

# BPM Capability and Credibility: A Process Management Culture Requires Both Capability And Credibility

Roger Tregear  
Leonardo Consulting

There is something deep down in all of us that responds positively to the essential Business Process Management (BPM) message that organisations are best envisaged, measured and managed as a set of processes whose interdependent purpose is to add value for stakeholders. The essential BPM message is this: we design, manage, measure and reward our organisations along functional lines and yet what we seek to deliver is clearly the result of cross-functional processes. Each of us, with a lifetime of experience in the myriad process that form our lives, knows that almost every process can be improved and all should be actively managed.

Creating a process management culture is a difficult and daunting task. We are never looking to make inconsequential change to unimportant processes. We look to change not just some abstract notion of activity sequence, we seek also to change the way that individuals and groups think about those activities and how we measure their success.

An essential element is to maintain the right balance between *capability* and *credibility*. BPM practitioners must demonstrate, not only that they have the knowledge and tools to deliver effective change, but that they also merit the trust of the organisations they seek to change.

## The States

The pathway to effective process management has two axes: *Capability* and *Credibility*. *Capability* is about process management teams, and individuals, having the appropriate tools, techniques, facilities and knowledge and the ability to use them effectively.

*Credibility* is about both process management teams and their clients (internal or external) having the confidence to commit key processes to review.

Capability and credibility are both required at high levels to effect significant and continuing change. In this matrix there is only one state that will lead to effective and sustained process thinking and management.

A process team with genuinely high levels of capability will achieve nothing but frustration and detachment if it fails to convince business owners that it can be trusted to deliver positive results. A process team that actually has low levels of capability but is regarded highly by business owners, will cause significant damage. More dangerous yet is the team that shares their client's erroneously high opinion of it's capability!

Four development states can be described:

- Preparation
- Paralysis
- Jeopardy
- Mastery.

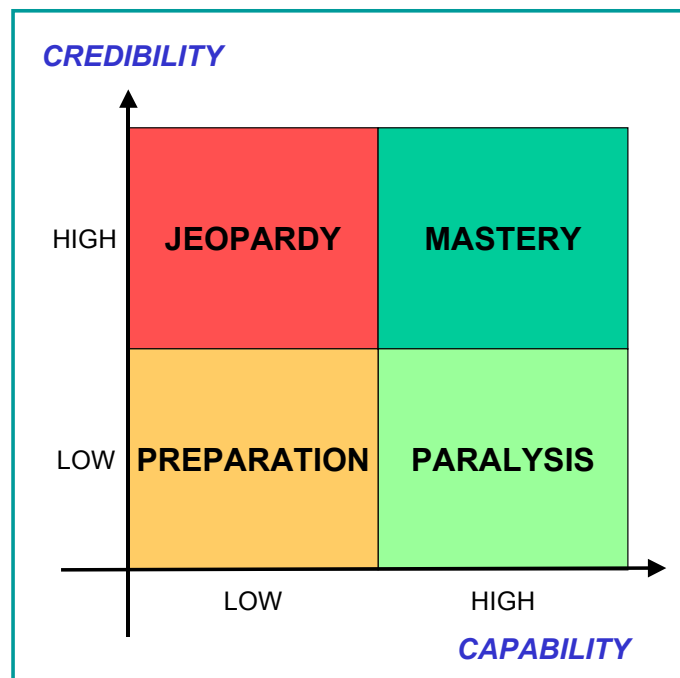


Figure 1.

#### PREPARATION

This is a common starting position with both capability and credibility at low levels. The process team, and the organisation generally, are in the initial phase of developing process-based management approaches. Some work is starting in a localised and manageable environment. Other parts of the organisation begin to take an interest. This is a reasonably benign state since the low credibility is likely to prevent over-ambitious projects. Business managers will not yet be prepared to give the BPM practitioners open access to core processes. Indeed this state can prevent all attempts to introduce process awareness. Too much time spent in this state will mean that true BPM will be still born. Meaningful projects will not be attempted and BPM will come to be seen as a peripheral and passing fad. This state corresponds to the lowest level of BPM maturity. It is important to remember that the quality of later BPM success is determined by the quality of this preparation.

