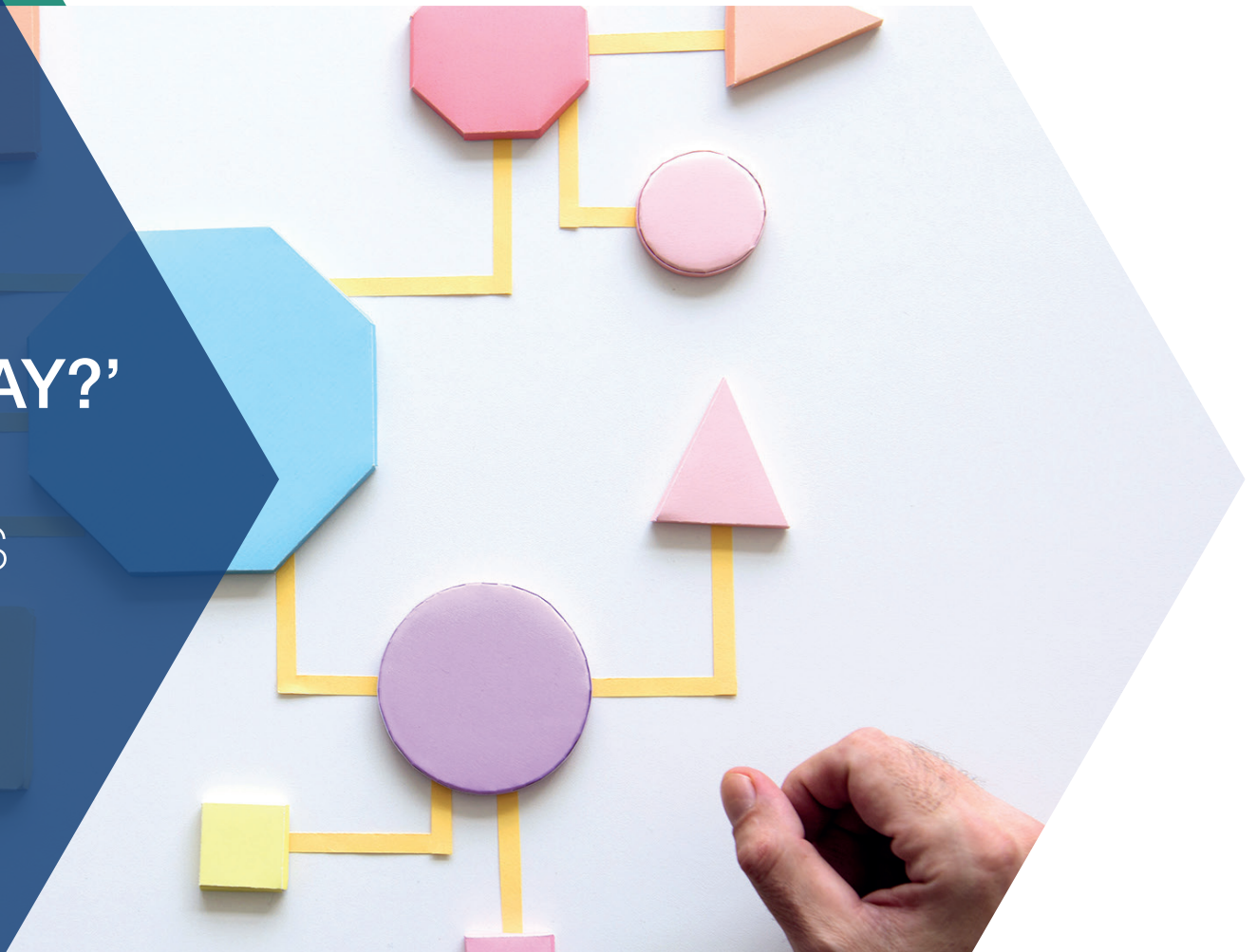


‘WHAT IS A PROCESS ANYWAY?’

