

How process mapping can enhance council performance

The Managing Director of the Australian Continuous Improvement Group, **GERARD COLLA**, details how local government managers can use the technique of process mapping to improve the delivery of council services and enhance staff productivity.

What does bricklaying have to do with local government improvement? A lot, if you follow the pedigree of one of the most effective and common improvement techniques available.

In 1885, a 17-year-old by the name of Frank Gilbreth joined a New England firm of contractors and builders as a bricklayer.

An astute young man, Gilbreth noticed that each bricklayer used a slightly different way of constructing his part of the wall, even though they all arrived at the same result.

He also noticed that the way they demonstrated the job to him was not the same as they used throughout the day.

Gilbreth continued to study the process and by the age of 22 had refined it to such an extent that it enabled bricklayers to lay bricks faster and with less effort and fatigue than ever before.

Gilbreth became a management engineer and with his wife, Lillian, an industrial psychologist, went on to study the work habits of employees in all sorts of industries to find ways to increase productivity and make their jobs easier.

Frank and Lillian also had 12 children whom they used as guinea pigs for testing out their ideas for improving efficiency and productivity. Their family life became immortalised in first the book and later the film *'Cheaper by the Dozen'*.

In 1921, the Gilbreths made a presentation to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers called "Process Charts: First Steps in Finding the One Best Way to Do Work", and thus one of the most effective and popular improvement techniques – process mapping – was born.

What is Process Mapping?

Process mapping, also known as flow charting, is a powerful technique that visually depicts how each step in a process leads to the final product or service output.

It is used by many organisations, including local government, to continuously improve service delivery performance as well as staff productivity.

The saying "a picture is worth a thousand words" is an apt description of the power of process mapping.

Each symbol in the map represents a step in the process. In the hands of an experienced map reader, a process map can highlight wasteful practices and identify opportunities for improvement.

Why Process Map?

It has been estimated that people working in administrative functions or service organisations spend about 40% to 50% of their time dealing with waste, eg re-doing things that are wrong, chasing things, querying incomplete instructions, doing other people's jobs, and so on. These practices occur in even the best organisations.

Imagine if you could reduce the wasteful practices in your organisation. How much more productive would your staff be? What would be the impact on service levels and customer satisfaction? Process mapping can deliver these improvements.

Process Mapping at Port Phillip Council

Here is a recent example of how process mapping was used in the City of Port Phillip in Victoria.

The Manager of City Development, Business Support and Systems Development, Mr Rick Bottiglieri, wanted to review the Archive and Retrieval Service within the Planning and Building Department.

The department was preparing to move to a new premises and it was an ideal time to consider opportunities to improve service delivery.

A secondary reason for reviewing the processes was that staff were having difficulty keeping up with the workload and Rick wanted to assess whether any productivity gains were possible before considering additional resources.

Two Records Officers – Steve and Athina – worked with an experienced process mapping facilitator to review their processes.

Their first task was to identify every step in each of their processes, mapping them exactly as they are carried out now.

They used functional process maps which highlight the contributions from the different stakeholders involved in the process.

They also collected data such as how many records were processed each day, the number of planning requests, typical delays in getting things done, and so on.

Finally, for each process, they produced a map of the current situation, called an AS-IS map. The AS-IS maps turned out to be more complex than anyone expected, which led to more questions and further investigation into some practices. For example:

- The process maps highlighted that the Records Officers spend a lot of time following up requests because they do not have the correct information. This shortfall in information is only discovered well into the process and long after the customer has submitted the application form. Not only did going back to the customer to clarify information waste the record officers' time, it was annoying to the customer. This led the team to investigate how they can capture all the information they need at the time the customer submits a request.

- Another issue the team found was that planners often access the filing system themselves but may not record the retrieval of a file correctly. This leads to considerable time wasted when a Records Officer later tries to find a file that a planner has taken. This led the team to question the security of the filing system and the robustness of their access procedures.

The team did a lot of questioning and identified many ways to improve their processes.

Some of their recommendations were simple changes that could be implemented in the short term, others were longer term.

The team then developed TO-BE maps, which are a picture of what a process could look like if it were operating efficiently and effectively.

The team is now implementing their improvement recommendations. As well as measures to improve service, they are removing a number of process steps that add little value but consume a considerable amount of the Records Officers' time.

Freeing up their time enables them to deal with more applications, which means additional people are unlikely to be needed to cope with the workload.

Steve and Athina found the exercise challenging because they had to work through and question every step of each of their processes.

They also had to commit considerable time to the exercise, which meant they had to fit in their normal work around the mapping sessions.

The biggest impact for Steve, however, was to see how complicated his processes were when mapped out.

Until then, he did not fully realise where he spent his time and how many variables influenced the outcome.

For Rick, as manager of the area, the exercise had a number of benefits:

- It involved the Records Officers in analysing their own processes and developing improvement recommendations, which not only improved the quality of service but also led to productivity gains.

- The TO-BE maps have been particularly useful because they show clearly what each process will look like when the recommendations have been implemented. Rick says that he regularly shows his staff the TO-BE maps to remind them of where they are going.

- Mapping their processes made the team question why they do the things they do. In some cases the answer was because 'we've always done it like this'. When they really thought about it, some of the things they do actually do not add much value - so they stopped doing them.

Although it is only one part of Port Phillip's ongoing improvement efforts, process mapping is allowing staff to take a critical look at the way they work and come up with ways to improve their processes that will lead to better customer service as well as increased efficiencies.

Tips for successful Process Mapping

Process mapping is a powerful way to improve an organisation's performance. Here are some tips to get the most out of process mapping:

1. Include representatives from all those who work in and around the process:

- Those who do the work – the process experts.
- The Suppliers to the process.
- The Customers of the process.
- The Owner of the process.



Port Phillip's Steve & Rick review the process maps

2. Use an experienced process mapper to facilitate the team. Although it looks simple, it takes some experience to extract the most out of a process mapping exercise, so use someone with experience to guide the team.

3. Map every step of a process, even if it seems trivial or inconsequential. Inexperienced mappers tend to make decisions on the run about the importance of each step and leave out steps they have decided will not have any impact on the final result. Every step should be drawn and then challenged only after the whole map is drawn. That way the inter-relationship between different steps can be considered.

4. Analyse every step and ask:

- Why are we doing it?
- Is it essential to do this?
- If it is essential how could we do it better?

Look for waste in the process. Waste can mean:

- Re-working something not done right the first time;
- Unnecessary forms/paperwork/reports;
- Not having access to the right equipment;
- Working from unreliable or inaccurate information;
- Dealing with mis-directed phone calls or mail;
- Doing things that you've found others are also doing/have done;

- Dealing with problems caused by others not doing their job correctly first time;
- Bottlenecks of work, or excessive delay/movement of work;
- Excessive travel;
- Fire fighting and dealing with symptoms rather than causes;
- Having to obtain unnecessary authorisation;
- Attending unnecessary or poorly managed meetings.

5. Draw a picture of how the process should look if it was efficient and effective. This TO-BE map then becomes the target to aim for and the recommendations to get there become your roadmap for change.

Process mapping is a powerful technique being used by many local governments as part of their continuous improvement strategy.

Gilbreth's legacy has been to leave us a technique that is simple to use yet can yield enormous results.

For local government, this means improved service delivery and greater staff productivity. Not bad for someone who started by studying the humble trade of bricklaying!

For further information about the Australian Continuous Improvement Group phone (03) 9650 7222 or visit www.acig.com.au