8

Implementation of a Process-Based Approach

Every enterprise conducts business using a set of practices expressed through processes, structures, policies, and systems. Behind these practices is an equally important collection of operating practices that are unspoken and unwritten. This second set is rooted in the traditions, biases, practices, tenets, and habits that propagate throughout the human interactions inside the enterprise. And it is this set that defines an enterprise's culture—its very personality and how discussions are conducted, how decisions are made, and how the organization mobilizes resources to chase opportunities. The widespread acceptance of these operational practices acts as a stabilizer for decision making—a common lens for framing choices. But these same practices come at a cost. As the competitive environment shifts, these beliefs and policies limit the consideration of alternative courses of action. They anchor examinations of choices to what is perceived as proven, tested, and safe. And unfortunately, these limitations can spell doom when situations require major shifts in strategic direction to get the enterprise in a competitively viable position. What worked in the past feels safe to leadership teams. Stepping outside the boundaries of the existing conventions invites risk—or so the thinking goes. An aversion to disruption and big change pervades today's leadership ranks. Iconoclasts and free thinkers are viewed as troublemakers who need to soak in the culture before speaking their mind.

To a large extent, these limitations are heavily affected by the size and organizational structure of the enterprise. In stark contrast to the behemoths of the corporate world, entrepreneurial ventures are comparatively nimble. Because of limited resources, the leadership team often wears many hats and can be found actively engaging with customers on the front line. This proximity begets a ground-level understanding of the customer and a comparatively quick identification of issues and market opportunities. Armed with both knowledge of the situation and the authority to get things done, entrepreneurial leaders are well positioned to realign resources and nab the advantage.

From my consulting experience, I learned that when outright asked, most managers will respond that they and their departments are adept at changing. From their perspective, their worlds are in constant flux as new leaders arrive and promote their way of doing business. But the change these managers refer to is more akin to settling in and returning to a business-as-usual environment after the latest restructuring. When a new leadership administration takes over, or when performance drops below leadership's expectations, senior leaders frequently resort to a corporate reorganization. Today's reorganizations are primarily a shuffling of the management team. Several unfortunate managers are let go, but most are simply reassigned to new roles and responsibilities. Although there may be new names in dozens of positions, in most cases these "reorgs" lack any true fundamental change to the way work is designed and performed. The average worker punches his or her time card and follows the same patterns he or she would on any other day. It is a fresh coat of paint on the corporate facade, but little more. Once the reorganization is complete, the same work activities equate to the same results. Over time, the lack of progress from these reorganizations breeds lethargy and tacit resistance among the workforce. People quit believing that any transformational effort will really change anything. The prevailing sentiment is to just wait around, and things will revert to normal.

Why Established Enterprises Struggle to Adapt to a Changing Environment

For a moment, think about the railroads of yesteryear, where icons such as Carnegie, Gould, Pullman, and Vanderbilt amassed immense fortunes. In their heyday, the railroads consisted of a network of rails that traversed the land—spanning rivers, burrowing under mountains, connecting cities across the United States, and serving as the primary means of long-distance transport for generations of travelers. From their vantage point atop the transportation industry, the railroads attained seemingly insurmountable strategic advantages. They understood business and leisure travel to an extent never previously envisioned. They accumulated vast stockpiles of cash to invest. In fact, if they played their cards right, they were on their way to reign over the transportation industry for decades. But their fortunes unraveled as the world changed. A wave of inventions including the automobile and airplane enticed customers with faster and more convenient alternatives. The railroad magnates took their eye off the ball and failed to adapt. These days, although railways span more miles in the United States than in any other country in the world, railroad traffic is a minor percentage of total transportation mileage.

Where in 1900 there were 132 type 1 railroad companies (revenues over $350 million adjusted), there are only 7 today. Amtrak is the sole intercity passenger railroad. Although once hailed as crucial to America's fortunes, the performance of the remaining seven railroads is mediocre in their best years—and horrific more often than not. Despite their significant competitive strengths, the railroad companies failed to keep pace with advancements in transportation. Why did they fail on such a grand scale?