GAINING BUY-IN ON PROCESS INITIATIVES

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INTRODUCTION



Any type of initiative that involves modeling, managing or improving a business process will require the involvement and buy-in of a range of stakeholders. To truly understand a process it is important to liaise with representatives from the various teams that are involved, and it's important to gain an understanding of the process' core

objectives from the perspective of both the organization and the customer. This will include liaising with managers and team leaders as well as the 'process operators' who actually undertake the work. This can be a very diverse range of stakeholders, each of whom has a different perspective on the process. It can sometimes feel like we are piecing together a puzzle, with each stakeholder holding a different piece. In order to ensure we create processes that are as efficient and effective as possible it is crucial that we make sure we look at each of these pieces of the puzzle.

Yet, in some cases it can be a challenge to get the level of engagement that we need. Operational stakeholders are often very busy with their 'day job', and might find it difficult to make time to discuss process related issues. This is particularly the case when the existing process is ineffective and problematic. Ineffective processes often generate a high level of 'failure demand' such as defects, errors or complaints – meaning that the 'work' has to be done multiple times. This can lead to process stakeholders feeling overloaded, or like they are in constant 'crisis' or 'fire-fighting' mode. In these circumstances, with so much work to attend to, attending a 'process mapping' workshop may not be on the top of their list of priorities – even though improving the process would (in the long term) reduce their workload by fixing the systemic issues that are occurring. Without the detailed knowledge and insight that they possess it will be difficult for us to proceed, so how can we engage and involve them? How can we convince them that time spent working on a process initiative will be time well spent?

A decorative graphic featuring a large dark blue hexagon with a green border. Inside the hexagon is a quote in white text. Surrounding the hexagon are various other geometric shapes in pink, orange, and light blue, connected by yellow lines, resembling a puzzle or a network diagram.

“It can sometimes feel like we are piecing together a puzzle, with each stakeholder holding a different piece.”

CREATING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

WHAT IS A PROCESS?

An important first step is to spend time building rapport and explaining the nature, scope and purpose of the process modeling and improvement activity. As analysts, it is easy for us to implicitly assume that it is obvious why we should be improving processes – after all we work on these types of initiative every day. Many stakeholders will share this intuition, but some will not and we should not assume that there is a common understanding of our objectives. Indeed, in some cases we might find that there is an element of fear amongst the stakeholder community. If we put ourselves in our stakeholders' shoes it is easy to imagine why. If an 'analyst' or 'consultant' appears at your desk and starts to ask you about how you do your job and why certain tasks are undertaken it would be very easy to assume that the objective is complete automation, leading to every member of staff being made redundant! Yet, it is more likely that we are looking to relieve the load on busy members of staff, making their lives easier and giving them additional time to focus on more valuable activities. If this is the case it's important that we convey this message early, to ensure that everyone is on the same page and any concerns are addressed.

One practical consideration that we should keep in mind is that not everyone will have the same understanding of the term 'business process'. The word 'process' is used a lot in organizations by different people in many different contexts. Some people might think it relates to work that is processed through some kind of IT or automated tool. Others might initially feel that only work that is initiated within their area is worth mentioning. Yet it is likely that our area of interest will be much broader, and it can be valuable

to spend a short time outlining what we mean by 'process' to ensure that everyone is on the same page. This only needs to take a couple of minutes at the very beginning of a one-to-one meeting or workshop, or can even be done in a meeting invite or briefing note.

Of course it is difficult to arrive at a succinct definition of 'process' as the term is so broad. A useful resource is the Business Process Model & Notation (BPMN) formal specification, which defines a business process as:

“

A defined set of business activities that represent the steps required to achieve a business objective. It includes the flow and use of information and resources.

(OMG, 2011)

”

We could perhaps add to this that a process tends to be repeatable, can span departments/areas and that when undertaking process analysis we are typically interested in the end-to-end view rather than focusing on any individual team's work. We should also take time to elaborate on the specific process or processes that are in the scope of the work.

