Localization
Maturity Model
Release 1.0

Applying a Capability Maturity Model to Technology, Product, and Website Globalization

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Localization is the process of adapting websites, software, documentation, and other products to satisfy the needs and requirements of other markets or cultures. It is a black art to some companies, a well-defined process to others, and a continuing journey for most. Because many organizations will pass the same milestones on their way to localizing their wares or their communication channels, we decided that it is time to document those landmarks.

This report provides an overview of the organizational, process, and technology lifecycles of localization. Labeling our discussion the “localization maturity model” (LMM), we document the behaviors, processes, and activities that constitute defined, managed, and repeatable best practices.

- We discuss these adaptations using capability maturity model (CMM) frameworks pioneered by Carnegie Mellon University’s Software Engineering Institute’s (SEI). We base our description of LMM behaviors on our four years of research at Common Sense Advisory and on many years of prior research, observation, and market participation at previous firms as consultants, advisors, and providers.

- With the goal of identifying the metrics and key process areas (KPA) for graduating from one phase to the next, we offer specific recommendations on how to discover, analyze, and improve the process of transforming software, websites, and other content for global or domestic ethnic markets.

We also relied on the insight of and questions asked by industry professionals such as Denise Spacinsky (formerly of Hewlett Packard), James Grealis (Symantec), Dan Kuperstein (formerly of EMC), Inna Geller (Medtronic), and many others with whom we discussed these concepts over the last year.

Caution and Call for Participation: This Is a Work in Progress

When we discussed our plans for capability maturity research with colleagues on both sides of the buyer-supplier divide, we heard both that: 1) the practice of localization is too arcane for such a model and does not lend itself to the
increasingly quantitative, quasi-scientific analysis pioneered by SEI; and 2) practitioners and providers would benefit from more clarity in the evolution of localization staff roles, organization, process, and technology.

We agree with both sets of comments and present this report along with an open invitation to our readers to challenge and supplement these descriptions with their own experiences. We will extend this research to include more details, such as costs, benefits, checklists, common errors, and an interactive assessment.

**Who Should Read This Report?**

First created in the software development industry, capability maturity models have been developed for business functions as quality management, product design, collaboration, reliability, and testing. Companies use them to assess their progress over time or benchmark against other firms. This approach lets organizations observe and codify both its best and worst practices as the company moves toward improved support for its global business initiatives. When applied to localization as part of a balanced scorecard, a maturity model approach helps managers tie that evolution with the risk and rewards of their international activities.

This information and the localization maturity model we propose should prove useful to organizations that are globalizing and those that help them:

- **Practitioners, planners, and decision makers.** Anyone responsible for setting or advising product, website, or corporate globalization strategies can benchmark their experiences against the five phases we describe. They can use this information to uncover best practices and learn which behaviors to avoid. The levels we describe may not map perfectly to your organization, but the discussion of each phase will allow companies to identify themselves and to learn from the experience of those who went before them.

- **Suppliers.** This model should be a valuable tool to any company that provides software solutions or language services that help companies localize their products, processes, websites, or documents. It will help them identify the pain points typically seen at each stage of localization maturity so they may better offer appropriate products or services.

At the end of each level, we suggest actions that each of these groups should take. So that they understand the motivations and needs of the other team, we recommend that practitioners read what we tell suppliers and vice versa. That way each side will better understand the person on the other side of the table.