



Human Processes

Keith Harrison-Broninski

CTO Role Modellers (www.rolemodellers.com)

khb@rolemodellers.com

Playing in the Orchestra on the Titanic

Happy New Year! Let's hope that 2010 will bring economic improvement.

Although one has to question whether it will. Once last year's government handouts have been spent, for most organizations it will be back to business as usual, without the sort of step changes required to implement any kind of sustainable way forward. Those who talk about green shoots should look up the Wall Street Crash on wikipedia.

Is there any reason to look at the business process industry as a source of step change? Not unless we start doing things very differently. Recently I was visited by an old colleague whose company provides enterprise architecture services to large UK public and private sector organizations. His clients are evaluating the impact of 18 months in which they have been forced to do without management consultants, and suspend operational improvement projects indefinitely. They are finding that operating costs are down with no discernible impact on effectiveness.

This can't last, of course. Eventually systems will degrade, and the business environment change, enough that such consultancy and projects must resume. However, having gone cold turkey, clients are going to start asking for a lot more bang for their buck – and are unlikely to accept that the bang will come from mainstream BPM techniques and tools. ROI in the order of 15%-30% is just not going to make enough of a difference.

It is also becoming more and more common knowledge that BPM projects in industries such as financial services are often done simply to demonstrate conformance with industry regulations. In such projects, no ROI at all is ever expected or delivered by those in the know – the armies of process modelers are simply there to keep the directors out of jail. This is most definitely unsustainable. There's no point wasting energy on demonstrating conformance if the business is failing around you.

Old wine in a new bottle

Some commentators are starting to accept that new solutions are required. For example, last month Paul Harmon wrote an Email Advisor on "Complex and Dynamic Processes", in which he described the growing acceptance of the view expressed in my 2005 book, namely that "there are, increasingly, processes that involve people working together in ways that cannot be modeled using conventional techniques." Paul went on to describe the attempts made by the OMG and by software vendors to address the problem.

Unfortunately, however, these attempts are only making the situation worse. The current plethora of case management systems and online workspaces are effectively building a swarm of mini-silos inside organizations, as cases and work groups multiply without any overarching means of control. These little nuggets of isolated work solidify into tumours that resist integration, and make it even harder for strategic managers to create the kind of dynamic, responsive organization needed to survive in a 21st century business environment.

Ironically, my call to do something about human interactions seems currently to be resulting in the exact opposite of what I intended. The original and underlying aim of process improvement is to break down barriers. Now process specialists seem to be putting them up merrily, not just between departments as in the old days, but between every group of individuals working on a sales proposal, creative project or customer issue.

It is like playing in the orchestra as the Titanic sinks. The music may be intended to suggest resilience in the face of disaster, but actually it adds to the atmosphere of desperation. The musicians would be better employed helping save the ship, except that they don't know how.

Waiting for the (Human Interaction) Man(agement System)

The reason for this backwards step may simply be that Human Interaction Management ideas represent a major change in thinking – so major that most organizations require new technology to support their implementation – and this technology, like other paradigm shifts in IT, has taken a long time to mature. HumanEdj, the reference implementation of a Human Interaction Management System, only went into large-scale production use during 2009. As Gartner predicted back in 2007, the HIMS will not reach the mainstream until 2011 or 2012.

Looking on the bright side, the technology is, if anything, exceeding original expectations. The most conservative projections from early adopters are of ROI in excess of 1000%. This is because the HIMS deals directly with the 20% of work that generates 80% of the costs and 80% of the benefits – what McKinsey call “tacit interactions”.

How a HIMS works

A HIMS deals with tacit interactions by turning an organization into a **dynamically integrated process network**, in which all human activities:

1. **Scale up** to integrate senior management with operational activity;
2. **Scale out** to co-ordinate work carried out with partner organizations.

Operational staff use HumanEdj to co-ordinate human work with automated workflows, via interactive plans hosted online. Each user has an online workspace in which they can do their work in a structured way, and manage the work in real time, handling plan changes naturally.

At a higher level, plan templates can be created for anything from strategic programme management to partner contract management, then distributed as and when required. Collaboration is able to span organizational boundaries while providing each organization with the ability to manage the work of their own staff at multiple levels.

Adopting HIM

My original aim with HIM was to deliver ideas that could be implemented without need for technology support. In my own consultancy work over many years, I repeatedly saw order of magnitude improvements. For example, statistics gathered during 2 large-scale engineering projects showed that HIM techniques consistently **doubled** productivity.

However, not every organizations can afford or even obtain a full-time HIM expert to help them transform. So HIMS technology is a necessity in order for HIM to enter the mainstream.

In the next 2 years, this technology will become available, and experience is showing that adoption will be painless. During user trials of HumanEdj in 2009, people started using the system without need for any training. They immediately see how a HIMS works, how it helps

them deliver results more quickly, and how it improves their interaction with colleagues. Managers understand instinctively how a HIMS has the potential to transform business operations at every level.

Take away

There is a lot of talk at the moment about moving to the cloud – see Peter Fingar’s fascinating new book **Dot Cloud**, for example.¹

Here is the key nugget to take away from this column: it’s not your systems that need to move to the cloud. Some organizations will deploy their HIMS, BPMS, databases, mail servers, etc in the cloud - others will continue to host them where they can see them, at least for the immediate future.

So what does need to move to the cloud? Your work. And for that, you need a HIMS.

Author

Keith Harrison-Broninski has been regarded as an IT and business thought leader since publication of his book “Human Interactions: The Heart And Soul Of Business Process Management” (Meghan-Kiffer Press, 2005 - "a must read for Process Professionals and Systems Analysts alike", BPM Group). Building on 20 years of research and insights from varied disciplines, his theory of Human Interaction Management (HIM) provides a new way to describe and support collaborative human work.

Conference organizers around the world regularly invite Keith to give keynote lectures to business, IT and academic audiences at national conferences, most recently in Poland, India, the Netherlands, the UK, Finland and Portugal.

Keith is CTO of Role Modellers, whose mission is to develop understanding and support of human-driven processes - the field that Keith has pioneered. Role Modellers’ software product, HumanEdj, leads the industry in computerized support for innovative, collaborative human work.

Keith stays active as a business consultant and software architect, via which activities he continues to refine and extend HIM theory.

More information about Keith and his work is available online (<http://keith.harrison-broninski.info>).

¹ <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ISBN=0929652495/pfingarA>