

There's Always a Time for Process

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Businesses across the globe are hunkering down, hoping for the best while planning for the worst. With everyone in crisis mode, the temptation is once again to say there's no time for process. We are too busy fighting fires! Yet, the reality is that during times of crisis, processes become more critical, not less.

Mothballing, rightsizing, mergers and acquisitions, expansion, digitalization, re-planning IT systems, cross-training, contingency planning are all process-related activities. Now, process, just like enterprise architecture, will be something many wish they already had a better handle on.

Interestingly (to me, at least) is the fact that most process modeling vendors started in times of crisis. A quick look at the usual suspects shows that many started during the recession of the early '90s (e.g., Mega and Casewise). Others came at the time of the post .com bubble (e.g., Avolution and BiZZdesign), then during the 2008 financial crisis, Signavio was born. However challenging, process will be one of the critical weapons successful businesses will deploy.

The current situation is something that nobody under the age of 90 will remember. I suggest that instead of looking at the 2008 financial crisis or the .com bubble of 2000, we need to go back further. To me, our nearest model will be that of the depression of the 1930s to see how long recovery might take. During the next few weeks, organizations will discover that the "temporary" crisis changes they made will start to become normal. The quick fixes will become permanent, and this creates challenges.

Just as sticking plasters start to lose effectiveness after a few days, so the temporary ways of working will lose effectiveness after a few weeks. Organizations should use these next few weeks to put in place more long-term changes, and this means looking carefully at processes and process gaps.

If you have not already done so, then you should immediately be carrying out four particular activities on your process landscape;

1. Go through your entire process portfolio and assess each process in terms of business criticality. Make sure you identify "Critical," "Important but not Critical,"

- and "Non-Important" processes. This will assist you in determining where limited resources must be applied and where things can be more relaxed.
2. For critical processes, start to create scenarios and run resource simulations. Whether you are struggling to have enough people through sickness, furloughs, or permanent layoffs, you need to understand what activities are going to be at risk.
 3. How might processes need to change to support increased levels of remote working? With more process work occurring remotely, it is not just systems that need to be adjusted. Reviewing processes from a risk and compliance perspective could protect organizations from further damage later.
 4. Reviewing which processes should be further automated or differently automated. Others have written that there are now many RPA bots sitting in offices, either working without supervision or, like their human counterparts, unable to function at the moment. The bots were programmed to do specific tasks on specific software in particular ways. Things have and will change, so many bots will either need retraining or need to be replaced with alternative low code/no-code workflow systems. In all cases, it is not about the systems, but the underlying processes, and these will need analyzing and changing first.

In other articles on LinkedIn, I have written about now being a time for [Business Architects to step up to the plate, to work harder on understanding the organization's Business Capability Model](#). At times like this, connecting processes and systems back to capabilities plays an integral part in helping executives understand the real impact of the changes they are making and to start planning for the new future.

Capability models provide a high-level overview that executives need, but journey models give better insights for business managers and process/architecture teams. It is accepted that [current events will forever change](#) the world of work. Customer behavior will be evolving in ways we don't yet understand. The picture will probably not become clearer until Q4 2020 or Q1 2021, with some experts already suggesting it maybe 2022 before full economic activity returns. Whether as part of your process initiative or under the guise of business architecture, you will need to be capturing and analyzing journeys. Journeys not just of customers, but of employees and users too. Journeys remind us of what they do, the steps they take. Process, on the other hand, is about what we do, the activities we perform.

Even before the crisis struck, all too often, organizations only focused journeys on customers, and then mainly purchase journeys. Customer journeys had become almost synonymous with sales pipeline management. Journeys, as we talk about in our "Customer Excellence" work, are far more potent than that. Journeys, if mapped correctly, can act as high-level transformation roadmaps. So, when reviewing those critical processes, think not just about the capabilities they are delivering, but also of

the journeys they interact with. What might stalled or ignored processes mean for customers or employees? Could that unimportant process actually be critical to a customer or employee?

The list at the start of this article did not include supply chains. Supply chains are, of course, processes that will see significant changes. For some, the changes will have been immediate and unexpected, as they will have shifted to producing new items to assist health systems. In the longer term, the current crisis will have highlighted, even further, how modern just in time supply chains are vulnerable to travel disruption. On top of that, we are starting to see governments closing down exports to satisfy internal demand. Such actions will cause more than a few ripples post-crisis, and we are likely to see many countries switching to more local supplies.

Whichever way you respond to the situation you face, it will be processes that define your success, and a lack of attention to process that will hurt your business once things find a new normal. So, now is the time for process teams to demonstrate how they assist with making smarter decisions faster. It is also the time to ensure that everyone in the organization can view, comment on, or suggest changes to your processes. Now is not the time for process models to be firmly held by small groups of process experts.

Finally, a call to managers and executives to be thoughtful in how you deal with people. In "[Stop and Think Before you Act](#)," I look at the human side of the changes. With some estimates suggesting that unemployment in the US could reach 30%, and no reason to believe that similar numbers may not occur in Europe, a hefty price is going to be paid by large swathes of our population. We already know that many of the jobs that have gone or will be going over the next three months may never come back. But how we treat our employees and customers during this time will affect whether it might be possible for our businesses to bounce back. Social media is already highlighting organizations and executives who are being respectful and supportive, and those who sadly are not.

So, stay safe, stay home, and stay strong.

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A former Research Director at leading IT industry analysis firm Gartner, Mark has an extensive background in enterprise architecture, business process management, and change management. He has held executive positions with several technology companies. Since retiring from Gartner, he now works as an independent consultant with clients such as Changepoint, Erwin, Mega, Planview, LeanIX, and Signavio

Mark has authored or co-authored four books on business and process management, including "Thrive! How to Succeed in the Age of the Customer" and "In Search of

BPM Excellence” and “People-Centric Process Management. Widely respected for his knowledge and views on business change, he is the creator of "Next Practice" and has been described as a "BPM Guru," a "Thought Leader" and a "Master of Mindset."

Mark is passionate about the people aspects of change, and he has spent much of the last twenty years traveling the world, learning, teaching and researching the cultural issues of change and how executives perceive business and process improvement. In this capacity he has taught hundreds of people and been fortunate to interview and interact with many CEO's

Mark holds certifications in Six Sigma, PRINCE2, Sales, Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Hypnosis! Mark suggests that it is the variety of his studies, which provide the depth he offers to his clients. In his words, "It is the difference that makes the difference."

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