

Chapter 23

Business Process Management in the Computer Games Industry

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ABSTRACT

Computer games conceptualization and development are processes that have particular features with significant complexity. The life cycle at computer games development should attend the dynamism, the challenge and the opportunities of the game market. Business process management (BPM) pretends to give an alternative perspective of management to the departmental and hierarchical one. Game firm's business should be seen with an integrated attitude, incentivising employees from different departments to work together in the same process with a common mission and persecuting same objectives. The importance of integrating the strategic level plans and the task level deployment is crucial for increased alignment and so, organizational performance. This can be better done if there is a process strategy definition, which links strategic initiatives with all needs of a process infrastructure. The processes' standardizing tendency opens the chance to outsource parts of them bringing possible benefits to game firm and customers. The definition of a clear framework at the strategic level allows lower processes description and global business process architecture specification. Other important aspects of business process management approach at computer games industry should include ownership clarification, performance measurement mechanisms and obviously the identification and activation of improvement opportunities. Author elects business processes customization, integration of flows between firm and its supply chain partners and superior user interfaces using specialized workflow tools as being three improvement opportunities at games industry. In addition to those components, three additional extra concepts are considered critical to have a complete understanding of BPM. They are the conscious process management, the macro process management and the centrality of process. This chapter is going to follow these vectors in order to understand possible opportunities powered by BPM to gain competitive advantages in computer game industry.

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INTRODUCTION

Computer games are special information systems. Their management presents an enormous effort in terms of idealization, development, promotion and maintenance as others. One particular aspect of these systems is that they usually have a very dynamic live cycle, with special efforts to develop the product in order to get some new behaviour within a new version. On the other hand, different levels of a game can be activated as being different processes. This is an evidence for almost all games but particularly usual in games with strategic aspects incorporated.

As business in general, a game as one or several proposes that can be achieved following standard processes previously defined. Usually, it is possible and interesting to define several ways to achieve the same result. This complex multi path approach may present a great programming challenge. Many computer games companies have realized that the time is long overdue for them to start looking at ways to make their applications more process oriented. Computer games tend to adopt and implement standardized (and yet flexible and easily modifiable) business processes to help their operations run more consistently and smoothly. Service oriented architectures make today that kind of scenario possible.

Business processes customization is also a great opportunity to make clients more pleased, allowing them to choose according to their needs. Another opportunity is integration of flows between firm and its supply chain partners allowing outsourcing some of their non key activities or own expert ones. These new approaches permit firms evolve to a higher service level of offers, with fewer costs, better products, or improved control of time schedule. And this means better results for stakeholders.

On the other hand, web based games (network games), usually need to communicate to players that a new rule has been defined. For instead, at a “boxer combat” game, it would be useful to spread

a new rule like using a “new food supplement” that improve energy 30% in just 30 seconds. This sometimes is done using a network file share that most people have no idea when it appears and where it is. Some time it is often the use of word-to-mouth information to learn the processes for the game. Otherwise, defining and spreading a new game version or a new level can be difficult for numerous players’ games. When any changes are made somewhere in the game, players have to remember to notify one another of the change or else rely on others finding the updates on their own. Neither solution is practical in the long term.

Process oriented practices may help by having in consideration different stakeholder’s needs and contributions. As we will see a business process management implementation should have a global approach with, at least, strategy, architecture, ownership, measurement and improvement aspects considered in an integrated view.

The Importance of Business Process Management

Functional point of view has been the principal perspective of business organization during decades. Employees were divided by departments and hierarchy separated, with very distinct objectives and concerns. New economy brings new paradigms and obliged a structural change in the way the work is organized. Instead of a single department view, employees should think with a global perspective of the business. The organization global purposes should rule each one’s work and its priorities. Since the beginning of business function automation, information systems have been organised around the “software application” concept. Classical business functions like accounts payable, order processing, inventory control and others were grouped into applications that automate parts of it. But that approach conducts organization into functional islands without enough communications within each other (Smith & Finger, 2002).

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