BPM at Ampirical
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Ampirical is a Louisiana-based power-generation engineering services firm which was founded in 2006. In early 2016, where our story begins, Ampirical had about 120 employees and approximately $47 million in revenue. Its work includes engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) with major power companies located throughout the United States.

Jim Boots is a Business Process Management consultant who has worked with large and small organizations. Aris Kyriakides is an Ampirical employee who was Jim's primary contact at Ampirical from the beginning of the effort.

Aris Introduces BPM to Ampirical Management (by Aris)
When I started at Ampirical, I knew it was going to be a challenge which is why I took the job. My experience up to that point was mostly managing IT software development projects or IT related teams that mostly had to do with implementing solutions to help organizations organize and visualize data in a manner that was productive and empowered management in making intelligent decisions for their organizations. But I needed a challenge and the thought of getting my hands dirty and dealing with the everyday procurement and construction issues of large relay, substation, and transmission projects sounded interesting.

When I first started, my role was as a Project Manager working on supporting large EPC (Engineering, Procurement & Construction) projects. While I was learning the ins and outs of how these projects worked and what it took to make them happen, I realized that a lot of what I was used to as the 'norm' was not the case here. I found myself lost in the daily issues without a way to manage the process. I came from environments where I am used to following a process and always liked to think I was in control. Or I at least I knew what to do when things looked like they were about to get out of hand. It felt as if I was mostly reacting to put out fires rather than proactively taking consistent, repeated, documented steps to avoid those fires. Those

were my thoughts, but since I was new to the whole EPC world, I thought maybe I just needed time.

When I was given the opportunity to lead a new team focusing on internal customer and project support, I jumped on it. I saw it as the first step in getting an opportunity to make a difference and apply what I had learned in my career up to that point to help streamline Ampirical. I remember sending multiple late-night emails to my manager pointing out inefficiencies and mentioning ideas I thought could make things better. I knew I was running a risk if all I was doing was pointing out problems, so I made sure I had some suggested solutions too. I saw a huge potential in helping the organization and thankfully so did my immediate manager. Right then I thought it was a great chance to introduce Ampirical to Business Process Management (BPM). The processes described in all the meetings I was attending sounded so involved and so unique that I expected some kind of documentation. But there was none. At least none that was visible to everyone in the company where one can turn for immediate help.

I started thinking about all the PMP management principles I had followed all my life. And my mind then went back to my 5-year experience at Chevron. There I had the opportunity to work with Jim Boots and his unique approach to documenting processes. I knew something like that would be of great benefit to Ampirical. However, I knew it would be a challenge because of the cost of bringing a consultant in, especially since this would be an overhead expense and it would not be a short project, rather a long-term undertaking. But I also knew that my manager was forward looking and always open to ideas that would help the organization's future. He made sure the company did the right things in the short term to be profitable but also had a vision of doing the right things now to position Ampirical to be successful in the longer term. So, after talking to Jim and explaining the situation and finding out that he was available to assist, I approached Mark and introduced the idea to him. Mark was very receptive to the idea and was intrigued. I arranged the first meeting where I made the introductions and Jim explained what he could offer while Mark explained the needs and challenges. That was it, the rest is history as they say. Ampirical was about to make its first baby steps towards BPM.

Jim's Initial Engagement with Ampirical (by Jim)
Having been involved in both successful and unsuccessful BPM efforts, I had learned what it takes to derive value from BPM. First, I would

2   www.bptrends.com

not take on any new client unless the top management team was on board with the approach that would be taken. I recommended a one-week proof of concept, followed by a 6-8 week pilot so management had a clear understanding of what they were committing to. Second, I expected to have a direct line to one of the top three managers – whom we would refer to as the BPM Sponsor – with the expectation of a regular meeting or phone call for the purpose of (a) prioritizing the areas for process mapping, (b) identifying and mitigating any obstacles to progress, and (c) educating the BPM Sponsor so he would understand all the elements that would need to be developed to achieve a self-sustaining, mature BPM capability. I was fortunate to find that Mark Stephens, Executive Vice President of Engineering and one of the company's founders, was an enthusiastic and highly capable BPM Sponsor. The importance of this cannot be over-emphasized. The approach agreed to by Mark and the other management team members included the following elements:

1. Create a comprehensive process architecture, documented in free online software. This process architecture would start with a depiction of the "top level" view of all Ampirical's major processes, with the idea being that every Ampirical employee could pinpoint process areas in which they have responsibilities. (See Figure 1) With the top level documented, we would then focus on priority areas based on business needs, e.g., where the organization was encountering the most difficulties and/or having negative bottom-line impacts.

