Actions and conditions supporting strategic integration of BPM

Business process management (BPM) is a holistic strategic management approach and a top-down methodology that aims at maintaining operational efficiency. Despite its importance to organisations, there is a lack of a practical understanding of how to successfully adopt BPM. To address the gap in the literature, an exploratory case study was performed in a South African company that adopted BPM in 2009. The two-part study specifically aimed to investigate which actions and conditions encourage successful adoption of BPM by targeting the integration between the strategic (top) and task (ground) levels within a BPM environment. The qualitative analysis results show that organisations can have a fair degree of control over the outcome of their BPM implementation. The first part of the interpretive study that focuses on strategy, culture and governance is presented in the article. Actions and conditions that facilitate strategic and task-level integration are described. The study reports conduct within three important themes in the literature. Careful planning around the themes 'strategic and task-level integration', 'BPM enablers' and 'business and/or information technology (IT) alignment' will support the practice regarding BPM implementations because the literature deems the BPM and information systems symbiosis as important. The findings corroborate the literature.

Introduction

Business process management (BPM) is seen as a key concept and strategy to achieve a more effective organisation, optimise business conduct and gain a competitive advantage (Antonacci & Gokee 2011; Armistead, Pritchard & Machin 1999; Thompson, Seymour & O’Donovan 2009). BPM is a young but growing research area with many researchers calling for a better understanding of the concept and/or strategy for various reasons. Firstly, the factors that contribute to BPM success have not been extensively researched and understood (Thompson et al. 2009). Secondly, even though BPM has been ranked as a key priority by the Gartner Group for a number of years, the current status of BPM research is not aligned with practical implementation and field reports of the methodology (Bandara, Harmon & Rosemann 2011). Thirdly, organisations do not have a sound understanding of what BPM has become. This is reflected by the low levels of maturity in the implementation of the practice and the selection of basic tools where more advanced and appropriate tools are available (Johnston, Munge & Mwalemba 2012). Part of the reason for the low uptake of BPM is that it presents organisations with challenges that arise at its inception, which are primarily caused by its ambiguity in language and semantics (Armistead et al. 1999). These challenges are exacerbated by the different meanings of the term ‘process’ across the various academic domains.

Therefore, the main purpose of the research is to better understand the practicality regarding actions and conditions that encourage the linkage and effective integration of strategy and task levels in a BPM environment within the theoretical context stated above. The research builds on the model developed by Thompson et al. (2009), which expanded the theoretical BPM success model of Rosemann, De Bruin & Power (2005) by defining what entails success in a BPM environment and the factors that enable the success. The model identifies six enabler categories: strategy, culture, people and/or resources, governance, information technology (IT) and methods. The data are analysed thematically to derive a list of actions and conditions within the six enabler categories. The article (the first of a two-part study) presents the findings relative to the strategy, culture and governance categories of the expanded BPM success model. The article’s contribution is unique because of the practical report of a 5-year BPM implementation journey. The article is organised as follows: a review of relevant literature is followed by the research strategy and techniques. It concludes by presenting inferences from the collected data in the form of a list of actions and conditions per enabler category, which is illustrated and discussed in the context of a theoretical model.
Literature review

For the purpose of brevity, most of the literature will be included in the Discussion section. Figure 1 illustrates a combination of the concepts in the literature that motivated and supported the study.

Integrate: The strategy and task levels are linked as the integration between these two is crucial for BPM implementation (Armistead et al. 1999). Consequently, effective integration facilitates the application of strategic intent at an operational level. The outcomes of the study will address the integration by presenting actions that encourage integration.

Enable: The Thompson et al. (2009) BPM success model contains six categories of enablers for BPM. The categories, namely strategy, culture, people and/or resources, governance, IT and methods, are illustrated in the context of an organisational pyramid shown in Figure 1. Factors within these enabler categories aid in the implementation of BPM.

Align: BPM implementation depends on the clarity of the strategic intent as well as the alignment (Rosemann & De Bruin 2005; Thompson et al. 2009). Likewise, BPM implementation depends on business and IT alignment (BITA).

Research method

Ethical clearance

The main research question of the study is as follows: what can organisations do, from a strategic perspective, to encourage the integration between strategy and task levels in a BPM environment? BPM has not been well researched; therefore, a predominantly inductive approach was chosen for the study. However, an a priori theoretical concept was applied. Three of the six enabler categories in the Thompson et al. (2009) study expanded BPM success model combined with a combination of concepts from the literature and guided the research by providing underlying theoretical concepts from which research objectives were derived. BPM had been implemented over a period of five years in the organisation, where the case study was conducted. Seven respondents who had played a key role during the implementation of BPM in the organisation were identified. These respondents’ profiles are presented in Table 1.

