Chapter 8

A New Methodology for Business Process Improvement

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ABSTRACT

Information flows across the organization are complex, and procedures employed to understand, share, and control organizational knowledge and experiences should be properly supported by collaborative environments. Nevertheless, few collaborative methodologies have been proposed to describe and evolve business processes. In the future, business processes models should be the result of cross-team and cross-departmental collaboration, with involved business people sharing their personal knowledge and formalizing it. This chapter focuses on a methodology for business process discovery and the importance of integrating local information into coherent and sound process definitions. Business Alignment Methodology (BAM) is a methodology that provides guidance about how organizational practices and knowledge are gathered to contribute to business process improvement against current BPM approaches.

INTRODUCTION

The Business Alignment Methodology is aimed at improving business processes combining theories from software engineering, enterprise architecture, organization, and social sciences. This approach is driven on one side, by the idea that organizations need means to share, communicate, and improve business process descriptions. On the other side, the business world is continuously changing and organizations are aware of the importance of supporting interactions among its participants that are not always predictable. With this methodology, we intend to improve business processes based on the alignment with day-to-day activities.

Contemporary paradigms of organizational science regard organizations as complex systems and emphasize constant changes, the existence of multiple points of view about an organization and a perspective centered on socio-technical agents (Zacarias, Magalhães, Pinto, & Tribolet, 2010). In this context, an appropriate mechanism to support the production of business processes descriptions should take into account the processes require to
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share the information, knowledge, and experiences of those involved in its implementation regardless of their departmental area or hierarchy level, and not just from the perspective of managers and modeling teams selected for this purpose.

Moreover, it should provide mechanisms for reviewing, discussing and updating business process descriptions, as well as allowing different descriptions of a single process description reflecting a particular viewpoint of specific agents.

There is a vast literature about principles and theories behind collaborative tools (Huettner, Brown, & James-Tanny, 2007). However, few collaborative tools had been proposed to describe and evolve business processes within an organization. Existing tools do not provide the right methods for business processes discovery, modeling, monitoring and improvement. They don’t show how current experience and knowledge is gathered to contribute for business processes discovery and improvement. They don’t explain the mechanisms of business people’s collaboration to cope with changing contexts or react to existing problems. These are the main reasons for high rates of failure and disappointment in many approaches, methods, and techniques used for Business Processes Management (BPM).

All these factors allowed identifying several problems associated to current BPM approaches, such as: existing BPM approaches are based on the top-down paradigm; knowledge acquisition and modeling are time consuming activities; existing BPM approaches don’t provide means to react to change; existing BPM mechanism don’t allow identifying business practices which are diverging from the base business process description.

BACKGROUND

This methodology deals with important topics in several areas: Business Processes Improvement (BPI) and Enterprise Modeling (EM). The development of a new approach for BPI, designed by Business Alignment Methodology (BAM), allows to propose solutions to current challenges in Business Process Management (BPM), such as: existing Business Process Management (BPM) approaches are based on the top-down paradigm; knowledge acquisition and modeling are time consuming activities; existing BPM approaches don’t provide means to react to change; existing BPM mechanism don’t allow identifying business practices which are diverging from the base business process description. This project will focus on managing organization’s response to change and will address areas such as business process discovery (Ghose, Koliadis, & Chueng, 2007), business process modeling (Aguilar-Savén, 2004).

BPM systems were built to automate processes ignoring the increasing amount and frequency of change in the business environment. BPM systems don’t analyze business. Notable examples of BPM systems are Staffware, MQSeries, COSA, and FLOWer. Other systems, like ERP systems, SAP, PeopleSoft and Oracle also include BPM facilities (van der Aalst, 2003). None offer all the necessary capabilities for BPI, such as: iterative discovery methods, change management, collaboration abilities, appropriate models and agile practices. Our proposal provides mechanisms to organizations trigger their own process changes as they become clear about changes in their daily work.

The Business Process Maturity Model (BPM) (OMG, 2008) is intended for people (appraisal teams, members of process engineering groups, managers and professional staff) interested or involved in improving an organization’s business process. BPMM is a maturity model that rigorously follows the principles of established Software Engineering Institute (SEI) process maturity frameworks, e.g. Capability Maturity Model-Integrated (CMMI) (SEI, 2010). Further BPM maturity models are offered by TeraQuest/Borland Software (Curtis, Alden, & Weber, 2004) and Business Modeling & Integration Domain Task Force (BPMI, 2008). A BPI program is based on a comprehensive reference model, such as the BPMM that increases the effort and time required to interpret the model. Small and