
TestCon EU

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Process Change is Culture Change: How to Make Improvements Stick

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About Doug Hoffman

- Consulting in SQA for over 30 years
- Writing automated tests for a long time even before that
- Founding member, past President of AST
- Particular interest in test automation and test oracles



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Defining a Process

The series of activities followed to get a particular result.

- *Often described by WBS, flowchart, or state machine*
- *Generally comprised of people, activities, and work products*
- *The process exists even when not documented*
- *Usually the documented processes differ from the processes being performed*
- *It changes when a better process is developed*

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Defining a Culture

The customary beliefs and social norms held by an interacting group with something in common.

- *We exist in multiple cultures (e.g., family, friends, church group, or work group)*
- *Different groups have different cultures and different norms (even within a company or department)*
- *The cultures exist even when haven't thought about it*
- *Cultures evolve in the face of a changing world*

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Why Change A Process?

- Necessary response to changes
 - Environment
 - Technology
 - Customer requirements
- We cannot improve anything without changing something
- Organization's changing demands
- Exceptions must be reconciled

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Changes Vs. Improvements

- Most changes are not improvements
- Avoid unnecessary changes
- Many improvements are not worth the cost
- There are limits to how much change an organization can take all at once
- People prefer the status quo

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Process Involves Culture (And Culture Drives Processes)

- Participants roles in the process overlap at the interfaces between people
- People interact during processes
- Interactions have certain routines
- Interactions reflect social norms
- These social norms are the basis of *how* things get done

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Preparing to Change a Process

- Identify the real process and document it
- Identify the stakeholders and what each needs
- The 6 W's in the process
- Figure out why the process is this way – How did they get here?
- Immerse yourself in the culture (at least mentally) – become part of it

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Owners of the Process

- Usually a manager is the official owner
 - Has to at least accept the new process
 - Has the power to dictate but not really change it
- The participants are the real owners
 - They have to live with the process
 - If not owners, they will revert on the first exception
 - Things change; they will make exceptions or change the process when necessary

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How Should We Approach Planning a Process Change?

- Keep an open mind
- Plan thoroughly before expressing a plan
- Draw conclusions only after extensive investigation
 - Avoid assumptions – find out for sure
 - Identify the "land mines" and "third rails"
 - Gather evidence and opinions from representatives of all stakeholders

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What We Need to Know to Change a Process

- Information: read the docs and talk to people
 - Docs may be for management
 - People doing the job really know about it
- Use diplomatic interviewing
- Identify what's working and what's not
- Learn the current paper and real processes
- Start planning from the current real process
- Recognize that we can't fix everything
- Not everything that isn't right needs fixing now

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Changing the Process

- Get input from all favored stakeholders
 - Identify the opinion makers (real power to make changes)
 - People who live the process are the ones who really know it
- Evolve the current sketch with them
- Identify and emphasize things that are working
- What should be improved?
 - Areas of conflict
 - Things that are not working
 - Changes that are meaningful, impactful, effective, logical
 - Where participants see benefit to themselves
- Circle back so stakeholders see the changes being proposed and can provide feedback

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Identify the Parts of the Process that Need Changing

- Talk to people
 - Focus on the paper, not the people
 - Listen – silence is your friend
 - Be a diplomat (you don't know their sensitivities)
 - Let them suggest the changes
- Ask
 - What would you change if you were in charge?
 - What's wrong in that other department?
 - What would happen if ...?
 - What really bugs you about the process?

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Diplomatic Interviewing

- Focus on the paper, not the people
- "The other guy" approach
- Make people feel safe
- Use silence to get more complete, real answers
- Let people suggest changes (guide them when needed)
- Praise what's working
- Plant the seeds of change

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What Should be Changed?

- Real improvements
 - The people who are changing must see the benefit
 - Meaningful, effective, understandable, logical
- What not to change
 - Very small things
 - Too little benefit
 - Too high a cost
 - Too much at once (stagger the changes)

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Changing the Culture

- Culture change happens from within
 - Participants in the process are the ones who need to shift
 - The culture changes are reflected in changes in behavior
- People need to decide to change
 - Education – why the change is an improvement
 - How the improvement benefits them specifically
- They must buy into (own) the changes
 - Not only agree with the changes, but are invested in them
 - Easiest way to get buy-in is to have them come up with the changes
- Owning the process means they must have the ability to make changes to it

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How We Make Changes Stick

- Circle back to check the process as it evolves
- Let people see their part of the new process
 - Where possible, get some of their changes in
 - Use their language
 - Let them know you give them credit for coming up with the improvements
 - Let (make) them own the process
 - Let them know that all processes evolve, they can and will change this one when it needs changing
- Make sure it is not "your process" (e.g., Doug's)
 - The first time it breaks is the last time they use it
 - It will break at some time (exception or time to change it)

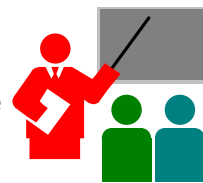
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Conclusions

- It is most effective to evolve the process
- Let the stakeholders suggest the changes
- Allow (make) the participants own the process
- Be diplomatic with the stakeholders
- Learn what is working and not from the participants in the process



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