

2008

Strategies to Increase Executive Commitment to Business Process Management

Tonia de Bruin

Queensland University of Technology, t.debruin@qut.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: <http://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2008>

Recommended Citation

de Bruin, Tonia, "Strategies to Increase Executive Commitment to Business Process Management" (2008). *ECIS 2008 Proceedings*. 84.
<http://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2008/84>

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 2008 Proceedings by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE EXECUTIVE COMMITMENT TO BUSINESS PROCESS MANAGEMENT

de Bruin, Tonia, Queensland University of Technology, 126 Margaret Street, Brisbane, 4000 Australia, t.debruin@qut.edu.au

Abstract

Business Process Management (BPM) remains an important issue facing today's organizations. Existing research has long shown that a key ingredient for success in BPM and BPM related endeavours such as process improvement initiatives is executive commitment (a.k.a. executive support, executive buy-in and top management support). Despite this, to the best of our knowledge, there have been no studies in the BPM domain that investigate how to gain or increase executive commitment. This issue is addressed with experienced, international BPM practitioners using an on-line, open-question survey. Responses from over 40 international companies identified over 100 data items pertaining to strategies useful in increasing executive commitment to BPM. In this paper, these responses are classified into eight categories of strategy, supplemented with experiences gained in conducting detailed case studies with organizations practicing BPM and considered on the basis of potential relationships between the respondents, demographic data and the derived categories.

Keywords: Executive commitment, executive buy-in, top management support, business process management

1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of executive commitment to Business Process Management (BPM) initiatives (including business process reengineering, business process improvement / innovation and process management) has been well documented (Bandera et al. 2005, Rosemann and de Bruin 2005, Spanyi 2006). In one of the first empirical investigations into BPM as competitive advantage, Hung (2006) hypothesises that the construct *People Involvement* that comprises principally executive commitment and employee empowerment, relates positively to performance. In his summary of findings, Hung confirms "...People Involvement is significantly related to organizational performance (p 35). Similarly, there are a number of maturity models within the BPM domain aimed at assessing the maturity of process improvement projects, the management of discrete processes, and the development of BPM capabilities (Curtis and Alden 2005, Hammer 2007, Rosemann et al. 2006). These models stress the need for executive commitment to BPM initiatives. For example, Curtis and Alden (2005, p2) contend the process area of "Organizational Process Leadership" – establishes sponsorship of the program to improve the organization's business processes as a Level 2 capability, whilst Rosemann et al. (2006) identify "Leadership Attention to Process" as a key capability in the development of holistic, organizational BPM capability. Similarly, in his more recent work, Hammer (2007, p113) identifies assigning a "senior executive who has responsibility for the process and its results" as one of his five process enablers.

Despite its importance to BPM, there has been scant research into how organizations might gain or reach higher levels of executive commitment. This research provides some first insights into this highly relevant area. Using an on-line survey and a simple, open question directed at BPM practitioners, data was gathered about strategies found to be successful in increasing levels of executive commitment. The resultant 100 plus data items form the basis of this paper.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses related work that supports the relevance of this research. In Section 3, the methodology used to collect data from senior BPM practitioners within more than 40 international organizations ranging in size from 5 to 100,000 employees is detailed. Section 4 presents the initial data analysis process including demographics relating to respondents, BPM initiatives and organizations. Section 5 presents the key findings in the form of eight high-level categories of strategy including sub-strata classification where further similarities were found in the data. The classification of survey data is combined with insights gained from experiences in associated research studies. Section 6 highlights potential implications of this research by considering the categories with regard to the BPM initiatives, organizations and industries of the originating respondents. Finally, in Section 7 this paper concludes with a discussion on the limitations and future research direction that this research provides.

2 RELATED WORK

As in BPM, related disciplines such as project management, operations management and information management have identified the importance of and relationship between executive commitment and critical success factors (Nath 1989, Sanders and Courtney 1985, Steinhart and Nath, 1992). Such studies focus more on measuring the consequences or impacts of having executive commitment and less on the implementation and success of strategies for increasing the required executive commitment. Consequently, there appears to be little existing research relating to the identification, selection and implementation of strategies for increasing levels of executive commitment.

