

2010

The Phenomenon of Business Process Management: Practitioners' Emphasis

Sebastian Reiter

Queensland University of Technology, sebastian.reiter@qut.edu.au

Glenn Stewart

Queensland University of Technology, g.stewart@qut.edu.au

Christine Bruce

Queensland University of Technology, c.bruce@qut.edu.au

Wasana Bandara

Queensland University of Technology, w.bandara@qut.edu.au

Michael

Queensland University of Technology, m.rosemann@qut.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: <http://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2010>

Recommended Citation

Reiter, Sebastian; Stewart, Glenn; Bruce, Christine; Bandara, Wasana; and Michael, "The Phenomenon of Business Process Management: Practitioners' Emphasis" (2010). *ECIS 2010 Proceedings*. 28.
<http://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2010/28>

This material is brought to you by the European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS) at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in ECIS 2010 Proceedings by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.



**THE PHENOMENON OF BUSINESS PROCESS MANAGEMENT:
PRACTITIONERS' EMPHASIS**

Journal:	<i>18th European Conference on Information Systems</i>
Manuscript ID:	ECIS2010-0195.R1
Submission Type:	Research Paper
Keyword:	Business process management, Interpretive methods, Interviewing, Research methods/methodology



THE PHENOMENON OF BUSINESS PROCESS MANAGEMENT: PRACTITIONERS' EMPHASIS

Reiter, Sebastian, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane QLD 4000, Australia,
sebastian.reiter@qut.edu.au

Stewart, Glenn Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane QLD 4000, Australia,
g.stewart@qut.edu.au

Bruce, Christine, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane QLD 4000, Australia,
c.bruce@qut.edu.au

Bandara, Wasana, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane QLD 4000, Australia,
w.bandara@qut.edu.au

Rosemann, Michael, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane QLD 4000, Australia,
m.rosemann@qut.edu.au

Abstract

Since 2005, Business Process Management (BPM) has been one of the top 10 issues for CIO's. However, while there is a general awareness what BPM is and what it relates to, one needs to ask 'does everyone have the same understanding of the BPM phenomenon? And if not, is there a pattern to these conceptions and how do the ways of conceptualizing BPM differ?' This paper presents the practitioner conceptions of BPM using a phenomenographic approach to detect variations in the BPM conceptions emphasised. 26 interviews were conducted with BPM practitioners with various scopes of work (namely program management, project management and execution levels) in this qualitative research. Distinct variations in how BPM is conceptualized among BPM practitioners are revealed, showing that emphasis is put depending on their scope of work either towards value generation, improvement or managing processes. This is of particular relevance to the Information Systems and BPM community in order to align the rigorous work done to date by the research community with the current understanding of BPM in the practitioner community.

Keywords: Business Process Management, Conception, Phenomenography, Qualitative Research

1 INTRODUCTION

Business Process Management (BPM) is an emerging discipline, which is of high relevance to both practice and academia (Hammer, 2002; Rosemann, De Bruin, & Power, 2006). However, *“The story of the practical use of business process management in different organizations is one of diversity and of effective outcomes”* (Armistead, Pritchard, & Machin, 1999). Research shows that practitioners often fail to adopt the findings of research into management practice (Rousseau, 2006). It is criticized that studies are neither useful to practitioners nor implemented (Beer, 2001).

Even though BPM and process improvement is ranked by organizations as top priority (Gartner, 2009), there seems to be a gap between what is addressed in current research and actual industry needs (Bandara, Indulska, Chong, & Sadiq, 2007). Given these circumstances, it is of particular relevance to the Information Systems (IS) and BPM community to understand critical variations in the ways in which BPM practitioners conceptualize BPM.

This paper explores the conceptions of BPM amongst BPM practitioners'. It is one of the first studies that provide empirical evidence on the variation in practitioners' conceptions of BPM. The research question posed for this study is *“How do practitioners' conceptions of BPM vary?”* One particular interest is the variation in BPM practitioners' conceptions of BPM and the relation to their scope of work. Thus, this paper will eventually point to potential prepositions that can assist future research agenda identifying the variations on how practitioners conceptualize BPM.

The structure of this paper is as follows: The paper firstly introduces the basic theory and understandings of BPM, briefly. Then it describes the research method, the problem posed as a phenomenographical study, and the interview technique used for data collection. There after, the study results are presented and discussed. The paper concludes with an outlook to proposed future research.

