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I ran across the following article and felt it was timely for a company that I spoke with recently. They had experienced some of these "blunders" and were trying to figure out why their efforts had not met with the success they expected.

We talked about the necessity for top management support and involvement in bringing process improvement into an organization. The need for you and your management team to have a solid foundation and a common language - so communicating with your people is easy. It is critical that you have a deep understanding and, most importantly, provide knowledgeable support of what you are asking your people to do.

The Number One Blunder in Process Improvement and What to Do About It

If Paul Nutt is right in his assertion that two-thirds of all business decisions are based on failure prone tactics, think of your last four decisions. If even two of them made a positive difference, then, you've beaten the odds!

The truth is, the main reasons a business can't design and implement responsible and effective improvement programs aren't that mysterious. In fact, a review of current literature shows that, in the aggregate, there are probably three characteristics to improvement programs that have fallen short of the mark.

They are:

- A failure to obtain not only top management's support but its involvement,
- A failure to identify and concentrate on those processes that matter and
- A failure to accurately define a Business's desired State before beginning a program that alters its current state.

Okay, so what's the value of knowing the origin of a problem if solutions are so plentiful? Just this; **If a common thread can be identified that clarifies or otherwise mitigates the source of a problem, then a reasonable and effective solution to the problem can usually be identified as well.** Let's investigate that idea for a moment.

Senior Management Support

The involvement of senior management and the cooperation of an organization's culture is generally achieved through the specific exchange of information. For the greatest effect, management must repeatedly and forcefully explain, endorse, and encourage improvement efforts. At the same time, to garner and insure their cooperation, members of the organization must be informed by management of the specific benefits of process improvement activities as well as the negative outcomes resulting from failure. But, how can the right information be identified? And, how can both factions be convinced of the validity of their claims?

Concentrate on Processes that Matter Most

The second source of error stems from a business's failure to identify which processes matter the most and therefore where the greatest effort toward improvement should be exerted. Research has shown that improving just any process isn't sufficient, rather, that for the biggest gains in effectiveness, efficiency and contribution, only those processes that have a prominent place in the value chain should be considered. But, how do you know which processes those are, what their contribution is and what effect a change in each might produce?

Knowing the End from the Beginning

Finally, the third source of error lies in the inability, reluctance or unwillingness of a business to pinpoint just where it wants to go before it leaves where it is. As an old sage once quipped, "If you don't know where you want to go, any road will do!" Unfortunately, that's usually the pattern that develops when no destination is specified in advance. So, how can a business determine where the best destination might be, or if that destination is even obtainable with the resources at hand? Good question.

So, what do all of these questions have in common? One thing. In every case, **the answer lies in the collection, evaluation, and dissemination of specific information regarding the business, its processes and the impact of change.** But, it's not that simple either. A business embarking on Process Improvement has to be able to determine the answer to each question in a manner that is consistent with its aims while simultaneously considering a wealth of alternatives any one of which could spell the difference between success and failure.

Article written by processmodel, inc. and can be found at www.processmodel.com