



Preparing for process improvement

Setting things up so your
process improvement efforts succeed

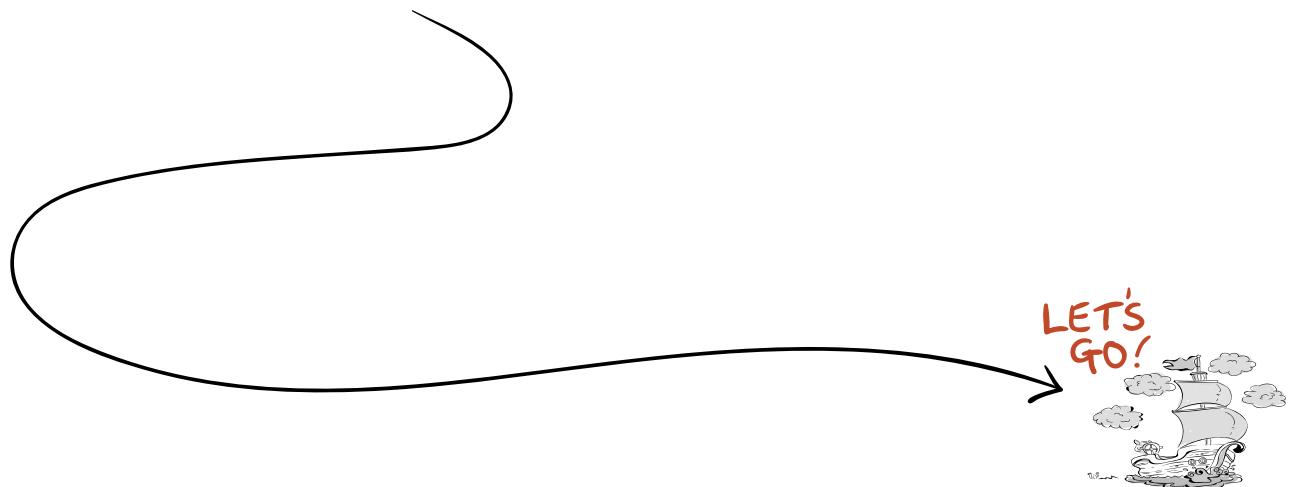


WRITTEN FOR:

Anyone who is serious about
implementing process improvement

WRITTEN WHY:

Get a fast heads up
on how to prepare your company
for the benefits of process
improvement

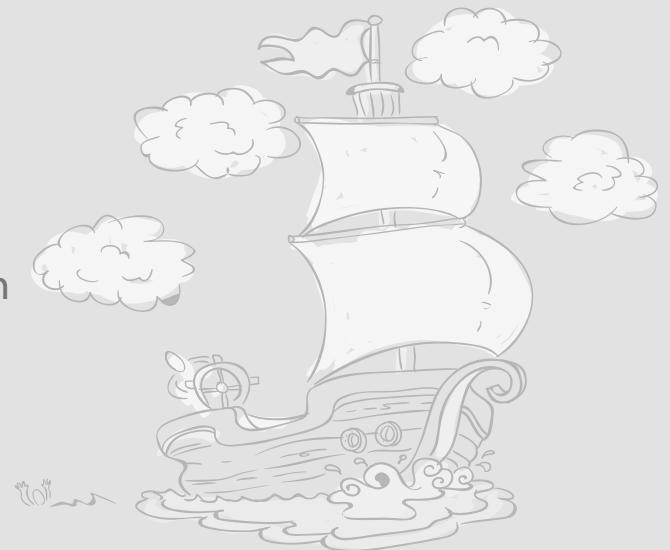


Contents...

STORMY SEAS, UNDERCURRENTS, SANDBANKS AND PIRATES

*Just like at sea, there is more than one hazard to avoid on your process improvement voyage.
Here are the big ones:*

1. Not having everyone onboard
2. Picking the wrong first process
3. Underestimating how much time it takes
4. Picking the wrong moment
5. Not setting realistic expectations
6. Not training the team
7. Know how you are going to document our processes
8. Failure to Identify what kind of process you are dealing with
9. The wrong sized team
10. The wrong people on the team
11. Having no dedicated team space
12. THE NEXT STEP...



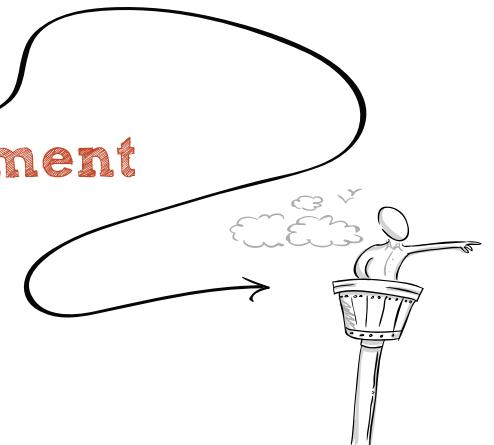


Setting Sail For Process Improvement

If you're reading this, it's probably because you've got a business process problem and you want to fix it. Maybe it's your job to guide your team through the journey from where you are, process-wise, to where you need to be. Maybe, you are a member of that team and want to see what it's all about.

Like every important journey, you want to be prepared. And it won't surprise you to learn that there are some common do's and don'ts

Well, there's **no need to fear**. This eBook will equip you to navigate the stormy seas of process improvement, give you a map, show you the ropes and point you in the right direction. OK, that's enough nautical metaphors for one page.



1.

