# How Managers Can Make a Success of Business Process Management

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## Abstract

*The implementation and the continuation of a Business Process Management system within an organization is not an easy task. One of the most important roles for the success of Business Process Management lies with management. This Article describes a number of elements that managers need to consider in order to implement a Business Process Management System with success.*

## Introduction

The implementation and the continuation of a Business Process Management (or BPM) system within an organization is not an easy task. It implies a large amount of effort, the contribution of all members of the organization, well established and understood methodologies and a collaboration across all entities of the organization. In many cases, implementing Business Process Management within an organization will lead to a complete change of culture.

One of the most important roles for the success of implementing Business Process Management within an organization lies with management. Success will depend on the attitudes, beliefs and actions of managers within the organization and on the actual impact, they can have on the organization.

This Article gives a non-exhaustive list of elements that managers need to consider in order to implement a Business Process Management System. Each element is explained in some detail to show its importance for the Business Process Management System and what should be done to make it work.

## A very short Introduction to Business Process Management

Business Process Management can be explained as a way of managing an organization through its processes. Processes will be the translation of the organization's strategy into the way in which it wants to achieve its objectives.

Business Process Management therefore becomes an all-in system that must consider all possible aspects of the organization. Since processes are the backbone of an organization, their management includes managing materials, resources, planning, roles and responsibilities, knowledge and training, customers, products and services, risks, supporting systems and infrastructures.

In order for the Business Process Management System to accommodate all these aspects a number of requirements need to be fulfilled. In the following paragraphs several of the most important requirements are discussed.

## Business Process Management requires Vision

Any organization requires vision, whether it is for steering the organization, providing sound financial leadership, leading its employees, etc. In order to do the right things, providing the right resources and creating the right products, an organization needs to know where it wants to go. The same is true for Business Process Management. Managers need to establish a vision for Business Process Management. Where they want to go in the next five to ten years with their processes?  What will the processes be used for? Does the organization seek to standardize,

automate or improve its processes? Who will be in charge of setting the standards of the Business Process Management system?

Without a vision of how the processes will be used, the purpose and approach of Business Process Management remains unclear. The people in charge of the implementation and/or ongoing process improvement within the organization are left with no choice but to improvise and follow the road they feel appropriate. Lacking the assignment of leadership and responsibility to one person, the organization will find itself at sea.  Each entity within the organization could conceivably develop its own, independent and uncoordinated system of process management.

So after having chosen Business Process Management as a means of managing the organization, managers must establish a clear vision of where they want to go with this system. They must define the purpose and objectives of the system. They must designate a person or group of persons as the custodian and overseer of the Business Process Management system, and must delegate the power to make decisions to that person or group.

## Business Process Management requires Commitment

Opting for a Business Process Management system, requires not simply a top-down decision from the top managers. To make it happen requires a commitment from the top executives to actively show the way. They must lead the organization by example and provide the means and the time required to achieve the goals of the organization. Without this formal commitment, Business Process Management will become yet another failed initiative driven by individuals without backing and support and the empowerment to achieve the organization's goals. Despite their efforts, this initiative will die a silent death, leaving the organization disappointed.

The bottom line here is that managers must commit to a proactive leadership role in the implementation of a BPM system. They need to be aware that successful implementation will require their time and effort and will not occur overnight.  They need to engage in changing the organization's culture, in making the right decisions and to training and convincing all stakeholders  of the value of Business Process Management.

## Business Process Management requires Appropriate Tools

Within the literature and the BPM community a myriad of methods for managing processes have emerged. Each can boast of a number of success stories, but not every application of a method is a guaranteed success. Although it is not my purpose to suggest the best methods in this Article, I do believe that it is important for organizations to do a critical analysis of the various methods and select the ones most appropriate for their processes. It is best to avoid selecting a single method for implementing the BPM. For example, 6 sigma methods in a low volume organization is not always appropriate. Or using Business Process Reengineering in its original format makes no sense in a mature organization where processes can only be improved incrementally.

That does not mean that existing methods should be ignored. Each has useful concepts and tools that may be adaptable to the organization's processes. In short, methods should be assessed on their value to the organization.

## Business Process Management requires Practical Processes

Processes are really about coordinating and standardizing activities and making their results repeatable. In order to make the results repeatable, one might think that processes should be described as highly regulated and overly detailed documents leaving absolutely no room for creativity, intervention or reasoning. This may be appropriate for parts of certain automated high-volume processes. However for processes with human interactivity, this is not an effective way of documenting processes.

When illustrating human interaction processes, it is important to show the principle steps involved in the creation of the product or service, and the interactions between the different roles as well as the flow of information and material between the entities within that process.

     

Trying to achieve a detailed description of the tiniest tasks within an organization from the start with the introduction of Business Process Management is impossible and can result in uncoordinated islands of processes within the organization. So avoid attacking the Business Process Management from the bottom. Or at least make sure that the overall picture is clear before tackling the details.

Processes should first and foremost document their interrelation with other processes and the way entities within the organization collaborate. Recently when I was explaining processes and their use, one of the people attending said simply that "processes are all about coordinating the activities".

