

Digging deeper

How to determine when to use a third party to uncover inefficiencies

INTERVIEWED BY JAYNE GEST

In order to eliminate or mitigate inefficiencies, businesses must take a close look at current processes. This enables employers to uncover pains, such as the amount of paper being routed throughout the enterprise or the time it takes to process an invoice. Being able to recognize these inefficiencies is great, but many times, quantifying the end result is much simpler than isolating the source of the inefficiencies.

“The problem can be anything — accounting, human resources, policies, leasing documents,” says Nano Zegarra, director, Imaging Solutions Division at Blue Technologies. “It also could be a simple fix, but perhaps the company doesn’t recognize an issue because it’s accustomed to doing things the way they’ve always been done.”

Smart Business spoke with Zegarra about the role of a business analyst and how an outsider’s assessment could uncover problems you weren’t aware you had.

How can inefficiencies be uncovered?

It’s tough. These may be hidden from the CEO or COO, who doesn’t realize parts of the process can be more efficient, especially if monetary values aren’t apparent.

The people who catch most inefficiencies are those who hear the griping, such as a manager who handles the time of individuals working in a particular area. CEOs have the vision, but those in the organization who get their hands dirty, or their direct managers, often discover inefficiencies. Pay attention to the negative feedback from employees, then dig deeper to understand the true pain.

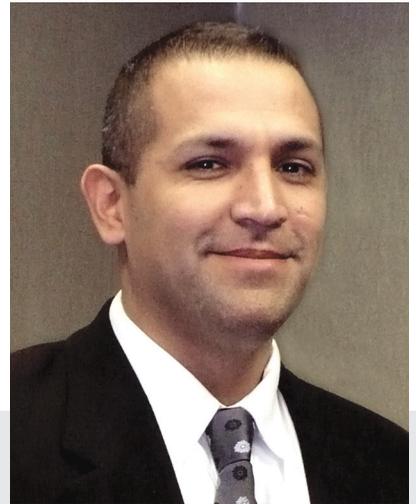
It might take a specific problem to start to unmask these inefficiencies. Perhaps an employee has plenty of downtime, and you feel that he or she might be used more effectively elsewhere but are not sure where. Or you missed a large number of early pay

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discounts in comparison to the previous year, but where was the ball dropped? If a manager can understand the entire process and quantify the roles of each individual, it is much easier to identify the bottlenecks.

What is a good way to begin the process?

Internal communication is key. Pay attention to the feedback from the process owners. If you identify an area that has more work than another, hold a meeting for open feedback. This is when you should bring in an analyst.

An external analyst can objectively look at the whole business process from beginning to end, using expertise in multiple industries to ask pointed questions about particular processes. A good business analyst will look for inefficiencies anywhere when mapping out work flows and showing where there’s room for improvement. Then, employers can do what they like with the assessment.

How can you accomplish more with less?

Utilize technological resources. The greatest business expenditure is an individual, so ensure your people are as efficient as possible. Even the smallest solution can help existing employees do more in less time.

Saving time can be as simple as having a centralized multifunction printer with the ability to digitally send documents throughout an enterprise. Or take a look at what is being outsourced and understand

what investment would need to be made to eliminate that expenditure. Many times, the ROI can outweigh the initial investment to save time and ultimately money.

Is it always about efficiency?

Not always. There are industries where it is critical for multiple individuals to look at a particular document. An experienced business analyst has industry expertise and knows best practices. This understanding may lead to an additional step in a process that may not make it more efficient, but will improve revenue or customer service ratings. This could ultimately give your company added value and a competitive advantage.

How can an analyst improve processes?

Business analysts must understand current processes before making recommendations. This entails in-depth digging and information gathering in order to map out on paper what a company is currently doing. Throughout this process, he or she should be identifying and documenting the greatest pains and largest bottlenecks for every process. With a complete understanding, the discussion on potential changes can take place from an objective point of view.

The analysis’s most important part is the written assessment, which maps a more streamlined process and the steps a company must take to reach its ideal efficiency level. ●