With the turn of the twentieth century, the United States was rich with resources and the spirit of innovation. Automobile companies such as the Olds Motor Vehicle Company in 1902 and the Ford Motor Company in 1903 began selling cars to the wealthy and elite. Then, in 1908, the Model T was manufactured on Ford's assembly lines, and the automobile was produced at a cost that made it within the means of the masses. Air travel also was taking off. With the conclusion of World War I, a mass of aviators returning from the battlefront spurred the postal service to explore mail distribution by air. After an initial failure, a network of contractors was hired to fly mail to destinations across the United States. From these initial 12 contractors, companies such as Delta, America, United, TWA, and Eastern Airlines were launched. Shortly thereafter, commercial air travel took off. While the transportation industry was rapidly changing, the railroads stuck to their business models and practices. Although well capitalized and armed with superior knowledge of passenger and freight travel, they opted not to engage in the automobile or airline industries and missed a gargantuan opportunity to build a comprehensive transportation network serving customer and freight needs on a grandiose scale. But before you scoff at the failure of the U.S. railroad companies, recognize that they are not atypical in their shortsightedness. Examples abound of companies, industries, and governments that reigned for decades—even centuries—before the winds of change pushed them to the pages of history texts.

Making Big Change Happen

From my observations, it is an undeniable truth that most enterprises struggle mightily when confronted with change of any significant level. The culture and institutional practices born of historical success have effectively vaccinated leadership teams against future innovation considerations. Adjusting strategy or making profound market adjustments is taken off the table in many boardroom discussions. The personal ambitions of leaders conflicts with the risks of sailing into unchartered areas. Having seen other leaders get the boot for failures, they know that such a blemish on their record may well derail their career and affect their personal livelihood. Such a mentality is epitomized in popular platitudes such as “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Rationalizing their inaction through public statements that things will be just fine, leaders conveniently ignore the subtle and not-so-subtle shifts in the markets. But the clock continues to tick—and eventually the reality sets in that the enterprise is losing ground. Something must be done.

Today’s enterprises are not built for periodically reinventing the way they do business. Market and other insightful information flows poorly from the front lines to the decision makers in the enterprise. Plans take months to create. Getting buy-in and coordinating execution takes even longer. Although there is the occasional exception, enterprises rarely seek to reinvent themselves and truly change their operational practices in but a handful of circumstances. The first is when a new senior leader takes over and seeks to put his or her imprint on the organization. When Steve Jobs returned to Apple for the second time, he reinvented the company's core operational practices. He cut the company's product offerings, eliminated a good portion of the distribution channels, and set out to develop a pipeline of new, innovative products. This case is also equally illustrative of another instance when enterprises undertake large-scale reinventions—when their backs are to the wall. When the threat is so great that the doors may close unless drastic action is undertaken, the leadership team may galvanize around a fix that fundamentally alters the enterprise's way of doing business. But even when the odds are firmly against them, many leadership teams will stand firm to their accepted business practices and ride the corporate ship as it descends beneath the waves. This leaves us with a final instance when enterprises drastically change course—when an undeniable success occurs because of a substantial shift in an enterprise's operational practices. For example, think of when Henry Ford institutionalized the assembly line. If the competition hoped to compete against the Ford Motor Company, adopting the assembly line was an imperative.

Regardless of the catalyst that precipitated the action, all the aforementioned enterprise transformations were possible because some visionary individual convinced (or was) a senior leader with the authority to get the full enterprise united behind the program. This type of visionary is a unique individual—possessing the awareness to see that things are not operating as well as they could and the conviction to promote the potential of a new idea. These champions have that rare capacity to connect the dots and see beyond the chaotic and dysfunctional environment in which they currently reside. To make the change happen, these champions must build both awareness and momentum.

