

An integrated approach to process and service management

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Abstract

Any enterprise exists to create and capture value, and much of this value is created through processes and services. Given the heavy dependency of processes on information and IT, the chief information officer (CIO) has a key role to play in ensuring that the enterprise has the appropriate tools to identify, design, implement, monitor and measure the processes and services which will deliver an enterprise's strategic goals and objectives. This paper looks at the nature of processes and services, proposes a toolbox for their management and looks at the implications for information strategy and effective information management regimes.

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Keywords: Process management; Service management; Information strategy; Information systems

1. Introduction

1.1. Processes

This paper adopts a process view of an enterprise as an essential step towards the effective design, implementation and management of information systems and services. While a functional structure is necessary to define reporting lines and to organise physical assets, it can create barriers to effective information flow and constrain the value that can be generated by the enterprise. It can also lead to isolated systems development and hinder the re-use of software components and other information assets. A process view, on the other hand, forces the enterprise to look at how functions must co-operate in order to achieve customer satisfaction. The enterprise should, therefore, map, define and model its processes, highlight the interdependencies between processes, and identify and sequence the activities which comprise these processes.

Processes are one of the key capabilities of an enterprise and are crucial to the delivery of value to the customer. The number of top-level processes will vary, but large enterprises will typically have between 15 and 25 major processes. The relationship between processes and information strategy (see Fig. 1) is an important one, as processes are heavily information- and IT-dependent. An information strategy, therefore, should help ensure the cost-effectiveness of those processes that deliver the greatest value for the business, while seeking to improve the cost-efficiency of processes which do not deliver value directly to an external customer.

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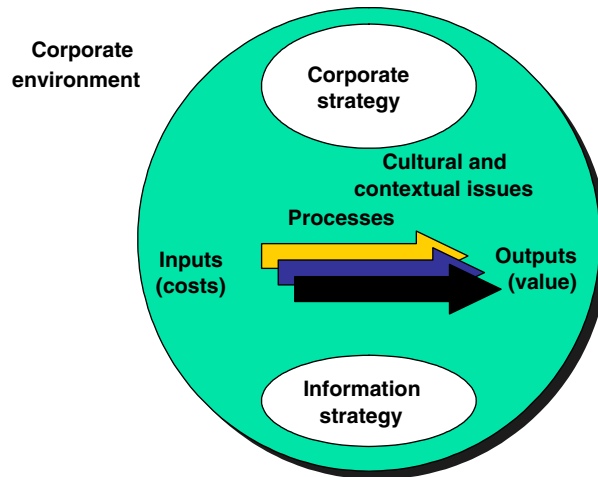


Fig. 1. The enterprise as a system (Buchanan & Gibb, 1998).

Hammer and Champy (1993) provide the following succinct definition:

“[A process is] ... a collection of activities that takes one or more kinds of inputs and creates an output that is of value to the customer”

while Pyke (2003) states that:

“[A process] can be used to ease integration between partners and customers, communicate more effectively with customers, glean the most out of enterprise applications, and reuse existing assets rather than perpetually start from scratch.”

Within the context of an information strategy, we define a process as:

- a set of activities, which are organised as
- a logical sequence (i.e. a workflow), which incorporates
- decision and sign-off points, which are influenced by
- business rules,¹ which define or constrain some aspect of the business.

Processes require

- inputs, such as data and information in order to create
- outputs, such as information and knowledge.

The combination of processes and resources (i.e. people, materials, money and capitalised items) creates a service.

Many processes are transactional in nature; i.e., they involve an organised chain of activities which convert an initial input of resources into a pre-specified output, such as a product or information. Key goals are to impose standardisation and repeatability to maintain the quality and consistency of the output, as well as providing metrics against which the process can be tested and benchmarked. Transactional processes can be comprehensively modelled as a linked set of data structures, procedures and workflows. They are, therefore, highly amenable to implementation as information systems and can be readily audited. Credit-rating is an example of a transactional process.

¹See <http://www.businessrulesgroup.org>, last accessed 20th November 2004.

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