

## Business Rules

May 2004



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The three proposals for Business Semantics of Business Rules presented at the Anaheim meeting of the OMG are continuing to evolve through the OMG's internal process of refinement and evaluation. One of the submitters has submitted a revised proposal and has attracted additional co-submitters. Although there are significant differences in approach among the submissions, the approaches seem to be complementary. This is encouraging. The submitters appear interested in seeking a mutual accommodation they can present to the OMG. While it is challenging to compare and contrast complex proposals such as these in a sentence or two, I would say that one group has proposed an approach based on there being different types of facts as its main organizing concept, while the others have proposed approaches based on there being different types of objects. The first is closer to natural language and the mode of expression of business people and the second is closer to the object oriented approach to implementing information systems.

BSBR is seeking to bridge the gap between the business community and the information systems community. Somehow, we have to get from the business side that thinks in terms of subjects and predicates and facts to the IT side where the conceptualization is in terms of objects and attributes and associations. The issue comes down to the question of where the intelligence resides that does the initial linguistic-to-object mapping.

The first proposed approach focuses on capturing a faithful representation of business utterances, formalized with predicate logic. Tools that would implement this metamodel would thus focus on faithfully capturing the business expression of rules in a logical form that maps readily to natural language. With the first approach, the real work of transforming to objects would be done by a transformer, as in MDA transformer. With the second proposed approach, tools that implement the metamodel would need to translate back and forth between the business expression and OCL (OMG Object Constraint Language) immediately, storing business expressions in the OCL metamodel. With the second approach, the MDA transformer from BSBR would be spared the job of transforming to the object model, but would rather get straight to the task of creating system artifacts to implement the model.

Proponents of the first approach claim their approach is more robust and flexible, that tools that implement their approach will be better able to cater to the business person's language and needs to get the natural expression down in a standard, logical way and allow developers the flexibility of choosing or developing whatever MDA transformations suit their needs. Proponents of the second approach claim that it will be easier with their approach to build tools and MDA transformers, because they are reusing existing technology, that the existing technology can adequately cater to the needs of business people with proprietary transformations internal to the tools. The good news is that, in the BSBR proposals, we have groups on each side of this divide who both want to see the bridge built, and who, at this point, are interested in exploring the potential for collaboration to build it.

The two approaches could complement one another. We need to cater to the natural language of business people and their needs for natural expression of



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their terms, facts and rules. We need to capture a faithful, logical, machine-interpretable representation of what business people mean by their expressions. We need to transform these logically-based expressions into OCL and object technology representations as needed for some (but not all) purposes. There is wisdom in doing the job in steps: it is a big leap to do it at once, and not all applications need it. Having a standard for mapping to OCL separate from the standard for logical capture would enlarge the potential for innovation by allowing tool makers to concentrate their expertise on one or the other. It appears the proposals could be effectively combined so that we end up with a very flexible and robust system. Having teams on each side of the gap seems like a good idea, if they can work cooperatively.

I would be interested hearing your opinion, dear reader, on this question of the structuring of the Business Semantics of Business Rules standard. Please feel free to email me at [stan@hendryxassoc.com](mailto:stan@hendryxassoc.com).

The other Business Rules news from the OMG is that there is a Request for Information for Business Rules Management in the works. An initial draft has been prepared and is expected to be completed and issued at the St. Louis Technical Meeting of the OMG at the end of April. This RFI will go out to industry, not just OMG members, to ask for input about needs and desires for standards related to managing business rules. Input will be collected over the summer, and work started in the fall based on this input to draft a Request for Proposals for Business Rules Management. Readers of this column and others interested in business rules are urged to participate in this opportunity to provide input to the standards process. Look for more information about the RFI in next month's column.

In other business relevant to this column, the OMG voted to merge the Business Rules Special Interest Group and the Business Enterprise Integration Task Force (BEIDTF). The action will allow greater focus the business rules work, especially as the BSBR and other business rules work is increasingly focused at the Task Force level. (In the OMG, Task Forces evaluate proposals and recommend them to a Technical Committee for adoption.) The Co-Chairs of the new BEIDTF are Fred Cummins of EDS and Stan Hendryx of Hendryx & Associates.

