

## **Facilitated Rule Breaking**

### **(Breaking the Rules On Purpose)**

Ellen Gottesdiener  
Barbara von Halle

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While business rules can promote a business' prosperity, suboptimal business rules can cause its disintegration. Adherence to suboptimal business rules can prevent an organization from recognizing and reacting productively to business opportunities. Such rules may bind the entire organization to archaic processes and behavior founded on irrational or long-forgotten justifications.

For this reason, the skill of rule-breaking is often as important as rule-making. This column will focus on the process of conducting facilitated rule-breaking sessions. Such sessions are becoming a part of business reengineering efforts and business rule approaches. The business rules that result from such sessions should foster organizational learning, increase corporate IQ, and launch the enterprise into a better future. Ellen Gottesdiener, a professional facilitator specializing in IT modeling and BPR, shares insights for conducting facilitated rule-breaking sessions. Specifically, she shares with us:

1. The art of rule breaking
2. The basics of a facilitated rule-breaking session
3. Designing business rules for an unknown future
4. The value of balancing creativity with structure

#### **The Art of Rule Breaking**

Rule breaking is, by definition, rule making; and it's systematic hard work. Through facilitated sessions, you can focus the group's attention either inward or outward. An inward focus studies the value, efficiency, and effectiveness of business rules as they relate to the enterprise's business processes. A group at a mid-west insurance company, for example, as working to reengineer its commission application, significantly enhancing it with new technology, or replacing it with a package. But most importantly, the company needed to understand the existing business process, including its justification, its decisions, and its actions. Only then was the company prepared to address technical issues.

The group went through a series of activities together in which thinking oscillated between creativity and factual analysis. One outcome was the breaking of business rules that governed a special commission subprocess. Analysis and objective review of the subprocess revealed that it was costly and inefficient. The company no longer offered the insurance product, very few customers held policies for it, and only a handful of agents were receiving commissions for the prior sales of it. Yet much time, energy and expense went into maintaining the commission subprocess.

Business participants realized the only justification for the subprocess was '*we have always done it.*' They feared that axing the process would upset the agents. However, through creative thinking, the group devised a sensible and attractive one-time payoff to agents. This enabled the company to eliminate the subprocess while providing the agents with a single, fair, and final commission. For this conservative, business rule-constrained organization, this simple rule-breaking decision was a cultural as well as financial breakthrough.

The insurance company's group focused its reengineering efforts inwardly on internal processes. But, of course, it is possible to focus a group's attention outwardly by studying external customers, their

interactions with the enterprise, and their desires. This focus is more inventive in that it seeks to develop, discover, or improve existing markets. In some cases, facilitators must plan and navigate rule-breaking sessions to be both inward and outward focused.

Outward-focused sessions emphasize the customer perspective. First, group participants must learn to identify with customers, understand their customer types and their motives for using the product or service. Next, they must assess how highly customers rate their products and services. They can measure customer satisfaction from a variety of perspectives. One perspective might be the characteristics customers want in the product or service. Another might be those unspoken characteristics that customers may not ask for but take for granted (and the lack of which cause dissatisfaction). Yet another perspective might be "exciters", characteristics that customers don't expect but welcome.

An example of outwardly-focused creative rule breaking occurred within one company's help desk software design group. The analysis group decided not to force the user to supply details about their computer problem. Instead, automatic software agents were to detect problems and download data about them to the help desk. Another example of rule-breaking occurred when strategizing about providing an 800 phone number to support a new pharmaceutical product. The group decided to provide an unexpected service - to share information about advocacy groups involved in the same medical problem to external customers of the new product. Additionally, for virtually no extra cost, the organization would share caller profile information with sales representatives and corporate marketing. This provides valuable information to the 800 phone number's internal customers.

### **The Basics of a Facilitated Rule-Breaking Session**

A good rule-breaking session is facilitated chaos. Rule-breaking is much like RAD in that it has very tight time constraints and must result in explicit deliverables. As with RAD, facilitated rule-breaking requires that an infrastructure be in place for the accelerated delivery of the deliverables. Fundamentally, there are two types of actors in facilitated rule-breaking sessions: the facilitator and the participant. Figure 1 highlights the characteristics of a good rule-breaking facilitator while Figure 2 does the same for a participant.

The facilitator is responsible for orchestrating the infrastructure through which chaos is creatively channeled. To facilitate chaos, you must expect unpredictability, be open-minded, move quickly from activity to activity, and practice the art of constant self-correcting feedback.

Rule breaking entails learning. The group must learn rules that exist, why they exist, and how to break or improve them to better meet specific business goals. A good facilitator knows that humans learn with different intake styles - visual ('I see your point'), auditory ('I hear you'), and kinesthetic ('I get it') - and manipulates the group process to exploit these varying intake modes.

