



Practical Process

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Occasionally, It Has To Be Remarkable

If process improvement projects find only the same changes any problem solving approach would discover, what's the point? If all we do is identify obvious problems and suggest obvious solutions, what's all the fuss about? We need to know that we've found the very best ideas for process redesign, ones that are occasionally remarkable – ideas that are clearly and uniquely the result of the process approach. If all we ever come up with are the changes that anyone would have discovered using any problem analysis technique, then we aren't adding value.

In his latest book, *Operational Leadership*¹, Andrew Spanyi reports an alarming statistic. He says, “Fewer than 40% of major improvement projects typically achieve their stated goals, and the sustainability of these gains is even more questionable.” Try using that stat in your next presentation seeking support for a process improvement project! Why would anyone support an approach that seems programmed to fail?

To be credible, process improvement, using any methodology, needs to produce results that are qualitatively and quantitatively different from the much more generic (and common) approach of “making things work better.” This needs to happen with the big changes, not just the small stuff. We are seldom asked to make minor changes to inconsequential processes. What we are more often expected to deliver is radical improvement to mission-critical cross-functional process. It seems we fail at this 60% of the time. The “process of process improvement” needs some work!

Some practical suggestions below help deliver remarkable outcomes, at least occasionally.

All the problems

The first important step in getting the right solution is to define the right problem. This is not just a matter of making a list of the problems people tell you about. We need to dig deeper and uncover all of the problems and opportunities. Just because all the stakeholders think a process is working well doesn't mean it doesn't have problems and can't be improved. Just because customers don't complain doesn't mean we can't give them better service.

There won't be enough budget, time, or interest to fix every problem so we need to prioritize. If we are going to get the best result we need to be culling from a complete list.

Then we need to understand the causes of those problems. In process improvement we are in the business of “cause removal” not just “problem resolution.” Remove the cause and the problem, perhaps more than one, has gone forever.

Some would say that we shouldn't worry about the current state of a process and that what we want to do is to change it, not analyze it. While I agree that it is easy to send too much time in the

¹ Spanyi, A. 2010. *Operational Leadership*. Business Expert Press LLC. New York.

As Is world, it is necessary to get a clear definition of the problems and their causes if the best solution is to be found. Importantly, this activity also generates a set of evaluation criteria for possible redesign options.

All the solutions

Discovering process redesign ideas can be difficult. Here the arts and science of BPM meet, and creativity, sensitivity, economic judgment, and many other skills are required. While there are many techniques for modeling a process and identifying its shortcomings, literature, and current practice are short on actual approaches for generating process improvement ideas.

Again, we need to go beyond the obvious. If the correct answer really were obvious, then you could skip all the analysis and go straight to implementation. However, this is seldom true. We need to dig deeper to find all the reasonable solutions and then apply our evaluation criteria to select the very best answer. Remarkable is seldom easy.

Whatever process improvement methodology you use, there comes a time when you know enough about the As Is and you need to come up with ideas for change; you need to define the To Be. It's as if someone says, "*Be clever – now.*" That can be difficult. The most common outcome is that the very best improvements are NOT discovered. We cannot afford to waste resources generating mediocre results.

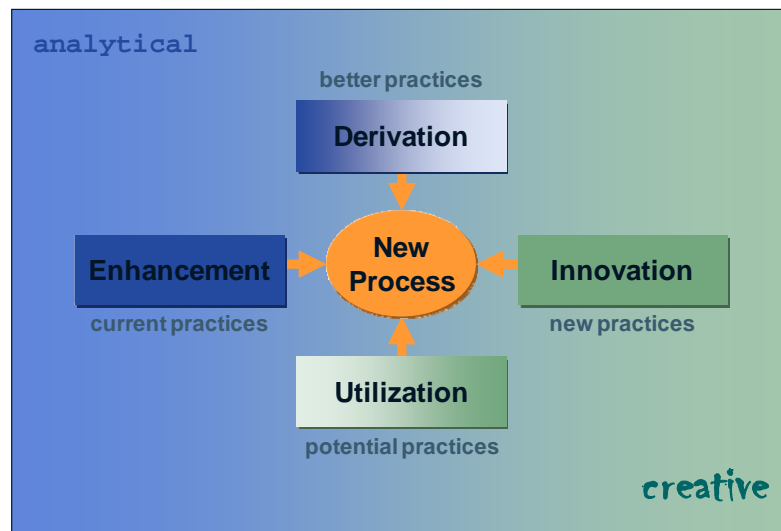
What we don't want is to be dependent on project team members "having a good day" to come up with an interesting idea. This process needs to be predictable, reliable, and repeatable. If we are relying on serendipity to generate great ideas for change then we will mostly be disappointed.

A structured way of discovering possible process change ideas, developed by Leonardo Consulting, is the 4Dimensions Model.

Exploring all of the Dimensions

The model suggests that process redesign ideas can come from four different dimensions with a mix of analytical and creative thinking. Redesign patterns are suggested across the Enhancement, Innovation, Utilization, and Derivation dimensions. The many redesign patterns identified are generic descriptions of changes that might be made. They form a powerful mechanism for thinking differently about the problem and the solution. To find the remarkable solutions we often need to trick our minds into thinking differently, to find a new perspective from which to assess the possibilities.

