6 Sure Signs You've Hampered Your Business Processes

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When your company wants to change a business process, perhaps to accommodate a customer request, a marketing opportunity, or a supplier or production change that's outside the fringe of your current procedures, what happens? Do business teams articulate their requirements to IT teams, who in turn code and implement what's called for? **How's that working out for you?** *For most companies, the common activities of changing and creating business processes don't fare well. Six telling questions can help you put business process change and composition — activities that determine how well your company can execute its strategies — into perspective:*

| Yes | No | *From request through implementation, are your business teams pleased with IT turnaround times?* |

| Yes | No | *Are business rules and requests consistently translated between business and IT teams?* |

| Yes | No | *Do your business and IT teams share common tools to view and model processes?* |

| Yes | No | *Are your business process management (BPM) tools integrated with the SAP transactions in which key elements of processes are executed?* |

| Yes | No | *Is the business defining requirements in a language that IT can readily understand?* |

| Yes | No | *Are your business processes immune from the degrading efficiency that typically accompanies paper-based workarounds or large volumes of exceptions?* |

If you answered "No" to any of these questions, you're operating at a disadvantage. Your business processes are constrained. They are intractable at a time when the market is volatile and you need the flexibility to adapt (or construct) processes with fewer resources and at a lower cost. Those companies that can do all these things quickly have a competitive edge.

BPM technology has evolved considerably. Imagine business teams that can model processes with tools that are as easy to use as drawing tools. No coding is required. Your core SAP applications are fully integrated with the tools. There is one common, intuitive platform available to executives, business managers, analysts, application architects, and developers. Customers using the tools describe them as revolutionary.

SAP Senior Vice President Wolfgang Hilpert is at the helm of this BPM breakthrough. In this interview, Hilpert introduces customers to the flexible, integrated vision upon which SAP's BPM platform is based, and advises readers on how to get started.

Q: For many organizations, workflow is a familiar concept. How does SAP's business process management (BPM) offering compare to that?

A: Workflow management works well for "sunny-day" business process cases. It so happens, however, that it often rains in real life. Things happen out of band – customers want something different from what's offered, or they want it at a different time than originally planned for. Traditional workflow alone doesn't provide the agility necessary to evolve business processes on the fly or to deviate from predefined business process paths.

To cope with the real world and all of its out-of-band requests, you need more. You need a comprehensive BPM model that encompasses business rules management, event management, human workflow and system integration,

Inside

Business Process Management | SAP INSIDER

management of roles and processes, and tools that serve business and IT organizations and facilitate collaboration between them. We took all these factors into account in designing SAP's BPM platform. Our SAP NetWeaver Business Process Management (SAP NetWeaver BPM) and SAP NetWeaver Business Rules Management (SAP NetWeaver BRM) components enable organizations to automate, monitor, and optimize business processes faster and more effectively than workflow-only, routing-focused offerings.
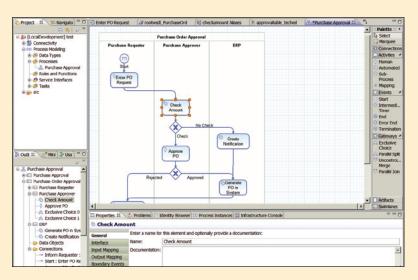
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Q: Can you describe the BPM user experience?

A: Business users see and work with process models, not with code (see **Figure 1**). These models are simple, intuitive diagrams that show a business-oriented view of a business process — including the steps that are involved, the sequence in which these steps are performed, the human interactions that are required, and how exceptions should be handled. We're talking about a simple modeling language that is used by both business and IT organizations. It's important to note that the models users produce are executable; business organizations don't need IT to generate executables for them. We're putting business organizations, not IT, in the driver's seat. This affords them more control and visibility.

Think about the order-to-cash process and how advantageous it is for the finance organization to see and manage it end to end, particularly now. In this economy, there is tremendous pressure to identify and address revenue leakage and to quickly react to changing market conditions. Or imagine a small manufacturing environment where the CEO asks you to change the order in which the company receives goods and issues payments. Many manufacturers are reshaping relationships with suppliers and customers, so

this isn't an outlandish scenario. These types of process changes, once considered extraordinarily difficult, become quite easy with SAP NetWeaver BPM.

Q: How do you ensure the integrity of these business processes?

A: It starts with a very rich understanding of the core processes that we deliver with our SAP Business Suite applications. This is a key point of differentiation for the SAP NetWeaver BPM offering. Remember that SAP Business Suite applications are service enabled. There are thousands of enterprise services that encapsulate business functionality and expose it in a way that ensures process and data integrity. Only the levers that can be safely pulled or changed are exposed, and through our modeling environment, this is all done in a business-user-friendly manner.

The collaborative nature of our BPM environment further ensures business process integrity. Nothing gets lost in translation. Business organizations compromise business process integrity when they work with PowerPoint or other diagramming tools, then pass that work along to the IT organization, which uses an entirely different set of tools. With our BPM environment, business users and IT are working with the same platform, definitions, tools, concepts, and notation. So IT sees, in very specific terms, a high-fidelity rendering of a business process specification and can support it as needed. In many cases, no support is even necessary — the SAP tools know how to deploy (publish, so to speak) these models in a machine-readable way so the server can execute them.

Another point worth noting is the obvious proximity of our BPM component to our applications. I do not, however, want to suggest that our BPM component only works with SAP applications. Our focus on Web services and standard interfaces ensures that you can easily hook BPM up with other systems. The component was built from the ground up to work in heterogeneous environments where business processes cut across SAP and non-SAP systems alike.

Q: Are there tips you can offer to help organizations continuously adapt their business processes?

A: Think big, start small. You want to first identify a process to model or adapt that has significant value, yet doesn't require you to boil the ocean on your first go as you gain experience with the tools, interfaces, and methodology. I've seen small, dedicated teams establish valuable pilots and achieve significant goals. And it took very little time for them to master the BPM environment. ■

FIGURE 1 ▼
SAP NetWeaver Business Process Management allows you to design, model, and execute new or adapted business processes without having to write code