

THE ADVICE PROCESS

A simple and effective way to increase collective intelligence

A white paper by **Human Stories**

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Humanity's ability to think abstractly, adapt to change and collaborate sets us apart from other species. The invention of language increased our capacity for collaboration manyfold, eventually leading to us conquering nearly every square inch of our home planet. The ways in which we share information and resources decides the effectiveness of our collaboration—the more we can sense, make sense of, actualize and learn together, the higher is our potential for collective intelligence.

In short, collaboration and a win-win mindset is a winning strategy.

The advice process is a simple and effective way to increase the level of collective intelligence in the organization—in a sense, increasing the bandwidth of information and resources. Instead of relying on everyone to be an expert on their own, we rely on each other to come up with better solutions to internal and external needs. Given the right conditions, when people share wisdom and perspectives with each other, there is synergy.

This is a simplified version of best practices used by many agile and self-managing organizations all over the world. It can be adapted to any organization. Prototype and adapt it into whatever works in your organization.

IN SHORT

Anyone is mandated to make any decision, as long as they seek advice from those either *meaningfully affected* by the outcome of the decision and/or those with *relevant knowledge, experience or perspectives*.

IN DEPTH

We trust people to make the right decisions, given the above prerequisites. The advice process a way of recognizing that while every person is empowered to contribute, no single one has all the answers. It's also about respecting mandates in the organization.* This enables organizational agility because you don't wait around to get everyone on the same page before taking action. It's simply put "both and more".

The person with the mandate is responsible for taking advice into account whenever an important decision is made, including subjectively valuing the information and perspectives given. Naturally, this means that some perspectives will be considered more important than others. We respect each other's autonomy. Over time, this will increase personal and collective learning, further evolving the organization.

PREREQUISITES

- Define a clear external or internal need as the underlying driver of action.
- Create a concrete proposal or a clearly defined question to ask advice on. It's usually easier to receive good advice if there is a concrete proposal on the table.
- Decide who meets the requirements—i.e. those who are meaningfully affected and/or has relevant knowledge, experience or perspectives. Not doing this is often considered misconduct.

**Mandate: Someone holding a clearly defined role, someone delegated a task or someone meeting a need not yet mandated within a role. This can be more than one person.*

THE PROCESS

1. Invite and set a clear time frame, e.g. "before Friday" or "15 minutes today".
2. Present the proposal or question, including the underlying need.
3. Ask for advice and record perspectives. Finish with "thank you".
4. Only ask questions. Never argue, seek consensus or strive to collaborate in this stage.
5. Repeat steps 1-4 after evolving the proposal, as needed. Complex issues require more time and perspectives to evolve and mature.

COMMON FORMATS

- *Digital ad hoc*: Any colleague who would like to contribute.
- *Digital headhunt*: Ask colleagues in a separate channel, either individually or as a group.
- *Physical headhunt*: Ask colleagues in focused and in-depth one-on-one conversations.
- *Physical group*: Invite a selected group of people to a session. Ask one at a time going around in a circle. Repeat as many rounds as needed.
- Innovate other solutions!

A VERY IMPORTANT NOTE

Seeking advice does not equal consensus, argumentation or co-creation. The advice process is about being effective—tapping into the collective intelligence whilst also being efficient, respecting everyone's time and resources. We don't seek agreement, argument or a specific creative outcome—instead we seek perspectives and then simply say "thank you" followed by everyone going back to their work. In this way, we empower both the individual and the collective.

A LAST NOTE

It's all very simple, yet it might change how you collaborate in your organization on a fundamental level. We're standing on the shoulders of giants: the information provided is based on best practices from many different organizations. Simplicity is key—try to keep things as simple as needed but no simpler than that. It's usually better to just do it than to do it perfectly. The best way to learn is to practice.

If you would like to use this in your organization, we'd like you to honor the creators of this document. If you want to reach out, don't hesitate! hello@humanstories.se.