Several individuals contributed to the development and the current corporate emphasis on business process. One thinks of Thomas Davenport, Michael Hammer, Michael Porter, Geary Rummler, and A-W Scheer, among others. Of all these early founders of the business process movement, however, the individual who has been most successful in institutionalizing his ideas has got to be August-Wilhelm Scheer. Scheer began by creating a methodology for business process redesign, called ARIS, then created a software tool, also called ARIS, and finally proceeded to combine them with an international business process consulting company called IDS Scheer. IDS Scheer is easily the largest “pure play” business process company in the world. In 2002, IDS Scheer earned 181 million Euros. In the first half of 2003, the company’s net profits had increased by 110%. A little less than one-third of its income is derived from product sales and product related service, and over two-thirds derive from consulting. The company employs some 1,605 people and has offices in some 50 countries. Clearly, Dr. Dr. Scheer (yes, he really has two PhDs, one in IT and one in economics) knows how to move from theory to practice.

Scheer began writing books on information management at the beginning of the Nineties. He wrote Business Process Engineering, which first described his ARIS approach in 1994, and has written several books since. In all his books, Scheer has focused on using IT to automate business processes. In the mid-Nineties, he made a strategic decision to emphasize how companies could use SAP applications to help improve their business processes. This emphasis resulted in ARIS becoming the modeling approach of choice for SAP developers, and has contributed significantly to IDS Scheer’s success. In October 2003, in the latest example of cooperation, SAP and IDS Scheer announced a joint effort to create a comprehensive BPM solution, based the integration of ARIS and SAP’s NetWeaver.

This year, Scheer joined with four other IDS Scheer executives to produce a new book entitled Business Process Change Management: ARIS in Practice. This is, in fact, a book of readings, some generic and others focused on specific case studies. The four editors have each written a major article, and they are joined by many other contributors.

The book begins with an article by August-Wilhelm Scheer and Mathias Kirchmer, the current president and CEO of IDS Scheer. Scheer and Kirchmer provide a nice overview of ARIS and show how the approach has been adapted to current concerns. Figure 1, which provides a summary of what they refer to as the Three-Tier Architecture of Business Process Excellence, gives you a feel for the scope embraced by those using ARIS in their practice. It also communicates the emphasis on IT development or customization that is core to the ARIS approach to business process change.
The subsequent chapter titles provide a good overview of the range of subjects covered:

The Change Management Process Implemented at IDS Scheer
Ferri Abolhassan

Change Management with ARIS
Steffen Exeler and Sven Wilms

Managing Change through Project Management and Process Management
Kelly Talsma and Trevor Naidoo

Information & Communication to Prepare for an ERP Implementation
Ed Brady and Marc Scharsig

Using ARIS to Design the Future Logistics Enterprise
Thomas Gulledge, Philip Hayes, Alexander Lotterer, and Georg Simon

Process-Centric Approach for ERP Evaluation Using ARIS Methodology in a Midsize Group of Companies
Low Siow Hoon and Christian Rieger

Change Management – Health Care Reform in Bulgaria
Boyan Doganov, Gencho Nachev, and Ralf Martin Ester

Slovenian Railways Process Reengineering Project
Peter Lovsin, Josip Orbanic, and Miro Sobocan

Evaluation of Business Processes – Basic for Successfully Changing the Organization of ERA Ltd., a Slovenian Retail Company
Iztok Pusaticnik

It Pays to be Prepared
Andrej Devecka, Vaclav Kalenda, and Jan Sirota

Increasing Process Efficiency at Siemens AG Austria
Maria Beham, Kurt Broinger, Walter Obrowsky, Gabriele Kaltenbrunner, Peter Nattermann, and Florian Schober
### Business Process Change Management: ARIS in Practice

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Like any collection of articles written by many different people, this work is uneven. Those familiar with Scheer’s earlier works will not find this book so dense or so rigorously argued as his texts have been in the past. Instead, the emphasis is on describing projects and telling how processes were improved, using the ARIS methodology. That said, good case studies can be very instructive, and the best of these are detailed and provide lots of diagrams that newcomers can use to get a good feel for how the managers and consultants went about changing their processes. There are a couple of good financial examples. The Slovenian Railways BPR project is very instructive. Similarly, the Siemens example provides a very detailed study of an effort to install SAP in a very complex environment. The healthcare example and the retail example will also prove interesting to those interested in using ARIS in those domains. Similarly, the university examples provide nice documentation for academic change projects.

No one can work his or her way through this book without acquiring a much better understanding of how ARIS can be used to help analyze the need for process change, or how it is used in conjunction with SAP to install packaged applications to improve specific processes.

The last article is more whimsical. August-Wilhelm plays the saxophone and uses his interest in jazz as a context in which to discuss improvisation. He argues that strategies followed without deviation are rare and usually don’t work over the long run. He argues, instead, for an approach to management that treats a management team as a jazz band that creates strategy “at the edge of chaos.” Those of us who have lived through the last few years can certainly identify with the problems every company faces as it tries to adjust to constant change. Scheer doesn’t tell you how to do it, but he suggests one way of thinking about the problems most managers are facing.

If you are interested in ARIS or in using models to plan for SAP implementations, you will certainly benefit from reading this book.