Transcript of the interview with Roger Burlton (November 17th 2015)

Recording along with additional resources is available on: http://bpmtips.com/rogerburlton

Zbigniew Misiak (ZM): *Hello this is Zbigniew Misiak from BPM Tips and today I have a great pleasure of speaking with Roger Burlton.*

He is an author, global innovator and a thought leader in business process management. He also chairs several high profile BPM conferences and runs pragmatic BPM seminars for over 20 years.

First of all thank you very much for joining me today. Roger, could you give a brief overview of you personally and how do you help BPM practitioners?

Roger Burlton (RB): Certainly. I live in Canada but I travel the world and quite often I am in Poland so I've actually seen a lot of organisations by actually helping them and talking to them and implementing these ideas.

So my most proud work is when I see organisations who are moving forward in business process management. My best efforts are when I see an organisation that learns over period of time how to implement this and not to be just academic. So yes I teach, yes I consult, but the most valuable thing for me is working with companies. Actually help them mature and get better in business processes. That's what I do most of the time in addition to conferences and addition to training as well.

ZM: *Thanks. You have over 20 years of BPM experience could you tell me what is most common error in organizations that start building the process architecture and what should they do instead?*

RB: I think that the most common mistake I see is a mistake which comes from lack of understanding is to what business process architecture truly is.

Well, many people think that it is just the description of all the processes that happen department by department or organisational group by organisational group. So what we typically see is process architectures which are very closely connected or aligned with the organisational structure. So for example we will see architectures that say there is the process called 'sales', there is a process called 'marketing', there is a process called 'accounting' and a process called 'account receivable' or ... go on on an on. And what you end up seeing is that each one of these processes is very very close to what a particular part of an organisation does.

So what people miss is that true business processes - not just activities - the true business processes are end to end. They start with the outside world and go back to the outside world.

One of the challenges we see with things for example such as process frameworks is that they tend to be very functionally oriented. They tend to reflect what various groups do as well. So even when people adopt what they think is a nice process framework what they actually adopt is also very heavily oriented towards the structure of the organisation.

Now what we think is not useful about that is that the business processes exist regardless of the organisation. It really doesn't matter how we are structured. As a matter of fact, our customers really wouldn't care less about our org chart. What they care about is when they make the request

to the organisation that all of their needs have been met and they may actually see value in all the work that we have done. That's an outside-in view not an inside-out view.

So what we really think is a better way to do it is to actually look at what are all the needs and expectations and required experience of the outside participants. We call them outside stakeholders, customers being one type. And making sure that everything we do inside the organisational chart is supporting the things which are important to the outside.

And that may seem like a fairly obvious thing to say, but typically what happens is we start with an existing organisational look at the work that people do and try to somehow craft a process architecture.

We really think we should start with customer, the regulatory body, the owners, the suppliers and make sure that everything that is important for us and everything that is important for them is in balance and that we can trace all the way from the first request, all the way through the final outcome or for the stakeholders. Take it outside in. When we do it that way we actually find our process architecture is remarkably stable, it lasts a long period of time and even though we may reorganize the actual processes stay pretty much the same.

We always have to sell to our customers, we always have to deliver our services, we always have to be compliant with the regulatory body, we will always have owners who expect us to return a fair return on their investment or to comply with the mission we have been given, we always have our employees wanting rewarding job and so on.

So those process will be there if we would look at them from the outside in. Of course at some point of time we have to match those activities to work done inside the organisation but the motivation should be on the outside not on the inside.

ZM: Thank you. You recently have published an article on BP Trends about the business architecture essentials [Business Architecture Essentials: The Business Architecture Landscape], you listed 10 components of business architecture and stated that selecting the essential aspects to start with and rolling out the remainder over time is the only practical way.

So what would be the best way to start. You told that we should start with the outside inside but how would you do it in practice? Would you start with IGOE? Would you start with Burlton Hexagon? What would be the best way?

RB: Of course the big challenge of this is that in order to have an effective business you have to have all the components of the business working together - just like if you are building a house for yourself then you have to make sure that you have a good foundation and you have the walls built properly that the insulation is appropriate especially when you live in Canada but also in Poland.

ZM: [Laugh] This is so true!