Adopting the practices and structures of a process-focused enterprise is definitely classified as large scale—on a level exceeding the modern-day reorganization. In fact, it drastically parts with the traditional manner of organizing people and establishes new practices and structures to manage the enterprise. The magnitude of these changes makes it impractical to jump forward using an "all-in, full-steam-ahead" approach. In lieu of a "big bang" approach, a more gradual, concerted, and systematic approach yields the greatest probability of success. My recommended approach is to make the big change appear minimal—to make it palatable until that point of no return when the process-based approach is delivering an undeniable advantage. This is the aim of the visionary—to ostensibly deliver incremental value until senior leaders cannot help but be curious about the next steps. At that point, however, the sell and plan need to be buttoned up and ready for presentation.

Start with a Small Win

One of the great strengths of a process-based approach is its ability to define work activities and provide an enriched view of business operations. One of the simplest ways to build awareness and momentum is to implement the principles of process management in a part of the enterprise. This includes mapping the processes, setting process goals, and gradually building a plan for innovating the area using process adjustments as the language of change. Once things get moving, the transparency of intent and ease of interaction with this team will capture attention. The team becomes easy to do business with. As this occurs, the visionary catalyst needs to have the story ready to go—a picture of how the enterprise could operate if everyone used a process-based approach.

Build a Convincing Story

Before making the sell, take the time to clearly note what the transition will mean on an enterprise level. A process-focused enterprise is a new animal to most leaders. Educating them on the difference between a process-focused enterprise and the more traditional functionally based enterprise will be an eye-opening experience.

The sell not only identifies the benefits to be gained but also spells out how the practices of managing and innovating the enterprise will change for the leadership and managers. A short list of benefits might include

- *Customer connectivity*. A process-based approach revolves around providing superior products and service for the customer and recalibrating the enterprise to support these customer-specific aims.
- *Clarity and shared awareness*. This involves a universal and crystalline understanding of the operations and capabilities of the enterprise and immediate access to know who does what.
- *Innovation foundation*. This is a foundational view of the enterprise on which to base improvement activities.
- *Effective strategic planning*. This is the forging of a simplified and concrete link between strategy and its execution.
- *Efficiency and cost reduction*. This involves building a responsive structure to eliminate excess and focus resources on the key activities to improve performance and accelerate capability building.

Although the benefits paint a picture of what could be possible, it is equally important to bring the idea home. Communicate the benefits in the enterprise's terms. What will it mean for operational challenges existing today? How might interactions with customers be different? What have similar enterprises done to achieve success? Why not us?

Deliver a Comprehensive Plan

A frequent response from leaders after being introduced to a process-based approach is to argue, "We already have many of the elements of this approach." This statement is equivalent to, "We have some elements of a bridge." A working process system depends on all the components working in tandem to make innovation effective and efficient. Only having parts of the solution means that many advantages of the approach remain hidden in the closet.

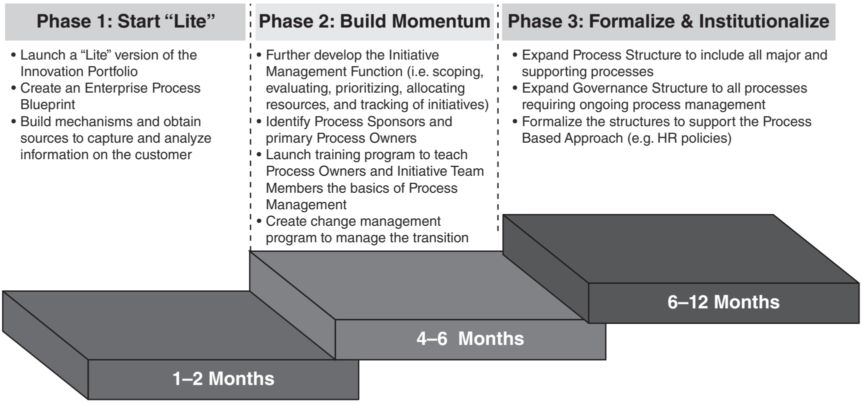
When asked to provide input on the transition, change agents need that elevator speech—several simple statements as to the anticipated benefit of the approach. Put it in simple terms. For example, "What would a group of executives say if they were told that they could have a deeper and richer understanding of their business and a vastly increased connectivity between their strategy and daily execution—and have this capability delivered in less time than it takes to develop the corporate strategy today?"

