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BUSINESS

PROCESS REDESIGN

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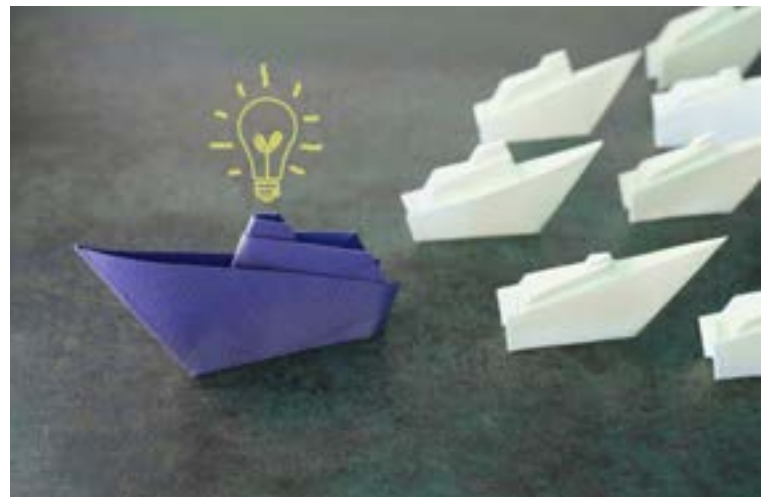
BUILT FOR SPEED

The right redesign can transform not only processes, but your ability to compete and win for the long term

PROCESS REDESIGN IS MORE THAN A BAND-AID

The term can be simultaneously tantalizing and terrifying. Business process redesign promises to deliver increased operating efficiencies that can address pain points, improve customer and vendor relations, increase productivity and employee satisfaction, and create a more agile, competitive company. It's also a time-consuming and daunting endeavor. But with the right approach, the investment can increase your company's capacity to anticipate and respond to industry trends and market opportunities.

To make it a cornerstone of your business playbook, you need to begin by understanding what process redesign can accomplish. One rationale is to put your company in a power position and strengthen its competitive advantage. Another is to address specific operating challenges, such as customer complaints



or persistent glitches in the decision-making process. Or perhaps existing processes are causing the company to overspend in the wrong places.

Redesign can help the company to consolidate and streamline processes, save money, and optimize use of its workforce. “It’s a strategic decision to position

you better—to develop greater competitive advantage,” says Paula Cope, M.Ed., president and CEO of [Cope & Associates, Inc.](#) and a faculty member at the University of Vermont’s Grossman School of Business. “And there are so many more options for how you can change a process now rather than just rearranging people or bringing in some technology or taking out some wait time.”



That said, process redesign isn’t a quick fix, and it’s not a means of addressing an immediate operating problem. Even when a pain point creates a crisis, you can’t plan a process redesign reactively in response to

that crisis. You can’t do it in panic mode. Rather, you must look dispassionately at the process redesign, even if it was precipitated by a crisis.

“Revamping a process does not dictate patch-up jobs,” says [Aciron Consulting, Inc.](#) founder and CEO Puneet Gangal. “You have to look at where you can create efficiencies. Identify flaws, gaps, and all the manual handshakes that are happening between resources and the teams that are related to that process. You cannot do a complete overhaul of a process when something has already failed. Improving and fixing don’t go hand in hand.”

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The process begins by identifying one or two critical pain points that need long-term resolution. Gangal offers the example of a company whose growth goals are being constrained by a lack of revenue. What’s the source of that problem? Is the sales process flawed? Are there distribution or supply chain issues? Drill down to the specific processes that are creating the problem you need to address, he says, and make sure you’re not confusing wants with needs.

“You need to validate that what you are observing is in fact a pain point,” he says. “You validate that yes, that’s really the problem. The next step is identifying inefficiencies or gaps in the process. Then you need to define the set of activities that you need to follow to be able to do that. Sometimes it depends on the process that you’re evaluating.”

He adds that as you’re evaluating processes, you need to consider the human and technological elements that may be affecting their performance. Is the system driving the process, or is technology the enabler rather than the master? And in either scenario, what prompted the adoption of that technology? It’s essential to weigh each of these components in the course of assessing the process.

Another key factor is having a clear vision of where the business is going. This allows you to test prospective process redesigns for their ability to support and scale with the company’s evolution. At the same time, you’ll need to assess whether the company and its leadership have the appetite for change necessary to execute that evolution. The organization must be “willing to sustain whatever changes it decides to make,” Cope says. Otherwise, the danger is that individuals and departments will create workarounds that defeat the attempt to do things differently.

“In manufacturing, when you’re bringing in robots to take over an area, you’re doing something completely different. You can’t really sneak back into the old patterns,” she says. “But in an office environment, you can. Most people don’t really love change, so part of process redesign is really looking at how you sustain those changes and then measure their successes over time. You don’t

GETTING TEAM BUY-IN

Although Cope begins redesign projects by meeting with senior leaders, she stresses the importance of “the people who touch the process.” Successful implementation depends on training those people and ensuring that group dynamics and communication support the initiative.

