Get up to speed with **BPMN**

The Business Process Model & Notation (BPMN) standard is a popular approach used by many organizations. At first glance it may appear to have similarities with other approaches, yet it is a rich and nuanced notation.

In this article we briefl y discuss some practical ways of getting up to speed and learning BPMN.

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If you have done any form of process modeling in the last few years, you may well have heard of BPMN. The 'Business Process Model & Notation' (BPMN) standard is maintained by the Object Management Group (OMG) and is increasingly being adopted by organizations that typically use it as an internal process modeling standard.

At its core, BPMN aims to provide a standard that is precise enough to specify how a process can be executed, whilst simultaneously enabling 'views' of a process to be created that senior business stakeholders can engage with. This aim is outlined at the very beginning of the BPMN specification:

"The primary goal of BPMN is to provide a notation that is readily understandable by all business users, from the business analysts that create the initial drafts of the processes, to the technical developers responsible for implementing the technology that will perform those processes, and finally, to the business people who will manage and monitor those processes."
OMG, 2011, p.1

Yet if you are new to BPMN, it can seem anything but simple. The visual notation provides us with a rich variety of event types, and there are even different types of BPMN diagrams that we can use. The BPMN specification itself provides rich information, but it is rather a 'dry' read and may prove difficult to follow for those practitioners wanting to get up to speed with the approach itself. So how can we get to grips with BPMN?

Build on your Existing Knowledge: Classroom based or E-learning

One key thing to keep in mind, if you are already familiar with other process modeling notations, is that there will be some elements of commonality between the approach you use now and BPMN. Just about every process modeling approach has the concept of start events, sequence flow, tasks/activities, gateways/branching, and end-events. These logical principles exist in BPMN too, although there are many nuances that can be added to them.

If you are familiar with other modeling notations, you'll have a head-start, but it may take you some time to get familiar with some of the elements of BPMN that are different (it is these elements that make BPMN so flexible and powerful). In particular, those new to BPMN often need some assistance in shifting towards using 'pools' and differentiating between 'sequence flow' and 'message flow'.

For this reason, if you are serious about getting up to speed with BPMN, it is worth investing in the relevant training. This could be classroom based, where you'll have the chance to practice case-study material during the class. Alternatively, you could choose an on-line e-learning provider (such as Good e-Learning) where you can run the training on-demand, whenever suits you. e-Learning has the advantage that you can 're-play' modules if you need a refresher, and this is perfect for practitioners who are applying the techniques to a real-world

situation. You can watch the theory, practice it, and then go back and re-watch it if you need further information for a particular project.

Deliberate Practice: Keep a Reference at your Side

It has to be said, however, that most detailed learning happens 'in the field', in response to real business situations. However you learn BPMN, it is important to be able to take the knowledge away and apply it to the processes that you're modeling in the real world. You will undoubtedly find this raises additional questions, reflections and learning. For this reason, it is well worth compiling a reference guide and a set of notes as you start to use BPMN.

If you have purchased an e-learning package, you might refer back to it, and make additional notes. You might even browse blogs such as this one, picking up ideas and tips, logging these down in your journal. Having the opportunity to model 'real world' processes of increasing complexity help us refine and sharpen our knowledge Once you reach mastery, you might even consider teaching BPMN to your colleagues (a real test of applied knowledge is to train the skill to others!)

In conclusion: BPMN is a commonly used standard which seeks to connect business and technical people. It is different from other approaches, and it takes time to become familiar with. Investing in relevant training (whether classroom based or e-learning) will be money well-spent, particularly when combined with a commitment to use the skills on real-world business processes.

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