



BUSINESS PROCESS OPTIMIZATION IN THE CONTACT CENTER

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Brian has extensive experience as an executive manager in businesses ranging from start-ups to multi-million dollar companies. He has been involved in the design, development, application, and support of an activity based planning and analysis tool for contact centers, conducting many consulting projects focused on process-driven analysis. Brian retired from the U.S. Navy as a Commander. He has consulted in the call center industry for ten years, analyzing the business value of technology implementations and process changes. Brian has authored several key financial planning models used by Fortune 50 companies. He has an M.B.A. in Business Administration from Harvard Business School and a B.S. in Business Administration from the University of Illinois.

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BUSINESS PROCESS OPTIMIZATION IN THE CONTACT CENTER

Organizations have understood the value of reviewing and optimizing processes for over 100 years. The focus started back in the 1890s with continuous process improvement, grew in significance after WWII with the manufacturing quality initiatives flowing out of Japan, and became Business Process Reengineering (BPR) in the 1990s. Yet moving process optimization out of manufacturing and into the enterprise as a whole has been difficult because:

- End-to-end process change requires total organizational buy-in and massive change. *[You can't turn a ship on a dime.]*
- End-to-end process change crosses organizational boundaries. *[It's tough to break down the silos.]*
- Organizations can be jaded by the ebb and flow of the latest organizational fad. *[Not again!]*

One hundred years of experience tells us that there is value in optimizing processes. The contact center can be a great place to break through the enterprise barriers. Why the contact center?

- Most centers have complex desktops that were cobbled together with less than ideal application integration and the associated processes.
- The contact center is a critical element for many of the organization's internal processes.
- The contact center is made up of labor intensive, repetitive, high volume processes. There is "low hanging fruit" that could generate results – in measurable payback – quickly and secure buy-in to go further.
- Business Process Optimization (BPO) is a way to improve service while reducing costs, breaking the historical tradeoff between better service and lower costs. *You can have it all!*

GET STARTED

To begin a business optimization project, define the overall project in detail. Identify the opportunity for process redesign and develop the associated business case for the project. Define and document the business drivers for process redesign project and the goals for the specific project. A detailed project definition includes scope, budget and timeline.

Next, form a project team by identifying appropriate team members based on the project definition. Give the team the opportunity to refine the project definition during the initial team meetings. Then, to complete project preparation, develop a communication plan that starts with passing project details to the entire organization to begin preparing for change.

DISCOVERY – KNOW YOURSELF

Before redesigning processes, it is important to understand your current environment so that the end-state meets your needs. Discovery provides that understanding – what is unique about your organization, the issues you face, and the goals you have defined. Discovery establishes the context within which you define and understand your current processes.

HOW TO DISCOVER

Begin Discovery through team meetings to review the project process and discuss the goals of each stage. Clearly, a key aspect of Discovery is gathering and sharing information about your current situation. Team members will assemble and present the following information for the area(s) they represent:

- Overview of current operations, processes and technology
- System and process demonstrations
- Process observations, if required, for everyone to be fully informed
- Strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities in each area

This exercise ensures that all team members fully understand the end-to-end process flow and how each area impacts other areas. In addition, the team needs to get up to speed on best practices and enabling technology for each area under review. Be sure to assign responsibility for research and reporting to the entire team and assign due dates.

The final step in Discovery is to revisit the project definition and scope now that all team members have the information they need. Use standard one-dimensional flow charts to define the high level call center functions with basic links to other departments. These charts help define the scope of the current project and identify "touch points" into processes for which others are responsible. Use tools such as Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed (RACI) tables to explore links to other areas and ensure those stakeholders are at the table. (See Figure 1.) Finally, use multi-tiered, swim-lane charts to document processes when required.

	Stakeholder	Stakeholder	Stakeholder	Stakeholder	Stakeholder
Function	R	C	I	A	
Function		A	R	I	C
Function	A	C		I	R

Figure 1: Responsible, Accountable, Consulted or Informed (RACI) chart defines the stakeholders and roles

As you conclude Discovery, you should have a clear understanding of your current processes such that they support documentation of the fully optimized "to-be" processes in a later stage of the project.

SUCCESSFUL DISCOVERY

Here are some critical success factors to keep in mind as you "Discover" your current operations:

- Expand Discovery beyond your own four walls – research benchmarking and best practices within and outside your industry to fully understand what is possible.
- Explore how state of the art technology might enable your process vision
- Don't spend time blindly following unnecessary steps. You need only understand your "as-is" environment and processes sufficiently to move forward. Don't get bogged down in detailed "as-is" process mapping unless it has a material impact on process redesign.
- Record baseline metrics to ensure you can measure the results of process redesign when the project is complete.

