
How to Move from Paper to Impact in Business Process Management: The Journey of SAP

Corinne Reisert, Sarah Zelt, and Joerg Wacker

Abstract

- (a) **Situation faced:** In order to produce innovative solutions faster and more simply, SAP started in 2008 to transform its research and development processes. SAP moved away from complex and static project methods toward agile and simple processes, thereby significantly reducing the throughput time of the standard innovation cycle. Based on the experience of this transformation and optimization, the first at that time in a global company of knowledge workers, SAP decided to increase the emphasis on Business Process Management (BPM). Therefore, BPM initiatives were implemented on a company-wide level in the effort to establish a process infrastructure and a process improvement culture.
- (b) **Action taken:** The Productivity Consulting Group (PCG) was founded with the mission of strengthening the importance of BPM throughout the company. The SAP Process Map was established to create transparency in SAP's key processes, roles, and responsibilities. The SAP Process Maturity Model was created with the aim of constantly increasing the maturity of SAP's processes. An approach to performance measurement and process improvement and a portfolio of BPM-related services were introduced to support Process Managers on their way to reaching process excellence. In addition, activities were introduced to strengthen the BPM community, the foundation for BPM at SAP.
- (c) **Results achieved:** Implementing BPM at SAP was an important step toward overcoming the complexities that plague our businesses, a step that was important to both SAP and its customers. Following the operating principle "Run Simple," SAP developed a process-management

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infrastructure throughout the company that led to transparency in SAP's key processes and measurable process improvements.

- (d) **Lessons learned:** The key success factor in SAP's journey from BPM concepts and ideas to measurable impact—that is, from paper to impact—was the strategic alignment of BPM with top management support. Strong governance with the SAP Process Map, the SAP Process Maturity Model, and BPM standards enabled the company to strive toward process excellence.

However, a lively and engaged BPM community was as important as having the right methods or tools at hand. Implementing BPM from a top-down perspective helped to some extent, but building an understanding of BPM and its value from the bottom-up using a variety of mechanisms (introduced in this article) was also required.

1 Introduction

As the market leader in enterprise application software, SAP is at the center of today's business and technology revolution. SAP has a 44 year history of innovation and growth as a true industry leader, has an annual revenue (IFRS) of 20.793 billion euros, and employs more than 77,000 employees in more than 130 countries (SAP Global Corporate Affairs 2016). SAP's innovations enable more than 300,000 customers in 190 countries to work together more efficiently and use business insights more effectively. SAP's intention is to help organizations of all sizes and in all industries overcome the complexities that plague our businesses, our jobs and our lives (SAP SE 2016).

“Run Simple—If we simplify everything, we can do anything” is not only the SAP's key external message but also its operating principle. Simplifying processes is also a key request from SAP's employees. The employee survey (the “people survey”) contains a set of questions to measure employees' satisfaction with processes and to collect feedback on specific process improvements. The Chief Operating Officer (COO) is responsible for the company's process office, and the COOs of each of SAP's business units, who form the company's virtual COO network, agree on the joint execution of the SAP strategy and a common portfolio of process improvements.

In order to produce innovative solutions faster and more simply, in 2008 SAP started an initiative to transform its research and development processes to move away from complex and static project methods toward agile and simple processes. As the transformation significantly reduced the standard innovation cycle's throughput time, SAP decided to build on this success and founded the Productivity Consulting Group (PCG), which acts as process office with direct oversight of SAP corporate functions in all regions throughout the globe.

During the past couple of years, BPM's role was strengthened through a variety of BPM initiatives, including the development of the SAP Process Map, the SAP

Process Maturity Model, approaches to measuring process performance and process improvements, and a portfolio of BPM-related services. This chapter summarizes SAP's BPM journey from paper to impact and presents a case that shows how BPM can be set up in organizations. As such, this chapter focuses primarily on the governance capability area of BPM's six core elements (Rosemann and vom Brocke 2015). A variety of initiatives is required for the successful implementation of BPM (which will be explained in the course of this paper) that relate to the phases of the BPM Lifecycle (Dumas et al. 2013). After a description of the situation that SAP faced (Sect. 2), Sect. 3 introduces all BPM-related actions that have been undertaken, ranging from strong governance to establishing a lively BPM community. The results achieved are discussed in Sect. 4, and the lessons learned are summarized in Sect. 5.

