

November 2003

**Services Blueprint:
Roadmap for Execution****Dr. Ravi Kalakota
Marcia Robinson****Addison-Wesley
2003.
354 pages.****Services Blueprint:
Roadmap for Execution**

Reviewed by Paul Harmon

This is a wonderful and frustrating book. The authors have written a book that provides an overview of how business processes can be automated in a Web Services environment. The book is wonderful because it has so many good ideas and offers such interesting insights into so many different business processes problems.

It's frustrating because the authors often use their own idiosyncratic terms, when more popular terms are available. This requires the reader to check carefully to determine that some term that the authors use a Services Blueprint for example, is really the same as a better known term, like a Business Process Architecture or an Enterprise Architecture. It's also frustrating, given the broad scope of the book, that the authors didn't describe standards like the OMG's Model Driven Architecture and the Supply Chain Council's SCOR framework. (They mention SCC in passing, but you'd never understand that the SCC has already realized many of the concepts the authors discuss with their idiosyncratic vocabulary.) As someone who has worked with business process organizations for years, I certainly understand how confusing the various terms can be, and how tempting it is just to ignore everything that has gone before and to define all your own terms from scratch. The problem with the approach, however, is that it makes it harder for the knowledgeable reader to relate what the authors are talking about with other, similar efforts.

My frustrations, however, are ultimately quibbles. This book has so much of value that every manager interested in process analysis ought to give it a read.

The book straddles three worlds. First, it conceives of business processes in terms of high-level frameworks. In other words, the authors are recreating the SCOR work done by the SCC, and anticipating the frameworks that will probably be developed by the recently established Design and Customer Chain Councils. The book assumes packaged applications and often takes it for granted that the various ERP and CRM vendors will eventually offer their modules as Web Services. Finally, the book focuses on Web Service technologies, and considers what kind of software architecture will be required to integrate business frameworks and packaged applications using a Web Services approach. Put a slightly different way, readers interested in business process frameworks, packaged applications and Web Service architectures will all find things of interest in this book.

Figure 1, copied from the book, provides an overview of what the author's term the elements of service platforms. At the bottom, you see the various packaged applications that might be used in various business processes. Above that you see an integration layer which is based on Web Service technologies. Above that you find what the authors term the Composite Process Layer, and at the very top, you see the various groups involved in these composite processes.

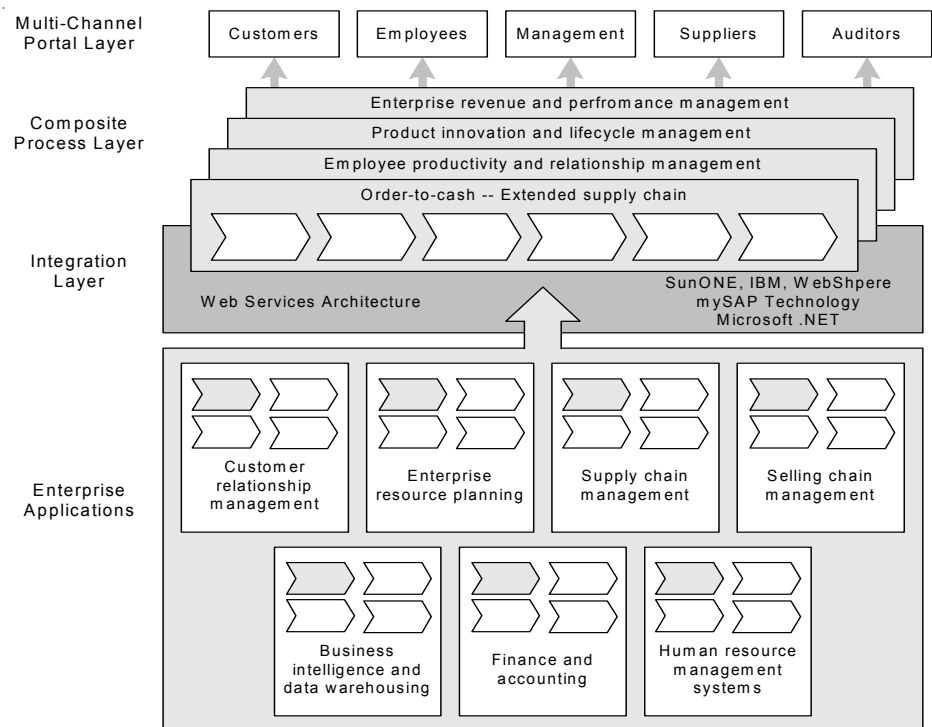


Figure 1. Elements of Service Platforms (After Services Blueprints)

As the authors note: “Composite processes represent a new form of business integration, service-level integration, that seeks to enable firms to build flexible, responsive, composite applications quickly, usually exploiting an underlying and preexisting software infrastructure.”

They go on to say: “SAP has developed its own marketing term to describe the new breed of cross-applications: xApps. Siebel has countered with its version of a cross-application framework: Universal Application Network (UAN).”

Ultimately, the authors assume that companies will develop Web Services Platforms for each of several Service Blueprints. They have chapters on Service Blueprints for Multi-Channel Customer Experiences, Spend Management, Supply Chain, Employees (HR), and Product Innovation. In each case, they present the platform architecture and the blueprint. In most cases they also discuss a strategy map for the blueprint, derived from the Balanced Scorecard tradition. Thus, in the case of the supply chain platform and blueprint, they offer a strategy (which they call a focal point) and document it with a supply chain strategy map. Then they consider the composite services required by a supply chain process and then proceed to discuss how it would be implemented using a Web Services Architecture and enterprise applications. Along the way, the authors provide lots of information about what’s involved in analyzing and designing good Web-based supply chain systems.

The key feature of the author’s approach is that it is driven in a top-down manner, from strategic goals and from a high-level business process framework (or



composite process layer if you prefer). This approach is very similar to what we have termed a second generation approach to business process analysis and design, since it depends on a generic, high-level analysis of the processes common to all companies. The advantage that SCOR brings to this approach is that the SCOR analysis of the generic supply chain processes was created by teams of supply chain managers drawn from an organization made up of 700 companies. The authors offer interesting examples of frameworks, but ultimately their frameworks are based on their limited experience. Their top-down approach seems right. If they had integrated the work on an organization like the Supply Chain Council, and used the SCOR standards, the composite layer could have had the SCC imprimatur and an established audience.

Below the frameworks, the authors discuss the use of Web Services technologies and enterprise applications. Their discussion is interesting. They assume that companies will rely on packaged applications and many well. We would like to have seen more discussion of alternative approaches, either component-based approaches integrated with the OMG's Model Driven Architecture, or perhaps a discussion of the use of a BPMS approach based on BPEL or WSDL. We were also a bit nervous about where the people disappeared to as the authors passed from the composite layers that must have involved lots of employees to the Web Services layer and the enterprise applications that are focused entirely on the automation of processes. What happens with activities that take place in composite processes that are never automated? How are they represented in subsequent architectures?

This book is well worth reading. It provides a much broader view than the typical Web Services book, and is a major step toward helping managers understand what a truly process-centric company might be like. It's especially insightful about how packaged applications from vendors like SAP and PeopleSoft can be integrated via the currently evolving Web Services technologies. It's only because it's so good that we missed, so keenly, the bits that we felt still needed to be added to make a comprehensive picture. But, no matter the reader's understanding, it's hard to imagine a manager that won't come away from this book with new ideas and insights.

E-Business is alive and well and this book provides a fine guide for those who want to roadmap forward.