Human Processes

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Cross-Boundary Processes

Organizations of all types and sizes need to work with other organizations. Government departments and agencies must collaborate with other departments and agencies, as well as with private sector organizations, to comply with policy and meet citizen needs. Commercial companies must partner with suppliers, customers and even competitors to deliver maximum value for minimum cost and maintain market competitiveness.

In other words, a fundamental capability in modern business life is design, execution and management of **cross-boundary processes**. What options are there for achieving this? We need solutions that not only empower decentralized work but (a sine qua non in the Internet Age) also permit flexibility.

It is necessary to avoid approaches that are inherently command-and-control, such as case management (adaptive or otherwise) and project management. Case management is based on the storage of documents, data and business rules in the repository of a single organization, placing all the management power in the hands of that organization and forcing a centralized structure that is antithetical to cross-boundary collaboration. Similarly, project management is based on the use of a Work Breakdown Structure – a tree of tasks managed in hierarchical style - so again all the management power ends up in a single place.

An alternative is the creation of Public and Private Processes – Public Processes that describe the conversations between organizations in terms of messages passed, and Private Processes that describe the work internal to each organization that creates and consumes the messages (and ultimately delivers value). However, this approach has 3 major weaknesses.

First, it is necessary to decide at the start where the boundaries between Public and Private are to be placed. This means that work cannot be divided among organizations flexibly over time, but must be allocated once and for all at the start, and thereafter remain behind closed walls.

Second, the essence of the approach is to hide rather than to share – to maintain an atmosphere of defensive privacy rather than to open the kimono and expose the details of business operations to partners. It is becoming widely recognized that open-ness is a key factor in business success. Not only is demand pull more efficient than supply push (as Lean practitioners have known for decades) but, more generally, open-ness makes for better, closer business relationships.

Third, the mutual inter-dependence of Public and Private Processes makes the structure as a whole fragile, with poor tolerance for change. An internal change to a private process may invalidate related Public Process(es), and vice-versa, without there being any obvious way of detecting the problem. In general, having 2 separate types of process, only some of which are shared, makes it harder to create dynamic, responsive partnerships that flex with business circumstances.

Having said this, Public and Private Processes are valuable if the business processes with which you are concerned are highly automated and repetitive. However, if you need to manage cross-boundary processes that are dynamic and collaborative, there is a better alternative. In this article I will look at an approach to handling cross-boundary processes that simplifies all forms of collaborative business process – and allows work that spans organizational boundaries to be managed in exactly the same way as work within a single organization.

Human Interaction Management

The approach is known as **Human Interaction Management** (HIM). Let's look at what HIM is and how it differs from other forms of process management.

Broadly speaking, there are 2 types of business process.

- There are processes that can be understood as a set of related **tasks**, where the structure is based around SIPOC - Suppliers use Inputs to Produce Outputs for Customers. Examples of these processes include manufacturing, order fulfilment, logistics, finance, HR and so on.

- Then there are processes that can be understood in terms of individual and shared **goals**, where the structure is based around the 5 principles of Human Interaction Management - effective teams, structured communication, use of knowledge, time management and dynamic planning. Examples of these processes include R&D, marketing, complex sales, project management, M&A, and organizational change generally.

HIM provides support for the second type of process, allowing business people to describe (and build IT support for) their own working activities in a way that provides helpful, scalable and repeatable structure.

HIM is based on 5 principles:

1. Effective team building
2. Structured communication
3. Knowledge creation
4. Empowered time management
5. Collaborative, real-time planning

To implement these principles, HIM work processes are described as **Plans**:

- A Plan has an overall Goal and multiple, possibly concurrent Stages with separate sub-Goals.
- In each Stage people play Roles with separate responsibilities, resulting in the provision of Deliverables.
- Plan members negotiate via Stage-specific communication channels to evolve the Plan during usage.
- A Deliverable may be produced via sub-Plans and used as an Input by other Roles.
- A Plan is made either ad-hoc or from a template. Any Plan can be turned into a template for future Plans, thus enabling re-use and improvement of collaborative work.
- Enterprise resources are included in a Plan by defining a Task that invokes a Web service, URL, or workflow in a BPMS that orchestrates multiple Web service calls.
- The Plan owner manages the work in a Plan, adjusting use of Deliverables and approving Stage/Deliverable statuses as necessary.

- The resulting network of Plans may cross any organizational boundaries.

