



Human Processes

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Working together on the Web

Many projects, programmes, initiatives, ventures, or other collaborative efforts involve people from multiple organizations, with multiple professions, in multiple locations. Effectively, each such effort results in the creation of a dedicated **virtual enterprise**. What management structures are required to ensure that a virtual enterprise achieves its desired goals?

The UK healthcare advisory organization The King's Fund¹ provides a useful discussion of the issues associated with such a virtual enterprise, which it terms an "extended enterprise", in its analysis of 12 pilot projects between 2008 and 2011 to introduce new technology into UK health and social care ("the WSDAN sites"). In particular, the authors explain how the issues are not simply those of *communication* (i.e., data sharing) but more widely of *collaboration* (i.e., purposeful interaction):

When organisational and, by implication, individual goals are different, how can they be brought into equilibrium? It is not enough to settle on standards; what is needed is a different way of conceptualising the combined services so that data could flow from one service sector to another (possibly incorporating user-held data), and be used to the benefit of users, patients, and other stakeholders. One approach might be to view integrated social and health care as an example of an extended enterprise – a loosely coupled, self-organising network of organisations that combine their services to provide new products or services to a specific market.² This, perhaps, largely describes the current relationship between telehealth and telecare projects and their commercial partners and collaborators at the 12 WSDAN sites – it certainly describes those sites that are involved in forming social enterprises, trading arms and other service configurations. This arrangement, however, lacks the ability to answer the questions, 'What should the objective function of this enterprise be? Who is responsible for delivering quality of outcomes and for managing budgets? How can such responsibilities be enforced?'

It is not uncommon to ask the first two questions, but the third is often neglected. The third question, however, is critical, and should be asked before any telehealth/telecare equipment is deployed in someone's home, because its answer leads to the programme's governance structure. In their landmark paper on the theory of the firm, Jensen and Meckling³ view the organisation as nothing more than a nexus of contracting (both implicit and explicit) relationships that, among other things, control individuals and help to ensure that individual and group activities meet the needs of stakeholders. The contractual relationships are important because they make explicit who the stakeholders

¹ "The King's Fund is a charity that seeks to understand how the health system in England can be improved. Using that insight, we help to shape policy, transform services, and bring about behavior change", www.kingsfund.org.uk

² 'Enterprise Architecture as Strategy: Creating a foundation for business execution', Ross J, Weill P, Roberston DC, 2006, Harvard Business School Press

³ 'Theory of the firm: management behavior, agency costs and ownership structure', Jensen MC, Meckling WH, 1976, Journal of Financial Economics, vol 3, no 4, pp 305–60

are, and the limits and types of individual and groups activities that serve stakeholder interest.

Jensen and Meckling write that this view of the firm is not limited to corporations, but to any organisation:

This includes firms, non-profit institutions such as universities, hospitals, and foundations, mutual organisations such as mutual savings banks and insurance companies and co-operatives, some private clubs, and even governmental bodies such as cities, states, and the federal government, government enterprises such as ... the Post Office, transit systems, and so forth.

So, the data management problems that the WSDAN sites face highlight a larger problem concerning the overall governance of their programmes.

“Perspectives on telehealth and telecare – Learning from the 12 Whole System Demonstrator Action Network (WSDAN) sites”, Richard Giordano and Mike Clark with Nick Goodwin, The King’s Fund, 2011

This governance problem is not limited to healthcare, or to the public sector. It applies in all walks of life. Whether you are organizing a small town festival, laying an oil pipeline, or sending a rocket to Mars, you need to “make explicit who the stakeholders are, and the limits and types of individual and group activities that serve stakeholder interest.” In other words, you must find a way to show **who is involved** and **what each person is responsible for**. Until you do this, there is little chance that the responsibilities will be enforced appropriately and hence that people will deliver what is required of them in order to meet the goals of the effort.

This is a process-related question, but not one that can be solved using traditional BPM or case management techniques. Stakeholder responsibilities cannot be helpfully described or managed using flowchart notations or by assigning tasks in isolation. Rather, it is necessary to depict in a simple way:

1. The sub-goals of the collaborative effort
2. The stakeholders in each sub-goal (i.e., those with an interest in achieving it)
3. The nature of each stakeholder’s involvement – in RACI terms, whether they are Responsible, Accountable, Consulted or Informed

In the Human Interaction Management approach to collaborative work, these items become **Stages**, **Roles**, and **Activities** respectively in a **Plan**.

