

## Eat Your Vegetables: responding to the *Why* questions of software process

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I've seen different tactics used by various clients to get people to embrace and assimilate process: bribery by providing incentives for those who comply, threatening dire consequences for those who do not, and asserting authority by executive mandate. Rewarding those who follow the process with incentives and punishing those who don't are **not** great tactics if you want sustainable process compliance. This article describes an approach to encourage people to consistently follow process because they want to and not because they are forced to.

### *Eat Your Vegetables*

"Why do I have to eat my vegetables?" asks my 5 year old son. Now there are many different ways I can answer that question.



Response 1 - "because I said so"

This is easy and authoritative. I'll probably get the result I want- at least for the short term. But what happens when my son has to make a decision about eating his vegetables when I'm not around?

Response 2 - "because if you don't eat your vegetables, there will be no dessert."

This response is non-threatening and rewards good behavior. Again I'll probably get the result I want for the short term, but what happens when I want my son to eat his vegetables and there is no dessert for a bribe?

Neither responses 1 or 2 provide the *real* reasons why I want him to eat his vegetables. These responses don't answer his question, nor do they encourage him to make good decisions on his own.

*Real Why* response - "because they have antioxidants, fiber, and vitamins that keep you healthy and strong. They nourish your body and blood and they make you strong like Popeye."

This response is risky because I haven't customized the message for a 6-year old audience and it will surely lead to more questions like "what are antioxidants?" and "who is Popeye?" I will not get immediate results (unless, of course, he figures it is easier to eat his vegetables than listen to my lecture).

The *real* why response does explain why I want him to eat his vegetables. If I'm able to persevere and he gains understanding of the value, it will impact his food choices

for the rest of his life. No bribes, no punishment, but eating his vegetables because he understands why they are good for him.

## ***The Real Why of Software Process***

*Real* why responses are critical to successfully implementing process change. Individuals want to understand the reasons they must adopt new practices and they want reasons from their perspective. Furthermore, you want people to follow process because they understand the importance, not because they are forced to. Why? Well because:

- they are more likely to buy-in to the process and follow it for the long-term;
- they provide better feedback on how to improve the process;
- when a deviation to the process is necessary, practitioners can better analyze and make intelligent decisions about the best actions to take that are in keeping with the spirit of the process.

Recently, I met with the quality assurance team that was responsible for conducting project audits for a large IT engagement.

I asked, "Why do we need to audit projects?"

After a long pause someone responded, "because project audits are necessary for us to reach our CMMi level 3 certification".

"Okay that's true," I said. "But that isn't the *real* reason why we audit projects. There must be a benefit to conducting the audits besides the fact that CMMi says so. How will you respond when a Project Manager challenges you on the audit or opposes the audit process? And they will challenge you. Are you going to say sorry, I know you don't like it, but we need to do this for CMMi?"

Variations of this same scenario happen all the time. Here is another example.

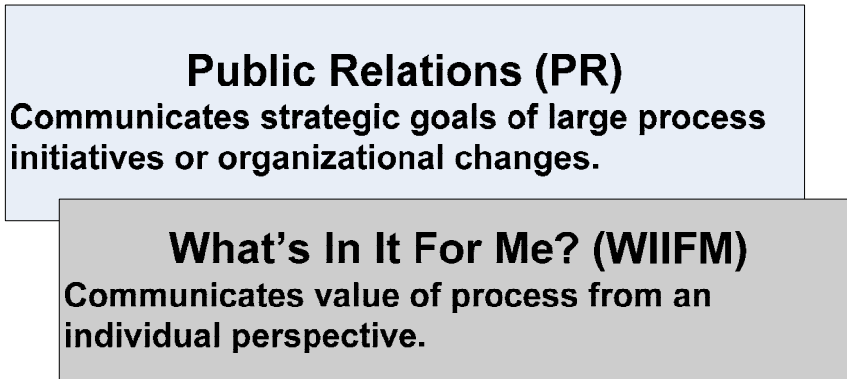
"Why did you select Use Cases as the method for gathering functional requirements?"

"Because we have adopted the RUP methodology and RUP supports Use Cases."

"Okay, so let's pretend for just a minute you did not implement RUP. Would you still implement Use Cases? There must be a reason besides RUP says so. How will you respond to the Analyst when they produce functional requirements in a format that isn't a Use Case?"

In both these scenarios, the individuals had never been asked to articulate the value of the specific process at the practitioner level. They understood very well from an organizational perspective (CMMi, RUP) why the process was necessary, but not at the level where the process is actually executed. And if you want people to embrace and assimilate process, then *communicate* the *real* why from not only the organizational perspective, but also their individual perspective.

