# BRIDGING THE DESIGN/EXECUTION GAP

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# INTRODUCTION

Designing effective processes can be extremely hard, yet implementing them and ensuring that the benefits are achieved can be even harder. If we do not have the right level of buy-in we may find that we reach a situation where we draw beautiful process models which we are certain will be efficient and effective… yet we find that we struggle getting them adopted. Perhaps we implement a new IT system to allow work to flow seamlessly through an organization—yet in three months' time we find that people have reverted back to using paper and have 'extended' the process using home-grown spreadsheets and desktop databases. These well-intentioned changes may have negatively impacted the effectiveness of the process, and may have resulted in the benefits being nibbled away.

This example illustrates a challenge that is all too common in organizations: The gap between design and execution. If our process innovations are to be successful it is crucial that we bridge this gap, cultivating a situation where change is adopted and sticks. A situation where there are clear shared objectives, and people feel engaged and listened to. This ebook provides some relevant and practical tips.

# MIND THE GAP

If you have visited London in the UK and used the underground 'tube' train, you will have heard the famous announcement that reminds travelers to 'mind the gap'. This piece of advice, given in a very deliberate and directive voice, is as relevant for us as business process analysts as it is for travelers in the London tube.

The first step to us bridging the design/execution gap is to be aware that gaps can exist—and for us to actively look out for them throughout the business process design and management lifecycle. Much like a London commuter is aware of the gap between the platform and train, we need to be constantly aware that a gap may exist or emerge at any time. We would be doing ourselves and our business stakeholders a disservice by acting as though getting engagement on large scale process change is easy signposting the risk of a gap early is crucial.

These types of considerations should be made long before there are detailed discussions on implementation of a particular change. As soon as a potential change program is conceived, thought should be put into how a gap can be avoided. We should ask who will need to be involved. How will we ensure that the right people feel engaged? How will the change be specified and designed? How will it be rolled out, and how will we monitor its effectiveness after implementation? How soon will we know if a gap emerges, and what action will we take?

Of course these are not one-off questions, they are areas that ought to be revisited regularly. Our response to them will change as more and more is known about the current (and desired future) situation. Yet asking them early ensures that there is a clear focus from the very beginning not just on the required outcomes or improvement but also how to engage and communicate to ensure that the improvement is actually achieved.

*'How soon will we know if a gap emerges, and what action will we take?'*

# FOCUSING ON OUTCOMES: DESIGNING THE 'RIGHT' THING

As alluded to earlier, driving adoption of a process change should start long before the change is actually made and long before processes are modeled and solutions are designed. In fact, it really ought to start when we discuss the problem that we are trying to solve and the outcomes that we are trying to achieve.

This might sound like somewhat of a retrograde step—why would we waste time discussing outcomes. Surely everyone just wants the process to be better? Why would this need discussion?

Of course, in reality things are rarely simple, and there can be multiple perspectives on what 'success' looks like. If we do not gain consensus we might find that we deliver a process that meets the desired outcomes of only some stakeholder groups. Other groups may actively resist the change as it does not meet—or perhaps conflicts—with their explicit or implicit objectives.
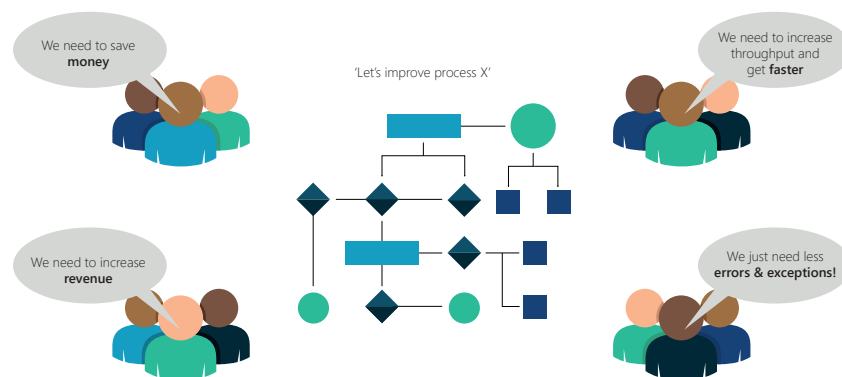
This may sound rather abstract, so let's take an example. Imagine a process improvement project taking place in a warehouse that picks and packs goods that are subsequently shipped to a customer. We may, quite logically, assume that the focus should be on cost and speed. If we can get the parcels out quicker, at a lower cost per order, then the organization will reap tangible rewards.

