

# Processes ain't Fortresses

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Processes are helpful. Once the instructions on how to do something 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, working with process definitions can also have downsides.

Example: This summer we took the train to the airport. The originally booked train and its replacement train were canceled, but as experienced travelers that's something we are able to handle. One last change to the destination and 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 the next eight 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 warm condition and won't go through the whole train for the remaining short time." He: "I have to apply the barrier tape. Anyway, nobody but you had a problem with it." 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 example of a process that tempts to be used as a *barrier* to hide behind. The process is used as a 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 *the* process. Remember, a process is made for the people, not the other way around. Which people? *All* involved stakeholders. So don't forget about the multiplicity of single stakeholder groups – in this case the passengers or more general speaking the users can be a quite large group. However, this knowledge doesn't help to prevent that a process is used as a shield. Why is it even used that way?

My *personal theory* is that this happens when a process is written as a set of rules. Due to the commandment like style, it often remains unquestioned because it speaks like a parent figure to our child ego state (transaction analysis). 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 one'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.