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Business Process Management (BPM) is Integral and Essential to Anti-Corruption Programs

by Robert E. Ross

Corruption sees no boundaries. Corruption is a universal evil and an immoral menace to society. Over 140 countries have recognized the criminal nature of corruption as evidenced by their signatory to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). The conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan, for example, and the constant struggles and distractions among political parties, law enforcement agencies, religious factions, and governmental leaders have allowed corruption to expand unchecked and unchallenged. When one thinks of corruption, one may not think about internal and external process efficiency and the use of reported Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or metrics as critically important. And yet, establishing the appropriate organizational Business Process Management (BPM) foundation and integrated control principles is critical to unearthing, exposing, and preventing corruption in public and private sector entities.

Most countries and their respective inherent cultural heritage face the same ongoing challenges, whether in a post-conflict state or functioning in a seemingly stable environment. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private sector entities, concerned citizens, and governmental resources eagerly strive to address corruption and improve the delivery of services by government ministries, agencies, and organizations to citizens in all areas, especially health services, pharmaceutical distribution, and basic utilities. Combating unfairness, social inequities, waste, fraud, abuse, and poor service delivery are inherent in anti-corruption programs. Administrative and operational processes are at the heart and nerve center of any organization.

The World Bank, United Nations, African Union, Asian Development Bank, and Council of Europe among many other international organizations, as well as numerous state



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sponsored aid programs have invested incredible amounts of time and money to combat corruption. Most people hear the word corruption and conjure up the images of bribery, embezzlement, or trading in influence. Corruption also includes process inefficiencies and poor administrative and operational performance, not just waste, fraud, and abuse as the usual suspects. Unnecessary delays in distributing critical pharmaceuticals to hospitals and clinics, for example; a charity in which only 10% of donations make it to the intended beneficiaries, while 90% go to office space, furniture, salaries, and entertainment; or a government agency that takes 45 days to accomplish a series of tasks when it should really require only 14 days should be targets of anti-corruption programs. Whatever the label, these behaviors aren't right, and they can – and should – be fixed. Conventional approaches to fighting corruption involves several fronts:

- Legislative frameworks and new laws
- Attorneys General or Inspectors General investigations
- Judicial enforcement of the rule of law
- Criminal Prosecution of individuals and organizations
- Education and awareness campaigns
- Internal audits of transactions and communications

Clearly, multiple fronts are necessary to affect change. Achieving results requires a coordinated effort on all fronts. Certainly, the legislative process, investigations, audits, and judicial actions are critically important to combatting corruption but these are not taken in a preventive way. Clearly, these responses are necessary longer term tactics. Business Process Management (BPM) introduces preventive measures to monitor activities and mitigate the exploitation of “nodes of corruption,” which are potentially embedded within administrative and operational processes. Changes in organizational structure and responsibility require change in the process, which are then affecting the organizational alignment. BPM offers opportunities for change in both areas.

BPM includes comprehensive process analysis, (documentation of the relationships among organizational units, activities, and information), process design (strategy to move from an inefficient “current state” to an effective “future state”), and process implementation (application of disciplined work flows and monitoring and reporting performance). BPM is a unique structured methodology, a consistent approach to change, and a uniform roadmap to operational and administrative efficiency. Using this BPM framework, one can discover and improve internal control choke points to expose and mitigate the risks associated with potential “nodes of corruption”. We can also incorporate Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and standard metrics into the process construct to provide transparency at the transaction level and enable early warnings of potential malfeasance.

BPM is not only valuable for governmental operational and administrative process execution, it is also beneficial for improving efficiencies within the private sector. Transparency of activities entrenched within process execution enables monitoring and reporting of potentially corrupt practices, procedural breakdowns, regulatory violations, and unethical behavior. A close look at the integral role BPM in combatting the plague of corruption in its nefarious shapes and forms should be taken by leaders in both public and private sectors.



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