

Human Processes Keith Harrison-Broninski

The Hidden Teams behind the Swim Lanes

I often quote John Seely Brown: "Processes don't do work, people do." However, generally the people who operate the swim lanes in your processes do not work in isolation, so it might actually be more appropriate to say, "Processes don't do work, teams do."

So, I thought it might be helpful to write a few words in this Column about how to ensure that the teams who operate your processes work effectively. In particular, there are three things which make a huge difference and which any organization can put in place with low cost:

1. Hyper-productive teams
2. Communities of Practice (CoPs) for the various skill sets required to operate the processes
3. Centre of Excellence (CoE), to help people make best use of the CoPs

Hyper-productive is a term for teams that manage to adopt into daily practice the characteristics of tiger teams, war rooms, and other effective emergency tactics. Any team can become hyper-productive if led appropriately and there are no personal/technical barriers. At the heart of the approach is the recognition that people are unlike loudspeakers or lawn sprinklers – they can't be redeployed with full flexibility or set running and left alone. For humans, effectiveness relates directly to things like:

1. **Strong relationships within the team** (trust, friendship, kindness, recognition of achievement/effort, and so on) – this comes not only from daily contact between team members such as in stand-up meetings, but also from social occasions and other personal interactions over a sustained period of time which are not purely functional – for example, social outings on an occasional basis.
2. **Strong relationships with stakeholders at multiple levels** – this means building relationships between team members and other parts of the organization, from senior management through to subject matter experts and sites across the organization.
3. **Understanding of, engagement with, and commitment to goals** – take time to explain and reinforce the benefits of your work to team members as well as to other stakeholders, explaining the roadmap and emphasizing that

success is dependent on acceptance, patience, and collaboration from all parties.

4. **Manageable workload** – the above roadmap must be paced so that team members as well as business stakeholders have time to participate fully, providing key feedback at each point, even if they have workload issues – for example, do not attempt to discuss all areas of work at every meeting, but rather present the highest priority information for review and action.
5. **The ability to prioritize** – establish a clear and unified chain of command for prioritization decisions, making sure that all concerned know each other well and are not forced to compare unrelated issues for urgency or importance.

As well as building hyper-productive teams, it is vital to address the sharing of knowledge including best practices, so that people work more consistently and there is reduced risk of disruption or knowledge loss if people leave or go off sick. There are two aspects to this, both of which should be owned and led by permanent rather than outsourced staff:

1. Establish Communities of Practice (CoPs) to foster, agree, maintain, and share knowledge and best practices on areas like:
 - a. Data sources, governance, and sharing
 - b. Product commercialization
 - c. Stakeholder management
 - d. Horizon scanning (for useful input into R&D)
 - e. Specialized technical topics
 - f. And many more.
2. Create a Centre of Excellence that reaches out to the business to direct people to knowledge in CoPs on a case by case basis, guiding them through use of this knowledge as needed.

None of the above is expensive, but it makes a huge difference both to productivity and to morale – which means it will make a correspondingly huge difference to how effectively your processes are implemented.

AUTHOR

Keith Harrison-Broninski is a writer, researcher, consultant, and software designer. His book "Human Interactions" (2005) was 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 the social enterprise [Role Modellers](#), a Gartner BPM Cool Vendor that provided the UK National Health Service with NHS GATHER, an award-winning cloud service for large-scale collaborative innovation in healthcare. With Royal Society of Arts, NHS, and council

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