

# Ten Steps to Business Process Improvement

AMY RADISHOFSKI, Features Editor, Manufacturing.net



Companies are always striving to make their businesses leaner and more efficient, so the concept of business process improvement (BPI) is nothing new to them. However, many companies default to a third party to help with the process.

“There are several reasons why companies use consultants, usually either because they think BPI is more complicated than it is, they don’t feel that their employees have the required skills to do the work, they feel that they need better facilitation skills to lead the work, or they don’t believe that existing employees will eliminate a step in a process if it negatively affects their job,” said Susan Page, Manager, HRIS for a major entertainment company located in Orlando, FL.

While Page is somewhat critical of third-party consultants, the dangers of generalizing or minimizing the potential impact of outside sources can be dangerous. In many situations, especially when dealing with the instillation of more efficient manufacturing processes and employee mindsets, the use of an expert in Kaizen, Six Sigma or ISO certifications, even to help get the ball rolling, can be invaluable in improving production and overall performance.

However, Page feels companies can go through the BPI process on their own and get the same benefits without hiring a pricey consultant. By opting not to use a third party, companies may even see some additional benefits.

She adds that working on BPI in a team environment can help employees gain a better understanding of the end-to-end business process.

However, before beginning any sort of BPI initiative, companies must be sure that they understand the three core objectives behind BPI:

- Effectiveness — Does the process meet customer needs?
- Efficiency — Does it cut down on the usage of resources?
- Adaptability — Is the process flexible enough to change as requirements change?

Once a company understands the motivation behind BPI, they can move on to Page’s 10 Steps:

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1. Develop the Process Inventory: Identifying and Prioritizing the Process List — As with most projects, this step involves figuring out where to start.
2. Establish the Foundation: Avoiding Scope Creep — After figuring out what the improvement effort will be focused on, Step 2 involves the scope definition document, which is the blueprint for the rest of the process.
3. Draw the Process Map: Flowcharting and Documenting — This step involves mapping the business process so everyone involved understands how the process works and where handoffs occur between departments.
4. Estimate Time and Cost: Introducing the Process and Cycle Time — Step 4 helps the company summarize the labor required to deliver a business process and how long the process takes.
5. Verify the Process Map: Gaining Buy-in — In Step 5, the process map is reviewed to be sure that it accurately reflects the existing process.
6. Apply Improvement Techniques: Challenging Everything — Companies apply the six improvement techniques, which changes the business process so that it delivers business value.
7. Create Internal Controls, Metrics and Tools: Making it Real — This step is about minimizing possible errors, identifying process metrics and creating tools to automate the business process.
8. Test and Rework: Making Sure It Works — Step 8 creates a plan to test the new process to ensure everything works as planned.
9. Implement Change: Preparing the Organization — Communication is key here. The company must identify who needs to know about the change, what they need to know about it, and how to properly communicate the right information to the right people.
10. Drive Continuous Improvement: Embracing the New Mindset — Continuous improvement is an ongoing process, not just a one-time event.

“The steps provide a framework to do the work. I find that people I work with on BPI appreciate knowing the journey that is ahead of them. One step builds on another, so it helps things move more smoothly,” she notes.

Most of the 10 Steps seem straightforward and relatively easy, but eliminating bureaucracy and redundancy, for example, may seem a bit tricky for business managers.

“When you’re trying to eliminate bureaucracy, you should try to determine if there is a legal, tax or audit reason why a seemingly bureaucratic step in a business process is required. If it doesn’t meet one of the above needs, then it should be eliminated,” Page advises.

To cut down on redundancy, Page suggests that managers be on the lookout for people who are duplicating work. She says that redundancy may not happen within a department, but rather across departments. When they spot redundancy, they should identify an official source and get rid of the duplicates.

So what happens after the company finishes Step 10? Considering that Step 10

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focuses on continuous improvement, it should be clear that the process is never really done.

“It is much easier to develop a schedule to revisit the business process on a regular basis rather than leave it to chance,” Page said. “Continuous improvement is easier if you make it part of your improvement mindset.”

If a company is still a little apprehensive about taking on the 10 Steps on their own, Page says they should start small. After all, continuous improvement can be a daunting task, and trying to do everything all at once can be more than a manufacturer can handle. Page’s 10 Steps can be an easier way for companies to begin the process of continuous improvement.

“Go through the first step and identify your business processes and then prioritize them. Pick the one that scores the highest and work on just that one process to see how simple it really is to do,” Page says of her 10 Steps. “Ask for help if you get stuck by visiting the many blogs out there, but look for sensible answers instead of someone trying to sell you services.”

*Susan Page is author of “POWER OF BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT: 10 Simple Steps to Increase Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Adaptability.” For more information, visit [www.powerofbusinessprocessimprovement.com](http://www.powerofbusinessprocessimprovement.com) [1].*

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