## Business Process Management requires Collaboration throughout the Organization

An important first step managers have to undertake, is to show the employees what Business Process Management is all about. To do so, they must establish an overview of the organization's key processes. This overview, sometimes called the process map or macro process, shows in a simple manner the organization's processes that involve the customer and the processes that support them.  The process map also shows the relationship between processes and entities and maps the fundamental collaboration within the organization.

There is in fact only one thing more important for an organization than its internal collaboration: the customer. When the collaboration and coordination between processes of different entities is missing, the risk of offering bad products to the customer increases. The risk of creating unnecessary costs and wastes will also increase. Activities of one entity might jeopardize those of another entity. Products of one entity might not fulfill the requirements of the next entity and require rework or create waste.  Making sure that what one entity is doing works with what others are doing helps to avoid passing poor products or services to customers.

The overview of the key processes must therefore include the interfaces that exist between the different entities. Very few entities create a product without support of other entities. Key processes therefore need to include a detailed network of sub processes representing this collaboration. It is up to the managers to set up this collaboration and to define how they will work together for the customer.

Despite the mandate for collaboration within an organization, entity managers remain responsible and accountable for the proper functioning of their own entities. Collaboration creates a common goal that will further the organization's success.

In short, if the organization and its entities have a set of common objectives, the organization will benefit in the long run.


## Business Process Management requires Employee Involvement

For a successful introduction and continuous improvement of Business Process Management, the involvement of all employees is, of course. also required. If managers alone are engaged with the Business Process Management system, the system remains theoretical and successful implementation is put in jeopardy. If the whole organization is involved, however, Business Process Management will be fully deployed.

When implementing Business Process Management into the organization, a participative approach should be used. Although managers will lead the way and define the strategy and objectives, they need to empower their direct reports to contribute to the implementation process. Managers should use the knowledge and experience of seasoned employees in order to incorporate agility in the processes, to detect deficiencies and improve the way things are done. A strict description of activities isn't adequate to the task of maximizing employee involvement in the process.

## Business Process Management requires Managers to set an Example

One of the surest ways to get the employees involved in an organization is management by example. If managers show what is supposed to be done by actually doing it, by stressing the importance of the processes, by showing that the results of everyone's job performance effect the whole, then people know their jobs have value. Failing to create this feeling within the organization, alienates people from the work they do. All the organization will obtain are employees who lack pride in doing the things well, in going that extra mile to satisfy the customer.

When managers themselves adhere to the processes and use BPM to manage their execution, employees will feel valuable to the organization, and individually pursue its vision and the processes that will help to attain it.

## Business Process Management is an "all-in Package"

Business Process Management as a management system is an "all-in package". One must consider and incorporate every aspect of the system into the organization's processes. Processes must contribute to customer satisfaction **and** to the organization's strategy. Process improvement must be an ongoing process. Systems and the organization must be considered as well. Quality, environment, safety and risk mitigation need to be integrated in the whole system.

The point here is don't try to cherry pick. For example, don't look only at the financial implications of process improvement, since this can have a negative impact on quality, customer and employee satisfaction or safety. Do not restrict yourself to the introduction of a limited set of specific tools and methodologies within your organization. A few tools and methodologies alone can resolve some short term issues but will not lead to a systematic and integrated approach to managing the organization. If you introduce Business Process Management only for a specific part of the organization, you'll miss out on optimal collaboration, the exchange of best practices and scale effects of similar processes.

Business Process Management is a multidimensional and organization wide method. This doesn't mean it has to be complex and complicated. Business Process Management should take into consideration all of the dimensions of the organization. It is important to know that Business Process Management comprises many aspects that impact the entire organization and should not be deployed piecemeal.

## Business Process Management is taking Control over Processes

A Business Process Management System helps an organization manage its operations. It includes methods for monitoring the organization's activities and improving them. Monitoring activities such as measurements, audits and inspections indicates where the processes go wrong.

Indicators alert when activities or product quality slip out of control. Business Process Management Systems are there to make sure the organization has control over its activities and its resources. Not the other way around.

It should be emphasized that it is the process that is monitored. The monitoring activities aren't there to control the employees. It is a mistake to think that a negative result from monitoring activities is the fault of the people executing the tasks. Poor process results can have many causes, but the people executing the tasks within the process, as research shows, are in most cases not to blame. The process, the resources, the inputs and even the monitoring itself are more often the culprit. Using these results to evaluate employees has an extremely counterproductive effect on the implementation and maintenance of the Business Process Management System. If the most important interaction employees have with the BPM is a repression, they will not embrace it which may ultimately undermine it.

## Conclusion

The implementation and continuos improvement of a Business Process Management System isn't accomplished overnight. It requires time and effort, collaboration, commitment from both

management and employees and the right set of tools. To get there it also requires a certain set of attitudes, beliefs and actions by the managers within organizations.

This Article enumerates places in the process where managers can influence a successful outcome in the implementation of a Business Process Management System. The list of managerial responsibilities is not intended to be exhaustive but rather to suggest places throughout the process where their leadership can be most effective.


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## Author

Bruno Vanhecke obtained his PhD in Physics in 1994 and a Degree in Management in 1997. Working in Quality and Processes for nearly two decades, he helped a variety of small, medium and large organizations, both national and international, in establishing and maintaining their Business Process Management Systems. He obtained Quality System certifications under both international and sector specific standards.


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