2. The creation of the process architecture – or "process map" as it became known – was to be done interactively with subject matter experts (SME's) within Ampirical. For example, when we worked on project management processes, we involved project managers; if it was a Finance area, then Finance people would provide their insights. Typically, sessions would be scheduled for an hour and a half or two hours and would include between one and five SME's. During the first week when we were doing the proof of concept, those sessions took place in an Ampirical conference room. However, to minimize travelling costs, most subsequent efforts were conducted via conference call with the SME's viewing the process map on their computer screens. The sessions consisted of asking the SME's questions about the process we were mapping, typically starting with a focus on overall inputs and outputs of the process, and then moving to identify the steps in the process that led from the inputs to the

outputs. Responsible resources, typically in the form of organizational titles, were added to each activity box, and internal inputs/outputs were labeled as well. Key supporting documentation was linked to activities. Given the limitations of SME availability, we recognized that the process map would take shape gradually over the course of at least a couple of years. A typical week's worth of activities consisted of three or four sessions with SME's, covering 4-8 hours in total.

3. While creation of the process map was an essential element of the effort, it was not everything. There was recognition that key roles would need to be developed within Ampirical if its BPM capability were to be sustained without the attention of an external consultant. The development of these roles could be done gradually as the process map took shape. Key roles which would be needed were: the BPM Sponsor (which Mark was fulfilling), a BPM Coordinator who ultimately would oversee BPM capability at Ampirical and make sure all the other roles were performing as needed, one or two Process Mappers who would learn how to use the online software tool to draw and modify process diagrams, and Process Advisers who would ensure process diagrams and related content stayed up to date so the diagrams could be relied on to train and guide employees with responsibilities in a given area.
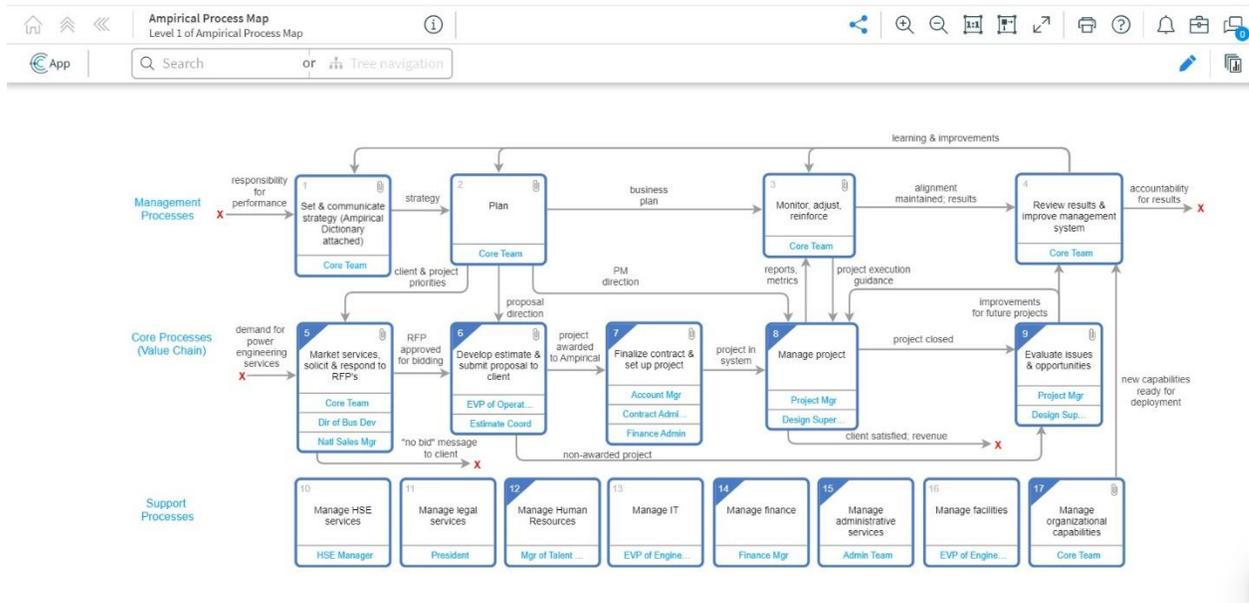
Figure 1: Top Level of Ampirical Process Map

Initial Success

The initial focus for process mapping was in the project management function because this appeared to be where the biggest business opportunity was. At the time, Ampirical was experiencing uncomfortable levels of "unbilled engineering time," ranging up to 10% of revenues. It was thought that this unbilled time was due to disconnects in communication between Ampirical and the client which ultimately would lead to the client expecting Ampirical to perform work that was not anticipated. As we dove into the processes associated with project management, we realized that there were a few key points where disconnects with the client could crop up. The most salient points were (a) during the estimation and proposal process when Ampirical would evaluate the scope of a client project and develop a proposal, or bid, to win the project, and (b) during the contracting phase when the awarded bid was translated into an actual contractual commitment.

