Invitation To Participate In Research Study

DISTRIBUTED CO-OPERATION IN BOUNDARY-SPANNING IS DESIGN

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BACKGROUND
The co-design of business process and information systems required for enterprise-level or cross-functional information systems inevitably involves groups of business managers that span multiple departments and processes. These boundary-spanning groups typically involve managers from finance, production, sales and marketing, engineering, procurement, and IT, among others. So a disparate set of stakeholders is expected to collaborate in defining a common set of business process changes and IT system requirements that none of them completely understand. Inevitably, there are scope-conflicts (various people apply a different scope to the solution, as they perceive different problems), goal-conflicts (different people prioritizing different goals for change), and problems of language (the same term meaning different things to different people). These are all symptoms of “wicked problems”: problems that are so interrelated and undefinable that they cannot be resolved without several iterations, much pain, and at least one manager refusing to buy-in to the proposed solution. When people disagree over wicked problems, they tend to see the disagreement as political, when it is often just a consequence of different perceptions of what “the problem” is. Defining a solution is easy. The difficult part is agreeing a problem to solve in terms that everyone understands in the same way.

THE RESEARCH STUDY
The research study under way seeks process solutions to wicked problems. I am testing methods to manage the process of getting and visualizing agreement on business process and IT change simultaneously. This involves modeling techniques that present multiple viewpoints in a non-political way so that all stakeholders can see the same scope of problems from similar perspectives. These techniques are coupled with a “systemic” approach to problem analysis, that provides a management process to ensure that stakeholders are on the same page.

I am now looking for two further organizations to participate in the final stage of the study, to test methods for the co-design of business-processes and IT systems. The methods have been developed from initial studies that observed management stakeholder groups in action, during change initiatives where early requirements analysis for enterprise-spanning or cross-functional IT systems was combined with business process redesign.

EXPECTED BENEFITS
The methods suggested by this study are intended to be directly applicable to the organization’s future information systems and business process change initiatives. Participating organizations are free to use and adapt these methods, as the research is funded by the National Science Foundation, which provides open access to (anonymized) research findings. In addition, Dr. Gasson will be available for consultancy and facilitation of the change process. Commercial confidentiality is both required and assured as part of this research.

Dr Susan Gasson worked in information systems consultancy and management for 14 years prior to becoming an academic. She has a long history of providing successful solutions to organizational problems. Dr Gasson’s participation as process consultant and facilitator is provided free of charge, as the study is fully-funded by the National Science Foundation. Please contact her directly for further information on the study (contact details above).