



Human Processes

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De-risking Business Change

Business Process Management is essentially a particular technique for business change. Certainly, if you don't intend to change the way your organization operates, then you have no need for BPM. On the other hand, if you do intend to make such changes, then you should consider BPM techniques and tools – which is probably why you are reading this column.

As a consultant I often advise large-scale business change projects that have got themselves into trouble, or fear they are about to. More often than not, the root causes are mistakes and omissions made early in the project lifecycle.

Most people appreciate that mistakes and omissions made early in the project lifecycle are the most expensive sort of mistakes and omissions. However, they are also by far the most common sort. One has to wonder - why do people not learn that a stitch in time saves nine?

The answer, I believe, is that mainstream approaches to project and programme management still lack mature techniques and accompanying tools for understanding, preparing and managing the associated business changes. Further, I believe that mainstream BPM methods do not deliver enough in this respect, since they fail to take sufficient account of the human-to-human interactions that underpin and drive all business operations.

In this column, and in subsequent columns over the coming months, I will suggest ways that you can de-risk business change by using the techniques of **Goal-Oriented Organization Design (GOOD)**. GOOD is the methodology associated with **Human Interaction Management (HIM)**¹ techniques and tools, but its applicability goes far beyond process design and implementation.

If you are interested to learn how business motivation modeling, process architecture, organizational design, edge stories, user profiles and classic scenarios can help you capture and analyze requirements more effectively, then read on.

Software Development

As an example to illustrate the problem area, I'll start by describing a type of project with which most readers of this column will be familiar: software development (under which heading I include process design and implementation using a BPMS).

Most people who have worked on software development projects would caution against leaping straight into process design - and it makes no difference whether you are designing via Sequence and Class Diagrams in a UML tool or via some-IDEF0-based-technique² and BPMN in a BPM tool. Rather, it is generally recognized that some preliminary work must be undertaken prior to process design, in order to scope the project's domain – in effect, to model the business around the system.

The classic technique for this in IT is Use Cases, due originally to Ivar Jacobson. Use Cases show at a high level the Actors who interact with a system and the general flow of their interactions. Yet even when a project makes an effort to construct Use Cases they often turn out to add low value, concealing much of the true complexity of the business environment.

This may be partly because Use Case design has been stripped of entity modeling aspects included in its original formulation, aspects designed by Ivar Jacobson to help ensure the viability of the approach. However, a deeper reason is that current techniques used early in the software development lifecycle are incomplete. We need more than better Use Cases - we need more than Use Cases per se.

Yet despite dramatic improvements in the last few years in many aspects of software production, such as the emergence of agile methods (including practices associated with iteration such as test-first coding) and higher-level code generation techniques (ranging from model-driven programming tools to process and rule engines), there have been only minor improvements to the way in which people understand the business drivers that cause software to be constructed in the first place.

Consider **Rational Unified Process (RUP)**, which thanks to adoption by IBM is one of the most widely used software development methodologies. Proponents of RUP claim that it is an almost universal technique, offering support for iterative approaches despite its traditional waterfall origins. RUP has given rise to an "open" descendant, **Open Unified Process (OUP)** which is also touted as being adaptable to pretty much any software project.

RUP and OUP place particular emphasis on business analysis in the early stages of a project. "Construction" is deferred until the third of four phases, and practitioners are encouraged to use structured disciplines for Business Modeling and Requirements Analysis. However, dig a little deeper and the picture starts to develop cracks.

In particular, the "Inception" phase of RUP is supposed to include development of a "business model". What exactly is a RUP business model? Well, who knows - certainly, there is little in RUP itself (or in the accompanying IBM toolset) to explain the term.

The main clue is the mention in RUP documents of "business" Use Cases, as opposed to "system" Use Cases. This is a useful distinction, but not a very clear one, and does not go anywhere near far enough. Where are the business objects of primary value identified, their lifecycles described, their stakeholders defined, and the interactions between these stakeholders captured? Where are the drivers for high-level system strategy, and the mechanisms for implementation of this strategy? How are domain security models to be understood and related to user experience models?