2 Situation Faced

SAP started to improve processes systematically in 2008. At that point, SAP's core software development process was a waterfall process that was implemented in the late 1990s. The waterfall process introduced customer validation, quality gates, and compliance with standards, thus ensuring that the products being shipped were compliant with an ever-growing set of formal and quality requirements. However, the process was built on a globally distributed functional setup based on a division of labor, which created long decision times, long development cycle times, and developers who identified poorly with the whole process. Customers complained about limited usability and medium levels of quality, which resulted in a low adoption. Unhappy customers and an inefficient work environment also influenced SAP's numbers. While single departments had always had approaches with which to optimize processes, there was no central team or organizational setup that was responsible for managing processes comprehensively. Therefore, this situation had to be changed in favor of an approach that increased efficiency (reduced time, resources, and costs) and the quality of products and solutions (ease of consumption and superior user experience).

SAP decided to strive for efficiency and effectiveness in its entire product development process by implementing a development model that follows lean principles (Lean Development Model) and is based on agile practices. Scrum, an iterative and incremental software-development framework, was introduced at the team level. Teams were built to cover cross-functional requirements to define, build, and deliver products and functions in short cycles of 2–4 weeks. Each cycle ends with a review and team retrospective. Issues and obstacles identified in the retrospective were integrated into a continuous-improvement process. This effort resulted in constant improvement of throughput time, on-time delivery, productive capacity, product adoption, number of deliveries, sustainable pace, and workload, and is now building a solid foundation for an even more innovative delivery process for cloud products.

Based on the success of this transformation and optimization, management decided to extend the approach to all of the company's business units. Employees

had expressed their dissatisfaction with complicated internal processes via the yearly “people survey” at the same time that the need for standardization (e.g., triggered by implementing Shared Service Centers) increased. Therefore, SAP’s intention was to build on the experiences from the research and development transformation to widen the scope to the organization as a whole. This effort required a central organization with strong governance and a process improvement culture that could drive Lean thinking, operational excellence, and BPM initiatives.

3 Action Taken

After the decision was made to enhance the success of the recent transformation in research and development, the PCG was founded as a process office with direct oversight over SAP’s corporate functions throughout all regions. The PCG is responsible for establishing a process infrastructure in the company, including process governance, idea management, and improvement services. The PCG is located in the area of SAP’s COO, which facilitates a direct connection between the PCG’s portfolio and the corporate strategy. By grouping PCG with an organizational unit called Business Insight and Technology, the company ensures a close relationship with IT projects and innovations.

In contributing to SAP’s strategy, the PCG increases the organization’s efficiency and effectiveness by implementing governing processes and standards, the Lean methodology, and continuous improvement and by providing transparency for sound decision-making. The components of BPM at SAP follow many phases of the BPM Lifecycle (i.e., process identification, discovery, analysis, redesign, implementation, monitoring and controlling) (Dumas et al. 2013) and include the SAP Process Map, the BPM community, continuous process improvement, the SAP Process Maturity Model, performance measurement, and improvement and productivity services and strategic projects.

3.1 SAP Process Map

A process map typically results from the process-identification phase of the BPM Lifecycle (Dumas et al. 2013). SAP’s processes are reflected in the SAP Process Map (shown in Fig. 1), which serves as the primary top-down process perspective and is the single source of internal process information. The SAP Process Map is closely linked to the corporate strategy and is the basis for audits and external certification and the starting point for business-driven process management and improvement projects. It is accessible to all SAP employees via the intranet (corporate portal). According to established process-classification frameworks (Dumas et al. 2013), the processes are structured as *management processes*, which are used to plan, diagnose, and manage core and support processes; *core processes*, which create direct value for SAP’s customers’ and *support processes*, which provide the necessary resources and infrastructure for core processes.