Get everyone onboard

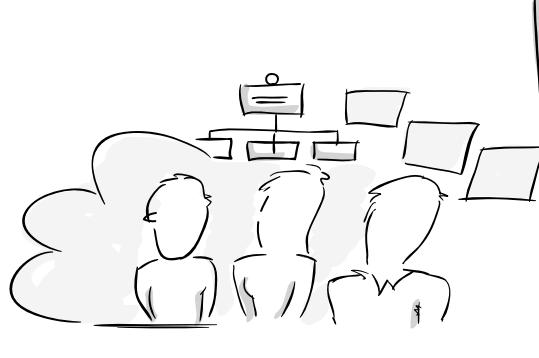


What goes wrong?

Yeah, yeah, we all know we have to get "buy in". Without it you are just not going anywhere good. But did you know that there are **three groups of people** with **three different concerns** that have a big interest in your process improvement efforts?

Best practice

Few people like the idea of being a sales person (including some salespeople) but that's what you have to be. The good news is that in this sales position there is no cold calling. Plus you are selling something your (internal) customers know they need, and you know you can deliver. The key here is to recognize your sales pitch is not about the benefits of process improvement. It's all about re-assurance – to three separate customers.



The supervisors and middle managers.

Theoretically, the managers of the departments, sections, call them what you will, can only benefit from process improvement. Their team is going to work more efficiently. What's not to like?

But there is a catch. Making process improvement work requires the process users to have a say in the improvement. They have the best ideas. Why wouldn't they? They are the ones who see the problems and feel the effects every day. But giving people a say, means **giving up control**. And supervisors or managers of any stripe crave control. For them, it's the classic "**lunatics running the asylum**" syndrome. And that can be very scary.



The people in the cubicles.

The people who actually **do the work** and **use the processes** that you want to improve have an obvious interest. Some are going to feel threatened because, by definition, improvement means change and **change induces anxiety** in all of us.



The senior managers.

The top brass are the folks with the near impossible targets to reach. Their **calculation is always about the risk** that the time and effort this takes won't pay off. If you screw up, they will be the person who authorized you to waste a lot of time. So, when you are making the pitch about the merits of process improvement, they are thinking "hmmm...sounds good, but can this eager beaver actually pull this off?" **The issue here is your personal credibility.**

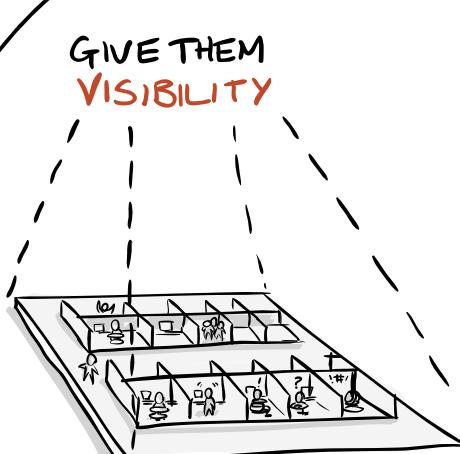
The pitch to the people in the cubicles.

The process users will overcome their fear if they know they will get a say in any changes. Set things up so that your process improvement project is clearly not just going to involve them, but to **put them in the driving seat**. If they can see they are going to actually make decisions, they are going to be much more likely to sign up. And you don't have to convince everyone upfront. If you can **get the "people of influence"** and you know who they are, to see they are going to be in charge, the rest will come along later as the project gets going.

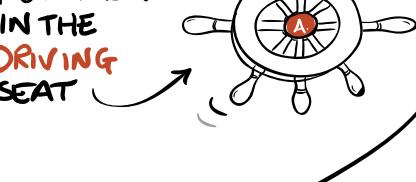
The pitch to the senior managers.

You need to **convince** these folks that you know what you are doing. And the way to do that is to make your first **pitch for a pilot project**. **Limit the risk, learn what works and build some confidence**. It helps if you have prepared yourself. That means **training**. OK, that was a **shameless plug**.

GIVE THEM
VISIBILITY



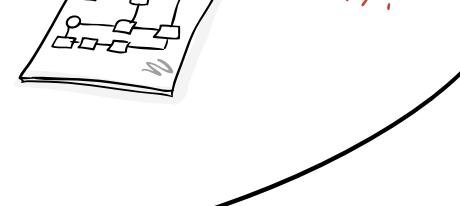
PUT THEM
IN THE
DRIVING
SEAT



B. GET 'PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE'



A. PITCH FOR A
PILOT PROJECT



B. TRAIN



2.

Pick the right first process

What goes wrong?

When it comes to deciding where to start, there is a **big temptation to choose the process that is giving the most pain**. And that's likely to be a very important one to your organization. Messing with a key process before you and your team have had your first process improvement success together is a **high-risk strategy**.

If the pilot process improvement project is a **high profile failure**, you won't get a chance to do another.

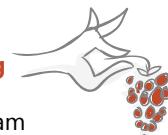


Best practice

So how do you choose the right first process? **Remember Goldilocks?** Not too hot, not too cold? That's the right approach to take with selecting your first process improvement project.

Choose something that is doable.

You don't want to choose a project that is too ambitious for you and your team. Pardon the cliché, but you want to pick some **low hanging fruit**. Don't just dive in. Take your time and identify a process that will give you a good chance of succeeding. That will give you and your team an opportunity to climb a good way up the learning curve. Then when you are ready, you can take on something with a bit more complexity.

