



## Processes in Practice

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### Process in the Digital Revolution

The business world is changing fast; driven, not just by changes in technology, but increasingly by rapid cultural changes. Walk around the business areas of any major city in the West and you will see just about everyone carrying their iPads, talking on their Smart Phones, sitting in coffee shops holding meetings and generally conducting business on the move. Today, business is about the “here and now” – wherever “here” happens to be at whatever “now” people choose to work. Documents, and even e-mail, are going out of fashion as people want concise and relevant information at their fingertips without the need to wade through lots of text. Social media is not just about Facebooking your friends, but media-driven social collaboration is becoming a key part of business.

So where does this leave process and process management? Traditionally seen as very document-centric, somewhat bureaucratic and slow to react to business needs, process – and those of us in the process business – need to embrace the digital revolution and the business and cultural changes that it brings about.

Of course there is a lot of hype about. For instance it is impossible to have a discussion about IT these days without mention of the “Cloud”, but the nature of these buzz-word topics is that they either disappear without trace, or that we find that they are soon embedded in everything we do without us even noticing it.



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There are four main technology and cultural forces that are impacting process now and will have a major effect in the new few years: Social – Cloud – Mobile – Big Data.



Users want to connect, communicate and collaborate to improve processes



Users want to consume, create, analyze and improve process content on their mobile device



User want to analyze process content fast and easy



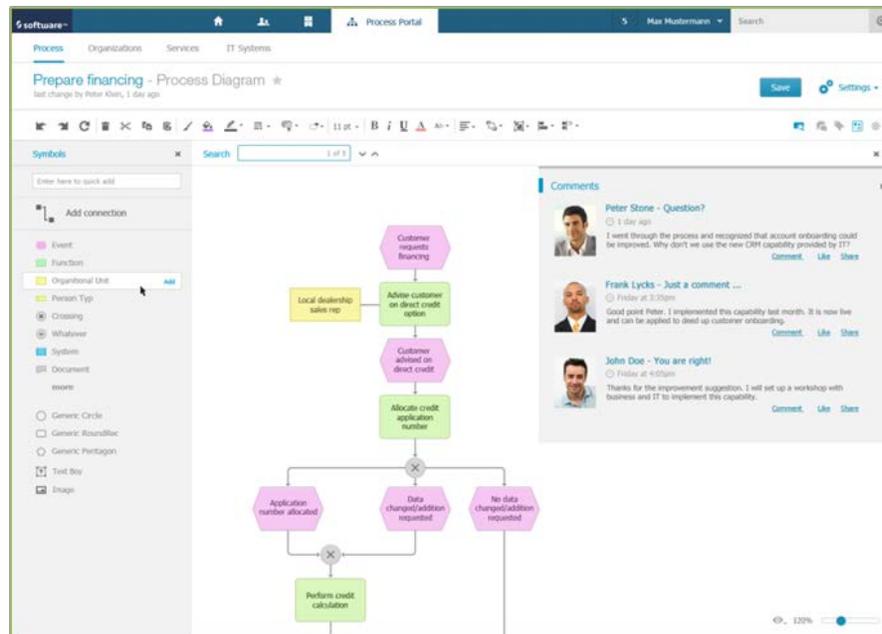
Users want to open BPA to all stakeholders to leverage the wisdom of the crowd

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## Process in a World of Social Media

Perhaps the most important of these is Social. This is not just because social media is the latest hot topic, but because the ability to collaborate on the design and implementation of processes is something that business for a long time has been crying out for. Process design has gone from one extreme to another over the last few years; from the domain of specialist process designers with complex tools to where everyone is trying to create their own processes using office and drawing software.

In my last Column [1], I discussed how neither of these was the right approach. The professionals should not be the only people involved in process design. Running a business requires collaboration between a wide range of people with many different skills. Equally we don't want hundreds or even thousands of people in the business designing processes, but what we do want is everyone in the business involved in the design of processes.



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The technologies of social media incorporated in process design tools can ensure processes are “for the people”, involve all people, but are still designed by professionals using professional tools. By providing a business context for social collaboration we can draw on the wisdom of the crowd for providing feedback and suggestions for process improvement.

## Process in the Cloud

To enable process collaboration to work, we need to have a social collaboration platform that provides process improvement tools to everyone within the organization and even those beyond the organization's borders. Involving suppliers, partners and even customers in the design of the supply chain can yield significant improvements in process speed and quality. Hosting process tools in the Cloud (Public or Private) can offer a truly collaborative process improvement environment that, coupled with a single source of timely and correct information, brings together multiple stakeholders from anywhere to strategize, create, review and implement processes.

