Performance Architecture:
The Art and Science of Improving Organizations

Roger Addison, Carol Haig and Lynn Kearny
Pfeiffer / Wiley, 2009
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Reviewed by Paul Harmon

There are many different approaches to improving business processes. Some focus on the elimination of non-value adding activities, some focus on improving the way software systems support or automate processes, and still others focus on establishing measurement systems to monitor process results. Several speak of improving "performance." The term "Business Performance Management," at the moment, seems to be used primarily by Business Intelligence vendors to refer to their particular approach to monitoring and analyzing process measurements. Other groups use the term "Organizational Performance" to refer to financial measures of performance. The International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) uses the term to refer to ways of improving human performance.

Specifically, ISPI advocates the use of Human Performance Technology (HPT), in contrast to the American Society of Training and Developments (ASTD) advocacy of Human Performance Improvement (HPI). Both organizations draw on the insights of Geary Rummler who was a member of both, and whose seminal book was entitled: *Improving Performance* (Jossey-Bass, 1995). Both organizations have published books that describe the various tools and techniques that they group under HPT or HPI. (ISPI, for example, publishes a *Handbook of Human Performance Technology*.)

Performance Architecture is a nice introduction to the concepts and practices of human performance technology. The lead author, Roger Addison, has been, for several years, the senior director of human performance technology at ISPI. He has taught courses in HPT throughout the world and brings his extensive and very practical experience to the book. Prior to his work at ISPI, Dr. Addison was the manager in charge of performance improvement at Wells Fargo bank. His co-authors, Carol Haig and Lynn Kearny are equally experienced consultants who have applied HPT in a variety of contexts.

The emphasis on *architecture* suggests the broad approach that Addison, Haig and Kearney take. Most readers are familiar with the BPTrends pyramid. The pyramid is designed to stress the different levels at which process work is undertaken. The enterprise level is the arena for enterprise wide architectural efforts, for defining value chains and developing process measurement systems. The process level is where business managers focus on the work being done in the organization and seek to improve the organization and flow of their processes. The implementation level is where support groups develop the resources to implement and support the organization's business processes. BPTrends normally divides the implementation level into two parts, one for the implementation of resources that support employees and the other for the implementation of automation and systems resources. We provide an overlap in the center to account for those processes that are supported by employees working with software applications, and a sliver below to provide for the resource role played by facilities and equipment.
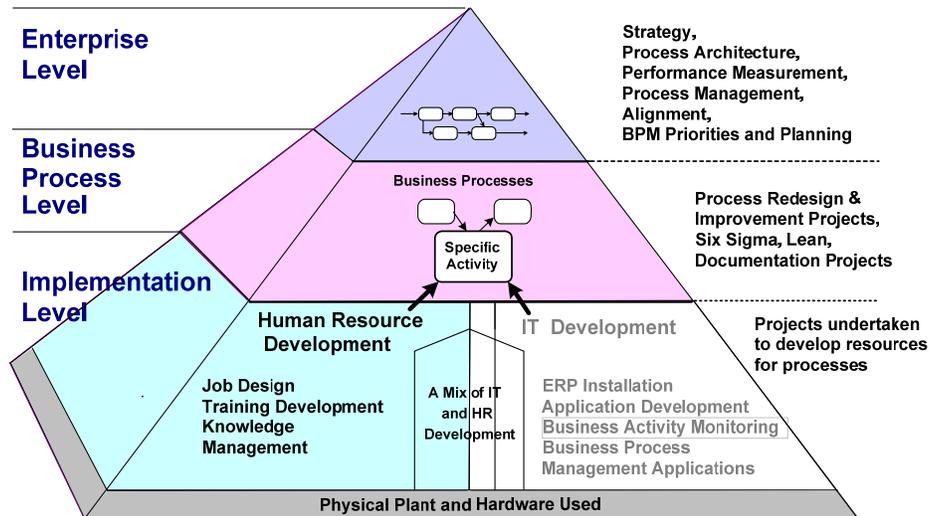
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Figure 1. The BPTrends Pyramid

