BPTrends ARTICLE

Real World Business Processes: 'There is no such thing as a bad example'--Renewing a Passport
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Rationale for this Article

I was asked to write a new article recently. I thought hard about what the message should be then I had an inspiration. I had just gone through a poor service experience and immediately started to analyze what caused it to be poor, as I usually do(it's an occupational hazard). I thought that maybe the experience could become a theme for learning. I knew there would be a never ending source of great material about bad and good situations that I could find myself in. I could figure out what lessons I learned and could share them with readers of BPTrends. I have always advised my clients to become their own customers to find out what problems they have so this seemed to fit. This would become my chance to share some grief or delight or at least blow off some steam about it. I remembered a cartoon strip in the Wizard of Id where the king had complained about one of his underlings being useless, and the Wizard said 'No sire he can always be used as a bad example'. I thought maybe I can be the wizard and we can all learn something from these stories.

The Passport Story

I was about to go on an overseas trip, my British passport was about to expire and I wanted to renew prior to leaving. I went online and found the UK government site to file a renewal. I filled out all the required information and clicked on 'Submit'. After an edit or two everything was deemed to be OK to proceed. I was confident that I had met the approval conditions (including submitting the mandatory fee) so long as the passport office could verify the required legal source documents (their verification conditions); so far so good. To do so I had to send the current passport and another document or two to the UK from Canada. The courier company picked up the envelope and I relaxed, hopeful, despite the knowledge that someone else had my passport but is taking great care to move my process along. What could go wrong? I thought that's their job, they are the experts, so I'm OK.

Two weeks later, passport renewed, the chosen trusted courier company attempted to deliver the package to my home. They buzzed the apartment but got no answer. We were down the hall. They left a sticky note on the outside condo front door saying that they tried to deliver it but no one was home so we should go to their location downtown to pick it up tomorrow (Friday). I was not overly happy since we were there and they could have called the phone number we gave them when we registered for the renewal. A phone call would mean that the job would be done there and then.

Friday morning arrived and I went to the downtown office as directed. I jumped on the transit system with my sticky notification and 30 minutes later asked for my envelope. They couldn't find it. After an online search they told me that it was not there but at their airport location. They did not know why that happened. I asked if they could arrange to redeliver it, and they said yes they would make sure it got out tomorrow. On the way home I received a phone call saying how sorry they were but tomorrow is a Saturday, and they do not deliver on Saturdays but how about Monday. Knowing that my flight to Sydney was scheduled on Tuesday, and I needed the passport to register for my Aussie visa online, I decided I had to do the 45 minute drive to the depot at the airport.

I got to the depot and they retrieved the package but did not know why I got a note saying to go downtown since the package was not there. Now, I started asking some classic process questions to which they had no answers, except that they were just doing their job. The one question I really wanted answered was 'given that I paid for door to door delivery, why could I not get it? Especially, I noted that I had provided a contact mobile phone number at the destination end. So why did the delivering driver not phone that number, since I could have walked over and picked up the envelope on initial delivery. Their response was that they do not give the drivers phones. When asked why I was required to provide that number, they said, 'oh that's for us in the depot just in case we need it'. When I reminded them that they had also just done a whole lot more work they replied that that's just the way we do things around here, but I could fill out a complaint if I wanted to. My biggest realization was that each person was focussed solely on their own part of the total job, even within the courier company.

My Analysis of the Situation
Here are the processes from my personal point of view:

Activity	Capability
Submit application (me)	Passport Office has to design the process to do this and build the technological capability for me to do so.

Send supporting documents (Courier)
    Customer to courier hub
    Courier hub to courier hub
    Courier hub to designated receiver (Passport Office)
	Courier has to design a process and implement human, physical and infotech capabilities to do this.

Prepare passport (Passport Office)	Passport Office has to design a process and implement human, physical and infotech capabilities to do this and to interface with the Courier.

Ship Passport to Citizen
    Designated Sender (Passport office) to courier hub
    Courier hub to courier hub
    Courier hub to designated receiver (me)
	Courier has to design a process and implement human, physical and infotech capabilities to do this.

What Caused this to Happen?
So was this whole thing one or many processes? It depends who you ask.

- For me it is one set of activities that I entered into to meet my specific need (not just my want or expectation) of a new passport in my hands in time to travel. I did not get it as needed even though I paid for it. So my answer is yes, it's one customer end-to-end process.
- The Passport Office does not know about package delivery. It did everything it could to get a fast decision and expedite production of the passport. It succeeded in what they saw as its process.
- I understand that is hard for the courier company to know or think about everyone's personal shipping needs. They have their own processes focused on their trigger and completion (an operations point of view). Their process trigger and end points do not appear to be customer's need based (a customer perspective) as shown by how they handled their mistakes in this example. The courier company was not successful in this instance.

