

Workflow: Improvement Projects

Toolkit 13.1

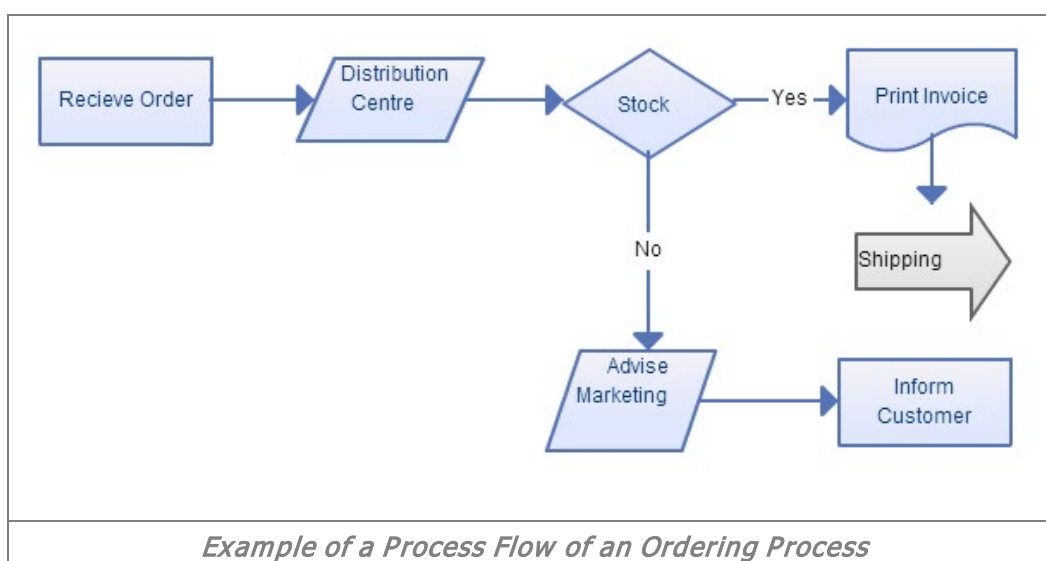
Understanding the Operational Process

target audience

Leadership team, strategic partner, supervisors, and contractors.

what it is

A business, or operational process, is an organized set of activities or tasks that produce a specific service or product. The process of producing citrus consist of taking care of the tree during the growth season, harvesting the fruit, and performing post harvesting activities. Each of these mainline processes can be broken down into the next level of activities so that the business has access to, and can evaluate, the impact that change in one activity will have on sequential activities. The example below is a very simplified process flow of an ordering process:



Processes are developed by dotting down the individual activities that are needed for a particular outcome and creating what is referred to as a process flow or a process map. A high-level project plan is another example of how process flow is used to explain progress over time. Process flows, or process maps, are typically used to explain the relationships and dependencies between activities, allowing staff to understand the impact of changes and potential risks, as well as areas where losses occur. For continuous improvement, process mapping will be used as follows:

- Developing or enhancing current processes, e.g., the recruitment and appointment of new staff.
- Visualising project progress against a timeline to identify project delays.
- Mapping the operational process (and paper flow) to indicate loss and waste areas (Refer to [Toolkit 13.2 – Identify Key Losses and Register Improvement Projects](#)). At each activity, key

losses will be discussed and quantified with the assistance of the work teams. This becomes a powerful tool for prioritising improvement projects.

- Mapping the complete value chain to create a thorough understanding at business-level of the magnitude, or size, of the process, and highlighting the importance of product and process quality at each activity. A happy customer in Japan depends on all role players throughout the value chain to follow standard processes that will see the consistent delivery of a standard product.

why it is important

Process mapping is a tool frequently used in many activities as described above. Visualising a process makes it much easier to develop, follow, and understand; as well as exploring potential shortcomings. Process mapping makes it possible to improve efficiency and avoid losses. Process maps provide insight into a process, help teams brainstorm ideas for process improvement, increase communication and provide process documentation; while also identifying bottlenecks, repetition, and delays.

For improvement projects, process maps can be effective because they:

- Provide a common understanding of the process, showing detail connections and sequences of the entire process.
- Align all staff involved into a common understanding of the improvement areas.
- Identify problems and possible solutions (whether quick wins or confronting more deep-seated, systemic problems or risks).
- Provide effective visual communication of ideas, information, and data.
- Help with problem solving and decision making.
- Can be built quickly and economically.

Process maps help you to understand the important characteristics of a process, allowing you to produce helpful data to use in problem solving, while letting you strategically ask important questions that help you improve any process.

success factors

What are the success factors for understanding the operational process?

- Leadership commitment and understanding.
- Mandating process mapping to be included in all projects and procedures.
- Diligence to use process mapping at all levels of the organisation.
- Simplification and standardisation of the symbols used in the mapping process.
- The involvement of staff from various levels when reviewing existing processes to get an accurate view of current processes. Very often, managers think they understand processes at the lower levels, only to find that, in practice, processes deviate substantially.

- The availability of process maps for reference when doing problem-solving and running improvement projects.

execution steps

The process should start with clear understanding and buy-in from the leadership team. They need to accept the value of the tool and use it when reviewing project or processes.

The following steps should be followed when doing process mapping:

- Put a multi-functional and multi-level team together and brief them with regard to the outcome of the exercise.
- Decide on a simple process mapping method. There are numerous free software options which are more than adequate for most basic process needs, e.g., [ARIS Express](#).
- Explain the mapping configuration symbols and allocate tasks. Ensure simplicity, both in the symbols used, the rules, and the aesthetic (art and display) of the process maps (See [Basic Process Map Example](#) resource).
- Physically walk through the process, recording activities and engaging with operators to:
 - Understand how the process works, including deviations from the standard?
 - Get improvement ideas during the process, while also considering the operating environment, e.g., defects, equipment conditions, ergonomics, neatness, etc.
- Map the "as is" process using the agreed configuration and symbols.
- Brainstorm improvement ideas or consolidate loss and waste opportunities.
- Agree on improvements and develop the "to be" map.
- Confirm the accuracy and finalise the map and procedure (if required).

Safety should always be a key determinant in any process design or recommended improvement changes.

assessment questions

Please Note: There is no minimum / maximum number of questions you can add.

1.	Has process mapping been accepted as a basic improvement tool?
2.	Is process mapping used in process design and continuous improvement projects?
3.	Are operators consulted when processes are mapped and improved?
4.	Are process maps available for all key production processes?
5.	Are process maps included in all SOPs?

resources

1.	Basic Process Map Example
2.	Process Mapping Example and Template
3.	ARIS Express
4.	Basic Modelling Training using Aris Express