



Frequently Asked Questions

What to Expect When Participating in Business Process Modeling Activities

A BPM+ Health Guide

2023-07-25

A NOTE TO READERS

This Frequently Asked Questions guide was created as an asset to help you and your organization effectively engage functional experts in modeling activities. Please feel free to adapt and customize!

Every organization has unique roles, terms, approaches, and nuances. This FAQ is designed to be tailored, and you are encouraged to do so to adapt to your specific audience and needs. We welcome your feedback and experiences and feel free to send comments to the authors by sending a note to oacm@engage.bpm-plus.org

Thanks for your interest!

FAQS FOR SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

This document is for individuals invited to participate in business process modeling (BPM) workshops or activities, to provide background and offer insight to prepare you for a successful engagement.

BPM workshops are part of capturing, documenting, refactoring, or validating clinical or business requirements. This document addresses common questions and will help set expectations around what is likely to occur. The FAQ highlights the purpose and value of the activity, what is expected of your participation, and how the resultant products will be used.

Q: Why do I need to participate in this workshop?

A: You likely have been invited to a business process modeling workshop to provide expertise in an area being studied for process improvement. This is your opportunity to influence the analysis of that process to help it become more efficient or to achieve better outcomes.

Q: What do you mean by business process modeling?

A: BPM is an approach toward understanding and documenting how business processes work to improve communication and understanding of the processes. This is typically done to standardize processes, foster consistency, improve outcomes, and impact IT solutions.

Using narrative (text description) of business processes is inherently ambiguous, resulting in differences in interpretation and practice. “Modeling”¹ improves precision, consistency, and reduces interpretive error.

¹ “Modeling” references the use of diagrams and symbols that have a precise meaning.

Frequently Asked Questions

BPM is a way to create visual representations of workflows; it includes the data that those workflows require to be successful, and the data produced that feed other workflows and activities.

BPM+ is a moniker representing a set of open industry standards used to document processes and workflows, stewarded by a well-established nonprofit industry standards body.

Q: What will I be expected to know in order to contribute?

A: You are invited to participate due to your expertise in your subject area. Modeling sessions will often involve input from several subject experts, such as yourself, whose collective input will be captured within a formal model.

Your expert knowledge will be elicited by a facilitation team typically comprised of professional modelers, note-takers, and facilitators.

You are NOT being asked to become a professional modeler, though a basic familiarity with modeling notations can be useful. (Often, a “primer” guide and education session will be offered, and a modest time investment—30-60 minutes—is common to achieve proficiency in reading the resulting models.

Workshop participants often come away with a deeper understanding of their specialty through the peer interaction and the rigor of the analysis framework. Frequently, these insights extend beyond one’s focus area, highlighting how that area or specialty affects others.

Q: What is my role in this process?

A: Your role is to share your expert knowledge, which the modelers will capture to create visually accessible expressions of that knowledge. Be mindful of the goal of the workshop as described to you. Sometimes activities are about *re-envisioning* how things might work, whereas other times, the purpose is to document *how things work today*.

Typically, there are two roles served by subject matter experts: *contributors* and *reviewers*.

- Contributors are asked to participate in work sessions, sharing their expertise to inform the models being produced. This can include how things are being done today, opportunities for improvement, identification of challenges or problems, potential new futures, etc.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Reviewers are asked to validate the models that result from these work sessions. If they participated in the session, they ensured that what was captured in the model was what was expressed in the session. Other reviewers may provide independent validation or approval that the models reflect preferred or best practices.
- Your informed opinion is why you are there. If a documented process doesn't make sense, question it. Please ask if you don't understand what a diagram or symbol means. It is far better to "ask the dumb question" than to assume something is correct and let it go.

Q: How much work is this?

A: The level of effort will correlate with the complexity of the process being captured and your role as either contributor or validator. Typically the modeling team will try to break processes into smaller segments that are easier to tackle.

