Tips for a good process workshop

Process workshops are booming! Reason: Process workshops are not only important as a one-time instrument but their strength lies mainly in the continued exploration – together – of the process within an existing organizational structure. Together, identifying small improvements again and again and putting them into place. Together, learning again and again to look at customer-oriented processes and to continually examine these anew. Together, searching for bottlenecks and opportunities to improve. And every time, looking at the integrated process anew.

<mark>Update May 2020</mark>

With the COVID-19 crisis many of us have to work remote. A process workshop can be very well done remotely. At the bottom of this whitepaper you'll find extra tips in case you have to do a remote workshop.

In this whitepaper we focus on the process workshop itself, with or without support from the right software. In the workshops we use a 7-step approach, which we will also use for the chapters of this whitepaper.

The 7 steps of a process workshop:

1. Organization of the workshop;
2. The first workshop: drawing the IST together;
3. Post-workshop;
4. The 2nd session: insight into the process;
5. Discussion of general improvement methods;
6. Design of the desired situation;
7. The implementation begins after the workshops.

1. Organization of the workshop

- *Select a process that really matters.* Use, preferably, a *customer process* where all concerned understand that an improvement can benefit everyone.
- *Always plan the process workshop at the beginning of the improvement path.* As soon as a team has discussed its processes in a workshop, this serves as an outline for all further discussions about organization, systems, compliance issues, and so on. By all means, don't first talk for months on end about all sorts of aspects at the

individual level. If you do that, the subsequent process will lack a common reference framework.

- *Set up a brainstorming space.* If this is a meeting room, then make it informal. Make sure that the team can get close to the board or screen that will be used for the discussion.

- *Provide a large board or screen* when using a digital tool. A projector can often be used to display a large picture. A 'large TV' is often too small to represent a comprehensive process well and then make it open to discussion.

- *Have two people lead the workshop.* Often four fields of expertise come together during a session: workshop facilitation, process management, domain knowledge and the operation of any tools. If it goes well – and that is often the case right away – then one person can no longer handle all these activities well. Pay attention! The workshop advisors must themselves not have <u>too much</u> domain knowledge. The content of the discussion must come from the participants.

- *Set a maximum of 8 to 12 participants* Ensure that *all roles* within the process, from beginning to end, are directly represented. Direct – so not via the managers but by those who actually carry out the process. Pay attention that there are not too many staff members, not even from IT. Otherwise, employees can feel that they are being watched.

- *Organize the first session for a time period of 3 to 4 hours.* This provides sufficient time for an initial inventory of the process. The concentration (span) is also then coming to an end.

- *Let the owner of the process do the kickoff.* Explain here *why* the process can be better, *what* can be better and *how*. Also, make it clear that the team has the mandate to identify these improvements and to enact them. What does the process owner expect of everyone and when can who report about what? Try to make the link between the improvement objectives of the process and the general strategy or position of the organization.

- *Ask a participating manager, if present, to limit him or herself to the main steps.* Show respect for the knowledge that the team has about the detail steps.

- *Always start from the current situation: the IST or the AS IS.* Do this even when you want to map a new situation. Place the current situation first, so the team can better experience the existing divisions of tasks, bottlenecks, etc.

2. The first workshop: drawing the IST together

The team is present. The projector is on or the brown paper is hanging on the wall. And then? Start with the most obvious. Draw the process with each other, step by step.

- *Describe WHAT happens.* Do this in simple language and active form and make it immediately visible as a process step. Use a verb or verb form and a noun. So: 'customer call' or 'call the customer'. Don't go into too much detail. So, don't describe HOW the task will be done.
- *Always directly link a role to the activity.* And, especially, let this role tell the story.
  - *How long do you take?* Make note of the experience with the processing time.
  - *How often does this occur?* Note the frequency.
  - *At which moment?* Note whether the action occurs the same day as the previous step, or a day later, or X times per week.

  The discussion of this processing time, frequency and moment are important for two reasons: (1) it increases the perception of this process step as well as the entire process, and (2) you can use it later to help calculate. It's definitely not about the exactness of the data. It is no scientific study. The first and spontaneous empirical data are good, because these reflect the experience of the participants.
- *Do not use existing process descriptions.* These process descriptions are often made by department staff and lack the detail level of the work floor.
- *Focus on role changes.* There is much hidden in role changes. Is it true that all those cases go to you? No? What happens then?
- *Make waiting times separately visible.* If a participant indicates that his/her task begins the following day, then show a waiting time of 1 day. The lead time for many processes is namely determined for a large part by waiting for the transfer from one person to the next. By making it visible, you give the team a handle on shortening the lead times without anyone having to work harder.
- *Map exceptions.* Does this always happen? If not, then map what does happen and how often. Discussion of the exceptions is an important element. That's because the sum of the exceptions is often greater than the 'clean case'. Many exceptions in company processes run through the entire normal process PLUS a couple of extra steps. And because they are exceptions, they require extra steps and more energy than 'regular' process steps. They disturb the rhythm, they stand still longer, etc. In short, if we want to improve company processes, then it's precisely the exceptions that are fascinating!
- *Split into 'good' and 'not good'.* Approval is a split. Many processes have one or more checks or approvals. That actually means that there is always a 'not good' branch. Don't forget to make this split visible and to indicate what percentage fall-out we're talking about here, so what goes to the 'not good' branch.
- *Note simple empirical data.* Again: it is not necessary to use scientifically correct figures! When this is the case, you can always refine the numbers later.