2 BUSINESS PROCESS MANAGEMENT

Gartner studies between 2005 and 2009 (2009) have identified improving processes as being the number one business priority of CIO's. A range of research has taken place in relation to BPM recently which covers various aspects of BPM. Some relates to the evolution of BPM in organizations (De Bruin, 2007) and others relates to major issues in BPM (Bandara et al., 2007), BPM maturity (Rosemann et al., 2006) or process modelling (Indulska, Recker, Rosemann, & Green, 2009). Emerging BPM research also focuses on Services Orientated Architectures (Woodley, Gagnon, & Agnon, 2005), or even more technical aspects like Workflow modelling i.e. YAWL (ter Hofstede & van der Aalst, 2005) or Workflow patterns (van der Aalst, ter Hofstede, Kiepuszewski, & Barros, 2003).

Irrespective of these studies, others still argue that BPM methods have neither lacked standards (i.e. for notations and techniques) while evolving (Lindsay, Downs, & Lunn, 2003), nor are they specific to any industry or the organizational level in which BPM is executed. BPM also exists in other forms such as 'business transformation', 'business improvement', 'change or harmonization project'. BPM activities like process analysis, process improvement, or process execution often occur under different banners (De Bruin & Doebeli, 2008).

While BPM is seen from different perspectives in various management practices, 'process thinking' has become the focal point (Grover, Kettinger, & Teng, 2000). *“A process is [...] a specific ordering of work activities across time and place, with a beginning, an end, and clearly identified inputs and outputs”* (Davenport, 1993, p. 5). One perspective of BPM focuses on 'how' the process works whereas another perspective focuses on 'what' the process produces: *“A business process as a collection of activities that takes one or more kinds of input and creates an output that is of value to the customer”* (Hammer & Champy, 1993, p. 35).

Literature provides a variety of BPM definitions and viewpoints in terms of its content and extent. These are widely spread from a holistic management approach (Armistead et al., 1999; De Toro & McCabe, 1997), to radical reengineering efforts (Hammer & Champy, 1993) or IT focused views (Harmon, 2003). In the practitioner community, consultancy companies and IT vendors in particular recognized BPM as a marketing instrument for their services and products (Smart, Maddern, & Maull, 2008), tailoring BPM approaches to the specific needs of their customers. BPM is currently understood as *“a field of knowledge at the intersection between management and information technology, encompassing methods, techniques, and tools, to design, enact, control and analyse operational business processes involving humans, organizations, applications, documents, and other sources of information”* (van der Aalst, ter Hofstede, & Weske, 2003).

When looking at BPM, a crucial distinction has to be made between ‘process management’ (an activity, which focuses on the process itself) and ‘business process management’ (a management approach characterized by process orientation). Process management is the way to operate and manage a business process (Hammer, 2002) on an operational level whereas BPM is *“..an approach which is dependent on strategic elements, operational elements, use of modern tools and techniques, people involvement and more importantly, on a horizontal focus which will best suit and deliver customer requirements in an optimum and satisfactory way”* (Zairi, 1997). Organizations often adopt BPM tailored according to their needs and requirements (Armistead et al., 1999).

On the other hand, and often mistaken as mutual synonym by practitioners, Business Process Reengineering (BPR) is a radical concept driven by change and improvement which was proposed and lead by Hammer in 1990. BPR was seen as *“the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business processes to achieve dramatic improvements in critical, contemporary measures of performance, such as cost, quality, service and speed”* (Hammer & Champy, 1993). However in 2001 Hammer revised his position, and then said *“I no longer see myself as a radical person; instead I have become a process person”* (Hammer, 2001). Nowadays BPR is no longer a significant phenomenon while BPM is growing on activity (Smart et al., 2008).

There are reported differences of BPM conceptions in literature and practice. Consequently it becomes difficult for a layman in the field of BPM to distinguish between these various viewpoints of BPM, which can then effect his or her actions. This paper aims to show how BPM practitioners conceptualize BPM and if there is a relation to their scope of work. The focus is thereby on what conceptions are emphasised rather than to assess the deviation from definitions provided in literature.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

Aiming to explore the variation in the practitioners conceptions of BPM, a phenomenographic approach (Marton & Booth, 1997) was chosen in this study. Phenomenography is *“a research method adapted for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them.”* (Marton, 1986, p. 178). BPM practitioners were asked: *“How would you explain BPM to a business colleagues unaware of BPM?”* expecting an articulated story that would identify the practitioners’ primary conceptions of BPM, and elements they emphasise when conceptualising BPM. This question is consistent with the strategies used in phenomenographical research trying to understand BPM conceptions among BPM practitioners (Trigwell, 2000, p. 65), which does not seek to constrain viewpoints but tap into the underlying conceptions. The next section discusses such an approach.

