BPA-AS-A-SERVICE:
PROCESS THINKING AT A NEW LEVEL

By Jim Sinur

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About the author

Jim Sinur is an independent thought leader in applying Business Process Management (BPM) to innovative and Intelligent Business Operations (IBO). His research and areas of personal experience focus on business process innovation, business modeling, business process management technology (iBPMS), process collaboration for knowledge workers, process intelligence/ optimization, business policy/rule management (BRMS) and leveraging business applications in processes. Jim is also one of the authors of "BPM: The Next Wave."

What is BPA?

Business Process Analysis (BPA) is the discipline of visually mapping out and analyzing business processes and their key flows, important business policies/rules, crucial process data (cases), engaged process roles/personas and desired business outcomes represented by goals and visual SLAs. This requires coming up with a visual map that represents all of the perceived views of the process and netting them out to a solid map that can be analyzed for optimal results.

Why is BPA important to organizations?

Organizations are represented by their processes that engage customers, employees, partners, stakeholders and the community they operate in on a regular basis. These processes represent the organization's face to each of these constituents. Processes have proven to help organizations operate efficiently at a lower cost, raise revenue in competitive markets and deliver innovation with the collaboration business visionaries. Needless to say processes and the cases they operate on have a great contribution to desirable organizational outcomes. It is important to understand your current processes, at a minimum, to make sure they optimize results. At a maximum, target processes plus transitional plans to get to the target processes for differentiating organizations should be mapped with along with incremental improvements along the way.

Having a target map and communicated milestones helps the change process immensely. Generally, the more parties involved during the creation and communication phases of process analysis, the better the results for an organization. This map can be done manually in a centralized fashion, but modern efforts leverage technology to complete these maps. Those who leverage BPA-as-a-Service get faster results and this paper concentrates on showing the benefits of BPA-as-a-Service.

Approaches to BPA

There are many successful approaches to mapping and analyzing processes that can be used separately or in combination to glean benefits for organizations. The following are listed in order of difficulty, so that organizations can taste benefits along the way without the maximum effort. However, some organizations want to start fresh and come up with a radically different approach to their processes. They might start with defining new operations first, but the majority of organizations start with assessing the existing processes first.

Assessing current business operations and flows
Quite often organizations think they understand their existing flows because everybody knows their own job well and feels that others should as well. In reality, when a combined process flow is created across job roles, organizational boundaries and even outside the base organization, the process map tends to point out problems that only appear when you put the big picture together. There ends up being significant benefit to creating a current flow usually revolving around removing unnecessary or old task steps. Quite often, role and goal conflicts can be discussed and resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. These benefits usually come from removing unnecessary work and the benefits can be immense in large, scoped end-to-end processes, such as supply chains and value chains. Over a short period of time, BPA proves that you must inspect better to manage better. Having a BPA technology as a service allows for maximum participation necessary for optimum benefits and majority acceptance of the resulting new or changed processes.

Adjusting existing flows for immediate impact
Once the process map(s) are understood and the obvious low-hanging fruit of removing unnecessary steps has occurred, an approach for identifying more subtle changes can be taken. By publishing the map far and wide, the process-improvement-focused personnel can identify new ideas from many resources that would not be focused on just process improvement. In some cases, simulation of alternative approaches can take place. The good ideas can be gathered and implemented fairly quickly to glean quick results. Having an economical and far-flung BPA technology as a service provides the opportunity for maximum participation.

Defining new operations and flows
When trying to create better operations and better flows to support those operations, much vision must be exchanged. Process flows have to created and updated. Some organizations like to start with a blank sheet of paper and throw business visionaries at the task to create innovative operations. Others take a core process and expand and tweak it to create an incremental improvement for better operations. In either case the sharing of the core innovation or core process far and wide helps deliver a better result overall. Again BPA-as-a-Service helps here as many individuals can be economically added to the collaboration pool in creating the new flows. This discipline of sharing the core idea or flow and all the additions over time help the acceptance of the new and changed processes. BPA technologies add significant value to the definitional efforts.

Planning transitions to new operations and flows
In the pursuit of new processes, organizations must make sure that each of the essential tasks can be transitioned to the new process. Matching the new target process map with the current process map is essential in creating transition plans, projects and activities. In addition to process tasks, transition plans for resources, policies, goals and outcome visualizations like dashboards need to be planned. Again BPA technologies and their repositories with a variety of reports can provide great assistance in creating a complete transition plan.