A Comprehensive Plan for Transitioning to a Process-Focused Enterprise

In general (although there are exceptions), most leadership teams lack a relatively accurate view of their customers, the ground-level operations of their enterprises, or exactly where to focus resources to take advantage of opportunities. At this stage, the plan is to tackle these items in a relatively unobtrusive manner—and thus take the first steps on the journey. For these business challenges, a process-based approach delivers immediate benefits—and it does so without shaking too many trees.

The recommended transition consists of three phases: start "lite," build momentum, and formalize and institutionalize (Figure 8.1). Each phase expands the transition but does so under the guise of simplifying the way work is completed while building new awareness of the current operational processes as well as the external forces affecting the enterprise.

FIGURE 8.1 Three phases of a transition to a process-based approach.



Phase 1: Innovation Portfolio, Enterprise Process Blueprint, Customer Information Gathering

The aim of phase 1 is to introduce stability (including common terms/views/reports) and order into the management of ongoing and planned innovations. Again, the intent is to deliver incremental value by injecting clarity and precision into the innovation cycle. To achieve these objectives, the initial focus is to launch a "lite" version of the innovation plan. By introducing a high-level system to manage initiatives and allocate resources, the leadership team immediately gains awareness of ongoing innovation activities. More often than not, this initial foray into managing innovation usually points out glaring deficiencies in current business practices.

A "Lite" Innovation Portfolio

When an enterprise is undergoing a transition to systematize the planning and execution of initiatives, it becomes necessary to set boundaries on the scope and nature of those initiatives in the portfolio. Commonly, such guidelines revolve around the size of the initiative and whether it is cross-functional or not. The initiatives fitting the criteria become the working innovation portfolio. However, what sounds like a simple exercise can often be a major undertaking. At this point in time, the initiatives are rarely developed using a rigorous process to clearly define the end goal, the business case, or the resources required to bring them to fruition.

But excessive analysis at this point can paralyze the innovation process. For this reason, take a shortcut and use high, medium, and low ratings to rank the net benefit delivered, timeline for completion, or other prioritization factors when data is not readily available. Using this "lite" approach, the highest-priority initiatives can be pushed forward before the full-scale deployment of a robust initiative evaluation process. Time is money in today's hypercompetitive markets.

Creating an Enterprise Process Blueprint

While the "lite" innovation plan is being implemented, a team should be commissioned to build the initial enterprise process blueprint. A complete approach for documenting an enterprise process blueprint was presented in Chapter 5. The blueprint is invaluable to leaders attempting to grow awareness of the operational capabilities of an enterprise. When first created, an enterprise process blueprint is an eye opener—equivalent to shining a flashlight into the recesses of the operational structure where unclear ownership, ambiguity, and misunderstandings flourish. As this initial foray into mapping the enterprise's processes is completed, it invariably sparks a collective review and epiphany about the current operations.

The blueprint will likely be messy at this point—with "bolt-on functions" and other inefficiencies immediately visible. Heritage and non-value-added processes abound. This is a result of the degree to which an enterprise is functionally focused—and quickly conveys the need to focus on the customer and reposition the enterprise to serve the customer.

The blueprint is the launching point to understand the focus (or lack of focus) that exists in the current state of the operational structure. It serves a holistic view of the enterprise and allows for clarity around the capabilities of the enterprise and where platforms exist for new offerings. The act of building the blueprint helps identify functions/processes where ownership is confusing or even missing and it leads to insightful questions:

- To what degree is customer focus embedded in the enterprise? Where are the touch points with the customer? How are they managed? Are there customer feedback loops to leadership and other appropriate individuals?
- Where are the work handoffs across functional borders, and how are they affecting the performance of the process? Are there bottlenecks preventing scalability of major processes?
- Does work flow via a simple path through the enterprise? Or does confusion and chaos reign in certain areas?
- Is work completed in the correct place and by the correct performer? Could the work be transitioned to other performers or locations better equipped to complete the work?
- Are there duplicative functions that could be consolidated in designated centers of excellence to aggregate work and resources to enhance efficiency? (In the case of a conglomerate or diversified company, obtaining this perspective may require a review of multiple enterprise process blueprints.)

