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Roles Evolve As Organizations Become More Mature

A few days ago I got into a discussion regarding the roles required by an organization doing process, work and I pointed out that, roles, like many other things, varied according to the overall process maturity of the organization [1]. Also, the focus of the people in those roles necessarily changes as the organization becomes more mature.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the basic CMM stairstep model with its 5 maturity levels. I have added some notes on some of the roles involved in the evolution of process maturity and suggested how they vary as an organization becomes more mature.

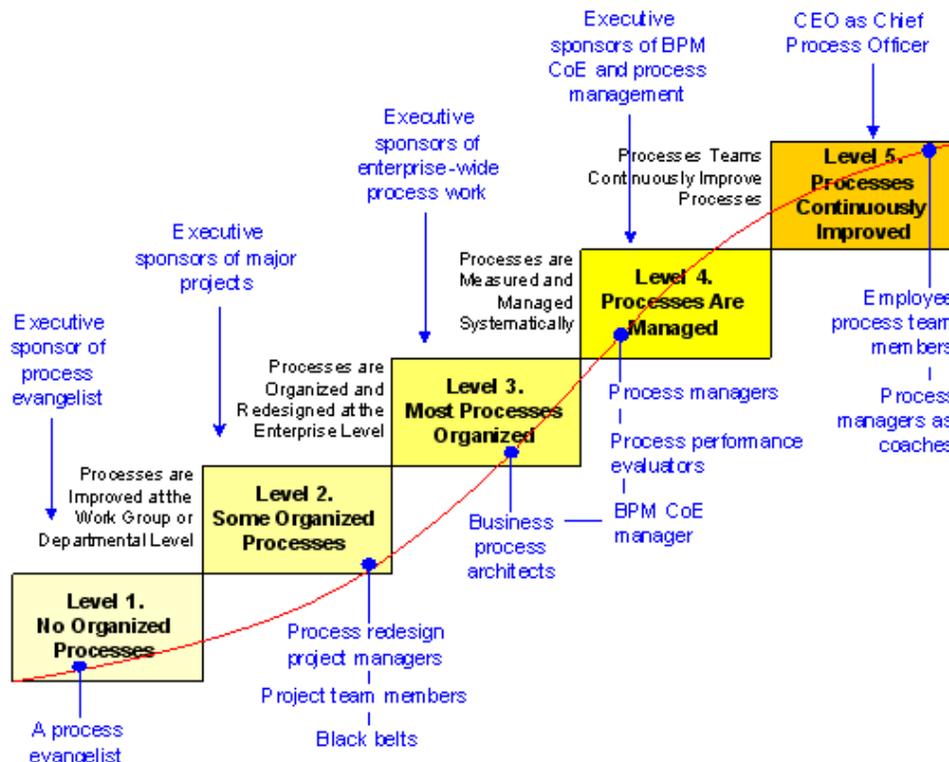


Figure 1. How Roles Change as Organizations Increase Their Process Maturity.

A level 1 organization has no well defined processes. Something and/or someone has to initiate the process work. For example, a government regulation might require a new set of reports about particular processes. Or, a new manager might be hired from an organization that is process focused and he/she begins to push for a process focus at the new organization. The effort might be initiated by a senior executive or by a middle manager, or even by a technical team member. However it begins, someone begins to use process concepts to make changes in the organization.

A level two organization usually begins by focusing on the documentation and the redesign of major core business processes. This type of effort is usually undertaken by a team that is, more or less, independent of the people who perform the business process on a day-by-day basis. The BPM redesign project requires a manager who is well trained in process redesign and knows the tools and concepts required to undertake a major redesign effort. This person may be assisted by external consultants, internal staff with specialized skills in process redesign, and/or by managers and staff who are familiar with the process. As a general rule, a level two process redesign project is sponsored by a senior executive or a line of business manager who is strongly associated with the process to be redesigned.

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A level three organization moves beyond specific processes and seeks to create an enterprise-wide view of how all the processes in the organization work to produce value for customers and key stakeholders. This is the point at which the organization generates a business process architecture that provides everyone with a good overview of the major processes and relationships that define the organization. This requires a business process architect who is a business person – not an IT (Enterprise) architect – as the goal is a process architecture that business managers can understand and relate to. A successful enterprise-wide business process architecture requires the active participation and sustained support from a team of senior managers and executives over the course of several months or years.

At this stage, most organizations establish a BPM Center of Excellence (CoE) with a manager who functions as the lead process advocate in the organization. Again, this should be a business person with a serious commitment to developing the organization's process maturity. This person's role is often complemented by a senior executive who assumes overall responsibility for managing the organization's process efforts. In some cases, this role is assumed by a senior executive with the title of Chief Process Officer (CPO). In other cases, the role is assumed by the COO or the CIO. As organizations move from level 3 to level 4, they extend the business process architecture with enterprise-wide process measurement systems and, eventually, move to a process governance system that assigns managers responsibility for each major process in the process architecture. This requires a major commitment on the part of senior executives to change the way the organization evaluates day-to-day performance, the way it organizes managerial jobs, and the way it compensates employees. Many organizations already have balanced scorecard systems that they use for managerial performance evaluation and they extend these systems to support process manager evaluation efforts.

The transition to level 5 is, perhaps, even more difficult than the transition to level 4. In the transition to level 4, managers and executives have to move from reliance on traditional functional or departmental perspectives to a cross-functional, process perspective. In the transition to level 5, organizations have to change their ideas of management, again, and empower employees. Most level 5 organizations are organized around employee teams who are responsible for the performance and the continuous improvement of specific processes. The process manager shifts from being responsible for the process to being a coach of a team that takes responsibility for the process. At the same time, the organization needs to adjust employee compensation to assure that a significant amount of each employee's compensation is based on the success of the process for which the team is responsible. Obviously, employees can not assume these roles without training and a major commitment to process from the organization's executive management.

Most organizations, as we have frequently reported, are between levels 2 and 3. They have documented core processes and are seeking to extend their understanding of their processes. Thus, their main focus is on developing individuals with skills in analyzing and designing processes as well as project management skills. As they mature, they need to develop a business process architecture, and they need to establish a BPM CoE. And, of course, they need executive support for these functions and roles.

Note that we have not talked about traditional business analysis, process automation or IT roles in this discussion. IT frequently operates independent of the overall organization's process maturity. IT developers often use the term "process" to refer to whatever software system they are focused on, and it may or may not have much to do with business processes as business managers understand them. Similarly, an organization might try to install ERP software with little reference to its current process maturity. This often leads to significant problems resulting from lack of alignment between what the ERP software supports and the organization's actual business practices.

Business analysts can play any of the process roles described in Figure 1, but in many organizations they are focused on gathering software requirements for IT.

A BPMS developer can perform a business process role, or an IT role, depending on how the organization intends to use BPMS software. In some organizations, of course, IT people take the lead in helping the organization become more mature in its understanding of business processes, and in those cases some of the roles described in Figure 1 are performed by individuals located within IT.

Ultimately, BPM views the organization as a set of processes that work together to produce value for customers and other stakeholders. Some organizations understand

this perspective and others don't. Any organization that wants to embrace the process perspective must establish the necessary BPM roles and cultivate individuals who embrace the process perspective and are able and willing to acquire the skills needed to help the organization evolve, regardless of where they report in the organization or what their current job title is.

Till next time,

Paul Harmon

Notes: [1] Organizations use a wide variety of job titles so I have tried to focus on roles which simply describe a task that needs to be performed. One job title can include multiple roles and one role can be performed by any of several job titles.

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