Being able to identify the weaknesses (and strengths) of the SW development process in place, either for subcontractor selection, or for internal auditing before launching a SPI initiative, or even for improvement tracking purposes, is the main concern of SPA approaches.

Process Assessment is as a means to assess the extent to which an organization's processes follow best practices.

By providing a means for assessment, it is possible to identify areas of weakness for process improvement.

There have been various process assessment and improvement models but the SEI work has been most influential.

Several frameworks have been proposed and refined in the last few years like the CMM model (Software Engineering Institute), the BOOTSTRAP and SCOPE models (emerged from the ESPRIT projects of the same names), the TRILLIUM model (Bell Canada) or the international ISO SPICE (Software Process Improvement and Capability determination) initiative.