

Discover essential parts of a business process

Whenever I teach people how to prepare a business process map or model, I first emphasise the importance of understanding and capturing the essential elements of a business process. By asking the right questions, these elements can easily be discovered.

Who is the customer of the process?

The primary purpose of a business process is to deliver value to a customer. The products and services of an enterprise are the means by which value is delivered to customers – business processes produce these products and services. Process customers may be external to the enterprise or they could be internal customers. In the early stages of building a process model, you just have to discover and identify the processes customers - a more in-depth understanding of customers' needs is done when the process is analysed and redesigned.

Where does the process start?

All business processes have a start and an endpoint. The identification of the start and end is done when the business process is first identified and the **scope** of the process is defined. This scope may change as you start to build the model, but it is important that you have a clear understanding of the process scope before starting the process model.

The first thing to do is to define the process starting point, called the **start event**. This is the trigger point of the process and it is usually the arrival of a person, document or a physical object that is going to be transformed in some way in the process. These are the **inputs** to the process and their flow through the process is discovered during the building of the process model. Processes can sometimes be started by other types of events such as a time of day or time of the week, month or year.

Where does the process end?

The endpoint of the process is called the **end event**. The end event is the result of the process. The results of the process are the **outputs** which impact on the customers of the process – these impacts are called the process outcomes. Process output should add value to the process customer but negative outcomes also need to be identified.

What work is done in the process?

The main purpose of business process models is to make the work of an enterprise visible. The work carried out in the process is defined as the **process activities**. Process activities can be defined at a high level but the most useful definition of work done in a process is at a detailed level, called task level. A task-level activity is called a **task** and is defined as a single piece of work performed by a single person or machine in a single timeframe. Process activities are the building blocks of organisational work – which, when put together in the right way, produce the products and service of the enterprise in the best possible way.

Who does the work?

Work in an enterprise is done by people or machines. These are referred to as the **process performers**. In a process model the process performers can be represented at a high level, for example as department, divisions or teams. I find it is best to define the process performers at the detailed level. At the task level the process performer is defined as the role name of the resource doing the work. This might be a human job role or the name of a machine or computer application when a machine does the work.

How does the work flow through the process?

You can only find this out by walking through the process. I like to walk through the process physically but, if this is not possible walk through the process mentally with the guidance of the people who know the process well. The discovery of the process workflow is best done by talking to as many people as possible about the process and getting them to describe how work is done in the process in whatever way suits them. Usually people only know about the piece of the process they are working in. You then need to put all the pieces together to trace the flow from the start to the end.

When you discover how work flows through the process you need to pay particular attention to where the process flow takes different directions. The branching of the flow can be due to decision being made or different business rules being applied. What is important is to discover and all the flows – a detailed analysis of the decisions and rules can be done later.

Once you have asked the process experts these questions and have carefully noted their replies, you will be ready to start the process model. Further detail can be added as you go along but by now you should have discovered the essential elements of the process.