



## Human Processes

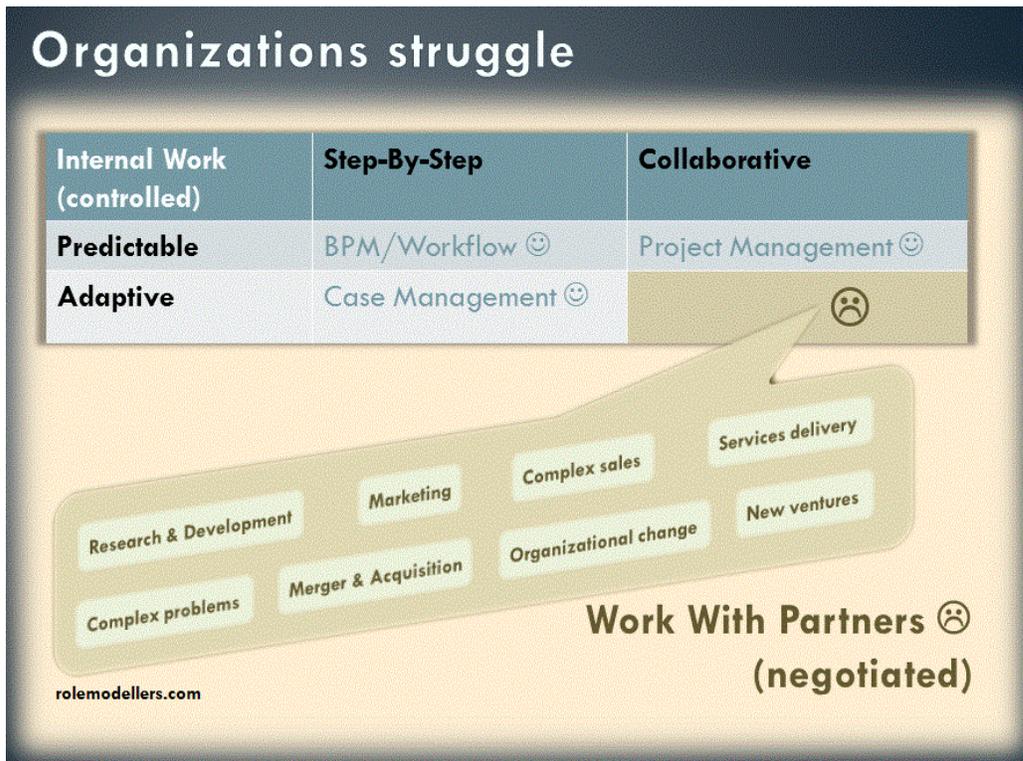
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### Lego vs. Cooking

Many organizations struggle to improve critical, high-visibility business processes, due to poor understanding of the different *types* of business processes. A direct consequence of the problem is the inability to improve, or support with technology, much everyday work. In this Column, I will try to explain the problem using an analogy familiar to everyone.

Let's start with a picture.



**Figure 1: The process gap**

At the top of Figure 1 is a grid of the different process types within a single organization, showing the technique appropriate to support each process type:

- Step-by-step work in which the sequence of steps can be predicted – for example, manufacturing, licensing or order fulfilment – is generally described using a flowchart-based notation (such as BPMN) and supported using **Business Process Management** or **Workflow** systems.
- Step-by-step work in which the steps and their sequence adapt to the situation at hand – for example, claim processing, medical diagnosis or invoice discrepancy handling – is

- generally described again using a flowchart-based notation but this time supported using **Case Management** systems.
- Work in which deliverables are provided through collaboration rather than each person carrying out steps individually, but is nevertheless predictable – for example, laying an oil pipeline or building a power station – is generally described using a Work Breakdown Structure and supported by **Project Management** systems.
  - Work that is both collaborative and adaptive – which may in fact represent a very large proportion of organizational activity, since it includes areas such as Research & Development, Marketing, Complex sales, Services delivery, Complex problem resolution, Merger & Acquisition, and Organizational change – is generally not described in any formal way but rather using documents and illustrative diagrams. As a result, it is not supported by specific systems, but rather left to fend for itself in a minefield of workplace technologies such as email and content management systems.

Figure 1 shows how this problem and the resulting support gap exists not only for collaborative, adaptive processes within a single organization, but for collaborative, adaptive processes that cross organizational boundaries – as they typically do.

