Human Processes

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Going HIM

People often write to me with queries about adopting **Human Interaction Management** (HIM), asking, for example:

- What is involved in "Going HIM";
- How long does it take;
- About the sort of experiences, good and bad, that organizations have had
- If there is any general advice that would be helpful in getting started.

So this Column provides a summary of the answers I usually give.

The problem with consultancy

Here is a real-life story about "Going HIM".

Some time ago I was asked to help a software organization with fault management on a large project. The system in question was not only safety-critical but also about as complex as it is possible to get - numerous components on different networks, interacting in real time to perform complex tasks via a sophisticated user interface providing multiple views of dynamic data.

In order to deal with the challenge, the project was using advanced techniques both for development and for project management. However, a deadline was approaching, there were more faults than expected, and the fault/fix ratio was increasing at a stage when it should have been decreasing.

At this point I was asked to step in as interim Fault Manager, to see whether or not emergency application of HIM could reduce the fault level and allow the project to meet its deadline. I've detailed the techniques I used in previous Columns, so to cut a long story short, we doubled productivity pretty much from day one (according to my client's statistics), met their deadline, and after documenting what we did and how to introduce it more generally, I moved on to other things.

You would think that, with such convincing evidence of the value of HIM, the company in question would have started the transition to HIM techniques straight away - and they did state their intention of doing so. Committees were set up and people delegated to investigate how to introduce HIM techniques on a more long-term basis. However, a year later, I got another call. Guess what - the same project was in the same situation as before, with faults scaling out of control as a milestone approached.

Again I came in, and used exactly the same techniques with exactly the same results - doubled productivity and successful on-time delivery. Again I documented how to do it for themselves, and went away. I don't know whether my client ended up introducing the techniques in their day-

to-day work, but from what I've heard informally, won't be too surprised to get another call one day.

What is the moral of this story? Why did my client, who had convinced themselves twice in succession of the value of HIM, find it impossible to sustain the practices concerned without my personal presence in a consultancy role?

Using a watch to tell the time

The old story about consultants is that they borrow your watch to tell you the time.

HIM, like most successful management techniques, is essentially formalized common sense. If you look at the **Quick Reference Card** on the HIM Web site,[i] the theory may seem complex, and it is certainly multi-faceted, but each individual aspect is something that most people already know from experience.

So why hasn't everyone gone HIM already? If HIM is "just common sense", why didn't the world go HIM at the dawn of civilization?

Unfortunately, most people find it very hard to be structured in the way they deal with life from day to day. How many people keep their New Year Resolutions for 12 months? Or stick to a fitness regime? Or take up the musical instrument they always wanted to learn? The habits of a lifetime are very hard to change. It takes terrific will power to change your routine for good, and when the change in routine must be made by an organization rather than an individual, the problem becomes exponentially harder with the number of people involved. This is why people visit gurus, of course - who are just consultants with a rather more impressive job title.

The difficulty is particularly severe when it comes to adopting new process-related techniques, since most people have a pretty good idea of what a process is, and unfortunately the idea they usually have is not helpful. For reasons to do with the history of management science, that again I won't go into here since previous Columns cover them at length, the average business person's understanding of a process could be summed up as "organizing activities into some kind of flowchart".

When it comes to collaborative human work, this is about as wrong as you can get. Anyone that has tried (and I sympathize) to create process diagrams for what HIM calls "human-driven processes" is likely to start seeing death as a quick release - and it gets even worse if you try to use such diagrams for managing the work itself.

So how can you use your own watch to tell the time? Surely there must be a way to change the way you work, and make a step change in your own organization's productivity, however deeply embedded current practices are.

Guru in a box

What you need is a guru in a box, and the place to look is your laptop. The great benefit of office software, and software generally (if designed with a decent user interface), is that you don't need to become an expert in order to change the way you do things. Spreadsheets are the classic example - they opened up a world of financial analysis to people who would never have dreamed of studying statistics - and the productivity benefits that come with a **Human Interaction Management System** (HIMS) have been compared to those that came with spreadsheets.[ii]

These days, of course, new software is not usually installed on your laptop, but rather available via your Web browser. HumanEdj, for example, is available as a pure cloud application requiring

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no plug-ins or downloads. You use your Web browser to create templates for "Plans" (i.e., processes), then make actual Plans from the templates in order to do work. In each Plan there are a number of Stages in which people do their work in a structured fashion, recording information along the way in documents or form fields, and in some cases invoking automated processes to do more routine tasks. The owner of each Plan is easily able to support and control the work as it is carried out, since they (and everyone else) can see what is happening as it happens. The user interface is so simple that the software is not even supplied with a user guide, just an API for system integrators who need to know how to connect to the internals.

This is what people need, isn't it - no consultants or gurus, and no learning. The thing about software is that it doesn't give you much choice. You have to use it the way it was designed, which if it was designed according to helpful principles, means you adopt its paradigm without making the conscious choice to do so.

Take away

There is still a choice to make, of course, but it's a fairly simple one, and comes down to sink or swim. As everyone knows, the world of work is changing for good. So the question everyone must ask themselves is this - will you be part of the old guard, or the new wave?

If it's the latter, going HIM is more likely to mean a new bookmark in your browser than an army of consultants in your office. And I don't suppose too many people will complain about that.

Author

Keith Harrison-Broninski has been regarded as an IT and business thought leader since publication of his book "Human Interactions: The Heart And Soul Of Business Process Management" (Meghan-Kiffer Press, 2005 - "a must read for Process Professionals and Systems Analysts alike", BPM Group). 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.

Conference organizers around the world regularly invite Keith to give keynote lectures to business, IT and academic audiences at national conferences, most recently in Poland, India, the Netherlands, the UK, Finland and Portugal.

Keith is CTO of Role Modellers, whose mission is to develop understanding and support of human-driven processes - the field that Keith has pioneered. Role Modellers' software product, HumanEdj, leads the industry in computerized support for innovative, collaborative human work.

Keith stays active as a business consultant and software architect, via which activities he continues to refine and extend HIM theory.

More information about Keith and his work is available online (http://keith.harrison-broninski.info).

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[i] human-interaction-management.info
[ii] http://www.rolemodellers.com/information_age.htm

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