

Report

Beyond operational chaos

The 2025 process excellence & AI-readiness report

Drawing on insights from 600 global business and operations leaders, this report explores the challenges and critical success factors that lead to process excellence and AI-readiness

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Foreword

Scott Leddy, Vice President,
North America, GBTEC



Across all industries, organizations are embarking on a journey for wholesale transformation.

Business and operations leaders recognize the potential to redefine operating models, dramatically enhance customer experience, and open up new revenue streams – all through the power of automation and AI. Organizations – with the ability to transform in a fast, seamless, and responsible way – will gain a competitive edge.

But, as transformation strategies are finalized and execution plans are rolled out, much of the focus will be on the technology itself – the automation, AI tools, and solutions that are entering the market en masse to transform the ever-growing set of use cases. There's less attention being given to the underlying business processes – which are the foundation for all successful transformations.

95% of business and operations leaders state that well-defined business processes are crucial in achieving transformation goals. 84% state that operational chaos and complexity are the silent killers of business transformation.

This research reveals how, as transformation ambitions grow, confidence in underlying processes lags. Few organizations currently have the right operational foundations in place to support transformation, and the danger is that this lack of process excellence will hinder their capacity to leverage the power of automation and AI technologies.

Without full visibility of processes and a complete understanding of how they operate across the organization, business leaders have limited capacity to deliver impactful change. Automating a bad – or even undocumented – process does not make it effective. It remains inefficient and costly. It's much harder to realize a vision for transformation without knowing where to start. But, that's what is happening across a large number of organizations – they're throwing the dice and hoping to win.

Process excellence is the missing bridge necessary for successful transformation

Process excellence is the foundation for deep and sustainable transformation. And to achieve process excellence, leaders have to consider a number of different dimensions, including the following: process maturity, embedded process governance, the alignment of processes with enterprise architecture, the integration of governance, risk and compliance into process management, automation readiness, and AI enablement.

The six dimensions of process excellence

- Process maturity
- Process governance
- Enterprise architecture alignment
- Embedded governance, risk & compliance
- Automation readiness
- AI enablement

Process excellence is the foundation for deep and sustainable transformation and includes



Organizations need well-defined, visible, and governable processes that span departments, align with systems and architecture, and are ready for the integration of automation tools and AI agents. It's not just about knowing processes – it's about being able to change, scale, optimize, and trust them to support transformation.

Alignment between processes and enterprise architecture is essential to generate an IT lens on process improvement, identify duplication and redundancies, and ensure teams have access to the tools and solutions they need to maximize their impact.

Automation readiness is also key. If organizations have fully documented processes across each department and the organization as a whole, they can be far more strategic in how they automate. Leaders can pinpoint where the greatest efficiencies can be achieved and make investment decisions accordingly.

Organizations need to strive for process excellence for a smooth transformation

As found in this research, there is a wide gap between a relatively small number of organizations that are close to achieving process excellence and those that are only at the start of their journey.

The majority of organizations are somewhere in between – where leaders are reasonably confident about their processes but recognize areas for improvement. This means generating more visibility into processes across the entire organization – driving better alignment between process management and business functions and closely linking processes to enterprise architecture management.

Encouragingly, this research shows that business and operations leaders are acutely aware that they urgently need to progress towards process excellence to realize their transformation goals and remain competitive. Those lagging need to catch up – and quickly.

For now, the challenge for leaders is to implement the right strategies, tools, and integrated ways of working to rapidly improve their process management and lay the foundations for automation and AI transformation.

This report highlights the critical role process excellence plays as the foundation for successful transformation and reveals the key challenges that leaders face in their efforts to drive improvements.

With contributions from GBTEC experts, customers, and other industry leaders, this report offers practical advice and guidance for business and operations leaders who are tasked with process improvement and business transformation within their organizations. We trust this proves useful to readers and helps them to accelerate their journeys towards process excellence – propelling their organizations into a new era of transformation.

Featured experts in this report:



Scott Leddy

Vice President, North America, GBTEC



Alexander Trail

Senior Account Executive, Northern Europe, GBTEC



Thomas Kohlenbach

Principal Consultant, GBTEC



Michael Schank

Founder, Process Inventory Advisors



David Barnes

Head of Business Process Management, AstraZeneca

Research Methodology

To better understand current levels of process maturity, as well as ambitions and challenges in driving operational excellence and business transformation, GBTEC has undertaken comprehensive global research across ANZ, Benelux, DACH, the UK, and the US.

The research is comprised of:

- Online interviews with 600 operational and business leaders currently operating within senior positions. More than a third (36%) held C-level roles, and over half (53%) were Directors/Heads of Department.
- Interviews were conducted in nine markets: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland, the UK, and the US.
- Respondents worked for organizations with a minimum of 1,000 employees, except in ANZ, Benelux, and DACH, where they worked in organizations with a minimum of 500 employees.
- Respondents worked in a range of job functions, including Operations, IT/ Digital, Finance, Process Excellence/ Process Management, HR, Compliance, and Change/ Transformation.
- Respondents worked across a range of industries, including manufacturing, automotive, energy and utilities, financial services and insurance, Telco/IT, and pharmaceuticals/chemicals.

This research was conducted in June 2025 by Insight Avenue.

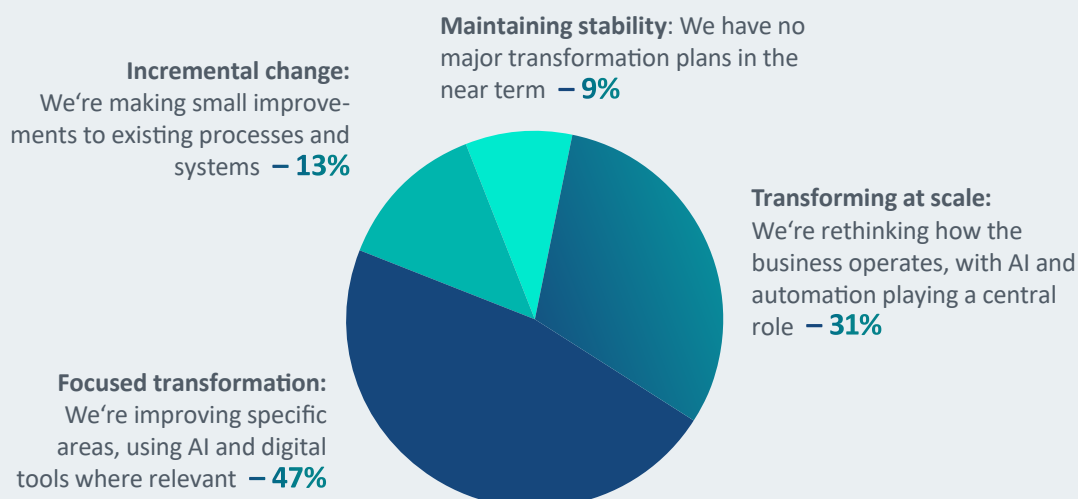
Introduction – Leaders face challenges on the path to transformation

Transformation remains top of the boardroom agenda in every region and industry. And the research shows that organizations have bold ambitions over the next two years.

