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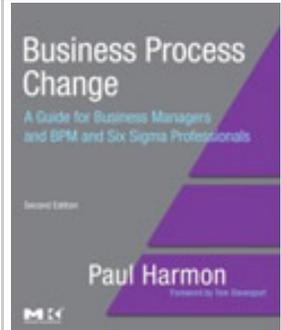



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Business Rules and Business Processes

I spent the last week in Las Vegas attending the 12th annual International Business Rules Forum. The 2009 conference was interesting and well attended. Many of the participants were focused on rule based solutions, but a growing number of the participants are interested in how one integrates the use of rules and processes. I gave a session on integrating rule and process methodologies and had a standing room only crowd.

Several years ago, when we first began to discuss the relationship between rules and processes, we used Figure 1 to illustrate the challenge. As this figure suggests, rules and processes can be conceptualized as independent perspectives. If one focuses on rules, one can either undertake a top down approach, as we do in the process world where we begin with a process architecture, or one can begin with a specific decision situation and seek to improve it. In either case, rules have their own concerns – with a focus on ontologies, the alignment of rules and policies, and the governance of rules. In a similar way, one can focus entirely on processes and ignore rules.



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The Business Rules Management Perspective

The Business Process Management Perspective

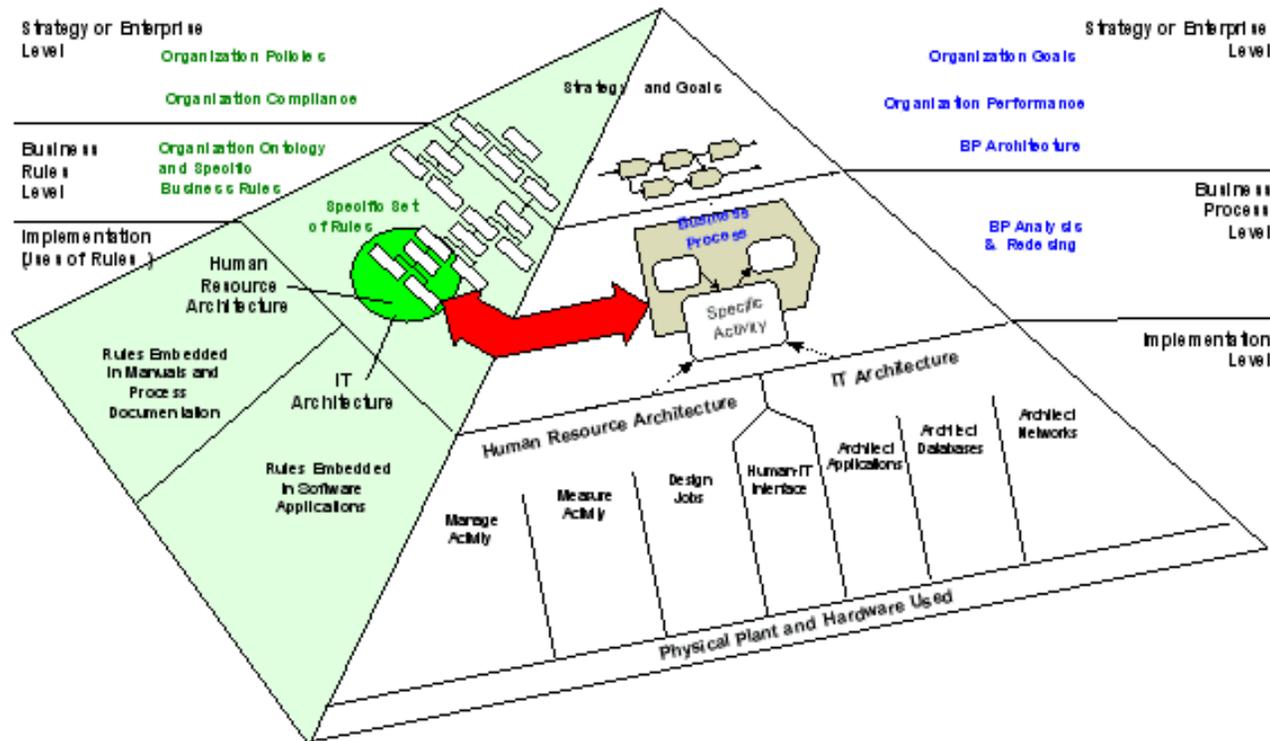


Figure 1. Rules and Processes as independent perspectives.