This might be true, and it might accurately reflect the view of the manufacturing manager. Yet the customer services team might provide useful insight too—they may explain that there are a high level of returns due to the wrong product being sent out. We might therefore discover that quality is an underlying concern—and leaving this unresolved may just lead to us sending out the wrong parcels more quickly!

We might go and speak with the IT director who may explain that the organization has expanded at an extremely quick pace. It runs on legacy, unsupported software that was never intended for an organization so large—and in particular the data structure really isn't appropriate (and doesn't allow a single view of the customer to be obtained). Therefore the way that data is handled and stored in the process is crucial—and, perhaps if we resolve the data issue, we resolve the quality issue, which improves cost and speed of shipping.

Clearly this is a hypothetical example, but it demonstrates how important it is for us to spend time with relevant stakeholders to define what success looks like. However, this raises the question of how to define outcomes.



**Figure 1 :** Different perspectives on 'success'

# ARTICULATING OUTCOMES: CSFs & KPIs

It is quite normal to find that when discussing process improvements, our stakeholders will jump straight into the solution-space, listing the types of solution that they would like to see implemented. An operational stakeholder might tell us that "we need a new barcode scanning system" and a sales director may tell us we need "a new CRM system and process". Both of these things may well be correct, but it is crucial that we start by taking a step back and articulating the outcomes.

This can be done by defining Critical Success Factors (CSFs) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the specific improvement or intervention that we are working on. CSFs tend to be fairly high level and qualitative, and are measured by one or many associated KPIs. In our warehouse example we might focus on a handful of CSFs, some examples are shown in the following diagram:
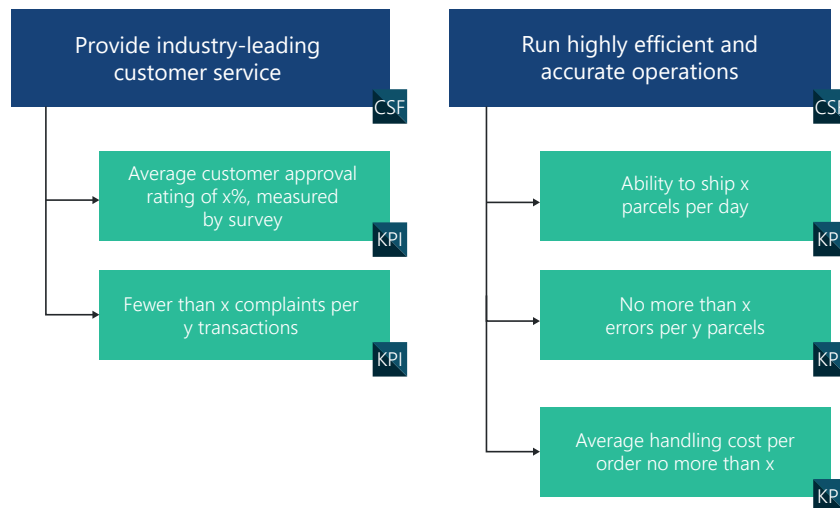
*'…allows us to create a hierarchy of measures that all connect to ensure that the organization is pushing forward towards its strategy.'*

I am sure many readers will have come across this idea of CSFs and KPIs before, and will have observed that these are often set at an organizational or departmental level. Setting them at process, or process-family level can be equally beneficial—and this allows us to create a hierarchy of measures that all connect to ensure that the organization is pushing forward towards its strategy.

