Aligning People with Business Processes: Building Robust, Self-Correcting Alignments

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Proper people-process alignment is achieved when sufficient numbers of well prepared people are readily available to support business processes.

People function best as enablers when given the specific directions, clear responsibilities, necessary BPM tools and other resources needed to support business processes. However, even at the highest preparation levels, the alignment of people with processes is never easy. Events occur which disrupt the enabler-to-process connections so that people no longer function as effective facilitators.

Alignment drift, a major destabilizing force, occurs when people are drawn away from properly delivering their process support responsibilities, creating serious consistency and performance problems. Weak alignment frequently arises when people charged with supporting processes at any organization level become unwilling or unable to function as productive enablers. Some of these problems can be traced to inadequate training, lack of resources, competing work demands, and conflicting priorities. Other alignment disruptions occur because people are not committed to their enabler roles. They often fail to see the value of the tasks, assignments, and tools that support processes.

To avoid these problems and function as effective, efficient, and consistent process facilitators, people must fully commit to and highly integrate with business process support practices. Several proven Business Process Leadership (BPL) tools build commitment and bond people to process, IT, and technology. People truly attached to processes function more productively both as individuals and as team members. Additional benefits include rapid recovery from alignment drift and disruption, improved cross-functional hand-offs, robust and agile collaboration networks and business cultures that truly support BPM.

Aligning people with process is a good start

While aligning people with process is hard, keeping them aligned is the greater challenge. In the normal course of business, work disruptions and unintended consequences interrupt organized support systems. For alignment to survive, everyone from executive to professional to hourly people must fully commit to solid business process support practices.

The good news is that we are halfway there. Current BPM methods provide an excellent set of tools to create alignment. Organization charts, position descriptions, and task assignments do a fine job of defining alignment responsibilities and goals. Improved communication, change management initiatives, and conflict resolution remove alignment disablers. BP analytics, IT, and technology enablers give people the techniques they need to align with process.

Unfortunately, the individual contributions and collaborative efforts that evolve from these methods routinely fail to integrate people with process, IT, and technology. People must be able to self-correct when confronted with disruptions. BPM provides the tools but not the commitment needed for robust, self-correcting alignment. Application of Business Process Leadership (BPL) techniques provide the commitment and integration solutions.

Making Alignment Stick

People are more apt to bond with techniques they use to support a process, rather than with the process itself. The stronger the bond, the greater the commitment. The complexities of people-process alignment require that BPM practitioners also employ Business Process Leadership (BPL) methods to integrate people with their enabling tools. BPM management methods create the process platform; BPL leadership tools provide the people connection. BPL gives practitioners an essential means of handling complex and disruptive situations.

Integrating People with Business Process Practices

Appearance of active engagement in BP practices does not necessarily indicate actual engagement. Unless people see the tools they are using as helping them solve problems and be successful, they will just go through the motions. This disengagement creates alignment drift, inconsistency, and ineffective problem solving that leads to poor process performance. People are more likely to bond with the tools they use to support a process than with the process itself. By understanding what causes people to engage with process supporting tools, practitioners can overcome these obstacles to effective alignment.

Natural talent, aptitude, and a sense of success drive robust alignment and link people to process. When they use their strongest aptitudes to complete tasks and solve problems, people are productive, successful, and engaged. Because aptitude is a natural knack for doing something well and natural talent acts like a hardwired reflex, we automatically do certain tasks better and more easily than others. These talents originate in childhood and are strengthened by education and experience. Since these abilities make us successful, we are inevitably drawn to the tasks, subtasks, and problems that require them. People are most apt to commit to those BPM, IT, and technological methods that work best with their problem solving and task completion abilities. When they apply their strengths to supporting processes, people automatically form a robust alignment.

The second essential ingredient for building robust alignment is that people must believe that the tools they use will make them successful. These definitions of success will range from simply staying on top of the daily work load to increased income and responsibility to recognition for their contributions. Practitioners should recognize that they need to define the usefulness of BPM tools in broader terms than improved efficiency and effectiveness.

