

Just Enough Process Management

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It's easy to get caught up in the frenzy of doing something just to do it. We've all seen it happen. Companies who implement full blown quality programs, like Six Sigma, often find themselves lost in a myriad of unfocused green belt projects, unnecessary processes and mountains of paperwork. They did not comprehend the trickle-down impact such an implementation would have on the organization. Does that mean the program is bad? Absolutely not. But its implementation was not tailored to the needs and objectives of the company.

The same can happen with process management. Without a clear assessment of our goals, it's easy to become obsessed with the measuring, monitoring and controlling of processes – simply because we can. To avoid this trap and the unintended consequences that come with it, take a moment to consider if you are implementing just enough or too much process management.

Just Enough Clarity. When launching a BPM effort, you need to understand the “why”. You may hear companies say they're implementing BPM to get to the next level of CMM or attain a certain quality goal. But rarely is improvement itself the goal. Typically the desire for process management originates from a more basic need like cost reduction, additional revenue generation or customer satisfaction. Find out the “why”. It will assist you in developing improvement goals and process targets that are pertinent to the true need of your organization.

Just Enough Change. You can't do it all at once. As the re-engineering craze of the 80's confirmed, attempting full scale organizational change produces more chaos than lasting improvement. So focus your efforts. Identify your core processes – those which produce the outputs that keep you in business. Evaluate where, within these core processes, your organization is feeling the most pain and start your process management effort there.

Just Enough Measurement. Just because it can be measured, doesn't mean it should. Once you've developed your process targets, implement just enough process and/or technology to measure those things relevant to attaining your goals. If your target is to improve customer satisfaction by reducing average delivery cycle time 40%, then you'll get no value from measuring ordering trends. Put just enough measurement in place to assist in improvement and assess success. And remember, the overall benefit gained by implementing the measure must exceed the cost to put it in place.

Just Enough Control. Process management allows standardization of tasks and monitoring to ensure that variability remains within acceptable levels of tolerance. But before you apply that level of control, step back and ask “do I care?” To what level of detail must I control? A simple analogy – if you were creating a process for getting children ready for bed, a step in the process would be “brush your teeth”. So we'd implement just enough control to monitor whether that task was occurring to our satisfaction. Assessing whether they brush starting at the top left and going to the bottom right would be too much. The same applies in business. Before you put monitoring processes in place, evaluate whether the information you gain will provide just enough control to manage the desired process variances.

Ms. Adams is the Managing Partner of Chaosity LLC and specializes in Project Facilitation and Business Process Analysis. As a certified facilitator and quality manager, Ms. Adams works with project teams in a variety of industries to elicit, capture and translate their shared knowledge about processes, products and services into project and design deliverables. Ms. Adams is co-author of the book “Facilitating the Project Lifecycle: Skills & Tools to Accelerate Progress for Project Managers, Facilitators and Six Sigma Project Teams” and a regular speaker at International Facilitator, Quality, Business Process and Project Management Conferences.

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