

BPM EXPLAINED

Steve Towers and Dermot McCauley present a user's guide to business process management.

Despite much industry hype and expectation, business process management (BPM) remains a confusing area for many organisations who find it difficult to visualise potential benefits in terms they understand and that are directly relevant to their business. With this in mind, *CXO* asked renowned process management expert Steve Towers from the BPM Group to put his end-user's hat on and ask the questions that businesses really want to ask. Dermot McCauley, Director of Strategy and Marketing at business process management specialists Singularity, provides the answers.

ST. Process teams are people that work together in groups (in the same room!) to get key process maps right. How can BPM software be used for this activity without forcing us to change our team approach?

DM. Rather than undermining team-based approaches, BPM software includes features that actively support collaboration. The best process designs are the result of iteration and team interaction, and BPM software supports both. By combining white board technology (to allow seamless capture of process models from a white board), walkthrough and simulation capability (to make the process 'come to life') and integrated interface design (to help the team visualise how people will work together in process execution), BPM software allows people working together in groups (in the same room!) to visualise, design and agree on how their business processes work.

ST. What about time to implement? We can't afford to spend months configuring and deploying processes (especially non-core processes). Can BPM software really help us in this way?

DM. Increasing productivity in the process improvement cycle is one of BPM software's greatest breakthroughs. By equipping teams to move quickly from idea to implementation, BPM allows design-to-deployment timeframes to be cut from months to weeks. How? By equipping the team at every stage with a suite of integrated productivity tools – to quickly develop and test process models, quickly create and deploy browser-based interfaces to the process, and to rapidly integrate with legacy and third-party systems. It is this focus on the full lifecycle of process improvement that allows BPM software to slash implementation times while delivering real business value.

ST. I don't see how BPM software can help. All of our process maps are too complex. There just isn't a simple path through them. We need simplicity, not complexity wrapped in shiny new paper. Can BPM software help us with this problem?

DM. The purpose of BPM is to streamline complexity and to improve process performance. Some people confuse BPM software with process mapping software – they're not the same thing and they're not used for the



same purpose. Process maps too often simply document processes, in all their glorious, present-day complexity. On the other hand, BPM software reduces complexity and implements process improvement, streamlining processes for the purpose of improving business performance.

ST. BPM software sounds great but we know from experience that after we deploy a new application (process, in this case), this is where the work really begins – when things don't work like we expected. Can't BPM software help us test this out, to see what will really happen before we go live? Can't there be an easy way for even our process people (business folks) to check things? I mean, they are the ones that know how things are supposed to work...

DM. Simulation and walkthrough capability is a standard feature of good BPM software today. A team, and all the stakeholders, can see how a business process will perform before they put it into 'production'. In effect, the team can 'kick the tyres' thoroughly, correcting design errors and creating a high-performing process before the process is adopted into everyday business operation. Of course, no process can be truly road-tested other than by the business people who will execute it – and that's why BPM's process simulation and walkthrough capabilities are built to be used by all stakeholders, including business people.

ST. If we do use BPM software, can we really see into processes and identify bottlenecks and opportunities for improvement? Will we need to analyse reams of data to find this or will the system guide us to these? If so, is it really easy – even for a non-technology business user?

DM. Spotting bottlenecks and other improvement opportunities is supported in two critical stages by BPM software. First, at the process design stage, BPM allows teams to trial-run the process with test data (sometimes derived from historic performance) – here is where the initial bottlenecking and imperfections are seen and corrected. Second, after the process is adopted into everyday operation, BPM software monitors and evidences performance, highlighting unforeseen bottlenecks that have emerged in real-world operation. Indeed some BPM software can suggest process improvements or even optimise processes in real-time automatically. ■