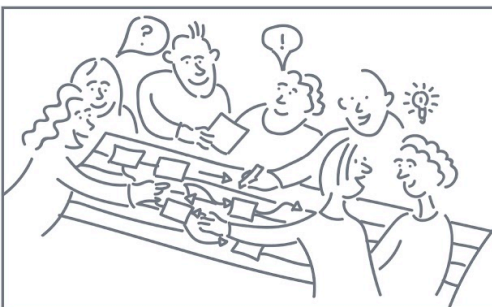


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Participative Process Reviews: Developing a sector-wide tool kit

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Participative Process Review (PPR) TOOL KIT

Introduction

Let's take a moment to think about your University. Do you have teams:

- that continually take on more and more additional tasks without ever losing existing ones (and not being given additional resource)
- increasingly finding that they lurch from one busy period straight into another?
- who have frustrations caused by the actions (or non action) of other teams?
- which have a reputation of frustrating students and colleagues with their inconsiderate demands and timeliness of their requests?
- which spend disproportionately large amounts of time on activities which if

only they had "the time to think" they might question the need for all their efforts?

In response to situations like these the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development (OCSLD) developed an innovative format for Participative Process Review (PPR) workshops, drawing on existing good practice (Sarchet and Kenward 2006; SUMS 2009). The PPR workshops act as catalyst for bringing staff from different parts of the University together to problem solve complex process issues.

The key to success for effective PPRs is in ensuring the right representation mix are all together in the same room. The participative nature of the workshop using real process issues enabled a breadth of viewpoints to be discussed in a constructive format which

identified points in the overall process that were inefficient and could be improved.

One of the desired outcomes from the PPR workshop initiative was to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of staff to enable them to facilitate further process reviews on their own. In this article you will see that we have been successful in realising this aim.

After taking part in internal workshops, teams within Oxford Brookes University have changed their practices to be less complicated, more streamlined and more time/cost effective.

Through the Leadership Foundation in Higher Education's (LFHE) Innovation and Transformation scheme we sought to trial our PPR approach into the wider HE community. This involved facilitating PPRs at 6 other Universities enabling them in turn to carry out their own process reviews.

The workshops and the resources have been evaluated and are now launched as a resource toolkit to enable you to carry out PPRs in your University. See the end of the article for a link to the toolkit.

PPR origins and rationale

On my return from a senior management secondment in 2012 I took on a commission in conversation with our Registrar to develop an intervention to enable staff to carry out internal process reviews. A traditional approach may have been to develop a workshop specifically designed for process reviewers. The big stumbling block for me was conjuring up a suitable case study exercise that would resonate with all delegates.

When I started to entertain the idea that in lieu of a case study delegates brought live issues the whole workshop started to re-orientate itself. In place of the intended workshop for process reviewers there would be a live review workshop with an assembled process review team. I would then augment

the live review with mini insight sections specifically for those who wanted to subsequently lead their own reviews.

This meant everyone would benefit from absorbing the insights into the skills, knowledge and attributes to conduct future process reviews.

The essence of PPR

The key for a successful Participative Process Review is people participation. This was borne out by one commentator from our research who remarked:

"Even just calling it a participative process, using that adjective has an impact on how people engage with it."

It's important to ensure that:

- you have a sponsor who provides clear and concise terms of reference
- the workshop has a representative cross section of staff involved and impacted by the process
- you allow time for people to talk, share and discuss
- you engage a facilitator who ideally is neutral to the process under review
- everyone is empowered to challenge the status quo

One of the most useful articles we have found regarding participation in process reviews is "The Key to Good Process Mapping" by Ben Graham (2006). In this article Graham emphasises that when it comes to processes, the top factual authority is the person who actually does the task and should subsequently be respected in that position. We attach a copy of this article to participants' joining instructions. This provides emphasis and reassurance that each participant is valued for their potential input.

The PPR workshop makes linkages to the customer focused strategy of *Moments of Truth* (Carlzon 1989) used by Jan Carlzon the CEO of Scandinavian Airlines in the 1980s.

He used the term to mean those moments in which important impressions are formed by customers and where there is significant opportunity for good or bad impressions to be made. This technique urges organisations to slow down time in watching customer interactions and in questioning how these can be improved.