Although this new vantage point may bring issues to the surface that initially frustrate and confuse leadership teams, it quickly becomes foundational to conversations regarding the improvement of operational capabilities—and with an unprecedented clarity. Although it is a very powerful tool, the enterprise process blueprint is only an initial step to grow awareness of the enterprise's operations. Equally important in this initial phase is the development of a richer understanding of the customer. "The first step in exceeding your customer's expectations is to know those expectations."[1]

Grow Feedback Channels and Awareness of the Customer

As spelled out in Chapter 2, the first facet of an innovative enterprise is for it to be customer focused. Although some amount of customer research exists in nearly every enterprise, the data rarely provides sufficient detail to plan future innovations. A process-focused enterprise uses customer data as the fuel for plotting adjustments in the process structure—and delivering superior customer experiences. Achieving this state entails building feedback loops from the frontline employees who interact with customers on a daily basis and merging this information with that from other sources, including customer analytics, research studies, and qualitative customer analysis sources. Because of the importance of the customer, this is always an area where improvements can be made. Some of the immediate opportunities for improvement include identification and management of customer connection points, capture of customer data from frontline workers, and compilation of this information into a format conducive to distribution. Techniques and approaches to gather and synthesize customer information were presented in Chapters 2 and 4.

At this juncture, the enterprise has taken several significant steps on the path to a full process-based approach. Whereas implementation of a "lite" innovation plan, creation of an enterprise process blueprint, and development of customer feedback channels are relatively benign and unobtrusive adjustments, they put structure where previously there was none. In most instances, these changes breed minimal resistance. As the three pieces come together, opportunities to improve the enterprise surface. One surefire way to build awareness with leaders is to review the current-state enterprise process blueprint while overlaying the customer analysis. This approach never fails to bring a number of commonsense initiatives to the surface, and it eases the transition to phase 2.

Phase 2: Kicking Off New Initiatives and Stabilizing the Portfolio-Management Function

Phase 2 builds on the foundation put into place during the initial phase and pushes the management team to amble further down the trail to a process-based approach. Even more important, it builds knowledge and processes that are foundational to successfully driving future innovation. Depending on the degree of attention and interest received, phase 2 may be the appropriate time to get a team up and running to guide the entire enterprise through the transition. And this precipitates other activity as well, including formation of an enterprise resource pool to staff initiatives, development of a financial planning group to oversee the initiative-development process, and setting up basic process training classes and other related activities.

Enhance the Initiative-Management Processes

With an innovation portfolio loosely in place, the next step is to increase the robustness of the processes used to evaluate and prioritize initiatives. An important accomplishment in this phase is translation of the enterprise's priorities into a comprehensive portfolio-management function that evaluates, ranks, and orders improvement initiatives. Embedding the priorities of the leadership team into the initiative-development process effectively institutionalizes the team's relative significance to the future prosperity of the enterprise. This activity requires leaders to commit to the innovation plan and the decisions it creates. The shortcut is to use standard prioritization factors, including net present value created by an initiative, initiative dependencies, and resource requirements.

With the prioritization decision made, the tools and techniques to analyze and design improvement initiatives need to be further developed and embedded into the planning routines. Because these processes are generally underserved and underdeveloped, a review of the full gamut of initiatives is necessary to ensure that the prioritization is a fair and accurate ordering based on the confirmed priorities. Initially, the executive committee or other governing council that makes the major strategic decisions serves as the ad hoc leadership council. As new initiatives are released for evaluation, the leadership team performs the portfolio-management responsibilities presented in Chapter 7. Simply meeting on a regular basis to review the initiatives formalizes and legitimizes the innovation plan. There will be speed bumps, but now the leadership knows how its forces are arrayed and where activity is taking place. Almost immediately, leaders and employees begin to grasp the rationale behind the portfolio-management process and use it as the framework to explore new opportunities.

