

Business process mapping

A Guest Article by Adam Garland
October 2010

Business process mapping

A Guest Article by Adam Garland for TCii Strategic and Management Consultants

Plane, trains, automobiles – and business

Imagine how airplanes, trains or cars would be built if there were no formal designs, no planning and no blueprints. Would you drive a car, fly in a plane or travel by train?

A business is no different from trains, planes and automobiles – or at least it shouldn't be. A product designer first draws up the plans to enable analysis of the design of a product, to see all the parts and how they work together. In the same way, a business should have blueprints – more commonly known as process maps – to see all the business activities within the process and how they relate to each other.

Performance begins with design

If we cannot see all the activities of a process and their relationships with other activities, we cannot know whether changing one part of the process will affect other parts (unexpected consequences). If we don't know what the big picture looks like, we cannot know the effect of making changes to different parts of the business.

Changes become risky without a set of process blueprints. Having a set of business blueprints allows companies to respond to change more quickly. Remember, performance begins with design.

It is surprisingly difficult to get others to even conceive of the notion that businesses, just like planes and trains, have an actual design that will largely shape the performance of the business. It all starts with design, and the executive team really needs to understand what changes need to be made to the design of the business in order for it to remain competitive.

Where do we begin?

The first thing to recognise is that there are tools and expertise that will enable your business to help itself. Secondly, understanding the mapping process is not rocket science. You already have most of the tools and all of the knowledge. It is just a case of getting started.

Processes are simply inputs, activities and outputs all joined up together to produce business blueprints. Once you have a blueprint you can take a step-by-step walkthrough of your business.

Business process mapping

A Guest Article by Adam Garland for TCii Strategic and Management Consultants

Business process mapping (BPM) is one of the fastest growing markets in business. It is supported by an expanding software market that offers effective organisational software solutions for improving business processes, increasing efficiency and complying with regulations.

Most new technologies suffer from a dearth of good information, which leads to confusion and misconceptions. Business process management is no exception. Let's take a look of some of the myths.

Myth #1: BPM is a project we need to do

Creating your blueprint shouldn't be a one-time project that comes to an end. Business process management is a discipline, and is something that should be revisited. The discipline comes from measuring how a process is performing and how you constantly improve and optimise the process.

The emphasis of BPM is on the cycle: how a company goes about defining its processes: mapping, simulating, deploying, then monitoring and analysing the process, and only then do we optimise. Only then do we revisit and redefine the process. It is a cycle.

Myth #2: BPM is about software tools and technology

BPM is not dependent on software tools. There are many basic mapping tools widely available to all, in existing in-house programs such as Word and Visio. Capturing your business activities and process brings significant impact by enabling managers to make quicker, more informed and better decisions.

Having a set of blueprints as a reference source gives stakeholders more visibility over their business processes and helps businesses to foresee future problems using trend analysis, improve organisational efficiency, minimise risks, enforce organisational policies and reduce internal process complexity.

Myth #3: BPM is only for BPM experts or business analysts

We are surrounded by processes. They are embedded in our lives. We know them as routines. Generally we don't have a clear picture of what we do and how we do it. The reasons for this are twofold.

Firstly, we don't have documented the level of information or detail that is required to fully understand what it is we do. This is called explicit knowledge.

Secondly, the knowledge required to complete the picture comes in the form of experience and knowledge that is built up over time and resides in people's

Business process mapping

A Guest Article by Adam Garland for TCii Strategic and Management Consultants

heads – the tacit knowledge. To get a clear picture we need to marry the explicit to the tacit.

The solution is to run a workshop with those who have the explicit and the tacit knowledge, and simply write it down. When documenting a process you will need an easy-to-understand format. One method is to document the input, the activity and the output.

- **Input:** When we do an activity, or the trigger for starting something.
- **Activity:** What we do – a clear description of the task.
- **Output:** Why we do it – the outcome of the activity.

Run a workshop to capture the process with your business people. Remember that this is not an IT project. Business users should create their own process. This will help embed ownership and accountability. Once the first process is documented you have an immediate benefit: you have begun your BPM cycle. These are your first steps to a repeatable, measurable, predictable and rigorous business process.

Myth #4: BPM is expensive

Hopefully we have already shown you that starting BPM is straightforward: you have the tools and the knowledge. However, if you want to invest in BPM tools, they no longer require large investments in infrastructure. Most require a Windows 2003 server and an SQL server 2005 database installed.

BPM software is usually priced per user, per company or per process. Software as a service is now available, so BPM software can also be rented, saving money on maintenance and IT staff.

Adam Garland
Managing Director – One BPM

If you would like more information on any of the points covered in this Guest Article, please contact **TCii** on **020 7099 2621**.