

A MODEL DRIVEN METHODOLOGY FOR BUSINESS PROCESS ENGINEERING

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ABSTRACT

Having competitive processes has become as important (if not more) as having competitive products. Simply designing good products is not enough to gain competitive edge. Business processes have grown complex and fragmented in an ad-hoc manner. They span several departments and are very inefficient. Often the work being performed conflicts with the organizations' goals and strategic objectives. Traditional practices and policies tend to encourage this, resulting in being part of the problem instead of being part of the solution.

This paper presents a model driven methodology for Business Process Engineering (BPE) to support an organization's migration to effective, agile and efficient processes. The essential elements of the methodology are process modeling, process analysis, and process execution by utilizing an array of information technologies. The methodology steps depend on process models for understanding, analyzing, simulating, improving, innovating, and implementing the business processes. The methodology starts by defining the goals and objectives of the BPE project. Candidate business processes are identified. The selected strategic "As-Is" business processes are analyzed to find where problems exist. Several techniques are employed to engineer the "To-Be" process. The new process may be a radical departure from the old process. The alternatives are evaluated using cost/benefit analysis. The selected processes are then implemented using a phased approach that relies on information technology solutions alongwith the implementation of recommended organizational and cultural changes. A continuous improvement program is put into place to ensure long term success.

INTRODUCTION

"I have seen hundreds of organizations that by all rights should have crumbled under the inefficiency of their redundant, over-specialized, compartmentalized, costly business processes.

There is only one reason they survive -- the same inefficiencies run rampant throughout their industry"

-- Thomas Koulopoulos

The quotation from Koulopoulos (1994) sounds harsh till one realizes that the actual working time in an average process is typically less than 1% of the total elapsed time. This is because business processes have grown complex and fragmented in an ad-hoc manner. They span several departments and are very inefficient. No one completely understands or is responsible for the whole process; everyone knows and takes care of their own little piece. Often the work being performed conflicts with the organizations' goals and strategic objectives. Traditional practices and policies tend to encourage this, resulting in being part of the problem instead of being part of the solution. Such process inefficiency leaves a lot of room for improvement, and thus is receiving considerable attention in industry. This becomes significant if you ascribe to Thurow's (1992) prediction that, "In the twenty-first century there will be high-tech and low-tech products, but almost every product will be produced with high-tech processes."

Fine tuned and highly efficient customer-oriented processes are one of the key competitive advantages an organization can have in today's business environment. This paper describes an integrated suite of Business Process Engineering (BPE) tools and capabilities to support an organization's migration to effective, agile and efficient processes. A broad set of capabilities focused on modeling, simulation, cost/benefit analysis, optimization, workflow implementation, and information technology are required for a successful BPE effort. While there are several critical factors in successfully re-engineering processes, it is realized that information technology and workflow automation play a significant enabling role in making the re-engineered processes feasible and successful.

WHAT IS BPE

The fundamental thread in this discussion is accelerating change in the marketplace and the resulting need for continuous change in the way an organization thinks and operates. Tom Peters (1987) recognized this about a decade ago, and offered the following as the fundamental concepts for an organization to succeed:

- An obsession with the customer.
- Innovation to allow the enterprise to adapt to changes in the needs of the customer and the business environment.
- Full involvement of every-one in the organization to be the source of that innovation.
- Effective leadership with a vision that can focus and mobilize the organization towards a common mission.
- Common-sense systems designed to effectively meet the needs of the customer as efficiently as possible.

An organization can be viewed as a summation of its business processes. It is the effectiveness and agility of these processes that will determine how well an organization can satisfy the changing market.

Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) is one of the ways to address radical change. Hammer and Champy (1993) have defined BPR as the "fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business processes to achieve dramatic improvements in critical, contemporary measures of performance." Due to its very nature, BPR is a high risk venture. Information Technology is considered to be the primary enabling technology for BPR.

Business Process Improvement (BPI) on the other hand stresses continuous evolutionary improvements to the processes. Scope of a typical BPI project is narrower than that of a BPR project. BPI follows the Total Quality Management (TQM) philosophy. BPI projects are not risky, but the payback is also typically not very high. BPI on the other hand is a necessity for any organization even after a successful BPR project. Without a sustained BPI program all the advantages gained could be quickly lost in today's dynamic business environment.