3.1 Phenomography

The focus of phenomenography is to explore the *variation* in human meaning, understanding and conceptions within a group, rather than for each individual of a group (Akerlind, 2005). Thus, phenomenography is a descriptive interpretation of a particular phenomenon as experienced by a specific group. Phenomenography has been used in IS research. Examples are studies on Learning by

Vartiainen (2007), the students view of IS by Cope (2003) on Enterprise Systems by Klaus and Gable (2000) or on IS Leadership by Stewart (2002).

As there are similarities between phenomenology and phenomenography, these methods have to be clearly distinguished. Phenomenology has human experience as the object of investigation in its rawest form (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 116). In other words, phenomenology is about the experience of others, while phenomenography's concern is with what is experienced and how it is experienced. Thus, the central objective of phenomenography is to explore variation in people's experience (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 121) and to identify potential explanations for such variations. The most common data source for phenomenographical studies are semi-structured interviews (Marton & Booth, 1997).

3.2 Data collection: conducting interviews

Interviews are seen as the most powerful way to understand humans (Fontana & Frey, 1994), yielding "*a great deal of useful information*" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 146). Interviews can be either conducted in a structured, semi-structured or unstructured way. Since the nature of this study was explorative, semi-structured interviews were chosen to examine the phenomena and elicit variation of the practitioners' conception of BPM.

The focus of attention here is solely to understand how BPM practitioners conceptualize BPM. In addition, the related demographic details such as age, years of professional experience, scope of work were collected through the interviews. No definitions were provided to the interviewees beforehand to avoid influencing their response. When using phenomenography it is important to ensure that the phenomenon is not 'destroyed' by asking questions with an intention to build up assumptions about the character of the phenomenon. In this case, it is the participants' experience which is the object of interest and they must be allowed to choose how they talk about the phenomenon and express themselves freely. A pilot study using a think-out-loud protocol (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Roemer, 1993), with a sample of three academics was conducted to ensure the quality and understanding of the questions by the interviewees was within the target group.

A qualitative interviewing approach (Kvale, 1996) was chosen and an appropriate sample was considered. Previous phenomenographic research has indicated that a sample size of 15-20 interviewees is ample (Trigwell, 2000, p. 66). This study consisted of 26 valid responses.

Interviews were conducted in-person, by telephone or video conferencing and the mode of interviewing was dependent on the interviewee's location and preferences. In order to build a relationship and supportive atmosphere, in-person interviews were preferred (Pressey & Selassie, 2002). In fact, to improve quality of results it was considered advisable to have more than one third of the interviews conducted in-person or via video conferencing (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 146 & 183). Given the circumstances, interviewees were dispersed across various locations in different time zones and continents, in-person interviews were possible in 11 cases (42%); two were by video conferencing (8%). While in 13 instances (50%) interviews were conducted via telephone, thus achieving the quality criteria suggested by Leedy and Ormrod (2005).

All interview responses were audio recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Audio recordings were supplemented with field notes, including notes of the interviewee's work context and observations taken during the interview in accordance with the suggestions of Yin (2003, p. 93). Interview summaries were written immediately after each interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003, pp. 76, 77) and reviewed shortly after to ensure all effects were sufficiently captured. Concurrently audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

3.3 Sampling Frame

The selection of the interview participants was based on their expertise and background in the area of BPM to ensure that they represent the targeted respondent group (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 147). Selecting a suitable sample frame of interviewees was crucial for the purpose of this research.

Individuals for this study were selected based on the following criteria: Their depth of professional experience or academic background in a BPM context and practitioners working in the field of BPM, process management, process improvement, change management or organizational issues (as BPM manifests in organisations in various forms under these different initiatives). A further criterion for selecting interviewees was a minimum of 5 years experience in the area of BPM (working at least in 3 BPM related projects or initiatives). The 5 year minimum cut-off is to identify the interviewees with more than 10,000 hours of professional practice which is a benchmark for the minimum time to develop expertise (Ericsson et al., 1993) or mastery (Levitin, 2006, p. 189 et seq.). While selecting interviewees, priority was set on quality; having only a few but therefore more powerful interviewees rather than quantity.

The following sections provide a demographic overview of the interview sample¹, to justify its representativeness and to introduce some of the facets used during the data analysis. While particular attention in this paper is paid towards the interviewees' scope of work, further characteristics such as professional experience, professional background, and region of current work enriched the interview sample.