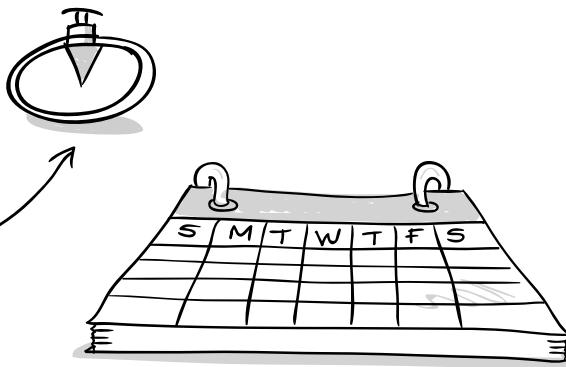


Choose something that has an impact.

Whatever your chosen process, it needs to be something that has a positive impact. Sticking with the food metaphor, if you choose a low hanging fruit make sure it is a juicy one. It is important for the team and the project as a whole that you are able to **show some concrete progress** call process improvement.

3.

Be candid about the amount of time you will need



It is easy to under estimate the time process improvement takes. You are going to discuss, dissect and just plain argue about your processes. Eventually, you will come up with solutions and improvements. But it takes a while. A rule of thumb is to take your **first estimate – and double it**

x2



Best practice

Be upfront about how much time this will take

When you're making your pitch to the senior management, be upfront about what this is going take in terms of **resources to get the job done**.

You want these guys on board for the duration. That means being very candid about what it's going to take and when they can start seeing results.

What goes wrong?

Failure to communicate this, not only to the team but also to their managers, will handicap your project right from the start. Daily work starts to pull your team back. You have to cancel meetings. The project starts to slow down. Enthusiasm wanes. Inevitably, the project loses momentum and **fizzles out**.

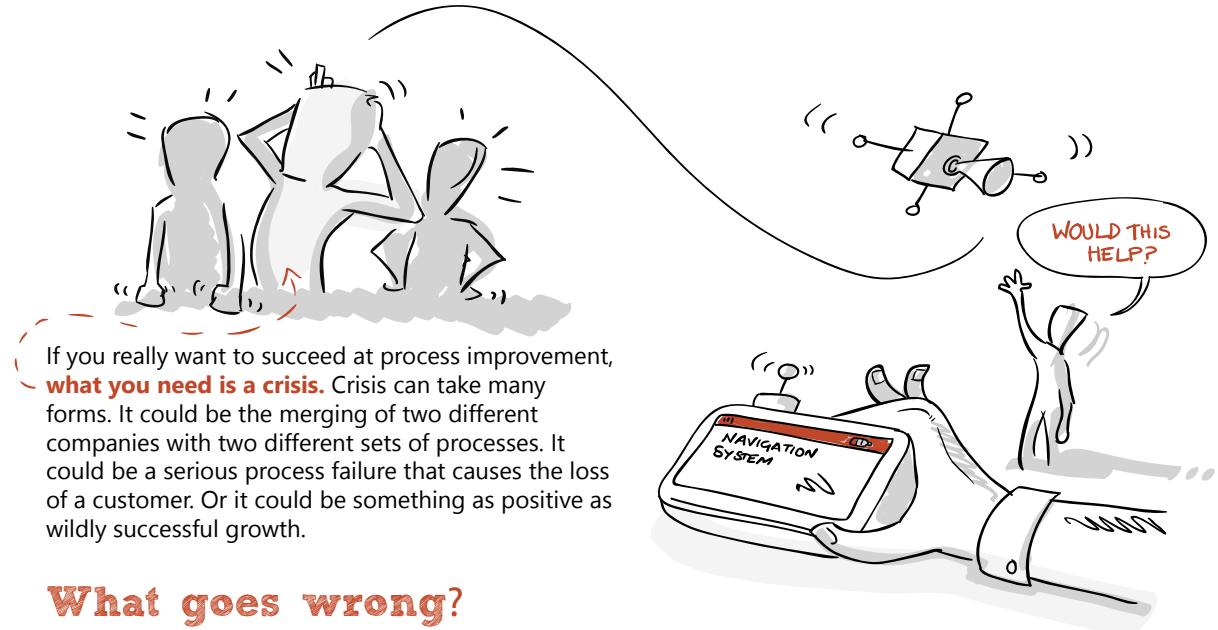


LUMPS & BUMPS



4.

Pick the right moment



What goes wrong?

If you think your processes need to change, that's good. But **everybody else needs to feel the same**. Process improvement is a serious undertaking. It demands a certain **fire in the belly, a shared sense of purpose**. If things are going along swimmingly why should people overcome their natural reluctance to make changes?

Best practice

Crisis is your friend, so the **time to launch a process improvement is when things are looking bleak**.

5.