The PPR workshop also makes linkages to the concept of *Lean* thinking (Womack & Jones 2003). *Lean* thinking in its broadest sense is a holistic and sustainable approach to do more with less. *Lean* represents a culture in which organisations continually look to eliminate wastefulness in delivering value to a customer. Key requirements in creating a *Lean* environment are:

- maintaining an unrelenting focus on providing customer value
- delivering what is needed by the customer at the right time
- keeping things moving (flow)
- applying various techniques to examine and eliminate root causes of waste
- continuous learning and making everyday improvements
- taking a long term view (*Lean* is a journey not a destination)
- building long term relationships with all stakeholders
- respecting people

For *Lean* to succeed the last point is arguably the most important. In *Lean* it's people who create value. They are more important than tools, equipment or capital. It's people who implement processes and utilise equipment. Rooting out waste through *Lean* depends on creating the right culture and environment where people are respected.

Fundamentals for PPR to work

The PPR workshop adopts a simple approach to process mapping whilst acknowledging there's a large volume of advice out there to satisfy people who would like to progress to greater complexity. For our purposes our stakeholders have often greatly appreciated our keeping things simple approach.

Outlined below are some key fundamental consideration points to ensuring your Participative Process Review workshop has a successful outcome.

Process Review Stages

For the purposes of keeping things simple the process review itself has been condensed into 6 key stages as shown in the delegate handout in diagram 1. The diagram offers suggestions on how to conduct a process review with different options available in tailoring it to the prevailing local circumstances.

Types of Process Reviews

Our toolkit is designed to enable teams and cross functional teams to take time out of their normal work activities to review their localised processes. Whilst not originally intended to be used for large complex university-wide processes the PPR approach has since been found to be effective for these as well.

This toolkit is not intended for very specialised or regulated processes which have adopted a more sophisticated set of symbols and protocols for process mapping. These could be IT related processes or industry specific processes.

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY	Participative Process Reviews	Session 1
OCSLD	Process Review Stages	Ver: 10 July 15

**Stage 1:
Definition stage**

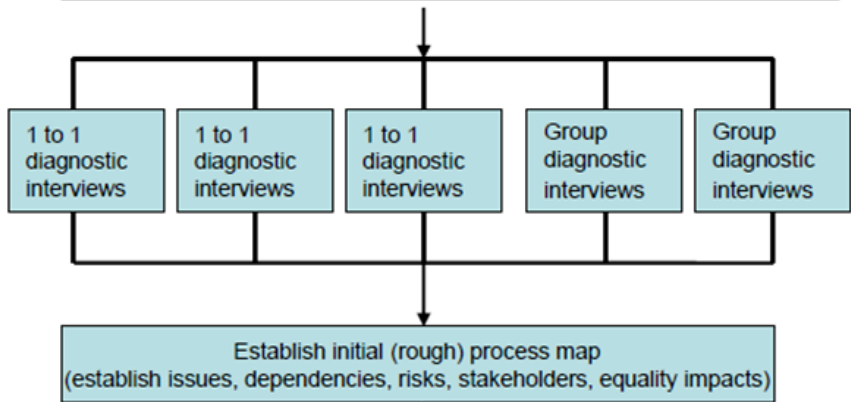
Establish ToR for the process review
 Articulate objectives (possible problem) (desired outcomes), scope, stakeholders time frame, process review team

Agreed

**Stage 2:
Plan and prepare**

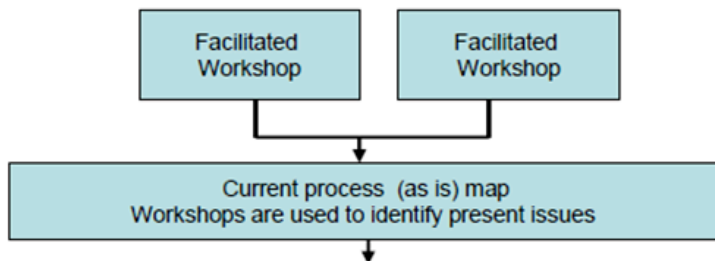
Determine who is to be interviewed
 Plan and prepare schedules, communication et al

