Chapter 11
What Has Jazz to Do with BPM?

Jazz and BPM have more in common than you may realize. Jazz and its inherent improvisation can be used as a metaphor that helps business process engineers deal with the continuous change and dynamic of today's business environment as they help their organizations pursue high performance in our digital world. Business process engineers can learn a lot from Jazz musicians.

While working closely with August-Wilhelm Scheer, founder of IDS Scheer, and many other companies, for more than 10 years, I learned a lot more than just business processes from this renowned BPM thought leader. He also introduced me to the world of Jazz and how it relates to business, which had a major impact on me, my thinking, and the way I work on business processes for strategy execution. Jazz became my number one hobby. I started to learn to play Jazz on the piano so that I could understand some of the challenges and great skills of professional Jazz musicians. Whenever possible, I listen to live Jazz, at famous clubs like Blue Note, Birdland, Iridium, Smoke or Village Vanguard in New York City, Jazz Showcase in Chicago, the Jazz Bakery in Los Angeles, or Snug Harbor in New Orleans. But I also like to go to smaller, lesser-known Jazz clubs, such as the former Vincent's in West Chester or Chris' Jazz Cafe in Philadelphia which is on its way to becoming a major club. For some time, I had even been co-owner of a Jazz club.

The collaboration with Scheer also resulted in a few CDs—unfortunately, my musical skills are not sufficient to play with the renowned musicians featured on those CDs. However, I acted as the executive producer, organizing the development of all arrangements, bringing the musicians together, booking a recording studio, and seeing the project through to the completion of the engineering work. The CDs are named "Bebop Process Excellence"—Volumes 1 and 2, referring both to "Bebop," an important core Jazz style, and to the notion of process excellence.

This title refers to the close relationship between Jazz and BPM. A band playing a Jazz tune can be interpreted as a process execution, delivering a result of value for the audience, the customers. They enjoy the tune and pay a cover charge for the music. The sheet music used can be compared to the process models, the "design" of the process of music. The Jazz band recording "Bebop Process Excellence—Volume 1"

Fig. 11.1 Playing a tune is a process; the sheet music is the process model (photos published with CD)

is shown in Fig. 11.1. The band included August-Wilhelm Scheer; Cecil Payne, the famous baritone saxophone player who passed away in December 2007; Mickey Roker, who played in the Dizzy Gillespie Band; Gunnar Mossblad, the musical director of the Dave Liebman Big Band; John Swana; and Mike Boone. Mossblad also arranged the tunes. For the recording of Bebop Volume 2, even Jimmy Cobb, the legendary drummer of the Miles Davis Group that recorded the "Kind of Blue" CD which was released in 1959, joined the performing musicians.

A few years later, I organized another interesting recoding project with Scheer where we added Randy Brecker, one of the finest Jazz trumpet players, to the band to play Monk tunes—again all arranged by Gunnar Mossblad. Also at BPM-D we continue to support Jazz and recently sponsored the production of Gunnar Mossblad's CD R.S.V.P that includes a tune he has written for me, "Calypso for Mathias", as well as one for my partner Peter Franz, "Sail on, Peter" [1].

The relation between Jazz and business has numerous facets [2]. An increasing number of professionals use the comparison of Jazz and business for management education in general [3, 4]. This chapter will focus on aspects of Jazz important for value-driven BPM. Learning about the principles of Jazz can help to organize the

Fig. 11.2 Positioning of
what Jazz has to do
with BPM
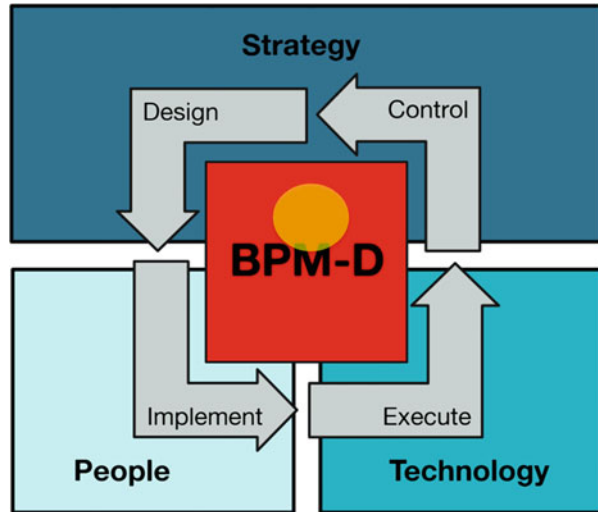
discipline of vBPM and establish the right process culture. In working toward particular concepts, such as digitalization or the agile organization, the dynamics and characteristics of a Jazz band and Jazz music become very relevant.