More broadly though organizational development literature explores how leaders and leadership within organizations might be developed. For example, Bolman and Deal (1984) present a theory for reframing the organization by having leaders view the organization through four frames being political, human resource, structured and symbolic. This suggests that there is potential to leverage

research in some domains when it comes to understanding *how*, *when* and *why* certain strategies might be more or less applicable. Thus, while this research does not address *the context* in which the identified strategies are successful it does contribute to BPM research by categorising successful strategies and presenting potential relationships enabling future research into such context.

3 METHODOLOGY

The data analyzed and presented in this paper was collected using an on-line, anonymous survey¹. The survey was advertised via a number of channels. Initially a link was communicated on the BP Trends website in September 2007. In addition, the survey was promoted by contacting individuals that had access to BPM personnel within organizations e.g. consultants, other BPM researchers and conference attendees.

Aside from the standard *Introduction* section encompassing background, ethics and so on, the survey was structured in four data gathering sections being: (1) *BPMI details*, (2) *Level of Emphasis*, (3) *BPM Progression*, and (4) *Organization Demographics*. The survey was anonymous however, a further voluntary section was available where respondents could separately provide personal contact details if they were interested in obtaining details of results arising from the survey or providing extra comments about the survey or BPM in general. A further feature to the survey was the inclusion of a Definitions section. This section was included due to the varying interpretations of BPM provided and applied within existing literature and practice (Lee and Dale 1998, Nickols 1998, Pritchard and Armistead 1999). Ensuring respondents had a consistent definition of the terms used within the survey increased the comparability of responses and the reliability and validity of responses. The definitions of BPM and BPM Initiative (BPMI) provided were:

‘**BPM**’ is used to refer to a holistic management practice aimed at adopting a process-orientation as a way of doing business. It is recognised that an organization **may not** refer directly to BPM however in the context of this research this term is taken to encompass a management approach that includes a focus on:

- Having a strategic focus on process management;
- Defining the end-to-end processes of the organization;
- Standardising and streamlining processes;
- Creating a customer perspective and generating value-add;
- Collaborating on processes;
- Connecting with customer and supplier processes;
- Eroding cross-functional boundaries;
- Simplifying process work; and so on.

The term ‘**BPM initiative**’ or ‘**BPMI**’ is used as a proxy for your organization’s process-based initiative. Such an initiative might be in the form of:

- an ad-hoc approach to process improvement and management;
- a project-based approach to process improvement and management;
- pockets of BPM excellence e.g. a centre of excellence, contained within discrete business units or perhaps a specialist team; and
- an enterprise wide BPM initiative.

Again, it is recognised that the initiative may not be called ‘BPM’ within each organization but may be called something like Business Transformation, Business Improvement or Change Project. In essence, such an initiative would display (to a greater or lesser extent) similar attributes as those detailed above in the definition of BPM.

These definitions were accessible to respondents via hyper-link at all points where the terms appeared throughout the survey.

¹ The complete survey can be accessed at: <http://www.bpm.fit.qut.edu.au/students/toniadebruin/survey/index.jsp>

The survey included 30 questions in total, although some questions had multiple components (i.e. asked for up to three responses, or responses at two points in time) and some respondents were not required to answer all questions. For example, respondents that indicated their **current** organization did not have a BPMI did not have to complete Section 2 – Level of Emphasis. These respondents were however still able to respond to the questions in Section 3 – Progress BPM – on the basis of experiences they may have had at earlier companies or experiences they may have had within their current organization which had not resulted in a BPMI. Table 1 shows the distribution of questions:

Section	Description	Questions
1	BPM Initiative Details	1 – 12
2	Level of Emphasis	13 – 19
3	Progressing BPM as a Discipline	20 -21
4	Demographics	22 – 30

Table 1. Distribution of Survey Questions

This paper utilises data from Sections 1, 3 and 4 but focuses on the qualitative data obtained from Q20 of Section 3 – Progressing BPM as a Discipline. Figure 1 reproduces Section 3 of the survey. Data from Section 2 of the survey is outside of the scope of this paper.

Progressing BPM As A Discipline

Please note, your responses to these questions about **BPM** do not necessarily have to apply to your current organisation.

