



BPM in Europe

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“ THINK AHEAD, STAY SMALL!”

As a management discipline Business Process Management (BPM) supports organizations in streamlining their business and connecting the silos within the organization. In this respect BPM is very much a change management discipline. Management needs to change the way it thinks about its structure and the processes.

From a rational point of view implementing a process oriented organization makes sense. However, often enough the reality is that the emotions get in the way. Below are a couple of my observations which you might want to keep in mind.

First off all, any website, book, course or conference on BPM will give you a positive message on its benefits and value. When I ask the average visitor of a seminar what they think of with the word “process”. I will, for the most part, get positive feedback. On the other hand, when I ask a person outside of our industry (e.g. my next door neighbour Hester) about what he or she thinks of when they hear the word “process” I get responses like “Kafka”, “set in stone” or “the law”. In most cases the word “process” evokes a negative emotion. My assumption is that many people confuse “process” with “procedures”. And procedures are associated with unnecessary bureaucracy (my apologies upfront to any person out there I’ve offended by agreeing that procedures cause a negative emotion). I sympathize with these negative emotions and feel that our industry is much to blame for this as well. Most analysts, consultants or suppliers have their own definition of BPM and have often changed it over the course of time. As long as we do not have one common definition, people outside of the in-crowd (like my next door neighbour but also the average business manager), will stay confused and annoyed and will most likely associate “process” with a negative emotion.

Secondly, the issue is that streamlining an organization and connecting the silos is probably the last thing the average business manager wants to do—even if he does understand what a process is. Remember that streamlining will often result in smaller organizations—albeit more effective ones. Further, identifying someone’s position in the overall business process means having to work with other departments and people. In my opinion, we need to consider the self-esteem (read ego!) of the average manager. Thanks to Frederick Taylor’s assessment, we know that the self-esteem of the average manager relates directly to the size of his organization and the breadth of his autonomy. I have yet to meet a manager who would enthusiastically make the following statement: *“last year I had to manage 100 people on my own, but this year I’m pleased to tell you that I’ve downsized to just 20 people and I’m now part of a team!”* My point is that most BPM marketing material talks about efficiency improvement, FTE reduction and the possibility of implementing enterprise wide processes. This could be read as “we’re making you smaller and we’re taking away your freedom”.

Implementing a business process is also about gaining control—a positive step you would think. However, I was astonished to hear someone who works a large corporation complain that his colleague would resist an improved customer service process. The specific improvement involved providing the customer with just one invoice instead of three. The manager of the billing centre

reasoned that if the customer got just one invoice instead of three, he might want to get a discount, and this would mean losing turnover. With such a policy in effect, this organization might maintain its turnover in the short run but, in the long run they will inevitably lose customers.

In summary, we have a long way to go before we change the mind set of all potential players in an organization. I've heard the phrase "think big, start small" in support of organizations beginning the transition to becoming a process oriented organization. From a rational point of view, I understand and even agree with this statement. Nevertheless, from an emotional point of view I have some reservations. "Big" can be associated with bureaucratic, rigid and resistant to change—the antithesis of what BPM aims to accomplish. Note the above examples.

Finally, I would like to propose a new slogan for the transition to a process oriented organization: "Think Ahead, Stay Small!" Think ahead is about understanding and executing your company strategy on a daily basis. But, please stay "small". Small is about staying flexible or agile, small is about recognizing the need to connect and collaborate, small is about staying focussed on the core business, small is about lean and mean, and small is about being personal and intimate. All core values of BPM. So, I hope this new slogan will help change the mind set and thus will help to achieve genuine change.

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