Understanding Business Process Automation

Tools for Business Process Management

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Foreword

This paper is intended for:

- Managers in charge of business processes (in finance, quality, HR, and other departments) who want to put cost-saving plans in place quickly and easily, applying standardization, automation and intra-and-inter-departmental integration.
- Managers in information systems who wish to place BPM tools (formalization, automation, simulation and process management) at the heart of operating performance improvement processes for their company or organization.

This white paper discusses the key elements necessary to:

- Prove that BPM and implementation of process automation projects naturally work well together;
- Identify reasons why the current technological context is favorable for implementing process optimization projects supported by BPM platforms (service-oriented architecture, extending traditional company boundaries, BPMN, and so on); and
- Position process automation projects at just the right level in order to roll them out more effectively.

We offer examples from projects where Bonita Open Solution has been implemented to illustrate some of these points.

In this paper,

- The acronym BPM is used for “business process management.”
- The acronym BPMS is for “business process management suite,” the software platforms organized around a workflow engine that makes it possible to model, simulate, execute and pilot processes.

Note also that process references are regularly updated on www.allaboutbpm.com and on www.bonitasoft.com and www.bonitasoft.org, in downloadable documents and as processes that can be implemented with Bonita Open Solution (BPMN modeling).
1. Introduction

Acronyms can be useful to say a lot with just a little. This is particularly true for “BPM”, which can mean three different things at once:

- Managing by processes: implementing a process-based management system to steer the company to sustainable performance.
- Company reference mapping: modeling processes, information systems, organizations, management rules, etc.
- Execution and process management: implementing ERP and BPMS tools with workflow engines, such as Bonita Open Solution, that allow you to develop, execute and manage processes.

BPM has become a very popular acronym, one that suggests opportunity and is easily recognizable, so professionals in the sector (software companies, service providers) seem to want to make it mean what suits them. This suggests that the different BPM realities are also reflected in a power struggle:

- Some players who wish to stand out for their process management are careful to distance themselves from the players involved in process modeling and execution. In doing so, they are often criticized for working on a solely conceptual level that doesn’t always translate to improvements in operations.
- Some players involved in process execution try to reassure their clients in order to strengthen their sales position, but by doing so they increase confusion about business process management itself and the BPM tools that support it.

The goal of this white paper is to reconcile these two approaches and show that BPM and the process of implementing BPMS platforms are closely linked, and that each one supports and reinforces the other. We illustrate this through the following points:

1. Process automation is inextricably linked to process reconfiguration. It’s possible to rapidly put in place plans for improvement, which support both Business Process Management techniques (process mapping and re-mapping) and their implementation (process automation).
2. BPMS tools make information systems more agile in general, particularly enterprise resource planning (ERP). Business process management justifies return-on-investment (ROI).
3. BPMS tools strengthen the business’s capability to manage and measure processes, which is at the heart of BPM implementation.
4. The emergence of a common modeling and execution language, BPMN, makes BPM more intelligible for business users who are responsible for processes, and for the information technologists that implement them. This makes it possible to imagine and develop technical solutions to support innovative BPM.
5. Following the lead of BPM that places the individuals who are involved in a process at the heart of performance improvement, the applications created around workflow engines place the individual at the heart of the process execution.
6. BPM relies more and more on the concept of extended systems in order to offer innovative, high-performance processes. BPMS tools allow you to put these concepts into practice, supporting processes from beginning to end using a variety of different information systems.
2. **Automation is closely linked to redesign**

2.1. **Creativity and automation are complementary, not opposite**

Does BPM inhibit initiative and stifle creativity, as some critics claim? The arguments behind this idea declare, basically, that by structuring processes, BPM sets them in stone and forbids any change or innovation in the way a business or organization delivers its products and services.

This view stems from a misunderstanding about the true nature of BPM, the aim of which is actually to coordinate continuous process improvement.

To achieve this, there are two distinct phases of BPM:

- **The process execution phase.** The goal here is to ensure that processes are carried out as they were designed to be performed. Following that logic, “automation” is precisely what is sought, the idea being to control productivity and reproducibility.

- **The analysis and optimization phase.** The goal here is to coordinate all the various steps from getting suggestions for improvement, though process performance analysis, to defining and implementing plans for improvement. The point here is not to reproduce but rather to improve procedures.

