

The Role of the Super User in Achieving Business Process Management Maturity

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Abstract – Many process improvement initiatives and companies' strategic projects do not have their benefits reached in its full potential for different reasons. First, there is a weak or inexistent understanding of the company's level of Maturity in Business Process Management (BPM). Second, the organisation is not ready to deal with most "soft" aspects of process-related initiatives: change management, internalisation of new knowledge and people's willingness to apply new solutions to everyday work. The paper presents two ways for the companies to resolve these issues. The first is a self-assessment model of BPM Maturity measurement, the model BPM 6×5 (6 by 5). The second is the concept of Super User role with an extended scope of work: it is not only support to the users of the system, but also a deep understanding of the process and knowledge management within the department.

Keywords – Business Process Management, Change management, Business Process Management Maturity, Super user.

I. INTRODUCTION

Each day different companies start projects to improve their processes and way of operation. Many of these initiatives are related to a new system implementation, but usually include not only the simple adoption of the system, but a transformation and re-thinking of the company's processes. Unfortunately, too commonly the resulting benefits are not felt in all its potential. After a wide and expensive effort to design a company's processes, implement a system to support its execution and change the strategic approach to be process-oriented, the professionals involved in the project realise that the rest of the employees are not really using what is now available, or limit its use to minimal levels, and attain to the old way of working. This puts into question the value of the entire project and can lead to a loss of credibility of such initiatives.

There may be various reasons for this situation, but the two main ones can be distinguished. First, there is a lack of a deeper understanding of the level of Maturity in Business Process Management already reached by the company. Second, there is a lack of a structure that allows dealing with most "soft" aspects of any process-related initiative: change management, new knowledge internalisation by the people affected and their willingness to assume what is proposed to apply to their own work. It is not enough to have an approximate idea of the level of maturity in BPM at the company, for BPM includes many different aspects that should be considered: not only Methodologies to design and improve processes, or IT systems, or even strategic aspects, but also People and Culture. At the same time, the company should have finances to deal with all these aspects – and especially with People and Culture – not only during the project, including rollout and handover, but also

in a permanent way at the organisation, both in the short and long term.

A primary step to avoid the unsuccessful process and system implementation initiatives is to identify and understand the company's level regarding Maturity in BPM. The article presents a self-assessment model of BPM Maturity measurement – the BPM 6×5 with detailed results of the model usage for evaluation of the company's current situation in BPM. By evidencing its strengths and weaknesses, it facilitates the definition of an action plan to grow in maturity and the definition of a roadmap to develop improvement initiatives in a consistent way, so that they can be managed as a programme to reach excellence. Another important step to guarantee not only short-term success of improvement initiatives, but also lasting results, is having a structure to deal with the most complex aspects of any project: People and Culture. The solution proposed in the article is the adoption of the Super User role at all company's departments, broadening its meaning and the scope of its work, from a system-focused role to a process and knowledge management role.

II. MEASURING MATURITY IN BPM: THE MODEL BPM 6×5

The practice of measuring the company's maturity was spread with the proposal of the Capability Maturity Model (CMM) by the Software Engineering Institute of Carnegie Mellon University [6]. Companies measure their maturity in a certain aspect to understand how advanced or delayed they are on it. "The Maturity in BPM, more specifically, refers to how much the company knows about its processes, its vision of them, how they are managed, and how much this "process view" is embedded in its culture. Having it embedded in the culture goes beyond having a few people that know about it. Instead, it means to have a general way of working where the employees take into account the existing processes, both in daily tasks and in the interaction with other departments, and also in problem-solving and improvement initiatives" [9]. This helps not only understand the present situation with its existing patterns, but also make a gap analysis comparing with the stage the company is willing to reach and identifying which BPM practices do not exist at all, and which exist and can be drivers of company's maturity [12].