Implementing new flows with incremental transformation
Organizations that are trying to avoid a "Big Bang" approach to implementing the "End Game" process can use process maps to incrementally transition to the ultimate process over time. This is typical in large-scale process efforts such as value and supply chains or "end-to-end" processes. Similar to transition plans, but designed with incremental differentiation delivery points, it is truly a "divide-and-conquer" approach leveraged for incremental benefits on the journey to the new target flows.

Advantages of BPA-as-a-Service

There is a strong trend to license and deliver software that is charged on a subscription basis and is centrally stored on the cloud in an "on-demand" fashion. There is now significant action in the business process analysis sector because there is a need to build and collaborate with many participants to make sure the models are complete and correct. BPA is ideal for this model in that many of the participants only participate in short and sharp periods of time.

While model-driven change appeals to organizations because of the desirability of visual communications, typically there are tangible benefits during both process development and process execution. First, there is reduced time to results in process improvement efforts and can be accomplished in weeks on smaller scales. Secondly, the cost of operations can be reduced in the range of 15 – 30 percent. Last, but not least, customer response time during operation can be reduced from 20 – 30 percent allowing for higher customer satisfaction scores. BPA-as-a-Service adds an additional savings in that there are savings of 20 – 30 percent over non-cloud approaches.

Time-to-market results because of ease of starting
BPA-as-a-Service allows for an instant start to the process analysis effort because the software can be easily downloaded and used immediately for self-starters. For those who like a little guidance, there are online tutorials that are short and sweet. This is great for process model reviewers and process scales that are readily digestible. The contracting issues fade in the background and authorizations get out of your way. This is true "time-to-market" behavior.

Flexible scaling of efforts
Because BPA-as-a-Service is in the cloud with unlimited scale and the ease of adding participants, the ability to add others to the process model collaboration party is straightforward and quick. Process analysis efforts can flex in size, scope and participants quickly and efficiently without a strict planning discipline.

Mobile for modeling anywhere
Since the BPA technology works through a browser and can run on multiple mobile platforms, modeling can be done anywhere at any time. The synchronization of the local models will need a connection to update any central process model repositories, however. This obviates the need for many meetings because people can work autonomously.

Leveraging the wisdom of the crowd
Because BPA-as-a-Service is ubiquitous and economical, parties that would not normally be invited to participate in process analysis efforts can be helpful. If an organization desires feedback from random prospects as well as loyal customers, BPA technology can be made available to leverage participants from all walks of life.

Democratization of process knowledge for faster cycles of improvement
Since process models will be available both far and wide, process knowledge will be exposed a larger pool of idea and innovation sources. These ideas can be reviewed, tested and implemented in faster cycles by leveraging larger idea and review audiences.

Leveraging the cloud for central sharing & availability
The cloud is a great site for the sharing of process models and the contributing policies, goals and resources. The cloud is available at all times with space and power to spare. The cloud works perfectly with higher levels of distribution.

Location-neutral collaboration with multiple physical locations
Traditionally many BPA efforts occurred in a central fashion in some headquarters war room, which required most of the participants to be co-located. With BPA-as-a-Service, this set of constraints gets blown away and is no longer in the way of results.

Time-neutral collaboration with multiple time zones
Many organizations are so physically distributed across time zones. With BPA-as-a-Service, the process analysis efforts can follow the sun and be distributed. Obviously, there will have to be some synchronization points during the process analysis effort, but much work can be accomplished all over the globe, running 24 hours a day if need be.

Global compliance with engaged people
Quite often standard processes are pushed worldwide without considering the needs of local market needs. BPA-as-a-Service could allow a core process with local variations that could be communicated and shared across multiple markets. There could also be a promotion scheme for process variations to become a regional approach or eventually part of the core process.

Reduced analysis paralysis
Quite often process efforts end up in paralysis. People fear change and fear not being part of any change, even if it is inevitable or highly desirable. If process and any modifications are constantly available, this resistance can be managed. BPA-as-a-Service includes as many regions and people as possible. Therefore, it is more likely to be successful.

Social collaboration enabled
BPA-as-a-Service can be augmented by popular and ubiquitous social collaboration capabilities. It also be combined with automated social network analysis for additional proof points for the BPA effort. This is particularly useful in gathering ideas from customers and potential customers.

