

## **The Evolving Role of Process Practitioners**

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The expanding range of digital tools is having a significant impact on businesses around the world. Some observers even believe that [“digital transformation is not a choice but a necessity.”](#) While many companies continue to struggle in achieving digital transformation success, the expanding assortment of digital tools is likely to have far reaching implications for process practitioners – not just today – but also for the foreseeable future.

The central role of process in digital transformation [success](#) has been known for nearly a decade. Yet, in some companies, process practitioners continue to focus on modeling small processes within departmental boundaries. In others, process specialists emphasize incremental improvements with a cost reduction focus and fail to look at the business from the outside-in – from the customers’ point of view. In yet others, due to a lack of collaboration with IT – they downplay the potential contribution of information technology. Process experts need to elevate their game to looking at the cross functional, end to end processes that create customer value.

There are a handful of skills that process professionals must develop if they are to take their rightful place in the digital business environment of the future. The first of these critical skills is arguably how to build competence in developing customer journey maps. This is indispensable in helping the senior leadership team see the business from the customers’ point of view and recognizing that improving customer experience invariably involves the redesign of cross functional processes that create value at key touch points. What’s important here is to create customer journey maps at the right level of detail. By staying at a relatively high level, one can focus on those touch points – or moments of truth – that really matter to customers. Customer journey maps can be used to drive dialogue with the executive team on the importance of cross functional collaboration. In this way, process practitioners can take the lead in advocating that [digital transformation should start with the customer.](#)

Next, it's indispensable that process specialists become conversant with the expanding range of digital tools. Not just social, mobile, analytics, and cloud (SMAC), but also robotic process automation (RPA), process mining and big data. [Jack Levis](#), an expert in supply chain with over 43 years of experience at UPS, believes "the future of supply chain is digital." He thinks there are at least four interconnected elements that need to be nurtured and managed to set the stage for process practitioners to deploy frameworks such as PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) in producing results:

- High quality data
- Advanced analytics
- A suite of digital tools
- Strong leadership/change management

It's important to note the emphasis on a "suite of digital tools." It's the integrated use of multiple digital technologies that yields superior results versus using just one tool at a time in a disconnected fashion. It's particularly critical to avoid deploying tools individually within the context of a single department. The *University of South Florida* (USF) was one of the early adopters of using an [integrated approach](#) by combining BPM, Case Management, and predictive analytics in an agile development and delivery methodology to build a 360° view of students' experience. Other forward thinking companies have also come to realize the benefits of an integrated approach as the universality of mobile devices and the Internet have fundamentally altered customer expectations and behaviors. Competent leadership and change management matters hugely too. In an interview with CIO magazine, [the CIO and SVP of Supply Chain](#) at Reynolds Consumer Products recognized that customer and consumer expectations are changing, and that the only way to meet those expectations is by reimagining the business and creating the necessary cultural change for transformation.

Then, process professionals need to build design thinking skills. Incremental improvement while still important will not be sufficient in the digital age. Some experts in design thinking such as Clay Richardson, a co-founder of [Digital FastForward](#) consider design thinking to be a "superpower" for creative problem solving; allowing teams to innovate through challenges and unleash their full creative potential in deploying disruptive new technologies. Those process improvement practitioners that continue to focus solely on incremental improvement may soon find that executives will pay more attention to technologies such as RPA and process mining as opposed to old-style approaches.

Finally, process experts need to build their mental muscle in articulating the role of process in business models and operating models. Such models are built on a framework of value streams or end-to-end business processes and provide the means to stimulate dialogue on how work flows across departmental boundaries, how value is created and how it is measured. This can drive the advancement of performance measurement from simple backward looking traditional financial metrics to looking at quality and timeliness based metrics such as those illustrated in Table 1 below.

Traditional Metrics	Early Focus on Customers	An Outside-In View
Revenue	Number of customers	On time order delivery
Gross Margin	Average revenue per customer	Perfect (on time and right first time) new product introduction
Net profit (EBIT)	Average margin per customer	Perfect (on time and right first time) response to inquiries
Cash Flow	Churn	

Table 1: Measuring Performance

Through the dialogue around operating models and performance measurement, the senior leadership team can begin to realize that [strategy – not technology](#) – drives digital transformation success.

Building skills in developing customer journey maps, digital tool sets, design thinking and operating models will equip process professional with the credibility and skills to ask and answer questions such as the following:

- How might we use digital and a process lens to make the customer journey easier and better?
- How might we make our processes faster and better with digital – reduce our costs – and make it easier for customers to do business with us?
- How might we embed digital into our products and use a process lens to create more value for our customers?

## Author

Digital transformation success also calls for a shift of management attention from what departments do – to how value is created for customers. That can best be accomplished when the organization adopts a customer centered, business process via **Andrew Spanyi** is the Managing Director of Spanyi International Inc., a consulting and training company working at the intersection of customer experience, process innovation and digital technologies.

His early work in process improvement and management was with The Rummler-Brache Group [RBG]. He joined RBG in 1992 as a consultant and was a Managing Partner of the Canadian practice from 1996 to 2001. Andrew is the author of [three books and dozens of articles](#). He has been involved in over 170 major performance improvement projects across several key industries in the USA and Canada. He writes and speaks frequently on the connection between [customer experience](#), [process management](#) and [digital business](#).

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