Almost a third (31%) of operational and business leaders report that their organization will transform at scale – through wide-scale deployment of automation and AI. Alongside this, 47% of organizations will pursue more targeted transformations – using automation, AI, and digital tools to rethink specific business units and workflows.

This means that over the next two years, more than three-quarters (78%) of organizations will be executing major transformation programs – leveraging the capabilities of automation and AI to drive operational efficiencies, enhance customer experience, and gain a competitive edge.

Organizational goals for transformation over the next two years

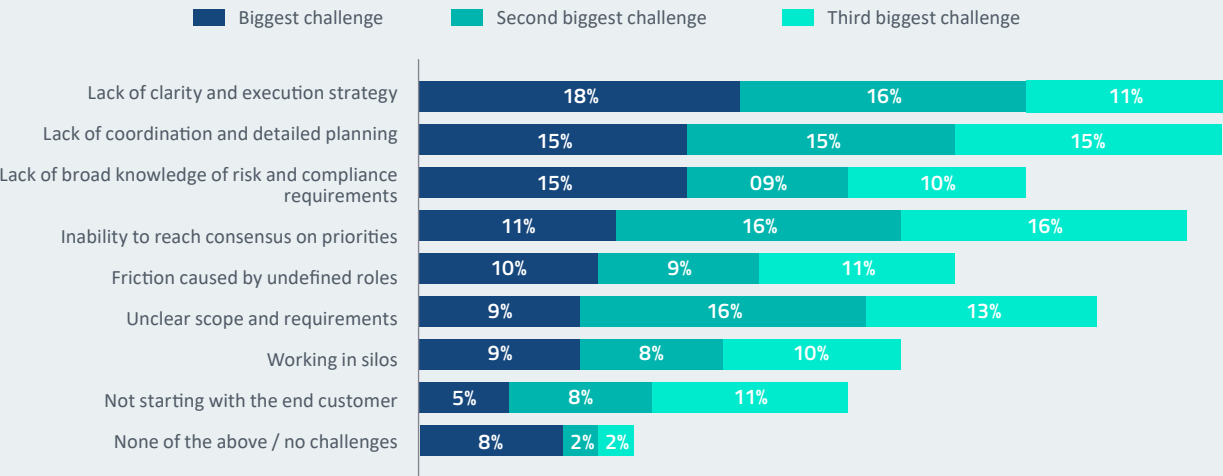


Which of the following best describes your organization's ambitions for transformation over the next two years?

This research highlights barriers that leaders will have to navigate as they prioritize their transformation initiatives. These include: a lack of coordination and detailed planning, clarity and execution strategy, knowledge of risk and compliance requirements, and an inability to reach consensus on priorities. Significantly, these challenges are connected to business process management.

88% of business and operations leaders report that their organization is encountering challenges in efforts to drive business transformation.

The biggest challenges in business transformation



Which of the following best describes your organization’s ambitions for transformation over the next two years?

Scott Leddy, Vice President,
North America, GBTEC



More and more companies are now buying into the concept of process-based transformation – understanding their current state before they start to transform.

But a lot of companies are still overlooking processes within their transformation and then getting to the end or mid-way through their projects and wondering why they haven’t seen the results they wanted. They’re implementing new tools and systems, but they don’t understand who is using them and for what – they’re essentially just throwing new functionality at people, but it’s not fit-for-purpose, and teams end up going back to what they know, be that Excel or email.

Leaders need to take employees on the transformation journey, explaining what new tools will do for them on a personal level and for their team and organization. But this is only possible if organizations actually have visibility and understanding of this themselves.

Alexander Trail, Senior Account
Executive, Northern Europe, GBTEC



There is definitely growing awareness of the importance of process excellence within transformation, but we’re seeing a lag between this lightbulb moment and execution on the ground.

Previously, process management was often compliance-driven – documenting processes for audits within heavily regulated parts of the business, such as finance. But it’s now being seen as a driver for transformation and change within different parts of the business – particularly those that drive value for the organization, such as customer experience and revenue operations.

Leaders know they need to drive operational efficiencies – to do things quicker and cheaper – through automation. And process management is the roadmap to automation, helping leaders to prioritize and understand where to make investments for maximum impact.

Thomas Kohlenbach,
Principal Consultant, GBTEC



With so much hype and excitement surrounding AI – and particularly agentic AI – it’s understandable that business leaders are eager to accelerate their transformation initiatives and start reaping the benefits. But, it’s so important to take the time to truly understand current end-to-end business processes and link this to enterprise architecture. You need to know where you’re coming from as well as where you’re aiming to get to.

The reality is that we’re still not seeing significant numbers of successful transformation stories, at least not at an organizational level. And much of this is down to the fact that organizations are neglecting process excellence within their strategies. They’re rightly focusing on solutions, data, and IT infrastructure, but they’re not starting out with a clear picture of how processes are currently working across business units and how this needs to change to maximize the potential of automation and AI. This is severely hampering the execution of transformation initiatives further down the line.

