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Workflow Automation Process for a Reinsurance Company using BPM Tool: Stakeholder Engagement Perspective

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Abstract

This paper describes the Stakeholder Engagement methodology applied for the design and development of a workflow automation process for an accounting system in reinsurance domain, using Business Process Management Tool (BPM). The BPM tool offers a workflow solution, which can be customized and managed. The Workflows comprises services, tools and screens, to provide required assistance to the stakeholders.

This is a case of Reinsurance Company, automating the accounting workflow process. Earlier the workflow was done manually, which was time consuming and complex process involving various dynamic business rules. As part of automation, the customer wanted to include flexible business rule engine embedded in to the workflow automation system, while following ACORD standards.

The automation exercise required buy-in from all stakeholders for a sustainable and smooth transition from a manual to an automated workflow system. In order to enable this, a holistic stakeholder engagement methodology was used to get the buy-in from all stakeholders. The stakeholder engagement methodology ensures automation workflow process is complete, satisfying the Principle of Inclusivity. Principle of Inclusivity refers to three important elements i.e. Materiality, Completeness and Responsiveness. This helped to satisfy all the stakeholders, needs and concerns while designing and development of workflow automation.

Keywords: Automation, BPM Tool, Communication, Stakeholder, Stakeholder Engagement, Workflow

Introduction

Reinsurance is a complex business involving risk protection and advisory services extended to insurance companies (Cedents). The Reinsurers operate either directly with Cedents or through

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intermediaries called Brokers. The nature of business involves extensive information exchange between Reinsurer and Cedent/Brokers. This requires the reinsurers to spend substantial amount of time in processing the information received from the Brokers according to the business rules and validations applicable.

This complex and tedious manual process can be streamlined by adopting support from the Information Technology (IT) systems to define, monitor and control the manual processes. The BPM solution provided here requires a predefined set of business workflow processes, business validations and end-to-end business flows.

The project is aimed at development and implementation of accounts workflow system as part of e-business program for the customer. The primary objective is to automate the finance department's processing of account information received from brokers to update the core reinsurance systems. The objectives of automation are to:

- Reduce turnaround time for processing Broker messages
- Reduce the effort of data entry of booking process for technical accounting staff
- Use the workflow process to streamline the transaction and tracking system
- Bring transparency and accountability to the system through auto notifications to business users.

Context and Methodology adopted

Reinsurance domain has complex business processes. Reinsurance provides risk protection and advisory services to insurance companies. Information exchange between reinsurer, intermediaries, involves extensive process flow and data exchange. The workflow process design should comply with ACORD standards, as this is the standards followed by the brokers/intermediaries.

The reinsurance company wanted to automate their accounting workflow process to get better control over daily operations they execute. The workflow automation process requires deep reinsurance domain knowledge, along with understanding of complex accounting business rules applicable for the industry.

The team applied stakeholder engagement methodology for effective transitioning from manual process to automation process. The stakeholder engagement methodology included Principle of Inclusivity. Principle of Inclusivity refers to three important elements i.e. Materiality, Completeness and Responsiveness. Materiality helps to identify the needs and requirements of all the relevant stakeholders in the process. Whereas Completeness ensures that requirements complete in all respects, not leaving any scope for omissions. Responsiveness is to ensure that the automation process is responding to the needs or concerns expressed by the stakeholders, in manual as well as designing and development of the automation process.

The project team identified stakeholders who are involved in the automation process. The team also identified needs, requirements, and concerns of all the stakeholders, which enabled the team to have a better understanding of the problem. Team had requisite business knowledge of the stakeholders' needs as well as customer's pain areas in terms of gathering data from different sources to define the workflow. Stakeholder engagement helped to address these concerns of the stakeholders in the workflow automation, effectively.

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The Stakeholder Engagement methodology helped to satisfy all the stakeholders, as the methodology factored in all the stakeholders and their needs concerns, while designing and development of workflow automation. The workflow automation helped the reinsurance organization to cater effective services in place of manual operations.

Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging the stakeholders is essential, at the beginning of a project, so that we will get the buy in from the stakeholders who are involved or who get affected by the given program/initiative.

Stakeholder is a person, group, or organization, who has direct or indirect stake in an organization because it can affect or can be affected by the organization's actions, objectives, policies. Key stakeholders in a business organization include creditors, customers, directors, employees, government and its agencies, owners, shareholders, suppliers, unions, and the community from which business draws its resources [1]

While automating the workflow process for the reinsurance team, the project team has identified the stakeholders who have stakes in the automation process. They are:

1. Customer CIO
2. customer IT team
3. US Business Unit CIO
4. Customer business team
5. BPM vendor
6. Application Management team
7. Application team
8. Services Group
9. Customer Group IT – Global
10. Brokers/Cedents/ACORD Standards

Need for Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder Engagement comes in to picture whenever any organization initiates an open two way dialogue seeking understanding and solutions to the issues which are equally important to both the parties. Stakeholder engagement involves time; resources and commitment to take the engagement forward [1].

It is extremely important to involve stakeholders in all phases of a project for two reasons: Firstly, experience shows that their involvement in the project significantly increases the chances of success by building in a self-correcting feedback loop; secondly, involving them in the project builds confidence in the product and will greatly ease its acceptance among target audience.

Why Business Process Management (BPM) tool?

- Support rapid application development
- Helps to set-up standard framework for enterprise wide process
- Brings the disconnected system processes and management together in a connected environment.

- Defines rules, allowing governing business calculations where as the integrated workflow provides the application specific rules that are either automated or manual.
- Less effort required to change the existing workflow process

The BPM tool has the flexibility to connect to external systems for data and documents interchange. It's easier to customize the administration, workflow and rules validation using the tool instead of using a programming language from the initial phase [8].

Principle of Inclusivity

The AA 1000 series guides organizations in establishing systematic accountability process that involves stakeholders in building policies, strategies, and programs in alignment with the organizational performance. The AA 1000 framework is based on the 'Principle of Inclusivity'

Inclusivity-For an organization that accepts its accountability to those on whom it has an impact and who have an impact on it, inclusivity is the participation of stakeholders in developing and achieving an accountable and strategic response for its sustainability.

An organization is striving for inclusivity means that an organization is committed to reflect the views and needs of all stakeholder groups. Stakeholder views are expressed / obtained without fear or restrictions. The term Inclusivity also refers to the unsaid needs of the environment, future generations etc.

The principle of inclusivity comprises of materiality, completeness and responsiveness provide guidance in ensuring that the stakeholder engagement supports the accountability of the automation team.

- **Materiality** – understand what is important to you and to your stakeholders. The material issues which will influence decisions & actions and performance of an organization or its stakeholders. What concerns are important to their stakeholders and the project they are working? What concerns and important to you and to your stakeholders.
- **Completeness** – requires understanding and management of material impacts and associated stakeholder views, needs and performance perceptions and expectations. Understand the impact and what people think of you collecting and analyzing information from within and outside the organization to make an organization informed decisions.
- **Responsiveness** - requires coherently responding to stakeholders' and organizations material issues. Is response to stakeholder issues that affect its sustainability and performance? It helps to respond to the stakeholders concerns and expectations. The main principle applied in this phase is Responsiveness, which means the team commits ensuring that the team responds to their stakeholders' material expectations, needs, and issues adequately. [3]



Figure 1: Principle of Inclusivity

Stakeholder Engagement Methodology

We all feel the need for engaging the stakeholder is important for a program's success and for the sustainability. The application team has made a similar approach to engage the stakeholders before the program initiated to get the buy-in from them. This approach led to build trust and

long term relationship with the stakeholders of the program. The Stakeholder Engagement model has five phases with communication being at the centre occupying key position. The five stages of the stakeholder engagement are as listed below [1,2,5,7]:

0. Communication
1. Think Strategically
2. Analyze and plan
3. Strengthen engagement capacities
4. Design the process and engage
5. Act and review

