From **PURPOSE** *to* **PROCESS** to **PEOPLE**

The nature of work

By Jerry L. Talley

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Preface

Over the last 45 years I have worked in hundreds of organizations. Some as large as Intel, Amdahl, or Xilinx. Some as small as an organic grocery store in Santa Cruz, California. They have come from virtually every segment of the economy. Every client engagement had its unique features, but now that I can look back over my entire career, I find some surprising impressions.

Like most organizational development consultants, clients typically called because of "people problems". Morale. Turnover. Lack of engagement. Low resilience. No buy-in to strategic changes. Lack of accountability. No entrepreneurial spirit. Excessive conflict. Lack of role clarity. Resisting necessary change. It seemed that people were the most problematic aspect of organizational life.

And the field of organizational development had an array of tools to address the problems: surveys, focus groups, all-hands meetings, weekend retreats, large group interventions, training, coaching, mentoring, a raft of standardized tests, and so on.

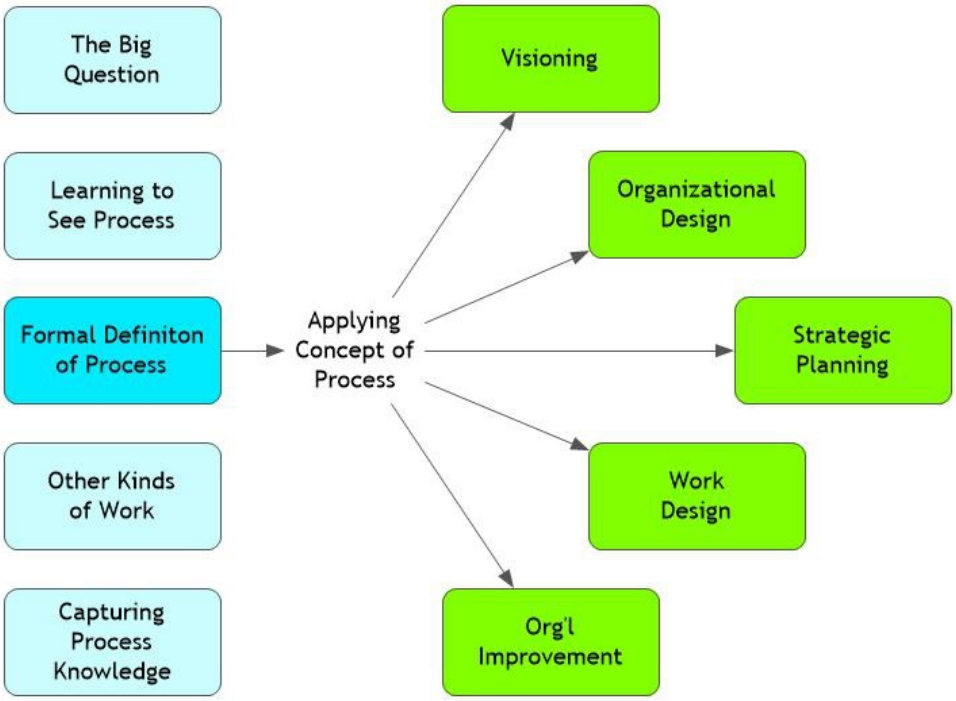
As a sociologist and a former licensed marriage and family therapist, I was also inclined to see people problems. Now, looking back, I would say that people are the most vocal and visible part of the organization, but ***not*** the most problematic. The most problematic facet of organizational life is the work! People have an uncanny ability to organize themselves. But poorly designed or poorly integrated work flows have no voice, except for the human distress they cause; the proper response is to focus on the work, not the worker that garnered the lion's share of attention.

That focal impression led to years of reflection on how we think about work. This book is essentially what I found after re-visiting and re-thinking decades of experience with organizations.

The urgency of this insight has only been highlighted by the level of incompetence or compromised performance that we tolerate in most businesses. Performance in the public sector is equally – if not more – vulnerable to shortfalls and poor outcomes.

Graphic Roadmap of the Book

Books are read in a linear sequence, but the ideas are seldom just sequential. This graphic may give you a better sense for how the ideas are related to each other. The starting point is a "big question" that has always vexed me. Having worked in over 450 client engagements, I have always been impressed with the often damaging impact of formal hierarchy. Communication is distorted; decision-making is confounded; employee engagement is blunted. And yet we are inexplicably attracted to this singular style of organizing large groups into a functional company. Luckily concepts like holacracy are evolving new notions that are equally if not more effective, but retain the humanity we need in organizations.



"Learning to See Process" revisits the power of our conceptual repertoire in determining what aspects of the world we are able to discern. Unfortunately the more sophisticated notion of a work process is not widely distributed, so often times it goes unnoticed. Walking through a "Formal Definition of Process" attempts to build that conceptual lens which affords a new and powerful view for looking into the work of an organization.

After outlining the most significant applications of the notion of a work process, we return to more abstract considerations, expanding on the types of work beyond the generative efforts most of interest to organizations. And lastly we look at how this new notion of work can be captured in meaningful documentation.

The Big Question

I have often wondered…

> *If the organizational chart was the answer, what was the question?*

The organizational chart is fairly ubiquitous and yet still so unsatisfying. We can all see the shortcomings of the chart as a representation of the organization. It "puts everyone in a box", hardens boundaries between departments, and activates a hierarchy of authority that compromises communication and distorts decision-making. And yet only the bravest of organizations dare operate without one.

The question that led to this universal faith in a flawed artifact is actually an important question, but I fear we have come up with the wrong answer. The question, put simply, is

> *What aspect of organizational life is so unruly that it needs to be structured, contained, or managed?*

The answer we came to originally was "the people". It seemed obvious that a bunch of people, armed with substantial resources, could do some serious damage if they were not properly channeled. After all, people are notorious for pursuing their own personal agendas, getting embroiled in interpersonal conflict, flirting with the wrong people, playing favorites, and they show all manner of cognitive distortions. It seemed an obvious point to put some structure in place. And so we invented the organizational chart.

It clarified who you had to listen to. It defined who was on "your team". It meant everyone belonged to a "box" that linked to their job description. It insured that any conflict could eventually be resolved by someone higher up on the chart. What could possibly go wrong(!)

Unfortunately, we may have gone down the wrong path. As difficult and messy as humans can be, they also have an incredible talent for self organizing and for problem-solving. (Apparently that was our evolutionary advantage a hundred thousand years ago.) But for some reason it does not work as well in an organizational context.

So let's revisit the question about what aspect of organizational life is so unruly. And let me suggest that the correct answer is not the people, but ***the work***. And when it comes to managing work we probably got off to a bad start with the organizational chart; it does lump work into functional units (defined by departmental boundaries), but the

typical organizational chart does little to showcase how work is performed. And the organizational chart also led us to the second most popular tool for managing work, which is the job description. So we detailed what tasks are assigned to a particular box on the chart. And the third tool we use for managing work is, of course, procedures. We write down the detailed, typically sequential description of how a task is to be executed.

So at first pass it seems that we are managing both the people and the work. But on closer inspection it is apparent we are managing neither as well as we might.

With respect to people, we still have some troubling shortfalls. We struggle to keep employees engaged. We apparently do something that dampens peoples' enthusiasm and connection to the organization. We end up searching for mechanisms that will engage people beyond their financial compensation.

We have elaborate systems for performance evaluation, (which tend to be universally disliked). Innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit seem elusive for most companies. And, just to round out the list, we seem to always struggle with the organic facet of organizations: the emergent culture, informal networks of respect and trust, and those pesky individual differences. We know that people have unique styles or temperaments, and yet in the interest of "fairness", we design organizations assuming people with comparable skills are all interchangeable. We leave it to supervisors to struggle with the obvious fact that they are not.

So our tools for managing people fall short in some critical areas. And for managing work, we have functional divisions, job descriptions, and work procedures. But these are work management tools anchored in the worker, not in the work. They emphasize boundaries and distinctions rather than cultivating an awareness of the Big Picture. They are mechanisms for bringing staff to the work, not for defining the work itself.

With the advent of process improvement, we found a new array of tools which seemed more anchored in the work… and just the work. We use value chain maps, work flow charts, and more as ways to visually characterize work, independent of whoever actually does the work. Sometimes the worker creeps back into the equation (swim lane maps, process owners, etc.), but generally we are finally looking at just the work.

Admittedly, the field of process improvement is the default approach to improving quality, containing costs, ensuring customer satisfaction, and improving the workers' experience. The face validity of process improvement is pretty high; on the surface, it seems to be asking the right questions and offering powerful tools for greater design effectiveness. The BPM industry continues to roll out ever more sophisticated tools for capturing, tracking, graphing, and managing work processes.

And yet the majority of process improvement efforts fail; estimates are as high as 60-80% fail to deliver expected outcomes. Some big name companies have had their Six Sigma efforts backfire in a very few years.

So what are we missing?

Process Improvement was initially launched with a simple principle: the front line workers know more about the complexities and subtleties of the work than do the supervisor or manager. The front line worker interacts with the customer to sell, deliver, install, and maintain products. The front line worker delivers the services, where interaction with the customer is an essential feature of the delivery. Often they have more customer intimacy than managers and executives.

So it is not surprising that process improvement started with Quality Circles; shut down the assembly line early on Fridays and bring staff together to ask them "Do you have any thoughts of how we could improve the work flow?".

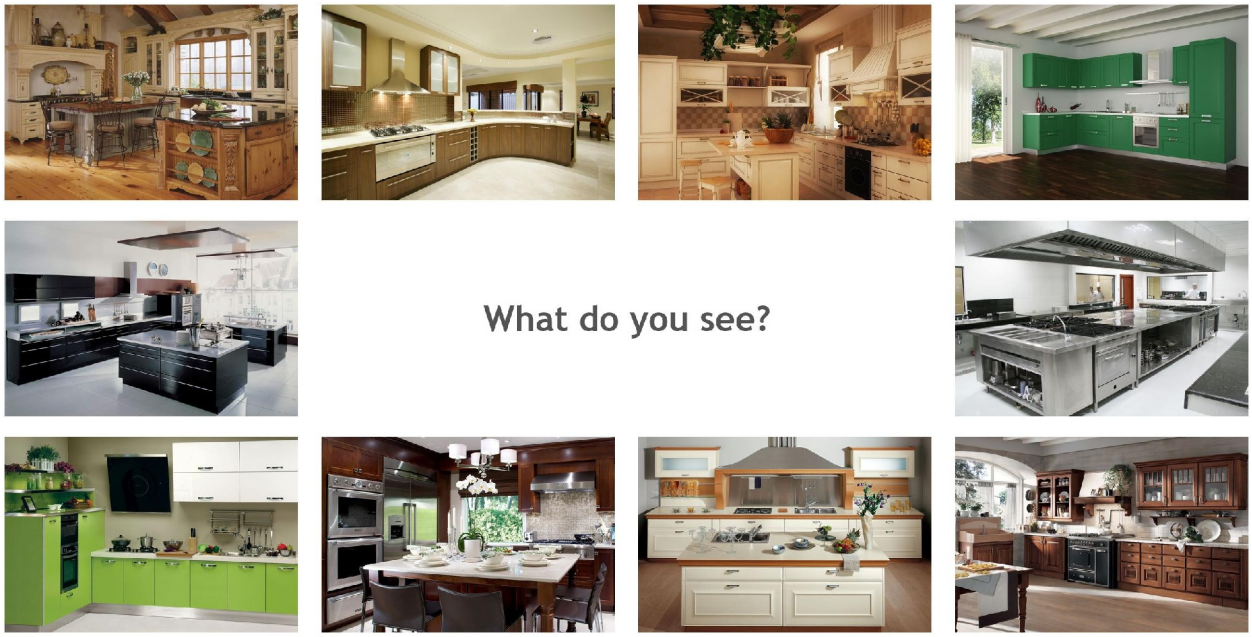
We have expanded our capacity for handling straightforward work, such as physical assembly and simple sequential processing. But the field continues to be awkward with work that remains subtle, multi-threaded, and even artistic. New product development, customer service, performance management, hiring, strategic planning, sales, coaching, and a host of other work processes do not fit well in the linear, fixed model that works so well on the manufacturing floor. And the work processes common to executives and managers and supervisors are often the most in need of improvement, but the least compatible with Lean or Six Sigma or other variants of the process improvement field. A model that applies only to the front line staff is woefully inadequate; we need a view of work which accounts for and clarifies the wide variety of styles, rhythms, and flows of *all* work.

So our next task is to revisit the concept of a work process and explore its potential beyond the manufacturing floor. Let's take the worker out of the equation temporarily so we can finally address the complexities of just designing work.

Learning to See Process

For most people, work processes are invisible. Looking around the office, they can see activity and sometimes tasks, but the processes around them are elusive. The block to recognizing processes turns out to be a cognitive flat spot that has nothing to do with the events around them. Take a look at the array of pictures below; identify what you are seeing as quickly as possible.

FIGURE 1: A common thing



If you are like most people, it took only a second or two to figure out you were looking at kitchens. Despite the wide variety of details, style, and colors, you were probably able to recognize the various defining features: sinks, counter space, dining area, oven, stove top, refrigerator, cabinetry, etc. What is also interesting is that only 2 of the pictures show a refrigerator, which is clearly a major defining feature of a kitchen. But people report that they are sure there is a refrigerator present, it just was not included in the framing of the photo.

If we hold a concept in our heads, we can recognize the phenomena easily, even when key features are missing. It is impressive that people can identify the essential nature of the rooms pictured despite the variety of details and even when key elements are not in evidence! The concept of a 'kitchen' is so ubiquitous and articulated that we can spot one in a second.

This concept is so well understood that you can probably figure out almost immediately that the photo to the right is not a kitchen, at least not a *real* kitchen. It is a "Break room", as evidenced by the office cubicles in the background, the 3 young men standing around watching the TV screen, and the lack of food preparation counters. Even though the room has a refrigerator (a key component *missing* from most of the kitchens above), it still does not qualify as a normal "Kitchen".

Now try your hand at this next array.

FIGURE 2: An uncommon thing

Most people take more than a few seconds of reflection on these items. And most never recognize what they are looking at. You might have said "Pipes" or "pumps", but I am guessing that very few of you said "Control valves". If the concept is not in your head, perceiving it is next to impossible. Perception is never merely passively receiving visual inputs; our minds are quite active in organizing and categorizing data *using the concepts we have available*. If you do not have the concept of "Control Valves" in your mind, it is difficult to see past the superficial differences and see the essential nature of the thing.

If we are to exploit the power of the concept of a work process, our first step is to be able to see them clearly, even when the refrigerator is missing. If you do not have the concept of a work process clearly articulated in your own mind, you may miss them even when they are playing out in front of you.

The most common definitions of 'process' are some variant of

A series of steps that produce a value for some customer.

The flaw is in the first 4 words: *A series of steps*... The definition draws our attention to the procedural expression of the process. Flow charting only reinforces the attention to visual, sequential events. It seems perfectly reasonable; after all, work process is about work, about getting things done.

The essence of a process, however, is not in the procedure. In fact, procedures are the most fluid aspect of a process, the most likely element to be revised in the face of customer feedback and experience. So what are the more durable anchors to the notion of a work process?

Answering that question will give us a richer definition of 'process' that allows us to find the process woven through numerous positions and departments. It will allow us to find the missing refrigerators as well as the visible components. It will allow us to immediately recognize whether a process is 'good' or 'bad'. It will replace standard documentation as the best representation of a process. It will also define an entirely new strategy for teaching or training in a process. In my practice I often hear new hires only 6 months into a position exclaim that they know exactly *how* to do their job, they just do not know *why*. If the concept of 'process' achieves anything, it should keep us anchored in the *why* of work as well as the *how*. Unless, of course, engagement and innovation are of no interest to you.

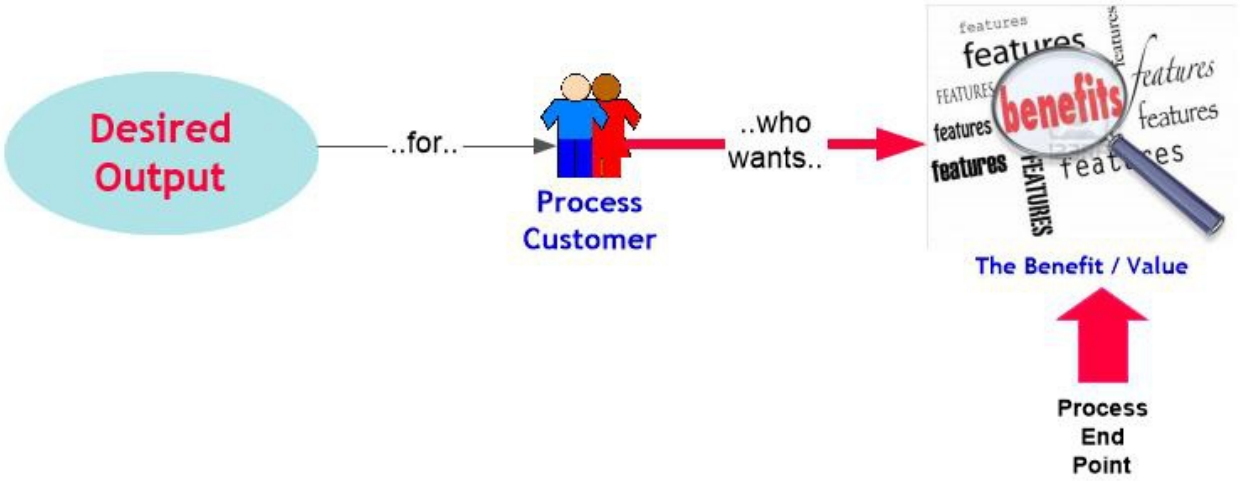
As we will see, a process is *more of a promise than a procedure*. It is a commitment to design and execute work in a way that enhances the value to a customer, that enables them to achieve some benefit that goes well beyond the mere execution of our tasks. It is also a promise to look back at work from the perspective of the customer, rather than only viewing it from the perspective of the worker or even of the manager.

This definition of a process as a promise has some significant implications. We cannot define work to deliver a product or service and then starve the work with inadequate budget, too few staff, or constantly postponed maintenance. If we cannot deliver *as promised* we should be honest enough to re-align strategy and operations to match our capability and capacity. If we only think of processes in terms of procedures, we can delude ourselves into believing we are process oriented when, in fact, our delivery falls far short of our intention.

A Formal Definition of Work Process

If we are to look past simple procedures to understand a work process, we need to articulate those abstract anchors that define the essential elements of the thing.

ANCHOR #1: A process is defined by the output it creates, the customer waiting for that output, and the benefit or value the customer hopes to realize. The output could be a product or a service (which will shape the relationship between the worker and the



customer), but good process definition (and process improvement) starts at the very end and works backwards. The "very end" is not the final step in the work flow; it is the realization of benefits in the experience of the customer. The promise is a commitment to the customer to explore whatever means are possible and legal to deliver the product or service most likely to help them achieve that final benefit. It is also a promise to look at the work from the perspective of the customer as the best reference point for refinement.

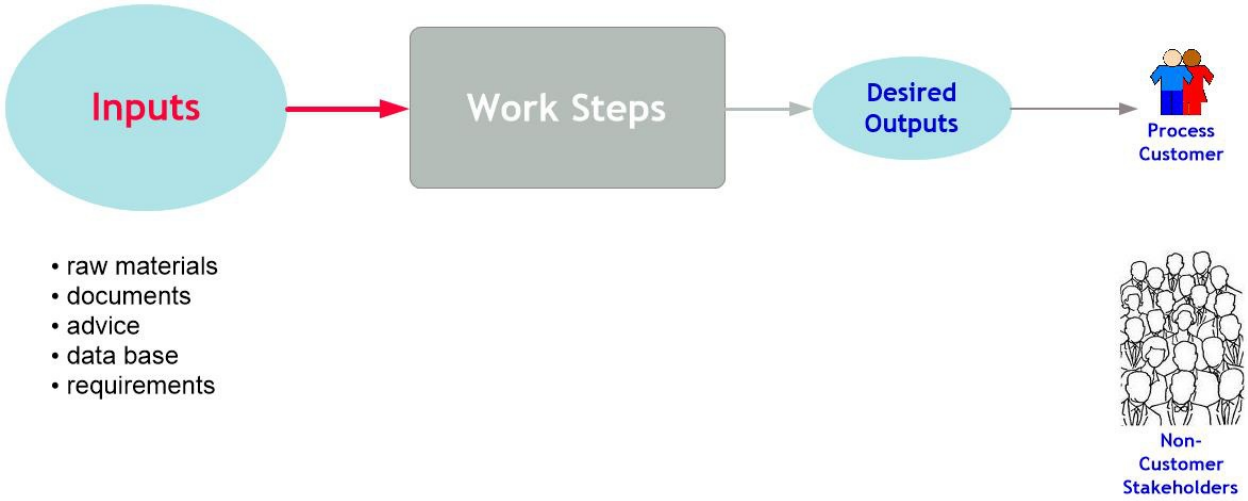
(There are sometimes beneficiaries, who are not direct process customers, but they receive some ultimate benefit from its operation. For example "The Public" is the beneficiary of local law enforcement, but we never want to be a judge's customer.)

The traditional flow charting starts at the front by capturing the worker's first steps in the process. The proper starting point is at the end, oftentimes well after the worker has finished their involvement.

ANCHOR #2: A process requires certain inputs to support creating a new output. Those inputs could be concrete, informational, or even cognitive. To fulfill a process, workers might need raw materials, data, documents, decisions, advice, design parameters, or more.

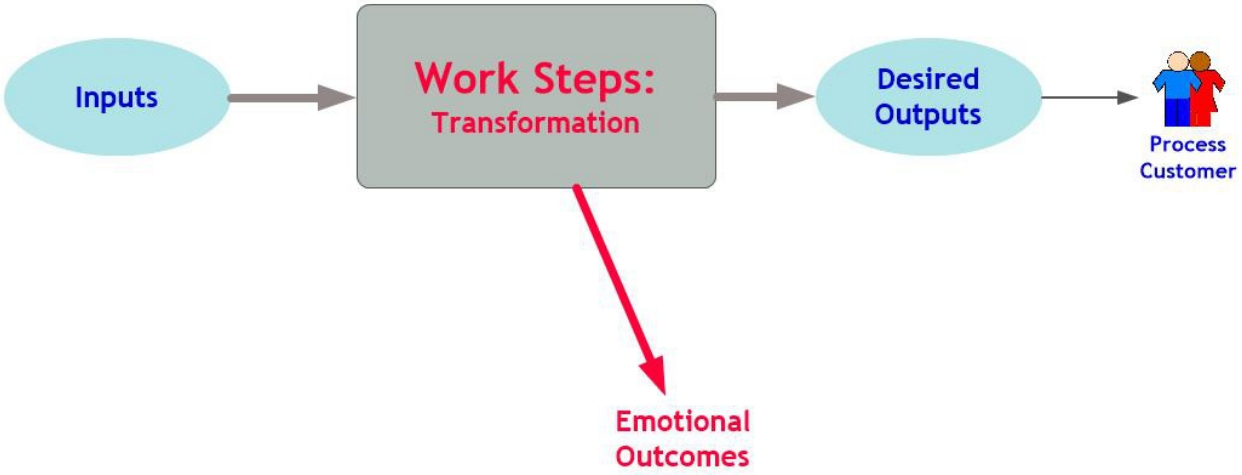
The key concerns are whether inputs are timely and usable upon receipt. And are they adequate to support the final delivery.

There are other "inputs" to a work process we will introduce later, but the



distinguishing characteristic of these anchor inputs is that they are consumed or transformed by the work. Space and equipment, for example, are used but not consumed.

ANCHOR #3: A work process transforms INPUTS into OUTPUTS; it is never a simple pass through. The work could be performed by a person, by a machine, or by a



computer. The work could even be done naturally; talk to anyone in agriculture or gardening and they will tell you that some key work processes are entrusted to Mother Nature. (And she doesn't even have a box on the organizational chart.)