Business processes are not supporting transformation initiatives

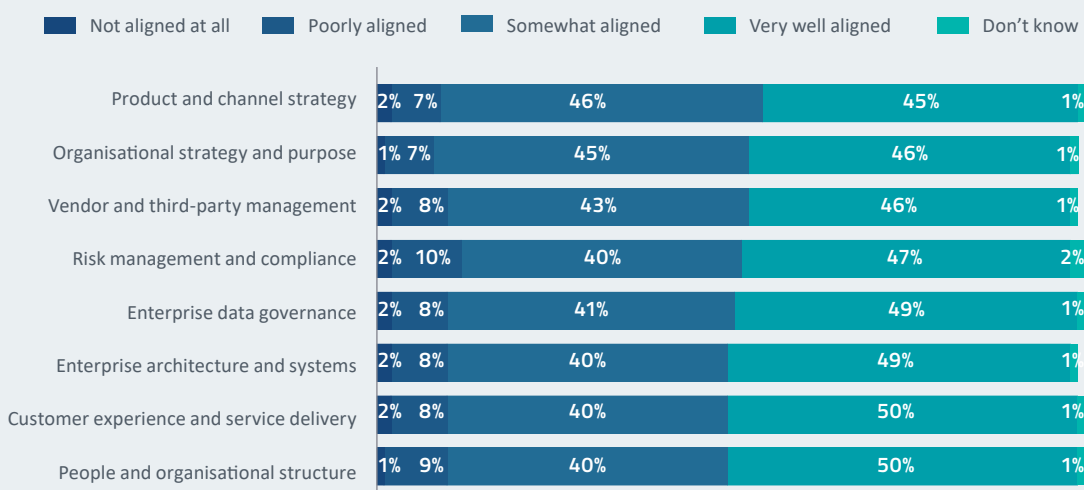
This research highlights the vital role that business processes play in overcoming roadblocks and driving meaningful and sustainable organizational change. 95% of business and operations leaders state that well-defined business processes are important in achieving transformation goals, and more than two-thirds say that they are extremely important.

Leaders know that their transformation efforts will quickly stall without clear, robust business processes.

However, business processes (in half of organizations) are not currently aligned with value-driving functions – such as customer experience and service delivery, enterprise architecture and systems, enterprise data governance, and risk management and compliance.

Only 49% of business and operations leaders report that their business processes fully align with and support enterprise architecture and systems.

Current levels of alignment of business processes with other areas/functions



How well are your organization’s business processes aligned with and supportive of the following areas?

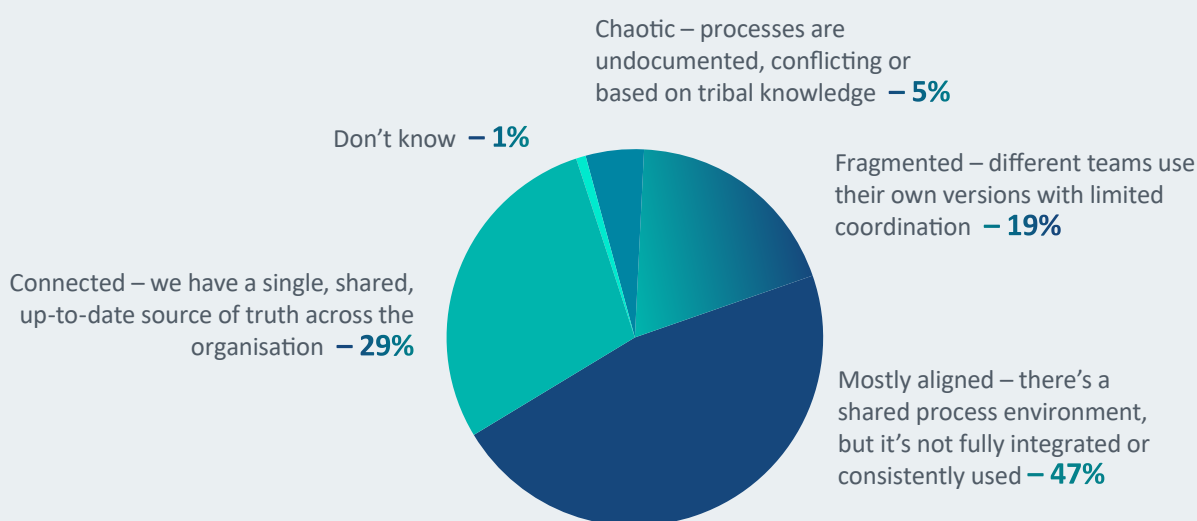
Organizations recognize the impact that this lack of alignment could have on their transformation plans moving forward. And leaders know that a lack of end-to-end visibility and insight into their business processes represents a major risk – hampering their organization’s ability to innovate at speed, enhance customer experience, and bolster resilience and security.

85% of business and operations leaders believe that business transformation fails without clear, end-to-end process visibility. 84% state that operational chaos and complexity are the silent killers of business transformation.

At a broader level, only 29% of leaders claim that their organization operates with a 'connected' process environment – meaning there is a single, shared, up-to-date source of truth for all processes across the organization. Almost half (47%) of leaders report that their organization has a shared process environment, but it's not fully integrated or used consistently.

What's worrying is that nearly a quarter (24%) of leaders admit that their organization's process environment is either 'fragmented' or 'chaotic' – meaning different teams use different processes, or processes are undocumented and conflicting.

Current process environments within organizations



Which of the following best describes your organization's current process environment?

Michael Schank, Founder, Process Inventory Advisors



Process management is about much more than improving individual processes; it's about standardizing a semantic layer for all operational data. If you can create a taxonomy that captures everything – every process within your organization – then you can achieve true alignment around those processes, such as ownership, systems, risks, and third-party interactions. This foundation makes it possible to identify every process within the scope of a transformation project and understand the impact of change on operations and resources.

Process names become the glue that brings everything together – connecting strategy, transformation design, change execution, risk and compliance, IT management and operational excellence through a single business oriented language. Once you have this common language, you can create scope, project plans, requirements, designs, and testing with precision. This precision brings alignment, budget and timeline certainty, and enables delivery of promised functionality. It goes beyond change to become a guiding principle to manage all operations aligned to processes – from business metrics and KPIs, risk and controls, quality, and much more. It becomes an organizational philosophy.

Ultimately, transformations are complex, but if you have a universal, simplified language to map out every aspect of a transformation, it creates clarity and confidence – ensuring everybody is focused on the right things.

David Barnes, Head of Business Process Management, AstraZeneca



At AstraZeneca, we discover new medicines, we develop them, and then we establish them as products and introduce them into our commercial supply chain.

And then we're into ongoing business as usual operations – planning supply, sourcing materials, manufacturing and distributing of those products. So, the value chain involves R&D and supply operations, and at some point, there is a transfer of ownership, knowledge, and accountability. That means processes need to flow across boundaries, and it makes sense to have them connected. We talk about looking left and right which means our business process owners knowing how their processes are connected upstream and downstream on the value chain.