3.3.1 *Scope of work*

The differentiation by the interviewee's scope of work was based on aspects such as projects they were involved in, their degree of involvement, the position held by the interviewee and the scope of these projects. In accordance to these aspects, 6 (23%) focused on program management [PROG], whereby program managers are responsible to manage and drive multiple interdependent projects with the aim to fulfil a particular predefined object. Program managers mostly deal with and report directly to the top-management and board members of organisations. 13 (50%) BPM practitioners were involved in project management [PROJ] planning, organizing and managing resources with the aim to achieve specific project goals and objectives. Project managers typically coordinate and align daily activities to the overall project plan, review deliverables and ensure that the project is on track. Another 7 (27%) were working on an execution level [EXEC] often in the role of business analyst responsible for defined work packages of a project, such as process analysis, process controlling and monitoring.

The scope of work was of particular interest for data analysis as depending on the activities and responsibilities of BPM practitioners, BPM might be conceptualized differently, and emphasis can be put on varying aspects.

3.3.2 *Professional experience*

The level of professional experience was measured by years of professional work experience. Those were grouped as follows: from 5 to 10 years, from 11 to 20 years and more than 20 years. Most of the interviewees 15 (58%) had a professional experience of 11 to 20 years, followed by 6 (23%) with more than 20 years experience, 5 (19%) had a professional experience between 5 and 10 years.

3.3.3 *Professional background*

The professional background describes the interviewees current position and organizations they are working with. Interviewees were either working in consulting companies 23 (89%) or general management 3 (11%). No distinct separation of general management practitioners was made, like by industry sector due to the small number of respondents. Participants from consulting companies were working as, either Partners 10 (39%), Managers 7 (27%) or Consultants 6 (23%) versus general management, where 3 (11%) held at least a Manager position.

¹ Further details of the respondents are not revealed in this paper due to confidentiality and ethical reasons.

3.3.4 Region of current work

Lastly interviewees were clustered according to the region they are currently working in. Most of the interviewees were working in Europe 11 (42%), followed by Australia 8 (31%), North America 4 (15%), and one each in Asia, Africa and South America. This showed the diversity of interviewees that participated.

This demographic overview shows that the study has a credible representative sample of BPM practitioners, having at least 5 years of work experience with a wide range and variety of highly experienced participants mainly working in the consulting area. Further interviewees are currently working across different regions of the world. However, particular interest was paid to the variation of BPM practitioners' conceptions of BPM and the correlation to their scope of work.

4 DATA ANALYSIS

The process of phenomenographic data analysis is strongly iterative. The steps include sorting and resorting of data, ongoing comparison and verification of the categories and descriptions created until a degree of stability is obtained. "*.. categories are tested against the data, retested, and adjusted again. There is, however, a decreasing rate of change and eventually the whole system of meanings is stabilized*" (Marton, 1986, p. 42). By searching for variation in the meaning of the interviewee's expressions the iterative, exploratory process of phenomenographical data analysis allowed BPM conceptions to emerge from the data.

The research object is the variation in conceptions of 'BPM'; what are the conceptions of BPM emphasised by BPM practitioners and how do these vary between them. This study focused thereby on what practitioners' emphasise when explaining BPM to a business colleague unaware of BPM, in order to identify any variation between their emphases.

Data analysis started after all interviews were transcribed, looking at the whole set of data rather than individually (Trigwell, 2000, p. 70); meaning to look at all responses at one time rather than only on selected ones. An inductive approach was used for conceptions to emerge from data. Thereby each quote was interpreted from three facets; the origin of interview, the meta data and the 'pool of meaning' where it belongs to (Marton, 1986). After finalizing the categories of description (descriptions of conceptions), these were checked against the original statements to ensure their consistency with the interview data and revision will be done if necessary. This research sought to identify and describe the conceptions which evolve from data in regards to their overall meaning. In continuing future research, the structural and referential aspects of each conception will be further detailed.

5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The semi-structured interviews gave insights into practitioner's varying conceptions of BPM. Given the complexity of research findings, several key categories of description (see section 5.1) representing how and what practitioners emphasised when explaining BPM will be illustrated. Next, attention is paid to the variation of emphasis related to their scope of work followed by a discussion of the findings. Special attention was paid to the scope of work as data analysis showed a significant variation of conceptions depending on the BPM practitioners' scope of work.

5.1 BPM Practitioners' conceptions of BPM

The data analysis resulted in eight different conceptions emphasised by BPM practitioners explaining their understanding of BPM. These are depicted in Table 1; where column 1 lists the key conceptions,

column 2 defines each conception and column 3 provides supporting sample quotes from the interview data, indicating the interviewees² scope of work (see section 3.3.1). The practitioners were Program managers [PROG], Project managers [PROJ] and practitioners working on an Execution level [EXEC]. It is worthy to note that this is an overarching summary, and not all respondents mentioned each conception.

