

March 17, 2008

If you are like me, I find that not a day goes by without hearing yet another buzzword, at work, on the Internet, at retail establishments, even at home – my 13 year old is a master at exposing me to new and cryptic terms that I think only he understands.

So when I read the following article, I just had to smile. See if you don't agree that just plain old common sense can help ensure your success when considering real improvements in your organization.

As most of you know, I live by the motto – "Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple is the key to success."

I would love to hear from you about how P Squared can help you fix your processes with some good old "team-based process improvement" common sense!

Forget the Buzzwords: Fix the Process FIRST

by Robert Osborne, ProcessModel, Inc.

Face it – there's a lot of hype about the next "silver bullet" solution, and it comes from many directions.

Methodology and management hype often comes from the gurus who write best-sellers on business strategy, marketing, manufacturing methods or human change management. From "Freakanomics" to "Lean Thinking" to "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team", consultants and "experts" are vying for your attention – and your dollars.

Information technology hype may come from research groups like Gartner/Meta and Forrester Research who work closely with information technology vendors and their clients to define, analyze and promote market segments and products. Also, the solutions and software vendors are publishing "white papers" to educate the market about trends while positioning their products as best of class while the hardware vendors are waiting for you to upgrade your infrastructure to handle the new systems.

Sometimes it feels like a huge conspiracy. The pressure to get on the latest technology or management "fad of the month" bandwagon can be intense when the fear of being "left behind" in the next technology wave is combined with the pressure of economic uncertainty and the competitive challenges of the marketplace.

For example, two current TLAs (three letter acronyms) that possibly DMS (don't make sense) are BPM (business process management) and SOA (service oriented architectures). BPM is touted as a methodology for process improvement with a clear focus on creating computer applications that can be dynamically altered through flexible workflows. At the same time, the promise of SOA is that large business systems will be replaced by Web services with interfaces that allow mixing, matching and hosting on networks. Blah, blah, blah...

At this point, most people, unless they're technology centric, have tuned out, thinking "What does this really have to do with the business challenges I have today?"

Technology advances must be considered for the health and competitive strength of the company, and are crucial for businesses today. However, most people have business departments to run, products to build, services to deliver or customer relationships to manage. They are in the trenches, marketing their own products, conducting R&D, or scheduling manufacturing orders. Many are managing call centers, service teams, order desks or warehouses.

These people have operational problems to solve, and they need to solve them now. They can't afford to wait on a new computer system and the promises of utopia – besides, they've heard it all before.

To keep it SAS (short and simple), I'll suggest that ACS (applied common sense) is in short supply, and often we need to simply FTP (fix the process) before we SPM or WLT (spend piles of money or waste lots of time) on ITS (information technology solutions) or ECS (expensive consulting solutions) that JDW (just don't work), TTL (take too long) and have a poor ROA (return on aggravation).

ACS (applied common sense) and being sure to FTP (fix the process) first are more appropriate than implementing BPM, SOA, ERP (enterprise resource planning), CRM (customer relationship management), or any other large-scale systems application. This is also true whether people are applying Six Sigma, Lean, TOC (Theory of Constraints) or any other methodology approach to improvement.

Buzzwords aside, doing the right thing is more important than continuing to do the wrong thing, or automating to do the wrong thing efficiently. As management guru and author Michael Hammer suggested in his breakthrough article on BPR (business process re-engineering) over ten years ago, don't "pave the cow paths". He's still right.

Problem solving is a day-to-day requirement. The paybacks of fixing processes and eliminating non-value-added efforts are immediate and often substantial. If managers and employees are solving problems and simplifying processes along the way, automation can later be done with the confidence that they'll be speeding up what works – not doing the wrong thing faster. Companies will save a lot of money, hundreds of hours of effort and add a lot of value for their customers by focusing on process improvement first and automation second.

So, FYI, before you start down the path of BPM/SOA/ERP and technology "silver bullets", consider some ACS (applied common sense) and FTP (fix the process) first. Sounds like a TNB (true no-brainer), doesn't it?