



Processes and interactions



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All interactions are crucial steps in any business process. Yet, in most process descriptions, interactions are just endpoints. Once we get there, the process reaches completion and everything is OK. There are no further consequences. Unfortunately, this is incorrect.

After the publication of our [Business Interaction Management](#) white paper, we received a number of reactions such as "Well, OK, but what are the implications of this? Why is it important? Why is it not enough when we correctly manage our business processes?"

All very valid questions and we have to admit that it is not always easy clarifying all the various aspects of the concept. However, we'll give it another try.

Enterprise driven intent

While trying to grasp the importance of interactions or the difference between an interaction-driven and a process-driven approach, the keyword we have to keep in mind is "strategic intent".

When we think about managing business processes, we immediately start thinking in terms of "zero failure", "execution time", "measurability", "controllability" and especially, "planned and intended". Business processes are created to handle specific tasks wherefore we, as a company, have decided that they are worthwhile doing. Therefore, business processes are expressions of "enterprise driven intent".

And this is where things often go wrong.

We'll try clarifying this with a small example and what example can be more inspiring than the example of our dear bank, a company that excels in business process management.

In [We value your opinion](#), we already mentioned that, regularly, our bank sends a survey to its customers asking for feedback about the quality of the service of its branch network.

We also receive this survey at regular intervals and, as explained, we are not interested. We do not really make use of this branch network and there are other service aspects that we think are more important.

Nevertheless, our bank thinks differently and therefore has created a well-managed process to survey its customers. I assume that a reasonable number of these customers will reply, so the bank will get the information it is looking for.

In theory, this is a well-executed business process. No strings attached. Unless the replies are an indication for certain problems, the process can again be suspended until the next iteration a year later.

Unfortunately, this perception of "everything OK" is a poor perception of reality. Indeed, we must not forget that any business process that has interactions with customers or partners **ALWAYS** has an impact or has certain side effects, most often **outside** the intended scope of the business process itself.

Interactions are not free

In our case, this survey always creates a feeling of "These guys only think about themselves and how they can save more money. They are not really concerned about the things that matter to us. Why are we still a customer?"

Now, everyone will understand that these are not the kind of thoughts you want to stimulate. Once you get there, it is only a matter of time before losing the customer.

Fortunately, our bank also had some real strengths and one of them was their solution for on-line banking. Not the normal browser-based solution, but still with a good old-fashioned desktop application.

Well, we had to admit that this was a real advantage. Whatever progress has been made developing Ajax-based web applications, browser-based web transactions remain a time-consuming and frustrating activity. Having the desktop application was a big plus for our bank, an advantage we did not find elsewhere. But whenever they end their support for this, then they can forget it!

Which recently, they did.

Of course, without surveying their customers about this intended move.

Why?

Well, because for the bank, this was a non-issue. For years they already knew that they were not interested in continuing support for this. Too complex, too expensive and too many problems with customers who do not understand how real applications work.

We understand.

Nevertheless, our bank now is on the list of suppliers who will be replaced. It will take some time since switching financial institutions is a bit more complex, but it will have to happen. It can no longer be avoided. Interactions and especially, poor interactions are too important. They reach into our emotionality and no process is a match for that.

That's why interactions are so important. Not because they are so well-structured. Not because they are fully controllable or measurable. Interactions are most likely the worst and the most complex parts of your business processes you can dream of and they will stay that way.

But they are the most important ones.


Bad luck.

About the author



Marc Buyens is analyst, management consultant and owner of Xpragma. Marc started Xpragma in 1999 after a 20+ years career in the IT sector. Today, he provides advice, training and mentoring services focusing on the intersection of technological evolution, organisational change and business strategy: a messy world of unfulfilled promises.

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