Conception	Description	Examples
Orientation towards value generation	In this way of conceptualizing, practitioners emphasise on generating output or creating deliverables, which are of value for a customer of internal or external nature.	<i>BPM is all about organizing processes and organizing structures, in a way to reach the companies targets in the best and most efficient way.</i> [PROJ-01]
Customer orientation	In this way of conceptualizing, practitioners emphasise on activities or circumstances with a strong customer orientation.	<i>The important thing is that there is at the end there is the customer and even within an organization in the various faces of a process there are internal customers.</i> [PROG-04]
Process orientation	In this way of conceptualizing, practitioners emphasise on 'process' as central point, underlining process thinking or orientation versus the orientation along functional units.	<i>.. the people, the management are completely committed to process orientated thinking.</i> [PROG-02]
End-to-End orientation	In this way of conceptualizing, practitioners emphasise on a holistic overarching 'end-to-end' view of business, processes, whereby the beginning and the end depends upon the counterpart's perspective.	<i>BPM is a management philosophy, a way of managing companies, which is orientated towards the idea of an End-to-End process</i> [PROJ-05]
Improvement orientation	In this way of conceptualizing, practitioners emphasise on improvement and/or describe activities to improve business or specific processes e.g. through changing variables.	<i>.. focus on Business Process improvements, we want to improve the way of working. The improvement can be done in different ways.</i> [PROJ-03]
Management of business	In this way of conceptualizing, practitioners emphasise on accenting management of all business related matters by getting people together to accomplish desired goals and objectives.	<i>.. approach focused on managing your business by managing the process that operate your business.</i> [EXEC-04]
Management of processes	In this way of conceptualizing, practitioners emphasise on a process or activity itself. These can include phases of the process lifecycle management like; process definition, controlling or implementation etc.	<i>.. management [...] of business processes and the steps it takes to execute it ..</i> [PROJ-12]
Organization specific	In this way of conceptualizing, practitioners emphasise on aspects specific to an organization.	<i>.. a managed way that takes into account the companies objectives the overall company objectives and strategy.</i> [PROJ-06]

Table 1. *Conceptions of BPM*

5.2 Variation in BPM Practitioners' conceptions

This section analyses how the conceptions vary based on the scope of work (program management, project management or execution level). A closer analysis of the conceptions in relation to the scope of work is shown in Figure 1.

² For example; [PROJ-01] shows that the quote was from a Project manager, with an ID of '01'.

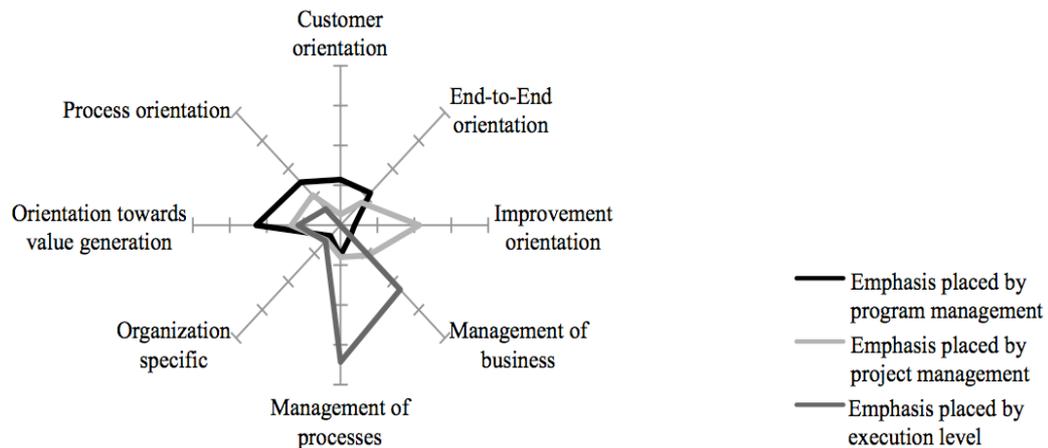


Figure 1. *Emphasis on conceptions of BPM, placed according to the scope of work*

The length of each spoke of this radar graph depicts the magnitude of emphasis per conception and the amplitude underlines the conception made by the different groups of respondents distinguished by their scope of work. The conceptions of each group add up to 100%, whereby 50% is the maximum shown in this radar chart.

