



A Postcard From Europe
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The future is bright. The future is BPM. Well, it is if you believe the vendor presentations at the recent Global Business Process Forum held in London on the 7th and 8th of May. End users seemed a little less enthused. They were less interested in buying additional technology and more interested in making what they already have work better! One incisive comment from a delegate was that the technology looked great but it was at least three steps ahead of what most businesses could swallow today. Someone else pointed out that it might be nice to have a clearer understanding of the compelling business reasons for adopting a BPM solution.

Certainly, in the round table discussions which I participated in, it was apparent that the Business/IT divide is as wide as ever when it comes to Business Process. Vendors continue promoting analysis and modelling engines, and users continue talking about the need to define the value chains and business processes within their organizations.

So it seems that once again, the industry is in danger of providing solutions to problems that are at least one step removed from the problems users are confronting.

Meanwhile, a panel discussion on a related topic highlighted the terminology gap. The views of the technology vendors, ably presented by Howard Smith of CSC/BPMI, seemed to indicate that more people are interested in the human and cultural aspects of a business process change program than in the automation of business processes. Once again, the issues are confused by the lack of a common understanding of terminology..

BPMG, who hosted the event, is a broad based organization with room for a wide variety of opinions and perspectives, but again, it was very apparent that for end users and many consulting firms, BPM is about managing business change and all the business processes associated with it, in contrast with the vendors who continue to push engines that manage and run the automation of these processes.

The biggest concern I heard the audience voice is that the vendors win, the silver bullet myth is exploded and suddenly the world turns against BPM. This is nothing new as vendors have traditionally managed to survive and grow through the use of hype cycles.

This time, however, the risk of over-hyping is much more serious. Software vendors may not be the epitome of agile companies, but they have become pretty adept at adapting to fashion. Consultancies, however, have a much harder time and in the BP space there are probably more people working on the consulting side of the business than on the software side. Consultants were expressing extreme concern. They cannot "turn on a dime" and they face major risks if the software industry, while passing through their territory, negate the work they have done establishing the market and educating managers regarding the benefits of a Business Process driven approach to business.



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However, life for end users is more complicated than that. Those that are able to work out for themselves the compelling business benefits, to understand the difference between BPM and BPM are still faced with an overwhelming choice of automation engines.

Currently there are probably 250 vendors selling automation tools for business process change and the consensus among attendees at the conference is that this is likely to whittle down to maybe a dozen over the next 2 to 3 years. So which to choose?

The choice for users will not be easy, but by I thought it might be interesting to speculate about the vendors who are likely to appear on the short list.. So, I took a quick informal poll of some of the analysts who cover this market. Their suggested list includes some names that surprise me and omits some I would have thought were fair bets. Here it is, in no particular order: Filenet, Staffware, Metastorm, Commerce Quest, Fujitsu, Fuego and Savvion. They also included two vendors in the Business Rules segment of the market. They are: Pegasystems and Rules Power.

I thought the inclusion of Business Rules oriented vendors interesting. Business Rules was certainly another topic that rated a lot of interest as people looked to the future. And, with Ron Ross as a speaker, the audience certainly got to hear about it from the horse's mouth.

There seems little doubt that Business Rules is a growing market, but I go back a concern expressed by an end user early on when he when he talked about the organization's need to define the existing business processes and requirements before grappling with the issues of automation. I suspect that for many organizations Business Rules have a place, but only after they have modelled, analyzed, and optimized some of the processes they already have..

So, while the future of BPM, looks bright, as vendors experience significant growth in sales and consulting firms are busier than ever, I suggest a word of caution and urge users to look beyond the "hype" and focus on the compelling business reasons for their BP initiatives.