The idea of Kaplan & Norton's balanced scorecard—which traditionally examines organizational performance from the perspectives of Financial, Customer, Internal Business Processes and Learning & Growth can be useful here (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). In fact, these categories can prove useful as a starting point for considering the types of outcome that are required for any type of project or process improvement initiative. Simply talking about these types of outcomes allows explicit and implicit expectations to be surfaced. It allows stakeholders to outline precisely what their expectations are—and for us to document the agreed output and move forward with certainty. This helps avoid a gap in expectations emerging. After all, a gap between design and execution often starts life as a gap in expectations.

| Provide industry-leading customer service | CSF |
| --- | --- |
| Average customer approval rating of x%, measured by survey | KPI |
| Fewer than x complaints per y transactions | KPI |

| Run highly efficient and accurate operations | CSF |
| --- | --- |
| Ability to ship x parcels per day | KPI |
| No more than x errors per y parcels | KPI |
| Average handling cost per order no more than x | KPI |

**Figure 2 :** Example (hypothetical) CSFs and KPIs

# ENGAGEMENT: UNDERSTAND THE REAL REQUIREMENTS

Another factor that can significantly affect whether an implemented process is successful is the extent to which it meets the actual requirements of the customers, operators and other stakeholders whom it involves. If it is to be successful, process design cannot be conducted from the comfort of a boardroom nor can it be conducted from the confines of a single departmental office. If we were not to ensure that a whole range of stakeholders were represented in the design or re-design activities, it would be very easy for us to miss a crucial area—something that is an 'unknown' to us and is completely off our radar screen.

Drawing back to the warehouse example mentioned earlier, we might (for example) think that one way of improving throughput would be to rejig the layout so that similar products are stored next to each other—meaning that pickers and packers can more easily remember where items are located. Yet, upon discussion with people that work in the warehouse we might find that this isn't really feasible because there are so many different product lines and variants that it's impossible to remember—which is why an IT system is needed to 'map out' the warehouse—and that the team have deliberately placed similar items away from each other to avoid accidental mis-packing (i.e. accidentally choosing the wrong item). These kind of insights into how the work really works can only be gained by engaging a wide range of interested parties.

It is also crucial that analysis is carried out to determine any significant exceptions that the process may need to cater for. It is very easy, in process design or re-design sessions, to focus on the 'happy path'. Indeed, if this is where 90 or 95 per cent of your transactions flow, then it makes sense to focus here first. Yet it is often the case that whilst exceptions are low in volume, they are high in cost. Perhaps they are more complicated and

perhaps they require a higher level of manual intervention or consideration. It is always difficult to know which types of exceptions should be considered when modeling a process. It is very easy for us to end up discussing (and modeling exception flows) for processes that are extraordinarily rare. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, but if we are not careful we may find that it crowds out any visual process model that we create, and may detract the reader from the main flow of the process. Process modeling notations such as BPMN can help here, allowing us to abstract away information, showing it only when necessary.

However, even when abstracting away information on a model, it is important to consider which exception situation to explicitly include in a process model. You will almost never be able to model every single exception that could occur. Do you really want to discuss what happens if "a member of royalty rings us whilst there is also a power-cut and we can't access the core customer database". Perhaps you do… but in most cases, it is worth considering frequency and predictability/variability of the exceptions. Exceptions that are frequent and predictable are worth codifying in a process model. Those that are very infrequent and unpredictable may be impossible to model anyway—so perhaps having a general ad-hoc management task to cater for these unpredictable exceptions may be sufficient.

Understanding the situation from multiple angles, whilst analyzing any underlying problems and requirements, will enable us to work with our stakeholders to co-create a process that works well for them whilst also delivering the outcomes we discussed in the previous section. Buy-in is much easier to attain if people have been involved in this process.

# COMMUNICATE, SUPPORT, ADAPT

**COMMUNICATION**

Of course, everything we have touched upon in this ebook so far relates to the analysis of a process and proposals for improving it. These are hard topics to broach, but they are only the start! Once we have a new, shiny, agreed process modeled and documented, there is then the tricky task of implementing and embedding the change.

In many cases, implementation of a set of changes may take time. It may, for example, involved the selection, procurement, configuration, integration and testing of new Information Technology components. It may involve organizational changes, recruitment and many other activities too. These all require careful planning and coordination, and there is (quite understandably) a time lag.

