



Human Processes

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Productivity Frustration

According to recent research, between 28 and 53 percent of employees feel their work conditions prevent them from being as productive as they could be – and 20% or more of the workforce classify themselves as “frustrated”.¹

In this Column, I will take a brief look at what it means to be “frustrated” about productivity, and propose a simple way around the problem – a way that is open to any organization.

What is productivity frustration?

Informally, typical symptoms of productivity frustration include:

1. **Misuse**
 - Not being allowed to do what you do best
 - Having to do activities that you are ill-equipped to perform
 - Lack of training for certain types of activity
2. **Disempowerment**
 - Unavailability of resources required to be effective
 - Inability to remove unnecessary barriers
 - No way to prioritize the activities that add most value

In more formal **Human Interaction Management (HIM)** terms, these symptoms boil down to 2 basic mismatches, between:

- **Roles** and the characteristics of the **People** playing them
- **Activities** and the resources available to the **Roles** carrying them out

Hardly rocket science. So why is productivity frustration so common? Its attendant impacts on motivation and effectiveness have an obvious impact on staff churn and on the bottom line, so one would think that this simple problem would hardly be a feature of the modern workplace.

¹ <http://www.slideshare.net/CanadianMgmt/the-enemy-of-engagement-national-thought-leader-series>

Acting Responsibly

The common factor in both aspects of productivity frustration is **Roles**. In HIM terms, a Role is not a job title, but rather a way of assigning responsibility in a specific **Plan** – i.e., responsibility as a virtual team member in a collaborative process that may involve multiple organizations.

A HIM Role is also quite different from a swim lane in a workflow or BPM model (or system). Although a HIM Role includes Activities that may have Inputs and Deliverables, it is much more than a grouping of nodes in a flowchart.

To illustrate, here is a screenshot showing an example Plan template in a HIM software tool:

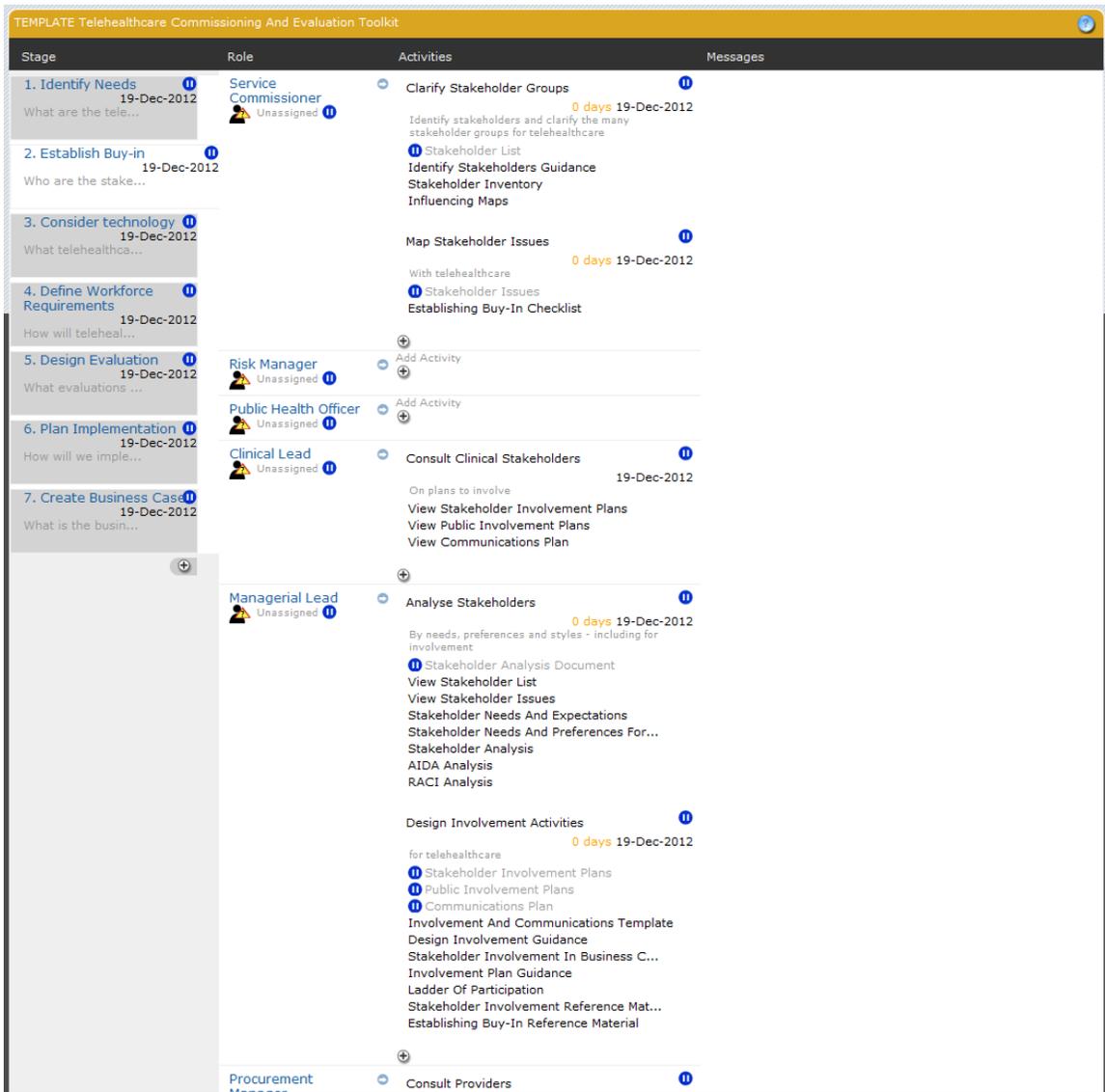


Figure 1: HumanEdj screenshot of a HIM Plan template

The screenshot shows some aspects of a HIM Role:

1. Flexibility

Each HIM Role appears in specific **Stages** of the Plan, and its basic duty is to support the achievement of the goals represented by these Stages. This may or may not involve producing **Deliverables** – participation in a Stage may simply involve helping to create ideas, participation in review meetings, contribution to online discussions, and so on.

Further, even if Deliverables are originally assigned to a Role via specific Activities, the actual outputs of the Role may be different – depending on the situation at the time, more or less items may actually be required, and each item may take a different format to that expected initially. The players in HIM Roles are empowered to achieve their aims in the manner that does so best.

2. Information Access

A HIM Role not only has behavior, it has content – documents and data that it can access. Anything produced via a Role belongs to that Role and should be accessible via the Role at any time.

Further, each Role needs a copy of anything produced by other Roles in its Stages, so that the person playing the Role can stay up-to-date, review other people's Deliverables, and use the Deliverables as necessary in their own work.

3. Communication Channels

HIM Roles communicate with each other *purposefully* – i.e., when they talk about things, in person or electronically, the discussion may be as wide-ranging and creative as desired, but it is *about* something. It is about the goal of that Stage, and focused on moving towards achieving it.

In other words, the messages sent in a Stage form a critical part of the work of that Stage, and must be aligned towards the goal of the Stage in order to ensure that the goal is reached efficiently and effectively. Further, such messaging alignment must be enforced even when (as is common) the participants in the Stage do not all work for the same organization, and when some of them will not use any software tool other than email.

Armed with this more helpful concept of Role, we can see why the 2 main mismatches that cause workplace frustration are so hard for many organizations to handle. Simply assigning a person to a set of tasks – even giving them a budget - does not make it possible for them to act flexibly, to access the information they need, or to communicate effectively with colleagues.

The classic problem of “responsibility without authority” is just a part of this picture. In order to put all the critical enablers in place, it is first necessary to understand that a Role is not just a job title or a swim lane, but rather an active agent responsible for meeting specific goals in a flexible, collaborative Plan. Using HIM techniques, and optionally HIM tools, this becomes a simple matter – and a rewarding one, not only for employees but for their employer, who will see less staff churn and most probably an immediate impact on their bottom line.

Author

Keith Harrison-Broninski is CTO of Role Modellers, a Gartner BPM Cool Vendor 2012. The company mission is to develop understanding and support of human-driven processes - the field that Keith pioneered. Its software product, the Human Interaction Management System (HIMS) **HumanEdj**, provides unique software support for collaborative, adaptive human work across multiple organizations.

Keith has been regarded as an IT and business thought leader since publication of his 2005 book "Human Interactions: The Heart And Soul Of Business Process Management". Building on 20 years of research and insights from varied disciplines, his theory of Human Interaction Management (HIM) provides a new way to describe and support collaborative human work. Keith speaks regularly about HIM and the associated change management methodology Goal-Oriented Organization Design (GOOD) in keynotes to business, IT and academic audiences at national conferences, most recently in Poland, India, the Netherlands, the UK, Finland and Portugal.

More information about HumanEdj is available at www.rolemodellers.com and about Keith at <http://keith.harrison-broninski.info>.

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