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BPM and Business Analysts

When writing articles for BPTrends, I often use the vague phrase “business process practitioners.” I do it because there are many different people in any large organization who are engaged in process work. There are often Six Sigma teams or Quality Control groups. There are Balanced Scorecard teams working on strategy maps, and, in some cases, scorecards for processes. There are supply managers who use the Supply Chain Council’s SCOR process framework, and, if it’s a Telecom, there are probably managers using the TeleManagement Forum’s eTOM framework. There are business managers who have been asked to serve as process sponsors for a process change project and who then became process leaders in their organizations. Similarly, there are people who have been specifically trained in Business Process Redesign. And, there are individuals who began their careers as Business Analysts.

At a recent dinner with Kevin Brennan, Vice President, Professional Development, International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA®), we got onto the topic of where the business process practitioners of the future will come from. Kevin suggested that many of them would be Business Analysts. He went on to suggest that a major trend in the Business Analyst community is to expand their interests to embrace BPM.

Kevin’s comment started me thinking. I’ve been working in business process for a long time. When I started out working for Geary Rummler in the late Sixties, most of us were trained in psychology. IT was still confined to the back office, and when companies came to us and asked us to fix their processes, they invariably meant that the employees were not performing as they should and that we should figure out why and then institute changes. Like everyone else, I have watched and been awed as computers have grown to play a larger and larger role in our organizations. Today, almost all processes are more or less integrated with information processing systems. It’s hard to imagine a manager, even in a service business like landscaping, without a laptop where he or she tracks inventory, manages project schedules and profitability.

On the one hand, perhaps because of my own background, most of the people I know engaged in business process management come from the business side of the house - people who acquired process training after having been trained in some other management area. Think of all those Lean Six Sigma practitioners out there, most of whom have little knowledge of IT. Think of all the Supply Chain Executives who work together using SCOR.

On the other hand, I certainly know of lots of IT people who are heavily involved in process work. Many, I am quick to note, are narrowly focused on process automation, and are likely to overlook the broader business or human performance concerns that are my main focus. Still, as I thought about my conversation with Kevin, I asked myself whether Business Analysts are likely to become the main source of business process professionals in the future.

One way I started to think about the question, was to think about the roles that need to be performed in a process-focused organization.

I believe that there are at least six major areas of process work in any large organization. Figure 1 provides an overview of the kinds of business process change roles that exist in a large CMMI Level 3 organization. On the left of Figure 1 I’ve placed the BPTrends pyramid representing the three levels of process work within an

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organization - the enterprise level, the business process level, and the implementation or resource level. To the right of the pyramid I have depicted two columns. The column to the immediate right of the pyramid focuses on creating **projects** that introduce change. The column on the far right focuses on managing the day-to-day, **operational activities** within the organization