Comparing the conceptions amongst the scope of work, the graph clearly shows a significant difference in emphasis of the various conceptions by the three categories of BPM practitioners. The next sections analyse the conceptions of BPM practitioners focusing in each dimension: Program management, project management and execution level.

5.2.1 *Conceptions of BPM emphasised by program management*

The majority of respondents working in program management put strong emphasis on delivering objectives and generating value for the organization, internal or external customers in the most efficient and effective way. An example of this orientation is:

".. generate measurable value for the customer, who is willing to pay for or pay more therefore" [PROG-03].

Process orientation, and -thinking were emphasised as essential by program managers. BPM is seen as a management philosophy where the organization is driven and structured around its processes:

".. all the things we do to achieve that are basically refer to business process so put aside for a moment the organizational chart" [PROG-06].

Program managers emphasised BPM as a way to manage the business in the means of an End-to-End orientation rather than focusing on pockets of the value chain.

"BPM is a management style [...] looking at the organization from an End-to-End perspective" [PROG-01].

Next to those mentioned above, program managers clearly stress customer orientation:

".. think about all the things we have to do to satisfy our customers, all the things we have to do to satisfy our regulatory stakeholders .." [PROG-06].

5.2.2 *Conceptions of BPM emphasised by project management*

Substantial attention by BPM practitioners involved in project management was paid to improvement.

".. optimizing the process flow from the customer to customer [...] find practical solutions for improving the business of a company .." [PROJ-05].

BPM is seen as a continuum of improvement and initial starting point for everything:

“BPM is the absolute starting point of everything” [PROJ-08]

Next to improvement, project managers emphasised on their orientation towards value generation:

“.. looking at the business from the customer point of view and looking at the very large business processes that create value for both customers and shareholders [...] to improve customer satisfaction” [PROJ-05].

Moreover project managers were concerned about the overall management of the business, which was evident through expressions like:

“Business Process Management is about defining in an organization how things are being done from the initial idea to the actual action” [PROJ-11].

Program managers further emphasised the process orientation:

“Everything depends on how you set up the process” [PROJ-08].

5.2.3 Conceptions of BPM emphasised by execution level

BPM practitioners working on the execution of BPM strongly emphasised the management of processes while explaining BPM. Some even declared BPM as the management of processes.

“.. to identify and define the business processes define what are the activities in the processes ..” [EXEC-07]

Practitioners executing BPM often highlighted elements of process life cycle management from process identification, assessment and definition, to process implementation execution and controlling (Rosemann, 2001) in their explanations.

Next to management of processes, the emphasis was put on the management of business.

“BPM is a mean of organizing and managing a company.” [EXEC-02]

Moreover the aim to achieve defined targets for either external or internal customers was expressed,

“.. make sure [...] processes deliver business objectives in the most effective way ..” [EXEC-04].

5.2.4 The effect of variation in the scope of work

The responses from practitioners involved in program-, or project management showed that they were seeing BPM more holistically; emphasising all conceptions identified in the data analysis. In contrast, interviewees working on an execution level focused on pockets of BPM; these respondents neither emphasised the end-to-end orientation nor the improvement orientation or customer orientation in their illustrations. However, all BPM practitioners emphasised the orientation towards value generation even though emphasis by program managers was dominant compared to project managers and execution orientated practitioners.

Table 2, below shows the top three conceptions emphasised by program management, project management and execution level BPM practitioners.

		Program managers	Project managers	Execution level
Conception	1	Orientation towards value generation	Improvement orientation	Management of processes
	2	Process orientation	Orientation towards value generation	Management of business
	3	Customer orientation & End-to-End orientation	Management of business & Process orientation	Orientation towards value generation

Table 2: *Variation of conceptions of BPM emphasised depending on the scope of work*

The variation of BPM conceptions emphasised by BPM practitioners depending on their scope of work provides faithful insights in their understanding of BPM. Furthermore, it reflects alignment with their scope of work.

5.3 Further findings and discussion

A surprising fact is that IT, and any relation to IT was rarely mentioned. Enterprise Architecture (EA) and Service Orientated Architecture (SOA) were mentioned only one time, as part of BPM. Even when interviewees enhanced their description with examples, IT was hardly mentioned.

Business process modelling is seen as a main domain in IS and BPM research, and also in the foci of the minds of IT vendors and practitioners (Indulska et al., 2009), numerous responses declared process modelling as a pocket of BPM. *“Process modelling is one part of BPM, but BPM is much more than that”* [EXEC-06]. It was highlighted that process modelling is often the starting point of the BPM journey: *“BPM builds up on business process modelling”* [PROJ-06].

