Chapter

Process Management: A Requirement for Organizational Excellence in the Twenty-First Century Business Environment?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to define process management as a requirement of organizational excellence in the twenty-first century business environment. The business environment in the twenty-first century has reached a new height as far as challenges are concerned. The Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences have shaped a new business environment that requires organizations and businesses to raise the bar for themselves in honoring their obligation to achieve excellence. This means that competitive advantage, quality service, and product are achieved through organizational excellence. How can process management help organizations and businesses achieve organizational excellence in such a hostile and turbulent business environment? Applying a conceptual approach, the study attempts to answer the question through a comprehensive literature review. Testable propositions have been formulated, action steps defined, and implications of the study established. By identifying workflow design (WFD), control and correction of workflow processes (CCWFP), monitoring of workflow processes (MWFP), and workflow promotion of process-related learning in organizations (WPPRLO) against the background of conceptualization, operationalization, and context, the study findings suggest that process management is indeed a requirement for organizational excellence in the twenty-first century business environment. Scholars and practitioners have the opportunity to confirm or disconfirm the validity of the assumptions and ideas presented in the study.

Keywords: twenty-first century, business environment, Covid-19, organizational excellence process management, product quality, service quality, workflow

1. Introduction

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in late 2019 and its gradual spreading across the globe in 2020 urged countries to shut down businesses as the global efforts to fight the pandemic [1]. Such measures signaled the new height that the business environment in the twenty-first century has reached as far as challenges are concerned.

The Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences have shaped a new business environment that has raised strain on the relationship between businesses, customers,

and suppliers requiring organizations and businesses to be at their very best if they are to survive in such an environment. In other words, the new business environment compels organizations and businesses to sustain their competitive advantage through excellence.

Twenty-first century organizational development (OD) scholars Harrington [2], Rad [3], Dahlgaard-Park [4], Brown [5], and Samawi et al. [6] identified process management (PM) as a critical success factor for organizational excellence (OE). Although much has been written about business process management (BPM), the concept of process management in organizations (PMO) is not widely understood, is far more complex than is commonly perceived.

The purpose of this study is to examine the importance of process management as a requirement for organizational excellence. Six testable propositions about process management have presented that address the nature of process management and organizational excellence.

Based on a comprehensive literature review [7], the study begins with an examination of the complex nature of excellence and organizational excellence. After defining process management, the study identifies key elements considered integration facilitating factors and six propositions that practitioners and scholars can test to assess the nature of that process management. The study concludes by identifying five contributions and suggests opportunities for additional research.

2. Organizational excellence: a conceptual framework

Excellence is conceived as "superiority, greatness, distinction" [8]. To excel implies "to do or be better than; surpass; to show superiority, surpass others". In other words, excellence can describe, in the words of Paul, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise" [4].

Scholars and practitioners have scrutinized the word "excellence" in an attempt to establish its essence. From a practical perspective, countries and regions across the globe attempted to establish particular frameworks of excellence. The European foundation for quality management (EFQM), for instance, considers adding value for customers, creating a sustainable future, developing organizational capability, harnessing creativity and innovation, leading with vision, inspiration, and integrity, managing with agility, succeeding through the talent of people and sustaining outstanding results, as attributes of excellence [9]. In Australia, leadership, strategy and planning, data, information and knowledge, people, customer and market focus, innovation, quality and improvement, success, and sustainability are all regarded defining factors of the business excellence framework [10].

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) in the USA, considers leadership, strategic planning, customer and market focus, information and analysis, human resources focus, and process management as quality associated with excellence [11]. The same applies to the Canada Awards for Excellence program, which promotes leadership, governance, strategy, planning, customer experience, employee engagement, innovation, and wellness as qualities for excellence [12]. The Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers (JUSE) is consistent with the above-mentioned frameworks of excellence by considering organization and its management, education, quality information, planning, analysis, standardization, control, quality assurance, and results as contributing factors to excellence [13]. It is evident that practitioners, by pursuing quality as an end, established excellence as means. Therefore, by establishing a framework of excellence it is more likely to have quality as an outcome.

