

Organizing the Information Management Process in Process-Based Organizations

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Abstract

This paper examines the management of the information management process in process organizations. Throughout the 1990s there is evidence that some organizations have transformed themselves from functionally oriented to process-based entities. The information management process is critical in supporting a process enterprise and this study looks at how it may be organized.

The study focuses on in-depth qualitative data that has been collected by the author during an extended period of fieldwork at the case site, Xerox Ltd.. The manner in which information management (IM) can be organized for process organization is examined. Several IM trends are identified and the changing nature of IM staff skill profiles is presented. The 'programme management' role is shown to be central in the effective co-ordination of IM in a process organization. These people are shown to perform procurement, co-ordination, support, monitoring, and control tasks. These are largely 'managerial' and not technical skills.

The relationship between IM, strategy, and structure is explored within the context of a process-focussed enterprise. Such understanding is currently lacking from academic literature. The research shows that a holistic approach to management by process is possible and that it can be facilitated by appropriate organization of IM.

1. Introduction

Organizations have traditionally been organized by specialist function. By the mid-1990s, several large organizations such as Motorola, Westinghouse [2] and Xerox [10] created process enterprises in order to maintain high levels of performance and to survive global competition. At this time academics and business leaders had identified the need for radical organizational change because "the old ways of doing business aren't working anymore" [18]. What business leaders referred to as the 'old ways' are work organization practices that can broadly be summarized by that which is known as 'Taylorism' or 'Scientific Management'. It would appear

that the process-based organization [15, 25, 5, 9] is emerging as the 'new organizational form' [18] with the 'business process' as the basic organizational construct.

By simplifying tasks and standardizing procedures, F.W. Taylor [29] developed methods of work organization that achieved considerably higher levels of productivity than those which were being experienced at the time. Scientific management required workers who performed similar tasks to be grouped together and hence 'functional organizational units' became widespread. As the functionally oriented organizational form, with its characteristic hierarchical control 'structure' became commonplace, the increasing intensity of business competition, particularly with respect to the global market place, put unprecedented pressures on this type of organization. "The extensive divisions of labour, functional divisions and economies of scale derived from Adam Smith, F. W. Taylor and Henry Ford worked when demand was high, competition low and customers indiscriminate, but now all of these have been reversed and complacency has to be removed by shifting the focus from producer to consumer" [14, p. 100].

During the 1990's Hammer [15] and Davenport & Short [4] introduced an 'organizational change strategy' which became known as Business Process Reengineering (BPR). This appeared to provide the solution for shifting focus from producer to consumer. Many firms attempted to re-engineer their business processes [32] but there are few examples in the academic literature of firms such as Motorola and Xerox who adopted a holistic model of process management. In other words, there is little research evidence that contributes to an understanding of how process enterprises *really work*.

An oft-implicit assumption which underpins much of the literature on business processes (particularly BPR literature) is that by doing BPR, the aim is to convert a functional organization into a process-based one. As there is little in the academic literature to indicate even the existence of process-oriented holistic enterprises (POHEs) (i.e. organizations that are *totally* organized around and focussed on business processes), then one can assume that if the aim of re-engineering is to 'create' the process-based enterprise, then the organizations cited in the literature are not process-based but probably functional (or something else). This is not to say that BPR is