SHARING “THE WHY”

Another key element that will help drive buy-in is a shared understanding of why the work is being undertaken. If there isn't a shared understanding of the objectives of the initiative, then there is a danger that activities may start to 'drift' in different directions. Imagine that some stakeholders thought the objectives were solely related to “reducing costs” and others thought that the objectives were solely related to “improving service”. It is quite possible that completely contradictory ‘improvements’ will be made! Those seeking purely to improve service may increase costs, perhaps by providing a more luxurious experience. Those seeking purely to cut costs may reduce the quality of service. In reality the aim may have been to balance both – and if this is the case it is important that those involved are aware.

It can also be useful to share the objectives in a written, as well as verbal, form. This allows people to reflect and refer back to them. Team managers may also use these when briefing their own staff, so it helps create a consistency of message. Having a succinct ‘problem statement’ or ‘purpose statement’ outlining the initiative can be hugely beneficial here. In fact, the activity of putting together a problem or purpose statement often uncovers subtly different views amongst those involved in running the initiative. It is important that these types of issues are reconciled early, so that they do not derail further work.

Two possible examples using a fairly standard problem statement format for different initiatives follow:



The problem of	Undocumented and unmanaged processes
Is affecting	Our staff (who have no guidance for their work) and our customers (who receive good but inconsistent service)
The impact of which is	Complaints due to inconsistent service, backlogs, stressed team members and an inability to easily train new staff
A successful solution would	Ensure that we have an up-to-date modeled and managed set of processes, that staff are aware of how each process works, and that everyone has the ability to raise and ‘own’ process improvement ideas.

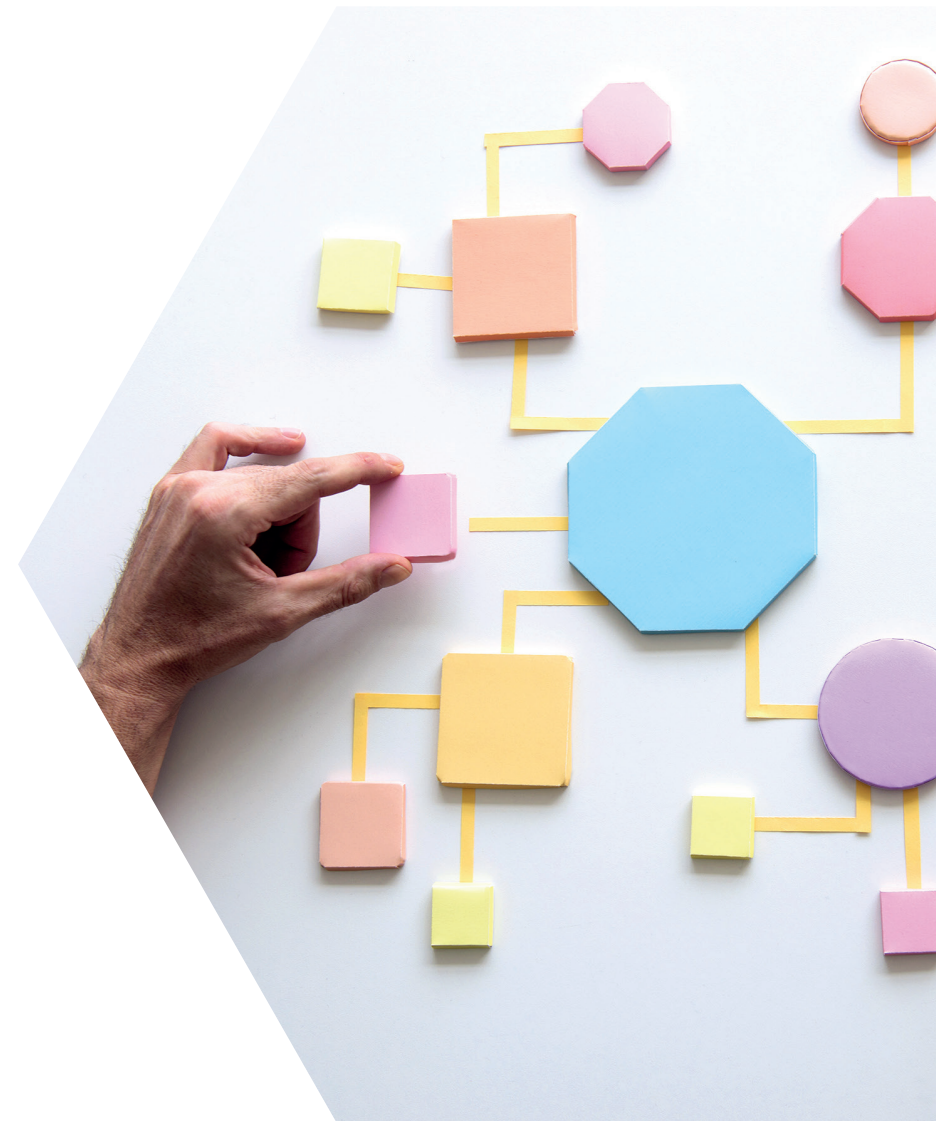
Figure 1: Example of a general problem statement for a process modeling/management initiative.
Problem statement format adapted from BABOK® v2

