

Sensible business process management (BPM) for sensible times

Making business as usual, better

By Martin Atherton, January 2010

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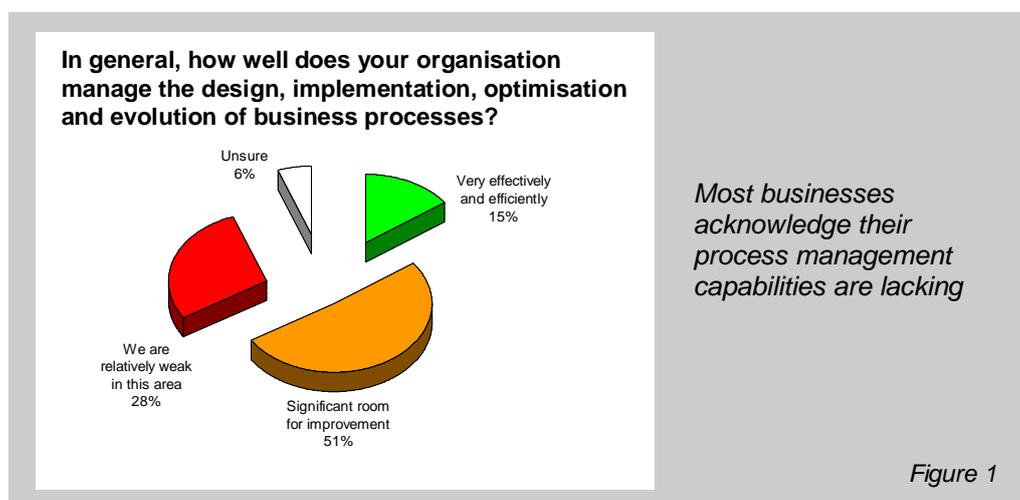


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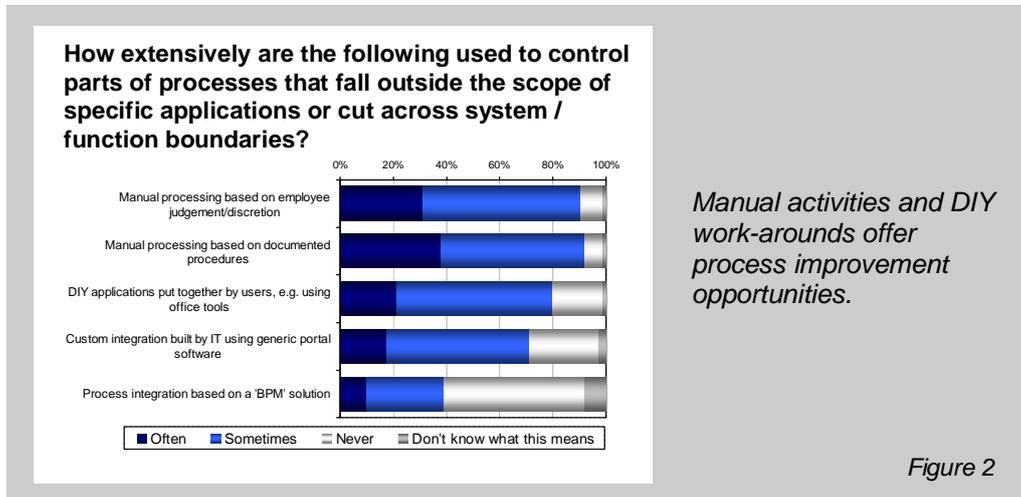
By most accepted standards somewhere north of two thirds/70% of IT budgets are spent keeping everything running. It stands to reason that in a given year (since we're at the start of a new one) most of what an IT department will spend its time doing could be described as 'business as usual'.

However, in a year following one of the most difficult - financially and operationally – on record, 'business as usual' needs to find a bit of extra room for improvement. I believe this will be the reality for many IT shops lacking the resources (or will, or sign off) for 'big' projects in 2010.

Essentially, the sources and options for incremental improvement need to be readily available, physically or logically touchable, and naturally, linked to the businesses goals at large. They also need applying consistently. I'll wager that a plentiful supply of opportunities can be found amongst the processes your business employs in its daily activities.



Our research activities in this area highlighted several factors of relevance to anyone seeking to make improvements to their business processes 'without making a big fuss'. The first is simply acknowledging where the opportunities for improvement lie. For many organisations these can be found at the junctions between automated segments of a process and manual ones. This does not mean 'automate everything', but it may present an opportunity to improve clarity, guidance and accompanying content to improve consistency and speed for these kinds of process steps (the kind of thing Casewise used to do and what Nimbus does today).



The second is making sure that the insight and experience gained - from exploratory activities such as process discovery and modelling right through to the changes implemented - are captured and stored appropriately. That way the next person revisiting the process – or looking for inspiration and best practice for a different process – can benefit from the goodness achieved the first time around.

Positive incremental changes can be realised consistently and sustainably by taking this end of the 'BPM equation' seriously. BPM vendor Lombardi's Blueprint tool represents just one way of sidestepping the risk of wasting great but unrepeatable process improvement work due to it being carried out in an environment not designed for sharing and collaborative input.

Business process management – in the software era in particular – is a compelling yet mine-laden area. At worst, it suffers from 'expert syndrome': too many big and wonderful conversations and full-on software suites rendering the essence and practicalities of the topic inaccessible, incomprehensible or simply unattainable by all but enterprises with deep pockets.

However, at its most accessible, BPM is about addressing the discovery, improvement and maintenance of the processes which we use to run our businesses as simply and sustainably as possible. It's this end of the spectrum where opportunities to identify and deliver incremental benefits without having to engage in a mega project or huge software implementation lie, and likely be welcomed with open arms by the board.

More articles by Martin Atherton available [here](#).

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