

Are You a Business Process Expert?

A Day in the Life of a BPX

Successful businesses are agile ones, so enterprises need experts, savvy in both business and IT, who understand business processes and the best practices to get these processes changed, deployed, and executed in real time. Many business analysts, process consultants, application consultants, business process architects, and other business process professionals have all found themselves filling this new role, a role that now has a name: *business process expert* (see **Figure 1**).

A business process expert (BPX) is the glue between business and technology. A BPX is not only competent in business practices and able to prescribe solutions for key business issues, but can guide the correct use of technology to solve these issues. Some BPXs are adept at solution configuration, too.

So what makes you a business process expert? And what exactly does a BPX do? BPXs specialize in looking at a business problem and modeling a solution that can be implemented through the use of technology. I've found that many people are BPXs and may not even know it. Consider the following scenario:

It's Monday morning and you're faced with a new task that must be completed by the end of the week. Your mission? To evaluate an existing business process in

need of some redesign, and to produce documented recommendations for new technology that will support the process. How do you get the job done?

This is a common scenario for the business process expert — a situation that requires high- to mid-level business-side analysis and a quick but comprehensive set of solution recommendations as output. Be they consultants or integrated parts of an organization, business process experts face the same fundamental challenges.

Quickly Develop Trust

A BPX may come into situations where the client — either an internal or

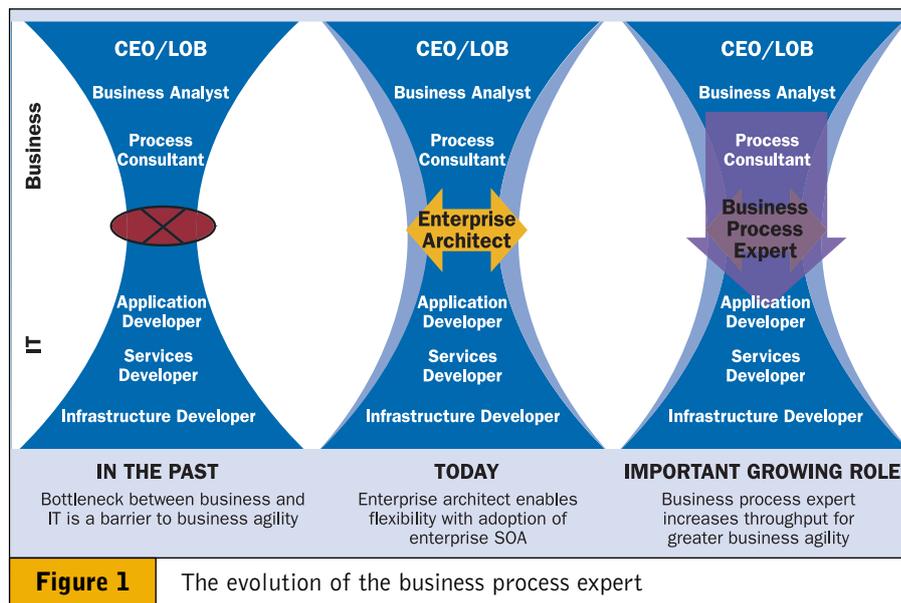
Regular Feature

BPXplorer



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external client — has no prior knowledge of the BPX's profile and history. In order to devise both the technology and business recommendations needed, it's incumbent on the BPX to become a trusted advisor as quickly as possible.



A face-to-face relationship is imperative for increasing the productivity of any interaction. To do this, BPXs should consider employing the following tactics:

- Listen attentively to the client's business needs
- Ask questions for clarity
- Demonstrate forthrightness: clarify that you do not have a hidden agenda and that you are working for them
- Outline your own experience in two minutes or less, focusing on other occasions where you were a trusted advisor

This openness will typically precipitate a comfortable, receptive relationship that enables BPXs to get the information they need to create their conclusions.