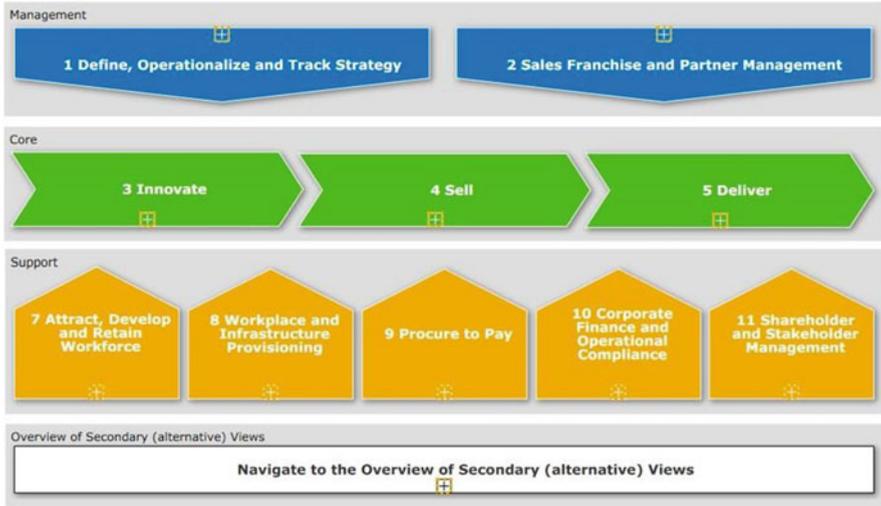


Fig. 1 SAP process map

The SAP Process Map is a hierarchical composition that consists of multiple high-level processes and corresponding sub-processes (Dumas et al. 2013). Processes on the highest level, called Level 1 processes, are directly visible on the Process Map. Level 2 processes break the Level 1 processes into more detail, while Level 3 process documentations describe the process flow, the responsibilities, and input and output documents.

Establishing strong governance mechanisms ensures that there are clear rules for including processes in the SAP Process Map, for consistent naming, and for modelling. A process can be included as a Level 3 process only if it has process costs of 1 million euros or if it impacts 1 million euros in revenue, and/or it follows certain compliance standards (e.g., SOX compliance), and/or it directly supports a core process.

Processes on Level 3 are named according to certain rules, which follow established guidelines (e.g., Dumas et al. 2013; Mendling et al. 2010).

- Use the pattern < Imperative Verb + Noun in Singular > unless there is a common name or business terminology (e.g., from ITIL or ISO standards).
- Avoid abbreviations.
- Names should reflect generally accepted common usage and be short and concise.
- Names should reflect the company’s terminology.
- Verbs like manage, perform, coordinate, and execute should have concrete definitions that are used consistently.

Each process should serve a purpose, should have a measure for efficiency, and should continuously be improved. The focus of process documentation is to deliver valuable information for the people who execute the process and to be the basis for business-driven management and improvement projects. To ensure consistency, the documentation should occur in a single tool that uses Business Process Model and Notation 2.0.

3.2 BPM Community: Central and Local Responsibilities

People and culture are core elements of BPM (Rosemann and vom Brocke 2015). PCG manages the SAP Process Map and provides SAP-wide BPM standards on how to design, measure, and improve processes. It also manages the BPM community, which entails educating the Process Managers on BPM methodology. Process Managers are responsible for defining, operating, and improving processes, so they pursue the business goals, strategies, and objectives defined by Business Owners. As shown in Fig. 2, the responsibility for a process's design, documentation, and improvement lies with the business unit that is responsible for the process's