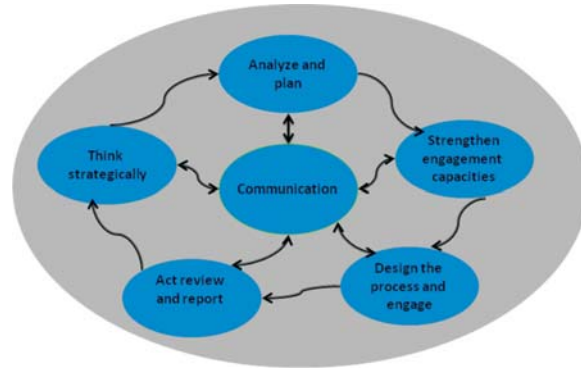


Figure 2: Stakeholder Engagement Phases with Communication at the Centre [1, 2, 5,7]

Communication

Communication plays a central focus, which revolves around the stakeholder engagement process. It has helped to ensure that the feedback within the engagement system has derived value chain during the process. The communication enabled the team to play a self correcting loop.

A good communication is essential in motivating stakeholders as it is to motivating the program's own members. It helped to maintain the enthusiasm and support it can convince neutrals to become supportive. A well planned communication with stakeholders can help them to understand [7]:

- Why the program is needed and how it will contribute to the objectives of the organizations
- The benefits and rewards from program success to them or their work group such as greater opportunities for promotion, reduced risks, enhanced satisfaction, the redundancies in their department
- The ways in which their work will be made easier for example through improved information or faster access
- Build assurance that particular issues that concern them will be dealt with effectively for example through appropriate training and the provision of additional support during transition periods.

Communication is a vital tool to influence the stakeholders to understand the program benefits and its effect on the stakeholders' interests. Communication strategy would vary based on the type of the stakeholder, i.e. if the stakeholder is an Ally, Neutral or opponent the strategy has to be appropriate.

Communication Mode and Exchange

Communication can be sent through one or many of the following channels with in the program.

- Regular progress meetings
- Program board meetings
- Company intranet
- Face to face meetings with key individuals

- Group meetings, workshops, seminars
- Individual and group emails
- Program plans etc.

The mode of communication which took place during the automation process between both customer’s team and Application team is provided below.

Table 1: Communication Shared between Customer and Application Team

| Sl. No | Customer Managers | Application team Managers |
|--------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Chief executive | Client Manager |
| 2 | Financial director | Program manager |
| 3 | Director IT operations | Delivery head |
| 4 | Operations manager | Project manager |
| 5 | IT manager | Technical architect |

The team was communicating with all the stakeholders, after completion of each phase of the engagement, either by play back sessions, workshops, demonstrations on the progress of the application. This process helped the team to ensure that the needs/issues of the stakeholders were considered while developing the application.

Think Strategically

The key phase in stakeholder engagement is to identify strategic priorities for stakeholders in the organization. The team needs to answer the questions with respect to who are the stakeholders of the program. What material issues are important for them? Are these needs/ issues/requirements are within the scope of the program. Who to engage? What strategy needs to be applied to engage [1, 2]

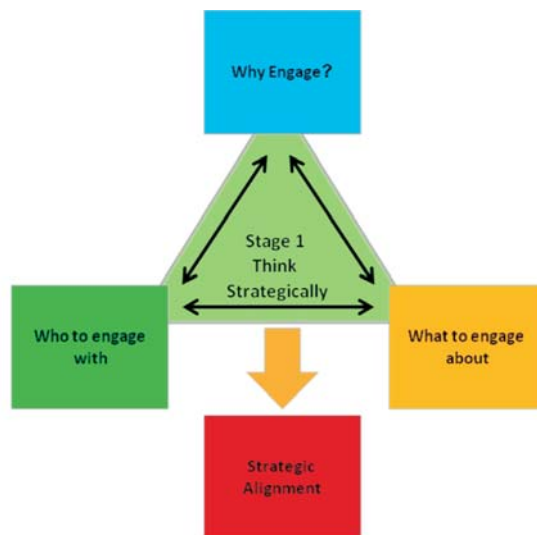


Figure 3: Think strategically

Workflow Automation Team Influence/Interest Grid

The stakeholders were placed at different quadrants based on their influence and interest over the automation workflow program. Below Influence and interest grid will provide us the details on each stakeholders placed at, in the workflow automation workflow program. Below Influence and interest grid will provide us the details on each stakeholders placed at, in the workflow automation program.