These techniques should not be confused with the reorganization and restructuring efforts that have become common in industry. BPR and BPI are complementary to each other, and both are valid and proven concepts. Typically an organization needs both. **Business Process Engineering (BPE)** embodies the characteristics of both BPR and BPI. BPE therefore supports both revolutionary and evolutionary changes. Business Process Engineering is a methodology that supports the evolutionary and revolution change that is required to achieve an organization's strategic goals through more effective, efficient, and agile business processes. BPE involves not only process changes but also organizational changes to support the new processes. There is a significant impact on the policies and procedures of an organization. Teams are organized around processes rather than around organizational functions. Teams are empowered to make more decisions as checks and controls are reduced. BPE leverages technology not just to make old processes better, but also to break

the old paradigms. BPE involves the use of several tools. Three key tools in the BPE life cycle are modeling, simulation, and implementation.

One of the key tools involved in a BPE effort is process modeling. A model is a highly effective mechanism that answers questions about the processes or information that is being modeled. Some examples are the blueprint of a house or a CAD model of an aircraft. Process modeling is a technique for collecting information and defining a process. We believe that modeling is critical and that if a process is not modeled, it cannot be fully understood, agreed upon by all involved, optimized, measured, or improved. Process model provides a communication vehicle for all the team members to come to a common understanding of the process. A data model is typically developed in conjunction with the process model to capture the business rules governing the objects that take part in the processes. This model should be developed at a very high level and should defer details to the implementation phase.

Another tool used in BPE is process simulation. Simulation provides graphical and analytical models of process behavior so that process constraints and workflows can be visualized and understood. Simulation uses the modeled processes and helps analyze their characteristics. The process models by themselves can offer a lot of insight into the process and uncover improvement opportunities. However, a lot of things are not intuitively obvious, and intuition does not always lead in the right direction. Simulation can overcome those deficiencies by providing quick answers to "what-if" questions. Simulation of processes also provides concrete metrics that form the foundations for cost/benefit analysis.

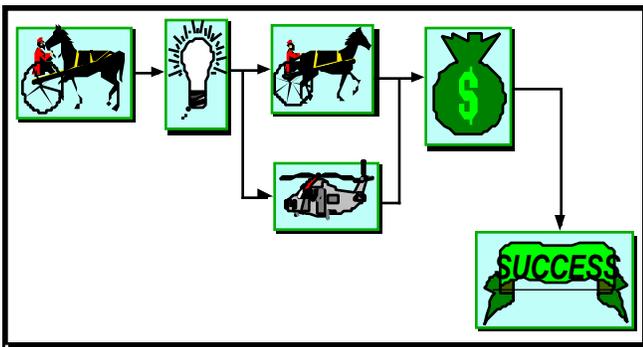
The third tool is Workflow Implementation. Implementation of the processes involves managing the workflow, managing the related information, and integrating various legacy systems using information technologies. A workflow tool automates and supports the work processes. One such tool is Intergraph's Design Methodology Manager (DMM). Workflow tools can consistently enforce established business rules while allowing for controlled changes. A graphical workflow interface provides an enterprise view of the overall work and its status. This visibility itself can motivate and improve productivity of the team members. The tool also keeps a log of all the work performed, thus providing a mechanism for continuous process improvement. These tools provide a means to consistently do work in a predefined manner, while allowing for changes. Workflow tools also provide mechanisms for ensuring that critical tasks are performed in the right order and can be used as "guiding experts" for new users.

There are several Information Technology (IT) components that support an implementation. Some of these are: Workflow automation, Distributed databases and computing, Document management, Imaging, Integrated messaging, Groupware, Knowledge Based Systems, Client server, Model-based product life-cycle, Virtual enterprise, Electronic commerce/EDI, etc.

The new processes need to be accompanied by new organizational policies and structure. This involves aligning organizational structure, human resource policies, training, etc. with the newly designed processes. This aspect of BPE is very critical for the success of the new processes.

BPE METHODOLOGY

The BPE methodology starts by defining the goals and objectives of the BPE project. Candidate business processes are identified. The selected strategic “As-Is” business processes are analyzed to find where problems exist. Several techniques are employed to engineer the “To-Be” process and “put the horse before the cart.” The new process may be a radical departure from the old process. The alternatives are evaluated using cost/benefit analysis. The selected processes are then implemented using a piloting approach that relies on proven hardware/software solutions along with the implementation of recommended organizational and cultural changes. A continuous improvement program is put into place to ensure long term success.



