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Complex, Dynamic Processes

Every organization has lots of process problems. My rule of thumb is that most any CMMI Level 2 or 3 organization can eliminate 20% of their activities without changing the quality of their output. This is the case because organizations, typically, continue to do things that were important in the past but are not currently important - or they continue to employ several people to do a task or tasks that can currently be accomplished by fewer people. Simply stated, most organizations can achieve significant process gains without resorting to reengineering their more difficult, complex or dynamic processes.

In the past, we typically advised organizations to focus on what they could easily solve and to defer working on the more problematic, complex problems. But, in the past few years three things have changed.

First, leading organizations have cleaned up lots of the more easily solved processes and are ready to tackle more difficult challenges.

Second, various technologies, principally the Internet and email, have made dynamic processes more prevalent.

Third, outsourcing and the emphasis on customer service have made it more important than ever to empower

Singularity



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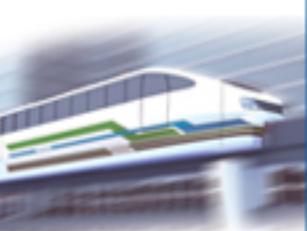
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individual employees who interact with customers to make decisions. That, in turn, requires that we define the jobs of employees who perform complex, dynamic and often knowledge intensive activities.

All of these considerations have led to a new emphasis on complex, dynamic processes – processes that are increasingly termed Case Management Processes. I would be quick to emphasize that, for most companies, these do not present easy opportunities for major process improvement – they are harder to analyze, harder to redesign, and riskier to try to improve. If, however, your organization has already solved its easier problems, or if some specific problem is causing significant problems, then you may want to consider this emerging area of process redesign.

Complex, dynamic problems take many forms. Sometimes they are complex simply because they require that performers make decisions that require lots of knowledge and experience. You can't ask employees with a high school education to perform tasks that require advanced degrees in engineering. You can't ask new employees to deal with problems that are only fully understood by employees who have 10 or 15 years of experience. Sometimes, problems are complex because they require many different people to collaborate to find the correct solution. For example, many complex problems require the consensus of a committee of specialists, in multiple locations around the world. This frequently requires lengthy real-time face-to-face or on-line discussion of issues relating to information that is changing daily.

BPTrends has published a number of Articles and Columns on case management and the problems of dealing

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with complex and dynamic processes.

One BPTrends Columnist, Keith Harrison-Broninski, has been writing about these issues for years. Some of us who came from an expert systems background have written about the design of rule-based knowledge systems that can deal with very dynamic situations – an approach sometimes known as cognitive task analysis. In the past two years, the OMG has been working on a standard to describe how software vendors might deal with case management situations. No one of these approaches is definitive, but each contributes a piece to the evolving solution.

In this Spotlight, we feature some of the more interesting Advisors, Articles and Columns we have published on complex, dynamic processes. We suggest you begin with the following:

[Complex and Dynamic Processes](#) - Paul Harmon - December 15, 2009

Various standards groups and vendors continue to work toward definitions and descriptions that put boundaries on complex and dynamic processes. Here's how we think about complex and dynamic processes and why we think understanding them is important.

[An Approach to Case Based Management](#) - Henk de Man - February 03, 2009

This Article by Henk de Man is a follow-on to his January Article on case based management. Like his previous Article, this Article explores the dynamic processes that deal with unique cases that he believes require different analysis techniques and a different notation than more conventional processes. In his first Article, he defined the problem, as he sees it. In this Article, he discusses one concrete way to approach documenting and managing case-based processes.



[Mastering the Unpredictable by Keith](#)

[Swenson.](#) – A Book Review by Paul

Harmon - July 06, 2010

Adaptive case management is one name for approaches that seek to deal with dynamic and complex business processes. In this Book Review of an edited collection of papers on Adaptive case management, Paul tries to sort out where things are and where they are going. (Start by reading the book review, then go on and buy the book if you really want a good grounding in the topic.)

[Case Management: Combining Knowledge with Process](#) - Michael White - July 07,

2009

Michael White, of Singularity, examines case management as it relates to the way knowledge workers do their jobs and the difficulties entailed in automating knowledge intensive processes. Read this thorough-going analysis to learn how a BPM approach can overcome those difficulties.

[Working Minds: A Practitioner's Guide to Cognitive Task Analysis, by Beth Crandall, Gary Klein, and Robert R. Hoffman.](#) – A

book review by Paul Harmon - October 03, 2006

Trying to figure out how knowledge workers perform tasks is a growing challenge. Cognitive Task Analysis offers new tools to help with this task. Paul Harmon takes a critical look at Working Minds, the latest book on this growing new field.

[What Is Expertise](#) - Rob Foshay -

September 05, 2006

Rob Foshay is a human performance technologist and researcher who has done a lot of work in Cognitive Task Analysis. Various authors have suggested that communication and knowledge work require special approaches. Dr. Foshay examines the current work in Cognitive

Task Analysis and suggests some of the techniques needed to capture the knowledge and skill sets of human experts.

Once you have read these more general publications, we suggest you move on to some of the more specific approaches. One author you will certainly want to read is Keith Harrison-Broninski, and we have published many of his Columns. I would suggest reading several, but you might want to start with the one he wrote in October of last year.

[Human Processes: Big Processes](#) - Keith Harrison - October 05, 2010

What, you may well ask, are “Big Processes” as opposed to small ones? In order to see the elephant in the room, Keith Harrison-Broninski suggests you stop identifying processes with flow chart diagrams. Read Keith’s thought-provoking Column to learn how a Human Interaction Management System (HIMS) deployment can effect order-of-magnitude changes while your competitors are occupied with tweaking the details of their operations.

Til Next Time,

Paul Harmon

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