Gold, a musician and educator, distinguishes five key behaviors of Jazz musicians that are relevant for business [3]:

- Autonomy: self-governing, independent, and adaptable, but still supporting a larger organization (the band)
- Passion: commitment and energy to pursue excellence
- Risk: ability to take chances and explore new things and to support others in doing so
- Innovation: creating new solutions by finding new ways to recombine existing things
- Listening: ability to really hear and feel the communication of others

We explore these aspects in the following discussions about Jazz and BPM. This chapter focuses on all aspects of the value-driven BPM-Discipline, as shown in Fig. 11.2. It closes the loop from Chap. 1, which introduced the concept of vBPM. The principles of Jazz help to establish the overall thinking and culture for this successful management discipline that moves strategy into people- and technology-based execution—at pace with certainty.

11.1   Teamwork with Continuously Changing Roles

Each musician of a successful and well-performing Jazz band is individually very skilled. This is the basis for the musician's certain level of autonomy. However, to be really successful, the band must work together as a team, toward a joint goal. The

melody of a tune is presented by one of the lead instruments and supported by the others. Then, each musician plays a solo, an "improvisation," supported by the rest of the band. After the solo, the musician steps back and supports the next musician in his improvisation. Everyone leads and follows during a Jazz performance. Naturally, there is a band leader who decides which tunes are played and organizes the band. But during the "process of playing," everyone must lead, support, and follow.

This behavior is coordinated by a very intense informal communication. Brief looks, nods, or other signs enable the band members to exchange information very efficiently and effectively. Musicians listen to one another, so their playing is inspired by the playing of fellow musicians. This results in a very agile team, in which every musician uses their own particular skills to move the entire band—the team—forward to reach its goal of high performance. The band adapts to the overall atmosphere and to the audience.

Traditional companies are still organized like a symphony orchestra. The conductor hands out the sheet music that everyone must play. Then he leads the performance and ensures that everyone follows the plan as defined. All of the other orchestra musicians follow—all the time. They also deliver a result of value to the audience—but through a "standard product" in a standardized process—depending all on the conductor. The Jazz band delivers "individualized products" that can be adjusted quickly to the audience's mood and requests, using agile processes created through the creativity of the individual musicians. Top management of a traditional company can be compared with the conductor and the employees with the musicians of the orchestra.

A modern organization which is successful in our business environment of continuous change must work like a Jazz band to deal with the fast pace of new developments, for example, the opportunities and threats digitalization brings. Everyone has to lead efforts in his or her areas of expertise and follow in other initiatives, supporting another leader. This results in high levels of agility and a climate of innovation. The resulting dynamic is especially important for emergent processes, as described previously [2, 5].

Modern organizations are increasingly replacing static organizational structures through the changing roles employees play. The BPM-Discipline provides the framework for the required intense communication and the use of team members' individual skills to achieve overall goals. BPM delivers the basic alignment and environment in which the agile business team can truly produce value for clients and enable the organization to become a high-performance business.

Continuous change management is supported by ongoing intense communication. Every member of a modern company learns from colleagues and provides others with new ideas and know-how, just like musicians in a Jazz band. Change becomes part of the day-to-day routine. This is the business environment targeted by value-driven BPM and ultimately makes BPM a team sport [6].

The changing roles in Jazz bands and enterprises are visualized in Fig. 11.3. In both areas an intense informal communication is required.

Fig. 11.3 Leading and supporting—continuously changing roles

11.2   Find the Right Degree of Freedom

People who are not accustomed to listening to Jazz and its improvisations may think that a musician can just do what he wants during improvisation. But that is not the case. A Jazz tune sets certain parameters, which guide the improvisation. The musician must consider the key in which the tune is written, the form, the harmony defined through the chord changes, the rhythm, and the melody.