20. Executive commitment to BPM is sometimes difficult to gain. Please provide up to three strategies you have found valuable for increasing levels of executive commitment.

i) ii) iii)

21. Please list up to three points that you believe will inhibit **BPM** in becoming a sustainable management practice.

i) ii) iii)

Figure 1. Survey Section – Progressing BPM as a Discipline

The motivation for Q20 was twofold. On the one hand, this was a largely unexplored area of BPM research as shown in Section 2 of this paper. At the same time, anecdotal evidence indicated that practitioners were also interested in this area, looking to answer the question:

“We know BPM is the way to go, but how do we get our executives to commit to it?”

As such, Q20 was intentionally designed as an open, exploratory and pragmatically based research question. The research aimed towards practitioners with relevant experience in BPM that could be used to develop a foundation from which further research could be progressed. The data collected by this question is thus qualitative in nature and as such has been subjected to qualitative data analysis strategies pertaining to data reduction (Miles and Huberman 1994) as is common in early stages of research in developing domains (Stuart et al. 2002).

4 DATA ANALYSIS

Whilst the focus of this paper is the strategies found to be useful in increasing executive commitment to BPM, an overview of the demographics of survey respondents when dealing with qualitative data can act to increase the validity of responses by showing that the respondents are informed, experienced and credible within the given area of research. At the time of writing this paper, 47 responses to the survey have been received. The survey remains open, however the rich data provided by these 47 respondents enables a timely and significant contribution to be made to existing BPM research. Of the 47 responses to the total survey, 42 provided valid responses to Q20.

4.1 Demographics

Over 64% of respondents have been directly involved with BPM initiatives within their organization since the initiative had started and a further 19% became directly involved after it started but have a strong knowledge of the initiative. Only 12% of respondents had limited or no prior involvement in the BPM initiatives. Over 78% of respondents hold strategic and/or tactical positions within their organizations.

Respondents classified more than 65% of all the BPM initiatives as either enterprise-wide or pockets of expertise. A further 21% had BPM initiatives that were largely project based. More than 25% of organizations commenced their BPM initiatives before 2000 and almost 30% starting their first BPM initiatives in 2006-2007. Only 5% of organizations had no BPM initiative. Over 50% of organizations are planning to continue with their initiatives indefinitely and a further 30% are planning to continue for longer than 2 years.

Over 70% of organizations had a recognised CxO position responsible for their BPM initiative, with 20% of these having a recognised 'process' title. For more than 25% of organizations responsibility for the BPM initiative was at the operational level.

The majority of organizations were from America and Europe, accounting for over 75% of respondents, with a further 20% from Australia and New Zealand. The remaining organizations were from India and the Middle East.

Almost half of the organizations had less than 5,000 employees, 15% had between 5,000 and 10,000 and over 25% had more than 25,000 employees.

These demographics show that responses were collected from individuals that are well versed in both executive-level thinking and BPM with international organizations from varying sizes. Consequently, the data collected provides a solid foundation from which to progress future research as these demographics support the validity and generalisability of the data collected.

4.2 Data Analysis

Initially the chief investigator collated responses from all respondents. Following this, a data reduction strategy was applied to increase the manageability of data and remove redundancy. A multi-round categorisation process was used to strengthen the data classification process. The high-level categories were identified by the chief investigator during the first round of classification. These categories were then refined during a subsequent review with a second coder. The initial number of categories was reduced from twelve to eight during this process as a result of perceived overlap between some categories. Following this, further validation of the categories was undertaken by conducting a further two rounds of classification with experienced BPM practitioners.

During these two rounds, independent shuffle exercises were conducted with participants from organizations practicing BPM and from local BPM forums. The participants were given two sets of cards i.e. *classification* cards and *item* cards. In addition to *category* cards, the classification cards included an *ambiguous* card and an *indeterminable* card. The participants were asked to place the *item* cards against the *category* card to which they felt the item belonged. If they felt the item could be put into more than one category they were asked to place the item against the *ambiguous* card, and if they felt the item did not clearly fit any category, against the *indeterminable* card.

