Book Review of:

# Business Processes – Operational Solutions for SAP Implementation

V Portougal and D Sundaram

*IRM Press (an imprint of Idea Group Inc.), 2006. 329pp. £50.95*
*ISBN: 159140979-9*

As the notes on the back cover of this book correctly state, while there is a substantial number of books treating information systems (in particular, business process modelling and management), enterprise resource planning (ERP) and operations management separately, books that cover all of these topics in an integrated fashion are scarce. However, such books would be very useful from a teaching perspective in order to support various ERP-oriented courses and also as a high-level textbook for industry-based practitioners. The question is whether the present book has succeeded in filling this gap.

This book consists of 13 chapters which can be broadly divided into three sections: chapters 1 – 3 cover business process modelling; chapter 4 – 5 deal with ERP implementation; chapter 6 gives a high-level overview of a leading brand of ERP systems, namely SAP; and chapters 7 – 13 focus on the practical design and implementation of a production planning and capacity management system using the production planning (PP) module in SAP. We shall now look at each of these broad sections in turn.

The first section contains three chapters on business process modelling. The first chapter explain the nature of business processes; this is followed by a chapter on business process improvement. While these first two chapters are quite generic in their approach, the third chapter takes a more SAP-specific view of business process modelling. The method of event-driven process chains (EPC's) is used to describe business processes, supported by the use of ARIS software. But this tends to ignore the fact that there are other, more generic, methods for business process modelling that could be used in an ERP context (including SAP), such as BPML and UML. Similarly, ARIS is not the only modelling software available in this context, although it is one of the more popular packages.

While the second section (chapters 4 and 5) provides a more generic overview of ERP implementation issues, backed up by relevant references from the academic literature, the third section (chapter 6) is SAP-specific. The authors are correct in claiming that "teaching ERP merely as software is ineffective". But if SAP is going to form a central element of an ERP-oriented course, then students (and practitioners) would still need a much more detailed introduction into the practical use of SAP than is given in this high-level overview of the SAP R/3 system.

The final section (chapters 7 – 13, comprising more than half of the book's 300-plus pages) is disappointingly narrow in scope. This section focuses on the use of the production planning (PP) module in SAP. But SAP contains a wide range of other modules, including financial accounting (FI), controlling (CO), sales and distribution (SD), materials management (MM), quality management (QM) etc. One of the main points of using SAP is to integrate key business processes such as order-to-cash and procure-to-pay effectively across these different modules. But, unfortunately, the present book has very little to say on this. Instead, it gives a very limited view of what SAP is about, concentrating mainly on a manufacturing engineering perspective.

To conclude, while this book combines a number of elements that could be part of an ERP-oriented course, the particular treatment of each of these elements is open to some criticism. While some parts of the book (in particular, the section on business process modelling) are insufficiently generic, the main chapter on SAP does not provide enough details on how to use it in practice. More importantly, the material in the second half of the book is too much focused on production planning problems. Therefore, in order to support more general ERP-oriented courses, it seems that we shall still have to rely on a collection of more specialist books in the three key areas of business process modelling and management, ERP implementation, and the practical use of a specific brand of ERP systems such as SAP.

*University of Strathclyde* RB van der Meer



This is an accepted author manuscript of the following output: Van der Meer, R. (2008). [Book Selection] Business Processes: Operational Solutions for SAP Implementation, by V. Portougal and D. Sundaram. Journal of the Operational Research Society, 59(8), 1145-1146. DOI: 10.1057/palgrave.jors.2602556