



Innovation

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Five Secrets for Using BPM to Deliver Process Improvement in Less than 60 Days

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Section I: Introduction

Business Process Management (BPM) is a management discipline that requires organizations to analyze, model, and redesign their business processes as a way to improve the effectiveness of those processes. Using BPM, organizations can achieve savings and efficiencies through new applications that streamline and automate business activities. Thus, BPM provides a springboard to business innovation, allowing organizations to dramatically improve such activities as recruiting and hiring, budget formulation and reporting, inventory management, and customer service and support.

Unfortunately, many organizations experience frustration and even failure when trying to implement BPM solutions. Problems often start with missed deadlines, perhaps because the implementation team did not fully understand all of the activities and steps required for implementing BPM. Delays lead to cost overruns, and soon the organization is forced to take shortcuts and scale back its BPM solution to avoid further expenses. Moreover, once the original deadline is missed, organizations often must adapt the BPM implementation to new business developments and strategies – thus spurring an endless cycle of change and delay.

The result? A BPM solution that is behind schedule, over budget, and unable to deliver the promised efficiencies or innovation.

How can organizations avoid these pitfalls? By adopting a BPM-centric application development that enables organizations to innovate and introduce new BPM solutions faster and at a lower cost than traditional custom development projects. In this approach, business users are fully engaged throughout the implementation, and help map out the process using BPM platform tools. These tools enable close collaboration between the business and IT staffs, thus increasing the likelihood that the organization will achieve the desired results.

Project Performance Corporation has developed a framework for identifying and implementing process improvement in less than 60 days. At Project Performance Corporation, we have found that BPM development is best achieved with an approach guided by five basic principles:

- Select high-value processes that are small and less complex, with about 10 to 15 main activities;
- Use existing infrastructure, such as existing code base and interfaces to legacy systems;
- Limit the number of interfaces linking the BPM system and external systems;
- Use out-of-the-box functionality to develop graphical user interfaces (GUI);
- Select processes that can be automated using established design and

development patterns

This approach yields BPM solutions that can be implemented quickly, are easy to use by employees, customers, and other targeted users; can be adapted to changing business and market conditions; and, most importantly, will achieve BPM's anticipated efficiencies and goals.

Section II: Five Secrets for Rapid BPM Implementation

Gartner defines BPM as a “process management discipline in which business processes are viewed as assets to be managed, designed, and continuously improved to enhance business agility and operational performance.”¹ In recent years, BPM solutions have incorporated business intelligence capabilities that enable organizations to monitor and adjust business processes in real time, a key element for continuous process improvement.

As with any development project, implementing a new BPM solution faces a number of challenges. BPM development, for example, is not suited to traditional methodologies for application development, because it requires that business users be involved throughout the implementation. In addition, even among experienced IT teams, few people have the skills or experience to design, develop, and install BPM tools and solutions. And, finally, every project needs buy-in from key stakeholders who must embrace the new processes and use the BPM tools.

One of the most effective ways to address these challenges is to implement BPM quickly while delivering a solution that is easy to use and provides clear reporting tools for managers. A fast implementation capitalizes on the enthusiasm and commitment of resources that typically characterize the early stages of project development. It minimizes the risk that changes in business or market conditions will require changes in the planned BPM solution. It also minimizes the risk of cost overruns and delays that can undermine support and derail the project. And by achieving immediate success and positive results, the organization lays the groundwork for additional BPM implementations and continuous process improvement.

Project Performance Corporation is a recognized leader in implementing BPM solutions for businesses and government, with extensive experience using software tools and solutions from a variety of BPM vendors. Using lessons learned from our experiences, we have identified five guiding principles that enable us to deliver BPM solutions rapidly and successfully, while simultaneously addressing each customer's unique problems, needs, and goals.

These five principles can help organizations improve key business processes and realize ROI in less than 60 days:

Secret #1: Select High-Value, Simple Processes

Select processes that have high value for the organization but are not overly complex. For example, an ideal process might have just 10 to 15 main activities. In selecting the process, an organization should consider how the process might be streamlined or simplified. This could be done using a design pattern to reduce the number of activities, or seeing if certain steps can be altered, combined, or removed entirely. The targeted process should be able to use as much out-of-the-box functionality as possible from the chosen BPM software.

