

Human Processes Keith Harrison-Broninski

We are all consultants

In my last Column, I argued for increased transparency in the decision-making processes used by the public sector, on the basis that we would then at least allow us to understand what lies ahead - then whatever we might feel about it, at least we'd be better prepared.

However, this is only half the story. Increasingly, public sector decision-making processes are starting to involve members of the public. In an age of austerity, governments across the world seek to engage more closely with the communities they serve, recognizing that the public represents a new source of value. To illustrate, the Bank of England measures the value of volunteer effort in the UK as somewhere between £200 billion and £1 trillion per annum, figures that at face value appear to raise the economic status of the third sector above healthcare, defense and pretty much everything else.

To help realize this value, initiatives such as Community-Wealth.org (<http://community-wealth.org>) and The Next System Project (<http://thenextsystem.org>) seek to devise, measure and disseminate practical strategies for community-based action. To help put these strategies into action, new tools such as Town Digital Hub (<http://towndigitalhub.info>) and Textocracy (<http://www.textocracy.org>) are emerging from the social sector.

An interesting example is Participatory budgeting (PB, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory_budgeting). Used with success since 1989 in Brazil, by 2015 over 1500 instances of PB had been implemented across five continents. In the last few years PB has spread to Canada, India, the US, and is now starting to take root in the UK with adoption by a major city in the cards for later this year. The Wikipedia description of PB outlines the following basic steps:

1. Community members identify spending priorities and select budget delegates
2. Budget delegates develop specific spending proposals, with help from experts
3. Community members vote on which proposals to fund
4. The city or institution implements the top proposals

This brief description might make it seem that you could capture a PB process using a BPMS or CMS, but try to roll out a PB process defined by such a means and it will immediately snag in a tangle of unforeseen loops and exceptional cases, as well as failing to capture the key drivers and outcomes. Despite the high level summary above, PB is in fact based on the 5Cs regularly discussed in this column: **Commit, Contribute, Compensate, Calculate and Change.**

In other words, PB is not a step-by-step process at all, but rather a collaborative human process dependent on multiple stakeholders, whose inherent complexity means it cannot be modelled or implemented using a technique such as BPMN. Try to do so, and the real process will simply end up taking place outside the system - i.e., the system will end up delivering cost but no benefit.

Under the changing models of government emerging everywhere, new forms of process are taking center stage - collaborative human processes, whose key players are not recompensed via salaries or procured from consultancy firms . Rather, the players are all of us, and we give our input free of charge since we have a direct interest in the conclusions reached. In this new world, we are all consultants.

Author



Keith Harrison-Broninski is a consultant, writer, researcher and software developer working at the forefront of the IT and business worlds. Keith wrote the landmark book "Human Interactions: The Heart And Soul Of Business Process Management", described by reviewers as "the overarching framework for 21st century business technology" and "a must read for Process Professionals and Systems Analysts alike". Keith founded Role Modellers (www.rolemodellers.com), whose company mission is to develop understanding and software support of collaborative human work processes, the field Keith pioneered with his work on Human Interaction Management. For more information about Keith, see <http://keith.harrison-broninski.info>.