Select De Facto Process Owners and Sponsors to Shepherd Initiative Solutions

As the initiative-development process begins to hum, it is a perfect time to introduce the role of process facilitator. In most large-scale enterprise transitions, a core team is engaged to build the guidelines and tools to support the new portfolio-management activities. The individuals fulfilling this role gain a ground-level understanding of the innovation cycle and a thorough education on the process-based approach. With this background, they are excellent candidates to be process facilitators. At this phase of the transformation, process facilitators are the smoke jumpers in the enterprise. When confusion reigns or progress is stymied, they leap into the fray and use their knowledge and skills to make progress and tamp down the fire.

They may serve as trainers, leaders, facilitators, and coaches during this period. As the evolution proceeds, gradually their responsibilities settle into the more traditional role of process facilitator.

With the engine running, the focus shifts to addressing shortcomings of initiative management, tailoring the prioritization to the enterprise's priorities, and institutionalizing the knowledge to manage process-based initiatives. As initiatives are pushed into the chute for execution, planning of the end solution needs to incorporate the eventual handoff to a team that performs the process in the normal course of business. Even at this early stage, it is beneficial to begin identifying de facto process owners who will supervise the process once it is up and running. The functional department heads are convenient candidates to groom into these roles because they already act as the subject-matter experts for their areas. As more initiatives are launched, a governance structure begins to take shape as more de facto process owners are engaged.

Institute Process Training

The final part of phase 2 is the launch of a training program to push the concepts of process improvement to a larger audience. Because the level of knowledge differs based on the role an individual plays, any training curriculum needs to cover the breadth of the roles and responsibilities of the full process-governance organization. Although process-improvement skills are foundational, the initial courses ideally focus on helping individuals to navigate the major components of a process-focused enterprise. As a sample curriculum, the initial courses might be as follows:

- Course 1: The Enterprise Process Structure and Process Management (for leaders and process owners)
- Course 2: The Innovation Portfolio (for leaders and process owners)

- Course 3: Initiative Execution (for process owners and initiative stakeholders)

These courses suffice to make the early adopters aware of the basic constructs of a process-based approach. As the principles of process management are adopted, additional coursework can expand on the basics communicated in these initial classes, and eventually, the training will expand beyond just the initiative teams to include leaders, managers, and workers throughout the enterprise. Fully capturing the benefits of a process-based approach requires the full employee population to be trained on processes—giving them the ability to weed out heritage processes and continually improve their areas of the enterprise. The goal is to incite the workforce to aggressively identify improvement opportunities and simultaneously provide the framework to evaluate those opportunities and begin leveraging the full resources of the enterprise in the most expeditious and beneficial manner.

At this point, the enterprise has adopted (occasionally unknowingly) many of the practices of a process-based approach. Although the only formal structure that exists is the portfolio-management function, around the enterprise individuals are beginning to catch onto the new way of thinking and organizing their work efforts. An enterprise can operate in this mode for an extended period—at least until any resistance subsides and associates become comfortable with the new approach.

Phase 3: Full Steam Ahead (Building Out Process Structure and Governance Model)

As initiatives are launched and completed, a portion of the process structure is rebuilt, and other sections receive at least token improvement treatment. Yet there are most assuredly gaps—areas outside the sphere of improvement efforts where heritage and poorly designed processes still operate, areas that would definitely benefit from attention. Over the years, I found these back-burner areas to be some of the most fertile areas for investigation. Indeed, teams focused on delivering immediate cost savings are advised to closely inspect these areas because they are rife with duplication, inefficiency, and an abundance of opportunity.

