Dear Reader,

Welcome to another issue of SPIP. The interest in process improvement and maturity and capability models appears to be contagious as it grips an ever increasing number of domains and disciplines ranging from testing to risk management and from project management to organisational leadership. What they share is the pursuit of improvement goals that can translate into enhanced organisational capability and performance. This issue brings together the global experiences and new ideas of different organisations.

Gaining a high level of maturity is defined as a target by an increasing number of organisations. However, sustaining performance at a high level implies being able to evolve the process continuously to meet changing needs and expectations. Improvement can be facilitated through the identification and addressing of strengths and weaknesses. The paper by Malheiros, Paim and Mendonca describes the lessons learned by Serpo, the largest (IT) services company in Latin America which is owned by the Brazilian Government. The organisation has thousands of developers spread over multiple units and areas. In the past 6 years, Serpo’s software process improvement approach has altered the practices as well as the organisational culture. Better engineering and management practices have enabled different units to improve their performance, achieve better results and gain higher levels of user satisfaction. Maintaining their achievements, while sharing and disseminating good practices across different business units implied using continuous process improvement to sustain their performance.

Indeed, evolving a process without understanding can lead to organisational problems. Ocampo and Munch make a case for capturing the rationale underlying process changes. In support the paper presents two studies that identify the information needs required for describing the rationale for process evolution. The studies present the need for an advanced rationale management system. Processes may be changed more consistently if the information about the process, context and the rationale for evolution is captured and utilised. The paper presents a classification of issues based on the classification of issues collected in change logs. The paper further presents a conceptual model that can be used as the basis for collecting the rationales. While the work in this area is only beginning, it carries the potential to open up a new direction of research in process improvement and evolution.

The paper by Holmberg, Nilsson, Olsson Holmström and Sandberg investigates a brand new approach to assessing the impact of SPI initiatives. The authors introduce appreciative inquiry as an alternative approach to organisational change.
Instead of focusing on problems and limitations, appreciative inquiry is concerned with bringing out the best people and the most successful processes and is thus a strength-based approach. The paper reports on the use of the approach within Ericsson, the Swedish telecom company. Appreciative inquiry is concerned with changing how people think rather than what they do. The new lens offered by the approach can lead to new insights. However, software engineers who enjoy solving problems may find the alternative viewpoint to be a hindrance. The paper concludes with recommendations and issues related to the application of the approach in assessing process improvement initiatives.

It is encouraging to see the evidence of new work in the process area. The selection of papers in this issue proves that process work continues in different domains and encompasses many geographical areas. Process improvement is a journey not a destination. New ideas and directions can help us to navigate on our journey and develop new perspectives.

We are grateful to those who shared their work and ideas on where the process movement may be heading and continue to encourage both the practitioners and the research communities to contribute and share experience reports, industrial best practice, challenges, insights, promising research directions and tried-and-tested solutions.