Thought should be put into how the momentum can be retained. Often the very stakeholders that have been consulted at the start of these activities are those that will be crucial in ensuring that the adapted process is successful once it is implemented. They often act as key advocates for the project, telling their colleagues about what is changing and why. They feel ownership for the change that they have helped to create—they are crucial and knowledgeable enablers of change.

Yet, if the implementation takes time, it is easy for these crucial stakeholders to get forgotten about. A different group of actors—perhaps a project team—are tasked with the delivery. Whilst this is perfectly sensible and logical, a consideration should be how can we keep the wider stakeholder community engaged. We don't want them to think that they have been forgotten about, and we don't want them to think that the change is 'on hold'. Perhaps they could play a part on the delivery project, as a subject

matter expert or 'super-user'. Or at the very least we should be sure to communicate with them regularly.

As well as this individual communication and engagement, for any large or medium sized change, broader communication is a crucial part of successful process implementation. It is necessary for us to spend time thinking about what will be communicated, to who and when. Utilizing different communication channels (e.g. perhaps starting with an intranet article, then e-mail shots and roadshows) can help us gain engagement over a period of time. We should ensure that the changes do not come as a surprise, and also that everyone has the opportunity to ask questions, raise concerns and have their voices heard.

Speaking specifically about communication during a re-organization, Iain Conn, the CEO of Centrica is quoted in Harvard Business review as saying:

*"You need to keep communicating with people. The biggest mistake is to communicate once and think you are done. You should keep communicating, even things people have heard already, to reinforce the message and ensure it sinks in."*

This quote illuminates something that is often forgotten—communication is never 'one and done'. It is something that needs planning and reinforcing. Careful consideration should be given the communication leading up to, during and after the change. This will involve considering what training is required, what training and support materials are needed and so on. This leads us on to the broader topic of support.

# COMMUNICATE, SUPPORT, ADAPT

## SUPPORT AND ADAPT

As much as we might not like to admit it, change is scary. Imagine you are starting a new job: You may well have moved to a much better position, but you'll still be nervous on the days coming up to the change. The same is true for everyone, and major changes to processes are effectively changing the way that people work. If they are significant changes (e.g. moving from paper to an electronic workflow system) then it may almost feel like a brand new job to those that are undertaking it. It is therefore important that we appreciate that there may be quite legitimate questions and concerns raised after implementation.

*'The reality, of course, is that there will be unforeseen problems. Whilst we can minimize risk, there will always be something that hits us after go-live.'*

When change is delivered as a 'project', there is often a frantic race to get the change 'over the line', but then after a brief celebration, the project team disperses and each individual moves onto a different task. If we want major change to embed well, it is important that we consider how we will support the change. Who will be available to answer questions during the 'bedding in' phase? Who will be assessing and measuring benefits? And who will be assessing and prioritizing any unforeseen problems?

The reality, of course, is that there will be unforeseen problems. Whilst we can minimize risk, there will always be something that hits us after go-live. If left to fester this can become a quite rational reason for disengagement; it can be used as a 'reason' that the system has failed, and a justification for people to revert back to their old ways of working (or for them to adapt the formal process in ways that are perhaps not desirable for the enterprise). So dealing with it quickly and communicating how it has been dealt with will be key. This leads us to another useful point—we should expect and plan for adaptation. Rather than trying to get things 100% right first time, why not accept that this is unlikely, and instead build processes that are flexible and adaptable? We might, in suitable contexts, run a pilot. We could deliver incrementally or iteratively, and test and learn along the way. This will enable us to stagger the change—with less of a 'step change' for people to get used to. Of course, there are pros and cons of these approaches, but it is certainly worth considering.

# CONCLUSION

Designing (or redesigning) processes is a hard undertaking, yet ensuring those processes are embedded and adopted can be even harder. If we are not careful a 'design/execution' gap can emerge. To avoid this, we need to keep a close eye on stakeholder engagement throughout our analysis and design. We should ensure that we consult and engage with a wide range of stakeholders, and consider wide ranging perspectives. When this engagement continues through design, implementation and beyond, we will help avoid situations where we deliver a process that doesn't meet the needs of those involved with it. Ultimately, it will help us to cultivate a situation where we can co-create a process design that key stakeholders feel that they can buy into, and once implemented, the benefits will roll in.

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