

## A Postcard From Europe

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The BPM spotlight was shining very much on Europe last month with the advent of the BPMG's 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in London. I said last year that the speaker line up was of a breadth and quality never before seen in Europe. Well, at this year's event, the organizers went one better and put together a line up of speakers who have never all come together at a single event anywhere in the world.

In addition to presentations and keynotes from leading experts such as Andrew Spanyi, Roger Burlton, Steve Towers, Paul Harmon, Howard Smith, Ron Ross, and Brett Champlin, delegates were challenged and informed by other well known presenters and authors from around the globe. Then, as if that was not enough, they heard case studies from more than 10 major organizations about how they had achieved major benefits from BPM and some of the pitfalls they found along the way.

In case anyone should underestimate the complexities of undertaking Business Process initiatives at a major company, some statistics given in the BAT case study presentation served to illustrate the challenges. Within BAT at the very top level, they have seven stated strategic imperatives or goals; these seven goals lead to a requirement for more than 64 corporate capabilities, which, in turn, are supported by over 160 strategic initiatives! And there is no reason to believe that it is any less complicated at any other major international organization. The undertakings are simply massive.

For many people, one of the highlights of the event was a session on the future of standards in modeling facilitated by Kathy Long of the Process Renewal Group. Kathy has many years experience in Business Process and has used a wide range of modeling tools. The purpose of the session was to promote debate on the types of notation suitable for business people as opposed to those used by IT professionals. With a strong BPMN lobby present in the room, the debate was sure to be lively, and, sure enough, the session illustrated to all who attended just what an emotional subject modelling standards is. As with any such session, an outcome was never going to be easy, but, judging from delegate feedback, the openness and frankness of the participants was well appreciated, and the only agreed outcome was that there was still a long way to go before anyone can rightly claim to have "the" standard for Business Process.

While the conference provided plenty of thought for those interested in the technology aspects of change, there were just as many sessions regarding the "soft" side of change. How to motivate and manage the people aspects was a theme carried through by many speakers, while others provided valuable insight into ways of motivating management to buy into the benefits of BPM.

At the same time, BPM was looked at in the wider perspective of Business Change with contributions on Business Rules and Enterprise Architecture and the use of pre-built models and frameworks.

I have attended numerous conferences in the USA over the years; a key difference at this conference, appreciated by me and by many delegates as well, was that the speakers themselves stayed for the whole conference and remained available to chat with people during the breaks, lunches, and evenings. This degree of



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socializing made the event very unusual; of course, it also provided plenty of opportunities to talk with and shape ideas with other experts in the field.

The closing panel saw the leading speakers answer the question, "What will be different in 12 months time?" The answers, as you may imagine, were quite varied; the common themes that emerged concerned consolidation, convergence, and not knowing all the answers. The "consolidation" being driven by the fact that there are just too many companies chasing too few actual dollars spent in this market, the "convergence" coming from the fact that the competing standards and approaches are doing more to divide the market than to grow it and the lack of "answers" being because we can't at such an early stage in the market development be expected to know all the answers.

Not all of the speakers used these analogies, but I feel that most would agree with them. It is said that the Industrial Revolution lasted around 100 years, with almost all of the technology being developed in the first 80, yet it was not until the last 20 years that the world worked out how to really apply the technology in ways that would allow us to innovate and create. Yet here we are barely 20-25 years into the Information Age, still developing and understanding the technology and wondering why we don't know all the answers about its application. I venture to suggest that we still have another 10 years at least of hyper-innovation, during which time we will still be focused on using new technology to do things the way we have always done them; it will probably be 10 years at least before we can truly open our minds to see the new possibilities offered by applying the technology in new and truly innovative ways. It is for this time in the future that the work of Business Process should be geared, ensuring that we fully understand what we have and how and why it works now, and ready for that time when the cultures in our organizations will be ready, willing, and able to live with the high levels of disruptive change we require in order to move up to the next level.

Overall, the conference was judged to be a great success with delegates feeling good that they were not alone in facing up to the challenges in trying to move BPM forward. My lasting impression is that increasing numbers of people are looking to get involved and are now wanting to hear more about the "How to do it," rather than the "Why to do it," although many of them are still focused quite narrowly on the technology, and almost all of them are still wanting to know more about how to get senior management to buy in. Hopefully, these are the themes that organizers will take on board for future events.

