

Maximizing Electronic Resources Management in Libraries

Applying Business Process Management

Lenore A. England and Stephen D. Miller



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DEDICATION

Thanks to my mother for her inspiration and support.

~Lenore

For my family.

~Stephen

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>About the Authors</i>	xi
1. Introduction: Business Process Management (BPM) and Electronic Resources Management	1
1.1 Introduction to the Book	1
1.2 How We Decided to Use Business Process Management	3
1.3 Purpose of the Book	3
1.4 Focus of the Book	5
1.5 Summary of the Structure of the Text and the Application of BPM to ERM	7
2. Elements of ERM from a BPM Point of View	9
2.1 What Is Electronic Resources Management?—Basic Definitions and Overview	9
2.2 Elements of ERM	10
2.3 Functions of ERM	11
2.4 Importance of ERM to Libraries	16
2.5 ERM as Knowledge Work	17
2.6 ERM as Supporting Infrastructure in Libraries	18
2.7 Conclusion	20
References	20
3. Organization of ERM	21
3.1 Disparate Business Processes	21
3.2 Why Is Organization Important?	23
3.3 ERM Organizational Structure Mapped to Workflows	23
3.4 Summary	24
4. The History and Evolution of Business Process Management	27
4.1 What Is a “Business Process”?	27
4.2 History of BPM	28
4.3 The Development of BPM	43
4.4 Summary	46
References	46

5. Application of BPM to ERM	49
5.1 Business Process Management Applications in Libraries	49
5.2 Overview of BPM Applications to Electronic Resources Management	53
5.3 How BPM Can Help with ERM Organization	54
5.4 BPM Concepts	56
5.5 Change Management and Leadership in BPM/ERM	79
5.6 Leveraging Expanded Knowledge of License Agreement and Procurement Procedures	89
5.7 Conclusions of the Application of BPM to ERM	93
References	93
6. Systems Thinking, Process Mapping, and Implications for ERM	97
6.1 Systems Thinking	97
6.2 Implications of Systems Thinking and Knowledge Work for Electronic Resources Management and Business Process Management	106
6.3 Systems Librarians and Other Technical Staff and ERM	109
6.4 Process Discovery and Mapping	110
6.5 Process Mapping and ERM	115
6.6 Summary	118
References	119
7. Future Development of ERM Based on BPM Principles	121
7.1 ERM Lean Knowledge Management	122
7.2 Social BPM Analysis for ERM	123
7.3 "Sweet Spot" BPM Analysis for ERM	124
7.4 Summary	125
References	125
8. Conclusions for BPM Applications to ERM	127
8.1 BPM to ERM Conclusions	127
8.2 Summary of Book	129
8.3 Ideas Presented	133
8.4 How to Apply BPM to ERM Ideas in the Book	133
8.5 ERM Budgets—Financial Benefits	135
8.6 Future of BPM for ERM	136
<i>Index</i>	<i>137</i>

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	Electronic resources management (ERM) elements at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC) Library.	11
Figure 2.2	Techniques for electronic resources management applied to electronic resources management workflows at the University of Maryland University College Library.	12
Figure 2.3	Electronic resources management acquisition function.	14
Figure 3.1	The disparate nature of electronic resources management (ERM): patchwork of issues.	22
Figure 3.2	Electronic resources management (ERM) organizational structure mapped to workflows.	25
Figure 5.1	General define, measure, analyze, improve, control (DMAIC) cycle.	59
Figure 5.2	Define stage for electronic resources management (ERM).	61
Figure 5.3	Measure stage for electronic resources management (ERM).	63
Figure 5.4	Analyze stage for electronic resources management (ERM).	64
Figure 5.5	Improve stage for electronic resources management (ERM).	66
Figure 5.6	Improve process checklist.	67
Figure 5.7	Improve project road map.	68
Figure 5.8	Control stage for electronic resources management (ERM).	69
Figure 5.9	Electronic resources management (ERM) centralized workflow processes at University of Maryland University College (UMUC).	87
Figure 6.1	Knowledge work to electronic resources management (ERM).	108
Figure 6.2	Basic process flowchart example.	114
Figure 6.3	Functional activity flowchart.	115
Figure 6.4	Activity detail sheet.	116
Figure 6.5	General electronic resources management (ERM) process mapping.	118

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Business Process Management (BPM) and Electronic Resources Management

Abstract

The nature of electronic resources management (ERM) work is a disparate and patchwork business, and the organization of workflows and processes is increasingly critical for successful management of electronic resources in libraries. In this book, the authors describe the application of the proven management theories of business process management (BPM) at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC) Library. The application of BPM theories to ERM work allows a small staff to manage a large amount of ERM work, making processes more consistent, efficient, and effective, while also allowing libraries to more easily review their processes during periods of growth and organizational change. Application of BPM processes at the UMUC Library can readily be adapted by all kinds of libraries. The chapter concludes with a summary of the themes of the subsequent chapters.

