BPTrends COLUMN

Human Processes Keith Harrison Broninski|

Collaboration = community

I've been writing for BP Trends since March 2005, about when my first book "Human Interactions" was published. At that time, I believed that the entire process world would be transformed by extending traditional workflow not only to enterprise level (the BPM vision) but also to work that was genuinely collaborative, rather than communication dressed up as collaboration – in other words, to work in which traditional command-and-control structures of management were replaced by the structured coordination of shared interests as they evolve over time. What I've come to realize since then is that such work only ever truly exists in one area of life.

My own consulting work generally focuses on large transformation projects. Many of these include organizations exclusively from the private and public sectors, and in these cases there is generally little or no opportunity for collaboration in the sense above. Either there is either a deal to be struck, in which case working relationships are solidified into contracts, or there is a power (such as a company board) with overall control. The governance disciplines resulting from shareholder interests and government policies simply do not allow for emergent collaborative work across multiple organizations.

Other projects however, such as those to help communities take control of local wellness (see www.towndigitalhub.info), include bodies from the social / community / voluntary sector, and here it's another kettle of fish entirely. Third sector organizations have quite different constraints and freedoms to those in the private and public sectors. Even where they are large enough to be organized using what appear to be conventional company structures, both their existence and ability to deliver positive outcomes depends fundamentally on a shifting set of relationships with other organizations, both local and national. In this world no single power is in charge, since there are always players that can simply walk away yet on whom outcomes are dependent.

Hence third sector organizations need to become skilled at collaboration, and are often led by highly networked individuals who mentor their colleagues to develop and use similar abilities. Collaboration in the sense above is the lifeblood of the third sector, and most processes developed by community organizations are deeply collaborative.

Looking back, it now seems to me that I spent the first few years after publication of my first book disproving a part of its thesis only to confirm another. I believed then that a connect-and-collaborate model of work would become a critical supplement to command-and-control for all walks of life, whereas I now believe that in fact this applies only but always to certain organizations and projects. Collaborative processes are fundamental to initiatives with significant players from the third sector.

Further, the importance of third sector is set to increase dramatically in years to come. Everywhere across the world there are now movements to devolve budgets and responsibility to local level, and while much of the power will still be held by local government, the massive potential benefits of this strategy come from integration of the three sectors at a local level. This will create a new set of challenges for public and private sector organizations, who are not as used to or comfortable with collaboration as those in the third sector. Multinationals may even find themselves outplayed by small local players with apparently much less clout – which will make a very interesting story as it unfolds!

Author

Keith Harrison-Broninski is a writer, researcher, consultant, and software designer. He wrote "Human Interactions: The Heart And Soul Of Business Process Management" (2005), 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), a Gartner BPM Cool Vendor that provided the UK National Health Service with NHS GATHER, a cloud service for large-scale collaborative innovation in healthcare. Backed by the Royal Society of Arts, Role Modellers now provides a new cloud service to local government, Town Digital Hub (www.towndigitalhub.info), your one stop shop for better local living.

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Nunc nec enim. Morbi vestibulum. Vivamus egestas nunc et orci. Mauris interdum.

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