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10 Principles of Good BPM

Abstract: The question concerning what makes for good BPM is often raised. A recent call from Paul Harmon on the *BPTrends Discussion* LinkedIN Group for key issues in BPM received 189 answers within two months, with additional answers still appearing. I have teamed up with a number of BPM researchers and practitioners to bring together our joint experience in a BPM workshop at the University in Liechtenstein in 2013, where we developed ten principles of good BPM, later published in *Business Process Management Journal* ([vom Brocke et al., 2014](#)). The paper, which has received considerable attention in academia, was ranked the journal's most downloaded paper the month it was published. Slides on Slideshare that provide a brief summary of the paper have been accessed more than 3,000 times since they were first put online in March 2014. Given the importance of the topic–what makes for good BPM–and the positive response to the ten principles, I wrote this note with the co-authors of the original *BPMJ* paper to outline the ten principles and illustrate how to use them in practice. We invite all readers to engage in this discussion via any channel they find appropriate.

Introduction

The field of BPM needs a set of guiding principles concerning what makes for good BPM primarily to provide guidance for practice, as many organizations still struggle with how to approach BPM. The purpose of BPM is not to model processes, implement workflows, or to define performance indicators but to drive business by fostering the effectiveness and efficiency of business processes. For that purpose it is important to understand how BPM can contribute to business value in a specific business situation, how to scope and size BPM accordingly, and what process related measures to take at all in order to realize benefits.

Unfortunately, many consultants provide only limited help answering or even highlighting these questions. The danger is that bad BPM practice may result in organizations' not benefitting from the value BPM can bring, not only in terms of automating and streamlining processes, but also in terms of driving innovation and transformation in many areas related to businesses and society now and in the future. Too many "bad" practices result in disappointment in practice and endanger the reputation of BPM as a professional tool and an academic field.

Having a set of well-established and agreed-upon guidelines that consolidate the academic and practical knowledge on BPM can certainly help. The more people who

know about these guidelines the better, because then consultants, professionals, executives, industry experts, researchers, and teachers can act on the guidelines and benefit from their actions in their work.

The 10 Principles

The ten principles are the result of research by twenty BPM experts from practice and academia. BPM researchers from four universities integrated the participants' viewpoints into the ten principles. The practitioners were BPM managers from eight global companies in diverse industries. The research was conducted in three rounds, including focus groups and group reflections. Additional details on the methodology are in the original study (vom Brocke, et al., 2014).

The resulting principles are displayed in alphabetical order in table 1 and are outlined in the following text.

Principle	Description of positive manifestation (+) and negative manifestation (-)		Reference number
Principle of Context Awareness	+	BPM fits to the organizational context.	(1)
	-	BPM follows a cookbook approach.	
Principle of Continuity	+	BPM is a permanent practice.	(2)
	-	BPM is a one-off project.	
Principle of Enablement	+	BPM develops capabilities.	(3)
	-	BPM is limited to "firefighting."	
Principle of Holism	+	BPM is inclusive in scope.	(4)
	-	BPM has an isolated focus.	
Principle of Institutionalization	+	BPM is embedded in the organizational structure.	(5)
	-	BPM is an ad-hoc responsibility.	
Principle of Involvement	+	BPM involves all stakeholder groups.	(6)
	-	BPM excludes employee participation.	
Principle of Joint Understanding	+	BPM creates shared meaning.	(7)
	-	BPM uses the language of experts.	
Principle of Purpose	+	BPM contributes to strategic value creation.	(8)
	-	BPM is done for the sake of doing it.	
Principle of Simplicity	+	BPM is economical.	(9)
	-	BPM is over-engineered.	
Principle of Technology	+	BPM makes opportune use of technology.	(10)

Appropriation	- BPM considers technology management an afterthought.	

Table 1. Ten principles of good BPM in alphabetical order

Principle of Context Awareness

BPM must account for the diverse nature of business, whether the business is well-structured and focused on operational effectiveness or unstructured, creative, and knowledge-intensive. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach to BPM is not appropriate; for example, there is no "right" modeling language for studying and specifying processes but many, any one (or more than one) of which may fit the business objective and environment. Many BPM initiatives require a number of languages.

