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A Business System Concept Matters

Teams get into trouble when they start building before they get clear.

At first, it does not look like trouble. It looks like momentum. People are active. Meetings are happening. Screens are being mocked up. Features are being discussed. AI ideas are flying. Vendors are demoing. Developers are coding. Everyone feels busy, and busy can look a lot like progress.

Then the symptoms show up. The team cannot explain in plain language what problem it is solving. Different stakeholders carry different pictures of the future. New ideas keep entering the mix because no one has established the logic for saying yes or no. The project gets pulled toward whatever is easiest to build, easiest to demo, or loudest in the room. What emerges may be technically impressive, but it does not hold together as a business solution.

A **Business System Concept**, or BSC, is a disciplined way to think before you build. It is a model of how the work gets done today, an assessment of how well that works, and a model of how the work should operate in the future if better system support is put in place. It is not detailed design. It is not a feature list. It is not a stack of stakeholder requests. It is a clear picture of the business system the organization actually needs.

Most troubled initiatives do not fail because people lack effort or intelligence. They fail because the team moves too quickly from dissatisfaction with the current state to enthusiasm about a tool, a platform, a product, or now, an AI capability. They skip the harder step of defining the future operating model they are trying to create. Without that model, design decisions become ungrounded. Tradeoffs become political. Scope expands. Rework rises. Confidence falls.

That does not mean preserving every step in an old process. Many organizations have accumulated too many handoffs, too many reviews, and too many layers between idea and execution. A good BSC does not codify that complexity. It helps a team separate what is essential from what is merely inherited, so it can simplify the work as it clarifies it.

A good Business System Concept starts with the work, not the software.

It asks: How does this process work today? Where does it break down? What business objectives must the new approach serve? What constraints matter? What data, decisions, handoffs, controls, and outputs define success? Where is the current system helping, and where is it getting in the way?

The point is to get a grounded view of reality. That includes asking which parts of the current process are truly required and which were added over time to compensate for older constraints, fragmented tools, or organizational habits. You need enough clarity to understand the shortcomings of the current environment and the implications of changing it.

From there, the BSC defines a future-state model. This is the normative picture of how the work should operate. It describes the logic of the business system to come. What information should be available, to whom, and when? What decisions should the system support? What work should be automated, guided, or controlled? What roles should people continue to play? What should improve in speed, quality, visibility, coordination, or cost?

That future-state model becomes the focus for the effort.

Once it exists, the team can evaluate different ways to get there. Build it. Buy it. Configure an existing platform. Introduce AI into selected parts of the process. Combine several approaches. Stage the implementation over time. The point is that the alternatives can now be judged against a coherent model of the business need rather than against personal preference, technical fashion, or vendor polish.

In that sense, a BSC sits between strategy and design. It is more concrete than strategic intent, but not yet detailed solution specification. It gives the team enough clarity to test ideas, compare options, make tradeoffs, and proceed with confidence.

Descriptive vs. Normative Model

One of the most practical disciplines inside a BSC is the distinction between the descriptive model and the normative model.

The descriptive model answers: **How does the work actually happen today?**

The normative model answers: **How should the work happen if we want better business performance?**

Too many teams skip both steps. They jump from frustration with the current process straight to features, tools, or AI ideas. That is how they end up building activity instead of building a business system.

A BSC imposes a better sequence: describe the current process, assess its strengths and shortcomings, define the future process normatively, and then evaluate alternative ways to achieve it.

That sequence slows the team down just enough to keep it from getting lost.

An Example

Consider a construction company's process for releasing work orders to the field.

On paper, the process sounds straightforward. A work order is prepared, reviewed, and released so crews can perform the work. But in practice, "release" often means different things to different people. To one person it means the scope has been approved. To another it means the drawings are ready. To someone else it means labor and equipment have been assigned. To the field, it may simply mean, "We were told to go."

That ambiguity is exactly why a Business System Concept is useful. It is also a chance to ask whether the release process has accumulated steps, checks, and workarounds that made sense under older conditions but now slow the business without improving release quality.