ASSESS AND ANALYZE TO IDENTIFY YOUR OPTIONS

Once you have defined your BPO project and understand your as-is processes, you will want to delve deeper to understand the improvement possibilities. You should also assess the implications that the projected process change has for the following areas:

- Organizational structure and roles and responsibilities
- Metrics and reporting
- Technology – including process automation technology

HOW TO ASSESS AND ANALYZE

Base your analysis on the understanding of the current processes you achieved in the Discovery phase. You can identify opportunities for process improvement by watching for the following conditions:

- Lots of paper and manual processes
- Inconsistent execution, including unmet commitments
- Many layers of review and approval
- High error rates and significant rework
- Low self-service success rates
- “Tribal knowledge” rather than documentation, manuals and tools to enable process steps
- Low first contact resolution leading to high transfer or handoff rates
- Customer complaints
- Contact Center agent complaints and turnover

As you create your “short list” of ideas that will achieve significant improvements, focus on the biggest pain points, your business goals, and best practices. Consider process strengths to build on at the same time you identify opportunities to improve. Define the actions to take to improve processes, and the critical success factors to making those actions viable and sustainable. Set priorities and define outcomes to expect for each process change recommendation.

Next, develop your assumptions and principles for process change. Make sure you identify the associated implications and requirements for other areas, including technology, organization, metrics and change management. Where appropriate, define and analyze options and tradeoffs, measuring against criteria relevant to your situation such as cost, complexity, and speed to implement. Create recommendations and define the key decisions you need to make to solidify your process redesign action plan. Also, conduct some preliminary value analysis of the recommendations and options under consideration.

Understanding what's possible with technology is critical to defining process improvements. Technology acts as an enabler and catalyst for process change. Three target areas to look for ways to get more out of what you have or make a big impact on process changes are routing, Customer Relationship Management and Knowledge Management tools. In addition, you may want to look at these newer technologies to assess the role they could play in optimizing your processes:

- **Unified communications** – specifically the Communications Enabled Business Process (CEBP) component offered by many contact center vendors within their contact center product suites
- **Business Process Management Suites (BPMS)** – typically considered an enterprise application so remember to include IT in your analysis phase
- Desktop-based process analysis tools, including those from performance optimization suite vendors (e.g., those delivering your Workforce Management System)
- Desktop application integration and process automation tools

SUCCESSFUL ASSESSMENT/ANALYSIS

Here are some critical success factors to keep in mind as you “assess and analyze” your current operations for process optimization opportunities:

- Involve the entire project team to get a broad picture of where your current processes might be broken.
- Don't be constrained by your current process definition. To really optimize, you have to think out of the box.
- Ensure IT is part of the discussion to assess opportunities to get more out of your existing technology and to assist in identifying and defining requirements for new technology.
- Don't forget the agent desktop. Optimizing desktop call handling can enhance agent efficiency and reduce training requirements.

DESIGN NEW PROCESSES AND DEVELOP THE PLAN

These steps launch your transition from exploring the options to using the analysis your team has done to design new processes and the action plan:

- Validate your project goals, objectives, and scope, focusing on the business drivers and what they mean for process redesign.
- Review and validate the process redesign assumptions.
- Define principles that will govern the types of process changes that the organization can make.
- Identify process changes that support the business goals, developed according to principles. Consider front line processes, support processes, back office processes, other workflows, and self-service.

HOW TO DESIGN THE NEW PROCESSES

Once you have the context within which you will design your new processes, start by documenting the functions performed in the contact center at a high level to understand the relationships among the functions and to identify touch points outside the contact center. This step ensures that as you target the specific functions or sub-functions for re-design/optimization, you understand the implications for other processes within the contact center and outside the contact center. You will also identify any other impacted stakeholders that should be part of your project team. We suggest using basic flow charts as shown in Figure 2.

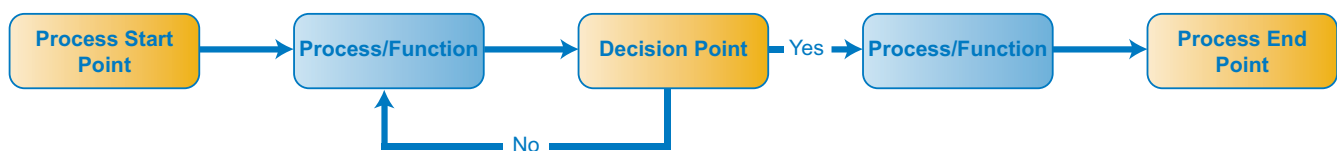


Figure 2: Flow chart defines high level functions and the relationships among them

To fully understand the impact of redesigning specific processes and to ensure all stakeholders have been included, define the “players” within each function and the role they will play. We suggest using RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed) charts to identify the stakeholders and the role each will play in the function.

