

Harmon on BPM Paul Harmon

BPM in 2005 and 2019

The past couple of months have led me to lots of reflections on the business process market. I've been talking with several friends who are well acquainted with the current interest in process and trying to pull together an overview. Everyone seems to agree that the market is slower and less frenetic than it was in say 2005, although different people suggest different reasons.

To try to better understand it, I created the figure below. It tries to help us focus on the drivers of the BPM market, which I've pictured on the left side of the figure.

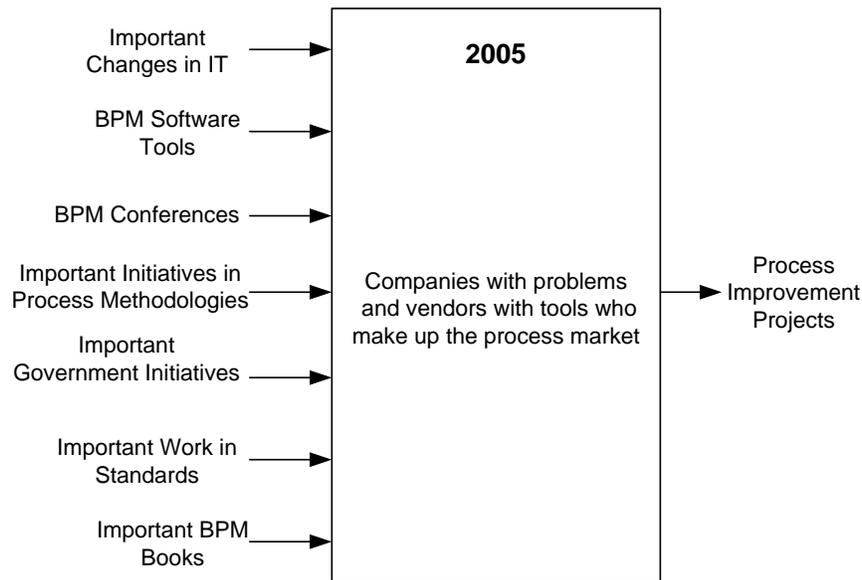


Figure 1. Drivers of the Process Market in 2005.

As you consider the list for 2005, also imagine what a similar figure for 2019 might look like.

Let's begin at the top left with Important Changes in IT. There are, of course, always new developments in IT. Some of them help process work very directly, however, and others don't. In 2005 a number of vendors had determined that new internet standards, combined with new IT developments, like Pi Calculus, made it possible to link most existing software via a meta model of the business process

being executed. This not only made it relatively easy to link a variety of ERP applications, but also made it relatively easy to make quick changes in a process by modifying the process model. Overnight, it seemed that process designers could move from simple process modeling tools to Process Management software that would make it much easier to design and manage day-to-day business processes. The book that explained this software revolution was *Business Process Management: The Third Wave*, by Howard Smith and Peter Fingar (Meghan-Kiffer Press, 2003).

By 2005 a large number of software vendors had launched BPM software tools and were creating quite a stir in the IT market. Software vendors rushing into a new market create a number of effects. They have raised venture capital and they spend it to advertise, and to attend conferences and show their wares. Thus, in addition to a number of BPMS vendors, there were a number of BPM Conferences where people gathered to talk about processes and the new software tools. For those who had followed the market for a couple of decades, it was like the Business Process Reengineering market (that had bloomed in 1992-95) all over again.

Process change is a perennial concern – companies always need to improve their business processes as technologies and customer tastes change. There are always process initiatives going on. When the software market for process is hot and conferences are occurring then people also learn about other process initiatives. Similarly, when the software market dies down, and the spending for conferences and advertising wanes, people learn less about other process initiatives. All this is to say that there were many processes initiatives occurring in the first decade of the millennium, and the BPMS tools market created an environment in which people found out about many different activities.