Table 2: Influence Vs Interest Grid for Automation Process [7]

| | | |
|-------------------|--|--|
| High Influence | Business Unit Team Customer Group IT-Global | Customer IT team IT CIO Business CIO BPM Vendor |
| | Brokers/Cedents/ACORD Services Group | Application Team Application Management Team |
| | Low | High Interest |

- **High Influence and High Interest** - Customer IT team, Customer IT CIO, Business Unit head and BPM vendor had high interest and influence over the program
- **High Influence and Low Interest** - The business unit team and customer group IT-Global has high influence over the program, but were not interested to implement the BPM tool, as they wanted to use Dot net technologies to automate the workflow process.
- **Low Influence and Low Interest** - Brokers/Cedents/ACORD and Services Group– had low interest and influence over the program
- **Low Influence and High Interest** – Application Management team and Application development team had high interest because it was one of the great experience for the team to work on automation process, new customer base was added to the list, the team was enthused to gain experience to work in reinsurance domain [7]

Stakeholder Needs

Application team did needs analysis based on the interest each stakeholder has over the automation workflow program. The team listed out following stakeholders and their needs and expectations from the program, so that can be accommodated in to the automation processes.

Table 3: Stakeholders and their Needs/Expectations from the Workflow Automation Program

| SI No | Name of the stakeholder | Needs of the stakeholder |
|-------|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. | Customer CIO | owns the automation process, highest stakes in BPM process, pioneer in BPM product implementation |
| 2. | Customer IT team | The automation process to be complete within budget, time, error free, the new tool to enable them to perform the job functions much faster, gain business satisfaction, which enable them to do more transformational initiatives. |
| 3 | US Business Unit head | Being a sponsorer of the program, is one of the key stakeholders to initiate and move the program from manual to automation process, to reduce the work load, cost, and increase the productivity. Faster accounting process which will enable them to handle more number of requests in a day |
| 4 | Customer business team | Move from tedious manual process to automatic process, increased productivity, error free functioning |
| 5 | BPM vendor | By successful implementation of their tool, will increase the market share and more product sales in reinsurance domain, to become a preferred tool vendor to implement the automation process, other than application tam. But the customer insisted, Application team to automate the workflow process |
| 6 | Application Management team | to gain different experience while executing the process in reinsurance domain, resulting in more business, gain experience in tool implementation, more integration opportunities going forward |
| 7 | Application support team | good opportunity for the team to learn about the BPM tool, understand the standards involved in reinsurance domain, and business from the customer |
| 8 | Services Group | Providing services on-time for the integration with other applications, improved services by centralizing the processes and sufficient time for providing the services. |
| 8 | Customer Group IT – Global | wanted to implement the DotNet technology, as global IT workforce is dominated by Dotnet technologies, was reluctant to implement the BPM tool |
| 10 | Brokers/Cedents/ACORD | transparent processes, error free data exchange per ACORD standards, less time to process, New tags are being derived for brokers and enhancing the tags standard |

Analyze and Plan

To come up with a basis for stakeholder engagement in order to prioritize further and develop a plan for engagement, it is essential that the team is aware of who their stakeholders are and what their needs and expectations from the automation process are. The needs gathered should be complete in all respects, to ensure that the automation process is not omitting any stakeholders nor the needs and requirements expressed as part of stage Think Strategically. This also involved capturing unstated requirements of business.

There is a need to understand how the needs expressed by the stakeholders are adequate enough to design the engagement process with the stakeholders. The needs addressed were

performed manually earlier, and how the automation process will bring the difference to the workflow process in terms of quality, productivity and error free with less possible process time [1-7].