BPA-as-a-Service is the way of the future

For organizations that want to have a model to follow as they plan changes to their existing process, create new and innovative processes and practice effective incremental improvement, BPA-as-a-Service offers many advantages over traditional BPA technologies. This is even true for organizations that want an 80 percent correct model that evolves to near 100 percent correct over a period of time. BPA is not for the "fire, ready, aim" cultures. It is better fitted to a "ready, aim, fire" focused culture, but BPA-as-a-Service speeds the efforts significantly enough to attract the reactionary cultures.

BPA is an important discipline but is sometimes considered arduous. BPA-as-a-Service makes process analysis speedy and effective. This will encourage more of the collaborative nature of BPA that is needed to deliver effective change in organizations today. BPA-as-a-Service changes the analysis game to more of a "time-to-market" approach while increasing the scope of participation and collaboration.

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Improve your processes in the cloud with ARIS Cloud from Software AG

ARIS Cloud is a full-scale BPA-as-a-Service product. It has been built for collaborative process transparency and improvement projects. Subscribe to ARIS Cloud to immediately design, analyze, share and improve processes without any participation barriers.

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To leverage the wisdom of the crowd, social collaboration capabilities are seamlessly integrated.So while designing a process you can ask others for help or feedback. This turns the one-way street of process improvement into an interactive dialog, increasing awareness and acceptance of your initiative.
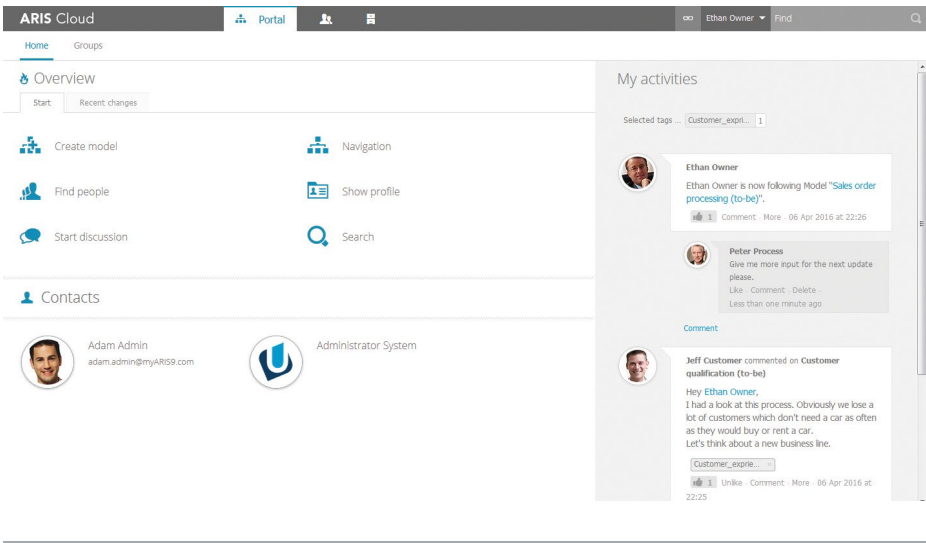

Figure 1: Home Screen in ARIS Cloud

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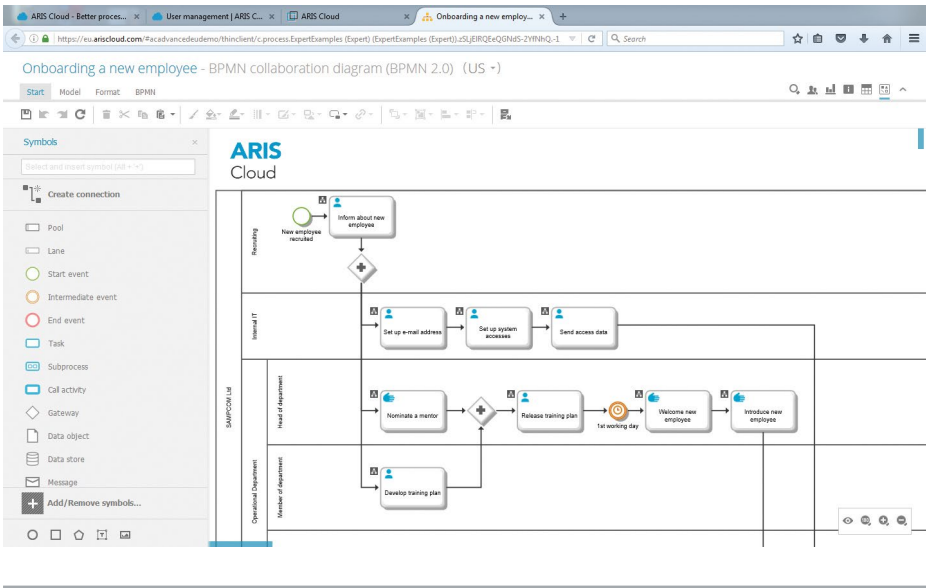

