

THE DEFINITELY SHORT GUIDE TO CRITICAL BUSINESS PROCESS MANAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

1. Choose a single person to be the in-house business process management guru and evangelist, and to develop a process competency center.

Most organizations have to create or hire such a person. They should be able to differentiate BPM from BPR and workflow both technically and philosophically. They should understand process orientations, organizational process modeling and implementation methodologies, continuous process innovation and total quality management principles, and, last but not least, your business. Secondly, they should understand the key technologies used by BPMS products (every BPMS uses a different set) well enough to understand and explain the cost/benefit of these to business and IT management. The person should be good at listening to people (at all levels, both business and technical) and soliciting their expertise. They don't have to be business or technical experts in everything, just able to select and use resources with good judgment.

2. Become process centric.

Educate, educate, and educate. Then educate some more! Being process centric does not mean a commitment to BPM, but implementing BPM successfully does require a commitment to the process centric view. Those who will (1) champion BPM, (2) sign off on the budget and support the project, (3) design and implement BPM, (4) judge its success or failure, and (5) live with its effects must be totally immersed in and thoroughly committed to process-centric operation and management thought. Hold workshops and educational seminars. Provide reading. Enlist everyone in the effort. Learn to identify non-process centric thinking and actions, and how to replace them with a process centric alternative. Critique each other constructively and openly, discussing the lessons learned. Do this with high visibility, respect, and tackfulness. Non-process centric methods are not wrong (e.g., traditional functional approaches), they are just incompatible with BPM. Adopting a process centric view brings alignment between organizational units, workers, and goals, exposing efforts that are counter-productive or superfluous to the objective(s) of a business process.



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3. Understand business process modeling methodologies and select one carefully.

There are numerous process modeling methodologies, but many were not designed for BPM. Rather, they were designed primarily for agendas such as BPR, workflow, and IT design, development, and implementation (including alignment with business or BPEL). BPM is a business strategy enabled by technology to achieve highly efficient and controllable tactical operation. The process modeling methodology you choose should focus on business issues and a process-centric analysis of business. It must provide clear definitions and strategies for identifying and measuring business processes in a business analysis phase. It should support the design of process and activity metrics (KPIs), cost-based analysis, and other quantitative techniques. When selecting a methodology, consider the source and history. Be cynical: Methodologies are often proposed by vendors who adapt some methodology to the capabilities of their products or services (especially with respect to modeling and implementation), rather than adapting their products to support a comprehensive methodology.

4. Choose a "low hanging fruit", simple, critical business process for your first effort.

Your first business process management project should be just complex enough to exercise the main features of BPM (both human activities and automated activities; integration; BAM; model-driven; etc.), BUT NOT MORE COMPLEX THAN THAT. Business processes that involve human activities and that involve high variance in performance often provide opportunities to automate task-to-task transitions, give a manager critical feedback or control, and expose implicit activities and goals. If you can't define the process's key goal in both qualitative and quantitative terms, don't use it for your first effort. If you can't identify an obvious cost savings or other key benefit from the prospective BPM effort within an hour of looking at a candidate process, it's the wrong process to implement first. Think outside the box: the process must be highly visible, but may not be thought of as a business process. You should be able to see how using BPM for the selected process will empower every contributor to make that process more efficient and reliable. Avoid processes that would require the first BPM project becoming an IT infrastructure project – for example, heavy conversion to SOA or ESB. It may expose the need for such a project and provide some experience with the technologies involved, but initial BPM implementation should not depend on such a project.

5. You can't manage what you can't measure.

First set a baseline. You need to thoroughly understand the process as it is before BPM, and measure it. Critical measures such as activity costs, completion times, errors and recovery activities, latencies between activities, and so on should be identified and their average values and variance identified. Identify measures that are not obtainable prior to BPM. Identify interactions with and dependencies on other processes. Know what will happen if you fail.

Second, build measures into the process as it will be implemented under BPM. Don't try to redefine and optimize the process initially. Automate it with BPM, gain familiarity with it (you will be surprised what the BPMS exposes), analyze the results, and only then try to optimize. Without this step, so-called process experts will often be wrong about how the process should be redefined for "improvement", and only manage to completely disrupt the organization.



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Third, engage in a program of continuous, incremental improvement. Identify a discrete change, simulate it, and, if the simulation appears positive, implement it. Then measure the results, analyze them, and validate the simulation. Repeat.

Make sure you can differentiate between BPM potential causes of failure and costs versus technology potential causes of failure and costs, and no matter how the BPM efforts goes, make that differentiation in quantitative terms. You will be surprised.

6. Choose the best BPMS for your needs.

Evaluating and selecting a BPMS is a complex task. There are lots of "gotchas", features don't always deliver what you need or are able to implement given your resources (time, money, IT infrastructure, organization, and skills), and requirements. Get help. Don't be fooled by carefully orchestrated demonstrations or by key reference accounts that don't duplicate your requirements or avoid disclosing negative information for some reason.

7. Be voracious. Beg, buy, borrow, or steal expert help.

No company, no team, and no person, whether internal or external resources, can provide all the expertise to make you successful. Every project must be a cooperative effort.

8. Don't expect, or even covet, instant success.

BPM is intended to enable continuous, incremental change at a minimal cost. The name of the game is agility: "zero" latency, automation, and integration are secondary. While not all BPMS products support this goal well today, proper selection of a BPMS will make it feasible. Don't underestimate the value of being able to make ongoing changes with minimal effort and cost. Capabilities such as process abstraction, process independence, and technology independence are crucial. You won't get it right the first time or the second time or even the third, so plan on making lots of little changes over time as you learn. If you try to design the perfect "to be" process out of the chute, you will consume lots of time without delivering value, ultimately fail, and probably create an unchangeable monolithic monument to that failure and a barrier to any future effort. Your definition of what constitutes a business process is crucial to success. Business processes do not have obviously identifiable boundaries. They are not discrete chunks of business that are cleanly separable from each other. It's easy to get drawn in to process creep, with ever growing indefiniteness and complexity. If you try to boil that ocean, it will sink you.

– *David McGoveran, Principal and Sr. Analyst*



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About Alternative Technologies

Alternative Technologies is an industry research analyst and consulting firm founded in 1976. Over the last thirty years, we have been deeply involved in the development of several industries, technologies, and markets including relational database, OLTP, client/server, decision support, data warehouse, business intelligence, enterprise integration, and business process management. Alternative Technologies provides consulting, mentoring, education, research, and market development services to technology vendors, start-ups, and firms in a wide variety of product and service sectors worldwide. Our clients have included many Fortune 1000 class firms and every major database management system, business intelligence, and business process management vendor. Starting in late 1997 and working predominantly “behind the scenes”, Alternative Technologies defined and established business process management as a new product category in conjunction with HP and IBM, and subsequently aided numerous companies in defining their BPMS product and marketing strategies.



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