

Choosing right approach to describing business processes

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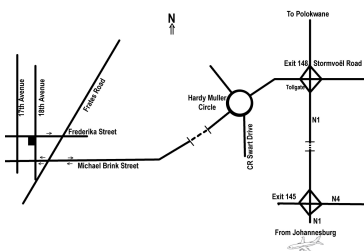
Business process description as a map

Business process description is a map that helps us to navigate through our business activities. In particular, it helps us to understand:

- where we are right now,
- where we need to go to,
- where we have come from, and
- how we have got to where we are.

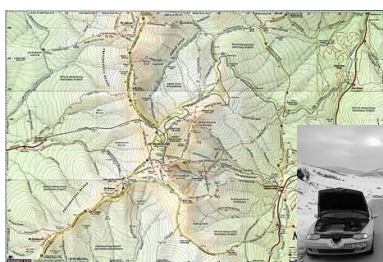
Variety of maps

Using a map for navigation is quite normal in many activities, e.g., it is a must when we need to move something or be moved ourselves from one place to another. We have different maps for navigating in the physical space, marine maps, road maps, hiking maps, etc. The choice of a map depends on what we want to move, where and by what means. If we travel by car we need a road map, if we travel on foot in a mountain area, we need a hiking map. What is more, we may need several different types of maps, in case of emergency. For example, a simplified road map that shows how to get from one point to another will not help if we make a wrong turn somewhere on the way. We will need a detailed road map to get back to our initial course.



A simple road map will not help if you make a wrong turn

Even a detailed roadmap will not help if our car breaks down on a lonely road in a mountain area far from any human dwellings in a stormy weather. A hiking map can help us to find the shortest route to safety in this case.



You may need a hiking map if your car breaks down on a lonely road in the mountains on a stormy day

The most commonly used type of business process maps is a workflow map. The workflow shows in which orders activities (tasks) should be completed in order to reach a goal of the given business process. A workflow map is similar to a road map, more exactly, a simple road map. If you can follow it in the exact manner, you will reach the goal. However, if you need to make a turn because the road is temporally blocked, it might be difficult to get back.

MapGuide

A typical project in the area of Business Process Management (BPM) starts with describing business processes that exist in a given company or organization, so-called as-is processes. It is very important to choose a right approach, i.e. right kind of maps, for creating these descriptions. For example, it does not make much sense to create a road map in the area where no roads exist (just small paths here and there). And it won't be enough just to draw a road map if you want to be able to find your way through even if you have been "blown off the road".

MapGuide is a pre-study that helps you to understand what kinds of business process maps you need to draw. The choice of maps depends on:

- Kinds of business processes you want to investigate (i.e. topography of your business: mountains, plains, deserts)
- The way they are run now, i.e. whether there are strict rules of how to handle a chain of operation, or decisions are taken on the case-to-case basis (i.e., whether you have roads, or just many narrow paths)
- What do you want to do with you maps, e.g.:
 - reengineer a process (i.e. build a new, may be wider road),
 - develop a computerize support system to run your processes more effectively (i.e. design a new vehicle adjusted to your terrain), or
 - be able to handle deviations from the standard way of handling (i.e., hike through the mountains to safety)

MapGuide consists of a number of workshops conducted by an IbisSoft consultant together with members of a BPM project. The first workshop gives orientation on business processes and various ways of describing them. The consequent 2-3 workshops discuss the type of processes that are to be described, and goals of the project.

The pre-study results in a report with recommendations on which techniques are appropriate for describing your processes. An example of a decision matrix suitable for this end is presented on the backside of this sheet.

Four views on business processes

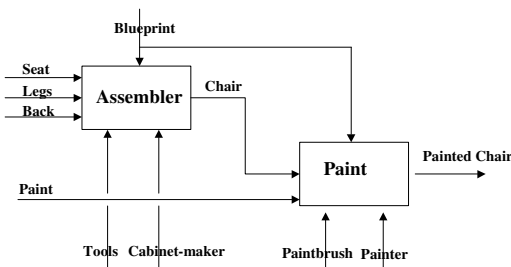
A business process is a partially **ordered** set of activities (operations) performed to reach a well-defined **goal**. A process engages a number of participants, which can be divided into two categories: "passive" and "active". **Passive participants** are consumed, produced or changed through the execution of activities, for example, documents being written, cars being assembled, patients being treated in the hospital,

departments being reorganized. **Active participants**, or **agents**, are those participants that perform activities aimed at the passive participants, e.g., workers, robots, etc.

There are four views on business processes that differ by what is placed in the focus of the observer. Describing a business process according to different views create different kind of maps of the same process.

Input/output flow

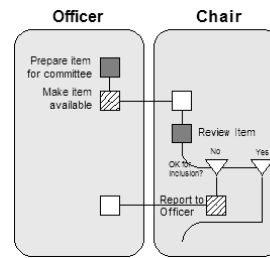
Focus on **passive participants** that are being consumed, produced, or changed by the activities. Important when there is a need to ensure that each passive participant has undergone a specified number of operations in a certain order. Who does the operations has less importance.



Process description according to this view represents a road map for "transporting" passive participants. Suitable for processes that deal with physical objects.

Agent-related flow

Focus on **agent** cooperation, i.e. order in which active participants get and perform their part of work. Important when there is a need to ensure each active participant doing his part of the job. How he does it is of lesser importance.

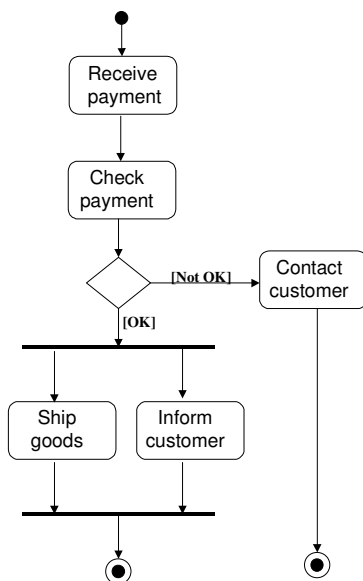


Process description according to this view represents a road along which the process pass through active participants. Suitable for processes with specialized agents, or with strict distribution of responsibilities, e.g. decision legalization.

Workflow

Focus on **order** of activities. Important when there is a need to ensure that all activities are completed in the right order. Who does the operations and what passive participants are changed during them has less importance.

Process description according to this view represents a road map of activities. Suitable for processes with predefined order of activities (operations).



State Flow

Focus on position reached in relation to the **goal** after execution of activities. Which activities are executed, and who executes them has less importance.

Process description according to this view is more like a hiking map that represents terrain and some paths across it. Suitable for loosely-structured administrative processes, the ones which do not have strict order of activities or distribution of responsibilities and which consume and produce information rather than physical objects. Also suitable for handling deviations from one of the three others road maps.

