

# It's Not Rocket Science

It's not rocket science, yet many organizations fail to address it. It takes time and energy, but the answers are openly available. It's the most important component of every automation initiative. So why is "it" usually ignored until problems arise?

Day-to-day business processes serve as arteries to carry the lifeblood (data and information) of an organization. Regardless, if these business processes are efficient, inefficient, effective, ineffective, boring or exciting (rarely are they ever exciting), they are the foundation required for all companies to function; yet they are often ignored.

Business processes are predefined paths that have been created, either intentionally or unintentionally, to accomplish various tasks within an organization. It has been my experience that most companies "think" they know their respective business processes but they are seldom documented.

## On the 'Must' List

Documenting business processes is a critical exercise required for any company planning to:

- ▶ Automate
- ▶ Reorganize personnel and/or functional account abilities
- ▶ Improve business performance
- ▶ Spin off or sell a business
- ▶ Effectively measure personnel performance
- ▶ Meet increasingly rigorous business audits
- ▶ Reduce general and administrative expenses



**David Waters** is a senior consultant with Gerke & Associates. He has more than 25 years of business experience, and 19 within information technology. He can be reached at (630) 530-4509 or by e-mail at [dwaters@gerke.com](mailto:dwaters@gerke.com).

The reason many organizations fail to sufficiently address and document their business processes is because they "think" everyone within the organization understands these processes. I find most company personnel have a general or high level understanding of certain business process flows, and a few personnel know specific details of a few business processes, but seldom do all personnel have the same understanding of any one process.

The \$50,000 question is: How can a company automate, evaluate, measure, or improve its business without a common understanding of business processes?

Be careful not to assume processes are correct, or that people understand the processes or have a common understanding. Business processes evolve over time. Processes change, personnel changes and companies change. It would be foolish for a doctor to operate on a patient without understanding the patient's current condition and medical history. Yet many companies operate on their respective businesses without assessing current conditions of internal processes and without understanding its history.

## Instant Gratification

It is prudent for a company to spend the necessary time and money to continually update its business process documentation. The benefits derived from the "documentation exercise" will be seen immediately. Comments such as, "I didn't know we could do that" and "We agreed to stop doing that a long time ago," to questions such as "Why are we handling that invoice three times instead of just one time?" and "If we changed this process just a little couldn't we save time and money?" will be heard. An automation initiative always works better if business processes are documented and understood upfront. Similarly, evaluating, measuring, reorganizing and improving your business will also be easier and more accurate.

Remember the \$50,000 question? How can a company automate, evaluate, measure or improve its business without a common understanding of business processes?

It can't! (And that's my final answer.) ■

