

BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT 2014 to 2018 BLOG
by Susan Page
Author of: The Power of Business Process Improvement

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The Recruitment Process and the Cost of a Bad Hire

9/7/2018

Everyone has probably made a bad hire at some time in their career and paid the price, whether financial, emotional, or culture related. The Labor Department estimates it can cost one-third of a new hire's annual salary to replace him or her and the costs increase the higher up in the organization the turnover occurs. From an emotional level, the hiring manager will experience a terribly frustrating period, and the organization will suffer from reduced employee engagement as employees witness the turmoil.

Why do so many bad hires occur? In a survey about why companies make a bad hire, [CareerBuilder](#) found that 43 percent of respondents said they made a bad hire because they felt they needed to hire someone quickly. I know I have done that. In the new book I'm writing, tentatively called *Employee Performance: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly*, I share some "bad hires" in the UGLY chapter.

So, how can you improve the recruitment process to avoid bad hires? An integrated Human Capital Management (HCM) system that automates the recruitment process can help with the **administrative** side of recruiting (creating requisitions, managing workflows, integrating with company career websites, allowing candidates to apply online, onboarding new hires, and tracking/reporting), but they do **not** help with making better, quality hires. You know, the decision making side of hiring.

While you can automate many steps in the recruitment process, you cannot automate:

- **Interviewing:** start by making certain you know what you want in your position (knowledge, skills, behaviors), ask good questions (a skill in itself), and include the correct people in the interview process (include technical people to probe deeper into a candidate's skill set when appropriate).
- **References:** call *all* references and do this *yourself* (do not delegate), obtain additional references from the individuals you speak with, spend significant time on this part of the process, and use a third-party evaluation vendor if available as an additional point of reference.
- **Onboard:** develop a custom 30, 60, and 90-day onboarding plan to help the new employee successfully integrate into your organization, including how you will measure the employee's performance. Does your company have a probationary period? You should know the answer and pay attention to the dates. If your new hire does not perform as expected, cut your losses and terminate the employee.

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Do you have other key points to avoid making a bad hire?

Protocol equals Bureaucracy in Medical Administrative Processes

8/11/2018

Business process improvement (BPI) is all about innovation. You have to think about how to perform activities differently eliminating bureaucracy, among other things. But, what about **protocols** in the medical field? Do you see any relationship between **bureaucracy** and **protocol**?

I just experienced a week-long session with a family member at a medical facility and heard the word “protocol” every time I questioned why something took so long. It became obvious that **protocol** was simply another word for **bureaucracy**.

In medical facilities though, most people do not question protocols. The word itself seems to make every delay or every step okay because of the criticality of medical treatments. While following step-by-step procedures in the medical field are important, after all lives are at stake, it does not give license to allowing bureaucracy to seep in little by little. It may seem intimidating to question protocol in the medical profession, but try to differentiate necessity from bureaucracy.

For example, the customer (i.e., the patient) wants effective treatment, but what about moving through the process efficiently? Why is there a two to three hour wait between your first appointment and your second appointment at the same facility? The answer....**protocol**.

CEOs of medical facilities should examine their administrative business processes to identify what their customers want (of course, excellent care), but what else? Examine protocols and identify where bureaucracy resides and think of how to improve the overall cycle time without negatively affecting care. Can you reduce wait times, hire more staff, rework procedures, eliminate steps, or automate? Find your roadblocks and eliminate them.

I find the nurses and the entire medical staffs work hard, but the inefficiency of the business processes make for a poor customer experience. If you do not feel well, or you're with someone you love who doesn't feel well, inefficiency just adds stress to an already stressful situation.

Thinking of patients as customers may help CEOs improve their organization's administrative processes. Of course, focus on care as the top priority, but do not use the importance of care as an excuse for inefficient business processes.

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Simplify your Business Processes

7/10/2018

Step 6 of the 10 steps to business process improvement is **Apply Improvement Techniques**. One of the techniques outlined in this chapter is **simplification**.

