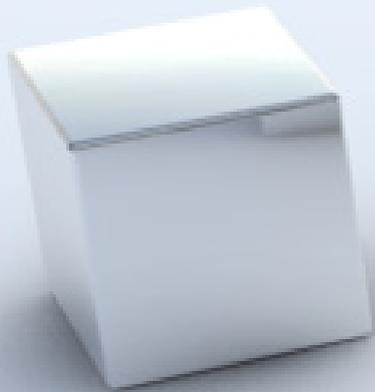Business Process Management

A case for specialized BPM Support and Operations

By Pietro Casella, BPM Manager at Safira, Portugal

Drive BPM adoption, business value, agility and full process orientation through specialized support and operations

The vast majority of BPM programs are the means for executing high priority strategic initiatives. Many times, despite a favorable business case, these are still tied to significant hidden risk due to the high impact BPM has on the enterprise architecture.

This risk is driven by complexity on several dimensions such as high impact on people work procedures, high levels of integration, deployment of new unknown software and application paradigm shift.

From pilot to project to rollout, ensuring proper support to Users and Project Teams is of utmost importance for four main reasons:

Why specialized BPM support and operations matter?

BPM adoption & enablement.

BPM adoption and customer enablement stages are critical. Faulty production of first deployments can severely compromise the value being delivered, and the evangelization and enablement efforts of a BPM program. A specialized service is an indispensable partner to BPM consulting teams from day 1, ensuring the infra-structure does not stand in the way of delivering value quickly.

Business Value.

BPM is all about business value, so no wonder 70% of BPM support requests require significant business process context. Analysts in specialized S&O service should capture the business context make sure the business language is spoken in all communication with the users.

Agility.

The iterative nature of BPM requires fast deployments and does not cope with lengthy handovers. Specialized S&O is designed to be able to pick up right where the consultants end. With built in bug fixing and workaround capabilities, S&O offloads the implementation teams while "keeping it running". By interfacing with the configuration management of the development cycle, S&O become part of the agile BPM cycle.

Supporting the processes

… not just the infrastructure. Specialized S&O goes beyond the application, the stack and the line of business applications down to the plumbing, to deliver true 360º process support. Owning every process support request and providing a single point of contact to solve each business users' problem. BPM Architects and Integration Developers provide a broad and deep array of technical skills, spanning SOA, databases, app servers, and everything else in the IT ecosystem, enabling full root cause diagnosis and correction anywhere under the hood.

Before understanding the needs it is relevant to understand BPM applications have a different set of features. In a nutshell, they are process oriented rather than silo or record oriented. Every activity is relevant to the final goal. They're also inherently mutable with frequent deployments due to new regulation or continuous improvement.

This means "changing the source code" while keeping full historical data compatibility. High levels of integration are also the norm. A typical BPM rollout includes tens to hundreds of integration points. Lastly, they're used by all levels of the organization which implies a broader range of user proficiencies.

All these differences have a direct impact on the underlying support and operations requirements, demanding alternative specialized approaches. Leveraging our experience delivering over five BPM programs and providing specialized BPM Support and Operations, we have identified (see Table 1) the main differences and corresponding actions leading to a strong foundation for continuously improving organizations with truly successful BPM programs.

How is BPM support different	How can a specialized BPM S&O address the differences?
BPM Adoption and Enablement	
Imperative user satisfaction and BPM evangelization – for an organization embracing BPM, user satisfaction and adoption of a process mind-set is key to BPM success. Longer term BPM evangelization is highly beneficial for all BPM programs and must be a key priority for user facing teams.	Address user satisfaction by ensuring outstanding communication skills and cultural awareness on support team, including speaking business specific language with users. Constant and consistent feedback to users is also a must. Finally, awareness of BPM program pipeline is key to managing user expectations.
Process based prioritization - an issue perceived by a user as low priority may have very high impact on the process as a whole, if it impacts the critical path. The opposite may also be true. Support team must ensure a holistic, process view at all times for correct prioritization.	Issue prioritization should be guided by the impact on the process as a whole. BPM expertise is critical for analysing each issue at different levels, in coordination with client teams, to ensure maximum overall process performance.
Business Value	
Process context intensive - 70% of support requests require business process context. Typical examples are user queries such as "how do I accomplish this business task", or "why was this process escalated?"	Ensure all our support and operations staff is trained, certified and experienced in BPM, with a deep understanding of BPM as a discipline and technology. Focus on the impact of issues in the context of a process. Staff teams with senior business analysts to reinforce full business awareness.
Low repeatability – traditional service optimization via FAQ is not always applicable to BPM as most issues are specific and therefore require customized solutions.	Approaching knowledge management not only by documenting general procedures but also by investing on the development of automated tools for accelerating recurrent issue resolution.

Agility

Agile deployment cycles – the typical BPM program is iterative with small deployment cycles. This means that every 4-6 weeks on average you have new functionality being accepted and deployed to production.

Agile development means ultra-quick updating of support teams to new functionality, and streamlined release management.

BPM Program awareness – User behaviors and frequent requests are precious in-field information to drive your BPM program backlog.

Program awareness can be implemented by coordinated impact assessments of new functionality, frequent communication to users, close integration with change management pipeline.

Supporting the Processes

Very high level of integration – BPM applications are strongly integrated with adjacent systems. This requires a deep understanding of points of failure and strong coordination skills when analyzing and patching.

Staffing teams with BPM Architect skills ensures fast and accurate root cause analysis. Documentation guidelines should include a mapping of dependencies for faster pinpointing, coordination of workarounds and escalation.

Cross-system support – Configuration and supporting a BPM application may require intervention on adjacent systems. Centralization of complete, cross-system procedures is key

S&O teams should be fluent and experienced on all adjacent technologies and layers, from infrastructure and system level to database, integration, document management, portals or central business applications.

The author: Pietro Casella is an experienced BPM Manager at Safira. With an eclectic IT consulting background delivering Process Reengineering, Corporate Performance Management and Business Process Management programs on the Financial Services, Health and Sectors, he focuses on improving customers' business performance through smart BPM enablement, development and servicing initiatives.

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