Understand that process redesign takes your employees outside their comfort zone—or at least away from the familiar—and make educating them a part of the redesign process. Success will depend in part on showing them what impact the redesign will have on the organization, on departments, and on individuals and how each will benefit from the change.

Gangal recommends beginning by interviewing the end users. He thinks of them as teachers whose role is to educate the redesign team about the current process and make it easier to identify inefficiencies.

Once the team has created a redesign plan, it goes back to those end users to map out the recommendations and changes that emerged from those initial interviews and to invite additional feedback. “It’s a very iterative process. It’s highly interactive,” he says. “If they have a say in designing the new process, they’re more likely to come on board, and buy-in is one of the biggest success factors.”

have to know what software you're going to use or how many steps you're going to eliminate. But you have to consider vision and change.”

MAPPING PROCESSES

Verbal descriptions are a part of any teaching process, but their impact on learning can be limited. That's one of the challenges of taking process redesign from concept to implementation. End users may be told what's going to happen without fully understanding it, and misunderstanding can breed resistance to the changes that are coming.

Mind maps, storyboards, flow charts, and other visualization tools can help people to see what's happening and therefore have greater comfort and facility with the new process. It can also provoke additional valuable feedback and input during the planning stages. In a strictly verbal discussion, “they don't know what they don't know,” Gangal says.

Supplementing those exchanges with visuals can lead to additional disclosures and “a-ha moments.” This, in turn, leads to the development of a process design solution that delivers higher performance—because it's better, and because the end users were involved and invested in its success. Make sure to include in those exchanges anyone with a direct or indirect connection to the process so that, for example, the new sales process doesn't create headaches for the fulfillment team.



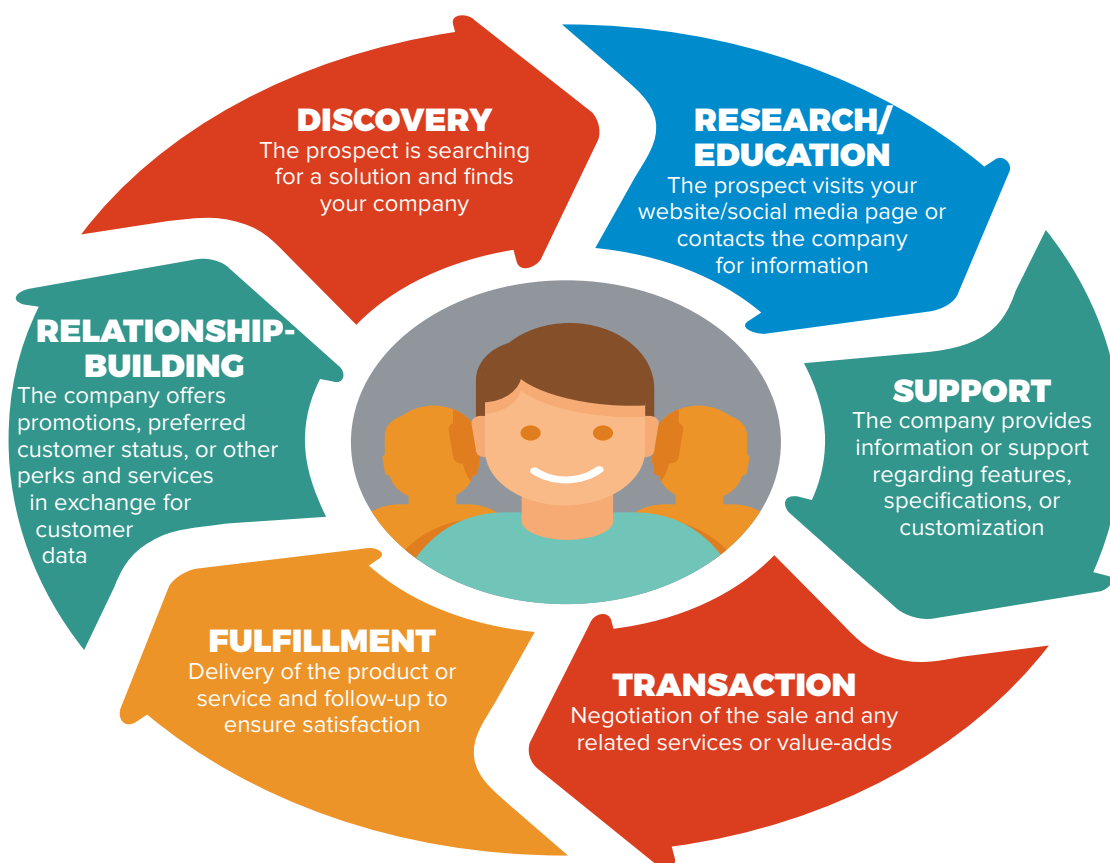
Mapping also makes it easier to compare scenarios and possible outcomes. Cope often maps long- and short-term solutions for clients who might not have the capital or human resources necessary to execute the total redesign immediately. In those cases, she'll outline interim steps that the company can take.

