

## Harmon on BPM Paul Harmon

### The Varieties of BPM

I got into a discussion the other day about BPM with a group of practitioners and quickly discovered that each was doing something rather different. One practitioner was working with people who were performing an existing process, helping them to introduce minor improvements in the way they worked. It turned out that a several of the problems being addressed involved feedback that the employees did or didn't receive from their supervisor. Another was working with a team that had been asked to entirely redesign a website and was in the process of redefining how customers would interact with the firm, and how employees would get and respond to information about potential customers. Still another was working with a new software tool designed to do process mining. In effect she was analyzing data about an existing business process to identify the steps that were taken and when and where problems were encountered. A fourth group was analyzing how decisions were made during a business process. They were focused on identifying business rules that were applied to decision making and considering if the rules were optimal and if the decisions could or should be automated.

To further clarify, I met this group of practitioners at a local BPM group meeting, and they were typical of those attending. If I had been attending a larger BPM gathering, or a more specialized gathering, I would have met Business Analysts, or Six Sigma or Lean professionals, or, perhaps, Business Process Architects with their more specialized concerns.

I mention all this just to remind readers of the variety of perspectives that a really comprehensive approach to business process management, process improvement or business transformation must embrace.

I was impressed with this need for a comprehensive approach in 2002 when I wrote *Business Process Change*. I had read several books on process change and each seemed to me to take one or two perspectives and ignore the rest. Six Sigma books were written as if everyone involved in process change were only working in the Six Sigma tradition. Some Process Improvement books and most Business Process Reengineering books were written as if automation was the only way to achieve process redesign. Other books were written to explain Human Performance Improvement, or Business Process Architecture, Lean, Supply Chain Improvement, or some specific Business Process Modeling Notation. In my experience, working with companies to improve processes for several decades, all of these perspectives were just that: perspectives. In my experience you started by examining the

problems the organization faced, and then you considered which perspectives would be most useful in that specific situation.

I wrote *Business Process Change* to provide readers with an overview of how I looked at problems, and to explain ALL of the different techniques and practices that one might use, depending on the specific situation one faced. One can only go into a limited amount of depth if one wants to provide readers with a comprehensive overview. One needs to offer a general perspective, suggesting the various types of problems one is likely to encounter and the various techniques that work best with different types of problems. One must leave it to others to provide depth in specific techniques.

This comprehensive perspective is the same one that I brought to Business Process Trends – [www.bptrends.com](http://www.bptrends.com) -- when Celia Wolf and I created a website to publish information about business process change. We wanted to create a site that would provide information on all of the different perspectives – a place where IT practitioners could meet business analysts, Lean and Six Sigma analysts, BPMN designers and human performance specialists. Now, 16 years later, we have accumulated a large body of articles, columns, book reviews and white papers on all different aspects of process work. Through it all we have remained a free site and I am pleased to note the number of practitioners and students that regularly show up to search our database as they seek specific information on particular problems they face.

In a similar way, Celia Wolf, Roger Burlton and I created Business Process Trends Associates to offer training in a comprehensive approach to business process analysis. We offer several courses, but over the years the perennial favorite is our introductory week of courses that offers new analysts an overview and introduction to all of the various perspectives. We try to look at real problems that companies face and then consider how a variety of different techniques and practices are required to solve the problems. In all cases our goal isn't to promote any specific approach or technique, but to train process practitioners who have the flexibility and then knowledge to consider different possibilities and to craft an intervention that will deliver the biggest improvement for the expenditure.

As I've noted in other columns, business process improvement is a perennial challenge at all companies. The process perspective offers the best general approach to creating efficient new organizations or improving the work of existing organizations. As time changes new approaches (or fads) become hot and new types of interventions become popular. What doesn't change is the need to think carefully about what is really involved in producing quality products and services, providing good customer experiences, and minimizing the cost and maximizing the productivity of employees. There are always multiple ways to deal with complex problems, and one always works with a limited budget, and is forced to prioritize one's interventions.

Understanding your options, and considering which intervention will work best in a given situation is always the best way to approach a process problem. Hopefully a comprehensive approach will continue to flourish.

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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 throughout the world. Paul lives in Las Vegas. Paul can be reached at [pharmon@bptrends.com](mailto:pharmon@bptrends.com)