While practitioners converged their views on the concept of excellence, OD scholars have over decades invested in research with a view of developing a framework for OE [5, 14–19].

For many scholars, such a framework encompasses the likes of performance of management, knowledge as a source of value creation, culture, and values of the organization, sustainable change, measures relating to leadership, processes, people, communication, and strategy to mention but a few.

Literature suggests that organizational effectiveness (OEf) was previously the focus of scholarly debates. In this respect, Yuchtman and Seashore consider the concept effectiveness deficient for making reference to goal attainment. For the authors when the term effectiveness is associated to the organization this should emphasize both the distinctiveness of the organization as an identifiable social structure and the interdependence of the organization with its environment [20]. The conceptual conflict amongst scholars led Connolly et al. to propose a "multiple-constituency" approach to the concept [21].

The proposed approach assumes that an organization's different constituencies will form different assessments of its effectiveness. Quinn and Rohrbaugh went further arguing in favor of what they refer to as "a competing values approach to organizational effectiveness" [22]. This approach encompasses three value dimensions including focus (task—people), structure (control—flexibility), and time (short-term—long-term).

Dragging the conceptual debates, Cameron's view is consistent with Quinn et al. by arguing that organizational effectiveness is a construct that is grounded in the values and preferences of evaluators [23]. Consequently, no single and correct concept exists. For Cameron, the approaches that emerged over time attempted to address specific purposes which prompted scholars to conceptualize effectiveness in the organization in various ways including matching the ideal characteristics of a bureaucratic organization, accomplishing goals, obtaining needed resources, satisfying important stakeholders, high quality internal processes, the presence of simultaneous opposites, producing flourishing and virtuousness. These are all useful approaches to assessing and producing valuable outcomes.

Significantly is the "4P" model (people' partnership, processes, and products). The model, by assuming that "excellent products and services are a result of building excellence into people, partnership and processes, and this requires a strong foundation—leadership", shifted the paradigm from organizational effectiveness (OEf) to organizational excellence—OE [4]. Interestingly, the "4P" model integrates both the mechanistic and organic approaches to organizational management pointing at leadership as the integration facilitating factor. The significance of the approach lies in the fact that OE can be achieved and sustained when variables from both the mechanistic and organic approaches complement one another.

Moreover, many research favors the organic approach for promoting the human resource dimension and its critical role in organization management. Such is the view of Alan Brown who affirms that "Organizations that fail to adopt an organic approach are unlikely to embed quality and excellence and engage both managers and employees. Without these key ingredients, sustainability is unlikely, and their quality efforts are likely to remain at the tool pusher and drifter stages" [5]. Importantly, the success of the organic approach is measured through the effectiveness of the mechanistic approach. Therefore, the need to establish well-functioning workflow processes that should guarantee the intended and expected quality as an outcome.

3. Process management: A concept and its scope

It is widely acknowledged that efficient and effective process management improves organizational dynamism, readiness, and reactiveness capability to challenges [24–27]. Scholars including Wagner and Patzak argue that leading companies without PM are no longer imaginable [28].

While its main objective is to increase efficiency and effectiveness, the understanding of the concept in both theory and practice revealed a mutual contradiction in some aspects along the years [29]. If not addressed adequately such inconsistencies may harm the very notion of PM by leaving gaps in the understanding and practice of PM. Therefore, the need to engage scholars and practitioners to address the inconsistencies in the understanding and practice of PM within the context of the twenty-first century.

Paim and Flexa conceptualize PM as "a coordinated set of permanent tasks required to design processes and assure they function properly and to foster process-related learning" [30]. Evidently, PM is all about aligning processes with the strategic goals of an organization. In this respect, business process management (BPM) has been the focus of many studies over several decades restricting the very concept of PM to business only. Moreover, the scope of PM in this study goes beyond business. It is broader involving both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations.