The results from all participants were documented. The categories were again reviewed, discussed and modified in light of the results from each round of classification. Consequently, a further refinement was made being the use of sub-classifications within some categories where further commonality was evident. For example, *Demonstrate Business Results* was determined as a high-level category within which a more specific strategy such as *External Validation (by benchmarking against competitors)* or *Proof of Concept (by demonstrating successful pilots)* could be adopted.

5 DATA CATEGORISATION

The final list of categories arising from the data analysis (and the total items mapped to each) is:

- demonstrate business results (24);
- gain sponsorship and involvement (16);
- link to business drivers (12);
- educate about BPM (12);
- develop governance mechanisms (11);
- present a business case for BPM (10);
- develop a common model for business transformation (9); and
- develop and execute a communication strategy (7).

Below, each high-level category is described, including the additional sub-classification and details of all mapped items. The categories are presented in decreasing order of the total number of mapped items contained within each. In each case, the analysed survey data is supplemented with additional commentary and examples based on prior experience in BPM. Such experiences have been gained through formalised research activities including the conduct of multiple case studies investigating the progression of BPM within organizations and through informal means including interacting with practitioners and other researchers at conferences and industry events or similar such interactions with participants at BPM training courses.

5.1 Demonstrate Business Results

The popularity of this cluster was seen in general comments such as: “demonstrate results”, “show them the money”, “drive results”, “show qualitative benefits”, “quantify financial and resource impacts”, “ability to quantify results”, “fast responses”, “demonstrate early success”, “measured results”. More defined strategies were:

- **Align with Strategy:** “build clear linkage to strategy”, “showing alignment of process to business strategic objectives”, “link to strategic goals long term”, “setting project goals”, “process improvement planning”
- **Proof of Concept:** “successful proof of concept within silos”, “successful pilot projects”, “use pilots”, “examples”, “small scale examples, e.g. treat IT section as an organization and model accordingly”
- **External Verification:** “competitor analysis with specific examples”, “competitive research”, “benchmarking”, “benchmarking others”, “independent diagnosis of current practice”, “worldwide acceptance”

The strong focus on *demonstrating results* in part reflects the current state and history of the BPM domain itself. Within a number of case studies, practitioners have expressed concern that BPM is just another fad like business process re-engineering / improvement / innovation / engineering. Arguably, an unbalanced focus on strategies in this category has the potential to be detrimental to BPM in the long-term. Why? Because a continual focus on short term, immediate results and outcomes can act to promote and reinforce short-term thinking and heroic efforts into isolated and discrete projects more in keeping with BPR than with BPM. Furthermore, such strategies do little to address the long-term commitment and change in fundamental thinking that is often required for transitioning an organization to a holistic BPM approach. Whilst there appears to be wide use of these strategies, isolated usage of these strategies may not have the desired long term effect.

5.2 Gain sponsorship and involvement

Comments of “senior sponsorship” and “CEO engagement and commitment” provide broad support for this category. Sub-strata classification includes:

- **Find the Right Trigger:** “apply BPM to solve key focus areas of concern to executive”, “alleviate their pain points”, “link to current pains”, “measure what matters to them”, “demonstrate how BPM affects the things they care about”, “pain in lack of business process definition in implementing new IT solutions”
- **Identify and Use Advocates:** “finding the right champion”, “enrol champions”, “get the right people on board that have influence with executives through referent power”
- **Personal Involvement:** “have them do the work”, “direct involvement”, “early engagement on benefits for addressing process issues”
- **Take a Top Down Approach:** “middle management is the hardest to get buy-in from, we started at the top”, “top-bottom supported”, “start with a new CEO”

In some ways, this category appears to be self-fulfilling – gaining sponsorship and commitment to increase executive commitment. Despite this, case study evidence indicates this approach is adopted by operational management attempting to progress BPM from the bottom up. To get a foot in the executive door in the first place, middle managers pay careful attention to strategies such as *Identify and Use Advocates* in the hope that once the first one is on board, there is a chance to progress further through these channels. Such a strategy utilises an individual’s knowledge of key executives within the organization and has been found to be effective in organizations where the BPM staff have been in an organization for a reasonable time and have a good understanding of the executives. Such strategies rely heavily on the influence and personal attributes of the BPM staff involved.