A comprehensive set of redesign patterns provides a predictable, reliable, and repeatable framework for idea generation.



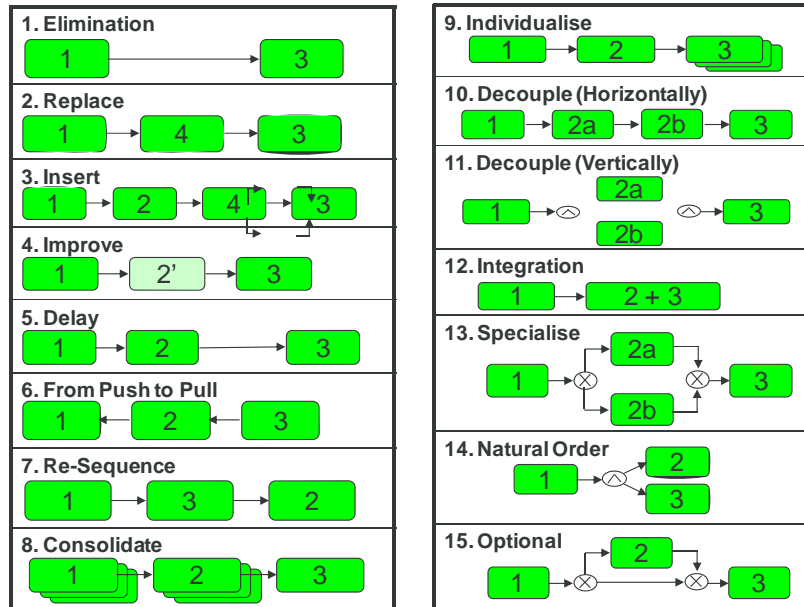
The model combines ideas about the degree of change and the source of ideas. In the change spectrum, redesign patterns range from Enhancement (improving the way things are done) to Innovation (changing what is done). In the sourcing spectrum, the patterns range from Utilization

(making the most of what is available) to Derivation (learning from what others have done). A summary of the redesign patterns from each dimension is presented below.

Enhancement

Enhancement patterns are one of four types: Flow, Object, Customer, Resource.

Flow patterns are shown here, using simple processes with three subprocesses 1, 2 and 3.



Object patterns include

- Eliminate objects
- Substitute objects
- Digitalize objects
- Harmonize objects
- Separate objects
- Design for process

Customer patterns include

- Empower customer
- Disempower customer
- Eliminate customer
- Individualize customer
- Consolidate customer
- Involve customers early
- Involve customers late

Resource patterns include

- Increase resources
- Reduce (eliminate) resources
- Engage different resources
- Standardize resources
- Improve resources
- Involve resources early
- Involve resources late

Innovation

In the Innovation dimension, there are seven master patterns:

- **Reimagine** – drawing on the work of Michael Hammer, especially in “Deep Change,” Harvard Business Review, April 2004.
- **Stimulate** – finding analogies and metaphors
- **Question** – questioning everything and challenging assumptions
- **Crowd sourcing** – creating opportunities for customers to design their own products
- **Crowd serving** – providing infrastructure to enable self service
- **Crowd solving** - outsourcing idea generation via an open call

Utilization

In the Utilization dimension we pose these three questions:

- *What elements of the process could we use in better ways?*
- *What elements of the process could we use in different ways?*
- *What new elements could we introduce into the process?*

It poses these questions of three elements (people, systems, data) to create the Process Utilization Matrix.

| | People | Data | Systems |
|-----------|--|--|--|
| Better | Make better use of the experience and expertise of staff, customers and suppliers. | Make better use of data assets. | Maximise the return on existing systems. |
| Different | Use people in different roles; involve people differently. | Use existing data differently; derive new data from existing data. | Use existing systems in different ways to improve performance. |
| New | Involve new people in process analysis, redesign and execution. | Obtain new data relating to process performance. | Introduce new systems to improve performance or product/service range. |

The Utilization dimension is about making the most of what is available. The Process Utilization Matrix facilitates careful consideration of how the people, data, and systems currently in use might be used better or differently and how new capabilities might be added.

Derivation

Isaac Newton said, “*If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants².*” Seems like good advice. The Derivation dimension is about exactly that – learning from what others have done. There are four general patterns involved:

- Reference Models – using open or proprietary models for idea generation
- Benchmarking – seeking actual or conceptual examples of similar circumstances
- Case Studies – drawing on the published information about successful process change
- Other Sources - study tours, syndicated studies, papers, conferences, user groups

There are few new problems, and many examples of how others have addressed them.

² Isaac Newton (1642-1727). Letter to Robert Hooke, February 5, 1675

In Summary

Key to getting the best process improvement outcome is to uncover all the problems and their causes and then to flush out all of the possible process change ideas. We need to cull from a long list and avoid the possibility that we are culling from a short list that fails to include the best options. Process improvement is not about making lists of the obvious. It's about knowing what problem we are trying to solve and pushing the envelope to find all the possible change ideas and then choosing the best.

The 4Dimensions model is one way of increasing the chances that, at least occasionally, the results will be remarkable.

I'd love to hear your opinions. Do you have a remarkable process improvement story you would like to share? Let's continue the discussion at the BPTrends Discussion LinkedIn group or you can contact me at r.tregear@leonardo.com.au.

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