Many models for measuring the company's maturity in Business Process management are available on the market. They mainly differ by the method of measurement, the persons involved in its application – only employees or also external consultants –, and the maturity factors considered [3]. The model presented in the paper has the advantage of being a self-

assessment model that can be applied at any time and with a few resources. “For example, the BPMM [17] from OMG includes a series of good practices but is not very detailed in its implementation. The BPMM from Rosemann and DeBruin [10] is very complete, but is designed to be applied by consultants. BPM 6×5, on the other hand, was developed as a tool for the BPOs, and no external help is needed to make the evaluation. At the same time, the model is relatively short, for it consists of one table, and is very concrete at each level. The levels are indicated by things that exist or do not exist, making it easier both to evaluate the maturity and to draw an action plan for growing in it, with concrete steps” [9]. Any person that has knowledge about BPM can apply it with no need of support from consultants or other external parties. Moreover, when the model is filled up, it also has a visual result that facilitates the communication with Managers and other teams and the definition of action plans. Another advantage of this model is the completeness of the aspects contemplated on the model. For example, it includes IT, which is not included in the PEMM model [16]. The second reason for the choice is the relative easiness to apply the model in comparison with other models.

The Model BPM 6×5 [8] was developed on the basis of the Capability Maturity Model (CMM) [6], and Rosemann and De Bruin’s [10] Business Process Management Maturity (BPMM) model. It consists of a table comprising two dimensions: 27 areas of development grouped in six maturity factors, and 5 levels of maturity in BPM (based on the CMM levels).

For example, the areas of development “Capacity to respond to changes in processes”, “Values and benefits from processes”, “Attitudes and behaviours from processes” and “Attention given by the leadership to processes” are grouped inside of the maturity factor “Culture”. The six maturity factors contemplated in the model are the following:

- Strategic Alignment: reflects how much the strategy of the company is defined considering the existing processes.
- Governance: the factor that connects a strategy to execution [5], by establishing relevant and transparent decision-making and accountability, and defining roles and responsibilities.
- Methodologies: refers to how the existing methodologies (e.g., for mapping or improving processes) are used, either with a process or functional view.
- Information Technology: in parallel with Methodologies, this factor identifies not only existing supporting systems, but also how they are used. “This needs to be balanced with the factor “Methodologies”, for if the tool is more advanced than the method, it may remain idle” [9].
- People: refers to the way people work and their mindset.
- Culture: reflects the values and beliefs that forge people’s attitude and behaviours when involved in process improvement.

Each maturity factor is broken into 4 or 5 areas of development and detailed in 5 levels of maturity in BPM [8], which are:

- Level 1: Culture of the hero: one isolated person knows what BPM is and is willing to apply it to everyday work.

- Level 2: Processes are managed at the functional level: the understanding of the processes is still limited to the areas.
- Level 3: Processes contemplated at the organisational level: there is already a view of the end-to-end process, but this is still only on the paper.
- Level 4: Processes controlled and managed systematically: people already work and cooperate based on processes, but still stimulated by the Business Process Office.
- Level 5: The teams continuously improve processes: the company has already developed a continuous improvement culture based on a process view, and the Business Process Office only gives support in high-complexity and high-impact process improvement projects.

The model details the different areas of development at each of the five levels. The descriptions are based on facts (observed behaviours, existing systems, flowcharts, and structures) that are typical manifestations of this specific area when the company is at a certain level of maturity. The results of the analysis indicate not only the company’s level in general, but also each area, determining the aspects where the maturity is lower.

The described model was applied to evaluate BPM in Cabot Latvia, global supplier of specialty chemicals and performance materials for a series of industries. Its Shared Service Centre for Europe and Middle East region was transferred to Latvia in 2014. From the establishment of a business unit in Latvia, some departments have worked with Super Users. A case study from Cabot Latvia shows that these departments have reached higher maturity in Business Process Management in a very short time period. While the departments without Super Users have reached, as a maximum, Level 2 of Maturity in some maturity factors, the departments with Super Users have reached Level 3 of Maturity in almost all maturity factors. The differences between the two groups of departments are striking, reaching a 1.33 difference in the factor “People”, and 1.92 in “Culture” [9].

