BPM in Europe

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Community Building—Down Under!

Last October I had the pleasure of being the keynote speaker on "BPM goes *Down Under*, the future of Business Process Management" at the ARK Group BPM conference in Melbourne, Australia, chaired by local BPM guru, Imre Hegedus. I was the first person to present to a great audience of professionals. As with most conferences around the world that I've participated in, we started a little bit behind schedule. Seems that in addition to BPM, time management is a global issue, too!

Oops, speaking of time management, I had to stop at the originally set time as I had invited Peter Fingar in Tampa, Florida, to do a live link on Cloud Computing and BPM. This meant I had to cut my presentation short and rush through my slides. So, I was a bit concerned that I had traveled to the other side of the globe for just a 35 minute presentation. To compensate, the organization scheduled me to do a second talk the following day. Fortunately – as I did not bring a spare BPM presentation with me – I did have a draft presentation on my experience with "Community Building." The presentation was about the lessons learned when setting up and managing the Dutch BPM-Forum.

What became obvious during the morning preparation, and even more so during the presentation, were the similarities between managing a community of independent people and managing an end-to-end business process.

In both cases, you aim to bring together a group of people and organizations with a common goal to deliver value. In both cases, there are no hierarchical relationships among the parties concerned. Instead, there are symbiotic relationships and, more specifically, mutualistic* symbiotic relationships. In such relationships all parties benefit from cooperation, e.g., a complex organism of the group Lichenes – a real win-win situation. Below are 10 lessons learned for succesfully setting up and managing a "community":

1. "Just do it!" A lot of communities get caught up in the beginning with a focus on setting up formal structures, paperwork, or a supporting IT infrastructure. A better approach is to allow the formal structure to emerge as the needs of the community evolve. So, in the beginning, just start, keep things small and simple, and only develop what you need (structure follows requirements). Essential to the inital step is having people involved who are experts in the topic of the community.

2. Create your own unique identity and mission statement. Having a name, logo, or even a mascot can help make the community visible, not only for the members of the community but, also, for the outside world. Over time this identity will have value and can grow to represent authority.

3. Within the community perspective, the focus should be on the common factors rather than on the differences. The management and members of the community continuously have to remind themselves they are part of the same team. So, outside the community you might be working for different departments or organizations, but within the community that becomes irrelevant as you have a common focus.

4. Being a member of the same community does not imply everybody has the same role. Preferrably, members should be complementary to allow good teamwork to take place.

5. When a community is set up, immediately start to look outside. Don't isolate the community in an ivory tower. Instead, assess the context in which you are operating. Preferrably, cooperate with other communities, and, if beneficial, form alliances. This approach allows you to reach a larger audience and jointly deliver value.

6. Plan ahead for how you want to grow the community but take your time for the roll out. By pacing yourself you can demonstrate continuous small wins (rather than just an intital big win) and assess what the real needs are.

7. Clearly state your governance principles and stick to them. How are you going to manage the community? Take into account the important *unwritten rules* that will present themselves over time. This will save you lots of needless discussions and will minimize the politics.

8. Time is the currency of a community, not money. Setting up a community becomes cheaper by the day, e.g., setting up a Linkedin group can be done in 5 minutes and costs nothing. You can become a member of almost an unlimited number of communities (Linkedin has 257 BPM groups at the moment). There is a big "but" here: Setting up a community or even becoming a member only has value if you actually spend time in the community.

9. Demonstrate "stickyness." You have to have tenacity. In the beginning you will not have your most sought after people or organizations become members of your community. The big fish will first wait and see if you will survive. So, be patient, keep your focus, and eventually even the big fish will also come on board.

10. Continually assess the value or reason that your community exists. Change Happens! So, adapt accordingly, but if your community becomes obsolete, do yourself and everybody around you a big favor and exit stage left.

Down under in Melbourne, it was great fun to cut-and-paste "Community" with the "Business Process Management" and see the similarities. I leave it to the reader to do the same. My conclusion is that being an active member of any community is a great school for any Process Manager.

Finally, I'd like to thank Peter Fingar for reviewing this column.

Regards,

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*Also see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mutualistic