The BPE approach presented below relies very heavily on the industry standard tools and methodologies and a carefully selected BPE team. The approach involves the following steps:

Determine the scope and objectives of the BPE effort (modeling, simulation, optimization, and workflow implementation activity)

This is perhaps the most critical step as this bounds the scope of the problem to a manageable size that can be addressed in a reasonable amount of time to demonstrate results. The scope of BPE projects can vary significantly. Factors such as complexity of current business process, scope of problems to be addressed, understanding of current business processes, organizational policies and procedures, and the size and structure of an organization all play a significant role in determining the final scope and objectives of a BPE project. The BPE team should also be formed at this time. A “Big Bang” approach to BPE is not recommended. Significant results can be achieved through incremental development of well-defined projects, along the lines of key processes that demonstrate solid results.

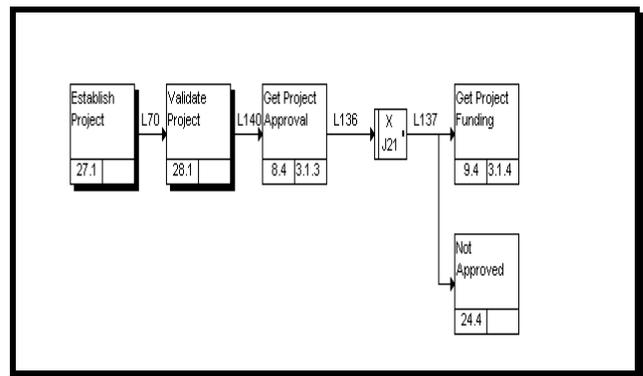
It is also important to set clear objectives for the effort up front. The objectives and viewpoint need to be set for the modeling, simulation, and optimization tasks. The critical success factors need to be identified and risk analysis performed to complete the project plan.

Identify the candidate strategic processes to be re-engineered

The next step is the identification and selection of candidate strategic processes to be re-engineered. Re-engineering a non-strategic process will not provide the expected benefits and will probably be a waste of time. For an inexperienced BPE team it is advisable to identify a low risk/impact process for re-engineering.

Define and document the “As-Is” business process using the Process Modeling methodology

This involves interviewing the people who are actually involved in and work on the process being modeled. Information about process steps, major objects involved, cost, resources, timing, business rules, policies, and constraints governing the process is collected. The scope of this effort is to keep the model at a fairly high level. The process and data models are built and validated with user input. This is a critical step before defining the “To-Be” processes. The “As-Is” models capture the working knowledge that has been learned through years. These are lessons learned that will be critical for the success of the “To-Be” process. The “As-Is” model establishes a baseline for the BPE project. It provides a reference point as to where an organization is and sets the stage to define where it wants to be and it later provides the basis for defining the roadmap for achieving the desired state. The diagram below shows a snapshot of a process model.



Develop a simulation of the “As-Is” model

Using the “As-Is” model, a simulation model is developed. This provides a rough validation of the process models and highlights any missing information. The simulation provides insight into the workings of the process and can highlight issues not intuitively obvious. Simulation can graphically show bottlenecks, deadlocks, fragmentation, and haphazard routing. The reports generated can quantify throughput, cycle time, resource utilization, waiting times, etc. Desired metrics are collected and documented for the model. It is important to understand the objectives of the simulation upfront and to control the level of detail in the

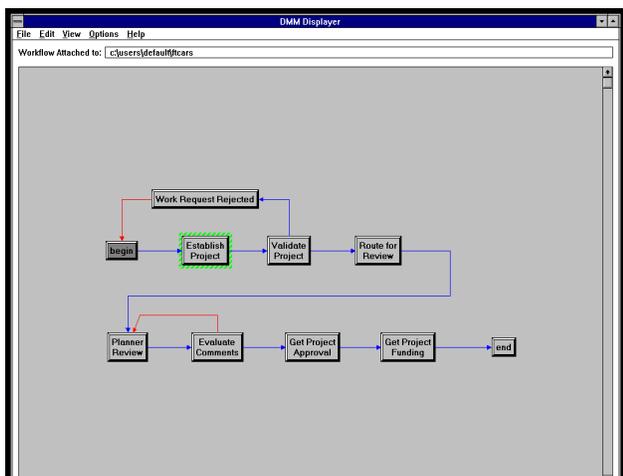
to control the level of detail in the simulation models so as to meet the objectives of the BPE effort. The simulation results should be carefully analyzed and validated by the BPE team and simulation experts. Simulation can be considered the very first prototype for the new process as it can provide an indication of how the process will behave.

