Geary A. Rummler

Who would have expected that two of the leading business process gurus would die within such a short period of time. Michael Hammer died on September 3rd and on October 29th, Geary Rummler died. Unlike Michael Hammer, who was a popular public speaker and got people excited about the need for process change, Geary Rummler was the process analysts' analyst and the ultimate methodologist of business process change. He was best in small groups where he could bring his extensive knowledge of organizational change to bear on specific problems.

To understand the impact of Geary Rummler, you need a bit of history. Geary Rummler began his career at the University of Michigan in the early Sixties and then went on to manage a series of consulting companies focused on analyzing and improving human performance in organizations. When I worked for Geary, in the late Sixties, in New York, we focused on helping organizations with human performance problems. Computers had just been introduced in the Sixties and were confined to supporting back office tasks. They didn't play a large role in most of the processes that companies were concerned with. Thus, in the Sixties, process work was very aligned with psychology, training and motivation, and focused on getting the people who performed the company's work to do so in a more efficient manner.

In the course of the Seventies, Rummler refined his overall approach, and in the Eighties, he joined with Alan Brache to form a consulting company, Rummler-Brache. During the Eighties Rummler undertook a number of major consulting engagements that introduced process thinking in major corporations. It was in the early Eighties, for example, that he spent several years working on process change at Motorola. In hindsight, it's easy to see Rummler's work as the stimulus that sparked the folks at Motorola to combine TQM and process analysis to create Six Sigma in the late Eighties.

In the late Eighties, Rummler and Brache wrote *Improving Performance: How to Manage the White Space on the Organization Chart*, which they published in 1990. The subtitle reflected Rummler's concern that companies were organized into functional silos and that work was accomplished by processes that cut across the functional units. Thus, the major complaint of functional managers was always that some other functional unit didn't provide them with the input they needed to do their job. Nobody, in other words, managed the process as a whole - no one managed what happened as work flowed across the white spaces between functional units pictured on organization charts.

In the early Nineties, business people suddenly became interested in process in a big way. Hammer, Champy, Davenport and others began to promote the idea of Business Process Reengineering. Hammer stressed that IT made it possible for companies to undertake major revisions in the way they did work. He argued that, in the late Seventies and the Eighties, IT systems had been used to set the existing processes in concrete within the functional silos. In a memorable phrase, Hammer argued that companies had paved cow paths when what they needed to do was radically reconsider the way they did work and then create freeways.

Hammer and Business Process Reengineering dominated the business literature in the mid-Nineties and suddenly everyone was interested in how organizations could improve processes. Unfortunately, Hammer didn't offer a methodology. He had the idea that it was important to do so, and he provided lots of examples of companies that had used IT to make significant gains, but he didn't tell you exactly how to organize a process change effort within your organization. As companies and consultants looked around for help, they discovered Geary Rummler. Rummler-Brache went from a small consulting company to a much larger consulting company, and suddenly everyone who wanted specific advice was either reading *Improving Performance*, or reading one of several mid-nineties books that derived from *Improving Performance*.

An IBM researcher took Rummler's courses and was so impressed with the power of Rummler-Brache diagrams that he created an IBM process methodology called LOVEM. The acronym stood for Line of Vision Enterprise Methodology. The "line", in this case, referred to the swimlane line at the top of a Rummler-Brache diagram that divided the customer from the process and allowed the analyst to see exactly how the process interacted with the customer. I personally gave a copy of *Improving Performance* and the LOVEM documentation to Grady Booch when he and others were drafting UML, a software methodology, to assure that swimlanes were incorporated in UML activity diagrams.

In a similar way, companies suddenly became more interested in other technologies from the Eighties, like Six Sigma, structured diagramming methodologies like the Air Force's IDEF0, and in Professor Scheer's ARIS methodology. During this same period, dozens of new books were written combining ideas that Rummler had developed over the course of the Seventies and Eighties with new approaches derived mostly from IT.

Geary Rummler was primarily a methodologist. He thought in practical terms - he wanted to define the steps and techniques that managers could follow to improve the performance in their organizations.

First and foremost he conceptualized an organization as a system. For Rummler, the ultimate process was the organization that took people and plans and materials and produced products or services for customers. From there, he proceeded to take the organization apart, as one would a fine watch, noting how the different elements functioned to produce the desired performance, and determining how they could fail and how they could be fixed.