The application team did a study on how other projects of similar domain are addressing the needs of the stakeholders. The automation team was cognizant of various factors before designing the engagement model, like mode of their engagement with stakeholders, what are the lessons learnt while automating earlier, whether the needs / issues expressed by the stakeholders are addressed adequately, limitations of the tool etc. These factors were considered, before coming up with the strategy for engagement.

Strengthen Capacities for Engagement

It is essential at this stage that the team is equipped enough to understand who their stakeholders are, the needs and issues of these stakeholders, in complete form, and the engagement is enabling the team to respond to their needs and requirements in a coherent manner [1-7].

The application team had list of stakeholders, needs of the stakeholders; also the team has the knowledge on how the manual process hindering the existing performance levels for the customer. With the automation of the accounting module using the BPM tool should enable processing in a much faster pace, while eliminating manual errors and omissions.

One of the feedbacks expressed by the customer “Business Process Management enabled this carrier to implement eAccounting in lesser time it would have taken, using traditional development methods. The resultant highly adaptable digital business platform enables real-time execution of its business value chain, with flexibility to adjust business processes with minimal coding changes. The platform should include independent rule engine and flexibility in updating business rules. The application has to follow the ACORD Reinsurance Technical Accounting standard for seamless data exchange between reinsurer brokers and cedents.

The application team had preferred BPM tool over the other tools available in the market based on the following:

- BPM tool has many elements and features which are user and developer friendly.
- The BPM tool also has Online Technical support for quick resolution.
- BPM tool is a administration tool which facilitates User Role Management, is easy to use, customizes and configure
- The tool has report generation ability to design reports and port into various file formats like access, excel etc [8]

Features of the BPM Tool

- Ability to configure the roles (static, dynamic) during the execution
- Built-in features like DMS, Error logging/Reporting
- It mandates to design the process with actors, stages, roles before the development
- The support to connect external components via web services
- Quick online helpdesk support [8]

Accounting Workflow System Architecture

The core architecture was designed to consider the functional requirements of Broker message retrieval, validation from Re-admin system, storing in DMS system, worksheet creation, accounting

process, and sending the processed messages as per ACORD standards and back to Brokers/Cedents. The architecture has emerged with an integrated work by different technologies to meet the business demands in all phases of software development lifecycle. The process comprises of:

- Realtime message system: Brokers/Cedent messages will validate against ACORD standards and captures required field from messages. And Vice versa with the fields, form an ACORD message to send it to the Brokers/Cedents with certification.
- BPM process Engine: Workflow management, accounting processing and user management
- Business rule Engine: All the business will be stored and allows flexibility to change the business rules without any impact
- Batch Processing: Batch processing for reporting and sending it to users based on the schedule [8].

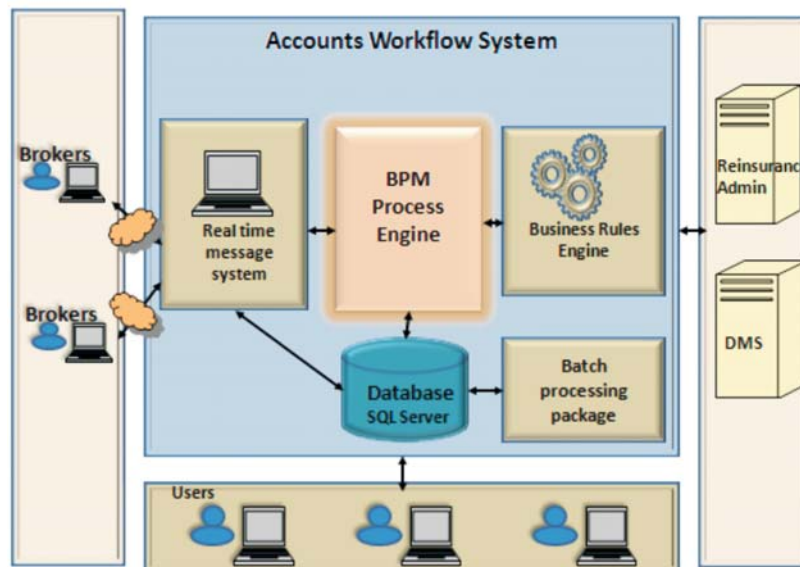


Figure 4: Workflow Automation System Architecture [8]

