Defining Social Business Process Management: A Delphi Study

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ABSTRACT

Business process management (BPM) is a holistic discipline which is focused on improving organizational performance by managing the business processes of the organization. In recent decades, it has been widely accepted and implemented across many different organizations with some success. However, there were some issues regarding the traditional approach to BPM, like the reality-model divide, etc. As a response, a new discipline, called social BPM has emerged which is based on the principles of social software. For the purpose of this article, a Delphi study has been conducted with the aim of defining the social BPM as well as to identify its main characteristics. The results are presented in this article, proposing a single definition of social BPM and the list of its characteristics.

KEYWORDS


INTRODUCTION

In recent few decades, business process management (BPM) has been in a great focus of many organizations as well as many researchers. Harmon (2007) defines BPM as a managerial discipline focused on improving organizational performance by managing its business processes wherein they are the core of every organization. However, in doing so, traditional approach to BPM stumbled upon some challenges and issues which have been reported by several authors (e.g. Schmidt & Nurcan, 2009; Erol et al., 2010; Ariouat et al., 2017). One of the most common problems refers to the model-reality divide, described by Schmidt & Nurcan (2009) and Erol et al. (2010), while others include issues like deviation and loss of innovation, lack of visibility, information pass-on threshold, lack of cooperation and lack of information fusioning. Most of these occur because of the lack of collaboration within the organization and/or because of lack of involvement of key stakeholders. The answer to the stated problems has been found in the attempt to implement the principles of social software as well as the social software usage for BPM as the new approach within the area of BPM. This new and emerging discipline has been named social BPM. Nevertheless, there is still no strong consensus on what social BPM really includes or on its definition. Moreover, different authors indicate different definitions and propose different characteristics of social BPM. For example, Pflanzl & Vossen (2013)

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view social BPM as “the practice of actively involving all relevant stakeholders into BPM through the use of social software and its underlying principles”, while Kirchmer et al. (2013) define it as “a tool that uses social media such as community Web pages, blogs, or on-line social networks to drive transparency in organizations.” Moreover, Lee et al. (2011) describe social BPM as “a promising tool to improve the performance of an organization by providing extensible communication tools, informal data handling functions, and knowledge based decision supports” while Batista et al. (2017) indicate that social BPM is “the combination of BPM with social and collaborative techniques for the purpose of exploring collaboration among stakeholders throughout the BPM lifecycle.”

This study is fully supported by Croatian Science Foundation under the project PROSPER - Process and Business Intelligence for Business Performance [IP-2014-09-3729]. One of the goals of the PROSPER project is to explore and define the concept of Social BPM and to investigate the levels of its acceptance within the companies participating in the project. In order to fulfil the stated goal, and with the purpose of identification, analysis and determination of the key concepts of the social BPM, a Delphi study has been conducted. Having in mind the goals of the PROSPER project and the lack of consensus on social BPM definition, the goal of this paper is to propose the definition of the social BPM as well as to identify its main characteristics, as indicated by the conducted Delphi study.

With the purpose of meeting the stated goal, the paper is organized as follows. After this short introduction, a theoretical background is given with the focus on social BPM and the description of the Delphi method. Next, the Delphi study on social BPM is presented by first presenting the employed methodology and then presenting the results of the conducted study. The paper ends with a conclusion, limitations and directions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Social Business Process Management

Social BPM is a new and emerging discipline within the BPM area. It has been in focus of a growing number of authors in the last few years. Although the number of papers regarding social BPM is increasing over the last decade, majority of them are conference papers, which indicate that the area of social BPM is still in its developing phase (Suša Vugec et al., 2018). In their research, Suša Vugec et al. (2018) reveal that the number of conference paper regarding social BPM grow by 10 papers per year since 2008 and indicate that there is still lots of likely benefits and unused potential for the usage of social BPM in practice. According to Richardson (2009) there are certain trends which could be considered as driving forces for social BPM development. Those trends refer to the demand for content generated by users, business environment characterized by accelerated change of conditions and the need to define a complete context of a process (Richardson, 2009). Within the company, the initiative for engaging in social BPM and enhanced collaboration usually comes from the top management of the company or from the motivation of an employee who understands what are the benefits which might come from enhancing collaborative work (Batista et al., 2017).

On the other hand, the development of social BPM can be understood as a consequence of issues which have emerged from traditional approaches to BPM within organizations. According to Schmidt & Nurcan (2009) and Erol et al. (2010), the main issues regarding traditional BPM are model-reality divide, loss of innovation, information pass-on threshold and lack of information fusioning. One of the most common and the biggest problem related to classic BPM is the model-reality divide. In simple words, this problem occurs when there is a difference between models designed by consultants or BPM department and those which are actually executed by employees in reality. Schmidt & Nurcan (2009) argue that the roots of the model-reality divide can be found in the lack of information fusioning which refers to employees as consumers of the processes only, rather than being properly involved into BPM. Furthermore, they argue that the traditional BPM related problems also occur when it comes to process improvement, mostly because of the loss of innovation
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