



Business Process Improvement
Symposium Community

Trip Report

Business Process Improvement Symposium Community

Members: 273

Key Takeaways

The foremost issue on the minds of attendees was getting started with business process improvement (BPI) and the challenges of becoming more process-centric. Among these challenges are dealing with the kinds of cultural change that are needed for BPI and avoiding having projects or initiatives stall as a result of internal culture clashes. Also, people were concerned about the issue of metrics — that is, how to measure the benefits that BPI can bring to their organization, since these measurements are an important means of convincing skeptics and “selling” further BPI improvements to enterprise decision makers. Gartner analysts heard that many BPI leaders spend a great deal of time defining the metrics they want to use, especially since measuring the wrong things can prompt counterproductive behavior.

Many attendees brought up the growing need for “hybrid skills” — finding people with the appropriate blend of technical and business skills needed to make BPI programs work. Fortunately, business process management (BPM) as a discipline lends itself to the marriage of business and technical skills, which is another point business process leaders can make when selling BPI to decision makers in their organizations. Enterprise architecture also lends itself to combining technical and business skills, so business process leaders should also pay attention to this area.

Conference Highlights

Conference Keynote

While the U.S. economy is currently experiencing a downturn, CEOs still want the same things from the IT organization: cost reduction, more flexibility and support for growth. BPM obviously has an important role to play in making all these things happen. Above all, enterprises should prepare for the economic upturn that will inevitably follow the current downturn. Waiting until the recession ends will mean losing valuable months of opportunity. Looking ahead includes deciding how creating a more process-oriented enterprise will help your business meet and exceed its goals. BPM is a long-term program, and at times the transition to greater process-centricity will be painful.

The following sessions were of particular value to business process leaders:

Getting Started With Business Process Management

Getting started in a BPM effort requires an assessment of organizational readiness. BPM is more than technology, so an assessment of current opinion and cultural factors influencing potential success is vital. Too many BPM initiatives have stalled, so planners need to develop a well-thought-out, pragmatic plan based on their enterprise’s culture. Recommendations:

- Generate a strategy to engage the enterprise executive team in pursuing a BPM program.
- Perform a high-level analysis of where BPM would be most fruitful.
- Hire a skilled business process director to mastermind the effort.

Architecture and BPM: How to Make Collaboration Pay Off

Enterprise architecture and BPM are independent disciplines contributing to enhancing IT performance, and each can increase its value through collaboration with the other. But, because each has its own orientation, it is not inherently clear how collaboration can be done productively. For this reason, collaboration between BPM and architecture needs to be an enterprise goal. Recommendations:

- Apply superior business process modeling and analytical tools jointly with the business.
- Accept the principle of consistent methods for development.
- Create the organizational environment to encourage and accelerate the new process perspective adoption.

Projects and Programs: The Future Must Be Smaller and Faster

Project management and associated project portfolio processes are not optimized to allow enterprises to fully exploit modern technologies against evolving business needs. Program and project management leaders must reinvent their approaches to ensure that project decisions are made close to the source, while maintaining executive transparency and major investment control. Recommendations:

- Use a “just enough” approach to project process.
- Start providing intervention policies, managing only what matters.
- Mix business and IT staff; hire/use experimenters.

IT as Process Innovator and Owner: Achieving the Next Level of IT Organizational Contribution

When it comes to having a positive impact on business performance, few opportunities offer IT what process management does. IT organizations that succeed in taking on a leadership role in true process management will no longer be “IT” organizations. They will be business organizations with an innovation capability and a talent pool that can be used in many different situations. Recommendations:

- Review your path to process ownership and innovation based on its real potential in your organization.
- Measure and communicate the near-term process wins you’ve already achieved, either in IT or in the business.
- Develop an action plan to pursue your chosen process path.

