

## The Reengineering Handbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to Business Transformation

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[Lowe, K. B.](#) (1995). Review of the book The reengineering handbook: A step-by-step guide to business transformation. *Organizational Dynamics*, 24(1): 86-87.

**\*\*\*Note: Figures may be missing from this format of the document**

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This well organized and readable book begins with a historical review of business in which the authors argue that reengineering and breakthrough innovation should not be characterized as new, but rather as both haphazard and extremely rare. They attribute the failure of most reengineering processes (both past and present) to the lack of a formal methodology that would put breakthrough performance on a systematic agenda.

The handbook's purpose is to define the boundaries of business process reengineering (BPR) efforts and to provide a systematic guide to reengineering methodology, adaptable to a range of organizational contexts and processes. The field-tested Rapid Re methodology is a five-stage, 54-step methodology designed to be used by business people working with ordinary business tools they already know or can learn within a short time period.

The motivation for reengineering is usually a result of a change that creates a felt need by a senior manager or "sponsor" to take action. The motivation may be the pain of lost market share, fear of aggressive competitors, or the ambition to expand share or enter new markets. Reengineering is defined here as the radical and rapid redesign of strategic, value-added business processes—and the systems, policies, and organizational structures that support them—to optimize the work flows and productivity in an organization to achieve breakthrough performance enhancement."

Important tenets of the approach are contained within the above definition. First, the radical and breakthrough nature of the change distinguishes BPR from quality circle and continuous improvement techniques, which are aimed at incremental change. BPR is characterized as large-scale change that is too difficult and painful a process to engage in without a significant change in business strategy or the environment.

Second, BPR as envisioned here is inappropriate at the strategic and tactical level of decision making. Instead, it is appropriate only to the 25-50 percent of operational-level processes that are both strategic and value added. Thus BPR is not about "reengineering the organization" or "reengineering the department" as some suggest, but rather about reengineering selected processes. Said another way, BPR can show a company "how to do things right," but it is limited in its ability to show "the right things to do." Third, a process will normally span several functional departments of a traditional hierarchical organization, requiring the sponsorship and commitment of senior management to achieve the broad impacts, shifts in culture, and leadership necessary for projects of this scope.

The handbook is carefully partitioned so that a variety of audiences, from senior executive project sponsors to project leaders, can choose the scope appropriate to their inquiry. Chapters begin with a "recap" to give the selective reader a frame of reference for how the chapter at hand augments and extends prior chapters. The initial framework section is intended for all readers as an overview of BPR using the five-stage Rapid Re model of preparation, identification, vision, solution, and transformation. The detailed 54-step methodology section is intended for project leaders and others who are intimately involved with the implementation phase of the project. A fictional case study, presented throughout the chapter, aids understanding, as does the liberal usage of diagrams and figures. The case provides a "feel" for process implementation, and the visuals provide a useful template for organizing and presenting the methodology.

The resource selection section is capably written with a focus toward the practical issues concerned with the choice of tools for organizing, communicating, and presenting. The book devotes considerable attention to the choice of technical platforms and admonishes readers to be wary of adopting platforms or tools that are not common to the workplace. Heeding the latter will avoid the substantial decreases in near-term productivity and the steep learning curve requirements that are likely to result from introducing new platform technologies to non-technical team members. An important suggestion by the authors is that the analysis tools chosen be capable of providing alternative views of the results that have been collected. By example, they note that to a procurement person a process is mainly a flow of materials from raw stock to finished goods, but to an HR person, the same process is mainly the expenditure of labor according to specialty type.

Concluding sections provide the ten precepts for success, why reengineering projects fail, case studies, and a summary outline of the methodology. An appendix comparing the reengineering process advanced in the handbook with ten other works on reengineering is of special interest.

In sum, Manganelli and Klein have provided a well-written and carefully organized handbook to serve as a reference for both senior and operational-level employees considering or engaged in business process reengineering. The major contribution of the book is the provision of a detailed and comprehensive how-to methodology that is lacking from many "reengineering" books.