When we think about assets and asset management our minds go directly to those tangible items we can purchase, see, touch, use, fix and replace. We don’t readily consider the intangible things, such as intellectual property or knowledge about processes, as assets. We talk about, execute, analyze, recreate, violate and sometimes completely ignore processes every day. Processes are assets and are as important to an organization as any other tangible asset or intellectual property.

**Extracting the Right Process**

All organizations face challenges when it comes to working efficiently. Departmental and team silos can create roadblocks to moving work through an organization. Employee turnover can cause disruption to the normal flow of work. Other restrictions such as cost reduction, time constraints, volume of data and the amount of work to be done are all factors contributing to process failure. Perhaps the biggest challenge to effective process execution and adherence is how best to extract knowledge from people’s brains about the work to be completed and use that knowledge to work more effectively.

From the need to overcome process challenges came several improvement methodologies. Lean is a production practice or methodology mostly designed to eliminate waste by doing things better. Eliminating waste and unnecessary processes will eventually reduce production time and costs and increase quality. Many companies see this as a way to change culture, to have these methods become part of their organization’s way of life, minimizing silos and leading to greater collaboration. Everyone from senior leadership to the lowest level employee must buy in to the culture change for it to be successful.

Six Sigma focuses on the process of quality improvement. The philosophy advocates training in areas such as strategy, quality and customer focus and then defines key performance indicators designed to measure and improve the effectiveness of business processes. Lean and Six Sigma are often used together, leveraging the best of both methodologies to improve organizational processes and quality.

**Business Process Management**

Business process management (BPM) is known for optimizing transaction processing — activities that are processed the same way repeatedly and with very little deviation. In its most recent Magic Quadrant for Intelligent Business Process Management Suites, Gartner defines BPM as “a management discipline that treats processes as assets that directly contribute to enterprise performance by driving operational excellence and agility.”

---

**IT’S ALL ABOUT THE PROCESS**

Finding the Right Work Flow Can Save Time and Costs

By Judith Morley

When we think about assets and asset management our minds go directly to those tangible items we can purchase, see, touch, use, fix and replace. We don’t readily consider the intangible things, such as intellectual property or knowledge about processes, as assets. We talk about, execute, analyze, recreate, violate and sometimes completely ignore processes every day. Processes are assets and are as important to an organization as any other tangible asset or intellectual property.

From the need to overcome process challenges came several improvement methodologies. Lean is a production practice or methodology mostly designed to eliminate waste by doing things better. Eliminating waste and unnecessary processes will eventually reduce production time and costs and increase quality. Many companies see this as a way to change culture, to have these methods become part of their organization’s way of life, minimizing silos and leading to greater collaboration. Everyone from senior leadership to the lowest level employee must buy in to the culture change for it to be successful.

Six Sigma focuses on the process of quality improvement. The philosophy advocates training in areas such as strategy, quality and customer focus and then defines key performance indicators designed to measure and improve the effectiveness of business processes. Lean and Six Sigma are often used together, leveraging the best of both methodologies to improve organizational processes and quality.

**Business Process Management**

Business process management (BPM) is known for optimizing transaction processing — activities that are processed the same way repeatedly and with very little deviation. In its most recent Magic Quadrant for Intelligent Business Process Management Suites, Gartner defines BPM as “a management discipline that treats processes as assets that directly contribute to enterprise performance by driving operational excellence and agility.”

---

**Figure 1:** BPM facilitates the merging of technology and ideas.
BPM is most often used in financial services, insurance and healthcare, but there are uses for BPM in all organizations. Looking outside the traditional BPM markets and applying process analysis criteria to manufacturing, energy and construction, we will see that as organizations seek ways to increase cost savings, efficiency, and accuracy, while meeting industry requirements and production standards, the use of BPM to manage workflow will become increasingly critical. Many organizations are establishing centers of excellence focused on process improvement. Process champions are leading teams of cross-functional employees in collaboration sessions aimed at examining current processes, figuring out what is working and how to fix what isn’t working.

**Business Process Model Notation**

Business process model notation (BPMN) is a method of illustrating processes, similar to a flowchart you might see in applications such as Microsoft Visio. The core components for BPMN include events, activities, gateways and flows.

An event is a trigger — something that starts or ends a process. For example, you might receive an email or other notification that it is time to create a report for an audit or inspection. The notification you receive is the event that starts the process to create the report.

Activities are tasks done throughout the life of the process. These can be user tasks or system tasks. User tasks might include the presentation of a form to a user that allows the user to input data relevant to the process. System tasks are automated and require no user intervention.

For the audit report you are creating, data must be retrieved from a database and displayed in a chart. A system task can automate that activity, reducing the time and resources required to compile the data.

Gateways are objects in the process model that make decisions. These can be very simple yes or no questions, but when integrated with sophisticated rules, processing engines have the power to make more detailed decisions about the process. The audit report must go through an approver prior to being distributed. It’s possible, with the use of gateways, to automate that decision and control the outcome of the process.

The flow of the process is created when these components are linked together to create the process model.

**Opportunities for Using BPM**

Facilities and asset management. Processes control the routing of work orders and assignment of staff. Historical data could be used in making decisions about how to address
issues. Setting inventory thresholds could trigger automatic reordering of inventory with minimal user intervention.

**System warnings or failures.** Notification of a system failure triggers a process. By automating that process using the notification as the start event, we could systematically extract critical data and, using business rules built into the process, route the notification to the appropriate team so remedial action could begin.

**Project closeout.** When projects or programs end, there is a process followed that may include multiple departments playing a role in the activity. Using BPM to model the project closeout process and route the work to those playing a role in the closeout facilitates collaboration amongst teams.

**Reporting.** Generating reports can require people to access data from systems and spreadsheets and compile that data to create reports. Using the task automation capabilities in BPMN, these tasks can be automated, saving money and resources. Date-driven reports can be automatically created by the process model, but routed to an approver for final review.

**Compliance.** Processes followed to prove compliance with governing agencies can be modeled using BPM so each step is executed and organizations remain in compliance. BPM could be used in security monitoring, reliability testing or other mandated compliance processes.

BPM and those who understand it for an organization are truly assets that can be the difference in how well a company executes projects and maintains productivity.