

Managing BPM

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You know, I like a sexy PowerPoint presentation as much as the next person – with nice graphics, well thought out visuals, and chewy data. I am a fan of Tufte, and of McLuhan, and I am always looking to improve the way I convey information. But there is a problem that lurks in BPM, and my team has to stress over and over to “the beginners” that the point of BPM is not to create beautiful models, but to improve business performance. The “M” stands for “Management.”

In a good BPM program (continuous, or discrete), at some point in the program we will probably work with a process model, an organizational model (probably an Enterprise Architecture model), and other representations of data about how the organization operations. Focusing on the business model of our program, we use diagrammatic models (Rummler-Brache usually), as well as narratives organized around our standard frameworks (SCOR, and so on). But the model is “an artifact,” as they say. The team has worked with business counterparts to understand how operations really work, successively refining the model and using it in a way that reflects agreement from various participants that it “works.” It is like publishing the minutes of a meeting, and having members vote that the minutes are accurate. The purpose of the business meeting was not to create minutes!

A good model-creating process has meetings together of people who use/own the processes, a way to communicate information about the model content, a way to get agreement, a conflict resolution, and some sort of “research” cycle. In the end, where you might have had siloed processes of independent teams, you should find that you have a team that sees its work end-to-end; understands the reasons for the work, material, and information flow; and understands what service levels are needed. The model can be used to initiate a new cycle of change later, speeding up “level setting” for the program.

A bad model-creating process has groups of BPM people who independently interview and collect process information, “closed door” ratification of the model content, no process to handle disagreement on the model content, and no level-setting on definitions and cross-team information. Siloed teams can remain siloed, and the end-to-end view is lost. Few participants feel like they “own” the outcome, and it may be rife with mistakes. Using it to seed new cycles of change is fraught with problems, and change management programs can fail, leaving the entire organization with no confidence in BPM.

Now, nobody is perfect. It is not always easy to get entire teams together to review, and you may not always get everybody to agree, but information is being distributed and created to a high degree.

What are some symptoms of those obsessed with the supermodel?

1. Modeling Tool Religion

I am all for having everyone use the same tools, to make it simpler and more efficient to create and distribute information, but, at a certain scale, just go with what works. Not everyone has to be in the religious group. If you are spending more time trying to get everyone to use a tool than you spend discussing business

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activities, you are in a rut. Have a couple of people be tool experts, and let everyone else be expert with the whiteboard and a marker.

2. Frameworks Religion

Many people barely believe their ears when I advise abandoning frameworks at certain points in a project. As with modeling tools, the purpose of the project is not to use the framework, the purpose of a project is to solve business issues. If the framework is unnatural, wing it. I have seen more hung-up projects where everyone is being forced to learn SCOR or some framework language. Focus frameworks with a few experts, while the business uses more natural language. If the framework works, they will adopt it quickly.

3. Russian Dolls

A Level-1 model. A Level-2 model. A Level-3 model. Then Level-4, Level-5, Level-... 1000? I have had frightened team members come to me, almost in tears, with vast, complex documents, wondering “when to stop.” I usually advise, “When the main questions are answered.” Well, not meaning to be sphinx-like, I clarify then, “Set the scope of the program, and keep any model development within that scope. If you are not configuring SAP, then you do not need level-5 workflows and such. We developed a rule of thumb: If there is an “if-then-else” flow, you are probably too far into workflow and not into process. Stop!

4. Spaghetti

Spaghetti is like Russian Dolls turned inside out. It happens with analysis, metrics, and enterprise architectures usually – incredibly complex, spidery diagrams of entire hierarchies flattened out. Really, if you are dealing with more than a handful of key metrics, or cause-effects, or systems, the business loses the ability to understand anything. The purpose is to understand and make decisions: If the business cannot make a decisions, it is wasted disc space.

5. PowerPoints preceding program documents

A well-written program document with key features like scope, participants, process narratives, ideas, analysis, and so forth, should be summarized into a presentation at some point for review. But I want to see detail and facts first, not sexy slides. Newbies will try to PowerPoint because they feel it is more important. Correct them!

Some of our best programs never had published models; they existed as intermediate program elements, and were reused in other areas, but the program outcome was a series of benchmarks, detailed process performance analyses, recommendations, project definitions – with no models to be seen! The *implementation* teams then took specific models and used them as input for detailed requirements, workflow, and configuration parameters, but, again, the output was change, not more models.

If you want to present models, I suggest:

- For C-Level, and Senior-VP levels, go no further than “Level 1” models to convey program scope. Level 1, in SCOR for example, speaks only to



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high-level business-to-business interactions around “Plan, Make, Source, Deliver, and Return.”

- For VP levels, Line-of-Business owners, go no further than specific “Level 2” models to convey varying business complexity. Level 2, in SCOR again, speaks only to variants on manufacturing complexity – build-to-order, build-to-stock, retail, and so on.
- For Director and Manager levels, go no further than specific “Level 3” models to convey general process steps. Level 3 in SCOR speaks of specific, generic tasks to execute “Delivery.” for example.

Keep models to the minimum. Just the facts, ma’am.

