



Handbook on Business Process Management, Vol 1 & 2

J. vom Brocke & M. Rosemann, Eds

Springer

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Reviewed by Paul Harmon

I worry, sometimes that Business Process Management (BPM) will fade, like Business Process Reengineering or Six Sigma – and become just another name for the perennial interest that organizations have in understanding and improving how work is done. Then I consider the work that a number of scholars have put into establishing Business Process Management as a field of study, and I have hope.

Michael Rosemann, the chair of the BPM group at Queensland University, wrote a paper recently in which he suggested that organizations used “services” to accomplish their work [1]. One service, he suggested, was Project Management, others included Risk Management and Change Management, and still another was Business Process Management. We might not use Rosemann’s language, preferring to think of process management as an approach to organizational management, or, perhaps, a profession, but we are in agreement on the overall approach. As with the service metaphor, just as lots of different groups of people within an organization need to know something about project management, similarly, lots of different groups within an organization need to use concepts and techniques that derive from process management.

A little search on Google suggests that the term BPM has been around for some time – people occasionally used the term in the 80s, for example – but it has really come into its own in the first decade of this century. I particularly associate it with two events, the publication of Roger Burlton’s book, *Business Process Management: Profiting From Process* (in 2001) and the publication of *Business Process Management – The Third Wave* by Howard Smith and Peter Fingar (in 2003). The first established the term BPM, as I use it today, as a concern with bringing together everything there was to know about process change, and managing it as an asset of the organization. The second suggested that new technology (the Internet, web protocols like XML) was about to make it possible to create software tools that would make process management much easier. For a brief period in the mid-Zeros, it seemed as if the second approach might predominate, and that we might end up thinking of BPM as a kind of software technology or product. As it turns out, the field seems to have decided to use the term BPMS to describe software that supports process management, and to reserve the term BPM for the broader field that includes the corporate management of all aspects of process analysis, documentation, redesign and management. Some companies have gone so far as to establish a new job title – Chief Process Officer – and many have established corporate BPM Centers of Excellence to serve as a repository for knowledge of BPM

best practices.

Interestingly, many of the BPM groups in universities are located in the IT departments. Others, however, are located in business departments, and, in any case, as the survey in this magisterial two volume handbook shows, BPM is being used in its broadest sense by leading BPM scholars, wherever they are located.

The Handbook on Business Process Management was edited by J. Vom Brocke and Michael Rosemann. Prof. Dr. vom Brocke occupies the Martin Hilti Chair of Business Process Management in the Institute for Information Systems at the University of Liechtenstein. Prof. Dr. Michael Rosemann is the Co-Leader of the BPM Group, and a professor of Information Systems on the Faculty of Science and Technology at Queensland University of Technology. And the book is published by Springer in its International Handbooks on Information Systems. In other words, if the term BPM was to be given an IT spin, one might expect it from these editors and this publisher. One has only to look at the range of articles included in this handbook to see that the editors and the publisher have defined the term BPM much more broadly.

Consider volume 1, which is subtitled Introduction, Methods and Information Systems. The articles in the Introduction include:

- What is Business Process Management? by Michael Hammer
- Process Management for Knowledge Work by Thomas H. Davenport
- The Scope and Evolution of Business Process Management by Paul Harmon
- A Framework for Defining and Designing the Structure of Work by Geary A. Rummier and Alan J. Ramias
- The Six Core Elements of Business Process Management by Michael Rosemann and Jan vom Brocke

I can't list all of the other articles in even the first volume, let alone the second. We are talking about over 1200 pages and some 50 articles. A few notable process thinkers have been omitted, but only a few. This book provides a great survey of who is active in the field and what they are focused on. Moreover, it provides a nice mix to articles by established scholars and practitioners and by young academics eager to advance the field in new directions.

Suffice to say that of the five introductory chapters represent a number of perspectives with at least three much more focused on business aspects of process change than on IT concerns. (As an aside, by the time this volume was published two of the leading process advocates of our time, Michael Hammer and Geary Rummier had died, guaranteeing that this Handbook not only inaugurates a new field of study, but provides a memorial to those who worked to create the field in the first place.)

Returning to the scope of the Handbook, consider the six core elements of BPM as Rosemann and vom Brocke summarize them: Strategic Alignment, Governance, Methods, Information Technology, People, and Culture. As I say, this is a book for everyone engaged in any aspect of process work in any large organization.

The quality of the individual articles varies, as they must in any book that has this many articles by such a wide variety of authors. Overall, however, the quality is high, and the editors of have done a good job of making some very technical discussions as straight forward as they could.

The different process traditions are well represented and there are good articles on Six Sigma, Analysis and Design, Simulation, Workflow, Choreography, Frameworks, SOA, Service Management, BPMN, in the first volume, for example.

The second volume is subtitled: Strategic Alignment, Governance, People and Culture. Here the variety is even richer, ranging from strategy, and management governance, and human-driven processes to process analytics, SOA and semantic interoperability.

Obviously these aren't books that you are going to sit down and read on a weekend. Indeed, given the price, most will prefer to access these books in the library, or download specific articles. However you access the information, this is a treasure trove on all aspects of Business Process Management.

If you want to know where Business Process Management stands today, or where it is heading in the near future, this is the definitive source of the best available literature from most of the best minds in the field. It will stand, I expect, as the definitive overview until vom Brocke and Rosemann decide to release a second edition – which, at the rate things are moving, will probably require three volumes.

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Notes. [1] Go to www.bptrends.com and search on *Rosemann* to find his October 2010 article: "Process Management as a Service."

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