The principle of context awareness emphasizes that BPM requires consideration of a given organizational setting. Context awareness involves a concern for factors that distinguish BPM contexts *between* organizations (such as size, strategy, industry, market, and objectives of BPM), and *within* organizations (such as types of processes or available resources. For example, small companies may have fewer personnel resources for BPM governance than large companies do, and specific IT systems may not yield efficiency gains in all processes to the same extent.)

BPM should be adapted to fit the organization and to differentiate the process management according to the process's nature (e.g., its degree of automation, standardization, and repetitiveness). In addition, temporal factors like the organization's financial situation play a major role in a BPM initiative's success. In this regard, practitioners must first understand fully the context in which an initiative is to take place and derive the consequences of positioning and tailoring the BPM initiative.

Principle of Continuity

BPM must be understood as a journey, rather than a project, as it requires a continuous effort to learn and apply appropriately, rather than an effort that is aimed at a one-off breach of the status quo. The idea of BPM is to make the management of business processes mindful and a part of the fabric of how the organization improves, grows, innovates, and transforms. Since the exact circumstances and objectives dictate the most efficient and effective way to accomplish these goals, BPM must be considered a continuous effort (Trkman, 2010).

It is well established that any isolated project may have benefits, but it can at best create a temporary optimum that will soon lose ground in the competitive landscape (Hammer, 2010). In fact, BPM initiatives often fail to deliver value because they do not include efforts to sustain results and to link individual BPM-related projects in a broader BPM program.

In order for BPM to avoid being a one-off change project, a process mindset must be established (vom Brocke, Petry, Schmiedel, & Sonnenberg, 2015), and that mindset must be embedded into an organizational culture that is supportive of BPM (Schmiedel, vom Brocke, & Recker, 2013; Schmiedel, vom Brocke, & Recker, 2014).

Principle of Enablement

BPM must enable the people in an organization to do something good with the organization's processes. Since BPM has to do with people in an organization using certain technologies to accomplish tasks, it is not so much the technical beauty of a solution as the appropriateness of the solution for people to fulfil their tasks in a given context that is important. In fact, we have witnessed many projects introducing great solutions such as intranets with process models, only to see that the solutions are not used or updated because few people find them useful or userfriendly. Thus, we need to think of demands and capabilities that are required to support employees in accomplishing their tasks. The principle of enablement focuses on the need to develop individual competencies and organizational BPM capabilities.

Extant research has found that a broad range of BPM professionals' and novices' personal competencies play crucial roles in actively developing organizational BPM capabilities (Müller, Schmiedel, Gorbacheva, & vom Brocke, 2014). Research has also examined how to assess which organizational BPM capabilities are needed at which stage and how to develop them (Plattfaut, Niehaves, Pöppelbuß, & Becker, 2011). Such issues should be addressed by taking the company's maturity into consideration (Škrinjar & Trkman, 2013); maturity models (Rosemann, de Bruin, & Power, 2006) offer a way to identify and evaluate required BPM capabilities. Given the continuous and evolutionary nature of BPM, initiatives should focus not only on building capabilities that an organization *currently* needs but also on building the dynamic capabilities that are needed to respond effectively to *future* contingencies (Teece, 2009).

Principle of Holism

BPM must draw the big picture first and derive initiatives that are linked to this picture. Organizations often dive into initiatives before they understand the organization's broader context or consider all the relevant issues related to enabling and sustaining effective change. As a result, work is sometimes done at a level of detail that is not required or that is even hindering at that point in time, and relationships between projects are often poorly managed. Failing to position projects in the bigger picture can result in too few synergies created and too many dependencies ignored.

The principle of holism as it relates to BPM has two dimensions: First, BPM should not have an isolated focus on specific areas of an organization; that is, it should not be a project limited to only one or a few departments but should be run throughout the entire company or supply chain. Second, BPM should not have an isolated focus; for example, BPM should not be conceived solely as a modeling exercise but as a holistic approach that also comprises strategic, methodological, technical, and social aspects. This holistic understanding of BPM has been advocated by BPM experts from both academia and practice, and we refer to their contribution for further reading (Hammer, 2010; Harmon, 2015; Viaene, Van den Bergh, Schröder-Pander, & Mertens, 2010).

Principle of Institutionalization

BPM must be anchored in organizational responsibilities. BPM initiatives too often start by developing models, methods, tools, or other kind of solutions and then trying to sell them to people in the organization. It is much more effective and

efficient to make people responsible for process performance first and then to provide them with the solutions they ask for to achieve their targets. Such institutionalization of BPM is also essential to sustain achievement and support continuity.