After eliminating bureaucracy, non-value added activities, and duplication, focus on **simplifying** your business processes. **Simplification**, or streamlining, means reducing or eliminating the complexity of an activity in a business process so that the process becomes easier to understand and more efficient.

Over time, our business processes become increasingly burdensome as we accommodate changes in the business. We cause our processes to become bloated by continually adding complexity. Begin by evaluating each step in the business process and define how to simplify each one, identifying who has accountability for the process and making certain only one person has accountability for the **end-to-end** process, and eliminating any unnecessary handoffs.

The simpler you make the business process, the easier you can tell what's working and what does not meet your customer needs.

Is the Veteran's Administration Capable of Performing Process Improvement?

6/15/2017

A friend recently visited the local Veteran's Administration (VA) clinic and, as usual, shared his frustration with me after his appointment. It wasn't his frustration with the doctor he finally saw; it was with the burdensome administrative processes in place. President Trump appointed David J. Shulkin as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and he received confirmation on February 13, 2017, but improvements do not seem forthcoming. Okay, only four months have passed since his appointment, but he previously had responsibility for the veteran's health care system for almost two years under President Obama. Mr. Shulkin should have started asking the right questions by now.

Shulkin could have started a process improvement effort by identifying and *prioritizing* the VA's internal administrative processes, by clarifying the identity of the customer and what they want from the process so the VA can deliver an **effective** business process, and by talking to employees who work in the process day to day so the VA can deliver an **efficient** business

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process.

Does the VA leadership even know which business process is in the worst shape? The process prioritization table (the key outcome of step 1 of 10 steps to business process improvement) would answer that question.

Does the entire VA organization recognize the veteran as the customer (step 6 of the 10 steps)? Does every employee treat the veteran as a guest? Does the VA know what is considered value added? Do they know what has to change to deliver effectiveness?

Does the VA understand how to make the business processes more efficient (again, step 6 of the 10 steps)? Have they talked to the right people – not just leaders, but the employees who work in the process on a day-to-day basis? No one has ever asked the doctor my friend saw what the doctor thought could be improved, yet he works there and has many ideas.

I doubt anyone would disagree the VA is an immense bureaucracy, but that should not stop Shulkin and his leadership team from taking on a business process improvement effort. Don't you agree that our veterans are worth it?

Eliminate Non-Valued Added Work

7/24/2016

Step 6 of the 10 steps to business process improvement involves applying a series of improvement techniques to a company's existing business processes. One of the techniques, **value added**, requires you to examine the steps included in a business process and eliminate any step that does not add value to the customer. The key question to ask is, "would the customer willingly pay for a step if they knew it existed?"

Think about how you can apply this same concept to your own job on a day-to-day basis:

- Do you do work you believe is not critical?
- Do you have a list of priorities, some of which you never get to...week after week?
- Do you wish you had more time to work on tasks you believe are more important?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you should wonder if what you do every day adds value and makes a difference to your company.

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Start each week by spending 15 minutes examining what is ahead of you for the week and make a list of three things you can eliminate. It may be a meeting, phone call, report, or a project. At the beginning, it may seem impossible – after all, it’s part of your job, but eventually you might be surprised.

What about your boss you may ask.

- If you can assume responsibility for something that contributes real value add, you will make your boss happy. Managers always seem to have more work than employees.
- Have a discussion with your boss about priorities. Is “A,” “B,” or “C” more important? You will quickly learn about true value if “A” always seems to fall to the bottom of the list.
- How can you restructure your job to better align with your company’s goals? Understand what your company wants to achieve and articulate how you can help.

There is no better feeling than when you do something that you can see makes a difference.

Please share an example of something you eliminated here on this blog.

Is There a Role for Reorganizations in Business Process Improvement?

7/11/2016

Everyone has seen reorganizations happen and you most likely have experienced one yourself. How does it feel? Your answer probably depends on how well you fared.

One aspect of BPM (business process management) is taking a *process or enterprise-wide* view of the business instead of a functional view. Although you may find it effective to reorganize this way, many companies find it difficult because functions have expertise. For example, human resources has training, compensation, and performance management expertise; information technology has system implementation, debugging, and software development expertise; and finance has accounting, budgeting, and risk management expertise. So, how do you incorporate a function’s expertise into a process view?

