

Business Rule Solutions Ron Ross

Manufacturing and production processes were the cradle of business process modeling. But most businesses these days don't make physical widgets. Even ones that do, struggle with managing meta-data and other forms of intellectual capital. Has process modeling's widget-centric origin resulted in deficiencies for developing world-class business solutions to white-collar problems? Are all your business capabilities really so process-centric? Are you being held back by traditional thinking? In this month's Column, Ron tackles these and related issues.

Process Modeling and the Knowledge Economy

Understanding, modeling and managing a business capability effectively requires a balanced view of six basic questions (following Zachman). Table 1 enumerates the six questions.

| | Interrogative | Basic Business Question | Kind of Model |
|---|---------------|--|---|
| 1 | What | <i>What</i> inventory of things needs to be managed to support business activity? | structural model (e.g., concept model ¹ , data model) |
| 2 | How | <i>How</i> do transforms of things in business activity need to take place to add value? | process model |
| 3 | Where | <i>Where</i> does business activity occur? | network model |
| 4 | Who | <i>Who</i> collaborates with whom to undertake business activity? | interaction model (e.g., organizational chart, use case) |
| 5 | When | <i>When</i> does business activity take place? | temporal model (e.g., schedule, event model, milestone model) |
| 6 | Why | <i>Why</i> are results of business activity deemed appropriate or not? | strategy model (e.g., Policy Charter ² , constraint model) |

If your business does nothing but manufacture or produce physical widgets (nevermind the meta-data about those widgets), you will probably emphasize question 2 (i.e., *process*) above the others. Your overall approach and architecture will reflect that.

¹ Refer to *Business Rule Concepts: Getting to the Point of Knowledge* (4th ed), by Ronald G. Ross, 2013, Chapter 1 and Part 2. http://www.brsolutions.com/b_concepts.php

² Refer to *Building Business Solutions: Business Analysis with Business Rules* by Ronald G. Ross and Gladys S.W. Lam, 2nd ed. (Sept, 2015), an IIBA Sponsored Handbook, Chapter 4. http://www.brsolutions.com/b_building_business_solutions.php

That tendency has at least three basic risks, even for organizations that do fall into the *nothing-but-widgets* category:

Your metrics will largely focus on process productivity (e.g., throughput, bottlenecks, latency), rather than strategic goals and alerts centered on external risks. E-suite executives tend to be much more focused on the latter.

Your mindset will be procedural, rather than declarative, which can cause you to embed business rules in process flows rather than externalize them. As a result your process models will be unnecessarily complex and your overall solutions un-agile.

Your approach will fall woefully short in addressing the intellectual capital that underlies your processes. Such operation business knowledge ranges from simple meta-data, to the business logic that underlies operational business decisions. Fewer and fewer business problems these days fall into *nothing-but-widgets* category. Even for *widget-centric* businesses, at least three needs are increasingly urgent:

Ensuring the quality of meta-data.

Demonstrating compliance based actual rules, rather than the artifacts and effects that IT systems produce.

Retaining, teaching and repurposing intellectual capital.

These are not strengths of many process-oriented practices.

For all the *non-widget-centric* business activity in the world – which includes just about all every conceivable form of white-collar work – these needs become paramount. And make no mistake, the future lies with automation that white-collar work.

What would I do to correct the shortcomings of your approach? Our answer is to become more *why-centric*, as opposed to narrowly *how-centric*. That shift has the following essential features.

Understanding business strategy as something distinct from business processes. Business goals and business risks should be drivers of business process design – *not* the other way around. You need to be *strategy-driven*, not simply process-driven.

Designing core metrics around business goals and business risks – the things that concern C-suite executives the most.

Realizing that for white-collar work the 3-D world of widgets has vanished, and that tolerances and quality can be expressed only in terms of business rules.

Treating business rules as a first-class citizen, externalized from process models.³

- Identifying operational business decisions (based on encoded business rules) as a crucial focal point in re-engineering business processes.

³ Refer to the Business Rules Manifesto, now in almost 20 languages:

<http://www.businessrulesgroup.org/brmanifesto.htm>

Including a *Why Button* as part of every business solution.⁴ Pressing the Why Button leads immediately to the business rules that produced the results you see from any process

Author



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⁴ Refer to: Ronald G. Ross, "The Why Engineer™," *Business Rules Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 11 (Nov. 2013), URL: <http://www.BRCommunity.com/a2013/b727.html>