Oddly, organizations will commit more easily to automating processes than they will to continuous improvement. The latter requires the organization to:

- Include a way to accept suggestions for improvement made by those involved in implementing the processes;
- Analyze performance in the processes already in place in order to identify problem areas and possibilities for improvement;
- Have a comprehensive overview of interconnected processes, as problems are often found where different processes meet;
- Categorize, test and select which suggestions for improvement to implement; and
- Roll out the improved processes, knowing that this can take time and that they may have to work with several variations of a process at a time.

2.2. **The business process management process**

In order to best automate and improve processes, organizations have to put in place a process management system. This is what allows them to manage the “analysis and optimization phase.”

“Process management” has three main parts:

- **Definition of roles and responsibilities** relative to the process management – who is responsible for the process, who oversees it.
- **Definition of governance** – process steering committees, monitoring committees.
- **Definition of the process performance analysis process** – scheduling and time frames for process analysis activities, defining and selecting plans for improvement, following-up on their implementation.
Managing the process performance improvement cycle is in itself a process. This is what is sometimes referred to as the “process management process.”

And this process, like other processes, can be automated. BPMS tools are a natural for this, as it is not covered by transaction tools (such as ERP). The following example illustrates this, presenting concretely how Bonita Open Solution is used for automation of the process management process at a software company.

### Three processes to automate the “process management process” in a software company implemented with Bonita Open Solution

1. **Collect improvement suggestions**
   Every employee at the company can go through the company’s intranet to access a formula that allows them to inform management about any problems identified and make process improvement suggestions. The employee notes on the form the process(es) concerned, states the nature of the problem (employees, process, system) and his/her suggestion’s potential for improvement. This information is automatically sent to the managers in charge of the process concerned. After the regular, scheduled process reviews, the managers complete the form, filling in the information about what was done following the suggestion (training, process reconfiguration, information system changes, etc.) and which plan(s) for improvement the suggestion was included in, if necessary. The suggestion-maker is automatically notified of the changes in the suggestion filed and what is being done following that. The employee can also follow the plans for improvement that were implemented relating to his/her suggestion.

2. **Follow up on planned improvements**
   Every plan for improvement identified during the process review is backed up by a workflow. When this workflow is being put into place, the various responsibilities for implementing the plan for improvement are distributed. The estimated time frame for its implementation is recorded. Every contributor will then record the progress in the workflow. A log is made of the improvement progress and alerts are sent out when a step is past its deadline.

3. **Follow up on process modifications**
   The company has reference description documents for its processes available on its intranet, accessible to employees. This reference document begins with a description of the organization’s macro-processes and for some processes goes all the way down to clear specifications for the operating methods. When a plan for improvement is determined (process 2), it is specified whether implementing it will mean the process reference document needs to be updated on the intranet. If it does, a process reference document update instance is created automatically. This makes it possible to follow the various steps of updating a process description. The new process will be provided to employees only once the process pilot has approved it.

In conclusion, though the invention of the ship may also have brought shipwrecks, process management certainly did not invent inaction. It may well increase inaction if the two sides of BPM (automation and continuous improvement) are not both taken into consideration. The best way to reduce the risk of this happening is to organize and automate the optimization and innovation process.
3. Making ERP agile again

3.1. New service-oriented architectures make information systems more flexible

With the exception of a few very specific fields, since the 1990s IT managers at businesses and organizations have been creating their IT architectures around the implementation of selected software packages. They have been confronting the issue of whether or not it a company’s needs could be met with integrated software, or if different specialized software would be implemented in different functional fields (the “Best of Breed” approach). Each approach has disadvantages: limitations in the functional coverage for ERP; and complex implementation and difficulty in maintaining interfaces between different software for “Best of Breed.”

To address these disadvantages, new architectures were developed in the early 2000s, and today they are coming into their own. They rely on technical components that facilitate exchanges between information systems, share company data (Master Data Management) and reuse other components (service-oriented architectures).

These new architectures aim to coordinate an information system that can include:

- ERP’s ever more extensive capacities for functional coverage;
- vertical offers that are very often innovative;
- specific developments that support the particularities of each individual organization;
- the opening of the information systems to third parties (data exchange and use by navigators); and
- using the offers proposed by SaaS (Software as a Service).