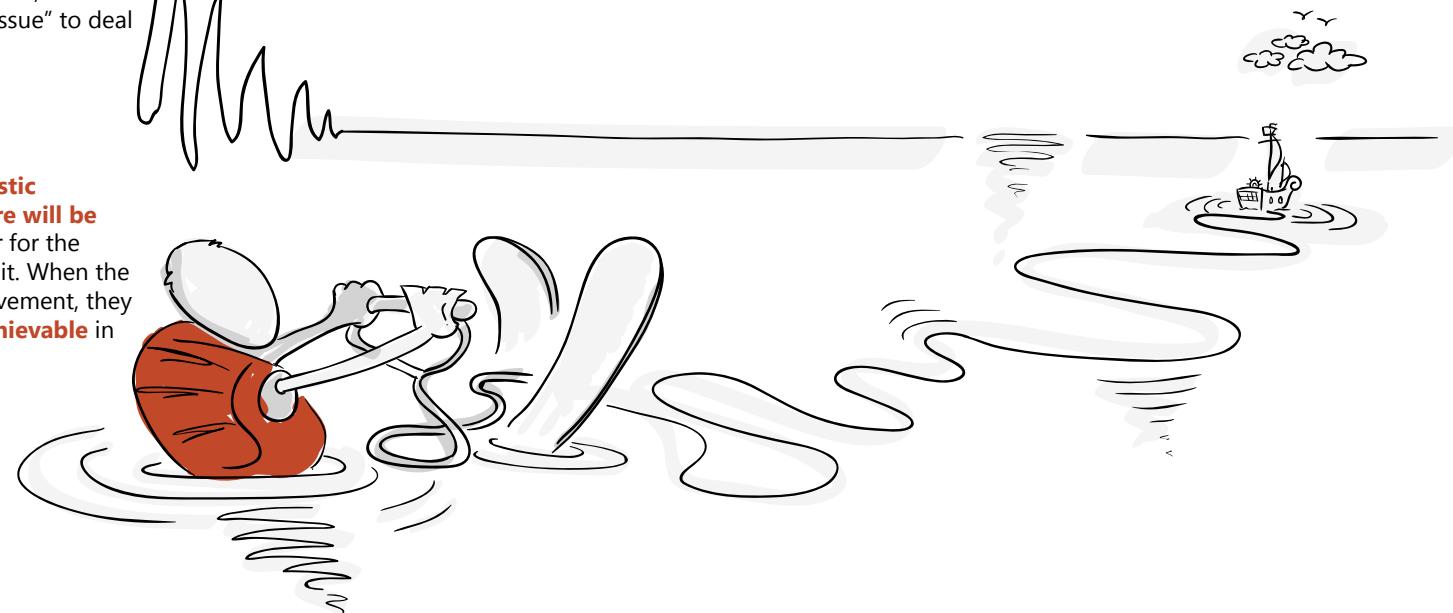
Manage the expectations of the team

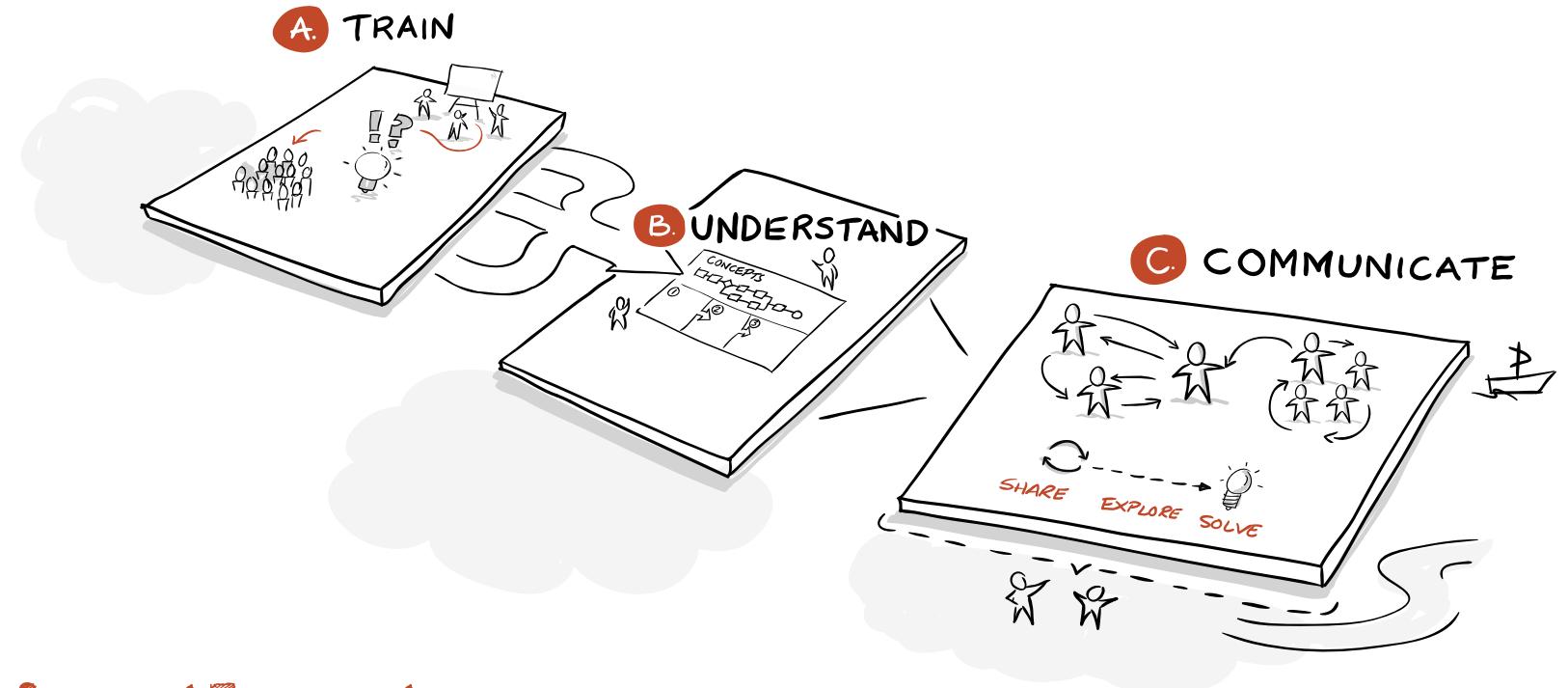
What goes wrong?