Different individuals who have learned from Geary will, no doubt, consider different elements of his approach as being most important. Here is my own quick survey.

Geary began with an overview of the levers one could move to improve organizational performance. He created the matrix shown in Figure 1 to illustrate how they all tied together. He divided organizations into three levels--an Organizational level, a Process level, and an Activity or Job Level. At each level, he argued that you needed to define goals and measures, indicate what was to be done, and determine who was responsible for making it happen.

	Goals & Measures	Design & Implementation	Management
Organizational Level	Organizational Goals and Measures of Organizational Success	Organizational Design and Implementation	Organizational Management
Process Level	Process Goals and Measures of Process Success	Process Design and Implementation	Process Management
Activity or Job Level	Activity Goals and Measures of Activity Success	Activity Design and Implementation	Activity Management

Figure 1. Rummler's Three Levels Framework

To help performance improvement teams, Geary then created models to help with the analysis of each of the levels. At the organization level, he created a relationship map (often called an organization diagram), which is pictured in Figure 2. The relationship map reflected Rummler's deep concern with a general systems view of an organization and his insistence that process improvement could only be driven by those with a broad, top-down understanding of the way the company worked.

The organization diagram wasn't a formal picture, but a working map of the organization. I have watched company teams spend hours examining a company organization map to assure that they have the flows correctly defined, and have heard executives exclaim when it became obvious that the company was doing something that was wasteful or inefficient.

Once the basic inputs and outputs of the organization were understood, Rummler urged the teams to define the basic value chain that took the inputs and produced the outputs. At the highest level, Rummler organized the core processes within a company value chain into three broad categories, 1) processes that imagine and Create the product or service, 2) processes that produce or Make the product or service, and 3) processes that sell or Deliver the product or service. This division of the overall value chain into three major processes was the starting point for a more detailed analysis of the process level.
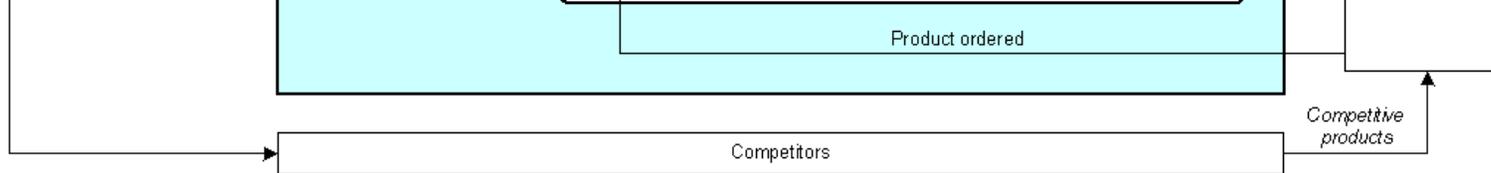
Product ordered