#### MASTERY

At the other end of the BPM maturity spectrum, this is the only state where significant and sustainable process management change can be achieved. High levels of capability are matched by high levels of credibility, ie the process team is able to effect good results and the rest of the organisation trusts them to do so. Mastery means that the process management team has the knowledge, tools, techniques, infrastructure and accurate self-awareness to reliably identify and implement process change. Adoption of BPM as a core management philosophy implies significant change for most organisations. Processes are inherently cross-functional and in focusing on them, business units change the ways in which they think about organisational structures, operational management, customers, product/service development, innovation and governance. Such changes require the confidence and commitment that can only be satisfied from the Mastery state.

#### PARALYSIS

When a process management team has the capability to do effective process work, but fails to convince the rest of the organisation that this is so, ie they have low credibility, a state of paralysis develops. The commitment of business owners is vital for process-based management. Process teams in this situation become frustrated and detached. They can see the benefits that might be realised and are keen to get started, but cannot get the necessary cooperation. They have the tools, they've completed the training and put the projects plans together but cannot get

the executive sponsorship required. It may not be the BPM practitioners alone who lack credibility. The concept of BPM has been around a long time and, for some people, carries a lot of baggage from perceived past failures. In some respects this also indicates a lack of capability – capability to communicate the BPM story and sell its benefits. For BPM thinking to have any chance of leading to BPM execution there must be extensive and effective communication resulting in a shared understanding and vision.

### JEOPARDY

This is the most dangerous state. Low levels of capability are not recognised by the process management team or its clients. There is only a superficial understanding of the concepts of BPM. The necessary tools and techniques are not available and/or are not well understood. Not only do some (or all) of the individuals working on BPM projects have low levels of capability, but the organisation itself might be at a low state of process management maturity. At the same time in this state, high levels of credibility allow the process team to embark on overly ambitious projects with, inevitably, disastrous consequences. In this state, expectations can easily be set too high. Then when the over-promised benefits are not delivered, credibility in both the BPM concepts and the practitioners will plummet. At this point it might be impossible to restart any serious focus on process management. BPM supporters have been let down and BPM detractors have been proven correct.

### Below The Line

Taking another perspective of the four Capability/Credibility states, we can see that in Jeopardy and Mastery it is likely that there will be fewer constraints on BPM activity than in the other states. The coupling of these two states might seem paradoxical, but these are the states where credibility is highest. Above the *Line of Credibility*, business managers have the greatest level of trust in those orchestrating BPM activity. If that trust is misplaced we walk a fine line between success and failure.

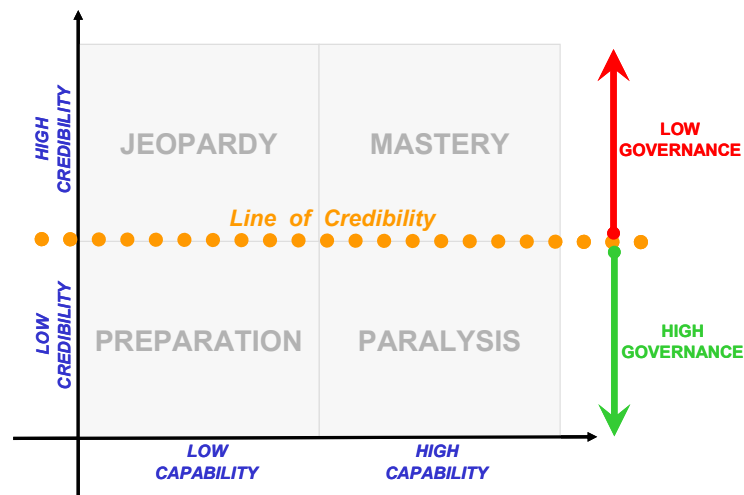


Figure 2.

Below the *Line of Credibility* the level of organisational governance and control is likely to be higher. The organisation doesn't yet trust the BPM practitioners to work without close supervision. Scrutiny and restraint may be exactly what is needed for these organisations giving BPM initiatives the controlled development that is needed for sustained success. However, negative consequences can result from too much control resulting in micro-management of the process teams and the suffocation of innovation and effective change.

This perspective is a sobering reminder that the compelling benefits of BPM do not come without risk and well-focused management.

## Pathways To Mastery

The achievement of Mastery is a progression from Preparation. The direct path is, of course, the preferred one. However, in most cases it is difficult to achieve. Assumptions that a process team is on this pathway -- the fast track from novice to master -- should be very carefully tested.