**Stage 3:
Initial diagnostics**

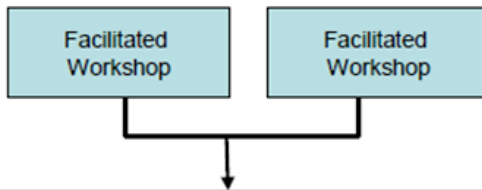


**Stage 4:
Defining the current (as is) process**

NB: More than 1 workshop depending on size and complexity of process



**Stage 5:
Design proposal for a new process**



**Stage 6:
Write report**

Report includes: definition of as is process together with proposal for any new process.
 Report highlights: issues, dependencies, linkages, risks and other key impacts

Recommendations with outline of cost and resource implications

Diagram 1: Delegate handout detailing the 6 key stages of a typical process review

Identifying the culture where PPRs work best

Participative Processes Reviews will work best in cultures where people are encouraged to:

- be open and honest
- be continuous learners
- ask questions
- admit and learn from making mistakes
- challenge where appropriate
- evaluate risks of doing something new
- empowered to make own decisions

...and where:

- management is supportive
- there is absence of blame culture

In some instances the introductions of PPR workshops have been a contributory factor in fostering such a culture. Where this is the case then having external independent facilitators may be necessary to challenge prevailing behaviours. If this is the case then having support from an influential sponsor will be a key factor for a successful outcome.

Key participant roles

A key requirement for the effectiveness of any process review is that key roles are identified, these are:

- **Process study sponsor:** the person who has responsibility for the process.
- **Process study review leader:** the person who takes on the responsibility of organising and conducting the process review through the 6 stages.
- **The workshop facilitator:** Ideally someone who is not directly connected with the process who can facilitate from a neutral perspective (this role could be fulfilled by the process study review leader if they are not directly linked to the process under review)
- **Workshop loggist / recorder:** an important role given the quantity of useful information discussed and generated throughout the day.
- **Process review team members**
- **Process end users**

For the workshop to be effective it is important that you get the right cross section of stakeholders in the room especially if they have the authority to initiate or empower decision

making. This of course acknowledges the logistical challenge of diarising for such an event.

The 1 day workshop format

The workshop is formatted (as shown in diagram 2 below) to guide a team through the 6 stages of a process review. Whilst able to touch and inform on all six stages of the process review it was not envisaged that a whole review could be fully completed in just one day. To condense the essence of a process review into a 1 day workshop a number of compromises were necessary.

Prior to the workshop the process review sponsor and/or the process study review leader will compile a draft Terms of Reference and distribute this to the team in advance of the workshop. This has two key purposes. One to ensure everyone arrives at the workshop with a clear understanding of the task ahead. Secondly it saves time on the day as it enables the team to concentrate on critiquing and refining the terms of reference (as opposed to compiling it from scratch).

A key part of the day is taken up with the process mapping activity using a simple set of tools (including a roll of paper, post it notes, felt pens and a long ruler). In session four participants map the current (as is) process. This usually absorbs the longest part of the day as the participants attempt to clarify what actually happens in the process review and start to articulate the problems and issues encountered. This often generates much discussion and ideas which the facilitator will encourage the participants to capture in preparation for session five. Having reviewed the outputs of session four delegates will then move to session five with a remit to conjecture a new process.

My original design for the workshop had envisaged an introduction to using process mapping software in session five. By the time I came to facilitate my first workshop I had concluded that incorporating a software element would be counterproductive to the flow of the workshop. Instead I provide information on two process software solutions (Lucidchart and Microsoft Visio) and encourage a participant (volunteer) to acquire a valuable new skill by compiling the day's process maps, post workshop.

This leaves two short sessions at the end of the day. Session six considers how the report will be written with an idea of the key content and recommendations. The final session concludes with next steps.

