

4 – Simplify

Keep it simple. Our goal is to have a positive impact and result immediately, not weeks or months later, so where do we begin?

Visualizing a process is generally the simplest way to understand it and break it down into a series of steps and this is called process mapping. There are many very detailed methodologies on how to do process mapping along with quite a few computer programs one can use. But do you have hundreds of dollars and hours upon hours of time to commit to learning these methodologies and computer programs? No and nor is it necessary.

Depending on the size of your organization this effort may be led by you, the Process Improvement Project Manager, or you can identify a Process Owner. A Process Owner will be a staff member that may be considered an expert or the most familiar with the process being improved. Again, use your best judgement – if you as the owner or manager will fit the role better, then do it. If the Project Manager can fill the role, then do that. Do not assign someone as Process Owner just for the sake of doing it. The ultimate goal is getting it done, not assigning roles and seeing what happens.

If the process is older or well-established, you may not want to have a staff member as the Process Owner during the ASI Process. You can, and will, use them as experts, but the Process Owner (and the Project Manager) need to be as objective as possible. A staff member overly familiar with a process may skip or forget to expand on certain steps as they have become instinctual or second nature. We want a fresh perspective on the processes, i.e., someone without preconceived notions. This may or may not be possible, so do not spend a lot of time going back and forth or trying to decide. Trust your judgement, trust your staff, assign a Process Owner, and get started.

Your staff (or you if this is a small or new business) are the experts so you want to have them explain the process to the Process Owner. How do they perform the tasks exactly and in what order? If necessary, have them show you how something is done or observe them while they are doing the process.

If it is a process performed by multiple staff members then interview a few of them, separately, to learn how they do it. Again, this is not a time to judge or critique how the work is performed. If they skip steps that you think should be there or they perform the steps in a different order from what you expect or what others do, just note it down – do not comment or critique. There is a reason why they are doing it a certain way and we will investigate this later on. Right now, you just want to document their process (not yours).

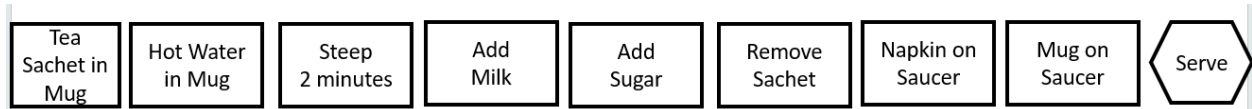
Once you have a thorough understanding of the steps of a process you want to create a Process Map. Each step or activity will be indicated with a square block and put in the correct order or sequence. Do not over document the process or steps at this point - Keep it simple especially if multiple people do the same activity but follow a different process. Here's an example using our cup of tea (Before we start an international debate on preparing tea, please remember this is just an example for illustrative purposes!):

Employee A – Cup of Tea:

Materials: Mug, Saucer, Tea Sachet, Hot Water, Spoon, Milk, Sugar, White Paper Napkin

1. Put tea sachet in mug

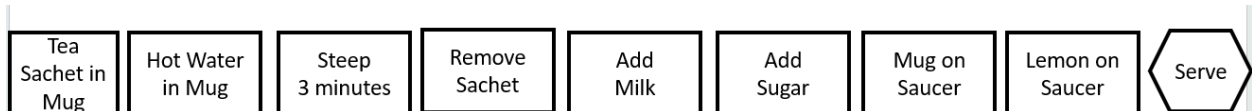
2. Pour hot water in mug
3. Let steep for two minutes
4. Add milk
5. Add sugar
6. Remove tea sachet
7. Place white napkin on saucer
8. Place mug on top of napkin on saucer
9. Serve to guest



Employee B – Cup of Tea:

Materials: Mug, Saucer, Tea Sachet, Hot water, Spoon, Milk, Sugar, Lemon Slice

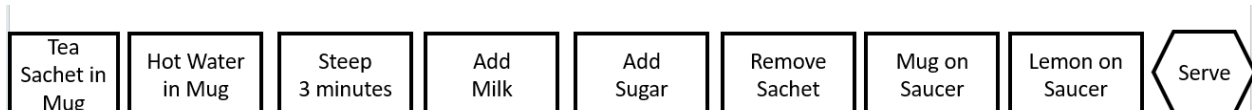
1. Put tea sachet in mug
2. Pour hot water in mug
3. Let steep for three minutes
4. Remove tea sachet
5. Add milk
6. Add sugar
7. Place mug on saucer
8. Place lemon slice on saucer
9. Serve to guest



Employee C – Cup of Tea:

Materials: Mug, Saucer, Tea Sachet, Hot water, Spoon, Milk, Sugar, Lemon Slice

1. Put tea sachet in mug
2. Pour hot water in mug
3. Let steep for three minutes
4. Add milk
5. Add sugar
6. Remove tea sachet
7. Place mug on saucer
8. Place lemon slice on saucer
9. Serve to guest



*A note on process map symbols – there are plenty of variations and ‘rules’ on how to build process maps and the use of specific shapes to indicate a type of action, e.g., timers to denote pauses or waiting, stop signs (hexagons) to denote an end to a process, etc. Do not spend too much time, if any, on what shapes ought to be used and what they mean. Simple rectangles or squares are generally more than adequate.

Once you have your process maps, review them with each team member or staff member to verify that they are correct for how they do the process.

Using our tea example, we obviously have a problem as the processes are different and impact quality, taste, and presentation, but which one is correct? The orders are different, the steeping is different. The Outputs are all different, so first we need to standardize the process...