Engineering Organisational Behaviour with Design Research

David Tuffley, Griffith University, Australia

ABSTRACT

Can Design Research be used to develop process models of organisational behavior? The question is significant given the desirability of finding ways to optimise organisational performance. It is also significant because the precursor of such process models have been largely restricted to the software engineering domain. This paper examines (a) whether Design Research is an effective tool for developing such models, and (b) asks, can process models be more broadly defined to include organisational behavior generally? The study concludes that Design Research is an excellent tool for developers of process models in general, and that there appears to be no good reason why such models cannot be used to describe optimal organisational behavior in a broad range of domains.

Keywords: Design Research, Organisational Behaviour, Organisational Behaviour Models, Process Reference Model, Software Engineering

INTRODUCTION

With increasing numbers of technology development projects being performed globally by virtual teams, the challenge of finding ways to more effectively coordinate such teams has never been greater (Herbsleb & Moitra, 2001). The concept and practice of distributed work is not new, enjoying a long and colourful history as discussed by O’Leary, Orlikowski, and Yates (2002) in their extended case study of the Hudson Bay Company from 1670 to 1826. Yet it has been the advent and subsequent advances in communications technology that has been a critical enabler of the development of this organisational form and practice (Ahuja et al., 1997).

Cascio and Shurygailo (2003) observed that distributed teams (or virtual teams) face particular problems in relation to leadership. Organisational and management research has focussed intensively on the issue of leadership, yet there is relatively little research done thus far on the emerging challenge of leadership in virtual teams (Cascio & Shurygailo, 2003).

High-performance project management is difficult enough with co-located teams, how much more difficult is it with virtual teams, particularly complex ones? Finding ways of improving the management capability of such virtual teams is becoming a priority. One way to meet this challenge is to transform managers into leaders. A leader in this context embodies the characteristics of an effective manager but also displays the kind of behavior that team members are likely to recognise as ‘leadership’.

DOI: 10.4018/jskd.2011040101
That means finding ways of getting team members to want to do what the leader wants them to do (Eisenhower, 1988), thus limiting the use of coercive managerial practices in favour of voluntary action by team members. A review of social psychology, business management and software engineering literature (to name three) revealed that while there was no commonly agreed definition of leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 1985), certain personality traits and behaviors are essential and must be present for a person to be recognised as a leader. It appears that these traits manifest themselves in various forms according to circumstance, hence no consensus on definitions at the level of appearance.

But can something as elusive as leadership be described in a process model? There is a strong case for the affirmative. Drucker (1996) and Bennis (1994) assert that leadership can certainly be learned, while Deming (2000) famously said that if you can’t describe what you are doing as a process, you don’t know what you’re doing. If leadership can be learned, it should be describable as a process.

1. PROJECT MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP ISSUES

To more fully understand the various issues of leadership in the globalized economy of the 21st century we must examine the ways in which the new generation of workers who participate in and contribute to the global, ICT-enabled economy are best led and managed. Project team members on complex virtual teams arguably fall into the category of knowledge worker for the reasons discussed below.

Knowledge workers are broadly defined as persons contributing to the knowledge economy (a post-industrial, post-service economic system). They are self-motivated, challenge-seeking persons who capture, manipulate and apply knowledge to create value. Knowledge workers usually know more about their job than their manager or anyone else in the organisation. Knowledge workers often do not consider themselves to be subordinates in the traditional sense (Dubrin et al., 2006). Such workers cannot therefore be managed/lead in the same way as industrial or service workers.

One of Australia’s leading academics, Professor Glyn Davis is recognised as an outstanding leader in a knowledge environment, having been described in those terms by former Queensland Premier Peter Beattie (Dubrin et al., 2006). Professor Davis, who is currently the Vice Chancellor of Melbourne University, says that leaders should not tell knowledge workers what to do. Instead, the leader needs to understand what they do and then lead by persuasive vision. This can be effected by:

- The views and visions of the knowledge workers are aggregated and shaped into a consistent theme,
- A vision based on these embedded values is developed,
- The vision thus formulated is articulated back to the knowledge workers with empathy and enthusiasm,
- The leader demonstrates high credibility,
- An understanding of the business and,
- Clear support for the business,
- The leader is perceived as the embodiment of the values of the organisation,
- The leader skilfully uses multiple channels of communication to convey a consistent message that makes people feel good about working for the organisation. This sounds similar to Eisenhower’s idea of leadership being about getting people to want to do what it is you want them to do. (Dubrin et al., 2006)

Skryme (1998) outlines some guidelines for the leadership of knowledge workers, distilled from the management literature. At a high-level, the critical leadership factors are a well-articulated vision, a clear understanding of the link between knowledge and business benefits, combined with effective marketing promotion. The leader must have a deep belief in the value of knowledge management to the
ERM Implementation and Future Directions at Ankara University: A Case Study
www.igi-global.com/article/erm-implementation-and-future-directions-at-ankara-university/84988?camid=4v1a

Gamified Persuasion: User Experiences of Online Activation Service
www.igi-global.com/article/gamified-persuasion/129533?camid=4v1a