The application team had a pool of experienced resources in the field of automation to bring different perspective to the table, knowledge on different architecture, experts from reinsurance domain etc. The team over a period of time built stakeholder engagement skills in terms of project management and analysis, personal behaviour, credibility, issues knowledge, engagement techniques etc. This is to ensure one of the principles of inclusivity for completeness.

Design Engagement Process and Engage Stakeholders

This stage of engagement is very crucial for the application team as all the Principles will be applied here i.e. Materiality, Completeness and Responsiveness. The aim of the application team here is to plan effectively to carry out the engagement process with the identified stakeholders in terms of Influence and Interest, each stakeholder has over the Automation Program [1-7].

Engagement Strategy over Influence /Interest Grid

The application team prepared Influence and Interest grid of each stakeholder over the automation

program. Depending on the quadrants the customers were placed, the engagement strategy was prepared.

Table: 4 - Engagement Grid Prepared Over the Influence and Interest [7]

| | | |
|-------------------|--|--|
| High Influence | Empower Business Unit Team Customer Group IT-Global | Partner Customer IT team IT CIO Business CIO BPM Vendor |
| | Monitor Brokers/Cedents/ACORD Services Group | Engage Application Team Application Management Team |
| | Low | High |

Interest

- **High Influence and High Interest** - If a stakeholder has high influence and high interest, he needs to be partnered e.g. Customer IT team and Customer CIO, BPM vendor has high interest and influence over the automation process hence were partnered.
- **High Influence and Low Interest** - Business Unit team and Customer group IT-Global has high influence but low interest, hence they were empowered for their active contribution for the automation process success.
- **Low Influence and Low Interest** - Brokers/Cedents/ACORD and Service Group have low influence and interest; they just need to be monitored. They were informed on the developments with respect to progress
- **Low Influence and High Interest** - Application team and application management have high interest but low influence; hence the team was engaged in the process of automation [7].

The team also has worked out a plan in terms of best way of engaging the stakeholders, designing the engagement process, engage the stakeholders. Some of the ways the stakeholders were engaged are listed below:

- Written responses
- Telephone hotlines
- One to one meetings
- Periodical status updates at operational level
- Governance meetings
- Involving stakeholders in investigating issues
- Workshop for detail requirements

While engaging the stakeholders, project team shared best practices and lessons learnt with stakeholders, who in turn helped to; involve them to contribute more actively towards program's success. The process of involving the stakeholders while providing with regular updates on the program progress, lead to build trust among the team and enhance the relationships with stakeholders.

Act, Review and Report

In the overall development lifecycle the communication to the stakeholders, was based on the stakeholder Influence and Interest grid. The engagement was carried out based on the quadrant each stakeholder was placed at i.e. partner, engage, empower and monitor. Stakeholders were informed about the solution development and its progress over Telephone calls, periodical team meetings, status updates, workshops the same was shared with the leadership teams over governance meetings [1-6].

Solution development using the BPM Workflow Automation tool:

During the solution development phase, majority of the work was carried out on the BPM tool and integrating with Rule Engine, real time messaging system and other different internal services while incorporating ACORD standards in to the functionality. The three major components of the tool, which complement with other technologies towards solution development, are:

- Administration: Facilitates User Role Management
- Designer: Sets Stage Actors Roles (STAR) matrix which helps in creating Process diagrams which include Actors, Stages, Processes, Events, Screens for the solution implementation
- Database: Creates Folders, Actors-Process mapping, Actors-Roles mapping in a highly normalized way [8]

Keeping in view of the stakeholders' needs and importance, following best practices were followed by the team, throughout the development of workflow automation process.