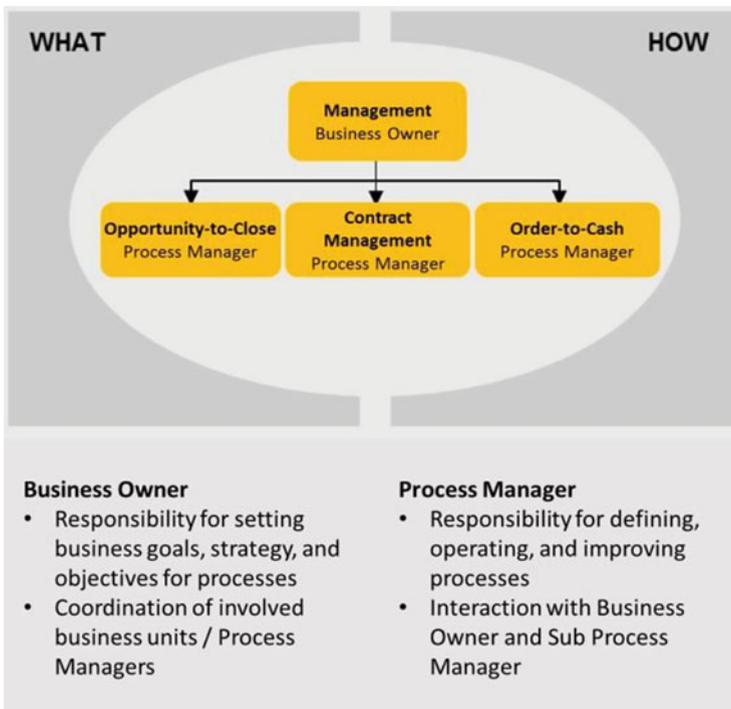


Fig. 2 Main responsibilities of Business Owner and Process Manager

business outcome. Therefore, the Business Owner and the Process Manager for each process are based in the respective business unit, not in the central PCG.

A key element for successful BPM is a vibrant BPM community (Fig. 3). Since this community is not necessarily defined by organizational structures, creating its own identity is important. The PCG supports a series of communication and enablement activities in order to establish a solid relationship with the BPM community based on the aligned collaboration model between Process Managers, the COOs of the various business units, and the PCG. These activities include:

- **SAP Process Excellence Newsletter:** Bi-monthly issues that contain training offers, information on upcoming events and success stories on process improvement



Fig. 3 Process excellence award 2015

- **Process Manager Information Sessions:** Bi-monthly sessions for Process Managers to share best practices and roll out information about BPM standards
- **Process Management Training:** Classroom and virtual training sessions on the BPM methodology, tools, and best practices (from Process Managers for Process Managers)
- **SAP Process Summit:** Annual event where all Process Managers come together to exchange best practices, get inspiration from external speakers, and learn about new topics related to BPM
- **SAP Process Excellence Award:** Increases the visibility of excellent processes and provides a platform for employees who are working on process improvement by rewarding outstanding processes that accomplish measurable process improvements and have a positive impact on the company.

3.3 Continuous Process Improvement

The primary target of BPM at SAP is to improve processes continuously. Process improvements can result from following the phases of the BPM Lifecycle (Dumas et al. 2013) or can be triggered by strategic initiatives. Although the triggers for actual process improvement can be numerous, the process activities involved in improving a process is standardized and, as such, is documented in the SAP Process Map.

The Process Manager is responsible for defining the process improvement goal (with approval from the Business Owner), which is typically derived from the SAP strategy (improvement portfolio, strategic objectives), from a current issue in the process (impediment, audit finding), or from an idea from the SAP idea management initiative. Process Managers define process improvements by reusing existing process definitions, thus following an evolutionary re-design approach (Dumas et al. 2013). They state the benefits of an improvement initiative for the business, as well as the improvement's impact on the process itself and on the process performers. The actual activities involved can be numerous and diverse, depending on the process and the character of the improvement. For example, improvements can:

- Result from following the phases of the BPM Lifecycle (Dumas et al. 2013): process discovery, analysis, redesign, implementation, monitoring and control
- Be strategic projects/programs/initiatives
- Be initiated through process improvement services provided by PCG
- Be part of continuous improvement (e.g., by establishing a regular feedback cycle/group)

The effect of the process's changes are measured according to Process Performance Indicators (PPIs), which include throughput time, customer satisfaction, and

cost per unit output. These PPIs are measured by the Process Manager and compared with previously defined success criteria.

3.4 SAP Process Maturity Model

As another aspect of BPM governance (Rosemann and vom Brocke 2015), SAP uses its own process maturity model that has been tailored to the company's needs and business model. It follows the idea of generic maturity models [e.g., Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) (CMMI Product Team 2002)], which is to offer a consistent, well-defined methodology to measure a process's maturity in a comparable way (SAP Process Governance Team and Konhaeuser 2015). The SAP Process Maturity Model distinguishes four maturity levels, from Level 0 (the lowest) to Level 3. Processes on Level 0 are neither transparent nor managed, while a set of predefined criteria define each of the higher maturity levels:

