

Seven Major Guidelines for a Successful Business Process Management Project

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Regardless of initial willingness to pursue business process management (BPM) and a host of major opportunities for improvement, Business leaders could do well to hold back and focus instead on a few projects that will deliver highly visible success.

Early, visible, concrete project success is especially important to the long-term acceptance of BPM as a valuable discipline. There are seven key factors that organisations need to observe when selecting a BPM project to pursue. Additionally, there are several other practices related to attitudes and management style that can be equally important to ultimate success. Compliance with these guidelines will translate into a very high probability of project success and a major boost for business interest in adopting BPM as a programme.

1. **Limited scope.** For the best results, start small. This means a limited-scope project, not a major end-to-end process to improve, but perhaps a portion of one. The time frame should be relatively near-term, perhaps no more than 60 to 90 days. It should not be a complex challenge, but rather one that is relatively straightforward for which you have the skills available. A small number of limited-scope projects is best to provide concentrated focus on achieving results and to spread the word regarding a high-value payoff. Nevertheless, to surface smaller candidates, it is important to first do a higher-level contextual business process model to find the best opportunities.
2. **High value.** The business performance improvement must be seen as having a high value towards attaining the desired business performance results. Only a fraction of all business processes are perceived as having high inherent value in achieving end results. An example would be the process of forecasting. Doing this well versus poorly can have dramatic effects on overall performance.
3. **Clear alignment to goals.** Another parameter to consider for target process selection is that of alignment with important organisational or business-unit goals and strategies. If the BPM-based performance improvement that is being pursued directly contributes to the attainment of a targeted goal and fulfils the corresponding strategy, this will add positive attention to the BPM effort. The link to goals and strategies can occur at various levels of the business purpose hierarchy — from the high level stock price down to the details such as employing Twitter — but the hierarchy should be developed and understood clearly.
4. **The right metrics.** Only through measurement can you get the necessary awareness and credibility regarding the value of the BPM-based improvement achieved. The definition and the means of measurement, involving only a few metrics, must be in place, understood and accepted by the rest of the organisation. Furthermore, it is essential that performance-baseline data be available as a basis for comparison of current results versus prior results. The quantitative degree of improvement is vital to make a strong impression. This clearly requires a sound, disciplined post-project review and/or audit — and potentially even a longer-term review of results.

5. **Goal agreement.** All the relevant process stakeholders must work together to agree on what the desired performance improvement is. Although this may seem simple and obvious, it is not uncommon that different constituencies regarding a process have different views about what "goodness" is for a particular process. Agreement towards a primary, shared, common performance goal must be worked out to claim success. Be aware that, in some cases, this work may take as much effort as that of the business process modelling.
6. **Enthusiastic business sponsor.** To get the project done promptly and well, and to spread the word across the organisation, an enthusiastic business sponsor is essential. The business sponsor is not in charge of the project, but rather is the person who is the primary beneficiary of the new, improved level of performance. This person is absolutely sold on the idea and encourages both the business operating staff and the BPM implementation staff to get things done. The business sponsor helps overcome any obstacles that arise and makes necessary decisions. Once one task is completed, this same sponsor, one who is ideally influential in the organisation, will continue to promote the great results to peers and superiors. This requirement is so vital that, if such a sponsor is not available, one should look for another project to pursue.
7. **Business user engagement.** Getting the people who actually do the work of the process onboard can be an enormous help towards success. Getting them on board typically means offering a fresh perspective on how to look at what they do in their jobs, and making a process view easy to understand and intriguing. Success here can mean that users realise that they are the experts, they feel a sense of ownership about what they do and they engage in seeing how things could actually be done better. Generally, to accomplish this means bringing good modelling, good methods of visualisation and meaningful measures of performance.

Mr Rosser will further discuss how organisations can attain BPM project success at the Gartner BPM Summit 2010, 1-2 March at the Lancaster London hotel. For more information please visit www.europe.gartner.com/bpm