RB: But all those various aspects all come together to make a house and the same is with the architecture. But the problem is as just when you build a house you have to do certain things before other things happen you do also with business architecture.

So we would always say first of all do what we call stakeholder analysis, understand the external parties as I just mention with regard to the process architecture. Understand those because it gives us the motivation and the drivers and the measurements we need to figure out what the right design would be for our business.

But one thing that probably holds everything together just like you build the house you need your framing structure. The one thing that holds everything together in business architecture we believe is the business process architecture, so if we understand what the process architecture is and for each one of these processes we can ask the questions and you mentioned the IGOE and Burlton hexagon.

We can ask the questions what is the information that comes in and goes out. What are the business policies and the decisions and rules which are in play when we run a process and make a decision. What are the technologies required in order to enable that work to take place. What are the human skills and competencies and cultural aspects that are critical in order for that process to work and of course the physical locations and so on.

There is a lot of business events that are taking place. Now each one of these is an architectural component like if we have a processes we can then connect up those things one at the time more appropriately and we don't have to get everything work at once.

For example we could start with very business view which says our business is all about making decisions about whether or not to grant a credit to the customer or to allow them to have a loan. And that decision is built into a process. But the business rules required for it support that decision. So maybe that is a place to start.

Maybe after that, after little while we will take on the technology aspect. But to try to take on all the policies, all the rules, all the strategy, all the technologies, all the things around the Burlton hexagon. When we try to do all this at the same time it becomes very confusing.

So we actually think that we start with the stakeholders and then we derive the process architecture and then for each of the critical processes the ones that are most important those that need most work then we can build a transformation program which brings the other things in a bit one at a time.

ZM: Thank you very much. Let's assume that you are helping a newly appointed BPM specialist who just started working for an organisation where they do some process improvement, but they don't have any kind of process architecture.

They just may have list of processes in Excel and are doing process improvement on a very low level. What would you recommend to this BPM specialist so that he or she can convince top management that process thinking on higher level and building the architecture really make sense instead of having quick wins with Lean and similar activities.

RB: Yeah. I think of course there is nothing wrong with Lean and 6 Sigma. There are all good techniques that we can use at any scale. But I think that the one thing that is mostly missing when business analysts and process analysts are doing this type of work is they are missing the connection

to measurement and if you want to talk to these more senior managers to make a bigger impact on what is happening, you really have to find the pain [points].

You really have to find what is it that is driving these people in their critical problems every day. What's keeping them up at night. So it could be the fact that they have a cost issue or it could be the fact that we have customer service or customer satisfaction problem or we are losing market share.

It really doesn't matter what it is. These things are measurable and if we can actually find the existing measure and then go to the business people, go to the executives and say 'We would like to improve your performance' and this performance that they care about.

We can then broaden scope a little bit more and not only look at the workflow improvement which quite often happens and we can look at, do we have the right rules, are we making a right types of decisions, do we have people who know what they are doing and have been trained properly and also have the right behaviours for the new world of business. Do we have an issue with technology do we have an issue with locations and physical facilities depending on the business you are in. Do we have an issue with how we are organised. Do we have an issue with the information quality. We bring all of these into discussion.

If we can have a good understanding that we have a performance problem and it is the performance problem that is affecting the senior executives. So I think processes without the connection to measurement without the connection to performance improvement if we are doing that kind of work then it is gonna be very difficult for us to determine what changes to make. We have no criteria to make those changes and need the criteria coming from the senior managers first. We have to understand their pressures and then we can respond with the appropriate designs.

ZM: This is a great tip. And I want to ask what it would be the # 1 tip you would like to share with the BPM practitioners. At one of the BPM conferences I had a chance to hear that you said that 'Hope is not a strategy', so what would be a strategy, what would be the best approach to implement BPM. Best BPM tip that you can share with practitioners.

RB: I will try to answer the question and I am pretty sure that was me that say that. [LAUGH]

ZM: Yes, it was exactly you. I think it was BPM conference Portugal.

RB: I think that the critical issue there is that quite often we can't articulate all the wonderful performance improvements we are gonna get. Just building on my last answer.

But we really do have to work on making sure that the organisation is educated and aware of what is a business process even in the first place and what is a business architecture, what are the components.

So I think there is a large component of the work we do as architects and as process analysts and business analysts is to make sure we educate our market.

