

Business Processes Are More Complex Than You Think

The following video transcription has been edited for clarity.

I was recently reminded of our tendency to underestimate the administrative overhead that's related to hosting and facilitating events for our communities. And it's true for me as well. And it's a problem because if we continuously underestimate the administrative requirements of hosting our community, we fail to manage that overhead, and we can become overburdened. Our communities can be unsustainable as a consequence.

So, what prompted this thought for me today was related to a new experiment that I'm running in Community Online, which I'm calling Open Mic events. The idea is to, on a regular basis, host opt-in events available to members to address topics of timely interest.

So, it's not an obligation. It's an opportunity to engage in live conversation via Zoom with up to four other members, including the host.

The process seems simple on its face. As host, I'll create an event at least two weeks in advance. If there's at least one RSVP from a member seven days in advance of the scheduled meeting time, then we'll move forward with the event.

As I said before, I wanted to make sure these are small group conversations and don't devolve into something like a webinar or simply a round table exchange. That means limiting the total participation to five people, including myself— so, four members.

I also wanted—just because people are busy and they forget—to have a mechanism the day before the deadline, so eight days before the event, to send a reminder notification. However, I wouldn't send that notification if the four RSVP maximum had already been reached.

Easy to describe, but this is where complexity can creep into our real life. That complexity is a function of things like agency. I don't have control over the members. They're independent people. They can do what they want to do or don't want to do. There's contingency, there's error, and there's interdependency. So even this simple example can quickly generate a fair amount of complexity.

I found that out when I was creating a process map for this event type. This is just a flow chart layout of how I might explain this process to somebody that's totally unfamiliar with the process or a machine.

There's a host—me—and there's the member. These lines here indicate that there can be more than one member, but these are our respective processes.

Two weeks before the event, I post the event, and there's a notification sent to a member. Now, the happy path, if you will, is:

- They're interested.
- They check the RSVP status.
- RSVP is open.

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- They RSVP.
- They have a question that they want to discuss at the event.
- They post one or more questions.
- They wait for the scheduled event time.
- They participate in the event.
- Their event participation is concluded.

Now, the happy path for me as a host is:

- I post the event.
- Eight days before the event, if there are fewer than four RSVPs so far, I'll send an event reminder.
- Seven days before the unit, I'll check to see that there's at least one RSVP. If there is, we move forward.
- I'll wait for the scheduled event time.
- Facilitate the event.
- Post the highlights back to our Mighty network.
- The event concludes

But things get complicated by contingencies.

What if the member isn't interested in participating? This process, aborts, and their event participation is terminated.

They might be interested in participating, but the RSVP limit has already been met, so they can't participate in that particular event. They might not have a question, so they skip this step. And then, even if they've done all of this if a scheduling conflict arises at the time of the event, they don't successfully conclude. They terminate.

Now for me as a host, we've already touched upon less than four RSVPs. If there's no RSVP seven days prior, the event would be canceled. If four RSVPs are reached at any point, I need to close the RSVP within Mighty Networks, et cetera.

So, this is fairly complicated for a “simple” process. Knowing that prompted me—not to automate—but to semi-automate.

This is a screenshot of the Trello board that I've created for Community Online, in which I created some templated “Open Mic” event cards.

- Here's the basic description.
- I'll set the time and date of the next open mic event.
- I created dates for the RSVP reminder and the deadline itself.
- Here's a prompt to schedule the next event in the sequence.

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Embedded are email reminders from Trello to me to do these things, so I don't have to remember all these little details. One of the things I will have to do is make sure that if for a particular event four RSVPs are received, I'll close the RSVP for that event.

Try not to underestimate the complexity of the administration related to your communities. Think it through carefully. Don't hide the complexity, and don't be afraid of the complexity. Be clear about it. That can lead to using simple tools or, sometimes, complex automation to help us manage administrative overhead so we don't become overwhelmed by it.