SHARING “THE WHY” (CONT...)

The problem of	An inability for our production process to meet the demand of our sales process
Is affecting	Our production staff (who are working extremely long hours), our sales staff (who are fielding complaints from customers) and our customers (who are waiting longer for their products)
The impact of which is	An increase in complaints, refund requests and the risk of reputational damage
A successful solution would	Increase the capacity of production whilst maintaining our high level of quality, enabling production to scale up (and down) with customer demand

Figure 2: Example of a problem statement for a production capacity problem. Problem statement format adapted from BABOK® v2

These types of succinct, concise yet precise statements act as a useful ‘guiding beacon’ throughout the initiative. As people start discussing processes it is natural that they will discover many possible improvement opportunities – many of which will be directly relevant to the work in hand and should be progressed. However, some ideas may be out of the scope or might even contradict it. A problem statement can help ensure people stay on track, and any other ideas are re-routed for consideration elsewhere as needed.




ADDRESSING THE FEAR

As mentioned earlier, there is always a danger that there may be an element of fear amongst some stakeholders when it comes to process modeling and improvement initiatives. This fear is often related to worries about job security, or fear of a fundamental change to the work or working environment. In some cases these things might be genuine possibilities – in which case it is important that we are honest and up-front (typically with a briefing being issued by a senior executive as to the scope and scale of the possible changes). However, in many more cases these things are not being considered and it is important that we ensure that those involved are aware.

Setting out the objectives of the projects with a problem or purpose statement is an important starting point, but we should ensure that we are empathetic to our stakeholders at all times. We should try and 'put ourselves in their shoes', taking time to understand and answer any queries

that they might have. Let's imagine we were planning some observation sessions where we will spend a few hours observing how the work is undertaken in a call center (whilst listening in on the calls). We could probably quite legitimately do this by consulting with the call center manager (and, if relevant, union representative). Yet there is always a danger that the call center manager might not have time to fully brief those being observed. Therefore, we should spend time explaining who we are and why we are there. It is often important to explain that we are not assessing any quality metrics, we are not there to rate, rank or criticize the team in any way – and that we want to see how the work is genuinely carried out. It can help to ask the subject to highlight any particular 'pain points' – often those who are closest to the customer have many ideas for improvement based on their extensive process experience.

Building rapport in this way is important as it will make it much more likely that we see how the work is actually undertaken, rather than seeing people conduct 'textbook' work (as they fear we are there to check their compliance against a 'standard').