Research reveals that the call for the shift or integration between the traditional functional management model with the famous "business process management" approach has proved challenging [31]. However, the lack of a universally accepted definition of BPM does not stop scholars and practitioners from attaching connotations to it. Significantly, people involvement through the leadership of the line managers is the most important component that BPM offers to process management favoring the organic approach to management [32].

To this effect, Kohlbacher stresses that BPM goes beyond designing, developing, and executing business processes. It promotes interaction between these processes, managing and analyzing, and optimizing them [33]. On this basis, literature considers

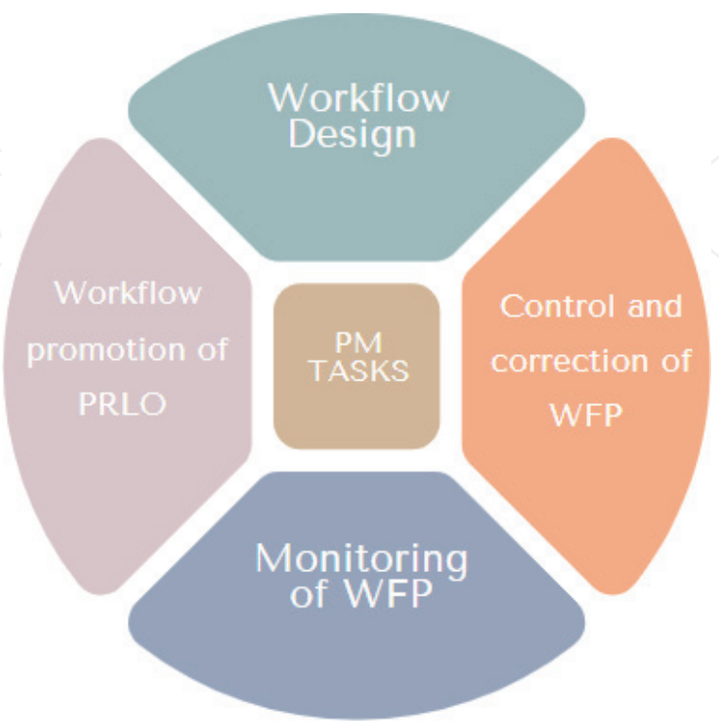

Figure 1.
PM tasks.

the following as tasks associated with process management: the design, monitoring, control, and correction of processes, and the promotion of process-related learning in organizations [24, 30, 34, 35]. These tasks are summed up in **Figure 1**.

3.1 Workflow design (WFD)

Scholars and practitioners identify workflow design as an engineering activity that schemes and shapes what they refer to as the sequential tasks involved to take an item from "initiated" to "processed" one step at a time. Significantly the activity requires an intention to contrive for a purpose [36–38].

Research suggests that workflow design is based on the structure and characteristics of the product [39, 40]. These premises prompted Reijers et al. to offer a method referred to as product-based workflow design (PBWD) [41]. The authors argue that PBWD takes the product specification and three design criteria as a starting point, after which formal models and techniques are used to derive a favorable new design of the workflow process. Consistent with Reijers et al., Lee and Suh established and recommended a workflow matrix (WfM) with a view to analyze and reengineer strategies to improve the design process [42]. For the author, Workflow design establishes well-defined procedures and an operational-level sophisticated workflow.

Held and Blochinger enriched the workflow design discussion by introducing a concept of the collaborative workflow design. The concept combines cooperation and workflow model analysis [43]. Held and Blochinger argue that workflow design is often an effort of distributed and heterogeneous teams, therefore making tool support for collaboration a necessity.

The above scholars' discussion has brought to the shore the utmost importance of workflow design. On the basis of the arguments presented by scholars, workflow design enables organizations and businesses to see their entire activity processes and how data moves seamlessly from step to step. Therefore, workflow design is an indispensable strategy towards OE.

3.2 Control and correction of workflow processes (CCWFP)

The success of a workflow design rests upon the resilience of its structures. This implies how robust, effective and efficient the process structures are when facing pressure. Thus the need for control and correction of workflow processes on a regular and permanent basis. Control means "to check the accuracy of, verify; to regulate," [44]. On this basis, control and correction of workflow processes are mostly methodical and technical support activities that aim at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the process structures.

