

COMCAST
BUSINESS

PUSHING TEAM SPEED



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Don't overlook the cultural component as you're establishing a new framework for optimizing performance

RETHINK PROCESS, RETHINK CULTURE

When we think about what it takes to optimize business outcomes, we tend to focus on productivity, performance, and profitability. But there's a fourth P in the equation: personality. And it turns out that this factor weighs heavily on your team's ability to get its work done, respond swiftly to opportunities and challenges, and compete successfully over the long term.

Personality affects each employee's role on the team, the way team members interact, and the extent to which each one's values align with the organization's. "These psychological factors are the main determinants of whether people work well together," write Dave Winsborough and Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic in the [Harvard Business Review](#). They note that in every working group, each team member plays a functional role, based on their formal position and technical skill, and a psychological role, based on the kind of person they are. Too often, organizations focus merely on the functional role and hope that good team performance somehow follows."



That's an important point to remember when planning a business process redesign. By involving your employees in the process and giving them a sense that they're helping to drive the change, you create the cultural climate necessary to foster engagement, empowerment, and a sense of commitment to the company and its objectives.

"In business process reengineering, you've really got to consider culture and the people aspect of things," says Jay Chander, partner for business advisory and enhancement at [Barker Henley](#). "It's not just about document flow and handling inefficiencies. It comes back to how you motivate someone to take charge."

GETTING EVERYONE ON THE SAME PAGE

The danger, when focusing on culture, is to fall into the trap of establishing communication and collaboration channels that turn counterproductive. Too often, companies establish procedures—weekly meetings, daily status updates—that aren't serving the real goals and priorities.

It's never a good idea to have a meeting just because it's 10 a.m. on Monday. Your meetings should have a clearly stated purpose that serves the team's goal and, by extension, the company's customers and markets. Make sure meetings have an established purpose, agenda, and end point.



"Once the outcome is achieved, get rid of the meeting—or reestablish it for a different purpose and maybe get some fresh people involved," says Shane Green, founder and president of [SGE International](#) and author of [Culture Hacker: Reprogramming Your Employee Experience to Improve Customer Service, Retention, and Performance](#).

To ensure a free flow of ideas, he urges clients not to have the manager or expert run meetings, "because they'll tend to dominate them. One of my best practices is to assign someone to be the meeting leader."

Chander extends that principle to presentations, including presentations to the board. He encourages clients to allow employees to participate in presentations that "identify a better way of doing something and how it translates into profitability," he says. "That

demonstrates what actually goes into the bottom line from improvements that they as individuals make. That helps the cultural side of things because they tend to own it. They tend to drive it. And once a process is reengineered and implemented, the system is sustainable.”

It’s equally essential to measure the outcome of meetings and communications to ensure that they’re moving the company toward the results it’s trying to achieve. And keeping employees focused on those results requires transparency



within the organization. “Even though that’s been a buzzword for the last ten years in business, we’re not good with transparency,” Green says. “Organizations that are good with it have success. To improve the business, employees have to be involved—and the Millennials now entering the workforce want to be actively involved.”

Chander takes a similar approach to getting team members involved in eliminating “unnecessary workload.” As he’s reviewing current

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

Communication is to some extent a question of individual preference and personal style. Some people get tongue-tied in meetings or presentations but reveal great ideas when they can put them in writing. Some prefer the immediacy of a text exchange, while others prefer to develop their thoughts in a memo or email.

To get the most productive input and insight from all your employees, it’s constructive to provide them with a variety of communication tools. At times, they’ll have to venture beyond their communication comfort zone, but make sure they also have access to the mechanism they prefer for sharing observations and suggestions.

CONSIDER A MIX OF THE FOLLOWING:

- **Social intranet:** An online clearinghouse for company news and announcements.
- **Group and individual messaging platforms** (e.g., [Glip](#), [HipChat](#), [Microsoft Share Point](#), [Slack](#)): To support project management and facilitate private conversations.
- **Discussion forums:** Separate from project management dashboards—a place where employees can seek advice, share expertise, and foster a sense of learning and interdependence.

If you’re working with a high level of proprietary knowledge or confidential information, or if you’re just concerned about optimizing data security, consider installing a virtual private network (VPN). This uses encryption and other security measures to allow information and data exchange via public networks as if they were private. See the Resource Guide for information about today’s leading VPNs.

processes, he asks employees how each of their tasks or activities benefits the end customer. “If it’s too far removed, ask yourself the question: do you really have to do it? This report—do you still need it? How often do you read it? If it doesn’t benefit the customer, we shouldn’t have to do it. Or do it less frequently. Or find another way to do it.”

These simple litmus tests can help identify the work that’s really moving the company toward stronger customer relationships and better prospects for profitability.

COLLABORATION, DECISION-MAKING, AND AUTONOMY

People need three things from their employers to deliver optimal work: the right training, the right tools, and the right information.

In a business process redesign, your company has an opportunity to improve performance by improving the quality of those tools and the ways in which they’re used. And part of the process of identifying the right changes is getting employees involved.

“The desk is a dangerous place from which to judge the world,” Green says. “You have to be on the front line.” He finds new employees particularly useful because they have a fresh perspective and are not yet stuck in the status quo.

And Chander looks for people who have been labeled “troublemakers”—he finds that often, they’re intelligent and frustrated because “someone’s put a lid on them.” Those who are knowledgeable and can influence others are an asset to the team.

Working with people in the trenches, Chander documents how processes are currently managed and where the people who perform the tasks see opportunities for improvement. “They come up with some great ideas,” he says. “We identify the problems and bottlenecks, you find the solution, and you get buy-in at the same time. And that has a huge cultural impact.”