Sort Through Business Issues Despite Limited Information and Time

It's easy to feel like a fish out of water in an unfamiliar environment, but a

surefire way for a BPX to gain an understanding of a business environment is by capitalizing on past experiences. As you listen to the business's needs, you'll often find that situations radically different in exterior application can be very similar at their core.

By establishing a thorough understanding, often through key stakeholders, of the organization's business priorities and areas of greatest pain, a business process expert can quickly get a sense of where the most urgent concerns exist.

Analyze the Technical Environment and Know Where It Is Headed

At the end of a project, no one likes to discover that a complete application built for one area of the business, which executes the exact requirements of the assignment, already exists but simply lies outside the main landscape. Work with

IT to ensure that you have a complete view of the technical landscape, including forward-looking plans for technical upgrades. With this view, you can adjust the suggested timing for implementing your recommendations.

Design a Set of Alternate Solutions

This step typically involves your own personal style. Generally speaking, recommended solutions will become apparent during your discussions with stakeholders. As you sort through the business issues and identify the pain points, possible solutions often naturally fall out of your analysis.

Again, past experience and intuition can be very useful for best-guessing on high-level project timing or phasing in a solution. You can use solutions you may have designed in the past to help estimate the implementation path for your current project.

Business Process Expert FAQs

What's a typical day in the life of a BPX?

Depending on the phase of a project, a typical day is spent between strategy mode and configuration design. Early in a project, the BPX's primary influence is on management and the business, shaping the organization into a redesign of existing processes or crystallizing the solution to a business problem. As the project life cycle progresses, the role becomes more that of a translator between business requirements and technology. Some days, a BPX may be heavily involved in configuration or troubleshooting, while other days a BPX may be evangelizing the new solution to the business through presentations or road shows.

Who are the key players a BPX interacts with on a project?

Day to day, a BPX may interact with anyone from C-level or VP-level management to project managers, from business users to technical and configuration team members. The BPX involves management in the early stages of problem definition and solution design, particularly to garner support for the solution and secure a champion. During the implementation of the solution, the BPX exchanges ideas with

both the business and the configuration/technical team to ensure robust solution design and implementation.

What are the key skills of a BPX?

In addition to wide-ranging business experience in a specialty area, certain "soft" skills are critical for a successful BPX. These include:

- *Excellent communication skills* to deliver concise, focused messages in the language each stakeholder understands; while management requires crisp, cost/benefit responses, technical or configuration teams need answers in the language of the technology and software to learn exactly what needs to be configured
- *Strong facilitation skills* to clearly articulate business issues and the effective solution design to the relevant players
- *Big-picture focus* to identify the impact of the issue and the solution on the business and to link the solution to the current business and technical landscape
- *Modeling ability* to model a solution that meets the business requirements within the confines of the technology

Create and Document Business Process and Technology Recommendations

All your analysis efforts may go unused without a carefully crafted recommendations report. Typically, a recommendations document should include the following sections:

- Introduction, including why you are creating this document
- Scoping summary, explaining when this exercise occurred and its outcome
- Detailed business process information for the specific scope reviewed
- Alternate recommendations
- Organizational impact assessment
- Required interfaces
- Security, authorizations, and roles
- Integration points

- Training requirements
- Description of improvements and business benefits
- Resource estimates of the main actions to be taken to implement the solution
- Proposed timing of the activities
- Key success factors
- Project assumptions

Conclusion

Enterprises are looking to business process experts to have the knowledge, expertise, ability, and confidence to competently liaise between business and IT. By sticking to the basics of analysis and design as discussed above, you have excellent odds of success. Honing your skills through experience is the key to mastering quick situational analysis.

And while the role is relatively new, you'll find that there are already resources specifically available to the BPX. In fact, there's a whole community of business process experts sharing best practices, methodologies, and techniques at <http://bpx.sap.com>. I strongly encourage you to join the Business Process Expert Community today and become an active participant.

For more information, please visit <http://weblogs.sdn.sap.com/pub/wlg/3892> and find other valuable resources available at <http://bpx.sap.com>. ■

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