



BPM in Europe

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Eat your own dog food!

About being Congruent

Let's face it: BPM is still an IT dominated domain. Any visitor to an average BPM conference* will recognize that the majority of sponsors are the usual BPMS vendors that often provide the talks; thus, we discuss and position BPM from an IT perspective. Having said that, the "service and tools" focus of yesterday has moved to the "management discipline" focus of today. We now talk about breaking down the barriers within organizations and linking the silos; i.e., we bring the organizational and business perspective into the game. BPM is becoming the linking pin between Business and IT. Peter Fingar describes this trend: "We're moving from Command-and-Control to Connect-and-Collaborate." I fully agree with this statement, but find the majority in the BPM industry not congruent with their own message. Often heard claims, like "everything is a process," suggest that BPM is the "mother of all solutions." Funny enough, if you were to visit an ECM conference or a CRM seminar you would generally hear the same type of claims being made: "Everything is information," or "Everything is about the client." and the other technology is there for support. The figure below symbolizes how BPM and Any other Business Software (ABS) have evolved from just technology to a management discipline where we now see an overlap in focus.

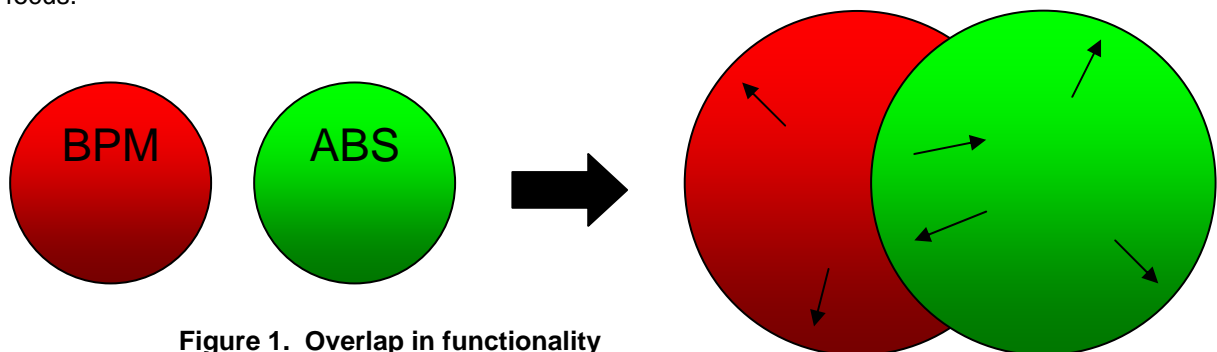


Figure 1. Overlap in functionality

I would like to argue that this is still an IT perspective, and the overlap in focus is merely a result of increased functionalities from both ends. So the same functionality is now found in both BPM and ABS technology. As the BPM and ABS vendors in general are always trying to distinguish themselves by positioning their "Unique Selling Points" – i.e., the mind set is not on collaboration – so, the BPM market is now often taking a "command-and-control" approach and fighting a battle over which technology is hierarchically dominant.

If BPM is truly about breaking down the barriers, by linking the silos," we should not only connect-and- collaborate in the organizations we aim to support, but also, apply this principle to the BPM silo itself. So, take a connect-and-collaborate view towards the other ABS silos. To do so

requires a new way of looking at the relationship. The following image might help us gain a new perspective. Just ask yourself if a square and a circle are the same. Most people I've asked this question answer, "Of course not! They're different," but add an extra dimension and you begin to realize that they are both different perspectives on the same content. Translated to organizations, this means that BPM and ABS are just different perspectives on the same organization and should not be treated as silos at all. Interestingly,, I have found that the business side of an organization was already aware of this. At the end of the day, the business group simply sees loads of different technologies, including BPM, trying to support the same organization.

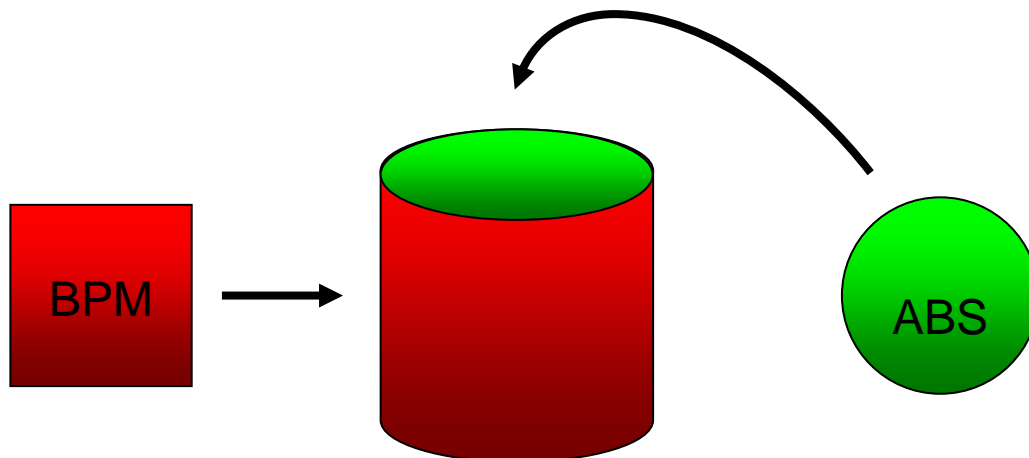


Figure 2. Different perspectives of the same content

So, I challenge the BPM community to be as congruent as possible with its own message: "Congruence is the state achieved by coming together, the state of agreement. The Latin *congruere* means to come together, agree. As an abstract term, **congruence** means similarity between objects. Congruence, as opposed to equivalence or approximation, is a relation which implies a *kind* of equivalence, though not complete equivalence" (from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congruent>). So, eat your own dog food; that is, while you get organizations to break down the silos don't be a BPM silo yourself. The business will love you for that.

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** An observation regarding BPM conferences:*

The way most BPM conferences I have attended so far are set up actually oppose the BPM message of linking the silos: First of all, if you are the chair of the conference, or the keynote speaker in the main session, you are at the top of the conference hierarchy. If you are a speaker in a parallel session, you are stuck in a silo. Secondly, most conferences are a series of independent monologues with very limited relation to each other or room for interaction. That is, most conferences are structured like the organizations we all try to break down! So, another challenge for the organizers of BPM conferences is to be as congruent as possible and model the event according to the BPM message: Facilitate a dialogue and align the presentations.