



PROCESS MANAGEMENT ESSENTIALS

By
Peter K Fraser
Process Principles Limited

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TEN COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT BUSINESS PROCESSES

“All business processes operate like a production line”.

No, some need to be rigorously defined and controlled and some are subject to individual interpretation. Objectives can be to minimise variation, to satisfy variable customer demand or to deal with a unique situation.

“You can show the sequence and interaction of the processes in an organisation in a 2-dimensional diagram”.

No, the relationship amongst processes in an organisation is too complex to show in this way.

“Everyone involved in carrying out one or more task within a process:

- knows what the overall process is”

No, especially if there is lack of internal communication, or if they are managed by department

- knows what the objectives of the process are”

No, people often do something because that is what they did last week / their boss told them to / that is the next thing in the in-tray

- knows (or cares!) who else is affected by the process and how it operates”

No, it may not even enter their heads

- knows who receives the Output(s)”

Why would they look beyond their own task?

“A process is a procedure”

No, a process description is (one form of) procedure, but the process exists whether or not it is defined.

“A flowchart is a process”

No, it is one way to represent a process.

“A process is a document”

No, it is “how work gets done” ie activities not words.

“Every step in a process adds value”

– if only...!

ANOTHER TEN MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT BUSINESS PROCESSES

A process has to “transform” all its Inputs, including Resources

No, whether a transformation happens or not is incidental and may in some cases be the worst possible outcome. This is one of the flaws in the production-line mindset of the ISO9000 definition.

All “Inputs” have to go in at the start of the process

No, some may be required only at the very end of the process.

All “Outputs” have to come out at the end of the process

No, some will be “put out” almost as soon as the process has started.

Inputs are always “put” in from outside the process

No, many are “taken” in when required from inside the process.

Reducing variation in a process is always desirable

No, many processes rely on competent staff to respond to the particular circumstances that occur at the time.

A task can belong to only a single process

No, it can also be part of a number of other processes.

Staff who regularly follow a process know what the process actually is (objectives, tasks, roles, outcomes etc)

– even (especially?) managers often don’t know.

Drawing “words in boxes”-type flowcharts is the best way to define a process

– they have (extreme) limitations in (eg) the amount of information they can show, the way in which they identify task responsibilities (and other role involvements) and the ability to print a complete process description in a usable format. Getting a consistent presentation format can also be a “challenge”.

There are only one or two distinct types of business process

No, we can identify at least five, each with distinct characteristics.

The (now superseded) ISO9000 “transformational” definition of a process could be applied to service and administrative processes

- in fact it didn’t always work too well even for a manufacturing process.

TEN WEAKNESSES IN ISO9001:2015'S REFERENCES TO "PROCESS"

A Quality Management System does not have its own processes

Processes already exist as part of any organisation's management system.

The standard does not acknowledge that a process does nothing until something starts it.

A trigger event is required before any action is taken.

It is (still) based on the "production line" mindset of raw materials being used to make components which are used to produce finished goods, and it tries to fit everything into that model.

Inputs and outputs are not the essential elements of a process. An objective (a concept ignored in the standard in relation to process) can be achieved in different ways depending on circumstances – the trigger event and the objective define the process.

It has confused the previous definition of "the process approach" by combining it with the previous (and separate) "system approach to management"

The concepts are different, and it has removed the focus on how activities are related in achieving an objective. Systems thinking is relevant to process management, but it is not the same.

"PDCA" and "risk based thinking" are not part of "the process approach"

Since the processes almost certainly exist before any reference is made to ISO9001, the "planning" will have been done, and the "doing" will be ongoing. Consideration of risk should have been an element of both. Recognising which activities are required to achieve an objective does not require either – although managing an existing process does require the consideration of risk.

The definitions of "customer", "output", "product" and "service" are so interlinked that they cause confusion and contradiction

For example: according to the definitions, a supplier is a customer(!)

The suggestion in a Note that one type of "product" (ie the "output of a process") be defined in terms of a process ("processed material") is a circular definition

Most of such Notes make things worse rather than better.

Although the term "internal process" is used, it is not defined and is patently nonsense

Where a process takes place is not relevant to how it is managed. Processes typically involve more than one department and may involve external organisations.

"Customers" and "Providers" are defined as being internal or external, but the terms are then used as meaning external to the organisation

The fundamental purpose for ISO9001 is to assess an organisation's ability to "*provide products and services that meet customer... requirements*" and to "*facilitate opportunities to enhance customer satisfaction*" – ie the relationship is "provider – organisation – customer".

Guidance issued by ISO contradicts the standard itself

For example, various definition(s) of a "system": are processes included and, if so, which ones?

And "processes define interrelated activities" – no, they don't, they don't "define" anything.

TEN REASONS WHY PROCESS MAPPING / MANAGEMENT IS OF VALUE

It clarifies roles and responsibilities

– especially if deployment flowcharting is used with the RACI methodology (Responsible, Assists, Consulted, Informed).

It helps teamwork

People can see where they belong in the overall process.

It highlights duplication and waste

Individual paragraphs in narrative procedures can sound convincing, but they do not show a concise presentation of the end-to-end process.

It helps you to focus on business objectives

– and on policies that affect individual tasks.

It is not difficult to define and communicate key processes

– especially if suitable software is used.

It is relevant to SMEs, large corporates and departments within global operators alike

The same principles apply.

It will save time, money (and possibly lives)

– by providing a clear appreciation of the operational, financial and other risks associated with running an organisation.

It saves paper

– (if you must print anything), and a good process map is far more concise than narrative.

It enables role involvements to be extracted automatically from the basic process descriptions

– (if suitable software is used) as well as risks, skills and knowledge requirements, standards compliance etc.

Induction and training is enhanced

New staff can see exactly where they “fit in”.

TEN POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN DEFINING A PROCESS

Decide where it **starts**.

Decide where it **ends**.

Be clear about its **objectives**.

Be clear **WHY** you are defining it.

Be clear **HOW** users will access the definition, and the level of detail they need.

Know where the process fits within the **overall management system**.

Ensure that the people who will be using the process description are **competent** – or train them.

Describe tasks in **verb – noun** format.

Identify **logical stages** within a process (if relevant) to make the description more readable.

(Unless you are defining a process at a high level...) Clarify who is RESPONSIBLE for each task, and who else is **INVOLVED** ("RACI").

TEN MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN DEFINING A PROCESS

Don't:

assume that a good process description on its own will make the process work

You still need to manage people.

go into more detail than is needed

Know your audience.

repeat yourself

– or say the same thing twice(!)

use passive tense for tasks

All tasks are actions, so “verb-noun” works best.

consider the “what ifs” and exceptional conditions at the outset

Concentrate on the normal flow.

use different terms for the same role, or document

You may need to rationalise your job titles and tidy up your document register.

make a process description too long

Refer to supporting documents or to a sub-process if more detail is required.

be inconsistent

Apply a few basic standards and simple conventions, and stick to them.

use technical language or jargon

Refer to a glossary if necessary.

assume that everyone knows the (business) objectives which the process should satisfy

They may not even appreciate why they do what they do within the process.

TEN OBJECTIVES WHEN CREATING A PROCESS DESCRIPTION

You should:

Be clear **WHY** you are defining it - and who will use the resultant description.

Decide on the **best medium** to use - eg brown paper, Post It notes, pen and paper, diagramming software, specialist process mapping / management system software.

Ensure a **consistent presentation format** (if you are defining a number of processes).

Ensure that you can display and/or print a process description **in enough detail** for a user to follow the process.

Refer (and link?) to **all related information** required for a user to understand what to do.

Clarify **who is responsible** (and who else is involved) in each task.

(If relevant) identify **risks, timings, competency requirements** and other measures against each task.

Ensure that you use the same names for roles and documents every time you refer to them.

Recognise that the performance of a number of other processes can be a **key influence** on a specific process.

The process description should **simplify, condense and visualise procedures**.