These parameters define a musician's degree of freedom. If you listen to the classical New Orleans style of Jazz for a few hours, it may become boring. The reason is that the musicians have very little freedom to improvise; the creativity has narrow boundaries. If you listen to Free Jazz for an hour, you may end up with a headache because you do not recognize any structure at all. The musicians have a great degree of freedom—but not much direction. The most interesting and, in my opinion, best-to-listen-to Jazz sets the degree of freedom somewhere in the middle, such as the Bebop style. In this style, musicians have enough freedom to really improvise and be creative while still maintaining harmony, form, and other parameters that makes listening easier and more pleasurable. They have a framework in which they work. They follow a direction that ensures they deliver a result of value to their audience, their customers.

An organization using BPM also must find the right degree of freedom for employees. If every working step is defined in detail through highly refined process models, human creativity is lost, and innovation and agility are difficult to achieve. If there are no rules or guidelines, the organization becomes chaotic without direction and is not focused on the company goals and the clients. In some areas, for example, in finance, you may even intentionally not want to give people too much freedom for creativity. It is more about being compliant with standards and

legal requirements. Therefore, companies must set the right degree of freedom when defining business process governance guidelines.

Organizations define the degree of detail to which the business processes should be modeled and, with that, the degree of freedom of the people who must apply and execute them. This can even vary from process to process, e.g., depending on the form of execution—automated or manual. The process governance and related guidelines provided by the BPM-Discipline organize this degree of freedom. One consequence is process models reflecting the different degrees of freedom for specific processes or subprocesses. Value-driven BPM sets enough direction to reach the defined goals by moving the enterprise strategy into execution and leaves enough freedom to use all the potential of the involved people. BPM delivers the framework and basic structure for success—while enabling innovation and agility through the right degree of freedom.

The definition of the right degree of freedom in Jazz and business is described in Fig. 11.4.

11.3   Use a Common Language

When a Jazz musician plays a solo, this improvisation is "invented" on the spot. The musician is an "ad hoc composer." However, not everything is invented from scratch. Musicians practice music patterns, or licks, and voicings of chords, e.g., for piano players, which they use during their performances. A lick consists of a certain set of notes that fit well together. Licks are combined to "produce" the improvisation. They can be transferred from one scale to another and from one tune
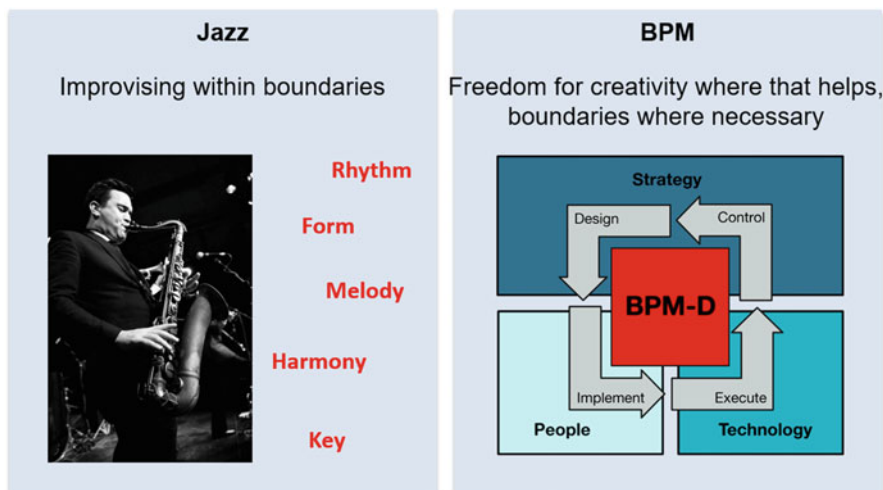

Fig. 11.4 Defining the right degree of freedom

to the next. Every Jazz musician develops a "vocabulary" of music and communicates the tune based on that "language" during the performance. New musicians start with a limited vocabulary, which they increase over time. They read the sheet music that visualizes licks and listen to their colleagues to learn the licks.

It is key to use this language of music at the right time during a performance. A Jazz tune has a rhythmical element called "swing" that creates a certain tension. This timing is a main characteristic of Jazz tunes. Every "music communication" must follow that timing. If the tune does not swing during the performance, it is not really Jazz. Jazz musicians communicate and deliver their music under strict time considerations.

