



Process for the Sake of Process = Failure

So you're pretty happy with yourself. You've churned out the most brilliant, thoughtfully paced out set of business process improvement initiatives you're sure this company has ever seen. There's no question, this set of optimizations are masterfully going to tackle and achieve the goal (as an example), "Implement 5 Process Improvement Initiatives within your Organization". Time to check that box and move on to your next strategic goal - right? Oh no my friend, a world of wrong.

View from the Top

Process optimizations are certainly wonderful opportunities and, like salted nuts, once you get a good taste from one, you involuntarily bring out your inner squirrel. Oblivious to the fact that tomorrow you'll have gained two pounds, you pay no mind to the empty bag lying on your desk. But I digress. Without a close tie-in to a business performance goal, the chance of your process optimization making a real impact on the organization is pretty low. So it is critical that the chosen Process Initiatives come from an understanding of what WILL impact Business Performance and associated KPIs. This also provides you with the momentum to drive the necessary change both within your organization as well as across the swimlanes into other parts of the organization.

Lack of Alignment is NOT an Option

Irrespective of the size of your organization, process initiatives tied to Business KPIs are key projects that must be embraced by all departments they target. Since the impact of change is felt across the company, it's critical that these initiatives be clearly aligned with these strategic KPIs, monitored at the top, and managed from a strategic standpoint to ensure overall visibility and adoption. You need to do all that you can from the get-go to increase the likelihood of success.

While you may have a structured set of process initiatives that you've thoroughly and painstakingly mapped out to target a KPI of, for instance, lowering operating cost at your company, how do you make sure that there is the visibility across departments needed to get buy-in to drive these process initiatives forward? Your work doesn't end with establishing them – a structured ongoing effort is needed to ensure that the necessary process change is adopted across the workforce to find true success.

Manage Across Swimlanes

While real and effective process optimizations come from getting the input of those really doing the work - the existing workforce – the people that make it happen, the communication doesn't stop there. It's

ongoing. There needs to be alignment across all relevant teams, and continued direction needs to be given to ensure the most important issues are tackled first, all while listening to their feedback, their concerns, evaluating status, etc.

While process initiatives can be innovative in nature (which will cause much more dramatic change), it is often the more subtle “transformational” change that can often be more challenging due to the effect on processes near and dear to people’s hearts. Certainly innovation creates major change, but people are often more prepared for such impact. With transformational process initiatives, people need to understand the benefit of this subtle change to get aligned with the change to their daily lives.

These transforming process initiatives thrive best and are most impactful when they are set as smaller goals that can be realized in a relatively short timeframe - there’s nothing like the sense of accomplishment – this is a real and motivating force. These initiatives are likely to cover a wide range of issues and need to be tackled in a structured way to get to the end goal. But how do you ensure that structure?

Not to get too new-agey on you, but effective management of process initiatives requires true synergy amongst groups. A clear focus on a select set of issues at a given time is key - it allows teams to move quickly and efficiently. Everyone can tackle the same set of issues at the same time in a structured and coordinated way because there is visibility into what everyone is working on, and evident what piece they need to address.

By keeping everyone in the loop by way of continuous communication, regular status meetings and the like, you’re actually increasing employee participation. Everyone has a stake in the outcome of the process initiative, facilitating the very thing that is desperately needed for success - adoption. Employees become comfortable with necessary change – they have a personal stake by actually participating in the decisions that affect their jobs and overall company success.

Avoid the “What if I would have...” Syndrome

For an organization to meet short and long-term goals, you need to have clear objectives that are embraced to put real business process improvement into play. Done correctly, your company will reap the unending rewards with the benefit of a more healthy company culture. Done incorrectly, you’ve wasted a lot of time and money. There’s nothing quite as frustrating as putting lot of effort to roll out a comprehensive set of process initiatives, only to see them run straight into a brick wall and plant roots because they aren’t going anywhere.

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