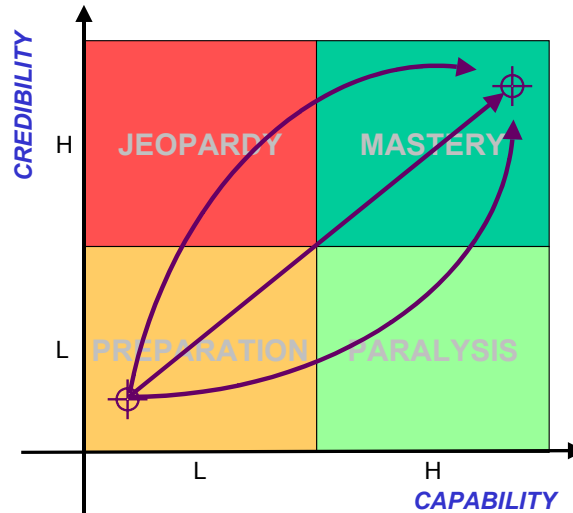


Figure 3.

The pathway via Jeopardy is to be avoided. For anything but the briefest flirtation with the Jeopardy state it will be very difficult to move on to Mastery. We have also seen that this is one of the two states where organisational governance is likely to be at a lower level. This is a dangerous combination – high credibility, low capability and low governance. The Jeopardy state guarantees implementation disaster and cannot be an effective launching pad for sustained BPM effectiveness.

The most common pathway will be via the Paralysis state. In this way, capability develops ahead of credibility and the process management team is able to deliver positive outcomes in a controlled way. Projects of increasingly complexity are attempted and the experience gained in this way further develops genuine capability. There is no better way to develop well-placed credibility than by having demonstrable success. Of course, too much time spent in the Paralysis state results in the consequences outlined earlier.

Individuals, their teams and the organisation as a whole, all have to make a controlled BPM journey developing capability and credibility appropriate to the different roles and responsibilities.

## Times Change

The above analysis makes simplifying assumptions about how process management teams, their clients and their projects work. Life is seldom a simple linear progression. Not all team members will develop capability at the same rate and in the same areas. Not all business owners will share the same view of a team's credibility. Different levels of capability and credibility will be needed for different projects to succeed depending on the complexity of the issues involved. Changes in team composition and client base will also impact the state positioning. All of these variables will change over time as the business context and stakeholders change. Over time, a process management team will find itself moving between the states.

This means that it is even more important that BPM practitioners and their sponsors and clients remain aware of the implications of their location and trajectory in the Capability/Credibility framework. The achievement of the Mastery state does not guarantee lifetime membership. Many things can, and will, change in both axes. Prudent management and practitioners will be always on the lookout for possible state changes.

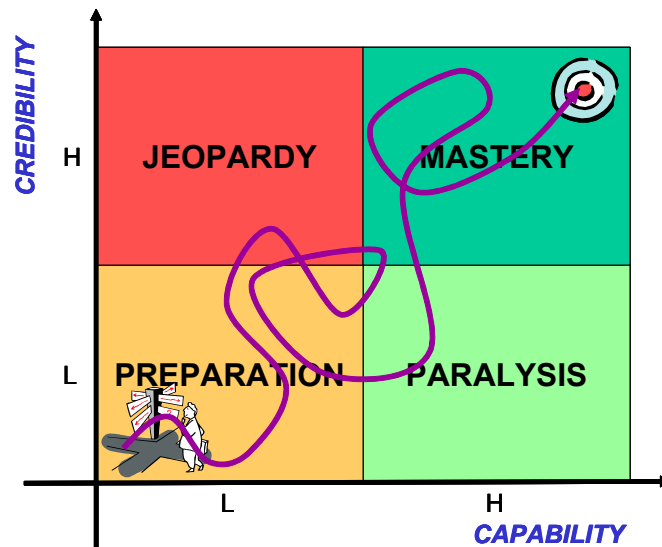


Figure 4.

### Improving Capability and Credibility

Both capability and credibility can be improved.

