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Facilitating Successful Business Process Management Projects: Pitfalls and Success Factors

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ABSTRACT

Recent growth of process-centric organizations has drawn attention to the need for business process facilitators to help organizational process endeavors. While the role of the facilitator for various types of projects is not new, the question remains whether the facilitation role is different during business process projects. This paper examines the role of facilitators during business process implementation and identifies the facilitator characteristics which lead to success and also examines pitfalls based on several experiences. A differentiation is made between several cases who employed process facilitators during their business process project and those who did not.

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to remain competitive, Organizations world-wide have focused on improving and managing business processes.. In 2002 Business Process Management (BPM) spending was estimated to increase from \$785 million in 2001 to \$2.6 Billion in 2005 (Aberdeen Group, 2002) with an average project size in 2003 between \$250,000 - \$500,000 and the potential to increase beyond \$1 million by 2005 (Delphi, 2003). Recently, the Gartner Group defined BPM as "a management practice that provides for governance of a business's process environment toward the goal of improving agility and operational performance. BPM is a structured approach employing methods, policies, metrics, management practices and software tools to manage and continuously optimize an organization's activities and processes"(Melenovsky et. al., 2005). Most researchers agree BPM is dedicated to a process centric organizational focus with the goal of integrating management, organizational issues, people, process, compliance and technology for both operational and strategic activities (Hill, 2004; Miers, 2004; Khan, 2003; Smith and Fingar, 2002). These strategic activities encompass analytical and predictive methods with technologies in an effort to create agile organizations. As a result organizations are replacing traditional silos with orchestrated end-to-end enterprise-wide business processes that produce value, serve customers and generate income.

In their efforts of transforming to a process-centric organization, the need and emergence of a Business Process Facilitator (BPF) role in companies of all sizes has emerged. In order to be successful, a manager's focus of BPM needs to be on the alignment between Information Technology (IT) and business, however with this increased focus on process, a significant role of process facilitation from management to execution is required. Well defined processes mark the beginning of organizational success however the key to sustained success lies in the ability to manage and orchestrate these cross-functional processes. This requires a wide variety of strategic, technical, and people skills that are difficult to find in today's professionals. These skills are emerging in

the role of the BPF. This role in business process endeavors has typically been conducted by existing organizational roles, and recently the consensus is that this BPF role requires additional skills (Bacel, 2004; Hindle, 2005; Hill, 2004; Sinur, 2005). As a result there has been a rise in the emergence of the process manager and an identified change in the role of the business analyst (Hindle, 2005). Yet research is lacking in identifying whether there is a change in facilitator skill set required for business process projects. The question remains what are the required skills of this BPF that leads to success and do these differ from traditional project facilitator skills? This paper examines the skill differences and additions of the facilitator role of business process projects as compared to the traditional facilitator role.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

To examine the effectiveness and changing skill needs of successful Facilitator's, the skills of the traditional facilitator role must be identified and compared with skills required of facilitators during a business process management life-cycle.

Question 1: What are the similarities and differences in skills between traditional project facilitators and BPFs.

Figure 1. Business process life-cycle

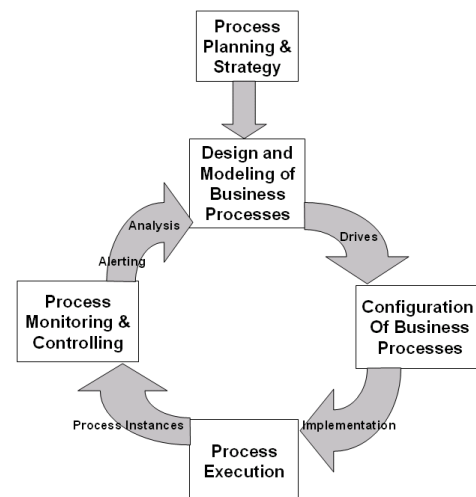
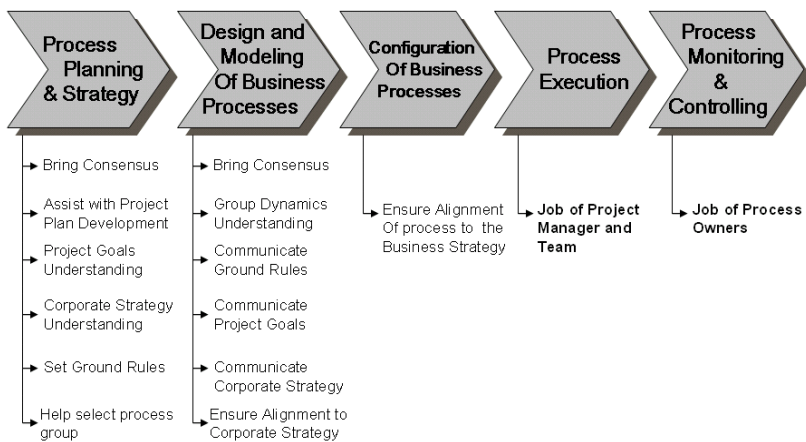


