

Three Jobs I'd Like

Most times I'm happy being a consultant. I get hired to visit an organization, listen to a description of a problem they face, and offer some advice on how to improve the situation. In some cases I work with the organization to help effect an improvement, but in most cases, at least recently, the organization has a team that actually does the work, and my involvement begins and ends with advice.

Every so often, however, I begin to think it would be fun to have a full-time job with an organization and deal with the organization's problems on an ongoing basis. When I think that way, I usually proceed to think in terms of a job that I'd like. When I went through the exercise the other day, I came up with three jobs that I thought would be worth a try. One is well-established, but the other two would require an effort just to define and to convince senior management that the job was needed.

The first job I considered is **Process Analyst**. This is a job I've actually held and that most companies have. They may term it Business Analyst, or Business Process Improvement Specialist, Six Sigma Black Belt, or whatever, but basically it involves doing what I often do as a consultant – considering specific problems and defining improvements. I wrote a book, [Business Process Change](#), to describe the knowledge and skills required to perform the job. The difference is that if I worked inside an organization I'd have the pleasure and the frustration of trying to go from initial problem analysis to an improved situation – I'd have to take responsibility for actually getting results. Some process change efforts can be very challenging, but, as I say, I've done quite a bit of it, and it's usually more about the politics of any given organization than it is about understanding what's wrong with the process and what would improve it.

The second job is a bit less common. It involves working with the senior management team to improve the organization's overall performance. Let's term this job: **Corporate Performance Improvement Advisor**. This usually involves considering large-scale processes like a supply chain, or a set of jobs to implement a new product line or service. I can remember working for a large bank, for example, when it wanted to roll out ATM machines in the Seventies. We began by asking what existing jobs would be changed and what jobs would be created. Teller and Branch Managers' jobs, for example, were changed, as were jobs in Accounting. Jobs were created to care for the machines, reload them as needed, and to answer questions when customers called with problems. Having defined some 20 on-going jobs that would be impacted by the introduction of ATM machines, we set about describing each of the actual processes that would need to change and developing training

interventions to assure that the employees would be ready to perform in new ways once the ATM machines were installed and ready to be used. The effort took a little over a year, required close cooperation between process people, the branch management organization, corporate training, IT people and hardware people and resulted in the banks successful roll-out of its new ATM services.

In another bank, on another occasion, we considered what would change if loan approval was removed from the branch banks and placed in a newly created business loan center. It turned out that many branch managers justified their jobs, at that time, primarily, by their loan analysis and approval work. In the new environment, with the responsibility for loan approval gone, sales and the acquisition of new business became much more important and managers needed to acquire or emphasize new skills to thrive.

The Corporate Performance Improvement Advisor might simply be the head of a BPM group, someone who is prepared to focus on big issues. Or he or she might have something to do with Business Architecture. It certainly helps to have a good overview of how the various business processes work together to tackle either of the bank problems I just described.

Note in passing that a traditional focus on an organization chart would not help much. You need to know how work actually flows in the organization to know the downstream consequences of creating or eliminating specific upstream activities. Similarly, to be effective, you need to report to someone who is high enough in the organization to command all of the groups involved at all stages of the flow – otherwise you find yourself trying to coordinate across different organization silos, and politics becomes a big and unpleasant part of the Corporate Performance Improvement Advisor's job.

Finally, the job I haven't had, that probably doesn't exist at any organization at the moment – at least in the way I imagine it – and that I'd most like to try: **Process Management Education Specialist** -- for an organization that was serious about making all its managers into performance improvement experts. I've become a bit concerned, maybe even obsessed, with the fact that performance improvement consultants work with organizations, help implement major new process improvement projects, and then watch as organizations revert, after a period, to old ways of doing things. Performance change is often considered a one-time improvement. To my mind, performance change, like process improvement, should be an ongoing task of every manager in the organization.

Within the process community, as a whole, the group that seemed to understand this best was the Six Sigma community. When organizations were most enthusiastic about Six Sigma – in the Eighties and Nineties – they set improvement goals for all division managers and had bonuses depend on meeting improvement goals. I've always believed that performance or process improvement is a basic responsibility of every manager. The problem is simply that most managers don't recognize or accept that responsibility. Most managers are focused on meeting specific goals – as if things were already as well-defined as they were going to get and the only thing that was important was to meet defined goals: to do as well this quarter as we did last quarter or a little better.

I'd like to work with managers to help them think about process improvement as part of their jobs. Of course just telling managers something doesn't necessarily have any impact. It wouldn't be worth trying something like I propose without the

explicit support of the CEO and some consequences for compliance or non-compliance. Given support, however, there are lots of things one could do to help managers provide better process improvement.

Too many people think of process improvement in terms of analyzing specific processes and changing them. There's just as much improvement to be had by simply assuring that existing process plans are met. Many employees don't think of their jobs as parts of processes – they don't think of how their work depends on inputs from upstream activities or as having consequences on downstream activities. Few have good data on how their job efforts affect flow. Few get specific feedback, or experience consequences, tied to their job performance. All this needs to be made explicit – and that's a management task.

In addition to calling attention to how things are related, gathering data and providing lots of feedback, there are many other tasks managers need to focus on – tasks that are well defined by process concepts that most managers don't understand very well. For example, a manager should always identify the individual who performs a given task best, and have a good idea about the difference between best performer and average performer on each task. These measures – the difference between average and best -- give a manager a quick idea of the savings in terms of materials, time and cost that could be realized for each given task.

At the same time a manager ought to have a clear picture of the overall process and should routinely play around with different possible arrangements of tasks to try to imagine breakthrough changes in the process.

Managers are the real source of process improvements, if they are trained and motivated to constantly improve their unit's performance. Providing the focus and the tools is a job for a management process improvement education specialist and it would be fun to explore just how best to accomplish this at some company that hasn't previously considered the possibilities.

Every company faces a constant pressure to improve and change, to deal with changes in processes and technologies, with customer tastes, and regulatory environments. Every company has lots of jobs that directly or indirectly involve a knowledge of how business processes can be improved. I'm happy consulting – I get to maintain a broad overview of the process movement. But every so often I think it would be fun to take on some specific work and try to make a real difference at a specific company. And when I have such dreams, I think in terms of jobs – existing or to be created – that I would like to try for awhile. I've outlined the three that play the largest role in my thoughts at the moment, but I'm sure with time other possibilities will emerge. Process work keeps changing.

AUTHOR



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