Finish Documenting the Process Structure

Mapping these back-burner areas will take an extended period of time if left to a convenient time, and the potential benefit will be pushed into the future. Why eliminate from consideration what might possibly be some of the biggest opportunities? The smart approach is to map these unchartered areas and assign process owners to begin examining them for opportunities. Knocking the mapping out in a timely fashion frequently requires a dedicated team. If they are available, process facilitators are the ideal resources to complete this work. However, if they are knee deep in managing initiatives and getting the leadership involved in the portfolio-management function, using them may delay the overall transformation. The alternative is to use process owners or other experienced process performers to complete this work. If appropriately qualified resources are not available, hire an external team to complete this work. From my perspective, the best option may be to hire experienced process consultants and pair them with promising internal resources. In this manner, the consultants' experience is leveraged to get the work done while simultaneously the internal resources gain an education. Locating consultants with strong process skills is rarely a problem because this type of work is their bread and butter.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, not every process requires mapping or, even more important, active management. There are a number of processes in every enterprise that are not suitable for mapping because of the variability of their inputs, outputs, or the process itself. Customer service and creative processes fall into this bucket. For these processes, procedures or guidelines suffice for managing their performance to desired enterprise standards. The degree of active management is significantly lower than with other processes. And there are always processes that are executed so infrequently as to be immaterial and require no management. The juice is just not worth the squeeze. As for general guidelines, a process should be assigned a process owner for active management if it meets any of the following requirements:

- The process is repeatedly and consistently executed in some interval of time.
- The process provides a valued output.
- The process consumes significant resources.
- The process is foundational in that it provides important capabilities to the enterprise.

In other words, which processes would deliver even greater benefits if a process owner were continually engaged to monitor its performance and make improvements? Using these guidelines, the remainder of the process structure should be built using the techniques presented in Chapter 5.

Formally Assign Process Owners and Sponsors

Simply defined, *process governance* is assigning managers to own parts of the process structure. Although the relationship between the two is symbiotic, the creation of a governance structure is entirely dependent on the existence of the process structure. As the processes and their connectivity are brought to light, process sponsors are appointed by the senior leadership team to oversee groups of similar processes. In most enterprises, the individuals most qualified to immediately occupy these roles are currently serving in traditional leadership roles (e.g., senior vice presidents or vice presidents). In many instances, the ideal candidate does not exist. Compromises are necessary until recruiting and training programs are in place to find and develop the ideal candidate. To get folks into roles, individuals may be chosen based on their leadership credentials, although they lack process acumen. Over time, these individuals will grow into the role or a more suitable candidate will be found. As with any major transformation, not everyone who started on the journey will arrive at the end.

As process sponsors are named, they are, in turn, responsible for filling open process owner roles in their areas. At this early point, a candidate's familiarity with the subject process takes precedence over his or her process expertise. Process skills can be bought or rented when needed—but operational knowledge is only available internally.

Eventually the process structure is fully built, and names are attached to the boxes. However, it will take time before the enterprise is hitting on all cylinders. It simply requires a number of cycles before all the sponsors and owners possess the knowledge to be effective in the new environment. Many enterprises attempt to shorten the learning curve by sponsoring knowledge-sharing sessions across levels (e.g., process sponsors, process owners, process facilitators, and initiative-team members). These sessions serve multiple purposes. First, individual process owners have a forum to discuss their daily challenges and, when appropriate, escalate common challenges to upper-level leadership. Second, these meetings are useful to build awareness of the endeavors of others at a similar level in the enterprise and to plan collaboration opportunities. And, of course, there is the additional benefit of providing a forum for individuals to network internally. Such a meeting is an excellent way for process owners (and sponsors) to develop awareness of candidates for future open positions.

With the creation of the process-governance structure and the initial innovation plan, the company is well on its way to becoming a process-focused enterprise. An initial goal of the acting leadership council is to formally approve the first slate of initiatives to be the initial innovation plan and to assign the resources to make it happen. From this point on, it is business as usual. The leadership council functions as a super program-management office—maintaining a continual focus on the customer, monitoring all facets of operations, and deciding on how to take advantage of upcoming opportunities. In every enterprise, though, the real work takes place in the initiatives—the place where the rubber meets the road and where innovation succeeds or fails.

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