Business Motivation Modeling

All types of business change project, not just software development projects, need to model the business, and they all suffer from a paucity of tools.

To remedy such deficiencies, the GOOD methodology starts with a technique that has been around for many years now but is not as well known as it deserves to be - the **Business Motivation Model (BMM)**. This is now an OMG specification³ although BMM originally started life with the Business Rules Group, which was responsible for the key concepts.

The BMM fills a vital gap in the business analyst's armory. Indeed, it is a technique that, in conjunction with the right supporting framework, is capable of elevating business analysis above the low technical concerns in which it is typically mired. IT projects benefit particularly from the BMM since it moves the high-level focus away from confusing technical concerns and towards critical business drivers. However, the BMM provides a formal basis for business change planning not just for IT projects but for any form of initiative, project or venture.

By now you may be thinking, "Surely no modern project of any kind would fail to take account of business issues - indeed, no modern project would fail to put business issues firmly in the driving seat." Here I must interject a hollow laugh. Especially where projects have an IT element (and how many projects don't, these days), "high-level" documents purporting to address strategy, benefits, requirements, change planning, and so on often become thinly disguised computer system proposals - the IT element hijacks and dominates everything else.

This may be because IT is more familiar territory to the people who draw up such documents, or it may be because business analysis techniques often originate in IT and are thus IT-oriented. The end result, however, is that projects that are IT-related in any way tend to become IT projects, and thus fail to deliver the full business benefits originally promised.

It is the responsibility of the business analysts who become involved at an early stage to remedy this situation - and doing so will have the pleasant side-effect of increasing their own credibility, since they will then become business change agents rather than factories for system architectures and program specifications. Most business analysts of today are in fact "systems analysts", which is not a healthy situation either for their organizations or for their own careers.

How does the BMM help raise the bar for business analysis? It provides a framework that you can use to capture the "ends" (vision, goals and objectives) of a proposed business change, together with the "means" to those ends - mission, strategies (with associated tactics), and policies (with associated rules) - and the "influencers" whose "assessments" drive, guide and control the work involved. Simple but powerful stuff. BMM provides just the right amount of rigor - enough to help understanding, but not too much to prevent flexible use in different circumstances.

If you use the IBM Rational Suite, there is a RequisitePro template for BMM available from IBM. However, you don't need specialized tools to use BMM. You can adopt BMM analysis techniques and document your findings using any word processor or spreadsheet.

Governance

Despite the potential value offered by BMM to enterprises of all types and sizes, its take-up has been slow. Some people find it confusing - there are feedback loops around Influencers and Assessments, for example, and it can be hard to retrofit BMM to existing projects. The lack of good explanatory documentation does not help here - and in general, the OMG could do a lot more to encourage adoption of BMM.

However, there is a deeper issue with BMM, which is incompleteness. On its own, BMM is simply a set of concepts. Any form of business change must take into account a number of varied factors, any of which can derail the effort if not dealt with properly:

- Organizational structures both old and new;
- Dependence and impact on external suppliers;
- Perceptions both inside and outside the team;

- Timescales and associated resources;
- Risks and associated mitigations;
- People and associated interactions;
- And so on.

To deal with all these factors harmoniously requires a clear and consistent approach to project governance. In other words, to render the BMM useful, one has to apply it via a business change **methodology**. In my own work, I use BMM as part of the GOOD methodology in order to provide a route to action and integrate change planning efforts at multiple levels.

