Frameworks: Beyond Operational Improvements
Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland   February 2022

The Expanding Role of Process

There has been a silver lining for process and performance management professionals over the last two years. Amid all the crises, organizations have a higher-level of understanding of the value these disciplines provide. Particularly the ability to create clarity and structure around how work gets accomplished, fix broken processes, engage people in change, and staying flexible enough to support a shifting range of priorities.

Consequently, professionals were tapped to support a wide array of projects. To gain further clarity of how the role of BPM teams have shifted, APQC asked the respondents of its annual priorities and challenges survey, which organizational activities their process teams support.
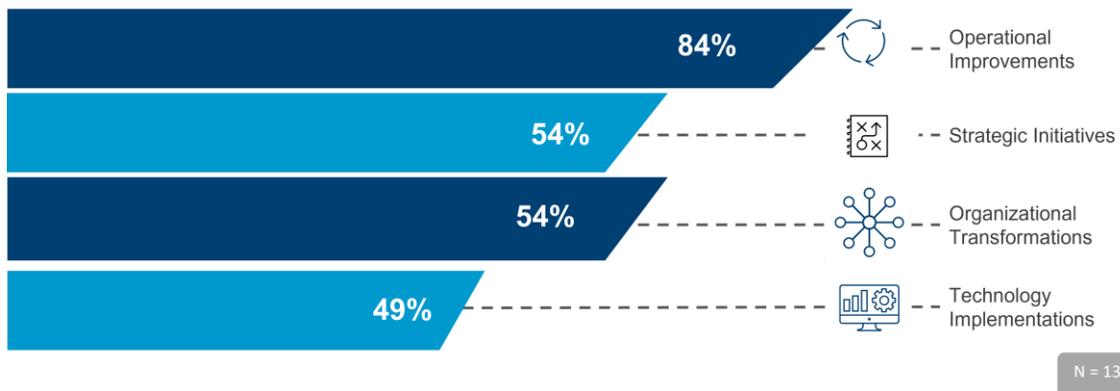
Top 4 Ways Process Supports the Business

Figure 1

Process's Role in Organizational Activities

Process teams have continued to push beyond productivity improvements (e.g., cost and throughputs) and expand their portfolio to include several strategic foci: transformations, strategic initiatives, and technology implementations.

Operational Improvements

Operational improvements are the proverbial bread and butter of process teams. The vast majority of teams continue to support traditional projects that focus on improvements in productivity, scaling the business, and cost savings.

For example, CMI uses a continuous improvement team comprised of centralized resources and decentralized process champions to standardize processes, identify opportunities, and execute projects throughout its Shared Services. While Pacific Northwest National Laboratory's process team developed a database of standardized processes, procedures, and guidelines for employees. This standardization served the organization well during the onset of the pandemic. The combination of standardized processes and building out tools to collaborate with other research institutes allowed the organization to scale its early efforts as its employees went to work from home.

Strategic Initiatives

Optimally strategy and process management should have a virtuous relationship. One where process teams' information feeds into the strategic planning process and where the organization's strategy guides process work and process teams help support the execution of strategic initiatives—either as advisors or as part of related project teams. This has been a growing focus for teams over the last 2-3 years.

For example, a consumer goods organization leverage a process framework as the core of its strategic planning efforts. The process team uses a process framework as the foundation for a heatmap that looks at performance via processes rather than functions. This information is used to identify gaps, which are translated into strategic roadmaps for an array of applications.

Organizational Transformation

At its simplest organizational transformation is the strategy and change management of moving an organization from its current state to a future state. Transformations are also large-scale changes that require heavy investments in time and resources, as well as a deep understanding of how work gets. Hence it makes sense that organizations tap their process teams to assess and redesign processes to fit new models, drive cultural shifts, and support the adoption of new behaviors through change management and soft skills.

For example, Dentsu Aegis Network UK's digital transformation was predicated largely upon process improvements its process team was central to the overall transformation efforts. Their team provided support through process analysis and design; systems analysis, defining requirements, and technology recommendations; and change management for communications and training.

Technology Implementation

As organizations emphasize the replacement of legacy systems and streamlining work, process teams help them understand the current state, identify the future state, and support the implementation of a range of technologies from ERP systems to AI and automation.

For example, Ontario Teacher's Pension Plan combined Lean Six Sigma, Agile, and Kotter change management model for implementation and adoption of its web-based pension management system. The team used Lean Six Sigma to dig into root cause analysis on impediments to adoption and Agile to realize quick wins for the implementation. For example, the team found issues on the back end of the system—employees had to wait to proceed to the next screen while the data entered was processed in the background. By enabling employees to immediately proceed to the next screen they were able to shave 12 seconds off every transaction—saving over 300 hours per year.

Conclusion

Organizations continue to rely on process teams for tactical responsibilities around improvements. But they are increasingly tapping into their process teams to support strategic priorities that impact the entire organization. The rash of replacing legacy ERP systems required understanding, standardizing, and documenting end-to-end processes. The significant growth in process automation required process teams help to capture the current state and re-design process for execution by bots. And finally process teams help their organizations tackled process-related impediments to transformation and productivity. Particularly in creating process harmony across the organization, streamlining and embedding flexibility in processes, and connecting employees to process knowledge.

About the Author.
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