Figure 2. Business process facilitator tasks in the BPM life-cycle



This question is designed to establish a set of tasks or skills that can be compared in future studies. The literature on facilitator roles was surveyed in addition to experiences of three BPM consultants to obtain the preliminary skills indicated.

Traditional facilitators manage information exchange, applying problem-solving skills in team dynamic situations using interactive and participatory methodologies (Hayne, 1999; Bachel, 2004). While an expert's role is to offer advice, particularly about content, the facilitator's role is to assist with HOW the discussion is proceeding. This requires Facilitators to be conscious of interrelated tasks; they should be able to illustrate procedures that will help the group think about the problem and, at the same time, help the group interact effectively. As Facilitators progress in these tasks they assume a position of responsibility that strongly influences the group without attempting to apply content expertise. Facilitators should be neutral, allowing group members to examine their values, assumptions, and choices, never suggesting or advocating what they should be (De Vreede, et. al., 2001).

In contrast, the BPF appears to require similar skills with the addition of offering "how to" knowledge where appropriate. End-to-end process-centric organizations require that BPFs coordinate and manage the process initiatives for *all* stakeholders *across* the organization with the goal of Business-IT alignment, helping stakeholders commit to change and instilling ownership (Winston, 1999). This requires consultant-like skills (Hindle, 2005) applied during each phase in a business process implementation cycle. Therefore, the BPF needs to carry out specific activities throughout the various stages of a business process management project.

In order to identify specific activities of a BPF within each stage of a BPM project, we examined facilitation tasks throughout the stages of several BPM implementation projects which were successful.

The typical BPM life cycle encompass five major stages as illustrated in Figure 1 (Scheer et al, 2004). To maximize the effectiveness within each of these stages, BPF tasks need to be aligned with identified BPM implementation success factors and these tasks need to be threaded throughout the appropriate stages.

In 2004 The Gartner Group identified several factors deployed during BPM implementations that lead to success and several factors that lead to failure. Successful implementations included alignment of business processes to organizational strategy, a strong understanding of business processes which were visible to the organization, a cross departmental scope, and involvement and trust of employees involved. Unsuccessful BPM implementations tended to lack senior management support and alignment of processes to strategy, have unclear and poorly documented processes, lack employee involvement (causing a lack of trust), and lack facilitation and project skills of people involved. An understanding of

the success factors helps identify the tasks BPFs need to deploy during each phase in order to achieve successful BPM implementations.

Figure 2 summarizes the various tasks of a BPF and the optimal stage in the BPM life-cycle they should begin. Several of these tasks need to be "threaded" through several stages.

During stage 1, the BPF assists with management level mindsets, helping management understand and commit to the BPM initiative. This includes facilitating a corporate consensus of organizational processes and their alignment to corporate strategy and objectives. During this stage the BPFs function is to help management agree what processes coincide with the Strategic direction of the company. Once that has been established, the BPF assists the Project Manager in developing the plan and selecting the team. While it's the Project Managers job to ensure the project is well defined, the BPF assists in developing the schedule.

During stage 2, the BPF begins to assist in the execution of the Planning and Strategy that was set forth in the previous stage. At this time the project group comes together to model organizational processes. During this stage it is imperative that the BPF communicate to the group the management objectives, project goals, and ground rules. The ground rules will vary by group emphasizing the importance of understanding group dynamics, but need to include how consensus is reached and how conflicts are resolved. The process of facilitation will vary greatly depending on the personality of not only the group but also the individuals. If groups tend to share information readily, the BPF should have an easier time in extracting information from the group. However, if the group is very reserved, the BPF will have to break the ice to earn groups' trust.

During stage 3, the BPF joins forces with the Project Manager during this stage to validate the model and ensures alignment between the Process and the Business Strategy. The Project manager's role throughout the entire BPM Life-Cycle is to ensure smooth transition between stages and maintain the project schedule.

