Harmon on BPM Paul Harmon

Where is BPM Today?

We launched the BPTrends information portal http://www.bptrends.com/in 2003, following the publication of my book, *Business Process Change*. Within months, Howard Smith and Peter Fingar published their book, *Business Process Management: The Third Wave*.   And, at the same time, groups of software vendors began to marketing Business Process Management Software (BPMS) and the ABPMP (Association of Business Process Management Professionals) incorporated. The ABPMP is a professional BPM association that promotes and supports the BPM community and they now have chapters in multiple locations, both in the US and throughout the world.

Business Process Change was very much in the tradition of Geary Rummler and Michael Hammer – a description about how an organization could coordinate all its resources to generate significant improvement in its performance. This is a tradition that began in the Eighties with Six Sigma and grew in the Nineties with Business Process ReEngineering. This approach emphasized management decisions and a systematic, top-down approach to improving productivity.

The Smith and Fingar book advocated the use of an improved approach to workflow software to manage business processes. Smith and Fingar put a lot of emphasis on software tools that would allow local business managers to take control of their own processes by going online to update their automated processes. This approach was soon supported by vendors like IBM and HP that wanted to encourage and support the redesign and automation of processes. Some combination of these approaches generated a lot of interest and activity. Between 2003 and 2006 we went from 3-4 process conferences a year to a dozen. An international conference of academics and researchers was organized and began to meet each year. BPTrends.com became the most recognized and respected source of unbiased information about BPM and process work and in 2006 we launched our integrated BPM Training Curriculum which continues to be available through our network of certified partners around the world.

Today, 13 years later, it seems like a good time to ask what happened. There is still a lot of interest in process work, but it isn't nearly the hot topic it was in 2005. The number of conferences has declined, *Business Process Change*, now in its 3rd edition, doesn't sell like it did in the beginning and public training is down in recent years.

A few years ago BPTrends launched a Discussion Group on LinkedIn. Today we continue to grow and this week we approved many new members with titles like Progam Manager, Malaysia Telecommunications; Process Manager, Asset Management, Netherlands; Business Process Consultant, Wipro Consulting, Ireland;

Quality Assurance, IT, Iran; and Business Process Partner, Telecommunications, Australia. This is typical of the folks who join our BPT LinkeIn Discussion Group each week.

People are still doing process work and companies are still interested in process change but frequently it is referred to as something else. One of the primary reasons for this is simply that the market (vendors and practitioners) is always looking for new things. They come up with new names that encompass different topics. In 2005, the OMG's Business Process Management Notation (BPMN) was the hot topic among modelers. Today, Case Management Modeling Notation (CMMN) is a hotter topic – even though BPMN remains more widely used. People know about BPMN, however, and they are now more interested in learning about something new – specifically CMMN.

Similarly, IBM no longer puts as much emphasis on BPM. It's much more likely to talk about Case Management, or Cognitive Computing. Each is different from BPM, but each has large elements of process contained within their frameworks.

Other things have happened, as well. Information portals like BPTrends are increasingly competing with blogs that offer asynchronous information around the clock.   Software technologies have gone into the cloud and been mutated in dozens of new ways. Jobs and industries have been outsourced. Training is delivered virtually and the major recession that began in 2008 is still working itself out in economies around the world.

So, where is BPM today? The idea that process work should be coordinated and managed has caught on – though more at some organizations than others. The idea of software tools that help managers understand and track their business processes has been implemented in leading companies, though not at others, but this is an ongoing effort, as the nature of the software tools continues to evolve. All processes are being integrated and leading companies are working to automate more complex cognitive processes – an effort that will certainly continue to be a challenge over the course of the next few decades.

Healthcare needs a huge amount of support to improve its management and efficiency. Financial processes are changing so rapidly that few can keep up with it and the customer environment is changing so quickly that most organizations are falling all over themselves to assure they still have the products and the channels to appeal to customers.

We many not call it Business Process Management (BPM), but the basic concepts still need to be mastered and applied if organizations are to grow and become more productive. The challenge isn't getting simpler, it's getting more complex. But it isn't going away – and the field still cries out for smart people to master the basics and then move on to help their organizations become more productive.

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