

June 2003



**Business Process
Management:
Profiting from Process**

by Roger T. Burlton
SAMS, 2001
398 pages

Business Process Management: Profiting From Process

Reviewed by Paul Harmon
Executive Editor, Business Process Trends

Roger Burlton is one of the founders of the business process movement, as we know it today. He started giving a seminar on Business Process Management in 1990, about three years before Hammer, Champy and Davenport kicked off the BPR craze, and he's been giving it ever since. In 2001 he published *Business Process Management*, a book that is surely based on his workshop*.

Before looking at the book, we need to consider what the title: *Business Process Management* (BPM) could mean. The term is being tossed around much too loosely these days. There are at least four definitions in circulation.

First, BPM can refer to an activity undertaken by senior managers as they seek to assure that the processes that support their business are those that will help the business meet its goals. In this sense, a senior manager, at various points in time, issues directives or participates in meetings to define the organization's current processes, and to specify how they might be changed.

Second, BPM can refer to the process by which a given business process is created or improved. In effect, this is a variation on project management and the goal of the project is a changed business process.

Third, BPM can refer to what supervisors and managers do on a day-by-day basis to assure that a process is running smoothly and producing the desired results. It generally involves measuring, monitoring and taking corrective action when needed and is frequently supported by automated software tools.

Finally, BPM is being used very narrowly to refer to a movement to model and automate processes using XML business process languages. (e.g BPML, BPEL)

Roger Burlton's book focuses on the first and second definitions of BPM. In fact, the book is divided into two major parts. Part I is called "A Management Guide", and Part II is termed "A Practitioner's Guide."

Part I provides a good overview of the types of changes taking place, how those changes might affect an organization's strategy, and considers how senior managers should adjust their processes to keep them aligned with their evolving strategies. The material in this section of the book is up-to-date and integrates a wide variety of theories and models on strategies and alignment. This is the book's greatest strength! It's well worth the price of the book simply to read Burlton's chapters on strategy, what drives business process change, and his 10 principles of process management.



Second, the book describes a systematic approach to actually redesigning a business process. The book focuses on a first generation strategy. It describes an approach that assumes that each process will be analyzed as if it were unique, and provides a step-by-step approach to redesigning the process..

This is a book about analyzing and redesigning business processes, not a book on automation. In spite of Burlton's current IT interests (He is the CEO of Adaptive, a company that produces software for storing, analyzing, integrating and sharing business and IT models.) the book is very balanced and considers the human side of business process change, as well as the possibility of automation. (He doesn't mention Adaptive, or even discuss the use of software tools to facilitate business process modeling. The book makes no effort to consider current change process methodologies like SCOR, Six Sigma, or XML business process languages. It hardly mentions the use of ERP or other packaged applications. At one point, it suggests that swimlane diagrams are a "recent" development. This isn't a book for a manager who is looking for an overview of the options available to implementing a business process change initiative. In fact I would not even recommend reading the book for its technical advice on redesigning a process – there are more current and comprehensive treatments. But, Burlton's discussion of human change is valuable and any manager involved in a process change project would be well served by drawing on the wisdom in these chapters. Too many process change projects fail because the managers don't think clearly enough about the human implications of change and don't take steps to make sure the change has buy in from those involved in implementing it. Burlton gives a lot of good advice on just how to do that.

This is a book that every serious business process change manager should read. Some parts can be skimmed, but I recommend reading the sections on strategy, alignment and change facilitation carefully. Clearly, Burlton has been around for a long time and he has learned a lot about how to organize successful business change projects. Lucky for us, he's put a good bit of it into this nicely written book.

* I've never taken Burlton's Business Process Management workshop, so I can't be certain, but the book has the feel of a book that was written by someone who has given a workshop several times. If you give workshops, you learn from your attendees, and are soon able to anticipate questions. You discover where basic definitions need to be stressed and examples need to be inserted to assure that participants will understand what follows. In my experience, books developed in this manner are usually very effective. They have a smooth, well written, and very systematic style, just as *Business Process Management* has, that I associate with a good presenter who has polished a workshop over the course of several years. Based on reading this book, I'd recommend Burlton's workshops. For more information about them, you can check with DCI (www.dci.com) in the US, or with IRM in the UK (www.irmuk.co.uk/4.htm)

Roger Burlton just chaired the Global Business Process Forum in London in May of this year, and will be chairing DCI's upcoming Business Process Management Conference in Orlando, Florida this coming November 18-20, 2003.