Think of the “customer engagement” process from an enterprise perspective. Let’s use the same three examples to think about how this could work if a company had a process owner of the customer engagement process. The process owner would look at:

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- **Human resources:** are employees measured and rewarded on his or her contribution to customer satisfaction?
- **Information technology:** does the department build tools to help satisfy customers, like a customer management system so employees know everything they should know about a customer to deliver personalized service?
- **Finance:** does the company have a customer friendly accounts receivable process?

Companies can have an enterprise view and still take advantage of functional expertise. It is hard though, do not kid yourself. And, it requires support from the top.

Do you know any companies who have done this successfully?

Is There a Quick Fix to Business Process Improvement?

5/1/2016

When a process does not work, you may hope it will get better on its own or the problem will simply go away. Can you put out the fire and move on to the next problem? I wish I could say yes, but unfortunately....well, you already know the answer.

There is no quick fix to improving business processes. Unless you spend the time uncovering the **root cause** nothing will change. You may temporarily stop the pain, but it will not last for long. When you find yourself short on time or employees, the quick fix becomes *so* attractive. Try to avoid becoming a fire fighter though.

If you followed the nine steps to business process improvement, do not forget the tenth step – *drive continuous improvement*. Only by incorporating this step can you ensure your business process stays relevant to what your customers want. Putting a continuous improvement plan in place will keep you on track and always ahead of the curve.

How to Kill a Business Process Improvement Effort

4/3/2016

Ever think about how to kill a business process improvement effort? It is really very easy – simply blame the employees involved.

When a department stops performing at the desired level, ask what has changed. Have customer needs increased, do you have changing priorities, has the competition for your

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product or service increased, or is it another business impact? Customer needs have a way of increasing over time – the bar continues to rise as you meet existing needs. Priorities continually change as the business stabilizes or evolves. Products and services have to change to keep pace with the competition.

If you start a business process improvement effort by blaming the employees who support the process, the finger pointing can easily go both ways and nobody wins. Sure you may have a problem employee, so deal with him or her. Most employees, though, want to do a good job.

Involve employees who work in the process in the improvement effort and let them know you are not pointing your finger in their direction, but rather looking at how you can collectively improve the process to keep customers engaged and committed to your product/service line.

Involving Other Departments in Business Process Improvement

3/13/2016

If you work in a single department like human resource, finance, or operations you may feel restricted in a business process improvement effort to areas where your department has responsibility. You may feel this way because you have tunnel vision or because you do not feel you have the authority to expand outside of your organizational boundaries.

In the first case, you may have worked in your department so long you can no longer “see” things differently because of limited experiences or you feel caught in the trap of day-to-day routines. In this case, try some mind exercises before beginning an improvement effort. For some ideas try [these ideas](#).

In the second case, think about the handoffs your department makes to other departments and talk with them about how to improve the handoff. Most colleagues want to do a good job and, as long as they look good to their management, they will happily work with you to improve the process. Remember to sell “what’s in it for them.”

Is Technology the Silver Bullet in Business Process Improvement?

3/6/2016

If you follow my blog, you know my answer to this question: ***Should technology drive the process or should the process drive the technology?***

Many companies who focus on process improvement look to technology as the silver bullet. They immediately look for how technology can improve the process. Consultants help promote

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this idea because so many large consulting companies want their share of this huge business potential.

However, when you start with technology, you lose sight of potential lower cost alternatives. Begin by understanding the steps involved in the process, so you can look to remove roadblocks and non-value added steps (steps the customer does not care about, nor wants to pay for, if they knew about the step). Use technology **after** you implement process changes.

Think about the people involved in the process and how you can adjust what employees and vendors do. Evaluating the efficiency of people involved in delivering the results of the process adds to the people/process/technology puzzle. Use technology **after** you implement people changes.

All three components (people, process, and technology) play a role in improving a business process; just save the cost of implementing technology until after you have the most efficient process possible.