1. A **Stage** represents a sub-goal of the **Plan**. If you are included in a Stage, then you have an interest in achieving it. You will receive its outputs and be on in its messaging channel. The current status of each Stage shows its progress (“Not Started”, “Started”, “Completed”, “Cancelled”, “Issue Raised”, and so on).
2. A **Role** is a Plan-specific job title. The Roles assigned to you define your responsibilities in each Stage that you are included in. You use a Role to contribute to the work of each such Stage, or simply influence Stage progress via messaging.
3. An **Activity** is how a Role contributes deliverables to a Stage. An Activity may have inputs, which are often the outputs (i.e., deliverables) of other Activities. If an Activity is just for review purposes, there may be no outputs as such – review comments can be submitted via Stage-specific messaging.

The Stages, Roles and Activities may well change during the life of a Plan, as the Plan owner responds to circumstances by adjusting the way the work is to be carried out, often in response to advice and suggestions from other Plan members.

Shown in Figure 1 is an example showing how this approach can be used to run a transformation programme for a local authority via the Agile methodology Scrum:

Example HumanEdj Plan template for a Scrum project

HumanEdj Stages for Scrum Stories

In the screenshot, the selected Stage is "Manage Sprint Backlog", in which only the Scrum Master has Deliverables, but all Roles take part

HumanEdj Roles for Scrum Development Team members

HumanEdj is the flagship product of Role Modellers, a Gartner Cool Vendor 2012 (www.rolemodellers.com)

Figure 1: Plan template for a Scrum project

As captioned on the screenshot, on the left hand side you can see the various Stages (sub-goals) of the work. The first 2 Stages are Scrum-specific, and run throughout – to manage the Product and Sprint Backlogs respectively (i.e., the work required overall and in the current Sprint). Each of the other Stages is specific to a service area of the local authority, and contains artifacts relating to that specific aspect of the overall change programme.

Also as captioned on the screenshot, on the right hand side you can see the Roles involved in the currently selected Stage – in this case, Manage Sprint Backlog. In this Stage, only the Scrum Master has work to do:

- “Prepare Next Sprint”, which delivers the Sprint Backlog
- “Manage Burn Down Chart”, which delivers the Burn Down Chart (the work remaining in the current Sprint).

The other Roles in this Stage are the Product Owner (typically the executive with responsibility for the change programme), the Programme Office (the administrator for the change programme) and people with responsibility for different aspects of the change programme (planning, risks, issues, change, finance and configuration). None of these have work to do in the selected Stage, but are included in it so that they have visibility of the Sprint Backlog and Burn Down Chart, and can contribute to the Stage by receiving and sending messages on its channel.

The other Stages have specific Roles and Activities of their own, out of scope here due to space restrictions.

Shown in Figure 2 is another example, this time showing how the Human Interaction Management approach can be used to streamline a commercial Sales Bid - typically a pressurized undertaking with a tight timescale:

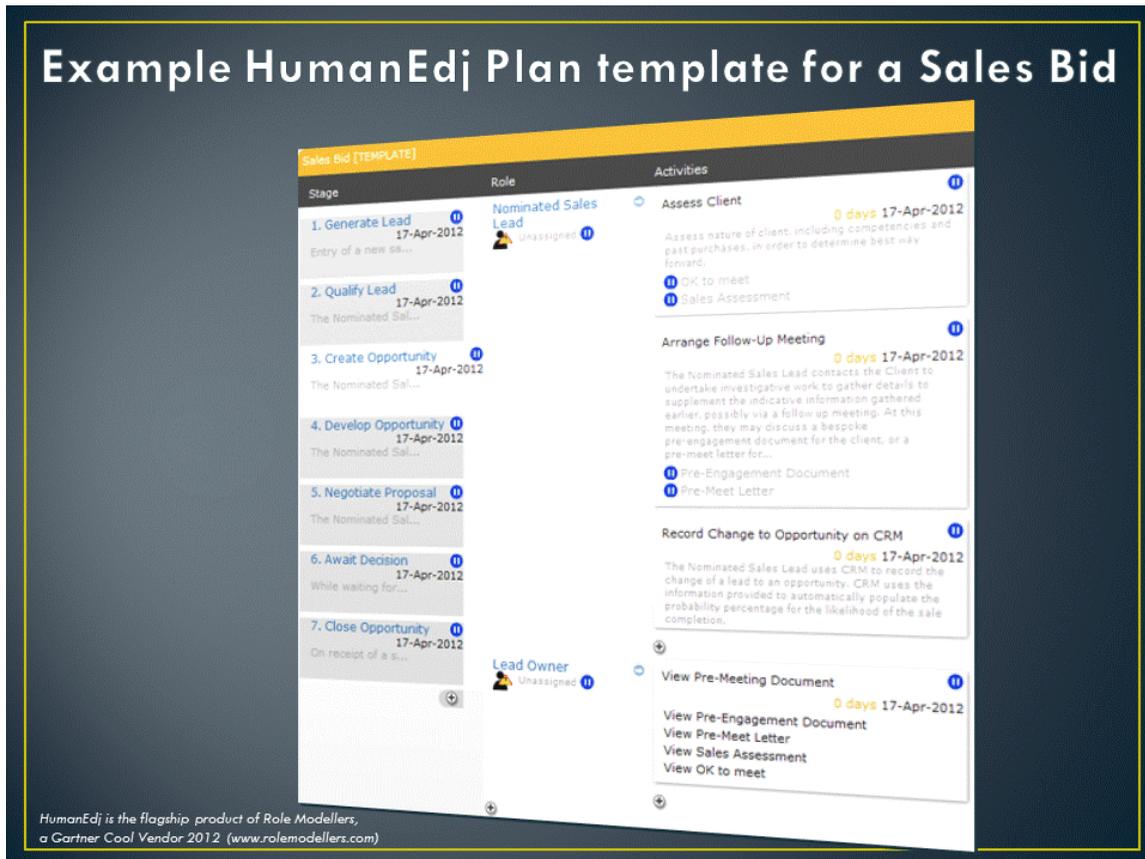


Figure 2: Plan template for a Sales Bid

Here the selected Stage is “Create Opportunity”. At this point, the lead has been qualified as worth pursuing, and the Nominated Sales Lead has the responsibilities to assess the client, arrange a follow-up meeting and record progress on the CRM system.

The Lead Owner has no deliverables in this Stage, but will follow progress closely and may contribute advice throughout the Stage.

There are other Roles in this Plan – Sales Manager, Technical Expert, Commercial Authority, and so on – but none of these are included in the Stage “Create Opportunity”. The responsibilities of these Roles are specific to other aspects of the work (i.e., other sub-goals) so they only see what is of interest to them. In other words, they are not deluged with unnecessary messaging in the usual way.

Returning to the public sector, shown in Figure 3 is a final example, of managing the case for a Youth Offender. This work typically involves many different parties, and is subject to rigorous legal and ethical constraints, which means it must be managed with great care:

Example HumanEdj Plan template for Managing a Youth Offender Case

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Figure 3: Plan template for Managing a Youth Offender Case

The screenshot shows the work required to supervise a disqualification order, which has deliverables from the Case Manager and Crown Prosecution Service Liaison, with the Youth Offending Team Manager involved only in a supervisory capacity. In order for the CPS Liaison to do their work, they use the deliverable from the Case Manager, the “Concerns About Breach”.

At the start of the case it will not be known whether or not this Stage is necessary at all, but by default all Stages in a Plan are optional, as are all Activities and production of all deliverables. The Plan *indicates* rather than *prescribes* the work required to meet the goals of the effort overall. As the work progresses, it will become clear exactly what should be done, and the best way in which to do it.

A Human Interaction Management approach guides those involved to work in a structured way that is amenable to management, while allowing them to use their skills and experience to determine the most efficient and effective route through the work.

Conclusion

A key benefit from taking the Human Interaction Management approach to a virtual enterprise is that it requires no training, process skills, or technical aptitude in order to understand what is going on and take part effectively. The simple intuitive approach makes it immediately clear to everyone involved what their own responsibilities are – and if they are interested, what the responsibilities of other people are. As the Plan evolves, and responsibilities change along with circumstances, the updated Stages, Roles and Activities ensure that everyone stays on the same page.

Further, it is not necessary to use specialized software. A Plan must be created via a Web browser by its owner (usually by customizing a standard template), but can then be used by others via standard email. The invitation message to join shows the outline of the Plan, and after that deliverables and messages can be sent and received via email messages in the usual way. Even if no-one but the owner ever uses a Web browser to do work, all deliverables and messages will be stored in the correct Stage via the owner's copy of the Plan, and in due course will be archived when the owner marks the Plan complete.

In effect, taking a Human Interaction Management approach allows virtual enterprises to be created and managed with close to zero technical or administrative overhead. Once you use this approach to manage a collaborative effort, you will wonder how you ever got along without it.

Author

Keith Harrison-Broninski is CTO of Role Modellers, a Gartner BPM Cool Vendor 2012. The company mission is to develop understanding and support of human-driven processes - the field that Keith pioneered. Its software product, the Human Interaction Management System (HIMS) **HumanEdj**, provides unique software support for collaborative, adaptive human work.

Keith has been regarded as an IT and business thought leader since publication of his 2005 book "Human Interactions: The Heart And Soul Of Business Process Management". Building on 20 years of research and insights from varied disciplines, his theory of Human Interaction Management (HIM) provides a new way to describe and support collaborative human work. Keith speaks regularly about HIM and the associated change management methodology Goal-Oriented Organization Design (GOOD) in keynotes to business, IT and academic audiences at national conferences, most recently in Poland, India, the Netherlands, the UK, Finland and Portugal.

More information about HumanEdj is available at www.rolemodellers.com and about Keith at <http://keith.harrison-broninski.info>.

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