

Business Rules

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Stan Hendryx

CEO
Hendryx & Associates
CoChair of the
OMG's BEIDTF
(Business Enterprise Integration
Domain Task Force)

stan@hendryxassoc.com

www.bptrends.com

Business Modeling continued to occupy the center of attention at the recent meeting of the OMG Business Enterprise Integration Domain Task Force (BEIDTF) in Montreal. The dimensions of OMG business modeling are becoming clearer: Business Rules, Business Processes, and Business Organization.

Fujitsu presented their revised submission proposal for Business Semantics of Business Rules (BSBR), a refinement of their February presentation of an approach that is heavily oriented toward implementation considerations. The Business Rules Team, the self-styled and diverse group of co-submitters of a very active proposal for BSBR, presented their revised submission. Their proposal for a metamodel of business vocabulary and business rules is architecturally the same as their previous presentation in February, based on natural language, business rule best-practices, linguistics, formal logic, and mapping to MOF/XML for interchange. It differs from the February presentation mainly in the fleshing out of details, adding refinements, and reorganizing the relatively complex document for clarity and better presentation. The group indicated this was their penultimate submission, saying they expect to have the proposal ready for a vote by the Task Force to recommend adoption by the time of the November meeting in Washington, D.C. Accordingly, the BEIDTF voted to extend the revised submission date to October 11, 2004. The creation of a BSBR Evaluation Team was also announced in anticipation of upcoming work to finalize BSBR, with Duane Clarkson of John Deere & Company as Chairman. The evaluation team, which is composed of people who are not BSBR submitters, has the charter to organize review of the proposals and feedback to the submitters to develop consensus within the OMG Domain Technical Committee for adoption.

The Business Rule Management RFI, discussed in the previous issue of this column, is still open for submissions. The BRM RFI presents an opportunity for anyone, whether or not OMG members, to provide input regarding the management of all kinds of business rules in business information systems, about whether there is a need or desire to standardize some aspects of business rule management. In an environment where there are thousands of business rules, many of which are subject to frequent changes that must be made quickly under business control, the need for robust rule management is apparent. If you have either brief or extended views about business rules and business rule management, you are invited and encouraged to submit your response. The Business Rule Management RFI can be obtained from www.omg.org/docs/bei/04-06-03.pdf. Responses are due October 11, 2004.

John Hall of the Business Rules Group (BRG), a business rules standards group, is one of the BSBR co-submitters on the Business Rules Team. He presented a preview of a proposal under development for a Business Rule Motivation Model (BRMM). The BRMM will likely be proposed under the OMG's Request for Comment track, in which existing standards from other organizations can be proposed for cross-adoption by the OMG, as an alternative to the Request for Proposal track (which is for original proposals from within the OMG). The BRG plans to put their standard, which was initially published in 2000, into OMG format, as required by the OMG, and to integrate it with BSBR. The BRMM provides a standard metamodel for modeling business ends, means, and influences, including vision, mission, goals, objectives, strategy, tactics, business



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policy, business rules, and various kinds of external influences that include regulatory, environmental, and technology influences. Hall proposed a process of “semantic integration by adoption” of several related OMG specifications, including BSBR, the Business Process Definition Metamodel (BPDM), the Organization Structure Metamodel (OSM), and the BRMM. Under the integration by adoption proposal, separately developed specifications can be integrated semantically by each adopting key concepts defined in the others to link them consistently into a larger suite of OMG business modeling specifications. Increasingly, semantic integration – identifying shared concepts and assuring common definitions and reference terminology – is seen as the key step in making business modeling specifications compatible, leaving domain details to be handled within each specification. For example, the BRMM would, under Hall’s proposal, adopt the BSBR concept of Business Rule, the BPDM definition of Business Process, and the OSM concept of Organizational Unit; BSBR would adopt the BRMM concept of Business Policy. Hopefully, submitters of the other specifications would go along with this and adopt key concepts on the edges of their specifications, to achieve the vision of an integrated suite of business modeling standards laid out by Hall.

