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# The Concept of Practice in the People Capability Maturity Model

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## The Concept of Practice in the People Capability Maturity Model

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### Abstract

This paper is based on the application of the People Capability Maturity Model (CMM) to the Foundation Bruno Kessler (FBK), a research centre located in Trento (Italy). People CMM is a framework to study the level of maturity of an organization in order to improve workforce's development and to help management to define people's capabilities in the organization. The project is an ongoing project. What we are presenting here is our critical approach to data collection. In particular, our aim is to understand how FBK can modify its practices in order to achieve a higher level of maturity in the management of human resources, that is according to the model: a managed level where "the first step toward improving the capability of the workforce is to get managers to take workforce activities as high-priority responsibilities of their job." In this position paper, we will discuss the implication deriving from the notion of "practice" assumed by the model with respect to a different notion of practice, which is intended to complement it.

**Keywords:** People Capability Maturity Model, CMM, Organization, Research, New approaches

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# THE CONCEPT OF PRACTICE IN THE PEOPLE CAPABILITY MATURITY MODEL

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*In this position paper, we will discuss the implication deriving from the notion of “practice” assumed by the model with respect to a different notion of practice, which is intended to complement it.*

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<sup>1</sup> Curtis, B., Hefley, W.E., and Miller, S. (2002), pp. 20.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The People Capability Maturity Model (also known as People CMM) was developed and published by the Software Engineering Institute (SEI) at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University in 1995, and then updated in 2001. It is a framework based on five increasing maturity levels through which an organization's workforce practices and processes evolve. At each maturity level is associated with specific process areas and a new system of practices is added to those implemented at earlier levels. Each overlay of practices raises the level of sophistication through which the organization develops its workforce. Within this environment individuals experience greater opportunity to develop and are more motivated to align their performance with the objectives of the organization.

Fundamental condition in order to apply it, is an IT organization in which people can be considered as knowledge workers. From the People CMM perspective, people are independent centre of intelligent action and own responsibility for developing their capacities, knowledge and skills, at the same time, managers has to ensure that the people in their unit have the skills required to perform their work and for providing opportunities to develop these skills.

It is really important that individual and workgroup motivations are aligned with the objectives of the organization in order to set up a common organizational culture with clear values and goals.

As mentioned before, the maturity process has to follow five levels and for each level are suggested increasing abilities to reach, capacity of workload to develop in order to work efficiently, improvements of single's performances and common goals; in this way organization can determine its staff's daily practices.



Figure 1. People CMM levels.

Applying People CMM to FBK<sup>2</sup>, we did not consider the initial level because it represents the existing situation and it does not provide any process areas. People tend to perform their practices either in a

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fbk.eu>

inconsistent or in a ritualistic way, is an heroic level where some heroes take on their hands management's responsibilities. It is not or very few managed, sometimes self-managed; organization does not provide resources to its employees and usually have difficulty retaining talented individuals.

In our analysis, we consider FBK starting from level 2, that is a managed level with wide margins of improvements: at this stage, some basic practices are guarantee anyway, goals and targets are not clear, work is overload, communication and coordination tend to be insufficient or underestimated, and finally, work environmental provides many distractions.

Nevertheless, this level is interesting because workforce practices are implemented here, and it focuses on activities at units level. This is important to us because is typically in this way that organizations can establish a culture that start from people. It's just in this stage that we will consider units before organization, ones achieved that, the following step is to consider process areas at organization level.

For each maturity level a whole structure of practices is defined in order to attain the single area's objectives. The definition that the model give to practice is: "Description of an activity essential to, in part or in whole, accomplish a goal in the process area. A practice is a sub process of a process area that contributes to achieving a process area goal. Practices is used to refer to standard workforce processes." [Curtis, B., Hefley, W.E., and Miller, S. (2002), pp.519] and the ensemble of practices is an area process that, if performed with synergy from all organization's component, let the organization to increase its maturity level and of course to obtain the results expected.

The model is not strict about how to collect data so we have chosen face to face interviews because on our point of view is the best modality to catch in deep which are the current work practices and also to make the workforce part of the research itself, identifying their best practices.

## 2 THE CONCEPT OF PRACTICE IN PEOPLE CMM

The first distinction that make interesting the notion of practice in People CMM, is between 'practice' and 'policy'. The notion of practice proposed by the model has to be intend in the Anglo-Saxon Civil Law so, is not as a procedure, in the sense of formal right and duty stipulated with written documents (as concerned by Roman Law). Practice is a consolidate way of acting and performing that can be written just to let it circulating more, as a template to follow, as a "best practice", not in order to put it into a strict procedure.

In spite of this more open consideration, our research group has considered useful to integrate this approach proposing an assessment model.

In fact, concerning data analysis, the model proposes to find the gap between the hypothetical categories set in advance and organization's situation. This is a deductive approach that consider an heuristic scoring therefore in our data collection we will consider a qualitative approach inspired by the Grounded Theory<sup>3</sup> capable to catch also small things, not so important if we limited our understanding to a quantitative point of view, but extremely interesting if we really want to take a descriptive and dynamic picture of the organization.

In other words, our criticism is about the deductive nature of the People "CCM" that consider some fixed a-priori categories generating the process areas that characterized organizational work.

In the specific case of study, we intend to combine the model's deductive nature with an inductive approach where practices are not taken for granted but emerging from organizational work itself, not deductible with an a-priori structure. So a quality framework to analyse more in deep and in detail our interviews and all the concepts that they contain, that has no reference with the model's standard categories.

With our model's assessment, we want a dynamic and reflexive relationship between organization's goals and workforce's practices inspired by the field work's knowledge and experience, whereas in the

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<sup>3</sup> Charmaz K. (2000) and Glaser B., Strauss A. (1967).

model this relationship is only instrumental because practices are considered as small pieces of the process established when an objective is decided. In this way we can consider practices also through their emerging characteristics because they are performed attending to be institutionalized.

The inductive approach of the quality framework that we propose, permit us to identify also single organizational practices performed, for example, inside one unit that will be interesting and useful to apply to the others in a more standardized way.

Finally, looking forward this critical approach our research can use the advantages of a systematic model increasing its power with an analytical description: again, to single specific practices inside FBK out, we would propose some concrete actions and organizational practices to develop inside the organization that are partially already in use and experimented.

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