Email Advisor

What is a BPM Practitioner?

As I write for BPTrends, I often find myself looking for a term to describe the job I have been doing for the past several decades. I began working to improve processes in the late Sixties when I went to work for Geary Rummler. At the time, we often referred to ourselves as Human Performance Analysts. That accurately reflected the fact that, in 1968, when organizations wanted help with process improvement they invariably wanted help in organizing how people performed their work. We often found ourselves recommending training to provide employees with different skills, or changes in incentive systems to alter the motivation of those involved in performing specific tasks. As time passed, we extended our practice in various ways, gradually evolving a process architecture practice and getting better at defining ways of measuring process work throughout the organization.

In those early days, we were competing with Industrial Engineers and while Industrial Engineers were trained in a slightly different approach, they were equally concerned with structuring the way employees performed their work. If I had been asked to discriminate between Performance Analysis (PA) and Industrial Engineering (IE), I would have said that IEs took a narrower view and were more likely to focus on employees working on manufacturing production lines, while PAs were more likely to look at people in front

office jobs. Moreover, PAs were more likely to look at management practices. We often found that changing management practices was a more effective means of improving employee performance than focusing on employee performance. On the other hand, PAs hardly ever looked at machines, while IEs were much more likely to be involved in introducing new technology that changed the nature of the work on a production line. In a similar way, IEs were often involved in establishing quality control initiatives that sought to measure output and assure consistency.

In the early Eighties, Geary Rummler did a lot of work at Motorola, helping them train people to do process analysis and re-design. By this time Geary had developed the now familiar "swimlane diagrams" and spent a lot of time helping Motorola analyze the flow their processes. After Rummler left Motorola, they developed a new approach that wedded quality control and process, pushing quality checks "upstream" at each step in the process rather than simply checking the quality of the output or product at the end of the production line. This only worked, of course, when every employee took responsibility for their own performance. In hindsight, it is easy to associate this with the Toyota Production System and with the quality control work of Deming and Juran. But, in the mid-Eighties, Six Sigma and, a bit later, Lean, seemed exciting new variations on performance improvement. One fascinating aspect of this new development was the development of "titles" for individuals trained in these techniques. Suddenly, titles such as Six Sigma Green Belts and Master Black Belts emerged. If you want to have all the employees in an organization support quality, you need to engage them, and Lean and Six Sigma found ways to engage employees and to create teams to support process improvement. None of us in the

performance tradition had ever considered this approach.

It was also during the Eighties, as organizations introduced personal computers across the enterprise, that I found myself working with IT teams analyzing human performance problems. This eventually led to the development of rule-based expert systems and it was at this point that I realized how computers were going to force us to completely re-conceptualize every process in the organization.

In the early Nineties, things got even more complex as Thomas Davenport and Michael Hammer introduced the world to Business Process ReEngineering. They certainly focused business people on the term "process" and made it clear that managers were responsible for creating and improving the processes in their organizations. Hammer, in particular, relied heavily on the Value Chain concept originally developed by Michael Porter, the Harvard strategy guru. Hammer launched efforts at dozens of major companies designed to identify an organization's Value Chains and analyze the processes that made up each Value Chain.

The work by Davenport and Hammer could be interpreted in either of two ways. On one hand, both stressed that it was the job of business executives to improve their processes. On the other hand, they both argued that major redesign was possible because IT had made huge progress during the previous two decades but that, by and large, companies had failed to use IT very effectively. Most companies had installed software and computer systems in silos – automating individual functions with no concern for integrating one function or system with another - one system automated accounting, another system

automated the production line and so on. Each system was built using different technology and each had its own database.

The introduction of the PC in 1985, made everything even more confusing. Hammer famously called for companies to rip out much of the systems they had built and replace them with integrated systems that could streamline their process work.

Business people who got excited by ReEngineering often came to Geary Rummler for instruction and learned what he was still calling Human Performance Analysis. Those in IT who were charged with establishing the new systems that BPR required created their own job titles. In some cases, they were Process Analysts. In other cases, they were Business Analysts who were charged with living between business and IT.

