

## The Future of SOA - Part 4 of 7

Keith Harrison-Broninski

### How to make money from IT

Or, rather, how not to *lose* money.

In the last two installments of this series:

Is your SOAP turning to SOUP?

SOA and the invisible side-effects of refactoring

... I outlined some of the business issues facing organizations implementing **Service Oriented Architecture** (SOA), such as managing change and assessing cost effectiveness. It has been generally accepted for some time that investment in IT is not, on its own, going to give your organization any strategic advantage. To the contrary, it is quite possible that investment in SOA will simply bring you a bunch of new expenses.

After all, what does SOA really promise to the **business**? New integration technologies are just what they say on the tin - new technologies for integration. Why should spending new *money* on integration improve your organization's bottom line?

I am not recommending that anyone should abandon their SOA initiatives. Rather, I am suggesting that such initiatives should be driven by business people, with business aims in mind. SOA proponents all claim, "Yes, this is exactly what we do already." But the "business advantages" espoused by the technical people currently heading up SOA projects are not usually business-related at all. They are technical advantages, whose effect will only be felt (if at all) by the IT department.

So what sort of things can be considered "business advantages"? Is there anything generic that we can usefully say? And how does it relate to SOA?

Let's start by recognizing that an organization is made up of people, all of whom have their own issues. So "business advantages" means different things to different people. Here is a very generic breakdown of the sorts of people involved in running any organization, and for those at an extremely high level, their most pressing problems.

**The board of directors** is there to lead the organization as a whole. What board members do is mandate **aims** (strategies and initiatives to implement) and **constraints** (policies and regulations to adhere to). So the generic problem that board members have is very simple: How can they ensure that these aims are achieved and these constraints are complied with? This is effectively a demand for "commitment processing." The board members wish to specify to executives how the business should operate, then would like to receive from these executives their *commitment* to do so, plus (as time goes on) statistics on how things are progressing.

**Managers** have slightly different problems. They have to deal with one-off ventures, projects, and issues. They may be responsible for how the organization handles routine cases and problems. Their fundamental need is to make sure that all these kinds of work are done efficiently – which means imposing enough structure for it to be facilitated, monitored, and measured. Some of the work can be (semi-)automated via workflow/BPM, but only some. For the rest, such flowchart-based tools are far too restrictive. However, the current alternatives – messaging and document sharing, perhaps via Web 2.0 technologies – don't provide any structure at all.

And then there's **everybody else** – the average office worker. This is not a meaningless concept, since most people (including, in fact, directors and managers) have a basic problem in common. Peter Drucker pointed out back in 1966 that "The Effective Executive" is good not at carrying out tasks, but at using time. But these days, none of us have enough time – we are *overloaded*. There is *information overload* – the well known struggle to keep up with everything

you are expected to know in order to do your job. Even worse, there is *network overload*, characterized by the deluge of messages cluttering up the email inbox of the corporate employee. The BBC says that

*It's not unusual for office workers to spend as much as two hours a day, every day, sorting and reading all the mail which pours into their in-boxes, let alone the time they have to spend responding to it.*<sup>1</sup>

We all suffer from too much **communication**, which gets in the way of true **collaboration**. And it is collaboration that delivers true business value.

### TAKE AWAY

What does the analysis above of generic business problems have to do with SOA?

Simply that we need to start by recognizing core business problems if we are to deliver genuinely useful business solutions. In fact, effective enterprise IT architecture can help deliver solutions to all the problems outlined above – but only if the services provided by such IT are based directly on business needs, rather than technology features.

Most ERP system functions are never used. Most "business intelligence" data is ignored. Most "single sources of truth" bear little relation to the information truly needed by executives. And the enterprise systems that people do use end up, as often as not, wasting people's time rather than saving it, like CRM systems that make you *first* do the work and *then* write it up.

In the second previous article referred to above, I proposed that the answer to such business problems lies in Human Interaction Management (HIM)<sup>2</sup>, a set of principles, patterns, and techniques for structuring collaborative work. HIM is aimed directly at solving such problems, and is now fully supported by free software tools.<sup>3</sup>

In the next articles in this series, I will show how HIM can be used to leverage SOA to gain true business advantage. In particular, we will see that HIM offers a direct way to understand change to services, and to measure their cost-effectiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/news/nicework/transcripts/20031021\\_nice\\_work.pdf](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/news/nicework/transcripts/20031021_nice_work.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://human-interaction-management.info>

<sup>3</sup> <http://humanedj.com>