Ideally, the strategy, with regard to weaknesses, in particular, would be to reduce and or transform them into strengths to reinforce the resilience capability of the process structures. In this way, the desired outcomes are most likely to be achieved because of the continuous improvement of the process structures.

3.3 Monitoring of workflow processes (MWFP)

Monitoring is understood as a general sense of "observe, keep under review, to guide" [45]. Characterized by a broader scope, monitoring of workflow processes entails keeping track of and gathering data about the performance of workflow processes.

Previous studies indicate that monitoring is "a continuing function that aims primarily to provide... an ongoing intervention with early indications of progress,

or lack thereof, in the achievement of results" [46]. Importantly, monitoring offers a "metric for tracking progress towards project goals through a logical framework documenting intermediate and long-term measurable objectives" [47].

Consistent with the above, the monitoring process starts with the definition of a logical framework that establishes a pragmatic approach to monitoring. Such an approach should ensure that actions are taken in order to "frequently facilitate the need to modify processes that can be used in instances where there are limited resources, limited financial capital, and limited human capital to determine whether programs and projects have had an impact" [48]. Unless monitoring of workflow processes is done effectively, control and correction of workflow processes will be undermined and thus jeopardize the outcome.

3.4 Workflow promotion of process-related learning in organizations (WPPRLO)

PM tasks are activities that promote learning experiences in organizations by linking research to practice with respect to workflow processes. From business and management perspectives, learning is key to both survival and success [49]. The significance of learning organizations has been discussed over the years. Scholars' arguments are consistent in suggesting that a learning organization is one that builds and strengthens resilience capabilities to secure the intended outcome [50, 51].

Design, control, and monitoring of workflow processes constitute an integrated approach to the workflow management cycle (WFMC). As such, a benchmark of learning organizations.

It transpires, from the above, that the successful implementation of process management relies on the efficiency and effectiveness with which its four tasks are executed. Thus the need to shift to or integrate BPM because of the promotion of people involvement in the process. This suggests that unless workflow processes are managed adequately through perfect execution of the above-identified tasks, it will prove difficult to affect the efficiency of an organization's actions and development—improving organizational dynamism, readiness, and reactiveness capability to face challenges of the global business environment [52, 53].

4. Process management and organizational excellence: the integration facilitating factor (IFF)

Research reveals that OE can be achieved and sustained when variables from both mechanistic and organic approaches complement one another. Furthermore, the success of the organic approach is measured through the effectiveness of the mechanistic approach. Hence, the need to establish well-functioning workflow processes that would guarantee the intended and expected quality of the outcome.

PM is recognized as one of the pillars for OE [2, 5, 6]. On the evidence of the discussed WFMC, it has become transparent that organizations cannot achieve excellence if WFMC is not established and does not function effectively and efficiently to produce quality bound outcomes. WFMC is an execution of PM tasks—design, control, monitoring of workflow processes, and workflow promotion of process-related learning in organizations. Therefore, OE is perceived as a means to a quality outcome. It depends on the successful implementation of PM from a mechanistic perspective. **Figure 2** below captures the process.

Figure 2 above, presents the relationship between PM and OE which leads to quality of service or product. However, the effectiveness of PM depends on three conditions namely conceptualization and operationalization of PM, and the context