**Human Interaction Management (HIM)**, and a **Human Interaction Management System (HIMS)** such as HumanEdj, fill the technology support gap. A HIM Plan template (i.e., a set of Stages in which people play Roles to provide deliverables) is a natural, intuitive way to structure adaptive, collaborative work. Further, people can use different HIMS servers (or even email) to work together in a Plan across professional, geographical and organizational boundaries.

However, for many people it is hard to separate out the different types of work. Where exactly should one apply each type of description technique, and each type of technology? It can be particularly difficult to separate adaptive work processes into step-by-step and collaborative, since even adaptive processes that are step-by-step typically involve multiple people (each carrying out their own set of steps).

So here is an analogy that you can use to classify your adaptive processes as either step-by-step or collaborative. Consider what happens when you build a Lego model as compared to what happens when you cook a stew. When you've completed a Lego model, you can still see the parts – and each part is the same as it was when you took it out of the box. With a stew, you can detect (most of) the ingredients by tasting it – or even just looking at it – but you cannot disassemble the stew into its components.

In other words, the constituents of the stew have been changed by the process of cooking, into something new – something that is quintessentially to do with that particular stew, and the chemical reactions that took place during cooking. A sea change has taken place, into something rich and strange.

It may or may not be possible to repeat the sea change on future occasions – and the ability to do so is part of the learning curve a chef goes through. But one thing is sure – you cannot undo the sea change for a specific stew, and isolate each ingredient in its original form. Making an analogy with human work, collaboration between the people (typically members of a virtual team) who carry out an adaptive process changes the original elements of that process irrevocably.

So this is how to tell the type of an adaptive work process: once it is complete, can you look back and identify what took place as being exact sequences of steps copied from standard templates? Or have the virtual team members used the original template processes as illustrative guides rather than prescriptive instructions - changing, repeating, adding and omitting steps as required by the situation at the time, based on their skills, experience and collective judgement? If the step sequences are identical to their original templates, your adaptive process is “step-by-step”, and you could consider using an Adaptive Case Management (**ACM**) system to support it – as long as it all takes place within a single organization, that is. If on the other hand your process

changes the template steps - or involves multiple organizations - then you are in the territory of **HIM** and its supporting technology the **HIMS**.

In a HIM process, as John Seely Brown said, "processes don't do work, people do." ACM is about tasks. HIM is about virtual teams.

## Conclusion

Both Lego and cooking may involve multiple model-makers or chefs. The critical difference lies in the interaction between constituent elements (bricks and ingredients, respectively):

1. A Lego model is always exactly the sum of its original bricks – it can be disassembled at any time, since the bricks remain unchanged by usage.
2. Cooking fuses ingredients into something more than the sum of their parts – into new flavours and textures, generated by a non-reversible chemical process.

Similarly, flexible, innovative business processes ("adaptive" processes) are of 2 kinds:

1. An ACM process is a collection of pre-defined fragments - in exactly the same way that a modern software application is a bundle of pre-built components and/or services.
2. A HIM process uses fragments only as a starting point - as the process unfolds, the participants shape the collection of fragments into something uniquely and holistically suited to the situation at hand.

This year I am a judge for the 2012 Workflow Management Coalition ACM awards. From the entries that I reviewed, it was clear that the case studies submitted of support for flexible, innovative processes not only focus exclusively on the first kind of process, but that most people only **see** processes of the first kind. Processes of the second kind are the elephant in the room – the hidden bulk of the iceberg, unsupported by mainstream techniques and tools. This hidden bulk conceals a huge amount of business-critical knowledge work, as shown in Figure 1.

The 2012 Gartner BPM Cool Vendors include Role Modellers, whose software product HumanEdj is based on process "design-by-doing". In its BPM Cool Vendors 2012 report, Gartner Inc. said that "design-by-doing" exemplifies the trend towards social BPM, noting that the ability to "do, then plan" — that is, to alter plans quickly and easily as time progresses and the overall goal evolves, and then reuse plans as new templates — will be useful to teams that need to collaborate on the fly, and then learn from their successes and failures.<sup>1</sup>

Flexible, innovative processes are currently high on many organizations' radar. So it is worth understanding the difference between Lego and cooking, and applying the analogy to adaptive work processes. Buildings are made of bricks. Organizations are made by teams.

## 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](http://www.rolemodellers.com) and about Keith at <http://keith.harrison-broninski.info>.

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<sup>i</sup> Gartner, Inc., "Cool Vendors in Business Process Management, 2012", Michele Cantara, Jim Sinur, Teresa Jones, Janelle B. Hill, Simon F Jacobson, 23 April 2012, [www.gartner.com/id=1992916](http://www.gartner.com/id=1992916).

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