3.2. Information Systems should adapt to the process, not the other way around

When this is the case, it can be a process manager’s dream come true. The process no longer has to adapt to the information system; instead, the information system adapts to the business process. Yet all BPM processes are more or less constantly faced with the problem of having to force the information system to evolve to support target processes that result from continuous process improvement.

BPMS tools today provide the solution, keeping the promise of “agile” information systems that these new technical architectures have offered. Workflow engines make it possible to construct information systems that support a process from beginning to end, encompassing multiple technology platforms and multiple applications. These tools make them accessible beyond the confines of a single organization; they rely on a service logic to make the most of available applications (both existing packages or specifically developed software); they rely on quick, accessible development software.
3.3. **IT will save us from IT-related problems**

In order for this idea to become a reality, BPMS tools must adopt the logic of service-oriented architectures. The activities that are included in a process need to be able to use the services proposed by applications in the company’s information system. The more connectors there are to support this coordinated interworking, the more quickly composite processes can be implemented.

The strategy of a software company such as BonitaSoft relies on an architecture and a process that encourage the development of various connectors. This is accomplished in part by using Open Source code for their products and developing a community of contributors who are constantly proposing new connectors that follow this type of logic. The example given below illustrates how this works.

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### Konica-Minolta improves customer satisfaction by optimizing its contract management with BPM

Founded in 1873, Konica-Minolta is one of the major international manufacturers of printing materials, as well as in the fields of optics, medical imaging and industrial measuring instruments.

With more than 95,000 pieces of equipment like copiers rented out to clients and more than 2,000 new contracts generated every month, contract management is critical for its French subsidiary. The contract management process involves 70 employees in the back-office along with 300 technicians, 300 sales people and 200 brokers.

To optimize data entry for contracts and help the sales team ensure customers the best service, Konica-Minolta implemented Bonita Open Solution to harmonize and streamline contracts. The automated process means that today all the internal approval steps can be done digitally, working in real-time directly with all the parties involved (pre-sales, sales, after sales, tech support). The process that BonitaSoft supports connects to multiple different applications (SAP, MS Exchange, etc.) to coordinate the services necessary to carry out all steps of the process. The project has made it possible to shift from an application run in Lotus Notes to a service-oriented architecture that makes use of the functionalities offered by the most cutting-edge application software in the field.

The process has thus been made faster and more reliable, and now every contract is proposed for approval with all the necessary pieces of information needed to make a decision. This improvement represents an improvement for clients and at the same time has increased internal productivity by 30%.

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The concept of continuous progress that is associated with BPM processes calls upon the capacity for continuous process adjustment within the company, not merely on the ability to reconfigure that is generally associated with major projects. Using “agile” BPMS tools meets this need for constant adjustment.
4. Performance measure and workflow

4.1. BPM processes support information system architecture projects

Return on Investment (ROI) is at the heart of most investment decisions, in particular when they concern information systems. The IT department’s role is to manage the IT portion of the company’s process assets, and it therefore has to justify the ROI for the investments it makes. There’s no difference if they are implementing “agile” architectures based on service concepts (SOA or Service-Oriented Architectures), or in rolling-out workflow within already existing architectures.

It’s not unusual for IT departments to propose an investment in a solution that was not specifically requested by IT service users. They will have to convince people not only that the solution is a good one, but also that it meets a need.

By using BPM, IT departments can justify their needs and prove how important meeting them is. When it is easier to identify and justify an IT project, it is easier to put forward objective, pertinent arguments when decisions need to be made.

4.2. Workflow helps make pertinent performance indicators available

Of course it would be misleading to say that BPM always provides the answers when it comes to justifying an ROI. It is in fact often difficult to measure the ROI that comes from improvement as part of continuous improvement. This is often because the pertinent performance indicators are simply not available.

Operational processes need to provide data that can be used to draw up cost/quality/deadline indicators. Creating key performance indicators is often complicated either because the data doesn’t exist or because it is hard to interpret.

Workflow engines can supply data that can be used to create these indicators at low cost. Also, indicators developed directly from the engine can be highly pertinent for three main reasons:

- They can deal with both quality and time, whereas most indicators available through transactional systems are only financial.
- They make the indicator more pertinent by automatically following the generating event (for example, the actual date a claim is made, taken directly from the source, not information entered when a claim is dealt with).
- They can monitor every step of a process, no matter what systems are used and who uses them.