5.3 Educate about BPM

General comments supporting this category include “teach”, “education” (2), “improving executive awareness of process”, “socializing the concepts”, “educating about the power of Process Management”. Additional classification within the category includes:

- **Use Informal Mechanisms:** “engage in general chat about such topics with senior management”
- **Use External Experts/avenues:** “bring in a consultant whom the executives respect to present the concept”, “brought respected, known thought leaders in to talk to them”, “send the executive to a BPM conference”
- **Demonstrations:** “they will understand “why” something happened (traceability of goals and results, simplified complexity)”, “video of current ineffective processing techniques”

There is evidence that interest in, and use of, this category has been receiving increasing attention in recent times. For example, in continuing education programs middle-level managers increasingly ask to have abridged versions of BPM fundamentals provided to executives within the organizations in an effort to increase their awareness and acceptance of BPM. Similarly, the use of techniques such as “elevator pitches” and “story-telling” are increasingly noticeable at BPM industry conferences.

5.4 Link to the Business Drivers

This category was evident in comments including “show the impact of inefficient process on the bottom line”, “clear link to economic results”, “assuring them of the benefits to be gained”, “if a project is approved to go forward to improve performance, reflect the benefit (for example a cost reduction) in next year’s budget” and “demonstrate improved ability to respond to business needs”. Additional classification within this category includes:

- **Cost Savings:** “cost savings”, “cost reduction”
- **Customer Value:** “improvement in customer value proposition”, “convincing them that it will make processes more efficient and result in better performance and satisfaction for customers”
- **Productivity and Quality:** “increased productivity and quality”
- **Risk Management:** “demonstrate risk exposure of lack of sound BPM”, “use BPM as means of establishing sound risk management”

Historically, BPM initiatives have often started with a view to cost cutting. Traditional strategies to link BPM initiatives to tangible business drivers such as cost, quality, customer values and productivity have been more dominant. In part, this is likely due to the scope of the BPM initiatives being undertaken i.e. more process improvement project based than the broader BPM. Arguably, the link between executive reward and remuneration and such visible business drivers has resulted in a strong focus in this area. More recently, an increasing role of risk strategies for obtaining executive commitment has been evidenced. In some cases, this has been in reaction to corporate collapses and the resultant legislative changes such as Sarbanes Oxley. In other cases, this has been the consequence of increased environmental commitments and health and safety legislation such as that evidenced in the mining industry. This is evident in a more balanced approach to traditional business drivers (such as the customer), with other stakeholders such as mining communities and landowners. Arguably, other factors such as greater media coverage of environmental concerns may also be contributing to executives being more open to achieving improvements in non-traditional business drivers.

5.5 Develop Governance Mechanisms

Comments such as “build into governance”, “demonstrate increased effectiveness in decision making” provide support for this category. Sub-strata classification within this category includes:

- **Assign Roles and Responsibilities:** “clearly defining roles of Process Owners”, “leadership team accountabilities”, “establish a process area council”, “officers acting as Process Owners”
- **Enforce Behavior:** “compliance”, “mandatory framework...regulations”
- **Link to Performance:** “add goals to annual performance reviews related to fostering a process based culture e.g. knowledge sharing, teamwork, change management activities with groups of employees”, “top executive holding his/her direct reports accountable backed up with appropriate positive and negative consequences”, “KPI’s”, “linkage of process results to compensation”

The development of governance mechanisms presents something of a paradox for increasing executive commitment to BPM. The reason being, the development of many governance instruments require **some** level of existing executive commitment in the first place. Case study evidence indicates that where a strong CEO leads the BPM initiative, effective introduction of governance strategies is much more likely and thus they can become tools for influencing other executives. For example, in one case driven by the CEO, governance mechanisms were used at senior levels to “encourage antagonists to move on”. Where the CEO has **not been** directly involved in the BPM initiative, the ability to implement governance mechanisms is left to other executives. In these cases, success can be dependent upon the individual characteristics and standing of the BPM champion. In some cases, even the strong support of one or two executives has been found to be insufficient for progressing governance mechanisms with remaining executives. For example, where the executive is new to the organization or where the executive is not particularly influential with remaining executives, it may not be possible to gain the necessary support to introduce new governance mechanisms.

