

1. You are part of the pioneering group of business process management experts. Who are some experts you admire?

I am fortunate in my life to have been able to work with and learn from many amazing people in the process space, some of the most notable and respected in my opinion include; Andrew Spanyi, a great man and a leading thinker in terms of the management discipline of process, Peter Fingar, ever thoughtful, ever supportive and always out in the front when it comes to understanding the impact of new technologies. Paul Harmon is a longtime friend who thinks deeply around process and in my opinion is one of the few to recognize the value of inclusive approaches, Roger Burlton is another who I respect greatly and who has helped influence my own work. Others of note include Professor Dirk Deschoolmeister, Professor Michael Roseman and Jim Sinur of Gartner and Ian Gotts. All of them have given so much to me and in many cases the honor of collaborating with them on work.

However, as you know much of my own inspiration comes not from BPM people but from Change experts, Business Leaders and Humanitarians, notable among these would be Richard Bandler, Robert Dilts, Kishore Biyani, Sri Sri Ravi Shanker and HH the Dalai Lama.

2. Has your view of BPM changed since your first exposure to this important management tool?

I am happy to say that my views have changed a lot! And I hope they continue to do so, any failure to change would be to deny new knowledge and new learnings. Perhaps the biggest change that I have taken on over the 15 years is the importance of two particular things in the area of process success, they are "change" and "people". I think that in the early days of BPM we were potentially blinded by technology and now leading organizations are recognizing that technology comes a poor third in turns of what it takes to be truly successful. I would also counsel that time has also taught me that we don't know all the answers, but by being open and sharing we can at least learn how to ask smarter questions, which in turn enable us to continue to grow as individuals.

When I first started to push the "People" aspects then I was cast aside or considered too unconventional, but now we see that just about everyone is jumping on the bandwagon. Conference organizers around the globe are now focusing their BPM events on people, and as they say copying is the sincerest form of flattery.

3. How do business processes drive business results?

This I find a fascinating question. You would have thought that with over 100 years of development since the industrial revolution people would be clear on this. But, as you know yourself, they still do not appear to. In its simplest form, process is merely the way that work gets done. We can shuffle data, information or raw materials around, but in the end it is how we move them around that delivers value and thus results.

No amount of reorganizations, systems or technology will make a true impact on the results of the business, unless we question how work gets done (the processes) and then apply the technology in ways to better support the processes.

As you and I have both seen, too much effort today is still placed on simply automating what we currently do. Whilst this can reduce cost and eliminate jobs, it rarely brings about a sea change in the way we work. It is only by bringing about such change that companies will really see major improvements, and indeed ensure their long term survivability.

If you look around the world at truly successful process centric organizations, people like FedEx, GE, South West Airlines etc. You will see that they tend to focus more on people and process, and then apply appropriate technology. Their business results over a long period of time suggest that perhaps this is a smarter way to go.

4. CEOs have been demanding business results from technology investments. How would your process-to-results equation change if you were confronted with an IT-rich process? Could you illustrate with an example?

CEOs have always demanded a business return from any investment and so they should. In this respect an IT investment is no different to buying new machinery or new office accommodation. The challenge is that historically IT has not provided the hoped for/planned/expected benefits and so perhaps is more in focus today than ever before.

The idea of an IT rich process exists more in people's heads than in reality. I think that when used people very often mean a process that can easily be substituted with technology. For an example I would like to use a process from HR, the recruitment process.

When we send in a CV or resume to a company today, the chances are that an IT system will scan the CV and search for buzzwords, then if the CV matches the buzzwords it will get passed on to the next stage of selection. All very easy and saves a lot of time of someone going through the CV. Business results are easy to see, we saved the time of a person trawling through CV's.

If we consider though that as applicants we all have varied skills, more than just words on a CV, so we now no longer get responses from hiring firms (seems very rude) and recruiting managers are no longer able to see some great CV's of fantastic people. Business result, great candidates are no longer considered, with the result that many opportunities are missed.

In my own career I have been pretty successful and I pride myself that I have more often than not over delivered against expected performance. But as of now not one of those jobs I was given and succeed at would I even make it past the automated selection process. Is that progress? Or technology for technology sake?

5. The IT-to-BT movement started in the early part of the previous decade. Why do you think software teams and vendors still struggle to deliver business-aligned results?

