

Persona-based BPM

**Filling in the “Missing Links” in
Process Management**

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BPM can be transformational, but far too often it is not because there are missing links in the common approach to process that limit results for the majority of process initiatives. The reality is that while the potential of BPM is understood by many, the realization of that potential remains elusive for most.

Certainly some of the factors that influence the outcome from applying BPM software to process are addressed by common practice. Yet only by addressing all of the influencing factors that determine process success can BPM initiatives consistently and reliably deliver organizational value.

For example, process models exist in all approaches, just as forms exist for process interaction, and reports or dashboards exist for oversight and management. The ability to embed business rules, orchestrate the flow of work, integrate to other applications and data sources, and assign user roles are all part of common BPM practice.

But these capabilities represent a singular view of process that does not help to create the right process goals, the appropriate process models for delivering on those goals, or an intuitive process environment that enhances the ability of people to achieve those goals. These are the ‘missing links’ in common BPM practice, yet they are fundamental links in the success chain of business process management—and if they are not there, the chain will fail to deliver expected value.

So process management that fills in the ‘missing links’ by addressing the personal perspectives of the people involved in the process—that maximizes individual

ability to achieve success—is the problem; or perhaps it is better stated as the opportunity.

The Critical Links in the Process Success Chain

The critical links in the process success chain are represented by the activities, wants and needs of all the people involved in the process. From conception to operation—then on to adaptation—process success is determined by the ability of people to interact with processes in a simple, personal and meaningful way. While many of these needs remain largely unmet, someone still has to...

...identify what process will be improved, and determine the KPIs that accurately reflect the desired outcome of the process.

...design the process model by figuring out what tasks must be performed, what dependencies exist and how work will ‘flow’ through the process.

...build an executable process model, automating tasks and even activities where possible, integrating with other systems and embedding active documents where needed.

...perform the tasks and activities of the process, deal with daily nuances that occur, and adapt to ad hoc requirements that often involve other people and resources to ‘get the job done.’

...oversee process operations, making strategic decisions to adjust resources to work demand, staff availability, and priority assignments.

...review process performance, develop line-of-sight into trends and patterns, predict emerging challenges and identify new opportunities for improvement.

...provide strategic oversight, make strategic decisions and 'piece together' the big picture to ensure the organization remains on track to achieve goals and shareholder value.

All of these 'some bodies' are the critical links in the process success chain. And if any of these links are not served, and served well, by the process approach then the entire process is subject to a high degree of risk and uncertainty.

Further more, each of these 'some bodies' is a person with their own preferences, behaviors, organizational style and approach to the performance of their work. Personalization is a natural part of all things that people do, and this critical observation is what yields the insight needed to take control of process results and realize the full potential of business process management.

By supporting these varying roles and activities in the process approach, and including the ability for people in the process to personalize their process experience, process success can be achieved on a predictable and consistent basis. This is called persona-based BPM.

User Types – Builders, Participants and Managers

People in process can further be classified into common user-types. The three user types of builders, participants and managers categorize people into affinity groups: i.e.

– groups exhibiting similar characteristics and common purpose.

Builders are involved in determining what will be done, how, when and why. They set the stage for process operation, as well as the shaping of process to achieve desired outcomes. The builder view of process is a construction view, and as an activity is often seen as a project.

Participants do the work of the process, handling the day-to-day tasks and activities that are part of each process constructed by the builders. It is important to note that participants have by far the most 'face-time' with the process, as it is the participants who are 'living' in the process every day. Suffice it to say that a poorly constructed process—from the perspective of its participants—will result in ongoing frustration, anxiety, and non value-added work as the people in the process struggle to find ways to 'work around' inefficient or inappropriate process design. The participant view is a perspective of work performed on an ongoing, daily basis.

Managers provide oversight, guidance, leadership and direction. Managers must view process as an aggregate of work for a given range or domain of the organization. It is the responsibility of managers to make critical observations that result in the directing of participant focus and work prioritization to ensure overall outcomes are met in a desired manner. The management view is a 'big picture' perspective of the relationship between demand, resources, outcomes, and context that support decision-making.

An analogy of the relationships between the affinity groups involved in process can help to build a complete—360 degree—view of process. Thinking of process in a transportation analogy, builders would build the roads, participants would drive vehicles and managers would provide the oversight and control to keep traffic flowing smoothly to desired destinations. While each of the roles in the analogy represents fundamentally different perspectives, they combine to produce a desired outcome. Success in the transportation analogy requires well designed infrastructure (roads, process model), drivers to handle the actual work of driving vehicles (process work), and managers to orchestrate overall flow patterns (prioritization, exception routing, strategic planning). Without all of these elements, working in harmony, the transportation analogy cannot be optimized to a desired outcome.