The range of possible transformations is quite limited. The infinite variety in procedures gives the illusion that processes are equally varied. Once we get above the detailed procedures, we find a surprising commonality across work processes. Later on we will list out the possible transformations and the unique features of each, but for this discussion, we can offer the following summary of work transformations:

Definition	*Detailed Transformations*
Move	
Data, things, or people are transferred from one point to another. Objects are left essentially unchanged.	Move, Buffer, Install, Exchange, Receive, Package, Publish, Stage
Transform	
Things are created or significantly modified.	Restore, Assemble, Refine, Enhance, Harvest, Stage, Clean, Integrate, Decompose, Protect, Translate
Organize	
Objects are categorized or organized.	Search, Filter, Sort, Link, Regulate, Reflect, Schedule, Measure, Define, Orchestrate, Embrace
Evaluate	
Objects are rated or assessed.	Audit, Certify, Monitor
Analyze	
Objects are investigated, explored or revealed.	Assess, Test, Infer, Extrapolate, Design, Innovate, Decide, Contract, Derive
Connect	
Operations on people	Invoke a relationship, Terminate a relationship, Engage, Entertain, Refresh, Celebrate, Elicit
Influence	
People learn to think, feel, or act differently	Instruct, Learn, Persuade, Reframe, Negotiate, Constrain, Resolve, Litigate

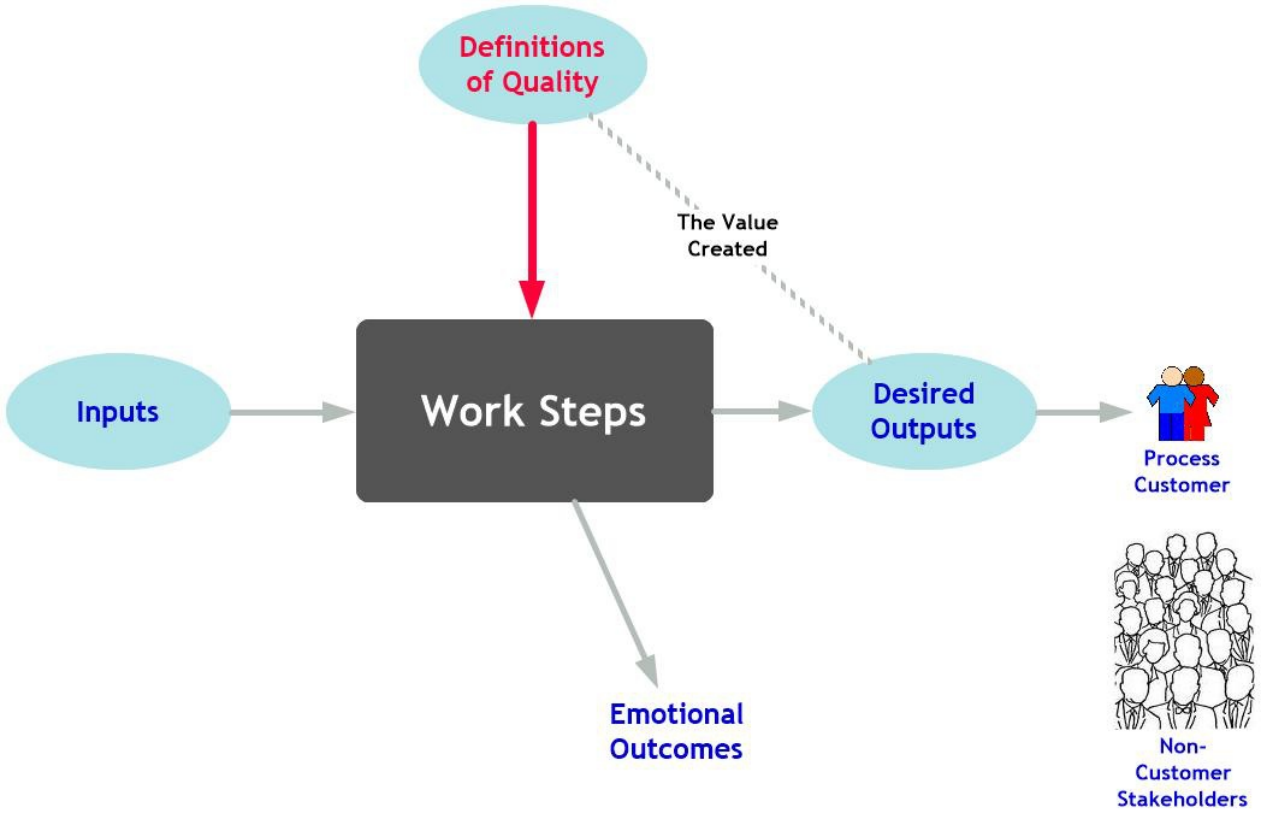
There is nothing elegant or systematic about this listing of transformations. Through years of observation and experimentation, it has proved sufficient to capture the essence of almost every work process. Although you may find undiscovered transformations in your organization, I am confident this listing is about 95% complete. If you manage a junk yard, have a pet grooming business, teach children to swim, or some other unusual business, feel free to add other transitions if they help organize your thinking.

The transformation not only generates the process outcome, it leaves a residual emotional experience for the worker, and others. While we are primarily focused on the product or service generated, it would be a serious omission to ignore this less concrete outcome. Work processes that satisfy customers but exhaust or exploit workers are not well designed. The exodus of nursing staff after the pandemic of 2020 and 2021 is only

the most recent and most visible example of ignoring emotional outcomes… and the unfortunate consequences. The imposition of Common Core in public education had a similarly demoralizing impact on young teachers. In this new world of "next-day-delivery", we are rightfully suspicious that our convenience comes at a serious cost to the staff in fulfillment warehouses and delivery vans.

Well designed work should leave the worker tired, but hopefully also satisfied or proud. It should not leave the worker feeling exhausted, spent, taken advantage of, or exploited.

ANCHOR #4: A work process is directed by definitions of quality, which (hopefully) reflect and help secure the benefit the customer wants. A process is purposeful and



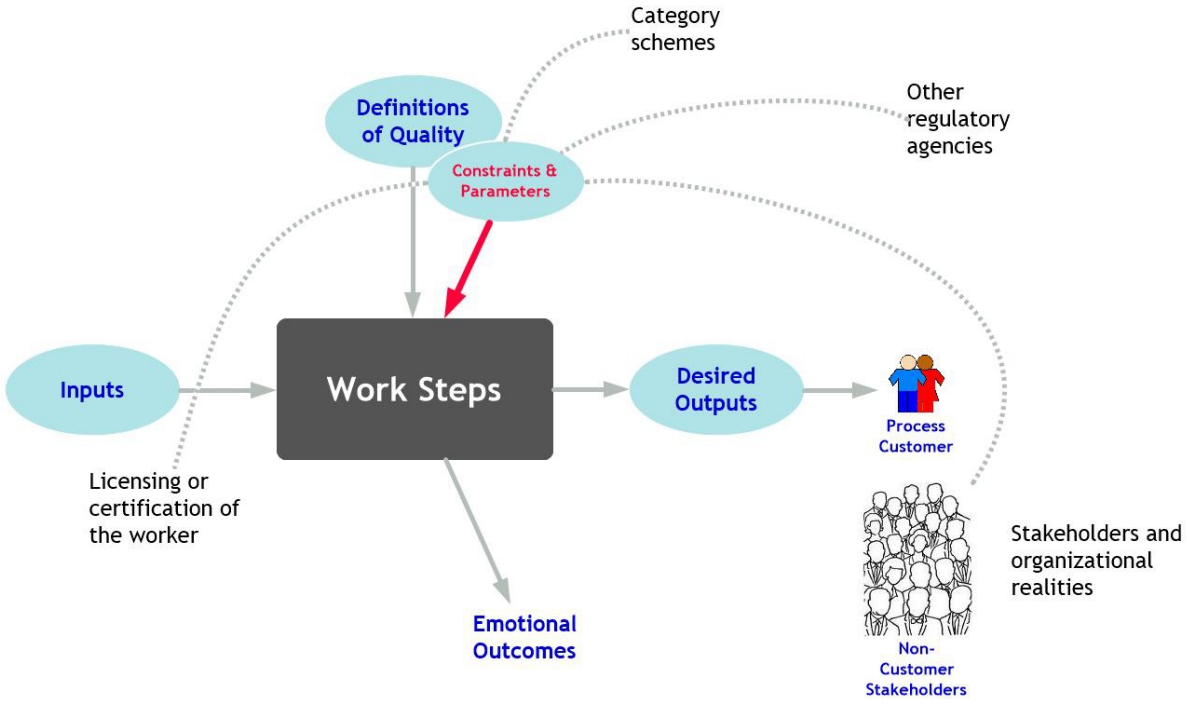
deliberate. It is not merely expressive or exploratory; it is designed to satisfy a well crafted set of standards. These criteria are seldom visible in the work itself, but they are always revealed in errors and customer disappointment.

In my classes on process improvement, I would often ask students what might be an element of the criteria for quality (CoQ) of their work. Unfortunately the most common response was *compliance to procedures*. Quality is always a property of the final deliverable; "compliance" is a property of the execution of work. Admittedly some work

is specified in exquisite detail, so it seems that compliance is all that is required. Strict compliance can be a constraint for some work steps (much more on that to come later), but the process itself is always answerable to *criteria* for the outcome, regardless of how strict the work steps might be. Even the most well articulated work process needs to incorporate new criteria in response to a shift in customer preference, for example.

These criteria define the value generated by the process; on that note, almost all practitioners in the field would agree. Any process that does not create value is a failure. Too often, however, focus on procedures blinds us to that simple fact. When we call a company "too bureaucratic", we mean exactly that workers are slavishly following the required procedures, even if it yields a disappointing impact on the customer.

ANCHOR #5: Work processes are subject to additional constraints and parameters. It would be naive to imagine that work is driven exclusively by the value to be delivered to the customer. In reality, work is often limited by a variety of constraints and parameters



from a variety of sources. There may be internal policies that constrain the work. It may be assigned to a particular job class and excluded from all others. Policies may dictate that final agreements have to be reviewed by the Legal department before being sent on (e.g., procurement, outsourcing, alliances, settlement agreements, etc.). For possibly self-serving transactions, company policy may require 2 or more workers on the process. For example, a bank teller cannot make transactions on their own account; grocery store

clerks cannot check out their own groceries; doctors cannot write their own prescriptions.

The stakeholders in and around the organization may impose additional restrictions, such as:

- Must work on a certain IT platform
- Performed with existing equipment and facilities
- Has Board approval
- Conforms to negotiated labor agreements

Within a certain product category, there may be constraints negotiated among all providers to ensure the widest possible compatibility:

- Light bulbs all have to have the same socket configurations
- Doors come in standard widths
- Every USB or USB-C plug has to conform to certain size and wiring specifications
- A size 13 shoe should be approximately the same length from any manufacturer
- Printers have to accommodate letter, legal, tabloid, and a few other standardized paper sizes

Some regulatory constraints are invoked because we suspect the pressures for profitability would entice businesses to engage in unhealthy or unwise practices; these constraints avoid undesirable circumstances, even beyond the quality of the product or service delivered:

- Rules for handling waste water in restaurants
- How to handle food or medical wastes
- City codes for construction, remodeling, excavation, etc.
- Use of hazardous materials like asbestos, toxic chemicals, pesticides
- Limits on radiation from consumer devices

Some regulation is designed to protect the public from unscrupulous activities; they counter businesses using deception or coercion to secure consumer dollars.

- Professional standards for financial characterization
- Truth-in-advertising or consumer fraud laws
- 7-day "free return" policy for auto purchases

Such constraints are not about ensuring quality, but about avoiding fraud and deception.

Other regulatory agencies or consumer laws may also constrain work:

- Sarbanes-Oxley
- OSHA, HIPPA, FDA
- County inspection and regulatory departments
- Federal mandates (seat belts, air bags, non-flammable kids' pajamas, etc.)
- SEC (insider trading prohibitions)

There may be procedural constraints imposed to preserve a societal value; they may or may not contribute to the quality of the final product or service, but they ensure a value is not violated in securing that outcome (e.g., privacy, public safety, justice).

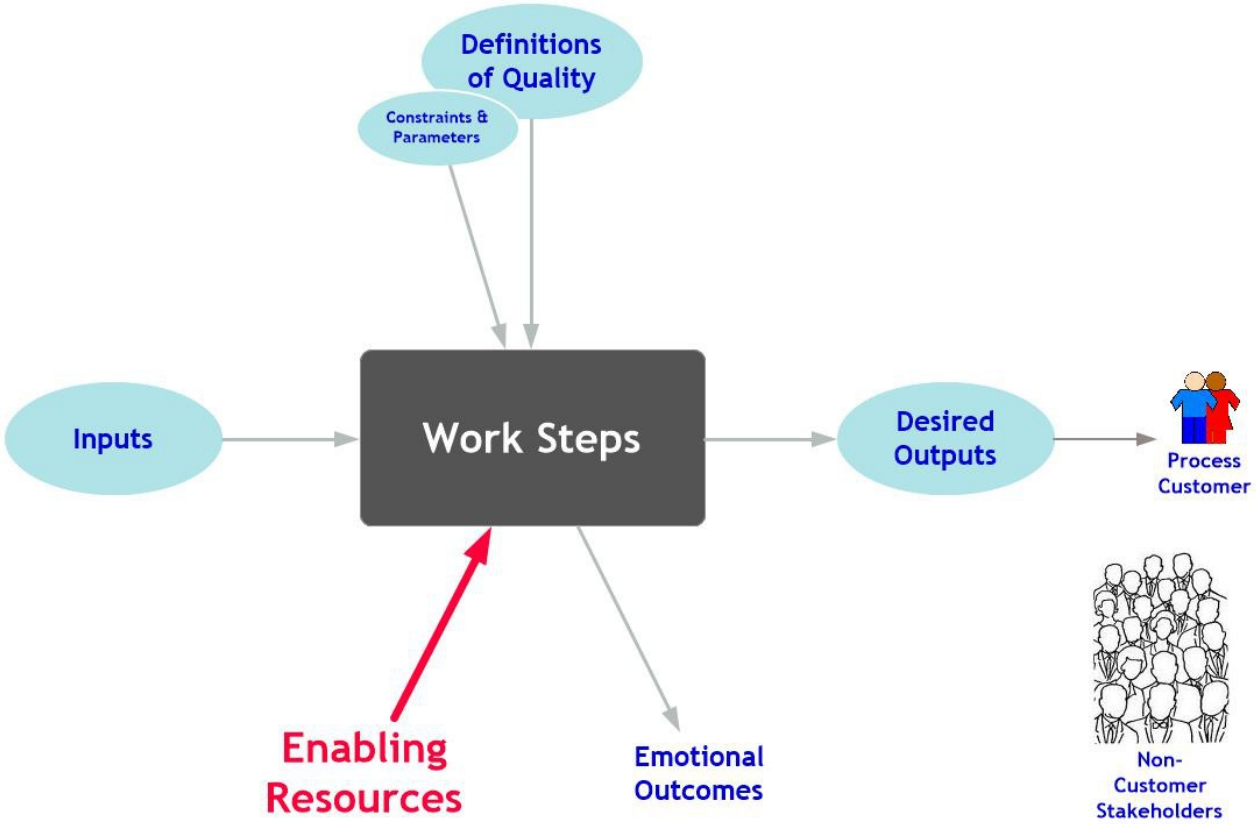
- We disallow certain questions in job interviews to avoid discrimination.
- Interlocks in a car's transmission make sure you cannot start the car unless it is in Neutral or Park.
- Mirandizing suspects has to be done in a certain way and at a certain time to ensure due process.
- Building codes ensure the disabled have equal access to public life.
- HIPPA constrains the collection and sharing of private medical information.

In some industries, there may be restrictions imposed by the necessity of security concerns.

- Companies delivering products or services to government agencies.
- Screening procedures; security of information or documents
- Locking up client records (therapists, financial advisors, medical centers, etc.)
- Law enforcement agencies that have to protect sensitive personal information (such as a sealed juvenile record).

Even this partial listing is rather daunting. Customer satisfaction may be the espoused goal of good work design, but the number of overlaid constraints is impressive, and sometimes undermines any attention to customers' desires. No wonder people start to consider compliance as the main requirement for quality; it is the only thing they can guarantee.

ANCHOR #6: A work process relies on enabling resources provided for efficient execution. Tools, staffing, checklists, protocols, templates, software, boiler plate text, skill



training, videos, food, equipment, measurement devices; anything that enables people do the work better and easier. Unlike process inputs, these are not consumed in the operation of the process, but they are essential for its success.

The most predominant enabling resources are budget, headcount, and often software. Their purpose is to support not only execution, but also improvement. Unfortunately enabling resources often require substantial investment. Software suites can cost thousands if not millions of dollars. Custom equipment and tools can be a major capital expense. While they may enable work to be done with greater ease, quality, and speed, they can also become a headwind to potential improvements. Staff may come up with a significant improvement in work flow, but re-programming the software or replacing equipment can dissuade the company from making the change. It takes a shrewd eye to buy software notable for its flexibility, or to arrange a production line in modules so improvements can be implemented without stopping the entire line.

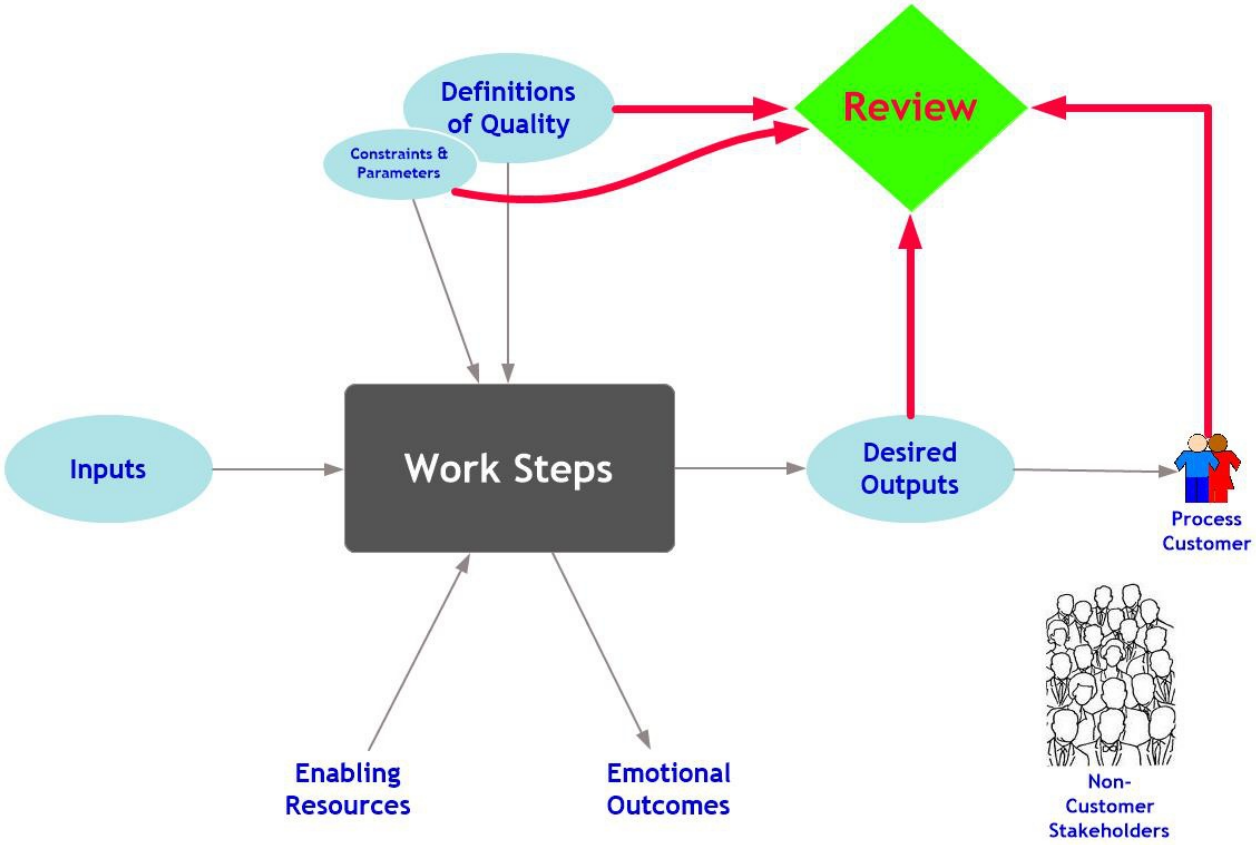
Staff and budget allocations are worthy of special note since they are often manipulated with little concern for the impact on delivering the value promised in the definition of

the work process. Temporary financial reversals push for leaner operations, but quality, staff, and budget are unavoidably yoked. When these enabling resources fluctuate without consideration for impact on the criteria for quality, the work process becomes dishonest. This common disjunct is a critical feature of corporate work. When inadequate budget and staff undermine or prohibit delivering on quality, we should not be surprised that employees respond by not caring. If executives don't care, why should they?

More reputable companies would adjust the criteria of quality to reflect true capability rather than some unrealistic intention. An equally honest response is to set aside some work so that available staff and budget are adequate to deliver high quality on a reduced set of work processes. Sometimes you have "to do less with less".

The disjunct of enabling resources and the promise of quality is sometimes so severe, that budgeting becomes the *de facto* strategic planning process; the company may set particular goals for quality or quantity, but staff know that the budget and staff allocation is the most honest statement of company intent.

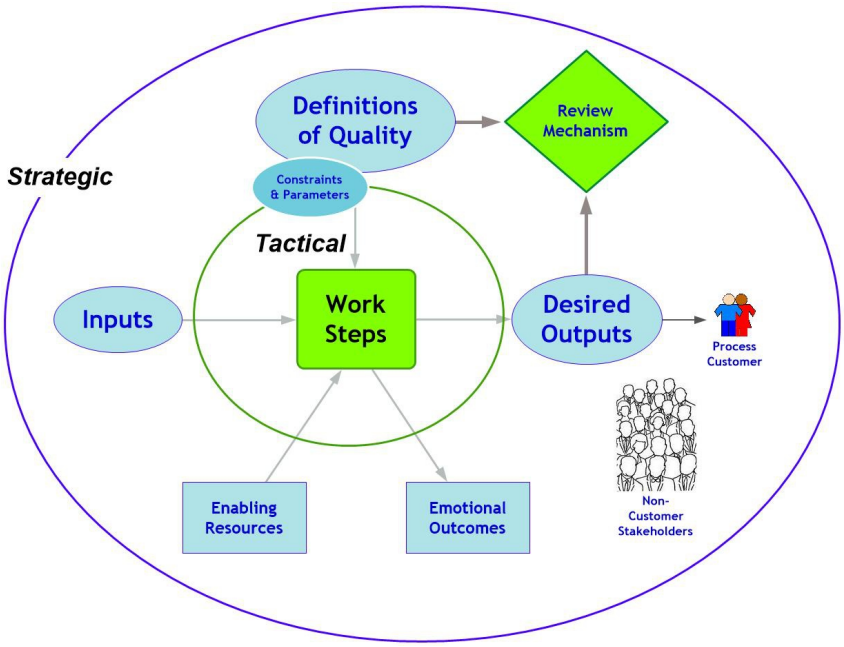
ANCHOR #7: The last feature of a work process is one of the most significant. Every work process should have a companion or parallel activity which provides a review of the



work steps. While the work steps are (hopefully) generative, this review work does not create any new value in the market; it ensures that the intended quality has been delivered. Did the product or service come out as intended, as designed? Does our deliverable meet the customers (evolving) needs? This review could be the responsibility of the worker (using multiple drafts of a report), shared with peers, designated to the work supervisor, or, in some cases, there is a separate QC department that performs a review of products or services delivered.

The design of a review mechanism could vary from a simple check on quality before delivery all the way up to a robust plan for continuous improvement.

In summary, a work process is anchored by a variety of relatively stable elements that, in turn, define the appropriate work steps. These elements define the container for activity, but they are not the activity itself. They are the strategic layer of a work process; the specific work steps are the tactical expression of that strategy.

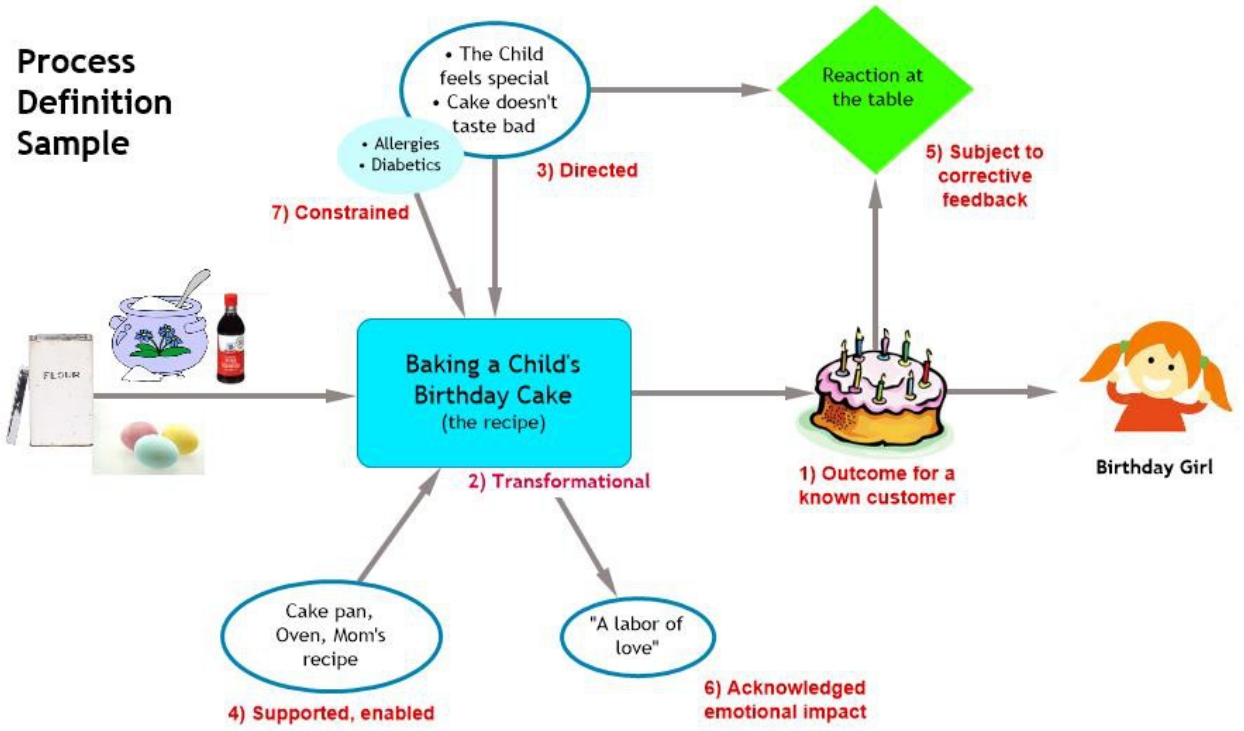


These strategic elements can be quite constraining, so it seems like the work steps could be the *de facto* work process. While that view is seductively appealing (since it makes the process concrete and visible), it is an unfortunate view that has unintended and damaging consequences.

