Improving Performance Through Business Process Re-engineering: Aligning People, Process and Technology to Ensure Success


SYNOPSIS: As many companies struggle with controlling costs and improving organizational structure, executives often pursue Business Process Re-Engineering or BPR to manage people, process and technology within a holistic and departmental-compliant effort to better ensure alignment throughout the organization and deliver the expected results. Done well, customer service and satisfaction should flourish in kind.

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Business Process Re-Engineering: A Holistic Approach
To the uninitiated, business process re-engineering (BPR) may appear as a simple, do-it-yourself undertaking. Identify the areas in need of improvement. Assign managers to pick teams and tackle the task. Return in a few weeks or months to gauge the results.

In truth, successful BPR utilizes the organizational team as part of a holistic approach that aligns people, process and technology to ensure lasting results. The goal is to design and deliver BPR as a cohesive process, as opposed to a haphazard, piecemeal undertaking.

Process re-engineering can be easily under-estimated, either in terms of the process itself, or the strategy and technology behind it. This can lead executives to think they have sufficient skills internally to manage people, process and technology, ultimately making poor choices — or no choices — along the way. Given the costs involved, choosing the wrong technology or wandering aimlessly down a re-engineering path with poor decisions made at the end can cost vital and irretrievable time, money and other resources.

BPR: A Starting Point
BPR redesigns processes and deploys technology to empower employees. It starts with a vision. Where many organizations seek to start at Point A, it can be better to start with the end-point in mind. Where does the organization want to go? What does it seek to improve with BPR? What pain point needs addressing? This “True North” process helps expose assumptions and determines desired results – before the actual process begins.

BPR is not about reducing headcounts; it helps employees work smarter. It is not simply about improving operational efficiency, though that often is a result. Executed effectively, BPR is about aligning people and behaviors, process and rigor, and technology leveraged to its greatest possible value. By ensuring the roles of people, process and technology, the organization can deliver more value for customers and stakeholders.

BPR begins with executives understanding needs and options, getting buy-in from across functional teams, and finally empowering people to build the process. It focuses on three key components: People, Process and Technology.

The Need to Align People
BPR starts with people – the right people, involved from the start. They should consist of personnel from the departments involved, to groups such as IT and compliance. Often, internal managers tasked with overseeing BPR tend to forget or think they can cover it themselves. Compliance might know things you don't, and IT might have their own playbook for coming years. To not include them may invite frustration or require re-addressing issues overlooked because they never were part of the process in the first place. Whether IT, compliance, senior management, affected divisions or even an internal or...
contracted subject matter expert, seeking approval or input early can help avoid complications later—even if their input is, “This is fine. We approve.”

**Gaining Traction with the Process**

Companies often struggle to launch the BPR process. They’ve tracked their people and how they function in the workflow. But to propose and implement change takes minimizing impacts upon people. After all, BPR is asking much from people, especially those long entrenched in “the way things have always been.” Changing mindsets and attitudes can be the biggest barrier or inhibitor to change. It is essential to encourage employees to welcome change—even if people say, “There’s no way to change what I do.”

The goal is to make the process of change matter to people, which then will translate into desired behavior or actions. Whether seeking exemplary attitudes or performance, incentives can be monetary (bonuses for milestones achieved), or recognition (mentions in public or internal company literature).

Often such change must be introduced in small pieces. For example, a Kaizen Event (Japanese for “improvement”) is a highly focused undertaking designed to target a result and achieve rapid improvement in a quick-turnaround process often taking less than two weeks. It employs Six Sigma tools and Lean concepts to implement small changes with a radical effects.

Along with the results, the goal is to expose the team to the possibilities borne from positive change. Once visualized, people who once said, “Change is impossible,” often are impressed and motivated by the possibilities. They become believers who embrace even more change and are willing to invest more time and energy in the re-engineering project.

For the organization, if a Kaizen Event is successful, the next step is to introduce longer-term improvement efforts.

Though the target is delivery of continuous improvement, a Kaizen Event—like any change—can be difficult to initiate. Organizations are encouraged to consider engaging an outside provider or facilitator to help introduce the concept and launch the program.

Ultimately, it is key to remember that any improvement must be part of a continuous process that seeks to augment, not necessarily replace, its predecessor.

**Embracing Technology**

The third element of a BPR endeavor is the role technology can or should play in process re-engineering. Some see technology as the essential component of the process. Some vendors sell it as a magical silver bullet designed to deliver remarkable results.

Technology is neither. It simply is a tool that may assist an organization in the process of re-engineering. It is essential to understand technology’s role in the effort, without underestimating its capabilities, complexities and effects on the end result.

One study found that 78% of IT executives believed that tools selected for a process or project were out of sync with actual needs. Such disconnect often can lead to delays or project failure. Involve IT early for process overview and tool selection, as well as long-term engagement. Not only is it likely the technology suggested for the program will need to interact with existing internal IT, the department itself may be called upon to help manage its implementation or ongoing maintenance. Lacking the appropriate training, expertise, insights, even research time invested in the process, the
misapplication of technology could set process re-engineering back through unexpected delays or conflicts.

Bringing IT into the program early helps prevent pursuit of ill-conceived or otherwise unchecked assumptions – both negative or positive. Such assumptions made by non-IT personnel – for example, whether to accept or decline an application – can be vetted early on or as they are introduced.

**Use of Specialized Vendors**
A provider will bring internal expertise or engage a vendor skilled in the necessary functions. This can include computer hardware, software or applications, or other specific resources, including research and recommendations of vendors or other necessary providers. Moreover, the provider can handle the implementation based on the recommendations provided.

BPR experts often are trained in Lean Six Sigma quality management methods and seek to analyze and transform essential operations and complex business processes at large enterprises struggling with high operating costs, heavy paperwork burdens, and quality and customer service issues. At DATAMARK, for example, the company's business process analysis for qualified enterprises delivers an on-site process review that identifies and defines a client's requirements, benchmarks the current level of operations and identifies opportunities for improvement. This high-level analysis helps guide decision-making behind whether to outsource, or acts as the first step of an in-depth business process re-engineering consultation.

**Seeking Results**
The results of a successful BPR program are seen through a variety of measures. These can be documentation or reporting on current state analysis and future state projections. Complete visibility is improved across the organization, with all stakeholders realizing a holistic view of all aspects of the process.

From team to department to the enterprise, improved and efficient management delivers heightened insights for simplified and option-rich management. This includes integration of management components into process delivery. In the end, the organization should experience better customer service, customer satisfaction and improved margins.

As many companies struggle to control costs and improve organizational structure, BPR can help manage people, process and technology within a holistic and departmental-compliant effort. Done well, alignment is achieved throughout the organization, and results meet or exceed expectations – for the organization, its stakeholders and its customers alike.
About the Author
Nina Brown is Director of the Business Engineering Department with DATAMARK. She joined the company in 2000 as a software developer and has since guided several successful software development projects and later, several large-scale BPO transitions as a Project Manager. In her current role, Brown oversees a team of Lean Six Sigma trained experts tasked with the analysis and redesign of client’s business processes. She holds a bachelor of science degree from Stanford University.

About DATAMARK
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