

Processes ain't Fortresses

Dirk Engel, info@engel-internet.de, Oct 9, 2022
<https://github.com/dirkengel/>

Once the process instructions are clearly written down, it's easier to streamline each step and the entire sequence. The information can be shared with people and the procedure becomes reproducible. Unfortunately, while processes are obviously helpful, using process definitions can also have some pitfalls.

Example: This summer we took the train to the airport. The originally booked train and its replacement train were canceled, but as experienced travelers we are able to handle that. One last change to finally reach the destination, only ten more minutes to go. We get on the train and find four seats with table right away. Lucky family. A few minutes later the conductor asks us to leave our place, the air condition is out of order but there is a nice, cool carriage at the end of the train. Me: "Ah, sorry, may we stay for eight more minutes, we have to get off the next stop anyway?" He: "No." Me: "?". He: "I have to wrap this red and white barrier tape around the seats." Me: "Eight minutes? We are OK with the climatic conditions and going through the entire train for the remaining short time doesn't make sense anyway." He: "I have to apply the barrier tape. And by the way, nobody but you had a problem with that." So, we ended up with other passengers and lots of suitcases and backpacks in the corridor next to wrapped vacant seats :-)

In my opinion, this is just one of many examples where a process is subconsciously used as *barrier* to hide behind. The process serves as line of defense to which one moves back, shrugs, and says "sorry, that's not me, it's the process that requires my (perhaps weird) action". That's neither reasonable nor the aim of *any* process. A process is always made for the people, not the other way around. Which people? *All* involved stakeholders. In particular, we shouldn't forget the potential multiplicity of *single* stakeholders – in this case the passengers or more general speaking *the users* can be a quite large group. But even taking this into account won't help preventing that a process is used as a shield. Why does this happen at all?

In my *personal theory*, this is the case since processes are typically written as a set of rules. Because of that commandment like style which speaks like a parent figure to our child ego state (transactional analysis), its execution often remains unquestioned. Some of us respond with a free child behavior (these guys who don't care about processes) and some of us respond as adapted child and do whatever the process says without reflecting on the current situation. To avoid switching ego states and speaking to somebody's *child* instead of talking with the *adult*, a simple statement at the beginning of each process definition may help: "*Do not apply this process in situations where it violates common sense. Please report your specific situation so the process can be adjusted accordingly.*" At best, the potential adaptation is made along with a rationale for the change, to satisfy the *adult's* interest in *why*.

My conclusion: Processes ain't fortresses. They are neither set in stone nor are they created to hide behind.