

Reaping benefits from Business Process Mapping

The Problem with Business Process Definition

The main reason for the failure of application software implementations is a failure to properly specify the business system requirements; generally compounded by a lack of an accurate understanding of the business' current processes.

Traditionally, defining a business' system has been difficult. The question, "What do you want your system to do?" has no context unless it is based on a clear definition of what their current systems do.

Processes are rarely designed; they evolve over time and end up incorporating bad practice, waste and redundancy. Applying automated systems to such foundations merely embeds the inefficiencies and makes them more resistant to future change. Therefore, before looking at future needs, current processes must be reviewed and simplified. In the process it is possible to find that up to half of the current process steps are no longer required.

Processes are used by people. Their involvement and understanding is critical to a successful outcome. However, involving the necessary people is so problematic and costly that organizations rarely commit to the exercise properly.

Traditional Business Process Definition

Currently the main challenge faced by an organization in achieving this is the large time commitment of management, staff and consultants required to undertake the analysis and review project. This is due to the way in which it has to be managed.

Five steps are involved:

1. A consultant facilitator leads the discussion and review with management and staff providing information about current practices. Another consultant takes notes of what is said and what is decided.
2. The consultants return to their offices and convert their notes into documents using separate text and diagramming tools; usually Microsoft Word and Visio.
3. Some days later the draft documents are submitted for review by the meeting attendees, who by this time will have other priorities on their mind. They may wait several days before reviewing the document and when they do they have difficulty recalling what was said.
4. Changes to the draft document are suggested by attendees. Another meeting may be held to resolve disputes between individual views but trying to get the original attendees together is difficult and by the time they have reconvened recollection of their original discussions is poor.
5. Error and compromise introduced through the extended process are repeated in all functional areas of the organization being reviewed. Every time changes are introduced the consultants need to ensure that they correctly modify both the text and the associated diagrams - not only in terms of synchronizing the wording and flow but also ensuring the integrity of the process. For example, if entry of a resource is removed from an order taking process (e.g. selecting the Sales Rep) associated references to the resource should also be removed (such as a subsequent debt collection activity for the Rep).

With the constant pressure to change processes and improve efficiency a company needs a regular process review program, at least quarterly, rather than waiting till inefficiencies are impacting the bottom line. However, current technology makes the process review exercise so problematic that they are undertaken rarely, if ever.

Interactive Business Process Definition using XSOL Mapping

XSOL Mapping is designed to overcome the existing problems with process definition by enabling discussion; review and documentation to take place simultaneously.

The benefits of the interactivity of XSOL Mapping are dramatic; quoting the Business Information Manager of a large consumer goods manufacturer, “We have achieved more in today’s workshop than we have done in the past six months.” A consultant leads the discussion, entering what attendees say, displaying the resulting diagram and modifying the content immediately where processes can be improved.

The result is that all attendees depart from the review meeting having:

- a) Agreed the nature of the current processes
- b) Agreed changes to be made to improve the processes
- c) Agreed who is responsible for making the process improvements
- d) A better understanding of how the whole process operates, not just their part
- e) A hard copy of the process definition documentation that they have agreed to
- f) Improved productivity substantially and added big dollars to the bottom line
- g) Set the date for the next process improvement meeting

These results are achieved in a fraction of the time, with far greater accuracy and more beneficial outcomes than current business process definition methods. More importantly it enables the organization to make process improvement an ongoing part of its practices.

The Benefits of XSOL Mapping Interactive Business Process Definition

With XSOL Mapping it is now possible for any organization to achieve:

1. A clear detailed definition of the organization’s existing processes that all staff have agreed is the way in which they work.
2. The simplification and improvement of existing processes with identification and elimination of redundant and incorrect activities.
3. Greater productivity and lower operation lead-times and cost, without adversely affecting ongoing day-to-day operation by tying up significant employee time.
4. Making induction of new staff easier and allowing greater use of temporary staff by providing accurate and up-to-date Procedure Manuals, that are only ‘printed’ (on paper or online) when an employee needs one. Changes made to processes yesterday are included in manuals printed today.
5. The automatic preparation of a Request for Proposal (RFP) document to be used for going to the market for a new application software product, showing exactly what the organization requires from the products being proposed.
6. The buy-in of staff to the tasks with which they are involved both through their participation in defining their own process improvements and through having a better understanding of the business as a whole and the role they fulfil.

What are Business Processes?

All business is undertaken as processes, regardless of industry, locale, language, or whatever - this is a fact. Within most organizations some processes are computerized and so dictated by the application software. Most are manual and the process is determined, at best, by a procedures manual, or failing that local knowledge. Typically manual processes are a mixture of both written procedures and unrecorded personal experience.

A company that conducts it’s business using processes that are efficient, controlled, flexible, well documented and regularly reviewed is in control of its operation, able to satisfy its customers, minimize costs and overheads - and thus maximize profits. The company has a blueprint of how everything works, who does what, under what conditions, where the interactions are, and can adapt to change whilst at the same time being aware of the implications of that change. They are prepared!

Who participates in the Business Process Mapping?

Business process mapping requires:

- A sponsor; someone within the company who can champion the cause of bringing efficiency and orderliness to the workplace - to a specific area or company-wide
- Selected staff members who participate in the processes being mapped. Their input is vital in terms of buy-in to the project and intimate knowledge of the process.
- Partners (suppliers, customers, etc) where applicable, to gain co-operation and buy-in, but also to be aware of their processes and how to best operate for the greatest gain to be achieved by all parties.
- A consultant facilitator well versed in the area of business processes who can assist, suggest and validate the process mapping

How is Business Process Mapping undertaken – the XSOL way?

The following scenario typifies the business process mapping operation:

Someone within the organization, typically the sponsor, sees a need to review their processes, whether for improving productivity, to get product to market quicker, to accommodate impending change, or simply to document how things happen. They see the need; they have a vision.

The business area for review is identified, desired outcomes specified, and metrics that can assist with measuring the results of the process mapping are logged.

The existing process is discussed, with management and workers, and the results of the discussions captured using XSOL Mapping, defining:

- the operations within the process,
- the activities within each operation
- the activity type
- who does it
- the workflow to link all of the operations together.

This definition is at a high level of granularity with captions only (e.g. Enter Order, Storeman, Manual task). In a very short timeframe it can provide an overview of the process in a diagrammatic form that is easily understood by all participants.

The existing process can then be discussed and reviewed to identify:

- Areas of duplicated effort
- Actions that can be eliminated by changing the workflow
- Opportunities to reduce the participants in the process
- Opportunities to reduce times by undertaking operations simultaneously
- Inclusion of control points to ensure that what is to be done is in fact done
- The inclusion of checks to identify those situations outside accepted limits that can be handled as they arise.

The results of the review are added to the XSOL Mapping process map, interactively whilst the discussion and review are in progress

Post review the map becomes the blueprint for the revised process. It can be printed in a Procedure Manual format at the push of a button and it is available for subsequent change when the need arises. It can also be published on an intranet for all to see and review.

Given buy-in from management and staff in the mapping exercise, implementing changes to the current process is made as easy as possible. Once the new process is implemented, any metrics that measure the effectiveness of the change should be re-taken and evaluated

Given the success of that BPM exercise, now decide which process is next