Having a BPM platform makes it so much easier to have a connected process environment. It's not just a platform for capturing process design; it's also a change management tool. You can see how changing a process might impact other processes and other teams, and explore dependencies.

In our Global Operations area of the business, we link our process management to overall business strategy, so we classify every process as gold, silver, or bronze depending on its scale and level of importance to the business. It isn't a one-size-fits-all approach.

As a business process owner, you should be speaking to your customers and senior stakeholders to understand how your process connects with our strategy, plus how it is performing versus the level of performance that is needed. You need to know if there is a gap and whether the process requires improvement.

So, our processes are in one of two modes at any time, either sustain mode (to maintain the current level of performance) or transform mode (where you need to improve or transform the process to achieve a tangible outcome with clear KPIs). This approach helps us to stay focused.

A mixed bag when it comes to process maturity

This research highlights significant variances between organizations in their levels of process maturity. Most find themselves mid-way along the maturity curve – operating at a 'Defined' level (with standard and audited processes and process owners), 'Controlled' level (with targets, quality, and time reliably controlled), or 'Optimized' level (with continuous process improvement and integrated risk management).

Less than a fifth (17%) of organizations are operating at the highest, 'AI-powered' level of process maturity (with proactive and predictive process management, collaborative AI, and human-machine interaction). This means that eight in ten organizations still have room for improvement.

Levels of organizational process maturity



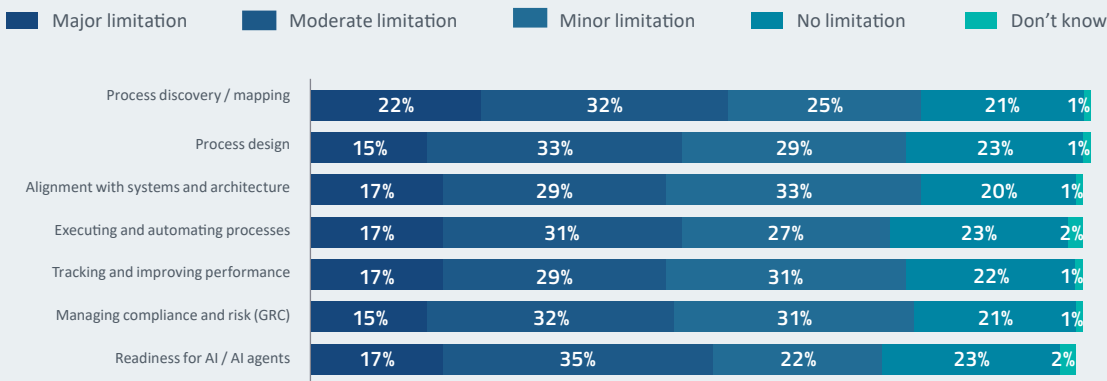
Currently, how would you rate your organization's overall process maturity?

Only 43% of leaders report that business processes are managed as a strategic asset within their organization, and as many as 78% claim that most organizations are still guessing how their processes work.

48% of business and operations leaders report that they are encountering difficulties when trying to automate processes, and this is limiting their ability to deliver operational value and achieve transformation goals. 46% state that a lack of alignment between process management, enterprise architecture, and systems is preventing their transformation efforts.

This research shows ways in which sub-optimal process management is already hampering organizations’ ability to deliver operational value and achieve transformation goals. Most of all, leaders point to capability limitations around process discovery and mapping, process design, and alignment of processes with systems and architecture as issues that are hindering transformation.

How process capability limitations are impacting transformation



To what extent are the following aspects of your organization’s process capability limiting your ability to deliver operational value and drive transformation?

David Barnes, Head of Business Process Management, AstraZeneca



We’ve seen first-hand at AstraZeneca how the parts of our company that take a process-led approach to transformation encounter more success than those that don’t. If you just throw technology at different parts of the business, you’ll get some benefits, but you will miss the bigger opportunities. You’re also risking operational failure if new technology has unforeseen consequences, and you’re going to alienate people if they feel that transformation is out of their hands.

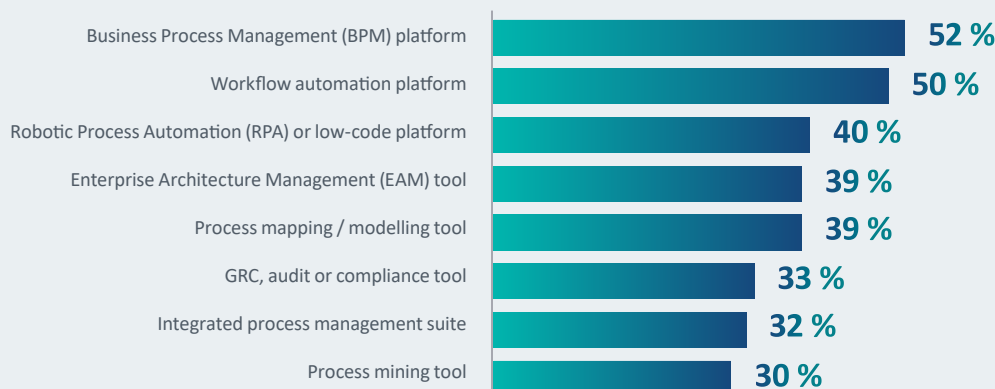
We started organically with individual parts of the business – several manufacturing sites and global functions – recognizing that having a common platform for managing processes would enable them to work more effectively together. Our senior leadership team understood the value of a standard approach to managing key business processes and committed to sponsor and resource these processes to drive greater standardisation and performance.

The ‘M’ in BPM isn’t ‘mapping’; it’s ‘management’. It’s not just about process maps; it’s about what you do to manage and drive improvements in people, process, data and technology. And that’s why it’s an investment decision.

Fragmentation of tools and ownership is undermining process improvement

To improve their process management and ensure standardization, consistency, and visibility across their process environment, organizations are now deploying a wide range of tools and solutions. Most commonly, they have implemented business process management (BPM) and workflow automation platforms. In addition, a large number of businesses are deploying Robotic Process Automation (RPA) platforms, Enterprise Architecture Management (EAM) tools, and process mapping and modeling tools.

