



Managing BPM

Joseph Francis

Managing Partner
PCOR

Joseph.Francis@pcor.com

The Food Processor

My work in BPM has recently taken a couple of turns towards the Supply-Chain side, and at the same time has also focused less on projects, and more on enabling large teams of people to be fluent with BPM concepts, frameworks, processes, and metrics. One of the biggest challenges I have in enabling and training is in finding ways to explain business process in terms that everyone understands, and at the same time hit on all the key elements of business process. I encounter this issue routinely within companies that are trying to convey the principles of BPM with maximum speed and comprehension. So, what processes are universally familiar and also illustrate the entire range of critical processes? Well, we all have to eat, and all food production is a process. In this article, I'll discuss the five key elements of BPM and how I use them to train. Our training exercise is in the context of an "outdoor barbecue". I have yet to encounter a place where no one has been to a barbecue!

First, we discuss the scope of the process and all the actors involved in the BBQ-BPM program. Experienced BPM practitioners always seem to start with the customer – in the case of a barbecue, the guests – and then trace backwards through major actors in the process, including first tier suppliers of materials and services for the event. Inexperienced practitioners try to list all possible suppliers, and then see if they can somehow identify all the major process actors in-between and up to the guests. At this stage, the main idea to convey to the students is that parties are given for people, not for grocery stores. They all grasp that concept fairly quickly, and they are well on their way to understanding one of the first major principles of BPM programs and process-- consumer needs.

Next, we turn to the material flow in the event. At this point, we suggest the students think about the final product as it appears on the buffet table, and track back, to the grill, and finally, to the grocery store-- the source of the raw meat, the condiments, the plates, and so on. We then track forward from the suppliers to reveal any missing elements, e.g. who is the cook?—to ensure that we have all the elements necessary to complete the process. It's amazing to observe how many different approaches people come up with at this stage, but, in the end, everyone understands the "variables", so we are able to spend time focusing on the process rather than the "BBQ."

At the third step, we identify the "type" of BBQ event we're planning. Will this be a 'build to order' event where hamburgers are cooked to order for each person? Or are hamburgers just placed on the buffet table—some rare, some medium, some well-done? Do you allow for vegetarian guests requesting tofu burgers? What if too many people come – we may need a contingency plan to acquire more materials quickly, perhaps an "OEM" supplier for complete hamburger kits? We then walk through the material flow process and try to understand how the processes involve accumulating material and/or information at every step and identify the "type" of major process involved – WIP hamburgers on the grill, finished-goods hamburgers on the table, raw materials for hamburger in the mixing bowls... Again, the analogy works like a charm and everyone gets it. They even get inventory models and process configurations without too much difficulty.

The planning processes, the fourth step, separates the men from the women.. These are the special processes we need to anticipate in order to facilitate production. How many barbecues have we attended where no one anticipated the time required for timely serving: 30 minutes to heat up a wood or charcoal grill; burgers need time to cook, etc. Women are very good at the

planning and timing of these events; men simply are not, but they do love to cook on the grill. At this stage, we also look at the planning processes involved in getting the *material* for the event, i.e. the planning processes necessary to prepare for grilling and for putting all the condiments, plates, chairs and so forth out for the party, and, finally, checking the list to ensure the entire event will run smoothly—starting with the invitations stating arrival and departure times,

Fifth, we look at reverse-flow processes, the “returns”. Everyone understands that you have to clean up after the event, but more importantly, everyone intuitively understands when processes falter and rework is required (underdone hamburgers), or you have too many hamburgers and you need to deal with the excess material, (doggie bags for guests or left-over food, wrapped for refrigerator or freezer). Most people enjoy the “family dog scrap” part of the process or the numerous beer bottles to be recycled. But with it all, what you’ve accomplished is to get your team to look at this simple event—the backyard barbecue-- as a series of processes.

The final step is close examination of a particular process – say grilling – and breaking it down into its component parts--detail work, material, and information flow. We ask everyone to write down a narrative version of how they would perform the task, and then we classify the steps of the narrative using a framework (SCOR). Then, we begin to ask probing questions, such as: ‘When do you get the hamburger, when do you light the grill, knowing that it takes 30 minutes to warm up, where are the buns in relationship to the grill, “Do you put all hamburgers on the grill at once? “How do you know when a burger is done?” From these questions, we are able to identify gaps in their process models, and provide them with a complete, seamless model with no missing inputs or outputs.

In the end, the students have a good, complete process model of how to hold a backyard barbecue from the initial planning all the way through the cleanup. They understand how to articulate the scope, planning, and materials, as well as how to create the process flow and workflow within the whole process. Everyone is astonished that a BBQ is so complex, and they begin to realize the complexity of the work they perform in their jobs everyday. Only when they begin to describe it, do they truly grasp the complexity. Finally, what do they think are BBQ-BPM metrics? What’s a good barbecue process? Starting on time, meeting all the guests’ needs, and staying within the budget. What’s a bad barbecue process? The food is put on the table late, or is cold, or we’ve gone over-budget, or incorrectly estimated the number of guests. The results are simple, intuitive, and applicable to the BPM process they are considering.

My takeaway from BBQ-BPM is, when training and evangelizing BPM, use simple familiar processes to illustrate the range of BPM techniques (scoping, flows, process models, metrics) so that you do not suggest an air of mystery and complexity around BPM. But rather, make it your goal to demystify BPM, and use analogies to demonstrate how it is always present in everyday life. You’ll go a long way toward effectively communicating the techniques and uses of BPM within businesses through simple analogies, and food seems to work everywhere every time.

And, hopefully, you’ll be in “good taste”.