The metamodel sought by the Organization Structure Metamodel RFP will support design, analysis, and modification of the organization as well as other business modeling that involves aspects of organizational structure. The OMG is now soliciting interested parties to submit proposals. The Organization Structure Metamodel RFP is available at www.omg.org/docs/bei/04-06-05.pdf. Letters of intent are due November 8, 2004, and initial proposals are due January 10, 2005. The OMG is currently soliciting submitters for OSM. If your company is interested in submitting a proposal, or being part of a submission team, please submit a Letter of Intent by the due date. An LOI signals interest, and is required for eligibility to submit, but does not commit you to submit a proposal.

The Business Process Definition Metamodel submitters announced they have all joined to submit a joint proposal. They asked the BEIDTF for, and were granted, an extension of the BPDM revised submission date to March 21, 2005, along with the related Business Process Runtime Interface submission. The BPDM aims to provide a common metamodel for business process modeling that is compatible with a variety of process modeling approaches, including UML. The union of BPDM submitters is good news, as it signifies industry cooperation on this very important business modeling area. Some BSBR submitters are also submitters on the BPDM. A joint session involving BSBR submitters and BPDM submitters was held in Montreal, and agreed to continue to coordinate their work.

The BPDM and BSBR groups, it appears, are in agreement that business rules play an important role in business process definitions, and that business rule definition and management should be external from the definitions of the business process they govern. The business process metamodel will provide for business rules to reside outside of process definitions; processes will refer to rules rather than embed them, to a significant extent. This architectural separation is important for the evolution and management of business processes and business vocabulary/rules along separate but mutually supportive paths. It was gratifying



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that both the BPDM and BSBR groups had arrived at this architecture independently. Separating rules from process definitions provides visibility of the rules, so they can be managed, and simplicity to process models, so they can concentrate on the sequential, temporal, and resource allocation aspects unique to processes and not have to deal with the declarative and policy aspects that are the province of rules. Separating the vocabulary definition from the process definition promotes semantic integration of the business, and, ultimately, seamless interoperability of business units and systems, by making the shared vocabulary available for processes, rules, systems, and training. Details remain to be worked out about how the interface will work and, particularly, the extent to which some rules should properly be embedded in the process and not be available for external management.

Continuing the prevailing spirit of cooperation, the OMG BPDM submitters are reaching out to other groups working on business process standards, especially Oasis and its Business Process Execution Language (BPEL) group, and the Business Process Management Initiative (BPMI). BPEL support is a core requirement of BPDM. BPMI, which is the author of the emerging standard Business Process Modeling Notation (BPMN) supported by both Oasis and the OMG, recently joined the OMG and intends to be fully involved in the OMG work. BPMI will have a joint meeting with OMG in November, and BEIDTF will host a half-day joint session on business process modeling and notation.

The Ontology Definition Metamodel (ODM) submission group released a draft of its response for review and comment by OMG members. The aim of the ODM is to provide a common metamodel for a variety of knowledge representation techniques, with a key objective of supporting the semantic Web. The release includes the proposed MOF meta-models for RDFS, OWL, Topic Maps, Entity-Relation Diagrams, generic Description Logics in several formats, and Simple Common Logic. The BSBR group has been coordinating with the ODM group for some time, since both RFP's were issued about the same time and are related. BSBR supports a superset of the logic supported by ODM, and there are plans eventually for interchange between ODM/OWL and BSBR, so the groups are coordinating to keep this on track.

In other news, the Business Rules Forum is preparing to convene November 7-11 in Las Vegas. The BRF has always been a good gathering place for pioneers of the business rules approach, and this year promises to be the biggest yet. See www.businessrulesforum.com for details.

Feedback from readers of these columns has been encouraging for the uncompensated time that goes into OMG and other standards work. It helps to see that the effort is beginning to make a difference. Please feel free to communicate your insights and opinions about business rules and standards to me at stan@hendryxassoc.com.

