

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

Table of Content

- [Are Business Process Improvement Efforts Doomed to Fail?](#)
- [How Do You Communicate a New Business Process?](#)
- [Does Business Process Improvement Work Require Certification?](#)
- [Where Do Ideas Come From in Business Process Improvement?](#)
- [Is There a Difference Between a Process Owner and a Process Sponsor?](#)
- [Should Employees Focus on "Activities" or "Results" to Achieve Business Process Improvement?](#)
- [Systems Thinking and the Business Process Owner](#)
- [The Role of Innovation in Business Process Improvement](#)
- [Can the Healthcare Industry Improve Its Business Processes?](#)
- [Can Business Process Improvement Help When a Company Only Wants to Reduce Costs?](#)
- [Will Employees Support Business Process Improvement?](#)
- [What is the Relationship between Business Rules and Business Processes?](#)
- [The SaaS Model and BPI](#)
- [Anyone Can Do Business Process Improvement](#)
- [How Do You Ensure that Improved Business Processes Remain Relevant?](#)
- [Planning for Challenges when Implementing Business Process Improvement](#)
- [Applying "Agile" Methodology to Business Process Improvement](#)
- [When they Say "it can't be done" in Business Process Improvement](#)
- [When Executives Want Quick Results](#)
- [The Importance of a Process Description](#)
- [The Most Valuable Question in BPI Work](#)
- [The Speed of Business Process Improvement](#)
- [How Long Has Business Process Improvement Been Around?](#)

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

Are Business Process Improvement Efforts Doomed to Fail?

01/16/2012

You have surely heard the sayings:

- “Culture trumps process every time.”
- “70% of change efforts fail.”

Does that mean that Business Process Improvement (BPI) must fail? Absolutely not! New processes usually make sense to employees, yet why do the above sayings still resonate?

It could have to do with a lack of employee engagement in the work, the inability to clearly link the change with improved customer satisfaction and/or financial savings, or the need to better show how the employees fit into the new process. If employees do not recognize the need for change, fear they may lose their job, feel they may have outdated skills, or feel that they may not succeed, then they will naturally resist the change.

When you develop the implementation plan for a BPI project, make certain to consider these points to ensure a successful process improvement effort. Include specific key messages in your communication plan to address the known areas of employee concern.

How Do You Communicate a New Business Process?

01/29/2012

When you have finished redesigning a business process, how do you communicate the change with stakeholders and impacted employees?

Sometimes you see a process lead share the process map they created, but do you think that anyone, not involved in the work, would actually read the map? I would not count on it!

For stakeholders, provide an overview of the work that includes a summary, goals, key findings, and a high-level process map. This map should take the detailed map and pull it up (or summarize it) into a one-page view of the most important activities with a notation on how to gain a deeper level explanation if desired.

For impacted employees, the communication plan should include what is changing and why,

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

their role and responsibility in the new process, an outline of upcoming training on the new process, and a contact for additional information.

Whenever communicating change, it helps to communicate **often** and to use **multiple** vehicles. It does not seem that you can ever **over** communicate.

Business Process Improvement is the #1 Area Organizations Spend their Time
02/12/2012

In the new 2011-2012 CedarCrestone HR System Survey **business process improvement** (BPI) again tops the list of where organizations are spending their time...although the survey indicates that this is even stronger this year.

CedarCrestone conducted their 14th annual survey on HR systems and 71% of respondents identified BPI as the number one area where they spend their time, and 55% indicate it is the number one area where they spend their budget. [Visit their web site](#) for the complete survey.

Does Business Process Improvement Work Require Certification?
03/10/2012

How important is it to have a certification in Business Process Improvement? Does becoming a Black Belt buy you anything?

If you have followed my postings over the past few years, you know that I encourage all employees to become involved in process improvement. Every single employee can make a difference at their workplace by examining what and how they perform their day-to-day tasks.

Experience is so important because there is no better teacher than failure. There is not one project I led that I did not learn something new – even today, after all my years of experience. It usually has to do with the people side of the projects and I hope that I never stop learning. No certification program can teach you about human behavior.

I think certification does have a place if you are looking for a new job because a recruiter (who most likely does not understand BPI), may just want to check the box that says “certification.” They have no other way to evaluate a person’s skill level. Certification though is no guarantee

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

of success.