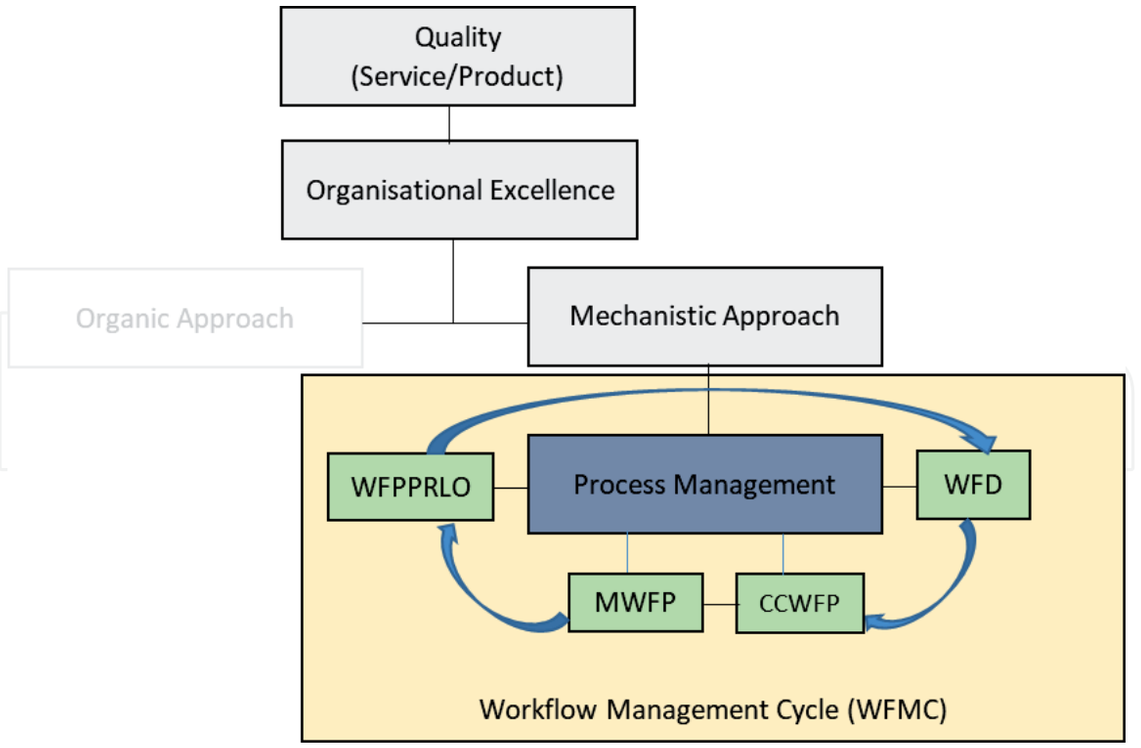

Figure 2.
An integration of PM and OE.

in which PM is implemented [54]. These conditions determine when and how PM may have a stronger or weaker impact on OE.

4.1 Conceptualization and operationalization

Conceptualization and operationalization of PM encompass how formal, participatory and comprehensive PM has been defined and established. PM is a formal process because it incorporates and promotes a systematic way (e.g. thinking, doing, and applying) to reaching a possible outcome. This is bureaucracy by excellence [55–59]. It is participatory because it encompasses the involvement of all stakeholders (e.g. the superior and subordinate) in the process, therefore consistent with the theory of management by objectives [60–62]. The comprehensiveness refers to how aligned both employees and the management are. It emerges as a result of PM formality and the participation of the stakeholders in the process. Our first three propositions reflect the impact of these the integration facilitating factors between PM and OE:

P1: Formalized processes in organizations are most likely to be managed with efficiency and effectiveness for establishing a systematic way of completing tasks (doing things).

P2: Organizations that involve all the stakeholders (i.e. employees and the management) in the design and operationalization of processes are most likely to achieve success in formalizing processes.

P3: Unless all the stakeholders (i.e. employees and the management) are involved in the conceptualization and operationalization of processes, it would prove challenging to share a common understanding and comprehend the workflow management cycle.

Therefore, it becomes evident that the conceptualization and operationalization of PM help align the understanding of the workflow management cycle following the involvement of all the stakeholders. Consequently, processes will

be engineered and run with efficiency and effectiveness because they have been formalized. When they have been designed to show conformance to standards such as ISO 9001, ISO 14001, and OSHAS 18001 in particular, formalized processes establish consistency in performance and results saving time and money to organizations [63–66].

4.2 Context

The context encompasses the management and administration of public and private organizations in both developed and developing countries. A school of thoughts advances that distinctions between public, private, and non-profit become confusing and misleading because of diverse sets of management settings involved in them [67].

