

Harmon on BPM: The Scope of Management

By Paul Harmon

As I mentioned in my last column, I am currently working on a book on management. I have become rather obsessed with the fact that organizations that do good process work are led by managers who understand business processes.

Many organizations have process improvement efforts going on somewhere down at the departmental level, but somehow that never gets translated to the organization as a whole. In Capability Maturity Model (CMM) terms, the organization remains a level 1 or 2 organization. It never transitions to level 3 – where senior managers get actively involved. Or, sadder, the organization has an executive who “gets” process, and drives the transition, but then that executive gets replaced and the new executive ignores process initiatives and the gains are lost.

I say all that to say I want to write a book to encourage senior managers to pay more attention to business processes. Understand, I do not want to write a book for business process managers, telling managers how to manage processes. These managers presumably already understand the importance of processes, and just want techniques to manage a process change project. My book on **Business Process Change**, first written in 2003, provides lots of advice for process managers. Instead, I want to write a book for people who have become managers and want to know what to do next. I want to advise them to include process concepts and tools in their tool kit.

I can well remember meeting a senior manager at a major bank who I was interviewing for some project I was doing for the bank. He had a copy of Peter Drucker’s *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* on his desk when I arrived for the interview. I noticed it, commented on it and we got to talking about management, in general. He started by saying he’d been in technical work for some time, but now found himself in a much more general managerial role, with lots of non-technical people as reports, and had begun to realize how little he really knew about what managers were supposed to do.

There are lots of different ways to approach teaching someone about management. (Full disclosure: I used to be head of training for Lewis Allen, a management consulting company that specialized in teaching new company managers about good managerial practices.) Drucker is one of the fathers of management education, and his approach is widely copied. In effect, Drucker divides management into a set of tasks. Managers don’t follow step-by-step procedures, like production line workers. Instead, they need to be very flexible: they need to respond to whatever challenge or opportunity presents itself in a seemingly endless, unpredictable order. Drucker lists the major types of tasks a manager faces and gives advice for how to handle each one. I think it’s a good approach and provides the new manager with an

effective way to get an overview of what they face, so it's the approach I'd follow – with this qualification: I'd emphasize the places in each task that require or benefit from a knowledge of process concepts and suggest effective ways to apply them. That said, we have a general approach to a book on management: list and teach the types of generic tasks that a manager will face.

The second thing one needs to consider is how managerial tasks are distributed among the various levels of management. No one quite agrees on the levels, but over the years I've come to organize tasks according to three levels.

Supervisors: These are the managers who work directly with the people who do the actual work. In most cases they began as workers and were promoted to be supervisors. They usually know the job to be done very well, and, in the worst case, rather than explain to a worker what he or she is doing wrong, the supervisor, conscious of time, will simply do the job themselves. You need to work with them to fight this tendency – they need to learn how much better it is if they can improve the work of a whole group of people, rather than shifting back into a worker's role.

Middle Managers: These are often new college graduates, or supervisors who have been promoted again. This is the point at which the individual manager is managing a lot of workers who are doing tasks that the manager couldn't do as well. The manager isn't hired because he or she is better at the task than a worker -- they are hired because a group needs a coordinator who can balance out contrary concerns and stay focused on achieving the group's goals. At this level the manager needs to work with peers to coordinate larger processes – to assure that the group's inputs are what is required and to assure that the group's output is that the downstream group requires. This, in turn requires working with a senior manager to coordinate the department's overall effort. It often requires revising the group's process to take advantage of new technologies or to implement improved processes. There are usual several levels of middle managers, each responsible for more activities within the organization.

Executives: These managers have a different focus from the middle managers. They are focused outside the organization to assure that the organization is generating what customer's want while the organization is generating a profit (or staying within budget, if it's a non-profit). These managers focus on goals, on strategies, and on coordinating how all the middle managers work together to achieve the organization's goals. They also focus on how government regulations will affect the organization and on keeping shareholders, regulators or committee chair chairs happy.

One can either write a book for one of these three types of managers, or one can divide it into sections and address the different tasks faced by the different types of managers in different sections. As I am writing an introductory book, I'll be considering all three types of tasks, dividing them into sections. Thus, I'll have a chapter on process-focused strategies and goals for executives, and a chapter on tasks required to deal with line employees on a day-to-day basis in a different section.

I've included a draft outline of the table of contents of the book below, and will elaborate on different sections and chapters in columns that follow.

Management: A Process-Focused Approach

DRAFT ONLY! June 2022.
Paul Harmon

- 0. Introduction
- Section I. Executive Tasks
 - 1. Management and Process
 - 2. Strategies, Value Chains, Business Models and Productivity
Gerstner and IBM, Welch and GE
 - 3. Value Chains, Customers and Other Stakeholders
- Section II. Middle Management Tasks
 - 4. Delivering Value as the Core Management Job
 - 5. Organizing to Get Results: Architectures and Performance Audits
 - 6. Managing Change, Innovation and Transformation
- Section III. Supervising
 - 7. Managing to Get Work Done
- Section IV
 - 8. The Process Journey

I realize this is a bit of a change for a column, but I hope readers will enjoy it and that it will stimulate them to think about some of the issues involved in management and business process change. If you are moved by any of this, or would like to write something by way of comment, please feel free to write me at Paul Harmon, pharmon@bptrends.com