Selecting simpler processes to deploy speeds up development and testing. It requires a smaller implementation team, and makes it easier for the team and the organization to become comfortable using the tools, thus making on-time project completion more likely.

Secret #2: Use Existing or Planned Infrastructure

Select processes that can use existing code base. This can be accomplished by using the existing application program interface (API) for services already running or, better yet, by

¹ Paolo Malinverno and Janelle B. Hill, “SOA and BPM Are Better Together,” Gartner RAS Core Research Note, 2007.

publishing those services in a service-oriented architecture (SOA) environment so they can be consumed by the new processes. The API is the set of protocols, tools, and other building blocks that programmers use to develop software applications. Thus, using existing infrastructure can streamline and shorten development time.

This approach also points to another reason why the choice of your BPM platform is important to project success: Web services integration within the SOA approach is a minimum requirement in any BPM platform. That's because BPM platforms usually consist of the actual BPM software and also may include an application/web server.

Secret #3: Limit the Number of External Interfaces

Select processes that have a limited number of interfaces to external systems. A large number of interfaces will increase the amount of time needed to design, develop, and test the new BPM solution, as well as increase the potential for problems during those phases.

If external interfaces are required, restrict them to interfaces that are supported by the particular BPM application or product that is being installed. For example, the LDAP, or Lightweight Directory Access Protocol, which is used for user authentication and, at times, user authorization, is a widely supported standard and interface. Consequently, LDAP and other common interfaces can be easily incorporated into BPM solutions without stretching the project timeline.

Secret #4: Use Out-of-the-Box Functionality to Develop User Interface

Use the graphical interface design tools provided by the BPM software selected for the project. Developing the GUI is often the most time-consuming aspect of BPM implementations. Consequently, organizations can reduce significantly the time required for GUI design and development by using the user-interface form tools that typically come with BPM software. The user interface form tools provide a quick but effective way to map, design, and implement the user interface, because they almost always have built-in hooks to the application, such as a tag library that is specific to that BPM software product or key words that can retrieve and save data entered by users. Similarly, the out-of-the-box functionality includes GUI controls that do not require extensive coding to produce the desired functionality because they are native to the software.

Using out-of-the-box functionality makes it easier to roll out the application quickly and also provides for easier maintenance. Developers do not have to spend time coding functions that are needed by the application, because most of these functions are already built into the tool.

Secret #5: Use Established Process Design and Development Patterns

Select processes that can be automated using established – and tested – development and design patterns. This improves the usability of both the process and user interface, and is much easier to implement than a customized BPM solution. By sticking to tried and true methodologies, developers can quickly design and implement the new, automated processes. This is another reason why selecting simple processes is important

The work flow processes illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below demonstrate the value of using established design patterns to help map and build improved business processes. Figure 1 is a process map describing the approval process within an organization for routing internal requests. This process proved much too cumbersome and complex to automate because it incorporates multiple roles – employees, supervisors, managers, vice presidents etc. – and because it allows for many of the people in these roles to forward or return requests to others.

Figure 2 represents an established pattern for routing and approving requests. By adapting the original process in Figure 1 to this design pattern, which has a single user and approver, the process has been simplified and dramatically streamlined. The end result is a process and system that is easier and less costly to use, and much more effective.

