

Case Study - Process Improvement - Released 26 October 2021

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Okay, welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie, she's for Fulyana Orsborn. This is Inside Exec. Today, we're going to look at a case study that's been sent in to us and we do thank all of you who send in these studies for us. It gives us a chance to think about what we would do in those situations and also a chance for our listeners to share their experiences in these situations as well. You are not alone is the message we want to give you today. This one is about a process improvement. It's something that's very dear to my heart. I spent a lot of years in quality management systems, so I understand this sort of dilemma. So let's have a look at it. I've been in my role for six months. I like the company and the team that I'm in, my colleagues are very professional experienced and good to work with. I believe one of our main processes is letting us down. I don't want to come across as the new person who thinks he knows it all and I don't want to offend anyone, but I also don't want to ignore it. I believe fixing the process will help our efficiency and customer service.

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What's the best way to approach it without upsetting the others? Firstly, it's great that you're working in a new company that you like. I think it is very powerful to have the fresh eyes sometimes when people have been there awhile no matter how good and wonderful they are. You know, things are not seen the way a newcomer would see it. So hang on to that, that's a really good thing. It's great that you believe that your

colleagues, your impressions of your colleagues are professional and experienced, etcetera. Given all of that, it might mean that in the past they have what I'm very sure that in the past they would have worked on different things as well. So maybe your first step might be just a bit of research, a bit of research about how did this process come about, Where is it at, etcetera? I'll tell you what I mean. What I mean is that if that's been reviewed before and this is where they are at, when was it reviewed?

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Why is it at this stage and not more advanced the way you think it should be advanced. The other thing is there might be some limitations. For example, if you think if we automate this bit or if we have a new system to do that and maybe they thought about all of that, but it's a timing thing that they can't do it because to do that, they have to change other systems and there's work being done there, etcetera. So, without making assumptions and without saying, jump to the conclusion that I know how to improve this system, find out what's the, what's the history, what's that process? How does it work? Did you always have that? So talk to the people who own the process or work within the process and find out a bit more about what was done in the past and by doing that research, you might hear people say, oh, this process is so annoying because I can't do that if they only did this so they might have all these ideas already.

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Once you've done all of that and believe there might be

something that you could improve to the extent that you think it should be improved, then that's when you talk about it, it could be that now that I heard about this and this, I still believe we could make incremental improvements until these other obstacles or business, wider issues can be resolved and addressed through technology or whatever it might be. It could be just a straight out budget issue, which means it's still got to be addressed. Maybe it has been addressed and put in the budget for the next financial year, maybe it hasn't. So again, researching is really, really important talking to the right people and the key people and I think people would understand that you are new and you're trying to understand the process as well and not just come in with solutions and then if you've done all of that, then the person that you worked the closest with on that process and let them know what you're thinking as well.

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And then you might get a bit more traction in that sense and you'll get a feel for the organization, timing budgets and appetite for change. Very much agree with all of that. My viewpoint comes from quality management system quality improvement and the basis of those systems is continuous improvement. And that means that processes in general should be reviewed once a year and sometimes more often, sometimes every six months, so that everyone is on an equal standing regardless of how long you've been in an organization when that review process happens. So if this is a process that's not part of a formal quality management system or quality improvement system, then you need to take the sort of approaches that have been talked about already. But I also think that you can approach it from the point of view of using

the fact that you are new and or haven't been there all that long as a starting point saying, look, I know I'm new, I don't understand where this process came from.

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And so to me, there are things that could be better than they are for everybody, but I need to know where it came from first and the history as Fulyana and has talked about, but also to say, I don't want to appear to be the new person who thinks they know everything, but I don't want to let something pass if I think I've got a good idea about it and that says to your team that you're always going to be thinking about what you're doing. And isn't that what you would want with a team member regardless of whether you're in the team or you're the leader of the team, don't you want someone who's constantly looking at how you're doing things and thinking about how you could do them better. So, as a team leader, if someone in my team meeting said that to me, said that to the team, I'd be very happy, I'd be very happy. First of all, they acknowledge that they are new and they might not know all of the background and so they recognize that that's how they're going to be seen. So it takes away an objection, first of all, for anyone that's listening that says, what do they know?

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You know, they're just new already they've said they know they're new. So I can't object to that. I have to listen to the next thing that they've got to say. So they listen to what you've got to say. If you do the disclaimer, first off, then that's out of the way, as an objection. They will hear the next thing you've got

to say and maybe they've been thinking about it as down and saw something different in the process or something that they've tried in the past or something that they couldn't manage in the past didn't have the resources, whatever else it is, but now they might think about it because someone has brought it back to the forefront of their mind, they've been thinking about the doing, rather than how it is done. So you bring them back to think about how these things might happen. In terms of these podcasts, we constantly get information from places who want to offer extra services extra assistance. And oftentimes, as we discussed earlier today, it's something that we thought about in the past and it's just put to one side because we're time poor basically.

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And so we don't have the time to do that then. Yes, we know it would be good. We don't have the time to do it. Yes, there are services out there that could do it for us, but it hasn't floated back up to the surface again. But today something floated back up to the surface. And so we sat down and we said we are at a stage where we need to do this because of what's happened since we talked about it last time, we've got heaps more episodes that are up and out in the world. We know that people learn better one way or another. So, is this a service now that we should think about doing? And the end result was that we agreed that this was something we need to do and we'll use the service that has approached us again about doing it. So it doesn't mean that if you put your hand up now and say this needs to change that you don't ever put your hand up again because the first time you got knocked back down. Yeah. That you just keep doing that review and keep

questioning where you see that there can be improvements, keep that open mind because all sorts of other things take over in priorities and when it comes back to the surface again, it might be the right time.

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Doesn't have to be the right time now, but you do have to say something about it. The other thing to keep in mind is if the process, by the way, I definitely agree with the continuous improvement because nothing is perfect and will ever be perfect unless will continuously improve it. But in looking at the process you might be, it might be you've got to look at it end to end from the beginning all the way through and a lot of processes don't just sit within one part of the organization, It goes across different areas. So the area you're in, you might have seen an improvement opportunity, but if you do it in isolation to other areas, it might cause a problem by improving it in one department that might cause a problem in another. So it's very, very important to do the cross functional process improvement where all areas that touch the process are involved in identifying the issues and the solutions so that they know that's going to or not going to cause a problem, but it's going to cause an improvement for them as well as the other departments that are involved in it.

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It's probably useful to find out whether there is a process for suggesting improvements rather than just going to your boss or going to the team meeting and saying it. There might be an organizational method of suggesting improvement processes

that looks at that umbrella approach rather than the individual team approach. I think that that's all we can think of on this topic because we're both so very focused on continuous improvement. We just see it as something that should be happening and so we encourage you to make that happen in one way or another. But for now I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.