TOOL 10

Process Mapping

Overview

Processes are a series of connected steps or actions taken to achieve a particular goal or outcome. In healthcare, this could include admitting a patient or issuing a medical device (e.g. a four-wheeled frame)

A process map (or flowchart) is a visual representation of the people, tasks and decisions that make up a specific process. It is a useful tool for breaking down complexity within a system and assisting in the development of a team's shared view of that system. It also helps you understand each step in the current process and identify potential bottlenecks, waste, errors, and variation that may occur in a process. It is important to understand the process as it currently operates when developing ideas about how to improve it.

What can a process map show?

- What waste exists in a process.
- If the process can be simpler, faster, less confusing, more efficient.
- If there are any unnecessary steps in a process.
- Bottlenecks or points where things slow down.
- Whether there are any steps where errors commonly occur.
- The potential risks of changing the process.
- Variation in how different people do the same process.

Types of Process Maps

High-level flow

High-level flow is the simplest form of system or process description. They provide a helicopter view of the process, show the basic steps of the process and help visualise where to focus. High-level flow is the first step in process mapping to establish a shared vision of the process. If it contains more than eight blocks or steps, consider either simplifying or redefining boundaries.

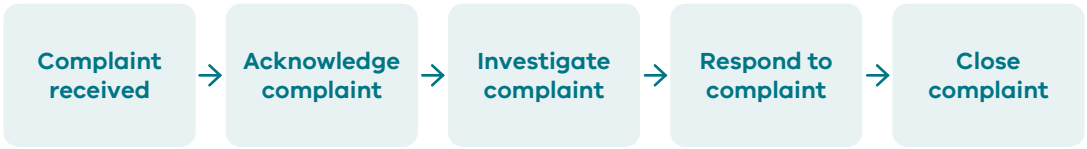


Figure 1: Structure of a driver diagram

Detailed process map

Detailed process maps illustrate each step of a process, including decision points, sub-processes, and points where documentation or data is required. They allow the project team to engage key stakeholders and identify steps that may be impractical and in need of change.

Example process map:

Comsumer complaints process

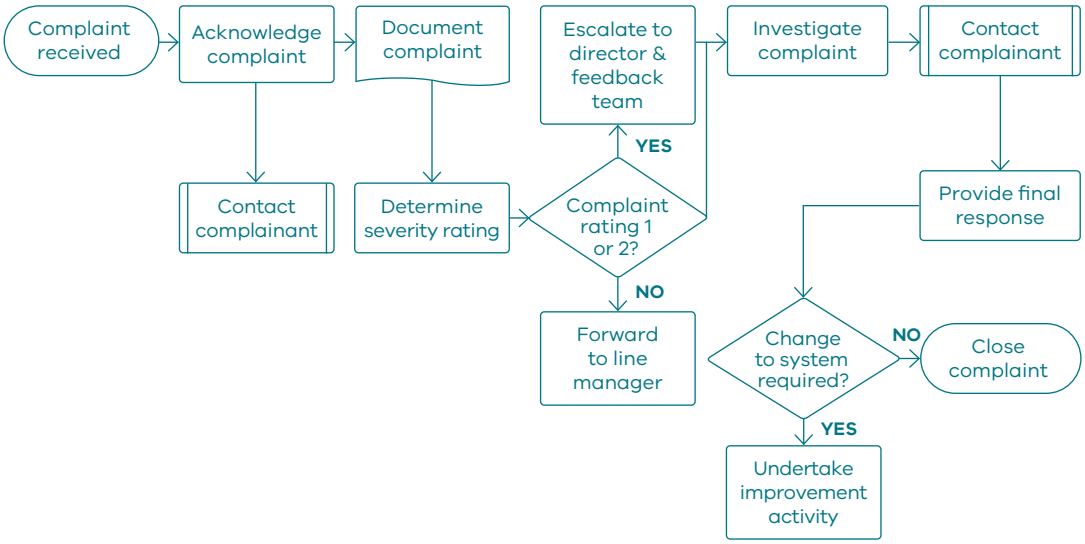


Figure 2: Example of a detailed process map

How to create a process map

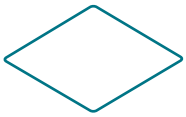
1. Define the process to be visualised.
2. Invite key stakeholders (those most affected by and involved in the process) to participate in the process mapping exercise.
3. Consult with process participants and/or conduct observations of the process.
4. Define the boundaries.
5. Identify the activities that take place.
6. Arrange the activities in proper sequence from first to last.
7. Draw arrows to show the flow of the process.
8. Review the process map with others involved in the process (workers, supervisors, suppliers, consumers)
9. Discuss the different experiences of the process to help identify areas for improvement.
10. Identify any problem areas (e.g. bottlenecks) for improvement and change ideas.

Remember: It's unlikely that a single individual has a clear view of an entire complex system. When developing a process map, enlist the help of team members who are familiar with different aspects and have different experiences of the system under review.

It is recommended that project teams initially draft process maps collaboratively using whiteboards or wall pads and post-its. The process map can then be transcribed electronically using software such as Microsoft Visio, PowerPoint or online resources such as Miro.

Common process mapping symbols

Table 1: Data reference

Symbol	Name	Description
	**Start/end points**	Indicates the beginning and end of the process.
	**Process/task**	Documents each high-level step to get from the start to the end of the process.
	**Sub-process**	Shows a series of actions related to a specific task which is part of a higher-level process.
	**Decision point**	The point at which a decision needs to be made. The arrows from the decision shape are usually labelled either yes, no, true or false.
	**Connector/arrow**	Shows the direction of process flow and can only point in one direction.
	**Document**	Indicates a process step that generates a document or report.
	**Data**	Represents material or information entering (input) or leaving (output) the process. For example, receiving a report is an input and generating a report is an output.

Additional resources

To learn more about Quality Improvement you can access the following resources:

- SCV Quality Improvement Toolkit
- IHI Flowchart Video 1 (8mins)
- IHI Flow Chart Video 2 (7mins)
- Tom Wujec: Got a wicked problem? First, tell me how you make toast (9mins)
- NSW Clinical Excellence Commission Quality Improvement Tools

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