The common emphasis is on the development of capability. This can be seen to have two related streams of activity: training and practice. There is a great deal of training available. This includes courses both on general process topics as well as specific BPM tool training. Personal reading and research, membership of “roundtable” or special interest groups and conference attendance are other examples of capability development via the ‘training’ stream. The second stream for capability development is just as important. Genuine capability comes from practice and experience. Practice usually comes in the form of project work – analysing, modelling, improving, explaining and implementing process improvement strategies. Another very important capability enhancement practice involves development and delivery of presentations on BPM topics and discussion of process issues with colleagues and peers.

Increasing credibility is a different, and often more difficult, task. Building credibility within an organisation is an internal marketing process. The objective is to have the idea of Business Process Management take root in the organisational culture. [An engaging discussion of “idea management” can be found in the book by Davenport and Prusak, *What’s The Big Idea?*]

There is no better marketing strategy than to continually report and promote successful projects. Success breeds success. Project selection therefore becomes critical. The “ideal” projects are those that have a reasonable chance of delivering noticeable outcomes. A balance needs to be struck between risk and relevance. Particularly in the early stages, a failed BPM project can sound the death knell for process work. It is equally true that successfully delivering a result that is inconsequential does not promote, and can even damage, credibility.

Senior executive support is needed if a process-aware culture is to develop. The ‘executive floor’, where the credibility needs to be highest, must be a key target of internal marketing.

Other activities can add to the development of credibility: briefings, newsletters, internal BPM forums, invited speakers from external organisations, support for formal study programs, explaining and celebrating successes. It’s about communication - communicating the core messages of BPM, relating them to the particular enterprise and telling the success stories.

Developing credibility is not about spin doctoring. The credibility must be genuine and not just a perception built via slick marketing. Undeserved credibility will not last long but it might just last long enough to do damage to the organisation and to the 'process idea'.

Achieving high credibility is not the end of the story. Credibility needs to be sustained. After 'easy wins' it may get harder to sustain the attention of the organisation and its senior decision makers. It is also possible for 'quick wins' to create unreasonable expectations for following projects. If credibility (and capability) are sustained long enough, process awareness becomes second nature and part of the culture. An interesting characteristic of high levels of BPM maturity is that process-based management is so ubiquitous as to tend towards invisibility in the sense that there is less conscious awareness of "doing BPM".

Davenport and Prusak<sup>1</sup> identify a cycle through which ideas travel from first introduction into an organisation (**Progenitor**) to the point where they "are sufficiently pervasive that no one feels the need to talk about them" (**Pervasiveness**). This is also a useful pathway for mapping the development of credibility.

