

Welcome...

...to *TSI Monthly*. Yes, we did take a short summer hiatus and we are back in the groove of trying to provide some germane content that, we hope, is valuable to you.

This month's article addresses a topic near and dear to our heart, mind and soul – process improvement. Specifically, we want to explore the desensitizing that can occur and “numb” us from distinguishing the difference between efficient and archaic processes. This article provides a perspective and a few questions for consideration to help you break out of this pattern.

As always, we welcome your feedback and promise to consider your needs as we continue to evolve this newsletter and our services. If you would like to share your thoughts or have any questions, feel free to send us an e-mail at info@transforming.com.

- The Editors

Heighten Your Process Awareness

- By Dan Feely – Managing Partner, Transforming Solutions, Inc. (www.transforming.com)

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It is becoming increasingly apparent that we (as individuals, a work force and a society) are getting used to broken processes and, as a result, are desensitized to how things should really work in a more efficient world. In fact, we're beginning to expect mediocre or suboptimized processes from most of the people and vendors involved in our work.

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What do you experience?

From a consumer standpoint, maybe you have been involved with some of these processes, that in all likelihood, were neither efficient nor effective:



- ❑ Requesting DSL or additional phone service and getting it connected correctly without having to commit at least a ½ day and a few dozen phone calls to the installer;
- ❑ Bringing your car in for service – and having it fixed correctly within the estimated timeframe and the estimated costs;
- ❑ Going on a vacation that included flying, renting a car, and/or reserving hotel rooms without having to wait in lines or having your special requests forgotten.

From a business perspective, we have come to expect broken processes in these areas, to name a few:

- ❑ A new employee starts – does he/she have a computer set up with a user id, password, e-mail, and all of the necessary applications prior to their start?
- ❑ A new product or service is being defined and deployed – is Marketing, Sales, Customer Service, Call Centers, Billing and IT all on the same page for the successful and seamless deployment?
- ❑ Business/Service/Product Acquisition – have you acquired a group or company? How does the service offering fit and how does the process flow through both organizations in a seamless fashion?

A Process-Centric Perspective

At TSI, we look at “lifecycle” processes as a good beginning point to how processes *should* work. In other words, we define the end-to-end processes for the activities:

- ❑ Employees - beginning when an organization first contacts a Recruit through the time he/she is new employee continuing through all employee job, demographic, family status changes and finally termination;

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- ❑ Customers - when targeting prospective customers through all of the new customer activities continuing through the time it is a mature customer and ex-customer;
- ❑ Orders/Service Delivery - starting with an order from the time it is a proposal, accepted order, fulfilled order and order follow up;

You get the picture now. Take every important component of your business - employees, customers, finances, products/services, vendors and define the lifecycle they go through now. Next, define the processes they should go through.

Start asking questions like:

- ❑ How must our processes operate so we achieve a competitive advantage?
- ❑ To manifest the business strategy, what process improvements are needed?
- ❑ Why do we do some of these tasks we do today?
- ❑ Who benefits from this work?
- ❑ What should we be doing?
- ❑ What hurdles do our customers have to go through to do business with us?
- ❑ Is it a struggle for our vendors to be successful? If so, what barriers can be reduce to enable them to accelerate their turnaround to benefit us?
- ❑ What manual tasks can be better automated?
- ❑ What work can be grouped better to eliminate handoffs?
- ❑ What work can customers or vendors do and get better results?
- ❑ What improvements can we make in the next 10 business days to improve the process?
- ❑ What changes can we make today?
- ❑ What "lines" do we make our customers wait in?

Too often, in many organizations, changes are stalemated by needing to get everyone's buy in. Too frequently, we view these endeavors as an "all or nothing" proposition. What about making one or two simple, but effective changes as a mechanism to generate momentum?

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Recipe for Success

In closing, consider this thought process:

1. Estimate what "pain" is felt by customers, employees or whomever is feeling the pain. This pain should be numbers of complaints, time lost, wasted \$ - some tangible measure that others, especially executive, feel is important;
2. Determine how to align the addressing of process-triggered pain with achieving strategic objectives, greater market share and other high-level, executive sponsored initiatives.
3. Get the participants involved in the process and map out the processes relating to the pain; *Note: you may need an objective facilitator here.*
4. Ask the questions listed above and document answers and suggested improvements;
5. Develop an action plan that defines action, driver and deadlines for the next 30 days;
6. Set a follow up date in one week to see how you progressing. If you are making progress, keep going. If you're stuck, figure out why and fix it.

Sounds simple? It is. It just requires an analytical perspective, discipline, time, and follow through. But it begins with the AWARENESS that things are or are NOT working right to begin with.

Dan Feely (dfeely@transforming.com) is the managing partner for Transforming Solutions (www.transforming.com), a process improvement consulting and training firm in Chicago and Denver. Dan and his partners help organizations improve their performance (i.e., increase profitability, efficiency, effectiveness market share and accelerate growth) by improving their business processes and when necessary inventing new processes.

Dan teaches Process Improvement courses in the Executive Education Departments on behalf of the University of California - Berkeley, Michigan State University - Broad School of Management and Colorado State University in partnership with Orion Development in New York. Dan also serves on the board of William Webb, Incorporated, a litigation consulting and software company. He is also a member of the Executives' Club of Chicago, Chicago Quality Assurance Association and the Chicago Software Process Improvement Network.

HOT LINKS (or, more places we like to surf)

- ❑ **CEO Express** - www.ceo-express.com - Great linking spot for business, national and world news and periodicals.
- ❑ **The May Report** - www.themayreport.com - What's happening in the Chicago e-commerce world.
- ❑ **Harvard Business Review** - www.hbsp.harvard.edu/products/hbr/index.html
- ❑ **Northern Illinois University Football** - www.niu.edu/athletics/football/index.html - Go Huskies!