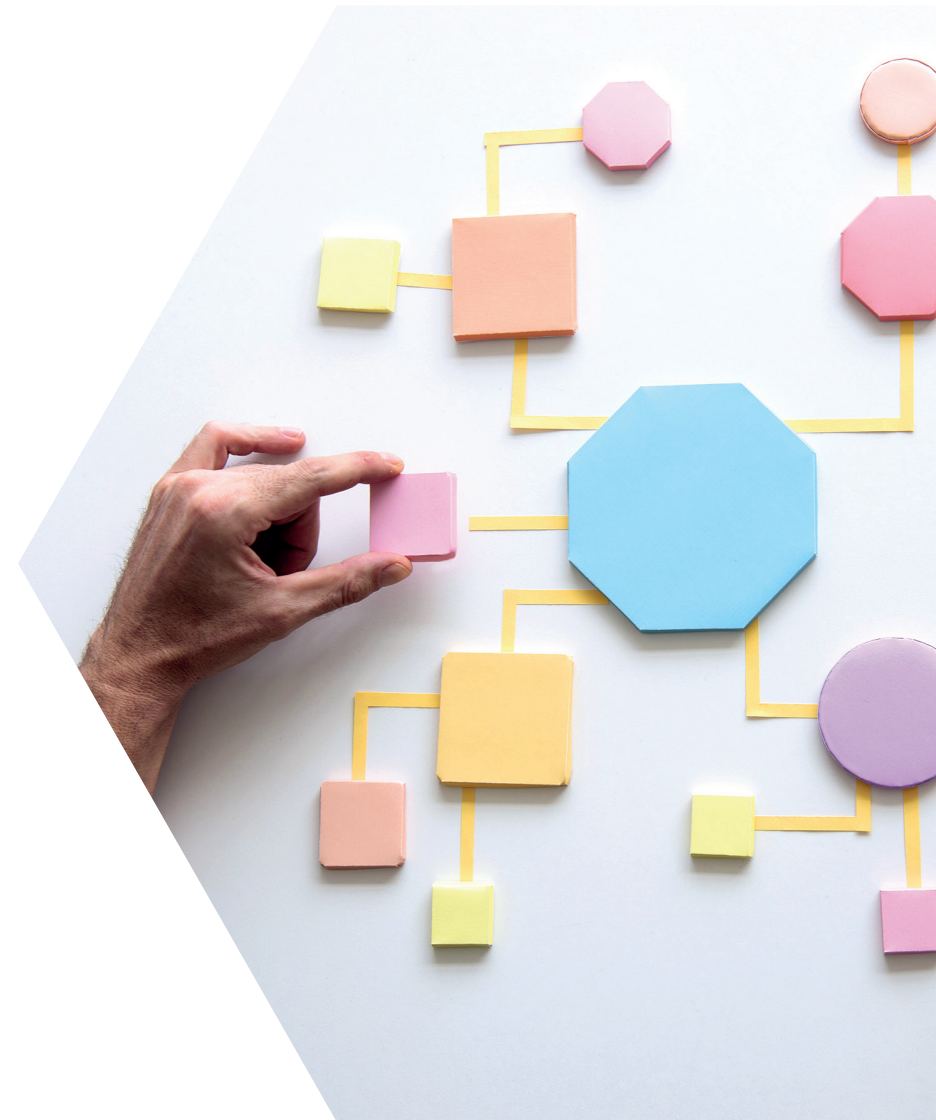


“Setting out the objectives of the projects with a problem or purpose statement is an important starting point, but we should ensure that we are empathetic to our stakeholders at all times.”

WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM?

Another important element to consider when seeking to build engagement and buy-in is to consider what's in it for them? Having an objective to 'cut costs' may excite managers and executive stakeholders, but those involved with the work are unlikely to have direct visibility of the finances, and may or may not be motivated by a general desire to cut costs. However, it is likely that there will be benefits for them too. Imagine a situation where customers of a mail-order retailer are complaining as parcels are regularly reaching them late and damaged. This is leading to expensive 'failure demand', since new products have to be sent to them. The sales and service staff that handle these queries are likely frustrated, as it feels like they are forever 'fire-fighting'. Dealing with returns may clog up the phone lines, meaning that they can spend less time helping other customers who are wanting to place an order. So to these staff, the benefit may be "less stress, and more time focusing on more rewarding work".