I liken certification to a college degree. You may work for a company and have a great job, but you cannot receive a promotion because you do not have a bachelor's degree. It has nothing to do with your ability, but it can hold you back from progressing in your career. You have to make the decision whether certification is right for you.

I guess I have seen too many colleagues with certifications who had no idea how to lead a BPI project.

Where Do Ideas Come From in Business Process Improvement?

03/24/2012

Do process improvement ideas come from the executive suite, a functional area like HR or IT, the operations where employees work day in and day out, or by a process improvement team? Does a company have to create a continuous improvement team, an innovation team, a six sigma team, or a new term I read the other day an "agility capture team" to generate process improvement ideas?

Not really! Employees can do a lot without official sponsorship by simply thinking about what he or she does in their job every day as a **process**. As an employee, identify the most frustrating business process you deal with right now and develop a *scope definition document* on that process (see step 2 in my book). You will surprise yourself at how much information you can gather just by talking to colleagues, and no one will object to you trying to better understand a particular process. Once you have a basic understanding of the process, try drawing a process map (step 3) and then think about the improvement techniques you can apply (step 6).

Make a recommendation based on your analysis and you may be surprised at how well your organization reacts. Not many managers are against an employee trying to make their business processes more effective. Just stick to a process that you work with every day.

So, who comes up with an improvement idea does not matter, and what you call a team focused on improvement does not matter. Remember the Nike slogan that says:

"Just Do It !"

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

Is There a Difference Between a Process Owner and a Process Sponsor?

04/02/2012

A reader asked me if I used the terms process “owner” and process “sponsor” interchangeably.

While the two are different, I find that in my experience I usually find myself working with the process owner as the **sponsor** of the process improvement work.

Technically though, the process owner is the one person who has ultimate responsibility for the process even if the process touches multiple departments. If you think of the hiring process, who would you say “owns” that process? While you can debate ownership, the head of recruiting would most likely sponsor a process improvement effort, and they may be the owner because he or she has to answer for the number of open vacancies.

What is your experience? Do you see clear distinctions or more similarities?

Should Employees Focus on "Activities" or "Results" to Achieve Business Process Improvement?

04/08/2012

On the one hand, if a manager bases employee goals on **results**, then this helps the employee to focus on the two to three most important outcomes. The results should directly relate to the delivery of customer or client needs.

On the other hand, business process improvement results from streamlining or eliminating non-value added **activities**. Employees should examine the processes they use every day to identify activities that do not contribute to delivering customer needs.

So, what is the answer to this question?

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG

by Susan Page

Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

Systems Thinking and the Business Process Owner

04/20/2012

A few posts ago I discussed the difference between a “sponsor” and “owner” in business process work, and some readers thought that I downplayed the owner’s role...so, thought I would clarify.

The process owner has responsibility for the end-to-end process, is the one who can bring multiple departments together, and the person who has ultimate responsibility for the process delivering what the client/customer requires from the process.

Do you remember Peter Senge’s work around **systems thinking**? At the time when his work first surfaced over twenty years ago, it provided us with a common language to explain the interconnectivity of events. He explains systems thinking as the “discipline for seeing wholes.” Applying this conceptual framework to a business process brings clarity to the impact that each activity has on the “whole” because it helps us to work across organizational boundaries and understand the downstream impacts.

Looking at the end-to-end business process allows a process owner to see the whole and understand how each activity is connected, thus providing clear opportunities where to make improvements.

The Role of Innovation in Business Process Improvement

05/13/2012

I was reading an article in the Harvard Business Review about innovation and it so clearly relates to BPI that I thought it was worth sharing.

Innovation deals with the unknown and the authors state how difficult it is to create something that never existed before (e.g., a new process) because you cannot predict the outcome.

In BPI work I have always said that it is fine to lead an improvement effort around a business process that you do NOT know – actually I find it better! By not knowing the intricacies of a business process, you automatically think differently, and your job as the facilitator is to ask thought-provoking questions. As you see project team members falling into an area of predictability, challenge them. Your best weapon is to simply ask “why!”

