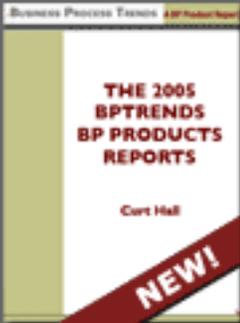
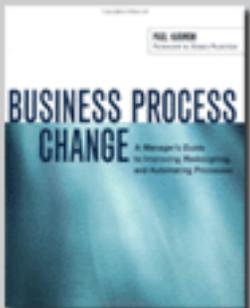


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Building Bridges for Interoperability

Most organizations have several different groups working on business process change. It's not uncommon for the Six Sigma teams to use different software tools from those used by the business redesign groups, the architecture teams, or the IT analysts. Indeed, it is common to find that a single IT group uses several different business process tools. Thus, every organization has an interest in standards that make it possible to exchange models and data among different software modeling tools.

The most comprehensive effort to create business process standards that would allow BP software products to share models is the Object Management Group's current BP semantic metamodel effort. In essence, the OMG BEI task force is working on a general model that describes the key elements of any specific business process model as well as the major relationships among those elements. Once the generic model is complete, any vendor can map their product's internal metamodel to the OMG process metamodel. Once the vendors have done the mappings, companies can use the system to move their process models from one software tool to another.

As always with major standards efforts that embrace a wide variety of companies from around the world, it takes time for everyone to agree on just what should be included in the generic metamodel. The OMG's BEI task force has already expanded its effort and the OMG is now pursuing not only a generic business process metamodel, but an organizational metamodel, an ontology metamodel (i.e. a business vocabulary metamodel), and at least two business rules metamodels. Different vendors have different approaches and it will take time and negotiation to assure that the generic metamodels really can support accurate exchanges among the diverse software models being used by all the OMG member companies.

This past month, Proforma, a leading business process modeling vendor, decided to work with a number of the leading BPM Suite

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vendors to build a bridge allowing ProVision users to migrate their models to the BPM Suite vendor tools in the very near future. This isn't a replacement for what the OMG is doing. In essence, Proforma will offer an open version of its product's metamodel and each of a number of BPM Suite vendors will create mappings to that metamodel, making it possible to transform a ProVision process model to a BPM Suite vendor's process model, and vice versa.

The consortium, made up of Proforma and, at least so far, Appian, CommerceQuest, Fuego, Fujitsu, Insession Technologies, Lombardi Software, Metastorm, Pegasystems, and Savvion, has announced that it will term its general metamodel the Common Interchange Format (CIF). The initial version of the metamodel will provide support for business process modeling. It will serialize the objects expressed by the ProVision workflow model (e.g. activities connected by workflow links) and will include secondary concepts (e.g. deliverables, events, resources). In addition to business concepts, version 1.0 of CIF will provide traceability to interfaces and operations (in support of web services) and to class models (e.g. to express data structures such as deliverables). CIF Version 1.0 will be released next month in conjunction with the July release of Proforma's new BPMx version of ProVision.

Future versions of CIF will provide a broader scope. Initial extensions will focus on the specific needs of the BPM Suite partners. The consortium is also considering integrating CIF with BPEL and xPDL so that users can move models to those languages as needed. Eventually CIF will cover the entire ProVision metamodel and will serve as the primary tool for general interoperability with ProVision.

This will surely accelerate the development of the BPM market. Although some confuse BP modeling tools like Proforma's ProVision, and BPM Suites products, like those offered by Appian, CommerceQuest, Fuego, Fujitsu, Insession Technologies, Lombardi, Metastorm, Pegasystems and Savvion, they are, in fact, playing in two different markets. (For those interested in a detailed look at the BPM Suites and BP Modeling Tools products and markets, see the [BPTrends 2005 BPM Suites Report](#) and the [BPTrends 2005 EA & Modeling and Simulation Tools Report](#).)

BP Modeling tools are relatively inexpensive software products used by business managers, Six Sigma, and BP Redesign teams when they analyze and redesign business processes. In addition, BP Modeling tools are often used to model business architectures and to serve as repositories for information about

business organization and process models.

BPM Suites, on the other hand, are relatively more expensive, and are being used by IT groups to create systems that can manage the runtime execution of business processes that include both employee activities and software components.

The heart of a BP Modeling tool is an easy-to-use process modeling environment. Most of the leading BP Modeling tool vendors, like Proforma, have been around for a decade and have had time to polish their environments to make them acceptable to management teams.

The heart of the BPM Suite, on the other hand, is a BPM engine that manages workflow and application integration at runtime. Most BPM Suites are new, or at least recently modified to function as BPM Suites, and most have relatively less friendly business modeling environments. Right off, it is harder to create a modeling environment that captures the detail necessary to manage EAI and workflow at runtime. But the modeling environments are also less friendly for business users because most of the BPM Suites were developed by IT developers for IT developers and incorporate elements that business managers don't immediately find easy to understand.

From a marketing perspective, companies have bought a lot more BP Modeling tools than BPM Suites. BP Modeling tools are established while BPM Suites are still struggling to become established. Many company managers tell us they are still waiting to read more articles about successful BPM applications before they invest the time and money required to commit to a BPM Suite solution.

Proforma's ProVision is a popular BP Modeling tool, and it has a reputation as an easy tool for business managers to use. Thus, all of the BPM Suite vendors in the consortium benefit by gaining access to a body of practitioners who have already modeled their processes and can now move those models to BPM Suites when they are ready to automate the management and execution of those processes. For its part, Proforma can continue to specialize in offering a high quality BP Modeling environment, while still guaranteeing its clients an easy path to process execution, if and when they want it. This is a very good strategy on the part of all the vendors involved in the consortium.

It's easy to imagine that some of the other BP Modeling vendors will seek to join this consortium or set up something similar. In

the long run, this rather narrowly focused consortium will probably be replaced by the open business process metamodel created by the OMG. In the short term, which is what counts for the vendors seeking to establish market share this year and next, the CIF Consortium will surely help develop the market for business process software tools. It's a very welcome development for companies who are trying to determine how to enter the business process arena with a minimum initial investment.

'Til next time,

Paul Harmon

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