Tools or platforms used to support process improvement or process management



Which tools or platforms does your organization currently use to support process improvement or process management?

Unfortunately, even with all the investment organizations have put towards tools and platforms to improve process management, this research highlights a widespread feeling of dissatisfaction with the current results. Many organizations deploy multiple tools to manage processes, but a lack of integration between these tools means that leaders are unable to get a single, reliable view of processes across their organization. And this severely limits their ability to drive improvements.

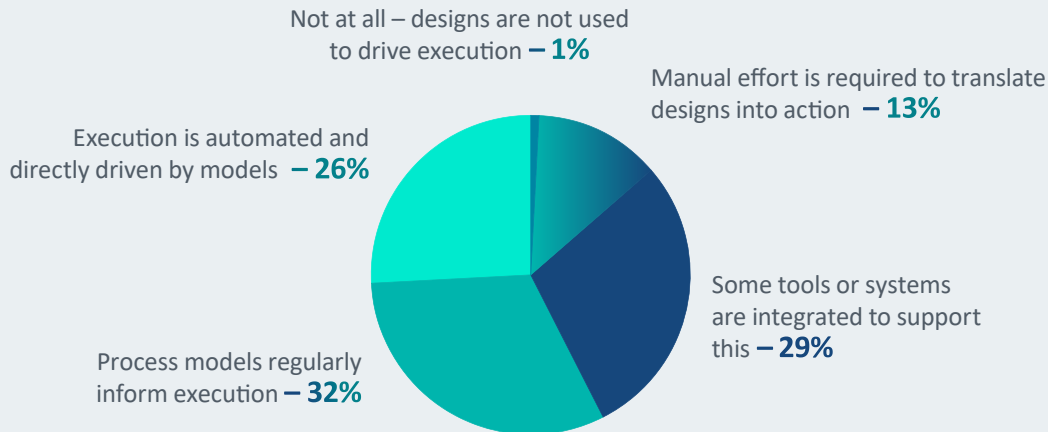
85% of business and operations leaders believe that business transformation fails without clear, end-to-end process visibility. 78% state that enterprise process visibility is being lost to tool fragmentation and siloed ownership.

This research highlights a gap between those organizations that are using tools in an integrated and strategic way to generate full visibility into their process environment and drive improvements, and those where tool fragmentation is preventing any significant improvements.

More than a fifth (22%) of leaders report that it is difficult for teams in their organization to design and improve processes using current tools. On the other hand, more than a third (36%) of leaders claim that their current tools are intuitive and widely adopted – making it very easy for teams to design and improve processes.

It's a similar story when it comes to converting process designs into real-world applications. Within organizations with a higher level of process maturity, designs are translated into execution in an automated way and are directly driven by process models. On the other side of the spectrum, some organizations have teams that are still manually translating designs into actionable, real-world processes.

Ease of translating designs into real execution



How easily are process designs translated into real execution?

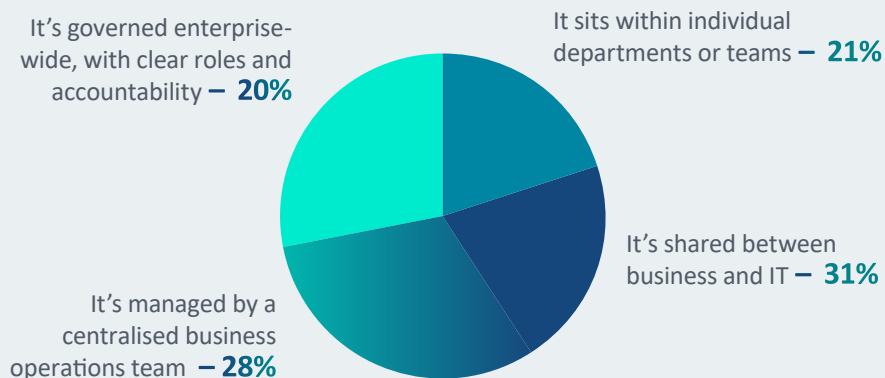
There are also major variances between organizations when it comes to ownership and accountability for processes. It's a fairly even split between organizations that have centralized management of processes and those where process ownership sits with business units.

20% of organizations have a centralized ownership structure, with enterprise-wide governance and clear roles and

accountability. A further 28% have a centralized business operations team, which is responsible for managing processes.

On the other side, ownership for process management is shared between business and IT teams in 31% of organizations, and in 21%, it sits within individual departments or teams.

Ownership structures for process management



How is process ownership structured in your organization?

Thomas Kohlenbach, Principal Consultant, GBTEC



A lot of organizations use the BPM tools that are wrapped into their ERP systems, but they don't consider the usability of these tools beyond implementation.

They're driven by price and not by the requirements of the business, so you end up with a misalignment between tools and the teams that are using them on a daily basis.

This lack of up-front strategic thinking leads to problems down the line when organizations realize that these tools aren't working for them. They're then having to weigh up the complexity and cost of change involved in introducing the right tool.

Michael Schank, Founder, Process Inventory Advisors



Process excellence is only possible once you have named every process in your environment. Every process performed impacts the performance of the enterprise – otherwise, why would you do it?

So you need to name every process, assign an owner to it, and define what ownership of the process means, in terms of change, innovation, and day-to-day performance. This level of accountability creates a positive culture of ownership.

Scott Leddy, Vice President, North America, GBTEC



Leaders should be looking to push business process management into the organization, making department and team managers responsible for operational processes. Front-line staff have to

be empowered to take ownership of and continuously improve the processes they work with, rather than relying solely on a centralized team. If you can break down departmental silos and nurture a more holistic and collaborative view, then you can start to improve functional flow. Process owners can access help from a centralized function or Centre of Excellence for learning and guidance on how

Page 17 of 28 best to document processes and drive improvements – but in the best organizations, ownership for processes sits within each department.

Alexander Trail, Senior Account Executive, Northern Europe, GBTEC



It's hard to overestimate the importance of usability when evaluating process management tools. We've now got people entering the workforce who were born in 2009, who are used to accessing and

digesting information in completely different ways to employees who might have been with an organization for 30 or 40 years. They expect tools to be intuitive and personalized to their own needs and preferences, and they won't put up with slow, cumbersome systems. So, you need tools that are simple to use and fully future-proof.

