Culture Reigns Supreme in Process Teams' Priorities

By Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland

Every year APQC conducts its annual process and performance management (PPM) priorities survey taking stock of the trends and challenges impacting PPM professionals in the year ahead.

Once again business process management (BPM) is the primary areas of focus for professionals. While technology tools for BPM receive the most media buzz, professionals are concentrating on more strategic, value driven, and people-focused priorities this year. Compared to prior years' surveys, there is less emphasis on measurement and governance. Instead process teams are wisely focusing on embedding themselves in the business first and foremost this year.

Consequently, the top challenges for process teams focus on the foundational work of end-to-end mapping, aligning process to strategy, and driving a process-thinking or improvement cultures across the organization.

Developing End-to-End Processes

End-to-end isn't just a passing fancy or this year's buzzword. It's become how organizations think about their processes.

That said, end-to-end process development has been the number-one BPM priority for four years in a row, and it's not hard to understand why. End-to-end processes enable customer centricity, scalability, and productivity that isn't possible with a functional viewpoint. Technology, particularly the widespread replacement of legacy systems is another key driver of this continuing priority. New and upgraded enterprise systems, such as ERPs, are often structured to include end-to-end processes like order-to-cash and procure-to-pay. Of course, the technology itself cannot reconfigure how the organization executes work, instead the process teams must lay the groundwork first if they want to make the most of these systems.

End-to-end processes also help organizations execute on the next priority: aligning process efforts with strategy.

Aligning with Strategy

Strategic goals are rarely functional in nature, so a function-focused process mindset isn't helpful for aligning process to strategy. You need an end-to-end view to align process to big-picture strategic goals such as boosting productivity, improving customer centricity, and increasing market share.

For process teams looking to provide value through process, strategic alignment is extremely vital. The relationship between organizational strategy and process management should virtuous, ensuring that process efforts stay focused on what the organization values most. There are a few ways to achieve this alignment:

- Creating an executive steering committee to guide process efforts at a high level and keep the process team apprised of the evolving business strategy.

- Incorporating strategic objectives into process project selection criteria.

- Integrating process teams into strategic planning and/or implementation processes.

Creating the "Right" Culture

Process teams recognize that the most dangerous impediments to their work are operational silos and function-based thinking. Silos prevent process improvements from becoming embedded and sustainable. Function-based thinking encourages organizations to continually optimize one part of the business to the detriment of another, which in turn breeds resentment, frustration, and inefficiency.

The second biggest impediment is that even the most well-equipped team can't identify all opportunities or execute all process projects alone. Instead, they need well established partnerships with the business. It's even more beneficial to ensure employees have the skills, tools, and decision rights to support process efforts and identify opportunities on their own, in the flow of their work.

But cultures, like Rome are not built in a day.

Engage and Empower Employees is Key

Building a culture of process thinking and/or continuous improvement requires a lot of work, including training, incentives, and change management. If you want employees to change their behaviors, you need to:

- Engage employees with an array of change management tactics.

- Empower people with the skills and decision rights to fully participate (so the change happens with them, not to them.)

Best-practice organizations use targeted engagements, change agents, and adoption measures to encourage the behavioral changes necessary for a cultural shift. Moving to a new culture is a marathon—not a sprint—so organizations must be prepared to change tactics and develop new approaches based on stakeholder feedback and touchpoint evaluations of the overall effort.

Role of Process Professionals in Culture Shifts

Additionally, in research exploring how to manage culture, illustrated the impact process professionals have to drive cultures as:

1. **Informal leaders or mentors**—process professionals are often good coaches, mentors, and facilitators. The relationships they build with people through enterprise-wide initiatives give them opportunities to play a more

informal role in mentoring and helping others, even when it's not directly related to project work.

2. **Ambassadors for corporate values tied to continuous improvement**—continuous improvement initiatives often overlap with the work of culture change because they involve modifying the way that people carry out work. Especially in organizations where continuous improvement is an explicit cultural value, PPM professionals play an important role as evangelists and champions for this facet of organizational culture.

3. **As people managers**, play a key role driving culture within specific initiatives or areas of work in which they are involved.

4. **Transformation agents**—work to convince people of the value of changing behaviors or adopting new frameworks. These transformation efforts often result in a culture shift, whether toward a culture of continuous improvement, a culture of data-driven decision making, or a process-driven culture.

Conclusion

Process teams' foci for 2022, is a mix of continuing to develop and actualize end-to-end processes, strategic alignment to provide better value and resource management, and building a supportive culture to drive key behaviors and norms. Of these priorities, culture is the most challenging and rewarding for the overall process effort. Process is a team sport that requires active participation from people at all levels of the organization: from leadership support to expert input, and from manager encouragement to frontline adoption. For any process effort to succeed, you need people to have the right mindsets, norms, behaviors, and skills. It's not easy to get there, but once you have a supportive culture, there's almost no limit to what the process effort can achieve.

About the Author

Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland is a principal research lead at APQC, with over ten years of business research and consulting experience. Her focus has predominantly been on best practices in business processes, change management, corporate strategy, and R&D. She can be reached via email at hlykehogland@apqc.org and on Twitter at @hlykehogland.