Participative Process Review Workshop

Workshop outline

- **Introduction** (aims and objectives)
- **Session 1: A general approach to process reviews**
- **Session 2: Creating a robust Terms of Reference**
 - Stage 1: Definition stage
 - Stage 2: Plan and prepare
- **Session 3: Gathering process information**
 - Stage 3: Initial diagnostics
 - Key skills (interviewing and facilitation) for effective diagnostics

Break

- **Session 4: Introduction to process mapping**
 - Stage 4: Defining the current (as is)

Lunch

- **Session 5: Stage 5: Design proposal for a new process**
 - Overview of Lucidchart / VISIO

Break

- **Session 6: Presenting your proposals for Stage 6: Write report**
- **Session 7: Decisions and next steps**

Diagram 2 PowerPoint slide with workshop outline

Slow fuse approach to PPRs

An automatic response expressed by some delegate feedback is a desire to jump straight to envisioning and mapping a new process. On reflection (post workshop) they often appreciate (or understand) the value in taking a slower build up approach to the review through refining the draft terms of reference and carrying out a SWOT analysis and spending time reviewing the old “as is” process.

All this has impacts with regard to workshop timings. None of the sessions have specified time allocations set against them. This is deliberate. Having facilitated over 25 workshops I can confirm that no one workshop has replicated another. The facilitator needs to use their intuition, experience and judgement as to when to move participants through the sessions.

Internal launch and external piloting

The first PPR workshops were carried out in 2013 and since then I have facilitated 18 internal one day PPRs on quite a diverse range of processes. Examples being:

- Shared housing tenant damages recovery process
- Introducing Talis Aspire reading lists
- Summer School accommodation booking
- University Mitigating Circumstances
- Student induction and enrolment
- Post offer conversion
- Tuition fee receipting
- Blanket Order invoice payments
- NHS contracting

With a prompt from our Registrar we applied to the LFHE’s Innovation and Transformation Scheme established to disseminate good practice in developing efficiency in the HE sector.

The objectives of the project were to:

- determine measures for evaluating participative process reviews, which will be of use to other universities.
- evaluate the intended and unintended consequences of undertaking process review in academic and professional service contexts.
- provide evidence for the impact of participative process reviews.
- document lessons learned, from which the wider sector can learn.
- provide the sector with the rationale and tools required to undertake a participative process review.

In December 2014 I emailed the SDF community and really appreciated the response from sector colleagues to be involved in piloting the PPR approach. During the first half of 2015 we facilitated PPRs to six diverse universities across the country.

Research findings

Our research findings have been far ranging and are contained in the final report which can be accessed from the PPR tool kit. The following section is extracted directly from the final project report (OCSLD & Belanda Consulting, 2015).

Discoveries coming to light from PPRs

All process leaders and workshop participants interviewed remarked on having "light bulb moments" during the process mapping activity. In some cases this was how PPRs crystallised some obvious bottleneck or 'simple' solution, while in others it was how the sheer length of the mapped process was visualised in terms of the number of tasks, steps, handovers and/or people involved. For some institutions, there was an obvious gap between what senior managers expected and what the 'rank and file' wanted from the process.

Many participants also remarked that it was surprising how differently people work on tasks, even those in a similar role (such as 'administrators', 'managers', 'coordinators').

"The light bulb went on when people saw the duplication, the amount of waiting and effort [by course leaders] ... and we realised we had this assumption that it

had to be done every year whereas someone pointed out the regulations only require it every three years."

The benefit of sharing important information and working documents was highlighted, since people are not all working from the beginning of a process or have little or no experience of some aspects of the process (such as finance, payroll, information systems or promotions).

A clear benefit arose from taking time out as a group to problem solve in a concentrated effort. The need forcibly to interrupt day--to-day patterns and habits and question how things are done was felt to be an important factor in improving a process.

"There was a general sense that finally some change is happening for something that had been a known problem for a few years."

Having the right people involved in the PPR workshop on the day had the effect of speeding up decision making. This was felt to be an important factor in making significant progress and achieving the aims and objectives for the process review. Action planning and communicating with wider stakeholders was felt to keep implementation on track so the changes could happen fairly swiftly during the next cycle of the process.

"Having the right people in the room allows you to do all of that iterative process at once."

"The fact that we are engaging with the issues and proposing improvements is welcomed and one of my concerns now is to manage [stakeholder] expectations about how much it can be improved given a short time."