It was not as if management and employees were totally surprised by these findings. There was an awareness that many steps in the estimation/proposal phase and in the contracting phase were fragmented between groups and that the approaches taken differed based on who was leading the effort. Where the process mapping became particularly useful was in identifying a standardized workable approach, and specifically where certain coordinating responsibilities were needed. After a few months of sorting this out and achieving a reasonable degree of consensus, it became somewhat obvious that a couple of new roles were needed at Ampirical – specifically, the roles of Estimate Coordinator and Contract Specialist. Each of these roles would be responsible for overseeing and coordinating the activities needed to ensure that early-stage communications between Ampirical and the client were clear and that the contract reflected the commitment that Ampirical thought it was making when it created its proposal.

Once the standardized approach was in place and the new roles had been filled, Ampirical saw its unbilled time reduce to less than 5% of revenues. This was a big win!

It would be an overstatement to claim that Ampirical would not have made this improvement without its BPM effort. As mentioned, management already had intuition about where some of the problems were. But the process mapping helped in multiple ways. First, it gave management confidence that its intuition was based in reality. Second, it helped pinpoint the key steps where things could go off-

5   www.bptrends.com

track. Third, it clarified in detail what responsibilities the new roles of Estimate Coordinator and Contract Specialist would have. And fourth, it gave everyone involved in project management and engineering at Ampirical a common understanding of how the process was supposed to be orchestrated. These benefits, combined with the improved results, gave the BPM effort an early win that helped get Ampirical personnel on-board with the approach we were taking.

Another initial success at Ampirical was in the Human Resources area. The Human Resources Manager, Maria Buggage, became an early enthusiast of the process mapping approach. She rightly saw the effort as a way to standardize managing the lifecycle of employment at Ampirical. Over the course of about a year, meeting roughly once per week, a comprehensive set of diagrams that described all HR activities was developed. (See Figure 2) These HR diagrams helped Maria clarify roles and increase delegation in her department. They also ensured that every employee had a consistent introduction, or on-boarding, to Ampirical. One of the key on-boarding activities became introduction of a new employee to the Ampirical Process Map. In the map, each new employee could see the depiction of their responsibilities, and, therefore, would be more confident from Day 1 about how to perform their new role.
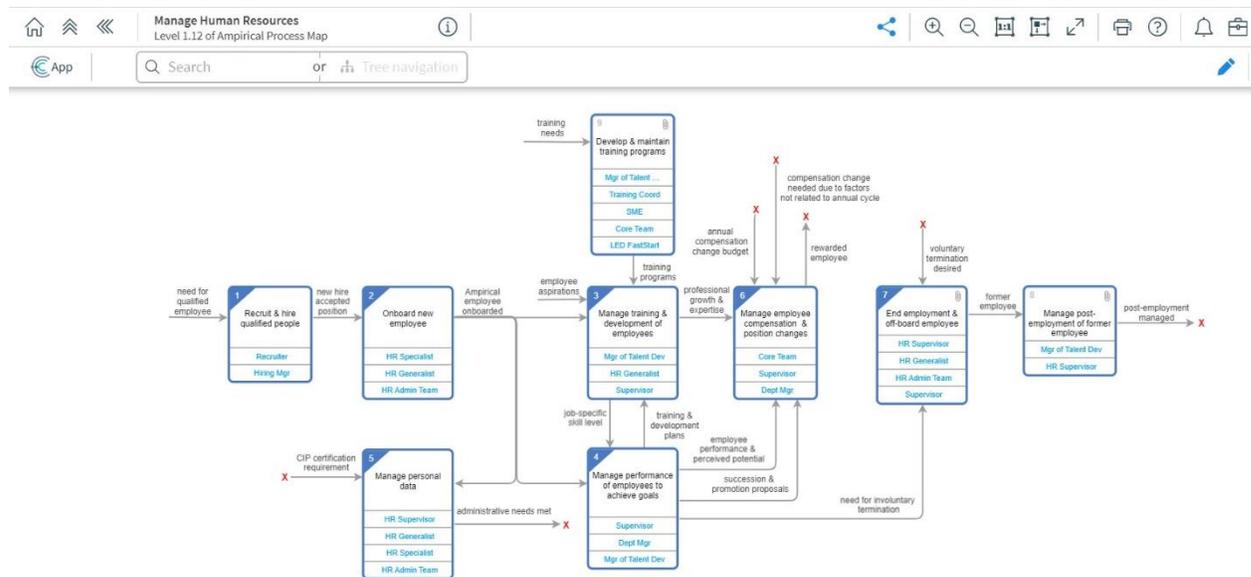
Figure 2: Top level diagram of Ampirical's Human Resources process – each box with a blue triangle in the top left corner has a "drilldown" to more levels of detail.