The respondents expressed their experiences during the implementation journey. Therefore, an interpretive philosophy was deemed suitable because it extracted the different perspectives of the key role players. Because of the nature of this approach, conclusions could be drawn from the single organisation’s case (Flyvbjerg 2006). The exact position of their roles was not apparent in all cases as certain respondents could not be isolated to a specific level, whereas other roles clearly fitted into a certain organisational level, conducive to the research context provided by Figure 1. For example, two of the respondents acted as interfaces between the divisions and had a strategic focus as well as process and operational exposure. Respondent six was a business support manager (BSM) who had to make strategic decisions based on the requirements and implement process changes. The role also involved testing the IS underpinning BPM as well as implementing the system and concepts at the business operations level. In short, two of the respondents were positioned within the strategic level. Three of the respondents were positioned within the process level, and two were positioned at the task level.

A short questionnaire was used to profile the respondents and their exposure to BPM. Semi-structured interviews

FIGURE 1: Construct of a combination of concepts from the literature that support the research.
followed, which documented their experience during the implementation of BPM. Interview questions were constructed in the context of and tailored to each of the six enabler categories shown in Figure 1. The targeted interview duration was 30 minutes, and it was digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. The researcher requested consent to record interviews from all participants. Ethical clearance was obtained from the researcher’s university. The data were then collected and coded by means of thematic analysis to recognise patterns across different data sets (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006). Text extracts were taken from the transcribed interviews and then related to the three enabler categories. The first iteration of this process resulted in 354 text extracts from the seven transcribed interviews. The text extracts were iteratively coded into sub-themes. The sub-themes were subsequently allocated to the six enabler categories. This process yielded 223 induced sub-themes spread across the six enabler categories. The result was 24 actions and 16 conditions, which were substantiated by text extracts. The 24 actions and 16 conditions were summarised and coded into a final 6 actions and 5 conditions, which formed the overall result of the second part of the research.

The case study was conducted at a financial institution that is a market leader in its competitive segment (hereon ‘FIN’). The study focused on projecting the lessons learnt from this company’s BPM implementation rather than evaluating the state of the company’s success with its BPM implementation. The company which was conscious of the implementation journey had continuously sought to improve its processes. Within South Africa, FIN was a pioneer in the implemented architecture of the business process management system (BPMS), which consisted of a combination of the different layers of technology enabling BPM. The BPMS has delivered business benefits to FIN, such as optimised business operations and smoother functioning business processes which lead to cost reductions and increased client satisfaction. For this reason, its BPM programme continues.

Findings

The overall distribution of text extracts across the six main themes is shown in Figure 2. The proportion of text extract and the distribution was maintained throughout subsequent thematic analysis iterations. Most of the text extracts emerged as actions and conditions within the ‘strategy’ theme. This is in agreement with the literature which, amongst many definitions, states that BPM is a strategic approach of managing an organisation (Armistead et al. 1999; Johnston et al. 2012).

The preliminary findings were 10 actions and 9 conditions as listed in Table 2. These were further coded and reduced to four dominant actions and three dominant conditions, represented in bold font in Table 2. These are now discussed.

Culture is seen as a main driver for BPM, and it can cause BPM initiatives to succeed or fail (vom Brocke & Sinnl 2011). Proper governance depends on assigned process owners (Thompson et al. 2009). The study explored the staff experience of BPM from a ‘lessons learned’ and implementation perspective, and the governance aspects seemed least prominent. This could be because of several organisational restructurings resulting from executive management resignations, which was mentioned by one of the respondents. One such restructure was the appointment of a new chief information officer just before the research was conducted; therefore, some of the governance aspects might have been concealed during the research period. In addition, the head of BPM and staff reporting to him were not available for interviews during this period. The respondents who were interviewed were mainly exposed to BPM implementations and the resulting outputs. The researcher could not interview respondents who were more active in the improvement methodology area. Therefore, the ‘governance’ theme is represented by 2% of the conditions and actions.