- *Don't write down too many details.* Especially with the focus in recent years on IT systems, we have the tendency to note input, output, names of the IT systems, documents, etc. This level of detail is not needed initially and can always be added later.
- *Note whether a step adds value for the customer.* If the step is not value-adding, then you may already now have a suggestion for improvement. Why do we do this? Many process steps have crept in over time and once had a good reason. Is that reason still good and valid?
- Do not draw a swimlane but rather a value stream. Many of us learned to draw processes mainly in swimlanes. This indicates how the process runs from department to department. But these swimlanes actually emphasize the sense of department and often make the discussion too complex for a workshop. Keep it simple and focused on the customer. Go through the process as the customer experiences it, independent of the departments that are involved. You can always look at swimlanes later, per department, per location, per IT system and so on.
- *Note suggestions.* Keep track of comments, complaints and suggestions, preferably in a separate field and per process step. Look especially at 'Quick Wins'.

3. Post-workshop

In the first process workshop, all information is collected and the *IST* is created in about 3 to 4 hours. If team members are discussing a process for the first time, then organize a follow-up session after 3 or 4 days. In the meantime, the team members will do a reality check. They will pay attention to, for example, the frequencies of processing time, realize that there are more exceptions, and so on, without this requiring much extra work. It provides great new insights for the follow-up session.

4. The 2nd session: insight into the process

In the second session, the team works on improving their insight. This is done based on the information obtained in the first session. More experienced teams can already develop insights into the processes directly at the end of the first session.

- *Look at the statistics.* How many activities, how many role changes, how many splits, how many roles are there in the process?
- *Look at it from various angles.* Is it possible to tilt the process? Look now in swimlanes: swimlanes per location, per IT system, per input and output, etc. Do we get new insights, more bottlenecks, more Quick Wins?
- *Calculate.* What is the lead time for the customer and how much time do we put into that period ourselves? This can be confrontational. Processes definitely don't always have to be performed immediately, but by shortening the lead time, there are almost always great advantages to be had.

- *Summarize Quick Wins.* Look at the list of Quick Wins and try to judge these based on *impact* and *feasibility*. Which Quick Win does the team embrace the most?
- *Publish all the work. Don't let anyone go home empty-handed.* There is nothing worse than a workshop where, a few weeks later, the participants wonder what was achieved. Work preferably with a tool that allows the team to use it for modeling as well as take away the results in exactly that format. The transfer from brown paper to, for example, a Visio or PowerPoint slide will unmistakably lead to a lower sense of ownership for the participants.

5. Discussion about general improvement methods

After mapping the current situation, it can be handy to brainstorm with the same group about improvement methods. Are they clear to the team? Concepts such as shortening lead times, performing actions in parallel, auditing the source, removing steps that don't add value, combining or eliminating tasks, standardizing, reducing batch sizes, etc. A simulation can be very helpful here. Perhaps some members of the team, often internal staff members, have already had experience with improvement concepts and trainings but the ideas and their advantages are not easily recognized by all team members. The discussion of these concepts is thus important to increase the acceptance and involvement of the team.

Improvements from within or from an advisor?

The best suggestions come from within, from the bottom. The trained advisors often quickly see lots of improvement possibilities. But they must not mention these! The acceptance and practical applicability of ideas are much greater when they come from the team itself. And after all, it's not about how many ideas you can collect in the first step; it's about continual improvement in the long term. So, try to explain improvement concepts to the team members and see which ones they find suitable to the written process.

6. Design of the desired situation

- *Improve the current situation or start with a clean slate?* There is much to say for both methods. The great advantage in the improvement of the current situation is that, in so doing, the team makes a step toward continual improvement. Look critically together at what you were doing and try to find small improvement steps. This is often very doable. By contrast, the design of a completely new process often requires much more preparatory work.

- *Look at all Quick Wins and other improvement concepts discussed.* Look at the list from the first workshops and hang the list on the wall. Also hang up the list of general improvement concepts.
- *Introduce improvements step by step and calculate them directly.* See what the impact of a specific improvement is on the process model. That motivates! Naturally, we focus here especially on the objectives that were mentioned at the kickoff by the process owner.

7. The implementation begins after the workshops

It is important for teams to know and feel that they have not done their work for no reason. The goal of a process workshop must not be limited to the documentation of a process. It is mainly about what we can do with it in practice, and the motivation of teams to put their own suggestions into place is often significant!

- *Select a number of improvements and implement them.* Don't spend too much time on finding improvements. It is recommended to identify a few that can be realized in the short term. Discuss the implementation and ask permission to introduce these improvements.
- *Publish all the work, again.* The same is true in each phase of the improvement cycle: keep people involved and ensure that they take all information with them to the workplace.
- *Finally, celebrate success.* Reflect on the fact that, with teamwork, you have found improvement methods in a short period of time!