Competitive
products

Competitors
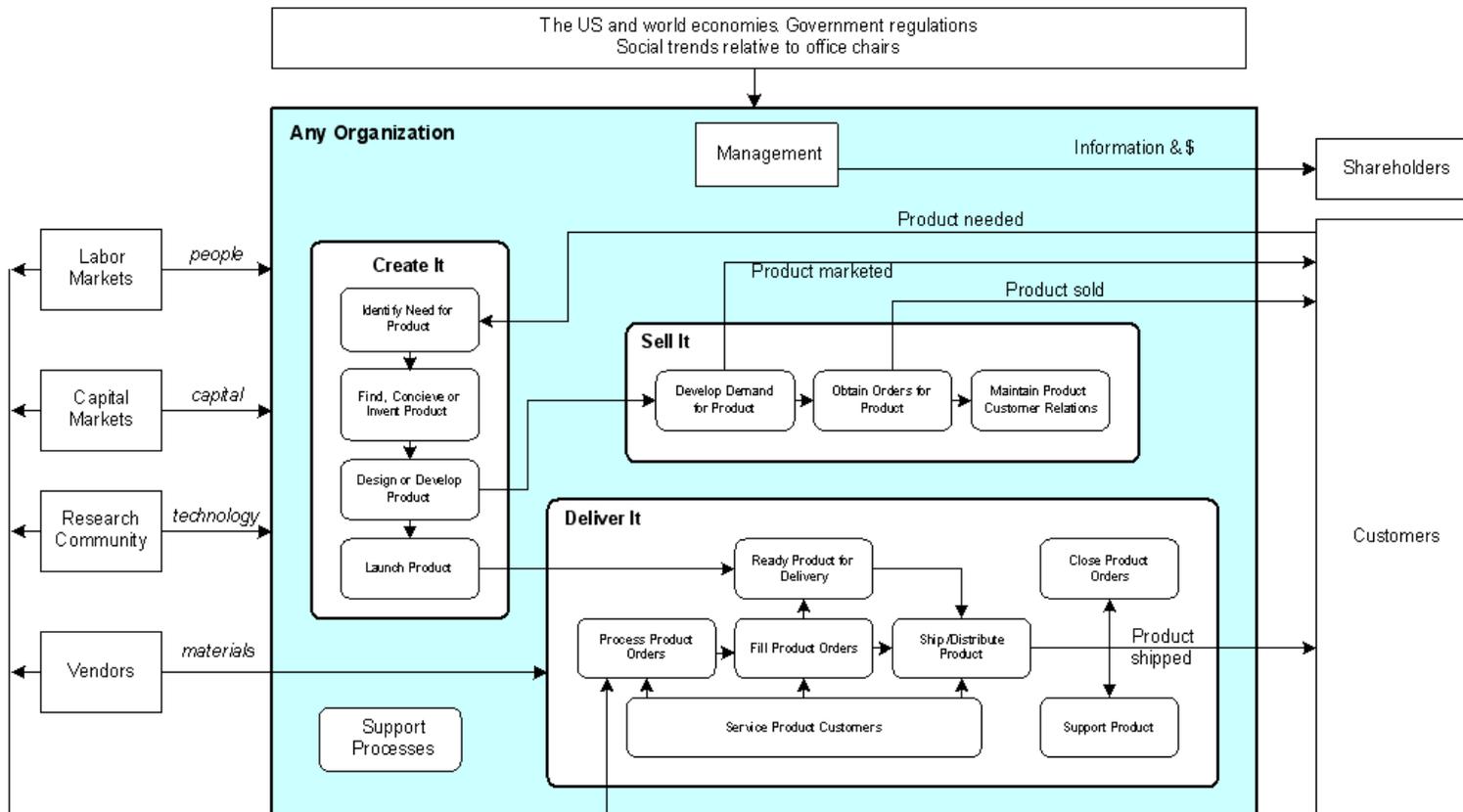
Figure 2. An Organization Map

At the process level, Rummler used what people in the Nineties termed a Rummler-Brache diagram. Today, most readers would probably call it a swimlane diagram. (See Figure 3) In essence, Rummler modified traditional workflow diagrams by introducing three important innovations. First, he introduced swimlanes to indicate what department or individual was responsible for specific processes. Then, he added a top lane where he showed how the process-in-scope interacted with the customer of the process. Finally, he added lanes below in which he showed external support processes. He often listed software systems in support lanes to show how specific activities used particular systems. When used to map a large-scale process, a Rummler-Brache diagram made it obvious just where the process interacted with the customer, exactly where inputs came in from other processes, and, most important, where processes were handed off between one department and the next.

Rummler was never very concerned with the semantic details of the swimlane diagram. The diagram wasn't intended for software developers; it was created to help business managers and employees figure out how their processes worked and how they could be improved. Geary always thought it was more important for business people to feel comfortable using the diagrams to capture their processes.

Today's BPMN diagrams are a direct descendent of Rummler-Brache diagrams. The BPMN core notation can be used by a business analyst to help a group of business people describe how their As-Is processes work and to generate To-Be processes. Later, software developers can extend the core diagram with additional notation to specify a process description that can be used to generate a software system.
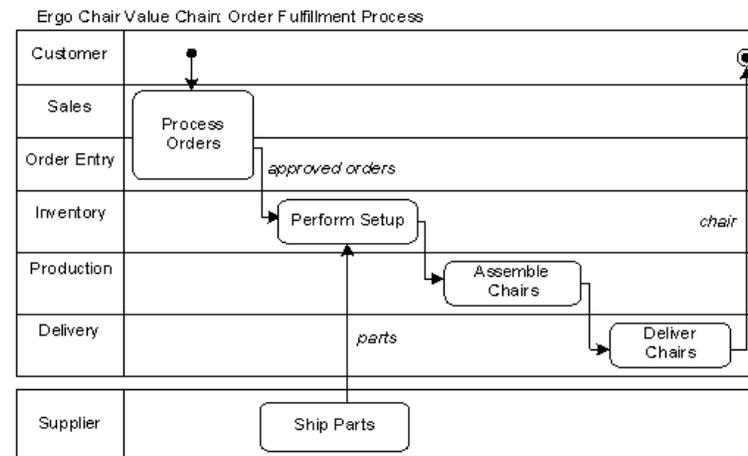
Ergo Chair Value Chain: Order Fulfillment Process