BPL Methods for Bonding People to Process

To create a robust alignment, BPL fully engages people in the tools they use and the processes they support. These alignment practices protect support systems from the disruption and failures which are a normal part of organization life. Disappointing results from drift, unexpected consequences, and collateral damage can also be neutralized. Properly aligning peoples' talents provides powerful protection from disruption and is an antidote to process failure.

BPL Role for BPM Practitioners

BPM practitioners need to assume a leadership role when they orchestrate the bonding process. Allowing people to use BPM tools in ways that best displays their problem solving talents creates a strong link to the methods. Bonding is further strengthened when people understand that these tools will make them successful. There are Four Essential Problem Solving Talents and Four Basic Success Attractors that link people with process. The challenge for BPL is to develop teams and collaboration networks in such a way that people can readily deliver their native talents through BP tools.

Four Essential Problem Solving Aptitudes

All process focused organizations need people with the four basic problem solving talents. However, some people excel at analytic assignments but continue to struggle when asked to suggest new ideas. Others grasp the big picture yet stumble when communicating their observations. Although we could correct these talent deficits by educating people in skill areas that need improvement, the results are often mixed. People with a strong natural ability in a subject will learn it faster, absorb more information, and retain and execute what they have learned better.

Communication	Analysis	Perspective	Innovation
Able to craft and convey clear, meaningful information to others	Able to apply precise, focused, and critical thinking to solve problems	Able to employ big picture and complex problem resolution thinking to resolve multifaceted issues	Able to produce useful ideas for solving problems

Table 1: Four Essential Problem Solving Aptitudes

The four basic success factors are Job, Career, Rewards, and Personal Satisfaction. Each factor contains specific success attractors. Most people are naturally drawn to methods and tools that allow them to be successful. Each person has their own definition of success. Some will bond to methods that help them manage heavy workloads, earn more, and enhance their job security. Others are more interested in tools that display their abilities and create learning opportunities while they gain respect and autonomy.

Job Factor	Career Factor	Rewards Factor	Personal Satisfaction Factor
Specific Attractors	Specific Attractors	Specific Attractors	Specific Attractors
.Managing work load .Interesting assignments .Displaying abilities	.Advancement .Learning .Responsibility	.Recognition .Money .Respect	.Working with others .Autonomy .Security

Table 2: Four Basic Success Factors

BPL techniques activate talent reflexes and success attractors that integrate people with process supporting tools. This can be accomplished by applying five simple steps. Each step activates different talents. Because alignment is supported by natural reactions, you can initiate the steps at any time and follow them in any order. However, you will achieve the quickest results when you follow the phases in sequence.

The 5 BPL Steps for Creating Robust People-Process Alignment

Leaders create robust people-process configurations by following a few simple steps that activate peoples' natural responses. The Five Steps guide you through procedures that convert these natural responses into process supporting actions. Each step delivers additional strength to the alignment. Alignment crashes are averted, and self-correcting collaboration networks automatically reconfigure as needed to correct process and enabler malfunctions.

Step 1: Initiate BP engagement with individual assignments

Besides producing solutions, individual assignments begin the process of bonding people with BPM methods. Step 1 is especially effective for activating peoples' analytical abilities. When assigning personal responsibilities, practitioners can also determine the connection between each person's particular notion of success and the process support tools they will use.

Your BP leadership role:

Start the tool bonding process among people within your department and function. Meet with each individual to explain the purpose of each BP tool and how the tools will help them be successful. Ask each person to create their own list of ways they can apply BP tools to solve

problems and complete tasks that support processes. Every person should provide you with their completed BP applications list.

Assignment	Group Size	Problem Solving and Task Completion Aptitude Engaged	Outcomes	Alignment Benefits
Complete individual tasks and problem solve	1 or more individual assignments	Analysis: exact, critical thinking	Numerous clear-cut initial solutions suggestions	Initiates bonding with alignment-supporting BPM tasks, problem solving tools, and solutions

Table 3: Configuration and Benefits of Individual Assignments

In addition to matching natural ability with individual tasks and tools, practitioners should build collaborative enabler networks among people with strong complementary talents. This creates a robust, agile, natural teamwork among enablers. Teamwork based on native talent and a feeling of success is the most resilient type since it reforms quickly when confronted with drift and other disruptions. Collaborative interaction is especially effective in addressing complex problems. Results produced by combined talents consistently outperform single talent solutions in almost all measures of efficiency, effectiveness, and durability.