## ***Two Layers of Why Communications***



### **PR Communications**

PR communications rally the team to support and endorse large process initiatives or organizational changes for the greater good of the company. These communications create momentum. They demonstrate support and sponsorship from top management looking to achieve strategic goals like:

- Improving quality
- Increasing productivity
- Improving margins
- Improving customer satisfaction

At this layer, the why questions are general: Why are we pursuing CMMi level 3 certification? Why are we implementing a new SDLC or Project Management methodology? Why are we establishing a PMO? And the response is any one or more of the strategic goals the company is trying to achieve.

### **WIIFM Communications**

**What's In It For Me?** WIIFM communications support the PR layer, but are more detailed and directed at individual practitioners. WIIFM communications require that the personal benefits to the individual be tied to the strategic goals of the company. This is nearly impossible to accomplish without understanding the value of the process at the individual practitioner level.

**Employee:** "It will take me longer to follow the new process than to just to fix the problem for the customer. Why do I have to track my time for defects and support calls? I don't see how this improves productivity or customer satisfaction."

**Supervisor:** "We need to log and track time for all support items. This consolidated information helps us identify trends and which applications to target for improvement. We can recommend additional training or communications for a specific user group. We can forecast resource requirements. If we take action to reduce the number of support calls, that means we can spend time on more meaningful work."

## ***Tips for Why Communications***

### **1. Measure and Communicate the value the process is providing**

When defining process compliance measurements, you must not only measure whether individuals are following the process, but also measure the value the process is expected to provide. For example, if the process is expected to improve productivity, then set a baseline and measure individual productivity improvements. Know both: who is following the process and the value the process is enabling at an individual level. Communicate the value often. Rather than create incentives for following the process, reward people for improving productivity, quality, customer satisfaction, etc.

### **2. Prepare front line managers**

Equip front line managers with all the tools necessary to effectively deliver PR and WIIFM communications. Before new processes are implemented, prepare them for the inevitable why questions and help them respond positively and consistently when faced with opposition.

**Project Manager:** "Why do we have to do project audits anyway? It's a waste of time."

**Front Line Manager:** "We conduct project audits in order to identify where the PM processes may be breaking down and need improvement. We want to evaluate projects so we can learn from the bad and repeat the good. It is an evaluation of the process, not of the individual project manager. We make the PM processes more efficient and everyone benefits."

If front line managers are able to articulate the value the process provides at the individual level, they are less apt to resort to reward/punishment or mandate type responses. "Do it or else" may get their employees to eat their vegetables for the moment, but next week they will feed them to the dog when no one is looking.

### **3. Establish a mechanism for front line managers to communicate, collaborate, and compile feedback after the process is implemented**

What are the main complaints or questions being asked? Are there successes, short term wins? Where is the process breaking down? Is more training required? Front line managers are closest to this information and it is critical they share it with some frequency. Why? Because they can identify trends, common questions, common problems and formulate a consistent response.

Identifying trends, anomalies and exceptions is critical to measuring process improvement. Front line managers can provide invaluable feedback to process compliance and auditing organizations when they understand the value of process at the WIIFM layer and can collaborate on their experiences.

#### 4. Learn from the Sales Organization

Successful sales people know their customer. They are able to quickly articulate the key selling points that are important to a specific customer audience and are prepared to counter objections with the value the product is expected to provide. This requires a thorough knowledge of the customer and strengths *and* weaknesses of the product they are selling. Consider a process as your product.

- **What are the key selling points?**

For example, improve productivity and ability to allocate senior resources to more meaningful work.

- **What are the possible objections?**

For example, following the new process will take longer and the customer will be unhappy.

- **What is the cost?**

For example, I have to learn something new or give up control of an area where I'm the expert.

Think through the responses to the above questions as if you were selling the process to a customer. If you were truly selling to a customer, you would not use reward/punishment or mandate sales strategies. Sales people sell a product based on its value to the customer.

#### 5. Process for the sake of process is called bureaucracy

You must be able to substantiate the value the process provides at both the PR and WIIFM layers. If you cannot, then why are you implementing the process?

### Summary

Explain the *real* why to encourage people to follow process because they understand the value, not because they are forced to. This establishes an environment of sustainable process compliance that doesn't require constant policing from oversight organizations. It empowers individuals by giving them information to make intelligent decisions about the way they work and better suggestions for improvement.

How is my son doing with his vegetables? Very well thank you. This summer we planted a garden together and I discovered that he will eat anything that he helped produce. But now that is a topic for another time!

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