Increasingly, however, organizations and methodologists have tried to consider how we might combine rules and processes – to define what the red arrow in Figure 1 might be like. There are a variety of suggestions but few published methodologies that truly integrate rules and processes. Most are more like parallel approaches than a truly integrated approach. Everyone agrees that rules ought to be maintained independent of processes, but beyond that, how one proceeds is wide open.

- Do you begin with a process analysis and then generate rules when decisions are called for?
- Do you define rules for As-Is processes, or wait and define them only for the To-Be processes?
- Do you create vocabulary models only for the rules you create, or do you create vocabulary models that can serve both process and rule uses?

To date, most rule methodologies have focused on defining rules and then creating an automated rule system. In the future, rules methodologies that are designed to integrate with comprehensive process methodologies will undoubtedly allow for rules delivered in training and via manuals, as well as rules automated in software applications or rule-based software management systems.

I suspect the real key to the evolution of process-rule methodologies will be driven by BPMS products and vendors. Most BPMS tools provide both workflow and rules engines. Someone is going to have to advise BPMS developers when to use what capability and how to develop efficient BPMS applications that combine the two capabilities. Those directions, in effect, will constitute a pragmatic business rule/process methodology. In hindsight, I realize that I have been deficient in not asking more questions about the current mix of rules and processes in today's BPMS applications and I will certainly be asking more questions in the near future and reporting on the topic in future Articles and Advisors.

We have published a lot on business rules and processes. Here's a sample of some of the most interesting things we've published, divided into three groups: Articles, Columns, and Book Reviews.

Some Articles on Business Rules

[Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Business Rules](#). Alain Gougeon - July 01, 2003

Alain Gougeon is an experienced systems analyst who has spent most of the last 12 years helping South American governments develop financial systems. He has an active interest in business rules and wrote this article to provide those who are new to the subject with a good introduction to business rules. This article is a good complement to the July 2003 BPTrends Newsletter on Business rules and provides another perspective on the available resources and the challenges and opportunities facing those interested in using business rules.

[Are All BPM Solutions the Same?](#) Alan Trefler - April 06, 2004

Alan Trefler, the Founder, Chairman and CEO of Pegasystems, argues that existing vendors will have a large role to play in creating BPM systems and suggests the special role that business rules will play in these systems.

[Workflow and Business rules: a Common Approach](#). Heinz Lienhard and Urs-Martin Kunzi - September 06, 2005

The authors, members of Switzerland's ivyTeam-SORECOGroup, consider how business rules should be combined with workflow. Rules can be developed independently, but the authors argue that it is much more productive to combine the two approaches using the latest software tools.

[Don't Panic: Business Processes and Business Rules Need Not be Complex](#). David Pedersen - September 08, 2009

Simplify! Simplify! say Larry Goldberg and David Pedersen, and in this article they show the way. Citing several examples from their own experience in coaching process improvement teams, the authors demonstrate that by separating your process and business logic into appropriate, and separate models, you will likely discover that your processes are simpler than you think.

[The Silver Bullet of Business Rules Management Systems](#). Art Tortolero - November 06, 2007
Art Tortolero is a strong advocate for the use of business rules management systems and, in

this Article, he provides reasons why he perceives this approach is creating a “sea change” in how corporations will build and maintain their core business systems.

[Business Process, BPMN and Business Rules](#). Advisor by Paul Harmon - September 23, 2008
Business process rules and business process models are two sides of the same coin. Business process analysts often forget this, to their peril. If we want to describe processes so business managers can understand and improve them, we need to pay as much attention to rules as we do to processes.

