Mark Myers

A relatively short, but content-packed book for both business and IT professionals, Business Rule Concepts is an excellent resource, written in easy-to-read style. It is very suitable for both the business professional who is interested in creating agility in business, and for the IT professional who is interested in building systems which support agility.

Ross has successfully delivered in concise form the basic knowledge a business professional needs to use the Business Rules Approach as a primary method in business and software design. This pragmatic handbook is neatly divided into two parts. Part 1 is aimed toward the general reader seeking to understand the basic ideas of the business rule approach.

Chapter 1. What You Need to Know About Terms and Facts
- Business vocabulary
- Improving business communication
- Fact models and what they represent

Chapter 2. What You Need to Know about Rules
- A central role for rules
- Rules for guidance and control
- The inner workings of rules

Chapter 3. What the Business Manager Needs to Know
- Lessons of legacies
- Implications of the business rule approach for business
- Real-time knowledge delivery

Part 2 is aimed toward the practitioner seeking more complete understanding of the business rule approach.

Chapter 4. A Closer Look at Fact Models
- Forming definitions
- Forming fact types
- Advanced vocabulary representation

Chapter 5. A Closer Look at Rules
- What is a business rule?
- People rules vs. knowledge rules
- Rules in information/knowledge systems

Chapter 6. A Closer Look at Work and Processes
- How rules relate to business processes
- How rules relate to system processes
- The “big picture” of business systems in the business rule approach.
For those who believe that agility is a primary ingredient of successful business, Ross has cooked up a winning recipe. The subtitle of the book, *Getting to the Point of Knowledge*, can also serve as the premise – the conclusion being that without rule independence, true business agility cannot be achieved. Ross offers concrete and practical methods to increase business agility at all levels of business.

Pundits may argue that the approach is too disciplined; however, documenting the business terms and facts forms a solid foundation for sharing and retaining business knowledge, a key factor in an agile business. Disciplined organizations will get the message and run with the ball. Ross has provided an improved description and a more complete reference on how Fact Models should be built – information lacking in the first edition.

A complete categorization of business rules is provided in Chapter 5. This categorization of rules -- a vocabulary and set of rules about rules -- will help the serious practitioner analyze and manage core business logic. The conclusion is that each rule costs something and you can’t control what you can’t manage. A down side is that no reference is given for tools that support the maintenance of terms, facts, and rules.

Throughout the book, insight is provided on how rules and definitions should complement each other. In Chapter 6, Ross makes an attempt to introduce a new term “time shock.” From this reader’s perspective, Ross seems to violate the rules against creating new terms as outlined in the opening pages of the book. Ross makes his point, but more time could have been spent on defining the term “name” – how to name things well – a crucial skill in the Business Rules Approach.

The final chapter of the book concludes with insights into the relationship between rules and processes. The idea of externalizing business rules from process and creating “thin process” by using what Ross calls *scripts* may prove to be as powerful a pattern as the Model View Control (MVC) pattern is to GUI development.

Including a glossary and an index in the book is a nice touch. Coupled with its small size, it makes an excellent “stay-on-the-desk” reference. Additionally, the *Business Rules Manifesto* by the Business Rules Group is included in the back, a powerful and important master guide for any Enterprise Architecture or Business Process Modeling effort.

Despite a few glitches, I believe *Business Rule Concepts* is a “must read” (one or both parts) for just about everyone on both the business and IT sides concerned about how their company can achieve business and system agility. I gained valuable insights at just about every turn – It was well worth my time.

Mark Myers is an Enterprise Architect at the Northern California Power Agency