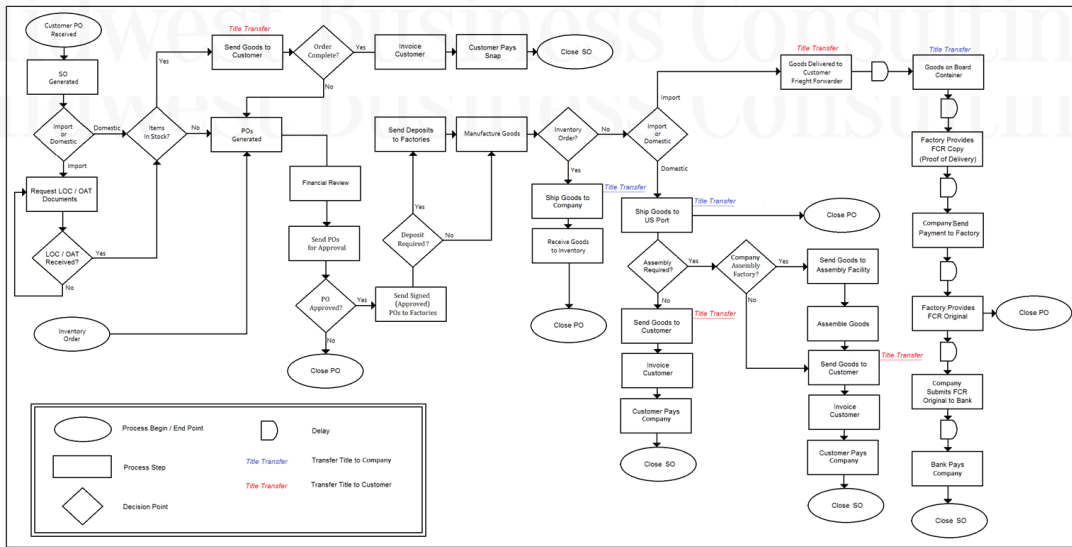


The Process Map

Whether you've got 'gremlins' in your business or would just like to streamline operations, reduce costly mistakes, improve your industry-standing and ultimately improve profitability, this article is for you.

To arrive at your desired destination, you must first define where you want to go and how to get there.

A [business] *process* is a set of inter-related events and decision points put in place by business managers to achieve some desired outcome. A *process map* is a visual representation of those events and decisions, arranged in a deliberate order, that allows business managers to gain true insight into a process, create universal understanding among team members, pinpoint failures, streamline operations and effect positive change through continuous-improvement initiatives.



“When beginning most consulting engagements, the Process Map is one of the first documents I ask for – ‘help me to understand your business so I can begin to make some meaningful evaluations – I can’t help with something I don’t understand.”

Stated simply, before attempting to resolve a problem, it’s best to understand goals and what a process should look like in a perfect world; the process map provides that insight.

There’s a hole in my bucket...

Much like any problem, acceptance is the first step – until a client is willing to acknowledge shortcomings, there’s little a business consultant can do to fix what isn’t broke. Fortunately, most managers know when there’s a problem within their operations - the dilemma, more often than not, lies in identifying the nature of that problem. For the few that have identified a problem, even fewer possess the resources and know how to clearly articulate root causes and implement effective solutions. The result is invariably increased costs, lost sales, low repeat business, high employee turnover, etc. Any one of these consequences alone can negatively affect profits – taken together, they can spell disaster.

OK, so my process is broke – now what?

Most problem-solving strategies tend to start with ‘defining the problem’. While this is absolutely essential to any resolution, this author would challenge that it is not necessarily the starting point. In fact, in order to ‘define the problem’ it is first necessary to understand the purpose of the process and what it should look like. To gain that insight, I maintain that the process map is one giant leap in the right direction.

Once we understand the process, we can evaluate it to determine if it is truly the optimum solution to achieving our goal(s). Further, we can evaluate the ‘reality’ to answer the ever-present question - ‘are we doing what we should be?’ If the answer to both of these questions is yes, we can utilize the process map as an effective tool to identify stakeholders and process-owners, define process boundaries, eliminate non-value-added steps, and pinpoint where things may be *falling through the cracks*.

Do I really need a Process Map?

Einstein defined insanity as ‘doing the same thing(s) over and over but expecting different results’. I ask business owners to accept the axiom, ‘you can’t transform a business by continuing to do things the way you’ve always done them.’

While many processes appear simple on the surface, the truth is processes can be long, complex, evolve over time, involve multiple departments or handoff points, be poorly defined, misunderstood or not supported, be ambiguous, outdated, not accepted (or even resented). There may be differences in interpretation between management and staff and/or language barriers.

The process map provides a common understanding of how a business is intended to work, supports training and continuous improvement initiatives and helps business managers to highlight disconnects and redundant activities in a process. My recommendation is that business-owners develop process maps for any mission-critical operations within their organization.

About MBC:

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