

Introduction

make work make sense

This is a book about computer system design. It is also about business processes and business change.

It is about an integrated, holistic approach to all of these things.

Fundamentally, it is about work, and about an approach to designing and building computer systems which help people in their work. Because implementing computer systems changes people's working lives, it is also about change.

It is not however a book about 'change management'. It is about an approach to designing and implementing computer systems which recognises that change is fundamental.

But it is also about business processes generally, regardless of whether they are supported by computer systems. So there should be something here of value to people interested in the analysis, design, specification and re-engineering of business processes. In fact I will have something very specific to say about business process re-engineering (BPR), although the main thrust of the book is not about BPR as such.

The book also more than touches on what is coming to be known as 'business process management' (BPM), and is very much in line with emerging BPM principles². It focuses in particular on applying process management principles inside a system rather than (just) between systems. Where appropriate it employs the emerging standard 'Business Process Modeling Notation' (BPMN)³, although BPMN is not explored in any detail, as this is beyond the scope of this book.

Mention of industry-accepted acronyms like BPR, BPM and BPMN could however give the false impression that the book is primarily an academic contribution to a current strand in systems theory. It is not. Yes it describes an approach to designing and implementing systems and system-supported business change. But the approach is based on many years of practical experience in specifying, designing and implementing systems in the international financial services context. It is intended as a practical guide to using standards like BPMN, not as a contribution to the standards themselves.

It is an approach which works. For the types of challenges it can address I do not know of a better approach.

² Howard Smith and Peter Fingar, Business process management: the third wave, Meghan-Kiffer Press, 2002.

³ Business Process Modeling Notation (BPMN) specification, Version 1.0, Business Process Management Initiative (BPMI), 3 May 2004.

I hope the book will be of interest to anyone playing a project role in implementing a new system or system change, or a new process or process change, and in particular getting the customer business ready to receive that change.

There will be some jargon. (I've used some already!) Most of the actual terms I use are fairly arbitrary. A lot of the concepts though are fundamental.

I would have liked to have introduced everything in sequential order, as it would appear in a typical system development and implementation project. However I persuaded myself to talk first about the architectural principles, and then apply them in the context of a case study.

The reason for this is that the approach to *designing* systems provides an opportunity for approaching an overall system development and implementation *project* (or a process re-engineering *project*) in a particular way. It will be much easier to explain these repercussions once the architectural principles are established.

A word on language and gender. I have written this book in the variety of English I have spoken all my life. In this variety of English, the words 'he', 'his' and 'him' in for example the sentence 'The project manager should know how he should speak to his team so his team understands him' will have different meanings depending on whether or not the sex of the project manager is known. If the project manager's sex is unknown, then the 'he' literally means 'he or she', 'his' literally means 'his or her', and 'him' literally means 'him or her'.

I do not know why English doesn't have single words meaning 'he or she', 'his or her' or 'him or her'. If it did I would use them. But in the variety of English I speak the sentence 'The project manager should know how he or she should speak to his or her team so his or her team understands him or her' is barely intelligible; and the sentence 'The project manager should know how they should speak to their team so their team understands them' breaks too many grammatical rules to preserve clarity.

I am not implying that all project managers are or should be male. In my own experience, which I do not claim to be at all representative, I have noticed that a higher proportion of successful project managers happened to be female rather than male, and also that this observation came as no surprise.