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Modeling Organizations

In *Business Process Change** we argued that there are, in essence, two broad classes of models that business people use when redesigning business processes. We termed one set Organization Models and the other Process Models. Other authors have used slightly different terms. Geary Rummler refers to Organization Maps and Process Maps. Roger Burlton uses terms like Context Diagrams, Management Frameworks, and Stakeholder and Strategy Diagrams to refer to diagrams managers use to represent their organizations, and uses Process Diagrams to refer to the step-by-step depictions of workflow.

Most business process modeling tools support both types of diagrams. There is little disagreement about the key elements of a process diagram. It must contain process or activity boxes, and arrows to connect activities. In addition, there are usually ways to represent events and decision points, and often swimlanes are introduced to suggest which departments or individuals are responsible for which activities. The Object Management Group has summarized the basics of process diagrams in its UML 2.0 Activity Diagram notation. Similarly, the BPMI's notation working group has just completed BPMN, a notation that is especially designed for Business Process Management modeling and for driving BPEL generation. In addition to these notations there are others like the US government's IDEO notation and the various notations supported by individual modeling and workflow products.

The key thing about process diagrams is that they are so similar that everyone seems to agree that they could be standardized. No one is interested in arguing about whether a process box ought to have rounded or square corners. The important thing is to simply adopt a standard notation so that everyone can more easily communicate. At a high level, UML 2.0 activity diagrams and BPMN are similar, and the basic pattern common to both is likely to become the basis for a standard over the next few years.

Finding agreement on organization diagrams will be harder. At the recent Global Business Process Forum conference in London, Kathy Long, a very experienced Process Renewal Group consultant, gave a talk on the Fundamentals of Process Modeling, Analysis and Design. After considering the variety of diagrams available, she proposed that we standardize business

process diagrams, since everyone uses rather similar notations anyway, and that we agree not to try to standardize organization diagrams, since there is considerable divergence among practitioners in this area. It's probably a wise suggestion.

Organization models seek to convey a variety of different sorts of information. Everyone is familiar with the classic organization chart that describes reporting relationships, and more broadly, the hierarchical organization of functional or departmental units within an organization.

Most process modelers are also familiar with the generic organization systems model that shows suppliers and customers outside the company box, and major units or processes within the box with arrows showing how processes are supported by external suppliers and, in turn, support customers.

Similarly, there are several variations on diagrams that list organizational goals and show how goals relate to major processes and to stakeholders inside and outside the organization. Most process analysts have also used diagrams that show the number of value chains supported by the organization and the major relationships among value chains. Our personal favorite is an organization diagram that shows departments as vertical silos and value chains or processes as horizontal bars, and then shows which departments are responsible for which activities within the various value chains or processes. In addition, there are a number of different diagrams that are used to organize information about organization goals, or identify problems that may be causing processes to be dysfunctional.

Everyone understands what process diagrams are designed to do - they are designed to show the sequence of activities that occurs in the course of a process. Organization diagrams, on the other hand, are created for a variety of different purposes. Different projects suggest rather different views of the organization. That's exactly why Ms. Long suggested that we agree to disagree on this class of notation.

The major driver pushing in the opposite direction is the growing interest in creating enterprise and business process architectures. Two good examples of specific business process architectures are the Supply Chain Council's SCOR framework and the TeleManagement Forum's eTOM architecture. Both are concerned with high-level relationships among functional units and very general processes. Similarly, many US government units are required, by law, to generate enterprise architectures and are looking for standard ways of representing the relationships among lines of business and functional units. They also use systems diagrams that represent strategic and stakeholder concerns.

We know of one informal group working in Washington DC that is trying to agree on some standards. At the same time, the Object Management Group's BEIDTF task force is considering requesting proposals for organizational modeling standards. Neither of these efforts is very far along and even if these efforts continue to move forward, it is easy to imagine that the organization diagrams preferred by those who lean toward process automation will be very different from those who are simply focused on strategy consulting, or redesigning processes that are largely manual in nature.

We'll continue to report on efforts to standardize organization diagrams and would be interested in hearing from readers with strong opinions on either side of the question. If a consensus can be reached, we'd be happy to see some standards for Organization Diagrams. In the meantime, however, we're inclined to feel as Kathy Long does - that it is probably better to standardize process notation and simply agree to allow organization notations to vary.

Till next time,

Paul Harmon

**Business Process Change: A Manager's Guide to Improving, Redesigning and Automating Processes.* Paul Harmon, Morgan Kaufmann, 2003.

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