Strategy

To obtain good results, an organisation should be aligned with its strategy. There are many areas that may require

TABLE 1: Summary of respondent profiles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Primary BPM background</th>
<th>Years at company</th>
<th>Years of BPM experience</th>
<th>Level of role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>Technical team lead (IT)</td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>Solution designer and/or business liaison</td>
<td>Technical and business</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 3</td>
<td>CIO</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 4</td>
<td>Technology specialist (IT)</td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 5</td>
<td>Senior systems analyst</td>
<td>Technical and business</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 6</td>
<td>Business support manager</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 7</td>
<td>Senior manager (business)</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 2: Distribution of text extracts across enabler categories.
alignment and others that should be kept in alignment in order to achieve the defined goals (Jeston & Nelis 2006:71). According to Rosemann and De Bruin (2005) and Thompson et al. (2009), linkage of BPM projects with organisational strategy enables BPM practice. In addition, such projects should add value to the chosen strategy (Jeston & Nelis 2006:71). Therefore, the organisation’s strategy and architecture should support the implementation of BPM-associated technologies as well as principles; however, sufficient and ongoing funding is required to do so (Thompson et al. 2009).

The largest portion (40%) of the text extracts emerged from the ‘strategy’ theme. The perception of the driving factors behind and benefits realised with the BPM implementation at FIN varied widely, which indicates that the strategic intent behind its BPM had not cascaded throughout the organisational hierarchy. What was clearly presented by the data is that BPM had delivered different benefits to different audiences across the organisational hierarchy. Benefits include the following: better system integration which reduced business process cycles and interaction between divisions and companies, more information to measure business performance by means of process performance and measures, more information to better manage staff and workload, business cost reductions, optimised use of staff, earlier fraud detection which lead to cost savings, reduced and market-leading unit costs and standardised business operations in certain areas. The technology had been implemented under the BPM banner and views on why the organisation had adopted BPM varied, as indicated by the different views stated above. A common theme found amongst respondents was improved client experience and cost savings.

There were varying views on the banner under which BPM was implemented at FIN. Int7 expressed a perception that BPM was adopted to enable FIN to closely monitor and discipline staff involved in routine BPM and workflow tasks. Metrics exposed by the BPMS, such as work queues, offer more information regarding time spent on work items and workload; therefore, the perception is that it would be used by FIN to have more work carried out by certain staff. Int7 is positioned in the IT division, and this perception was corroborated by Int4, from the business side by stating that the aim was to obtain more results out of the resources. Consequently, it is important to define and clearly convey the driving factors for BPM as a basis for benefits realisation. This will allow visibility on how BPM projects have directly contributed to the strategy. Moreover, there may be a possibility to reach consensus regarding the benefits achieved. This approach within the ‘strategy’ theme specifically supports strategic alignment.

IT and business alignment were cited as major issues by most of the respondents. The business did not feel as if their requirements were properly understood. Moreover, the business felt that the solution they were provided was far from their understanding of the specifications agreed upon (Int7). From an IT side, the misalignment between business and IT was acknowledged. Business did not feel their requirements were understood and completely translated to a technical solution they expected, and IT’s view was that business did not understand the application that was created for them (Int3). Therefore, the misalignment was confirmed by both the sides, business and IT (Int2).

FIN reacted to this in certain instances, whilst in other instances, such circumstances were managed ultimately resulting in increased emphasis being placed on aligning IT with business. The actions specified in this subsection fall under the ‘strategy’ theme and support BITA. Custodians in this area of alignment were the solution designer (Int2) and the BSM (Int6). The following condition addresses these findings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of actions and conditions</th>
<th>Text extract count</th>
<th>Relevant main theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1 Provide implementation support</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 Assign a liaison between business and IT from the start</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3 Develop a feasible implementation process</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4 Manage awareness and understanding of BPM from the start</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5 Plan well around IT capacity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6 Define upfront the benefits that the BPM implementation will realise</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7 Define roles and responsibilities to facilitate effective implementation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8 Clarify and document upfront the driving factors for BPM initiatives</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9 Proactively manage the impact that strategic BPM has on the organisational culture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A10 Structure effective communication channels between strategy and task levels</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1 A collaborative environment exists between business and IT</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2 Optimised interaction between business and IT is supported by the tools available</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3 Conditions should favour the development of process understanding</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4 Culture is supportive of cross-functional teamwork</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5 A culture that supports continuous improvement to emerge</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6 Solution design practices exist that favour reuse</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7 Process and domain ownership is required</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C8 An environment that supports and prepares the organisation for BPM ahead of implementation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C9 There is sufficient ongoing funding for BPM initiatives</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C1: A collaborative environment between business and IT exists

