



A Strategist's Perspective

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Business Process Management Maturity: It's Not That Simple

Maturity implies, by its meaning, that you have arrived and are complete/finished or, at least, well under way. In the area of BPM, it is not a simple formula that one drops into a spreadsheet and thereby achieves a rating that means the same thing to everyone. It is not hopeless, however, as there are some sign posts and rules to keep in mind on the way to becoming more mature.

Rule 1: You can never stop becoming more process mature.

There seems to be one principle in life that persists - The more you want; the more you get. The more you get; the more you want. The more you give your boss in terms of output; the more she/he wants. It is human nature to say it is never enough. While I like the idea of contentment, we are living in a world of extreme competition. Therefore, contentment is a luxury few can afford. Process maturity is a never ending journey, but the amount of effort it takes will reduce over time, assuming chaotic change is not present

Rule 2: Processes have a maturity and so do the organizations that employ BPM

Quite often people confuse the maturity of unique processes within an organization with the maturity of the organization that builds and maintains those processes I think it is important to have different scales for measuring the maturity of processes and the maturity of the organization.

Process Maturity

Some people think that if an individual process attains savings in terms of time and money, it is sufficiently mature to move on to the next process project. While this makes sense pragmatically, it is a rather short term and limited perspective. First of all, processes do not consistently stay in tune and on the mark, and they evolve over time because of business change and exceptions. Processes suffer from entropy (rust), just like anything else on earth. Secondly, there are levels that need to be satisfied. At an operational level, throughput and cost are very important, but there are also issues of how the process can support tactical and strategic goals. You could tune the process to identify cross selling opportunities to grow the business. This could add operational time, but could well be worth the extra time in terms of revenue increase. A good process has three things going on simultaneously: **planning, acting and watching**.. There is no implication of sequence here because all three activities are always occurring once the process is up and running. Traditionally, just ushering work through a process was good enough (**acting**), but in today's world, the processes must be watched and monitored to make sure they are on track (**watching**). In a world of continuous optimization, the processes and the people that control them must plan and re-plan while work is in-flight (**planning**). This means we have to do process discovery while leveraging process intelligence towards stretch goals. When we arrive at this point, our processes are mature.

Process Management Maturity

This is an area that is a bit controversial. There are various bodies that are rushing to produce an accepted standard for process management maturity. OMG and CMMI have their baking standards, and, in the middle of this process, Gartner produced a BPM maturity model last fall. It seems to have gathered momentum among user organizations in the absence of a published and widely accepted standard. If you wish to read more about the Gartner model, go to www.gartner.com and search for "BPM Maturity Model Identifies Six Phases for Successful BPM Adoption" published on October 18th, 2006 (ID Number: G00142543). Once the many other standards organizations produce their final work, we will have great fodder for debate on the issue of maturity models. In the meantime, I would like to suggest that all the models produced will have the common threads of **process discovery, continuous process improvement and process nimbleness**. Like it or not, you have processes already established. The question is, are they standard and do they employ best practices?. You won't really know until you model them and/or measure them (**process discovery**). Once you practice process discovery, you are moderately mature. You won't keep your processes sharp without trying to improve them constantly or recognize you have to start over or reengineer them (**continuous process improvement**). Once you practice continuous improvement, you are very mature. Once you use your processes to actively compete and are able to keep up with rapid change and still gain business advantage (**process nimbleness**), you have reached process excellence.

Rule 3: You have to invest in knowledge and experience to gain maturity in process success

The big secret here is that you can't win, if you don't play. You have to invest money to make money. Process is no different, but the payoff can be big. Yes, there will be risks, but business professionals are accustomed to minimizing their risks and racking in gains. IT professionals, on the other hand, try to eliminate risks. Even if you can't find a business visionary (a must in my book for large benefits), you do not have to back away. There are plenty of savings in IT and administrative processes. You will need to stay in the game, so practice process disciplines as early as possible and invest in proof of concepts and skills training.