

Human Processes Keith Harrison-Broninski

We are all Politicians

In my January 2015 Column, [Minutes = Weeks](#), I asked why meetings are often conducted so badly - to be specific, the part where you all confirm what you agreed. I outlined a simple and cost-free change to meeting practice that results in a huge improvement to the efficiency and effectiveness of your collaborative activity.

In this Column I'd like to return to the subject of meetings - this time to look at another aspect that is often conducted badly, and is even more likely to diminish your chances of a successful outcome, namely the work required beforehand. I don't mean the work required by individuals to prepare their inputs - most meeting invitations identify the required inputs, together with the people responsible for preparing them. Rather, a more common problem is a failure to identify all the people and organizational groups who may have an interest, ensure that the right people are included, and (here's the key aspect) conduct any preliminary discussions required to make the meeting a success.

For most everyday meetings there is no need for such extensive stakeholder management beforehand. However, for many critical meetings, where key decisions need to be taken, and which typically include people with varied interests, ensuring that people arrive ready to agree the way forward - for example, having discussed requirements and commitments with their own stakeholders - is essential but often omitted.

The reason these key precursor interactions are often poorly understood is that the process of which such activities form a part is full of loops and exceptional behavior. You certainly cannot model it as step-by-step control flow using a technique such as BPMN. It is in fact a human collaborative process, for which the appropriate modelling technique is much simpler but at the same time less well understood. As often discussed in this Column, human processes can be captured and then managed very easily using just a spreadsheet, with the following Columns:

- **Goal** - the distinct aims you are working together to achieve
- For each Goal, the **Stakeholders** with a definition of the **Role** that each Stakeholder plays
- For each Stakeholder in a Goal, the **Contributions** that they make

Any less information than this will leave you unable to manage the necessary interactions. You can add more information of various kinds, but in many cases the above simple structure is all you need. In some cases you may find it helpful to use a tool to manage the work, but this will be nothing like a BPMS - for example, my own current work with the Royal Society of Arts is a solution ([Town Digital Hub](#)) to help manage human processes on a city-wide scale, processes that include a large percentage of citizens, such as for wellbeing, participatory budgeting and community wealth creation.

Returning to the subject of meetings, for the largest and most critical meetings, although their ostensible purpose may be to take key decisions, a successful outcome depends on understanding that such decisions are only rarely taken during the meeting itself. Generally people arrive knowing what their own decision will be. So, for the organizer, successful collaboration means aligning these personal decisions before the meeting even starts. Politicians know this in their bones and it is fundamental to how they operate. Just as [we are all consultants](#), with respect to key decision-making meetings, we are all politicians - so must learn to operate like them.

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>.