Cost/ Benefits analysis

Cost/Benefits analysis can be performed for the “To-Be” and “Transition” candidates with respect to the “As-Is” baseline. Costs and quantifiable benefits are readily obtained from the process and simulation models. Qualitative benefits need to be determined by the BPE team in conjunction with the end user if possible. This analysis will help select and prioritize the new processes for implementation.

Implementation of the proposed process using workflow and application software and the integration with legacy systems and data as required

Implementation of the processes involves managing the workflow, managing the related information, and integrating various and legacy systems using information technologies. The workflow automation software executes the optimized processes and graphically depicts the execution sequence. The applications are integrated/encapsulated behind the process steps. The workflow provides capabilities like automatic routing of work packages, enforcement of process steps, work tracking, approvals, etc. The workflow provides a great deal of flexibility to facilitate changes in the process steps. This lends itself to rapid prototyping in conjunction with highly graphical 4GL development tools. The implementation of the “To-Be” or the “Transition” processes is done by using various technologies, some of these are: Systems/Network integration, Workflow automation, Distributed databases and computing, Document management, Imaging, Integrated messaging, Groupware, Knowledge Based Systems, Client server, Model-based product life-cycle, Virtual enterprise, Electronic commerce/EDI, etc. There are several new organizational policies and procedures that need to be put in place to ensure the success of the newly implemented processes. Some of the critical ones are the alignment of work teams along process lines and their empowerment. The diagram below shows a snapshot from a workflow execution tool showing a workflow corresponding to the process model shown above.



Along with the implementation of the new process, it is very important to implement the new organizational structure and policies for the process to work efficiently. Without these changes, the new processes can be counterproductive.

System maintenance and continuous process improvement

Once the new process has been implemented and the users have been trained, the process needs to be maintained and continuously improved. Maintenance is important because the user requirements change over time and new requirements come up due to changes in the marketplace or technology. The workflow tools provide the agility to handle these changes. System maintenance costs are significant over a system’s life cycle, therefore it is critical to invest in analysis and design up front to reduce the maintenance costs. The organization should also institute a quality or continuous improvement program. The newly installed system is more of a starting point rather than a stopping point.

BPE TEAM

To be successful, BPE requires strong upper management commitment and involvement. The BPE effort should have a sponsor who assumes the responsibility for the establishment of the goals and objectives of the project and empowers the team. The team should be carefully selected with the best and the brightest from all organizations that are involved with the process. The team should be selected not to avoid conflict, but to have managed conflict among its members. Innovative and creative thinkers are a necessity on any BPE team. The BPE team should involve the designated process owner for the process being re-engineered. It should also involve key managers who can be instrumental in making the new process a reality. The BPE team should be led by someone who thoroughly understands the concepts of BPE. A successful BPE project depends on a process engineering/implementation team with the following key skills and experience:

- Understanding and ownership of the current business processes (users).
- Process Modeling, Simulation, Implementation, and IT Expertise.
- Team Leadership Skills.
- Project Management Expertise.
- Organizational, and Human Resources Experience.

Consulting experts provide an impartial, independent view of the process. Consulting experts can also take a key role in conducting interviews to collect information, development of IDEF models, simulation, cost/ benefit analysis, and the corresponding workflow enabled system development. The customer supports the team effort through the determination of the project scope and objectives, understanding and articulation of the current business process, key participation in the creation of the new processes, review and validation of the models and simulation, review and approval of the optimization and technical improvement

recommendations, and participation in the complete workflow system development life cycle.

KEY BENEFITS

BPE can provide numerous benefits that can directly influence an organization's competitiveness. Some of the key benefits are:

Elimination of redundant and inconsistent work leading to dramatic improvements in quality, productivity, profit, and responsiveness.

Complete understanding of the business processes.

Complete process tracking and enhanced process status awareness.

Investment and effort targeted towards business objectives and strategy.

Process Integrity: Process execution is as modeled and documented.

Integration of process and product information through IT.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have established that efficient processes are one of the key competitive advantages that an organization must have in the 21st century. A model driven methodology is presented for Business Process Engineering. The methodology shows how processes can be modeled, analyzed, and implemented. It is realized that information technology plays a critical role in the realization of the new processes. It is also important to understand and implement the organizational impacts of BPE together with the implementation of the new processes.

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