BPTrends ARTICLE

Questioning BPM?
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QUESTION 9

Process governance—control or liberty?

The term 'process governance' has many meanings. For some, it is about the strict control of process change, and ensuring that process models reflect an accurate picture of current activities. Others will see process governance as a much lighter application of control allowing the maintenance of no more than a high-level view of an organization's processes. *What role, if any, do you see for process governance? Do you discriminate between process governance and process management? Where do you see the optimal balance between control and liberty in the management of business processes?*

Overview

These process governance and management topics provoke quite a diversity of views. The differences are not in whether process governance is important, but in how and when it should be exercised. There is general agreement that, in a process-centric organization, some form of control needs to be exercised across the spectrum from high-level strategic management to low-level tactical operations.

A distinction is made by several authors between governing and managing individual processes, and applying those controls to the overall practice of BPM.

The need to balance the level of governance with the BPM maturity of the organization is raised. Should governance be imposed right from the start, or should it grow organically to meet developing needs?

While a variety of process governance models are discussed, there is consensus that process governance mechanisms need to be designed to meet the requirements of the particular environment and be integrated with other management systems.

Some authors challenge the need for heavy-handed governance arrangements, and remind us that there is a need to prove the business benefit for the costs and effort required to create and sustain process governance arrangements.

Jim Boots

Global Process Innovation, owner

In short, governance is more concerned with 'what', and management is more concerned with 'how'.

Roger Burlton
President, Process Renewal Group

Everyone seems to want to introduce level-4 maturity governance on a level-2 mature organization, and it is too much too soon. Governance has to mature along with capability and cultural readiness. From most immature to highly mature, there are mainly three types of process governance: governance of compliance; governance of change; and governance of performance. Each of these commands a notch up from the previous level.

The last level of governance should not be adopted until the organization is ready. Having process ownership in place prior to having the commitment, measurement tools, and cross-functional culture in place and expecting results is a myth. It is not sustainable.

Melissa Doherty
Process and Innovation Manager, Brisbane City Council

The ultimate goal for a mature organization would be to have almost indefinable process governance—and to have the practices of BPM and the governance of process change embedded into the existing organizational structures and practices. This would resemble the existing governance bodies having 'business process' as an ongoing topic, and practices such as project management integrating BPM approaches and methodology on relevant projects.

Ian Gotts
Founder, CEO, Q9 Elements, Nimbus

In client organizations, we see different levels of process maturity as measured against the five-stage CMMI (Capability Maturity Model Integration). At the lowest levels, there is chaos—a culture of heroes. At the next level, there are some defined processes. But it is not until Level 4 that process management is formalized, and Level 5 until strong process governance is in place. And it goes without saying that the benefits that a client at Level 5 is getting are orders of magnitude higher than at Level 1. So, it worth the effort to climb up the maturity curve.

Leandro Jesus
Co-Founder & Director, EloGroup

[G]overnance is not just about the definition of roles and responsibilities; it involves the creation of a whole structure to ensure these roles are performed effectively. In any case, a simple and pragmatic process governance begins with the demystification of the role of a process manager (or owner). We believe the manager responsible for a process should be simply an existing manager, or group of managers, from the business (by the way, every manager should be responsible for one or more processes).

Matthew J. Morgan
Head of Process & Metrics Excellence, Bridgewater Assoc.

Process governance or ownership is an essential component of process management. … Processes must be defined in order for them to be managed and improved.

[G]overnance or control … exists in two levels. Governance committees can establish design decisions in both standardizing processes across and organization or in making changes over time.

Authors

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