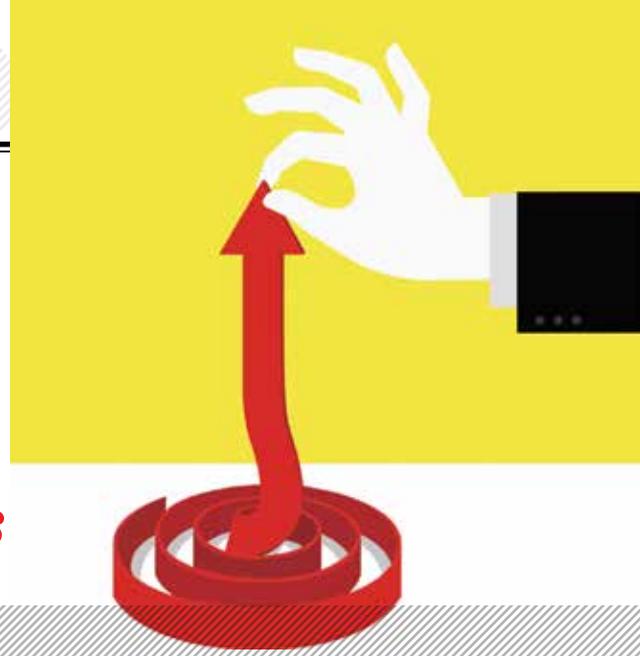


By *Michael Chen*

WHY YOU SHOULD HIRE ...

a czar of bad systems



When a Hootsuite Media Inc. employee decided to send a branded T-shirt to a customer as a gift, he didn't expect it to cost \$200. But according to an article written by Hootsuite chief executive officer Ryan Holmes that appeared on the website of U.S. publication *Fast Company* earlier this year, that's exactly how expensive it was after factoring in the time spent by everyone involved in the approval process.

As a result, Hootsuite introduced the role of a so-called czar of bad systems, a voluntary additional duty for its then-senior director of technology, Noel Pullen. The informal position gave employees a specific person to go to for fixing unresolved issues over processes.

Now, workers at Hootsuite no longer need to get formal approval to send out a shirt.

"I think it's brilliant. I would be surprised if every company out there couldn't benefit from having a role like that," says Lisa Kay, president and lead consultant at Peak Performance Human Resources Corp. "I really do think that one of the major challenges in so many organizations is just gaps in processes that make things inefficient."

Getting at the cause

Leah Fochuk, consulting services manager at Salopek & Associates Ltd., has seen lots of bad systems at work.

One of the more severe cases she has encountered was an organization that required processes and approvals for "absolutely everything."

"For instance, they had a policy that didn't allow their employees to make personal phone calls or send personal texts on company time," says Fochuk. "If you had to make a personal phone call . . . they would make you fill out a paper form to document the amount of time you spent on the phone call so they could dock it from your pay."

Lynn Brown, managing director at Brown Consulting Group Inc., cites several causes for the

prevalence of bad processes and policies. In some cases, bad policies are a reaction to very specific problems. Brown has seen what she says are bizarre company rules, including a ban by one organization on bringing weapons to work in lunchboxes.

Other problems stem from processes that involve doing the same thing repeatedly and either fail to make allowances for technological advancements or have had too many elements added to them. "Often, we'll go in and we'll see all these connecting arms for a process, and no one has taken the time to step back [and ask], 'Why does this connect here? Why are you doing it all?'" says Brown.

Kay, however, notes the expense of a dedicated role to address bad systems can be a concern for organizations. "If you are in a position where you can afford it, I would say that most companies, even smaller companies with 20 or 30 employees, could benefit from it," she says. "They probably can't afford it but they would benefit from it."

Alternatives to a full-time role

When a full-time role is too expensive, Brown says smaller companies can bring someone in to review their management systems.

But while she notes outsiders can offer a fresh perspective, they may have limited knowledge of the organization and less understanding of how it operates overall.

Fochuk agrees that companies don't necessarily need to have a permanent role focused on process management but she suggests having a dedicated resource of some sort, such as a committee that meets every few months.

"The workplace is changing, so I think you want to have systems and processes in place that are also agile enough to keep up with that change. I absolutely do think that there is a need for this in organizations." 

Michael Chen is a Toronto-based freelance writer.

DOES IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY LEAD TO HIGHER WAGES?

While economists often tout the benefits of productivity growth and lament Canada's poor performance on the issue, a report released by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards last year raised questions about whether workers are benefiting from improvements in the area. It found the following:

From 1976-2014, labour productivity in Canada grew by **1.1%** per year

Median real hourly earnings, however, grew by only **0.1%** per year

U.S. labour productivity grew at an annual pace of **1.6%**, but real median wages barely budged