Once you get a process improvement initiative going, you might be surprised how enthusiastic people become. But there is a trap here. That **energy and excitement will vanish if you can't follow through**. If the team comes up with good ideas and then nothing happens, it is not hard to see why they become disillusioned. In the future, the next time you want to start a process improvement effort, there is a certain amount of psychological "scar tissue" to deal with.

Best practice

Before the project even begins set **realistic** expectations. Let people know that **there will be delays and setbacks** but that this is par for the course. Tell them they can help prevent it. When the time comes to select projects for improvement, they can **prioritize according to what is achievable** in the short term.

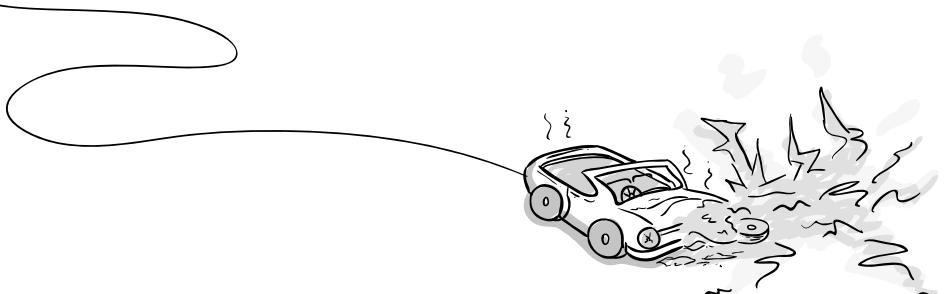




6. Train the team

What goes wrong?

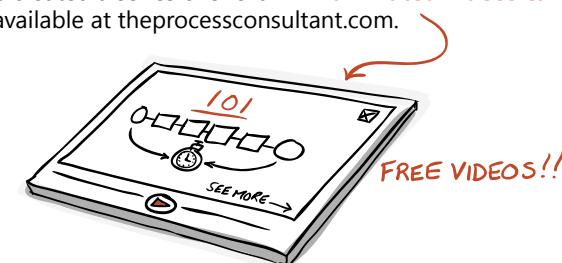
Typically, people start project improvement efforts by diving straight in. In other words, without any training for the people involved. That's like **jumping into a car and heading down the freeway before you can drive**. It's fun and you can go fast, but it's not long before you crash.



Best practice

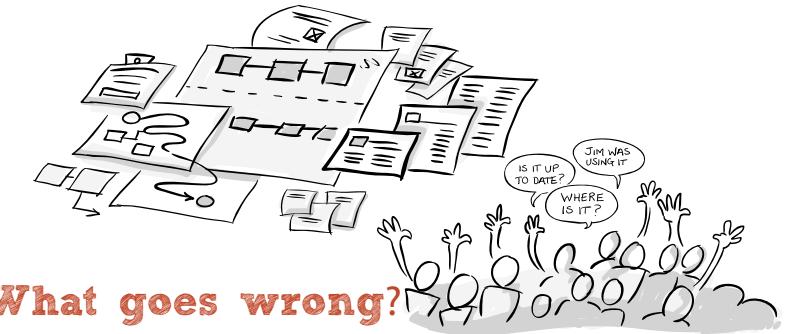
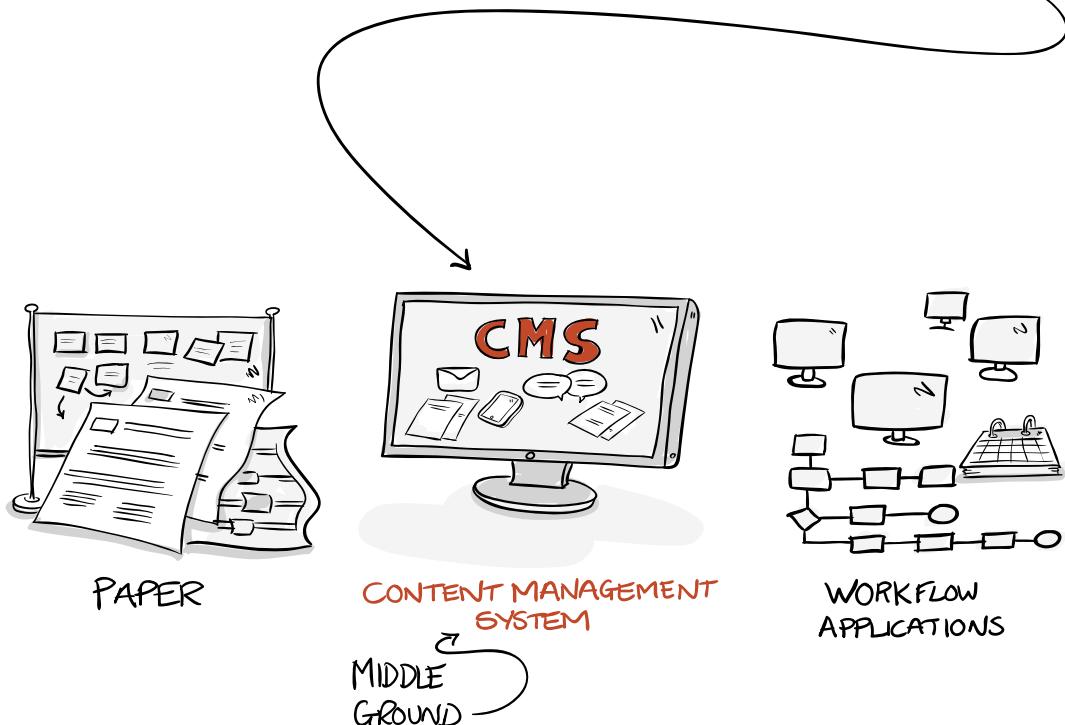
Training in process improvement before you start has a big payoff. Things go much faster when everybody shares a common understanding of the basic concepts. And it helps when everybody is using the same terms to describe the problems that they are grappling with.