4.3. BPMS tools strengthen management and control of operational performance

Beyond the usefulness of indicators, with workflow tools it becomes possible to implement a proactive rather than a reactive management system. It is possible to follow process performance as the process happens, not just after it is finished. Depending on the level of performance found, workflow can be used to implement alert systems to inform users of any problems so they can decide more quickly how to fix them.
4.4. Managing safety and controls

Process performance is not only measured by productivity indicators and what is on schedule. It is also measured by how closely processes conform to the requirements they must meet (for example regulations, safety, and security).

Workflow tools boost operations process monitoring and control on two levels:

- They facilitate systematic implementation of controls into processes, to boost the ability to effectively control that the process is taking place as expected.
- They increase the capacity for process controls to be automated because these processes are better covered by the information systems.

In addition, workflow tools themselves actually support control procedures (internal audits, internal controls, security, etc.) which in their turn are organized around rolling out structured processes:

- for self-evaluation;
- for automated monitoring; and
- for following up action plans to strengthen internal controls.

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**Implementing BPM at the Croatian insurance company Triglav to strengthen the incident management system and improve process management capability**

The Croatian insurance company Triglav implemented a solution based on Bonita Open Solution to strengthen its feedback system and incident management for its information system.

In addition to the advantages that an industrialized Help Desk type of process could bring, the project team wanted to develop a project that would be a reference for extending BPM. The approach they chose needed to:

- Define target processes in keeping with the good practices in the field – manage level 1 support at the Contact Center, use a single point of contact, manage priorities, create knowledge bases, etc.
- Automate these processes with a BPM coordination and execution tool (BonitaSoft was chosen).
- Implement an operational pilot process.

For the last point, using Bonita Open Solution to roll out the project made it possible to identify the main elements of process management:

- Use of a log for the main process performance indicators, data for which is managed by Bonita Open Solution (event traceability).
- Creation of real time alerts related to how critical an incident is.
- A continuous process improvement system in place, which uses key indicators that identify bottlenecks in the process (to flag the need for process reconfiguration/allocation of resources).
5. Bringing the language of business in line with the language of IT

5.1. BPMN: the “promise of Esperanto” made good?

BPM relies on 3 main drivers to fulfill the promise of continuous improvement:

- The human driver – how to get the best out of employees’ skills and human resources
- The process driver – how to optimize the value production chain
- The information systems driver – how to support processes through an effective information system

These 3 drivers are intertwined. Information systems have to work with processes, processes have to make the best use of technological advances, company employees have to be able to carry out processes according to rules, processes have to take into consideration the company’s employee capacity, and so on.

With these three indivisible drivers, there are many actors involved in the improvement system, which means there can be many difficulties in communication. Those involved in the information system side of things often speak a language that is foreign to business managers; business managers can have a hard time making themselves understood by the IT teams, and the translation of a business process description into process automation is difficult and a frequent source of errors. In other words, dialogue between those managing a project and those running the project is complicated.

Various standards organizations have attempted to address the subject and create a process description language that can be used by business managers to describe a company’s processes and by the information system designers to automate them.

The BPMN standard was drawn up in this context in order to create a standard means of graphic representation in a business.

There are benefits to this standard on 3 levels:

1. It helps to facilitate dialogue among the various actors in process management:
   - Individuals in the process optimization system, for standardized deliverables resulting from process analysis and reconfiguration, improved quality of process description
   - individuals who execute processes on a daily basis and those involved in optimization
   - individuals who reconfigure processes and those in IT who develop the tools to support target processes

2. It helps to simplify workflow implementation by rolling out automated solutions created from process descriptions that are intelligible to business managers.

3. It improves interoperability of various systems by following the BPMN standard, in particular for various BPM tools, in the broadest sense (design, execution, monitoring, change support).
5.2. A driving force in rolling out solutions

The BPMN standard, and now the BPMN version 2.0 are garnering more and more support, both of end users and of BPM professionals (software and consulting companies). This is partly due to the fact that following this standard makes it easier to implement good practices, and makes it easier, for example:

- to have company reference documents that use the BPMN 2.0 standard for detailed representations of process activities;
- to take processes formalized in the BPMN 2.0 standard and integrate them directly into workflow tools;
- to use the same process representation in training tools and change management.

