
Editorial: Learning, teaching and disseminating knowledge in business process management

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Abstract: Process-oriented thinking has become the major paradigm for managing companies and other organizations. The push for better processes has been even more intense due to rapidly evolving client needs, borderless global markets and innovations swiftly penetrating the market. Thus, education is decisive for successfully introducing and implementing Business Process Management (BPM) initiatives. However, BPM education has been an area of challenge. This special issue aims to provide current research on various aspects of BPM education. It is an initial effort for consolidating better practices, experiences and pedagogical outcomes founded with empirical evidence to contribute towards the three pillars of education: learning, teaching, and disseminating knowledge in BPM.

Keywords: Business process management (BPM); Knowledge dissemination; Learning; Pedagogy; Teaching

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1. Introduction

Business Process Management (BPM) has emerged as a powerful concept for improving organizations' performance and ensuring success in a highly competitive world (Davenport, 1993; Hammer & Champy, 1993; Harmon, 2008; Jeston & Nelis, 2008). Designing, analysing, implementing, improving and controlling business processes has become an essential paradigm for organizations across all industries. The term BPM comprises a set of structured methods and tools for managing business processes. Furthermore, BPM is supported by technologies such as workflow automation and service-oriented computing. Thus, the need for BPM expertise is increasing with many BPM-related roles emerging, which often requires new sets of skills for those employees involved in these roles.

However, the BPM concept is much more comprehensive. It has become a holistic management discipline also covering aspects such as strategic alignment, governance, people and culture (Rosemann & vom Brocke, 2010). BPM initiatives require a major shift of thinking – from a traditionally vertical 'function-oriented' perspective to an understanding which is based on horizontally organized 'business processes'. For many employees and managers this mind shift is quite demanding. As a result, BPM education has been raised as a perennial topic (Seethamraju, 2012).

The topic of BPM education has many facets. For example, the challenges of converting function-oriented organizations and its employees to process-oriented thinking (Moormann & Bandara, 2012; Leyer & Wollersheim, 2013); effectively training employees to select and use specific methods, tools and technologies for managing business processes within different areas of designing, analysing, implementing, improving and controlling; and the overall challenges of teaching a complex multi-disciplinary domain like BPM. Education is not only needed for those in BPM specific roles in an organization, but has become an essential requirement on all levels including top executives, supervisory board members, workers associations and other stakeholders – to ensure acceptance and support for improvement initiatives. The required skill sets for BPM capabilities are diverse and include business skills, technical skills and a range of soft-generic skills such as facilitation, negotiation, relationship and change management. This is aggravated by the fact, that to date there is a lack and a need for a clear body of BPM knowledge. Another challenge is how to spread BPM-related knowledge to every level of an organization to ensure BPM thinking is embedded in all daily actions. Subsequently, there are many issues awaiting to be examined, studied and addressed. To cover these topics, we look at three pillars of BPM education:

- *Learning in BPM*: This area comprises the build-up of individual and collective knowledge on BPM. Exemplary topics include strategies of learning, learners' perceptions and the impact of these perceptions towards BPM in general, learners' motivation in BPM initiatives, and strategies and tools to facilitate learning in the BPM context.
- *Teaching in BPM*: Here topics include strategies of educating, curriculum design for BPM training in companies, public administration and universities, the role of instructors, coaches and facilitators in BPM, role plays and other tools for teaching purposes in BPM projects, and the incorporation of advanced information technology into BPM (distance) education.

- *Disseminating knowledge in BPM:* This area involves the diffusion of relevant knowledge within companies and other organizations. Thus, topics include approaches to delivering BPM education, including seminars, workshops and role-plays, the use of collaborative tools, Web-based conferencing and social networking, strategies and tools to facilitate peer interactions and other forms of collaboration, and the provision of a BPM center of excellence to disseminate BPM know-how.

This special issue of KM&EL international journal is dedicated to learning, teaching and disseminating knowledge in the field of BPM. In our call for papers we invited manuscripts that report on empirical studies of issues and challenges related to BPM education as well as the use or design of tools supporting teaching efforts. We did also welcome manuscripts discussing conceptual frameworks or theoretical constructs related to learning, teaching and disseminating BPM knowledge. The call for papers had been internationally distributed. All submissions went through a double-blind peer-review process to ensure rigor and relevance. As a result, four papers have been selected as important contributions for this special issue. These pieces of work present not only a broad spectrum of BPM educational issues but also a fascinating range of methods used.

2. Preview of papers

The first piece, authored by Julian Krumeich, Dirk Werth, and Peter Loos, deals with business process learning on the job. Precisely, they look at how employees should learn before they execute processes. The authors strive to achieve a minimum up-front learning time and to ensure that the employees can work efficiently on processes from the very beginning. They use the concepts of task guidance and process guidance, a Design Science oriented approach. The empirical evaluation is shown by a prototypical implementation of their approach.

Katrin Bergener, Jan vom Brocke, Sara Hofmann, Armin Stein, and Christina vom Brocke discuss the integrated nature of BPM and hence the essential need for BPM experts to excel in communication skills. Yet, the authors show the lack of the consideration of these aspects in current BPM curricula designs and executions. They argue for the need and value in instilling agile communication skills into the BPM curricula and present design principles for BPM courses to teach agile communication skills.

Nick Letch positions BPM experts as professionals who must continuously critically reflect and learn from prior and present experiences. He recommends the use of reflective learning journals in BPM courses, as a way of developing reflective capabilities and better engaging the students in the overall learning process. Empirical evidence based on the qualitative analysis of more than a hundred reflective journals is provided to illustrate the impact of reflection in BPM education.

There are many cases that describe business process changes which could be beneficially used for fulfilling BPM education needs. Zuzana Kristekova, Marlen C. Jurisch, Michael Schermann, and Helmut Krcmar in their paper describe how System Dynamics can be used as a valuable approach to consolidate findings of case studies on business process change projects. In particular, it is highlighted how System Dynamics can convey the complex relationships between important phenomena within the context of process change.

3. Conclusions

The field of educating in Business Process Management is still in its early phases of maturity, with many open issues still unaddressed. BPM education is crucial. Employees and managers have to conduct the mind shift towards a process-oriented organization. And today's students and trainees are those who will introduce and implement BPM initiatives in the near future. The papers collected for this special issue provide an insight for academics and practitioners on recent research on learning, teaching and disseminating knowledge in BPM. Since education in BPM is a valuable and requisite investment for the success of BPM in organizations, we hope that this special issue will foster further interest in what we believe is decisive for the sustainability and success not only for BPM initiatives but for the BPM discipline in general.

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