The Business Process Manifesto

You don't need to work in the business process field for very long before you realize that there are lots of groups involved in process change, and that each has its own definitions of the common terms used in our field. Get three people together and you can generate four or five definitions of *process*. Getting good definitions of *activities*, *value chains*, *value streams* or *workflow* is even harder.

Those of us at BPTrends are well aware of this. We publish Articles that use common terms in different ways. Initially, we considered standardizing on a common vocabulary but abandoned the idea in favor of representing the various ways in which different process communities define the terms. We did, however, standardize on our usage of the terms and we posted a glossary that defines how we "officially" use various terms on BPTrends.

This lack of a common vocabulary has caused considerable confusion in the business process community and several years ago my colleague, Roger Burlton, Chairman of the BPTrends Advisory committee, set out to try to develop a consensus around the basic concepts in the process field. He began an informal process to develop what he referred to as the *Business Process Manifesto*. As he traveled the world speaking at conferences, consulting with large and small organizations and talking with thought leaders and practitioners, he discovered just how difficult that task would be. For example, there was no agreement on how to name business

processes - some preferred the verb-noun format (Sell Widgets), while others preferred the from-to format (New Orders to Product Delivery). There was, however, strong agreement that any individual organization should standardize on a single vocabulary so all processes in the organization were named in the same manner.

Over time, Roger documented versions of a *Business Process Manifesto*, and he developed an informal group of correspondents who provided edits and suggestions. This Spring, after some 3 years of work, Roger released a "final draft" of the *Business Process Manifesto* and BPTrends published it. Although the document bears a copyright claim, it is, for all practical purposes, an open source document, and anyone is free to reproduce it in the format in which it appears on BPTrends, including the source credits. And, although it represents a "final draft," it is really just a milestone and may yet be changed or expanded if a consensus develops that revisions would be useful to the process community.

The Business Process Manifesto is broken up into five sections:

- Why a Business Process Manifesto
- Use of Terms
- Guidelines Followed for the Business Process Manifesto
- Business Process Manifesto Scope
- Principles

The heart of the Manifesto is a set of statements – the principles – that seek to define common assumptions used by those doing process work.

Information about the purpose of the effort, the basic vocabulary, the scope, and the guidelines, are to constrain the effort and limit the principles to a workable set.

The first item under Principles is:

Working definition of Business Process: An organization's Business Processes clearly describe the work performed by all resources involved in creating outcomes of value for its customers and other stakeholders.

It may sound simple, but as I have already suggested, this statement is the result of quite a bit of discussion and many edits. A process is work – it's work performed by all of the organization's resources, and it's work that creates valuable outcomes for either customers or other stakeholders.

As I suggested, the *Business Process Manifesto* can be improved or extended. In the meantime, however, when there are so many competing definitions, this one well-thought-out definition is worth serious consideration.

Following the basic definition of a process, there are 8 sets of more specific assumptions, as follows:

- About work
- About value creation
- About resources
- About context
- About motivation
- About names
- About models
- About uniqueness

We can't look at them all, but let's consider the first:

About work: A Business Process describes the work of an organization:

- The work performed in a Business Process transforms physical or informational inputs into outputs

- A Business Process is comprised of a set of activities, each of which may have its own set of activities
- A complete set of Business Processes of an organization describes all of the work undertaken by that organization
- A Business Process may be comprised of highly structured and repetitive work or be loosely structured and exhibit high variation.

Each of the other specific groups provides its own set of specific statements, which taken together, offer a nuanced and comprehensive definition of business process.

Roger Burlton has done an impressive piece of work, pulling together all the basic information and presenting it in a way that is internally consistent and it should serve as the basis for other efforts in the future.

I am not under the misapprehension that, suddenly, Business Analysis, Industrial Engineering, Lean, Six Sigma, IT and business managers will all start using common terms. That will take awhile. Now, however, we have a foundation document that others can build on to improve the way we talk about what it is that we do.

If you haven't read the *Business Process Manifesto*, I recommend it. If you are trying to define process efforts at an organization, then I recommend it even more strongly. It would be nice to think that our field is becoming more professional and that we increasingly rely on a common vocabulary.

The Business Process Manifesto is freely available on the BPTrends website at http://www.bptrends.com/bpmmanifesto.cfm

Till next time,

Paul Harmon

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