

BPM in Europe



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When Paul and I agreed that I would write a column on European developments for BPTrends, I decided that the first column I would write would describe how I helped start the BPM-Forum in the Netherlands, since this new organization provides a great example of the rising interest in business process management in Europe.

“Dear BPM-Professional:”

About a year and a half ago, I started sending out Emails using this opening as chairman of the BPM-Forum Netherlands. Initially, the mailing list was just over 40 people. Today the mailing list is approximately 300 people from the user, academic, and supplier community. I am very pleased that I can now use the same opening in my first column in BPTrends.

How did we get started?

Around spring last year, a couple of people in the Netherlands realized that the way knowledge is shared on BPM, as in seminars or books, was not always that effective. At the same time, interest in BPM was growing rapidly: The various ROI/TCO studies from international publications were bringing attention to BPM in a country where, according to a recent Dutch Survey, only 4% of Dutch organizations calculated their IT expenses based on their business process. Questions were being raised, such as “What is it? Is it new? How do we get these ROI/TCO benefits?”

By founding a BPM-Forum as a neutral and independent platform, we unexpectedly hit the bull’s eye. We could provide the answers. From the start, people were enthusiastic, and we started to attract a good crowd of people who wanted to learn, exchange knowledge, and listen to “best practices” at the various events we organized. We aimed at getting a good mix of representatives from the user, academic, and supplier communities. To achieve this, we obtained advice from an excellent board of directors.

BPM—What does it mean?

Given my background and the background of my other board members, it was obvious to us, from the start, that BPM is the abbreviation of Business Process Management—until we wanted to register our new website and discovered that, to some, BPM can also mean Business Performance Management (and Beats Per Minute, of course). With such a variety of definitions out there, it became clear that one of the first initiatives of the Forum was to be the introduction of a local “phrase book.” This at least helped us be certain that everyone was talking about the same thing.

What did we do?

The feedback from the attendees showed us that “best practices” was our highest priority, along with “learning from each other.” So, we set up afternoon sessions, starting at 4 pm, where just one speaker would speak for an hour. Afterwards, there would be a reception. For our first event in November 2003, we were hoping

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that 25 people might show up. As it turned out, over 50 people were in the room to listen to a presentation on the use of BPM at Telfort, a local mobile phone operator. This felt good. So, in 2004, we organized bi-monthly meetings, which attracted, on average, 60 people. Highlights included a presentation by the Rabobank, a major Dutch bank, which attracted well over 100 people, and the session "Amongst Professors" at Nyenrode University where 75 people followed a debate on BPM between four Dutch University professors.

There were also speakers from the BPM-Forum, which was the media sponsor for various BPM-related events. Serving as a neutral platform, we have been asked to publish in BPM-related magazines. This all enhanced the BPM-Forum brand and brought us greater attention. Last summer, a Belgium sister organization was set up. The first meeting at ING bank in Brussels attracted over 70 people. So, it seems that there is an interest in learning about BPM by means of our format. We hope that other parts of Europe will follow us in 2005.

What comes next?

In 2005, we will continue organizing our own events. We are aiming for ten events this year. Furthermore, we will be publishing various columns on BPM.

Up until now, we have been mostly "preaching to the converted." We have been able to attract the professionals who were already looking at BPM, often from a technological point of view. So, our goal in 2005 is to target the "Business Manager" with presentations that cover what BPM can mean for an organization. We have to keep in mind that BPM is not the end-goal. It will always remain a means to achieve things like product leadership, customer intimacy, or operational excellence. Furthermore, BPM is not just about the underlying technology; it is also about organizational issues. The first sign that this will become a concern is the interest shown by general management magazines, and even national newspapers, that want to write articles about BPM.

If you want to know more about the BPM-Forum, visit our Dutch website www.bpm-forum.org, or send us an email: NLinfo@bpm-forum.org.

In the meantime, I will be writing regular columns for BPTrends to keep you informed on what is happening with BPM in Holland, Belgium, and, hopefully, the rest of Europe

With kind regards,
On behalf of the BPM-Forum Netherlands,

Frits Bussemaker

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