The results are important for two reasons. The main one is referred to the understanding of the current situation by the company. The company cannot pass to a next level of maturity if it is not ready in all the maturity factors. It is not enough to implement system level 4, if people are at level 1 or 2. The second reason is that the results highlight the evidence that the different areas of development inside of maturity factors “People” and “Culture” are still at a lower level and should be developed. Taking this into account when planning a process improvement initiative is the first step to identify and mitigate implementation and life-after risks related to the people involved.

II. THE SUPER USER ROLE

Super User is a role commonly adopted in system implementation projects. Also called a power user or a key user, it is involved in the tests needed for implementing the system, and also gives support to users, especially during the project

roll-out and handover phase. However, the paper presents another vision of the Super User role, which is lightly different from the original one.

The first difference is that it is a permanent role at the the company, and it is defined on the basis of the teams, rather than the system's structure. Instead of having one Super User that knows well the functionality of the system, and supports users from different teams, the proposed Super Users are people from each department that execute the work on a daily basis and support the rest of the team on their daily routines.

The second difference is that this Super User is not system-focused: it also includes process and knowledge management within the department.

A Super User is a person from the department who has a profound understanding of internal processes and is responsible for knowledge management inside of the department. Without being an official process owner, the Super User is the link of each department with the Business Process Office. At the same time, being totally inserted in the functional structure, the Super User has an on-the-job knowledge of the process since he/she is also executing it on a daily basis [9]. The Super User responsibilities include maintenance of the process together with the process owners (usually defined by cross-functional process) and the Business Process Office; creation and maintenance of internal documentation; on-the-job training and all knowledge management within his/her team.

The mission of the Super User is to put processes in service of of the team. Often people see processes as simple flowcharts and process management as extra duties that generate more work. In reality, the understanding of the processes and its management should bring value to the business and facilitate everyday work. To be able to reach this goal, the person defined as a Super User should, in the first place, know well the team's daily routines, so that s/he can support the others, and also give real input to the process owners and maintain the knowledge at the department. In addition, this person should be self-motivated and enjoy finding solutions, understanding the reason behind each activity, analysing and sharing information. Self-motivation is a key to create an atmosphere of continuous improvement at the department, for it stimulates people to find out the root of the problems, instead of just solving isolated issues in the short term. Lastly, the Super User should be communicative, forthcoming, and open, ready to listen and adapt to different situations and people. More than dealing with an entire department, the Super User is working with each of his/her colleagues, and therefore should be able to have a one-to-one communication with each one, adapting the message to be transmitted.

III. HOW SUPER USERS ENABLE GROWTH IN MATURITY IN BPM

The Super User, as it is here defined, enables the growth of the company in maturity in BPM because his/her work has two main effects: changing gradually people's mindsets and facilitating the creation of a continuous improvement culture, by being a constant component of change management in the company's structure.

A. Leading Each Person to Maturity Level

An important fact to be taken into consideration when talking about growth in maturity in BPM is in which dimension this happens. The dimension most commonly considered is the company as a whole, as it is reflected, for example, in reports about the state of the industry [13]. The second dimension where the maturity may be measured is the department level. The model BPM 6×5 is also foreseen for measuring the maturity of a specific department, based on the premise that the company can only go to a next level if the all departments – or at least most of them – are ready to move forward. While there are departments at level 2, even if others would be ready to work at level 4, the company gets stuck between level 2 and 3 – what Harmon calls the “Process Management gap” [1], where most of the companies are right now [2].

However, at the end, a department can only grow in maturity if each of the team members grows. This is a constant effort that the companies have to assume, if high management has real intention of creating a process-based continuous improvement culture. However, this becomes more and more difficult, considering that with the new generations the employee turnover is higher than years ago, and the new comers have each time more different backgrounds. This means it is not enough to have isolated trainings about processes directed to the departments, for the people at each department may be at a very different level. This change of mindset “can only be done in a consistent and effective way in a one-to-one relationship, where each person is invited, at their own pace, to “break the walls” and see the entire process” [9]. This has to be a continuous training at the individual level.