First of all, mistaking the procedures for the process makes us reluctant to change the one component that should be the most fluid. Process improvement should not be a periodic project requiring a Black Belt to conduct it well; process improvement should be an ongoing activity that engages the worker in refining the work. Too many executives unfortunately do not trust their staff to stay within the constraints (regulatory, legal, budgetary, etc.), so they fall back on strict specification and admonishments to "do it by the book".

The most unfortunate consequence of mistaking the procedure for the process is that we lose our focus on the quality of the final output. Once the work leaves my out-box, it is literally out of my hands. If I am told to "stay in your lane", it is out of my mind's eye as well. Whether it is received as a quality output for the customer becomes irrelevant. If we are steeped in our expanded definition of a process, our attention extends out to the consumption of our deliverable, and its subjective benefit to the customer. 'Compliance' is always tested by the level of customer satisfaction actually delivered. Ironic as it seems, "just do your job" is actually a recipe for eventual failure.

A simple example may serve to drive home this definition of a process. Imagine I want to bake a cake for my young daughter's birthday party. I could walk you through the recipe (Thanks, Mom), but the following gives you more insight into the overall process:



It would be easy to focus on the quality of the cake. Is it moist? Is the frosting smooth and creamy? Is it level and symmetrical? Does it have the requisite lettering and sparkles? But the real criterion for quality is the subjective experience of the birthday girl. If she is impressed that her Dad baked a cake for her, it may not matter if it is a little uneven or not as moist as grandma's cakes. In fact, I would suggest the real criterion is that the cake not taste bad; anything better than that is fine as long as the child feels honored and special.

There are some constraints that may need to honored as well. If someone in the family is allergic to chocolate, or if the child is diabetic, the recipe and the preparation needs to respect those parameters.

It is also important that the Dad comes out of the kitchen feeling proud and loving; if he is frustrated and annoyed, then there is a dire need for process improvement.

In this case the review mechanism happens just after everyone sings "Happy Birthday" and she blows out the candles.

Finding the Elusive Customer

Taking a process perspective on work design must start with refining our notion of the customer. The most critical anchor in process definition is identifying the customer and the benefit they hope to achieve. If our notion of the customer is vague or sloppy, everything from there on out will be compromised.

There are several colloquial notions of who constitutes the customer, all of which are misleading. The most common notion is that the customer is the person who pays for the product or service. That definition works fine for retail goods and professional services, but it fails for most not-for-profit and public sector work. Many social safety net services are paid for from the county's general fund, from foundation grants, from Federal block grants, or from charitable donations. In fact, one of the key functions of the board of a not-for-profit organization is to be the voice of the customers precisely because they are *not* speaking through their purchasing behavior.

Another common definition of 'customer' is to focus on the next person in line, whoever picks up any product or service. This produces a serious distortion within organizations, since it frames every handoff from one department to another as a supplier-customer relationship. In this model, the Sales department is the customer of the Marketing department, since they take leads from Marketing in the hope of turning them into a sale. Marketing is the customer of Engineering, since they have to turn product specifications into marketing collateral. The resulting frictions and tensions are so common they are often considered "just the way things are".

The "next department inline" is not my customer; they are work partners in a sequential flow of work. They cannot demand that I meet their needs (which a customer can ask for); the 2 departments are jointly responsible for building a work flow that serves the ultimate customer of the company's products and services. Our relationship is one of partnership, collaboration, transparency, and joint decision-making.

Some have even suggested that the customer is whoever can press for special accommodations until they are satisfied. Supposedly "the customer is always right", so the person who demands to be right all the time must be the customer? In fact, when someone asserts "I'm the customer here", it is usually a preamble to demanding a better price, waiving fees, free delivery, more latitude in returns, or some other exception to the rules.

A more formal and useful definition of the customer is

> *the person waiting to receive the final product or service which reflects the purpose of the organization*.

Work which results in the defining product or service of the organization often involves a sequential handoff from one department to the next. Design parameters are passed off to Procurement, Warehousing, and Manufacturing. Finished products are managed by Fulfillment and Dispatch as they flow out to customers. Customer Service handles questions, complaints, and returns. No one in that flow is the customer of the departments earlier in the sequence. Everyone is a work partner within a sequential flow of work. As work partners, their responsibility is to work collaboratively and transparently in designing work so it satisfies the needs of the final, external customer. If I process blood samples in the lab of a health care organization, my customer is the patient receiving health care. The physician requesting the blood test is not my customer; they are my work partner. Together we should develop a work flow that is most valuable to the patient.

The Internal Customer

Some work activities do not contribute to the final delivery of a product or service to the external world. The *only* potential customer is internal. Human Resources, IT, Finance, and Facilities are frequently delivering products or services to an internal customer; there is only a tangential link to the final external customer. Even this is not a simple supplier-customer relationship (although most managers wish that it were).

For many internal processes (hiring, budgeting, IT services, safety provisions, maintenance, facilities), the support agency also has review responsibilities which complicate their attempt to provide "customer satisfaction" to their internal customer. Internal agencies end up being both coach and cop; HR wants to help the hiring manager fill their vacancy, but they also have to enforce restrictions from numerous sources. These internal service agencies are answerable to overriding organizational concerns, like fair and legal hiring, orderly financial flows, elaborating a enterprise-wide IT platform, or maintaining the physical plant. The hiring manager wants to be HR's "customer" so they cut corners, promote a junior person over more tenured staff, hire their cousin, or pass over racial groups they do not like. The HR department is charged with making sure those "customer demands" do not put the company in legal jeopardy or violate internal policies and labor agreements.

A simple provider-customer mind set would lead to distortion and dissatisfaction for these internal "customers".

The Special Case of Customer Service in the Public Sector

Public sector agencies raise another nuance in the notion of customer and customer service. Delivering high quality customer service is an axiom of the business sector that is widely considered appropriate for public sector as well. The agencies that impact our lives in so many ways should certainly be responsive to their constituencies, right?! But special conditions in public sector work suggest that "responsive" is different than providing good customer service.

Any county's Tax department receives phone calls frequently complaining that "My property taxes are too high". And one common theme from the complaintant is that "You people work for me, you know; my taxes pay your salary. And I'd like a little customer service here!" It is easy for the public to imagine that they are the "customer", and County agencies should be striving to improve their customer service wherever possible. Staff that annoy a citizen by being frustrated or "stubborn" are sure to hear about it when the complaint is escalated to their County Supervisor or the Mayor's office.

But a little reflection suggests the actual situation is quite different. As members of the public, we enjoy a wide variety of services (roads, water infrastructure, libraries, police and fire, the court system, probation, mental health services, administration of numerous state and federal programs, and even the benefits of the Mother's Milk Bank). And each year the county Tax Department calculates the levy against the property held by its constituents and sends out tax bills.

The Roads Division, the police and fire departments, the Probation Department, libraries, and the Mother's Milk Bank do, indeed, have customers and they typically reflect on their quality of their customer service. But the similarities to private sector end there. In the private sector, customer service is a strategy for securing customer loyalty and additional future business. Customers at a local restaurant or hardware store have choices where they spend their money, and the customer service they receive can be a pivotal concern. But County residents have no choice; they cannot go to the Tax department in another county hoping for a better tax rate. A private sector shopping mall might offer special arrangements to attract new customers, but a County agency is required to treat people equally; any "special arrangement" would smell of favoritism. Rather than striving for an expanded relationship with its "customers", public sector agencies typically look for increased independent living and reducing the draw on city or county resources. .

In the public sector social services, the emphasis is usually on greater self-reliance and independence rather than expanded use. Safety net services are supposed to be a temporary aid until someone can find employment, housing, medical care, or other essential services and function on their own. The County library system will do customer outreach; the Probation Department hopes to never see you again.

So the notion of ‘customer service’ does not seem to apply across the board. We need a new notion of ‘public service’.

Public service is not a marketing strategy hoping to secure more public dollars. Public service, in contrast, is a moral commitment to the body politic; the citizenry (the moral owners of government) want to be treated well regardless of the circumstance.

Public Service

The dimensions of "Public Service" are quite different from traditional "customer service":

- **Clarity:** the public deserves (and demands) that procedures and policies be explicit and intelligible.
- **Transparency:** the public deserves an open process. Private sector firms can have proprietary processes not visible to the public, but city and county governments are required to be more forthcoming.
- **Equitable:** the public expects that everyone will be treated the same. There can be no special treatment for some if not extended to all. If the daughter of the Sheriff gets a mere warning for a DUI, it would (rightfully) be considered corrupt.
- **Lawful:** the public expects that treatment is in accord with applicable laws. Public sector agencies cannot do whatever they want in shaping programs.
- **Timely:** The public expects that services and decisions are delivered in a timely manner..
- **Respectful:** the public expects to be treated with respect and consideration regardless of whether they are the tax payer, library customer, permit applicant, inmate, defendant, or taking court-ordered anger management.

These criteria are not always easy to follow. Cities and counties can face unpredictable surges paired with constraints on staffing. A recession may produce a wave of requests for re-assessment of property taxes due to a drop in housing prices; and the county can expect sharp criticism if they take months or years to make adjustments.

Having dealt with the definition of the customer, we can return to our discussion of designing the organization as a portfolio of work processes.

Visioning: Articulating the Corporate Purpose

The unique feature of corporations is that they are designed for a purpose; they are judged by their ability to generate a defined outcome of value to a defined customer. Unlike a family, friendship group, or a community, everything is designed backwards from the final product.

So the vision or purpose of the organization has to be translated into an array of products or services. The purpose of the organization might be

To eliminate world hunger

but the products or services that express that vision could be any of the following:

1. Pursue cutting-edge research on the best land management practices
2. Provide training to Third World farmers
3. Advocate for dismantling corporate farming (mono-cropping)
4. Advocate for greater food equity in international politics
5. Develop systems for collecting excess food for local redistribution
6. Educate the general public on reducing food waste

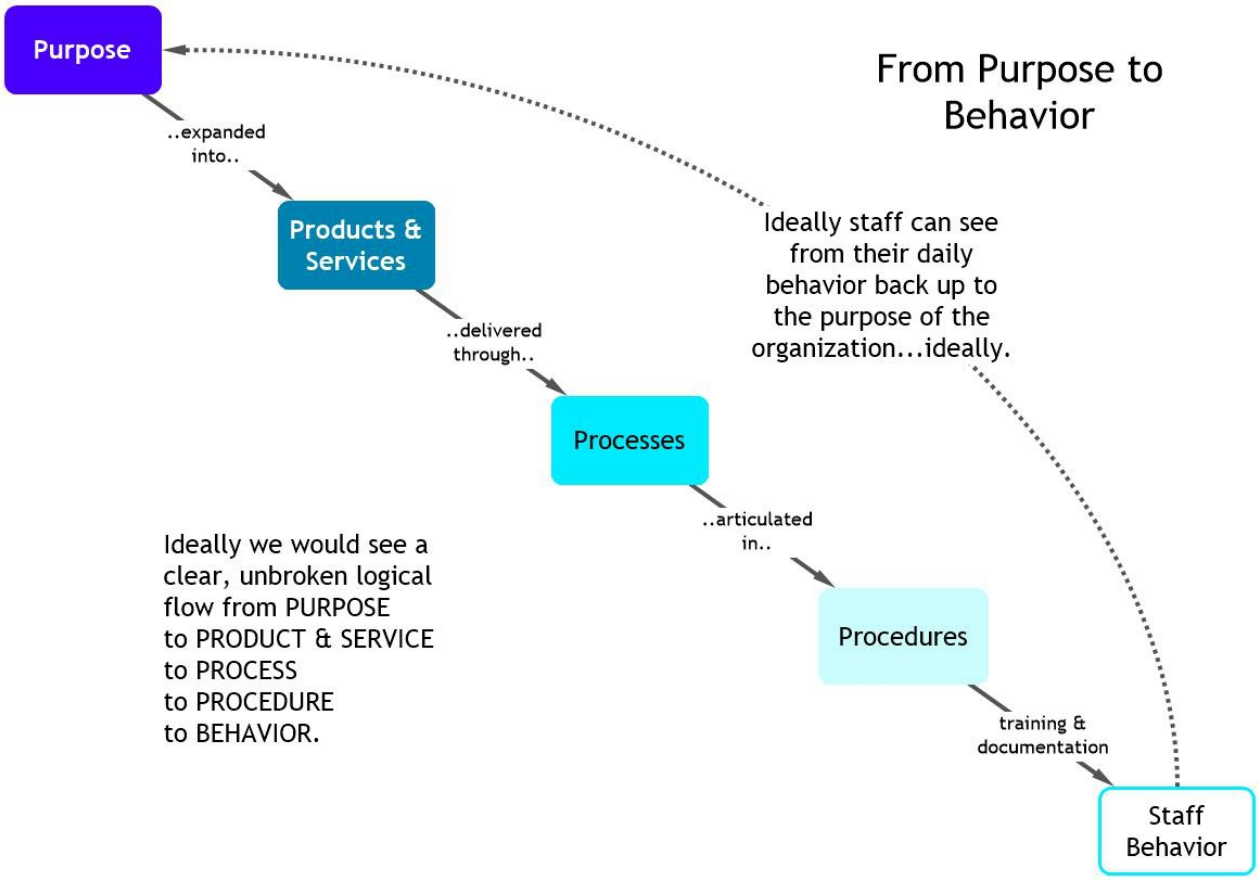
And for whatever mission (products or services) the company chooses, the next challenge is to articulate the work processes required for delivering on those promised products or services. The purpose statement is a hollow promise until the company defines the work processes to achieve the desired outcomes.

If we were to take #1 from the list above, we could anticipate at least the following work processes:

- Manage agricultural test site
- Research topic selection
- Design of experiments
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Writing articles
- Publishing findings

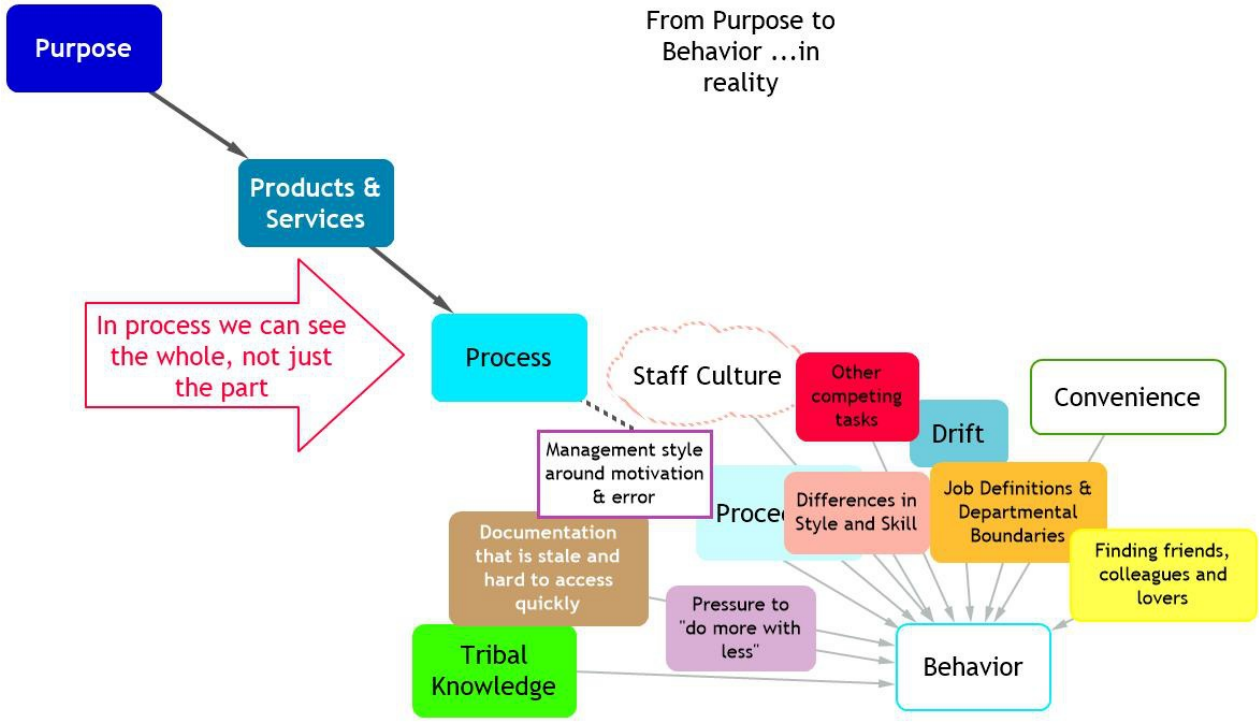
Without viable work processes for these and other efforts, the vision of the organization is a fantasy.

If we were to continue this articulation of the organization, we would build a logical chain of steps, which extends down from the initial purpose (vision), through products and services, which imply needed work processes, translated into procedures, delivered



through training, and ends up directing staff behavior. Ideally staff could retrace that chain of logic, so they can see how their work contributes to the larger purpose of the organization.

The real world, however, is never quite so clean. If we were to re-draw this diagram with an eye to being more realistic, it would look quite different:

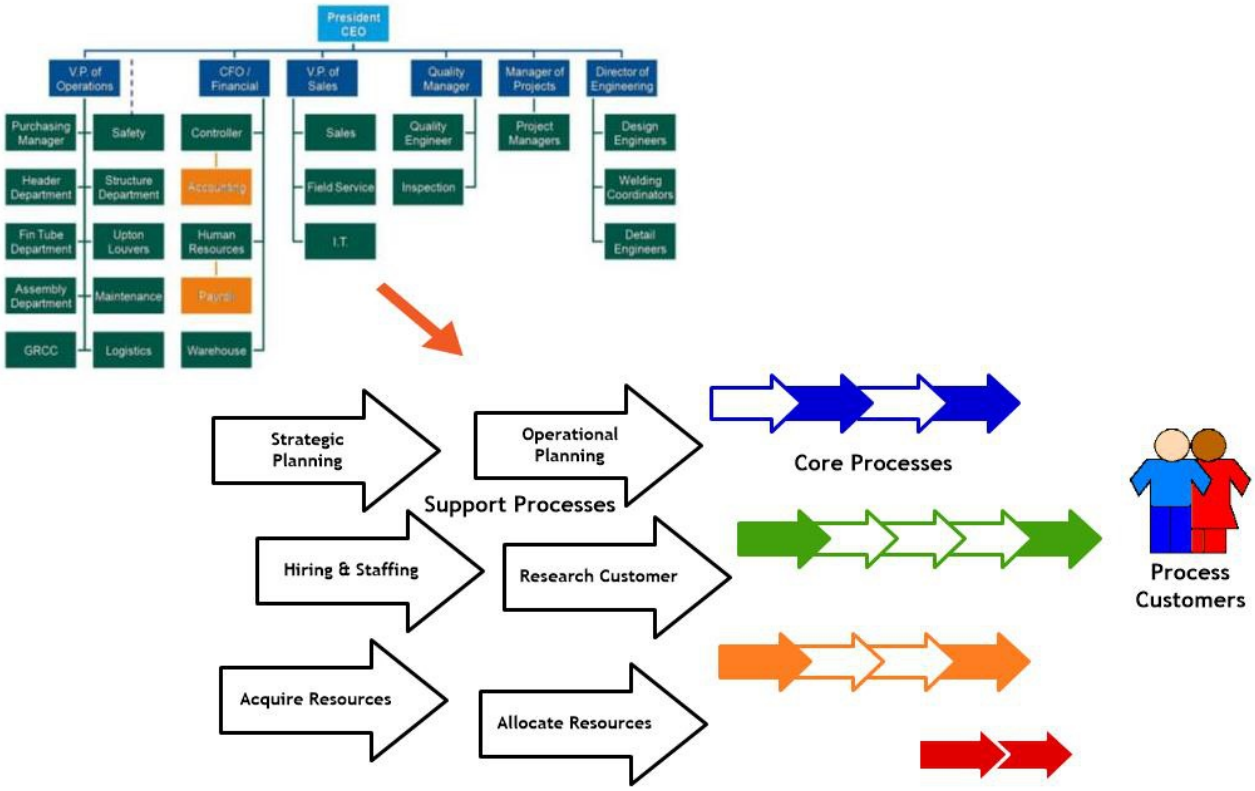


The daily behavior of staff is impacted by numerous other factors, only some of which are determined by the vision of the organization. Managers have their own unique style of directing and inspiring work. Some time at work is more social. There is a relentless pressure in a for-profit firm to squeeze a little more out of expenses. Staff often modify work steps to be more convenient for them. The tribal knowledge of how to get things done can easily slide away from the prescribed process work.

The point is that the definition of the work process is just above the more turbulent swirl around procedures and behavior. It is the best way to anchor design and discussion without the distractions of more tactical challenges. Working at the level of process design ensures that the Big Picture is not lost by scrambling to address lower level issues.

So let's explore reframing the organization as a portfolio of processes. This provides the scaffolding or skeleton on which we can anchor more detailed design work.

For the sake of clearer thinking, let's temporarily put the worker into the background and bring the work itself into the foreground. So let's move from the organizational chart to the process matrix:



So we start by highlighting (1) the core processes of the organization. These are the activities that most immediately express the vision and mission of the organization. They generate the products and services promised in the purpose statement of the organization. If they were ignored, the organization would have failed in a most fundamental way.

(Often these core processes are visible to the customer, so we might highlight those components that are clearly seen by the customer by using a solid fill.)

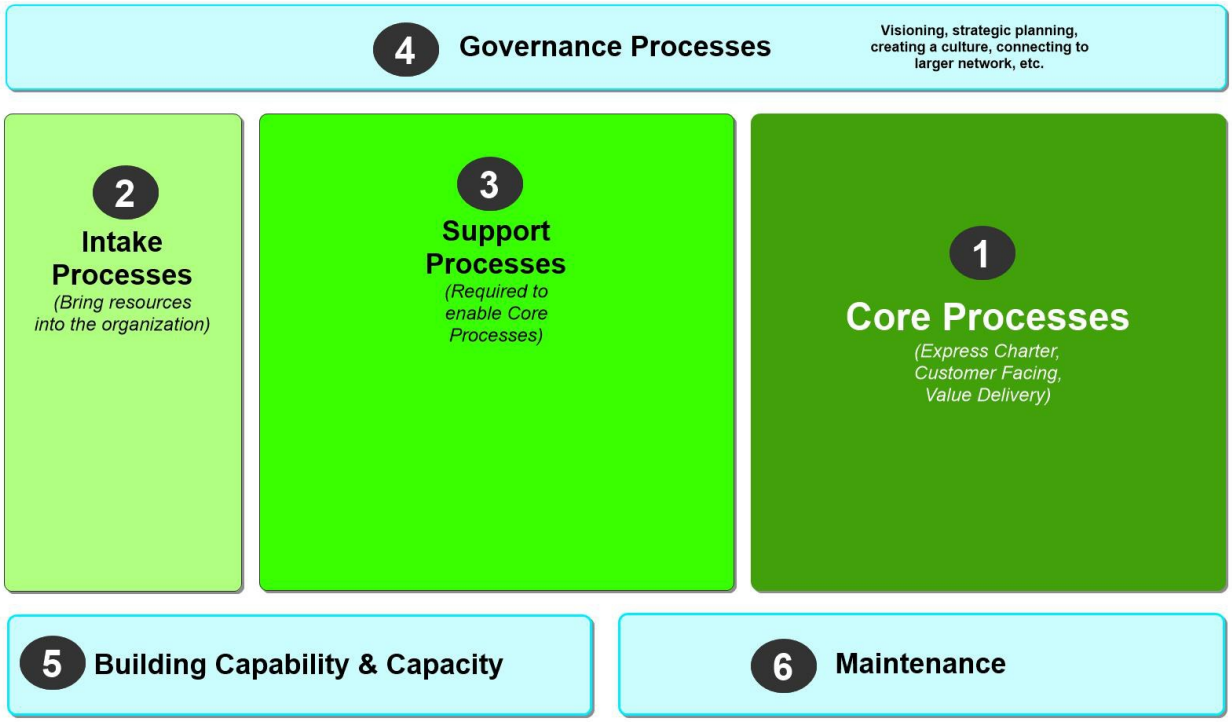
To support the organization, we have the (2) intake processes that bring clients, income, data, and facilities into the organization.