Rethinking Change: The Practical Realities of Successful Transformation

Business and cultural change management continue to confound most companies. Executives introduce ideas with fanfare, but people revert to the same habits within weeks or months. Getting people to buy into change requires road maps, organizational reinforcement, measurements and education to match the initial vision. Recommendations:

- Do a sanity check — be honest. Are people angry, crazed, demoralized?
- Take inventory. What’s working, not working? What has succeeded, failed?
- Lasso disparate programs, projects and task forces. Re-evaluate what’s going on, where and at what cost. Reprioritize.

What People Asked About

Here are some questions attendees asked during the conference:

We’ve defined our organizational structure and roles, but we’re still having trouble getting the right people to work together effectively. What can we do about this?

One organization we talked to had a similar problem — they had a governance council; but its job was to evaluate and approve big projects, and its control hadn’t trickled down to lower levels of the hierarchy. Their solution was to create a council one level below the formal governance council, with the business process director at the helm, to screen the more day-to-day issues. In other words, you sometimes need to create a process that will help you select and properly limit the less-significant programs that are dedicated to improving your business processes.

How do we select the best tools for our BPM initiative?

One overarching rule is to avoid the temptation to jump at a fancy tool that a vendor promises will solve all your problems. Tool selection should follow a thoughtful evaluation of your organization’s particular needs — in other words, make the tool fit your environment; don’t place yourself in a position where you will be struggling to make your environment fit your tool. This means understanding what you want to do with BPM and aligning your BPM strategy with your company’s goals. Critical foundational steps include creating a process architecture, identifying needed skills and roles, and understanding that the cultural impact of potential changes to operations are critical foundational steps.

What is the difference between BPM and business process re-engineering?

Business process re-engineering often sought to tear down processes and start from scratch, with the frequent result that whole departments were eliminated, along with their jobs. BPM takes a more measured approach, and seeks to build on the skills and processes that already exist within an organization. BPM doesn’t take a “slash and burn” approach, but is more amenable to building on legacy systems, using what is best and discarding the rest — with the primary role of improving performance, not eliminating staff.

Things to Watch For

Continued need for “hybrid” skills — skills that combine elements of IT and business expertise. The future of BPM depends on people who can see the world from both perspectives; for example, the ability to see things from the point of view not just of a customer, but also of a customer’s customer.

The success organizations are having with user-friendly modeling. Many enterprises can benefit from using explicit, visual process models. While some products have offered multiple views for years, tools (such as Lombardi Blueprint) are now emerging that can help facilitate communication between business and IT. Visio has bridges into the leading business process analysis (BPA) tools, and many other tools have role-based capabilities that enable less-skilled users to participate in the modeling process. iGrafx offers a complete suite of integrated repository-based BPA tools, including iGrafx FlowCharter, which is a direct competitor to Visio. Still, we expect additional products to emerge to expand Visio’s capabilities or provide a competitive solution, including from Microsoft as part of its Oslo strategy.

Growth of the process perspective. Service-oriented architecture vendors are pushing the process view, because it offers an effective tool for implementation. Businesses can’t know what they want to construct if they don’t know what they want to accomplish, and BPM can help provide clarity in this area.

Interactive Polling Results

A number of sessions polled attendees about hot topics.

Dozens of people and parties will have the power to influence business direction, services, products and reputation, almost randomly, across global markets, outside official channels, through a potentially infinite Web and at a head-spinning pace.

Strongly Disagree — 2%
Somewhat Disagree — 12%
Somewhat Agree — 47%
Strongly Agree — 39%

IT practitioners create innovative solutions to business needs almost all the time.

Agree — 35%
Disagree — 57%
Undecided — 8%

I am confident that we have successfully designed our roles, workforce competencies and skills to support the future state.

Strongly Disagree — 35%
Somewhat Disagree — 35%
Somewhat Agree — 29%
Strongly Agree — 1%

My company is well-positioned to anticipate and manage the changes that business transformation introduces:

Strongly Disagree — 23%
Somewhat Disagree — 42%
Somewhat Agree — 30%
Strongly Agree — 5%

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