The solution designer became a business liaison. Regular meetings were held with business at various geographical locations, and the relationships were proactively managed. This role familiarised itself with system issues on the business side and did analysis to identify what impacted the business and caused the confidence in the BPMS to deteriorate. It was found that the small adjustments the BPMS and user interface had made a big business impact, resulting in greater satisfaction levels amongst business users. Furthermore, a stabilisation and optimisation drive began, as there were many system outages initially due the complex, layered architecture of the BPMS. These efforts from IT resulted in a more satisfied business customer and a more stable BPMS (Int2). The BSM had a similar function, by bridging the gap between the business communities. System requirements originating from various business divisions, and following different procedures in order to be implemented, go to the same IT division. The various requests were channelled through the (BSM) (Int6). Furthermore, this role operated as the liaison to IT, focusing on aligning business with IT from the business side. In addition, the misalignment between business and IT had impacted the quality of the solution that was delivered. The quality of the BPMS, which was delivered during the initial two phases, was not up to the desired standard (Int7). Consequently, the business deployed actual system users to aid testing and to confirm that the business requirements were being met. Therefore, the following action supports alignment practices:

A2: Assign a liaison between business and IT from the start

The outputs of these two roles resulted in implementation support for BPM in the form of a liaison on the IT as well as business side, subsequently a happier business customer and better, more managed working conditions that encouraged BPM. It furthermore benefited the organisation by cultivating a better working relationship between business and IT, effecting better operational results (Int4, Int3 and Int7). Business confidence greatly increased when they felt that IT understood their needs, and the effort to build and improve the working relationship was visible (Int7). As a result, the following action was derived.

A1: Provide implementation support

BPM in this case depended on the alignment between business and IT. Hence, the organisation responded by incorporating pro-alignment functionality into different roles. In addition, they shifted other resources around centralising the analysis competency to address a broader business scope (business change) so that the business requirements could be translated more effectively (Int5). As the BPM journey matured, there was a shift in awareness about how work was carried out. Project delivery received priority, and operational work, equally crucial to a healthy BPMS, received less attention (Int3). They realised that BPMS functionality depended on project work and that project work implementation processes between business divisions varied (Int6). In this instance, the implementation was impacted because of the different nature of the business channels and the implementation had to be adjusted. Therefore, the following action was derived.

A3: Develop a feasible implementation process

Culture: The literature prescribes that organisations should create a working environment that favours cross-functional teamwork, where employees will continually seek to improve processes (Thompson et al. 2009). BPM is an enterprise-wide approach to horizontally manage an organisation and often organisations operate in silos, resulting in a failure to grasp a concept of end-to-end customer processes (Trkman 2010). A lack of common understanding of what BPM is can be attributed to the varying views of the methodology. The lack of consensus about the methodology, as well as a plethora of acronyms and misguided references associated with BPM, further creates confusion regarding the benefits, deliverables and expectations of BPM (Bandara et al. 2007).

Organisational culture can shape the way BPM works; conversely, BPM has an impact on organisational culture (Armistead et al. 1999). The impact that BPM has on the organisation should be managed; moreover, an awareness of the intentions behind methodology should be raised in alignment with the strategy. There was a perception that BPM was used to cut staff. Such a perception is detrimental to the perception of the methodology, and it might cause a counterproductive culture amongst employees. Therefore, the strategic intent behind BPM should be clear and conveyed to all those who are involved so that there is no confusion about the intention behind the methodology (Int4). In addition, there were complications because of a lack of process understanding when IT staff had to develop the system because BPM knowledge and concepts were generally lacking, which impacted BPM in the areas of system development and testing (Int4); therefore, the following condition applies.

C3: Conditions should favour the development of process understanding

There were various factors that impacted IT capacity. Business is critically dependent on the enabling technology, and BPMS outages had significant impacts. If outages occur, teams or divisions cannot work, depending on where outages happen in the system architecture (Int4). Subsequent to major project releases, multiple smaller enhancement projects followed, whilst large-scale project development continued, both making use of the same resources. After-hours work became a norm. Consequently, resourcing issues arose because after-hours work is intended for routine maintenance and operational tasks. This culminated the perception that BPM caused and requires overtime work (Int1). Therefore, the following action applies.

