

All in the mind

Too many BPM initiatives fail. We've got to do better. In this Column, I discuss an important area where considerable improvement can be realized.

Process-based management is not achieved and sustained by having the right software and methods, indeed you can probably make it work well with the wrong software and methods. Done properly, process-based management is a systemic approach to the relentless pursuit of organizational performance improvement. It's largely a mind game. Put simply, to 'do process', an organization, its people, and their teams need to 'think process'.

In a process-centric organization, all employees are conscious that their roles are to participate in executing a range of processes. They think beyond the activities described in their own job descriptions to see their roles in the bigger picture of creating, accumulating, and delivering value to customers and other stakeholders via cross-functional processes. Yes, that is a big change.

The unrelenting emphasis is on conscious, cross-functional collaboration—and that is often challenging for individuals and functional units in an organization.

Achievement of effective, sustained, process-based management is ninety per cent mindset and ten per cent toolset. Too often, the focus is on the ten per cent at the expense of the ninety per cent. Tools, including software, systems, methods, and techniques, are critically important—the full one hundred per cent is needed—but the tools are not the main game.

Having the right tools is necessary but nowhere near sufficient for success. It might be argued that the mindset/toolset emphasis is 80/20, or perhaps even 70/30, rather than 90/10, but it's certainly not the reverse of any of those. Tools and techniques alone won't create a viral spread of the idea of process-based management. Hearts and minds are also needed.

To have any value, process-based management must support achievement of organizational objectives.

Success is not measured by the number of models drawn, the cleverness of a process architecture, the number of process measures identified, or the sophistication of automation. Success can only be claimed if organizational performance has been demonstrably improved as a result of taking a process view. The process mindset must be about achieving those consequences of effective

process management and improvement; that is, it must be about improving organizational performance.

Having the process-based management idea resonate throughout an organization provides a shared mindset with which to build its practices.

The likelihood that organizations, teams, or individuals will adopt process-centric management approaches depends on what they think will happen if they do. When everyone is conscious of their contribution to the cross-functional processes that are delivering value, the result is process management excellence. The process mindset is not about attracting devotees to a theory, but about creating and sustaining change in the way work is designed, undertaken, and managed across the organization.

The practical application of process-based management needs to take systemic form. It may not be enough to declare a commitment to 'operational excellence', since that might just imply working harder to keep poorly designed processes operational. 'Excellence' needs to be found in a ubiquitous desire to continually find ways to improve performance—not just in a continuous, heroic struggle to correct for process flaws.

Ironically, at the highest levels of BPM maturity, the practices of process-based management are so embedded in the culture, and so ubiquitous in practice, that they are virtually unseen. At the lowest levels of maturity, the idea of process does not even arise. As maturity develops, driven by the development of all seven enablers, individuals, and then teams, start to think about cross-functional processes.

Eventually those thoughts result in practical activities to shape and nurture process thinking. Over time, the application of process-based management becomes automatic and the classic definition of organizational culture, 'the way we do things around here', once more proves accurate.

Timing is everything. An organization must be ready to start, and continue, a journey to process-based management, a change that is as much about organizational culture as it is about the logistics of process management and improvement.

Passively waiting for the happy day when everyone is ready is clearly not a winning strategy. Neither is the development of a process mindset a Jedi mind trick, something that just requires the exercise of a greater and more powerful will. A deliberate, well-designed plan is required to develop an organization's process mindset, that is, its cultural readiness for process-based management. The ongoing results of such a plan need to be measurable.

Defining the process mindset

Minds are often hard to change, but it can be done. Once changed, minds are likely to stay changed for the same reason.

A process-aware organizational mindset will have a particular, and sometimes challenging, set of characteristics. It will be:

- measurement-friendly
- community-focused
- quality-motivated
- change-welcoming
- challenge-addicted
- action-oriented.

Each of these is important.