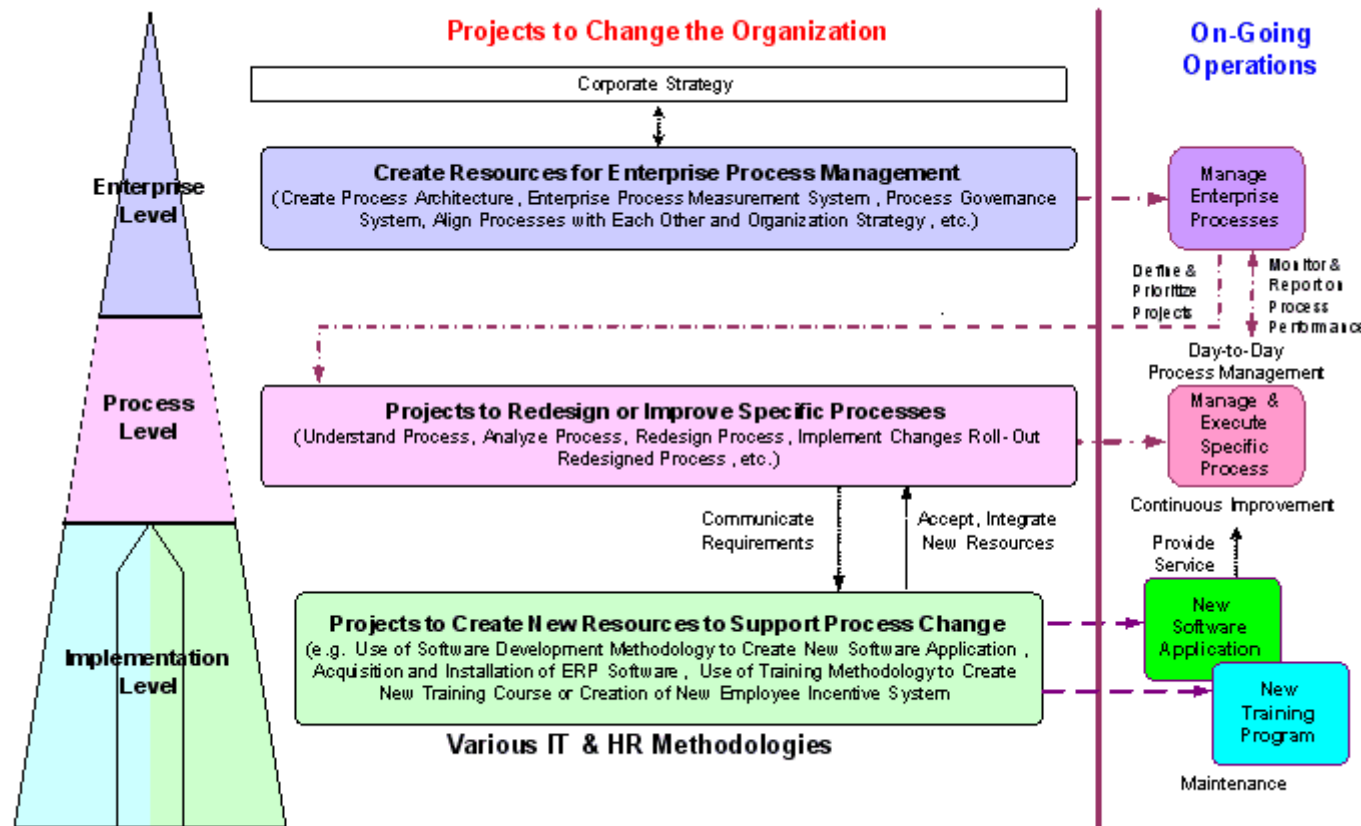


Figure 1. An Overview of the process tasks within an organization.

Looking first at the process level, there are projects that organizations undertake to redesign or improve specific processes. Serious Process Redesign efforts are projects - they have a start and an end. They represent a concentrated effort to change an existing process and they end when the new version of the process is rolled-out and executed. To the right, there is a box that represents all of the processes that are being executed within the organization. Each of these processes has a manager and employees working to perform the day-to-day work of the organization. In an ideal world, the manager and the employee teams engaged in ongoing execution are also continuously looking for opportunities to make incremental improvements in the operational process.

These two types of projects call for two different sets of roles. The project redesign effort calls for a team, led by a project manager and staffed by process redesign experts who are skilled at analyzing and redesigning processes that require major changes. The operational effort, on the other hand, requires everyday employees who are skilled at performing the specific tasks required to execute the day-to-day work of the organization.

In a similar way, if we look at the enterprise level, we see that there is a project area, which includes all of the tasks involved in creating a business process architecture, defining enterprise-wide process measures and establishing a process governance system. And, in addition, there are the day-to-day activities that will subsequently use the models and the data produced by the process architecture. In some cases, the users will

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be senior executives who will use the architecture to help plan and control the overall operation of the organization. In other cases, the architecture and the data produced will be used by a BPM Center of Excellence to identify problems and prioritize future process redesign projects, or to implement process management training.

At the bottom of the pyramid, we have all of the resource and support functions. If a given process redesign effort requires the automation of some subprocess or activity then IT will launch a project to acquire or develop a software application. Similarly, if the process redesign team identifies job changes that will be required, an HR group may be asked to develop new job descriptions, training classes, manuals or checklists to assure that employees will have the needed skills or knowledge. And, of course, in either case, once the software or training materials are developed they will have to be maintained on a day-by-day basis.

For the purposes of this discussion, we will ignore the implementation level and focus only on the enterprise level and the process level. Similarly, we will ignore the roles of managers and employees who execute processes on a day-to-day basis. These are not, in common usage, termed “process practitioners” although in some cases the day-to-day managers or the employee teams may be very skilled at finding ways to incrementally improve their particular activities and they often play an important role in making the organization’s processes more effective. Those engaged in the other areas, however, are more likely to be trained process practitioners. Some are engaged in process redesign efforts. Some are engaged in business process architecture development efforts. And, still others manage or support ongoing process efforts. Generally speaking, we use the term “process practitioner” to describe these roles, preferring the more inclusive term to some of the more specific titles. For example, in some organizations these roles are played by Six Sigma or Lean professionals. In some cases the roles are played by Business Analysts, and in still other cases the roles are performed by individuals trained in specific BPM or Process Redesign methodologies.

