improvement in programme and project delivery, Sue concludes. “All of which add value to the bottom line and contribute to the health of the organisation.”

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Official outputs of a Maturity Model Review:

- Assessed overall maturity level and an indication of which processes need to addressed to achieve the next level
- A report on findings and recommendations
- A prioritised Action Plan

Unofficial outputs / outcomes of a Maturity Model Review:

- Light bulbs going on in brains...the simple basics that organisations often get wrong
- Engagement in the improvement process at all levels
- Ownership and accountability for change
- Cathartic / Stress relieving interview process
- Better working relations between teams
- Blossoming of individuals who realise how good they are / or could be
- Informal / Formal mentoring of key individuals
- A credible voice for niggles, issues and concerns and hopefully solutions