Once you’ve identified opportunities to streamline work and improve processes,





you've set the stage for empowering employees to play a more active role in decision-making. But to do that beneficially, they need to understand not only their own tasks and activities, but how those relate to the full process chain, Chander says. He recommends process maps rather than narratives because they're visual and give everyone a clear view of the process, end to end. Once they understand both their jobs and the way those jobs fit into the overall scheme, they're better equipped to understand the impact of each decision on the company's fortunes.

THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT PATH

When managed productively, communication and collaboration foster a culture of trust in the organization and the individuals working there, and that makes employees more receptive to change. As teams navigate that change, the company will find leaders among

TOP MOBILE COLLABORATION APPS

As the mobile workforce becomes the norm, it's essential to keep your team members connected no matter where they're located and what device they're using.

It's not just a question of staying in touch via text messaging. To remain productive, your employees need to be able to send and receive documents and files, join video conferences, and encrypt messages about sensitive or confidential information. And if they're working on their own mobile devices—if the company doesn't control which operating system or platform they're using—you need something that will work across platforms.

Think about which other features (such as capacity to sync with email and calendar apps) would aid your productivity, then compare your requirements with the features available from these popular options:

- **Asana** is designed to help manage tasks, projects, and conversations via a dashboard.
- **Basecamp** organizes project management and company-wide communications.
- **Skype for Business** aims to deliver a unified platform for calling, conferencing, video, and sharing.
- **Slack** creates open channels organized by project, topic, or team to promote transparency. It also offers a private channel option.
- **Trello** focuses on making collaboration fun by organizing projects and communication across boards, lists, and cards.
- **Wrike** is designed to enhance communication, transparency, and accountability via secure connections.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT PROJECT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Project management software is designed to increase efficiency, enhance productivity and performance, and keep your team on track and on schedule. Many of them will meet those basic requirements for your business—so how do you find the best one for your company? This checklist of questions can help you evaluate your options and make the right purchasing decision.

■ *What task management features does it offer? Does it have the capacity to organize task specifications and instructions? Does it track which individuals were assigned to each task and track progress and milestones on the way to meeting the deadline?*

■ *Does it provide the planning capacity you need? Do its features include project mapping and a mechanism for ensuring that work is completed in the correct order? Will using the program help team members to visualize the overall project, their role in it, and its relationship to other projects and priorities at your company?*

■ *Is it a good fit for your company's culture? Are your employees going to use it willingly, or are they going to seek any excuse to switch to something they prefer? If they object to the choice, are their reasons valid, and can you address their concerns?*

the employees, people who motivate and inspire others to create a collective success. Green calls them “change champions” and notes the importance of encouraging their role: “The change process is about reinvesting, making relevant, and making meaningful the employee experience and working on that relationship so that when change comes it is collaborative.”

Of course, in addition to those ad hoc or informal leaders, each team will still need a formal leader and management structure. “The owner of the process is really the project sponsor, who delegates to the person who’s going to do the work,” Chander says. “At the end of the day, the project sponsor is going to make the final decision.” But when the company establishes optimal procedures and gets everyone involved, the project manager can make those decisions with the support of the team and based on the knowledge of the entire organization. And that, in turn, positions the company to make the most of its resources and its opportunities for growth.

TEAM OPTIMIZATION RESOURCES

Tap these online references for the knowledge you need to help your team achieve its best performance.

From communication and collaboration strategies to software and app reviews, these online resources give you the information you need to create the right cultural climate for process redesign in your business.

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

Team members need the right balance of interdependence and coordination. Too little coordination leaves members struggling to get information, complete tasks, and make decisions, says author Roger Schwarz. On the other hand, excessive coordination puts too much emphasis on tasks and slows the team down. "[Is Your Team Coordinating Too Much, or Not Enough?](#)" offers advice on how to strike the right balance for your organization.

In "[How Managers Can Make Group Projects More Efficient](#)," Amy Jen Su offers practical advice about how to manage collaboration so that it serves the company's objectives instead of being an end goal in itself.

Niche experts build their careers by developing specialized knowledge. "And yet that expertise must be integrated across fields and areas of practice to solve the complex problems that today's customers face," notes Heidi K. Gardner. In "[Getting Your Stars to Collaborate](#)," she offers guidance on "engaging in smart collaboration" to promote creative problem-solving and increase productivity and profitability—"achievements that attract top-caliber talent and keep the stars engaged."

KENAN-FLAGLER BUSINESS SCHOOL

The authors of "[Creating a Collaborative Organizational Culture](#)" note that "most organizations only selectively embrace collaboration." The white paper provides an overview of the characteristics of a truly collaborative environment and shows how such a culture has impact on the bottom line. In addition, it examines common reasons for collaboration failure; explores the building blocks of effective collaboration; and outlines an action plan for making collaboration work within the workplace.

PC MAGAZINE

"A virtual private network is the best way to stay anonymous online and secure your web traffic," the editors note. They tested more than 50 to develop their top ten list, "[The Best VPN Services of 2017](#)."

The magazine also published its list of [“The Best Online Collaboration Software of 2017.”](#)

CAPTERRA

The project management software industry has grown past the \$1 billion mark, says Capterra. The company, which offers a free web-based service designed to help businesses find their best software options, prepared a [“Top Project Management Tools” infographic](#) to help you compare the most popular software brands.

COLLABORATINGBETTER.COM

Topics covered on the company’s blog include:

- [“The Search for the Perfect Small Distributed Team Collaborative Tool”](#)
- [“Why Don’t We Have the Collaboration Skills We Need?”](#)
- [“Making Meetings Matter”](#)

The company also produces a [“Distributed Project Management Tools” Directory](#).