- **Maturity Level 0:** The process is neither transparent nor managed.
- **Maturity Level 1:** The process is transparent.
 - Basic process documentation (included in the SAP Process Map) is available.
 - An accountable Process Manager and Business Owner are named.
 - The degree of process standardization is transparent [e.g., is this process a global process applicable to all of SAP's local Market Unit or are there local variants (e.g., to reflect local legal regulations)?]
 - Knowledge transfer through such efforts as internal training and process handbooks is available to ensure that process participants have the required knowledge to execute the process.
- **Maturity Level 2:** The process is managed.
 - Process operation, input and output is measured, monitored, and transparent to decision-makers.
 - PPIs are regularly monitored using SAP standard software.
 - "Customers" of the process are named—for example, a Manager who is looking for a new hire is the customer of the HR recruitment process—and their top three requirements are defined.
 - Detailed process documentation is available (included/linked in the SAP Process Map).
 - Process variants are documented.
 - Risk assessment is performed.
- **Maturity Level 3:** The process is on a high level of optimization and is continuously improved.
 - The process vision is defined.
 - Annual improvement targets are defined.
 - Service level agreements are established.
 - SAP standard systems are applied to support the process's execution.
 - Online real-time process data is available for processes that are supported by SAP tools.

- Accountability for the process output is ensured.
- A continuous improvement process is established.
- Process standardization is higher than 80%.

Since SAP strives for process excellence through continuous increases in its processes' maturity, the processes' maturity is monitored centrally.

3.5 Performance Measurement

Process monitoring and controlling are critical phases of the BPM Lifecycle (Dumas et al. 2013), so a central element of maturity Level 2 is the measurement of process performance. The importance of performance measurement is based on the assumption that one can only manage what one can measure. The inability to measure basic PPIs like the number of process instances or a process's throughput time, working time, or costs per output makes it difficult to judge a process's quality, not to mention the effect of changing a process.

Setting up performance measurement for a process requires significant effort and thorough discussion beforehand. What are the right indicators? How and how often should they be measured? What is a reasonable sample size (if continuous measurement is impracticable)? SAP introduced six basic PPIs have been introduced at SAP to simplify process measurement, all of which refer to processes' input, operations, and output:

- Input
 - Number of requests per year (how many instances of the process occur per year?)
 - Number of people involved (how many employees are required to execute the process?)
- Operations
 - Throughput time (How much time does it take to complete one instance of the process?)
 - Working time (how much working time is required to complete one instance of the process?)
- Output
 - Cost per output
 - Customer satisfaction

This basic set of PPIs is often the starting point and can be extended through area-specific PPIs that cover more business-specific needs that depend on such factors as the process's purpose and nature and organizational and environmental factors (vom Brocke et al. 2016). These business-specific needs serve as a fact-based instrument that support Process Managers in discussions with stakeholders, such as higher-level managers or process customers.

3.6 Improvement and Productivity Services and Strategic Projects

In addition to the BPM initiatives introduced above, the PCG offers a portfolio of well-structured, innovative services that can support BPM experts in their efforts to improve processes. These services contain classic process-improvement support services and services that increase the efficiency and effectiveness of individual roles and business units. The services of PCG are clustered along primary improvement dimensions and levels of intensity, as depicted in Fig. 4.

The standardization of the PCG services facilitates means that a PCG employee can use the service description to prepare for their first service delivery with an experienced colleague and later deliver the service on their own. The standardization of services also supports the measurement of results and simplifies collaboration with internal customers. Project results are assessed jointly and measured with respect to their value and customer satisfaction. Collaboration between the PCG and internal customers is voluntary, driven by the internal customer’s need for support in improving a process or analyzing a problem. The standardization of the services, the customer’s equal representation in the project team, and the measurement of the results help to prevent misuse of the services the PCG offers.