However, practitioners and a growing number of scholars joined Harvard Business School Joseph L. Bower in distinguishing that public management and administration entails dealing with the needs and interests of a nation as a whole [68, 69]. Private management and administration, on the other side, focus on the needs and interests of individuals or a narrower group of people. **Table 1** below illustrates the difference.

Significantly, the difference lies in values. While public management and administration value amongst others sustainability by trying to balance public interest, public needs, and political interests [70]. Private management and administration values promote business profit by focusing on "risk-taking", "customer focus", and "bottom-line orientation" [71, 72].

It is argued that both public and private management and administration in developed countries yield better results than in developing countries. In fact, one of the common characteristics of developing nations is the struggle portrayed in matching the level of results produced by developed nations as far as public management and administration is concerned. Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa are an example of such characteristics. They lag very much behind developed nations in ensuring that everyone benefits equally from provided goods and services such as mail service, public health services, schooling, and highway systems to mention but a few. In the light of the above, the last three propositions read.

P4: Effective management of organizational processes helps generate outputs equal to or beyond the expectations of stakeholders.

P5: Values promoted in either public or private sectors influence the conceptualization and operationalization of organizational processes towards effective management.

P6: Developed and developing country contexts are separated by the ways in which both contexts approach and associate values to organizational process management.

A well-established and functioning PM promotes an organizational culture of excellence. The opposite destroys trust with employees and reduces their commitment and creativity—resulting in lost profits and lowered productivity [73].

Public management	Private management
Entails dealing with and controlling the needs and interests of the whole as a nation	Focuses on narrower needs and interests of an individual or particular groups

Table 1.
The difference between public and private management and administration.

5. Actions steps

1. Establish firm's strategic plan involving all the stakeholders aiming to earn the trust and commitment of all [74, 75];

2. Conceptualize and operationalize a business workflow with the involvement of all the stakeholders aiming to improve firm productivity and profitability [76];

3. Adopt and adapt to context without losing own identity and culture [77].

6. Implications of the study

In addressing the importance of PM as a requirement for OE in the twenty-first century business environment, this study makes five meaningful contributions:

1. It defines OE within the context of the twenty-first century business environment and its challenges: OE acknowledges both the organic and mechanistic approaches. Focus, however, was on the mechanistic approach (PM). This must be verified at every type of business and organization;

2. It identifies and discusses the tasks of PM within the context of the twenty-first century business environment and its challenges;

3. It clarifies the integration facilitating factor between PM and OE: Each factor plays a significant role to the degree that it seeks to facilitate the integration between PM and OE;

4. It suggests six propositions associated with PM and OE: in framing these propositions, the study identifies the importance of individuals and organizations carefully re-evaluating their missions, choices, and responsibilities;

5. It establishes three actions steps for PM that promote OE: Although many organizations are outstanding examples of OE, each organization and individual has the responsibility to assess their own choices with regard to PM to identify how they can raise the bar for themselves in honoring their obligation to achieve excellence.

Each of these practical implications has value as organizations and businesses seek to achieve excellence, which will result in the trust, followership, commitment, and extra-role behavior of their employees [78].

7. Conclusion

One of the challenges of the twenty-first century business environment is the Covid-19 pandemic. Its consequences have shaped a new business environment requiring excellence in the way in which businesses are conducted. Process management (PM) is identified as a requirement for organizational excellence (OE).

The purpose of the study was to examine the importance of process management as a requirement for organizational excellence. Six testable propositions about process management that addressed the nature of process management and organizational excellence were formulated. Opportunities for future research abound

in testing the elements and propositions of this study. Each of the propositions suggests measurable elements of PM and OE that have practical implications for modern organizations.

As organizations and businesses struggle to find their feet in order to earn and retain the trust of those whom they seek to lead and to serve, they require wisdom, experience, and a broad range of skills that are important to understand and establish PM that promotes OE [79]. As scholars and practitioners work together to examine the propositions of this study, they have the opportunity to confirm or disconfirm the validity of the assumptions and ideas contained herein.

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