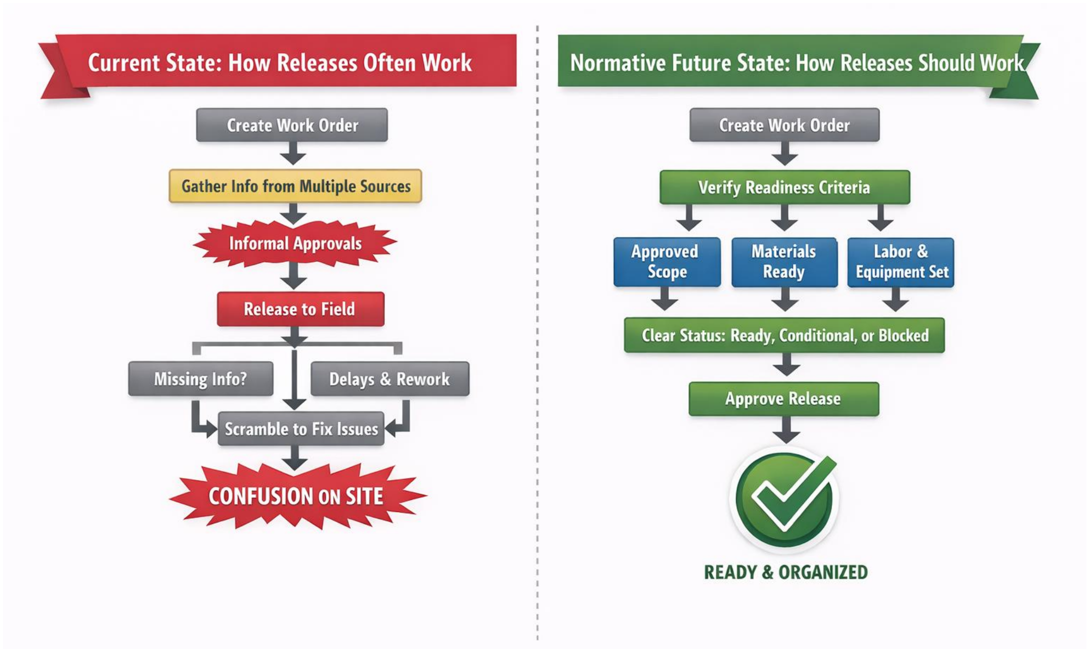

Figure 1. Current-state and normative future-state release flows

A BSC for releases would begin with a descriptive process model. This is the model of how the process actually works today (see left side of exhibit 1), not how people describe it in general terms when speaking abstractly.

Descriptive process model: how releases often work today

A work order is created. Scope, drawings, quantities, and supporting information are assembled from multiple sources. Someone decides the job is nearing readiness and begins pushing for release. Readiness is checked inconsistently through calls, texts, emails, spreadsheets, meetings, or memory. Approvals occur informally or only partially. Labor, equipment, materials, permits, predecessor work, and site readiness may or may not be confirmed.

The work order is released to the field. The field then discovers missing information, missing prerequisites, changed conditions, or conflicting assumptions. Supervisors, planners, and office staff scramble to resolve gaps. Work is delayed, improvised, re-sequenced, or redone. Status is updated after the fact, often manually and with limited visibility.

That model does not exist to blame anyone. It exists to make the operating reality explicit. Once the team can see the process as it really is, it becomes possible to assess it honestly.

The assessment may conclude that the company does not really have a controlled release process. It has a loosely coordinated handoff. The business consequences are predictable: idle crews, missed schedules, field frustration, rework, management confusion, and weak accountability for what was truly ready and what was not.

From there, the BSC defines a normative process model. This is not detailed design. It is a clear picture of how the process should operate if the business system were working properly (see right-side of exhibit 1).

Normative process model: how releases could work

A work order is created using a standard structure and required data fields. The release requirements are explicit for that type of work. Required prerequisites are identified up front: approved scope, current drawings, predecessor work complete, materials available or committed, labor assigned, equipment assigned, permits satisfied, safety requirements addressed, and site conditions confirmed. Readiness is reviewed against those requirements in one visible process. Exceptions are surfaced explicitly rather than buried in side conversations. Each work order is assigned a clear release status such as blocked, conditionally ready, ready for release, or released. Formal responsibility for release is defined. Field teams receive a complete and credible release package. Once work begins, execution feedback is captured so the company can improve release quality over time.

In that future model, a release is not just a signal to begin work. It is a controlled business event. It occurs when defined conditions are met, when exceptions are visible, and when accountability is clear.

Once the team has both the descriptive and normative models, it can evaluate different ways to close the gap. It may decide that process discipline alone will solve much of the problem. It may conclude that an existing project management or ERP tool can be configured to support release readiness. It may determine that workflow automation is needed to standardize approvals and visibility. It may find selective uses for AI, such as identifying missing prerequisites, spotting inconsistencies across documents, summarizing blockers, or predicting likely release delays.

That is the value of the BSC. It does not begin with technology. It begins with the business system the company needs. Some people assume that in the age of AI, disciplines like this matter less. The opposite is true. AI makes the need for a BSC more urgent because it makes it easier than ever to confuse possibility with value.

A team can now generate workflows, interfaces, agents, prototypes, and content in a fraction of the time it once took. That speed is useful, but it is also dangerous. When production becomes easy, the cost of building the wrong thing falls at the front end and rises later in the form of confusion, weak adoption, operational risk, and expensive rework.

If anything, AI raises the premium on thinking. When teams can build faster, prototype faster, and automate more easily, they need stronger judgment about what problem they are solving, which steps in the process still matter, what role humans must continue to play, and where speed without clarity will simply produce better organized waste.

An AI-era BSC has more to account for than a traditional one. It must clarify where human judgment belongs and where machine support belongs. It must distinguish between work that is deterministic and work that is interpretive. It must identify what data and context the system depends on. It must specify where recommendations are acceptable, where approvals are required, and where automated action is inappropriate. It must define how performance will be judged, including accuracy, cycle time, consistency, transparency, and risk.

Without that discipline, teams fall into one of two traps. One is AI theater, where intelligence is added to the surface without improving the system beneath it. The other is AI overreach, where too much judgment is handed to a system that does not have the context, controls, or accountability to carry it.

A BSC helps avoid both mistakes by forcing a better question than, "What can AI do here?" The better question is, "What business system are we trying to create, and what role should AI play in it?"

The more AI compresses the cost of execution, the more the human side of the work stands out. Teams still need people who can understand the problem deeply, form a view of the future worth pursuing, communicate it clearly, and exercise judgment amid ambiguity. A BSC is one of the places where those human responsibilities become concrete.

Bottom line

A Business System Concept is not bureaucratic overhead. It is the work of getting clear before getting busy, and of stripping away complexity that no longer deserves to survive.

For a team that has lost itself in building, that is not a luxury. It is the way back.

If the current effort is generating activity without clarity, features without coherence, or technical output without a strong business logic, stop and build the BSC. Model how the system works today. Assess it honestly. Define how the work should ideally operate in the future. Then compare the available paths for getting there.

Do that well, and the team has a real chance to build something that works.

Skip it, and the team is not designing a business system.

It is improvising.

Get Clear. Align. Grow.