BonitaSoft made the choice early on to use the BPMN standard. By doing so, as is shown in the following example, users can clearly describe processes and execute these processes without creating program code. There are multiple advantages:

- target processes are designed from the onset with consideration for how the information system will be able to support those processes,
- proposals for improvement can be quickly and directly tested in operations,
- modifications in business processes can immediately be rolled out within the company.

The Open Source approach that BonitaSoft has taken, together with the use of the BPMN standard, make it possible to mobilize an extended community of developers who regularly add to the lists of connectors available for the platform (links to messaging solutions, databases, ERP, CRM, monitoring tools, etc.). These connectors make it possible to develop cross-component solutions covering different portions of the information system; Bonita Open Solution becomes the coordinator for complex organization processes. By using the BPMN 2.0 standard, developers have the guarantee of being able to make the best use of their know-how in all environments that use this standard. By working with Open Source software, developers are sure to reach a large audience, as Bonita Open Solution is one of the most widely distributed BPM solutions in the world.

6. Placing users at the heart of process management

6.1. Employees are at the center of operations improvement

BPM places employees at the heart of operations improvement for 4 key reasons:

1. The best-laid process plan will only work if the people involved in implementing it do the job they are expected to do;
2. Employee suggestions contribute to improving the company’s processes;
3. In terms of performance, the devil is in the details and those details often have to do with human behavior; and
4. Increased productivity is linked to a good understanding of the value-added production chain.

Relevant to the last point, businesses have been working for years on programs to optimize their operating efficiency. They have often focused on getting rid of redundant tasks or tasks without added value, and on helping employees fully master the tasks they perform.
6.2. Moving from “transactions are at the heart of the system” to “users are at the heart of the transaction”

The widespread adoption of transactional systems in general and ERP in particular has served to support these optimization programs. They provided the traceability necessary to analyze and optimize flows, supplied automation capabilities, and helped get rid of redundant tasks.

These systems made it possible to know what had been done, but they did not provide a way to have suggestions for what should be done. To take that analysis a little further, let’s look at an information system contribution to proper process execution.

This contribution can be broken down into 3 types:

1. **Data contribution**
   Information systems make it possible to gather, manage and monitor changes in data (e.g. update of customer files, managing compatibility, etc.).

2. **Transactional contribution**
   Information systems make it possible to execute complex tasks by automating processing (supply chain management tools, for example in sales).

3. **Collaborative contribution**
   Information systems make it possible to manage individual and group contributions to the value chain.

We can illustrate these contribution concepts using the Human Resources recruitment process as an example:

1. **Data contribution**
   Employees keep a file with the information about each applicant, their interviews, evaluations, etc.

2. **Transactional contribution**
   The information about each applicant is organized in a way that makes it easy to review the criteria for the selection. The recruitment process is connected to the new employee onboarding process. The system has automated replies to candidates to confirm receipt of applications.

3. **Collaborative contribution**
   Applications are entered online by each applicant. HR receives a message notifying him/her of a new application, then judges the eligibility of the applicant, which generates a message to the candidate and also to the person concerned in-house. For eligible applicants, the HR manager schedules an interview using the shared calendar for everyone who would be present at the interview. Interviewers who do not provide the required feedback after the interview are sent reminders asking them to document the results of the interview and their assessment of the candidate.
Most businesses today have an information system that covers the first two levels of contribution. This means that the user is not at the center of the process—the transaction is. The user knows their role, which is to feed information into the system by completing the required tasks. At the third level, it is no longer the transaction at the heart of the system, it’s the employee. Employees are sent information via email or a portal that lets them know what needs to be done and also informs them about what else their fellow employees have done in the process.

In recent years, ERP has been included in workflow functions in order to “push” information out to system users and meet the needs associated with collaborative contribution. Tools that are part of workflow extend the benefits of this type of management to more fields of business. By making it possible to create solutions that cover the process from beginning to end, no matter what information systems are used, workflow tools place employees at the heart of the process and provide them with the information they need to do their job well.