Every business must educate its market with regard to its products and services. We have those products and services too. We have to educate the market.

We have to make sure we have a very good case studies from other places that show the reason why need to do all of this and so just having any technique that anybody uses and makes up for themselves is not good enough.

We need a methodology we need a structured way of doing the work and we need a better project [management to] manage it in the most effective way and in addition to that there is something else that Process Renewal Group - my company - that we are really focusing on these days and that is the issue of how do you actually change the behaviours of the people and the culture of the organisation because quite often when we introduce new architecture and new processes into the organisation we will do things like train people on the systems.

We will do a lot of work with regard to building of these systems so we will do all the things around the hexagon with regard to building up the capabilities, but what we are missing is the behaviours and so we hope that by building those capabilities that everything would be ok, but it's not automatic

What we have to really do is asking question what behaviours do we want, how will we coach people on an ongoing basis, how we will make sure that the measurement data for managers day to day to use, how would we make sure that we are monitoring the performance as managers and how would we make sure that the people who are working for us are actually performing the way we wish to from the behavioural point of view.

Then we are in the position to coach. So what I am really saying here is that quite often we build new processes, we build new capabilities, but we don't think about what we have to do to continue to operate and sustain the benefits and I think that's what I really mean by saying 'Hope is not a strategy'.

We hope everything is gonna work out but we have to think really really carefully what types of changes do we want and how do we want people to act and how would we make sure that people have the right measurements on their own performance so there is a lot of things to think about and the hexagon is actually quite a good way to make sure we address all of those.

ZM: *Thank you very much. And the last question: at the beginning you mentioned that it is important to educate, to have a common understanding I personally like very much the Business Process Manifesto that you edited. Could you share useful resources that would like to recommend to BPM practitioners like your books or recent articles, something that you think can be helpful for BPM practitioners around the world.*

RB: Certainly. Very happy to do that. And thank you for mentioning the Business Process Manifesto. That particular piece of work is something that I coordinated over three years with over hundred people around the world just to come up with 8 main principles and 4, 5 points in each one of them, so that we have a common understanding of what we mean by business process.

I think it all starts there and I would definitely read that and that document is available in Polish, is available in 13 other languages in addition to English and Polish and that's a download from BP Trends you can get that on bptrends.com so I would definitely recommend that.

I wrote a book number of years ago now [Business Process Management: Profiting From Process] and I keep looking back at it, but the truth is still there I believe that if you really understand the foundation and the main principles behind all this you can actually work out a lot of details for yourself. So really understanding those principles those foundations are really gonna be key.

I strongly recommend a subscription - which is free - to BP Trends because the articles that come out there on a regular basis are actually quite useful. I wrote number of them and you mentioned the one on business architecture [Business Architecture Essentials: The Business Architecture Landscape] - that is just the first in the series. The second one would be available in early December which talks about how do you establish value chains and what are they and it is go on from there. So there is a number of articles there.

BP Trends in general is a really good place to go. Paul Harmon's book [Business Process Change] is a good book to look at if you want to cover end-to-end fairly well methodologically, so there are number of articles, but I would just stay in touch keep looking on it, so again if you subscribe to BP Trends then once a month you get a series of articles, notifications for you from some really smart people from all around the world. That would be my biggest recommendation.

Then never stop learning. There's a lot of good case studies. I say learn from case studies as well because every implementation is different. It is never by the book. It's always something that you have to be practical because different organisations are in different stage of readiness, have different situations, different challenges, so learn from the foundation, but also read about the case studies.

ZM: *Thank you so much for your time and for the interview and sharing your knowledge with BPM practitioners all around the world. Thank you very much.*

RB: You are welcome.

Resources mentioned in the interview:
BP Trends – monthly updates http://www.bptrends.com/join/

Business Architecture Essentials: The Business Architecture Landscape
http://www.bptrends.com/business-architecture-essentials-the-business-architecture-landscape/

Business Process Change http://www.amazon.com/Business-Process-Change-Third-Press/dp/0128003871/

Business Process Manifesto http://www.bptrends.com/resources/bp-manifesto/

Business Process Management: Profiting From Process http://www.amazon.com/Business-Process-Management-Profiting/dp/0672320630/

Process Renewal Group http://www.processrenewal.com/

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