

Holistic BPM Is Coming of Age

Michael Rosemann and Marlon Dumas

By bringing business and IT stakeholders into apparently common ground, Business Process Management (BPM) carries the promise of business-IT alignment (yet again, some would say). But despite the high expectations created by vendors and think tanks, the divide between BPM as a management discipline and BPM as a system engineering paradigm has proven difficult to overcome. Executives, managers, and business analysts view BPM firstly as a way of understanding, analyzing, and improving business operations. They are concerned with revising accountabilities along processes, setting up internal Centers of BPM Excellence, and defining new process performance metrics. It is acknowledged in this community that BPM may sometimes lead to a technology solution, but this is almost an after-thought. And, indeed, understanding business processes is a proven approach to identifying and overcoming inefficient work practices, whether or not these practices are supported by technology.

However, there is only so much efficiency that can be achieved without technology. Sooner or later, BPM initiatives need to understand how to put technology to their stack of solutions. This is where the phantom of the BPM divide makes its appearance. Arduously knitted process models representing countless days of interviews and workshops have trouble finding their way into a technology solution. Fundamentally, the problem is not one of process modeling language (e.g., BPMN vs. BPEL), but one of differences in perspectives and concerns. Business stakeholders are interested in intuitive visualizations capturing among others risks and controls, compliance, costs, customer touchpoints, time-to-market, etc. IT stakeholders, on the other hand, are concerned with data schemas, messaging, failure recovery, security credentials, etc.

It is not surprising that handovers between business and IT stakeholders are inherently difficult. For example, ask Steen Brahe and his colleagues at Dankse Bank, the largest financial group in Denmark, who have invested a good part of the last five years taking high-level models of the bank's "customer product package" processes, and slowly (but surely) streamlining them in a service-oriented architecture. The system now binds together 27 different financial products across 10 functional silos, to deliver 1800 customer product packages by means of 30 business (sub)processes that orchestrate over 200 service invocations.¹



This is one of the numerous case studies to be presented at the upcoming **5th International Conference on Business Process Management**, to be held in Brisbane, Australia, from 24 to 28 September 2007.² Looking at the program of the conference, it is clear that the vision of "*holistic BPM*" is coming of age. In fact, the main conference opens up with a keynote talk with exactly this title by Simon Dale, CTO, SAP Asia Pacific Japan. And the following day, John Deeb, Director, Product Management at Oracle, will follow suit by explaining how

Oracle's concept of "Business Process Blueprints" aims at moving business processes from analysis all the way to execution.

The BPM Conference Series is best known as the world's premier forum for academics and industry researchers in the field of BPM. Traditionally, the conference had a stronger focus on the academic progress in this field. However, this year the proportion of BPM practitioners will exceed 50 %, with an anticipated 100 practitioners sharing seats with a similar number of academics – an unusual but also stimulating combination that goes beyond the classical set of BPM conferences and their line-up of the usual suspects.

No panic though; there will be room and food (for thought) for everyone. The academic view on how to achieve holistic BPM will be given by Prof. Dirk Deschoolmeester from Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School in Belgium. Prof. Deschoolmeester will give the first research paper

¹ <http://brahe.org/MamboPHD/>

² <http://bpm07.fit.qut.edu.au/>

presentation at the conference. The paper presents a BPM maturity framework specifically targeted at moving organizations towards the vision of holistic process-orientation. This is one of 30 paper presentations to be presented at the conference, out of an initial pool of 152 submissions from 41 countries, making this a truly international event.

Other paper presentations will cover issues ranging from how to make process models understandable by a broad audience, to measuring business process performance, and applying BPM for policy compliance. In the days before and after the conference, a total of nine workshops will provide opportunities for focused discussions. In particular, BPM practitioners from government agencies will gather at the Workshop on Management of Business Processes in Government, while researchers will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of BPM and service-oriented architectures during the workshop on "Web Services and Formal Methods." Other workshops will cover topics such as business process design, BPM governance, and business process intelligence.

It is unusual to see a conference that combines academics and industry representatives on a 50-50 ratio. But BPM is precisely the discipline where this can and should happen. Indeed, BPM is largely about rigorously analyzing relevant problems. This is the view to be exposed by Steve Tieman, a veteran BPM champion at Estée Lauder in New York. Steve will explain how Estée Lauder has successfully deployed BPM holistically to develop and launch new products into the market. He will share his team's experiences on taking high-level process models, deploying them in an enterprise-wide service-oriented architecture, and negotiating hosting and services contracts underpinned by process-oriented service level objectives. Steve's talk will be followed by a full day dedicated to presentations by BPM practitioners from leading Australian organizations. This day will close with a panel discussion on how to combine rigor and relevance to achieve holistic BPM.

If you can't make it all the way down under to hear these case studies, stay tuned on the BPM 2007 conference web page (<http://bpm07.fit.qut.edu.au/>). All keynote presentations will be made available as streaming video. And if you are lucky enough to join us in Brisbane, don't forget to register and to bring your sunscreen and sunglasses.

Authors

Michael Rosemann (m.rosemann@qut.edu.au) is Professor for Information Systems at Queensland University of Technology, where he co-leads the Business Process Management Research Group. Author of five books and 130 refereed papers, Michael has spoken at BPM courses and conferences in over 20 countries. He is general chair and program co-chair of the International BPM 2007 Conference.

Marlon Dumas (m.dumas@qut.edu.au) is Associate Professor in the same group, where he is responsible for research and consultancy activities on service-oriented architectures. He is organization chair of the International BPM'2007 Conference, and he will be program co-chair of the next edition of this conference to be held in Milan, Italy, September 2008.