A5: Plan well around IT capacity

Action A5 impacted organisational culture at FIN. Various text extracts pertaining to it aligned with a culture that does not support BPM, and it may lead to further misconceptions about the methodology. Therefore, the suggestion is to
manage potential impacts to organisational culture. For example, the organisation was more proactive in the business space because change managers were appointed specifically to sensitize the business users who would use the new BPMS. The focus was to ease the users into the change that BPM brought as well as comfort the users in context of the negative propaganda associated with BPM such as retrenchments (Int4). Such an approach is more favourable to implementing BPM. Therefore, the following action applies.

**A4: Manage awareness and understanding of BPM from the start**

There was a perception that the organisational culture supports a main focus of delivering IT solutions to business, whilst continuous improvement of processes that effect the changes did not receive the attention it required (Int1). A view that the main goal is to deliver functionality does not favour BPM because all the resources and efforts are applied in the context of delivery and not improvement of processes. Issues that hinder operational process performance are raised in one cycle of delivery, and by the next, there is more caution surrounding previously experienced issues. However, the culture of delivery takes precedence and the deliverable receives priority focus (Int1). The BPM implementation journey at FIN equipped resources with invaluable experience during each implementing phase. Subsequently, they learned from their mistakes after each phased implementation and learned to use the tools and BPM concepts better (Int5). Therefore, the following condition was derived.

**C5: A culture that supports continuous improvement to emerge**

**Governance:** In a BPM environment, processes should have assigned owners with defined permission levels to change and alter the relevant process. Furthermore, process scope and integration touch points with other processes should be defined (Bandara et al. 2007). Ownership should be established and transparent; moreover, accountability should be well-defined. It becomes complicated when processes span the boundaries of business units; nevertheless, ownership should be enforced (Rosemann & De Bruin 2005). Decision making and reward processes should furthermore exist to encourage and guide employee efforts, and organisations should aim to remain as flexible as possible whilst at the same time keeping track of work (Bandara et al. 2007; Thompson et al. 2009).

Governance was impacted by the complexity of the technological implementation because the multilayered BPMS was deployed enterprise wide and it was not homogeneous. Therefore, one department could not be held accountable for one process in some cases because it spanned divisional boundaries and departments (Int2). Furthermore, because of the software architecture, it was difficult to hold a single party accountable for the portion of the application that falls within their domain. Consequently, a culture to protect personal interest arose because portions of the BPMS and process had no assigned owner, and if there was a system incident at a particular point in the process and BPMS, accountability was shunned. Generally, ownership and risk taking regarding operational and system decisions were avoided, cultivating a culture that hindered process ownership (Int4). At the start of the BPM journey, BPM was very technocentric. Requirements and direction regarding changes were initially driven by IT; however, after the first year, control gradually shifted to the business. Direction regarding system requirements subsequently came from business. When IT drove requirements, the culture that underpinned BPM was technocentric, and when business started to drive requirements and system changes, the undertone became more strategic. Furthermore, business started to place more focus on ensuring that their requirements were met, because they were more assured of the strategic direction and no longer required IT to provide direction in the context of system changes, thereby supporting a more feasible business-driven BPM (Int7). Consequently, ownership should be assigned from the start so that the proper parties remain in control and steer process-related implementations. Ownership was unbalanced because in this case IT initially assumed ownership, as BPM was being implemented under a technological banner. If ownership assignment was a more managed discipline, then business might not have had to ‘push back’ a year after the BPM journey started in order to gain control of their processes. This relates to BITA, which has already been cited as a key matter. Because governance is a key issue at the strategic level, some of the actions in the ‘strategy’ main theme might address the ‘governance’ theme as well. However, because of coding, it migrated across to some of the other main themes. An example of an action in the ‘strategy’ theme which also supports governance is ‘define roles and responsibilities to facilitate effective implementation’. This action supports ownership. Ownership has many dimensions and has vast impacts, and it remains critical in support of BPM. Subsequently, Action A1 caters for impacts to governance because process ownership will support the implementation of the methodology.

Figure 3 represents an envelope containing recommendations for BPM implementation. The recommendations are the actions and conditions discussed thus far. The envelope is in the context in which the recommendations are presented. It is constructed by four main themes. Placed in the centre is the Harmon (2014) BP Trends pyramid, which represents the levels within an organisation: the strategic level is at the top, the process level in the middle and the implementation or task level at the bottom. The main themes found in the literature are represented as columns titled ‘integrate’, ‘enable’ and ‘align’. The main themes, namely strategy, people and/or resources and culture, were applied during the data gathering and analysis of the research. Therefore, it supports the presentation context. The actions (A + n) and the conditions (C + n) are plotted relative to the combination of themes it applies to in Figure 3. The objectives of the article are addressed with actions A1, A2, A3, A4 and conditions C1, C3 and C5. Supporting arguments within the organisational context are found in the following sections.