Optimizing the Business Process

2/21/2016

Do you remember the work of Peter Senge? He discussed systems thinking, which is the “discipline for seeing wholes.” When you hear colleagues criticize optimizing parts of a business process while sub-optimizing the whole, you should recognize the criticism is directed at departmental process improvement efforts. Is that fair?

Senge is right; your colleagues may be right. Applying Senge’s conceptual framework to a business process highlights the impact each activity has on the “whole” because it helps you to work across organizational boundaries and understand the downstream impacts.

The challenge for many individuals though is the lack of authority to work at the enterprise level (or across organizational boundaries). While the value to performing business process improvement company-wide cannot be diminished, the frequent lack of a process owner can stop this effort. Remember my earlier posts about process owners?

So, what do you do? Nothing?

You can still work on improving your department’s business processes – just make certain to follow the 10 steps to BPI. When you perform step 2, you will clearly understand what your customer or client cares about; and when you perform step 5, you bring in a cross-functional perspective to your work by talking with stakeholders to make sure your changes work for their

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department. Whenever you identify a handoff in your improved process, include the downstream receiver of the output in step 5. By performing this step, you focus on the end-to-end process, which in turn helps you to optimize the whole.

The Impact of “Followers” in a Business Process Improvement Effort

03/07/2015

I blog quite a bit about the people side of change and after reading a [Harvard Business Review](#) article about leaders, adapters, and followers, it made me think about how to help *followers* through business process improvement.

When you focus on implementing a new process (step 9 of the 10 steps), think about how to present the change to this group of employees and do not assume they will just go along. We all like followers because they do not seem to require as much coaching (or as much of our time) – as the article suggests, they are compliant. But will they **help** the change effort?

If followers truly do not ask for help, or embrace learning and improvement, your BPI effort could run into trouble. Ask employees that fall into this category what they need from you, how they can help their peers, and give them time to process the change. How can you help them feel positive about the change and about themselves, so they do not feel the change is because of something they did wrong?

“Listen” to both the words spoken and the body language. What percentage of your organization comprises Followers?

Is Culture, People, or Technology Most Important in Business Process Improvement?

06/28/2015

Culture –While culture is one of the hardest things to change in a company, think of the shift to process improvement as a multi-year journey. We all know it won’t happen overnight so accept that fact and begin today. Work to ingrain process improvement as part of your company’s DNA.

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People –Empower your employees to think about how they do their work and allow them to align their work processes with customer value and your company’s goals. Do all employees know what your customers value? Does everyone understand your company’s goals? Is process improvement a company goal?

If employees make **commitments** to process improvement, they will feel more ownership for the outcomes. Commitments bind you “emotionally or intellectually to a course of action,” and isn’t that what you want employees to do with process improvement? Ask your employees to set commitments instead of objectives.

Technology – Every year technology changes and it just keeps getting better and better. The application of technology to automate a process can quickly demonstrate improvements. While it’s part of the mix, it does not stand alone. Place your effort on the ten steps to BPI first to make certain you spend your technology investment in the right areas.

In summary, all three work together, but if forced to pick one I would have to go with culture because *culture trumps process all the time*. You will find building a culture of process improvement more sustainable (because people and technology changes), and eventually it will become part of your company’s DNA. Just think of the power your company can gain if all employees think of continuous process improvement every day.

Paint a Vision for Business Process Improvement

06/20/2015

If you’re leading a BPI effort, how do you create a vision for process improvement? While I recommend sharing the roadmap, which outlines the 10 steps to business process improvement so your organization understands the journey ahead, you should also create a vision that speaks to the experiential, or emotional, side of employees.

But how do you do this? I am not talking about writing a vision statement and posting it on the wall. What I mean is verbally describing the end state with words that help the organization mentally “see” the future. Do you see the difference in these two statements?

- After we improve this process, our company will experience a 10% decrease in customer complaints.
- After we improve this process, our customers will send us testimonials, will follow us on Twitter, and will write positive reviews of our product on Amazon.

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The first statement provides a quantitative statement that addresses the analytical side of an employee's brain, while the second statement paints a picture that an employee can visualize.

Combine both *analytical* statements and *descriptive* statements when beginning a process improvement effort to effectively engage your organization.

