

Foreword

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It does not seem that long ago that I welcomed you to the 2001 WfMC Official Workflow Handbook. Now I have the honor and pleasure of welcoming you to this latest edition.

Since I first introduced the Handbook, the world in which we all work has changed beyond recognition. The general economic slowdown has also had a dramatic effect on the prospects for business process automation. The increasing need to reduce costs, improve business efficiencies and business flexibility has pushed the concept of business process technology to the forefront of an organization's consciousness.

But it is not just the impact of the economic slowdown that is driving interest in business process automation. The extended supply chain—or value chain as some have termed it—is a key business driver. The much vaunted eBusiness revolution is now a reality. The over hyped Dot Com sector, with its focus on the consumer market, may not have been the new business paradigm many were expecting, but what has rapidly become a reality has been the revolution in the business-to-Business sector. eBusiness is here to stay.

The drive to reduce business costs has also spawned a new opportunity for workflow vendors—the Business Process Management market—or BPM.

Organizations across the globe are now actively looking at outsourcing entire business processes which do not lie at the core of their business. Finance, invoicing, manufacturing, procurement and customer service are among a host of business processes that are already being outsourced to specialist organizations.

Whatever way you look at it, business processes such as these need automating whether they still reside within an organization or whether they are outsourced. Avoiding—or even shedding—non-core business processes, as well as reducing costs are the key drivers in this. However, given the events of September 2001, the protection of mission-critical business processes, ensuring 24x7 data availability in this eBusiness world, has also come to the fore.

Never has the time been more opportune to define and manage the business processes within and beyond an organization through the use of workflow.

The accelerating adoption of new technologies such as the Internet, is causing shifts in the way people work and their working environment. The Workflow Management Coalition is chartered with keeping pace with these advances and you will see a number of these issues addressed in this book.

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Importantly WfMC has worked strenuously for the adoption of standards throughout the industry. So where, in this rapidly expanding market, do industry standards fit in?

Standards allow organizations that have more than one workflow system to connect them easily. They provide a fertile environment for workflow component development to grow and flourish, giving a rich array of options for user organizations. Most importantly, standards provide an infrastructure for inter-organizational process automation. The term 'inter-workflow' was first used by a working party in the Japan Standards Association to describe this scenario.

Since its formation the WfMC has made significant progress in establishing vendor-independent workflow standards.

The WfMC has made significant progress in the past year; the release of the new interoperability (Interface 4) based on XML technology (Wf-XML 1.1) is particularly pleasing; and the WfMC would like to extend its thanks to all involved, but especially to Michael Rossi, Rainer Weber and Mike Marin of the WG4 working group, together with Dave Hollingsworth, the Technical Committee Chair for their dedicated efforts in turning the standard into a reality.

With such a broad range of applicability, 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. For the same reasons, it should not be surprising that different approaches are chosen for managing workflow. Combined with the eBusiness revolution workflow has become a rich and diverse technology.

The members of the Workflow Management Coalition hope you enjoy the Workflow Handbook in its latest edition and find it useful as you explore workflow and its many benefits.

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