

Comments on "Business model representations" by A. A. Verrijn-Stuart

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Abstract

Information systems requirements can be expressed in a business-oriented view leading to an identification of functionalities and to a layered business meta-model. The reflections comprise pivotal design dimensions: organisation, object world, task, and communication.

Keywords

Information systems design; design methods; business analysis.

1 MODELLING THE ORGANISATION

Organisational design antecedes all other activities and sets the stage for them. Specifying the information needs is provoked by both deficiencies and chances - so curing inadequacies of existing information systems and offering novel prospects at the markets.

So it is legitimate that the paper commences with strategic and operational business views. But due to the fact that this part is well in line with literature on IS-Planning it could have been considerably shortened (in favour of more space for the discussion of the examples).

Business Process Re-Engineering (BPR) has emerged and has become a necessity (with conferences such as TC8 '94 Conference in Australia devoted to this topic). So any business model presented has to prove its applicability for BPR. These requests have to be compared with the chapter on "Business and Information Modelling" and the corresponding examples given in the appendix. The author has this in aspect well in using terms like "core business" and "primary business". The steps proposed in the paper (step-0, step-1, step-2, step-3) and the representation achieved seem both to be suitable for organisational re-engineering.

2 MODELLING THE OBJECT WORLD

Various methods for modelling of the object world have been developed by the IS-community. There exist a big diversity of Information Systems Design Methods (ISDM) with Avison counting more than hundred. Due to the diversity of methods establishing frameworks was a prime target for IFIP. So the paper presented has to be judged with reference to existing frameworks.

In particular IFIP has undertaken big efforts to survey and analyse the diversity. Especially its Technical Committee 8 (Information Systems) has merited major activities in that direction. This was done in the series of the CRIS review conferences (CRIS'82, '83, '86, '88, '94). These reviews resulted eventually in a general framework. The author of the paper discussed had been a proponent of all above mentioned activities. So, no wonder that there occurs a high degree on consistency with the ideas presented in the CRIS-Framework. Compared with the CRIS-Framework - that is mainly pragmatically intended to set a framework for comparison of methods - the FRISCO-Framework has set a goal of much higher theoretical aspirations. Its main aim is to establish a consistent set of concepts for information systems as a formal and proved reference point for design methods. Due to the fact that the author of the paper has been a FRISCO proponent and given essential input, the contribution is heavily based on the concepts developed in the FRISCO group.

This should not be seen as a reproach, because the paper seeks to extend the FRISCO ideas into the realm of business modelling. This is quite necessary because the FRISCO-Framework treats this subject-matter in a rather brief and casual way. Core of the paper is the chapter dealing with the organisationally functionality categorisation (table 1) and the business meta-model levels (table 2). The functionalities are produced in a hierarchical break down of business activities with a frame of six functionality types. The business meta-levels reveal the basic constructs with reference to the corresponding ontological, systemic, interaction, and support level. All in all, together with the examples (appendices 1 and 2) a well readable introduction in business modelling is given, that might be used as a smooth introduction to the way of FRISCO-thinking as well.

3 MODELLING TASKS AND COMMUNICATION

Tasks play a major role in design. Within the problem dimension of organisation defining tasks is the goal of the functional decomposition of business activities in a hierarchy of tasks. At the same time task is the core of the user-system-interaction and so the basic concern of the HCI-community. On a closer look at the examples in appendix 1 and 2 the level of modelling seems to be rather too coarse for deriving HCI-specifications.

In modelling communications there has to be made a distinction between highly formalised communication and communication for co-operative work in general. The case of coordinated activities and highly formalised communication can be found in offices. This type of office communication is touched adequately.

In addition to this formalised communication, business environments have to provide an infrastructure of general communication services. Such a infrastructure has to include a lot of services whose basics are open communication and shared information spaces. Serious doubts remain, whether the representations presented are capable to model such general ways of cooperative ways.

Roland Traummüller earned a PH.D. in Theoretical Chemistry from Vienna University in 1969. Quite afterwards he turned to business computing accepting a position as head of administrative data processing. In 1983 he became Professor for Applied Informatics at Linz University. In addition he has been invited as a visiting professor at several universities and institutions (Heidelberg, Bonn, Paris, Prague, Speyer). Since 1992 Roland Traummüller is chairman of IFIP WG 8.5 (Information Systems in Public Administration).