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**Business Process Change:
A Manager's Guide to
Improving, Redesigning,
and Automating Processes**

by Paul Harmon

Morgan Kaufmann, 2003
529 pages

Business Process Change: A Review

by Mark Melville

Paul Harmon's *Business Process Change* is an outstanding overview of and comprehensive guide to business process initiatives. As the reader moves through the varied topics covered by the book, what emerges is a critical read for anyone involved in large business process redesign initiatives, on-going business process management, or software development and implementation — i.e. most business and IT managers. Having read the book cover-to-cover, and having taken numerous applicable lessons, I have placed the copy in a prominent location on my desk.

MDA, BPR, Six Sigma, Value Chains: the sheer volume of methodologies, buzz words, and acronyms in the business process area can be daunting to business managers. Even so, Harmon compellingly argues that organizations are systems, and consequently, that processes are the optimal vehicle to analyze and manage organizations. Determining how process methodologies interact, what they involve, which ones are appropriate in which situation, etc., is difficult and not often covered by other texts. *Business Process Change* provides an easily digestible positioning of the interactions and applications of the many process approaches. The book flows from a discussion of organizational strategy right down to the analysis and management of day-to-day activities. An historical perspective is also included, demonstrating that even through the numerous fads and failures, an emphasis on process management continues to be an important element in successful organizations.

After setting the context, *Business Process Change* moves into a very practical introduction to process modeling basics. The ability to interpret and interact with process models is at the core of all process initiatives and is therefore a vital managerial skill and one that is growing in importance. Whether the reader is looking for a manageable overview of process modeling or a starting point to becoming an expert in modeling techniques, the book contains an appropriate level of detail. As with other sections of the book, Harmon does an excellent balancing job of introducing the many methodologies that exist without being dogmatic or becoming bogged down in them. Consequently, the reader comes away with a rounded toolset that can be used in the interpretation and execution of organizational modeling.



Having provided a process modeling toolset, Harmon shifts to the meat of the discussion—the analysis and management of processes. Initially addressed are techniques for the on-going management and gradual improvement of processes that all organizations and managers are, or should be, engaged in. The book highlights the importance of managing, measuring and continually improving processes, and provides actionable suggestions for doing so. For example, the recent emergence of Six Sigma as a popular approach is introduced and described in one chapter.

Business Process Change then moves on to the more radical approach of process redesign or new process creation. Historically, the area of much process management disillusionment, Harmon rightly points out that BPR is a major undertaking that requires an experienced facilitator and an established plan and methodology. Harmon does an excellent job of distilling the numerous methodologies to find common themes across business process redesign methodologies and initiatives. While the book does not detail the specific steps of a large redesign undertaking, it does provide an excellent introduction and framework for such an initiative.

Lastly, the book addresses the large area of business processes automation through workflow systems, prepackaged applications and custom software development. Harmon sites a recent study in which two-thirds of the companies stated that their business process change efforts were being largely driven by the Internet or e-business concerns. At the same time, numerous recent studies report that IT project failures are in the 75-80% range. This failure is often traced to the inability to appropriately link business process requirements to the technical architecture and development. Harmon describes various recent approaches to dealing with business process-IT alignment, including MDA, UML modeling, and CASE tools. Significant time is also spent on the use of the Internet, e-mail and other technical advances to better redesign and automate processes. The extensive discussion of the linkage of IT and process management is a real strength of *Business Process Change* and expands the applicability of the text to IT managers and business managers who are highly influenced by IT initiatives.

Business Process Change is an important and highly practical resource for business and IT managers. Numerous useful books have been written on the specifics of a broad range of business process initiatives (e.g. business process management, process-driven software development, and Six Sigma). However, none, wrap together the context, methodologies and applications of process analysis in such an easily digestible manner for managers. *Business Process Change* provides managers with a heightened



understanding of the various areas of process management and how to choose and execute the right initiatives. After a first reading, the book will become an indispensable reference guide for managers whose organizations will undoubtedly continue to execute and grow their business process initiatives.

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