Summary of the findings

Integrate: To the left of the envelope in Figure 3 is the ‘integrate’ theme, which addresses the integration between the strategic and task levels in a BPM environment. At the strategic level, the actions A1, A2 and A3 were found to be dominant. It can be viewed as BPM implementation methods that facilitate linkage between the strategic and task levels with the following output: an employee base that is more aware of BPM from the strategic through to the operational level. FIN provided implementation support during development phases. It was carried out to ensure that business requirements had been fully met by the functionality of the technical solutions. Business was not part of the development process in the first major technological release, and they experienced challenges with quality and functionality post-implementation. Business was involved in the systems development processes after the first phase, and the technological implementations were much smoother. Moreover, it was more stable after implementation. FIN deployed a post-implementation support team. This team supported business users and consumers of process changes for 4–6 weeks in each region after changes to the BPMS. This was carried out to reassure and educate the user base post-implementation journey and because people are the drivers of change (Jeston & Nelis 2006). Therefore, Action A4 applies. A sound understanding of BPM will enable implementation and interaction amongst staff. Condition C3 was also prominent in the ‘strategy’ theme and supports Action A4. Organisations should nurture the development of process understanding, and conditions should favour the related processes because it is crucial to BPM adoption.

Enable: In the centre of the envelope is the ‘enable’ theme. The actions and conditions that are plotted here can be considered as the ‘fertiliser’ in a BPM environment. Should organisations wish to adopt BPM, these actions and conditions will allow it to flourish. In conjunction with the implementation actions (A1, A2 and A3), organisations should manage the awareness of BPM from the start and across the entire organisation. This is necessary for staff to participate in the implementation journey and because people are the drivers of change (Jeston & Nelis 2006). Therefore, Action A4 applies. A sound understanding of BPM will enable implementation and interaction amongst staff. Condition C3 was also prominent in the ‘strategy’ theme and supports Action A4. Organisations should nurture the development of process understanding, and conditions should favour the related processes because it is crucial to BPM adoption.

Align: To the right of the envelope is the ‘align’ theme. The research presented BITA as a main theme and concern. FIN acknowledges that they struggled to build relationships and trust between business and IT, and they acknowledge that they are interdependent. BITA was challenging since the inception of the BPM programme, and it is still a concern today. However, they are positive that the relationships in BITA context are maturing. The actions and conditions plotted here support the notion. The IT implementation was highly complex, and the business is critically dependent on it. System outages severely complicated BITA efforts. The topic will be covered in the second part of the study.
BPM enables business to operate more efficiently. However, the research found that emphasis was on the delivery of technical solutions and therefore on the project outputs and not on the optimisation of operational processes. Greater emphasis on process optimisation would inherently align more with BPM practice. Moreover, when projects are scoped, the main focus does not always align with process improvement. Consequently, condition C5 is isolated.

Conclusion

BPM is a maturing practice, which harbours great potential to provide companies with a competitive advantage. The research aimed to provide information in support of the linkage between the strategy and task levels in a BPM implementation environment. According to the literature, factors which contribute to BPM success are not very well researched. The research project set out to address this gap in the literature with a pragmatic approach in a BPM implementation environment in order to answer the research question. Practical implications were constructed from the data collected during a case study at a company that has been practicing BPM for approximately 5 years. This is expressed by actions and conditions that supported BPM at FIN. The research question is answered by a portion of this constructed view; however, the research produced additional themes that in conjunction with integrating the ‘strategic’ and ‘task’ levels are critical for BPM implementations. In a BPM environment, strategic intent and alignment is a key driver to ensure better implementation of the practice. Therefore, well-planned implementation methods and strategic support will enable optimal implementation of BPM. It will be supported by the key building blocks: a clear strategy, an employee base with a mindset that favours BPM and good organisational culture support for BPM. These aspects are critical to successful BPM implementations. All staff should be educated on the methodology and related concepts prior to an implementation undertaking. A clear vision and strategic intent behind the proposed BPM initiative is imperative and should be communicated to all those who are involved. Consequently, BPM is favoured when driven from the strategic level, with particular focus on strategic alignment and BITA.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors’ contributions

I.L. (University of Cape Town) and L.S. (University of Cape Town) contributed equally to the writing of this article.

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