GOOD distinguishes 2 levels of project governance: how to set goals and stick to them (**strategic control**) and how to make the work fit into an organizational context (**executive control**). Figure 1 shows the key roles in each governance level:

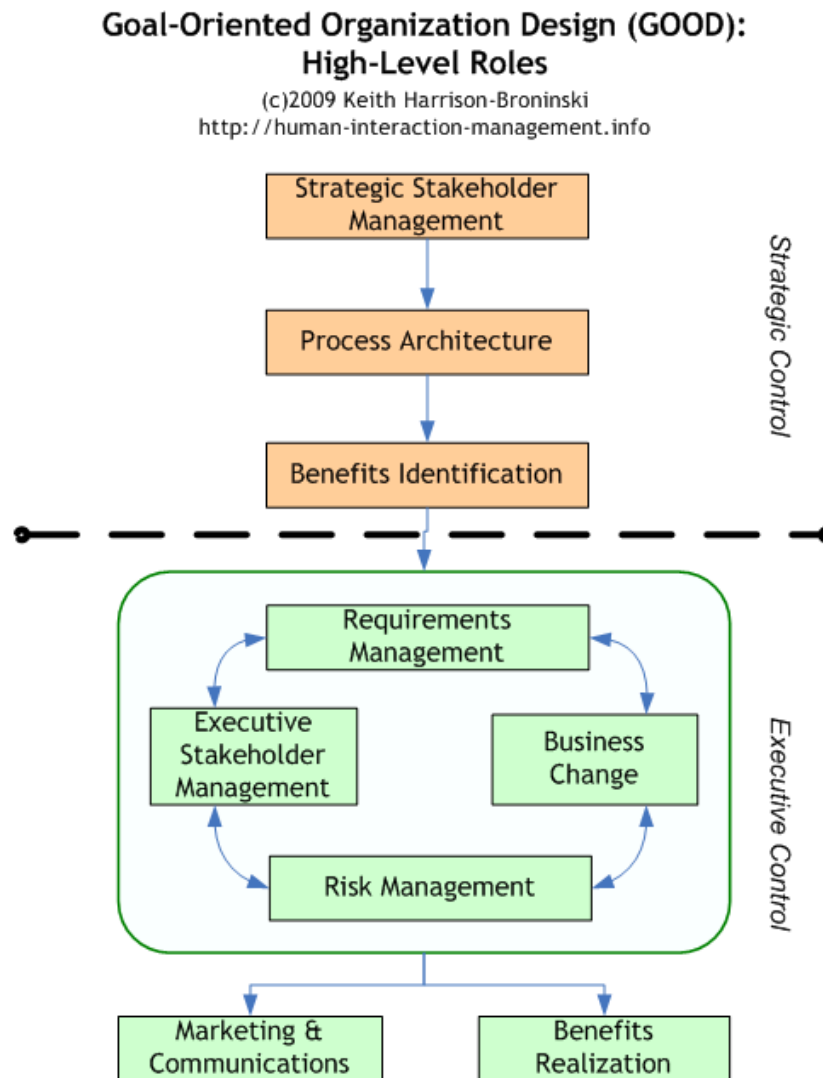


Figure 1: High-Level Roles In GOOD

There is also a lower level, **management control**, which concerns team management rather than project governance. I will address this lower level in future columns.

The diagram above may not be clear to you yet - in this and future columns I will explain it in detail. First, however, what is the point of having such a complex governance structure? Is it not gilding the lily to burden a project with so much management overhead?

In my experience, if there is a single key factor that distinguishes successful initiatives, projects or ventures, it is *transparency*. If everyone involved can see what is going on generally, they can understand their own part in it and make sure they are working effectively, safe in the knowledge that their work will be recognized. They can also help identify general issues as early as possible, and see why it is in their own interest to do so.

If, on the other hand, the waters are generally muddy, people go into back-covering mode. They work to rule, not only doing the minimum necessary but also spending valuable time proving that they have done so - time that would have been better spent making productive contributions. In extreme cases, where there is little reason to believe that the work as a whole will succeed, people will devote most of their daily effort to saving their own reputations - much like a run on a bank that is suspected of failing.

