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# BUSINESS PROCESS MANAGEMENT AND THE IS FIELD: HAVE WE FINALLY ARRIVED OR JUST MISSED THE BOAT?

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# **BUSINESS PROCESS MANAGEMENT AND THE IS FIELD: HAVE WE FINALLY ARRIVED OR JUST MISSED THE BOAT?<sup>1</sup>**

*ICIS 2010 PANEL STATEMENT*

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## **Abstract**

*As BPM (Business Process Management) is gaining acceptance among academics and practitioners, questions remain about its role in Information Systems (IS) teaching and research. This panel continues and expands the dialogue within the IS community on how BPM is and should be integrated within IS. Initially proposed by Donald Chand, Alina Chircu and M. Lynne Markus (Information and Process Management, Bentley University, USA), the panel is chaired by Alina Chircu and features Varun Grover (Clemson University, USA), Ann Majchrzak (University of Southern California, USA), and Michael Rosemann (Queensland University of Technology, Australia). The panelists will address the current status, the IS field capabilities, and the future opportunities related to the integration of BPM in IS research and teaching. Each panelist will be able to interpret the definition of BPM in their own way and will be taking pro and con positions for the purposes of stimulating the debate.*

**Keywords:** *Business Process(es), Business Process Management (BPM), Information Systems (IS), IS education, IS research*

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<sup>1</sup> Title suggested by M. Lynne Markus

## Introduction

Business Process Management (BPM) is a “management discipline and a set of technologies that support managing by process” (Antonucci et al., 2009). BPM encompasses methodologies for business process change, such as business process improvement (BPI), business process reengineering (BPR), and Six Sigma, management methods for building and managing process-related organizational capabilities, standards, notations and tools for process modeling and simulation, and enterprise systems (ERP) and BPM systems (BPMS) (Antonucci et al., 2009; Davenport, 1992; Hammer, 2002; Hammer and Champy, 1993; Spanyi, 2008; vom Brocke and Rosemann, 2010).

The Information Systems (IS) field (including both academics and practitioners) has only recently turned its attention to BPM and its supporting information technology (IT) applications. However, the IS field has recently begun to incorporate BPM concepts in IS model curricula, research, and practice (Chircu et al., 2009; Gorgone et al., 2006; Grover and Markus, 2008; Topi et al., 2010; vom Brocke and Rosemann, 2010; Watson, 2008). This panel proposes to continue and expand the dialogue within the IS community on how BPM is and should be integrated within IS research and teaching. The panel will be chaired by Alina Chircu, Bentley University, USA, and will feature three distinguished IS and BPM academics: Varun Grover, Clemson University, USA, Ann Majchrzak, University of Southern California, USA, and Michael Rosemann, Queensland University of Technology, Australia, who represent two different Association of Information Systems (AIS) regions. The initial panel proposal was prepared by Donald Chand, Alina Chircu, and M. Lynne Markus from the Information and Process Management Department at Bentley University, USA. The panel proposal was further refined based on feedback obtained from two anonymous reviewers, the panel members, and the ICIS panel track chairs, Claudia Loebbecke, University of Cologne, Germany, and Yolande Chan, Queen’s University, Canada, whom we all thank for their valuable inputs.

## Controversial Issues and Panelists’ Positions

Should IS academics include BPM as part of the IS field core? Or will emerge BPM as a successful approach without being studied and influenced by the IS community? Depending on one’s perspective, BPM can be an organizational mindset and management approach, a performance improvement and process change initiative, a set of notations, technologies and information systems supporting business processes, or a combination of the three. On the one hand, BPM is focused on change methods (either for incremental improvement or radical redesign), the design of organizational structures and capabilities that enable firms to plan, implement, and manage competitive and compliant processes, and the success factors and outcomes of such processes (Grover et al., 2008; Grover and Markus, 2008; Markus, 2010a, b; Markus and Jacobson, 2010; Majchrzak and Wang, 1996). On the other hand, BPM is also focused on technologies such as workflow, process modeling and process execution tools, and their integration into complex, “black box” software packages such as ERP and BPMS that execute and monitor automated processes, within and across organizations (Markus, 2010a; Recker et al., 2009; Rosemann et al., 2008).