Historically at least software teams and software vendors have been about selling IT solutions to IT people, so are used to talking about technology to those who are interested in technology. Today though does a business care about buying a BPMS based on BPEL using BPMN and SOA etc to improve their cash collection process? Or do they simply want a solution to the problem that delivers on time within budget by a trusted partner?

For many, not all, this is challenging when you have to learn a new vocabulary and can no longer rely on technical specs to get you through. Especially when things like expressing your solution in terms of other people's pain point, connecting emotionally and building business cases is not part of what you were taught.

I suggest that software people and technology vendors need to spend more time listening to business people expressing their needs in simple language. Learn to communicate with those people in that language and finally take more time to learn more about what business is really about

6. The call to bring business and IT together does not appear to have worked. Do you think it makes better sense to create the required cross-functional skills in the same person, say, someone on the IT side?

Has it really not worked? Or is it simply that IT people have failed to make business people see the world their way? We have both said for a long time that there is no such thing as an IT project only a business project supported by IT. This of course can be quite a challenge if you are an IT company who sells and delivers IT projects, with staff who learned IT at university and have only worked in IT.

I agree with you that it not only makes more sense to approach things with a cross functional view, but believe it is the only way. At both a personal, departmental and business level we need to create more rounded people. I suggest that the world of specialization has gone too far, we no longer value general managers, those highly skilled people who have a broad knowledge of many aspects of our business.

My hope is that we get back to recognizing the value of broad skill sets and understand that detailed specialized knowledge is only required at times.

In our own area of process we see the same things, how often do you see a bank or insurance company advertising for a process expert with banking experience? Surely they would be better with a process expert with great communication and facilitation skills without industry knowledge – so that they focus on facilitating change not imposing their own ideas.

7. You deliver a lot of seminars and workshops. How are organizations and professionals responding to process training? And any trends you may be driving?

You and I have discussed previously how the position I take is very different from many. I truly believe that success comes when people work with people to improve processes. For many years this was tough, people were more interested in applying technology or being given a prescriptive way of working. The idea of delivering results through workshops and through thinking about situations was a tough sell.

The world today though is very different. I think more people are realizing that they have to put people first. They also understand that in a world that needs to create employment to avoid recession and popular unrest only by working with people can we truly survive.

It is true that I still get a lot of skeptics who attend my programs, but there seems to be fewer of them today than in the past. Perhaps it is just that I am attracting the enlightened people who know they have to change to make a difference and simply want to learn how! And if anything I do or say helps them improve their own lives or the lives of those around them then I consider myself blessed.

8. You were a process expert and now you are a change professional. How do you manage your own evolutionary growth in expertise?

I am not sure if I do manage it, but it is true to say that I focus a lot of my time of personal growth. When you leave school at 16 with almost no qualifications you quickly realize that it is up to you to learn and grow. In my career I have been fortunate to work for some great business owners who allowed me to earn and learn, but in the end it is a personal choice. Either learn to change and adapt in order to stay current and add value or simply watch your skills become obsolete.

Those that know me, as you do, know that I am passionate about business and change, so it is only natural to me that I keep looking for new and better ways to help others achieve their dreams.

I would add though that before process and change I spent many years in sales and business and executive management. So I believe that I understand about business as much as about technology, especially given that the businesses I ran were in the technology space.

If I were to offer any advice to others it would be, don't let anyone stop you from living your dream and in order to do ensure that you learn everything, from anyone, everywhere.

9. What is that exciting initiative you are working on currently? A new book?

As ever I am working on many things, too many things! Earlier this year at the Gartner BPM event in London I launched my new book "People Centric Process Management". The book seems to have been very well received and is perhaps the fastest selling book I have been involved with. In conjunction with Global 360 I have been able to take the book and a seminar based upon it around the world. We have

already run events in South Africa, Europe and Scandinavia and we are hoping that the Middle East and Asia Pacific will follow soon.

Beyond that I have another two book projects underway and hope to have one of them out early next year.

I also launched a couple of new training programs, “The People Side of Change”, aimed at helping IT people learn how to more effectively communicate and drive change and “You Can Change Your Life”, a personal change workshop to help individuals improve their lives (and make some money for charity at the same time)

Outside of work I have decided that as the big 50 approaches I need to work harder on improving my fitness, so I suspect I will have to reduce the work pile a little to make time for it!