To help, I have created a series of short **FREE animated videos called Process101**, available at theprocessconsultant.com.



7.

Have a plan for you process documentation



What goes wrong?

As your process improvement project progresses, you will find that you are generating all kinds of documentation. There will be maps, policy documents, forms, checklists and so on. It builds up pretty quickly. It needs to be **organized and accessible**. And later, you will want to make changes to it.

If you keep it all on paper you're going to give yourself a big headache.

Best practice

All organizations seem to go through the same progression. At first they use paper to document. Then they move on to workflow applications. There is, however, a middle ground. I recommend to all my clients that they **use some sort of content management system** specifically for process documentation. You'll make life much easier for yourself.

By having all your documentation on an intranet, or on some web-based in some way, you'll find the task of keeping it **organized and up-to-date** much easier. You can create something in-house or;

...Take advantage of The Process Library.



8. Match the process improvement method to the type of process

What goes wrong?

Not all processes are the same. Some are cookie cutter, repeatable processes that you use all the time. These lend themselves to the classic process improvement approach.

Some, however, are highly variable. They have many possible routes and outcomes. If you're trying to use the same approach here, the exceptions will soon bog you down. Some processes occur infrequently. It will take a long time before the effort it takes to map them pays off.

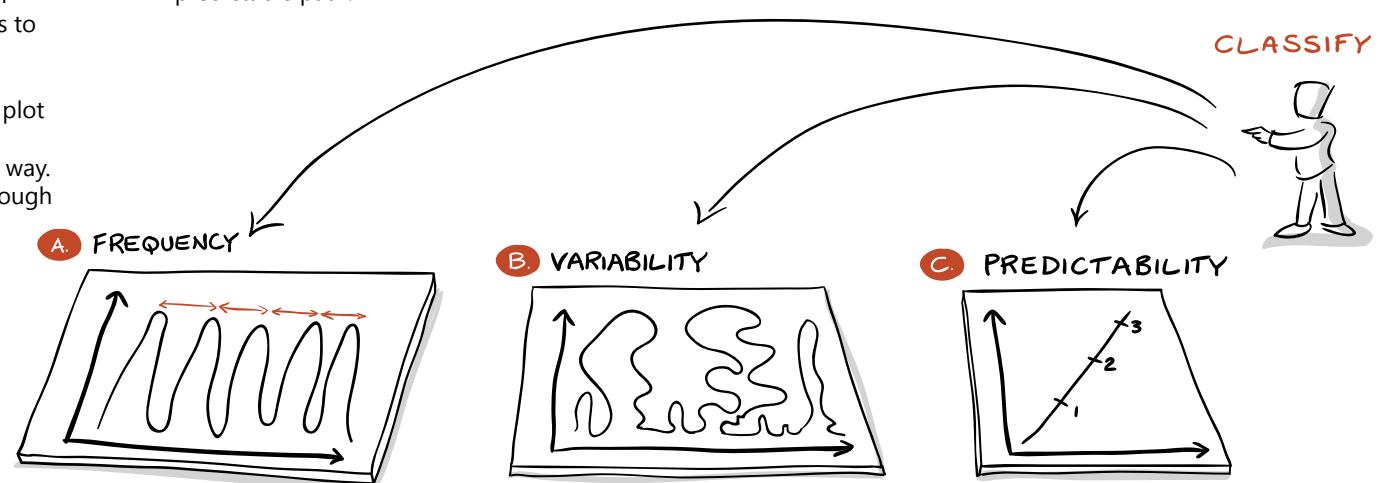
In the case of some processes, you can't plot them out in advance. The path they take depends on events and decisions on the way. It is better to handle these processes through case management.

Best practice

You want to use the right approach for the kind of process you are targeting. When you are choosing a process to work on, **classify them** according to three criteria:

Frequency Variability Predictability

When you are first starting process improvement efforts, pick something in the cookie-cutter category. So, something that is used frequently, repeatable and has a predictable path.



9.

Choose the right sized team

What goes wrong?

Naturally, you want everyone to participate. You want the best ideas. So, logically everyone should be on the improvement team, right?

Well, not really. **It turns out that there is an optimal number.** It's the Goldilocks Principle again, not too hot and not too cold. If you have too many people on the team, not everyone gets a chance to participate.

Unless you are careful, only the noisy ones get to speak. Then there are a lot of folks who can't get a word in and who could otherwise be at their desks doing useful work. And if you have too few people, you don't get a balanced input.