Researchers generally use the notion of business process governance to refer to the need to institutionalize horizontal, across-silo thinking (Markus & Jacobson, 2015). To prevent BPM from being an ad-hoc responsibility, process owners with real responsibility, accountability, and authority are pivotal (Power, 2011). Many organizations have also found that a centralized BPM support organization (e.g., BPM Centre for Excellence or BPM Office) can help to raise the general level of process orientation (Rosemann, 2015). These support organizations typically use multi-dimensional BPM maturity assessments to guide the organization's journey toward becoming more process-oriented, although their portfolios of service offerings may vary widely (Rosemann, 2015; Willaert, van den Bergh, Willems, & Deschoolmeester, 2007).

Principle of Involvement

BPM must involve the right people in order to drive initiatives, including not only people who are formally assigned to a project or program but also people who are not formally assigned but are relevant to BPM success.

Organizations often attempt to limit stakeholder involvement by gathering information through interviews and then having a dedicated team of experts (re-)design processes (Rosemann, 2006b; Sarker & Sidorova, 2006). Ideally, the design process is a collaborative effort by actively involved stakeholders that represent the voices of their peers and that act as change agents (Rosemann, 2006a). The broader group of all stakeholders can be involved through mechanisms like interactive feedback sessions, idea boxes, internal social networking sites, and collaborative process modeling.

To consider the preferences of stakeholders, BPM initiatives must link to individual agendas as well as to the attitudes, styles, and moods of stakeholder groups. This affective side of BPM may be even more important in the future as it becomes increasingly important for BPM to uphold a positive image among employees, especially young professionals. Young professionals expect mobile technologies and social media to be an integral, if not dominant, part of their professional work environment. BPM needs to demonstrate innovative solutions in important areas of business. This will increase the attractiveness of the field and the involvement of people both in practice and research.

Principle of Joint Understanding

BPM must create shared meaning and a common understanding that extends across and unites the stakeholders who are involved in business processes, independent of their level of expertise. Many BPM projects create confusion among employees because only a few understand the BPM methodology that is used. The principle of joint understanding calls for introducing and sustaining a common language that allows all stakeholders to view, frame, analyze, and design organizational systems. Incorporating business-process thinking into an organizational culture requires that all stakeholders understand, acknowledge, and use the term "process." Ideally,

processes are part of all business conversations, and they reflect a shared understanding of processes and how to seek their improvement and innovation.

Most efforts in creating a joint understanding revolve around the use of process models (Curtis, Kellner, & Over, 1992). Typically, organizations model processes using a common, often graphical language to describe, communicate, and analyze processes. Process modeling encourages users to conceptualize processes in terms of events, tasks, actors, and other notions (Recker, Rosemann, Indulska, & Green, 2009). However, business process representations are only as effective as the common understanding they actually create. Process models should not be complex artifacts that can be comprehended only by experts (Mendling, Strembeck, & Recker, 2012) but should be simple and intuitive to foster joint understanding.

Principle of Purpose

BPM must create value. BPM initiatives that are not in alignment with an organization's strategic missions and goals are likely to result in a lack of traction in the organization, often leading to project failure. BPM should not be adopted because it is in vogue or it is "the way of doing things"; it should serve a specific purpose that is strategically relevant to an organization. While this principle may seem obvious, it is often forgotten in practice. It is particularly important, as it focuses on BPM's ability to create transparency about the business and the organizational system. This transparency helps to not only create and improve the value that can be generated from BPM, it is also essential to creating a credible and supported BPM practice.

The idea of the principle of purpose is linked with the notion of value-oriented BPM (Franz & Kirchmer, 2012; vom Brocke, Recker, & Mendling, 2010) in that it highlights that value can be created by means of mechanisms proffered by BPM and that the choice of mechanism should be aligned with a strategic purpose, such as efficiency gains, compliance enforcement, networking with business partners, or integration and agility. Case studies have demonstrated that BPM can have many purposes (Bandara, Guillemain, & Coogans, 2015), including green initiatives and sustainability transformations (vom Brocke, Seidel, & Recker, 2012).

