

## **Empowering People with Core Business Knowledge: Concept Models**

A while back we were helping a large pension organization develop their concept model. The ultimate goal was to integrate and re-platform several core business systems. We had been at it for several weeks, making excellent progress.

For that initiative we used flipcharts to diagram the model and to record the associated definitions of terms. We were working in a large conference room and the walls were plastered over with marked-up sheets. The team was deeply engaged.

Then, without prior notice, the CEO walked silently into the room. He was relatively new to the company, less than a year on the job. Saying not a word he looked over the work, taking his time, gradually moving from wall to wall. Naturally, team conversation faded, then ceased. After what seemed like an eternity, he finally made his way back to the entrance and said just one surprising thing before exiting:

“I wish I had had this when I started working here.”

We often overlook the challenge of bringing new people in new roles up-to-speed on the business knowledge of the company and the vocabulary used to communicate it. It's true all the way from line workers to the C-Suite. The knowledge is always much more complicated – I prefer to say far richer – than almost anyone perceives. You need a blueprint for it and most companies simply don't have one.

That omission simply won't do in the Knowledge Age. And the problem grows worse and worse as workers' tenure at any given organization, and in any given role, steadily shrinks in time.

How can you catapult new workers to high levels of knowledge productivity in as short a time as possible? A concept model provides the solution. And by the way, it's also how you keep knowledge from walking out the door when people leave – which sooner or later they unfortunately will!

What impressed the CEO so much about the work? The short answer is that it would have allowed him to engage much more quickly in his new role.

It's not that he wasn't already generally familiar with the industry. He was. But generalities are not specifics. It would have informed him painlessly about how this organization talks about their rich business knowledge – what words this organization uses to mean what things. That's what a structured business vocabulary does – it's key for engaging in meaningful ways very quickly about hefty matters.

Something else he liked about the work was that it was devoid of anything IT-ish. It wasn't built by IT and it didn't use IT conventions. There was nothing whatsoever hidden behind curtains. No tacit assumptions, no hidden implications for software development. Pure business knowledge. Don't underestimate how empowering that feels for people on the business side.

Nor was the work arbitrarily siloed along mysterious application or functional lines. In fact, it was not siloed at all. It was big-picture, integrated and comprehensive – a unified and unifying view. That's also very empowering for business people. It enables them to think clearly and communicate unambiguously.

A concept model allows direct access to the fundamental building blocks in understanding the way the business works. It digs into the very foundations of the business and pulls forth the most elemental parts. It's liberating and enabling, unleashing a world of new possibilities.

## Author

### Ron Ross

Ronald G. Ross is Co-Founder and Principal of Business Rule Solutions, LLC ([www.BRSolutions.com](http://www.BRSolutions.com)). BRS provides workshops, consulting services, publications, and methodology supporting business analysis, business rules, business vocabulary, and rule management. His popular public seminars on business rules and business analysis, the first on business rules (starting in 1996) and the longest-running in the industry, are given through AttainingEdge ([www.AttainingEdge.com](http://www.AttainingEdge.com)). At BRS, Mr. Ross co-develops Proteus®, its landmark business analysis and business rules methodology, which features numerous innovative techniques including the popular RuleSpeak® (available free through [www.BRCommunity.com](http://www.BRCommunity.com)). These are the latest offerings in a 30-year career that has consistently featured creative, business-driven solutions. Mr. Ross also serves as Executive Editor of [www.BRCommunity.com](http://www.BRCommunity.com) and its flagship on-line publication, *Business Rules Journal*. He is a regular columnist for the *Journal's Commentary* section which also features John Zachman, Chris Date, Terry Halpin, and Roger Burlton. *BRCommunity.com*, hosted and sponsored by BRS, is a vertical community for professionals working with business rules and related areas. Mr. Ross was formerly Editor of the *Data Base Newsletter* from 1977 to 1998. Mr. Ross is recognized internationally as the "father of business rules." He has served as Co-Chair of the annual Business Rules Forum Conference since 1997. He was a charter member of the Business Rules Group (BRG) in the 1980s, and an editor of the two landmark BRG papers, "The Business Motivation Model: *Business Governance in a Volatile World*" (2000, revised 2005) and the "Business Rules Manifesto" (2003). He is also active in OMG standards development for business rules and business models. Mr. Ross is the author of eight professional books. His newest are: *Business Rule Concepts* (2005), a second edition of his popular, easy-to-read 1998 handbook, and *Principles of the Business Rule Approach*, Addison-Wesley (2003), featuring the business rationale and opportunity for business rules. An earlier work, *The Business Rule Book* (1994, 1997), was the seminal work in the field. Mr. Ross received his M.S. in information science from Illinois Institute of Technology, and his B.A. from Rice University.

[FacebookTwitter](#)