Improving Health Care Processes

11/01/2015

Over the past week, I once again experienced the negative impact of business processes associated with the health care industry. A family member, scheduled for an outpatient surgical procedure, ended up requiring an overnight stay in the hospital.

The entire process reminded me of the opportunities that exist for process improvement. This starts with the registration process and goes on to include patient identification, general hospital logistics, and the discharge process. Fortunately, the doctors involved were competent and the nursing staff cared, but nothing else went well. For example:

- If you have a common name, it becomes easy to mix up patients. No, my family member is not 45 nor does she have lung cancer. How scary.
- The ultra sound machine was not available at the time of the procedure...causing a two hour delay. Why can't equipment be scheduled along with the procedure?
- Where is the doctor? It took repeated requests to the nursing staff to call the doctor before he appeared. If a medical emergency arose, that's one thing but that was not the case.
- Finding a bed after deciding the patient should stay overnight took three hours. The worse part about this situation was the lack of information available. While the nursing staff could look at a monitor, they had no way of knowing what would happen when or where we were in the queue.
- Discharging the patient...need I say anymore?

Where do you even start with improving the processes?

Hospitals can begin by viewing the patient as the customer and start thinking about what the customer wants. While recognizing that emergencies happen, the number one improvement any hospital could make today is **communications**.

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The Power of Storytelling in Business Process Improvement (BPI) Work

03/01/2014

Step 2 in my approach to BPI is to establish the foundation, or create the blueprint, for a process improvement effort. Discussing this baseline information with the project team at the start of the first meeting allows everyone to have input and assists the team in coming to a common understanding of the business process, and involving others in developing or approving scope causes them to better respect and honor the agreements made.

I call the blueprint the *scope definition document*. You can use this document to tell the story of your journey. Think of how you would describe a recent vacation – what would you highlight? Perhaps you would share the places you visited, restaurants where you dined, attractions you visited, experiences you enjoyed, and problems you encountered. For example, when buying a train ticket while traveling in Italy I quickly learned that when someone told me “no problem” (nessun problema), I knew I had a problem. I had a ticket to board the train, but no assigned seat, so I had to sit in the rear car and hold on to my luggage.

In BPI, you can weave a story around the process itself by describing the key responsibilities of the process, identifying what customers want, and the challenges with the existing process. Instead of walking through the document in a boring step-by-step approach, think of yourself as a tour guide and take others on the journey. Spend some time thinking about how to relate the business process to a trip.

Have a great trip, or “buon viaggio.”

Business Process Improvement – Do You Need Internal Controls?

03/21/2014

Internal controls identify points in the business process where mistakes can occur and explains how to prevent them. In talking with a colleague a few days ago, he asked whether internal controls help or hinder a business process. He wouldn't let me off the hook – he wanted a yes or no answer.

Okay then, **yes** internal controls should exist, if you follow my approach to BPI.

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In step 6 you identify *value added* and *non-value added* activities, and eliminate the non-value added items, so that what remains delivers value to the customer. If an activity is important to the customer, then you should make certain that it works correctly and internal controls help do just that.

Step 7 is where you create internal controls, tools, and metrics. The order of the steps I propose is important because one activity leads to another activity. You do not want to create an internal control, build a tool, and develop a metric for a portion of the business process that does not deliver value to the customer.

Without internal controls, errors can occur. So, spend some time identifying potential problem spots and outline how you can avoid them.

Why, Why, Why – The Most Valuable Question in BPI

05/04/2014

As I read a recent discussion group, it reminded me of a blog I wrote several years ago, and it's worth revisiting.

The most valuable question (or your best weapon) in business process improvement work is asking "**why?**"

- Why does a delay exist?
- Why can't you eliminate this activity – what value does it add to the customer?
- Why do you collect the information?
- Why do you want to start doing....e.g., weekly audits, status reports, or quarterly reviews?
- Why have you identified those specific goals?
- Why can't you change the process?
- Why do you want to change the process?
- Why are there so many levels of approval?
- Why can't managers do their own hiring?
- Why do you have the current metrics?