If you asked us what roles we would expect a Business Analyst to play, we would hedge by suggesting that it varies widely from one organization to the next. In many organizations, especially in the past, Business Analysts have been primarily focused on identifying opportunities for automation and gathering and documenting Software Requirements to hand off to IT for implementation. We have indicated the scope of the Business Analyst as Software Requirements Gatherer in Figure 2 with a red circle.

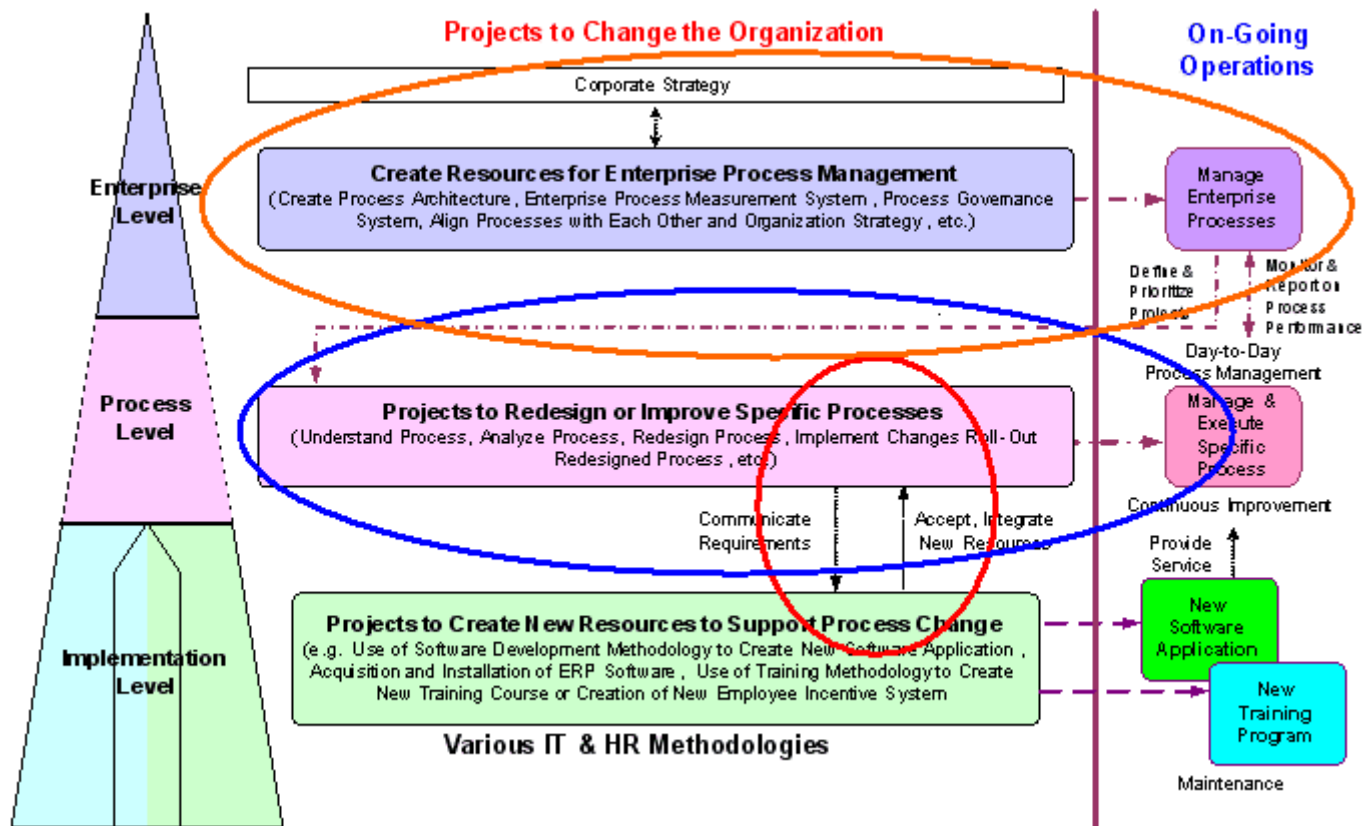


Figure 2. Roles that a Business Analyst can play.