The key to developing a transparent situation is to define the right Roles and associated Interactions, then assign the Roles to the right people.

On smaller projects, some people may play multiple Roles - there is no need to take on extra staff for the sake of transparency. However, it may be necessary for some people to do extra work to enable transparency. My aim is to convince you that this extra work will pay for itself several times over – that not only will effort be saved in the end, but that the simple practices depicted above ensure success both for the teams you work in and for you personally.

Requirements Management

As a starting point to explain the diagrams above, let's discuss a role that is pivotal to success in any initiative, project or venture, yet almost always misunderstood - Requirements Management.

Ask a range of people to define Requirements Management and you will get a range of answers. Some will say it concerns the management of a team of requirements analysts. Others will mention maintenance of a requirements repository. Many will talk vaguely about "engaging with the business".

Only rarely will you hear anything about the true focus of requirements management, which is sustainability. Anyone can run workshops and document a resulting set of "business needs". It is not even particularly hard to keep these documents reasonably up to date. What is far harder is to ensure that your requirements are the key to controlling business change - that they guide all the work carried out through all the life of an initiative, project or venture.

Achieving this requirements nirvana has several aspects.

For a start, your requirements repository must contain the right sort of artifacts. The most beautifully constructed Use Cases and/or process overviews in the world will not make up for there being no domain model (surprisingly often the case), process architecture, security model, organizational structure, and so on. However, it is not one size fits all - although certain information is always necessary, the degree of detail and appropriate formats vary from situation to situation.

Then there are scope issues. What is the reach of your information and your interactions? Have you modeled enough or too much? How far do the tentacles of your requirements gathering and analysis stretch, and how should you deal with the boundaries? More subtleties that take skill and experience to handle.

A different but vitally important aspect is how the requirements are used. Here it is no good relying on informal interactions with colleagues. However good your inter-personal skills may be, everything can - and will - go to hell if you don't have formal processes to manage the flow of intent (which includes the flow of information but covers rather more). Rely on goodwill and a single calendar clash, annual leave, change of position or accidental CC omission may throw a small but fatal spanner into the works of a huge programme.

Further, like all forms of management, the work involves continual adjustment to a changing situation. It is necessary not only to define goals and provide resources but to monitor the work carried out and make changes as necessary. Requirements can be wrong, for a start, or simply need enhancement based on the in-depth experience of those charged with implementing them. Further, requirements management is closely tied to other types of high-level management, as Figure 1 shows. These demands make the need for formal, well-understood processes (as opposed to informal human interactions) even more vital.

The processes in question are, as regular readers of this column will be aware, not the kind that can be described using flowchart techniques - rather they are the iterative, interactive, innovative kind of processes that typically cross organizational boundaries. To understand and describe such processes, you need HIM techniques.

Orthogonal to all the concerns above are relationship issues - within the requirements team, with those who must implement the requirements, and with stakeholders both internal and external. The best artifacts and the best processes cannot achieve their purpose if the people involved are misaligned. Here again it is necessary to apply HIM principles - teams, communication, knowledge, time management and planning are all essential factors.

You may be working in an organizational context that makes it hard to implement all these aspects of Requirements Management. If so, the way forward is not to demand deep organizational change, but to focus on intended outcomes - one by one. Make a public case for each aspect described above in turn, via a formal document, using language that is simple and neutral. Those above, around and below you - whatever their priorities or agendas - will find it hard to resist the simple logic of each small change to working practice. Working step by step in this way, you will eventually find you are where you need to be.

Roles and Goals

In the governance of business change, Requirements Management deserves special attention since:

- Requirements Management (as opposed to Requirements Gathering or Requirements Analysis) is widely misunderstood – and often not valued at all;
- Requirements are fundamental to any form of business change - get your requirements wrong and any related efforts are doomed to failure.

