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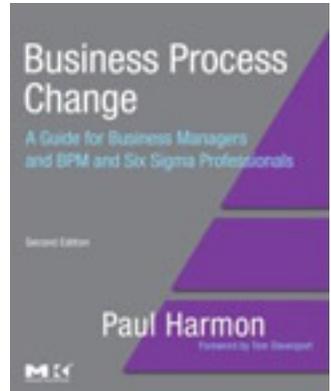
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Michael Hammer

Michael Hammer was not one of my heroes. I guess it was because I started working with Geary Rummler in the late Sixties. By the Eighties I was working with expert systems, which I regarded as a specialized process change technology - a way of capturing the knowledge of subject matter experts and making it available to other employees throughout the organization. I had been working on modeling processes and redesigning them for some twenty years. Thus, it was hard for me to get excited when Michael Hammer, James Champy, Tom Davenport and their associates seemed to discover processes in the early Nineties. Indeed, at the same time they were publishing books on Reengineering, Curt Hall and I published a book, *Intelligent Software Systems Development*, in which we described how techniques like expert systems, case based reasoning, neural networks, and CASE tools would gradually lead to the automation of nearly all business processes.

The main point that Hammer, Champy and Davenport made, to my mind, was that IT had made such advances during the Eighties that it was now possible to completely reconceptualize how processes could be implemented. Hammer famously suggested that most companies had been using IT to pave over cow paths and that it was now time to rip them up and build freeways. Since I believed that Curt and I had already described how to do that -- in quite a bit more detail than Hammer -- I felt that he and his ideas were getting



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more attention than was warranted. In hindsight, of course, I understand that I was jealous that my efforts and my approach hadn't gotten more attention than the ideas of this guy who seemed to me to have just arrived on the scene.

I'm a lot older now. I've figured out the difference between describing a technology and marketing a technology. Michael Hammer was the most important process guru in the latter half of the 20th Century. His only competitor, within the century, was Frederick Winslow Taylor, whose book, *Principles of Scientific Management*, dominated business book sales in the early years of the century.

I attribute Hammer's influence to two things. First - his enthusiasm. He presented his ideas with vigor and confidence. He suggested that if you didn't reengineer within the next year or so you would be in serious trouble. Second - his vision. Michael Hammer knew how to get the attention of CEOs and COOs. He didn't focus on details; he focused on the survival of organizations in a period of unprecedented change. He made the business case for caring about processes, and he made senior executives sit up and pay attention.

Of course Hammer also had some good ideas - that processes were important and that IT could help companies make processes much more efficient. But lots of other people had these same ideas and many of them understood the implementation problems involved far better than Hammer. Hammer wasn't a technical guy, he was a visionary and a salesman.

Reengineering got a huge amount of attention from about 1991 to 1997 and then began to fade. Hammer had encouraged companies to attempt too much. Too many companies tried to redo

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their major business processes and quickly found that the effort required years and that, meantime, employee resistance was fierce. Equally important, IT wasn't really as ready as Hammer thought it was. Hammer, for example, was urging companies to link employees together with pre-Internet communications technology, which really wasn't up to the job. Most organizations didn't begin to explore Internet and Web technologies until about 1995-96, and most people didn't get computers in their homes until the end of the decade.

By the end of the Nineties, hardly anyone was talking about Reengineering. Those of us who had been interested in processes before the Nineties had been taken along for a fantastic ride and were now left with a rather nasty headache.

In the late Nineties, however, when no one dared speak of Reengineering, companies were busy redesigning their business models to accommodate the massive process changes enabled by email, the Web, and by customers who now wanted to do business online. During the same period, companies finally gave up their commitment to developing their own software and embraced off-the-shelf software (ERP, CRM), automating and integrating processes in ways previously unimaginable. And, by 2003, software technologists were beginning to get excited about combining workflow, rules, enterprise application integration, and business activity monitoring tools to create Business Process Management Suites (BPMS) that allow business managers to better manage their newly automated processes.

We are, today, almost 20 years after Hammer wrote his initial Reengineering article for the Harvard Business Review in 1991, more focused on business processes than ever. The largest software

organizations are competing to develop the business process management platform that will power the next generation of corporate business applications and usher in a new generation of process management techniques.

Many different individuals have worked, each in their own way, to encourage the shift in management thinking that Business Process Management represents. None did more, however, than Michael Hammer.

In public Michael Hammer was always compelling and assertive. To the end he used the same examples and gave speeches that were similar to those he gave in the mid-Nineties. To the end he was always an over-the-top advocate of process change. In person, however, he could be quite different - quieter and more thoughtful, almost academic. He had moved well beyond his initial advocacy of radical process reengineering and tended, in private, to focus more on the problems of managing process change and on the importance of teams and empowering employees to achieve results. His understanding of process change was very humane. His recent publication of a Process Audit in the *Harvard Business Review* provides a nice example of how well he had come to understand the integrated nature of process change efforts.

Enthusiasm, however, always remained Michael Hammer's strong suit. He continued, to the very end, to excite senior executives about the possibilities of process. I don't know of anyone who can take his place.

I was shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Michael Hammer on September 3rd. Dr. Michael Hammer may not have been one of my heroes - but he

was the most important leader in the business process field. His was the first name most people thought of when they thought of business process change. The rest of us will all find it a little harder to get executives excited about process without Michael Hammer to tell them why they really have to embrace process change, or else!

Till next time,

Paul Harmon

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