My point in this rather long discussion is to point out that there was no profession commonly referred to as the process profession and there was no job title or designation that referred to someone who performed process work. Instead, there were a number of different titles, each slightly different. There were Industrial Engineers and Human Performance Analysts. There were Six Sigma Green Belts and Master Black Belts and there were Process ReEngineering specialists, Business Analysts and Process Developers.

In the early Zeros, a wide variety of people purported to speak for "processes." In that same period a number of people, independently, came up with the idea that we needed some way of pulling all the different strains of process work together into a single practice. I, personally, prefer the term Business Process Management (BPM) – and I associate BPM with a book by that

title by Roger Burlton. Roger was trained as an Industrial Engineer, worked in Business ReEngineering in the Nineties, and evolved a methodology that incorporates the best of several different approaches, including Business Analysis, Lean, Six Sigma, Human Performance Analysis and ReEngineering. BPM sought to integrate and manage all of an organization's process efforts in a systematic manner.

I have embraced **Business Process Management**, and have used the term **BPM Practitioner** to refer to anyone engaged in process work in an organization. Thus, to my mind, a BPM practitioner can be a Six Sigma Black Belt, a Business Analyst, a Business Process ReEngineer, a Lean practitioner, or a Human Performance Analyst. Whatever we call them, BPM Practitioners should be focused on integrating and managing all of an organization's process efforts in a systematic manner.

I'd like to say that the problem is solved - that we all now use the term "BPM Practitioner" and that everyone recognizes BPM as a professional practice that embraces all of the various aspects of process change.

Of course, it isn't that simple. A year after Burlton published his book suggesting that BPM was an overarching approach to process work in organizations, a group of software vendors established the Business Process Management Initiative (BPMI) and suggested that XML and Pi Calculus made it possible to create a new type of workflow software that would allow business people to manage their processes in a more effective manner. The interest in this new software – which, in hindsight, we see as a replacement for rigid ERP applications - grew rapidly and **BPM** quickly emerged as a term to describe a class of software. Over the

course of the last decade there has been a running battle for control of the term **BPM**. At this point, most discriminate between **BPM**, which refers to the coordination of an organization's process improvement efforts, and **BPMS**, which refers to a type of software used to automate and manage the ongoing execution of processes.

There have been other skirmishes, as well. SAP proposed that the title "Business Analyst" should be replaced by Business Process Expert (BPx) to emphasize the broader concerns of the Business Analyst who has moved beyond his or her IT roots and now functions as a BPM Practitioner.

At the same time, a number of Enterprise Architects – a group usually focused on defining the IT resources of an organization – have begun to focus more on the development of business architectures and now seek to establish the term Business Architect. This is something that process people have long assumed belonged in their camp. Rummler taught business architecture development in the Eighties and Hammer and Davenport showed how to create business process architectures in the Nineties. Equally significant, in the Nineties, groups like the Supply Chain Council (SCOR) and the TeleManagement Forum (eTOM) introduced business process frameworks that provided great examples of Business Architectures. Today, it almost seems as though some Enterprise Architects have discovered a way to create a new role for themselves. I suspect that they will eventually realize that Business Architecture is necessarily related to business process work and that it's one element in the overall practice of BPM.

Undoubtedly, these skirmishes will continue for awhile. There is, as yet, no

widely accepted title for those individuals who focus on defining, improving and managing business processes. My hope is that the **BPM** programs established in a number of universities will help to solidify support around Business Process Management and the role of the **BPM** Practitioner. It's not that I especially care what process practitioners are called. I could as happily live with Business Process Expert or Business Architect but I am convinced that we need to settle on one term and focus on building a body of knowledge and a comprehensive methodology that synthesizes what we know in a standard BPM practice. Moreover, I am convinced that if we want to influence senior executives, we need to speak with one voice. Having three different groups telling senior managers that their approach is the solution to the problem doesn't do anything but confuse executives. Changing job titles and building little niches of knowledge around specific techniques doesn't contribute much to the broader goals we all pursue – getting our organizations to focus on how to improve how work is organized and how value is created.

Till next time,

Paul Harmon

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