

## Paris to Dakar in a BPMS

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In 2008, Gartner surveyed over 1,500 Chief Information Officers. The top business priority identified in this survey was *Business Process Improvement*. But isn't Business Process Improvement a "solved" problem? With so many been-around-for-a-while Business Process Management System (BPMS) offerings, why isn't Business Process Improvement a day-to-day reality in every company?

A cloud of confusion often impedes progress on Business Process Improvement initiatives. BPMS offerings have matured at a very uneven pace, and with fundamentally incomparable feature sets. Market "noise" is generated by incomplete BPMS offerings shabbily disguised as complete solutions. These incomplete offerings gain traction because of their highly-**specialized** marketing messages—messages that sound enticing, with benefits illustrated in simple, crystal-clear-value-proposition scenarios.

To avoid confusion, it is vital to first understand that a complete BPMS must have a broad set of **generalized** capabilities, because a complete BPMS must work across all functions, disciplines, and divisions of an organization. Selecting a BPMS is in many regards like selecting a vehicle. You wouldn't choose a vehicle that *only* had *one* adequately-functional feature. Instead, you select a vehicle that *does everything well* (and may have a few exceptional features added on). The same mindset is appropriate when selecting a BPMS.

### What Kind of Vehicle is a BPMS?

For continuous and effective *Business Process Improvement*, you need a BPMS which provides:

- The ability to quickly and gracefully respond to changes in the business landscape or regulatory environment.
- The capability for individuals in all functions and disciplines to collaboratively and continuously optimize processes.
- Visibility into precisely where process problems are occurring, so that process improvement is informed and effective.

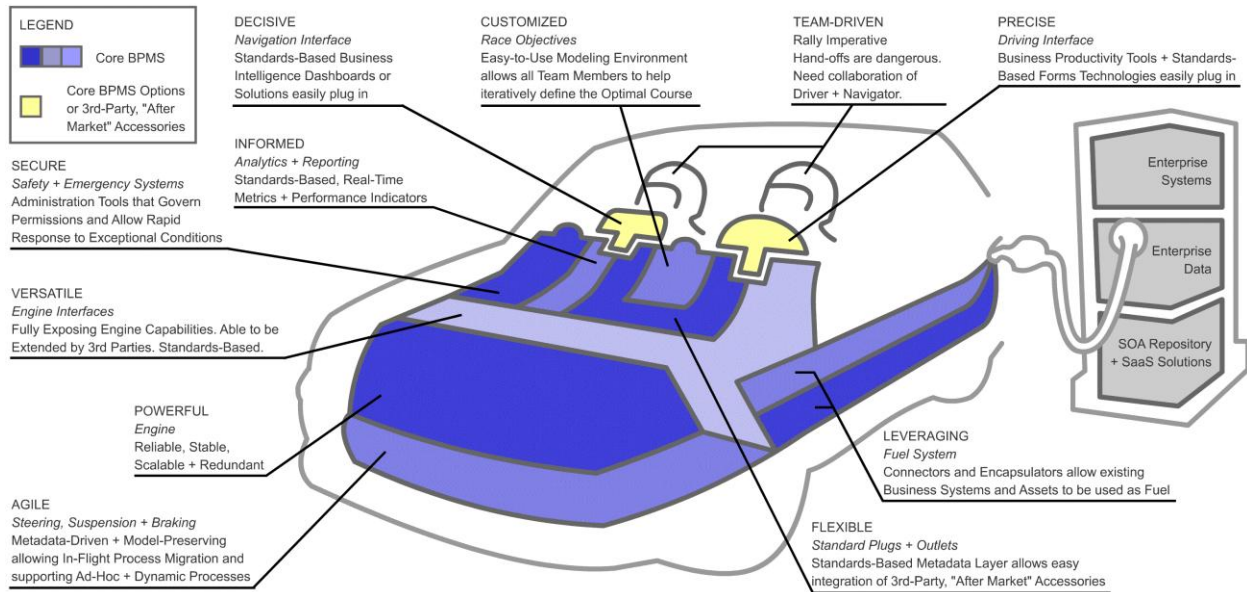
Your enterprise-wide BPMS needs to be a vehicle that is nimble and agile, that can respond to ever-changing conditions, that provides detailed and real-time feedback, and that allows drivers and navigators to continuously work together. In other words, you need a BPMS that is suitable for the *Business Process Improvement Rally*—a BPMS rally racecar.

### Steering, Suspension and Braking: The Importance of Agility

Most of the BPMS offerings on the market are not adequately agile. When you need to rapidly adjust course, you may find that parts of your race plan have been turned into difficult-to-modify compiled code. Worse still, if you manage to change your race plan—your business process model—you will find

that these BPMS solutions are unable to automatically move in-progress work from an old model definition to a new one.

There are only a handful of BPMS offerings on the market that provide the adequate agility to adapt to rapidly-changing market conditions. Gartner refers to this elite club as “explicitly-model-driven” BPMS. In these solutions, the model is preserved in metadata throughout the process life cycle. The same model is used for initially laying out your race plan, executing it, monitoring your progress, and for iterative refinement. A BPMS rally racecar is *metadata-driven* and *model-preserving*.



### Where Did the Navigator Go?

Some BPMS offerings market themselves as “human-centric”—geared at non-technical business users—and some market themselves as “integration-centric”—geared at technical users. In these cases it is necessary to “hand off” specifications rather than engaging in on-going joint work. Those formal hand-offs are like getting instructions from your navigator at the starting line of the rally, and then leaving them there. In a rally too many unexpected things can happen. You would never leave your navigator behind. The same is true for your business. A BPMS rally racecar needs to be “collaboration-centric,” providing a set of tools so that team members of every function and discipline—both technical and business specialists—can interchangeably serve as driver and navigator.

### Ten Technicians in the Back Seat

Among the small group of “explicitly-model-driven” BPMS providers, there are a few that derive the bulk of their revenue from after-sale services. They, therefore, have no incentive to make their products easy-to-use for *anyone*. Of course, in the *Business Process Improvement* rally circuit we need a BPMS that is easy for *everyone* to use. In the diagram above, imagine ten technicians in the back seat. Think of the waste of time and money. Think of the frustration as the experts inside your company try to explain

industry and organizational dynamics to a service crew that understands the vehicle very well, but does not understand the race that you are in, or your company's core objectives.

### **Business Process Improvement: Getting in the Race**

Fortunately, there is an easy way to determine if a BPMS is designed to require “ten technicians in the back seat.” A rally-worthy BPMS will frequently be used as a platform for companies that provide their own vertical or niche solutions—just as specialized racing companies build their cars on top of the best available vehicles. When a company is building their entire product on top of a BPMS, they will make sure that the BPMS provides the right tooling and interfaces to enable them to extend it and customize it without constraint. Simply ask a BPMS vendor about the number and nature of its “OEM licensees,” and you will quickly separate the rally-worthy BPMS offerings from those that will result in CFO-enraging service invoices.

Below all of the market “noise,” there are really only two or three BPMS offerings that will provide an adequate platform for continuous *Business Process Improvement*. It's time to choose one, and get in the race! Good luck and much success!

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