Builders, participants and managers have defined roles within the overall perspective of process, yet they are dependent on each other to achieve process success. Only when the interrelationships between builders, participants and managers are molded into a composite, and synergistic, view of process can the potential value of process be consistently realized.

Builders – Setting the Landscape

Call them process owners, architects, business analysts, process specialists, line-of-business owners, IT professionals... whatever their title may be, someone is deciding what processes are going to be targeted, why and what results the process should achieve. These

are process builders, and their link in the success chain involves setting the landscape for process success.

These builders may have to start by setting the stage for a process improvement project: by identifying improvement opportunities, building business cases, crafting process KPIs, and preparing the overall process plan.

But sometimes it's not easy to identify these opportunities, or to determine how to leverage an opportunity to create organizational success. Many opportunities stem from an existing undesirable process outcome, and while this undesirable outcome may be understood, it can be very challenging to determine how to improve a process to transform the undesirable process outcome to a desirable one.

Other times it's just not obvious where the best opportunities even are...

For many BPM initiatives, failure at this initial step of the process success chain presents an immediate barrier to achieving success. For others, the difficulty in navigating through the challenges in identifying and justifying process improvement on business-critical processes causes organizations to detour towards less critical processes in non-core areas of the business such as internal support processes or internal policy management. When this happens, tacit agreement is made to leave the majority of the opportunity 'on the table' in lieu of the fact that higher value opportunities are simply too 'challenging' for the builders to adequately address.

Persona-based BPM must address this issue. For BPM to realize its potential, builders must be able to identify high value process opportunities, and be able to build the supporting business case behind them that will yield results that directly improve the operational success of the business. If builders are not adequately supported in this part of the process success chain, then BPM has little chance of realizing more than a fraction of the potential operational improvement known to exist.

Participants – Doing the Work

Based on what the builders build, participants in the process do the work of tasks, activities, analysis and reliably ‘orchestrate’ operation. Participants can include employees in a number of roles such as operational staff, support personnel and business analysts but there can also be participants outside the organization; including business partners and customers.

Regardless of who the participants are, they need a process interface that is specifically relevant to their role, context and responsibility. For process success to be realized, processes cannot burden participants with the onerous challenge of ‘figuring out’ the process interface, and how to use it to accomplish their tasks.

The participant group has a common performance-based characteristic. Where builders have more of a project-based perspective, participants live in a world of daily workload. Their needs are clear. Process success demands that participants be given an interface into the process that directly aligns with their wants, needs and context; one that intuitively makes their work simpler, easier and more

successful. Anything less, and the process success chain will be broken.

Yet the approach to participant interfaces remains fundamentally flawed in most BPM approaches. BPM software addresses participant interfaces from the perspective of software, not from that of participants. While ‘good practice’ UI design and attractive design elements may exist; ergonomic, behavioral and contextual needs are largely ignored. The common approach is ‘one size fits all,’ with a prevalent attitude that as long as what is ‘needed’ to perform the work of the process is available, that is ‘good enough.’ But it is not good enough and it is not at all ‘good.’

Process success must provide participants with the interfaces they need, based on behavioral analysis, context and ergonomic study. Furthermore, process participants must be able to personalize their ‘process experience,’ giving them the ability to ‘adjust’ their ‘relationship’ with the process to suit their individual needs. Consider the driver of an automobile, where the function of the seat, mirrors and steering wheel do not change from driver to driver, but adjustments to these functional aspects of the automobile interface are highly desired and beneficial to the individual drivers. Process participants need this same flexibility to personalize their interaction with process. If participants are not adequately supported in the work they do, the process success chain will again be broken.

Process Participants – Collaboration

Process participants also require additional capabilities to deal with the many variances that occur when performing

the work of a process. These people must deal with contextual nuance, exceptions, ad hoc requirements and many other ‘variables’ that are simply part of the environment involved in performing the work of a process. It is impossible to identify all of the ‘challenges’ process participants will be faced with pro actively, so the approach to enabling success must derive from a combination of flexibility and collaboration.

Collaboration with other people is essential to enabling process success. Providing the means for process participants to easily seek expert knowledge, validation, assistance, creative input and to deal with ad hoc requirements are the cornerstones of dealing effectively with process variances. To ensure that process participants are able to address these requirements, a collaborative and adaptive process environment is required.

Process Participants – Adaptation

In addition, it is extremely important to ‘capture’ the source of variances, the discussions that are held to address them and the actions that are taken for resolution. By capturing these real world ‘process experiences,’ process feedback is available to help uncover new areas of process improvement and refinement, that can further increase process performance and improve process quality.

In many respects, processes are ‘living entities’ that are subject to ongoing change pressures from internal and external forces. The ability to capture process feedback, without requiring process participants to engage in a separate feedback process, is an essential part of

maintaining process efficiency and relevancy over time.

