Tools for Work Process Analysis
By Gary Corbin and Jeanne Nyquist
Innovative Growth Solutions

Identifying Critical Focus Points for Process Change

One of the most difficult aspects of Work Process Improvement is the decision of what in the existing process should change. After all, the existing process "works" to some degree – things get done, albeit perhaps not with the desired efficiency or effectiveness. Existing processes were developed with a great deal of effort over time to solve a problem using then-available resources. The organization has invested a lot in them.

Meanwhile, Work Process Improvement takes a lot of time and effort – and may not result in measurable improvement. Therefore you should only embark on a WPI initiative if you can be reasonably certain of achieving lasting, measurable improvements in effectiveness or efficiency.

Step One: Identify the problem
- What *outcome* of the current process is unsatisfactory? What is the evidence of the unsatisfactory result? Is it measurable?
- What *critical resource* is strained by the current process? Staff time, budget, facilities?

Step Two: Break down the process
- What are the major steps in this process?
- Where are the bottlenecks?

Step Three: Who does it affect?
- Who are the stakeholders/customers served by this process? How do they feel about the process's effectiveness?
- Who can help you improve the process? Who will *champion* the cause of change?

Use the answers to these questions to fill in the matrices on the next page.

Work Process Analysis Matrices

In Table 1, enter major subprocess steps in column 1 and key resources across row 1. Then place an "X" in the box at the intersection of where a process constrains a key resource.

Table 1				
Constrained Resources for process __(process name here)___				
	Budget	Meeting Rooms	Analyst Time	Elapsed Time (Deadline)
Subprocess 1				
Subprocess 2				
Subprocess 3				
Subprocess 4				
Subprocess 5				

In Table 2, enter major subprocess steps in column 1 and key stakeholders across row 1. Then describe how each stakeholder is affected (if applicable) by each existing subprocess.

Table 2				
Affected Stakeholders for process __(process name here)___				
	HR	Dept. Managers	Admins	External Customer
Subprocess 1				
Subprocess 2				
Subprocess 3				
Subprocess 4				
Subprocess 5				

Scoping WPI Initiatives

Work process improvement is very time- and labor-intensive. Scoping the level of effort required is key for ensuring successful outcomes of the initiative. Below are some hints and tools for helping you scope a WPI initiative. Keep in mind that there are always unforeseen complications, so estimate higher than your first impulse suggests. Better to be happily surprised by beating your initial deadline than to cut corners on key steps later.

- Initial scoping
  - Figure on 1-2 hours for identifying and describing initial high-level process – steps, desired outcomes, potential stakeholders
  - Full team meeting of 1-2 hours to review/discuss/establish strategy
  - 2-4 hours for identifying potential measures and data sources
  - How well do you understand and agree upon your current process?
    - The less shared understanding in your group, the longer it will take to document existing processes and agree upon solutions.

Streamlining Tips:

- *Begin with the end in mind.* Clearly define the problem you are trying to solve and the desired outcomes.
- *Identify your deadline.* When does the improvement need to be completed? Is the deadline real or self-imposed? What other resource restrictions exist?
- *Develop a realistic plan.* Work backward from the deadline. How much can you realistically complete by the deadline?
- *Plan the scope to fit your time/resource constraints.* Consider -
  - Narrowing the focus to improving key subprocesses
  - Limiting stakeholder involvement to key people or groups
  - Limiting the number of staff involved in the WPI
- *Build support for your WPI* – Make sure key decision makers are behind your project and are willing to support change.

- Analyzing existing subprocesses
  - Each key subprocess will take several staff hours to outline, describe, diagram, review, and revise. For EACH subprocess, figure on:
    - 1-2 hours for initial outline, description, and diagram of existing process
    - 1-2 hours for review with colleagues
    - 1-2 hours for revision of existing process description/diagram
  - Due to staff availability, this can take weeks to months, depending on the number of subprocesses and available analysts

> *Streamlining Tips:*
>
> - *Prioritize subprocesses for impact.* Analyze only key subprocesses that are critical to the improvement effort.
> - *Limit the depth of analysis when appropriate.*

- Stakeholder Review
  - The more stakeholders involved, the longer the process will take.
  - Be sure to include stakeholders in selection, establishing desired outcomes, measures, testing, and follow-up feedback
  - Even a simple process with few stakeholders will require 4-8 hours of YOUR staff's time
  - Scheduling can be an issue – figure on this requiring a few weeks or more

> *Streamlining Tips:*
>
> - *Prioritize your stakeholders.* Use a matrix to analyze your stakeholders. Focus your time on getting input from key stakeholders.
> - *Use a variety of stakeholder involvement tools.* If your list of stakeholders is long, consider using on-line surveys, focus groups, diagonal teams, etc. to efficiently identify stakeholder interests.

- Process change
  - Each key subprocess will take:
    - 2-4 hours for brainstorming and researching alternatives over a period of a few days
    - 2-4 hours to develop, diagram, and describe a new process, outcome, and stakeholders
    - Group discussion and further revision
    - Stakeholder discussion, review, revision
    - Figure on 12-16 hours over a period of a few weeks per major subprocess that you revise

> *Streamlining Tips:*
>
> - *Select a limited # of high priority processes for change.*
> - *"Pilot" key changes that can be implemented quickly.* Evaluate the results of the pilot and adjust accordingly.
> - *Ask yourself if an 80% solution is good enough.*
> - *Involve key stakeholders and decision makers in the change process to ensure support for lasting change.*

- Testing
    - Test each change separately and then the process as a whole
    - The more changes you make the more time this will take
    - Figure on this taking a few weeks at least

Streamlining Tips:

- *Limit testing to key process changes.*
- *Involve stakeholders in the testing process.*