So, as a customer, I asked myself what I should do. Who should I provide feedback to?

- Maybe the Passport Office, who did a great job, could get a better courier. Should I send courier feedback to them?
- The courier company made mistakes but also has some inherent performance design problems. Should feedback go to them?
- Should I just tell all my friends?
- Should I use social media to tell the world?
- Should I just write this article about it?

My assessment:

There are many reasons why this could have occurred but let me speculate that one reason could be that for one of the parties, at least, an internal perspective seemed to prevail over an analysis of the external stakeholder needs and expectations of the customer's view of the end-to-end process (what outsiders care about). I know that each party should have the capability to do things but choosing what to be able to do must have a purposeful context that can only come from starting with the question of what do customers value and what are our processes that create value for them.

A courier company was heard last year in a public forum as saying 'shipping a package from one location to another is a capability not a process'. This statement certainly concerned the process advocates in the room since we think it's both. I understand that the courier has to be able to ship that package or it cannot actually conduct that process that it got paid for. But when we look at it from that point of view, we are looking from the inside out (our capabilities) and not the outside in (our products and service needs) and, and as we have seen, the capability dots may be there but they can often be disconnected with poor consequences. Consequently alignment to business value is impossible to trace, while internally groups of people are meeting their SLAs. I can personally say as a customer that I don't really care about anyone's capabilities per se. I care a lot about performance and understanding and meeting my needs from the very beginning to the very end (my process). So I would suggest giving drivers' customers' phone numbers and a phone (or permission to use the one they probably have) and work on establishing a caring culture of service in the process of satisfying the customer. I care that your process 'works,' so therefore you should know what 'works' means for me. By the way, you will also save money in avoiding unnecessary extra work as well making more by increasing the lifetime value of the customers as a bonus. I care that you design your processes around understanding and satisfying customer needs and expectations which is hard

when you are a just a part of the end-to-end but not impossible. I care that you measure your own performance in terms of what happens to customers first. Then you can develop all aspects of your capabilities in a full context of relevance to business outcomes.

The bottom line is that as customers we can sense when our suppliers have designed from the inside, from the departmental, from the functional view and it is not good for those on the outside. We can also tell when a company has understood and designed processes with supporting capabilities for the customer moments of truth and our needs have been understood and the people and technologies make the process fly or, if something is not right, they do everything they can to fix it.

Three things that we can do to reduce the recurrence of such a situation

1. Start by understanding the full extent of your external stakeholders needs and expectations ignoring, for the moment, the inside world. Include how you will measure that from the outside perspective.
2. Build out your value chain and process architecture to cover the end to end of your customer and other stakeholder journeys including the outsourcing of any supplier or partner activity that the customer will notice. Reference frameworks in and of themselves are not strong in this regard.
3. Develop your capabilities in alignment of and support for the process/customer performance objectives.

In Closing

This is my passion; to help organizations design for everyone's success by architecting the business to have the best set of processes with optimized supporting capabilities to do the best we can for our stakeholders.

At BPTrends Associates, we offer a range of training certification classes including Business Architecture Workshops, Process Architecture Training, a Business Process Analysis and Design certification with the goal of helping you to reduce the risk of scenarios such as the one I've mentioned here. These will help you learn how to understand stakeholders, develop strategies, processes, architectures, capabilities and improvement opportunities by introducing a repeatable approach that scales. These sessions with active working sessions will allow you to apply the techniques and benefit from lots of time to discuss your challenges. More information can be found at www.bptrendsassociates.com.

That's how I see it. How do you see it? Let me know on the BPTrends Discussion Group on Linked-in.

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Roger T Burlton, P.Eng., CMC, is the co-founder of BPTrends Associates, the services arm of the BPM knowledge portal BPTrends.com and the author of the thought leading book 'Business Process Management: Profiting from Process'. He is considered the industry leader in the introduction of realistic ways of implementing enterprise BPM programs as well as innovative approaches for organizational and process change. He is the author of the 'Business Process Manifesto' which is now available in fourteen languages. He is regarded as a realistic practitioner, who delivers pragmatic solutions for his clients. He has helped over one hundred organizations implement BPM as a corporate strategy in many different industries, countries and cultures.

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