It is also possible that the future challenges and opportunities of BPM will change quickly. Emerging technologies such as clouds, service-oriented architectures, and smart assets (“Internet of things”), and business trends such as process outsourcing, virtual collaboration, “reverse innovation,” “frugal production,” and networked organizations suggest that work processes, systems and organizations need to be designed as loosely coupled modules that dynamically adjust to changes in geography, business needs and competitive landscapes (“A special report on innovation in emerging markets,” 2010; Bughin et al., 2010; Grover et al., 2009; Malhotra and Majchrzak, 2004; Markus, 2010a; Zammuto et al., 2007).

This panel is designed to maximize the discussion about the centrality of BPM in IS education and research by debating the following controversial issue: Should BPM be a core area of IS teaching and research? The panel members will argue for or against this statement by addressing the following topics:

- **Current status:** How far have we in the IS field come with respect to the teaching, research, and practice of BPM (Recker and Rosemann, 2009)? What is the status of BPM teaching and research at each panelists’ university? What departments or faculty groups (IS, Computer Science, Business, Industrial Engineering, Operations Management, etc.) are involved in the BPM efforts? What kinds of BPM research have they seen in the past as IS journal reviewers or editors?
- **Capabilities:** What are the IS field capabilities that support the inclusion of BPM as part of the IS core teaching and research? To frame the issues, the panel chair will provide the panelists with a list of BPM body of knowledge

topics (see Table 1 for a summary). The panelists can use the list as a starting point and debate if the major BPM topics fit the IS teaching and research toolkit or another discipline (such as Operations Management or Computer Science), and if IS research can be relevant for BPM practice (Rosemann and Vessey, 2008). The panel chair will coordinate with the panelists prior to the panel regarding their preference for discussing certain topics on the list, in order to avoid duplication, ensure equal coverage of topics, and determine opposing views for the debate.

- **Opportunities:** How are the BPM curriculum discussions and BPM article topics evolving? Are the panelists hearing or seeing any interesting trends that could position BPM in a fresh direction<sup>2</sup>? In light of these trends, what should the key BPM priorities for IS teaching and research be?

As a disclaimer, we note that (a) each panelist is allowed to interpret the definition of BPM in their own way and (b) each panelists will be taking pro and con positions for the purposes of stimulating the debate (not necessarily because they believe in them)<sup>3</sup>.

Process modeling and simulation	Modeling - purpose and benefits, standards and notations, quality, perspectives, levels, approaches, information, participants, techniques and tools; simulation
Process analysis	Justification, timing, roles, preparation, analysis, documentation
Process design	Roles, rules and principles, preparation, process compliance, process considerations
Process performance measurement	Importance and benefits; key process performance definitions; monitoring and controlling operations; alignment of business process and enterprise performance; what to measure; measurement methods; modeling and simulation; decision support
Process transformation	Improvement methodologies, redesign, reengineering, implementation, implementation roles, sustaining the BPM lifecycle, change management
Process organization	The process enterprise, roles, organizational structures, team based performance
Enterprise process management	Benefits, requirements, process frameworks (schematics), process repository management, maturity levels, best practices, implementation
BPM technology	Technologies for modeling , analysis, design, and implementation, advantages and risks of process automation, types of technologies available, standards, participants, trends and convergence of systems, implications

## Panel Structure<sup>4</sup>

The primary audience for this panel consists of IS faculty and PhD students with an interest in shaping the debate through future research and course development. The audience will have an opportunity to interact with the panelists as described below. The panel chair will moderate the interaction. The panel will be structured as follows: brief introduction, three debate modules (current status, capabilities, and opportunities) followed by audience interaction (for all modules) as well as by an informal vote and a brief concluding discussion. In the introduction portion of the panel, the panel chair will introduce the panelists, the panel purpose, and the organization of the panel (3-5 minutes). The debate portion of the panel will consist of three main modules (on current status, capabilities, and opportunities, as detailed earlier) (10-15 minutes each, with more time allocated to the last two modules). The panelists will all participate in each debate module. The panel chair will coordinate with the panel members prior to the conference regarding the discussion threads and opposing positions for the purposes of the debate. At the end of each debate module, the panel chair will invite the panelists and the audience to engage in an open-ended discussion and vote (10-15 minutes). This part will include general questions from the audience as well as questions from the panelists and panel chair for the audience regarding the particular debate module topics. In addition, the panel chair will ask for an informal vote (show of hands) regarding each debate module and any other ideas identified during the following discussion. Therefore, the audience vote will cover (1) status of BPM as part of core IS teaching and

<sup>2</sup> We thank the panel track chair Yolande Chan for suggesting this question.