Behind those core processes and intake processes are the myriad of activities that are essential but only (3) enabling. They could be outsourced and the organization would still be true to its vision. Hiring, planning, storage, procurement, and marketing would be just a few. A pharmaceutical company might have special enabling processes for

receipt of chemicals. A financial services firm might have special processes for confidential and disaster-proof client data storage.

The important thing is that we have provided a representation of the organization that makes no mention of workers, departments, or positions. It only identifies the work. We can generalize this notion and be more precise about the most important categories of work:

Macro Map Structure



In addition to our core processes, intake processes and support processes, let's also identify the (4) governance processes that operate on the organization itself. Visioning, strategic planning, setting values, and structuring the organization would be some of the most common examples. Some organizations would also need external political advocacy to influence the formation of public policy. For more insightful companies, another governance process is shaping the corporate culture. While these activities are often taken up by executives, our focus here is simply naming them as activities that shape the organization and not let them be too attached to a particular class of employees. That also allows us to talk in a meaningful way about how front line staff, for example, are critical in strategic planning.

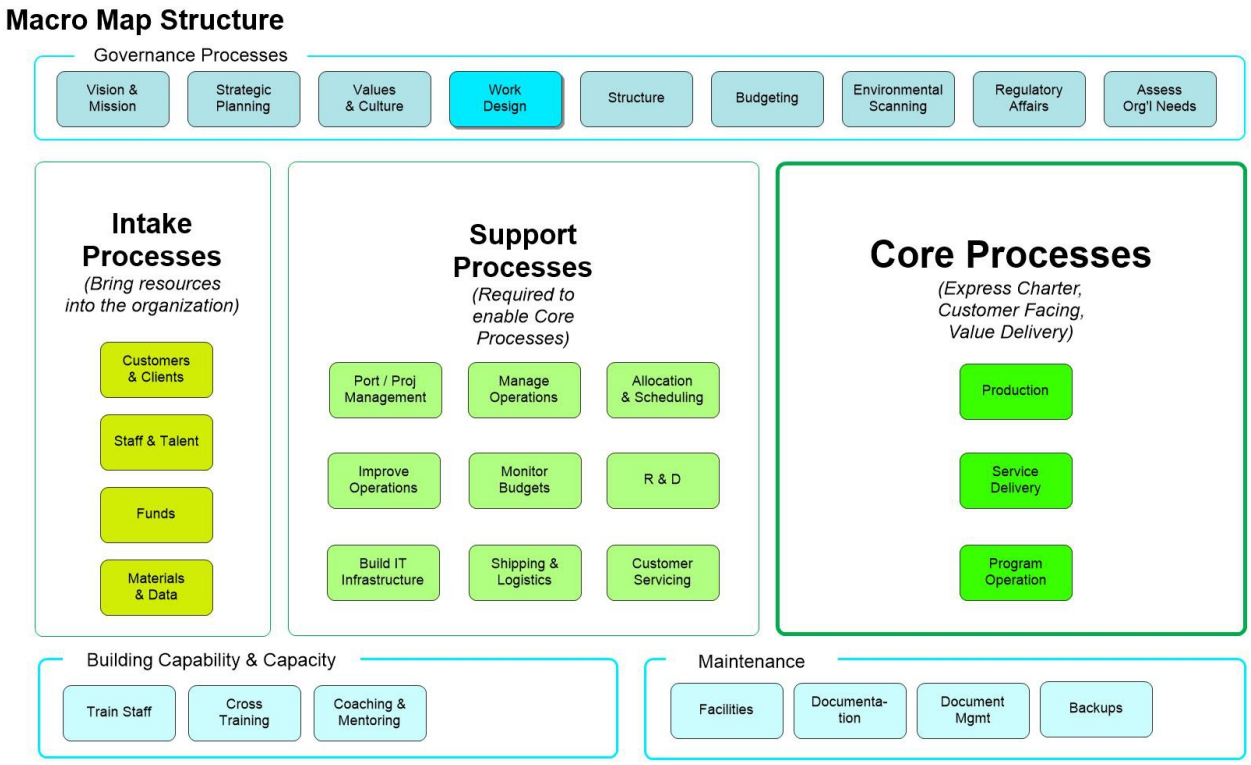
An often unacknowledged governance process is Resource Adjustment. The criteria for quality for a given work process implies a level of budget support and staffing levels to secure the desired outcome; this harkens back to the argument we made earlier about

the design of enabling resources. It is not uncommon for a financial reversal to call for some level of cost containment or a freeze on hiring. And suddenly the level of resources provided are incompatible with the quality promised. People focus on "doing what they were told" rather than working to achieve the quality defined. If it requires 10 staff to achieve the defined output, but only 6 slots are filled and the remaining 4 are "on hold", then compliance to procedures starts to substitute for quality of outcome. The process becomes dishonest; a more ethical move would be to restate the criteria of quality to match what is possible at a reduced level of funding and staffing.

The next auxiliary category is work processes that (5) build capacity and capability. Activities such as training, mentoring, professional development, or cross-departmental assignments would be common examples.

And the last category is work processes exclusively for (6) maintenance of the organization. Managing property and maintaining data bases would be the most common.

Just to flesh out the model above, here are some typical examples;



This chart shows some of the work processes that might be in each category. The important point is that we have captured the work of the whole organization on a single page. For some organizations, the page might be a big one (my largest was 3' by 5') but it

was still a visual representation of a complex set of activities. Regardless of its size, the map captures the portfolio of work processes that are the essence of the organization. Any work process might involve numerous staff, or weave its way through multiple departments. But it is the most useful unit of analysis for work. Any staff should be able to find the processes they touch in their daily work. And the map helps them see how their efforts fit into the total enterprise.

On numerous occasions I have put such a map up in front of 100's of staff. And something magical always seems to happen. We give everyone a few red dots and a few green dots; we ask them to put the red dots on processes that are not working well, and put the green dots on the ones that are working fine.

Suddenly *all* of the staff are talking about *all* of the work *all* together. When everyone steps back from putting their dots on the map, the consensus of the group is obvious. Some processes are obliterated by red dots! Clearly those should be a high priority for improvement efforts. Some processes are covered with green dots, so they could be templates for well designed work. And some were covered half with red and half with green dots?! Those were often the most provocative to discuss.

The important point is that the map becomes the repository for the collective wisdom of the group. It gives a clear focus for the discussion of the work (not the worker and certainly not the organizational chart). It empowers people to present conflicting points of view. I can ask the red-dot-people to share their point of view, and then ask the green-dot-people for their opinions. Since they can see numerous other dots, they are more willing to speak up. They know up front that there are conflicting opinions, so they are more open to exploring the disagreement.

The map could be coded for other key issues. Imagine if each process was flagged for the departments that contributed to it. Certain processes would jump out as requiring more sophisticated arrangements for coordinating between departments. “Turf wars” would be laid out in front the whole staff rather than allowed to fester in smaller venues.

One extremely useful query is to ask “What’s missing?” Staff can usually quickly identify the work processes that are nascent or ad hoc rather than well designed. Managers wise enough to listen can find the holes in the fabric of the organization.

Another useful query is to ask “Which work processes have the most impact on our customers’ experience?” The staff may find a new understanding about how to better serve the customer.

Perhaps more important, the staff learn they have a tool for pooling their collective insight. There is a way to coordinate the discussions of 100s of their co-workers. The map can facilitate rich discussions among staff about how the work is being done. But that is by no means the end of its usefulness.

- Imagine if supervisors and managers have a map they share. Every time a problem surfaces, they can tick off *where* it happens in the work flow of the organization (rather than in what department). Eventually the accumulation of tick marks will tell a story.
- Imagine if new-hires were shown the map as a "Table of Contents" for the organization. And everyone could locate their new job on the map, identifying the work processes to which they were contributing. And maybe they can start finding out where they would like to migrate in their tenure with the company. Most important, they can see their effort as part of the whole. They can stop thinking just from "in box" to "out box".

In the chapters to follow we will find more powerful ways to utilize the MacroMap as a tool for management and improvement as well as design.

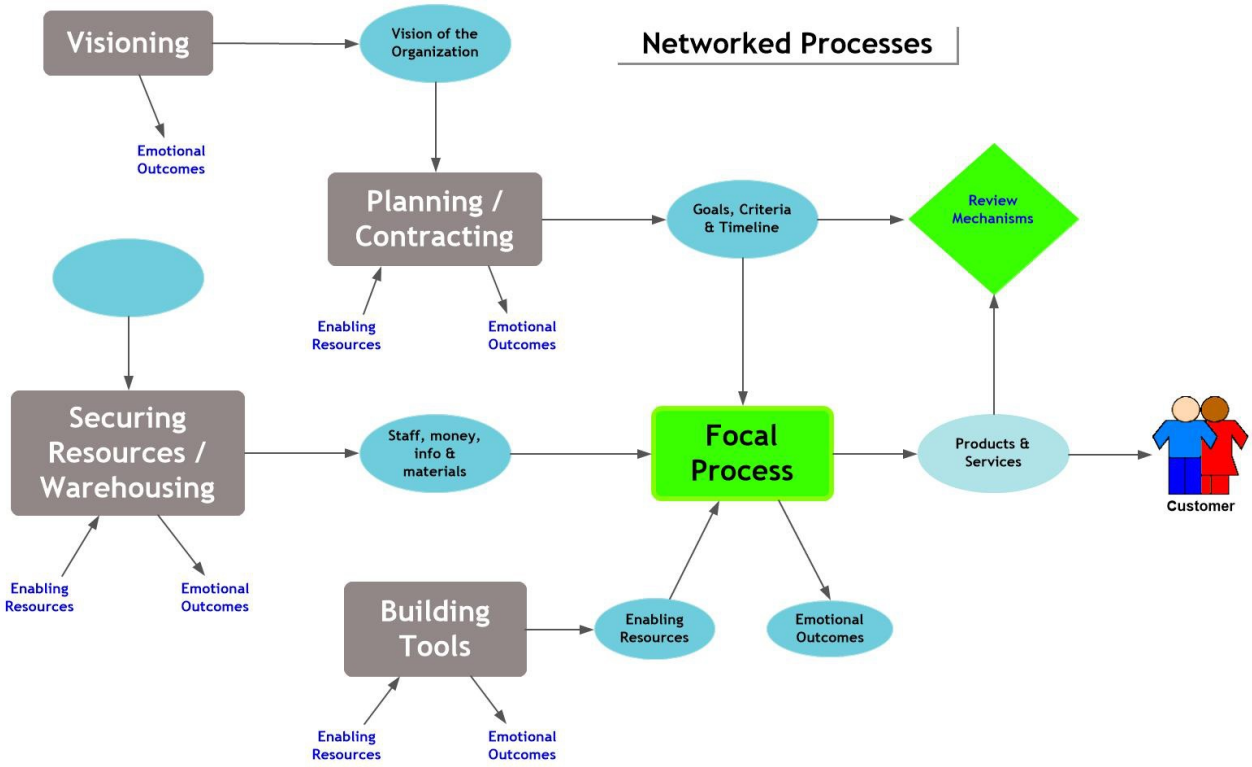
Organization Design… by Process

It would seem too obvious to state that organizations are formed to execute work. So it is surprising that flaws in "the work" are the most common source of organizational distress. Getting work done is the essence of the organization, but it is not always our strongest suit.

The logical flow from vision down through products and services, down through work processes, down through procedures is an abstraction too far removed from daily work to be particularly useful on the front lines. And most organizations default to the organizational chart as a more useful managerial tool. As we argued earlier, however, the organizational chart emphasizes too much of the WHO of organizational life and too little of the WHAT of actual work activities.

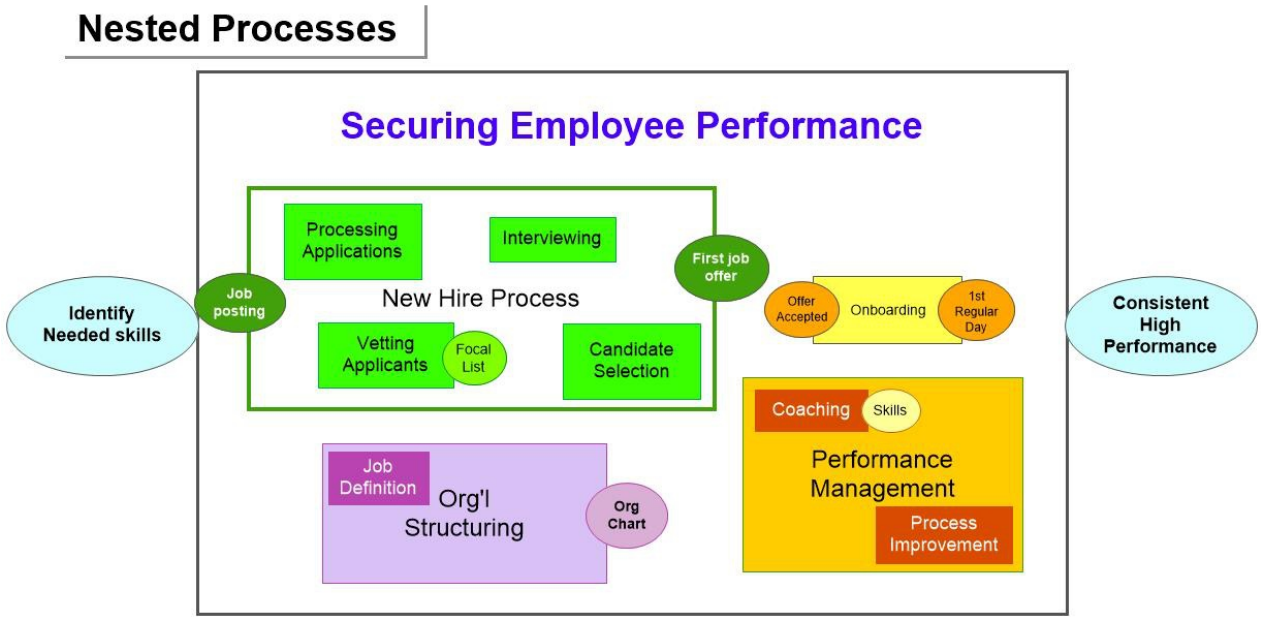
It should be no surprise that we would propose the MacroMap of work processes as the alternate starting point for organization design. All the surface turbulence and complexity of organizational life can be viewed as the expression of the underlying commitments of the organization: to deliver products and services of value to designated customers. Whatever structural features are chosen should be in service of work process, not executive preference or managerial convenience. The organization should be designed backwards from the customer and the benefit they hope to achieve with the company's products and services.

The MacroMaps we have presented so far exemplifies the concept, but a few elaborations are appropriate at this point. First of all, work processes are always networked. Whatever process is the focus of attention, there are other processes that contribute to its



performance. Other departments may be generating criteria for quality based on regulatory constraints, market research, or company policy. The IT department may be heavily involved in developing software to support the work. Procurement and Warehousing may be hard at work securing the needed raw materials for production work. Shortfalls in any work process can sometimes be traced back to one of its networked companions rather than some flaw in the focal process. Our MacroMap may need to be augmented by showing links between processes if that ever becomes the most useful perspective.

Secondly, processes are nested. Any process could contain multiple sub-processes, or be itself a sub-process to a larger process. This example shows the multiple layers of



processes within processes. Our overall concern is with ensuring employee performance, which is secured through new hires, on boarding, organizational structuring, and performance management. And the new hire process could be broken out into processing applications, vetting applicants, interviewing, and selection. All of them contribute to getting from a job posting to an initial offer to a specific candidate.

So the burning question, obviously, is which level should be captured on the MacroMap. Clearly going to the lowest level would produce an unwieldy document, while sticking at the highest level risks being too distant from actual operations. Luckily we do not have to choose. The main MacroMap can be like a “Table of Contents” for numerous sub-maps with greater detail. And a deeper dive only makes sense if we are concerned about performance in a particular area. The example map above would be appropriate if there was a widespread opinion that the hiring process was seriously broken. In one client, that exact map helped identify candidate selection as the source of the dissatisfaction. Human Resources did an admirable job of finding candidates, but the hiring managers were notoriously slow and flawed in their selection of a prospective hire.

The Conscious Corporation

The MacroMap as described above does an excellent job of supporting the design of work. But it suffers from two serious limitations. First, it fails to capture fully the integration of all the components parts into a holistic entity. Designing work processes is suspiciously like the machine model of organizations. We thoroughly design the pieces, without having a comparable view into the whole. Second, the MacroMap does not capture the human facets of an organization. We deliberately put the worker in the background so we could highlight the work. Bringing people back into the process is more than simply assigning tasks to individuals; we are more interested in the culture of the organization and the community created by it. The culture emerges out of the thousands of conversations that occur each day; it sets the tone or feel of the organization, and may or may not reflect the priorities or values implied by the portfolio of processes.

An organization is a mix of the designed and the emergent. It is engineered and organic at the same time. What we need are structures or mechanisms that reveal the human side of the organization; we cannot engineer the culture, but we can make it more visible and discussable.

Four Forums

We propose the following forums to help create an organization that is not just intentional, but almost self-aware. These forums are all designed to invite potentially difficult conversations, so the facilitation of each forum will require professional skills. Those with greater authority in the organization would most likely stifle discussion, so their role should be a variant of simple participant rather than being the center of attention. Titles – and egos – need to be checked at the door.

These forums are meant to operate outside, or parallel, to the formal structure. They are venues where authority and position are temporarily suspended. The goal is ***not*** problem solving or decision-making. The outcome is a widespread awareness of issues which is likely to spark more focused conversations about the challenges. Assigning one person or one group to be responsible for a particular issue merely releases everyone else from thinking about the challenges and perhaps experimenting with new approaches.

1. The Purpose Forum:

Bring together senior executives and a diagonal slice of the organization. The focal question of the meeting is (1) whether the purpose (vision, mission, charter, etc.) of the organization is still valid and relevant, and (2) whether that purpose is clearly reflected in the current processes and policies. Do our products and services “add up to” our mission statement? If a stranger were to examine the company and infer our vision from what we do, would they come up with our actual vision statement?

Do we have metrics which clearly reflect our customers' achievement of their desired benefit? Or are we tracking only the simplest level of satisfaction? Would our metrics give us an early warning if we were drifting away from our core purpose?

The MacroMap would support locating gaps in work more precisely. And some work processes will be obviously more central to delivering on the vision than others.

2. The Customer Experience Forum:

Bring together any customer-facing staff and middle-level managers. The focus is on highlighting the customer experience. Are customers achieving the benefit we assumed? How confident are we about the customers' experience? Do we fare better with some customers than others? What customers would we like to attract more? Are there some customers we should shed? Where in our workflow are we enhancing or degrading the customer experience?

The style of the meeting is more story telling than analysis. Any quantitative data should be elaborated with real life stories and personas.

The MacroMap would aid in locating where customer satisfaction is secured or lost. A customer journey map would provide another valuable group memory device. As before, the outcome of the meeting is a more widely shared awareness of how well the company is taking care of its customers.

3. The Operational Coordination Forum:

Like the other forums, this one definitely requires the MacroMap of the organization. Bring together department heads and a diverse few staff (newest? oldest?) from each department as well.

From the MacroMap, select the work processes that cut across multiple departments. Flag the ones that stumble the most from dropped handoffs, late deliveries, inaccurate inputs, and so on.

As a complement to the MacroMap, trace out the "gives" and "gets" from each department to some other department. What documents, reports, data, materials, decisions, etc. are passed from each department to any other department?

From those two representations, the discussion can shift to the general question of how well the departments work together to support work process performance. Are there work processes that would benefit from joint re-design by all departments involved? Are there departmental charters that conflict with process criteria for quality for some work process?

Are there departmental objectives or metrics that compromise cross-department process performance?

Work design is, of necessity, focused on rational design of the mechanistic pieces of the organization. This forum can complement that effort by assessing the organic performance of the whole. The whole is seldom just the sum of its parts, so this forum can identify the holistic dynamics not intended or even visible at the process level.

4. The Cultural Reveal Forum:

This forum requires senior leadership and a diverse, diagonal slice of staff. Like the other forums, it would require thoughtful and sophisticated facilitation. Senior leaders need to listen more and talk less. The facilitator needs to design a process that ensures safety and allows for exploring difficult topics.

The purpose of this forum is to illuminate the culture of the organization, both the desired and the actual themes. One strategy that works well is a critical incident review. In small groups, have staff pick events that exemplified the culture at its best; events that underscored who we are, how we treat each other, and the way we go about our work. Then turn staff attention to the opposite. What events stood out as unexpected, untoward, or seemingly in violation of our guiding principles? Sharing the stories starts to paint a picture of the elusive culture.

As a coherent picture of the culture emerges, staff can note how the culture might differ for different sectors of the organization. The internal service sectors (IT, HR, Facilities, Finance) might have a distinctly different feel than the product design and manufacturing segments. Whether these variations are complementary or contradictory can be assessed.

Although it would be easy to do so, there is no value in sliding into defensiveness or rationalization. The goal is to find a shared view of the unspoken fabric that weaves together the behavior of hundreds or thousands of staff. Work assignments are not sufficient to guide a community in coordinated action. There is an unseen soup of icons, stories, events, and images that allows people to find and share the meaning that illuminates their actions together. That is the essence of culture; it evolves with or without intentional effort. It is not defined by executives nor negotiated by organizational units. It is to be discovered, but seldom to be designed. An honest, shared view of the culture is the strongest lever for shifting it to a more functional state.

Decision-Making

One of the organizational features supposedly clarified by the organizational chart is decision-making. Anyone in a box higher than mine on the chart can claim the right to review, revise, or even revoke the decisions I might make. Presumably the higher up you move, the larger and more significant the decisions to be made.

Our process perspective suggests a different interpretation. Decision-making is a common component of many work processes. So most decision-making should be woven into the work design as much as possible. Decisions pushed "up the chain of command" become isolated from the process in which they should be embedded. Constantly taking possible decisions up a level on the organizational chart also suggests that the criteria for good choices have not been defined and articulated. A wise manager will use such moments as opportunities to explore the staff's thinking and possibly preclude the need to review such a decision again in the future.

Disagreements between workers that are brought to a supervisor for mediation should be treated the same way. It is a chance to explore how attending to the needs of the customer should help resolve conflicts. It is not a question of who is right or wrong, but what choice would ensure the greatest value for the eventual customer.

Review mechanisms are another way that decision-making gets confounded with hierarchy. When managers insist on doing the final review before products and services are delivered, they end up enforcing decision-making rights that should be a part of a review mechanism. Ideally the operation of the review mechanism would lead to fewer and fewer instances requiring action by the reviewer. So again, decision-making is driven down into the operation of the process by clarifying criteria well enough that any diligent worker is more likely to make good choices.

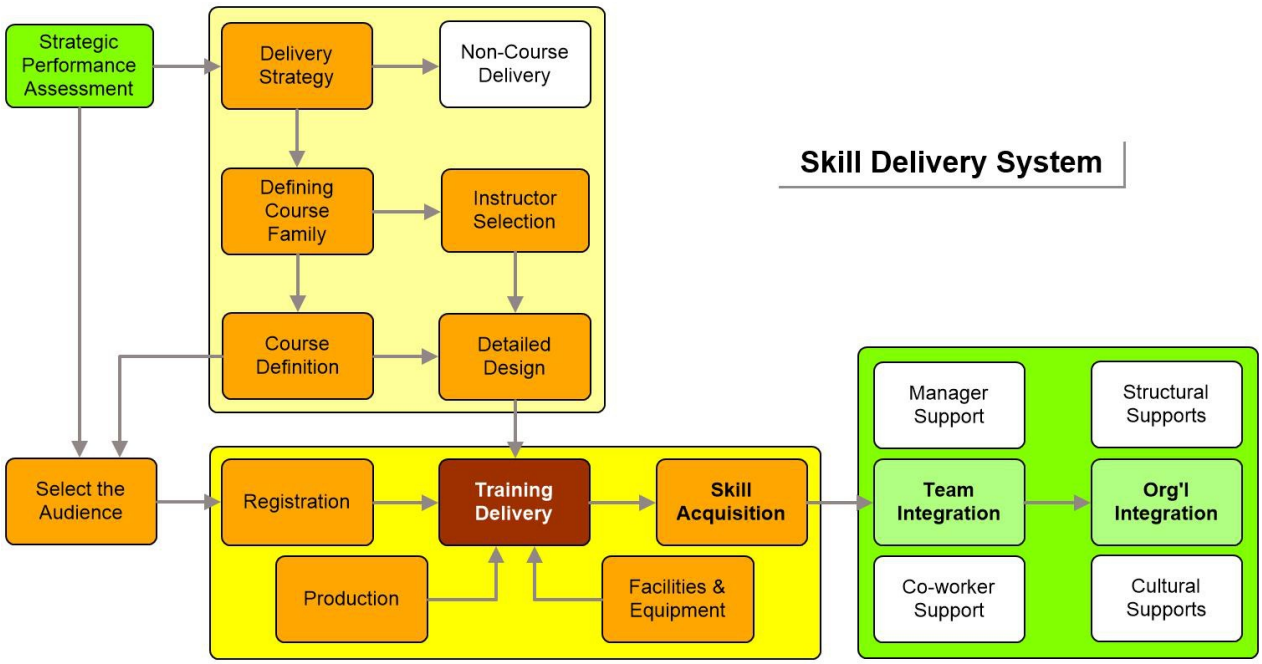
Parsing Big Problems

The organizational chart gives the illusion that problems can be contained to a particular location in the company. And also that a decision-maker capable of resolving the issue due to their greater experience, expertise, and authority is only a few steps up the chain of command. The organizational chart also draws our attention to the WHO of problems rather than the HOW or the WHERE. Problems are often attached to boxes on the chart, their associated job descriptions and departmental charters. It is easy to see why concern quickly focuses around skill levels, motivation, temperament, accountability, and other people-based themes. How often do we attack problems with training, role clarification, or shifting rewards? And how often does the problem persist or re-emerge in a short time?

