

In the thirty plus years that I've been managing people, one of the most frustrating moments for me is when I get a communication from an employee that informs me that they will not be at work today. Unplanned downtime drives management productivity down as we determine the impact of the absence and how to prioritize the tasks of others to ensure that critical work gets done.

We certainly understand that situations do arise that are unforeseeable such as:

- ✓ The nanny is sick and I need to stay home with the kids.
- ✓ I've got a sick kid who can't go to school and I need to stay home.
- ✓ I've come down with the flu and should stay away from my co-workers, etc.
- ✓ Bereavement.

Then there are the more creative / interesting ones:

- ✓ The flu excuse on a Monday or Friday (especially around long weekend or the employee's birthday or other celebration).
- ✓ The dog, cat or other pet is having surgery or has some ailment and needs tending to.

Lastly, there's the one that all of us that work in climates such as Canada's and the northern USA know is going to happen at least once per winter: Snow Day! For those readers that are unfamiliar with this phenomenon, that's when school buses don't run, roads are icy and dangerous and it's likely the employee (and the manager) may be digging out after a very large snowfall. I do understand that there are other climatic conditions (rain storms that result in flooding, etc.) in other areas of the world that could cause a similar situation to occur.



How Does An Organization Maintain Productivity?

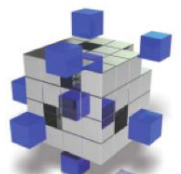


If the employee happens to be a machine operator on the shop floor, a warehouse forklift driver or is in a position where meeting people directly (e.g. a grocery store check-out person or a nurse in a hospital) then there's not much that management will be able to do but react to the unplanned downtime.

However, if the person works in finance, purchasing, operations planning or engineering, etc. and has an internet connection, they can be working from home on a list of prioritized tasks as effectively as if they were sitting at their desks. But...will say

some managers...how do I know they are actually working and getting things done based on priorities?

The answer for this situation is that there is an enterprise solution that works with an organization's other business solutions to ensure that if, for some reason, the employee has a time-sensitive task that doesn't get done within the given timeframe the task will appear for other employees to execute or be escalated to management to re-direct to another person. It's the same enterprise solution that allows organizations to reduce elapsed business cycle times, human effort and overhead costs. It's also the same solution that would enable an organization to implement a 'work-at-home' program to reduce employee-related overhead costs, greenhouse gas emissions and stress levels by reducing employee commuting.



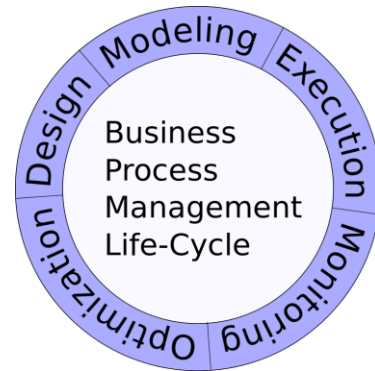
Business Process Management (BPM)

When we're discussing BPM, it's important to distinguish between the types of solutions that are commonly referred to as BPM.

Business process mapping solutions are just that...they give the user the ability to graphically document the process map and add notes. This type of solution is commonly used when ISO processes need to be documented.

Business process modeling solutions the next step up from mapping. They commonly allow the user to put metrics into the task and stage levels of processes so that factors such as elapsed time, human effort, costs and risks can be entered and reported upon.

Business process automation solutions are those that allow the organization to control what the user is doing through the automation of the processes and their integration with other systems such as ERP, CRM, CAD, QMS, credit management (e.g. D&B or Transamerica), human resources, payroll and others. These solutions will escalate processes that are falling behind schedule or need management attention and allow management to produce audit reports for processes such as employee discipline, health and safety, regulatory compliance and overall process systems performance. The automated BPM solution is providing the execution and monitoring of the business processes that have been automated and provides the reporting that allows for optimization.



Then there's the technology that is referred to as BPM but may not fulfill the needs of Lean Management initiatives. Some solutions marketed as BPM will only allow the automation of workflows within a particular solution (e.g. within the functional scope of an ERP system). If the solution that you're looking at does not allow for the modeling of the processes (necessary for Lean Management metrics) and the automation of integrated processes to multiple systems, then you are not getting the full benefits of a complete BPM solution.

About the Author

Ken Cowman's career has spanned over 45 years with 11 of those in operations management followed by more than 30 years as an enterprise solutions and continuous improvement project manager, educator, seminar leader and management coach. He has had over 70 articles published in various magazines.

A founding executive of the APICS Peel Chapter, Ken was part of the OMERIC team that wrote the Fundamentals of Operations Management courses for APICS. He is also the past Chair of the Business Operations Management Program Advisory Committee at the School of Business at Centennial College.

Ken is also the author of Emercomm's Lean Enterprise Management methodology and leads the team that develops the LeanControl RTO© applications.

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