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Process Maps are for All!

Effective process mapping is a must for operational efficiency!

Key Learnings:

- Review the benefits of process awareness
- Recognize the need to increase process awareness
- Recognize the importance of employees developing the basic skills required to build and interpret a process map.

Any organization is in business to achieve several objectives. While some objectives are unique, some objectives are common to most of them, irrespective of the industry they operate in. Eliminating defects, satisfying customers/ employees and minimizing lead times (right from design, production and delivery) are the common core objectives.

Apart from developing strategies to achieve these objectives, organizations need to focus on other important aspects. They should understand and change underlying processes that cause inefficiencies like customer dissatisfaction, late deliveries, product recall and slow production. Despite making substantial investments to increase capacity and add equipment and resources, some companies end up with such operational inefficiencies. Inevitably, the blame is passed on to employees most of the time.

Increase process awareness

Today with radical changes in thinking, we know operational inefficiencies are not caused by inefficient staff, but by inefficient processes. Hence, for improving inefficiencies and achieving core objectives, organizations must first understand and then change underlying processes that cause inefficiencies.

A process transforms inputs into outputs. Conventionally, a lot of importance was attached to the way employees performed their jobs and the activities they carried out. However, in a process context, the emphasis is more on the outputs a person produces. This shift in emphasis from strict adherence to actual activity taking place to productivity is an efficiency booster. In process terms, it is important that the output is as per specifications and delivered on time. How exactly an employee does his job, how much time he takes or when he performs it is immaterial.

The crucial correlation

When organizations are competing to woo a customer, one of the most crucial differentiators would be their process efficiency. For instance, how an organization transforms market research into product design and development makes a big difference. It also counts how an organization captures prospective customer interest and creates products/services. With inefficient processes, organizations fail to retain customers.



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There is a very clear correlation between an organization's effectiveness and its level of process awareness. Here effectiveness includes product quality, customer satisfaction, profitability and employee well being.

Take for instance, employee morale. When processes are not clear and planned, employees may feel insecure about taking decisions and lose interest in their jobs. Hence, when process awareness in an organization is very low, there is a high level of discontent. Employees are mostly fighting fires, and there are limited support structures. Processes are invented on the hop as new events/incidents/projects occur and this eventually leads to chaos and insecurity. Too few processes thus indicate that work is done the hard way. It gives more room for mistakes, and the organization learns its lessons the hard way.

The other extreme

Then again, there exists a high level of discontent even in organizations that are governed by too many processes. In such circumstances, employees are constrained from taking decisions by process requirements. These include filling up forms and written permissions before taking decisions. There is little room for creativity in such environments. Too many processes often result in unnecessary bureaucracy and this hampers efficiency.

Thereby, organizations should implement sufficient processes such that employees feel secure but not too many to make them feel constrained. There should be ample room for creativity and a healthy amount of management regulation and guidance. This can be done by putting in place optimal processes and ensuring good awareness.

Process maps...a powerful tool!

Process mapping is a vital tool that helps to raise process awareness to achieve better performance.

A process map is a picture depicting how the transformation from inputs to outputs is carried out. It shows the inputs and outputs (described using nouns) and the activities in between (defined using verbs). It also shows inputs and outputs used and produced for each of these activities. It helps to capture and communicate vital information.

There are many more benefits that can be achieved with process maps. They can be used as an everyday tool for employees to get involved with, understand and improve their processes. Hence, it is important that employees develop the basic skills required to build and interpret a process map.

People power

In the book 'Business Reengineering: The Survival Guide, authors Andrews and Stalick stress on the criticality of process ownership. As processes integrate several diverse functions within an organization, process ownership rests with employees. Undoubtedly, the potential for continual growth and performance rests with employees.

Ensuring wholehearted involvement of employees in processes is very crucial. Involving employees is not just about holding regular meetings and sending out newsletters. In the



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process context, it implies assigning responsibilities and ensuring adequate management support and guidance to perform them well.

It is necessary to understand properly the process of involving employees. It does not mean deputing a small team of analysts to learn everything about the organization's processes. Many organizations tend to centralize their process skills with the quality manager. He is expected to perform the impossible task of understanding and documenting everyone's processes and also suggest improvements. This is one of the biggest causes for process problems remaining undetected.

The achievers

Dell Computers is one company that uses its processes wisely, and this has caused its competitors to suffer badly. Its business process model is founded on a strong collaboration throughout its supply chain. Likewise, Harley Davidson is another hugely successful company that has actively worked on processes and withstood the changing business scenario.

Given the fact that customers have an array of choices, organizations need to attract and thrill them with excellent processes. Gone are the days when organizations treated customers with little concern and responsibility. This is the age when all individuals across all levels in an organization should strive to deliver what customers want. Organizations that do not wholeheartedly embrace process improvement and make it an intrinsic part of their culture face a big risk. They may lose to competition, despite being equipped with the best technology, equipment and people resources. So time to understand, map, think and act seriously on your processes!