The PCG services focus on analyzing an organizational unit’s process and understanding its business roles. In order to get a complete picture of the “life” of a business unit, one must understand the people who work on the processes. An organizational unit needs to ensure that employees are qualified for their roles so they can do their jobs. Taking into account the employees’ backgrounds, education, and day-to-day work reality is part of designing excellent processes. Typically, employees want to do their jobs and focus on their key tasks, but badly designed

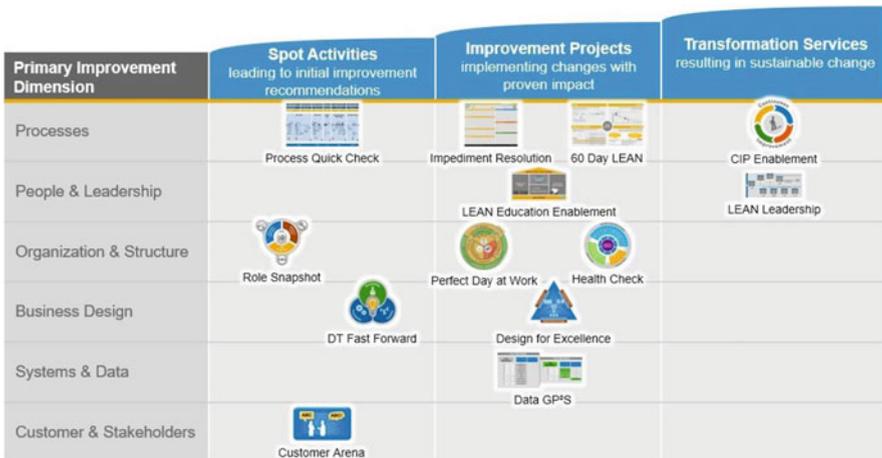


Fig. 4 PCG service catalog

processes, lack of education, and misassumptions hinder them from doing so. To change this situation, the PCG designed two services that focus on the roles that are involved in process execution: the role snapshot and the perfect day at work.

- **Role Snapshot:** This service contains an easy and intuitive Lean approach to analyzing a role. It identifies opportunities to increase a process role's efficiency, which contributes to improved productivity during the employee's workday and improves his or her work/life balance. The Role Snapshot service provides an initial assessment and concrete recommendations for improvement but does not develop or implement these improvements.
- **Perfect Day at Work:** The role-based service, "Perfect Day at Work," offers a comprehensive analysis to determine whether employees have the skills they need to do their job. The analysis provides a 360° view of all of the major aspects of a perfect day at work. Concrete recommendations are worked out and then implemented and measured during the project.

4 Results Achieved

The unique combination of strategic initiatives based on the corporate strategy, standardized service delivery, and sound process infrastructure enabled the PCG to simplify internal processes and raise overall productivity. Success for SAP's BPM activities is defined as creating measurable and sustainable positive impact by which it contributes significantly to the corporate strategy.

With the implementation of the SAP Process Map and easy-to-use tools for process documentation, process modeling has become an important part of Process Managers' jobs. Currently, 626 employees have an editor user for process modeling, and more than 1200 employees are enrolled in internal training that helps them to design and leverage processes at SAP. Today, 92% of all Level 3 processes are documented and published in the SAP Process Map, and 1023 processes on Level 3 and below are documented.

A documented process as part of the SAP Process Map helps Process Managers in their daily work by enabling quick onboarding of new employees and ensuring execution of a process independent of who undertakes it. It enables common understanding on common executions, so it facilitates delivery of the same results with consistent quality. As one of SAP's Process Managers in the Finance and Administration department explained, "[Process modelling] actually made an impact on the daily project work of the GCMS Team, as it changed the way we visualize processes. It accelerated and improved our collaboration..." As this Process Manager made clear, Process Managers' opinion has changed from viewing process modelling as an administrative burden to seeing it as a critical activity in fully understanding the complexity and dependencies of processes as a first and necessary step in process improvement initiatives.

The SAP Process Map is important to the daily work of individual Process Managers, but it also creates transparency in SAP's key processes, roles, and

responsibilities for the whole organization. All SAP employees have access to the SAP Process Map and can view all published processes, which helps them to understand the “big picture” of which their work is part, their work’s interfaces to other processes, and the people they can contact if they have questions or plan improvement projects. The SAP Process Map also serves as a reference structure for a broad variety of IT projects, the enterprise architecture, idea management, business continuity, and the data privacy and protection office.