However, the other high-level business change roles in Figure 1 are also critical:

- Stakeholder Management

- Business Change Management
- Benefits Management
- Risk And Dependency Management
- Marketing And Communications

“A lot of different Roles”, you may be thinking, particularly if you work on smaller projects. “OK, agile project management techniques do not always scale well to larger projects, but surely they suffice otherwise – so why should a small-scale project assign all these different responsibilities?” To answer this question, it is necessary to backtrack and ask a preceding question: what are the **goals** of a business change activity?

You might think that goals would be different in every case, but in fact the key aims of business change are always the same:

- To ensure that work meets stakeholder needs - for which you need to identify stakeholders, both internal and external, and communicate with them effectively;
- To deliver results into a business-as-usual environment - the key purpose of a dedicated business change role;
- To maximize benefits from outcomes - i.e., work out in advance what your benefits will be, and then ensure that the consequent work realizes these benefits;
- To minimize the costs associated with delivery - which means managing dependencies and risks.

A little thought shows that, to achieve these goals, all the Roles above are necessary. Even if some people play more than one Role, you must start with an understanding of Roles and associated responsibilities or important activities will slip through the net - and your work will not deliver the desired results.

Conclusion

In future columns I will show the different areas of interest of each of the Roles described above, and explain how to develop a governance structure for your project, venture or initiative in which they collaborate effectively - a governance structure that de-risks business change.

The approach set out here goes beyond current methods for handling business change – including both open methods and those proprietary to consulting firms – since no other existing methods are grounded in a robust theory of human work. The first such theory to appear was HIM, and the first associated method is GOOD.

In the end, all current mainstream approaches to business change are essentially a synthesis of selected best practices. The problem with such approaches is that one cannot join all the dots – establish a management environment that connects high-level strategy with middle-management practice with operational activities on an ongoing basis. Many business change activities appear at first to have succeeded but fail to deliver the expected results, since there are unforeseen breakdowns where the realities of human-driven process enactment do not live up to the expectation as depicted on colorful Web dashboards.

A key reason for this is Pareto's rule: that the 20% of "exceptions" consume 80% of the costs. Exceptions are really the rule, since they always occur – and to properly handle such edge cases, you need processes that have flexibility designed in. You need processes that do not pretend real life is as simple and mechanistic as a flowchart.

In harsh economic times, when cost reduction and improved effectiveness are more necessary than ever, we need to get business change right first time - which means acknowledging this real-world nature of human-driven work. We need a new approach to business change; an approach such as the GOOD method associated with HIM, in which business change is understood for what it is – a means of building new networks of human interactions.

Author

Keith Harrison-Broninski has been regarded as an IT and business thought leader since publication of his book “Human Interactions: The Heart And Soul Of Business Process Management” (Meghan-Kiffer Press, 2005 - "a must read for Process Professionals and Systems Analysts alike", BPM Group).

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. HIM has been described as:

- "the next logical step in process-based technology" (Chair of the Workflow Management Coalition);
- "set to produce the first fundamental advances in personal productivity since the arrival of the spreadsheet" (Information Age);
- "the breakthrough that changes the rules of business" (Peter Fingar, author of "Business Process Management: The Third Wave", "Extreme Competition", etc);
- "the overarching framework for 21st century business technology" (BP Trends).

HIM is now widely taught in MBA and Computer Science courses, and is the subject of books, theses and articles in several languages. In recognition of the importance of his ideas, conference organizers around the world regularly invite Keith to give keynote lectures to business, IT and academic audiences at national conferences, most recently in Poland, India, the Netherlands, the UK, Finland and Portugal.

Keith is CTO of Role Modellers, whose mission is to develop understanding and support of human-driven processes - the field that Keith has pioneered. Role Modellers' software product, HumanEdj, leads the industry in computerized support for innovative, collaborative human work. Keith stays active as a business consultant and software architect, via which activities he continues to refine and extend HIM theory.

More information about Keith and his work is available online.⁴

References

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- ⁴ keith.harrison-broninski.info