As organizations have become more process-focused, and especially as some organizations have embraced the use of BPMS tools, some Business Analysts have embraced a more extensive role. The best of the BPMS applications being developed seek to describe an entire business process, including both the manual and the automated activities. At the same time, these BPMS applications are designed to provide real-time performance data to the managers who are responsible for the processes. To define the process models for a BPMS environment, one needs to be able to analyze the entire process, including not only the flow of activities, but the measures that will let the day-to-day process manager monitor the results of process execution. Moreover, as Business Analysts are asked to do this end-to-end process analysis, they are increasingly being asked to improve the process prior to defining it in a BPMS application. Business Analysts who succeed in this task, especially when they are dealing with processes with large manual elements (workflow) or decisions requiring the formalization of business rules, require all the skills that any good business process redesign specialist requires. Thus, it is not uncommon today to find a Business Analyst working side by side with a Six Sigma Black Belt, a Lean specialist, or a trained Process Redesign specialist. The new Business Analyst is quickly evolving into a skilled process redesign specialist, equally capable of dealing with activity, flow, employee, management, business rules, and training concerns. This, as I understand it, is the expansion of the Business Analyst's role that SAP had in mind when they coined the term "Business Process Expert" (BPx) and suggested that today's Business Analysts need to evolve into Business Process Experts in order to be able to support the BPMS work that organizations are increasingly relying on. We've described this broader BPx role with the blue circle shown in Figure 2.

Most organizations are CMMI Level 2 organizations. They are primarily focused on defining and improving specific processes. Level 2 organizations do not have an enterprise-wide process architecture and most lack BPM Centers of Excellence. For these organizations the BPx role covers most of their process needs.

More mature organizations, however, are working at CMMI Level 3 and 4. They are creating an enterprise-wide process architecture, capturing performance data, and managing all of the processes in the organization as assets that should be continually monitored and improved. These organizations need individuals skilled at creating business process architectures, developing process monitoring and process manager evaluation systems and using the data they acquire to continually plan new process improvement projects. This systematic approach to process management is, of course, what BPM is all about. The skills and knowledge used to create a good process architecture and to manage a process center of excellence are not well defined. Today, it's probably fair to say that the individuals filling these roles have come to the role more by chance than by planning. And, moreover, they come from many different backgrounds. We have indicated the scope of these efforts in Figure 2 with an orange circle.

In several cases that I know of, the BPM Center of Excellence is located in IT. In one case I encountered in Greece, Poly Palaiogeorgou heads the BPM group at Cosmote, an Eastern European phone company that has grown rapidly by acquiring other phone companies. As each new company was acquired, Cosmote faced the challenge of classifying the new company's processes, identifying overlaps, and consolidating their activities. Ms. Palaiogeorgou started with the TeleManagement Forum's eTOM architecture and modeled Cosmote itself. eTOM provides a comprehensive process architecture which Ms. Palaiogeorgou's BPM team extended and supported with detailed metrics. As each new company is acquired the BPM group quickly models the new company's processes in the same way, then maps them to Cosmote's existing processes, and recommends how consolidation can best be accomplished. This is exactly the kind of work that a BPM CoE should be performing, and, in this case, the architecture modelling and the process change planning and prioritization is being done by a BPM CoE located in IT. I'm not sure how Ms. Palaiogeorgou would characterize her team, but many would certainly consider them Business Analysts, or Business Process Experts. They do not function like IT analysts, but are, instead, focused very broadly on the analysis of complete business organizations. Thus, I can confidently assert that these high-level enterprise process management roles can be fulfilled by individuals who began as Business Analysts.

In my experience, most BPM CoEs report to divisional heads, like the COO or an executive committee. And, many are staffed by individuals with a business and not an IT background. Similarly, most Business Analysts are focused on defining software requirements or, at most, on defining processes for BPMS application development. But that is today, and, as we all know, change is occurring everywhere and more rapidly all the time.

I suspect that Kevin is right and that Business Analysts are well-placed to become the Business Process Practitioners of the future – and, indeed, to become the managers of their organizations' BPM Centers of Excellence. It will take a different mindset from the mindset that many Business Analysts have today – a broader focus that embraces both the human and the software elements that make up large scale processes, that embraces business management, goals and strategies, as well as measurement theory and business innovation. I expect, as in the past, that process practitioners will come from many different areas of the organization. But, I will be very surprised if the Business Analyst community doesn't expand its role to embrace all of the business process concerns within the organization.

Till next time,

Paul Harmon

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