



BPM in Europe

Frits Bussemaker

Founder & Chairman
BPM Forum -- Netherlands

Frits.bussemaker@ordina.nl

GLASS SILOS

In March 2006 a group of people from the Dutch Business Rules community got together to discuss how to improve the awareness of Business Rules (BRs). As chairman of the BPM-Forum, I was invited to join the discussions. We've talked quite a lot about how to go about it. A number of people suggested expanding the BPM-Forum to include a Business Rules section. This sounds like a good idea as there is a big link between BPM and Business Rules. Furthermore, this would mean an increase in the potential number of members. Nevertheless, I was still against this approach for the following reasons. First, this would suggest a certain hierarchy between BPM and BRs where there is none. Also, the Business Rules community would "adopt" the existing "image" of the BPM-Forum. Furthermore, it would dilute the focus on either BPM or BRs. Finally, both communities approach different groups of people. In the end, we set up the BR-Platform Netherlands (see www.brplatform.org), using the BPM-Forum as a model, with a link between both communities. The first couple of meetings have proven the BR-Platform to be a viable initiative with a large number of attendees. The last meeting was a joint meeting with the BPM-Forum at the Dutch ING bank and was a big success. The ING presented their vision on Business Processes and the link with SOA, outsourcing, and Business Rules. Over 240 people wanted to attend. At the end we squeezed 140 people into a room with a normal capacity of 125. Linking two professional communities proves to be a success.

However, I've observed various situations where a link wasn't made, but should have been. Let me give you just three examples:

Example 1:

Last year at an IT-governance conference, SOX was discussed and its implications for the corporate lawyers. The audience included only IT people, with no lawyer to be found. That same year at a corporate governance conference, I heard a group of 100+ lawyers discussing the business process – with no IT- or process-professionals in the room.

Example 2:

On October 10th this year I was asked by an organization to chair a BPM-conference. Quite a lot of the presentations covered the benefits digital dashboards. Three weeks later I was invited to a Corporate Performance Management conference, organized by the same organization. Next to digital dashboards, a lot of presentations covered the benefits of a business process. I found out that there was almost no overlap in speakers, sponsors, or attendees.

Example 3:

On November 29th the BPM-Forum organized an event on BPM and Healthcare. One of the speakers, Harm Scherpbier, product manager of Siemens Medical Services, who lives and works in the States, told me that this was the first conference he knew of specifically about BPM in Healthcare. In Healthcare IT meetings there are few BPM-talks, and in BPM conferences there are few healthcare-related topics. With healthcare a major "industry," you would imagine that these topics would be covered in many more conferences.

In all these examples, I observe that professional communities are talking about each other but are not talking with each other. I believe these examples are not unique and are actually quite common. A lot of professional communities are “glass silos,” i.e., as with my observation, most people are not even aware that they work from an isolated position. Within these glass silos you will see a lot of “preaching to the converted,” i.e., to “the in-crowd,” and a wish to explain the business benefits to an audience from the same business or its customers.

In line with the discussions on the benefits of breaking down the walls between the silos of the big organizations, I am a strong advocate of linking the glass silos of the various professional communities. I believe the same type of benefits will apply. Sharing knowledge and best practices between the glass silos will lead to innovation and will eventually really result in the more effective and efficient organizations all these professional communities propose.

However, it does require a shift in the mindset. The individual departments/silos of big organizations are now starting to realize they are part of a value chain or a part of the total solution or service for a customer. In the same manner a professional community should realize that any technology or methodology it promotes is not the “mother of all solutions,” but, also, is part of a value chain, total solution, or service for a customer.

At the end of the day, our business is a like playing a team sport, e.g., soccer. Professional teams train separately for different parts of the game – e.g., offence and defense (the silos), but their interaction, too, is part of the training that leads to their becoming a team. In the same manner, we specialize in a technology or methodology but we also have to understand how these specializations interact. So, not only the Business-IT alignment is important, but the “IT-IT alignment” as well.

I would like to thank everybody who provided input and feedback to this column.

Frits Bussemaker Chairman BPM-Forum, Board member BR-Platform Netherlands, and Management Consultant with Ordina