Some Columns on Business Rules

We have had two Columnists focused on business rules. Early on, Stan Hendryx, who was instrumental in getting the OMG to focus on business rules, wrote to keep readers informed on the OMG’s rules standardization efforts.

[Business Rules: A User's Perspective of the OMG Business Rules Proposal](#). Stan Hendryx - March 01, 2005

The OMG met in Burlingame, CA in February and considered the developing Business rules Metamodel. Stan Hendryx is co-chair of the task force and reflects, here, on the latest proposal for an OMG business rules standard.

[Business Rules: Are System Requirements Business Rules?](#) Stan Hendryx - November 01, 2005

Stan Hendryx reports on the latest success of the OMG’s ongoing effort to standardize the use of business rules and then considers how it has led to other questions about the nature of business rules and business models.

More recently, Ron Ross, who is the chairman of the Business Rules Forum and a partner in Business Rules Solutions, has been writing a Column that delves into the details underlying rules systems.

[Business Rule Solutions: rules vs. Process \(Again\)](#). Ron Ross - May 06, 2008

Ron Ross recently reviewed ongoing standards work in business process modeling and found that some fundamental confusion remains over the difference between processes and rules. Have you, like many of us, confused those concepts? Read Ron’s Column to clarify what each term does and does not mean.

[Business Rules Solutions: Business Rules and Business Processes](#). Ron Ross - September 08, 2009

Early on in his Column, Ron Ross asserts, “Business rules do not substitute for business processes, they just make them a lot better.” Be sure to read Ron’s Column to learn how business rules and business processes relate and just how, correctly implemented, rules can improve your organization’s processes.

And, of course, other Columnists have occasionally written on rules and processes.

[Managing BPM: Gestures and Recipes](#). Joe Francis - March 01, 2005

This month, Joe Francis considers the recent evolution of process thinking, from primitive gestures where new workers do what older workers do, to recipes and languages that allow us to encode rules in frameworks.

Some Book Reviews on Business Rules

[Business Rules and Information Systems by Tony Morgan](#). Reviewed by Diego Passadore - June 07, 2005

Diego Passadore, the CEO of AgilNet, reviews Tony Morgan's popular book on business rules and explains why the business rules approach is so important to companies who want to improve control over their IT portfolio.

[Agile Systems with Reusable Patterns of Business Knowledge: A Component-Based Approach by Amit Mitra and Amar Gupta](#). Reviewed by Paul Harmon. January 3, 2006.

This is the first volume of a trilogy that describes a knowledge-based approach to defining reusable rule sets that organizations could use to organize the rules in their organizations. In essence, this is the equivalent of process frameworks. Unlike most of the other books on rules that come out of the relational database tradition, these authors are working very much in the knowledge-based systems tradition. This is a very technical book, but worth reading if you are interested in building an organization-wide or a reusable business rules framework.

[The Business Rule Revolution: Running Business the Right Way by Barbara Von Halle, Larry Goldberg, and John Zachman](#). Reviewed by Paul Harmon - January 08, 2008

At the recent OMG technical conference there was, once again, quite a bit of discussion about exactly how business rules and processes fit together. This book doesn't answer the question, but it does provide a good overall discussion of the role of business rules in leading companies, and provides an excellent place for anyone wanting to learn about the uses of business rules, to begin.

[Business Rule Concepts: Getting to the Point of Knowledge \(3rd Ed\) by Ronald G. Ross](#).

Reviewed by Paul Harmon - September 08, 2009

This is a new edition of one of the classic books on business rules. In his review, Paul Harmon takes a look at how the author explains the relationship between rules and processes.

[Business Rules Applied by Barbara von Halle](#). Reviewed by Paul Harmon - November 03, 2009

This book was published in 2002, but it still provides a good step-by-step approach for creating rule systems and relating those systems to business process efforts.

Till next time,

Paul Harmon

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