

## BPM in Europe

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This October, the BPM Forum was media sponsor of the BPM Congress, one of the largest BPM events in the Netherlands. As chairman, I had the pleasure of introducing the various speakers of the day. The event was a success; 90% of the 250 registrants were end-users – a great compliment for the organization. A wide range of sponsors and exhibitors contributed to the success of the Congress.

A large number of the sponsors and exhibitors were not the “usual suspects” one would expect at a BPM event. A relatively large number were “new kids on the block” – companies that one or two years ago I would not have associated with Business Process Management. (I suspect they didn’t think of themselves as BPM vendors 2-3 years ago!) In itself, it is good to see this growing interest in BPM. This means BPM is taken serious by more and more companies. This should result in providing the customer a broader choice of software vendors, system integrators, consultants, and educational opportunities. However, are these companies stepping up to BPM for the right reasons?

Most of the presentations were given from a supplier’s point of view – describing the technology push. In other words most presentations were a company pitch for a product with almost no time being spent on the business case of BPM or in presenting a real case study. This push for technology will result in BPM being presented as something for techies. The organizational impact and those aspects of BPM were covered only lightly in some of the presentations. Secondly, a number of times during the Q&A and in the forum discussion afterwards, the following question was raised: “What is the ROI of BPM?” As it turned out, each speaker and each member of the audience had a different definition of ROI and BPM. Basically, this question is one equation with two unknowns – i.e., it is unsolvable.

So what would all these presentations mean for the ignorant user who has come to his first BPM event to find out what BPM is all about? Will he be able to advise his manager on investing on BPM next year or not? Has BPM become clearer or, has he left even more confused? Unfortunately, I suspect that a large group will have left more confused. To limit this poor result, it would help to ask the speakers to present as many case studies and their business benefits from as many market segments as possible. Also, there may be a wide variety of definitions out there, but the organizing committee should isolate some key questions and definitions such as “What are BPM and ROI?” This will lead to all the participants being able to talk a common language. If the suppliers don’t make it clear what the business benefits of BPM are, then BPM will be seen as yet another 3-letter acronymic hype waiting to be blown away.

I suspect that a number of these “new kids on the block” are attracted to the BPM hype and are looking for a quick buck. Unfortunately, putting your company logo on a generic BPM presentation will not cut it, and is damaging to the BPM image. I would strongly advise such companies: If you want to be a player in the BPM domain, please work on presenting a “business pull,” explore the business impact of BPM, and get a client to speak. If you cannot do this, then there is still positive news: The industry has followed lots of three letter acronyms over the last years, e.g., CRM, ERP, BPR, WFM, ECM, etc. With our alphabet you can

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make 17576 three-letter combinations. I guess this assures that we will still have lots of new hypes to follow in the future.