Different types of stakeholders will value different things, and it is important that we consider the initiative from the perspective of each group. This will ensure that we can be targeted with our communication, outlining the initiative in a way that is meaningful for them.



HELPING PEOPLE 'ZOOM OUT'

Another great opportunity that we have when progressing process modeling, management and improvement opportunities is to help those involved to see beyond any organizational silos that exist – to help them 'zoom out'. In a retail call center for example, call center agents may explain that there is always a problematic 'peak' of calls at the beginning of the month, with customers ringing to redeem special offers. It might be found that this is due to the scheduling of marketing activity tending to focus on particular days – and once the impact is known it may be possible to adapt. Small decisions in one department can have a significant knock-on impact in others. Building in opportunities for feedback to flow – both formally and informally – between teams, processes and silos will help set the scene for continuing improvement. This is illustrated conceptually in the diagrams below:

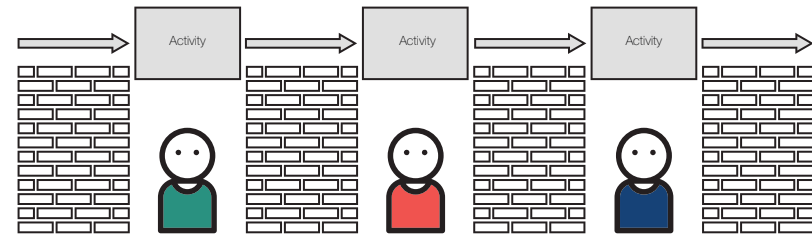


Figure 3: Stakeholders in 'silos' will see mainly their own activities and priorities

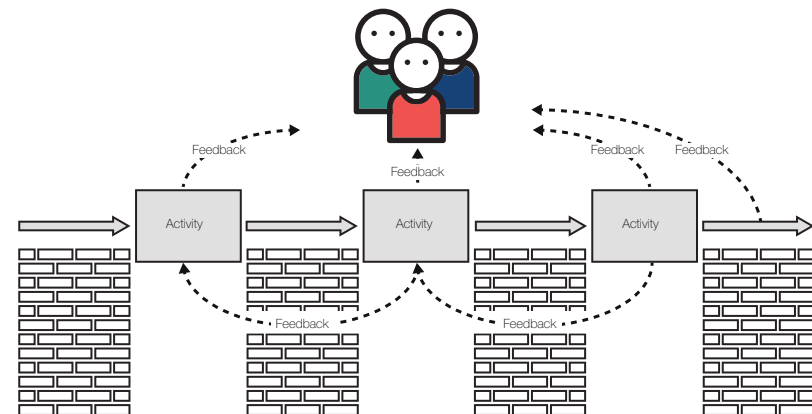


Figure 4: "Zooming out" helps people see more of the process, and helps people see each other's perspectives.

“ Small decisions in one department can have a significant knock-on impact in others. ”


Utilizing a shared process modeling notation such as BPMN, which allows a single model to be presented differently to different stakeholders, can be helpful here. Having a shared model in a common repository will allow people to have conversations about the end-to-end process, and discuss how problems can be solved and improvements can be made.

ADDRESSING THE FEAR

Finally, it is worth highlighting that stakeholder relationships tend to grow over time. Process analysis and improvement is often seen as a ‘technical’ skillset, yet the human side is of paramount importance. Our credibility with our stakeholder community grows as we co-create valuable change, and it is important that we continually engage. Stakeholder engagement is not a one-off activity!

SUMMARY

In summary, process modeling, improvement and management can be tricky areas but they can be extremely beneficial when undertaken well. Good stakeholder engagement is crucial as this will help ensure that we uncover a true picture of the process. It is possible that different stakeholders will have a different understanding of the word ‘process’, so starting with a concise definition can ensure that we start on the same page. A purpose or problem statement can be a useful tool for conveying the reasons that the initiative is taking place. It’s important that we build rapport and address any fear that may exist, and that we acknowledge that relationships and credibility are built over time. Blending our ‘technical’ process analysis skills with our ‘human’ interpersonal skills will help us achieve successful outcomes.