Even when employees or clients give you an answer to a question, you can ask "why" as a follow-up question to further fine-tune the process. I usually ask **WHY** three times. When a manager tells you that they want to start doing something new, ask why. When a client shares their goals, ask why they have those goals. This

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further probing will help you to understand the real source of a comment. Sometimes the answer simply supports the status quo; sometimes it is revolutionary.

When to Use Cross-functional Process Maps (or Swim Lanes)

06/08/2014

Have you ever wondered when to use a **cross-functional** process map? Or, wondered what one is?

These maps consist of cross-functional bands, or rows/columns, used to show the **functions** or **departments** involved in a business process. The cross-functional bands can represent as many functions as required. Cross-functional process maps can have two types of bands: the more common **horizontal** band (or row) or the **vertical** band (or column). When using this style, include a new functional band for each department or function involved in the process, label each band with the function's name, and place activities in the appropriate bands depending on the function or area responsible for the activity.

You may hear this type of process map called a **swim lane** because of the similarity with Olympic-style swimming pools that consist of eight lanes each 8.2 feet wide. Using a cross-functional process map makes it easy to see when responsibility for a step in a process moves from one function to another, something known as a *handoff*. Because handoffs often contribute to points in a business process where issues occur, you can use this technique to minimize such situations.

The decision of which type of process map to draw (standard or cross functional) depends on the goals of the work and the individuals involved. If the work involves a number of different departments, use the cross-functional process map; if the work includes only one department, then the standard process map will suffice. Those unfamiliar with reading a process map can easily get confused by the cross-functional bands.

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Do Executives Support Business Process Improvement? Make it Part of your Company's DNA

07/13/2014

Senior level executives only care about the bottom line right? So, if you are trying to get the top executives in your company to show an interest in business process improvement, link your BPI efforts to the **customer**. What is more bottom line than the customer?

Only customers can make a company profitable, so connect all your BPI-related talking points back to this **fundamental core**. Call BPI something else that resonates in your company, if necessary. Often the name you decide to use makes a difference in the acceptance rate at a company.

The ultimate goal is to make *Business Process Improvement* part of your company's **DNA**. You cannot change your DNA; it is inherent in who you are as a human being. Just think of the power your company can gain if all employees think about the customer and process improvement every day. Eventually, it will become part of your company's culture, or DNA, and then nothing can stop it because culture trumps process all the time.

Moving through the 10 Steps to Business Process Improvement

08/01/2014

How quickly can you move through the 10 steps to business process improvement? What if you do not have enough time in the day, but you want to do something?

How fast you can follow the 10 steps depends on your situation, but it is better to do something than nothing. While I provide an estimate of how long a step should take at the end of each chapter in *The Power of Business Process Improvement*, it still depends on your team – how large is it, how experienced are the participants, and how complex is the business process?

Step 2 is the most important step because it establishes the **foundation** for the rest of your improvement effort. If you skip this step, or move too quickly through this step, you will find yourself revisiting decisions and encountering scope creep.

When you review step 6, choose at least one improvement technique if you have limited time. For example, think about **bureaucracy**. Examine your business process with this lens to identify where bureaucracy exists and what you have to do to eliminate it. If an activity in a business

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process does not contribute to customer satisfaction, if it negatively affects cycle time, or if it increases cost, eliminate it. Bureaucracy is “productivity’s enemy,” according to Jack Welch.

How Best Leaders Can Talk Business Process Improvement

08/10/2014

I read an article called [The Best Leaders "Talk the Walk"](#) yesterday and one sentence in the article strongly resonated with me. “There are countless small opportunities for people to tweak a product, or **improve a process** that lead to big wins in the marketplace.”

In the article Taylor talks about how leaders have to talk to employees about **why** what they do is so critical to succeeding in the market. Think about the words you use every day. Do you express the concept of process improvement in a way that engages and motivates employees? Or, is your vocabulary dull and boring? Think about the WHY and discover a whole new way to talk about business process improvement.

What words do you use every day that helps move your business processes to deliver not what customers expect, but what they didn’t even know they wanted?