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

Can the Healthcare Industry Improve Its Business Processes?

05/22/2012

If you work in the healthcare industry, you may witness business processes that require attention – whether it is the record keeping, system support, or scheduling timeframes.

If you focus on the customer (the patient), then you will improve! What do patients want? They want to have competent doctors and staff, to be treated like a person and not a number, and to move through the system with minimal bureaucracy.

If the medical systems can support the human process, then healthcare providers will win. But, the question is...how do you focus leadership on the right target?

Can Business Process Improvement Help When a Company Only Wants to Reduce Costs?

05/28/2012

Have you ever been in a situation when management is on a drive to reduce costs – they want to build the product (or deliver the service) cheaper and faster? And, they do not see business process improvement as a tool to help because they think BPI costs too much.

Unfortunately, this is a battle almost impossible to win without proof. So prove it! Pick a business process that can drive savings and demonstrate the cost savings by providing a before and after view of the process, along with the cost structure.

Drive any proof around what executives have on his or her mind. For example, if they care about faster turnaround, focus on cycle time as proof; if they care about reducing the number of employees, focus on process time, bureaucracy, duplication, and handoffs as proof; and if they care about customers, focus on value added activities and cycle time as proof.

My favorite question is, **“What price do you put on quality?”**

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

Will Employees Support Business Process Improvement?

06/08/2012

I have written a few blog postings on getting employees involved in BPI work, but the question still remains – will employees support improvement efforts or will they sabotage them?

The answer depends on the culture, the leadership, and the company's history.

- Is there a culture of trust?
- Has the leadership in the company changed?
- What has happened in the past?

All these parameters impact how employees react to business process improvement. Leadership has to mold the culture, which takes time. I think the key to building a supportive change culture is developing **trust**, but this is easier said than done. Can employees trust what their leadership says? Do managers demonstrate trust in their employees?

There are different levels of trust and organizations can develop each level over time. Start with improving relationships by sharing information and admitting mistakes. I recall Stephen Covey talking about an “emotional bank account,” and I think it is a good analogy. Each action an individual takes either adds to, or withdraws from, his or her emotional bank account.

What is the level of trustworthiness is in your emotional bank account?

What is the Relationship between Business Rules and Business Processes?

06/17/2012

In talking with a reader last week he asked about how he should incorporate the business rules into his work and I recalled reading an exchange on one of the social networks about this same topic.

In my view, business processes define the “how,” and each activity in the process may rely on many things including business rules, to support implementation. Business rules should *guide* the process flow. So, I see a connection between business rules and business processes although they are not usually developed at the same time. In fact, if a business rule changes, it may require that the business process change.

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG

by Susan Page

Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

You can depict business rules in a business process if necessary. For example, in a compensation business process you may include a decision point where the business follows a different path depending on whether a proposed salary increase is above or below a certain percentage. This step in the process is based on a business rule.

Maybe the confusion is simply about terminology. What is a business rule? Is it the same as a policy, guideline, or something else?

The SaaS Model and BPI

06/26/2012

How do companies balance the influx of SaaS (Software-as-a-Service) providers with the need for unique business processes? While the SaaS financial model relies on standardization, companies differentiate themselves from competitors by their business processes, among other things.

So, how can a company take advantage of the economic sense of the SaaS model while still differentiating their company in the market?

Anyone Can Do Business Process Improvement

07/08/2012

BPI work is not rocket science. If you have read my blog over time, you know that I encourage everyone to get involved in improving their business processes. However, I think it is worth repeating because I just read something that talked about the complexities involved in BPI work. You can choose to make BPI complex or simple. I chose simplicity.

Think about what you do every day – at home, not just at work. Every morning you follow a **process** to get you and your family out of the house on time. It may not be a formal **process**, but it is a **process**.

If you think about how you can cut 15 minutes off your morning prep time, you are thinking about how to reduce your “cycle” time. Cycle time is the overall time required to do something – in this example, start counting the time consumed from the moment you wake up until you walk out the door. My cycle time is around 90 minutes.

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

Apply this same concept to what you do at work. There is no secret weapon to BPI, and anyone can do it.

In *The Power of Business Process Improvement*, I purposely avoid technical terminology and use simple language that anyone can understand because I want to encourage everyone to get involved because that is where the **power** of business process improvement lies.