Figure 2: BPMN™ Process in ARIS Cloud

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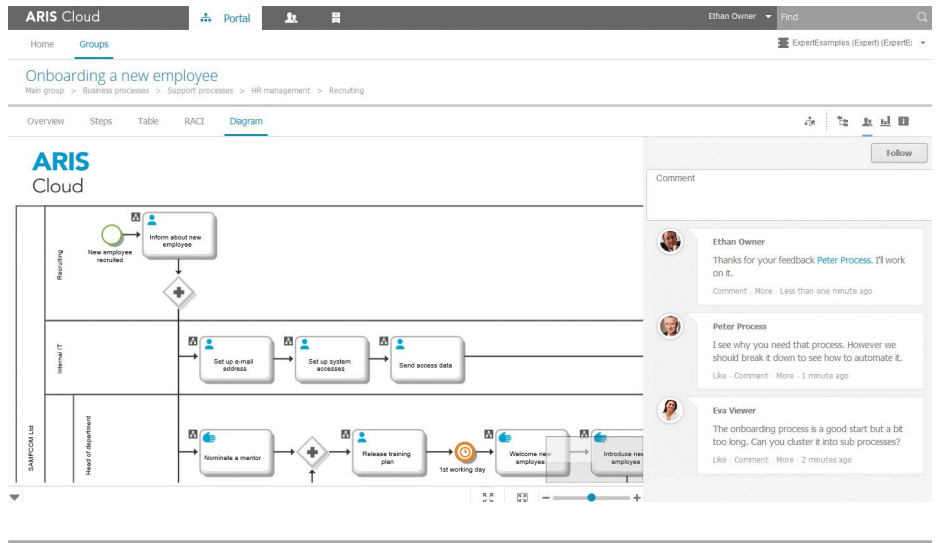

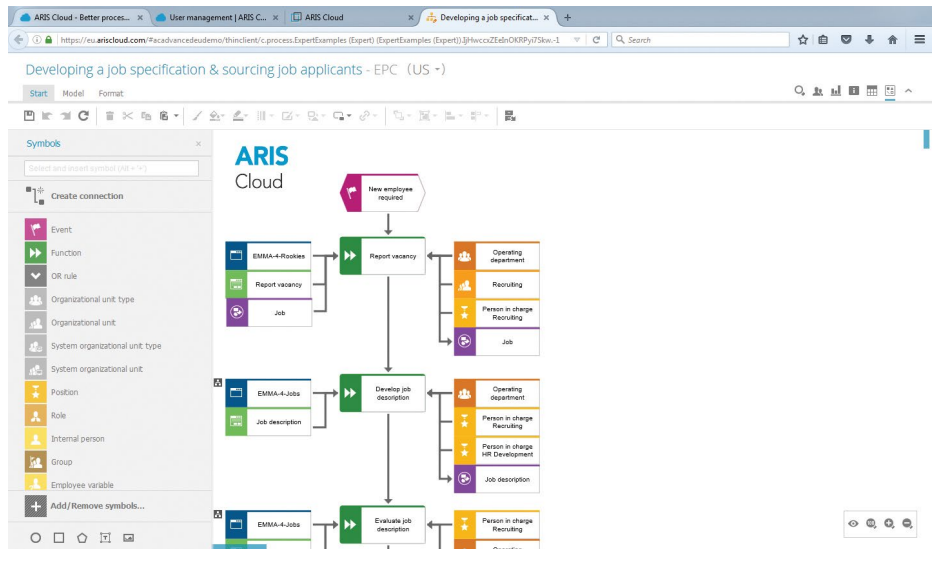Figure 3: Social Process Improvement in ARIS Cloud

Figure 4: Event-driven Process Chain (EPC) in ARIS Cloud

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