The most challenging of the organizational characteristics might be an openness to performance measurement. One of the most significant roadblocks to robust and sustainable process improvement and management can be the absence of a measurement-friendly culture.

Where measurement is about finding someone to blame, catching people doing the 'wrong thing', then nobody will be pleased about the idea of additional measures. Acceptance of measurement as an exciting pathway to performance improvement must evolve for process-based management to succeed.

People and their teams who work with a highly-developed process mindset are constantly aware of the community effort involved in the creation, accumulation, and delivery of value to customers and other stakeholders. It's not just about 'my job'; it's about 'our job' and how all involved collaborate to do the right work well.

A relentless drive to improve and produce quality outcomes is a key attribute of the process mindset. The search to find 'better ways' is never-ending, and the motivation to continuously improve quality is deeply embedded in the organizational culture.

Continuous process improvement means continuous change and, from time to time, significant change that poses challenges for the organization, its people, and their teams. The process mindset is uncomfortable in a static environment.

Process improvement is not about making recommendations; it's about making change. Well-designed, controlled action is required to realize the benefits.

In an organization with a well-developed process mindset, the following comments would be unremarkable:

- *It's OK to make mistakes; we welcome the opportunity to learn and improve.*
- *All questions are welcome and the organization is open to new ideas; we are willing to experiment.*
- *People at all levels are listened to, and we have open discussions about new and contentious ideas; we welcome dissent.*
- *We have a strong collaborative ethos without silos and turf wars; we strive for excellence by being collegiate and customer-focused.*

The absence of a process mindset at the organizational level is the difference between ad hoc attempts at process improvement, and the sustained operation of a

systematic approach that deliberately and continuously discovers opportunities for process improvement, an approach that is embedded in the organizational culture.

At the level of the individual, creating a process mindset is not necessarily about correcting some defect in staff motivation. The fact that poorly designed and/or managed processes work at all might be because of very high levels of motivation.

In many cases, staff need to be highly motivated to find the work-arounds and put in the extra effort required to make processes work. So, to say that an organization needs to develop the process mindset of its staff is not to be critical of them. It means that the way work is described, measured, and managed needs to change, and that staff need to be made aware of, and fully included in, the collaboration that creates value. Staff need to receive the training and experiences that will allow them to work effectively in an organization with a well-developed process mindset.

Changing minds

Many practical strategies can be employed to develop the 'process mindset'. Some of these include:

- regular 'community of interest' meetings
- process-improvement project discussion groups
- library of process information
- process innovation jams
- documented success stories
- open discussion of process performance results
- idea submission schemes
- recognition of individual and team excellence.

Training will also be necessary in topics such as:

- effective communication
- lateral thinking
- dealing with difficult people
- teamwork
- conflict resolution
- system thinking
- innovation.

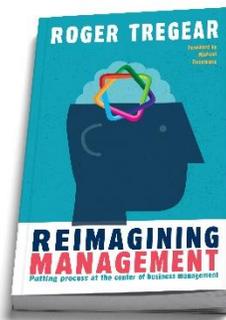
A process-aware organizational culture and mindset can evolve through active leadership and development plans, paving the way for successful and sustained process-based management.

The target is to employ such development strategies to achieve a tipping point beyond which process thinking is the norm, to trigger the viral spread of the process idea, shaped and made relevant to the organization.

How does this Process-based management idea help to make life a little, or a lot, simpler and easier in day-to-day work? Those messages must be tailored to resonate with the different stakeholder groups. Everybody needs to see for themselves the practical meaning and purpose in the theory and practice of process-based management.

Changing minds is not a one-off project, nor a single series of time-limited activities. Continuous reinforcement is required to remind everyone why process thinking is important, and to validate the assertion that genuine and worthwhile benefits are accumulating.

If we are to improve our hit rate in achieving and sustaining effective process-based management, process thinking needs to be actively nurtured.



[This column is an edited extract from the book, *Reimagining Management*, published in December



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