

Business Change through Process – Lessons Learned

Christine Dicken

Note: References to “issues” in this article refer to “pain points,” “burning platforms,” opportunities, gaps, risks, unanswered questions, problems, and, of course, issues.

Overview

Roger Burlton refers to “business change being a journey, not a destination” in his book Business Process Management / Profiting from Process. He writes about the need to “build adaptable solutions and keep our eye on what is changing to adapt in the future.” This piece of wisdom is applicable to addressing issues because the source of issues also requires adaptation on the continuous improvement journey.

The Center for Process Excellence has discovered that issues have four distinct sources in a business process methodology where continuous improvement is one of its goals:

1. Issues that are a “pain point” or “burning platform” for doing Business Process Management.
2. Issues that are identified as a part of process modeling that are prioritized and resolved to implement the “future state” process.
3. Issues that are identified as a review of products from the new, immature process.
4. Issues that are identified as a part of process review (Lean approach) that occur every three to six months.

The subtleties of the source of issues only became apparent after working through an engagement with one of our customers. The stages of that engagement involved:

1. Business process modeling that was initiated because of a “burning platform,”
2. The implementation of improved processes across a department,
3. The implementation of continuous improvement meetings that reviewed the products (deliverables) of the process, and
4. The review of the entire process to focus on, in this case, the scheduling component that was causing problems for the end users.

Issue Source #1 – “Pain Point” or “Burning Platform”

or Please help me!

Often times, issues are apparent because the process “just isn’t working very well” or “is very inefficient” – “pain points.” Other times, issues become apparent because of a major disaster resulting from gaps in the process – “burning platform.” The Center for Process Excellence (CPE) agrees in the basic concept that without a “pain point” or “burning platform,” there is probably not the enrollment needed to complete a business process management engagement. Unfortunately, smaller “burning platforms” or “pain points” may not be compelling enough for management to dedicate resources to the project. Conversely, the larger the “burning platforms” or “pain points,” the more likely that there will be resources dedicated to the project.

This customer came to CPE with a “burning platform” with regulatory requirements, and they were completely committed to analyzing and improving their processes.

Issue Source #2 – Issues Identified through the Modeling Process

or What is stopping me from implementing an improved process?

Issues are also identified through documenting process. As end users talk through the current process, they naturally point out areas that are in need of improvement. Initially, our BPM methodology stressed prioritizing and resolving issues that were identified in this way. These issues were prioritized with the most important being resolved in the improved process. The Process Owner was given the responsibility of resolving the remaining issues once the new process was implemented. Soon resolving issues fell by the wayside.

In retrospect, this makes sense because the most important issues usually were the ones that either needed to be resolved to implement the improved process or were resolved through the implementation of the improved process. Therefore, the ones remaining were, by default, less important. They were usually enhancements or “nice to haves.” So, CPE found that usually we succeeded in implementing new, improved processes but could not keep the momentum for ongoing, continuous improvement.

This customer tackled the important issues head-on and implemented new processes to resolve the “burning platform” issues and meet regulatory requirements.

Issues Source #3 – Issues from the Review of Process Products

or Are you getting the result you wanted from the process?

Processes produce products such as schedules, contracts, and work orders. Issues can be uncovered by examining the products resulting from the completion of a process.

The implementation of the new, improved process went well for this customer because they did a good job of training, educating, and communicating. There was also the added incentive of meeting regulatory requirements. The customer, with the help of an industry expert in best practices and the urging of the CPE representative, agreed to a Continuous Improvement Process that included meeting every month. The customer created a form for the crew leaders who, in their daily work, used the products of the processes. Crew leaders could not close out their jobs without submitting the form. The form underwent redesign until it was easy to complete with little time involved. (This is another example of continuous improvement in action!)

The agenda for the monthly meetings includes reviewing the forms and assigning the action items to the Process Owners for resolution. The action items are either issues or requests for change. Every month the number of problems decreases.

Issue Source #4 – Issues Identified through the Periodic Process Reviews

or How do you know when you implement an new process that it will work correctly or optimally if you have never done it that way before?

After a few months, the Process Owner for the scheduling component of the process complained that the process was not working as anticipated. The goal was to start scheduling five weeks from the work due date to allow for coordinating the maximum work at the unit, preparing the site, procuring materials, and assigning appropriate work crews. The planners were maintaining at three weeks, which sometimes caused problems meeting the due date with material availability, site preparation, and crew assignment.

The product review at the Continuous Improvement meetings could not have identified the scheduling issue because the review was of completed work and not of work that didn't get done because of process problems. In fact, indicators for this immature process showed great improvement in the amount of work being successfully completed because of the new process.

The process was reworked and implemented. There is now an agreement that there is a need to revisit the process periodically to ensure issues are addressed.

Findings

1. Having continuous improvement that addresses issues in the ways identified in this article requires sponsorship that is committed for the long haul. The time frame in this article is two years. There is a risk that if there is a lack of ongoing sponsorship that the Continuous Improvement meetings would no longer be held. There may be the option of having the meeting every two or three months if the product is stabilized or has met the goals expected by management.
2. Having Process Owners that see the value of reviewing the process periodically or requesting CPE services when there is a process issue is needed to support the review of the processes.
3. There is a need for an issue resolution methodology to augment the BPM methodology so that process owners and stakeholders are thoroughly analyzing the issue before determining a solution.
4. The process for documenting the issues and the methodology for resolving them can be the same but the sources will change based on where you are in the implementation of continuous improvement.
5. CPE now sees a future where both products and processes are used to create APS strategies. We are not there yet but we can visualize the journey.

Author

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