Business Processes and Process Improvement

1.   Introduction

There's much talk around the organisation about 'Business Processes' and 'Process Improvement' and you may wonder how these concepts link with Modern & Flexible Working. This paper explains what Process Improvement is, and how Modern & Flexible Working complements it. You may also find it useful to refer to our Process Improvement Approach where you will find more information and useful tools and techniques to support Process Improvement.

2.   What are Business Processes?

The term 'Business Processes' is used to describe the standard activities you do in your day to day work   (i.e. the steps you follow to perform your job). Process Improvement refers to the activity of reviewing these standard processes and introducing improvements. To be successful, the focus of Process Improvement should be the customer or end user of the service/work being delivered. This could be an internal customer/user, a partner authority/agency or a member of the public.

3.   What's the Connection with Modern & Flexible Working?

Modern & Flexible Working is aimed at improving the way we work for the benefit of the organisation, its staff and the Warwickshire public. It uses a framework model that examines the potential benefits that could result from change in the following areas:

> The Flexible Use of Time
>
> Mobile Working
>
> Hot-Desking
>
> Home-Working

These concepts are fully explained in the Introduction to Modern & Flexible Working.

Process Improvement has the same overall improvement objectives but it starts with confirming the 'real' purpose of the process and the end result it aims to achieve, before involving staff and customers in redesigning the process to improve how it works. The overall aim is to improve efficiency by eradicating the causes of service

failures which lead to delays and negative experiences. This means that Modern & Flexible Working can be regarded as a sub-set of the wider Process Improvement framework.

4. How Process Improvement works

The way in which a Process Improvement review is carried out is very similar to the steps taken to examine and implement a Modern & Flexible Working solution. The steps in a typical Process Improvement review are outlined below, and it may be useful to use these as a cross-check against your Modern & Flexible Working initiative as it progresses:

a. Define your process (the area of work to be examined)

This will include identifying the following:

- the 'real' purpose of the process
- the customers who benefit from the output of the process,
- the people that carry out the process,
- who owns the process,
- what changes are required in the process
- what the environmental constraints are.

b. Understand and analyse the current process

Consider the demand for the process - It will be necessary to understand the volume of demand for the service and how this can change over time so that you can consider how well the current process meets the needs of its users.

Consider the start and end points of the current process and all the activities and tasks in between. This may require the process to be mapped and its overall and component parts to be measured. Ideally measurement should cover:

- **Internal** - Business specific (e.g. response times, operating costs, volume throughput etc.)
- **Output** – Service levels achieved (e.g. accuracy, timeliness, error/defect rates)

- **Outcomes/Customer Satisfaction** - the customer experience and value achieved (e.g. reliability, responsiveness, value for money). During this stage it will be necessary to determine which activities in the process add value and which add cost. It's vital at this stage that the staff that provide the service and the customers that receive it are consulted and involved.

c.   Re-design and improve the process

Again, the people involved in carrying out the process should be involved at this stage, and this would normally be through a number of workshop sessions. The improvement stage will require a re-design of the process with possible improvements falling under the following headings:

- Making the customer central to the process
- Simplifying and reorganising work
- Eliminating delays and/or duplication
- Introducing missing activities/shortcuts
- Improving the management of the process

A measurement framework to enable the performance of the new process to be managed should supplement the improved process design.

d.   Implement the new process

Implementing the process will mean changing the status quo and this may prove to be the most challenging step.

It may be useful to conduct stakeholder analysis of all those who have influence on the change, assessing their power and influence and deciding the best approach to achieve their engagement and buy in.

It is a good idea to start small and try the new solution out to make sure that it achieves the intended changes for staff and customers (i.e. prototype or test the solution). This provides an opportunity for further refinement and encourages greater confidence in the new solution.

It will be necessary to plan the implementation, determining "who" will implement "what" and "when". You may also find it useful to refer to our [Project Management Approach](#)

It is important to involve and communicate with people at all levels before and during the change. The human aspects of the change may well prove to be the most difficult as individuals involved are likely to be influenced by their past experience of change, and may regard the changes as an opportunity or a threat. It is always advisable to consult and, if necessary, engage the HR service in order to effectively manage the human aspects of the implementation of the change.