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Development of Key Roles to Sustain BPM at Ampirical

The process mapping efforts gradually made their way into many departments and groups within Ampirical. As of this writing, four years after the first efforts, most of Ampirical's processes have been mapped with care. But a key question was how to make sure the process map stayed useful and up to date. In a nutshell, here's how it was done.

Although Aris had introduced the concept of BPM to Ampirical management and facilitated Jim's involvement, it was not immediately assumed that Aris would be Ampirical's BPM Coordinator. However, as Aris continued his involvement in many of the mapping sessions, he gained a deeper understanding of BPM and how crucial the process map was as an artifact designed to be used by all employees. It was the process map that made the initiative tangible and engaged employees. Before long, it was agreed by Ampirical management that Aris would assume the role of BPM Coordinator. This responsibility was combined with other project support activities, including document management and business intelligence/analytics reporting, and Aris was given the title of Project Support Services Manager.

Another key role for self-sustainability is the role of Process Mapper. This role requires a person to learn how to use the software tool – which is not very had to do – and how to facilitate discussions with subject matter experts to draw diagrams that help employees perform their responsibilities efficiently and consistently – which is not so easy. Over the course of the project, three people at Ampirical have been trained in the basics of process mapping. Ongoing development of Process Mappers will continue until they are comfortable facilitating mapping sessions on their own.

Finally, the role of Process Adviser was instituted. Once a set of process diagrams was developed, the Process Adviser would assist with introduction of the diagrams to members of their team, and then ensure the diagrams and all attached information remain relevant and up to date. The Process Adviser for any given set of diagrams would be someone working in that area who was a good communicator and well-respected by peers. The Process Adviser would be the go-to person for anyone in the group who had a question or a suggestion about how to make the process diagrams better. The Process Adviser would work with a Process Mapper to make diagram updates whenever needed.

There now are approximately 20 Process Advisers at Ampirical overseeing critical areas of the Ampirical Process Map. These Process Advisers, led by Aris as the BPM Coordinator, meet once a month to discuss potential process improvements, use of the map to on-board new personnel, and any ideas that could make Ampirical's BPM efforts even more robust and valuable.

Mark continues in the role of BPM Sponsor to ensure Ampirical is maximizing the value it is getting from its BPM initiative. Aris meets with Mark regularly to ensure BPM priorities align with business priorities.

Summary
Ampirical has demonstrated that even small to medium-sized firms can distill value from BPM efforts. Here are the key contributors to success at Ampirical.

- The top management of the organization must be supportive of and engaged in the BPM initiative. Management should understand at the beginning that BPM is an "all or nothing" proposition in that a half-hearted effort will only waste time and money with no sustainable value. Once management commits to the program, ongoing communication between management and the BPM consultant is critical to ensure that the BPM effort is tackling the most salient business issues and is doing so in a way that is workable in the organization vis-à-vis employee availability and receptivity.
- A visible representation of processes is essential to widespread employee engagement with processes. Various online software packages are available, and some of them are free to use. Subject matter experts must participate in mapping sessions with the BPM consultant to depict processes that make sense to the organization.
- As the organization's process map takes shape, various roles for sustainability must be developed. Besides drawing the map through facilitated sessions, the BPM consultant's other main responsibility is to develop people in these sustaining roles. Specifically, every organization will need, at a minimum, a BPM Sponsor (typically one of the top managers of the organization), a BPM Coordinator who will operationally oversee the entire effort, one or more Process Mappers who learn how to use the process drawing tool and, ideally, learn how to facilitate mapping sessions with subject matter experts, and Process Advisers who

ensure the process diagrams they are responsible for provide maximum utility to their peers.

In total, approximately 400 hours of Ampirical employees' time has been devoted to the BPM effort. Ampirical management considers this time well spent as the benefits of better process management have had a positive impact on Ampirical's bottom line – revenues have approximately doubled since the BPM effort began – as well as on the culture of the organization which has seen a near-doubling in personnel.

It is expected that the BPM consultant will continue working with Ampirical as it prepares for and achieves ISO 9001 certification in 2021, building on the foundation of excellent process work that has been done. Ampirical's own resources are expected to sustain the effort well into the future.

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