A BPM definition given by the Australian BPM Community of Practice *“Business Process Management is a structured, coherent and consistent way of understanding, documenting, modelling, analyzing, simulating, executing and continuously changing end-to-end business processes and resources in the light of their contribution to business improvement”* (Australian Community of Practice, 2009) encompasses the bigger picture of BPM. In contrast, BPM practitioner as individuals, focused on pockets of BPM rather than reflecting an explanation containing all elements given in theory or by practitioners as a group. According to a Program manager, who addressed this issue precisely: *“.. Business Process Management, not everyone knows what precisely it is what to do and most companies don't know how to do it well but almost everyone understands that the idea is to improve a performance either increase revenues or reduce costs or improve customer satisfaction or even all three by creating a better flow of activities across departmental lines ..”* [PROG-05] pointing out the variation of understanding and reflection of BPM among practitioners.

In summary BPM on one hand is understood and conceptualized as a management approach rather than seen from a technical view (IT) or purely from an execution level, such as process modelling. On the other hand, the conceptions emphasised by BPM practitioners enclose but do not represent precisely what BPM is, as stated in literature (see 2).

6 CONCLUSION

This paper identifies eight conceptions emphasised by BPM practitioners' under the BPM phenomenon, when they were asked to explain how they would explain BPM to a business colleague unaware of BPM. The main conceptions emerged from this study were: Orientation towards value generation, Process orientation, Customer orientation, End-to-end orientation, Improvement orientation, Management of business, Management of processes and Organisation specific. This study showed that significant variations among practitioners' emphasis on conception of BPM exist, depending upon their scope of work (program management, project management or execution levels). The most notable distinctions are related to the emphasis on value generation [Orientation towards value generation] held by program management, an emphasis on improvement [Improvement orientation] held by project management, or at the execution level emphasis place on operation [Management of processes].

The limitation in this study is the small number of interviewees compared to quantitative studies. However, the sample size is sufficient for the nature of an explorative phenomenographic study and fits with the research's explorative goals. This study did not evaluate the relation between the interviewee's scope of work and their professional background. A small number of interviewees from Africa, Asia and South America did not allow any distinct differences to be drawn as a function of country of origin or current work. On the other side, the diverse organizational background and the expertise of interviewees lend credibility to the findings.

The variation of the different conceptions emphasised by BPM practitioners is dependent on the scope of their work. This sheds important light into BPM practice and academia. For example, in practice, understanding what aspects different parties emphasise will assist in increasing awareness and gaining buy-in for BPM initiatives, and will support overall BPM program developments. In academia, this sheds light to critical definitional aspects that needs to be considered when conducting studies such as BPM impacts and success measurement. The findings of this study suggest a need for alignment, communication, and education of theory and practice in the emerging field of BPM to leverage a common understanding of BPM.

Future work to extend this study is planned. The analysis of practitioners' BPM conceptions by addressing the structural and referential aspects per conception, has commenced. Further work is suggested to look into the relation between the position held by BPM practitioners and potential variation to the scope of work and professional BPM experience. In addition, the research can be extended by collecting data from BPM stakeholders (in addition to BPM practitioners) such as BPM academics and BPM vendors, and derive comparative analysis on how the conceptions of these groups differ and relate across varying dimensions.

References

- Akerlind, G. S. (2005). Variation and commonality in phenomenographic research methods. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 24(4), 321-334.
- Armistead, C., Pritchard, J.-P., & Machin, S. (1999). Strategic business process management for organizational effectiveness. *Long Range Planning*, 32, 96-106.
- Australian Community of Practice. (2009). Retrieved 6th of September 2009 7:26PM, 2009, from www.bpm-collaboration.com
- Bandara, W., Indulska, M., Chong, S., & Sadiq, S. (2007). *Major Issues in Business Process Management: An Expert Perspective*. Paper presented at the 15th European Conference on Information Systems.
- Beer, M. (2001). Why management research findings are unimplementable: An action science perspective. *Reflections: The SoL Journal*, 2(3), 58-65.
- Cope, C. (2003). Educationally Critical Characteristics of Deep Approaches to Learning about the Concept of an Information System. *Journal of Information Technology Education*, 2, 415-427.
- Davenport, T. (1993). *Process Innovation: Re-engineering Work Through Information Technology*. Boston, MA, US: Harvard Business School Press.
- De Bruin, T. (2007). *Insights into the Evolution of BPM in Organizations*. Paper presented at the Australasian Conference on Information Systems.
- De Bruin, T., & Doebeli, G. (2008). Transitioning From Functional Silos to Process Centric - Learning from Australian Organizations. *BPTrends*.
- De Toro, I., & Mc Cabe, T. (1997). How to stay flexible and elude fads. *Quality Progress*, 30(3).
- Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T., & Tesch-Roemer, C. (1993). The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance. *Psychological Review*, 100(3), 363-406.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. (1994). Interviewing: The Art of Science. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 361-376). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Gartner. (2009). Executive Summary: Meeting the Challenge: The 2009 CIO Agenda.
- Grover, V., Kettinger, W. J., & Teng, J. T. C. (2000). Business Process Change in the 21st century. *Business and Economic Review*, 46, 14-18.
- Hammer, M. (2001). *The Agenda*. New York, US: Business Books.
- Hammer, M. (2002). Process management and the future of Six Sigma. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 43(2), 26-32.
- Hammer, M., & Champy, J. (1993). *Reengineering the cooperation. A manifest for business revolution*. London, UK: Nicholas Brealey.
- Harmon, P. (2003). *Business Process Change: A Manager's Guide to Improving, Redesigning, and Automating Processes*. San Francisco, CA, US: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers.