As an example, several IT implementation projects at SAP have used the SAP Process Map to structure their projects along end-to-end processes. This approach helped project managers to define the exact scope of their projects (i.e., the processes that are included or excluded) and to divide their projects into several work streams. The SAP Process Map has been a meaningful reference structure for discussions, as it ensures that Process Managers who are responsible for process execution are involved in the project. In addition, the SAP Process Map enables project managers to identify and consider dependencies on other processes or business areas, thereby linking the project more closely to the day-to-day operation. It also helped project managers to derive IT requirements and to monitor project deliverables with a clear reference to critical processes.

Another example of SAP’s use of the Process Map is the company-wide idea management, which is also structured along the SAP Process Map. SAP employees can submit their improvement ideas via a tool that links the ideas to processes and the responsible Process Manager. Using the SAP Process Map as reference structure for idea management ensures clear responsibilities and fast examination and implementation of ideas.

In addition to the SAP Process Map, strong governance and BPM standards for process maturity, measurement, and improvement support Process Managers in their efforts to achieve process excellence. As a result, since the performance indicators were established, the feedback from Process Managers has been overwhelmingly positive, as they finally they have a fact-based instrument that supports them in discussions with management and process customers and that helps them to measure business performance.

While the immediate value of a Process Map and strong process governance is difficult to measure, the impact of process improvement projects is not. Based on a sample of 100 projects per year, SAP currently achieves a typical result of 20:1 payback and a customer satisfaction that exceeds 75%. In addition, many processes’ processing time has been reduced significantly, including a process in marketing services team that eliminated eleven process steps and reduced processing time by up to 74%.

Another example of process improvement is a recent project undertaken with Global Facility Management to simplify and increase the efficiency of SAP’s internal food-counter processes. (This improvement project shows the wide range of fields to which BPM activities can be applied.) The project resulted in significant shortening of the waiting time for lunch and gave the PCG a chance to demonstrate to Global Facility Management the value of process management with tangible results.

5 Lessons Learned

The implementation of BPM in SAP has moved a long way from the concepts and ideas of BPM to measurable impact—in short, from paper to impact. BPM initiatives have moved from being an administrative burden to creating a real impact, the company's perceptions of BPM experts has improved significantly, and there is a high demand for the improvement services offered by the PCG. While BPM activities had been perceived as push activities that were driven centrally, they are now seen more as pull activities, where employees request services or strive toward process improvement. Moving from paper to impact in BPM could only be realized with the help of four primary success factors.

First, as is the case with most organizational activities, strategic alignment and top management support are important determinants of successful BPM implementation. Therefore, creating a central team that was responsible for the process management infrastructure, process governance, and improvement services and that collaborates with the various organizational units took precedence. The organizational set-up of this central team as part of the COO function plays an important role in ensuring a direct connection between the PCG's portfolio and the corporate strategy. The close collaboration with the COOs of SAP's business units helped to align the process-management effort with activities in the lines of businesses to create measurable benefit and promote process management across the company.

Second, establishing strong governance was important. One important driver was setting up the SAP Process Map as the central repository of process documentation, which created transparency in organizational activities, roles, and responsibilities. It was also important to set standards for how to document, measure, and improve processes. The SAP Process Map also serves as a central infrastructure for areas like risk management and data protection, which increases its usefulness. The implementation of the SAP Maturity Model supports the goal of process improvement and increasing process orientation in the company.

Third, the implementation of the PCG service catalog ensured the delivery of standardized process improvements. With the help of these services, it was possible for internal customers to focus on and resolve dedicated process issues and to understand the services' expected deliverables, scope, and duration. The process-improvement projects followed standardized service descriptions, and delivery was more efficient than it was in comparable projects. Each service delivery also included a concrete measurement of the benefit achieved, which helped to prove the value of the project and demonstrated the benefit of the process-management effort.

Fourth, experience has shown that a top-down goal to increase process maturity can motivate Process Managers only to a certain extent. In order to achieve a sustainable increase in process maturity, the added value of a managed process has to be communicated. To promote investment in increasing process maturity, Process Managers regularly share their experiences in information sessions and the yearly SAP Process Summit.

A strong BPM community and a culture that supports BPM initiatives, where every single employee contributes to process improvement, are essential. SAP established the Process Excellence Award, process management events, and other activities that contribute to the creation of a process management culture and a deeper understanding of the value of BPM.

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