

## Sidekick Sam sings Karaoke

### ***Captain Packer and sidekick Sam once again explores ways to reduce paper-work and increase production efficiency. By Gerhard Greeff – Divisional Manager at Bytes Systems Integration***

Captain Packer and Sidekick Sam are feeling good about themselves. They have just saved one of their packaging machines from becoming the victim of the dreaded Block-and-Break monster. This was their final heroic act of the day, and they are sitting in Peter Packer's office, reviewing the past week.

Once again, everyone else has left already, but there is still a mountain of paper to get through before they can call it a night. Since their previous discussion on MES, Peter and Sam has not had any time to discuss ways of doing things better and faster, and Peter decides that this is a good time to broach the subject. Surprisingly, almost like he is reading Peter's mind, Sam jumps right into it. "You know Peter, last week we discussed MES. Do you still remember, or have you forgotten what with all the problems we had this week?"

"You know Sam" says Peter, "I was just building up the courage to talk about that. I actually thought you had a change of mind, seeing as you haven't brought up the subject again. I am curious though, last time we talked, you mentioned two technologies? We only discussed MES and we didn't have time to discuss the other one. Care to enlighten me?"

Sam is not surprised at all by Peter's reaction. He knows that Peter has the mind of a steel trap. He never forgets anything that piques his interest. "Well Peter" says Sam, "now that you mention it, I actually wanted to tell you about Business Process Management or BPM as it is commonly known". Peter is stumped. Sam clearly has some hidden depths Peter was not aware of. The captain also has no idea where this discussion is leading, as he cannot see the relevance to their previous discussions. "Frankly Sam" says Peter, "I cannot see how any workflow technology can really assist us. We don't even have any electronic systems in production, and our back-office systems are not the most modern either. What we need is something that will assist us to validate and approve information captured by others, not something that pass un-validated data around electronically.

"Hah" says Sam with a smug grin on his face, "I never thought I would see the day I know something you don't Peter. You have just fallen into the trap most people step into when they try and understand BPM." Peter is not impressed. He has been reading trade magazines for a long time and thinks he understands perfectly well what it is all about. Now Sam tries to tell him that he misunderstood, and Sam only got interested in this stuff a couple of months ago! "Well Sam" says Peter sarcastically, "contrary to popular belief, I don't know everything. I clearly have a gap in my understanding. Please educate me."

“Come on Peter” says Sam, “don’t be like that. I didn’t mean to sound derogatory; I only meant that most people think of BPM in terms of workflow. Workflow is only one part of BPM. It is not the whole thing. Most people get that wrong, so don’t feel bad about it.” Peter feels a bit better. He is actually looking forward to whatever gem of an idea Sam has dreamed up. Maybe they could use it somehow. Not that he has much hope, but Sam is not prone to flights of fancy, so he decides to relent and give a chance to explain. “Okay Sam” says Peter, “explain it to me in a way I can understand. Remember, I am not a technocrat, I understand machines and business, not technology.”

“Well” says Sam, “have you ever been to a Karaoke bar?” Peter nods. “You can think of BPM as a karaoke machine” says Sam. Peter laughs. “A karaoke machine Sam? Really, you have to be kidding me!” Sam smiles and says, “No really, a karaoke machine guides a performer to sing the right words in the right place. It tells him when to start, when to stop and it also shows him what is coming. It works both for single acts and duets, so more than one person can interact with it at the same time, singing different words of the same song in parallel. It is also visual, displaying the words of the song in synchronisation with the music.”

Sam continues regardless of Peter’s amused laugh. “Now if you compare a business process and a song, you will notice lots of commonalities. A song is a combination of music and human voice, and a business process combines technology and human interaction. The music in a song is a combination of various instruments, and the technology supporting the business process can be a combination of various systems and sub-systems. There are words in a song that follow a specific sequence, irrespective of, but synchronised with the music, and in a business process, there are steps that need to be taken by humans in a sequence, irrespective of the system where the data is actually used, but synchronised with the actions of the system and other users. In my mind, I picture the words of the song as the process steps, the music as the workflow engine, the visual display as the human-machine interface and the machine as the BPM technology that make it all possible.”

“Okay Sam” says Peter, “I see that BPM is a lot more than just workflow. How will it help us in our business though?” Sam seems to be on a roll. It is not often that he gets to educate his boss! “Look at all that paper” he says, “BPM can help us do away with most of that! We can automate validation, approvals, escalation, the whole bang shoot! Then we don’t need to stay here till all times of the night to do it all manually! In combination with a Service Oriented Architecture.....” “Whao, Sam, down boy!” Peter interrupts and gestures to his desk. “Talking about paperwork, we still need to get through all of that tonight. So I am sorry to stop your parade, but we need to get to work if we don’t want to be here the whole weekend.”

As they start going over the log-sheets, stores receipts and issue slips, Peter shakes his head and smiles. “Karaoke machine indeed!”

Look out for the next edition of this continuing saga of Captain Packer and trusty sidekick Sam.

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