Principle of Simplicity

BPM must balance inputs against outputs and find the simplest and most productive way to realize organizational goals. BPM initiatives can easily consume enormous amounts of resources, so the principle of simplicity suggests that the amount of resources (e.g., effort, time, money) invested into BPM should be monitored to ensure that BPM projects are economical. Lots of BPM approaches we see in practice, however, tend to be an art in itself, resulting in complex and often too technical specifications with little visible value for the organizations. To ensure that BPM benefits organizations, every BPM initiative should, therefore, be conducted in the most efficient way.

While BPM encompasses multiple techniques, and its outcomes can be used for purposes like documentation, improvement, and compliance, the inherent complexity of managing business processes should not lead to a habit of over-engineering. If there is uncertainty about which options to pursue, Occam's razor can be helpful: the simplest approach is usually the best. In other words, one should not increase beyond what is necessary the number and intensity of BPM-related projects and activities required to realize efficient and effective business processes.

Principle of Technology Appropriation

BPM must make opportune use of technology in general and IT in particular. IT solutions can help to foster the efficiency and effectiveness of business processes. For example, introducing enterprise systems has often contributed to process re-engineering projects, and business intelligence solutions have significantly supported continuous improvement efforts. Predictions about the transformative power of digital technologies like cloud, mobile, social, big data, and analytics abound.

Treating IT management as an afterthought of process (re-)design may jeopardize the continuity, growth, and transformational capability of an enterprise as a whole. Selecting, adopting, and exploiting IT should be an integral part of BPM that is managed to support the enterprise, rather than single departments or individuals. In this context, best-in-class CIOs have realized that business and IT must improve how they realize enterprise value together, rather than focusing on locally optimized solutions or functional value ([Viaene, Hertogh, & Jolyon, 2011](#)).

Using the 10 Principles in BPM Practice

We presented the ten principles in alphabetical order to emphasize that they are all equally important and that they might be structured and prioritized differently based on a particular organization's purpose. Practitioners find these principles useful in planning and evaluating BPM initiatives, as well as in distinguishing those principles that address the strategy, the approach, and the measures of BPM initiatives. Table 2 presents the principles structured accordingly.

Strategy	Approach	Measures
BPM needs a strategy that - clarifies the purpose (8) - considers the specific organizational context (1).	BPM must apply an approach that supports the strategy and that - is holistic in scope (4) - involves all stakeholders (6) - enables people (3) - allows continuous practice (2).	BPM must take measures that fit the approach and that - appropriate technology (10) - lead to joint understanding (7) - are institutionalized (5) - are simple (9).

Table 2. Ten principles structured according to direction, scope, and measures of BPM (with reference number of the principle in brackets)

Table 3 presents a checklist organizations can use to reflect on how well their BPM initiatives fulfill each principle. The checklist allows organizations to self-assess their "BPM goodness" quickly in light of the ten BPM principles. The checklist considers all principles, structured according to strategy, approach, and measures, and illustrates how the principles can be used in the context of a BPM initiative.

	To what extent do you agree that the BPM initiative…	Not at all much				Very
		-- ++	-	o	+	
Strategy	…clarifies its purpose (8)	○	○	○	○	○
	…considers the specific organizational context (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Approach	…is holistic in scope (4)	○	○	○	○	○
	…involves all stakeholders (6)	○	○	○	○	○
	…enables people (3)	○	○	○	○	○
	…follows continuous practice (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Measures	…appropriates technology (10)	○	○	○	○	○
	…leads to a joint understanding (7)	○	○	○	○	○
	…is institutionalized (5)	○	○	○	○	○
	…is simple (9)	○	○	○	○	○

Table 3. BPM Quality Checklist (with reference number of the principle in brackets)

Current research investigates refining the evaluation criteria and developing a comprehensive measurement instrument and toolset for practice.

Summing Up – Lessons Learned

For BPM to be both successful and well regarded, all ten of the BPM principles should be considered in all BPM initiatives. Depending on the specific type of initiative, some principles might be more important than others. For instance, if initiatives are focused in scope, it is not necessary to extend the scope, but one must be conscious of the wider scope of a project in the sense of how it relates to other areas and projects. A good BPM initiative must be able to make convincing statements on how the individual principles have been (and are) considered in related projects. The checklist provided in table 3 helps practitioners to reflect on each principle and to determine to what extent the principles have been considered in practice.

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