Thoughts? Do I make it sound too simple?

How Do You Ensure that Improved Business Processes Remain Relevant?

07/24/2012

After improving a business process, you should develop a plan to make certain that the new process remains relevant to the customer/client needs.

The **Continuous Improvement Plan** summarizes the activities necessary to maintain a focus on the business process and should outline how frequently to perform each activity, identify any sources of data used, the technique or method used, and who performs the activity.

Before leaving a business process you just worked on, create a plan so that everyone can see the tasks required to keep the process alive and adaptable to the changing business climate. For example, how often will you review the customer/client needs – quarterly, semi annually, annually? What method will you use to collect this information – sales figures, conversation, or survey?

This plan should be short and include key activities - something you will use and not simply put in a drawer! A plan helps you take action, so dedicate a couple of hours to develop a plan before moving on to the next business process.

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

Planning for Challenges when Implementing Business Process Improvement
08/05/2012

Implementing a new business process (or new technology in support of the new process), requires change and we know how much employees like change. We know that we should involve those affected by change in the improvement effort, but *who* and *when*.

As the project team maps out the new business process, identify who will be impacted by the change and how the change will affect them. Capture why the team recommends the process change because this rationale helps explain the importance of the change to the customer. Use the customer as the common denominator that all parties can appreciate. I use a document called an ***impact analysis*** and it includes:

- Process change – the *what*
- Rationale – the *why*
- Department or area impacted – the *who*
- Individuals impacted – the *who*
- Action that has to occur – the *next steps*

Collecting this information as you design the new process helps you to remember all affected parties and build a better engagement plan.

Applying “Agile” Methodology to Business Process Improvement
08/12/2012

You read a lot about the agile methodology around IT projects and project management techniques. Why is it such a hot topic and can you apply “agile” to business process improvement?

Core to the agile approach is reducing the number of requirements, using prototypes to test ideas, making the work visible, and moving quickly through solution iterations. It differs significantly from IT’s traditional waterfall approach to projects. IT projects usually involve intense requirements gathering sessions and, as a result, sponsors include everything but the kitchen sink, mostly because they believe that they have one chance to get everything in. The financial budgeting process does not provide the flexibility to use an iterative design approach and so we keep repeating the traditional method.

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

Sponsors should define the most important requirements (the ones that the customer cannot live without) and focus on those first. In business process improvement, use the **scope definition document** to narrow the focus area. Once you define your customer and the customer's needs, use this information to identify the *start* and *end* of the business process. In this way, you focus on a smaller subset of the process and show an impact quicker.

When they Say "it can't be done" in Business Process Improvement
08/21/2012

Have you ever heard one of your colleagues say "it can't be done?" When you attempt to change a business process and you hear this phrase, it usually stems from an existing business practice, policy, regulation, or legal requirement.

But how true is this statement? Can the process be changed?

Whenever you hear someone say this stop for a minute and ask them to explain. You will hear about complexity, the requirement to do something a certain way, or the law that the company must follow. Of course you have to follow the law and the policies of your company, but you usually can uncover more flexibility than you might think.

While a regulation may require certain outcomes, often the "how" has been internally generated. Identify both the real requirement and the processes management has put in place to deliver against the requirement. Separate what is mandatory and what is self-imposed. You will find more reports, audits, and measurements than needed. Work to eliminate unnecessary tasks by demonstrating how the new process will deliver against the real requirement.

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

When Executives Want Quick Results

09/01/2012

In talking with a colleague, Samantha, this week she shared her frustration about the executive leadership at her company who wanted her to focus all process improvement efforts on the “low hanging fruit.” Does this scenario sound familiar?

Executives often lean towards quick wins because they want results in the current fiscal year (or even the current quarter). Based on their past experience with business process improvement, they may feel that it takes too long and they want to impact the financial results quickly. You cannot really blame them. They have accountability for revenues.

I suggested that Samantha revisit step 1 (of the 10 step process I propose) and identify prioritization criteria that she can apply to the process inventory she developed. The most important step though is gaining executive buy-in to the criteria up front, **before** applying it to the process inventory. If you cannot gain agreement, adapt the criteria as required to make certain that the executives will support the results of the prioritization.

