

Harmon on BPM Paul Harmon

What Comes Next

BPTrends began life in January of 2003, so this is, in a sense our 15th anniversary. The initial impulse to create BPTrends arose because I had just finished a book: Business Process Change, and wanted a site to follow-up by providing additional information and a place where others could contribute their perspectives as to what was happening in the business process change marketplace.

No sooner did BPTrends get underway than an independent concern began to animate the business process space – Business Process Management (BPM). This concern was driven by a number of software tool vendors who launched software products designed to help businesses automate and manage business processes. In essence these were workflow tools, but workflow tools with vastly different capabilities, since they were based on internet and web protocols that extended their power. BPTrends quickly became a focus of those who wanted to learn more about BPM Software products and debate the appropriate uses of these new tools. At the same time, the whole process market became more interesting as the BPMS vendors funded a variety of conferences to promote their new approach to analyzing and developing new business process applications.

BPTrends tried to maintain a neutral place in the process market. We covered the emergence and use of BPMS products and, at the same time, we tried to emphasize that companies would still need to use and integrate older technologies to balance the emphasis on software development. Human performance improvement and management were still important aspects of process improvement. Similarly process architectures and process maturity, and new industry specific frameworks like SCOR and eTOM were still important and have their place in corporate improvement efforts.

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As 2017 dawns, we are between enthusiasms. BPMS has had its run. I could easily argue that BPMS is still very important, just as I could argue that that Six Sigma, Lean and Business Process Reengineering still have things to teach us. The bottom line, however, is that people become bored with any term that hangs around too long. People begin to think: "We already did that. We tried it... we need something new to excite our people." The process market is in a lull, waiting for the next big thing to re-excite those who support process improvement.

It's unclear what will be the next big thing. Some people are excited by the words "Transformation," or perhaps "Digital Transformation," or even "Cognitive Transformation." Others are excited by "Case Management" or "iBPM."

Whatever excites the process market next, it will undoubtedly be driven by software tools, and by software vendors with money to spend to promote their visions. Whatever one **may think** of the phrase "digital transformation," the broad road to the future involves more automation. In the long run, process improvement always involves increasing the **productivity** of workers and organizations. Our goals are to produce products and services that are better and cheaper and to produce them faster. For awhile we may ship production to low wage countries, but only for awhile. Low wage workers gradually gain wage increases, improve their lives and become consumers. In the long run, it's the use of fewer employees and more machines, computers, and software that will facilitate more productive processes. One way or another that trend will continue.

I suspect that it will be cognitive technologies, and software apps to add intelligence to domain specific products and industries that will kick off the next round of excitement in the world of process improvement, but I could be wrong. Whatever it is, it will be emerging in the next couple of years.

In the meantime, those of us who believe in the process perspective must work to keep the basic concepts and technologies in place. The new will necessarily build on the existing process infrastructure and organizations that have their infrastructure in place will be best positioned to take up the new and gain benefits from it.