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## Business Process Architectures

Business managers are increasingly talking about business process architectures. In essence, an architecture is a suite of diagrams or blueprints that provides an overview of an organization's business processes, showing the relationships among the processes, between processes and strategies and between processes and IT resources. The term "architecture" has been popular among IT managers for some time, and the growing use of the term in business circles suggests that both business process managers and IT managers are developing a common language for talking about business process issues.

As far as I know, the term "architecture" became popular among IT folks as a result of a now classic article that John Zachman, an IBM researcher, published in the *IBM Systems Journal* in 1987. The article was entitled, *A Framework for Information Systems Architecture*. Zachman suggested that software developers faced the same problems that architects faced. Building architects design complex structures and need to explain what they want to do to a number of different audiences. Initially, the building architect must present drawings to a board to sell the overall look and design of the building. Later, specific floor plans must be developed to assure each group that will occupy the building that their needs will be satisfied. More detailed sets of blueprints must be submitted to zoning boards to assure the boards that the new building will comply with municipal codes and standards. Still other, much more specific diagrams must be prepared to guide specific groups of workers, like electricians, plumbers, and masons.

In a similar way, large scale software development projects are complex and developers are required to explain their designs to a number of different audiences. Business managers request software applications to fulfill business process requirements, and software developers must offer some kind of documentation to assure that the project will satisfy the business manager's requirements. Other diagrams must be created to specify how databases will be designed, how components will interface with each other, and how the new application will interact with existing applications. A modern software design notation system like the Unified Modeling Language (UML) supports a dozen different kinds of diagrams. Some diagrams are specifically designed to communicate systems requirements to business managers. Others are used to specify database designs or to describe how components will be assembled together and placed on different software platforms. The architecture metaphor has become so popular among IT developers that the title "software architect" is now a popular term for the individuals who oversee the design of a new software package, or who are responsible for overseeing how all of the software packages supported by a company fit together.

The Zachman Framework is a 6 x 6 matrix that provides cells for some 36 different types of architectures. Increasingly, the entire set of architectures taken together is referred to as an "enterprise architecture." One cell is labeled "Business Process Architecture." Zachman assumed that business managers and IT managers would work together to specify the business process architecture and that it would describe how business processes were supported by IT applications. In fact, many business process change or improvement managers have generalized the term to refer to any overview of corporate business processes. (For more information on the Zachman Framework, visit Zachman's Web site @ [www.zifa.com](http://www.zifa.com)). For more information on enterprise architectures, see the White Paper, *Building Process Architecture*, posted on the BPTrends website.

In my recent book, *Business Process Change*, I recommend that every company maintain a business process architecture. Such an architecture should identify all of the major processes supported by the organization, and the major relationships among the major processes. The team responsible for maintaining the business process architecture is well positioned to study exactly how each major business process supports organizational goals, on the one hand, and how it utilizes IT applications and databases, on the other hand. The same team is also well-positioned to mediate between an executive decision to shift corporate goals and the priorities assigned to change projects, and new IT development efforts. Goal changes require more changes in some processes than others. Similarly, some processes contribute more to corporate success than others. The business process architecture team is ideally situated to review the goal changes, decide which business processes need to be changed and to assign priorities to the changes.

The idea of a business process architecture was foreshadowed in the work of Geary Rummler and Michael Hammer. Rummler suggests the development of organization diagrams that picture all of the major processes in an organization in a single overview. (A good example of this approach to the analysis of an organization is provided by a new article posted on the BPTrends website by Carol Panza entitled, *An Air Travel Security Planning Map*. Carol discusses an effort she undertook to help airport managers think through all of the processes that might need to be changed to assure better security. The article includes a great example of an organization diagram that is, in effect, a high level view of an airport process architecture.) Similarly, Hammer urged companies to determine the number of value chains or high level business processes they supported before focusing on any specific process.

Recently, I have studied two industry consortia that have made major efforts to create business process architectures. The TeleManagement Forum is a group of telecommunication companies that have developed eTOM, a description of all of the business processes that could be supported by a telecom company. Similarly, the Supply Chain Council (SCC) has created the SCOR Framework, a high-level description of a business process architecture for any organization's supply chain. The SCOR architecture describes three levels of business processes and sub-processes, and establishes benchmarks

and specific measures that assure that companies can judge which of their own processes are more or less efficient than others in their industry. More important, the SCOR framework makes it possible for groups of companies to meet and discuss cross company supply chain processes using a common vocabulary and standard measures. (See the new whitepaper on the SCOR Methodology posted on the BPTrends site entitled, [\*An Introduction to the Supply Chain Council's SCOR Methodology\*](#), for a detailed look at how the SCOR architecture serves to coordinate every aspect of supply chain management and development.)

Broadly speaking, the interest in architecture is being driven by the same forces that are driving companies to pay increased attention to business processes in general. Dealing with online customers, partners and suppliers requires that organizations understand and integrate their business processes in ways they have not had to in the past. A business architecture is a tool that companies can use to assure that they are on top of all their business processes and using their resources most effectively. It's safe to predict that we'll all be hearing a lot more about business process architectures in the years ahead.

Till next time,

Paul Harmon