These collaborative tools also improve the ability to evaluate operating performance. Because the system actually starts generating information, it is possible to evaluate the timeframes for developing processes and do complete analyses of how those processes are performed.

7. Including the customer in the process

Plans to optimize processes have long been limited to the processes controlled within the company itself. Although third parties were identified as suppliers or customers of processes, it was impossible to modify exactly what they contributed to them.

Technology development has changed this situation in that:

- Internet navigators help give third parties the access to carry out tasks that were formerly reserved for employees of the company (entering an order, for example),
- Service-oriented architectures have made it possible to build information systems that include multiple organizations.

The activities that in the past were always performed inside the company by employess can now be handed over to a business’s customers or suppliers. The latter are an integral part of the scope of processes that can be optimized by BPM, which usually benefits all parties involved.

As far as cost, security and technical reliability concerns go, it is often risky to leave a company’s information system open to third parties. BPMS solutions have been used to coordinate data entry, transfer and processing among various actors involved in the process.
7.1. E-government, an example that everyone understands

One illustration of this trend is e-government systems, where citizens become an integrated actor in the process supported by the information system.

Many implementations of e-government procedures, like the example presented below, illustrate the advantages of process management that includes all partners in the reconfiguration and automation step:

- Reduced costs and shorter scheduled waits when data entry is done by third parties, and the process is set in motion at the earliest possible point.
- Better performance, both in terms of turnaround time and quality (citizens’ opinions are requested about the quality of the service)
- Reduced risk of errors through better allocation of tasks, and traceability of the various steps of the process

The Canary Islands and Mexico implement BPM for numerous processes involving citizens

The use of internet platforms for interaction between citizens and government administration (e-government) is a growing reality in many countries.

There are several advantages, as these systems:

- facilitate dialogue between citizens and various administrative offices;
- speed up processes while reducing costs; and
- improve the perception of the quality of the service provided.

The Canary Islands and the Mexican government both widely use BonitaSoft solutions today to automate administrative management processes in various departments. They use the concept of the extended organization, allowing citizens to enter their requests for services directly, monitor the progress of their requests, and give information to the various actors involved in carrying out their request, all via internet. This system covers multiple processes. For example, passport requests and birth certificates paperwork have been automated.

Reorganizing processes and automating them with a solution like BonitaSoft makes it possible to remove many formerly manual tasks, improves quality of service and traceability of information provided to citizens and provides a real solution for effectively, efficiently managing administrative services.
8. Conclusion

The opinions discussed in this white paper are part of much broader framework of reflections in which management’s concerns are focused on the notions of reactivity (making their organization agile), transparency (meeting the requirements of all those involved), performance (providing the expected services quickly and effectively) and innovation (offering the right products and services at the right time).

A certain number of key factors for success have been identified to:

- control the value creation system;
- encourage dialogue and discussion within the business as well as with the people involved in extended business (customers, suppliers, partners, etc.); and
- facilitate transformation, which is more and more common as continuous process improvement becomes the norm.

We believe that business process management, both at the management level and at the execution level, is absolutely necessary as a base for controlling key success factors. It is a way to coordinate the entire organization, providing transparency and the means to identify areas for improvement. It makes it possible today to take industrialization tools that were formerly confined to a single business and extend them to multiple organizations over various information systems. It supports skills management, allows companies to increase their know-how, and helps implement effective organization.

The process approach should also be able to grow and change in a context where performance no longer comes from a solely scientific management or Taylorist approach, particularly true in our Western economies where the cost of labor is high. It will also come from continuous process innovation where the role of the employee as an important actor, rather than a simple executor, becomes key.

Today this vision guides BonitaSoft’s strategy for solution development. We propose means for discussion and collaboration (“Social BPM”), provide organizations with the means to master “agility” (strengthening simulation capacity, for example) and support change by placing employees at the heart of the system (stepped-up “User Experience” portal functionalities) in order to quickly take advantage of constant technological changes (setting up communities of component developers for the BonitaSoft platform).

BonitaSoft firmly believes that the open source option chosen along with the BPMN 2.0 standard are keys to success in rapidly spreading this vision to a large audience. In this way, BonitaSoft becomes your partner in business process management, with advantages for everyone.
UNDERSTANDING PROCESS AUTOMATION: TOOLS FOR BPM

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