

Management Focus

Visualising Strategic Change: The Role and Impact of Process Maps as Boundary Objects in Reorganisation

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Based on an in-depth case study of an organizational change programme within a major UK bank, this paper explores how managers use process maps to facilitate the diffusion of strategy ideas. Process maps legitimise and diffuse strategic change, they are flexible, being able to evolve and incorporate other tools and have the potential to metamorphose into repositories of knowledge, thereby signalling the permanence of the change programme. However, while process maps might be seen as powerful devices, they are also subject to the capabilities of those who use them and contingencies such as the requirement for interim success stories and broader factors of organisational timing, technology and culture.

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Introduction

The pace of change has never been greater than in the current business environment, affecting all organisa-

tions in all industries (Balogun and Hope Hailey, 2004; Burnes, 2004; Carnall, 2003) and one of the greatest truisms in management today is that the successful management of change is crucial for any organisation to survive and succeed (Todnem By, 2005). Change is regarded as an ever present feature of organisational life at both operational and strategic levels (Burnes, 2004) and there can be little doubt regarding the importance of an organization's ability to identify its future needs and how to manage the changes required to get there (Todnem By, 2005). In this way organisational change cannot be separated from strategy and vice versa. Due to its importance, change management is becoming a highly required management skill and a primary task for management today is the leadership of organisational change (Graetz, 2000).

There is also a widespread discussion within the management literature on the detailed methods and tools for change (Werr, 1995) and their legitimacy is generally based on the belief in the effectiveness of their direct application to the change process (Werr *et al.*, 1997). Of these methods and tools, process improvement methods have gained in popularity in recent years. For instance, all the larger management

consultancy companies have in some way included the concept of BPR into their service portfolios, and it is the key tool in McKinsey's core process re-design methodology (Werr *et al.*, 1997). While the process view of the organisation is not new, the broadened scope of the processes of interest is; ranging from groups or departments in companies to whole companies or several companies (Werr *et al.*, 1997). This broad cross-functional view is spreading rapidly, replacing functional applications to business improvement with a means of integrating business processes and reducing conflict and bottle necks within organisations. Although BPR is now less widely used due to its association with restructuring, layoffs and failed change programmes (Davenport, 1996), the concept of business process remains important in the literature and has attracted a proliferation of methodologies and tools (Melão and Pidd, 2000), one of the most widely used being process maps.

The aim of this paper is twofold. The first objective is to empirically show the evolution and spread of process mapping throughout the change programme of a major UK Bank. The second objective is to conceptually explain the properties of the process map tool and the conditions which contribute to its successful use in organisational change. Research was carried out in a major UK bank undergoing a significant strategic change programme. The answer to the above objectives was sought through a case study approach. The case study provides a basis upon which theoretical propositions are formulated and generalised (analytic generalisation) (Yin, 2003). The choice of the case setting made it possible to analyse how process mapping as the major tool of change was employed in the bank by their internal consultants. This case study allowed careful tracking of the development and evolution of the process mapping technique over the time of the change programme and afforded insights into its multiple roles and impacts.

This paper is divided into three main sections. First, a literature review of process mapping is followed by their reconceptualisation as boundary objects to gain insights into the effective use of process maps. Second, the empirical setting in the banking sector with research methods and case study evidence will be presented. Third, an empirical analysis of the case of process mapping as a change tool in a bank will be presented. Implications for change practitioners and suggestions for further research are formulated.

Process Mapping

From the distinction Werr *et al.* (1997) make between a tool and a method, process mapping has the characteristics of both. As a method, process maps incorporate organisational input into the when, where, how, why and by whom of change while as a tool, process maps have the ability to solve specific problems in a given situation or functional area of

organisation, to transfer information into computer analysis applications or provide detailed scenarios. Process mapping is essentially a radical approach to change which allows breakthrough advancements in organisational process improvements through an understanding of complex processes (Pojasek, 2005). However, process mapping is more than just a tool for change as it can lead to a more holistic understanding of how an organisation works (Matsumoto *et al.*, 2005). As repositories of organisational knowledge (Tuggle and Goldfinger, 2004) process maps are used to understand, capture and transfer knowledge internally and externally, often yielding numerous additional benefits (Matsumoto *et al.*, 2005). In this way process mapping may be seen as much as the initiator of change as the tool of change, as our case study will demonstrate.

I explore how managers use process maps to facilitate the diffusion of strategy ideas which form the basis of a change programme and what the necessary preconditions and contextual attributes are for this tool to be successful. Process maps are seen as powerful if superficially researched tools (Melão and Pidd, 2000) based on value chain concepts and often applied in the manufacturing, construction and service sectors. They are essentially a visual map of work flows within a process or an entire operational setup, the aim of which is to improve business performance and deliver value to customers (Winch and Carr, 2001). A process map can model the key business inputs and outputs, multiple work steps, involvement by different departments, supporting processes and input from external organisations such as suppliers (Pojasek, 2005). For an example see Figure 1.

The normative literature on process mapping may be characterised as largely descriptive (Solimon, 1998; Symons and Jacobs, 1993; Eckes, 2001; Akamavi and Euuml, 2005), emphasising phases (Kaplan and Murdock, 1991) or developing generic methodologies (Kettinger *et al.*, 1997). Others have argued that not enough is known about business processes in general for the modelling of various techniques and tools to be effective (Melão and Pidd, 2000). The problem with this literature is that it gives only a partial view of the role of this change tool and its impact. Process mapping is seen as an essentially rational approach which ignores the socio-political arena of firms and promotes a static conception of modelling processes. This paper aims to redress this imbalance by demonstrating that process maps can be much more than a tool to model key business inputs and outputs. Rather, the use of process mapping in a major UK bank shows process maps as representing current and future organisational situations, to enable organisational learning and the transformation of knowledge into new ideas; in short they have the key attributes of what has been labelled as boundary objects (Star, 1989; Carlile, 2002). This view emphasises the inherent dynamism, multifaceted

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