Customer		
Sales	Process Orders	
Order Entry	approved orders	
Inventory	Perform Setup	chair
Production	Assemble Chairs	
Delivery	parts	Deliver Chairs
Supplier	Ship Parts	

Figure 3. A Rummler-Brache swimlane diagram.

At the Job or Activity level, Rummler relied on a Human Performance System model that focused process analysts on the types of things that could impede or improve employee performance. (See Figure 4.)

The Human Performance System model goes back to Rummler's earliest concerns with how to analyze tasks and structure jobs. As I suggested earlier, in the Sixties, this was the primary concern of process improvement, and Rummler's work here derived from the behavioral psychology models that were currently popular. Geary was one of the founders and a past president of the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI), and this professional association remained his main organizational allegiance throughout his career. In the course of that career, Geary gradually stimulated the organization to shift from its initial focus on training and development to a process-oriented approach that embraced the Human Performance System, which is now a key technology maintained by ISPI.

The Human Performance System model suggested that when you looked at a specific person working at a specific task, you began by asking five sets of questions. You asked what the task was designed to achieve and how it was measured. You asked if the performers knew what they were to do and if they had the resources to perform the task. You asked what consequences resulted from the effort. You asked if the employees got feedback that let them know if they were performing correctly. And, finally, you asked if the employees had the skills and the knowledge required to perform the task. To operationalize this diagram, Rummler provided worksheets and checklists to assure that analysts asked the right questions.

The methodology courses that Rummler taught always reflected his concern with learning, and he took training performance analysts just as seriously as he took improving the work of employees within other business processes.
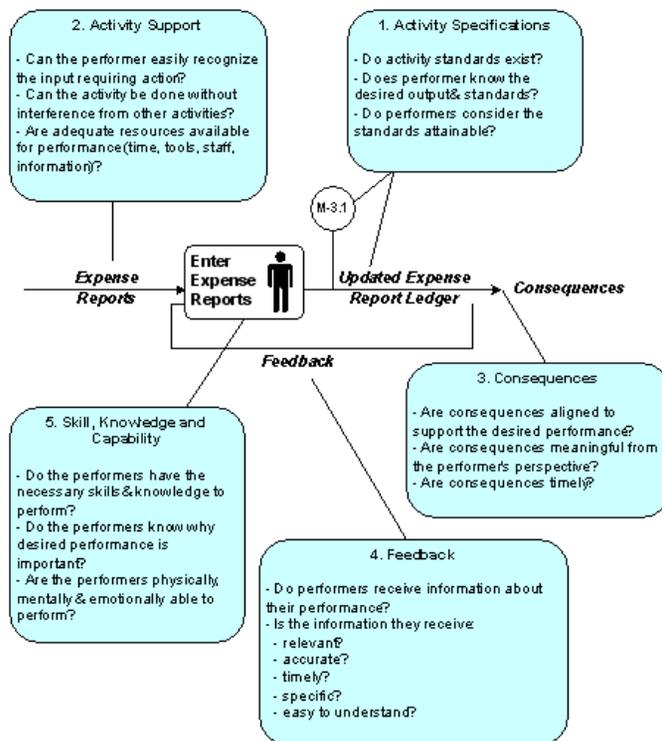
Figure 4. Rummler's Human Performance Model

In addition to looking at employee performance, Rummler also insisted that we always look at the performance of the employee's manager as well. Many of the elements of the Human Performance System model, after all, are not under the control of the employee. For example, it was the manager or supervisor that provided employees with information about the success of their work, or let them know if work they had done needed to be redone. Similarly, it was the manager who defined the job to begin with and made hiring decisions. Figure 5 illustrates Rummler's basic management model.

