



Altus

clear thinking for Financial Services

Process Discovery

It may be essential to success, but technology is rarely the real driver of Financial Services projects; that honour goes to business process. There is a growing trend to drive IT delivery via the process route in the guise of Service Oriented Architectures (SOA) and Business Process Management (BPM). However, acknowledging that process is the motor of your business is not enough; you need to know what the key processes are and how they fit together.

It may sound simple but developing a complete, consistent and integrated picture of what an organisation actually does is surprisingly easy to get wrong. That's why Altus has devised a reliable, repeatable and non-technical procedure for laying this essential foundation. We call it Process Discovery.



The Issue

It's tempting to draw the corporate process picture simply by asking each department what they do then combining the answers into one big list before getting started on the 'real' job of modelling the detail. If you do, chances are it won't be long before you start to encounter a few common problems: overlaps between some processes, gaps between others, processes that turn out to be part of something bigger, and quite likely some processes that everyone just forgot to mention.

All these are symptomatic of a bottom-up, departmental view of the enterprise. Individuals see a process from their own perspective and focus on the bits that are key to their performance so it should come as no surprise that this approach to process discovery yields fragmented and incomplete results. But there is an alternative.

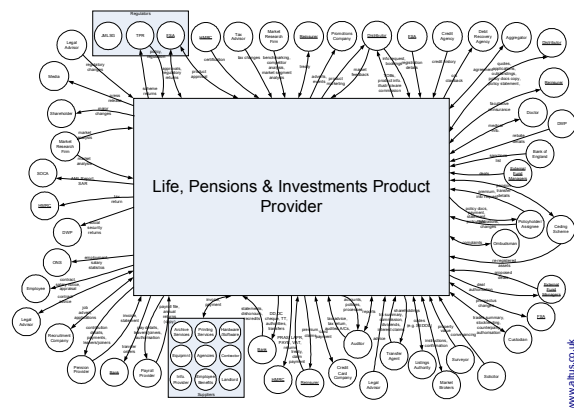
The Altus Approach

At Altus we take a top-down view of an enterprise, identifying all the parties involved, charting the ways in which data flows and how it's transformed in the process. The result is a clear, logical process hierarchy which you can be confident covers the entire business.

We begin by clarifying the scope; our method can be applied to an entire business or to selected parts of it. We can either reuse or generate business structure charts to complete this phase.

Next we identify key domain experts from all relevant parts of the business; these should be individuals who know how the business operates and not necessarily the obvious names on the organisation chart (though this is usually a good starting point).

Example Context Model



The entire process is then workshop-led; in our experience this is the best way to get a cross-functional view of process and to see the big picture. Not only that, all the participants walk away with a much clearer understanding of that picture – often with unexpected and immediate benefits for the business.

The workshops themselves are driven by an exploration of the way data flows into, out of and within an enterprise – starting from all the external parties with which it interacts. Essentially the business is treated as a black box which exists to transform the data coming in, into the information flowing out; a business process is what happens in between.

Identifying the start and the end is generally recognised as an essential first step in modelling any particular process but our approach goes further than that by using the identification of triggers and terminators to scope and structure the processes that define a business from the outset. Using a combination of experience and interview we link a series of flows together to produce an outline for each end-to-end process.

The Altus Approach (cont.)

Having identified what the main business processes are at an elementary level, the icing on the cake is to group them and produce a clear summary picture which can be easily understood by a wide audience, connects to other architectural models and can support further process-based initiatives.

We have no fixed rule for what this picture should look like; depending on the focus in a particular organisation, it may be most helpful to organise this around, for example, organisation structure, value chains or even the external parties who are served by a process. What is more important is that the set of end-to-end processes is complete.

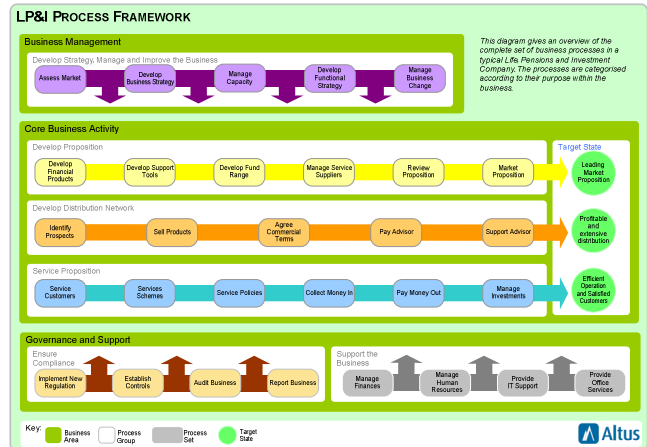
The Deliverables

The tangible results of this work are:

- Business Structure Model – a hierarchy of traditional organisation charts depicting the main business entities.
- Context Model – showing your business as a black box together with all the major flows of information into and out of it.
- Process Hierarchy – a structured list of all processes and sub-processes together with brief descriptions, triggers and terminators, intermediary flows and the key business roles involved.

The Context Model helps visualise the business (many people’s preferred method of learning) while the Process Hierarchy is typically used to drive and control subsequent activity at a process level – such as detailed process mapping.

Example Process Framework



The Benefits

No civil engineer would dream of modifying the piers of a suspension bridge without first consulting the blueprints to understand the effect on other parts of the structure. But that’s precisely the sort of tinkering that many well-meaning business process driven projects engage in.

Without a coherent model of the whole business and its processes, the results of any process initiative (whether it be BPR, BPM or systems development) are likely to be as unpredictable as the engineering example above.

What Altus provides is a reliable, controlled method to establish the corporate process blueprint which is essential for the success of any detailed process work.

Less measurable but equally important, is the understanding this whole exercise imparts to the participants from your business. In many cases those involved have gone straight out and improved aspects of their work as a direct result of the workshop discussions.




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Altus understand Financial Services - the products, the processes, the people and the systems that make the whole thing tick. With years of experience in complex change programmes, we understand that successful solutions begin with the business.

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