This is the point where the Super User can give a unique contribution. By being part of the team and working with people on a daily basis, s/he can identify at which stage each person is, what knowledge may be missing, and the best way of transmitting the message to each colleague. As a consequence, the benefits of BPM and the understanding of the process are not transmitted in a standard way, but, if necessary, also adapted to each person.

The Super User acts as “a BPM coach for the people of his/her department, helping each one to understand and assimilate the concepts at his/her own pace, and presenting things in a way that may be attractive for them” [9]. This facilitates that the knowledge related to processes changes from something purely theoretical into practical tools to be used when solving problems in everyday work [14].

B. Leading the Department to Maturity Growth

Apart from the “BPM coach” aspect, the Super User has also a role in structuring the departments' “mindset” and way of working to be process-based. This is done especially through process-oriented knowledge management and through the development of the department's learning capacity.

Being responsible for the department's internal documentation and trainings, the Super User structures them in a way that reflects the processes this department is involved in. This means that a new employee, from the first day, will learn his/her daily duties as the execution of part of a cross-functional

process. All the training material, internal procedures and work instructions are structured in a way that the “index” for finding something knows to which part of the process or sub-process it is related. Thus, people at the department start seeing their own function with a process view.

The ability of the Super User to develop the department’s learning capacity will highly depend on the Super User’s characteristics mentioned above: self-motivation, willingness to share knowledge and desire to understand deeper not only the know-what and know-how, but also the know-why of each activity [4]. When working closely with the team, solving problems, investigating new ways of doing things, making tests in the system and “questioning everything”, the Super User stimulates people to go deeper and understand what they are doing, and also question the reasons behind it. This will also be a source of improvements to the processes, and the experience of having everyday work facilitated by an idea generated by their own team is also a motivator for people to continue thinking and looking for solutions behind the problems.

This is a structure that allows for the generation of changes driven by learning, not only by top-down decisions. In Senge’s words, “This type of change process can become self-perpetuating. (...) A learning-oriented strategy aims to produce self-sustaining change in a way that continually accelerates its own growth and development. In systems terms, it operates as a ‘virtuous reinforcing cycle’” [11].

C. Leading the Company to Maturity Growth

The last dimension that Super Users ultimately affect is the company as a whole. The Super User role only reaches its full potential when it is not limited to seeing what happens inside of the department, but also cooperates with other Super Users to share knowledge, solve problems, discuss possible improvements, and ultimately implement them. The Super Users, then, are like a community of practice, or a natural knowledge community [15], looking for improvements in the end-to-end process in order to create value and facilitate everybody’s work. It also includes the cooperation with the process owners and the Business Process Office.

In practice, the process owners and the Process Office have the view of the entire process and the company as a whole, and the Super Users bring to them the contact with reality and operational work. These different ranges complement one another perfectly and allow ideas, knowledge and initiatives to flow in these different dimensions. The Super Users, then, may be used as a key element to create this cooperation, in a structured way, allowing the company to reach the levels of maturity where processes are not only flowcharts, but real life.

IV. CONCLUSION

This article has presented two tools that the companies can use to mitigate risks related to people’s understanding of the benefits generated by projects related to process improvements. The first tool is the measurement of the company’s maturity in Business Process Management, and the article presented the

model BPM 6x5, which is a self-assessment model that gives a detailed result of the company’s maturity. The second tool is the adoption of the Super User role with a broader scope than the original IT-related one. This role also includes Process and Knowledge Management within the department, and has positive impact in the growth in Maturity in BPM in individual, department and company levels. These two tools are related to understanding better the company’s situation in BPM when starting a project, and to having a structure that allows change management to be a continuous reality in the company, not just an isolated project activity.

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