The approach described in *Performance Architecture* considers all of the elements described on the BPTrends pyramid. When it comes to implementation, however, the book focuses primarily on *Human Resource Development* and only gives a nod to *IT Development* when it directly affects human performance. (Just the reverse of what leading IT Development books typically do.) HPT starts with the worker or team – what the BPTrends pyramid would refer to as the Implementation Level/Human Resource Development. They consider the nature of the jobs, the training required by employees, the knowledge and skills employees need, and the tools and physical resources they need. The Work Process refers to the BPTrends process level and the Workplace refers to the Organization Level of the pyramid. It is not surprising that there is a close correspondence, as BPTrends and the authors both lean heavily on concepts originally developed by Geary Rummler.

The Table of Contents of the book provides a good overview of the authors' concerns.

1. The Performance Landscape
2. The Worker: Individual/Team Level
3. The Work Process/Practice Level
4. The Workplace: Organization Level
5. Implementation: Weaving Performance into the Organization
6. What We Do
7. Focus Forward: Trends to Watch
8. Chart Your Course

I've reviewed other books that are very much in the Human Performance Technology tradition – but this book is special. It's much more practical. It's clear that the authors have been teaching this class for some time and have developed case studies and examples that make the concepts clear to their students. In a similar vein, the authors have developed a variety of tables and checklists to guide new practitioners. And they provide lots of practical advice about how to get managers to understand and implement the performance change programs that they develop.

Too many business practitioners focus at the process level, imagining that once they have redesigned a process, managers and employees will immediately embrace the new workflow. Or the redesign team is located in IT and focuses on redesigning and implementing a new software system, assuming that employees will happily embrace the new system without any effort on the part of the IT team. Both these assumptions lead to frequent business process failures. People matter! Managers and employees are the heart of any process and they are the ones who make the new process succeed or fail.

Process practitioners, no matter what their background, need to think more about the people in the process, to redesign their jobs and their training systems and their incentive systems and to assure that they understand why a given process is being changed.

This book is a great introduction to the basic concepts that every process practitioner needs to master. The section on *How to Make an Implementation Stick*, and the table summarizing why *Implementations Fail or are Derailed* is worth the price of this book. In a similar way their description of metrics that ought to be on your balanced scorecard, which organizes metrics into Financial, Customer, Product/Service, Process, and Internal metrics, and then subdivides those groups into organizational, process and performer metrics is a major contribution to what has been written about the use of the balanced scorecard in process work.

One way to think about what *Performance Architecture* offers is to consider the four principles they suggest to describe Human Performance Technology:

- Focus on results
- Take a systems viewpoint
- Add value and focus on the business or organizational purpose
- Establish partnerships and work collaboratively

I could easily argue that these principles are broad and that they shift perspective in a rather unsystematic way. They reflect the book, however, as it shifts from the importance of clear goals, a systems perspective, a focus on empiricism, testing and results, and its emphasis on practical ways to get things done. This is not a technical book, although it is based on a strong technical framework. It is a very pragmatic work that introduces you to ideas and then tells you how to apply them and make them work.

The book is an easy read. It is well and clearly written and has some delightful illustrations, and is only 160 pages long. Don't let that fool you. There is much that is important here and the book will reward rereading. Everyone who is engaged in process change needs to understand how human performance fits within the overall effort. At the same time they need a good idea of how to approach human performance problems to assure successful change. This book provides the basics on Human Performance Technology and everyone concerned with process change should buy and study it.

Independently, we are happy to announce that Roger Addison and Carol Haig will begin writing a column for BPTrends, in October, and will be making their insights on HPT available to the BPTrends community.

Paul Harmon is the executive editor of Business Process Trends website and the author of *Process Change* (2nd Ed).