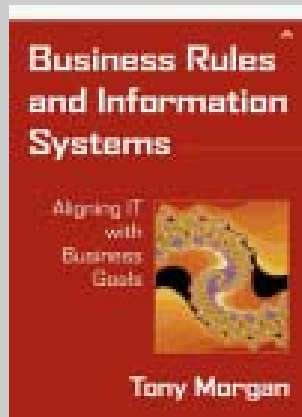


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**Business Rules and Information Systems:
Aligning IT with Business Goals**

Tony Morgan

**Addison-Wesley, 2002
\$39.95, 348 pages**

by Diego G. Passadore

The “do more with less” mindset dominates at the moment. But it takes far too long to turn relatively simple set of requirements into a system that meets user needs. There is also a huge application backlog and a large number of business systems that are needed but haven’t been implemented because there aren’t enough resources. A big part of the problem comes from the amount of code it takes to build a system. If code is the problem, the only possible answer is to eliminate the coding by building systems directly from their specifications. That is what business rules systems (BRS) are.

The best introductory book to understand what BRS is all about is undoubtedly Tony Morgan’s *Business Rules and Information Systems*. It starts depicting how we build software these days, showing all the problems this process has plus the huge emphasis on programming our current development culture has. As he explains it “it is a codecentric view of life: why is a page of C++ produced in the 1990’s no more intelligible to the business than a page of assembly code from the 1950’s?”

This book is written from experience: its main focus is not to show the latest technology but a careful painting of system building from frameworks and architectures to capturing and implementing business rules. And he does so focusing in what is important: “Aligning IT with Business Goals” instead of valuing the beauty of crafted programming.

The book does a fine job in explaining how to define business rules the right way, with lots of examples. The author also puts great emphasis on capturing requirements and on business rule quality, with many techniques depicted and an interesting case study.

Two important misconceptions are addressed in the book: that rules must be implemented in the Business Logic (or Middle) tier; and that BRSs are equated to Expert Systems as if they were the same thing. The truth is that rules can be located in many places from the presentation tier through the workflow system. Besides, Expert Systems usually solve single complex problems from knowledge taken from experts reaching a conclusion each time. BRSs, on the other hand, typically solve a large number of simple problems using business knowledge taken from several people.

BRSs also address the urgent need for business agility, as the author explains: “One of the big mistakes made during the development of many existing systems was to bury the rules somewhere in the program code without controlling their implementation. The result is that changing rules often requires a rewrite of the software, and, consequently, changing business functionality is slow and expensive.”

The book does not talk about any vendor technology in particular: this is very good for showing an unbiased picture of BRSs but it has the downside that after



you end reading the book you feel the need of to deepen your understanding of BRS with cases closer to reality.

If you think that IT is constraining and reactive at your organization, Tony Morgan's *Business Rules and Information Systems* will show you BRS's mindset and its benefits in a concise and inspiring way.

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