Now you are ready to dig deeper into the functions identified for redesign. The next step is to define the vision for the to-be process. Review as-is process analysis/documentation developed during the previous phases of your project as input to your thinking, along with the transition steps noted above. Then draft detailed swim lane charts (Figure 3) supported by process definition tables to document the process vision (or to-be state) for the new processes.

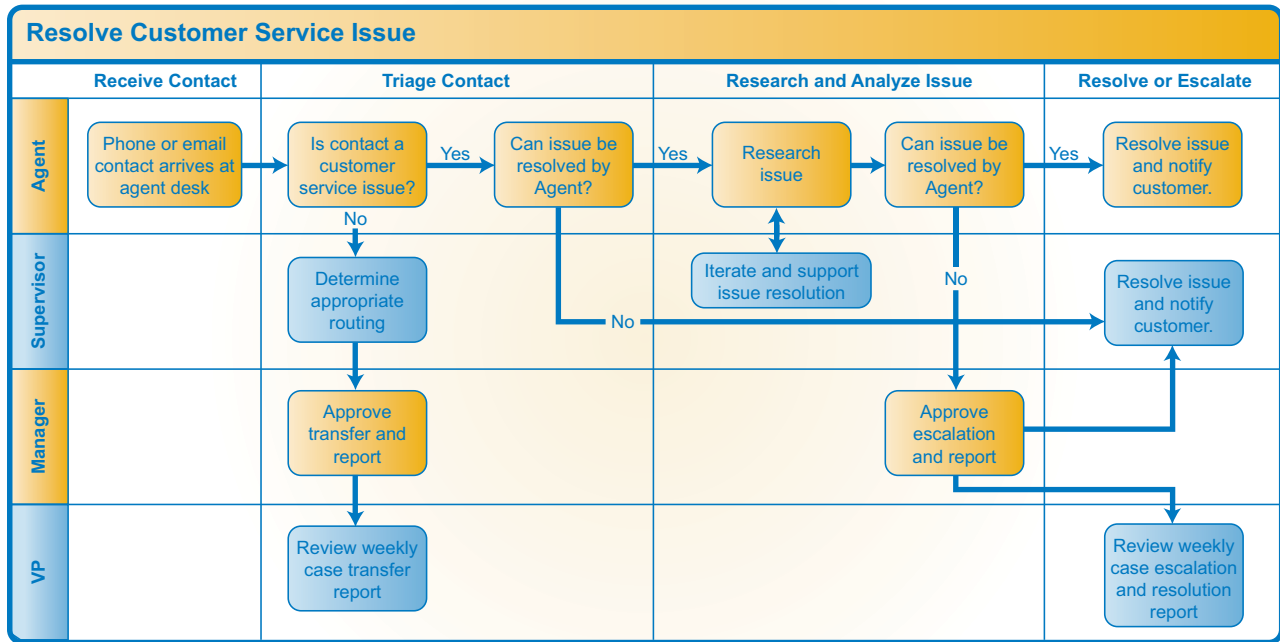


Figure 3: Swim lane flow chart documents "to-be" process flow

This stage is an iterative process and may involve several meetings to ensure you optimize the to-be processes. Start designing the new process using "yellow stickies" on a white board before finalizing the design. There will be changes as your team brainstorms options.

SUCCESSFULLY DEVELOP A PLAN

The specific steps required to plan for implementing new processes within your organization include:

- Review process flows, RACI, swim lane charts and supporting tables to ensure the team completely understands the new processes.
- Identify impacts on staff and changes that are required to support the process redesign. Consider front line staff, support staff, and back office staff.
- Identify how existing applications will be used differently and/or priorities for new technology, including sourcing and support models.
- Review issues and opportunities to change metrics and reporting to meet your goals.
- Define the role of project management in process optimization success.
- Define the role of formal change management in process optimization success.
- Complete any financial analysis of the benefit of the proposed process changes.
- Define key steps to pursue the process changes defined. Prioritize actions and develop target timelines and phasing.
- Define factors to ensure success in executing the plan.

As you complete these steps, you will document the process changes and supporting information, and iterate with the team and the sponsors to validate the process changes. Your goal is the "stamp of approval" to move forward.