“...process modeling, improvement and management can be tricky areas but they can be extremely beneficial when undertaken well.”

REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

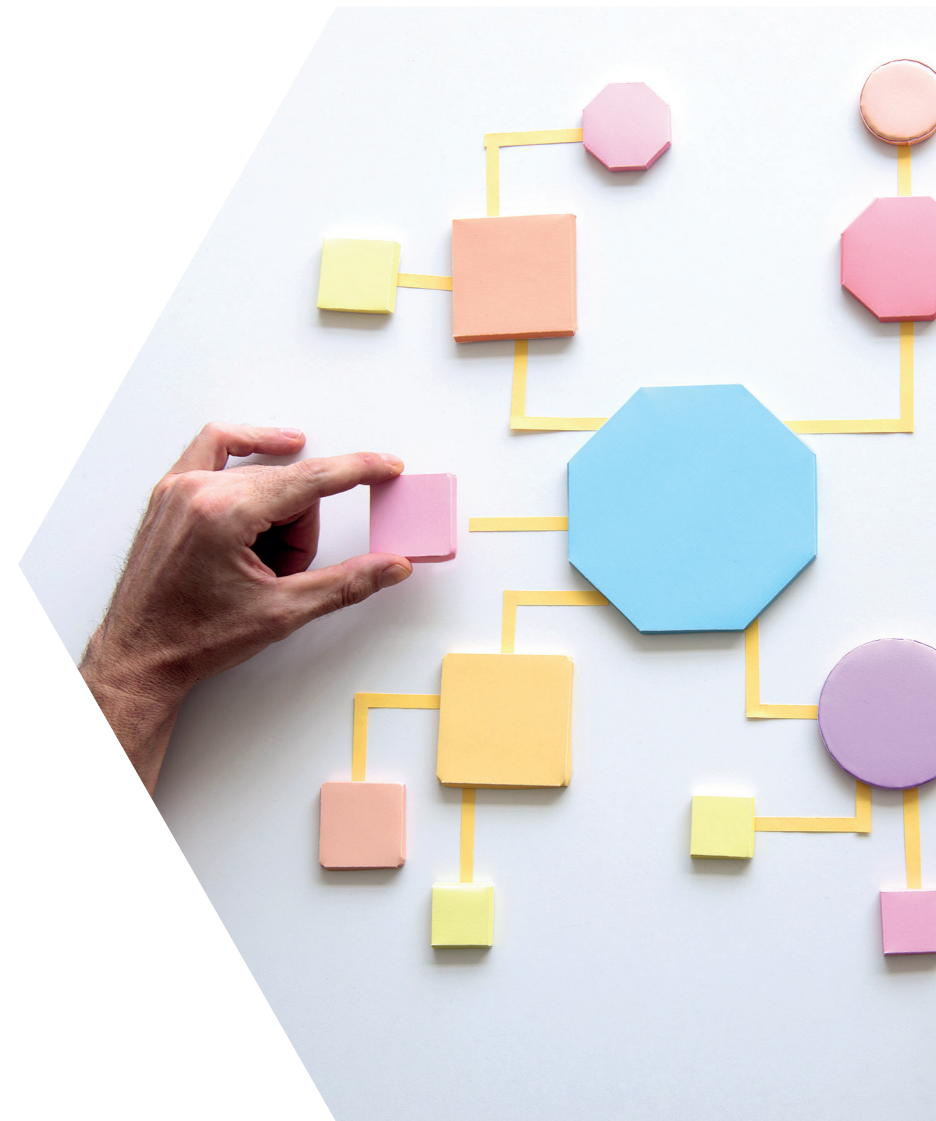
Readers interested in the topics discussed in this e-book may find the following resources useful:

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IIBA®, (2015). Guide to the business analysis body of knowledge v3.
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OMG (2011), Business Process Model and Notation (BPMN) Version 2.0.
. [Online] OMG. Available at: <http://www.omg.org/spec/BPMN/2.0/>





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