Keywords: Academic libraries; Business process management, BPM; Electronic resources management, ERM; Organizational change; Organizational structure; Project management.

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

As electronic resources in libraries proliferate and are increasingly difficult to manage, the need to organize and maintain them grows in proportion. This holds true for all libraries: Either in managing the changing workflow processes from print to electronic or in the case of our university, the University of Maryland University College (UMUC), continuing to manage primarily

electronic resources with a small print collection of our own and no physical library space. This can be an overwhelming task with a disparate set of electronic resources and the complexities of the staff, systems, and tools that maintain them. The thought occurred to us one day as we were managing the growing set of resources, both proprietary and open access: How can we manage with a small staff and yet obtain effective results? We were experiencing an overload of work and thought about what we could do before it became too much to manage and overly unwieldy. The fundamental idea was to take hold of and survey what we did as soon as possible in order to grapple with the electronic resources management (ERM) work and contain it. What tools were on hand to do this organizing? In the midst of a plethora of work both online and in paper, how to organize all of this in a systematic way? The way we were thinking was to strategically plan for the future in order to proactively assess now what might happen in the future, and to continue this assessment on an annual or periodic basis.

This is the basic premise of the book: To search for and apply organizational tools provided by proven management theories that helped us manage electronic resources. Organization of ERM is critical. We believed this approach could provide an effective structure by which our work would progress and grow as well as readily adapt to changes at our institution and in ERM. An effective underlying organizational structure would provide the support for developing technology, systems, and tools. We thought that if we were organized in our approaches to workflows, this would help to guide our project management and everyday operations more effectively and in a centralized fashion. How to do this in a systematic and strategic way was essential for ERM, we realized, and we reviewed and studied management theories to help organize our everyday workflows and projects. Ultimately, we wanted to take a larger view of our ERM work and take into account systems available to libraries and at our institution in order to support ERM at the organization as a whole.

1.2 HOW WE DECIDED TO USE BUSINESS PROCESS MANAGEMENT

Both of our backgrounds are in business and management and it dawned on us one day that we are already thinking about project management techniques and management theories learned in our master of business administration's programs. Why not apply these theories to ERM? The very idea of the application of management theories seemed to fit logically and naturally with our workflows. At UMUC, the focus is on virtual online access to courses and ultimately, virtual access for our patrons. UMUC was founded as a distance learning institution and the requirements for this type of academic environment are very unique. The UMUC Library, while in an academic setting, is also very unique. We have a small staff that could make changes readily. We could also make decisions quickly and even consider all sides rapidly in a few meetings. The environment at UMUC is that of change and rapid adaptations to change. Quickly arriving at solutions in the constantly changing environment of distance education is very important here. We do operate at a faster pace than many other academic institutions.

With the ultimate goal of providing the best access possible for our users, we embarked on a path of distilling down the best of the management theories to use with our ERM work. Then we began to realize that this could be applied at any library with divergent workflows. We wanted to turn ERM on its ear and think of outlier ideas and plow ahead with innovative notions. We thought that this new focus could lead to many possibilities for ERM. Innovation is fostered at UMUC and this did seem to be the best path for us. But, we also thought that all libraries could benefit from our ideas even though they operate differently from our own.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

Our book offers a very unique perspective of ERM in libraries: The application of sound management theories to ERM. We chose business process management (BPM) principles. These theories offered

sound practices for the organization of ERM work processes. It turns out that these fit ERM workflows very well and it seems natural to apply BPM to ERM. The larger perspective and breaking the boundaries of ERM practices were just what we needed. With such a small staff, one person and several very part-time personnel, organization to get a much better sense of the direction and strategic focus of our work was critical. In a way, the application of BPM is so expansive in terms of the approach to our work, and yet the applications we will discuss actually created a much more manageable structure for us. We roped in divergent processes, created new structures, and in a simpler way, perhaps even smaller. But all of this was so manageable that we could see what we were doing at all times and improve over time. With a larger staff, this is a much more involved process, but very worthwhile to go through as we will demonstrate.

As an application, BPM for ERM is very beneficial by leading to effective organizational changes within the context of the organizational environment. Environmental scanning is the critical first step for improving ERM at a major institution. What is the organization planning and what direction is it taking? In higher education, disruptive technologies are changing the landscape for our organization. Understanding these changes and adapting to them is essential for ERM. But adaptability takes some time and planning. BPM allows for these changes by providing a vessel in which to make the changes according to the organization's environment. We found we needed to be part of these changes rather than clinging to the traditional methods of ERM. Quick adaption is the key for ERM and we did not want to be left behind. Also, containment of costs to manage our electronic resources is something we had to build into our process, and BPM allowed us to brainstorm and apply all sorts of cost-effective measures, in areas from licensing negotiations to operations. What we also wanted to develop are transformative solutions for ERM that might be considered to be outside-of-the-box but are actually based on sound BPM theories and practices. We decided to stand on the shoulders of the BPM giants of the past, present, and future in order to get the broader perspective we needed to transform ERM and become more agile in our work environment.

