



Practical Process

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The Compelling Reasons for BPM

Introducing Practical Process

My name is Roger and I'm a process tragic!* As you go through your day, do you find yourself mentally redesigning the processes at the supermarket, airport, theatre and most other places you go? Yes? You're also a "process tragic". Join the club.

I'm pleased that others get excited about IT and BPM Systems. I don't. My interest in BPM is as a management philosophy. I'm interested in process-based management and the fact that the only way any organisation delivers value to a customer is via a business process.

This column will explore practical issues around process-based management. What makes it work? Why does it fail? How do we sell the idea?

So let's get started

The Compelling Reasons for BPM

An Hypothesis

I believe there is a finite set of compelling reasons for adopting process-based management--a relatively small number of persuasive arguments from which every person and organisation draws. Every organisation that adopts a process-based management approach does so because one or more of these reasons resonates with its circumstances. The set of causal reasons is quite small.

What if we agreed on what the reasons are and developed a rich and powerful body of knowledge about them? In this scenario, each reason would be comprehensively explained and supported by case studies, elevator speeches, stories, presentations, FAQs and other education and communication resources. If we had such a resource, would it be easier to change individual and organisational mindsets to the process view?

Changing Minds

Have you had the experience where you explain the process view to someone and they "get it" right away? Something about process thinking and doing appeals to them in a visceral and immediate way. These enthusiasts are the vanguard of organisational mindset change.

*Editor's Note: For readers like me who aren't familiar with the term process tragic, it translates roughly into American English as process maniac or process zealot.

Conversely, are there other people that you feel you could talk to for years, and they wouldn't "get it"? Some are skeptics and actively oppose change. They may feel threatened, or perhaps just overwhelmed, by the process view. Others just aren't interested enough to care either way; they are bystanders.

We have three mindsets to deal with: enthusiasts, skeptics and bystanders. One group actively promotes the change to process-based management, one group is active in opposition (or at least "actively neutral") and the third group is just not engaged. The majority of people in most organisations are bystanders.

Behaviours cannot be changed unless we change minds. What is the change in mindset that we seek to achieve? Simply stated, we want people to view the organisation as a set of processes that deliver value to customers and other stakeholders. Functional units are still important as they carry out the activities that form the processes. By themselves though, functional units cannot deliver value to external customers. The logic of that position is quite clear. I seldom have anyone disagree with it. Acceptance of the logic, however, does not always cause a change of mindset that results in behaviour change. If the outcomes are all so positive, why is it so hard to change minds to the process view? Why isn't the whole world doing it?

As process professionals, we must develop our ability to make the case for BPM. Effective education and communication approaches will speak to head and heart, describe benefits that are meaningful now, be credible, create urgency and reveal the way to achievement.

Then minds will change. Then process thinking will become the norm. Then organisational performance will improve dramatically and demonstrably. This is the core of our belief in BPM is it not?

A Repository of Reason?

A Compelling Reason Body of Knowledge would be a valuable resource in the quest to change minds. Here's my start on the list of reasons that persuade organizations the process view.

1. **Reduce costs, remove waste.** Why waste time and resources doing unnecessary things or doing necessary things the hard way?
2. **Avoid opportunity losses.** Deeper understanding of processes and their relationships reduces the chance of missed opportunities.
3. **Improve customer service (value delivery).** Business processes are the only way any organisation can deliver value to its customers.
4. **Increase organisational agility.** Change demands understanding. Big change and fast change demand intimate understanding.
5. **Improve risk management.** The more you understand a process the better you can predict and protect it's weaknesses.
6. **Document processes.** Simply documenting a process provides new understanding and reference material for training and review.
7. **Protect intellectual capital.** The fragile and portable heads of key staff members is not a good place to store an organisation's intellectual capital.
8. **Support contingency planning.** Process-based management focuses the development of contingency processes on the things that will matter in a crisis.
9. **Improve strategy execution.** Business processes are the way in which every organisation executes it's strategy.
10. **Reduce complexity.** Unnecessary complexity in any aspect of an organisation is a handicap to optimum performance.
11. **Improve IT outcomes.** The purpose of IT systems is to support the execution of business processes. How can that happen without shared process understanding?
12. **Improve effective performance measurement.** BPM allows us to measure the full set of things that matter.

13. **Support staff to achieve success.** If “people are our most important asset”, why do we so often frustrate them with broken processes.

What next?

The challenge is to turn this initial list into a comprehensive body of knowledge that can be used to support the case for process-based management. We need to develop and agree the set of compelling reasons and then accumulate presentations, stories, case studies and other support material for each reason. My future columns will be built around that idea.

Join me in meeting this challenge. I'd love to hear from you if you want to change, add, separate, condemn, delete, combine, criticise, praise or in any other way, participate.