<sup>3</sup> We thank panel member Varun Grover for suggesting this addition.

<sup>4</sup> We thank the panels track chairs Claudia Loebbecke and Yolande Chan for helping us refine this panel structure.

research, (2) the fit between the IS teaching and research capabilities and BPM topics, and (3) the new BPM teaching and research directions and their impact on the IS field, respectively. The overall debate will last 60-80 minutes (~20 minutes for the BPM current status, and 40-60 minutes for the capabilities and opportunities for BPM in the IS field). In the concluding discussion, the panel chair will briefly summarize the panel arguments and the results of the informal vote. If time permits (depending on the length of the previous debate portion), the panel chair will invite audience members to provide concluding remarks and questions. At the end of the allotted panel time, the panel chair will thank the participants and circulate a contact information sheet for any audience members interested in discussing further ideas about the panel topics (3-5 minutes plus any available time for final audience questions).

## Biographies

**Varun Grover** is the William S. Lee Distinguished Professor of Information Systems (endowed by Duke Energy) in the Department of Management at Clemson University, USA. He has published numerous articles on generating value from IT investments, business process change, the organizational impacts of information technologies, and other topics and co-edited several business process transformation books, including “Business Process Transformation” (Grover and Markus, 2008). He is Senior Editor for *MIS Quarterly*, and the Advisory Editor for *Business Process Management Journal*, among others. For a complete profile, see [http://business.clemson.edu/Management/faculty/L3\\_fac\\_Grover\\_new.html](http://business.clemson.edu/Management/faculty/L3_fac_Grover_new.html).

**Ann Majchrzak** is Professor of Information and Operations Management, Information Systems & Operations Management, Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California. She has published numerous articles on technology support for agility and innovation in knowledge-sharing processes, and authored or co-authored several books, including “Deploying Far Flung Teams: A Guidebook for Managers” (Majchrzak and Malhotra, 2003). She has previously served on the editorial boards of *Information Systems Research* and *MIS Quarterly*, and currently is Senior Editor at *Organizational Science*. For a complete profile, see <http://marshallapps.usc.edu/portal/subapps/digitalmeasures/faculty.jsp?surveyId=48812>.

**Michael Rosemann** is Professor for Information Systems, Head of the Information Systems Discipline, and Co-Leader of the Business Process Management Group, Queensland University of Technology, Australia. He has published numerous articles on BPM, BPM maturity and governance, business process modeling, workflow management, ontology, and ERP systems, co-edited the “Handbook on Business Process Management” (vom Brocke and Rosemann, 2010) and authored or edited several other books. He has been the founder and chair of the Australian BPM Community of Practice, chair of the *5th International Business Process Management Conference* (BPM 2007), industry track chair at BPM 2010 and will be co-chair of the PhD consortium at BPM 2011. For a complete profile, see <http://sky.fit.qut.edu.au/~rosemann/>.

## Participation Statement

All three panelists were contacted by email with a request for participation. All three panelists agreed to be part of the panel, and indicated they will register and present at the ICIS 2010 conference.

## Acknowledgements

The initial panel submission was co-authored by Donald Chand, Alina Chircu, and M. Lynne Markus of Bentley University, USA, who planned, wrote, and submitted the initial proposal and shaped the subsequent revision. The revised panel author list reflects the original authors’ and panel members’ availability during the conference, as required by ICIS 2010 conference rules. We thank Donald Chand and M. Lynne Markus for their leadership, help and insightful contributions. We also thank the two anonymous reviewers and the ICIS panel track chairs, Claudia Loebbecke and Yolande Chan, for their helpful feedback and guidance during the review process.

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