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DESIGNING BETTER BUSINESSES

# Modeling Levels

The BPMN modeling process is a top-down, hierarchical approach that starts with an abstract view and drills down into progressively more fine-grained levels of detail, where each child diagram explains the activities that comprise its parent.

Abstraction is the process of focusing on key ideas and information, ignoring irrelevant details. However, relevance is a function of context. Different levels of abstraction are appropriate for differing purposes and audiences.

A descriptive model represents the highest level of abstraction and is suitable for describing process scope and context with executives and others.

An analytical level of detail is required to provide day-to-day operational guidance and to specify requirements for process automation. It's the level of abstraction appropriate for conversations among process participants and the IT department.

An executable process model requires the highest level of detail. Process engineers use executable models.

Steps 1 through 3 of the modeling process yield a descriptive model. Here's an example of such a model. A typical descriptive model consists of participant pools, activities, sequence flows, and message flows. It describes who is responsible for key activities related to the execution of the standard process.

The iterative application of steps 4 through 6 yields analytical models of progressive detail. Here's a more analytical view of the previous process. It incorporates gateways, data objects, and a much broader palette of activity types and events. This level of detail helps to identify appropriate KPIs and opportunities for process improvement.