Many organizations struggle to optimize processes because the tools that they're deploying are too technical for business users. Organizations should be looking for tools that simplify and democratize process management, rather than adding even more complexity. You want departmental managers – whether that's sales or marketing or HR – to be able to easily document processes and collaborate on them. Internal process specialists can review documentation and give feedback, but you need tools that empower business managers to take ownership of their processes.

Lots of tools provide a snapshot of a particular process that is documented on a static diagram. But being able to break down processes in a hierarchy that makes sense for the organization – such as APQC frameworks or value-stream mapping – is far more valuable. You can review processes through different layers so that they make sense for different parts and levels of the organization. A senior leader can get a high-level overview, while operational teams can get more granular detail on individual tasks. Businesses need to ensure their platforms have this level of usability.

David Barnes, Head of Business Process Management, AstraZeneca



So many organizations jump into transformation programs – bringing everyone together for massive wall mapping sessions. They then go off and execute on the transformation project, but, most of

the valuable process insights and knowledge from the wall mapping go into the bin and are not retained. The organization then moves on to the next transformation project, and the same thing happens – they start from scratch to understand how their processes work today. Meanwhile, employees who leave the company are taking much of the understanding and experience of particular processes with them.

The knowledge that of how a process runs is an important asset, and it has value. If it were any other asset, like a manufactured product on a pallet, you would look after it, and somebody would be responsible for it. Organizations need to recognize processes as a digital asset that must be taken care of.

Implementing an enterprise platform for business processes is undoubtedly accelerating our path to process excellence by capturing and retaining the critical knowledge about our key processes. We're using this process intelligence to drive significant transformations across AstraZeneca, including in R&D, Operations, and Global Business Services.

It's so important for our process platform to be engaging and user-friendly. We've seen the difference it makes. We've now got business teams who are jumping onto our platform to rapidly map out processes and collaborate on the design with other colleagues across the business. That's the kind of usability and adoption you need to embed process excellence into the business.

A growing need to link processes to enterprise architecture

Throughout the research, business and operations leaders emphasize the importance of aligning processes with enterprise architecture management.

83% of business and operations leaders believe that enterprise architecture without process alignment is just expensive guesswork.

Enterprise architecture alignment is critical for leaders to generate an IT lens on processes. Many organizations are still dealing with the tool sprawl that came about during COVID. Having a high-level overview of processes – and mapping this against enterprise architecture – enables leaders to identify duplication, redundancies, and streamline applications. And from there, they can decide where tools such as Robotic Process Automation (RPA) can deliver the greatest return on investment.

Transformation involves technology deployment, so businesses need to understand how software applications fully support and enable defined processes. This type of process mapping allows leaders to make smarter IT investment decisions. They can assess the value that tools are delivering, implement new tools where required, and plan for tools being sunsetted in the future.

David Barnes, Head of Business Process Management, AstraZeneca



Linking enterprise architecture to business processes is a major priority for us at AstraZeneca. Enterprise architecture looks at business capabilities – what we want to achieve – and the process is essentially how we're going to achieve it. If you strategically decide that you need to improve a capability, then you have to identify and understand the impact of the processes required to deliver that capability.

If processes and architecture work together, the organization becomes more agile, and technology becomes more scalable and more standardized.

Scott Leddy, Vice President, North America, GBTEC



Organizations should look to draw connection points between tools and the processes and activities that they support. Too often, companies are running multiple project management tools for a handful of workflows. They don't know which tools are supporting which processes, and they don't know how well these tools are performing. Many organizations are missing major opportunities to consolidate tools and drive operational and cost efficiencies.

By linking enterprise architecture management to business process management, organizations can better understand the implications, risks, and opportunities that come with replacing tools. They can drill down into their application landscape and link applications to the processes they support.

This allows business and operations leaders to identify redundancies and duplication of tools and to model what it might look like if they were to consolidate or switch out some of these tools – consulting with the full range of stakeholders who are using them.

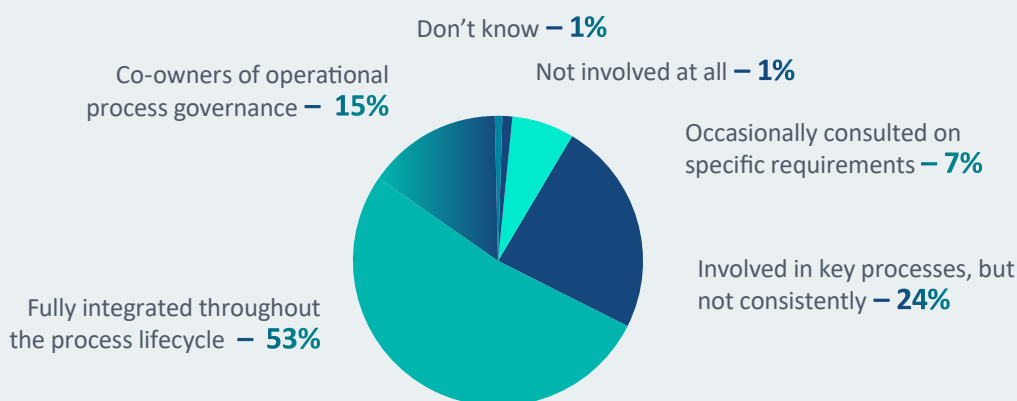
Business and operations leaders are also firm in their view that process management is essential for organizations to respond to an ever-evolving risk and regulatory environment. Indeed, 83% state that Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC) should be embedded from process design through to execution, rather than being bolted on later.

Within many organizations, compliance, risk, and audit teams are fully involved in process design and

improvement initiatives – either as co-owners of operational process governance or at least fully integrated throughout the lifecycle.

Elsewhere, almost a quarter (24%) of organizations are not consistently involving compliance, risk, and audit teams in key process design, and 7% are only occasionally consulting these teams on specific requirements.

