

Human Processes Keith Harrison-Broninski

Collaborate has 5 Cs

My last Column for BPTrends, "Discovering Collaboration" (June 2015, www.bptrends.com/human-processes-discovering-collaboration), discussed how collaboration rests on understanding and managing five basic aspects of human work:

1. **Teams**, to assign and accept roles and responsibilities
2. **Communications**, to create and support action
3. **Knowledge**, to maintain and share information in a useful way
4. **Time**, to target effort towards goals and measure its effectiveness
5. **Plans**, to discuss and update them as circumstances change

These are the five fundamental principles of human collaborative work - and you need them all, but that's often all you need. Last time I looked at how one can start to analyze collaborative business processes by identifying:

- The goals of the work
- Who has an interest in achieving each goal
- How they will work together to do so – i.e., who is producing and who is consuming, and what is being produced/consumed, to help achieve each goal

The above starting point addresses the first two of the principles, **Teams** and **Communications**. As I indicated last time, a fully-featured collaboration plan will include more information. In this column I will look at all five of the principles in more detail, and discuss how each one is used in a collaboration plan.

I'll also switch to a handy mnemonic for the principles, the 5 Cs - **Commit, Contribute, Compensate, Calculate, and Change**.

1. COMMIT

This is about team building. For a diverse set of organizations and individuals to work together effectively, they must each sign up not only to play a specific role (or roles) themselves, but also to work equably with other team members who are playing different roles. Each player also needs to understand the goals that the team as a whole is attempting to achieve, and which of these goals they personally should help achieve.

In concrete terms, a collaboration plan is made up of Roles and Goals. Each Role is assigned to a person (who may represent an organization) and has an interest in certain of the Goals. For example, if I sign up to be the Communications Manager

for Programme XYZ, I need to fulfil my own duties, accept that others such as the managers of specific work streams will make decisions on matters outside of my remit, and understand for which of XYZ's goals I should help spread awareness.

2. CONTRIBUTE

This is about communication. Much of the information that people exchange every day with each other is social - and while this is important for working relationships and for human well-being generally, often it doesn't contribute directly to achieving goals. We can learn from animals here, most of whose communications have evolved to achieve a specific intended effect as quickly as possible. If we want to also achieve goals in an efficient manner, then we need to send messages that help the team as a whole move towards an agreed goal of the work.

In concrete terms, people use Roles in a collaboration plan to send messages that help achieve a Goal of the plan. For example, a message may contain Contributions agreed in advance, that are then used by others to complete their own Activities. As a Communications Manager, I might send colleagues some example text that they can adapt when explaining the program to the business.

3. COMPENSATE

This is about recognition of the work that people do. In collaborative work, it can be easy to overlook how much time and effort people are putting in, especially when much of the most critical work is intangible - ideas, discussions, introductions, presentations, networking, explanation, reassurance, feedback, reviews, and so on. Compensation does not have to be financial, and often this is not expected, but it is vital at least to let people know that their efforts are valued. A particular aspect of this is to record concrete outputs in a way that maximizes benefits from the work that they represent - for example, to make documents available to an appropriate audience, making sure that they are attributed appropriately to all the contributors.

In concrete terms, value can be assigned to each Contributions of a Role in a collaboration plan. Value can be financial and/or descriptive. It is also useful to assign to some Deliverables a Likelihood (which if less than 100% alters the expected value) as well as an Impact (since some Deliverables may be of low value in themselves but essential as an input to higher value Deliverables). The slide set that I produce for explaining aspects of the program might have a low value in itself but be essential to obtain high value sponsorship from key people in the business.

4. CALCULATE

This is about using time effectively. Everyone has too much to do! So we cannot assume that we will ever complete all the work assigned to us - and there is a particular danger in trying to do so, since the temptation is to cherry-pick the quick and easy activities (which may not be the most important) and leave the high value "Elephant Tasks" for some mythical day when there is enough time to make a start on them. To avoid this trap, we should all manage our time, not out tasks, and focus on the activities that matter the most - calculating dispassionately how best to use the limited time we have.

We can measure the importance of Activities using the value of their Deliverables as discussed above, noting that some Contributions may have negative value - if they represent a cost, for example, or an undesirable outcome (in which case the Likelihood becomes important). Activities with a high negative value are as important as those with a high positive value, since the cost won't go away by ignoring it - and it may be a cost that is critical to success, such as the hire cost for a conference venue or the fee of the keynote speaker.

5. CHANGE

Finally we come to the hardest aspect of collaborative work - dealing with change, not only within the team but also external. It is all too easy to carry on working towards goals that have become outdated, and all too hard to be aware of changes in the environment that affect current work (and possibly even render it obsolete). In both cases, it is essential to adapt in a timely fashion - even if that means recognizing that much of what has been done so far is now redundant. There is no good throwing good money after bad, and usually the money is not all "bad" anyway - lessons are always learned, especially if you follow the advice above and compensate people for their work by publishing it in a way that others can make use of.

Suppose for example that another department starts a new program to address similar aims to ours. It is not sensible to bury our heads in the sand and effectively go into competition - rather, we should engage with them, learn from each other, and explore what opportunities there are for synergy. The first approach is likely to damage both parties (for example, with regard to obtaining funding), whereas the second is likely to make the work of both more effective (for example, by pooling resources or addressing complementary problems).

That's the basics - Goals, Roles, Activities, Contributions, Value, Likelihood, and Impact. If you're familiar with project planning, you'll recognize that the emphasis of collaboration planning is quite different. You might think of it as deeper - more concerned with fundamental questions such as why, what, where and how rather than the conventional task management questions of who and when.

There is more - for example, many situations involve more than 1 collaboration plan, so it is necessary to deal properly with their interactions. It may also be critical to understand the complementary personality traits that make up an effective team and, although most collaboration plans are long-running (and some never end) to deal with mundane matters such as deadlines. However, for now let's set such aspects aside and ask: how do the basic elements of collaboration, the 5 Cs, work in practice?

In my next Column, I will show how a new initiative (**Town Digital Hub**, www.towndigitalhub.net) that is transforming the delivery of public services in the UK uses collaboration plans to capture and support complex work processes across multiple organizations. Stay tuned!

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, 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>.

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