enterprise integrity

By DAVID McGOVERAN

BPMS Concepts, Part 7

Deploying a Business Process Management System (BPMS) without a strategy is asking for pain or outright failure. You need a well-defined plan of action with a schedule, objectives, risks, and quantifiable costs and benefits. The plan identifies initial business objectives, deployable BPMS components, and key stakeholders. The key strategies for BPMS deployment can be classified as bottom-up, dispersive, accretion, or top-down.

The most common strategy is *bottom-up*, where BPMS is built on top of a technology integration infrastructure as a new middleware layer. EAI vendors and IT departments, having tackled technology integration, find this strategy convenient. Pilots are restricted to a department or one interdepartmental business process. BPMS provides process (or even message-flow) integration and technology orchestration, coordinating various applications. The process engine will generally focus on process automation with little human-centric workflow, with technical activity monitoring. The process model will be only an idealized equivalent of the actual business process. Business managers may have difficulty interacting with and benefiting from the BPMS, reducing business objectives to lowering overhead or to technical objectives. Eventually, business activity monitoring, analysis, forecasting, and control are added. This strategy enables assimilating BPMS benefits slowly, but risks losing business management support and interest, while failing to reach the full potential of BPMS.

The *dispersive* strategy introduces BPMS selectively, addressing specific business problems throughout an organization. It creates multiple islands in an attempt to implement standardization and control costs. These islands are functionally integrated, rather than process-integrated. Local business measures roll up to higher organizational levels via data integration, such as a data mart or enterprise portal. With additional business functions, local business processes increase in scope until islands become process-connected. The process engine will often emphasize human-centric workflow, with limited process automation. This strategy is business tactical and does not depend heavily on a standard Enterprise Application Integration (EAI) infrastructure. It provides rapid, easily understood business benefits for middle managers, but risks insufficient technical integration as enterprise processes emerge and functional scope expands from operational to strategic business objectives.

The *accretion* strategy deploys BPMS throughout a particular, perhaps small, business operation. The implementation grows outward from a successful center or seed. Its initial scope is all of the existing business processes under the control of a specific management team, all their objectives, and necessary technology infrastructure. The scope can grow both horizontally, through other process-connected organizations, and vertically, through additional organizations falling under managerial scope as we move up the corporate structure. Accretion strategies require a well-architected BPMS, with all the components discussed previously, though these components need not be mature. The strategy provides measurable business benefits (tactical and strategic) in a reasonable timeframe, can grow with the integration infrastructure, and offers strong business and IT alignment. It risks failure from improper scope, lack of coordinated corporate and IT commitment, and a poor understanding of BPMS concepts.

The *top-down* strategy is unique to BPMS. It focuses on initial delivery of and acclimation to modeling, monitoring, analysis, and forecasting, with minimal reliance on technology integration, as tools for business managers and business analysts. Monitoring may not be real-time or detailed. As business activities become process-enabled (through technology integration) and the process engine is used more extensively, the BPMS becomes real-time. Likewise, analyses and forecasts become more accurate. Even when limited to e-mail or Web services integration, tremendous process agility can still be obtained. Managers use the BPMS to understand existing processes, measure current performance levels, identify process improvement opportunities, determine appropriate business metrics, and identify technology integration objectives. The desired technology integration infrastructure is developed incrementally and becomes BPMS-integrated. This strategy offers fast deployment and almost immediate business results. It risks failure from poor understanding of analysis and forecasting techniques (especially estimating and improving uncertainty), and inadequate or untimely process integration.

The top-down strategy seems superior. Although other strategies may be appropriately used, only the top-down strategy places priority on enabling business management practices. More could be said on this topic, but future articles will explore a new topic, process-centric development. The theme of driving technology from business objectives will continue. There's no other option in achieving and maintaining *enterprise integrity*. eAI

David McGoveran is president of Alternative Technologies, Inc. He has more than 20 years' experience with mission-critical applications and has authored numerous technical articles on application integration. e-Mail: mcgoveran@alternativetech.com; Website: www.alternativetech.com.