Our process perspective suggests – as we have done before – putting the worker temporarily into the background and looking for the potential impact of a poorly

designed work process. Imagine, for example, that a company has a rather sloppy or informal process for Project Definition and Launch. The project charter is typically a form filled out by the Project Manager the night before the presentation to a senior committee for a GO/NOGO decision. The document typically looks fine, so the approval is granted based on anticipated ROI. But imagine the consequences if the stakeholders are not fluent in the terms of the charter? Or if they were not briefed on their role as a sponsor for the project. Project team members take up the assigned tasks only to find senior managers surprised or even dismayed at their actions. Conflicts between departments emerge and the team starts to divide into competing camps. The problem has a human face on it – people are confused, angry, hesitant – but the primary cause is a poorly designed work process. Ideally the project charter is merely the paper record of what should be a thorough airing of options and an explicit consensus among stakeholders about the project's goals and their roles in supporting it. The project launch includes time to explore the value of the project in the overall company strategy as well as its possible value to individual project members. Once that criteria for quality is articulated, the project charter document filled in the night before stands out as the first sign of a highly flawed work process.

Take the common challenge of bringing new skills into the organization. If we were to use our process mind set we would parse out the problem differently than simply chiding



the Learning & Development department to "do its job". Bringing new skills into the company is never simply a matter of conducting classes. The organization has to identify the skills needed to pursue its strategic objectives. Training is but one method for securing those skills on site. We could also "rent" them through consultants, or outsource the operations to someone who specializes in the needed skills.

If we decide to pursue training, the course has to be well defined, instructors identified, and staff targets listed. Even when the course is finally delivered, the new skills have to be integrated into the culture and structure of the company. Perhaps most important, this process map notes the difference between Training Delivery and Skill Acquisition; the first is the work of the instructor, but the latter is the work of the student. If the company culture defines training as “a day off work and a free lunch”, we would have found the weak spot in the skill delivery system. A more typical weak spot would be the failure of teams to absorb the new skills from one of its members. And that work process is beyond the reach of the instructor.

The point here is that thinking through skill acquisition from a process perspective generates a richer map of the terrain. It highlights points where the final desired outcome (skills being applied in normal operations) is either secured or compromised. The process lens takes us away from reiterating the responsibility of the L&D department, or relying finding excellent instructors, or even making the training as enjoyable as possible. Let’s design the work first; then we can think through how to bring staff into that work flow.

Strategic Planning… by Process

The backbone of any organization is the line of thought from Purpose to Products & Services to Processes to Procedures. The activity defined by that chain of thought is how the company delivers something of value to its customers. That flow, however, is seldom stable. Customers shift their preferences. Technology creates new options for work. Turnover among staff brings new skills and experiences into the mix. The general economy shifts the calculus of "value".

Strategic Planning is nothing more (nor less) than reviewing and adjusting this backbone to ensure it continues to express the overall intention of the organization, how well it fits in the current marketplace, and how well the company is prepared to implement. For such a critical activity, it is dismaying how often strategic planning fails to improve the company as desired. It is hard for companies to carve out time where normal operations are suspended and leaders and staff alike can reflect on whether we are doing the right things. Doing things right is more immediate and compelling. That weekend "strategic planning retreat" just means that Monday will be more stressful than usual. On top of the work of the day, suddenly staff are asked to prepare reports, interview customers, review marketing data, and – above all else – ask some awkward and intimidating questions. Have we lost our focus? Who are our most important customers? Are we still delivering value to the marketplace? Are there competitors out there performing better than we are? Has our success and growth left us brittle and vulnerable?

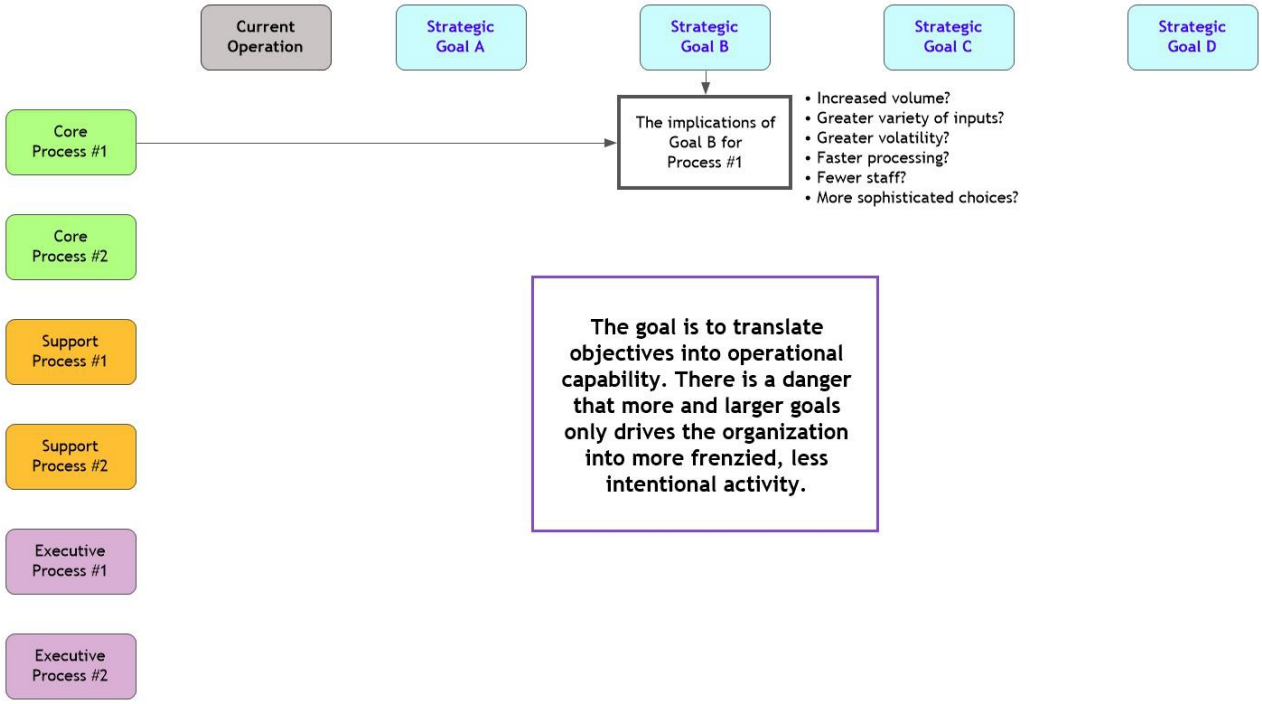
And the process for securing or refreshing that alignment is called "strategic planning". Such an effort will typically outline a new or revised set of objectives which are cascaded down into the organization through departments to particular work groups. It is no wonder that many strategic planning efforts have disappointing results. It is not that they fail; it is more accurate to say that they just fade away. New goals collide with everyday operational requirements. New metrics translate into more reports but not always new behaviors. Few strategic planning efforts spend as much time on what to *stop* doing as well as time on what new outcomes need attention. The net result is that new strategic initiatives run into the headwind from existing tasks and the pressure to "keep the wheels on the bus".

What we need is a way to keep strategic planning honest. It is easy to imagine new and exciting objectives, but the real work of the organization is not thoroughly considered in that conversation. The solution to this quandary is – not surprisingly – attention to work process. Until a strategic plan is articulated down into work processes, it is not likely to be integrated with daily staff efforts.

The common practice of cascading goals down through departments does not work precisely because departments are the wrong unit of analysis. The organizational chart

fails to capture some of the most important features of organizational life. In particular, it does not adequately represent the work itself. Luckily we have an alternative.

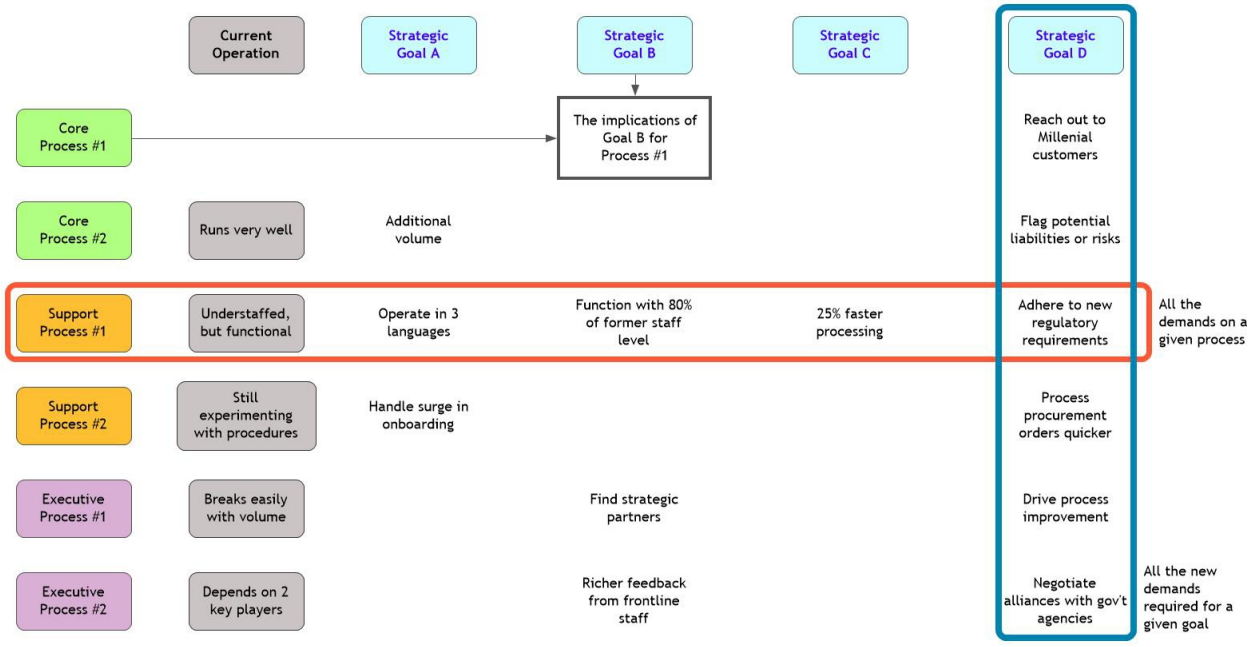
Recall that we (should) have a MacroMap for the work processes in the organization. Imagine that we take the processes and array them down the left side of a grid. Put the new strategic objectives across the top of the grid. We would have something like the following:



Notice that the 2nd column is reserved for current operations. We never want to ignore the demand on work processes that already exists. The entry in each cell would be the implications of the new strategic objective (column head) for a particular work process (row head). A goal might require greater speed, handling higher volume, dealing with a new customer group, providing services in more languages, meeting new regulatory requirements, and so on. This chart might have 40 to 100 rows, but it would provide critical guidance to the organization. And most people would look at just a subset for their particular area of responsibility.

It is worth noting that the conversations for generating these cell entries will be valuable in and of themselves. It requires all staff to decompose objectives into their operational implications. It calls for a level of candor and objectivity that is usually suppressed in the call for commitment and optimism.

Imagine that we fill out the cells in the grid. Now we have something more like the following:



Look at the row in red; it shows the total demand on a particular work process. We could scan across and evaluate whether the process is capable of meeting those demands. We might discover that a work process will require significant redesign or increased staffing. We could identify potential contradictory demands from different objectives.

Now consider the column in blue that shows the total implications of a new objective across the organization. We could scan down the column and estimate if the needed adjustments are possible, and what effort might be needed to make them happen.

Such a grid would be the process improvement agenda for the organization for years to come. It could prioritize needed improvements in terms of what is implied by the strategic plan. The implications could be conveyed to department heads and process owners for the needed changes in staffing or process re-design. Rather than measuring progress toward the strategic goals, we could measure progress in the needed process adjustments. In short, the grid establishes the link between the strategic plan and the daily, operational life of the organization. It engages staff in revising the organization rather than just adding to their workload.

Work Design… by Process

The design of a particular work process is the intermediate step between an abstract process definition and actual behavior. It has to express the purpose and criteria for the process and also provide guidance to even a novice staff. While it is tempting to provide a task list or checklist, the world of work is seldom so simple. Our directions for work have to be flexible enough to cover a range of subtleties, in the work as well as in the worker.

STEP ONE: **The Type of Process**

Work is always intended to be generative, to create value in the marketplace. So there is a product or a service somewhere after all the action. The product could be a toaster, a chain saw, a wedding event, a car loan, or an actual car. The service might be physical therapy, financial planning, house cleaning, wedding planning, or executing a will.

A product is a thing, an event, a document, a decision, or a piece of data. The eventual customer often has little or no interaction with the worker who produced the final outcome. The bride and groom interact with their wedding planning (who is providing a service), but the wedding guests experience a special event (a product) with little involvement in the wedding planning behind it. I never meet the workers who built my new car (a product), but I interacted with the salesperson who facilitated the sale (a service).

Product work is typically designed. The options for action are known ahead of time. Indeed, the wisdom of the organization is in the *design* of work steps. The worker brings their time and skill to the equation, but they are expected to adhere to the designed work steps unless specifically invited to a different kind of involvement.

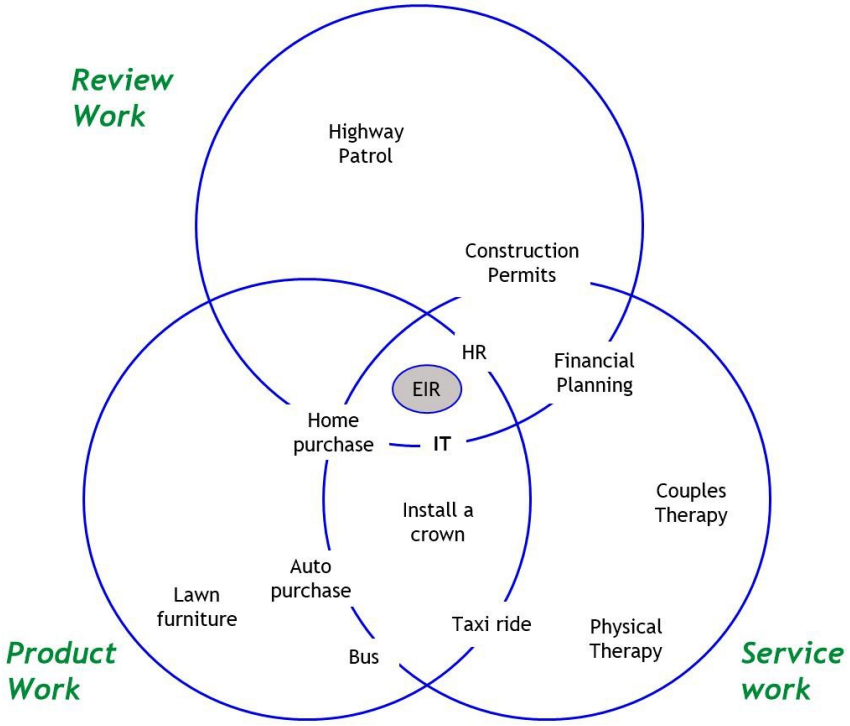
Service work, by contrast, is more adaptive. The wisdom of the organization is in the depth of the worker's experience, which allows them to interact with the customer and tailor their actions to meet the customer's unique circumstances. So the wedding planner has to contend with obnoxious in-laws, dysfunctional couple dynamics, and the groom's ignorance of color and style. They have to navigate local and seasonal availability of flowers. In contrast, the auto worker can rely on a standardized flow of parts from contracted vendors.

Product work strives for consistency; each chain saw should be exactly like all the other chain saws off the assembly line. Service work, in contrast, strives for customization. The wedding planner dare not rely on a fixed checklist since a service customer expects the delivery to be customized and adapted. They expect an allowance for special circumstances, such as a mother of the bride who is deathly allergic to flowers, or a groom who wants a black and orange color scheme to match his favorite football team.

The third type of work is not generative at all; it is review work. It is all the steps that check that any product or service work meets the criteria for quality and stays within the applicable constraints. Review work produces no value in the marketplace, but it is valuable nonetheless. That is, review work does not create a product or service, but it may be crucial in making sure the product work or service work are delivered as expected. It may also be the spark that ignites improvements in more generative work.

For review work, the wisdom of the organization is in the *criteria enforced*. Presumably they capture the best understanding of the customer's needs and other regulatory constraints. While product and service work have a definite customer, review work does not. Reviewers are answerable to the key stakeholders who helped shape the process definition, but those stakeholders are not strictly customers.

A few examples may serve to sharpen the definition of these three types of work:



Financial planning, for example is service work, that is, it is tailored to the client, their particular investment goals and tolerance for risk or volatility. The financial planner typically interacts directly with the customer, often creating a relationship that lasts for years. But their work is not entirely service work. The planner is also required to impose certain rules about financial disclosures or the types of investments that are legally allowed. So it is mostly service work with a sprinkling of review work.

If you have a crown installed on a molar, there is clearly a product (a shiny gold tooth) but no one would try to find a better price by checking Etsy or eBay for a used one. The service provided by the dentist to size and install the crown is essential to the value of the product. So it is mostly service work, which is required to realize the value of a special product.

Buying a home has a rather substantial product at the end of the services from the real estate agent; any agent who gave "excellent service" but failed to hand over the keys to the front door along with the deed or mortgage would be a failure. So it is mostly product work with a significant component of service work, much like the wedding planner. But the RE agent also has to ensure the disclosures and financial transactions are handled as required by law. So unlike the wedding planner, there is some review work mixed in.

Both a limousine, taxi and a bus provide the same product, namely moving you from Point A to Point B. The difference is the level of service. The taxi driver may offer casual conversation or recommendations for local restaurants, hotels, or night spots; they pick you up and drop you off at the exact place you want. The bus driver insists that you stand behind the white line and not interact with them at all; they only stop at pre-determined points, even if they are less than ideal for you. A limousine driver would go one step further than the taxi driver and add a stop to pick up your vanilla latte with extra foam! So we have the same product with three different levels of service.

If you want to modernize the appliances in your restaurant, there is a County agency that will review your plans and issue a permit to allow construction to proceed. There is a small amount of service work in educating the applicant or explaining what is needed for a successful re-submission, but it is overwhelmingly review work overseeing the construction work ahead. And you may be annoyed and frustrated by the Permitting office, but they are not committed to making you a happy customer. In fact, you are *not* the customer! Review work does not have a customer. (Remember our earlier discussion of "Public Service" rather than customer service.) In this case, you would be a mandated supplier in the review process.

The California Highway Patrol is conducting Review work. They decide if your driving behavior falls within the constraints established by State and Federal law.

As a more complicated example, consider an EIR, an Environmental Impact Review. A bank may ask for an EIR when a developer seeks a loan to help start construction on a 10-story office building. An environmental engineering consulting firm investigates the soil and hydrology of the site as well as a raft of other variables before issuing a report that the bank should or should not consider the loan. At some point, the engineering firm sits down with the bank, the owner, and the developer to review their findings and make possible recommendations for a more favorable finding. So they might suggest 5 stories is as tall as the soil would support, unless certain changes were made to the foundation.

So is the EIR an example of product work, service work, or review work? And the answer is… Yes! The report is a significant <u>product</u> that could end up in a court hearing if the project ends up in litigation. The joint meeting provides a valuable <u>service</u> to the owner and developer about how to improve their design. But the major activity is <u>review</u> work,

making sure the proposed construction does not run afoul of site characteristics, local building codes, zoning rules, state law, and professional standards.

So even though they may all come together in the same project, this distinction between product, service, and review work is still critical; these types of work are designed differently, executed differently, taught differently, and documented differently.

STEP TWO: **Outlining Service & Product Work**

Generative work (product or service) almost always has some natural clusters. Medical clinics treat patients with acute injuries, simple illnesses, and chronic illnesses. While the procedures for these 3 groups have many areas of overlap, the steps for one will not automatically suffice for the others. Patients with a chronic illness, for example, might require a more detailed medical history than someone with a simple injury. A bank might consider a loan application under $10,000 quite differently than a loan application over $100,000. Procurement contracts with known vendors are much simpler than contracts with a new vendor. A physical therapy procedure might be quite different performed on an elderly woman compared to an adolescent male.

Within a cluster, the work has a certain coherence and structure. Between clusters there could be dramatic differences. If the different clusters are lumped together, it creates an artificial sense of complexity. It makes learning the job more difficult than necessary. And it renders any documentation confusing and obtuse.

Typically there is one cluster that is the most common, the most basic, the modal pathway. That should be the anchor for work design. Other clusters may be a variation on a theme. And some clusters may be sufficiently different that they warrant a different work design entirely. For example, a medical clinic may need very different protocols for patients who also suffer from a serious mental disorder or show violent tendencies.

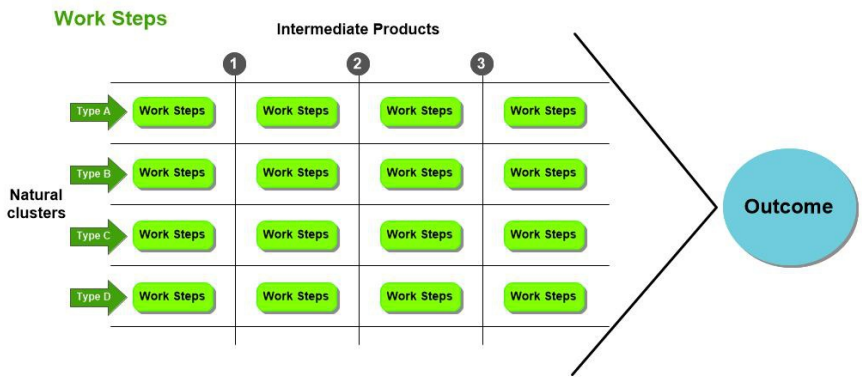
In project oriented work (such as commercial construction, installing solar panels, or pharmaceutical research) some projects are easy to estimate. Other projects contain unresolvable unknowns and require a much looser project plan. And some projects may be politically volatile and require an entirely different approach. It would be a mistake to squeeze all such variety into a single work process.

Every company faces the challenges of recruiting employees. But the work process of recruiting varies from entry level vs. executives vs. rare skills positions. So the first step in designing the work process of “Recruitment” is acknowledging and defining these different clusters.

Once clusters are defined, the next step is to articulate the milestone events that indicate significant progress in the work. Obviously our main concern is with the final product, but along the way particular events let us know that all the effort is progressing. So a

draft report, completed data entry, cement foundation poured, patient registered, or meeting scheduled all show progress toward the final outcome. Intermediate products are not just evidence of progress; they also provide the best location for a possible handoff or a review step.

So now we have the following skeleton for a particular work process:



So rather than listing work steps from start to finish, work steps are defined within a particular cluster from one milestone event to the next. This allows for greater clarity and coherence in defining work. If all these work steps were lumped together in a single list of work steps, the documentation would be cluttered with all sorts of qualifications and conditionals. One of the side benefits of this approach is that it is easier to identify work steps that might be simplified or even automated. Another benefit is that the new hire can learn even complex work in palatable chunks. The milestones identified are also the best places for review steps and/or handoffs from one worker to another.

Perhaps the most important benefit of parsing out a work process in this fashion is the chance to characterize the transformation involved in each unit of effort. The work steps within a given cluster and between one intermediate milestone and the next should be a coherent piece of work. We should be able to identify the essential transformation involved.

Starting with a high-level transformation helps to organize the elaboration of detailed work steps. As we argued earlier, the list of possible transformations is limited; only about 50 categories are sufficient to bracket almost any kind of work. The following table provides a more detailed listing of the transformation than offered earlier:

Inputs	Nature of Trans-formation	Outputs	Examples
Move		The elements are not changed, just shifted to a new position or place.	
From one place..	**Move**	..to another	Transport, shipping, delivery; data transfer; document management; handing off phone messages, forwarding email. Bus, taxi, airline. The thing transported is unchanged, just moved; could be reversed.
Raw materials	**Package**	Ready for shipment, transfer, or download	Stuff envelopes, build a crate, put in a box, styrofoam inserts for cushioning. ZIPped for email delivery.
Private ideas or documents	**Publish**	Document is made widely visible to specified audience.	Send out RFQ; print publication; broadcasting; distributing leaflets; putting up posters; advertising; bumper stickers
Unruly or random arrival	**Buffer**	Orderly arrival, easier to process	Waiting room in doctor's office; people in line waiting to buy tickets; receiving dock, being "on hold" for customer service; "take a number" at butcher counter
Needed inputs; raw materials	**Stage**	Materials are located in the most efficient position for further processing, production, or construction.	Placing construction materials on a site optimized for access; supplying parts to a production line; arranging tools needed for surgery; moving the most used items to the point of easiest access in a warehouse
Finished product In inventory	**Install**	Finished product installed and fully functional in a new location or new situation	Software downloaded; new heater installed; chair lift added to stairway. Some installations are permanent, while others products are designed for frequent reconfiguration.
I have X You have Y	**Exchange**	I have Y You have X	Purchase; payment; swap; sharing information. Asynchronous exchange may require contracting, an exchange of promises, an escrow
An event or an activity or a system	**Reflect**	Permanent paper or digital record or reflection of an activity (from a transaction up to an entire system)	Shipping manifest, receipt, certification of test, signing for delivery, doctor's notes, contracts, documentation of work, notes from meeting, court transcript. Always anchored in some poor other activity.