HIM is implemented via a simple, universal business change methodology **Goal-Oriented Organization Design** (GOOD), based on **Change Aims**. There are 4 Change Aims, which apply to any kind of organization and any kind of change:

1. Ensure that work meets stakeholder needs
2. Deliver results into a business-as-usual environment
3. Maximize benefits from outcomes
4. Minimize costs associated with delivery

These Change Aims give rise to 3 Stages (Design, Delivery and Optimization) in which a set of related Roles at Strategic and Executive level collaborate to produce a Process Architecture and Business Motivation Model, and then engage with stakeholders to deliver an on-going programme of effective, continuous business change.

The tool framework supporting HIM and GOOD, the **Human Interaction Management System** (HIMS, http://bit.ly/hims-technology), of which the reference implementation **HumanEdj** is available free, lets organizations apply the approach outlined above to deliver order of magnitude productivity improvement, build dynamic IT infrastructure, maintain effective partner relationships, and continually improve knowledge work.

HIM For Cross-Boundary Processes

HIM offers a powerful and flexible approach to defining cross-boundary processes, since Plans are entirely independent of organizational boundaries.

From a management point of view, the basic information boundaries in a Plan are Stages. All (and only) participants in a particular Stage may see data, documents and messages for that Stage, irrespective of the organizations for which they work. You see what you need to see, no more and no less. Hence it is possible to design processes and sub-processes without needing to decide which organization will perform each part of the work. The work can be allocated flexibly during execution without need to adjust the process or to worry about data protection issues.

From a technology point of view, HIM mandates that each participant in a Plan has their own copy of the Plan, containing the details that they need (and are permitted) to access. Hence the function of a Human Interaction Management System (HIMS) – the process server for HIM Plans – is entirely different from that of a BPM or Case Management System. Rather than maintaining the state of a process, and moving it on automatically when appropriate, a HIMS acts to synchronize the copies of a Plan held by each participant. This means that each person in a Plan can use a different HIMS, hosted by their own organization – just as each person in an email conversation can use a different email server.

HIM Plans interoperate and integrate with other standard forms of process technology. A HIM Plan can initiate, and be initiated by, a workflow process and communicate bi-directionally thereafter. Similarly, a HIM Plan can initiate a case and utilize its information artefacts. HIM Plans also provide views familiar to project managers, such as GANTT Charts and resource allocation overviews. In many ways a HIMS is the natural top layer of an enterprise process stack, and point of integration with the organization's intranet.

HIM provides not only a simple and effective way of designing collaborative work that non-technical people immediately relate to, but also an approach uniquely suited to a business

landscape in which connect-and-collaborate is taking over from command-and-control as the dominant paradigm.

Conclusion

Organizations of all kinds are grappling with a new world of cross-boundary processes. No organization is an island any more, if it ever was. Success means establishing a "value spectrum" in which customer needs and policy demands are met via a complex network of process fragments, assembled on the fly to meet day to day requirements as they change. This challenge requires a new approach to process definition, execution and management.

Process fragments must be independent of the specific organizations executing them – otherwise the flexibility which is their key aim is fatally compromised. It must be possible to provide visibility across organizational boundaries of process details, so as to improve the network of activities as a whole and build trust between partners. Cross-boundary processes must be able to flex just like internal processes, otherwise they will fail to keep up with a dynamic business environment.

For cross-boundary processes that are not highly automated and repetitive, a better solution than Public and Private Processes is provided by Human Interaction Management (HIM). HIM allows non-technical business users to create and manage a network of dynamic Plans that naturally cross any boundaries. Information boundaries within such a network of Plans can be configured separately from organizational boundaries, making the network as a whole entirely flexible. Participants in a particular Plan may use separate process servers, just as participants in an email conversation may use separate email servers.

Resources

For more information and to get started with HIM and the HIMS, follow the links below:

- HIM: http://bit.ly/humanedj-case-studies
- HIMS: http://bit.ly/hims-technology

Author

Keith Harrison-Broninski has been regarded as an IT and business thought leader since publication of his book "Human Interactions: The Heart And Soul Of Business Process Management" (Meghan-Kiffer Press, 2005 - "a must read for Process Professionals and Systems Analysts alike", BPM Group). Building on 20 years of research and insights from varied disciplines, his theory of Human Interaction Management (HIM) provides a new way to describe and support collaborative human work.

Conference organizers around the world regularly invite Keith to give keynote lectures to business, IT and academic audiences at national conferences, most recently in Poland, India, the Netherlands, the UK, Finland and Portugal.

Keith is CTO of Role Modellers, whose mission is to develop understanding and support of human-driven processes - the field that Keith has pioneered. Role Modellers' software product, HumanEdj, leads the industry in computerized support for innovative, collaborative human work. Visit humanedj.com to try online or download HumanEdj, which is free for individual use.

Keith stays active as a business consultant and software architect, via which activities he continues to refine and extend HIM theory.

More information about Keith and his work is available online (http://keith.harrison-broninski.info).

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