Establishing prioritization criteria provides a vehicle to engage the executives. After applying the criteria to the process inventory, you have another occasion to discuss a meaningful topic with the executives. If the results of the process prioritization do not reflect what the executives consider of utmost importance, determine why your work and the executive’s viewpoints seem disconnected, and decide whether you have to change the criteria, scale, or weighting used.

If you gain agreement up front on your criteria, you will have more success with the results.

The Importance of a Process Description

10/19/2012

Would you assume that all employees understand the purpose of a business process? It may seem obvious if you have a process named the “hiring process,” but this is not always the case.

Recently, I assumed project management responsibility for a software implementation project that had started over six months ago. The project team had identified over 50 business processes and no one took the time to document the process definitions or set the process boundaries. The project includes processes such as *provider management*, *travel medicine*, and

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

medical surveillance.

The first task you should perform after selecting a business process to improve is to **Establish the Foundation** (step 2 in the 10 steps I propose). This step helps with the following:

- building a common understanding across an organization
- reducing scope creep
- creating standard operating procedures

For more details on establishing the foundation, read my 4/17/2011 blog.

The Most Valuable Question in BPI Work

10/28/2012

Anyone who has led a business process improvement effort has experienced the difficulty in creating a future state process. After all, this requires employees to change and we know that most people do not like change (unless until they know that they are safe from any negative impact).

Use the simple question WHY? Asking “why” will prove to be one of your best weapons in completing BPI work. Even when employees give you an answer, you can ask “why” as a follow-up question to further fine-tune the process.

- Why does a delay exist?
- Why is the form sent to the next-level manager?
- Why can't the manager be trusted to know whether an employee is eligible for a promotion?
- Why can't you eliminate this activity – what value does it add to the customer?
- Why does the manager require approval to spend his or her budget?
- Why won't a spot audit work instead of reviewing every instance?
- Many times you will find that the answer simply supports the status quo. Why can't you change it?

Remember to think about the employees involved and help to diffuse the natural instinct all human beings have around fear – fear of the unknown. W. Edwards Demings said, “Drive out fear. No one can put in his best performance unless he feels secure.”

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

The Speed of Business Process Improvement

11/18/2012

You have heard it before - the only constant is **change**. Everyone can see the speed of change increasing. Just look at technology (and mobile devices) over the past year. The same is true in business process improvement (BPI) work.

No longer can companies afford to take months to make process changes; instead, they must adapt in days or weeks. But how?

1. Know your process inventory.
2. Know your customers and what they want - talk to them, keep an eye on social media.
3. Know your priorities - based on customers, process cycles, market changes, or competition.
4. Watch the changing technology - how does it impact your processes and, more importantly, how can it help to improve them?

The speed of **continuous improvement** keeps getting faster and faster. You can never rest on your laurels* because if you do, someone else is there waiting to knock it off.

* Do you know the source of *resting on your laurels*? "Laurels" refer to the wreath of laurel leaves placed on a victor's head for achievement back in early Athens, Greece. "Don't rest on your laurels" means to **continue the efforts to achieve** and not rely on previous achievements.

How Long Has Business Process Improvement Been Around?

12/02/2012

A long time and it will likely remain with us forever because every new wave of managers will continue to look for ways to improve the way employees do their work.

Although today's process improvement evolution easily goes back over one hundred years, even the Romans and Greeks demonstrated evidence of looking for ways to make improvements. After all, Sigma is a Greek symbol represented by "σ." In the late 18th century, Eli Whitney automated the removal of cotton seeds with his invention after observing the amount of work required to remove cotton seeds by hand.

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2012 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: *The Power of Business Process Improvement*

Looking over the past one hundred years, we had the controversial Frederick Taylor in the early 1900s making improvements in productivity; Walter Shewhart creating the first sketch of a modern control chart in 1924; W. Edward Deming (influenced by Shewhart), known as the father of the modern quality movement helped energize the concept of Total Quality Management in the 1950s; and Michael Hammer introducing reengineering in the 1990s.

So many individuals have contributed to process improvement over the years and many more will continue. I do wonder who will be the next Deming.

What do you think?