In essence, Rummler always thought of a process, and then immediately thought of a coupled element, the management process, that planned and controlled the process-in-scope. (At the process level, on a Rummler-Brache diagram, the management process is always represented by the swimlane and identified by the name of the swimlane.)
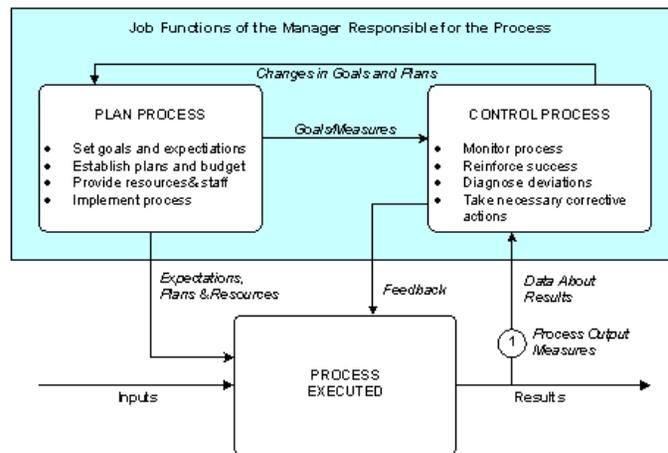

Figure 5. Rummler's Management Model

In separate work, Rummler developed models that showed how management responsibilities flowed down through a hierarchy of managers, from the individual responsible for the value chain to the supervisor responsible for specific, low level activities. And he always maintained that 50% of any process improvement effort should be focused on improving the way the process was managed. He often remarked that "if you put a good performer in a bad system, the system would win every time."

I remember talking to Geary in the Eighties, just after he had returned from a study trip to Japan in which he had visited several famous Japanese companies to see how they

were managed. At the time, every business magazine was filled with stories about how good Japanese manufacturing was. I asked Geary if the Japanese had really discovered something new. He assured me that they hadn't - that they were doing just what he had been suggesting US companies do for the past twenty years. "The difference is the management culture," he told me. "US executives still think it is all about money and that people are only a resource to be manipulated. The Japanese executives, on the other hand, understand that people are fundamental - that it's all about people. They really organize to constantly improve human performance and get the results that US companies could easily get if they had the same attitude."

I remember how upset Geary was with Reengineering -- even though it turned Rummler-Brache into a very successful company. He thought that Hammer had jumped into something he didn't fully understand and proposed changes so disruptive that they were bound to fail. He was even more upset when Reengineering turned into an excuse for massive layoffs. It was just further proof, as far as he was concerned, that senior management didn't understand the importance of people.

This overview hardly scratches the surface of Geary Rummler's contribution to our field. Hopefully, however, it suggests how his work predated, and now permeates, modern approaches to business process change. If you want to study Geary's early work, *Improving Performance* is still available. To my mind, his later book: *Serious Performance Consulting According to Rummler*, published in 2004, is even better, and should be required reading for anyone who wants to help his or her organization improve its performance.

Ultimately, Michael Hammer had a larger impact on the process movement. He made business executives really think about the importance of business processes for the first time. He certainly convinced everyone that IT systems were changing everything and that processes needed to be redesigned to take advantage of what IT systems could do.

Rummler's contribution was subtler - he taught two generations of process analysts the tools of their trade and how to think about business process problems. The systematic methodology described in his books embraces all the elements needed to achieve superior organizational performance. Throughout his life, Geary just kept working to create an elegant overview that would integrate all the elements and form the basis for systematic process management change.

From the day I took my first course from Geary Rummler at the University of Michigan, in 1967, he was my hero and my mentor. He convinced me I wanted to become a performance analyst and provided me with the basic tools that I have used ever since. I know he did the same for many other people active in business process work today.

When I decided to write a book on *Business Process Change*, I traveled to Tucson several times to discuss my ideas with him and to discover his latest insights. I was scheduled to have dinner with him this past month, but he died before we could meet again.

As with a parent, so with an intellectual mentor: You never really have time to finish the conversation. It just gets broken off and the one who is left keeps thinking of new ideas that would amuse the person, rebuttals to past arguments you have had, or other questions you would have liked to ask. And you can't; you are simply left to live with the loss.

I have lost my mentor and our field has lost its most profound process methodologist.

Paul Harmon

NOTE: Geary Rummler, along with Alan Ramais, wrote a Column for BPTrends titled *Performance Improvement*. The final Column of their collaboration will be published in BPTrends January UPDATE. Previous Columns describing Geary's most recent thinking can be accessed by going to www.bptrends.com and typing in "Geary Rummler" in the KEY WORD SEARCH on the upper left corner of the HOMEPAGE.