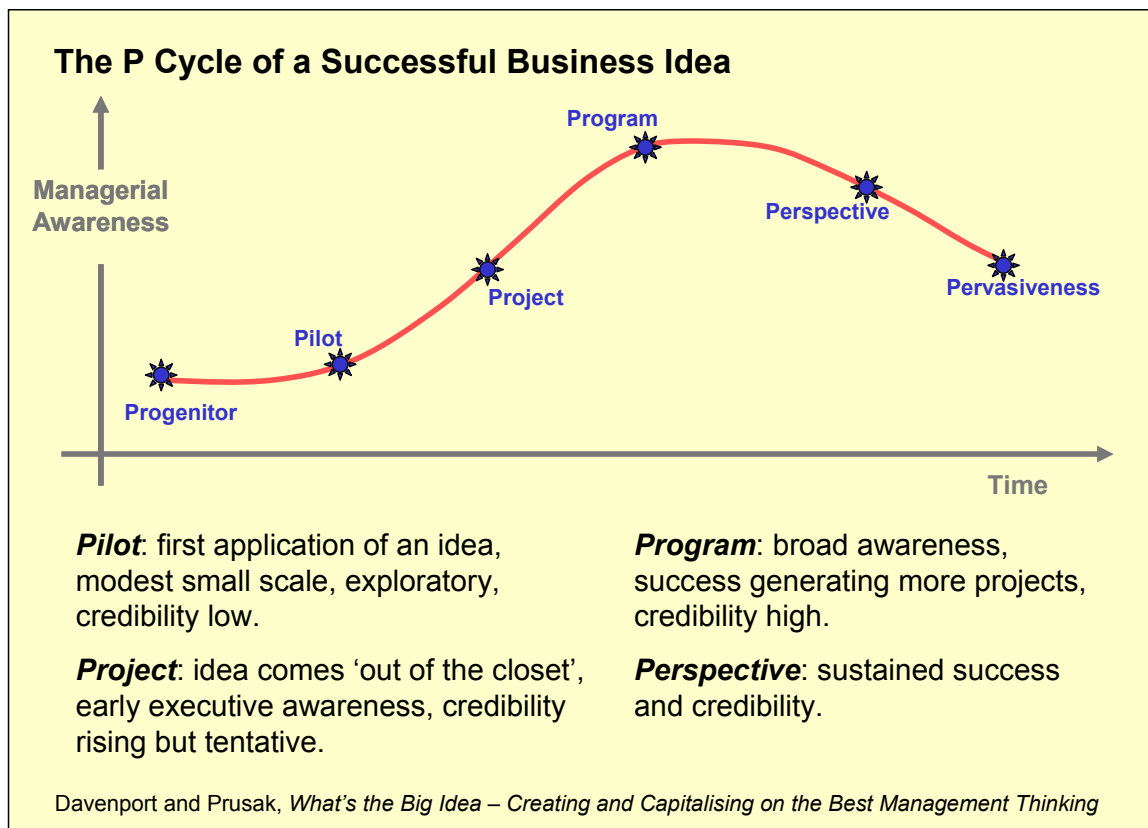


Figure 5.

In the **Pervasiveness** state of the P Cycle the BPM idea has become pervasive and unconscious. "Awareness levels are not zero ... But awareness is no longer necessary when an idea affects everyone's behaviour"<sup>1</sup>.

### In Summary

Mastery is where you want to be. Jeopardy is a very dangerous place to be. In the other states below the *Line of Credibility*, Preparation and Paralysis, the chances of doing much harm are low as the business owners are unlikely to allow it – credibility is low and governance is high.

However, the fact that process improvement is not happening in these two states is not neutral. The cost of inaction, of lost opportunities, can be significant.

Above the *Line of Credibility*, in the Jeopardy and Mastery states, governance will be at lower levels. This means that more significant projects will be supported but may also increase the chance and impact of failure.

There are many pathways between all four states and there are no 'lifetime memberships'. All of the key measures will change over time as organisational drivers and people develop and change. Maintaining an objective view of the impacts of these changes on operating states is an on-going requirement.

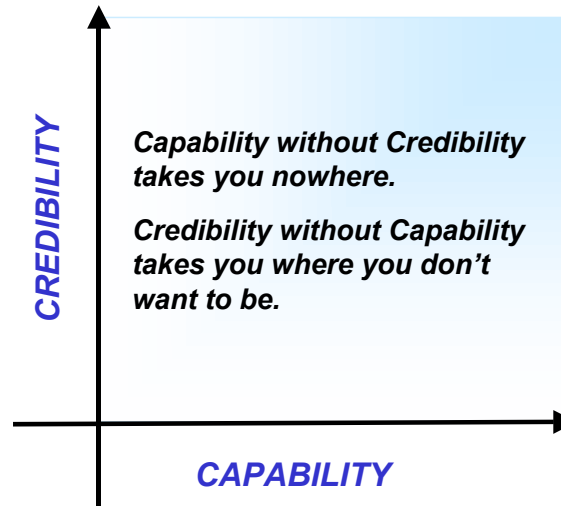


Figure 6.

Practical and pragmatic plans can be developed and implemented to nurture both capability and credibility. Organisations seeking to achieve effective process-based management should actively manage both vectors.

A model for visualising and nurturing the 'BPM idea' can be found in the P Cycle from Davenport and Prusak.

Making an organisation change-able. Making radical change unremarkable. Allowing change to happen more often, not less. These are hallmarks of contemporary management best practice. Effective BPM requires a continuous balance of **Capability** and **Credibility**.

-----  
**Roger Tregear**, Consulting Principal, Leonardo Consulting. Canberra, Australia. Roger manages Leonardo's business with the Australian Government and other clients. During 25 years as a consultant he has delivered many process and business analysis, information, technology, telecommunications and marketing assignments. [r.tregear@leonardo.com.au](mailto:r.tregear@leonardo.com.au)

-----  
<sup>1</sup> Thomas H Davenport and Laurence Prusak, *What's the Big Idea – Creating and Capitalising on the Best Management Thinking*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston Massachusetts, 2003.