



# PROCESS OR NO PROCESS? THAT IS THE QUESTION

SHOULD THE PROCESSES THAT KEEP A COMPANY IN CHECK TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER EMPLOYEES? OR SHOULD EMPLOYEES BE GIVEN MORE OF A FREE REIGN TO IMPROVISE. HANAN NAGI, FOUNDER AND CEO OF HNI TRAINING & COACHING, REVEALS THAT, AS WITH MOST THINGS IN LIFE, THE KEY IS BALANCE.

 Although I spent years working on processes analysis and improvement projects including quality and excellence certifications in both general business and Human Resources, I decided, before writing this article, to go online, check out relevant business and academic websites to see what are the latest trends, researches and conclusions related to one of the most controversial questions in business; do processes really suffocate or diminish people's creativity? And if yes, what to do? Businesses need processes.

## The story

A business owner (we'll call him Mr John) came to me for executive coaching as he was facing a business problem and needed some guidance. He was the owner and managing director of a big industrial factory

with a large number of employees. He had always believed in the power of processes. He had made sure that everything was documented. There were policies, procedures and processes for every department, service and production. He had a top management team who also functioned as business advisors and whom had in their hands the control to decide as and when a process needed to be changed. Everything was working according to the plan. He claimed that hardly any mistakes had been made and everyone was happy.

Mr. John's son, let's call him Nic, moved to the Gulf after he had sold his small media and advertising business. It was hoped that this would enable him to become a managing director of the company when the day came and his father decided to retire.

Nic, a hardcore right brainer, turned the world of his father upside down in less than three months.

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John, the father, had the popular approach: if something isn't broken, why fix it? The business had been going very well, surviving the financial crisis, with very few mistakes or problems.

Nic explained to his father that having taken a brief moment to talk to the middle level staff, by offering them the possibility of suggesting ideas and acting away from rigid processes, he received two fantastic suggestions which could not only increase the production and lessen the manpower efforts, but also improve the profit within weeks. Implementing those ideas, however, would mean not following processes thoroughly and would mean giving more autonomy to these staff to take decisions as and when required.

## The trap

Many big organisations start by forming a team that is responsible for designing the processes, then another team to analyse and suggest improvement to those processes and possibly a third team, internal and/or external, to audit those processes and eventually send them back to the first team to modify them. It is common view that either too little or too much involvement of the employees

implementing those processes will ultimately result with them dreading the process and dragging their heels with the issue.

Usually this results with the employees thinking twice before trying to improve a departmental process because s/he will then be required to fill a process change request to explain and justify why the change is needed. This potential change then gets evaluated by one of those four aforementioned departments and in the end it will be most probably the employee and his manager that will be responsible for drafting/updating the process the new version.

While it does help in so many areas and lines of businesses, I have seen so many employees and managers, including myself, deciding not to share great ideas because of the over-complicated process of changing a process. I felt like a robot following orders and not being able to create, change or take charge easily.

Therefore, although it can be said that developing the various processes did aid Mr. John, the rigid nature of these same processes may have hindered staff in sharing their ideas and opinions. If there were ideas of efficient change, the complication of implementing them may have more than often caused the idea to be buried. His staff were not afforded a sense of ownership and leadership when required, instead perhaps feeling more unauthorised and unsupported to take the simple decisions which could have made them a lot more profit and improved customer satisfaction.

On the other hand, many small businesses do not preoccupy themselves too much with rigid rules or processes, especially in the beginning of the business. With this said, these same small businesses do understand that as time goes on and the business grows, then problems do become larger and more frequent. In a particular instance you may have employees who carry out their work according to their own

understanding. This may in turn lead to a conflict of interests whereby the management or the owner has different expectations about how things should be run. These expectations may never have been officially communicated and before you know it internal arguing and personal issues arise which could eventually cost the business its reputation, image and consequently, profit.

In the case of Nic, he was very much excited about the prospect of implementing the various new ideas, which had previously helped him run a successful small advertising firm. He believed that creativity, spontaneity and engaging the employees were more important elements than rules or processes. He was correct, but only to an extent.

### Striking equilibrium

Too many processes or no processes at all? That is the question. A balance should be sought, bearing in mind not only your line of business but also your number of employees and the goals of the enterprise.

Any company, big, medium or small, should initially invest time in designing and creating the business vision, mission and strategy. Once this is achieved, basic policies and procedures should be developed to cover the main areas of the business. Detailed plans should be developed for critical aspects such as health and safety and finance, with a simple process being designed which would enable employees to always evaluate the existing processes and not be deterred from developing an idea for the benefit and service of the company's vision. In general,



Hanan Nagi, coach, speaker, and founder and CEO of HNI Training & Coaching

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the complexity and details of the processes should vary based on the size of the organisation.

Generally, communicating the company's main goals, strategy and guiding principles, while at the same time empowering the employees to suggest improvement to the basic yet strong processes developed, is a huge step in the right direction. Improvement to processes in areas like sales and retention of a client base should definitely be evaluated by specialists in those fields.

For SMEs, the following points can help you win the best of the two worlds and enjoy a balanced relationship between people and processes;

- Having a clear vision and business goals.
- Developing clear basic yet comprehensive processes which are easy to modify and improve.
- Encouraging change and rewarding sense of autonomy and creativity.
- Developing your employees through coaching and mentoring to ensure any risks which are taken under the hat of creativity will still be calculated risks. If you firmly sustain your goals as the North gauge of your business compass, then it will always guide you in the right direction for reaching your business' final destination. ■

### ABOUT:

**Hanan Nagi** is an international trainer, executive coach, personal development expert, writer and an inspirational speaker. She is also the producer and presenter of the coaching and human development TV show "Develop your Life" on DM.TV. With more than 16 years experience in the corporate world in various industries, Nagi now helps organisations achieve their goals through their people, using custom coaching and training programs.

She has been recognised by HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, for her contribution to excellence and achievement in the people's development field when she won the Dubai Government Excellence Award. For more information visit [www.hni.ae](http://www.hni.ae) or contact [info@hni.ae](mailto:info@hni.ae).