‘It’S All about the Processes’

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Your information systems (IS) are made up of your information technology (IT), along with the three P's: processes, people, and policies. If there is a problem with your IS, we usually focus on the IT. New IT will fix it. IT usually doesn’t. IT might have a new fancier interface or IT might make it faster, but you usually still have the same problems.

A CEO recently told me gone are the days when IT alone would solve problems. My reply was and always has been, when has IT ever? The problems with most systems and the solutions to most systems is usually in the three P’s.

In honor of our new football coach here at Georgia Southern, let’s tackle the first P (processes) today.

In all of our systems, we have embedded business processes. Our processes represent our standard operating procedures (SOP) and are reflected in how we use the system.

Sometimes our SOPs are hardcoded in employee manuals. More often than not, the really important SOPs are in employees’ heads and represent their lifelong experiences, or they are a part of the company culture and politics.

Let’s take a hospital for an example. A hospital typically has an electronic patient admission system. Nobody really remembers where it came from, who started using it or who designed it. The system has just always been there. Sound familiar? Changes are the online pages look like the old paper admission form, and, in fact, the patient probably still fills out the form on paper and it is then keyed into the system. The “new” online version follows the old process, and any problems we had with the form, such as not having a place for key information, are carried over to the new system.

When we introduce new IT (or a new IS along with the new IT) we need to not just reinvent the wheel, rather, we need to improve the IS at the same time. Therefore, I teach my students to be like Tom Hanks in the movie “Big.”

In “Big,” Hanks plays a pre-teen who wishes he were an adult, and somehow (movie magic) his wish is granted. As a kid in an adult body, fun follows him. An important lesson for designing new systems can be found in the movie, too. He still possesses a childlike inquisitive nature that he brings to his work, which is refreshing.

At the first important meeting he attends, he keeps asking his colleagues one question, “I don’t get it, why are we doing it this way?” We all need to look at the processes we do every day and ask that same question.

Are the processes you perform on your new IT the right ones, in the right order, with the right people?

If you want a better system, you might want to start with your processes and not with your IT. You might want to rent and watch the movie “Big” this weekend, too. It is not about the IT; it is all about the processes.

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