5.6 Present the Business Case for BPM

The need to develop a business case for BPM is evident in comments “clear business case”, “credible business case”, “making a strong business case”, “building a business case” and “having a credible plan”. This category includes the need to **Calculate Return-on-Investment (ROI)**: “ability to communicate ROI”, “at least indication of ROI”, “assuring them of ROI”, “show ROI” and “ROI”.

The effectiveness of these strategies can be dependent upon variables such as the level of existing executive support for BPM and the stage of the BPM journey. For example, when the CEO is driving the BPM initiative, there appears to be less need to develop and present a business case or show ROI to gain broader executive commitment because it is mandated by the CEO. In some cases where there is evidence of a more bottom-up approach (i.e. middle managers need to convince executives of the value of BPM) this approach is often tried. Case study evidence indicates that at this time, people find

it difficult to effectively develop a business case or calculate ROI due to the intangible nature of some aspects of BPM. Arguably, this may be linked (in part) to the lack of empirical evidence of strong examples of ROI and success at the “pockets-of-excellence / enterprise wide” BPM levels. It can be easier to provide such evidence for discrete or isolated process improvement projects such as information technology implementations as the outcomes are often more tangible and visible.

5.7 Plan for Business Transformation

Being able to articulate a common process view and structure for the organization is evident in comments such as “understanding the enterprise” and “the ability to transform the organization”. Additional classification within this category includes:

- **Determine the Structure/Scope of BPM Initiative:** “formation of process improvement team structure”, “project oriented activity”
- **Develop a Common Business Model:** “provide a common model”
- **Externalize the Focus of Organization:** “a means to drive customer focus and away from internal department silos”, “build partnership relationship, not client service relationship”
- **Deal with Internal “People” Issues:** “focus on cultural changes”, “collaboration”

Strategies such as *Develop a Common Business Model* can be used well during early stages of BPM initiatives. Presenting a single-page view of the organization including how it links to key elements of the external environment and to stakeholders has shown to be a powerful means of generating interest and discussion among other executives. Arguably, the ability to achieve some of the strategies in this category (e.g. *Develop a Common Business Model* and *Deal with Internal People Issues*) can require a relatively high level of executive support in the first place.

5.8 Develop and Execute a Communication Strategy

General comments such as “proactive communication”, “structured communications” and “periodic updates” provide support for the final category. Sub-strata classification includes:

- **(Increase/decrease) Visibility:** “make it invisible, hiding it within a wider business transformation initiative”, “evangelization”
- **Market the Concept:** “sell to process owner”, “being able to communicate with IT”

A strong communication strategy is useful for gaining support for the BPM initiative and acts to keep executives well informed of progress. Case study evidence has shown strategies such as *Visibility* can be used successfully in both contexts (i.e. increase or decrease) presented here. Operational managers and staff sometimes refer to a strategy of low visibility as a *stealth* approach. This approach has been witnessed in organizations that have repeatedly met resistance at an executive level to formalising BPM but where operational staff are convinced of the benefits of BPM and committed to its progress.

6 IMPLICATIONS

In the preceding section, the data categorisation process and outcomes were presented, providing the first empirical evidence of strategies found to be successful for increasing executive commitment to BPM. In this section, the potential relationships between the derived categories and the respondents and the organizations participating in this research are contemplated. ‘Potential’ because a limitation of the data is that the items identified by the respondents were not restricted to their current situation and could have arisen from past endeavours. Important nonetheless, as they provide first insights into relationships that can be explored further in future research aimed at verifying their worth.

A significantly higher percentage of items from respondents involved in project-based or pockets of expertise structured BPM initiatives related to the strategy of Demonstrating Business Results (28% and 29% respectively). Those working on enterprise wide initiatives reflected a more balanced use of

most strategies, with Linking to Business Drivers, Education and Developing a Common Business Model the only strategies accounting for less than 10% of items. Respondents from Ad Hoc initiatives have had success using an even mix of Demonstrating Business Results, Linking to Business Drivers, Education and Communication with no recognition of other strategies. Table 2 provides a summary of this comparison.

