

# Business Process Flexibility

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Business process management is mainly recognized for its capacity to manage ‘regular’ flows. However, real-world contexts often make it impossible to effectively follow the ‘regular’ flow. Therefore, increasing business process flexibility is paramount to fully realize business process management.

My attention to business process flexibility started with research on how to handle ‘true’ exceptions, which require humans to collaborate to overcome problems unaddressed by ‘regular’ flows. This research led to the development of resilience services supporting the detection, diagnosis, recovery, and escalation of process interventions [1]–[4].

My understanding of process flexibility evolved with parallel research on the adoption of process stories to elicit and model business processes [5]–[8]. By gathering a variety of process stories from the process participants, I realized that: 1) process participants develop very diverse views about the process, from abstract to detailed, and broad to narrow; 2) the process execution can vary significantly between uniform and unique cases; and 3) process participants develop numerous de facto practices to increase process flexibility.

More recently, I investigated how business process experts could use process stories to realize process flexibility [9]. I developed a metaphor for understanding the realization of process flexibility in business process management, which is based on the concept of friction: in the one hand, organizations push towards more flexibility, but on the other hand, people and technology in organizations also pull against flexibility. Using the interview method, I provide insights on the dynamics of friction in the business process management lifecycle.

My most recent research interest concerns the theoretical foundations of business processes, considering in particular how different conceptualizations of business process constrain the understanding and the implementation of process flexibility [10]. An early paper on this topic received the Best Theory Paper Award at the 2019 Australasian Conference on Information Systems [10]. This early study was followed by an expanded conceptualization of business process flexibility, which contributes an ontology of process conceptualization, and compares a set of competing process conceptualizations in regard to process flexibility [11]. This study suggests that increasing business process flexibility requires changing process conceptualization.

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