

Harmon on BPM Paul Harmon**2015**

As I write this 2014 is fading fast and in a few days we will be beginning a new year. It's a time to reflect on 2014 and to plan for the year ahead.

Very broadly, 2015 will be a confusing year. Some countries are sliding toward another slump, while others are enjoying new prosperity. The US just finished a quarter of record growth and seems ready for an expansive year. China also seems set for a good year while Europe's picture is more confusing. The factor that will have the biggest short term impact will be the price of oil. As long as it stays low, as it is now, countries that depend on manufacturing should do well, and those that depend on exporting oil should do less well.

I suspect that the cost of oil will stay low for awhile, reflecting the new US supplies being made available via fracking. That in turn should accelerate a trend that has already begun in the US – the repatriation of jobs from abroad, as manufacturing changes and moves back to the US. I don't think most jobs that went offshore will return, but I suspect that some will reflecting new techniques and lower energy costs. 3D printing is picking up speed rather quickly and it makes entirely new supply chain designs possible. A variety of items, especially replacement parts, will, increasingly, not be manufactured abroad, and then warehoused, but created, on demand, as needed, close to the ultimate consumer.

In a similar way, although low energy prices will slow the transition, the US is moving toward hybrid cars, and will probably be moving toward hydrogen-based cars in the near future. This suggests a major transition by US companies engaged in transportation – new cars, new distributors, new maintenance practices, and new filling station networks. Toyota's breakthrough in hydrogen technology has certainly demonstrated the idea that if you want to control the future, you begin by inventing it.

We could go on, but the main point is that change will continue to happen, at a very rapid rate, and new technology will continue to require the creation of new business models and new processes. This, combined with a rapidly growing US economy is going to guarantee a vibrant year for the US as companies gear up, hiring more people, and introducing new products and services.

Focusing more narrowly on BPM, most would suggest that BPM has faltered in recent years. There was great enthusiasm when Howard Smith and Peter Fingar published *BPM: The Third Generation* in 2003. Trade shows bloomed and people gathered to renew their commitment to using business process techniques to improve

organizational performance. By 2014 it seemed as if the bloom was off that particular rose. BPMS tools had certainly been developed and deployed, but more as software development tools, and not as a revolution in the way business managers controlled their business practices. Moreover, the whole process movement had become confused as process modeling vendors bought business rules vendors and both bought Business Intelligence vendors. Let's face it: the market has been confusing, and it hasn't had a string of major wins to underline its promise of major productivity gains.

In the past few years, as the world has struggled to work its way out of an economic slump, major process innovation has been the last thing on the mind of most business executives.

Technological change has continued, however, and now, as the US begins to emerge into a period of vibrant expansion, there is a new BPM technology in place to support it. The popular term is Case Management, and by extension, Case Management Software (CMS) which many will rightly regard as simply a variation on BPMS. Regardless, there is something to be said for new names to get people excited all over again. In essence, CMS is a more comprehensive approach to BPMS, with tools that include an integrated set of tools that will make it easier to tackle more complex and dynamic business processes. CMS tends to give more attention to customers and to the employees that serve them.

No matter how much manufacturing is reintroduced into the US, the North American economy is increasingly a service economy where value resides in the services provided by knowledge workers to consumers. Too many process people are still focused on automating routine procedures, while, in fact, the real demand is for the automation of jobs performed by people that involve tasks that are tailored for individual customers. Process methods have only recently evolved to define and systematically improve that type of process.

In 2015 we are going to hear a lot of talk about the uses and value of Case Management. Techniques evolved to support Case Management development will become of interest to a growing portion of the BPM marketplace and new software tools will increasingly stress that they support new approaches. Growth among Case tool vendors will probably even enliven BPM shows in 2015.

All of this: change and growth, new BPMS products and techniques, and business expansion will make 2015 a lot more interesting than any of the past few years, at least in the US. Other countries that don't experience growth will at least need to adjust processes to deal with the problems created by various shortages. Either growth or efforts focused on dealing with shortages call for business process development and deployment – though as anyone who has lived through the last few years will undoubtedly assert, dealing with new growth is more fun. All things considered, we look forward to 2015 with quite a bit of excitement. The world economy is picking up and lots of new technologies are going to challenge process professionals who will meet the challenge equipped with a variety of new tools.

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