A straightforward business process (such as a routine outpatient physical exam) might be fully addressed in one work session of a few hours, whereas more complex processes (such as radiation therapy) could take multiple sessions. At the outset of your involvement, a rough estimate of your expected level of effort will be provided.

Q: How should I approach the work?

A: Be mindful of the workshop instructions as you approach a modeling session. If envisioning the future, step away from the current organizational obstacles and constraints. If documenting how things work, focus on exactly how things are done today, noting improvement opportunities separately for later consideration.

Frequently re-envisioning exercises are met with healthy skepticism. Don't let that jade your work or participation; do your best to focus on how things will work when successful. We recommend you suspend disbelief, documenting concerns as obstacles, challenges, or issues so they can be added to a backlog and ultimately addressed.

You will likely be working with a facilitation/modeling team that does not have subject expertise. Do not assume they accurately reflect your statements or capture your intent. Expert review and validation are critical. One of the strengths of BPM+ models is that they can be read/validated with limited training or modeling experience.

Q: What's in this for me (or my organization)?

A: Business requirements are often subject to interpretive ambiguity that results in added cost or implementation error, adversely impacting business users and IT alike. By expressing these needs more precisely, there are several potential benefits.

Business needs can be more accurately captured and communicated, interpretive errors reduced, and implementations realized that are more consistent with business

Frequently Asked Questions

expectations and requirements. This impacts internal communications and furthers understanding outside the organization (e.g., partners, collaborators, external stakeholders).

Q: Why modeling?

A: BPM is an approach for collecting and documenting knowledge related to process flow and workflows (e.g., capturing clinical pathways or practice guidelines).

Models can be more precise and accurate than natural language.

Best practice in many industries is to use formal models to express knowledge and requirements; the healthcare industry is starting to catch up with this best practice.

Q: What are the benefits of a standardized approach to modeling processes?

A: Modeling fosters an improved understanding of the current state, and the use of precise symbols with specific meanings fosters clear communication while reducing interpretive errors.

The use of industry-standard notations offers many benefits: availability of commercial tooling, the ability to simulate process execution and automated review of models to identify potential errors. Perhaps most importantly, there are industry communities of practice that are documenting common patterns, sharing ideas, and offering expert peer review.

Importantly, modeling can inform and expedite the ability to do quality improvement.

Q: Is there a difference between “flowcharting” and Business Process Modeling?

A: Flowcharts are easy to draw by hand or via software such as Visio or LucidChart and can be very useful for capturing processes at a high level. However, their utility for process modeling is limited as they lack the precision of business process models, and their use for implementation is hindered because they are less precise.

BPM is effectively a language – or in reality, a family of languages (hence the term “BPM+”) – that has been developed to capture business processes more holistically: actors, data, documentation required, products produced, and so on. The result is a more accurate description of process flows and an enhanced ability to implement them.

The rigorous approach to business process modeling helps to identify information gaps and dependencies that won’t necessarily become apparent during a flowchart exercise.

BPM+ models built in sophisticated tools are reproducible, sharable, and modifiable. They can evolve and provide important historical context for why processes are as they are.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How will these products be used?

A: There are several common ways these models are used.

- First, process models facilitate a common understanding (“getting everyone on the same page”) about how a particular process is done now, resulting in a deeper understanding and further discovery of previously unsurfaced disparities in approach. This can spark discussions and decisions about best practices, leading to better alignment and standardization.
- Second, BPM is useful in future-state planning – identifying how things will/should work based on your intended practices. The use of rigorous notation furthers consistent interpretation, reduces errors in system configuration and IT concerns, and improves the ability to manage, monitor, and assure compliance and quality management.
- Depending on the technical tools used for modeling, this approach can be taken a step further. BPM models can be made “automatable,” where software systems read and consume the model, and the model guides how the systems operate. This allows the expert community to have ultimate control over how things work – change the model, change the way systems operate, with minimal human intervention. Pretty cool, eh?

Copyright © 2023, BPM+ Health®, a program of Object Management Group, Inc. (“OMG®”). All other trademarks in this document are the properties of their respective owners.