The applications of BPM to ERM noted in the book will offer librarians a skill set that is distilled and that they can readily apply. We did not set out to become “black belts” in the application of the theories. Instead, we studied BPM and decided to apply selected elements in manageable ways to transform the landscape of ERM. What we want to provide to the reader is a study of BPM and actual applications of BPM in order to help librarians recognize the changing landscape of ERM and seize the opportunity to adapt rather than the alternative of failing to recognize changes. The current means of ERM can be effective but really taking a look at what our patrons are doing and what they actually want from electronic resources is our focus. While ERM is a relatively new field of librarianship, our business model could be constrained by current library practices, which in turn would not allow us to adapt as readily. Driving change in ERM is essential for reaching a goal of effective and valued ERM within the institution. Seeking new ways makes changes continual and constant depending on the organization environment in which you find yourself.

BPM can be adapted to grow and expand with the ERM functions in unique library environments. The theories provide the means to effectively review the structure and work processes in order to think of new and innovative ideas. This frees us up to review what we are doing now, what we want to do in future, and develop ways to make it happen. The complexities of ERM work processes are evident, but is there a way to streamline our work and compete in an increasingly cost-efficient environment? Easing work loads and making processes and services more agile is very beneficial. That is the ultimate goal of BPM to ERM: more efficient and effective ERM work processes that can readily be understood by the organization and even partnering with organizational members that can only enhance ERM services in future.

1.4 FOCUS OF THE BOOK

The focus of the book is not so much on the ERM systems and tools available, which are uniquely set up for each library, but more on the organizational tools that BPM can offer. This may be an

unusual notion, but our premise is to provide what the user wants most—ready access to needed information resources in a way familiar to them in a “Googlized” world. With a small staff, the idea of a user-centered focus made sense to us. The ERM systems are especially important to libraries, but with our small staff, we think that the idea of organization so that the resources could be effectively maintained with a streamlined process and shifting that focus from a systems-oriented position to a customizable focus had much merit. Spinning out of a systems-based approach for us into a user-centric approach to ERM seems the best path for the future. At the same time, ERM systems are critical of course, but the idea is to think outside of these systems to see and learn what will be ideal for our users.

BPM allows for creativity and letting our ideas flow. We view what we are doing now with an eye toward the future of ERM as academic libraries and the vendor environment continues to grow and change. While the process can seem overwhelming at times and even seem to lack direction, we have experienced an increased level of ideas that we might not have been able to do as readily, if it were not for the application of BPM. Most of these ideas come at the time of brainstorming what we would like to see, improve or implement, but the ideas can also come later on while we are applying improved workflows and during the process of review. In a sense, we became an ideation group for ERM, not experts in the fields of strategic change for ERM at first, but as a group that could lead the way to make sound and cost-effective changes nevertheless. While we were in the midst of maintaining ERM operations and procedures, we could still envision what we could do in future to attain improved economies of scale and foresight into technological developments. We shook up our new, but already established practices in order to form a model of ERM that could adapt to a rapidly changing environment, that is, the world of libraries. We began to think of ERM as a business model for improved operations and cost efficiencies.

1.5 SUMMARY OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT AND THE APPLICATION OF BPM TO ERM

The structure of our book starts with a brief overview of ERM as we know it today, what ERM does, and why it is so increasingly important for libraries and institutions. In Chapter 2, we then discuss ERM from a knowledge work perspective based on our notion of the very essence of how ERM works. As we will show, the experience of managing electronic resources is the formation of a knowledgebase of linked tools, resources, and staff. We will also discuss how important ERM is to the infrastructure of library management today. We not only review the importance from an operational point of view, but also take a good look at our patrons' perspectives, which are evolving at an increasing rate. This is the most important basis of our BPM work. In a sense, our users are as involved in the infrastructure review as our ERM staff. This review establishes the basis from which we grew our ideas of BPM to ERM.

In Chapter 3, we give a more in-depth overview of why organization is so important to ERM. This leads to streamlining our workflows with the purpose of innovations with effective and productive results. We focus on how to make our work more effective—can we change what we are doing, even for certain process, which will lead to larger changes? Breaking down the application of BPM is just as effective as undertaking a massive change process. One step at a time was our approach, which over time has led to the bigger changes we sought from the beginning.

Before we applied BPM principles, we undertook a review of the history and principles of BPM, in order to understand the importance of BPM, as we discuss in Chapter 4. This included an in-depth review of how BPM has made for organizational change at many different companies in a wide variety of fields. We built our approach to the application of BPM to ERM on the shoulders of the giants of management theories and principles.