

BPM and Lean Peter Matthijssen

Playtime is over; it's game on!

A few weeks ago I had the privilege to participate in the 2015 edition of the Building Business Capability conference in Las Vegas (BBC2015). This conference brings together different disciplines, like BPM practitioners, business analysts, lean practitioners, business architects and managers. Central themes at BBC2015 were Change and Agility. I strongly believe that bringing together and bridging different disciplines and techniques is key to effectively support change.

However, many organizations are not at all effective in supporting and achieving change. Instead of collaboration I see different groups, with different modeling languages, different tools and different beliefs, arguing about models, principles, indicators and paper truth. This is making organizations neither stronger nor more agile; we need to do better. Playtime is over; it's game on!



“Is supporting change part of your job?” was one of the questions I asked my mixed workshop audience at BBC2015. Of course, everybody agreed! Let’s see how different practitioners would work on change from different perspectives. My short descriptions below are based on what I see in daily practice. I am sure you will recognize some of these characteristics.

BPM and change

Business Process Management is “a management philosophy, with processes in a central role, aiming at better results”. The BPM practitioner has a wide range of tools available to control, improve and design processes. The use of graphical models and modeling techniques play an important role in BPM.

The BPM practitioner is a very practical role (good!), but some lose themselves in creating great process diagrams. Just describing processes doesn’t support change.

Business Analysis and change

Business Analysis, according to the International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA), is “A liaison among stakeholders in order to understand the structure, policies, and operations of an organization, and to recommend solutions that enable the organization to achieve its goals”. This is a strong statement, covering a broad area, from strategy to (IT) operations. More than the other disciplines, the Business Analyst (BA) is a real role in organizations, supported by numerous approaches, techniques and tools.

So the BA is supposed to be a kind of superman (m/f). No wonder BA is a hype; it sometimes seems that everybody is a BA! However, most BA’s are no superman; they don’t cover strategy, business and IT. Many BA’s I know are more focused on IT than on business.

Architecture and change

The (Business) Architect works from an integral view on the organization, covering business and IT. Architecture is ‘thought out’ and aimed at translating strategy and principles into long-term roadmaps and plateaus. Conceptual models and viewpoints support the Architect in handling, relating and visualizing information.

Architecture is very powerful and needed to handle complexity and direct change. But in many cases, architectural products are abstract and hard to understand, and therefore only used by a small audience (mainly architects...)

Lean Management and change

Lean Management is all about continuous improvement. “Doing the work a little bit better every day...”. Lean provides a large toolbox, with instruments to solve problems (Plan-Do-Check-Act), reduce waste and improve flow. Next to a toolbox Lean is also a mindset, a culture: Lean thinking. Typical Lean improvements are based on best practices and ‘common sense’.

So Lean enables quick results (powerful!), but are these aligned with strategy? Can we rely on incremental Lean improvements in the complex environment that many organizations of today face?

Corporate management and change

Then we end up with the role of Management. According to Henry Fayol: "To manage is to forecast and to plan, to organize, to command, to co-ordinate and to control". Managers are responsible for directing resources to achieve policy's objectives. They therefore work from a hierarchy, and have the authority and responsibility to make decisions.

So Management is responsible for change! However, change is also a threat for management; it cannot always be controlled. Supporting change could mean less planning, less organizing, less control, ...: less management.

These five perspectives (and of course we could add more) show that all disciplines contribute to successful change. However, none of these disciplines can solely carry the complex change challenges that organizations face today. Key to success is bringing together the different disciplines. We need to improve collaboration!

Collaboration is an effort. It requires:

- Interest and insight in different disciplines: What's happening outside my BPM, BA, Lean, ... world? What can I learn?
- Respect and trust: We all want the best for our organization. How can we share a 'North star' and align our activities?
- Flexibility of practitioners: Where can I move along with other insights, and where do I need to stay tight?

An example: Supporting Lean initiatives, I always try to involve architects in the process. Architects (long-term, thought-out) and Lean practitioners (quick results, common sense) are not friends by nature, so bringing these people together and aligning their activities is an investment in time and effort. However, it is my experience that the involvement and support of an architect eventually makes improvement initiatives stronger. This always pays back in the end: less hassle, fewer frustration and better results.

If we bring disciplines together, and (very important!) also bring the people together, amazing things will happen! Only if we collaborate we can achieve that $1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 6$, or even a little more... This is what organizations need, today! Playtime is over; it's game on.

Good luck collaborating in your organization!

Author



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