You may think that this is nothing new and that shared data and hosted computing environments have been around for some time and it's all just hype. There is, of course, an element of truth in that and the best hype is usually grounded in approaches and technology that have been around for some time. However, what is also true is that many new concepts only have a real impact when various aspects of the technology come together at the right time with a business need. Cloud is not just application hosting but about providing a cloud architecture that provides elastic scaling, effective security, lower cost of ownership, subscription services and easy upgrade. All these are essential for providing industry strength process collaboration environments.

I think there is no doubt that cloud technology will have a significant impact on process design and implementation in the next few years. Initially by providing the ubiquitous access needed for collaborative design and later by providing Software as a Service (SaaS) process design capability.

## Process on the Move

Another building block that is vital for delivering collaborative process environments is the ability to deliver applications on a range of fixed and mobile platforms including Smart Phones, Tablets and Laptops. However, using ubiquitous HTML 5 browsers to deliver the same content on every platform is not enough. It is necessary to translate the applications into the right user experience appropriate to specific mobile platforms and user needs.

For instance, nobody will try to undertake graphical process design on their Smart Phones, but iPads are the perfect environment for presenting process dashboards to executives. Today we use desktop computers and laptops to design the process and enter key process data. In future we may still use conventional computers to do the graphical aspects of process design, but this may be complimented by a range of specialist mobile apps that collect data in specific scenarios to contribute to process repository (e.g. risk information) and present elements of process information directly to users. Mobile apps are also ideal for delivering process-based task information to users (e.g. change requests or authorization requests).



The world of mobile processes is only just beginning and requires us to rethink the whole way we collect and present process information.

## Getting the Big Data from Process

The term “Big Data” is the latest buzz-word and, as with all buzz-words, it means different things to different people. In simple terms it means leveraging the huge amounts of data that are being collected by all organizations, day-by-day, minute-by-minute, second-by-second and being able to interpret that data, extract relevant information, detect important business events and take immediate action.

A good example of this occurred while I was in the process of writing this Column. From the UK I purchased two ferry tickets in Canada for an up-coming vacation. Both transactions were the same value and made within a few minutes of each other. No sooner had I pressed Enter on the second transaction than my phone rang. The call was an automated call from my credit card company which had detected potentially suspicious transactions and asked me to confirm that they were genuine. Complex Event Processing: this ability to process, in real time, high volumes of data occurring at high transaction rates is a key element of big data.

So what is the significance of big data to process? There are three key areas:

- Deriving value from information in existing process designs.
- Gathering process performance data and combining it with other data to provide valuable business insight.
- Understanding key business events and linking process with complex event processing.

For years we have been capturing vast amounts of information in process designs: the process flow, who does it, what systems are used, where the risks are, etc., etc. However, the industry has been slow to provide the tools necessary to exploit and present this information in a variety of formats. Now with process collaboration environments and mobile platforms we have the opportunity to provide personalized, up-to-the-minute information in easy-to-use formats for all stakeholders.

Process designs, however, represent static information. What is more valuable is to collect real-time dynamic data about the performance of the process. Process Intelligence (PI) concepts allow step-by-step data from every process instance to be collected, aggregated and analyzed. This allows a detailed understanding of process performance with the ability to ‘slice and dice’ by dimensions such as product, day-of-the-week, region, organization, etc. Single process instances or aggregations of instances can be benchmarked against best practice or best performing regions. Combine this with traditional Business Intelligence (BI) data and we now have a highly valuable view of business performance that can be delivered straight to the executive’s iPads.

Finally, as complex event processing techniques take off there will be an immediate need to understand the key events occurring in the business and the risks and opportunities associated with them. Where better to understand business events than to look at business process designs?

## The Future of Process

The four forces “Social – Cloud – Mobile – Big Data” will drive the way processes are designed, communicated, implemented and monitored over the next few years. Of course things won’t stay still and new forces, technologies and cultural changes will come along. The importance for process is to grasp these opportunities, exploit them and influence them. For too long process has been seen as boring, slow to react and a barrier to change. Now we have the opportunity to change this and put process where it belongs as the true driving force of business.

If you live in or near the UK, you can learn more about how process is responding to the digital revolution at Software AG’s UK Process Forum in London on the 3rd June. It’s free so why not register and come along?



## References

[1] Rob Davis. “Process for the People or Just for Experts?” BPTrends January 2013

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## Author

Rob is Principal ARIS BPM consultant with Software AG which merged with IDS Scheer in 2011. He is an internationally recognized expert in Business Process Management (BPM) and the practical use of the ARIS Design Platform. Previously, Rob worked for British Telecom (BT) where he was responsible for selecting and implementing ARIS in a large scale implementation. Rob has built extensive experience of all aspects of BPM and specializes in providing consultancy on BPM, process modelling and design, architecture and frameworks, process governance, and integrating process and IT design. Rob has written three definitive books on the practical use of ARIS Design Platform for BPM.

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