



Process Mining in 2023: Time for Value, Time to Value

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For the past 12 years, process mining has had a remarkable adoption path, evolving from a niche technology to discover process maps from transactional data, to a rich body of data-driven methods and tools for business process monitoring and optimization.

Along the way, companies round the world have invested billions of dollars into optimizing their operations with process mining. Many have reaped tangible benefits. But an over-emphasis on technical capabilities and product features over and above business value, has led many process mining initiatives struggling to navigate past their proof-of-value phase to achieve enterprise-wide value delivery. A study on process mining opportunities and challenges finds that lack of management support remains a critical challenge for process mining programs.

Economic uncertainty and cautious investment budgets will make users of process mining more value-sensitive in the coming year. From now on, process mining will have to demonstrate business value consistently and sustainably. Executive teams will not welcome plans to spend several months setting up the ground for process mining to deliver value. Nor will they be satisfied with plans to deliver business value in one-off shots. They will expect value to be delivered in consistent cycles, in 2 months, in 3 months, in 6 months, in 12 months, and so on.

In this context, the key theme for process mining in 2023 will not be on yet-another technical capability. Sure, we will continue to see the uptake of predictive process monitoring, digital process twins, and other AI-augmented process optimization capabilities. Also, rapid advances in the field of conversational AI will drive the emergence of conversational process mining. But these evolutions in technological capabilities will happen in the background, rather than being critical focus areas.

Instead, the key process mining themes in 2023 will be twofold: delivering business value consistently and doing so with short setup and turnaround times.

In other words, process mining in 2023 will be about delivering business value by efficiently channeling change efforts (time for value) and doing so fast, reliably, and iteratively (time to value).

Time for Value

Companies making their first steps in process mining, as well as those scaling up their process mining efforts, will be paying careful attention to every investment they make. They will want to see value at every milestone, across their entire process mining portfolio.

What does this mean? First, we will see less process mining efforts targeted at merely delivering insights. Instead, process mining will be turned upside down. We will see more strategically aligned process mining efforts, driven by explicit and measurable improvement objectives and clearly scoped processes. Process mining programs will follow a portfolio management approach, linked to a process architecture. Every process mining effort will be carefully prioritized and scoped. The resulting insights will be linked to process changes and actions, which themselves will be linked to expected improvements in KPIs. In other words, every process mining effort will be linked to measurable (and measured) gains. And there will be more emphasis on ongoing post-change monitoring, to ensure that processes do not slip back into lethargy after getting a process mining boost.

Second, we will see more process mining happening on core and customer-facing processes. Ergo, we will see an increasing emphasis on vertical applications of process mining. We will see less emphasis on purchase-to-pay processes (except when linked to core supply chains). On the other hand, we will see more emphasis on process mining in the banking sector (loan origination, know-your-customer and other core banking processes), in the insurance sector (policy and claims management processes), in the logistics sector (freight forwarding and consignment processes), in the telco and utilities sectors (customer service processes), and so on.

Along the way, two things will happen. First, we will see more process mining used in conjunction with automation technology, including RPA and business process orchestration and integration. There will be fewer teams automating tasks just because they can or because it's apparently easy to do so with RPA. RPA will be targeted at delivering concrete improvements, such as increasing an SLA fulfillment rate, or reducing defect rates in a concrete business process. Process mining will be driving a lot of automation decisions.

Second, process mining will blend into the Business Process Management (BPM) lifecycle. It will be used in conjunction with other tools in the BPM toolbox, like root-cause analysis, waste analysis, value chain analysis, customer journey design, business process simulation, and other process analysis and redesign techniques. At the end of the day, there will be a realization that process mining is one of several methods to analyze, optimize and monitor business processes, and like other methods, it has to fit in a BPM framework.

Time to value

The second theme driving process mining in 2023 will be time-to-value. There will be a strong pressure for process mining efforts to deliver value incrementally, in short agile iterations. We have seen too many process mining initiatives putting the cart before the horse – spending countless months in building automated data extraction pipelines and over-engineering a whole range of analytics artifacts and so-called “apps”, before attempting to deliver value to the business, or sometimes, before even knowing which KPIs they seek to improve, which processes affect those KPIs, and what types of changes can improve those KPIs. This will be no more. Process mining efforts will need to start from the business value, not from the data nor from the “analytics apps”.

What does this mean? First, any process mining analysis effort will be subordinated to a business objective and the analysis will have to be change-aware. What’s the point of spending weeks analyzing a process to formulate recommendations that are not implemented? Analysis and redesign should go hand-in-hand – as we analyze a customer service process to improve response times, we may find that there are bottlenecks around some tasks, and that the process workers driving these activities are overloaded. Are we in a position to increase the capacity of these resource pools? Are we able to automate some of those tasks? Should we rather focus on reducing the workload by slashing rework and overprocessing?

Such questions need to be answered before even proceeding with the process mining analysis. For the same reason, we will see more emphasis in data-driven simulation, as a tool to validate the insights of process mining, to compare alternative process changes, and to quantify the impact of changes before their implementation.

Second, process mining approaches that require large teams of data engineers and data scientists to take off will fade out in favor of no-code citizen process mining approaches. After all, the power of process mining comes from its self-service nature. Process mining is, above all, a body of methods that enable line-of-business teams to answer questions and to validate hypotheses about their process by themselves, without being delayed by long roundtrips between business and IT teams.

As a manager, if I am wondering why the NPS score of my process has gone down last week, or if I ponder how I should improve the response times of a customer service process, the last thing I want is to have to launch a 2-months effort to do so. What process mining gives me, precisely, is a tool that enables my team to look into the data themselves, and to link these questions to bottlenecks, rework, overprocessing, defects, and other friction points.

If a process mining tool does not allow analysts in the business teams to build their own analysis, without roundtrips to technical teams, the tool is not serving its purpose.

Takeaways

None of the above should come as a surprise to the seasoned BPM or process mining practitioner. For some, value-orientation is already part of their process mining practice. Others have always treated process mining as one of several methods in their toolbox. But we still see many treating process mining as a standalone panacea, capable of solving all process improvement problems.

We hope this piece will contribute to changing mindsets and promote a more widespread thinking of process mining as part of the broader BPM discipline. The rhetoric wars between "process architecture", "process modeling", "intelligent process automation", and "process mining" should be put to rest. These are all tools in the war chest of value-driven process managers.

Process mining has succeeded in reaching substantial adoption and maturity. It will succeed even more as it becomes strategically aligned and part of a value-driven process management practice. Long live process mining and long live BPM!



About Apromore

By providing advanced process mining capabilities using artificial intelligence and machine learning in an easy-to-use interface, Apromore enables business leaders to quickly visualize their business processes for transformation or optimization. The result of over a decade of extensive research and innovation, Apromore is the only market player offering open source and enterprise-grade process mining solutions both on-premises and in the cloud. For more information please visit www.apromore.com or email us at info@apromore.com

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