

Defining the critical success factors for business process management

Ten ways to ensure BPM projects meet strategic objectives – and avoid common pitfalls

Grahame Sherwin, managing consultant, information management, Fujitsu

“Over the past decade business process management (BPM) has played an increasingly important role in optimising and automating operations within numerous organisations. However, alongside the many success stories, there are plenty of initiatives that have failed to live up to their original goals.

The good news is that years of delivering projects have armed BPM specialists with some hard-won lessons in what leads to success – as well as what results in failure. From that, it is possible to identify 10 key aspects that must be addressed before even thinking about the part technology will play in any BPM project, aspects that are more about people, the organisation, its culture and the goals of the BPM investment. By understanding these, and deciding how to deal with them, you can minimise the risk of encountering significant problems with BPM.

include evaluators, authorisers and others dealing with complaints or escalations. You need to understand what roles are vital to the processes execution, so you can decide which ones you want to keep and which you want to remove as the formal process design stages get underway.

3. Understand language and customs

Every organisation in every industry has its own vocabulary and practices. Unless you understand the ways in which an organisation and its constituent parts work there is a real possibility that the new – but ill-informed – process will receive a lukewarm or even hostile reception by those expected to use it. That lack of understanding is likely to result in the introduction of new inefficiencies even as original ones are eliminated.

Before thinking about technology, focus on people, organisation, culture and objectives

1. Understand the effect

Understand what specific effect you want to achieve as a result of the BPM project. In business administration, for example, do you want to see more invoices processed by fewer people in a shorter time? Knowing that, you can design the process to support those objectives. You can also decide how to measure the process activities so that these can be tuned to maximise the desired effect.

2. Understand the roles

Processes don't run themselves; they require people in different roles to carry them out or see that they are carried out. Claims processing, for example, might

4. Understand the skills

Just what skills are needed in the execution of a given process? In the case of an HR process, do individuals need basic spreadsheet abilities to play their part? Do some need an understanding of financial reporting or child-care laws? Once you know what skills are required for the existing process you might decide that by “systemising” it, some parts might be carried out by less-skilled people, with specialists only called in when exceptions arise. On the other side of this coin, new skills and a broader understanding of the workflow and roles might be required by individuals to support their performance in the newly defined processes.

5. Understand the inputs and outputs

By definition, every process is started by some form of input, and all the subsequent stages in that process begin with an input and result in an output. Clearly,

to develop an automated system you need a good understanding of each of those inputs/outputs, whether the process is started when a letter is received, a customer telephones or when new legislation prompts an update to employee or customer records. The process design must take into account all the ways in which a chain of activity and decision-making can be triggered, the multiple inputs and outputs along the way and what needs to be done to record each stage. At the same time, it must cater for break-points when a particular situation has stalled awaiting a decision or the completion of a related sub-process.

6. Understand the logic

Each step in a process has a logical order. For example, this might be driven by a legal requirement for a decision based on the production of specific evidence (eg a customer's credit report) or it might be based on a logic that has evolved within the process group. This does not stop you changing the process so that things can happen in a different order, or doing things in

Just because you can automate or systemise something, does not mean that you should

parallel when they were previously a simple series of steps. But it is essential to understand the reasons behind the existing process logic before attempting to improve efficiency.

7. Understand the outcome

This has more to do with people than with the output of the process or changes to operations. The people engaged in the process need to accept that its adoption represents a win for them. Are they getting the job done faster and with fewer errors? Are customers receiving a better service? Are reports produced at the touch of a button rather than by manually collating data?

What next?

- Contact Fujitsu: askfujitsu@uk.fujitsu.com
- Visit our website: uk.fujitsu.com

REF: 3315

Fujitsu Services Limited, Registered in England no 96056, Registered Office: 22 Baker Street, London, W1U 3BW Copyright © Fujitsu Services Limited 2011. All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form without the prior written permission of Fujitsu Services Ltd. Fujitsu Services endeavours to ensure that the information in this document is correct and fairly stated, but does not accept liability for any errors or omissions.

8. Understand what you do, not how you are organised

BPM projects sometimes falter because the design or implementation is constantly changed to reflect the evolving structure of the organisation. If you look only at the organisational hierarchy then there is a real risk that you will need to change the design every time a new manager is appointed or a new leg of the organisation is added. By looking at what the process does – recruiting, generating invoices, handling customer communications and the roles that correspond to these activities – you will get a clearer context for the process design and development.

9. Understand what not to automate

Just because you can automate or systemise something, does not mean that you should. If a process has only a few simple steps or happens rarely then automating it may be a waste of resources. You might also look at a process and decide that it is simply no longer required.

10. Understand who will sponsor the change

Any BPM deployment is going to lead to change. It might lead to people doing different jobs or people doing their existing jobs differently. Teams that previously worked at arm's length from each other might now be working together. And individuals will typically find their work under greater scrutiny. This means identifying and appointing a senior sponsor within the organisation who is going to support – and push through – the change.

As those 10 aspects suggest, by developing a clear understanding of the people, organisational and cultural facets of a BPM initiative – along with the enabling role of technology – companies are presented with a significant opportunity for a BPM deployment to be smooth, rapid and highly successful.

● **About the author:** Grahame Sherwin is a managing consultant in Fujitsu's information management practice. His expertise spans BPM, office and voice automation systems.