The facilitator should be aware of the "group think" phenomenon - the tendency for a group of people agree to behave in a certain way because it seems more important to agree than to challenge or question an issue. Group think is a problem - it stifles seeing alternatives, possibilities, and dangers. It can lead to suboptimal business decisions. Facilitators must be able to recognize evidence of unjustified group think and direct the group away from it. Since business rules, written or unwritten, can sometimes be a product from group think, the facilitator must listen for business rules that can harm the organization or stifle the organization. These kinds of business rules often surface during data, process, or object modeling sessions and in business process re-engineering discussions. Justifications for such business rules surface as statements such as "We've always done it this way"; "We don't do  $x$  until  $y$  has happened"; "We have to do  $x$ "; "We have always been cautious about doing  $x$ "; "We never do that." Underneath these utterings lurk business rules begging for a challenge.

In developing an agenda for rule-breaking sessions, facilitators should focus on the purpose, process, and principles for the session. The agenda should be more than a list of topics to cover. It must include a statement of purpose, working models and lists, specific deliverables or products the group must produce, guiding principles for the session, and its own rules for governing group behavior. Without these basics, the group will fail. The session's deliverables, whether tangible or intangible, represent a "starter kit" for baseline business rules - not personal business rules. They will be of the group's explicit consensus, meaning that each member not only can live with the business rules, but will openly support them.

Figure 3 summarizes the critical success factors for a successful rule-breaking session. One important consideration is to limit the quantity of participants to an optimum. The formula that determines the number of one-to-one human interactions for everyone in a group to participate in an issue is  $n(n-1)/2$ , where  $n$  represents the number of attendees. Each interaction requires time. As David Taylor stated in his presentation at *Database Programming & Design's* Business Rules Summit in February of this year, "Small teams sometimes out-think brightest members." Yet at times you will need larger groups to gain consensus from all key players. In these cases, all participants should be present simultaneously if the organization is to move immediately toward eliminating or establishment of new business rules.

A few words of warning: Rule killing is serious business. Before a business rule is questioned, reengineered, or, or completely killed, you must confront some serious questions. What is the impact of altering or removing the rule? Who needs to kill it? What mechanisms will we need to bridge the transition from old to new? Who has the most to lose from these changes, and are they involved (they should be)? When is the best time to kill the rule? How will we know we successfully buried it? How do we make sure the same or similar rule does not sneak back into the business?

Facilitated sessions can result in powerful momentum. Do not pursue facilitated sessions if your business' culture will destroy this momentum, as this will damage enterprise morale. Likewise, if the sponsor is not powerful enough in the organization to allow the rule making or breaking to happen, do not proceed. Also, don't conduct the session if the right people can't attend. One person's absence can negatively impact the course of events during a session. This person might be a key business-knowledgeable participant, decision-maker, or "old timer" with a good understanding of existing rules, or inventive thinker whose energy and ideas will spark creative thinking.

### **Business Rules for an Unknown Future**

Two techniques essential to some facilitated sessions are visioning and "the art of the long view" (see reference for Schwartz). Visioning is the quintessential rule breaking experience. Simply defined, it is the process of viewing or shaping a future that aims to be better than the present. Some tools rule-breaking facilitators can use to support visioning include process maps, lists of barriers, lists of desired features, story-boarding, visual models which represent future systems or processes, use cases, event modeling, event-process modeling, data modeling, object modeling with CRC (class - responsibility - collaboration), interface prototyping, and rule modeling. People inherently try to model how things should be. To create a model of how things could be better, they must inevitably confront the existing processes.

Of course, preparing for the future entails more than adjusting existing processes - it requires the establishment of new rules to accommodate brand new processes. In exercising the long view, a group takes on the challenge of making rules where they have not existed before. The long view involves looking at uncertainties inside and outside the enterprise and arriving at scenarios for possible futures. These scenarios, described in written stories by the participants, should represent the convergence of environmental, technical, organizational, and target customer influences at some point in the future. On the basis of such scenarios, the business can define triggers to recognizing when a particular future is emerging and kick off predefined business responses and associated business rules to proactively define how the business will handle that future.

Long view sessions result in a subset of most likely high-level scenarios, detailed scenarios stories, a list of triggers for each scenario, and the appropriate business rules. Applying the long view requires risky and inventive thinking balanced by hard-nosed analytical information. Participants must be qualified business leaders, such as marketers, who can recognize the future before it happens, as well as inventors, discoverers, and trend-setters who are excited about possibilities and enjoy change.

Results of successful long view approaches might include introduction of a new drug research area, entrance into a new geographic market, investment in the right startups, restructuring of software portfolio priorities.