Transform

The elements are fundamentally altered.

Raw materials, data	**Assemble / Execute**	New product or report	Original elements are visible in final product. Performance of a set of detailed steps; physical assembly, filling out a form. Sequence may be fixed or variable.
Raw materials (mostly intangibles)	**Integrate**	An irreversible blending of initial inputs; finding structure	Elements not visible in final product. Blending facts into a case study or a report; baking a cake. Transformation is variable; the worker adds nuance and subtlety.
Dirty or contaminated objects, sites, or people	**Clean**	Entities cleaned of any contaminates or dirt	Data cleaning, window washing, sterilization, “cleaning up language”, sanitizing, clean up after construction, decontamination, dental hygiene.
A damaged or compromised entity or system	**Restore**	System restored to maximal functioning or to its original state	Auto repair, hernia surgery, smart phone repair, art restoration, taking salt flats back to native marshes, restoring antique cars, painting weathered siding.
Well functioning product	**Enhance**	Increased functionality or features; improved capacity or performance.	Plastic surgery; software upgrade; kitchen remodel; stiffer shocks on your Jeep.
Important but vulnerable elements	**Protect**	Elements are protected, sequestered, secured	Fire wall, fencing, protective custody, copyright, vault, wall safe, quarantine.
Raw materials; undifferentiated mix	**Harvest**	Extracting valued elements from mix	Mining for gold, harvesting the wheat from the chaff, extracting valuable lessons from project review. Separating component parts from a shipping crate full of styrofoam cushioning.
Finished goods, physical structure, product, report	**Decom-pose**	Break down into parts, raw material	Demolition, tearing out a mountain trail, de-constructing a house, chopping a car for parts; forensic accounting.
From one modality…	**Translate**	..to another	Translate English into French; Engineering-speak into Marketing-talk; behavior into computer code (BPMN); jargon into plain English.

Organize

The following are evaluative processes that do not fundamentally change the inputs, only change their status against some known criteria.

Undifferen-tiated cluster of stuff	**Triage**	Items are sorted by critical criteria for subsequent processing	First responders to natural disaster, battlefield injuries, incoming mail, reviewing stack of job applications, orders for products, speed dating. Usually a quick sorting as a preamble to more thorough processing later.
An event, thing, or person	**Measure**	Render some property of an event or thing against a standardized metric	Surveys quantify attitudes and behaviors. Measures of dimensions, IQ, duration, tensile strength, wire gauge, quality or some other feature, MTBF. Draws attention to limited features; glosses over subtlety and nuance.
Isolated events	**Schedule**	Events have an assigned date, time, or sequence.	Calendaring, making dental appointment; wedding planning; printing course schedule for the quarter.
An ongoing situation or activity	**Monitor**	Activity is visible and easily tracked	Tracking spending against budget; matching program activity to grant parameters; time clock for attendance
A problematic entity or situation; dysfunctional or merely unknown	**Assess / Explore**	An entity or situation is revealed, evaluated, clarified, understood	Medical diagnosis, risk assessment, interview job candidate, interviewing new babysitter, environmental impact report, post mortem after project close, auto diagnosis, finding logical fallacies in an argument.
Unverified or uncorrected document, records, applications	**Audit**	Verified object (accurate, complete, etc.)	Reviewing application for loan or assessment appeal; reviewing shipping manifest
Company, person, idea, equipment, event, product, or procedure	**Certify**	Formal and durable public designation of status; required for operation or use	Accredited school or hospital, ISO 9000; board certified surgeon, LCSW, licensed contractor, certified executive coach; approved scale or pump, a tire meets DOT standards. Certified election. Marriage License, death certificate

These are key aspects of "getting organized" or imposing order

The Public Good, societal values, unacceptable events	**Regulate**	Law, policy, code	County policy translated into procurement or hiring procedures. State proposition articulated into requirements for school districts. Accessibility for disabled turned into building codes.
Numerous undifferen-tiated elements	**Tag**	A differentiating but neutral label; simple tag that only separates one element from another	Numbers on football jerseys; procedure code for medical billing; SKU# in inventory; numbering trees in your HOA; Soc Security number. Likely linked to other data, such as price, location, or stock.
Numerous undifferen-tiated elements	**Define**	Some essential quality is declared and labeled	MBTI, Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior; DSM V psychiatric categories; "mouthy" vs. "speaking one's mind", was Jan 6 an 'insurrection' or a 'rowdy tour group'?
Numerous undifferen-tiated elements	**Filter**	Focused selection; subset of original	Isolate elements meeting certain criteria; invoices for certain month or for a certain client; just the female managers; select only applicants with masters degree.

These are all aspects of dealing with facts or ideas.

Items in a chaotic or irrational array	**Sort**	Items are grouped, sorted, or sequenced in a more useful way.	Warehousing; data base sorting keys; accounting report; data aggregation; grouping orders into shipments; dispatching; lining up by height in middle school
A set of events or objects	**Link**	Elements associated with each other, sequenced, put in context; new elements added to the mix; ordered	Revealing informal networks; finding food chain; articulating interdependencies in work activities; building genealogies; revealing connections in an ecology; exposing criminal networks
Large field of potentially useful elements	**Search**	Desired element identified and secured	Finding legal documents, searching library records, finding the doctor you need, finding car part in junk yard; singles bar, Tinder, Google
Data, facts, previous experience	**Extrapo-late**	Draw out the implications for the future	Forecasting, estimating project resources and risks, project Gantt chart, budgeting
Initial requirements, assumptions, parameters	**Design**	Skeleton of production process; guides for output	Design of work process; architectural drawings; map for a journey; manufacturing specs for new product; plan for the company

High level statement	**Derive**	Next level of thinking or detail	Principles restated as practices; vision articulated into strategic plan; strategic plan expanded into logistics and tactics. Preferences restated as product specifications. Criteria for quality expanded into specific work steps.
Lower level of thinking	**Infer**	High level statement	Find unstated principles behind the behavior; identify rationale for beliefs; name assumptions in an argument.
Range of options	**Decide**	Selection of single option; commit to course of action or allocation of resources	Goal setting, getting married, buying a car. Might involve contingencies, back-up plans, or conditionals. Sets aside alternatives not chosen.
Parties unsure how to proceed without correlated, predictable actions from other parties.	**Contract**	Reciprocal and usually binding understandings between people; decision to coordinate actions.	All parties can initiate actions, confident that other parties will reciprocate as stipulated. Deliver materials at a time and place; perform work; release information; render payment
Coarse, incomplete, draft materials; functioning relationship	**Refine**	Polished, complete, elegant; enhanced relationship	Copy editing, refining written materials, polishing rough edges; couples therapy, "We need to talk"

The following are the basic components of teaching, coaching, mentoring, therapy, etc.

Information, models	**Instruct**	Novice knows what the expert knows	Instruction, informing, role modeling, demonstration, teaching cases, OTJ training
Mysterious or challenging domain	**Learn**	Competent performance; evident understanding	Study materials; problem sets; practice
Disordered, shallow, or unfortunate perspective on the world	**Reframe**	New mind set; world view. Creates cognitive room for new skills.	Moving from 'husband' to 'father', from 'worker' to 'manager', from 'owner' to 'steward', from 'employed' to 'retired', from 'victim' to 'co-creator'. Essential activity in mentoring or therapy. Typically a one-way transformation.
Unconscious, unacknowledged experience	**Elicit**	Awareness, explicit understanding of inner experience	Helping client uncover implicit or suppressed awareness of their own interior; active listening, questions to prompt reflection or more detailed expression. Exposing impact of a mind set, frame of reference, or metaphor.

Initially resistant or uninformed audience	**Persuade**	Audience seriously considering new options	Sales, political debate, social movements, leadership.
Conflicting perspectives on a shared resource or event	**Negotiate**	Parties initially at odds with each other find a common path that respects multiple interests; precursor to contracting.	Labor management negotiations; deciding on plan for family vacation; agreeing on size of wedding invitation list; neighbors agreeing on size and style of shared fence..
Unacceptable behaviors	**Constrain**	Behavior is kept within constraints	Maintain adherence to policy, dress code, budget monitoring, plan review, law, quality standards, or contract; involves monitoring and communicating variance or gap. Typically includes right to punish or reward.

These are all aspects of dealing with people and groups.

Group merely observing	**Engage**	An audience actively involved, attending, contributing, responding	Students thinking along with an instructor, part of the dialogue. A critical complement to Instruct or Reframe.
	Entertain	An audience eagerly consuming, taking value from events	Audience attending a concert, watching a ballet or pole dancer. Blurs with Instruct or Reframe if the art carries a significant message (i.e., the play Hamilton)
Two or more people	**Invoke**	Established or modified relationship; new feelings; engagement	Establish new relationship; create engagement or commitment; spawn feelings of confidence, trust, rapport. Team building, project launch meeting, dating, mentoring.
Existing relationship	**Terminate**	Relationship is ended	Exit interview; final client meeting, divorce
Differing views, conflicting interests	**Resolve**	Common mind; common path; same mind set	Dispute resolution, mediation, court judgment, negotiating family vacation options, foreplay.
Exhausted or depleted people	**Refresh**	People feel restored, ready to return to normal duty	1st class airport lounge; Happy Hour; Mardi Gras; Beer bust; vacations, “take five”, group hug
Stream of events	**Celebrate**	Selected events are intensified and memorialized.	Plaques, monuments, birthdays, anniversaries, award ceremonies, graduations.

Group with a common goal	**Orches-trate**	Individuals coordinated into an integrated group effort	Project management; facilitation; management or supervision; quarter backing; software roll out; product launch; diplomacy

What is most striking about this list is that it is finite... and not that long. Procedures come in almost limitless variety. Against the infinite number of procedural possibilities, we have only a few dozen transformations.

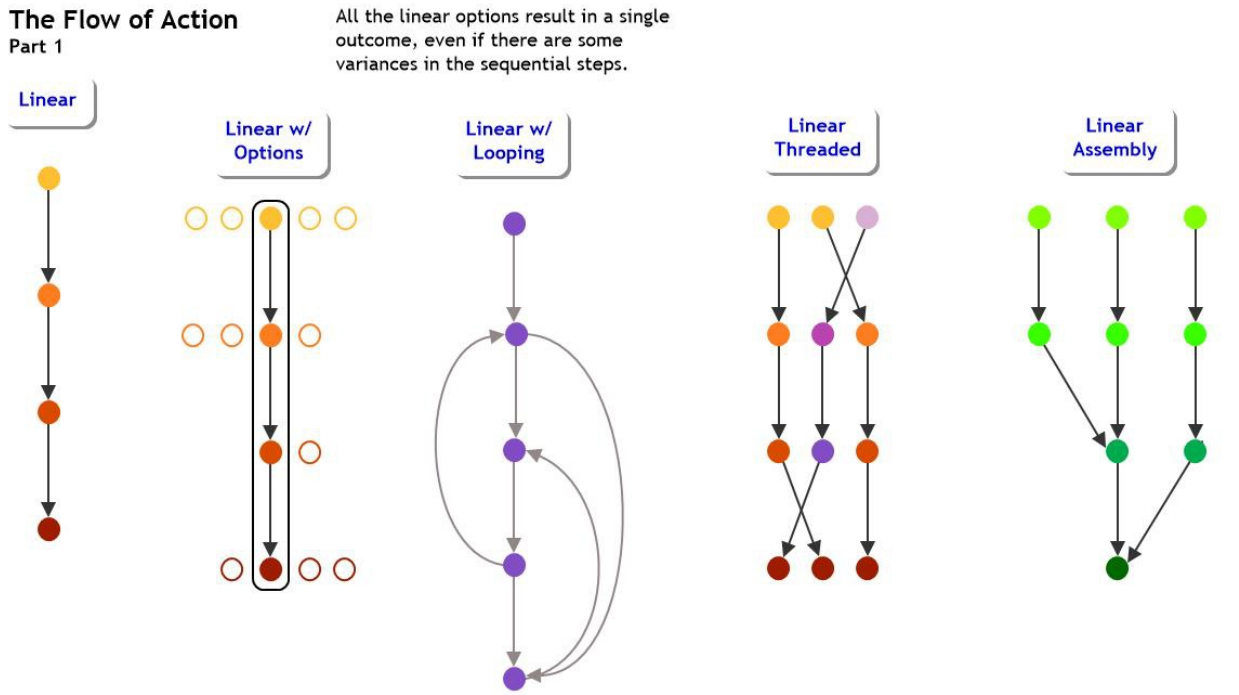
So before you articulate the detailed steps of a work process, ask after the fundamental nature of the transformation. You may find there are 2-3 different transformations involved in a work process, but the net result is that you have a few reference points on which to anchor the more detailed work steps.

One use of this level of detail is to identify other activities that are essentially the same, that is, they involve the same transformation even if the superficial appearance is dramatically different. So moving data to a backup server has some similarity to moving airline passengers from the check-in counter out to the departing plane. A Traffic Judge is similar to a parent confronting the guilty child standing next to a broken vase. On the surface they could not be more different, but the basic transformation is the same.

STEP THREE: **The flow of work**

Even before we detail the work steps, we can benefit from identifying the flow of work. Some work is simple and linear, while others are more circuitous or complex. This structure of work is what the new hire often fails to understand. If they only focus on what to do next, they can easily miss the overall outline of the sequence. Specifying the flow provides the new hire with a skeleton on which they can locate events and experience.

A very common work flow is linear, straightforward, repeatable actions with minimal variation. The simplest is a strict linear flow; The assembly line would be the most common example. Work is executed in a strict sequence resulting in an invariant final or intermediate product. A common variation on that theme is a linear flow with options to



be selected at each point. “Do you want fries with that?” is the most common example. The waitress taking your order may ask if you want salad dressing mixed in or on the side? Do you want your hamburger rare, medium, or well done? The same flow is shown when you rent a car; the agent walks you through all the choices available. Getting dressed in the morning for most people is the same sequence every day; they just choose different items of clothing along the way. The sequence of work is linear, even though the final product will vary depending on the options chosen.

Another variant of linear work is a flow that can jump ahead or jump back. There is a linear flow of work, but circumstances allows the worker to skip a few steps. An applicant who filled out paperwork ahead of time may find that their case is processed through a simpler, shorter sequence.

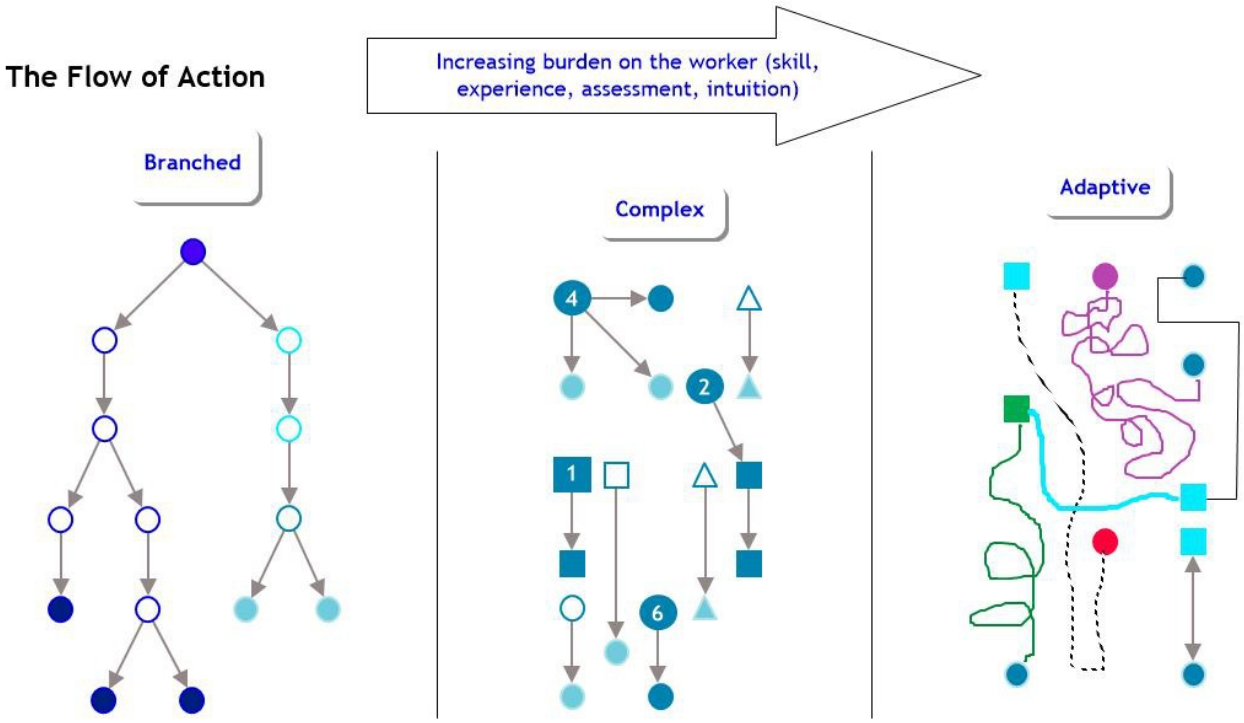
A fourth variant is threaded work. The worker is actually implementing multiple linear flows at the same time. To an outside observer their behavior seems complex and hard to capture. From the worker’s point of view, it may be 3 or 4 simple tasks all being handled in the same moment. For example, I could be facilitating a meeting, taking notes on the board, and playing timekeeper all at once. Watching a short order cook in a restaurant can be impressive just because we cannot easily sort out the many single threads of work

they are juggling all at once. Despite the superficial complexity, each thread (scramble eggs, flip pancakes, fry potatoes, etc.) is a known linear sequence.

The last variant to mention is a common framework for mechanical assembly. There are multiple linear flows that come together at various points to contribute to a single flow of work. One linear flow is assembling the transmission and another flow is preparing the interior seating. At some point in the assembly, both flows join with the main body of the car and become part of a larger linear flow.

The distinctive feature of linear flows is that the outcome is always the same, even if the path to get there has some variety.

Other than linear flows, there are 3 other structures that we can present together simply as “messy”:



These structures are more demanding of the worker. There are significant decisions or judgments to make to get to the final product or service. A common flow is Branched; the flow can take multiple pathways, but each pathway is known and defined. The work is shaped by decision points where the work goes left or right depending on an assessment of some condition. And unlike linear work, the final outputs are varied.

If you apply for a loan at the bank and announce that you are currently unemployed, the loan office may start to ask a very different line of questions. If it turns out you have

significant liquid assets, the loan officer will take another path in filling out the application. If your "significant assets" are all in foreign banks, yet another pathway may be selected. So the loan officer has to know the various options and what criteria would drive the work one way rather than another.

Complex work has a different flow. All the components are known, but their use or sequence is up to the worker. Every nurse know how to start a central line, give a shot, or take a blood pressure. But the nurse decides which procedure to use and when for a given patient. The crew of a sailing vessel has certain work steps that have to be executed at different times, but the captain calls out directions as needed based on direction, wind, current, and turbulence. So the work is variable from case to case, but each component is well known.

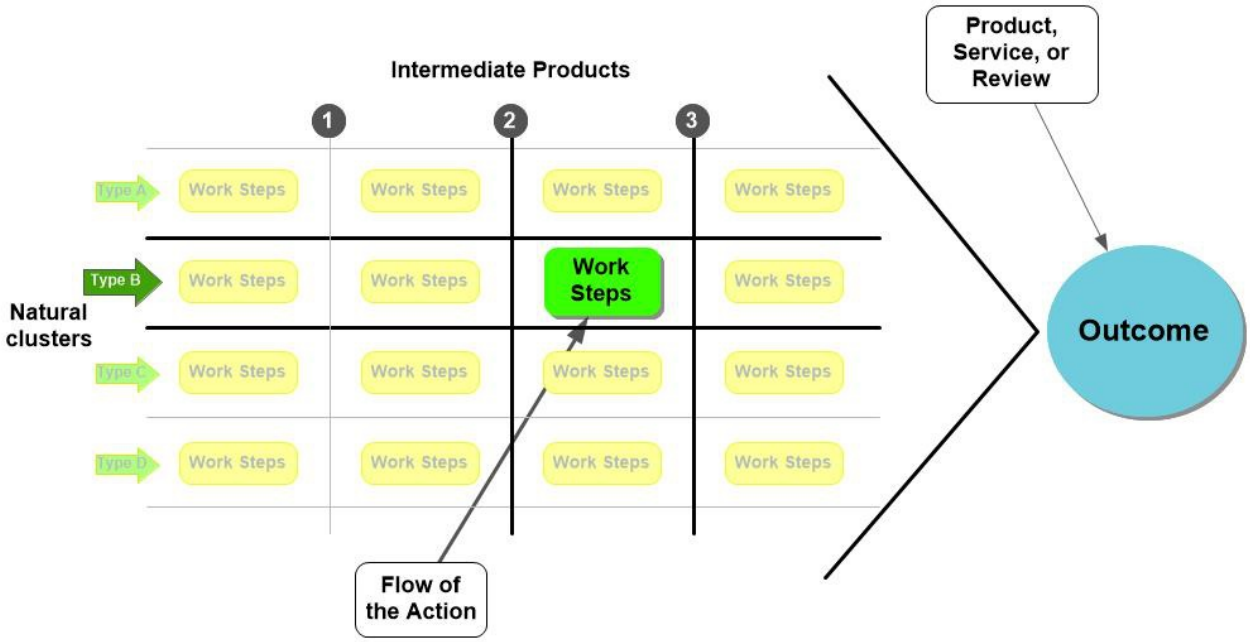
The last category is adaptive work. Here the steps to take are more often designed on the fly rather than existing as pre-designed modules. In conducting a performance review, the manager should (ideally) be responding to their subordinate's facial expression, voice tone, evident anxiety, their annoyance, or any other cues that signal whether the feedback is being accepted, deflected, or misinterpreted. So a really competent manager modulates their phrasing, finds the most impactful language, and adjusts the timing to secure the most valuable outcome.

The same challenge confronts the financial planner or couples therapist. They may use a unique sequence of words for a particular client that are never repeated again. A novice watching may be struck by the variety of approaches, even if they come to the same outcome. The work is anchored in the goal, the final outcome; the steps to get there are open to innovative varieties.

Adaptive work is almost impossible to document as procedures; it is more useful to articulate the principles behind the specific behaviors. Any teacher knows it is important to establish rapport with their students (a milestone event), but the ways to create that sense of connection and trust vary widely. A teacher might use humor with one student, physical proximity with another, and active listening with another student. A female teacher might establish rapport with female students by highlighting their gender similarity. So with male students she finds other methods.

These more sophisticated flow patterns are interesting because they are most evident in the more artistic, innovative, nuanced, and subtle types of work. Most managerial and executive work processes are adaptive. Professional services and design work are most likely adaptive. The linear patterns that dominate in production and data transactions are over represented in process improvement precisely because the work is easy to capture. And so process improvement is often ignored in the adaptive work which is sometimes more essential to the organization's success.

So let's summarize our approach to designing a particular work process:



The starting point is defining the outcome and identifying whether the process is product work, service work, or review work. For Product and Service work, identifying the outcome would include naming the customer and the benefit they hope to achieve. Then we identify the natural clusters and intermediate products that partition the activity into cleaner chunks of work steps. For a particular chunk, we identify the structure of the flow. Is it linear, branched, complex, or adaptive?

This is a different approach than the classical method of work mapping. Typically the facilitator asks "What do you do first?" And the work is unraveled from start to finish, with any branching or complexities all folded into the same visible sequence. Our approach is to start at the end and work backwards. It is also to start at the top and work our way down to increasing detail.

What about the procedures?

Some of you may be wondering if we have skipped over detailed work steps. How could you characterize work without highlighting the specific procedures? Isn't that the essence of a process definition as well as any documentation? Most new hires eventually ask "Exactly what do you want me to do?".

Surprisingly there are several unsavory consequences to focusing on procedures; for these reasons we should be careful about highlighting the more compelling details and downplaying the other elements.

- ❏ When workers are trained only in specific work steps they substitute 'compliance in operation' for 'quality of outcome', that is, "I did it the way I was told" excuses them from poor quality deliverables or customer dissatisfaction.
- ❏ Focusing on compliance makes it too easy for workers to just satisfy their supervisor rather than satisfying their customer.
- ❏ When procedures are highlighted, it allows work to drift to local convenience since the outcome is pushed into the shadows.
- ❏ Over emphasis on procedures undermines system awareness since everyone can claim "That's not my job"; staff are sometimes told "Stay in your lane." Staff come to believe that they only have to work from their inbox to their outbox; everything before or after can be ignored.
- ❏ Highlighting procedures strips work of its meaning; the purpose or value signaled in the final outcome is obscured by internal focus.
- ❏ A focus on procedures and compliance obscures the common flaw of not allocating sufficient budget or staff to achieve the desired level of quality; when resources are inadequate, we should modify criteria of quality so the process definition remains honest.
- ❏ Procedures are typically yoked to a particular organizational position, which compromises the transparency across workers that is required for continuous process improvement.
- ❏ Procedural focus blunts any attention to cultural or structural context for the work. There is a fiction that if everyone “just does their job” it will produce the best organizational performance. This is the mechanistic view of work that reduces the worker to a “cog in the system.” (No wonder engagement is problematic for most organizations.)

STEP FOUR: **Designing Review Work**

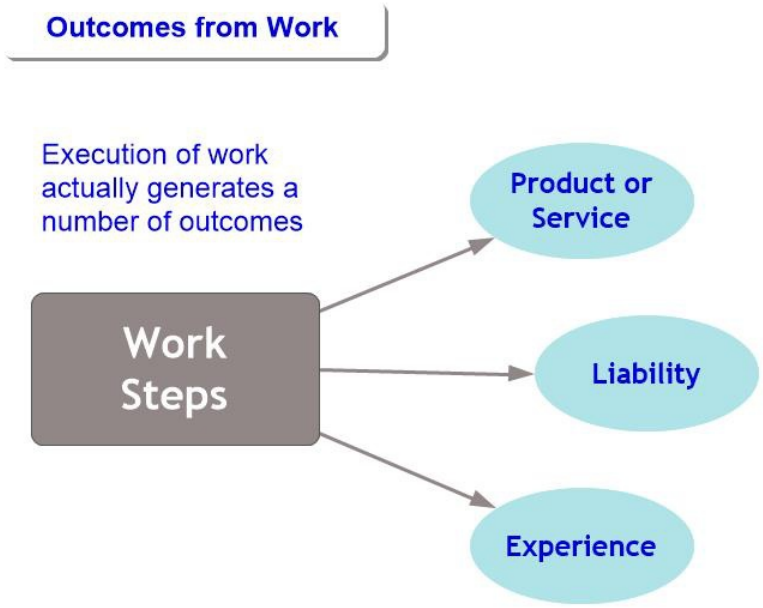
So far we have designed the product work or service work in isolation. Obviously there are key points where the work is reviewed to ensure it matches the criteria for quality or other constraints. It is common to build in review work as if it was part of the work flow; we would argue for designing review work separately, since it does not add value and might be revised in numerous ways without materially changing the generative work flow. And one hallmark of truly successful review work is that it becomes less necessary, i.e., we make fewer errors.

Review work is linked to generative work in 2 different patterns. The most common is to find review work sprinkled across the generative work flow. At various points work products are reviewed and approved by a supervisor, for example. The other pattern is that the review work is completely separate from the generative flow. Before the final

product is shipped, a QC technician performs a series of final tests. Faulty items are returned for re-work or relegated to scrap.

While the two patterns look different, the conceptual challenge is the same. That is, the design of review work is similar whether it is focused on an entire work process or just a segment of it.

One other facet of review work will shape this discussion. So far we have focused on the review of work outcomes, whether a product or a service. In fact, there are 3 outcomes from work that warrant a review mechanism. The first outcome is whatever product or service was as promised by the process. The second is the liability created by the work. In the most common case there is a cost that has to be resolved. In most cases the liability is covered by the price paid by the customer for the outcome. But the liability might also be satisfied through taxation, subscription fees, grant money, insurance, or even volunteer labor.



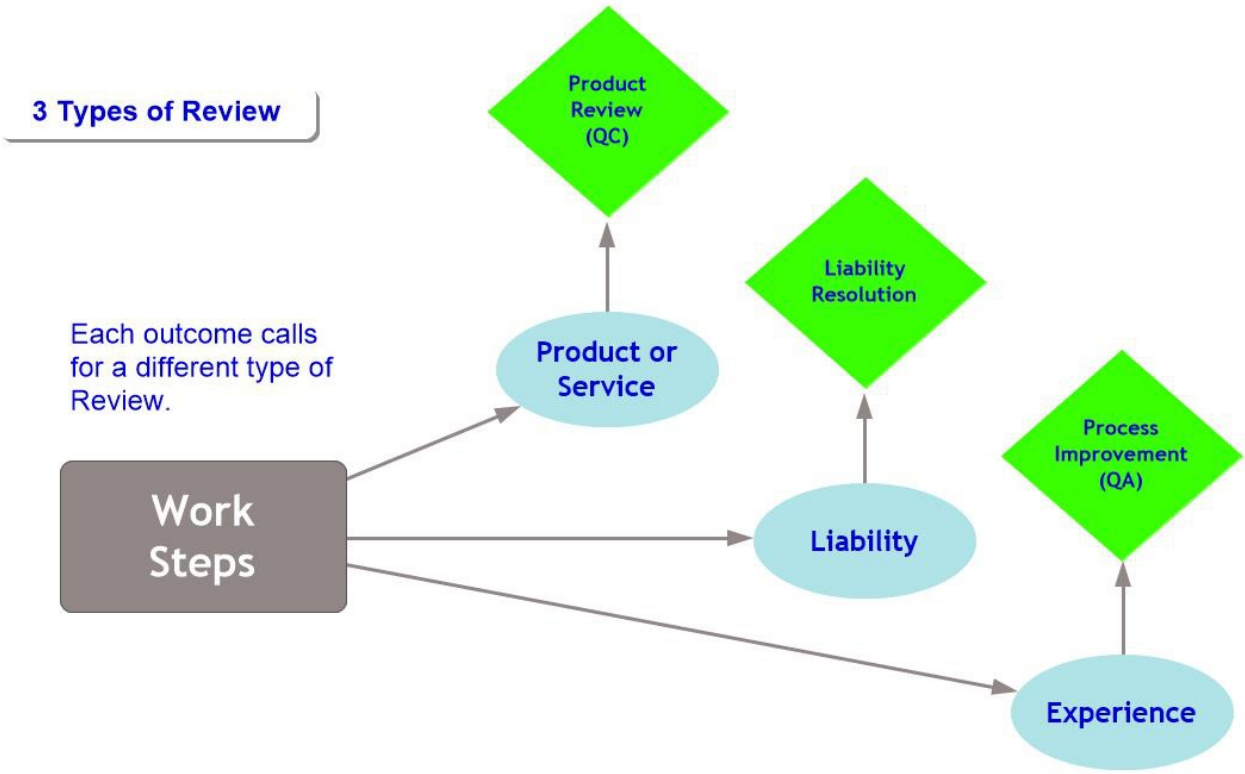
Another kind of liability is any waste materials that requires special disposition. Hazardous waste, medical waste, and even waste water from food preparation can all require special handling before the work process is completely over.

The last outcome is experience. Each time a work process is executed it may contribute new data on how well the process works. For example, process operation could reveal any of the following:

- Confirmation that the work design is effective and efficient
- An anomalous case might occur requiring special treatment (and thus challenge the definition of clusters)
- An outcome was disappointing to customers despite executing the designed work steps
- Some novel procedure worked better than the prescribed steps, suggesting a possible improvement
- The work produced an onerous emotional impact (exhaustion, feeling abused or exploited, undue stress, etc.) which makes it clear the work is not sustainable.
- The designed work has unintended consequences which requires examining the impact of the work beyond just the final outcome; for example the

implementation of Common Core created an increase in first-year drop out rate for new teachers. It simply made teaching less exciting for aspiring teachers.
- Unacceptable trends might surface, such a slowly worsening performance on projects despite training and additional decision gates.

And each of these outcomes warrants its own review mechanism. So a more complete rendering of review mechanisms would look something like this:



These conceptual distinctions are important to make, even if the actual execution of them is blended or combined in some way. The QC technician who tests the TV before it is shipped out could keep a count of the most common errors, which feeds directly into the Process Improvement review. The Liability Resolution might reveal some frequently ignored costs that could also point to possible improvements.

Process improvements uncovered by reviewing experience (the role of Quality Assurance) could reduce the liabilities from the work. The review of experience requires that the Reviewer can initiate improvement efforts among the workers. Their inspection of the work flow could direct attention to any of the following:

- Faulty work design
- Faulty inputs (late, unusable upon receipt, inaccurate, etc.)
- Staging failures (inputs not available at the right place and time for efficient use)
- Problems in team dynamics (coordination, shared decision-making, handoffs)

- Structural strains (work stretched across too many positions; too much work forced into a single position)

The most common error is designing review processes is to confound review work with supervision or management. Since we often hold managers responsible for the work of their department (which seems perfectly logical, right?), it is not surprising that they want to check work products before delivery. Unfortunately their position of authority insulates them from some of the responsibilities of a good reviewer. Ideally a reviewer is applying well known criteria that any diligent worker could have met given reasonable time and training. Too often managers fail to articulate the criteria for quality or the complex constraints they have to navigate. So they fail to infuse the workers with greater sensitivity to the criteria to be met. Staff are left to guess what the boss really wants. Or worse, staff come to rely on their boss to put the final touches on work. Review work slides into production work.

The other common failure of review work is collecting generic customer satisfaction data and then holding staff and management accountable for the numbers. Most satisfaction scores are frustratingly disconnected from good review work. Knowing that products or services are rated as 3½-stars does not reveal what might be improved. More valuable data would gather feedback on the pieces of the work flow where there are genuine improvement options under consideration. If customer satisfaction data were to start a slow but steady decline, merely threatening people with "consequences" if they do not turn it around is a poor review strategy.

Work Design in the Wild

It is worth remembering that work procedures are seldom designed in this deliberate way in the beginning. The first time someone is asked to do a task that has not been done before they just start from "common sense" and "what I think would work". So procedures start out rather organic. After they have executed the new task several times they may settle on procedures that work well enough. If they can off load the task to a new staff, the work becomes normative, that is, it is expected to be done a certain way. If more and more people get involved, the procedures may become structured with flow charts or check lists. And eventually the procedures become embedded in the organization, that is, they are named, assigned to a manager, and attached to a position definition.

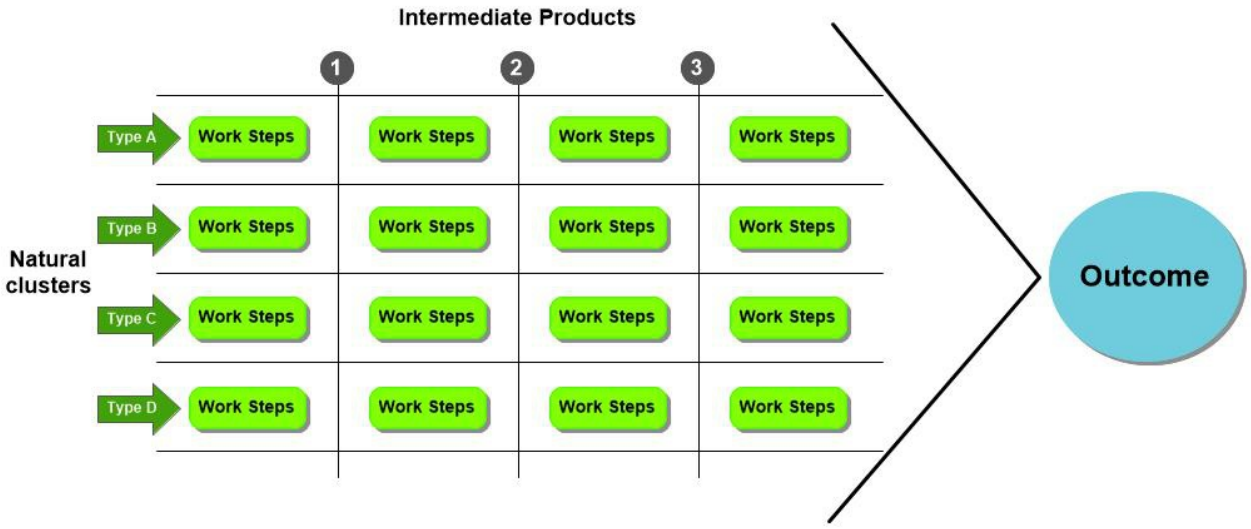
Only after this less auspicious beginning it is likely to be formally identified as a process within the portfolio of processes that make up the company's operating system. Once a company becomes more sophisticated about process design, the questions we have outlined here may well be posed earlier in the process. Rather than letting procedures just evolve organically, a wiser manager might start by asking about the customer for the work, the criteria for quality, the available enabling resources, and so on.

Putting the People Back into the Process

We started this monograph casting aspersions on the organizational chart. I suggested it was universally suspected of causing a variety of ill effects even while it provided some compelling structure. Now that we have a robust set of concepts for characterizing work without referencing the worker, we can raise the the very real challenge of how we link workers to the work. While it may be tempting to simply reintroduce the notion of a position (a set of tasks assigned to a particular person), the work process tools actually support a different option.

The central flaw in the organizational chart is the stability of the link between a bundle of tasks (a position) and a worker (who holds that position). They are *hired* for that position, *trained* for that position, *paid* for that position, and rightfully push back against anyone who wanders into their lane and starts interfering in *their* work. One of the many insights in holacracy and sociocracy is that the link between work and the worker can be fluid. People can shift roles over time in response to changing interests, new capabilities, and changing organizational needs. Promotion is not the only mechanism for taking on new tasks.

The only missing step is deconstructing a work process into roles that could be taken up by a particular worker. And the transition is fairly simple and straightforward. Recall that characterizing work at the lowest level uses the following template:



We acknowledge that not all work in a given work process is like every other. There are likely natural clusterings. In procurement, for example, requests to purchase typical items under $500 from a new known vendor is relatively straightforward. A one-time purchase over $100,000 from a new vendor would be quite different. We also note that

work typically generates intermediate products. For our procurement example, these intermediate products could be “completed data entry”, “contract agreed to”, “purchase order sent”, and “products received”. Particular work steps carry us from one intermediate step to the next within a specific cluster.
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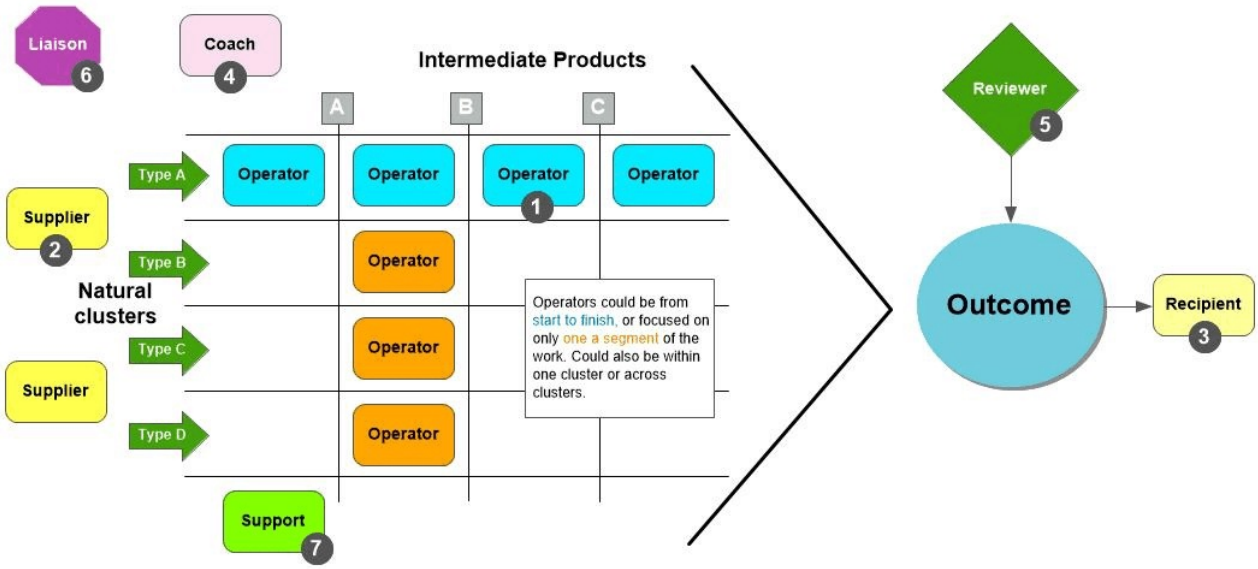
Using this framework, it is possible to articulate the different roles someone might take relative to a particular work process. Graphically we can summarize the options in the following:



The flaw in the traditional positional job definition is that the specifications are configured around a person rather than providing a coherent description of a complete work process. Defining roles around a work process definition keeps the work front and center even though we are specifying human-sized chunks of the work.

We can provide additional detail on the possible roles as follows:

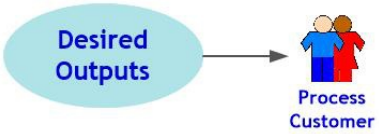
Role	Definition
1. Operator	Executing the key steps in the work process; they could be enacted across all intermediate products, or executed only within a certain phase across all clusters, or any combination of those options.
2. Supplier	Bringing needed information, raw materials, or other inputs to the work. They need to speak on behalf of the contributing work that may not be able to meet all the requirements of the receiving work.
3. Recipient	Receiving the output from the work; primary responsibility is to speak on behalf of the needed criteria for quality. We are not using the term 'customer' since that would imply a certain authority that is not appropriate here.
4. Coach	Someone so skilled in the work that they can provide training, on boarding, or coaching to Operators.
5. Reviewer	Someone who checks on the execution of the work, considers possible process improvements, and convenes the relevant players to implement changes.
6. Liaison	Provides a link between a work process and the rest of the organization. Speaks for the interests of the larger system, especially when a particular work process needs to suboptimize for the sake of the whole.
7. Support	Providing support activities to the work process; typical examples would be data entry, scheduling, filing, handling communications, taking notes, and so on.

The field of Holacracy (and its supporting software package GlassFrog) provides a more detailed treatment of how to manage these role definitions across the organization, and how people can take on or shift to a particular group of roles. Holacracy also articulates the group process disciplines required to support a self-managed organization where the assignment of roles is fluid rather than fixed.

Organizational Improvement

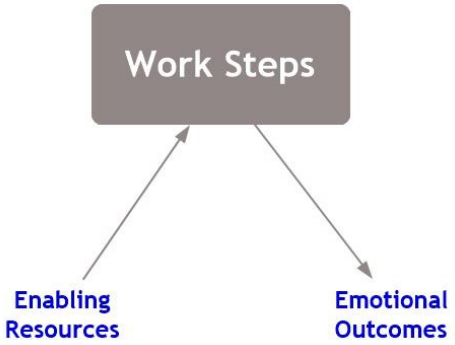
The notion of work process grew up along with the concern for improvement. It was always "Process Improvement" put together in one topic. The unfortunate – and really annoying – truth is that work processes naturally degrade over time. There are lots of things that get better with time. For example, most people are much better drivers in their late twenties than they were in their late teens. But work processes actually get worse with repetition.

Let's take our generic model of work processes and look at how they can erode rather than improve with time.



The final result of process work is designed to meet the needs of a particular customer. But customers have a habit of changing. Any number of factors can shift their needs, concerns, or priorities. The process that met their needs so well in the past can become inadequate or irrelevant under new conditions. Ideally shifts in customer needs would flow back into the process design, but efforts to streamline production, automate a service, or accommodate regulatory constraints can also make processes oblivious to evolving customer desires.

The criteria of quality – along with the accompanying constraints and parameters – can be another source of process erosion. Criteria for quality are often quite prominent in the early stages of work design, but the inevitable mistakes and errors often result in sharper specification of work steps; the criteria for quality start to fade into the background. As the company matures and responds to an ever shifting environment, policies and practices start to spawn new constraints. Codes and regulations constantly evolve and expand, usually with little consideration of their impact on process operation. And the net result is that constraints and parameters begin to eclipse and even supplant criteria for quality. Sometimes it is only a targeted and deliberate process improvement effort and restores the rightful focus on criteria for quality as the primary driver of process design and execution.



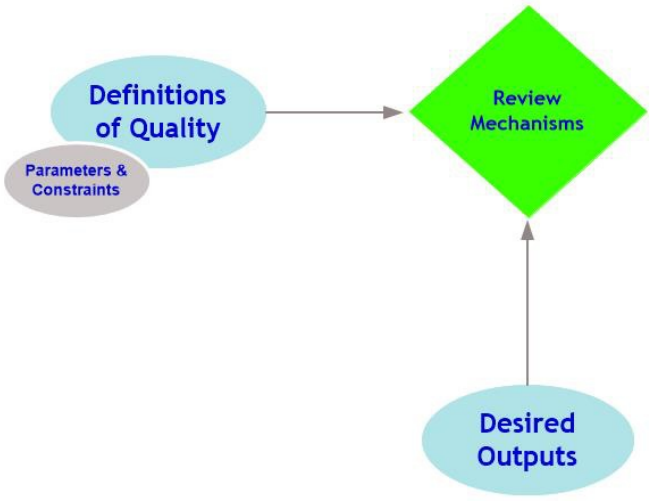
Every work process relies on enabling resources to operate. The most obvious resources are the budget and headcount required for execution. But other resources might be boilerplate text, checklists, tools and equipment, sample letters, forms, and special work spaces. Another major enabling resource in

today's world is software or sophisticated databases. As valuable as they are in supporting work, they are often a major investment. And software supports are not tailored to just a particular work process; they are part of a platform that has to support a multitude of work efforts integrated across the enterprise. The net result is that they become a headwind to potential changes. Staff may come up with an improvement in a particular work, but it cannot be realized in SAP or Oracle, or whatever vendor the company uses. Or perhaps staff have to wait on the next upgrade to the software platform before the new procedures can be installed. So the enabling resources end up limiting or constraining the process as it strives to shift and adapt to customer needs.

The emotional outcomes are a source of process erosion mostly when they are ignored. The COVID pandemic of 2020-21 made us all painfully aware of the emotional impact of work. Nurses and other medical staff were asked to work long hours under grueling and dangerous conditions. In the years that followed, hospitals found more nurses retiring or quitting than they could replace.

In 2022 and 2023, numerous civic groups tried to censor school books that referenced gays or trans people or some other lifestyle they found offensive. These contentious and political debates made curriculum design and delivery into dangerous activities; teachers felt more at risk rather than being supported or valued. The median tenure for public school teachers declined dramatically. The reality is that any work process that leaves workers feeling exploited, exhausted, or vulnerable is ultimately unsustainable. When our focus is entirely on procedures and products, it is easy for an onerous work process to eventually eat through the staff willing to perform it.

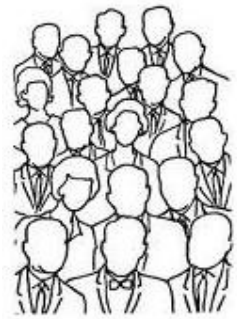
Review mechanisms are another source of process erosion. Too many review mechanisms slowly slide to their lowest level of operation: catching errors. While it is essential to find faulty products and services, the higher orders of review work require effort, professionalism, and deliberate design.



The most common mistake is allowing supervisors to take over review work as an extension of their oversight responsibility. Unfortunately their higher organizational level often makes them immune to serious negotiations on how they perform a review. They may review work without articulating the criteria being applied; in the worst case, they bring only "common sense" and a concern for their own vulnerability to the task without supporting the specific criteria for a particular process. They enforce a general notion of "quality" that is disconnected from

customer satisfaction. More important for our discussion, supervisors tend to review *operators* rather than *process operation*. Individuals are within the domain of their authority; work processes often require attention to multiple departments. So supervisors morph what should be a concern for process improvement into a focus on individual performance.

A particularly pungent source of process erosion is the actions of stakeholders. Workers often come to worry more about satisfying stakeholders than customers. Stakeholders are often people with greater authority and more prominent organizational position. These are the executives who craft company policy, regulators imposing rules with the force of law, union leaders focused on working conditions, or community leaders able to shine a light on company operations if they suspect unethical behavior.


Non-Customer Stakeholders

Some executives would even suggest that workers *should* be concerned about stakeholder perspective. By definition, stakeholders are those whose voice cannot be ignored. But they are still not the customer! The work process was not designed in the hope of satisfying their needs. Because of their authority, stakeholders often behave in ways that are insensitive and even reckless in their impact on work. First of all, stakeholders often act independently of each other; their compounded impact on work can be contradictory or confounding. For example, multiple unions in a county may all put constraints on the hiring process, without realizing the collective impact is to make hiring way too difficult. Almost always stakeholders are unfamiliar with the subtlety and complexity of the work they constrain; their attempts to achieve an possibly important result have the unintended consequence of making the work less responsive to the customer. Without a direct relationship with workers, stakeholders often prefer to specify particular behaviors (procedures) rather than articulating guidelines and trusting staff to exercise discretion and judgment to secure the best outcome.

This natural vulnerability of work processes means that “process improvement” cannot be a special project every few years; it needs to be an integral part of doing the work. So now we can shift our focus to opportunities for improving process design and execution, and how to ensure those options are live and accessible.

The primary benefit of characterizing work processes as more than mere procedures is that opportunities for improvement expand exponentially. Rather than only looking for ways to simplify, automate, or eliminate work steps, we can start at the top and work our way down.

Improving Process Definition

Unfortunately the concern for improvement has evolved into a narrow focus on specific steps. The hope was to streamline or possibly automate procedures, so the more specific the characterization, the better… it seemed. We forget that the initial effort of process improvement was to empower the front line worker to be more involved in work design. The first efforts at process improvement were Quality Circles; staff were invited to gather each Friday (usually over doughnuts) to reflect on any lessons, observations, or suggestions from the week's work. Their more intimate involvement in the work and their often direct contact with the customer made their experience more valuable than the manager who may be years away from direct involvement in the work. As process improvement became more elaborated it slowly moved away from the front line worker. They eventually became someone to be possibly replaced with automation; the business analyst became the source of knowledge; the worker was merely a data source.

A process is never just a string of activities. It has a purpose, a customer; it is an implicit promise to deliver products or services that enable that customer to achieve a specific benefit. Procedures should always be negotiable in the context of that promise.

These first options make the strategic anchors more explicit. They define the container for more detailed explorations of work steps. When work steps become encrusted with bureaucratic requirements and practical restraints, the best antidote is to fall back to the commitment around Criteria for Quality and serving the Customer.

1	Sharpen the definition of the customer, the product or service they seek, and the benefit they hope to secure.

This would seem the most obvious starting point, but two confusions often confound this attempt to improve clarity. As work snakes through the organization there are numerous handoffs; these are typically not provider-customer relationships. The next person or department in line is more often a work partner, which is a richer relationship requiring more transparency and collaboration in designing work flows to satisfy the external customer who receives the product or service that reflects the purpose of the organization.

In contrast to that perspective, some departments do provide services to internal customers with no connection to the external customer. The internal recipient of services (HR, IT, Finance, Maintenance, etc.) is the actual customer. Meeting their needs should be a driving concern in the design of work upstream from these internal service functions. But recall that internal service departments often have a dual role to (1) deliver a service and to (2) enforce external regulations or best practices. So IT has to

temper the demand for a local solutions with an eye to creating an enterprise-wide platform; HR wants to expedite hiring, but unions and governmental regulations constrain the process. HR also supports performance reviews and disciplinary hearings, but they have to keep managers within the legal guard rails to prevent lawsuits. Finance wants to augment the financial skills of managers, but they also have to compile an enterprise-wide characterization of income and spending that would survive an external audit..

2	Improve integration of a work process with its networked cousins (processes which are the source of inputs, the creation of enabling tools, or framing directives, etc.)

Processes can stumble because needed inputs are late or unusable. Or because criteria for quality or constraints are unclear or even contradictory. For example, a contracting process that generates criteria for a particular project maybe more attuned to closing the sale than to refining the requirements that would drive the work. The other processes designed to create enabling resources might be slow to respond, or oblivious to the real need of operators.

Improving enabling tools (software supports, boilerplate text, checklists, equipment, work aids, etc.) can dramatically improve the performance of our target process. They can also be a subtle obstacle to process performance; software supports, for example, can become a drag on improvements due to the cost of replacement or customization.

The most fundamental enabling resource is staffing and funding. Work processes that determine staff levels or budgets can easily become disconnected from process performance since the financial dynamics of the organization are driven by forces separate from operations. A financial downturn could constrain hiring or force budget reductions and thereby compromise performance.

3	Explore worker stress, frustration, annoyance, and apathy for clues to better process design.

Work which is routinely onerous or mind-numbing is a sign of a poorly designed work flow. Also look for how workers recover or rejuvenate themselves. During the COVID pandemic, some nurses reported sitting in the parking lot and crying for half an hour before heading home; we could do better at helping operators recover from burdensome work.

4	Upgrade qualifications or learning of workers to support smoother operations, more ingenuity, judgment, or creativity

5	Build documentation and training to ensure new workers do not slide into less than optimal habits.

These are all suggestions that improve the strategic anchors for work. They strive to enhance the container for more detailed questions about work steps.

Improving Review Mechanisms

As we argued earlier, there are 3 outcomes from any work activity:

1. some product or service (quality control)
2. a liability (cost, waste, time) that needs to be resolved
3. experience (quality assurance)

Although these happen simultaneously, it is helpful to conceptually tease them apart.

6	For quality control, reviews should be against published criteria that could be met by any diligent worker.

Reviewers are often remiss in not articulating and publishing the "checklist" they go through in reviewing a product or service. When operators are unaware of the exact criteria for quality, they seldom learn from errors. Even worse, staff can sometimes start to rely on their supervisor for the final level of quality.

7	Solicit and share feedback from customers on satisfaction and benefits achieved.

It is quite common to ask customers for their level of satisfaction with the product or service they received, the purchasing process, or the ease of use of the website. These are all looking at the customer from the operator's point of view. Turn that around and ask about the customer's point of view. Did they achieve the benefit they hoped for from the product or service? Did the purchasing process increase their confidence in their choice?

8	For resolving liabilities, make sure all costs are considered, especially costs of waste disposal, recycling, environmental mitigations, or recovery of scrap materials.

Reviewing for resolution of liabilities goes beyond pricing. As environmental concerns start to loom large on our shared horizon, the value of goods and services should be revisited. That responsibility should not be sidestepped by declaring liabilities as "externalities". The debate over single-use plastic utensils is just one example of

challenging the cost compared to the value delivered. This is particularly crucial as we become more aware of the social or ecological consequences of certain work activities.

9	Periodically compare liabilities against benefits to verify that the value delivered greatly exceeds the costs incurred.

Be particularly thorough around liability review mechanisms that have become wholly separated from the delivery of products and services. Insurance payments, grants, subscriptions, and taxation are all resolutions of cost that are separated in time from actual receipt of products and services.

10	Link the lessons from experience to the appropriate point in the process design for later consideration.

For example, unusual circumstances might force staff to try an unusual "work around" to deliver services as desired. Rather than immediately classifying such innovation as "deviation from prescribed procedures", treat them as experiments to be evaluated. Perhaps the staff stumbled on a new clustering. Or maybe they just found a better way to do the work.

One of my clients was a contract research house for pharmaceutical companies. They had a practice of telling every client that their project was "Our #1 priority". Eventually staff complained that having to lie to clients was personally corrosive.

11	Errors should be traceable back to a flaw in work design vs. operator error. Address operator error with better process design where possible.

Too often operator error leads to additional training or increased supervisory pressure to stick to procedures. The better alternative is to ask how the work might be reconfigured so the error in question was less likely, or even impossible.

12	Explore errors for clues about weak process operation. Reviewers can catalog the type and frequency of errors as well as investigate cases for possible origins.

Focus on eliminating the most common error; how could it be made impossible? Or somehow self-correcting?

Unfortunately review mechanisms are often confounded with the authority of supervisors. The real goal is to ensure quality of process performance, not to target individual workers for training, counseling, or punishment. A review should be performed by someone fluent in the process with a demonstrated ability to discern subtle

as well as obvious errors. Often the best reviewer is a peer who brings fresh eyes to a particular case.

Supervisors have a habit of evaluating the individual operator since staff are within their sphere of influence. Looking at overall process performance would require looking across departmental boundaries and raising issues not totally within their sphere of influence.

13	Advocate for reducing constraints & parameters, allowing more room for quality criteria. Facilitate stakeholders in developing a more consistent and less disruptive set of constraints.

Whoever reviews the operation of some work process may be the most acutely aware of how criteria of quality and other constraints start to accumulate, even to the point that the quality of work is compromised. Multiple stakeholders often impose restrictions on a work process without realizing the cumulative impact of different perspectives; they end up confounding or compromising the very process they were hoping to enhance or regulate.

So there is a role for the Reviewer to inform (confront?) stakeholders on their impact on the work. For example, a review of hiring procedures for a large county revealed differing constraints from dozens of union agreements. None of the unions intended to hamper the hiring of their membership, but that was the unintended consequence of never consolidating requirements to define a smoother process. Hiring often took over a year, which left union members carrying an extra load while an empty position or two was waiting for a new hire.

14	Invite workers to share any special accommodations or “work arounds” they found necessary; treat them as experiments rather than as errors or faulty execution. Use this review mechanism as a way to engage workers as co-creators of the work rather than just operators.

This requires that workers be given the full context for work, not just the steps for execution. They need to know the customer and desired benefit, as well as the CoQ and other constraints around the work. This not only promises to improve work processes, it is an important step in improving employee engagement.

Improving the Structure of Work Steps

Before looking at sequential expression of work steps, it is important to revisit the structure of those steps first.

15	Refine the understanding of clusters so each cluster is more consistent within, and more distinct from other clusters.

Clusters can be defined from empirical grouping as well as from abstract or administrative criteria. The only requirement is that all the cases within a cluster are more similar with each other than they are with cases in other clusters.

16	Pull out the most extreme or unusual cases for separate treatment in their own cluster.

It is often best to create a separate team for unusual cases (think crash cart or SWAT). Failing to separate out extreme cases is creating an artificial sense of complexity for what might be a fairly straightforward process once the extreme cases are separated.

17	Consider different pathways in work design for high vs. low volume, for orderly vs. urgent cases, for simple vs. politically volatile cases.

18	Refine definition of intermediate milestones to isolate more coherent work from one milestone to the next.

19	Identify essential transformations to target the key work steps and likely criteria for quality

20	Reduce the flow of work to a less demanding option

For example, find a branched or complex components embedded in adaptive work; treat the most common path in a branched work flow into a linear path.

21	Enhance the interface between documentation & tribal knowledge; use front line experience to challenge documentation, not the other way around.

Documentation is not sacred text; it should be a standing agenda item to consider alternate work steps. Front line experience is the richest proving ground for innovative or more efficient steps. Using documentation to suppress spontaneous innovation is a mis-use of the interface of documentation and tribal knowledge.

Improving the Sequence of Work Steps

Like language, the expression of work has a grammar; there are discernible rules for the correct flow of design efforts.

22	Initially design work flow around value-adding activities, not departments, job categories, or in service of clear lines of accountability.

Designing work should not be contaminated by parallel attention to designing position definitions, functional boundaries, or performance management strategies. The focus should always be on how we create products or deliver services. The "who" should be considered last.

23	Design out non-value-add time (waiting, review queues, moving, set up, change over, hand offs, etc.)

24	Reduce loss and waste in processing (Lean)

25	Design quality into the work flow rather than relying on exceptional competence, heroic effort, moral admonitions or supervisory review.

Many clients have identified one person in the office who carried the weight of it all on their shoulders. Luckily they had no social life and were willing to come in weekends and evenings. Supervisors heaped praise on them and celebrated all the times they pulled things from the fire through their untiring effort. What they failed to see is that this extraordinary individual was keeping the group from addressing the poor work design that makes them dependent on special effort.

26	Acknowledge the natural clusters across cases, and design for the most basic or most common cluster and then develop "variations on a theme" for the other clusters.

27	The mix of segmentation or integration of work should be driven by delivery of greatest possible value rather than respect for organizational boundaries. Be careful to avoid bottlenecks or weak hand-offs.

28	Bring downstream information needs upstream. Capture information once, at the source, and share it widely.

29	Treat review steps as outside the work flow rather than commingling them into the generative work step.

Review activities are not part of the work flow; they act *on* the work flow, not *in* that flow. If they are designed as steps in the work, it becomes more difficult to enhance review mechanisms independent of the work flow. This distinction is sometimes more conceptual than empirical, but it important to apply a different perspective to reviews than we would apply to the generative work flow.

One final comment on process improvement

We typically think that DESIGN drives EXECUTION. Clearly we figure out how to do the work and then expect staff to adhere to their training, their documentation, or their supervisor's directions. The reality is that EXECUTION drives DESIGN. It is the person most intimate in the delivery of products and services who is most able to find the next best alteration in the work design.

The suggestions for revising work design in this chapter are most likely to have positive impact if they are provided to the worker, not to the manager or executive. And the inevitable decay of work processes is a compelling argument for making process improvement an integral part of the work, not an occasional project driven by "process experts".

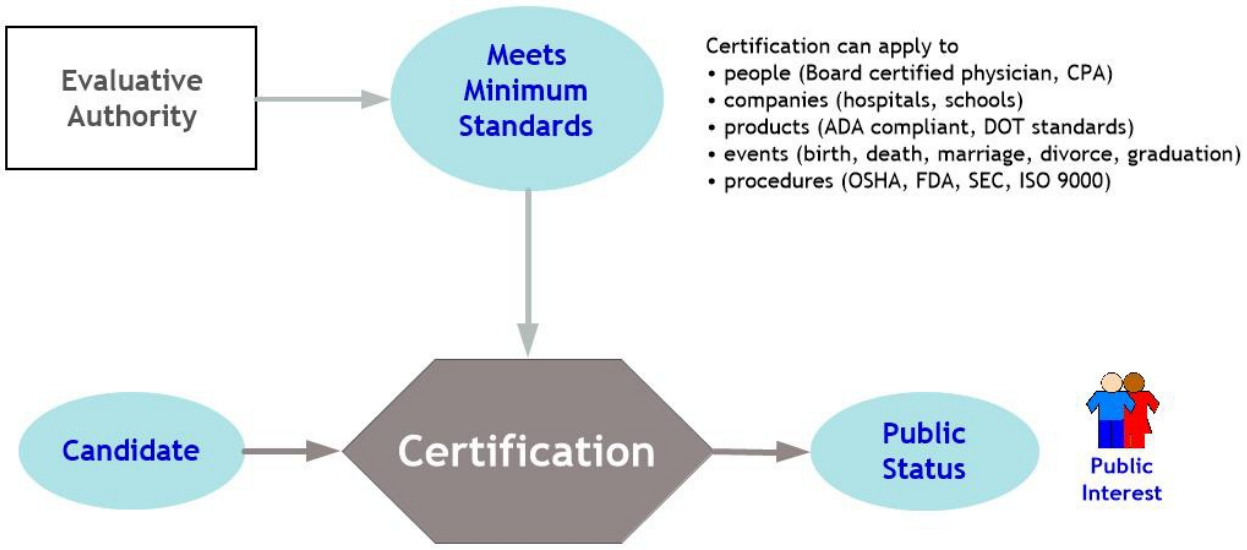
The Other Kinds of Work

We have defined product work, service work, and review work. But not all work activities fall into those categories. There are other highly consequential efforts that require special treatment.

Certification

There is an enormous amount of work that does not generate an outcome for a customer. Rather it assesses a person, product, procedure, decision, or event and pronounces a public status for that element. I am certified by the DMV as a minimally competent driver. The filter in my refrigerator came with a certificate of quality from a state agency. Companies can be certified as ISO 9001 compliant. Schools and hospitals have to survive accreditation reviews periodically. My real estate agent is licensed. Projects may be required to use union labor (i.e., workers who are certified plumbers, electricians, and carpenters). I have a birth certificate that formally declares the date and time of my arrival; I will eventually have another certificate for my departure. You might have a wedding license, a passport, or a Known Traveler Number. Elections have to be certified before they count. The turmoil around the 2020 election simply underscores the significance of certification separate from the work of actually conducting the vote.

There is a clear product in all of this activity, but no clear customer. The designations are formal, public statements of a particular status. But the DMV does not gather public



feedback to decide if its licensing is satisfying to anyone in particular. The Joint Commission reviews health care facilities every 3 years to renew their accreditation, but

they have their own standards for acceptable health care practices for providing safe, high quality care for patients.

Certification does not guarantee the quality for a particular work process; it merely creates confidence that someone or something meets the minimum requirements. A driver's license does not mean you are a good driver; it only means you are not blind or oblivious to the rules of the road. A restaurant certified by the Public Health Department does not necessarily serve delicious food, but at least they know how to avoid simple transmission of food-borne pathogens.

There is no clear customer that anchors the process evaluation. The public is more of a beneficiary. There is also no choice, which is a critical defining feature of the 'customer'. Neither candidates nor the public can shop around for alternate certifications. It is the customer's option to shop elsewhere that makes them the appropriate design anchor for generative work.

And there is also no formal review mechanism. Certification agencies are their own reviewers. As a result, their actual review mechanism is informal and highly variable; it is not the subject of deliberate design. Agencies which are vulnerable to extensive certification (such as health care providers, social service agencies, or pharmaceutical companies) often take advantage of informal channels of feedback to the auditors who renew or decline their certification. The auditors are often peers from another similar agency. So there is a professional relationship with the staff they are auditing; the targets of a today's review might be the auditors in the future. The subjects of an audit can complain that the standards are too stringent, likely to dilute provision of services, or too burdensome to implement. While such side conversations may result in modification of standards, the review mechanism remains obscured and without the benefit of transparent, collaborative improvement efforts.

To make matters somewhat worse, most people are unaware of the authority granting a license, permit, or certificate (except for the most common, such as the DMV). The public is equally unaware of the standards they impose or the methods of testing against those standards. The public presumes they have domain expertise and beneficent intent. Most parents would hesitate to send their children to a school that had failed to be accredited, but they are most likely unaware of the accrediting agency, their criteria for evaluation, or their methods of assessment. Most citizens do not understand that there are multiple accrediting, all certified by the Department of Education. And some accrediting agencies (such as Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools) have had their accrediting authority revoked for failure to meet the certification criteria for certification. .

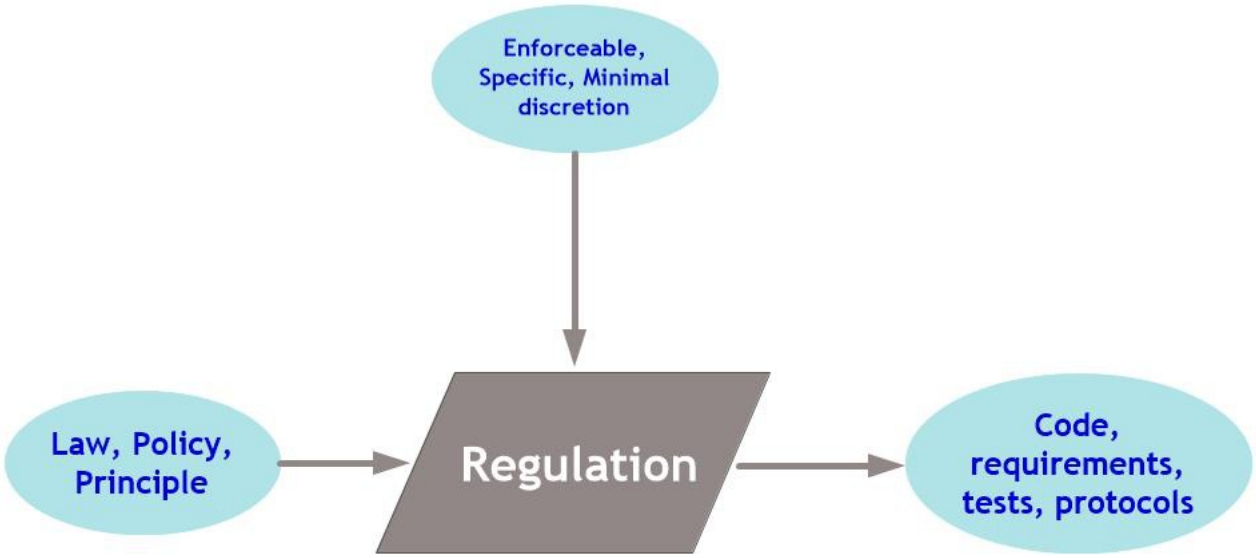
The purpose of certification is different from other generative work; the purpose is to create a level of trust in a marketplace highly vulnerable to deception and fraud. It signals a level of commitment to professional standards. Consumers can decide if a

couch is comfortable or not; most would be hard pressed to decide if their electrician was doing high quality work. The standards for a safe and reliable car are well beyond the comprehension of most consumers. Certification is the stand-in for that evaluation the consumer cannot make on their own.

Regulation

There is a companion work type linked to Certification. Laws and policies have to be articulated or expanded into concrete requirements that can be applied by people far distant from the authors of the general principle.

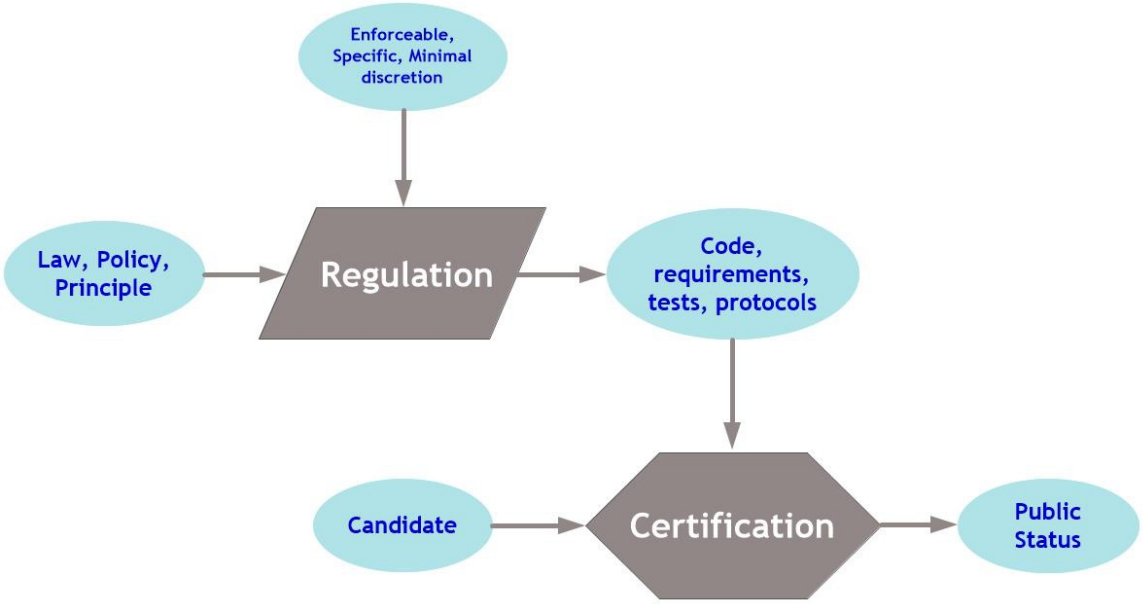
This is the work process of Regulation. It is a precursor to Certification, since it may produce the specific standards against which a certification is issued. The DMV has to



create the written test for knowledge of the rules of the road. Laws demanding accessibility for the disabled have to be translated into detailed architectural measurements. Wheel chair ramps have to have a certain width. Hand rails have to be specific number of inches from the floor. Such detail is beyond the reach of the legislators who crafted the general law; it falls to regulators to provide the extension of principles into specific requirements.

Regulation is one of the responsibilities of agencies within the Executive branch of government. The Department of Transportation has to publish specific criteria for the manufacture of automobile tires. The Department of Energy publishes standards for emission from power plants. Events of our recent political history have shown that Regulation can be a volatile activity, vulnerable to political or ideological distortion.

The work output of regulators has to be enforceable, since its primary use is providing the guidelines for certification. It should minimize the discretion or judgment allowed in



the system. So the height of the handrail for the disabled has to be specified as 42" rather than “about waist high”. The installation of a residential HVAC system has to use specific parts and materials to be certified by the County inspectors.

What is distinctive about this work structure is the lack of a clear customer or any review mechanism. People that rely on the outputs cannot choose an alternate source, which is a defining feature of the concept of ‘customer’. If I disagree with the city’s refusal to issue a permit for my backyard patio renovation, I cannot go to another city in hopes of a better response. If a high school student gets a low score on his or her SAT scores, they have no alternative but equivalent testing mechanism to certify their readiness for college.

Regulation and Certification can be performed only by a recognized authority. It might be Federal government, local zoning commission, city permit office, a craft union, or a professional association. In some cases the “authority” of the entity may be an open question. For example, there are several associations that claim to certify executive coaches. It is an emerging field and standards for professional conduct are diverse and fluid. So there is an active debate about whose certification is the most valid. Nonetheless, some companies will not hire an executive coach unless they have a particular certification.

Certification is often reinforced by other institutions. Federal student loans or scholarships are available only to certified colleges. Securing insurance or a construction bond may require demonstration of a certified business license and certified workers.

Some unions refuse to work alongside non-union labor. Grants for low-income housing projects may require numerous certificates in any application for funds. Accreditation agencies for a hospital would inspect the Board certified status of physicians, so certifications reinforce each other.

Unlike most work processes, certification has teeth. A certification amounts to a license to use, to operate, or to sell. A certificate can verify ownership, as in patents or copyrights. Offering therapy services without a Board certified license can result in civil and even criminal penalties. Using written material without a release from a copyright owner can lead to a lawsuit.

Final Comments

The focus on work is in no way an attempt to diminish or downplay the importance of people in the organization. Creating a humane, compassionate, respectful culture is of equal importance. Attending to motivation, culture, management style, and all the other variables that impact the employee experience is essential to creating a vital organization.

In fact, the whole subtext of this monologue is the invitation to let the worker be the designer of their world rather than just an operator added on at the end. It might be typical for a process improvement to be a periodic effort facilitated by a Black Belt expert, but the best process improvement is the ongoing conversation among the existing workers about the possibilities they see. The tool kit of the PI Wizard (Control charts and Six Sigma) are poor substitutes for direct experience and a feel for nuance and subtlety. And only those in a work process can speak to the emotional impact of it.

So the hope here is to elevate the worker by giving them the role of Designer on top of everything else.