



Business Genetics: Understanding Corporations Using XBML

Cedric Tyler and Stephen Baker
John Wiley and Sons, 2007
\$65.00

Reviewed by Thornton A. May

I have come across a book that provides a recurring source of insight and credibility to assist in bringing your organization back to 'reasonable person' equilibrium and away from IT's costly and time consuming detours.. This review will examine the basic concepts put forth in Business Genetics: Understanding Corporations Using XBML.*

In the preface, the authors, Cedric Tyler and Stephen Baker state that "...to cope with the massive business complexity of 21st century commerce, we require a new way of thinking about and describing how corporations function...we must begin to understand the genetic code or makeup of the corporation." The authors define complexity as, "more things to do, more people/organizations/systems doing them, more places in which they occur [regional/national/international], more time constraints involved in their performance and probably the biggest contributor to complexity is that there is more information, or at least more data."

To cope with this complexity, businesses "spend a great deal of time, energy and resources attempting to understand and describe themselves." In fact, the 'front end' of every corporate change and improvement initiative spends 10 to 50 [or more] percent of its effort attempting to understand and describe the business. The first step in every Six Sigma, Lean, organizational improvement, BPM, SOX initiative is to understand and describe the business. The authors conservatively estimate that 5 to 10% of our corporate expenses are consumed trying to understand and describe the business. In a multi-trillion dollar economy, that 5 to 10% adds up to an enormous sum.

Furthermore, we are terrible at describing the 'as is' of our business. "The way we describe and plan business is foundationally flawed. Our current practices, methods and tools, techniques and technology are still in the Dark Ages. Meanwhile we are now firmly entrenched in the 21st century, and the 'best science' available to us to describe the business consists of Microsoft ® Word ® based business planning templates, Microsoft ® Excel ® spreadsheets [measuring hypothetical income and resource consumption, which is ill-defined at best] and a hodgepodge [720 at last count!] of disjointed and very artistic 'process mapping' software tools/techniques [e.g., the most prevalent of all, Microsoft ® Visio ® or Microsoft ® PowerPoint ®]."

The authors conclude their 'why you should care' brief stating 'we are seriously ill-equipped to better understand, improve and manage the behemoth corporations of the 21st century and their massive complexity.'

The rest of the book is delightfully written and elaborates on xBML a graphical language with which you and your people can unambiguously describe the five Ws:

What work is performed?
Where do we do work?
Who does work?
When is work done?
Which information is needed to do work?

“The thought leaders of our time have done a wonderful job of motivating us to improve business: Total Quality Management, ERP, CRM, KM, Workflow, Business Process [Re]engineering [BPR], Six Sigma, and now Business Process [or Performance] Management [or Monitoring] [BPM]. All of these are advocated as the panacea to our business efficiency, accuracy and effectiveness ills. The Common denominator here is that all of the above assume that business can be depicted using artistic and unstructured ‘junk science’.”

Cedric Tyler and Stephen Baker are scholars of the first rank. They have extensively studied the history of business modeling and process notation. They have been in the field for some 30 some years testing and refining something we all have been talking about in the abstract for the longest time – how to talk to the business and how to talk about the business.

*I only just came across the phrase ‘reasonable person’ in Hampshire, England while listening to Denny McGuire, Founder and Chairman of the Houston-based sourcing advisory firm TPI talk about some of the truly crazy things thought-to-be-smart executives do while managing outsourcing projects/contracts.

Author

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