Business process engineers also use a specific language. Aforementioned information modeling methods, e.g., event-driven process chains or the business process-modeling language, describe processes. Such methods can be used as the basic language of BPM that can be compared to the notes on sheet music for a tune. This language drives process automation and supports change management activities—information, communication, and training. Reference models can be compared to the licks Jazz musicians use. They are predefined components that are used to design entire business processes. The overall BPM-Discipline provides the guidelines for the communication and the targeted use of language. This supports the agility required in today's business environment because it ensures an efficient and effective communication based on a common language. New employees can learn from the structured documentation of process, data, functions, organizations and delivered value. They increase their "language knowledge" step by step until they can understand the entire processes in which they are involved and master the subprocesses they actively work on.

The timing of process initiatives and related communication is also very important. Enterprises must react quickly, preferably in real time, to changes in the business environment. Digitalization and analytics are all about providing timely information. The "real-time enterprise," which is enabled through the BPM-Discipline, has to keep the right "swing" using the common "language of BPM," just like a Jazz band. The factor time, combined with effective communication, is just as important for BPM as it is for a Jazz tune.

The use of a common language is visualized in Fig. .

11.4   Continuous Innovation

During an improvisation, Jazz musicians "invent" new music. As discussed previously, they use existing patterns in the form of licks to put together a new improvisation. This is done in such a way that the audience appreciates the music, and so it is not only something new, but new music that is successfully positioned "on the market." It is a short-term innovation.

In addition, most of the very successful Jazz musicians also contribute to entirely new styles of Jazz. For example, Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk were at the
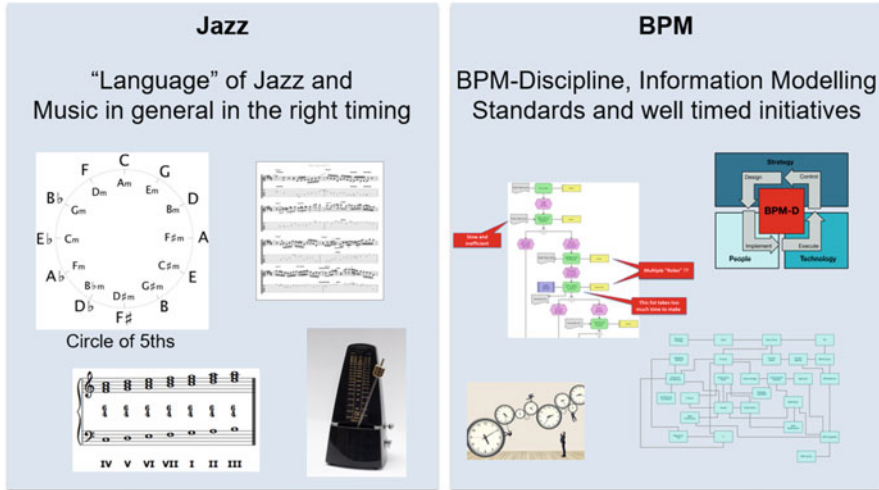
Fig. 11.5 Use of a common language

forefront of Bebop and made this Jazz style a reality [7, 8]. Miles Davis not only heavily influenced Bebop, but was also a driver of Modal Jazz and later Jazz Rock or Fusion Jazz [9]. Based on their improvisations and strong commitment to discovering new musical dimensions, Jazz musicians initiate continuous innovation. In this situation, it is a long-term innovation with a transformational character.

To innovate, Jazz musicians take risks—controlled risks. If someone plays a wrong note, that is generally not a major concern. One can repeat the "mistake" several times and, therefore, make it part of an interesting improvisation, of an innovation, if you will or one can correct the situation quickly by playing a neighboring note that resolves the initial "mistake". The high degree of creativity and innovation is possible based on the general acceptance of taking the necessary risk and defined approaches to manage risk.

This strong focus on innovation is also a key aspect of the discipline of value-driven BPM. Innovation and agility are among the main values it delivers. Therefore, BPM encourages that people act like Jazz musicians. They must be excited about doing things in a new and better way, about improving processes and inventing new ones to transform the organization. Driving a process from manual execution to semiautomated, then automated, and finally to a flexible, adaptive process can be the key for an organization's success. Business model innovation based on new processes is crucial for many enterprises. BPM needs the Jazz spirit to ensure short-term innovation, as well as long-term innovation and transformation effects. That is not something that one can plan and execute in detail. Every employee must practice the appropriate basic behavioral patterns. Everyone must behave and act like a successful Jazz musician, delivering first-class, short-term improvisations and supporting more and more long-term transformational changes.

