

Business Process Trends

Readers who have been following BPTrends for years know that we have been publishing statistical analyses of the business process market since 2005. We began BPTrends in 2003, just a year after I published my book, *Business Process Change*. Initially, the website was meant to provide those interested in process work with more information than I'd been able to provide in the book. As time passed, the website took on a life of its own and became the basis of a consulting and training business, as well. Through it all, however, my continuing concern is to provide readers with a broad understanding of the process market.

When I first wrote my book, there were process markets that never seemed to interact. There were books and conferences on Six Sigma, on Business Process Reengineering, or ERP tools, on Lean and on Business Process Management. There was a separate community that focused on Process Analysis, another that focused on Capability Maturity Model (CMM), still another group that focused on Supply Chain processes (SCC), and others that focused on Workflow. I always saw these as a set of tools that a skilled process practitioner would need master in order to help his company improve the way it worked.

We talked about all these different process communities on BPTrends. And, in 2005, when we began to do a biannual market survey, we decided to try to gather data on all of the communities in a single survey – to provide the entire process community with an overview of itself.

In the fall of 2019 we undertook our 8th survey, which we published early this year. As with all our surveys, we make the results available without charge to anyone who downloads it from our website [1]. If you haven't downloaded the 2020 survey, you should consider it. Each year we have asked many of the same questions. We did this to develop long term trends in the process market. In addition, each year, as the process field has evolved, we introduced some new questions. This year we also introduced two major innovations. First, I was able to convince Jorge Garcia, an process software tool market analyst to join me in preparing the survey. He helped add questions on the tool market and wrote a major part of the survey describing the current state of process software. In addition, I asked a number of people who I regard as among the major thought leaders in the process world to offer a brief opinion of where the market is trending [2]. I did that to assure that readers of the report would realize that the analysis and opinions of Jorge and I were not the only way of conceptualizing the current process market. As anyone who reads the short quotes from these thought leaders will recognize, bright, knowledgeable market observers can disagree in what they think about market trends.

Having undertaken a similar survey for 16 years in a row, I am in a position to make some broad generalizations about the market. First, language keeps changing. Partly because analyst groups like to have new things to talk about, and partly because technologies and business jargon keeps evolving, some of the terms that were popular 15 years are less popular today. In 2005 IT people talked a lot about Business Process Reengineering (by which most meant major changes in large scale processes, using IT). In 2020 IT people are more likely to talk about Business Transformation (by which most mean major changes in large scale processes, using IT). Six Sigma is less talked about today, but Lean Six Sigma is popular and is concerned with most of the same issues.

Artificial Intelligence is popular again. Remember how popular it was in the 1980s when everyone was building an expert system. It was that early round of AI that resulted in the rule-based tools that were used to evolve the whole business rules market that gradually merged with BPM tools to create the decision component for process tools. Today's AI relies on neural networks (machine learning, or whatever) and has generated two popular process tool groups: Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Process Mining. RPA serves to quickly automate processes that currently involve having a human copy data from one software app to another. Process Mining looks at how apps store and retrieve data from databases and uses that information to define processes and to identify bottlenecks and other problems in existing processes. Both of these applications are niche products, focused on narrow process problems, but with further use of AI, we can expect the whole process software tools area to expand rapidly in the years ahead.

As far as the broader process market is concerned, most companies still think process improvement is important, and most are still engaged in trying to transform sections of their business to introduce major new products or efficiencies. As in the past, CEOs still have trouble thinking of process as a single profession. In most cases the CEO is offered different solutions by competing groups and has to choose, causing confusion.

Much of process work still involves installing and then trying to improve ERP applications. Similarly, too often the human side of process work is overlooked, or delayed while the automation software is installed, and then has to be retrofitted. The fact that many process problems arise because middle level managers don't understand the processes they manage or how to manage people to achieve best results is still often ignored.

Companies are undoubtedly better at process work than they were 20 years ago. More people understand processes and there are many more models and tools to help improve processes. The broad trend is towards more process sophistication. But as with other types of business excellence, great process work depends on having a process focused senior management team. A company with managers who care and drive process excellence can make great strides and develop a great reputation. Then, after a change in management, the company shifts its focus, process people drift off and the company becomes less efficient.

I hope BPTrends readers will download and read the 2020 report. It's not the most exciting reading, but it's an honest effort to provide everyone who works in the process area with a good understanding of the market and where that market is treading.

Notes

[1] In the early years, BPTrends self-funded the survey, but in recent years we have relied on sponsors to help pay for the costs of undertaking and writing up the survey. In 2020 our sponsors were Creatio, TEC, Trisotech, and Signavio and I wish to thank each of them for helping to support what I hope is a valuable service to the entire process community.

[2] Thought leaders responding to my request for their views about process trends include: Dr. Roger Addison, Abdulrahman AlForaih, Bassam AlKharashi, Dr. Oscar Barros, Tom Bellinson, Tony Benedict, Roger Burlton, Peter Fingar, Denis Gagne, Carol Haig, Keith Harrison-Broninski, Terje Haugland, Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland, Mark McGregor, Iselin S. Nordal, James Odell, Tore Rasmussen, Dr. Michael Rosemann, Bruce Silver, Howard Smith, Dr. Richard Mark Soley, Roger Tregear, Dr. Wil van der Aalst, and Dr. Michael zur Muehlen

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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