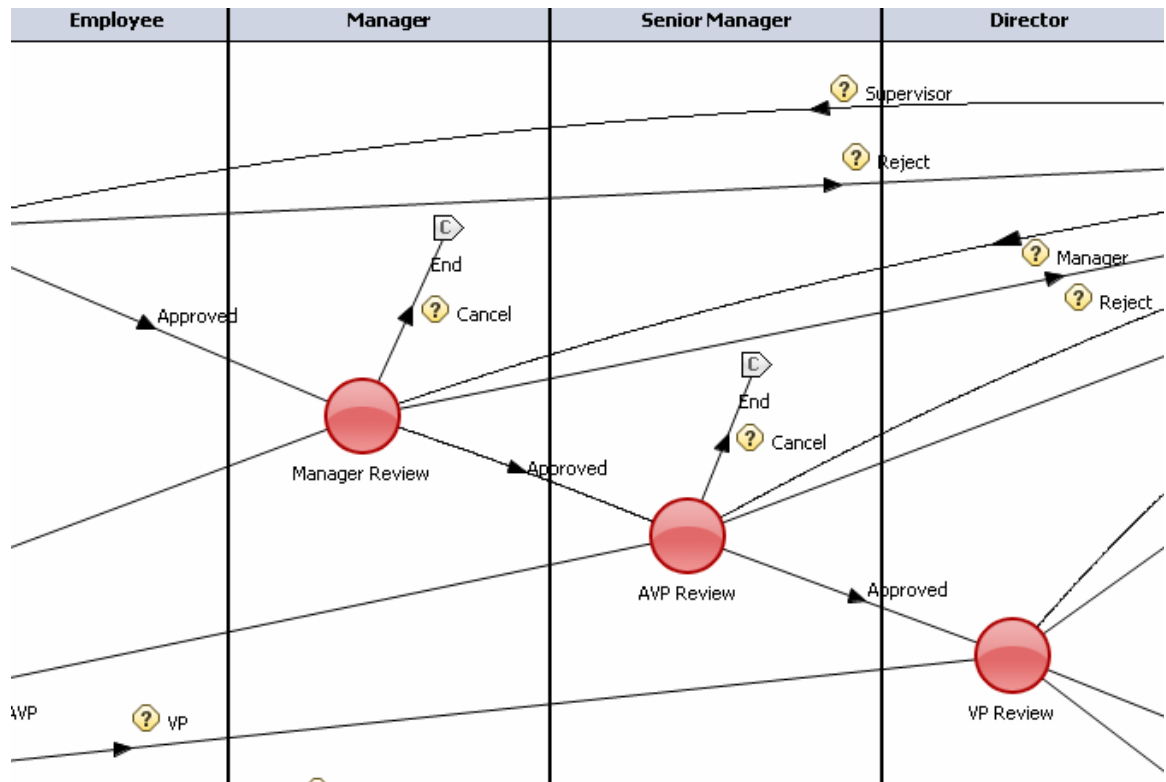


Figure 1. Original Routing and Approval Process

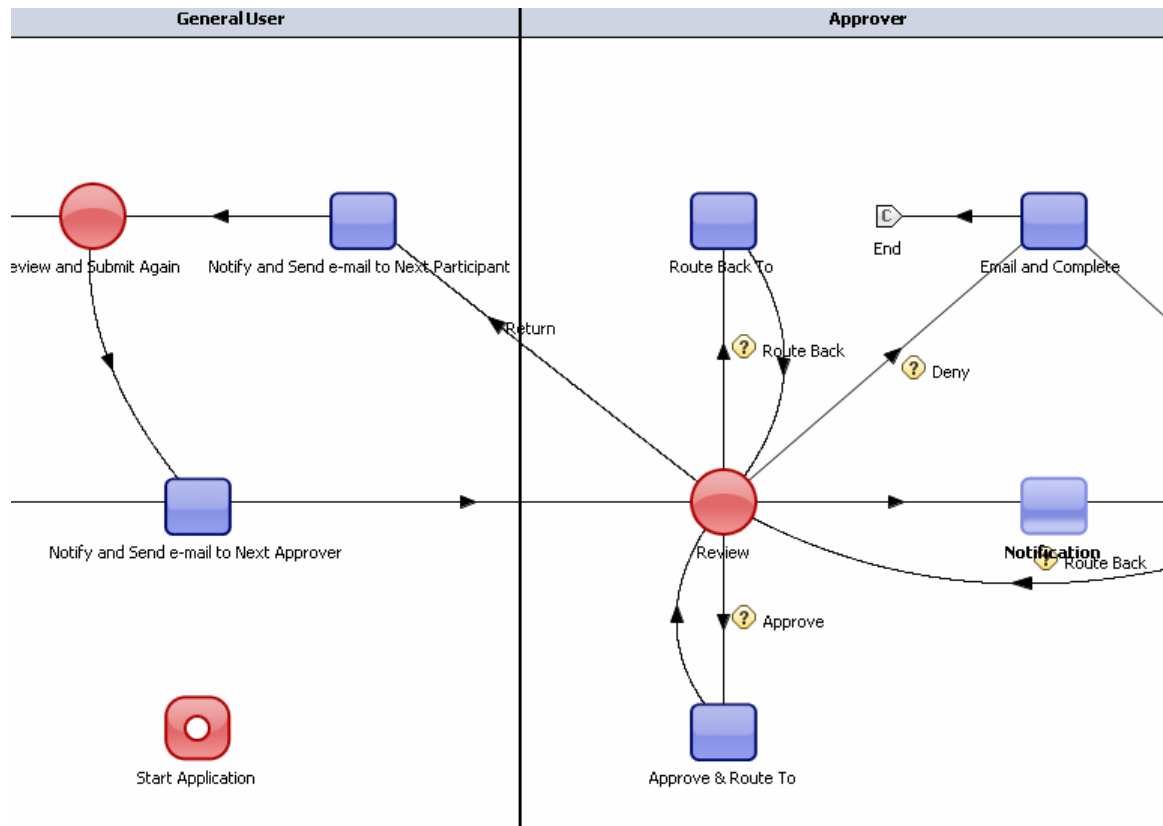


Figure 2. Streamlined Process Using an Establish Design Pattern

Section III: A BPM Business Innovation Case Study

In early 2007, Navy Federal Credit Union, one of the nation's largest credit unions, decided to automate and modernize back-office processes. Among its goals, Navy Federal wanted to include visibility into its operations and to standardize processes across 6,000-employee organization. Equally important, the company wanted to introduce a development platform that would facilitate rapid, innovative solution development while also allowing the business and IT staffs to collaborate more closely.

Working with Project Performance Corporation, Navy Federal adopted the process project selection and implementation framework provided by PPC for rapid development and deployment of BPM solutions. For initial projects, Navy Federal selected less complex business processes, and it reused existing infrastructure and components to limit duplication of effort. Similarly, the company used established design patterns to simplify the coding and mapping process. Finally, business stakeholders at Navy Federal were involved throughout the development and testing process, ensuring that they understood the new, automated processes and that those processes met their needs.

Although the project called for automating an array of vastly different business processes, Navy Federal was able to develop and deploy modernized processes within 60 days or less. Navy Federal's business users and IT staff now communicate and collaborate more effectively, using process models and other artifacts from the new processes. The rapid deployment of several initial processes has not only streamlined operations but has also paved the way for continuous process improvement as Navy Federal continues to develop and deploy new processes.

Section IV: Conclusion