Strategy	Ad Hoc (3)	Project Based (9)	Pockets of Expertise (11)	Enterprise Wide Program (16)
1. Business Results	25%	28%	29%	18%
2. Sponsorship	-	16%	14%	16%
3. Business Drivers	25%	12%	14%	5%
4. Educate	25%	20%	7%	7%
5. Governance	-	4%	11%	14%
6. Business Case	-	8%	-	18%
7. Common Model	-	8%	18%	9%
8. Communicate	25%	4%	7%	14%

Table 2. Items by respondents and structure of current BPM initiative

Respondents based in Australia/New Zealand had past success with Demonstrate Business Results accounting for over 35% of the items they provided with the next most common strategies being Gain Sponsorship and Education (both 18%). Conversely, Europe and North America both had significantly less recognition of the Education strategy with it accounting for less than 10% of responses. These regions had experienced greater success with Developing a Common Business Model (12% and 16% respectively) whereas Australia reflected only 6%. Of these three regions, Australia was the only one to have identified no items relating to the strategy of Developing Governance Mechanisms. Across these three regions, Communication consistently accounted for less than 7% of responses. Table 3 provides a summary of this comparison.

Strategy	Australia / New Zealand (8)	Europe (13)	North America (16)	India (1)	Middle East (1)	South America (3)
1. Business Results	35%	21%	19%	-	-	50%
2. Sponsorship	18%	15%	19%	50%	-	-
3. Business Drivers	12%	8%	16%	-	-	-
4. Educate	18%	8%	7%	-	67%	12%
5. Governance	-	18%	12%	-	33%	-
6. Business Case	6%	15%	5%	50%	-	13%
7. Common Model	6%	12%	16%	-	-	-
8. Communicate	6%	3%	7%	-	-	25%

Table 3. Items by respondents and location of organization

Data was gathered from respondents in a range of industries. Whilst insufficient to draw statistical inferences, it is interesting to consider the range of strategy items arising from respondents working in the various industries. Interesting in that respondents across all industries reflect use of multiple strategies with no obvious dominance of any strategy evident in respondents from any one industry. This provides support for taking a multi-strategy approach for increasing executive commitment to BPM. Furthermore, such dispersion supports the notion that other factors (e.g. leadership styles perhaps) have a role to play in the selection and successful application of such strategies. Table 4 shows the distribution of items based on the industry in which the respondent works.

Strategy	Banking (7)	Education (3)	Government (5)	IT (3)	Manufacturing (5)	Oil, Gas & Energy (6)	Prof. Services (8)	Telcos (3)	Transport (1)	Utilities (2)
1. Business Results	25%	33%	30%	13%	31%	28%	19%	-	-	17%
2. Sponsorship	20%	-	-	13%	23%	17%	19%	-	33%	33%
3. Business Drivers	20%	17%	7%	25%	15%	-	-	33%	33%	-
4. Educate	10%	33%	29%	13%	-	-	6%	33%	-	17%
5. Governance	-	-	14%	25%	8%	22%	-	-	33%	33%
6. Business Case	-	-	14%	-	15%	17%	13%	33%	-	-
7. Common Model	25%	17%	-	13%	-	11%	19%	-	-	-
8. Communicate	-	-	7%	-	8%	6%	25%	-	-	-

Table 4. Items by respondents and industry sector

7 CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

In this paper, over 100 initial strategies found to be effective in increasing levels of executive commitment to BPM were consolidated and presented. Data reduction principles were applied to improve the manageability of data and remove redundancies. The data supported high-level categories e.g. *Educate About BPM* and sub-classifications such as more specific strategies e.g. *Have external experts talk to executives*. Consequently, sub-strata classification was performed within a category when further commonalities were identified in the data. Within this paper, the analysis of the survey data was supplemented with practical examples and insights gained during prior experiences conducting in-depth case studies into BPM within organizations. Finally, the proposed categories were considered in light of demographic data collected during the survey including the structure of the BPM initiatives and the location of the organizations and industry where the respondents work. The implications drawn from this process provide direction for future research, although the lack of context around respondent's application of the strategies makes it impossible to make definitive statements at this time. In particular, there is support for the notion that a multi-strategy approach is more effective than a single-strategy approach and that other factors (e.g. leadership styles) need to be considered for their role in the success of strategy implementation.

