



# enterprise integrity



By DAVID MCGOVERAN

## BPM?

It's been awhile since I've written about business process management (BPM) and business process management systems (BPMS) here. Meanwhile, these terms have become quite popular. It's no wonder these and many other terms have become so confused due to several factors:

- BPM "pure-play" vendors are entering the market.
- EAI vendors have added process integration.
- ERP vendors are jumping on board.
- Workflow is becoming a "born-again" business process.

Standards groups and industry analysts are having a field day. Their unbridled, self-serving use of these and other terms is infuriating. Hopefully, I can influence you a little so that this month's tirade ends up being educational.

Bad definitions introduce lots of evils. They impede communication—so much so that any analyst or vendor who uses terms incorrectly is not worth listening to. They literally don't know what they're talking about. Buy their goods and you get what you pay for—all the value hot air can deliver. If a vendor or analyst doesn't know a product category's value proposition or how it relates to other categories, they can't possibly forecast the market, analyze its potential, specify product requirements, or advise on adoption strategies. Without understanding a product category's terms, a vendor can't effectively design, market, or support a product. Consumers try to achieve objectives inappropriate to product capabilities, with disastrous consequences.

Now that I've offended a few analysts and vendor friends, I'll give my definitions of some business process-related terms that are being used interchangeably in the software industry with BPM and BPMS. I don't want to claim authority I don't deserve, but as far as I can tell, I introduced the current BPMS concept to the industry (starting in 1997) through work with vendors, analysts, conference lectures and seminars, and eventually articles in this column. Prior to that, BPM was a little-used phrase referring to managing business process reengineering and process innovation. Unfortunately, the terms BPM, workflow management, business process reengineering (BPR), process innovation, process automation, process-driven development, and process integration are now quite muddled up. Here's what they really mean:

- BPM is a business management philosophy. Although technology is highly desirable for its implementation, BPM is not technology. Put succinctly, BPM teaches that a business can be understood and managed solely in terms of business processes, and it teaches how to manage those business processes. It's process-centric, closed-loop and continuous design, change, monitoring, and control responsive to business requirements and

objectives. Unlike BPR, BPM embraces how people actually work rather than forcing an ideal business process. BPM is mostly agnostic with respect to traditional management theories. The many implications of BPM are too vast to go into here.

- BPMS: Not all technology useful for implementing BPM is a BPMS. A BPMS product must enable BPM for business users with process-centric creation, modification, resource management, activity monitoring (as in BAM), performance analysis, optimization, development, and integration of people and software (see my early BPMS columns on [www.bijonline.com](http://www.bijonline.com)). Otherwise, the product falls into some other category about which business users couldn't care less (such as middleware). Contrast these ideas with those other terms that are so often confused with BPM and BPMS—the things BPM is not.
- BPR teaches wholesale process replacement. Dr. Michael Hammer, president of Hammer and Company, co-author of *Reengineering the Corporation* and author of *The Agenda*, said, "Rip it out and start over." More recently, Hammer said, "I was wrong."
- Process innovation is improving the efficiency of a process and is often related to total quality management (TQM).
- Workflow management is closely related to business process management, but is considerably less sophisticated and focuses on manual activities performed by people. Few business processes (or portions of them) are simple enough to be modeled as workflows. Flow control in a workflow is based on conditioned inputs and outputs rather than explicit business rules.
- Process automation is literally the end-to-end automation of all the tasks and activities in a process. It's not focused on either management or improvement, but rather on operational control.
- Process-driven development uses process modeling to design and maintain the control and data flow among programs or program components. Such flows are highly structured computational devices, rarely modeling the way real-world business processes work.
- Process integration is the integration of applications and services to automate portions of a business process.

We really need to clean up our language. Some define all these terms so that they have no separate meaning. When that occurs, we lose the impact of new ideas and the value of old ones. Our enterprises lose the integrity of communication. I don't think we can afford the mistakes that result. **BT**

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