Management Resources

Overview
Classic Tools
- Pie Charts
- Bar Charts
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Flowcharting

Flowcharts are maps or graphical representations of a process. Steps in a process are shown with symbolic shapes, and the flow of the process is indicated with arrows connecting the symbols. Computer programmers popularized flowcharts in the 1960's, using them to map the logic of programs. In quality improvement work, flowcharts are particularly useful for displaying how a process currently functions or could ideally function. Flowcharts can help you see whether the steps of a process are logical, uncover problems or miscommunications, define the boundaries of a process, and develop a common base of knowledge about a process. Flowcharting a process often brings to light redundancies, delays, dead ends, and indirect paths that would otherwise remain unnoticed or ignored. But flowcharts don't work if they aren't accurate, if team members are afraid to describe what actually happens, or if the team is too far removed from the actual workings of the process.

There are many varieties of flowcharts and scores of symbols that you can use. Experience has shown that there are three main types that work for almost all situations:

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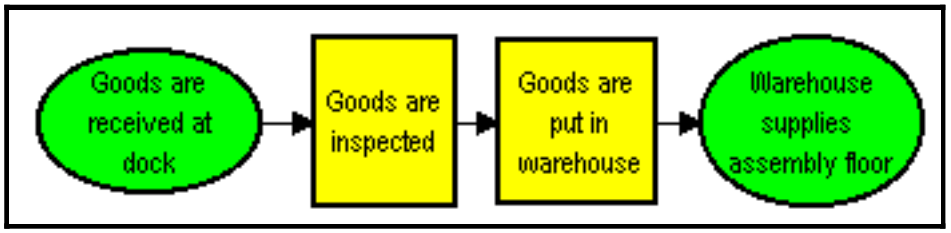
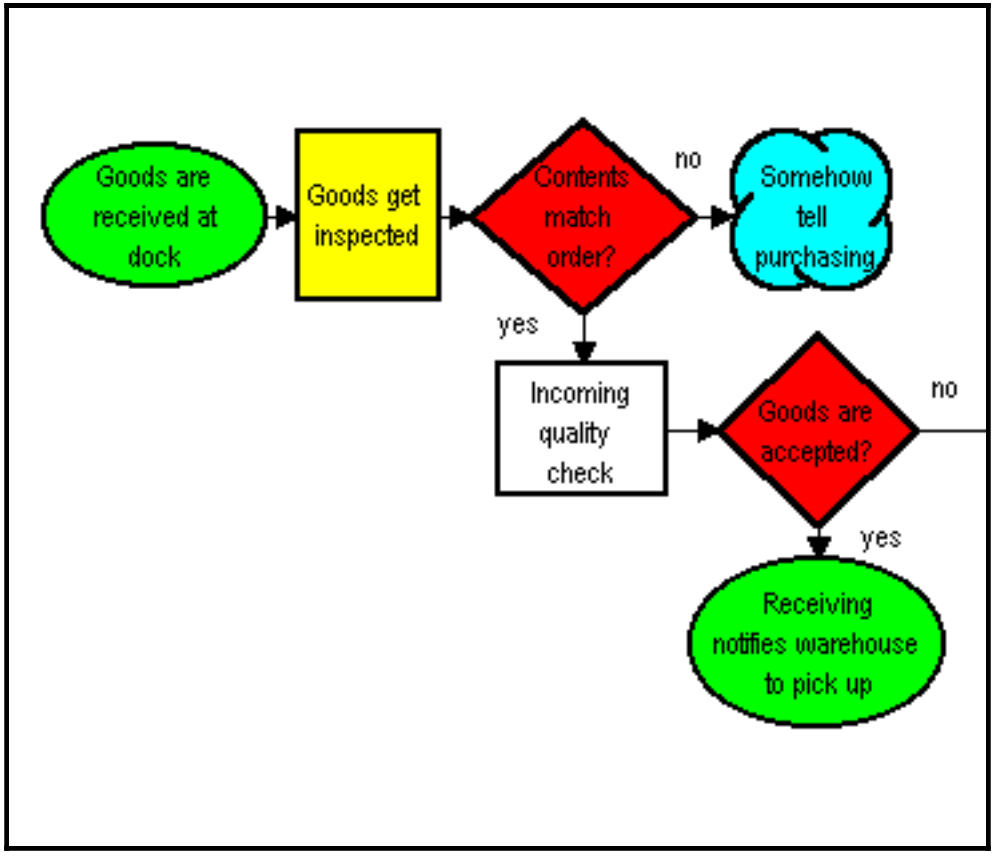
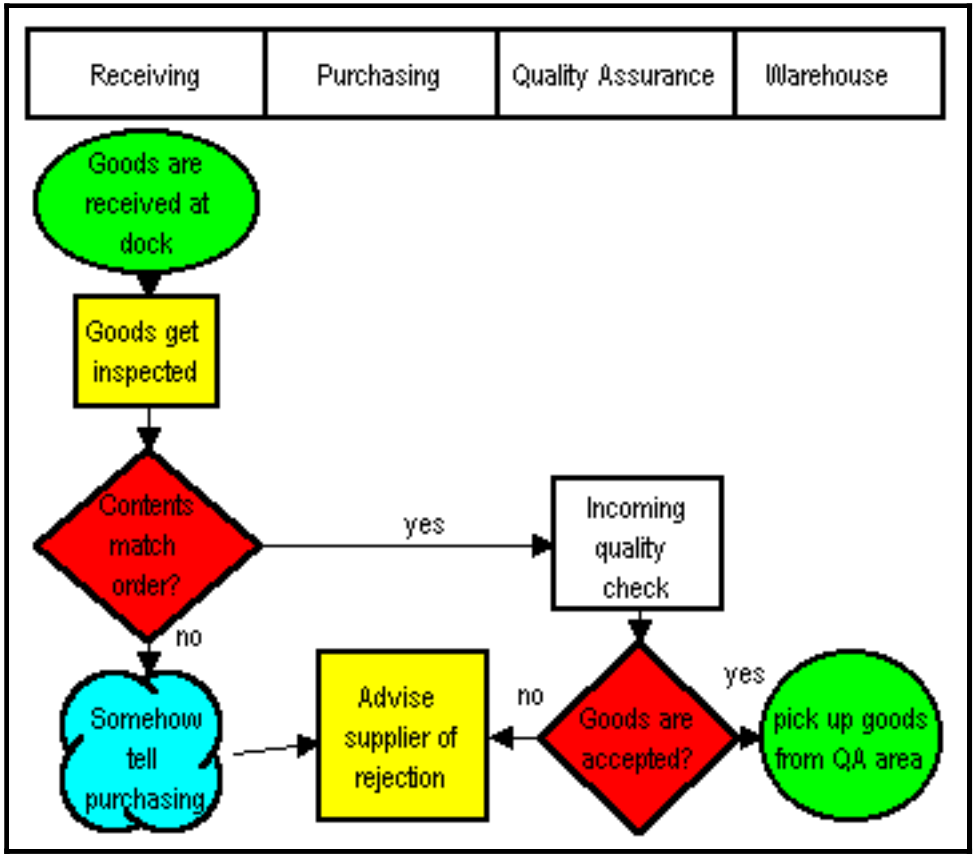


- Detailed flowcharts show a step-by-step mapping of all events and decisions in a process.



- Deployment flowcharts which organize the flowchart by columns, with each column representing a person or department involved in a process.



The trouble spots in a process usually begin to appear as a team constructs a detailed flowchart.

Although there are many symbols that can be used in flowcharts to represent different kinds of steps, accurate flowcharts can be created using very few (e.g. oval, rectangle, diamond, delay, cloud).

To construct an effective flowchart:

1. Define the process boundaries with starting and ending points.
2. Complete the big picture before filling in the details.
3. Clearly define each step in the process. Be accurate and honest.
4. Identify time lags and non-value-adding steps.
5. Circulate the flowchart to other people involved in the process to get their comments.

Flowcharts don't work if they're not accurate or if the team is too far removed from the process itself. Team members should be true participants in the process and feel free to describe what really happens. A thorough flowchart should provide a clear view of how a process works. With a completed flowchart, you can:

- Identify time lags and non-value-adding steps.
- Identify responsibility for each step.
- Brainstorm for problems in the process.
- Determine major and minor inputs into the process with a cause & effect diagram.
- Choose the most likely trouble spots with the consensus builder.

Recommended Reading:
