

The Process Organization

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Introduction

How often have we heard “We need a process to fix this issue”, “The reason this implementation failed is because we did not have a process”, etc, etc. We all have heard similar statements at some time in our professional lives. Some of us lived in these organizations long enough to witness some process changes being brought on; some changes have succeeded in improving the business, others have failed and created complicated workflows that left the situation worse than before it had a process. I believe what is worse than not having a process is rushing one to fit around a business or system function to resolve a particular issue without giving consideration to the other parts of the organization or without having an end goal that an organization is trying to achieve. Becoming a process organization is a strategic decision that requires buy-in and support from the top of an organization and proper execution from all the way down an organizational chain.

It is important for every organization to realize and embrace the value of a process driven architecture that steers an organization’s systems, daily operation, and performance improvement. To some extent all organizations have some sort of processes around a particular business function or multiple functions. Organizations need to have a

repeatable, measurable, integrated set of processes to improve their business delivery and customer support if they are to succeed in a challenging global economy.

Why repeatable?

Process repetition provides consistency where everyone is aware of the steps need to be taken and can execute these steps with ease and as a result, process stability is accomplished through repeated steps and minimized exceptions.

My favorite example for process repetition and consistency is international airports. Can anyone envision arriving at any international airport in the world and wondering what he/she needs to do, multiply that by the masses that arrive to any of those major international airports and you'll have chaos management waiting to happen. What is true for most international airports is the simple three step process that all people go through. No one needs to know the language of any particular country to check in and out of its airport. Most of those who travel internationally will know that upon arrival to the final destination, there are three step processes and these are:-

1- Immigrations, 2- Luggage check-out, 3- Customs.

What makes the process successful is the ability to be consistently repeated in the same manner for all travelers across the globe; therefore, turning airports into a global process organization that everyone understands and can execute on.

Why measurable?

Process provides keys for performance improvement efforts; performance improvement need to be measured to understand how an organization is doing against the set goals and if the processes are achieving these goals - whether these goals are cost reduction, system integration, outsourcing, etc. Organizational leaders will not be able to ensure sustained high performance, successful business merger, or application integration, etc., if they do not have measurable data that supports process continuity or process changes.

If we go back to the airport example, we'll find measurability is a very important aspect in identifying process efficiency. The airport authority may need to know peak hours of arrivals to staff more people at the immigration counters; similar analysis may be required at customs, etc. The availability of information to the decision makers regarding the measurability of a process allows for better assessment; hence achieving steady and consistent improvements.

Why integrated?

Process integration provides the ultimate umbrella for organizations to pull all their functional and system processes into a meaningful comprehensive flow so that business agility is achieved through streamlining separate departmental processes that function well on their own into organizational processes that function well together. In my experience, I have seen how a department within an organization can be very tight with its processes and can perform the job very well vertically within its own silo; however, when it comes

to handovers with other departments, the organization as a whole fail miserably due to the lack of integrated processes.

If I go back to the airport example, the integration is visible in the flow of events at any of these international airports; further, there is no confusion between the three process elements as to which one starts, stops, outcome of each, and handover between each. Each of us knows the set of steps that will take place as we stop by an immigration counter, and then when we check our luggage out, and finally when we check at customs. There are rules and procedures and everyone knows whether they are in violation or in compliance with them. There is an overall integration method the ties all three process elements to go back and validate or check with successor or predecessor steps to ensure continuity in the process. All that takes place seamlessly without us giving it too much thought.

Process Management

When I speak of the process organization, I do not mean IT within that particular organization. It is a commitment for the whole organization if that organization wants to succeed and be ahead of their rivals in a challenging global economy.

I have explored in previous articles SDLC and PLC within IT organizations and how both processes compete and overlap. I have offered a solution for smooth handover and overlaps. In every organization, there are many silo processes for every functional department, but there is little visibility to the overall organization process that pull all the parts together. Since there is a myth that if projects fail, IT is responsible, driving most of

the process development within only IT leaves the rest of the organization behind. The fact of the matter is implementing an IT system per clients' requirements and reaping benefits from that system are two distinct activities. The first is concerned with providing a system on time, within budget per the scope agreed upon with our clients. The second deals with process management and what does this implementation help with and how do the receivers of this new system measure the value and derive benefit out of it. One would think this should have been done during ROI in the project's early stages, not after the system is implemented.

Since IT has been flagged guilty in meeting project deadlines, we find process implementation is only done within IT and as if the business side of the organization had nothing to do with it. Speaking with many professional colleagues in the project management discipline representing various different industries, one common thread was shared and it was that project management is meant for IT and although the business side of the company has projects that need to go through the same steps and procedures, we find the discipline is stressed in IT more. Similarly with process management, we find pockets of the organization have processes and mostly in IT; however, the whole integration and flow of events to shorten our production cycle, reduce cost, or innovate new and better ways to attract and retain clients can not be done by stressing processes within IT only.

Process management is about managing the process enterprise from start to finish crossing all functions and disciplines within an organization, engaging all people within that

organization to see the big picture; therefore, measuring it will not involve a report that the CxO gets from a particular department only, it should be a discipline that all employees seek within their own domain to create a process-centric organization. With tighter budgets to manage, poor enterprise project performance, and higher expectations from CEO's and CFO's, organizations will need to optimize, establish or re-evaluate their processes to determine areas of opportunities, success, or failure and respond accordingly

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