

## Process Mapping is Not for Wimps

If you think process mapping can be completed in a two hour session, with a group of subject matter experts, a white board and some post it notes, then it is likely you will end up with a nice piece of paper with a bunch of squares and diamonds. Because let me tell you, process mapping is not for wimps. It is a painful process that should tell a data-based story when it is complete. A great process map should show you with certainty, where improvements can be made, where cycle time delays exist, and where smooth handoffs are not taking place. Some process maps may even have the ability to embarrass the most critical manager by pointing out obvious fail points in their process.

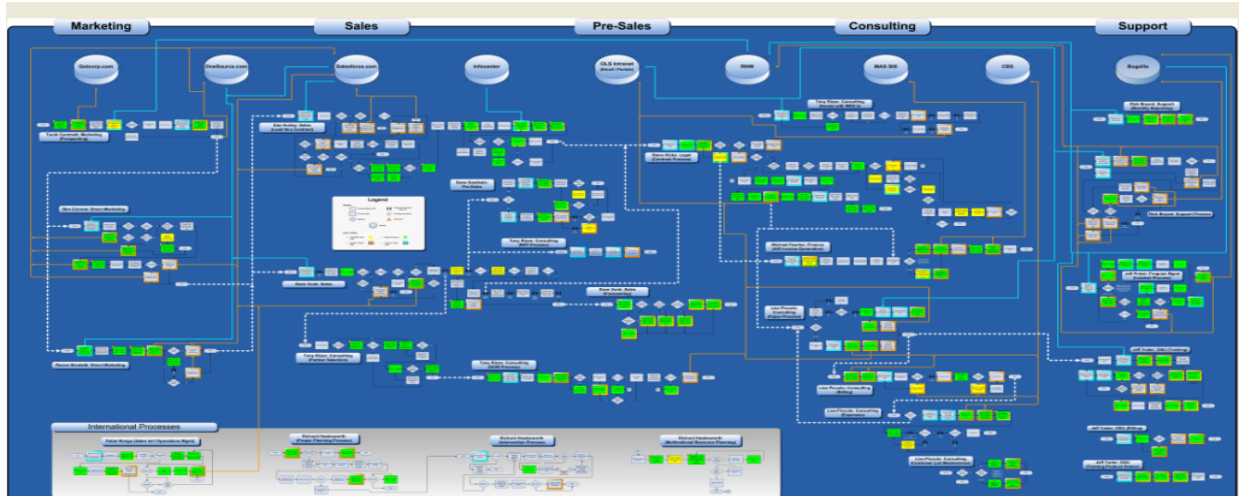
A process map or value stream map should be the first tool a company performs when seeking to make process improvements. It is simply a shame to see countless organizations implementing advanced process improvement methodologies when a good value stream map can really jump start their road to improvement. As a Lean/Six Sigma practitioner I am not saying to avoid these advanced methodologies, but I am saying start with something that can make an immediate impact. And by immediate, I am mean in less than 3 months.

But again, process mapping is not an easy undertaking. It is the perfect combination of business acumen and art. It takes special talent to interview an individual and get them to tell you exactly what they do everyday, as well as share their pains and express their wants. In fact, it takes the ability to connect with many different types of people and personalities, to find a way to ask questions that will effectively prompt the interviewee, and to listen to exactly what a person is saying without analyzing the content. You have to be able to hear what a person is saying and conversely ask the right questions to get a person to tell you what they are not saying. Did I mention this must also be done without judgment or prejudice?

So what about this data-based story component? Well, to perform a true value stream mapping exercise data must be collected in conjunction and concurrently with the interviews. Where do cycle time delays exist? Where do handoffs take place? Do people actually hand something off or is it submitted to a system with the assumption that it is handed off? What data points are put into systems versus those that are taken out? What is the pain the process causes and what are the wants or desires of those in the process? Do you think we might actually be able to put a customer's name into one system one time and have it carry over into other forms within the same system? Well isn't that a novel idea!

Gathering data is actually the real power of performing process mapping. The master plotter, meaning the final map with all the details is great for showing people the process, but the real juicy stuff is in the data that is collected. Here's an example: The following is a picture of an end to end sales process. All the green boxes are steps where cycle time delays exist. All the yellow boxes are manual steps where automation can take place.

The lines coming in and out of the circles (multiple systems) indicate data that comes in or out of a system. It looks pretty cool huh?



The real information comes from the ability to identify exactly how many handoffs there are in the process, and how many inputs go into a system but never get taken out. But the absolute biggest bang comes when you can take steps out of the process and calculate an ROI. Now that's magic. The final moment of excitement is in documenting people's pain within the process and capturing their wants and desires. You may actually do something to make people's lives better. Imagine that?

As a final note, if you want to see how change management really works - - implement changes voiced by the people in the process.

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