Involvement of compliance, risk, and audit teams in process design and improvement

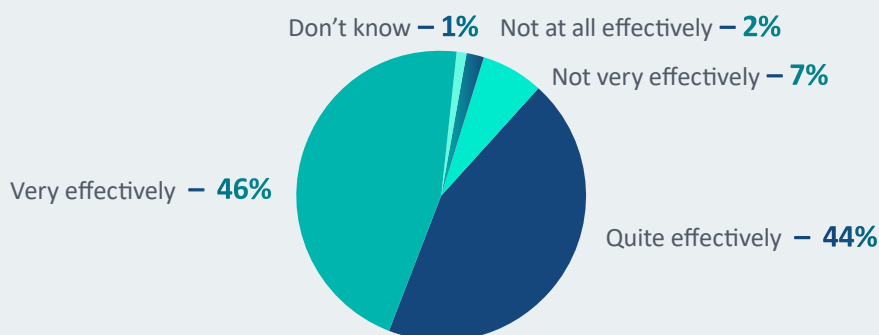


To what extent are compliance, risk, or audit teams involved in process design and improvement initiatives?

Without doubt, those organizations that are integrating governance, risk, and compliance into the process lifecycle from the start are better placed to adapt to changing risks and regulations. Less than half (46%) of leaders report that their processes

help their organization to respond to new risks and changing regulatory and audit requirements in a very effective way. This means that the majority of leaders recognize that their processes could be improved to help with governance, risk, and compliance.

Effectiveness of current processes in helping to respond to risk and regulatory change



How effectively do your current processes help your organization respond to risk, regulatory change, or audit requirements?

Scott Leddy, Vice President, North America, GBTEC



In many organizations in the US, there is a lack of alignment between processes and business units on the one hand, and risk and control teams on the other. They're working with different frame-

works and looking at different dashboards. Lots of organizations will have a basic Visio map for a process, and then they will have a large Excel sheet that details all of their risks. So they're operating with two completely separate sets of data, which are hard to align. Things don't get documented properly, and this weakens governance and creates a lot of extra work when it comes to audits and accreditations.

Internal risk and controls teams should be inputting in processes, from initial design and modeling, and throughout the process lifecycle. You can map processes against risks within the enterprise risk management framework. Tools are helpful for providing a single place for risk and control teams and business departmental teams to flag, assess, and collaborate on risks. Everybody can access the risk management framework and add suggestions for processes, and then risk and control teams can approve changes from a risk and compliance perspective.

Process excellence requires collaboration. Everybody who touches a process needs to know the

process end-to-end, understand their role within it, and feel empowered to suggest and execute improvements. That is really important as AI starts to automate execution-based tasks and teams are freed up from manual tasks. People can step up and add value by really thinking about how processes can be improved. Rather than being on the receiving end of transformation, they can be a part of driving it.

Process excellence is the foundation for automation and AI transformation

Despite the challenges they face along the way, organizations are steadfast in their commitment to drive process improvements. And this is driven by a strong conviction that process excellence can unlock a wide range of transformative benefits.

Most of all, business and operation leaders believe that process excellence can pave the way for widescale automation and deployment of AI technologies.

They also point to improved workforce performance, enhanced customer experience, and smarter decision-making as potential benefits of process excellence and improvements.

How process excellence can deliver operational value in organizations



Where do you believe process excellence or improvement has the greatest potential to deliver operational value in your organization?

The research explores ambitions for AI deployment and reveals the extent to which organizations are planning to ramp up their AI transformation strategies over the next two years.

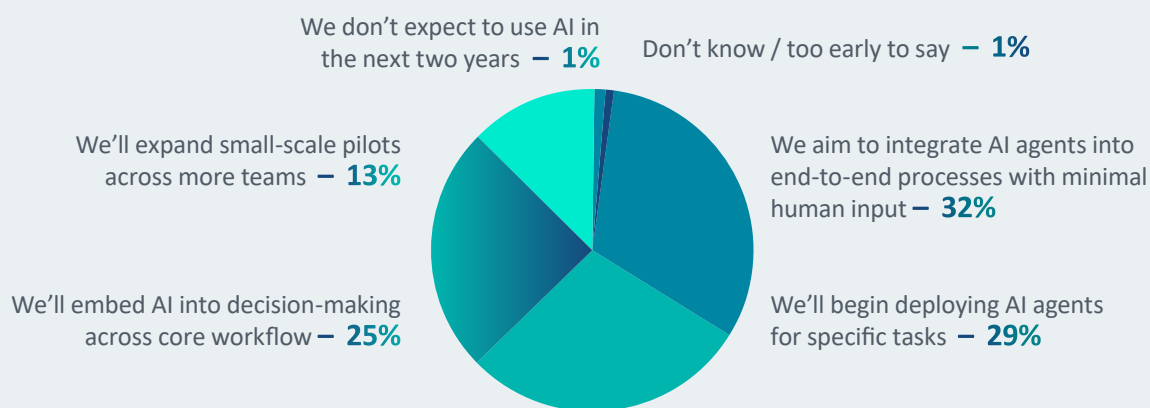
Almost all organizations will be looking to expand their use of AI over this period, whether that is small-scale pilots within specific teams or embedding AI into decision-making across core workflows.

More than half (61%) of business and operations leaders state that they will be integrating agentic AI into their operations over the next two years. This is a major step

beyond the generative AI systems and Large Language Models that have become so prevalent over the last couple of years. These AI agents are task-aware, self-directed, and able to reason in real time. They possess memory and can learn continuously to deliver relevant and personalized outcomes, with minimal human oversight.

Incredibly, almost a third (32%) of leaders report that their organization will be aiming to integrate AI agents into end-to-end processes – with minimal human input – in the next two years. And a further 29% state that they will begin deploying AI agents for specific tasks.

How AI deployment will evolve in business operations over the next two years



How do you expect AI to evolve in your business operations over the next two years?

When it comes to preparing for agentic AI deployment, less than half of organizations have reached the levels of process excellence required for seamless integration. Only 48% of business and operations leaders claim that their organization is fully prepared for agentic AI – with process models that are structured, integrated, and governable. Across all sectors, there is a widespread recognition that successful agentic AI deployment hinges on organizations having clear, accountable, and robust processes in place to support the introduction of AI agents across workflows. Yet as it stands, most organizations simply do not have them.

87% of business and operations leaders state that agentic AI needs structured, governed processes to deliver maximum value. 78% believe that agentic AI will not be effective in organizations that do not properly manage and govern their processes.

Alexander Trail, Senior Account Executive, Northern Europe, GBTEC



It's easy for business and operations leaders to be wowed by potential savings from new automation tools, but there are no guarantees – unless you have the right process foundations in place.

Automation programs that aren't aligned to process management are essentially flying blind. Leaders end up dealing with competing business cases for new automation tools and solutions based on siloed views of the organization.