And: AGAIN. The best process workshops are those where the teams have experience and the opportunity to look at their processes again!

NEW: The remote process workshop

Our Modeler is well suited for remote process workshops where participants are not all gathered in one room. You need to use a video conference application like Zoom or Microsoft Teams in addition to the Modeler.

Layout of the Modeler workspace

To get the participants optimally involved in the workshop you have to use a crisp and easy screen. You only show the panels that are essential: Process steps, Process window, Description field and Remarks field. Also use the 'Full Screen' mode (F11) to hide the browser that you are using. See the example:
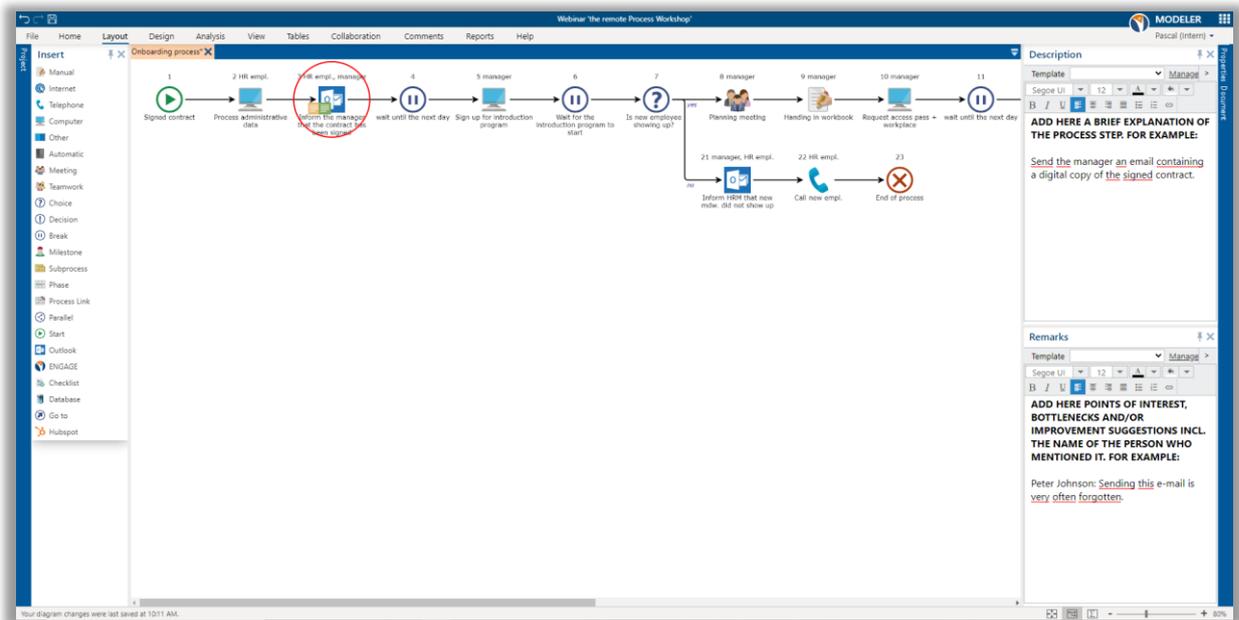
Next, you use the field 'Description' to highlight, only if needed, in a few sentences what is done in this specific process step.

The use of the 'Remarks' field is very important! Even more so than during a boardroom-workshop. Here you take note of any suggestion, comment and/or critical issue made by participants. Start the comment with listing the name of the participant. You show their participation and make it personal!

Preparation of the remote workshop

Organize the remote meeting and invite a <u>maximum</u> of 1 participant for each role in the process. You can use the brainstorm module and Engage Brainstorm App of the Modeler to gather information beforehand. For example, you can ask for which process steps the process has or which roles are involved in executing the process. This helps to build involvement. You can also do a brainstorm between the workshop in which you've mapped the "As Is" and the workshop in which you're going to map the "To Be" situation of the process. Between these workshops you can collect current bottlenecks, but also improvement suggestions.

The workshop itself

- The remote process workshop should also be done by 2 people. One person to use the Modeler and one as chairman/host of the meeting. The host needs to monitor the chat function of Zoom/Teams and decide who is talking.
- Start the session with all cameras active. Participants can see who is there!
- Let the participants do the talking. They can indicate via the chat if they want to contribute.

- Use the cameras at the end of the meeting again to share team conclusions and waving good-bye.

Next

After the meeting you <u>share</u> the process to the Engage Process Viewer. Participants can study the process and use the Feedback function to give input. Always organize a 2nd session to finalize the model and to inventory what needs to be done to get the new process/service going.

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In collaboration with the entire Engage Process team| May 2020

About Engage Process

Engage Process has been developing process management software for over 25 years. This software is combined in the Engage Process Suite. The Suite is used by many organisations for all aspects of process management, including compliance, improvement, new service design, transformations etc.

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