During stage 4, the BPF's role is minimized. The BPF is on hand to assist with gathering additional information as needed during the Execution of the Process in case something was missed when the Process was validated.

During stage 5, the BPF's role is also minimal. Once the process has been implemented, the process owners should periodically review the process, determining whether optimization has been achieved and whether process improvements can be made. Process Owners are company individuals who have primary control of the process, understanding how it affects the entire organization and how it fits in the corporate strategy. BPM is a continuous improvement process. As market conditions change, it is imperative that Process Owners examine the way they conduct business and determine if change is needed.

Based on the same rationale as question 1, the following questions are posed:

Question 2: Are there variations in BPR effectiveness among organizations?

Question 2a: What are the benefits and pitfalls of BPFs?

Several organizations that recently employed the role of a BPF were interviewed to determine the effectiveness of the BPM project. Overall there were varied results. Some organizations met with success where others have not. To answer question2a, we attempted to identify characteristics of BPFs involved in the successful BPM projects compared to the results from actions of poorly facilitated projects.

Table 1. Summary: Benefits and pitfalls of an active BPF in the BPM life-cycle

Benefits of an active BPF	Pitfalls of an inactive BPF
-Increased Coordination and Integration	-Lack of Coordination and Integration
-Unbiased view of processes	-Biased view of processes
-Understanding of intra-organizational processes	-Silo view of processes – lack of intra-organization process view
-Identification of strategic process value	-Departmental view of process, lack of strategic value identification
-Overall knowledge of organizational process and possible outside knowledge	-No understanding of the process beyond their (clients) expertise
-Understanding desired goal	-Only undertake one project without overall vision integration

- **Benefits of a BPF:** Organizations reporting successful BPM projects employed an outside BPF, bringing additional knowledge the organization did not previously have. They also tended to be unbiased and able to quickly map an overall view of a cross-departmental process. Process management skills of the BPF also provided the skills necessary to coordinate both the business and Information technology participants in the process while keeping work schedules on track.
- **Pitfalls of not having a facilitator:** The lack of a BPF can lead to fragmentation, rework, overextended timelines, and no process alignment with organizational strategy or objectives. These pitfalls are compared to the benefits of having a BPF in Table 1.

Question 3: What should a company look for in selecting a BPF for their BPM projects?

The need of a BPF to achieve successful BPM projects is clear. However this question is designed to give organizations a framework of skills to help fulfill the BPF role. Several studies have identified competencies and characteristics of successful facilitators as shown in Table 2 (Bacel, 2004; Hayne, 1999; Rohan, 2004). This may help organizations select and evaluate appropriate individuals. Additionally, several knowledge areas a BPF should possess were found from our interviews:

Table 2. Competencies and characteristics of successful facilitators

Competencies	Characteristics
-distinguishes process from content -evoke participation and creativity -honors the group and affirming its wisdom -maintains objectivity -understands underlying group dynamics -releases process hindrances -adapts to changing situations -assumes (or shares) group responsibility	-asks and counsels rather than dictate -spends time building relationships -initiates conversation -encourages opinions over enforcing their own -negotiates rather than dictating decision-making -listens without interrupting -ernoting with restraint when required -bases decisions upon intuitions with the absence of facts -portrays self-confidence -persuasive -enthusiastic -outgoing -naturally curious -can keep the big picture in mind while working on detail

1. Communication and Knowledge Transfer;
2. Process Knowledge: Understanding process related procedures, not specific industry skills;
3. Knowledge of various Industry Best Practice;
4. Flexible Analytical Ability: Thinking outside the box;
5. Process Methodology Application and Knowledge: The ability to apply different / multiple methodologies;
6. Political Savvy;
7. Change Management Knowledge: Understanding how to deploy various change management methodologies.

DISCUSSION

While process-centric organizations have realized the potential value of optimized end-to-end processes, they also realize these project initiatives require appropriate facilitation skills to ensure success. Understanding the specific tasks of the BPF during BPM projects can potentially increase the probability of achieving success leading to improved efficiency and profitability. By applying the appropriate facilitation activities early in the project and applying appropriate knowledge areas within the BPM life-cycle, confidence will increase among process participants, help identify and establish process ownership, and facilitate change. BPFs not only direct and advise, but unlike traditional facilitators they also assist in the “how to” required in a BPM life-cycle. This paper has introduced a set of tasks that define the emerging role of the BPF. Further research is required to validate the effectiveness of these skills during BPM projects and the level of impact BPFs have on BPM success.

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