“We look at four ways we can make change,” she says. The first is incremental

and involves small things the company can do immediately. Second, she considers how it may be able to improve its use of existing technology and resources to “leapfrog” past a current challenge. The third approach requires more substantive change in thinking, performance, and solutions that will take the company’s competitive capacity to a new level. Finally, she says, “the fourth one would be that blue ocean where our competitors become irrelevant because we’re doing something so new and so innovative that we really don’t care what they’re doing.”

Part of the process of mapping and evaluating those options is weighing where the company wants to go with what it will take to get there, given considerations such as cost and labor requirements. Data plays a key role in making this assessment, “and then you do your models of the new process, which could be the long term or could be the interim,” she says. “You look again at many of the same metrics: Is it going to cost less? Are we going to do it with fewer people? Is there less opportunity for error? Is there more opportunity for a good customer experience? And then you make some choices based on what you see.”

SAMPLE PROCESS MAP





BUILDING YOUR PROCESS PLAYBOOK

As you continue to roll out process redesigns, you'll need some flexibility in the specifics of one solution versus another. But the underlying vision and principles should extend throughout the enterprise so they continue to serve as both a platform and a motor for overall performance.

How do you integrate individual departments' input into process redesigns without creating a patchwork quilt of inconsistent solutions?

Start with practical considerations, Gangal says. Make sure each redesign works with external processes and integrates seamlessly with the ecosystem. If this is your first redesign, make sure it has the scaling capacity you'll need during future rollouts. And make sure that each system aligns with and supports the organization's overall goals so that it's equipped to handle your current and emerging needs.

Adhering to these standards helps you to create a playbook for process management and provides everyone on the team with a reference point for navigating change. That's essential, Cope says, because regardless of the type of transformation, "every organization makes change one person at a time. You have to build a structure that maintains the new way."

By enlisting the input and support of your team, your company can identify not just challenges within the organization, but opportunities to improve processes and results. The impact of this approach has the potential to make your team more responsive to customer needs, nimbler in seizing new market opportunities, and more adept at fully exploiting vendor and partner relationships in pursuit of growth. It's not just a matter of redesigning processes. It's a strategy for transforming your company into a business that's better equipped to compete successfully across more verticals, in more regions, against bigger players, and so to convert its objectives into sustainable performance realities.

PROCESS REDESIGN RESOURCES

Use these online references and tools to learn more about the power of process

Process isn't just about the way you execute tasks or transactions. It's a cornerstone of your capacity for growth in a world where smaller players are no longer limited to smaller productivity or performance. When you think of process redesign as a tool for increased profitability, you begin to tap into its potential to strengthen customer and vendor relationships, help you make better use of data, and speed your time to market with new products and services. These online resources can help you learn to redesign both your processes and your approach to competition so that your company is equipped to achieve and sustain optimal performance.

COPE & ASSOCIATES, INC.

Founded in 1991, the firm works chiefly in the areas of organization development, strategic planning, succession planning, community engagement, and training and development. Its recent blog posts include:

- [When to Do Business Process Redesign](#)
- [Business Process Redesign Is a Team Sport](#)

ACIRON CONSULTING, INC.

The company, which was founded in 2006, offers business process reengineering, strategy consulting, business requirements analysis, concept to launch, and project initiation services. Recent topics covered on its blog include:

- [Save Some Green with Digital Workspace Optimization](#)
- [Why User Acceptance Testing is Critical to Software Development](#)

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Process mapping is a technique used to create a visual of current processes and potential process redesigns. This [Process Mapping](#) overview covers seven steps to constructing a process flow chart and includes a flow chart sample.

LUCIDCHART

The company, which markets an “intuitive and collaborative diagramming solution,” offers a variety of online resources, including:

- [What is process mapping?](#), which covers the purpose and benefits of process mapping, reviews types of mapping and symbols used, and outlines the process of creating a process map.
- [A process mapping tool.](#)
- [A template library](#), which offers hundreds of models your company can adapt to its mapping needs.

SMARTDRAW

This vendor of mapping and diagramming solutions offers these resources on its website:

- A [process documentation white paper](#) available for download in PDF format.
- [What is a Flowchart?](#), a guide to flowchart symbols and construction, with a link to online tools.
- Mapping examples illustrated in a [template library](#).

CAPTERRA

The company publishes software research, infographics, and guides to help your company compare solutions and aid in making software purchase decisions. Among the resources available on its website are reviews and roundups of:

- [CRM software](#)
- [Customer service/help desk software](#)
- [Finance software](#)
- [Human resources software](#)
- [Logistics software](#)
- [Project management software](#)

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

What's on the horizon for process redesign? The authors of [Business Processes Are Learning to Hack Themselves](#) report that “thanks to machine learning algorithms, it's becoming possible for smart software to scrutinize data from a variety of sources—sensors on machines or changes in supply chains, for instance—and redesign processes in real time.”