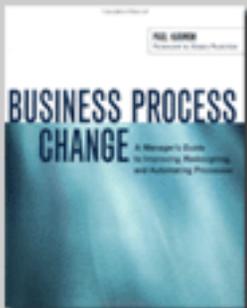


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The OMG-BPMI Merger

This month the Object Management Group (OMG) announced a merger with the Business Process Management Initiative (BPMI). This represents a major opportunity for those interested in open business process standards.

This is not a merger of equals. The Object Management Group has hundreds of members, including most of the largest technology vendors in the world, and an established constitution that spells out exactly how task forces are organized and standards are developed. BPMI has fewer than one hundred members and has always been informal in its approach to standards. In effect, those who are currently members of BPMI will become members of the OMG and the BPMI standards initiatives will be incorporated into existing OMG standards development efforts.

Under the circumstances, the success of this venture will depend on the willingness of the OMG membership to embrace the new emphasis on business process as a bridge between business managers and IT. As readers know, many business managers have concluded that they can use business process models to simplify their understanding of how their organizations work. Once business managers adopt this perspective, then IT becomes one of several resources that can be used to implement and support business processes. In a similar way, the success of any given IT initiative can be judged by determining how it improves the business processes it is designed to support. This is one of the motivations behind the US government's Enterprise Architecture effort and smart IT vendors will, increasingly, want to position and justify their projects as support for process management and improvement.

By merging with BPMI, the OMG is better positioned to be a major catalyst for this transition. The OMG gains a new set of members who have been at the forefront of the movement to put more emphasis on business process management and, hopefully, they will motivate the OMG to seek out new opportunities. By merging with the OMG, BPMI becomes part of

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a larger organization with the resources to help communicate the business process message to a broader audience.

In a sense, the OMG has been preparing for this role for several years now. The OMG was established in 1989 to develop object standards that major IT vendors could agree upon. It was hoped that if object standards were developed early the transition to the use of object software would occur more smoothly and quickly. In the early years the OMG's members focused primarily on the Common Object Request Broker Architecture (CORBA), a middleware infrastructure that made it easy for software languages and applications to pass information back and forth. CORBA was always pretty technical and, since it was designed to work between any two languages running on virtually any hardware, it was a very complex system. This, in turn, meant that OMG technical meetings were largely dominated by sophisticated software engineers.

In the mid-Nineties this began to change when the OMG adopted the Unified Modeling Language (UML). Initially, UML was to be a standard notation for object-oriented software design. As the effort progressed, UML incorporated other notations that were not strictly object-oriented - including the Activity Diagram notation. Unfortunately, during this transition period, rather technical folks still dominated the OMG, and the Activity Diagram specification was linked to a State Diagram notation which rendered it unusable by business managers and vendors who were developing workflow and process modeling tools. Thus, throughout the late Nineties, UML was usually characterized as a software modeling language and most vendors and users who focused on business process modeling issues used other notations. As a result, during the Nineties there was no standard business process notation and each process modeling vendor used its own notation - just as object software vendors had done in the early Nineties, before the arrival of UML.

Since the beginning of this decade, the OMG has evolved rather rapidly. It has gone beyond UML and embraced the Model Driven Architecture (MDA) which aims at creating metamodels that will make it possible for companies to move information among a wide variety of different models. To create MDA, OMG task forces have been working to establish metamodels in fields far beyond the original software models the organization focused on in the Nineties. The OMG has created a Data Warehousing Metamodel (CWM), for example, and XMI (the XML Metadata Interchange) which makes it easy to pass information about models to other modeling environments or to repositories using XML. At the same time, the OMG Analysis & Design Task

Force (ADTF) has updated UML (to version 2.0) and separated activity and state diagrams, making it possible to base workflow and business process products on activity diagrams.

One OMG task force, the BEI Domain Task Force (BEIDTF) has been working on business process and business rules metamodels. In the past year several members of the Business Rules Community have joined the OMG and they are also working within the BEI on business rule metamodels. Thus, the business modeling efforts currently underway in the BEIDTF include a Business Process Definition Metamodel (BPDM), a Business Semantics for Business Rules (BSBR), a Production Rule Representation (PRR), and an Organization Structure Metamodel.

The merger assumes that BPMI members will also join the BEI task force, enlarging it, broadening its scope, probably changing its name and, in the process, creating an even greater emphasis on business modeling within the OMG.

The Business Process Management Initiative (BPMI) was originally established to create an XML business process language that could be used to both model and execute business processes. BPMI established a task force and rapidly created the Business Process Modeling Language (BPML). BPML was a powerful and flexible language that could have provided a sophisticated basis for the BPM Suites that are being marketed today. Unfortunately, just as BPML was about ready for release, IBM, Microsoft, and BEA announced that they were merging their early XML BP language efforts and would be supporting the Business Process Execution Language (BPEL). The three vendors immediately released an early set of specifications and then turned the BPEL effort over to OASIS, where it still resides.

Unfortunately, the development of open standards is a very political process. As soon as IBM, Microsoft, and BEA announced BPEL, BPMI began to lose members. Most companies assumed that a standard supported by IBM, Microsoft and BEA would triumph over a standard proposed by a small, new standards group.

BPMI would probably have disappeared in 2004 except for two things. First, to support their language effort, BPMI had set up a separate task force that brought together all of the major business process modeling vendors and succeeded in developing a standard Business Process Modeling Notation (BPMN). This task force proved very agile and following the announcement of BPEL, shifted BPMN so it could be used to generate BPEL. At the same time, BPMI members also began working with the OMG to

integrate elements of BPMN with the BEI's business process definition metamodel standard. In addition, the BPMN task force used all of the basic graphic symbols used in UML 2.0's Activity Diagram notation to make it easy for process modeling vendors and users to support both UML and BPMN.

Second, the board of the BPMI also began to reach out to various standards groups in an effort to identify other business process standards that they could develop. They worked, for example, with the Workflow Management Coalition (WfMC) on some of their initiatives, and held a conference this Spring that brought together the WfMC, OASIS, and the OMG, among others, to consider business process standards issues.

In the end, BPMI presumably decided that it was a relatively small group and needed a broader organizational platform if it was to influence the market as it hoped to do. Several BPMN contributors were already working on both BPMN and the OMG's BEI task force. Thus, led by board co-chair Jeanne Baker, the BPMI decided to continue its work inside the OMG.

In the months ahead, members of the BPMI and members of the OMG's BEI task force are going to be working to figure out how to proceed. I've attended some of the BEI task force meetings and know that most current members will welcome the BPMI members and will be eager to explore new possibilities to extend the OMG's work so that the OMG can play a leading role in the development of the business process market.

Assuming everyone involved shows pragmatism and flexibility, I believe that the OMG will quickly emerge as a powerful force for business process and business rule standards. The resulting open business modeling standards will, in turn, play a major role in providing a better way for business managers and IT developers to communicate with each other to improve corporate performance.

'Til next time,

Paul Harmon

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