- Standard object naming convention was followed for development and maintainability of the tool
- To understand the processes, the team followed STAR matrix specific to the tool
- Training the team extensively on the tool prior to development helped to overcome tool specific challenges
- Flexible rule engine and tool design to alter rules & process design were incorporated in to the workflow
- Defined Orchestration (Executable business processes), for easy code integration, as and when required
- The team had a excellent back up plan keeping the experienced resource pool, to meet any unforeseen challenges
- Team worked with the stakeholders closely on tool limitations on regular basis to get their approval, for work around [8].

After successful engagement the team took a relook at what were the needs of the stakeholders, and how automation process transformed needs / issues of the stakeholders, during materiality phase were addressed in the automation process. This enables responsiveness, which is one of the Principle of Inclusivity. The engagement results were shared with the stakeholders, to ascertain which areas they need to improve in future automation management.

In this stage of engagement, both materiality and responsiveness were addressed adequately. The needs and issues gathered from the stakeholders at the beginning of the engagement and automation process were responded adequately in the development of automation workflow process. This process helped to involve the stakeholders at every phase of the development, which resulted in stakeholder's high satisfaction index. The process of gathering and responding

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helped the team to maintain the transparency in the process. The team has received feedback, to ascertain that the team has met the objectives listed in the beginning of the automation process.

One of the stakeholder who was reluctant (Customer group IT-Global) to use the BPM tool initially, was impressed with the time taken for automation process, the flexibility the tool is offering, overall architecture of the application resulted in extending the automation process to other business areas and geographies as well.

Integration of Principle of Inclusivity, Stakeholder Engagement and Workflow Automation Process

Table: 5. Principle of Inclusivity Encompassing Stakeholder Engagement and Workflow Automation Process

| Stage/ Dominant Principle | Think strategically | Analyze and Plan | Strengthen engagement capacities | Engage with stakeholder | Act review and report |
|---------------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Materiality | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Completeness | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Responsiveness | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Materiality- the principle materiality applies stakeholder engagement phases of Think strategically, analyze and plan and engage with stakeholders. The needs/issues which are matter to the stakeholders are collected in the think strategically phase. The requirements are analyzed for their relevance to the automation program, and planned for inclusion in the development of application during analyze and plan phase.

Completeness- The principle completeness is applied in Analyze and plan, Strengthen engagement capacities and engages with stakeholder, as part of principle of inclusivity. The requirements/ needs/issues gathered at the think strategically, should be complete in nature. The application team is required to do an analysis of the needs and requirements expressed by the stakeholders. These requirements need to be transformed as enablements of the end product. While engaging the stakeholders, the application team had to ensure that they use right medium/strategy / mode of engagement.

Responsiveness – The principle of responsiveness is applied in strengthen engagement capacities, engage with stakeholders and act, review and report phases of stakeholder engagement. While designing the engagement strategy the team had thorough understanding about needs/requirements, and the solutions the automation process is bringing in. While engaging the stakeholders, the application team was aware of what is the best strategy to engage. While in the act, review and report phase the team had ensured that the end product i.e. the automation workflow process is addressing the needs/requirements provided by the stakeholders initially [1].

Conclusion

Both the customer and application teams adopted right approach of identifying stakeholders involved in the program and engaged them strategically to get their buy-in. This proactive approach by the teams helped to complete the automation process on time. Another key factor which contributed for the success of the automation process was Communication. The team provided regular updates on the automation process, to all the stakeholders which in turn

fostered transparency amongst stakeholders. The stakeholder engagement methodology followed, enabled to build rapport with the stakeholders, which ultimately resulted in a healthy and successful relationship.

Use of BPM tool provided solutions to complex workflow systems by offering configurable design, business object integration, and support to external interfaces, which took less development effort and time compared to development in traditional languages. The Stakeholder Engagement methodology employed in the workflow automation process facilitated effective management of diverse stakeholders mix in the project, besides resulting in faster development of the project.

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