Where more traditional BPM approaches conduct lagging analysis, periodic process re-analysis or impose a separate feedback process; capturing work patterns as they occur is the only viable means to ensuring that process performance is protected and improved during the life cycle of a process. Without this critical link, processes that initially ‘serve their intended purpose’ will quickly become out of date, once more breaking the process success chain.

Managers – Providing Oversight, Direction and Leadership

Where builders set the landscape for process, and participants perform the work in process, managers must have visibility and transparency into one or more aggregate perspectives on process in order to provide oversight, direction and leadership.

Process managers may be tasked with re purposing resources to meet demand patterns that can often vary substantially based on one or more process influences. Whether a planned event induces a sales surge (product launch, sale), an unplanned event triggers a support influx (act of nature, i.e. insurance claims), something causes a reduction in available staff (like an influenza outbreak) or any of the other many factors that can cause process load/resources to fluctuate; one of the roles of the process manager is to balance resources versus demand in the best way possible to meet desired process outcomes.

Other times managers must look at even higher-level aggregate trends to manage shareholder value or

strategically make the decisions that lead to organizational success. Further, managers at all levels are often seeking to uncover new opportunities for business improvement and strategic initiatives.

Managers - Information is Often Captured but Rarely Relevant

While the information needed to perform management functions is often 'captured' in traditional BPM approaches, that information is rarely presented in a form that is easily consumable by the managers that must enact oversight, make decisions and provide leadership. Only when relevant information is presented in a way that is intuitive consumable, in the proper aggregate view, can managers consistently make good decisions and provide concrete organizational governance to protect the stakeholders of the business.

Without these relevant, intuitive and correctly aggregated views management decisions cannot consistently and reliably 'orchestrate' operations and strategy, again breaking the process success chain. Even where decision-making abilities are stellar within the management of the organization, decision-making abilities quickly default to poor choices when the information used to make those decisions is irrelevant, difficult to decipher or an improper set (superset or subset) of the information needed to properly support the decision-making process.

For BPM to be successful, managers must be empowered to spend their time, energy and intellectual capacity on solving actual problems (or opportunities), not on trying to

cull enough sense from inadequate process perspectives that are not properly aligned to their tasks and activities.

Persona-based BPM Embraces all of the People in Process

Persona-based BPM embraces the needs of all of the people in process, from their perspective, by giving them what they need to be successful: resulting in process performance that meets or exceeds expectations. There are no 'painful surprises' when each of the roles in process are taken fully into account. But even missing one link in the chain can cause the entire process to fall short of the mark or unravel at the seams.

Consider that if the builder fails to build the right process then in all likelihood other people in the process will be unable to successfully perform their job. If the design is inappropriate to the desired outcome, the outcome won't be realized. If the process is not designed with process participants in mind, then it will be unwieldy to use creating internal resistance and propagating work around.

If process participants do not have an intuitive interface they are unlikely to use it. If they do not have obvious and meaningful ways to deal with variances and exceptions, they are likely to 'push' work off to others, avoid addressing problems, or find shortcuts that compromise process goals. Issues will get 'covered up,' threatening process transparency and visibility.

Without transparency and visibility, managers cannot make informed decisions that support desired outcomes

and leadership is perceived by others in the process as ‘off the mark.’ If the process approach does not aggregate and present the information needed for managers to perform oversight, direction and leadership functions the resulting guidance will not address process reality, and will ferment discord and disharmony.

Process is the Sum of the Perspectives of People

The sum of all process views is the 360 degree view of process. It is tightly interwoven, and represents the success chain of process. Excellence at any given singular perspective, or even at multiple process perspectives—but not all, will break the chain and dramatically reduce performance, quality and value creation of each and every process where this is the case. It leads to inconsistency and unpredictability.

When considering that processes are nothing more, or less, than the sum of the people who participate in them it becomes clear what must be done to realize the full potential of business process management. Persona-based BPM that addresses the 360 degree perspective of process is an approach that will enable the potential of BPM to finally be realized on a consistent, predictable and broad-reaching basis.

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Global 360, Inc. is headquartered in Texas with operations in North America, Europe, and the Pacific Rim. For more information about Global 360’s process and document management solutions, please call 1-214-520-1660 or visit the company web site at www.global360.com.

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Terry Schurter is a Global Thought Leader on the subjects of Business Process Management, Process Excellence and Customer Expectation Management. He serves on the Board of Directors of the non-profit International Process and Performance Institute and has held past positions as Bennu Group CEO, Research Director for Process - Bloor Research, and BPM Group CIO. An accomplished author and highly sought-after speaker, Terry received the Global Thought Leadership Award from the BPM Group in 2007 and authored the book Customer Expectation Management - Success without Exception in 2006. Terry is considered by many to be the leading Subject Matter Expert in the field of Business Process Management.

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