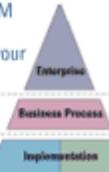


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Looking Forward to 2013

Every January we step back from the day-to-day details of business process and ask ourselves how the practice of BPM and the associated technologies are evolving. And, we consider how things are likely to develop in the near future. We don't claim any special insight, but here's how we see things at the moment.

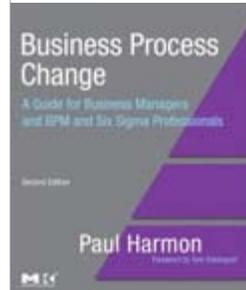
The BPM market is growing steadily, but not dramatically: Think one digit growth rather than two digit growth. There is enough activity to keep people interested and moving forward, but not quite enough to create the excitement we saw in 2005 when BPMS products were new and software vendors were introducing new products and pushing their wares at BPM conferences. As we noted in our fall 2012 [BPTrends BPM Market Survey Report](#), there is more interest and confidence in BPMS today than in the past, but even after a lot of consolidation, the market is still growing at a modest rate.

Obviously, the main reason for this has little to do with BPMS. The world economy collapsed in 2008 and it is still digging its way back out of a recession. Politicians in both Europe and the US have proved horribly inept at facing up to the changes required to get the world economy going again and have, thereby, pretty much guaranteed a slow, multi-year recovery. That, in turn, has left business executives in the lurch, trying to figure out where and how to invest in an uncertain economy. I suspect that things will improve in 2013, but I don't think anyone imagines that this will be a banner year for growth. The excitement that comes from a rapid business expansion will probably have to wait a bit longer.

Even in Brazil, which has experienced rapid growth over the last few years, is forecasting a decline in GDP and a rise in inflation. Overall, 2013 will likely see an emphasis on cost saving initiatives rather than on developing new processes for new business initiatives.

A slow year, of course, need not be a bad year. There is enough business activity that smart managers can identify projects that will prepare their organizations for renewed growth at a later date. Few organizations are as well organized as they should be, and struggling to implement savings can be an opportunity for tightening things up. What is the role of business process in all this?

Business Process Management (BPM), as our longtime readers know, means different things to different people. For most of us, it refers to a broad initiative to coordinate process work throughout the organization. In this sense, it isn't so much the rival of older traditions like Lean, Six Sigma, or IT process initiatives, as a new layer that can be added to assure that earlier initiatives are better coordinated and managed. As with any effort of this kind, there are opportunities for consolidation and exchange that can improve most any organization's performance. Setting up an initiative to get all the process people in an organization talking with each other, for example, can pay real dividends. Similarly, training in new techniques and approaches can help everyone.



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Much has changed in the practice of business process work within the past decade. Disciplines that seemed unique a few years ago are being rapidly integrated today. One hardly needs to point to Lean Six Sigma, which is now commonly spoken of as a conjoined approach. Lean Six Sigma and BPM is now spoken of as an even broader approach. Business Rules are now considered a technique for analyzing decisions within business processes, just as process architectures are being used to help organize business rules and other management decision resources. Equally, analytics, which can seem very technical at first glance, becomes a lot simpler when you think of it as just another aspect of a decision support program created to support a business process. Similarly, Business Analysis, Business Architecture and BPM are increasingly sharing ideas and developing common initiatives and Balanced Scorecard is gaining new interest as it is used to organize the measurement and management systems of business processes and business process managers.

At the same time, the use of software to support BPM (BPMS) has also grown more sophisticated. Major mergers have resulted in a few large companies that are rapidly releasing more sophisticated products. One need only glance at IBM's latest BPMS suite to see this is the case. The tool is simpler, yet more comprehensive than earlier releases while, simultaneously having a more consistent user interface than in the past. The new tool suite combines process modeling, the management of process execution, and the use of business rules for decision management. It also provides support for Case Management. And, IBM's new product is only one example of the new BPMS products now available. Companies and vendors have now been at BPMS development for almost a decade—about the time it usually takes to work out the bugs and to identify the real benefits of a new technology. We have yet to read about any worldwide supply chain that is managed by a BPMS application that constantly updates the status of the entire set of processes used in the worldwide chain, but we expect to learn about these applications in the near future. Indeed, some organizations probably already have such a system and are simply unwilling publish their success in order to maintain a competitive advantage. The point, however, is that the technology is available and it won't be too long before companies are willing to make the investment and take the risk to realize a major transformation in how processes can be managed to improve performance.

At the same time, process theorists are rushing ahead in an effort to build the tools needed to manage processes that are still too dynamic or complex for today's technology to handle. This effort is often referred to as Case Management, but it could, as well, be termed Dynamic Process Management. As companies create processes to tailor products and services to individual customers, or to unique, complex situations, process theorists and software developers are developing the tools needed to model and track such processes. Combining business rules and analytics with business process techniques is a major step toward achieving this new capability. In a similar way others are working to determine how to integrate Big Data and Cloud Computing into new business processes.

2013 will be an exciting year for those in a position to plan or act for the future. With modest investments, smart companies will lay the groundwork and plan for the emerging recovery, designing the methods,

training the people, and defining the techniques required to drive growth for the future.

Till next time,

Paul Harmon

BPTrends LinkedIn Discussion Group

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