- Indulska, M., Recker, J., Rosemann, M., & Green, P. (2009). *Process Modelling: Current Issues and Future*. Paper presented at the Advanced Information Systems Engineering - Caise 2009.
- Klaus, H., & Gable, G. G. (2000). *Senior Mangers' Understanding of Knowledge Managment in the Context of Enterprise Systems*. Paper presented at the Americas Conference on Information Systems.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: A introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2005). *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ, US: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Levitin, D. J. (2006). *This is your brain on music: the science of human obsession*. London, UK: Dutton.
- Lindsay, A., Downs, D., & Lunn, K. (2003). Business processes: attempts to find a definition. *Information and Software Technology*, 45, 1015-1019.
- Marton, F. (1986). Phenomenography: A research approach to investigate different understandings of reality. *Journal of Thought*, 21(3), 28-49.
- Marton, F., & Booth, S. (1997). *Learning and Awareness*. Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: an expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications.
- Pressey, A. D., & Selassie, H. G. (2002). Are cultural differences overrated? Examining the influence of national culture on international buyer-seller relationships. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 2(4), 354-368.
- Rosemann, M. (2001). Business Process Lifecycle Management. *White paper*.
- Rosemann, M., De Bruin, T., & Power, B. (2006). BPM Maturity. In J. Jeston & J. Nelis (Eds.), *Business Process Management: Practical Guidelines to Successful Implementations* (pp. 299-315). Oxford, England: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Rousseau, D. M. (2006). Is there a thing as "evidence-based management"? *Academy of Management Review*, 31(2), 256-269.
- Smart, P. A., Maddern, H., & Maull, R. S. (2008). Understanding Business Process Management: Implications for Theory and Practice. *British Journal of Management*.
- Stewart, G. (2002). Undercovering implicit Leadership beliefs: Variation between Information Technology (IT) Executives and Business Executives in a public service agency. *International Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 5(4), 163-179.
- ter Hofstede, A. H., & van der Aalst, W. M. (2005). YAWL: yet another workflow language. 30(4):pp. 245-275. *Information Systems Journal*, 30(4), 245-275.
- Trigwell, K. (2000). A phenomenographic interview. In J. Bowden & E. Walsh (Eds.), *Phenomenography* (pp. 62-82). Melbourne: RMIT University Press.
- van der Aalst, W. M., ter Hofstede, A. H., Kiepuszewski, B., & Barros, A. P. (2003). Workflow patterns. *Distributed and Parallel Databases*, 14(3), 5-51.
- van der Aalst, W. M., ter Hofstede, A. H., & Weske, M. (2003). *Business Process Management: A Survey* (Vol. 2678). Berlin, Germany: Springer.
- Vartiainen, T. (2007). Moral Conflicts in Teaching Project Work: A job burdened by role strains. *Communications of the Association of Information Systems*, 20, 687-711.
- Woodley, T., Gagnon, S., & Agnon, S. (2005). BPM and SOA: Synergies and Challenges. In A. Ngu, M. Kitsuregawa, E. Neuhold, J. Chung & Q. Sheng (Eds.), *Web Information Systems Engineering – WISE 2005* (Vol. 3086, pp. 679-688). Berlin: Springer Verlag.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (3rd ed. Vol. 5). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications.
- Zairi, M. (1997). Business process management: a boundaryless approach to modern competitiveness. *Business Process Management Journal*, 3(1), 64-80.