

# Foreword

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As ever, it is both a privilege and honour to welcome you to the 2004 edition of the Workflow Handbook. You may think that little can change in the world of Business Process Management and Workflow technologies in a 12-month period. There are times when I wish that were true, but I can tell you from personal experience that nothing could be further from the truth.

Since its inception in 1993, the Workflow Management Coalition (WfMC) has spent much time and effort developing a set of standards that allows business processes to interoperate between organizations. This is an important point of distinction, the WfMC defines interfaces between systems, and it has been doing so successfully for more than 10 years. Until relatively recently, the WfMC was the only standards-defining group focused on the needs of Business Process Management interoperability.

That position has not changed, what has changed is the emergence of bodies defining process execution languages and notation languages these included BPML, BPEL, BPMN and others. There are now 10 groups working on process management-related standards, seven of them dealing with process modeling alone. As Mark Twain commented, “the best thing about standards is that there are so many to choose from.” Furthermore, the standards specifications have also grown. Those for the WfMC’s reference models were, on average, 40 pages long. The average length of these new specifications is around 100 pages. I won’t mention the complexity of the content at this stage.

So far the greatest achievement of this increased activity of standards development is confusion. There is confusion over which standards fit where and which apply to what situation.

Users of BPM would be well-served by reviewing the objectives of this current process standards work. They should look closely at some of the underlying assumptions being made. Should we, for instance, leave the way we structure and conduct business to people who probably know much more about technology than they do about business? As a reader of this book, you are clearly interested in the development of Workflow and Process Management technology, so what should you do? First and foremost you should get involved in the standards debate. If you do not, you will get the standards you deserve, not the standards that you *need*.

Don’t delay in moving forward. If you do not intend extending the reach of your business processes beyond your organization’s boundaries then you do not need to wait. In the short term, the standards will be of limited use. You can always retrofit standards later if you need them, but waiting is going to cost you money.

Demand, demand, demand. Make sure the vendors are aware of what you need. Make sure they know how you work. Make sure the standards deliver true business benefits.

Business processes are the nervous system of your organization. They set your business apart from its competitors. Automating your processes can further increase their value to you, many times over.

Doing this requires nothing we have not done before. The need to understand all aspects of your processes before changing them is not new. The way you go about making those changes is also well established. So too is the need to keep your people with you the whole way. And, behind it all, the technology of Business Process Management is not new. Why do we therefore need new standards?

I am not saying that standards are bad—on the contrary—but *unnecessary* standards are. I believe that you will see a convergence of the standards bodies and from that will emerge a clear picture of where they all fit and how they will benefit you, the end user of the technology. There has been significant progress of discussions between the WfMC and the BPML.org, there is more to do but the relative strengths of BPMN and XPD are becoming clear. Both organizations are likely to throw their collective weight behind the Web Services standards work especially in areas of interoperability. The underlying principles of the WfMC are to make this stuff easy to understand, make it relevant, and to provide real business benefit to both its members and users because unless the proposed standards are of clear benefit to you and simple to use, they are, at best, a distraction. At worst, they could lead you into a damaging technology lock-in. Can you afford that risk? Can any of us?

This book covers diverse range of techniques, explanations and approaches to BPM and Workflow technology. The technology has been covered in a clear and uncomplicated way—making it both an enjoyable read and a pleasant learning experience. Examples of the topics covered include Web Services Orchestration and management, Business Activity Management and where scorecards fit, and Collaboration based Process management.

With such a broad range of topics and ideas, it is easy to understand why the WfMC membership comprises a highly diverse group of workflow product vendors, analysts, universities, government organizations and corporations all touched by workflow technology. The Standards debate has some distance to run—we are collectively responsible for ensuring we get the standards we need and deserve—this is too important to be left to technicians and software developers.

The members of the Workflow Management Coalition hope you enjoy our 2004 Workflow Handbook and find it useful as you explore workflow and its many diverse benefits.

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