Down Under

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BPM – the Sell, Definition, and Frustration

Over the last few months we have seen several discussions in articles and blogs about the above three aspects of BPM. The purpose of this article is to continue the debate and hopefully generate robust dialogue in the BPTrends blog. We will post a question via the blog as this Column is published.

How do you sell BPM within your organization, especially to senior management?

What the heck **is it** anyway? If we can't agree on what BPM is, then how can we expect others to understand it?

Why is it so frustrating to sell, explain, and have non-believers understand it?

It is interesting that in a recent BPTrends blog, someone posed the question, "What is your biggest frustration with BPM in your organization?" A great question.

The various answers and comments covered the various aspects of "sell," "definition," and reasons for the "frustration."

While we have attempted to group and summarize into a small number of categories our view of the various comments, it has been difficult because each of the above 3 areas are so intertwined. For example, how can you "sell" BPM when we all seem to have different definitions or views on "what" it is? Very frustrating!

We have grouped the various comments into an "intangible sell" approach and a "tangible sell" approach.

Intangible Sell Approach

Some comments related to this approach. They said that BPM

- o   was all about cultural change and was a management philosophy.

- o   is "everything involved in managing an organization's process concerns" – It is difficult to argue with this. However, we need to define the extent of what is considered a process. Is it just transactional or operational business processes? Does it include "management" processes? Management of an organization's process concerns should include governance, sustainability, continuous improvement, etc.

- o   "BPM is about knowing processes, improving processes, executing processes, measuring processes, and then again improving processes" – absolutely, and much more!

If you are attempting to achieve this cultural change, business transformation, or management philosophy "sell" or definition, then it probably implies a "top-down" sell to very senior management and therefore an enterprise-wide implementation.

Tangible Sell Approach

Some comments about what we have categorized under this heading included

- o BPM is a methodology – Methods that could potentially fall into this area are Lean, Six Sigma, Lead Six Sigma, 7FE BPM Project Framework (although we would both agree and disagree with this), and so forth;

- o Others suggested that "most people do not understand the difference between BPM and BPMS"; or

- o "Organizations see BPM as a tool rather than a concept behind managing for a purpose."

It could be argued that this approach could imply a "bottom-up" sell and implementation.

Why Can't we Sell it?

It was suggested that we "stop selling, and start doing." The person went on to say that you should just "pick a few projects, roll up your sleeves, and get involved by directly contributing to BPMing the project." Personally, we are big fans of this approach – You can talk forever, but action speaks louder than words (as they say).

Sometimes this is seen as a "bottom-up" approach and how most organizations attach "selling"/"doing" BPM. The thinking goes: If we implement some pilots and demonstrate business benefits to the organization, then management will see the advantages of BPM and try it again and again until it gains enough momentum and internal credibility across the organization to enable it to spread organization wide and end up as an "enterprise-wide" BPM organization. If this approach were to work, then the organization would reach a point when it must flip from bottom-up to top-down for it to be truly an enterprise-wide BPM implementation. The reason for the flip is that at some point the CEO or senior executive must become the BPM advocate and drive and demonstrably support the implementation.

We have seen many, probably most, BPM journeys start this way. We have, however, never seen one start as bottom-up and spread to be a **truly** enterprise-wide implementation without flipping from bottom-up to top-down. If you have, then please let us know, but the organization must have a true business process-focused organization that has not only made its processes more efficient and effective, but also now manages its business with a significant process lens.

On the other hand, there are examples around the world of successful top-down enterprise-wide BPM implementations that have been driven by the CEO, or another very senior executive with the CEO's clear backing.

One blogger suggested, "I honestly believe there should be no such thing as a "BPM" project….At the end of the day, organizations invest in change initiatives to improve the way they deal with/satisfy customers (along with staff/shareholders/stakeholders)….I think taking a top-down Process-Centric approach just doesn't resonate strongly enough with execs in terms of solving their tactical and strategic issues….They often don't have that mindset...even COOs." We agree with this statement. Trying to sell a process-<u>centric</u> organization is difficult, if not impossible. We would not even bother to try.

On the other hand, trying to assist executives with their issues by applying a process-<u>focus</u> can, and does, "sell."

We all know that functional silos have challenges. Well, so do process silos. It is the balancing between the two that enables organizations to move towards being a high performance organization. Extremes rarely work in any environment.

As suggested by the blog participants, whichever approach you take, you must always match it to the organization's culture and process maturity. We are, however, currently finding that senior executives are growing in their understanding that having a process-focused lens on their business is important, and they are therefore more willing to listen to your process based "sales pitch."

These questions were also widely discussed this past week at the 2010 ARK Asia-Pacific BPM Conference in Sydney.

Perhaps organizations and the proponents of BPM should determine the organizational pain points and what the "end" business outcomes are to be (start with the end in mind) and then match these to your BPM projects, or messages (sales pitch) to executives.

Sounds easy! As we all know is, it's not. It is incredibly frustrating. However, it can be done at the most senior levels in organizations with amazing results.

Good luck in your BPM journey. If you have any feedback, we would love to hear from you via the blog question or emails.

BPTrends Linkedin Discussion Group
We recently created a BPTrends Discussion Group on Linkedin to allow our members, readers and friends to freely exchange ideas on a wide variety of BPM related topics. We encourage you to initiate a new discussion on this publication or on other BPM related topics of interest to you, or

to contribute to existing discussions. Go to Linkedin and join the **BPTrends Discussion Group.**