Automation will only ever be as good as the underlying processes on which it is built. It may not be as glamorous or exciting as selecting and implementing new automation tools, but process mapping is just as important. If you have fully documented processes across each department and the organization as a whole, you can be far more strategic in how you automate. Leaders can see where the greatest efficiencies can be achieved and make investment decisions accordingly.

Thomas Kohlenbach,
Principal Consultant, GBTEC



To get their organization transformation-ready, leaders need to consider three key factors – people, technology, and processes. Right now, a lot of the focus is on technology. In some cases, it's like kids in a candy store as new AI solutions hit the market. CIOs and CTOs want the latest tools, but they're not always thinking about how these solutions align with real-world business requirements.

David Barnes, Head of Business Process
Management, AstraZeneca



Process excellence is core to successful automation. You need to know the current state and map out the future state of a process, identifying where automation or RPA can play a role. If you automate a poor process, you'll just end up with a poor process that runs a bit faster. You miss the transformation opportunity.

Scott Leddy, Vice President,
North America, GBTEC



Standardization is essential for successful automation and agentic AI deployment. If 15 departments are doing things 15 different ways, you can't train an AI agent on the optimal way to perform a task. Instead, the AI receives conflicting inputs, undermining its performance and reliability.

The starting point for a process-based approach to agentic AI transformation is to understand the current state first, document any variances, and work towards standardization. Then you can identify what tasks AI agents are going to handle and what they shouldn't touch, what data they will reference, and what documents they are going to create. Without this framework, agents can get confused and hallucinate, and that's when you run into operational problems and severe risk.

Enabling AI integration within process management itself can be hugely powerful. For instance, AI can digest complex documents or procedural instructions and turn them into process maps within seconds. Instead of starting with a blank piece of paper, you're leveraging existing documentation to get an 80% ready process model, which you can easily refine. AI dramatically shortens the time required to model and document processes. You can iterate faster and, ultimately, achieve your transformation goals sooner.

Conclusion – process excellence transformation and generative competitive edge

More than anything, this research highlights the number of different dimensions that leaders must prioritize and optimize to achieve process excellence, which are: process maturity, embedded process governance, the alignment of processes with enterprise architecture, the integration of governance, risk and compliance into process management, automation readiness, and AI enablement.

Organizations need clearly defined and governable processes that are fully aligned with business units and enterprise architecture. They need strategic ownership and accountability for processes, and full, unified visibility of processes across the organization to make process management accessible to all and enable strategic decision-making.

Only when an organization reaches an optimal level in each of these areas can it reach process excellence – with the solid foundations required to maximize automation and business transformation.

Encouragingly, this research shows how most leaders are now fully aware of the connection between processes and transformation, even if they have had to learn the hard way. They know that they urgently need to optimize processes to fast-track their innovation initiatives and drive competitive advantage.

Process excellence is the foundation for wholesale transformation that delivers game-changing business impact. And those organizations that are able to achieve process excellence in a fast and seamless way will undoubtedly set themselves up to thrive in the future.

84% of business and operations leaders believe that process excellence will be a key driver of competitive advantage in the next two years. 82% acknowledge that if they don't optimize processes, their organization will fall behind in the race to leverage AI.

Alexander Trail, Senior Account Executive, Northern Europe, GBTEC



As automation and AI transformation gather pace over the next couple of years, we'll see an even bigger gap emerging between those organizations that are rushing into projects without embedding the right process foundations, and those that are taking a strategic, process-led approach to deliver real business impact.

David Barnes, Head of Business Process Management, AstraZeneca



The tipping point in process management comes when you can prove the value of improvement. So, rather than trying to boil the ocean, I would suggest starting with a single process where there is an urgent need to transform or standardize. You map the process including the people, technology and critical data, find ways to optimize it, and communicate the new standard way of working and track the tangible business outcomes. And then crucially, you need to document the success to help build a positive peer pressure for other parts of the business.

This is something that we're not good at within the business process community. So much great work is being done, but we don't do enough in terms of sharing or shouting about it. And that's a large part of why we still have people questioning the value of process improvement – the successes aren't always very visible. Once you can point to tangible business impact, then a compelling business case for process excellence is much easier to achieve.



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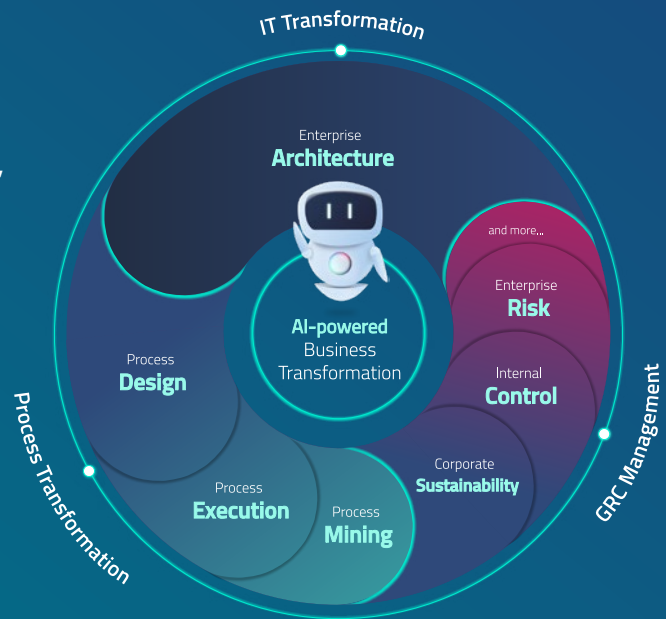
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About GBTEC

GBTEC is a leading provider of SaaS software in the fields of Business Process Management (BPM), Enterprise Architecture Management (EAM), Digital Process Automation (DPA), and Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC). The extensive product portfolio of GBTEC includes Business Process Design & Modeling, Process Execution, Process Mining, as well as Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC). The company is known for its modern and user-friendly products, which are based on no-code and low-code technologies and a state-of-the-art product platform. Customers also benefit from competent customer support and comprehensive training offerings. The products of GBTEC are used by companies of all sizes – from SMEs to Fortune 500 companies – as well as by public institutions. The company is headquartered in Bochum and employs around 300 employees at locations in the DACH region, Spain, Australia, the UK, and the USA.