EXECUTE THE PLAN SUCCESSFULLY

A successful business process optimization project rests atop three pillars of implementation: technology, financial analysis and change management. (See Figure 4.)

TECHNOLOGY

Process optimization generally entails eliminating or automating steps. You may need to purchase and install new technology before your new processes can go into effect. Don't cut corners with this step!

Follow a best practices approach to technology procurement by using your cross-functional team to define detailed requirements, establish vendor evaluation criteria, prepare and distribute a Request for Proposal (RFP) to two or three vendors that were chosen through a reasonable due diligence process. Evaluate the responses by scoring them against your selection criteria and select the best vendor to meet your requirements.

Once you've selected the technology you need, you'll progress to implementation. While implementing BPO technology is not that different from other technology, there are a few "hot button" areas of focus. Because the technology can present changes to users – internal or external – the design process and testing become particularly important. Involve the front-line users in both steps. Training and pilots are the next critical steps in the implementation of BPO technology, ensuring the technology is effective for the users in a production environment. Another target area is the reporting and analytics, which often get short-changed. Make sure the project implementation includes steps to ensure these elements are working well and delivering the information analysts need to continue to optimize the processes.

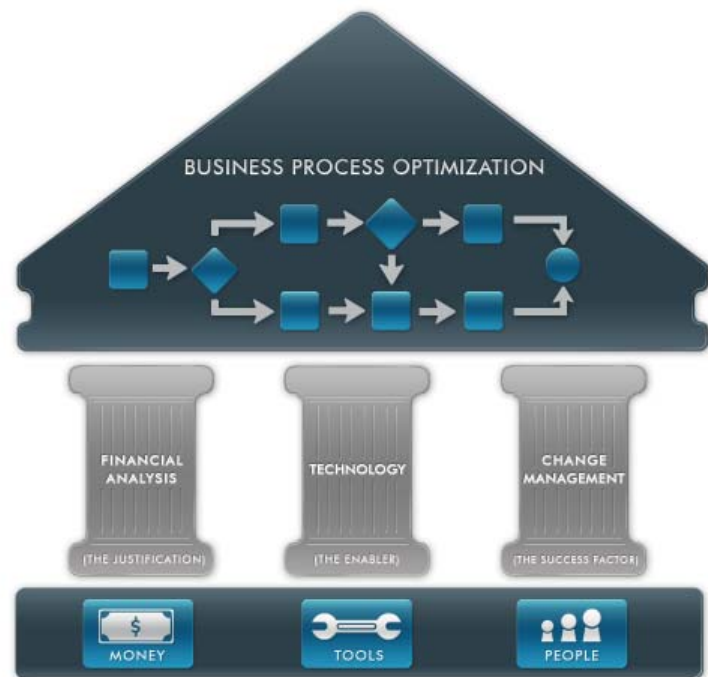


Figure 4: Business Process Optimization Model

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Part of getting buy-in for project approval is building a business case that quantifies the costs and benefits of the process change. The business value of a process change generally translates into measurable changes in a few specific variables, such as average handle time, first call resolution, quality scores and customer satisfaction. You can think of those variables as "success metrics." Before you launch your BPO initiative, establish a baseline value for the variables that you have identified as driving the benefit of your process change. Determine how you'll track changes in these metrics as you execute your optimization plan. Document and report on the improvements. Current stakeholders will want assurance that their investment dollars were well spent. Prospective stakeholders will be more inclined to fund additional projects as they gain confidence in your ROI models and project process.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Process change alters the way people in your organization work. Many people – if not most – will resist adjustments to work habits and routines to which they've become accustomed. You'll need to institute a formal Change Management program to help people adapt to the changes and ensure project success. A formal change management methodology¹ should include:

¹ Strategic Contact uses Prosci's methodology for Change Management; see www.change-management.com for more information.



- A communication plan that informs employees of the who-what-when-where-why-how of your project and gets them excited about the change
- A sponsorship roadmap that details responsibilities for communication and other roles the primary advocates play in supporting the project
- Training those whose work processes will change
- Coaching through the change to ensure your staff feel supported during what could be a difficult time
- Reinforcement through additional training when required and celebrating successes

KEEP THE TEAM TOGETHER THROUGH PILOT AND ROLL OUT

Process change can be difficult so it will be worthwhile to pilot the change in stages before rolling out to full production. Fine tune your processes, technology application and plans based on the pilot results. Keep your cross-functional project team in place throughout the pilot and rollout. As you measure the results of your optimization effort, your team can advertise the results to support your change management effort and ensure continued buy-in at all levels.