Business Process Modeling: A Key to a Successful 2021

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For many of you, 2021 will bring new opportunities—even new jobs. Whether you are a seasoned veteran or a newly minted recruit, a new job can be daunting. Regardless of the industry or the position, you are most likely in charge of one or more business processes—maybe it's risk assessment or customer onboarding or any of a limitless number of the processes essential to running a company. And if you are at a new company, chances are the processes are new to you.

One of the most effective methods of getting your arms around your new processes is through business process management and business process modeling (collectively and individually, BPM). BPM is an efficient way of learning your processes—and it's so much more.

Recently, an executive was hired to run a key operational area of a company in high-growth mode. The executive immediately asked for current state process maps and was able to quickly mobilize the company's operational teams to begin process improvement. This exemplifies "hitting the ground running."

But, what exactly are business process management and business process modeling? Business process management is a holistic discipline for documenting, analyzing, improving, and maintaining business processes. Business process modeling involves the methods, including tools and techniques, that support business process management. In this article, we will focus on business process modeling.

Modeling Is More than Flow Charts

You may know BPM as process maps or flowcharts. In its simplest form, BPM is the graphical representation of a company's business processes—pictures. In its complex form, BPM is a method of transforming a process or organization. It can include technology components, data management, and controls to mitigate risk.

There are plenty of benefits to basic business process modeling. Below are some reasons to ensure that you have a strong BPM program.

- The ability to quickly view a process tops the list of benefits. Good process maps provide a clear view of the beginning and end of the process and the players involved. Maps start based upon a trigger. What causes the player to start work? And there is a clear end to the process, whether it is a hand-off to another department or entity or a completion event. When does the player know the work is complete?

- Also high on the list is identifying tasks within the process that are wasteful, inefficient, or redundant. Value stream mapping or process simulation, which we will explore later, can be used to perform in-depth analysis of process efficiency and optimization. Yet sometimes, simply by looking at a process map, it is evident which steps could be eliminated to improve performance.

- Having consistent processes that are well controlled and aligned with business strategies is a key factor to a successful operation. As in all things, good documentation enables the operation to quickly make changes to meet business needs and regulatory requirements while reducing risk.

- Success is often achieved by having the ability to quickly change to take advantage of marketplace opportunities. BPM enables everyone to know their roles and their processes. When an opportunity presents itself, organizations can quickly align their processes to goals. Mergers and acquisitions are quintessential use cases for BPM. If each entity has well-documented processes, it is easy to see where they align and where they differ. Good business strategies may deem one process preferential over another, resulting in a true "merger" that chooses the best from each of the entities.

- We are often asked what makes a process strong. There are obvious answers—efficiency, effectiveness, controls, and compliance. But on an enterprise level, your processes should also be holistic and sustainable. By mapping your

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processes across an operational swath, it is easy to see whether your processes accomplish your goals and align with your business strategies.

- Let's not forget customer satisfaction. Customers may be internal—your employees—or may be external—consumers, vendors, and other third parties. Regardless of who your customer is, business process modeling enables process improvement through automation and elimination of waste. Incorporating metrics and goals into your process improvement efforts is easy with an effective BPM program.

BPM Has Many Applications

Business process modeling plays a part in most methodologies that support businesses. For example, Six Sigma practitioners use flowcharts and process maps during a DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Implement, Control) project and a DFSS (Design for Six Sigma) project. Lean methodology follows a similar approach to eliminate waste in processes. Certified project managers often utilize process maps to present a visualization of a project to the team and stakeholders. Choosing to adopt some, none, or all of the elements of existing methodologies is each company's preference.

How might BPM be used in your company? Depending on strategies and impending activities, there are a lot of use cases for BPM:

- Documenting the current ("as is") state of your processes is usually a good starting point. Grab a subject matter expert in the business line and walk through the process. (There is no need to worry about their staff or management level at this stage.)

- During this walk-through, ask focused questions that may help identify existing controls within the process or an opportunity to implement a control. Questions to help your subject matter expert think about controls could include: "How do you make sure this happens?" "What triggers you to do this?" and "How do you verify completion or success?" Of course, controls would eventually be aligned to risks to determine how effective the control is in mitigating risk.

- Process mapping both future ("to be") and interim states enables you and your team to brainstorm how to accomplish the process objectives in new and improved ways. Getting teams to think outside the box of established processes may be one of the most challenging efforts on your path to process improvement. Consider various techniques to encourage team members to look at things from a new perspective. Brainstorming techniques such as brainwriting and mind mapping can spur the flow of creative ideas to "do it better." Mapping an ideal future state leads to determining constraints and considering an interim state until you can get to a realistic future state.

- If you are looking to improve your processes, value stream mapping is a valuable tool to identify opportunities to reduce wait time and eliminate handoffs. Metrics play a key role in value stream mapping. The goal is to improve your processing time while maintaining, or even improving, quality. Most BPM applications include the ability to map value streams.

- Process transformation includes not just improving your processes but transforming them into new ways of accomplishing your goals. Consider combining processes or breaking them up. Look for opportunities that will leverage the results of your value stream mapping exercises—increase cycle times, decrease waste. Perform process simulation with a newly designed future state process to determine the gains that may be made to the original, current state process.

- Current state process map overviews can be used to introduce new hires to their department or new process responsibilities. They are also effective tools for continuing education for existing staff because they represent the most current, approved approach to completing a process.

- In general, process maps provide an easy way to graphically represent your organization to third parties. A map goes a long way in explaining to an auditor or examiner how you accomplish your goals and what controls you have to mitigate risk.

BPM Tools Are Readily Available

There are numerous tools in the marketplace to accomplish your BPM goals. Many of us start with Visio because it is easily available to Microsoft Office Users and contains many of the features already known to users. In choosing your ideal tool among the many options, look for the following:

- An adaptable architecture that will assist users in the initial setup and design of their individual platform.
- Automatic numbering or individual identification of each process step and all components to the process maps.
- System-driven methods to link process maps to the underlying procedures, risk designations, and mitigating controls.
- A library of the process mapping components, uses, and definitions.
- A workflow component that will allow users to review and approve the most current changes to the process maps.
- Automated alerts to inform senior management when process maps have been approved.
- Standard templates to assist in the development of dashboards and establishment of key process indicator tracking.

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- Automated version control for file recovery.
- Ability to print process maps individually or in mass under multiple configurations.
- Automated reporting to show the status of process map development.

The Bottom Line

Business process management is not a one-time exercise. You should build your program to be continually evolving and improving, through business process modeling. The key to a good BPM is encouraging collaboration to maintain process maps across your organization. As processes change, so should the accompanying maps. By making your model the center of your process management, changes will not be made without utilizing the tools in place and the documentation completed. Current state process maps are the foundation for process improvement and process transformation. Bottom line: New processes are much more likely to succeed.

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