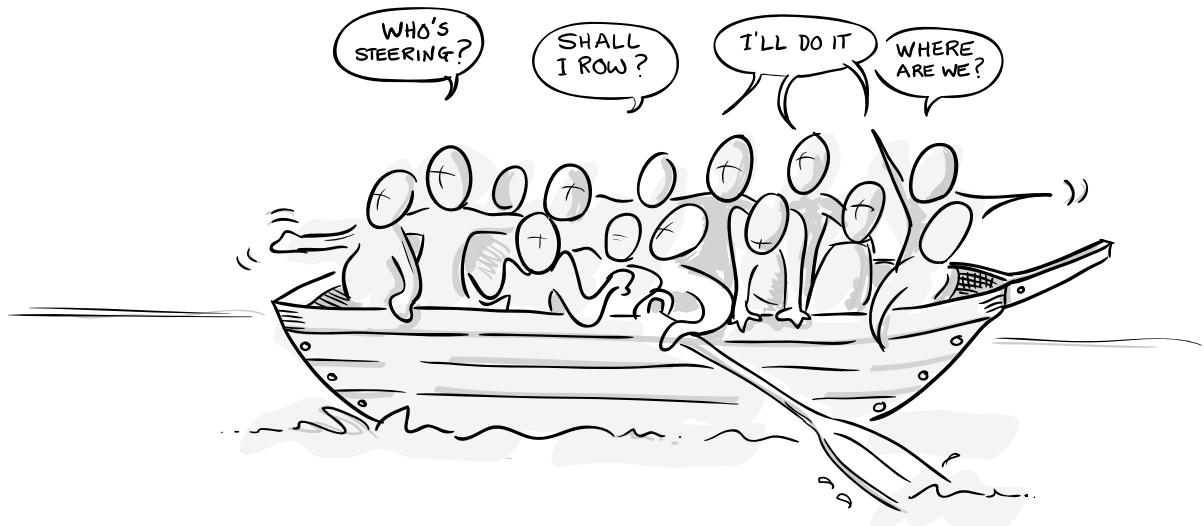


Best practice

OK. So what is the optimal number?
It's a matter of small team dynamics.

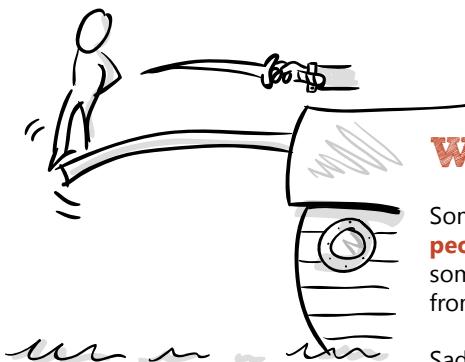
Usually, if you shoot for **about six members** in a single process improvement team, you are going to be about right. You can have multiple teams if that makes things easier. But any team that is as small as four members or as large as twelve is going to run into problems.

But the six people have to be **the right people.** You need a mix of roles that represents the complete process and **a good cross section** of experience. That way you will get the best bang for your teams time and effort.



10.

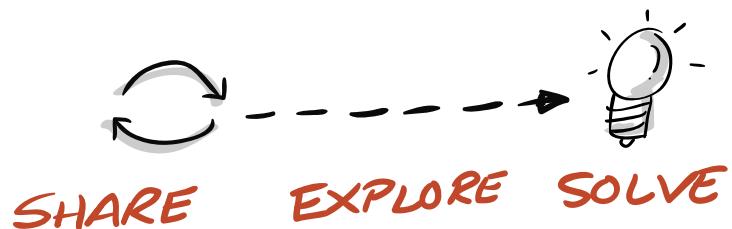
Choose the right people for the team



What goes wrong?

Sometimes, at the start of a process improvement effort, **all sorts of people want to be involved**. Sometimes it's the managers, sometimes people from outside. There can even be some interest from the HR department..

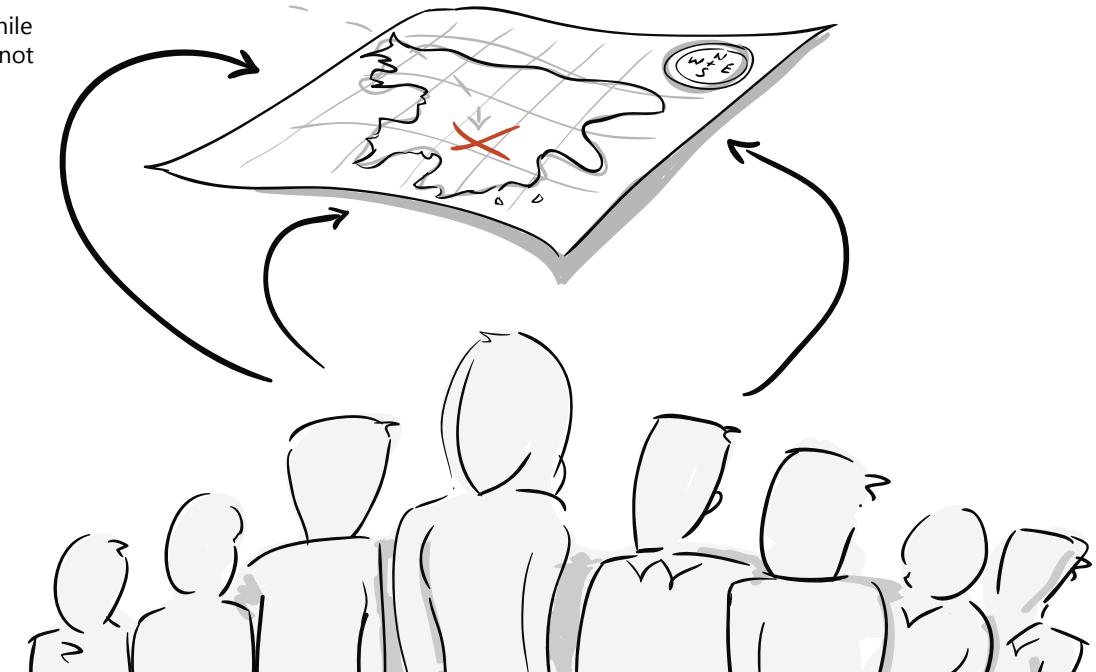
Sadly, **these are not the people you want to be involved**. While they might have a legitimate interest in the outcome, they are not the right people to shape the process itself.



