



Processes in Practice

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The Process for Process Management

All of us involved in BPM spend a lot of our time thinking about “Process Excellence” – that is, how to improve the quality and flexibility of our operational processes so as to improve business performance. That is what BPM is all about, but look at the Gartner definition of BPM below [1]:

"BPM is a management practice that provides for governance of a business's process environment toward the goal of improving agility and operational performance. BPM is a structured approach employing methods, policies, metrics, management practices, and software tools to manage and continuously optimize an organization's activities and processes."

It confirms that BPM is about operational performance, but it also highlights that “governance” is a key element of BPM. It also emphasizes the need for a structured approach and for policies, management practices, and tools.

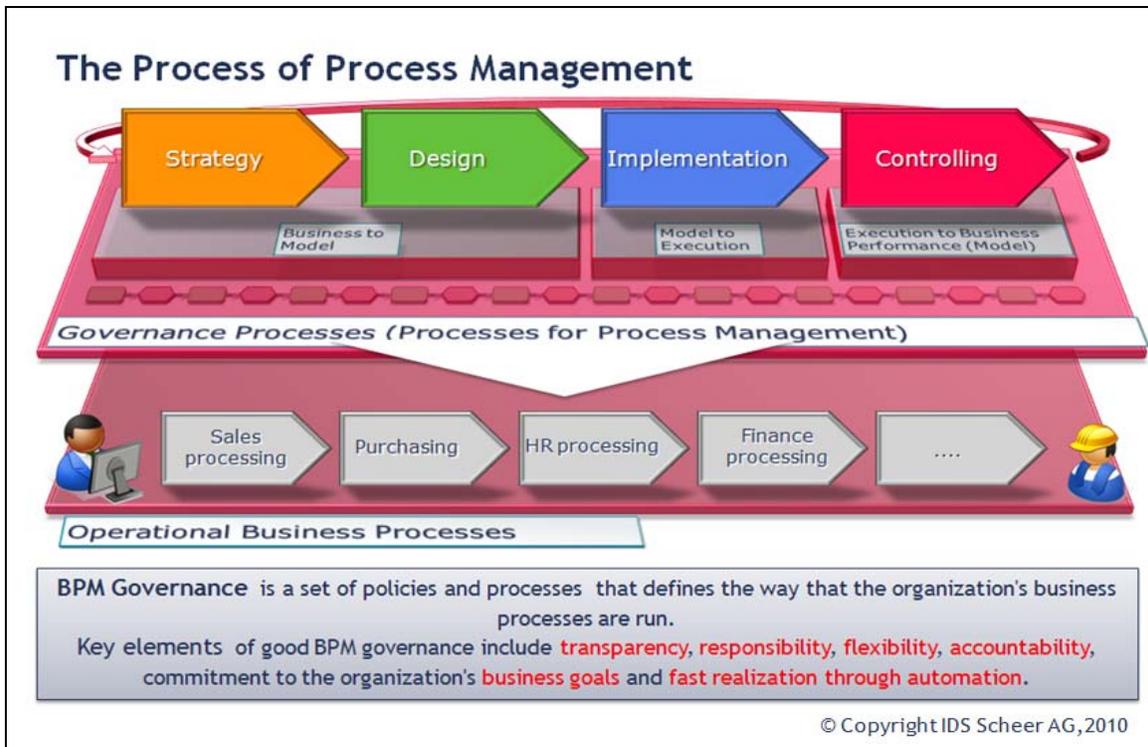


Figure 1. The Process of Process Management

When we talk about governance in the BPM context, we tend to think about process ownership, performance measures, and metrics. These are important topics, and most organizations are still far from having mature solutions implemented. However, there are other aspects of governance that we need to consider: change management, design standards, review, sign-off, communication, etc. These aspects of governance are very familiar to us from standard project management techniques, and most organizations are competent at implementing them for large projects and change programs.

However, for some reason, when it comes to process design, many of us are more lax in our approach, and we don't employ the rigorous governance or project management techniques that we use in other areas of our work. One of my colleagues uses the analogy that BPM governance is like the shoemaker whose children have no shoes [2]! We spend so much of our time trying to instill good practice into the design and implementation of operation processes that we forget to use the same techniques for our BPM processes. But, in order to achieve world-class processes, we need to employ a world-class approach to the "Process for Process Management" (See Figure 1).

If we think about the governance of our process, we can see that it ranges from one level, ensuring that process is aligned with and delivers business strategy, to the detailed level of ensuring process models have version numbers. We can visualize this vast range of activities as a layered approach (Figure 2).

Governance - A Layered Approach

BPM Governance

- Strategic Alignment
- Process Ownership
- Business Improvement
- Performance Management

Managing your business by
Managing your processes

Process Governance

- Process Objectives
- Change Management
- Process Improvement
- Review and Release Management
- Process Publication

Transparency & Control

Model Governance

- Access Rights
- Change Management
- Versioning
- Release Management
- Configuration Management

Quality & Continuity

Figure 2. A Layered Approach to Process Governance

At the top level, we are concerned with what we might think of as the traditional area of BPM Governance – what I call “Managing your business by managing your processes.” This includes process ownership, strategic alignment, and process performance management. These are very much the “hard topics” of BPM where there is still much to do.

The next level, Process Governance, focuses more on the processes as entities in themselves that require change. It is about giving transparency and control through change management, process improvement, review, and publication.

At the lowest level, we are concerned with some of the basic tools and techniques that we can apply to controlling access to process designs and process models.

As I mentioned earlier, many of these techniques are not new or special to process design. They are well known techniques used in project management and in software development. The list below describes some of the terminology frequently used.

- **Change Management** – the process by which required changes are identified, scoped, authorized, assigned, implemented, and tested. Process change management may form part of a wider project or business change management process.
- **Versioning** – the identification and management of successive instances of a changed process, normally indicated by a version number (e.g., “1.1.2”).
- **Release** – the specific version (or the various versions of the constituent components) of a process that is communicated and issued to the business.
- **Release Cycle Management** – the process of managing the changes to specific versions and releases of process models. “Release cycle management” is, of course, a “change management” process, but typically the term is used to refer to the more detailed aspects of design, approval, and release of ARIS models.
- **Configuration Management** – the identification and management of the various versions of the constituent components that together form a specific release. In the simplest case, all the components have the same version number as the release. In more complex situations, the components have an independent version history.
- **Variants** – the identification and management of different but very similar processes that apply to different products, locations, points in time (“as-is” and “to-be”) with the aim of promoting standardization and reducing variability. Process variants may have their own version history.

The trick in achieving a world class “Process for Process Management” is in designing such a process that employs all of these techniques and supports all of the stakeholders involved.

Typically, the stakeholders may come from different parts of the business, for instance as in the example Release Cycle Management (RCM) process shown in Figure 3.

The Process Owner may not have the detailed process knowledge to be able to understand the process changes without supporting information. Finally, a wider group of staff in the organization will need to be notified of the released changes, which they may view using a corporate process portal. The comments and decisions made by the Reviewer and the Process Owner need to be recorded and archived. In addition, the process models involved in this review need to be locked to prevent further change, versioned, moved to the release environment, and published on the Intranet.

We can see from this example that as well as designing an appropriate process, we also need to ensure that the stakeholders involved have the right set of tools, and also the knowledge to carry out the tasks. Once again, this is no different from that required to successfully implement an operational process, but so often these elements are not considered for the process design lifecycle.

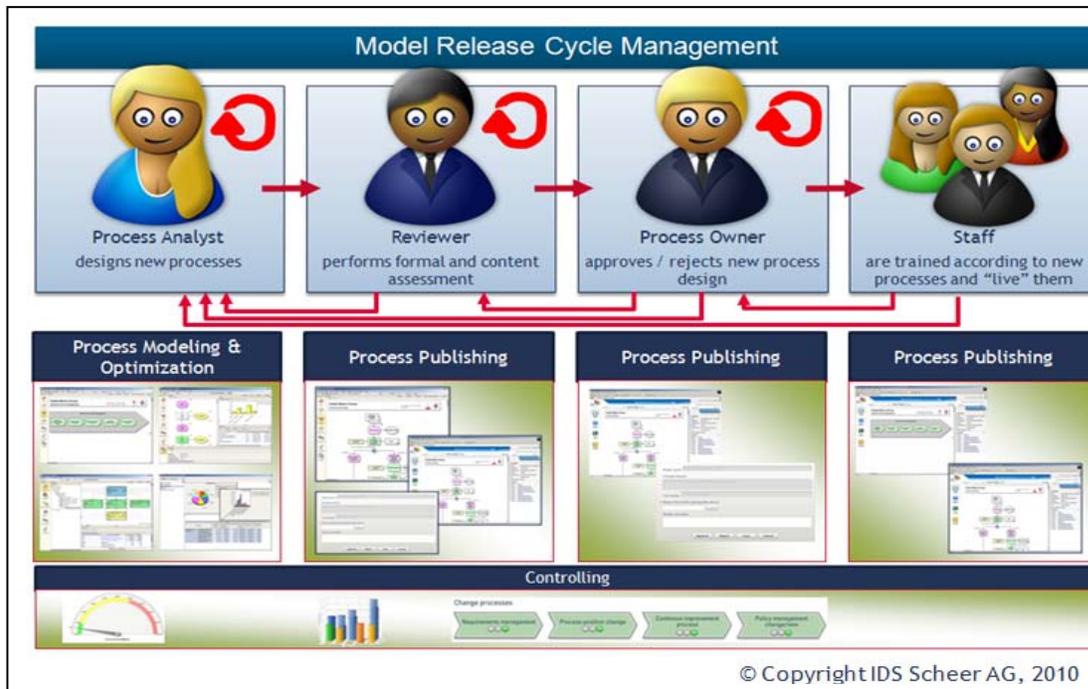


Figure 3. Release Cycle Management

By employing all the best approaches, tools, and techniques of BPM to the BPM processes themselves, we can ensure that they will deliver the best possible operational business processes. We can also ensure that we are using our process resources in the most efficient manner and that the right people are carrying out the tasks and that we can prove it. If we don't ensure that the "Process for Process Management" is world-class, then we can't expect to ever achieve high quality business processes.

References

[1] David McCoy, Gartner. "Business Process Management: Preparing for the Process-Managed Organization"

[2] Britta Hilt, IDS Scheer. "BPM Governance in action: World Class BPM Governance thanks to flexible BPM Process Automation". ARIS Expert Paper.

Author

Rob is Global Solutions Manager for Enterprise BPM at IDS Scheer AG and a Senior BPM consultant with IDS Scheer UK (Ltd). He is an internationally recognized expert in Business Process Management (BPM) and the practical use of the ARIS Design Platform.

Previously, Rob worked for British Telecom (BT) where he was responsible for selecting and implementing ARIS in a large scale implementation. Rob has built extensive experience of all aspects of BPM and specializes in providing consultancy on BPM, process modeling and design, architecture and frameworks, process governance, and integrating process and IT design. Rob has written three definitive books on the practical use of ARIS Design Platform for BPM. For more information see <http://www.rob-davis.co.uk>.

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