

BALANCE THE THREE PROCESS COMPONENTS: PLAN • PERFORM • MANAGE



A process requires three separate but interdependent efforts. First, there's the need for planning. Next comes performance, or execution. The third effort involves measurement and management support. The power of the overall process depends on a healthy balance between all three.

Historically, most of the effort invested in process improvement has been spent on component #2: *Perform*. Organizations polish their process execution to a high sheen. They eliminate unnecessary steps. They reduce the number of handoffs. They minimize the amount of time wasted on low-value-adding work. Eventually, the process itself becomes a work of art. Problem is, this bright and shiny process that's receiving so much attention is more or less an orphan. Both the front-end effort (planning) and the back-end work (measurement and management

support) are missing to a large degree. As a result, the process is misdirected . . . disconnected from the company strategy . . . or impotent due to a lack of follow through.

This tendency to over-focus on process execution is unfortunate. Organizations spend roughly 80 to 90 percent of their time there. But our experience suggests that the greatest opportunities for gain exist in the other two areas.

Take planning. Why invest more time and effort there? Well, this increases the odds that the process will be pointed in the right direction. It's an alignment issue. Good planning ensures that the process is linked to the organization's overall business strategy. That's essential. Because even an outstanding process can still be of very questionable

value if it's off target in serving the company's higher-level goals. Likewise, careful planning is necessary to link the goals of your process to other core processes in the organization. No process exists in isolation—it exists within a system of processes.

Planning also helps sort out precisely what you want a process to do. Set clear performance expectations up front, and you're in a position to measure outcomes. You need to know exactly what you're shooting for, and communicate it very clearly to all the people involved. Without that, any attempt at measurement later on is a rather worthless endeavor.

On the heels of planning and execution, the process needs measurement and management support. You analyze data. You review results. You make adjustments to improve the process' effectiveness going forward. The idea here is to dispassionately critique process outcomes, proceeding according to sound logic instead of managing by gut feel. No more going on guesswork in trying to improve the process. You rely on disciplined measurement to remove the emotion from the situation. Instead of being subjective, or playing a hunch, you can react to real problems.

Okay, so how do these duties compare with what you're accustomed to doing? Managers often struggle with what their role should be in the process-oriented scheme of things. They ask questions like, "What do I do? What's my role? How do I contribute now?" Some wonder if they'll become obsolete, since so many traditional management activities get pushed down for people to perform at lower levels.

No reason to worry. Don't disengage. There's plenty of work to go around.

In a process-focused organization, you earn your paycheck by focusing your attention and skills on planning. On measurement and management support. On synchronizing your process with the rest of the total system.

Done right, it's full-time duty. And it positions you to contribute even more to the organization's overall success.

Concepts in this paper are from the Rummler-Brache Process Improvement Certification Workshop.