Best practice

The only people who should be making changes to a process are the people who use it.

They are the ones who know what works and what doesn't. **They know where the skeletons are** in the process closet. You will find they have great ideas on how to fix it. But if you allow outsiders to have a say, you risk losing the buy-in of the most important group – the process users.





11.

Get a dedicated room

What goes wrong?

Your team meets in different conference rooms and you have to pull down the diagrams and put them up again at the next meeting. Or the team has to meet in a cubicle. Work is going on around you. There are interruptions and people who have nothing to do with the project can hear you. Not everyone in the team can sit comfortably or see the tiny whiteboard.

Best practice

Beg, borrow, or steal, a dedicated team room. You're going to **increase your chances of success** on your project by about **200%**. The next best thing is a conference room where you can keep your process maps up on the walls.

A room gives you two things. First, **privacy**. You can shut the door to keep the world from intruding. You need somewhere to argue amongst yourselves. Second, a room gives you walls. **You need walls** to put up diagrams, flowcharts and Post-it notes. Without the means to share a diagram you're going to make the task of communication much harder than it needs to be.

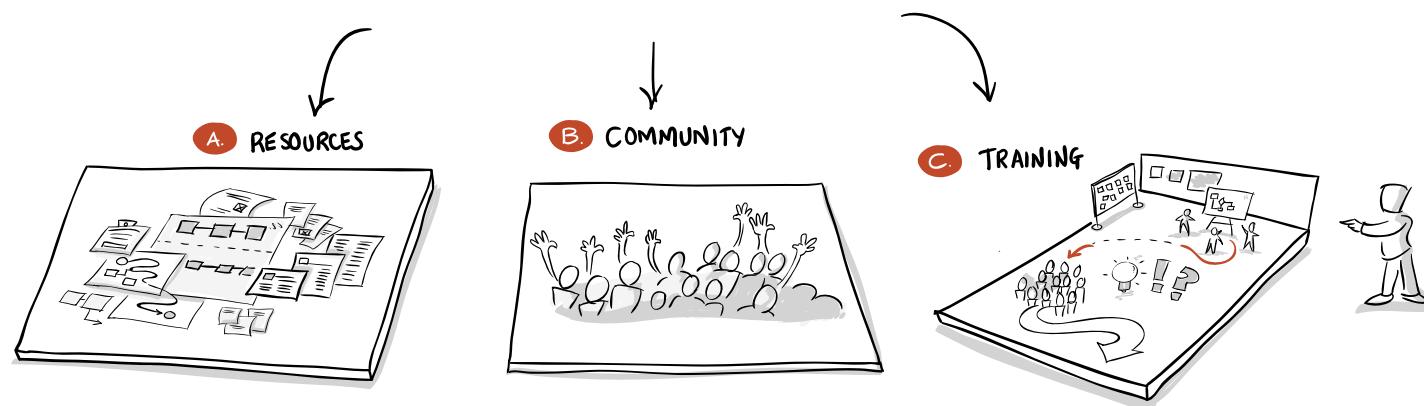
Thank you for joining us

12.

Next Steps



Do you want to streamline, profit and grow with
SUCCESSFUL process improvement?



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VIDEOS !!



FREE videos here



The Process Consultant

Quick Bio

Ian James

Ian is an **experienced** process management consultant specializing in helping organizations develop the capability of managing many concurrent complex processes. He has served in a number of internal consulting and senior management positions in GE and GEC (now Marconi, PLC). He has also founded or co-founded a number of successful start-ups, among them FreeMarkets, a global B2B online auctioneer now merged with Ariba.

Ian's **background includes a mix of process improvement, business management, and consulting expertise.** This view from all sides of the table provides a uniquely well-informed perspective on the management of process to **increase productivity and profits.**

One often-overlooked aspect of process management is the inevitable impact of change on people. Ian's outstanding leadership skills have frequently rescued failing projects by **creating common goals** among disjointed groups and welding them into **effective teams.**

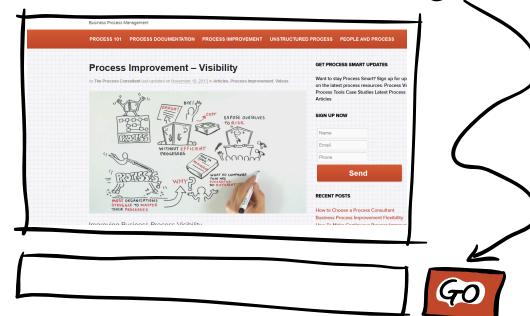
After graduating of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, the UK equivalent of West Point, he obtained an undergraduate degree from the Royal Military College of Science. He has a graduate degree in computing technologies from Cranfield University in the UK.

Contact:

Phone: 412-945-0102

E-mail: ianjames@TheProcessConsultant.com

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Go

WRITTEN BY:

Ian James

The Process Consultant

DESIGNED BY:

John Montgomery

The Whiteboard Animation Guy