By linking the identified strategies to experiences from earlier research in this domain, it is shown that variables such as the state of the BPM discipline itself, whether or not the CEO is instigating the BPM initiative and stage of the BPM journey within individual organizations can have an impact on the selection and subsequent effectiveness of these strategies. Again, this area represents a rich source of future research.

This paper is limited in that the context in which the respondents applied the strategies is not clear from the data collected. Consequently, the quality of the strategies identified for increasing executive commitment to BPM has not been independently determined. Similarly, the identified strategies have not been linked to direct measures of BPM success. Furthermore, the importance of context should not be underestimated. For example, caution should be applied to relying entirely on strategies such as *'Demonstrate Business Results'* without supplementing them with other strategies such as *'Educate about BPM'* that are going to address potential shortcomings in obtaining the commitment required for the fundamental change to long term thinking required of executives in their support for BPM and so on.

Despite these limitations, this paper makes a unique and much needed contribution to advancing research in the BPM domain. It directly contributes to addressing the single biggest inhibitor of BPM progression within organizations. Future research into the contexts in which these strategies are more

or less relevant and successful, how they interact with each other, and how complementary research areas such as organizational development can be leveraged would be potentially beneficial to the BPM domain.

In summary, knowing that executive commitment is critical to the success of BPM and BPM initiatives is important. Understanding how to **best** develop this within organizations and individuals is, in our view, imperative if BPM is to become an enduring, credible, embedded approach to how organizations work. More research is required to build on these first insights.

References

- Curtis, B and Alden, J (2006). Business Process Improvement Guided by the BPMM, viewed 18th June 2007, <http://www.bptrends.com/publicationfiles/11-06-COL-BPM%26OrganizationalMaturity-Curtis-Alden-Final1.pdf>
- Bandera, W., Gable, G. and Rosemann, M. (2005) Factors and measures of business process modelling: model building through multiple case study. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 14, 347-360.
- Bolman and Deal (1984). *Modern Approaches to Understanding and Managing Organizations*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 10th printing 1990.
- Davenport, T. H. (2005). The Coming Commoditization of Processes. *Harvard Business Review*, 101-108.
- Hammer, M (2007). The Process Audit. *Harvard Business Review*. April, 111-143.
- Hung, R. Y. -Y. (2006). Business Process Management as Competitive Advantage: a review and empirical study. *Total Quality Management*, 17(1), 2-40.
- Lee, R. G. and Dale, B. G. (1998). Business process management: a review and evaluation. *Business Process Management Journal*, 4(3), 214-225.
- Miles, M. B. and Huberman, A. M. (1994). *An Expanded Sourcebook, Qualitative Data Analysis* Second Edition. Sage Publications, California.
- Nath, R (1989). Aligning MIS with the business goals. *Information and Management*, 16(2), 71-79.
- Nickols, F. (1998). The difficult process of identifying processes. *Knowledge and Process Management*, 5(1), 14-19.
- Pritchard, J.-P. and Armistead, C. (1999). Business process management - lessons from European business. *Business Process Management Journal*, 5(1), 10-32.
- Rosemann, M. and de Bruin, T. (2005). Towards a Business Process Management Maturity Model. *Proceedings of the 13th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS 2005)*. Regensburg, Germany. 26-28 May 2005.
- Rosemann, M., de Bruin, T and Power, B (2006). A Model to Measure Business Process Management and Improve Performance, In: *Business Process Management*, J. Jeston and J. Nelis. Butterworth-Heinemann, Chapter 27.
- Sanders, G. L. and Courtney, J. F. (1985). A Field Study of Organizational Influencing DSS Success. *MIS Quarterly*, Mar85, 9(1), 77-93.
- Spanyi, A. (2006). *More for Less*. Meghan Kiffer Press, Florida.
- Steinhart, P. J., and Nath, R. (1992). Problems and issues in the management of international data communications networks. *MIS Quarterly*, Mar92, 16(1), 65-87.
- Stuart, I., McCutcheon, D., Handfield, McLachlin, R. and Samson, D. (2002). Effective case research in operations management: a process perspective. *Journal of Operations Management*, 20, 419-433.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge and thank all survey and research participants for their valued insights and contributions without which this research would not have been possible.