Who’s in charge?

In this Column I’d like to deal with some frequently asked questions about process governance. To get us all on the same page (or at least know if we are on different ones!), I will firstly provide an overview of how I see the nature, purpose, and importance of process governance arrangements, and briefly describe the process governance mechanisms that I think work best.

Then there are four questions that I am often asked in discussing process governance.

Process governance defined
Once the initial development of an organization’s process architecture has been completed (let’s assume that’s three levels of the architecture hierarchy), and process performance targets and data collection and reporting mechanisms, are established, process-based management ‘business as usual’ needs to be embedded. Recording and reporting process performance data are pointless if there is no response to the information. Continual assessment is required to test for the ongoing validity of the measures and for the need, or opportunity, to take corrective action to address performance gaps.

Process governance is the proactive, efficient development and continuous improvement, of the set of processes by which an organization delivers value to its customers and other stakeholders. Process governance is executed via an active system of measurement, assessment, reimagining, innovation, and improvement, designed to ensure that process performance and management is optimized. Effective process governance creates a systemic approach to ensuring that processes are well-documented and understood, opportunities for process performance improvement are continually discovered, and that those improvements are successfully realized.

Business processes, especially high-level ones, are executed across the functionally-oriented organization chart. Since the organization chart is not able to make a direct, meaningful contribution in this cross-functional, or ‘horizontal’, direction, an additional mechanism is required. An illustration of a generic process governance scheme that I find useful is shown in Figure 1.
The linchpin of effective process governance is the Process Owner role. This role is not responsible for process performance, but accountable for reimagining, and responding to, business process performance anomalies, innovation opportunities, and general process hygiene. The Process Owner is the ‘voice of the process’.

The purpose of process management and improvement is to enhance organizational performance, and process governance provides oversight for this core objective. Five streams of process governance activity can be defined, with each making an important contribution to process management excellence.

- **Performance management**: set performance targets, design measurement methods and data collection logistics, and analyze and report results.
- **Idea management**: nurture discovery of process innovation ideas, assess impact of changes, and prioritize changes.
- **Anomaly management**: identify process performance issues, analyze causes, and determine solutions.
- **Improvement management**: oversight process changes, test process change impact, review change projects.
- **Model management**: maintain process model accuracy and usefulness, and oversight modelling conventions definition and compliance.

Designing, implementing, and fine tuning an effective process governance scheme is tightly coupled with other enablers: an architecture is a prerequisite; the idea of process performance measurement is fundamental; the ultimate goal is always positive change; governance is a practical manifestation of a process mindset; capabilities must be developed; those involved must be supported. Development of the process governance approach must begin early to enable it to grow with, and support, this full enabler set.

Effective process governance is the lubricant that keeps the machinery of process-based management working.

---

1 I use the term “Process Owner” for the role because it is the most common. There are many other names for the same role including: Steward, Guardian, Trustee, Manager, Director, Coordinator, Custodian, Controller, and Principal.
Frequently Asked Questions

The following four questions are ones that I am frequently asked as people come to understand the practical implementation issues involved in setting up viable process governance arrangements.

Who should be appointed to Process Owner roles?
The most important ‘rule’ about the appointment of Process Owners is that we should choose them such that when they are meeting with colleagues who can collectively make changes to the process, they are meetings with peers. Remembering that we have a hierarchy of processes in the architecture, we can have a hierarchy of Process Owners as well. It’s important that appointments are made in such a way that the Process Owners are not required to manage a long way up the organization chart and into business areas where they can have no influence. Of course this means that for the highest levels of process, the process Owners are senior executives.

Is the Process Owner role a full-time commitment?
It’s certainly not a full-time position. Process Owner is a role rather than a position. How much time does the role require? This will vary depending on the organization and the level of its process management maturity. When first establishing process ownership concepts and practical systems, there is, of course, a heavier demand on the time of the Process Owner. However, once a reasonably stable ‘business as usual’ position has been achieved, it can be expected that no more than 10-20% of the Process Owner’s time is required. Naturally, if there is a lot of change happening for the process, the time demands will be greater. However, the work of the Process Owner is the work of management and when process management and improvement is embedded, the overall demand for management time will likely decrease.

How does process change get done, if the Process Owner can’t force it to happen?
The Process Owner role is more about influence than authority. There is no “ownership” of everything involved in the process management and execution. What is “owned” is the accountability to respond to process performance gaps. So who makes changes? How do processes get improved if the Process Owner can’t direct that to happen? Just as we execute cross-functional processes via collaborative action across the organization, process change is also a collaborative effort. Specifically, the collaboration is required to determine what needs to be changed to optimize process performance. The program of changes will be executed under the control of the functional managers who manage the areas in question. Essentially, changes get made the same way they have always been made. The difference is that we take a cross-functional process approach to deciding what changes are required.

How do we measure the performance of people and business units, if we are just looking at process performance?
When we are taking a process view we are measuring process performance, which is not necessarily the same as the traditional measures of individual and team, i.e. functional, performance. The functional organization (think organization chart) and the process organization (think process architecture) are independent, and the measurements would be different, always allowing for the fact that the lower we go into the process architecture the more coincident functional and process management will be. So, if you want to measure the performance of people and teams then those are different measures. Worth considering, though, what we really need to measure. My money is on the ways in which we create, accumulate and deliver value to customers and other stakeholders, i.e. on business processes.
Roger Tregear

As a Consulting Director with Leonardo Consulting, Roger Tregear delivers BPM courses and consulting assignments around the world. Based in Canberra (Australia) Roger spends his working life talking, consulting, thinking and writing about analysis, improvement and management of business processes. His work with clients is on short and long term assignments, in organizational improvement and problem solving based on BPM capability development, and business process, analysis, improvement, and management. He is available to help small and large organizations understand the potential, and realize the practical benefits, of process-centric thinking and management. Contact Roger at r.tregear@leonardo.com.au.