Step 2: Solidify Individual Commitment with Mini-Problem Solving Action Teams

Mini-Problem Solving Action Teams bring talent, tools, and success together. The best results are achieved when people of different aptitudes are placed on a team. Besides creating insightful solutions, mini-teams solidify the tools that sustain process.

Your BP leadership role:

Once each person has completed and submitted a BP applications list, assign them to small teams of two or three members. Instruct the teams to brainstorm their own applications lists to create a combined list of insightful BP tool applications and solutions to problems. Leaders may participate as team members.

Assignment	Group Size	Problem Solving and Task Completion Aptitude Engaged	Outcomes	Alignment Benefits
Mini-Problem Solving Teams	Groups of 2-3 people	Innovation	.Creates insightful BP tool applications and problem solutions .Personal bonding to BPM, IT and technology methods and tools	Solidifies the bonding of peoples' aptitudes and success factors with BPM methods and solutions

Table 4: Configuration and Benefits of Mini-Problem Solving Teams

Step 3: Build Collaborative Peer Teams

The next step is to merge pair teams into larger Peer Teams. These collaborative groups will build a collective commitment needed to support alignment because they are very effective at selecting the best solutions.

Your BP leadership role:

Merge the small groups into larger peer groups that will openly discuss and prioritize the best BP tool applications and problem solutions. Facilitate the discussion but feel free to express your own ideas. Excluding you as facilitator, try not to have more than six members per peer team.

Assignment	Group Size	Problem Solving and Task Completion Aptitude Engaged	Outcomes	Alignment Benefits
Collaborative Peer Teams	Groups of 4-6 members	Perspective	.Selects best BP tool applications and solutions .Collective commitment to methods and tools	Creates collaboration networks which support alignment with process

Table 5: Configuration and Benefits of Collaborative Teams

Step 4: Generate Responsibility-Focused Teams

This step connects people with process. Peer teams combine into groups that focus on responsibility. This step solidifies alignment by helping people both communicate their expectations as enablers and recognize their responsibility to willingly support processes as needed. It is important to define how people will use BP tools with their roles and accountabilities. BP tools and processes establish a connection when people recognize the importance of their alignment with process.

Your BP leadership role:

Your job is to present task assignments, performance expectations, and schedules as process supporters to your peer teams. You must ensure that everyone clearly understands their roles as enablers. Make the quality of communication direct and concise. Limit discussions as much as possible to clarifying expectations.

Assignment	Group Size	Problem Solving and Task Completion Aptitude Engaged	Outcomes	Alignment Benefits
Responsibility-Focused Teams	Groups of 4-12	Communications	Aligns people and their tools to process	Solidifies robust, self correcting people-process alignment - process

Table 6: Configuration and Benefits of Responsibility-Focused Teams

Step 5: Expand the Process Supporting Collaborative Network

You first establish solid alignment practices among the people in your own department and function. Since processes are cross functional, you then need to engage people from other departments and functions into your collaborative network.

Your BP leadership role:

Engage people from other departments and functions into your Five Step BP tool activities. When possible, include people experienced with the Five Step Tool so they can help train new people. Repeat these steps as often as needed to maintain people alignment viability.

Consistency	Engagement	Collaboration	Durability	Sustaining Culture
Minimizes alignment drift, disruptions and collateral damage	Increases availability of diverse talents to solve problems	Breaches functional silos that interfere with alignment	Improves alignment resilience	Encourages an alignment culture which supports people alignment, BPM, IT, and technology

Table 7: The Benefits of Collaboration Expansion

The Many Benefits of Attaching People to Process

People who are solidly aligned to process will function more productively as individuals and as team members.

By executing the five simple BPL steps, companies engage people with BP methods and the processes they support. Bonding people to process-supporting tools not only generates robust, self-correcting drift resistant alignment but also creates a process-supporting culture. Once people believe that the tools they use make them more successful, the culture will shift to support those methods. Collaboration networks which evolve from the BPL Five Steps breach the functional silos and allow a better, more agile utilization of resources and talent to support process.

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Author

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