### **Balancing Creativity with Structure**

The creative process is paradoxical. It is unpredictable, yet we can instigate it by directed thinking. We encourage creativity by shifting perspectives to permit concurrent thinking. Varying perspectives is a way to unleash new ideas and energy. The facilitator must orchestrate modeling activities during the session to allow the group to change perspective while keeping the main goal of the session in mind. Modeling activities can take place in subgroups in parallel or as a total group.

The creativity process may go through generic phases, such as generate, cluster/categorize/pattern, integrate, incubate, evaluate/rank/prioritize. The facilitator must understand these cycles and design group processes to allow this flow to occur in a natural sequence.

The most creative ideas evolve over time and so incubation is a crucial phase. For this reason, it is important that facilitators share the session purpose, products, and principles (agenda) well ahead of the facilitation event. Providing samples of the prework and possible sessions deliverables will allow participants to incubate ideas, analysis, and opinions prior to the session. A facilitator should be aware that creative thinkers do a lot of "obsessive contemplation." while exercising, showering, cooking, and going about their other daily business.

How does a facilitator foster creativity in groups? Tactics include setting priorities for changing processes or adding product features by "buying" them with pretend money; defining entity attributes by filling up entity buckets with attributes on post-its; subgroups write business rules for process maps; having subgroups 'walk-around' other models to constructively critique, correct, and confirm the contents; using a large plastic hammer to 'hammer' negative verbalizations or "unjustified" rule thinking. Refer to Figures 4, 5, and 6 for insights into additional techniques for fostering group creativity.

Analyzing business rules is systematic hard work. Business participants must expose and challenge existing business rules for public judgment and opportunistically invent new ones. Facilitated sessions provide an excellent framework for accomplishing both of these critical business activities in a safe, fun, and productive setting.

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Figure 1: Mentality of a rule-breaking facilitator

1. Ensure there is a well-defined and involved executive sponsor.
2. Do not underestimate the power of body language in assessing group consensus.
3. Recognize that groups are powerful, negatively and positively.
4. Detect and dilute negative group think.
5. Enable safe, constructive creativity in breaking business rules.
6. Grab onto group enthusiasm.
7. Ask for hidden agendas.
8. Be prepared for compromises.
9. Gain corrections and confirmation on all deliverables even after the session.
10. Do your homework: define and understand the session people, purpose and products then plan, plan, plan (culminating in a carefully crafted agenda, shared well in advance with the participants).

Figure 2: Mentality of a rule-breaking participant

1. Recognize rule-breaking as a form of enterprise creativity.
2. Challenge all rules.
3. Break many rules, on purpose.
4. Use models as sources for potentially undesirable business rules

Figure 3: Critical Success Factors

1. Sessions must involve high-level business participants
2. Participants must be willing to authorize change.
3. Participants must be willing to support change.
4. Quantity of participants must be kept to an optimum number
5. The session must be accurately and fully documented.
6. The session documentation must be validated by participants soon afterwards.

Figure 4: Group Activities:

Using the 7 Intelligences\* in Facilitated Sessions

Intelligence	Activity
Logical/mathematical	categorizing, prioritizing, sequence, rank
Linguistic/verbal	text definition, debate, personal poem, brainwriting pool
Music	music during session workshop time, song/rap writing
Spatial/visual	visual model drawing, mind map

Bodily/kinesthetic	simulation, move around 'gallery', ball toss, 'hammer' negativity
Interpersonal	role play, debriefing, debate
Intrapersonal	brainwriting, post-session documentation assessment

\*see references for H. Gartner

Figure 5: Lateral Thinking

Lateral thinking is: a neutral process, an attitude, a series of defined methods, pattern seeking devices. It's goal is to challenge, provoke, innovate. A sampling of lateral thinking techniques include:

PMI: Pluses, Minuses, Interesting points

APC: Alternatives, Possibilities, Choices

EBS: Examine Both Sides

OPV: Other Peoples Views

ADI: Agree, Disagree, Irrelevant

Figure 6: Generic Group Activities for Purposeful Rule Breaking (or Making): A Sampler

Problem Solving	Classify/Sort/Categorize	Create/Innovate	Evaluate/Select/Prioritize	Model
Fishbone Diagram	Storyboarding	Classic Brainstorming	Weighted Ranking	"As is" and "To be Process Models
Force Field Analysis	6 Thinking Hats*	Analogies	Buy feature/option with play money or with sticky dots	Generate scenarios (concrete use cases)
5 W's + H (who, what, when, where, why, + how)	Clustering	Vision/Victory visual picture	Customer importance ranking by feature	"fill-up" Data/Object with attributes
B/B/S/W (benefits, barriers, strengths, weaknesses)	Goalstorming	Brainwriting Pool	Relationship Matrix (whats x hows) - QFD technique	CRC cards

\*see references for E. de Bono