

The Key to Good Process Mapping

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There are three essentials that must be handled well to assure good process mapping.

- 1. The operating people whose work is being mapped must supply information for the map and must understand and support the reasons for the mapping.*
- 2. The map itself must be organized in a way that enables everyone involved to clearly understand the process.*
- 3. The information that is assembled in the map must be valid.*

Support of Operating People

The operating people work directly with the process and are in direct contact with the facts of the process. In order to map a process we need to learn about it from these people. We need their cooperation and we won't get it if they are suspicious of the reasons for the project.

By far, the most important source of information about any process is the people who live with it day by day. They know how it is supposed to work and they know how to make it work and keep it working. They have seen things go wrong and been a part of making them right. They have lived with its frustrations, know what to watch out for and have learned how to get past them. If the knowledge of these people is used to establish the map of the current process, there is a good chance that it will be realistic.

However, if these people are convinced that the reason the map is being prepared is to eliminate their employment it is likely that they will be uncooperative. Even if the true reasons for the project are totally devoid of any chance of downsizing, this has to be made clear to operating people or they will be quite apt to assume the threat and react accordingly. A clear statement of intent, from someone whose authority spans the process, is needed; something like – “It is our intent to develop the best process possible, we need your help and we guarantee that there will be no loss of employment as a result of this effort.”

There is also another approach to building maps that ignores operating people altogether. We do not recommend this approach. It appears to be based on the

phenomenon that: the less you know about something, the simpler it seems. The person building the map assumes that the operating people are performing simple tasks that can be logically deduced without their help. This limits the mapping effort to a systematically organized display of generalities. These maps permit managers and consultants to feel that they are actually analyzing a process when they are, in fact, thinking about it in vague, general terms. Then they think up a new process (without having tapped into reality) and impose it on operating people (who are in touch with reality).

In conclusion, the people who actually do the work need to cooperate in the activity of mapping their processes by supplying the information about their work with which the map is built.

Organizing the Facts in an Effective Map

It is one thing to obtain the cooperation of operating people. It is quite another to successfully learn from them the facts about their work that are needed to build an effective process map. The person building the map needs to push the fact gathering from generalities to specifics by breaking down the process into its elements, the items that are processed and the steps those items go through.

As discussed earlier, without the involvement of operating people our process information is limited to generalizations. But when operating people are involved, the information gathered may also be limited to generalizations. To push our fact gathering into specifics we need to focus not on the process as a whole but rather on the individual items that are processed.

We don't simply address the receiving process. Rather, we focus on the 'Pallet of Goods' that has been delivered, the 'Bar Codes' which arrive with the goods, the various 'Screens' of the 'Goods in Process Inventory Data Base' that are updated first by the receiving clerk and later by an inspector and a production control clerk, the 'Inspection Ticket' that is attached to the pallet of goods, etc. In a hospital process we focus on the 'Patient', each copy of the multi-part 'Admissions Form', The 'Patient Services Form', the screens of the 'Patient Data Base', etc. In a procurement process the focus starts with a 'Requisition', then a 'Procurement Data Base', the customer's 'Order System', our 'Accounts Payable Voucher', the customer's 'Statement', etc.

First we break a process down into its items. Then we focus on each of these items step by step. Our map will display the name of each item followed by symbols which indicate each time that item is moved, delayed, handled, altered,

and inspected. These item lines will also be linked to show when items are attached, separated or affect one another. Also the item lines will branch when there are alternatives in the process and sometimes they will rejoin. With a detailed map like this we come to understand how the process works. This, in turn, enables us to see opportunities for simplifying and improving.

There are people who don't want to get into all this detail. Sometimes they ridicule this detail as unnecessary. (Hopefully much of it will prove to be unnecessary, but it won't go away by being ignored.) Process maps don't become detailed because of the mapping technique. They become detailed because the process is detailed. They record reality and put us in a position to effectively understand and improve that reality.

In conclusion, to get a good process map you want to display the reality of how the process works by breaking it down into its items and steps.

Making sure that the Data in the Map is Valid

You can gather detailed data from cooperating employees and still wind up with a map that is shot full of errors. To assure that the data is actually valid, we need to gather our data from the person who does that work, at the work place, one step at a time, while observing it being done.

There are two important types of authority in every organization, social authority and factual authority. The CEO is the top authority of the organizations social structure and that structure and authority are vital if an organization is going to function. However, when it comes to factual authority, the person with the best knowledge and understanding of the specific facts being dealt with is the top authority. Therefore, when we gather data we strive to collect it always from the top (factual) authority of the organization and we treat that person with the respect deserved by a top authority. In doing so, we show respect for the person and the facts and improve our chances of capturing reality on our maps.

(When there are a number of people doing the same work, gather your data from the most skilled, the one the others turn to when they have questions. You will then be gathering your data from the top authority in the organization.)

If you actually follow the work through the process, gathering data on each step of the process while observing it at the work place, you will eliminate most of the causes of faulty data. You arrive at the work place and are introduced to the

employee (usually by the supervisor). Then you ask the employee for a demonstration. It is usually easier for a person to show you their work than to explain it. We will invariably get both, explanation and demonstration, with the emphasis on the later.

As the employee does the work it becomes obvious when subsidiary items come into play, items that might easily have been left out of an explanation. These items are usually there because they are necessary parts of the process as it is now being performed. Easily overlooked, their role is also missed as the process is being reworked and, when the new process is installed, another subsidiary item will need to be created to fill this need.

Compare this type of data gathering with talking to a group of employees simultaneously in a conference room. You miss all of the visual information of the work place itself. You don't always hear about a step from a person who actually performs it. Unnecessary confusion creeps in concerning sequence of steps, confusion that would be avoided if the steps were taken one at a time in separate interviews. And, there is a very high probability that important details will be omitted.

By carefully following the process through the work places step by step we tie up less employee time and get a better, more accurate map quicker. The cost in employee time is obvious. If you pull together a group of all of the people who work in a process all of them are tied up for the discussion of the entire process, not just their own part. The only way that the group meeting could possibly be less time consuming for the individuals would be if the data gathering was done superficially. As for actually completing the map sooner, the visual information available at the work place provides a level of clarity that produces understanding far faster than people talking. This clarity and understanding more than compensate for the time required to get from work place to work place.

In conclusion, to get valid data, gather it as close to the reality as you can.

Summary

1. The people doing the work are the best source of realistic data for building a process map.
2. To get cooperation from the people doing the work it is critical that they not be concerned about downsizing resulting from the process changes.
3. The people doing the work are the top 'factual' authorities on that work and therefore deserve to be treated with the respect due a top authority.
4. Generalities are the enemy of good process maps. Push for specifics in your data gathering. To get specifics, break the process down into its items and steps.
5. Gather data at the work place with both explanation and demonstration.
6. Display each item as a separate line on your map with its own steps.
7. Display effects between items on your map where one item supplies information that is used to do something to another item (i.e. transcribing information from one item to another, using one item to check information on another, etc.
8. Display alternatives where the work is processed differently under different circumstances.
9. Display assembly and disassembly by bringing item lines together and by separating them.
10. The real test of a process map is not that it makes sense to people who have never done the work but rather that it makes sense and is vouched for by those who do the work.