An organization must create an environment that encourages taking risks in order to be successful. Innovative companies encourage creativity, even if it increases the risk of controlled mistakes. Tools, methods, and approaches provided by BPM, such as the approach to managing emergence or the use of simulation and process-modeling approaches to create transparency, allow organizations to manage and mitigate risk so they can encourage their employee's creativity.

This also means the organizational structures in a company must be flexible enough to encourage such innovative behavior. The next-generation enterprise has to be organized like a Jazz band, not like a symphony orchestra. Larger companies may have characteristics of a Jazz Big Band, requiring additional structure, but still offering individuals the freedom to be creative and innovative.

Continuous innovation for short-term step-by-step improvements or longer-term transformational improvements is illustrated in Fig. 11.6.

11.5 Having Fun Is Important, Too

When you listen to live Jazz performances, you can generally feel the excitement and passion of the musicians. You often see that they really have fun doing what they do—improvising, being creative, and taking risks to come up with new, unique ideas. In many cases, this becomes especially obvious in the last set of an evening, when the musicians demonstrate all their talents while feeling good about finalizing a successful performance. "Having fun" is an important basis for delivering good music and for giving the audience the best "result of value." "Having fun" while delivering the "process of music" is a significant aspect of the work of a successful Jazz musician.

Fig. 11.6 Continuous innovation

That does not mean that playing Jazz music does not require a lot of hard work. Even professional, experienced musicians often practice eight or more hours per day. Having real fun at a performance requires significant effort on the front end. For instance, while learning very basic piano skills, I began to realize how many times I had to practice simple techniques before I could really have fun playing an entire tune.

When I moved from Germany to the United States, an American friend told me that there were two key aspects for being successful in the United States: "funny" and "money." Successful processes should contribute to revenue and profit, but it must also be fun to design, implement, execute, and control those processes. Business process engineers and all of the people involved in working on business processes should like their jobs and have fun during their work—at least most of the time. They must have a passion for processes and their particularities—and have fun while managing a process toward high performance to execute the business strategy. The BPM-Discipline needs to address this aspect to realize its full potential.

This does not mean that there is no hard work involved here, too. Process engineers have to learn the basic capabilities to work on processes and be productive and successful member of the BPM-Discipline community. Then they can really have fun making things happen, transferring strategy in to execution—fast and at low risk.

"Having fun" and "passion" enables creativity and innovation. BPM needs people to have fun with their work—and who can transfer that to their colleagues. Then the BPM-Discipline is on its best way to enable high performance and deliver value through systematic strategy execution, "Funny and Money."

This concept is visualized in Fig. 11.7.

Fig. 11.7 Having fun is important, too

11.6 The Bottom Line

- A successful Jazz band must work together as a team. The members continuously change roles. Everyone leads and follows. This dynamic is also required by the BPM-Discipline, especially for the management of emergent processes (Sect. 11.1).
- Jazz musicians must have enough freedom to really improvise and be creative while still maintaining harmony, form, and other parameters of a tune to make listening easier and more pleasurable. The discipline of value-driven BPM also has to deliver the right degree of freedom to an organization, especially through the appropriate business process governance and the appropriate design of processes (Sect. 11.2).
- Every Jazz musician develops a "vocabulary" of music, a common language. Based on this language, the music must be delivered in the right timing. BPM uses process and other information models as a language. Reference models and their components are "words" and "sentences" that are re-used. The language of process management drives related actions. Those must also be executed in the appropriate timing (Sect. 11.3).
- Based on their improvisations and the strong commitment to discovering new aspects of their music, Jazz musicians initiate continuous innovation, short term and long term. This is also essential for value-driven BPM: short-term improvements and longer-term transformational changes are critical for high-performance organizations (Sect. 11.4).
- Having fun and true passion is a significant part of the work of a successful Jazz musician. It is also essential for BPM and the involved people. It is important to create a culture of innovation and high performance both in Jazz and business environments (Sect. 11.5).

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