

Do Organizations Use Process Frameworks to Their Full Potential?

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Process frameworks serve as a time-saving, reference tool that we can use to create structure around how we accomplish work. In many cases process frameworks are the building blocks an organization can use to:

- classify processes into groups of related processes,
- support end-to-end process ownership,
- establish a common language between groups,
- provide visibility on how work gets done within the organization,
- improve hand-offs and cross-functional collaboration,
- support benchmarking and performance management,
- align departments for IT rollouts and updates,
- frame content management—ultimately putting information in the pathway of employees as they accomplish work, and
- pinpoint and prioritize performance or process improvement opportunities.

That said, process frameworks have the ability to support a wide array of process management activities that span the entire process journey. However do all organizations use process frameworks the same way? Do all organizations use them to their full potential or do they use frameworks at the beginning of their journey and then set them on the shelf to gather dust?

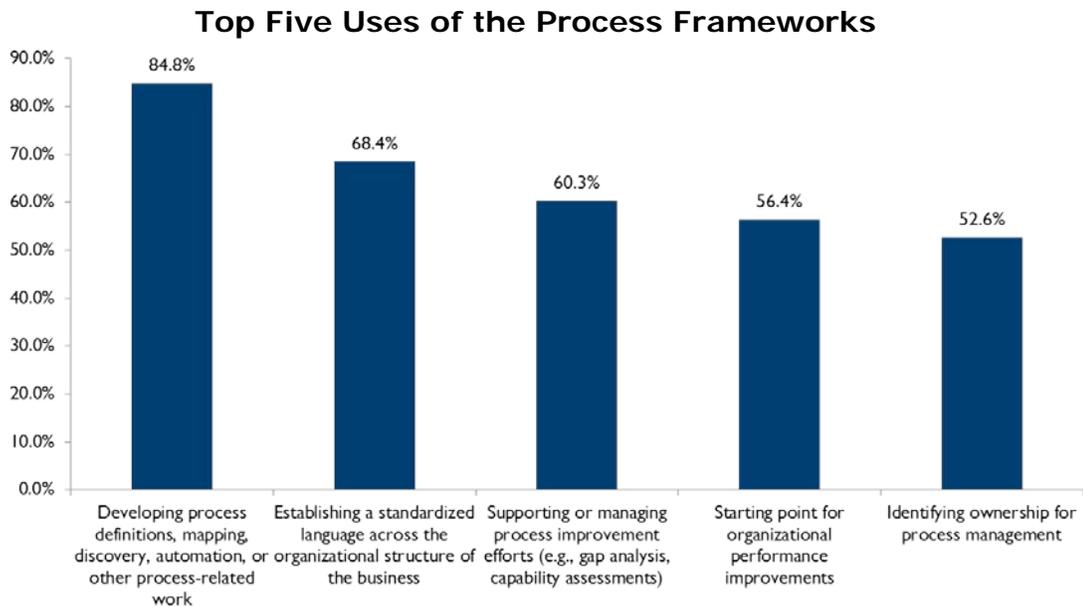
To answer these questions and understand how process frameworks are implemented APQC conducted a [survey](#) that looked at the common:

- uses of process frameworks,
- adoption and implementation practices, and
- implementation challenges.

This article is part one of a three part series and will explore the common uses of process frameworks.

What Are They Used For?

Though there is a wide array of potential uses for process frameworks most organizations use them for only a handful of applications at the beginning of the process journey (figure 1).



Note: The values in this graph do not add up to 100 percent because it was a select all that apply question.

N = 78

Figure 1

In general the most common reasons that people use process frameworks to define their processes, establish a common language, and pinpoint process and performance improvement opportunities.

Defining Processes

The majority of organizations use process frameworks for foundational process-related work such as developing process definitions, discovery activities, mapping, and establishing a common language. In other words most respondents are using process frameworks for their primary purpose—as a reference model that they can use to understand their processes, adjust to meet how they conduct work, and create a standardized model that ensures work is being accomplished efficiently.

For example, [Pearson](#) used a process framework in its mapping workshops to align the processes, develop a common understanding of the process life cycles, and engage stakeholders in open discussion on how work gets accomplished. The focus of the workshop was on the finance processes; specifically, the record-to-report (R-to-R) and procure-to-pay (P-to-P) processes. The team started their alignment discussion with a level-one category, financial processes, and then moved onto the next level. At level two, the team used a business process management perspective to outline the entire finance cycle—P-to-P, R-to-R, and order to cash (O-to-C). Then, they chose one of the level-two categories and drilled down (using the process framework as a reference guide) to outline the sub-processes and tasks and decide which were relevant to Pearson's business. Throughout the mapping discussions, the team also assessed how each process, sub-process, and task aligned to the organization's strategy; looked at how it would work in the technology delivery component of its ERP implementation; and noted any action items they would need to implement the new processes.

Improving Processes

The next common application is a natural extension of the defining process work—conducting process improvement. Once the organization has established a common framework and mapped out its processes, it can then use the information it gathered during the process discovery and mapping activities to identify improvement areas.

For example, [Hewlett Packard \(HP\)](#) uses a process framework as a method to help filter IT business architecture improvements. The team requires businesses within HP submitting IT business architecture project requests to denote which process framework component(s) are affected. This enables the IT team to look across all project requests and identify any synergies or overlaps, ultimately reducing duplications and improving project prioritization.

Other organizations use a process framework as the foundational structure for heat maps, which organizations can use to identify performance or capability gaps for improvement opportunities based on external or internal baselines. This information then helps the organization understand its gaps and prioritize them based on value.

Improving Performance

The majority of organizations also use process frameworks as a starting point for organizational performance improvements. To truly understand how to improve the organization's performance it first has to understand how effectively work gets done. This can include base lining how the organization performs work through its processes, identifying the performance and value of each process, and outlining which areas are: underperforming or of no value to customers, redundant, have inconsistent definitions and processes. All of these issues can be linked back to performance improvement opportunities.

For example, [Elevations Credit Unit](#) used a process framework as the foundation for a survey it used to measure the current state of its processes and documentation. To accomplish this it took each task and activity within APOC's Banking PCF and asked employees to state whether the activity or task is performed and, where applicable, if documentation exists.

Elevations was then able to take the survey results into a mapping workshop to identify its process gaps and focus its process models on customer value. During the workshop Elevations enlarged the sections of the process framework until they were wall-sized and used post-it notes to identify the "state" of each process based on the survey results. The color of the post-it notes corresponded to the rating system so employees could see the process gaps. The workshop participants then used customer-based scenarios to understand which elements provided value and connect sub-processes across the enterprise.

For example, how the credit union attracts a new member. Marketing might send a coupon to a member prospect; customer service would welcome him into the facility, and then hand him off to a teller to assist in opening an account, and so on. This exercise pinpointed which process-groups were intrinsic to the customer value and which ones were the least developed; providing information for future process and performance development prioritization.

Conclusion

Overall most organizations limit their use of process frameworks to the early stages of their process journey. The majority of organizations use process frameworks for fundamental process work: establishing a common language, checklist for discovery and mapping activities, and creating structure around process and performance improvement efforts. However most organizations still miss additional applications such as using a process framework to:

- breakdown barriers and create end-to-end processes,
- identify relevant KPIs and benchmarks to establish and track performance, and
- provide a framework for content management that will ensure access to relevant information and documents as employees execute their processes.

The next article will explore the common steps organizations embark on when implementing a process framework. It will also explore the implementation steps that most organizations should include to ensure adoption and use frameworks more effectively.

Author

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