There have always been process methodologies -- formal ways of undertaking process work. Geary Rummler had popularized the Rummler-Brache approach in the Early Eighties. Six Sigma had popularized a number of methodologies in the late Eighties. Business Process Reengineering had popularized IT-based process methodologies in the Early Nineties. And the ERP movement in the late Nineties had popularized ARIS and other software-oriented methodologies. Similarly Lean, a popularization of the Toyota Production System, flourished in the early Zeros. All of these methodologies, and new ones, got a new burst of energy as their proponents gave talks at the many different BPM conferences in the early Zeros. Gartner introduced a BPM Conference in 2005 and found it so popular that they added another one, offering two conferences a year for several years.

The Supply Chain Council promoted a supply chain process architecture it had developed (SCOR) and offered classes and a conference of its own. In the Zeros outsourcing was very popular and lots of companies embraced SCOR in order to use a common language to describe supply chains stretching around the world. In a similar way The Telecom Management Inst. offered a telecom process architecture that telecoms could use to describe their processes. Given that telecoms naturally interact to link messages around the world, standards became very popular. Several other industry groups began to explore common process standards.

At the same time several government initiatives added to the interest in process work. The US government launched an initiative to require companies that worked with the government to specify process architectures. Canada, Australia and the UK also generated process architectures as guidelines.

Standards group, from the OMG to the IEEE began to develop process modeling standards. The OMG developed BPMN, which rapidly emerged as the worldwide standard for process modeling, and the various tool vendors adopted it. The OMG proceeded to develop a variety of other standards for process work, ranging from standards for business rules to standards for modeling complex, very dynamic processes. APQC, a Chamber of Commerce initiative, continued to work with companies to help standardize their processes. And the Software Engineering Initiative offered improved versions of its popular Capability Maturity Model.

Books like Smith and Fingar's *BPM*, and my own *Business Process Change* encouraged business managers to think exciting new process opportunities were opening up.

This is hardly a comprehensive list of process activities taking place in 2005, but it gives the right impression. There were over a dozen major BPM Conferences in the US. They had many people present and they reported on lots of different developments that were taking place at that time.

Compare that with what is driving the process market in 2019.

There are, of course, changes in IT – although they are less related to process work. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is probably the most exciting IT development, but it doesn't seem to be affecting BPM very much. Analytics is contributing to process work. Process Mining is getting some attention, as is the very much misnamed Business Process Robotics (BPR), but none of them have generated real excitement among vendors. In fact, there is little effort going into promoting BPM software. There are a few, not very exciting conferences – most of them combining process with something else, like architecture, or business analysis.

There haven't been any announcements of new process methodologies or initiatives, and early ones have seemingly settled down and aren't getting much attention. Similarly there is little going on in the process standards space. What is going on is very esoteric. Without a thriving software vendor community pushing the market, there is little drive for standards work. In a similar way, though there are new process books, none describe new or exciting initiatives.

We are waiting for a new process initiative to excite the business world and generate a new interest in process software. When that happens, lots of initiatives that are just coasting along at the moment will spring back to life. In the meantime, companies do what they can to adopt new technologies and upgrade processes.

Author



Paul Harmon

Executive Editor and Founder, Business Process Trends In addition to his role as Executive Editor and Founder of Business Process Trends, Paul Harmon is Chief

Consultant and Founder of BPTrends Associates, a professional services company providing educational and consulting services to managers interested in understanding and implementing business process change. Paul is a noted consultant, author and analyst concerned with applying new technologies to real-world business problems. He is the author of *Business Process Change: A Manager's Guide to Improving, Redesigning, and Automating Processes* (2003). He has previously co-authored *Developing E-business Systems and Architectures*(2001), *Understanding UML* (1998), and *Intelligent Software Systems Development* (1993). Mr. Harmon has served as a senior consultant and head of Cutter Consortium's Distributed Architecture practice. Between 1985 and 2000 Mr. Harmon wrote Cutter newsletters, including *Expert Systems Strategies*, *CASE Strategies*, and *Component Development Strategies*. Paul has worked on major process redesign projects with Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Security Pacific, Prudential, and Citibank, among others. He is a member of ISPI and a Certified Performance Technologist. Paul is a widely respected keynote speaker and has developed and delivered workshops and seminars on a wide variety of topics to conferences and major corporations through out the world. Paul lives in Las Vegas. Paul can be reached at pharmon@bptrends.com