When companies build new business applications and systems, a fast turnaround from project conception to final rollout is crucial for overall success. Rapid implementation helps hold down project costs, bolsters user enthusiasm and support, mitigates the challenges and risks that can hamper new projects, and enables companies to quickly realize the desired payoff – business performance that is faster, cheaper, better.

This is especially true for BPM solutions, which can be developed and deployed in just 60 days by organizations that follow these five principles guiding BPM implementation.

Innovation does not have to take a long time, nor does it have to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Organizations can revolutionize the way they conduct business with streamlined, automated processes that satisfy both employees and customers. Moreover, in a BPM-enabled business, knowledge of the organization's business-critical and innovative processes no longer resides with just a few employees. Instead, this knowledge is captured within the processes, where it is available to everyone.

References:

¹ Paolo Malinverno and Janelle B. Hill, "SOA and BPM Are Better Together," Gartner RAS Core Research Note, 2007.

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Cornelius Pone has over 10 years of experience with architecting and implementing software solutions using the latest innovative technologies. Mr. Pone has extensive experience architecting and implementing J2EE applications that leverage various BPM Suites platforms, including BEA AquaLogic BPM (ALBPM) and HandySoft's BizFlow platform. Mr. Pone currently serves as a Principal Analyst for Project Performance Corporation's award-winning Business Process Improvement practice, where he leads BPM and SOA implementations for high-profile clients including Navy Federal Credit Union, Compassion International, and SAIC. Mr. Pone often presents at BPM industry conferences on implementation and architecture best practices for BPM.