PROCESS CHECKLIST

It may not be easy to decide on what to consider as a business process. A chunk of work that is frequently repeated might not be a business process on its own. To prevent poor scoping decisions, it is useful to consider the following *process checklist*:

Is it a process at all? Not everything we can observe in a business context is a process. A department, for example, is not a process. Neither is a manager or email.
For any *proper* process it must be possible to identify the *main action*, which is applied to a *category of cases*.
For example, we can identify the business process *approve—leave requests*.

Note how this name is of the form *verb* + *noun*. We can also test how appropriate the name is by considering whether the process outcome is of the form *noun* + *past participle*. For our example, completed cases are indeed *leave requests* that have been *approved*.

Can the process be controlled? Something that is ongoing or active may resemble a process, while it is not. A proper way of looking at business processes is to see them as a repetitive series of events and activities to execute individually observable *cases*. In an insurance business process, cases may be the applications for healthcare coverage that flow through the process. Each application is clearly distinguishable from another. Without a clear case notion, process management is not feasible. Consider how difficult it would be to identify cases for false process candidates like *Human Resource Management* or *Strategy*. Also, without any sense of repetition, a group of business activities may better qualify as a *project* than as a business process. A case in point would be the Mars Orbiter Mission, which is a unique endeavor—not a business process, considering the currently scarce space trips to Mars.

Is the process important enough to manage? Some processes do not even reach the minimum threshold to be considered as such. Clear indications for at least a modest importance of a process are that:
(a) there is a customer who is willing to pay for its outcomes,
(b) the organization that carries out the process would—in principle—be willing to pay another party for taking over, or
(c) there is a legal, mandatory framework that compels an organization to execute it.

Is the scope of the process not too big? Care should be taken that the activities that are considered to be within the scope of the process really contribute to its purpose. A good check for this is to determine whether there is a 1:1 relation between the event that initiates the process and each of the activities that are thought to be in scope. For example, let us consider a candidate make-to-order process like *manufacture bikes*.

Even though it is important to *clean the work floor* for a bike factory, such an activity does not relate on a 1:1 basis to a bike manufacturing order. Rather, cleaning may take place periodically, such as at the end of the day. In other words, cleaning the work floor should not be part of this process (but it may be part of another process of course).

Is the scope of the process not too small? One can sometimes come across *micro* business processes, which are not worth managing as processes at all. A rule of thumb is that for something to be a business process, there should be at least three different actors—*excluding* the customer—involved. If there are no handoffs between multiple actors or systems, there is little that can be improved using BPM methods.