Whilst resource intensive, the mapping produced real 'eye-openers' for teams, in terms of the information and activities represented by the 'as is' process. This highlighted the main causes of variation, duplication, inconsistencies, errors and workload pressure points for staff, which made it easier to see what could be improved or eliminated to streamline the process. As a result

the dynamic and mood of the group notably shifted throughout the workshop.

"[Through our review] we identified five key errors that accounted for 80% of incorrect applications."

"When you have something tangible in front of you ...[and] you put numbers to that in terms of staff rate and staff time [it] would be about 2000 [person] days which is incredible."

Hopefully you can see the linkages from the introductory questions at the beginning of this article to the positive findings from our research into facilitating PPRs.

PPR passing it on

What has been most encouraging from our perspective is that on delivering it once for cross functional teams they have subsequently gone on to carry out further process reviews in their areas.

Here is some choice feedback from our research.

Manager: "Before we went into the workshop, the team were unclear and unsure what this process review was all about, what it was for, why they were doing it. The immediate effect is that when you talk about process review now to my team, they don't hold their hands up in despair or anything like that anymore, they understand why we do it and what the benefits are. Since then, the team have done reviews on other processes as a direct result of the team members' ability to do PPRs. I didn't have to take any part in that, once they learned the techniques and approach, they just cracked on and did it".

Manager: "Before PPR, staff were not really thinking of and looking at a process in its entirety. People would just come do their job and if something wasn't working they might change it a bit, but they wouldn't necessarily look at the whole thing, which now they do. It's completely changed the way we work. Now the team are constantly doing process reviews. We have now done 8 or 9 and reviewed

almost every aspect of our summer business using the PPR technique".

Manager "Personally, the workshop was a really good experience, as I've never really facilitated something like that before. We have looked at quite a few (processes) now..... we all realise how good a method PPR is for clarifying a process. I've used it in a lot of other places in my work and see just how straightforward it is, get it right, get it all mapped out and working, it's a great tool to clarify processes and improvements. The more process reviews I'm doing, the more I'm learning about how to manage people and what it actually means to be in that facilitating role".

The PPR tool kit

This toolkit has been specifically designed to enable staff at your University to deliver their own Participative Process Reviews. It contains:

The first section provides advice on how to approach what we see as true participation, which has been validated through our research giving you an indication of the direct and indirect benefits you may gain for your own organisation.

The second part of the tool kit contains all the materials to deliver and evaluate your workshop. This includes powerpoint presentation with facilitator observation notes and delegate handouts.

All are designed to be customised by you to fit your circumstances.

The third section provides a quick overview of the 6 key stages involved in carrying out a process review.

The toolkit is available at

<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/OCSLD/Research/Participative-Process-Review/>

<http://goo.gl/XGDwd0>

Acknowledgments

Leadership Foundation in Higher Education (LFHE) Innovation and Transformation scheme

This initiative to bring our internal PPRs to the wider higher education sector was developed with funding from the LFHE under the Innovation and Transformation Scheme.

<http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/en/research-resources/itf-projects>

The Efficiency Exchange

This initiative is working with the Efficiency Exchange in the dissemination of the findings and promoting of this tool kit.

<http://www.efficiencyexchange.ac.uk/>

SUMS Consulting

SUMS Consulting a consortium working for Universities owned by Universities. SUMS have generously contributed to this initiative with their materials and ongoing support.

<http://www.sums.org.uk/>

Belanda Consulting

Jay Dempster of Belanda Consulting worked on the evaluation and co-authored the final project report with the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development team.

<http://belanda-consulting.co.uk/>

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Ian has been with the OCSLD since 2006. Ian's interests have led to the development of a variety of business related initiatives within the University. Practising what he teaches has seen Ian seconded to Senior Management to oversee the implementation of key University initiatives which included successfully project managing the restructure of the University and managing the 'Programme for Enhancing the Student Experience'.

Prior to joining Oxford Brookes Ian was a learning and organisational development practitioner

experienced in delivering new initiatives into a variety of industry sectors, applying well-honed consultancy skills, project management rigour and general pragmatism. Industry sectors include airlines (British Airways), high-tech engineering (Airbus), hotels (InterContinental Hotels) data marketing (Claritas), maritime (Sea Containers) and multimedia contact centres (iSKY Europe).

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