

A DBA's Habits for Success: CMMI (Part One)

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Finding the perfect flow for your business can take time and patience. Like almost anything else in life, a business must go through stages of maturity before it reaches its final form and only requires regular maintenance. In this five-part series, we'll dive into Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) and what phases businesses and their DBAs must go through to successfully manage IT as a business.

What Is a Capability Maturity Model?

Capability maturity models (CMMs) are proven industry frameworks leading to better outcomes for organizations. They're learning paths for businesses with stages of progression, similar to skill trees in video games. A maturity model gives you a step-by-step process with levels you must complete before moving to the next. There are several capability maturity models, each including a different type of skill set and outcome. Maturity models have benefits for various industries and aren't just specific to tech. Each step of the maturity model is dependent on the last and includes a mark of progression when proceeding to the next level. Benefits of adopting a CMM:

1. Get out of fire-fighting mode
2. Provide a consistent, high-quality experience for users
3. Predict trends and anticipate problems
4. Free up enough time to advise on new database projects and initiatives
5. Help improve the overall business and achieve better business outcomes

In this series, we'll also cover the information management maturity model (IMMM), a platform-agnostic capabilities maturity model DBAs can follow to improve the functionality of their business. This model evolves through five levels of maturity: Chaotic, Reactive, Proactive, Service, and Value.

Level 1: Chaotic

Like the beginner level in a video game or an intern at their first day on the job, Level 1 of the IMMM is a DBA's first step to maturing. This level is described as chaotic because it's the beginner level—it has much room for improvement and details a business without a strategic workflow. DBAs in this stage are often seen as heroic, taking on a business without proper functionality and putting in the hours to make sure everything is working as it should. Many DBAs experience burnout in this level, as they're responsible for creating the new blueprint for their business's success. Level 1 of the IMMM is characterized by the following habits:

- **Ad Hoc:** Without a true strategy or process, businesses in the beginner stage are often left with no choice but to respond to issues in the moment
- **Undocumented:** Failing to document issues, solutions, and other important information can leave DBAs empty-handed when help with past concerns is needed
- **Unpredictable:** Having no knowledge of when things will get busy, when issues will arise, or even when equipment will be purchased or upgraded can leave an organization stressed and on its toes
- **Multiple Help Desks:** An organization with multiple help desks often means there's no integrated or centralized error approach, creating conflicting interactions for DBAs
- **Minimal IT Operations:** No real process behind operations means anxiety-ridden hours for DBAs as they try to piece together a business without functionality
- **User Call Notification:** Businesses in this stage manage issues through direct calls from end users instead of receiving clear documentation from a database monitoring system

With each level of the maturity model, a company reaches a progressive landmark before advancing to the next. In Level 1 of the IMMM, this skill is tool leverage. Rather than scrambling to learn and create everything from scratch, DBAs learn to use smart tools to improve operations. For example, tools like GitHub can help DBAs by providing prewritten scripts so they don't have to take time and write them from scratch. Getting used to community-written scripts and tools is the first skill gained in Level 1 and is the progressive step needed to move to Level 2. Stay tuned for Part 2, where we'll explore Level 2 of the information management maturity model.