# The OMG/BPTrends BPM Case Study Competition Winners

In 2008, the Object Management Group (OMG) and BPTrends agreed to co-sponsor a contest to recognize organizations that had demonstrated an outstanding ability to use business process technologies and standards to achieve superior results. The OMG and BPTrends announced the results of the contest at the end of January, and the OMG will be presenting the awards at their Technical Meeting in Washington, DC the week of March 23rd.

At the same time, BPTrends is publishing descriptions of the winning applications. This month, we published descriptions of two of the winning applications and in April and May we will publish descriptions of the others.

In this Advisor, I want to step back and consider, in general terms, the nature of all the applications submitted for consideration. In the course of the last few years I have participated as a judge in several BPM application contests. My impression is that the quality and sophistication of BPM applications has been growing steadily and that companies are becoming increasingly skilled in their use of BPM. I think that all of the applications submitted to the OMG/BPTrends contest were interesting and many were better than those I have previously encountered.
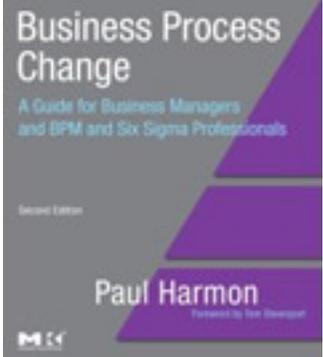
First, the raw data. Twenty-six (26) companies submitted applications for consideration. The three-judge panel included Rachel Locke of the OMG, Michael zur Muehlen, Director of the Center of Excellence in Business Process Innovation at Stevens Institute of Technology, and me.

Of the 26 entries, 17 described the development of BPMS applications. Some were primarily workflow oriented and others were more software integration oriented. The applications were all developed in BPMS platforms from many of the leading BPMS vendors.

One application described an organization with 50 BPMS applications and focused primarily on how one managed and integrated BPMS applications.

Two applications were concerned with business process frameworks. One described how the Supply Chain Council's SCOR framework and the Bolstorff methodology were used to redesign a supply chain. The other described how a group of European companies, working together, created a business process framework for small companies.

One submittal described a process redesign project.

One submittal described a SOA project undertaken to support process automation.

Four submittals described the development or use of an enterprise process architecture to structure business process efforts, and to guide specific redesign projects.

The judges awarded four prizes and mentioned two runners-up that were also

outstanding. Of the awards, two went to the enterprise architecture submittals, one went to the redesign project, and one went to a BPMS application. Of the two runners-up, one was also an enterprise process architecture solution, and the other, a second BPMS application.

I'm not going to describe the winners here, as they have been described in announcements from both the OMG and BPTrends and because BPTrends is currently publishing detailed descriptions of the winning applications. Instead, I will take this opportunity to reflect on the state of the BPM market.

Broadly, the current surge of interest in business process change, usually identified by the term BPM, began around 2003. In 2003, I published *Business Process Change: A Manager's Guide to Improving, Redesigning and Automating Processes*, a book that described a wide variety of ways that companies could improve their processes. At the same time, Howard Smith and Peter Finger published *Business Process Management:The Third Wave* in which they argued that new software tools would make it easier for companies to automate and manage the execution of business processes. Since then, there has been a continuing debate about the proper use of the term BPM. Does it describe a general approach to process change, characterized by a concern on the part of senior management to gain better control and coordination of their organizations' processes, or does it simply represent a new type of software that allows companies to better automate and monitor their processes. BPTrends has always used BPM to designate the broader approach and used the term BPMS to designate the software platform approach, and there seems to be a growing acceptance of this differentiation.

As an example, Gartner initially used the term BPM to refer to the software approach, but now uses BPM more broadly and uses BPMS to refer to software tools for business process development and execution. Similarly, most software vendors used the term BPM to describe their products, but a growing number are shifting to using the term BPMS.

I have judged several BPM application contests and most of them were termed "BPM Contests," however, most of the submittals described specific BPMS applications, only. Some of the applications engaged business managers in the design of the process, but most were simply software development efforts undertaken by IT teams.

Sometime in 2008, however, a real transition occurred toward acceptance of the fact that successful implementations of BPMS depend on a broader organizational commitment to process change efforts. Increasingly, companies realize that they need to understand their processes before they buy tools and attempt to automate the execution of those processes. Put a different way, most BPMS applications have been small and narrowly focused - they have been software automation projects. BPM is about identifying all the places and ways that your organization's processes can be improved.

The OMG, of course, has always taken the broader view of BPM and has worked on a variety of BPM standards. The BPMN standard describes a notation that can be used by either business managers for planning a redesign or by software developers working on software applications. The OMG has also created a standard for Business Motivation (BMM) that defines key strategic terms, a standard for the Semantics of Business

Vocabulary and Business Rules (SBVR), and a standard for evaluating the business process maturity of organizations (BPMM). In other words the OMG standards range well beyond BPMS development. Thus, it's not surprising that a contest sponsored by the OMG and BPTrends would attract a wide variety of different approaches to business process change.

In spite of that expectation, I was surprised by the range and sophistication of the submittals. The four process architecture entries described major efforts by organizations to understand their processes and establish frameworks and methodologies that would allow the organization to systematically monitor its process work and prioritize future process change interventions. These kinds of efforts were well beyond single projects to redesign or automate a process. Similarly, CERN's submittal described how their team developed some 50 BPMS applications and were now working to integrate them into larger process management systems, providing another example of an initiative that went well beyond simple BPMS development.

This is not to suggest that BPMS development was simple. Several of the BPMS submittals describe large and complex applications that companies would probably not have attempted two years ago. These applications suggest that companies have experimented, learned what works and are now scaling up and trying more ambitious BPMS applications. In fact, it was a BPMS application that generated the most impressive ROI among the submittals.

Perhaps the evolution of BPM will slow down over the next 6-12 months as the world economy reorients itself. Overall, however, I would suggest that the BPM market reached a critical point in 2008 - it

began passing from an early phase to a more mature phase. One sign is the increasing sophistication on the part of companies undertaking business process projects of all kinds. Another is the sophistication of the BPMS applications being developed. I expect that whenever growth resumes, we are going to see companies attempting a wide variety of new business process initiatives, building on what they have learned in the past few years.

The winners of the OMG/BPTrends contest deserve your attention, not because of their specific characteristics - although they are interesting enough - but because of the overall increase in sophistication they collectively demonstrate. BPM and BPMS are both coming of age.

Till next time,

Paul Harmon