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Process Improvement: Understanding a Basic Approach

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Understanding a Basic Approach

Companion Guidebook to:
How to Be an Effective Analyst

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Introduction

This document focuses on the "life cycle" concept of creating or re-engineering a business process, protocol, or standard operating procedure. The life cycle of any such approach includes four phases: (1) the study phase, (2) the design phase, (3) the development phase, and (4) the operation phase. Each phase contains information gathering activities, performance specifications, management or user requirements, and documentation. The following sections will help you understand these activities as essential to process creation or improvement. Within this context, formal systems analysis plays a very important part as the premier "tool" of modern process development or improvement.

The Premier Concept of Process Improvement: Learn to identify what you are required to create or improve.

Very often, people who are engaged in the act of identifying the components of some type of business activity are unable to distinguish between the subtle differences in the classifications of "action." Action, as a human-engineered response to some management or production requirement, can be understood and described in three fundamental ways: as a *process*, as a *protocol*, or as a *standard operating procedure.* These three classifications of human action are not the same. Below, we define the three classifications with standard industry definitions.

Common Definitions of Specific Types of Human Action within business processes

PROCESS[1, 2]

What is a Process?

By definition, a "process" is a collection of interrelated tasks that solve a particular problem or resolve a particular issue. It constitutes a series of changes or functional activities that ultimately bring about some identifiable outcome. In this context, it is often a "collection" of recognizable operations that, when performed as described, result in a particular effect; that is, a well-defined process can produce *repeatable results*.[3]

proc·ess[1] (prŏs'ĕs', prō'sĕs')
n., *pl.* **proc·ess·es** (prŏs'ĕs'ĭz, prō'sĕs'-, prŏs'ĭ-sēz', prō'sĭ-).

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[1] Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia: Process Theory.

[2] Webster's On-line Dictionary: *Process,* also The Free Dictionary by FARLEX.

[3] A concept of any ITIL-compliant methodology.

- A series of actions, changes, or functions bringing about a result: the process of digestion; the process of obtaining a driver's license.
- A series of operations performed in the making or treatment of a product: a manufacturing process; leather dyed during the tanning process.
- A **business process** or **business method** is a collection of interrelated tasks, which solve a particular issue.

There are three types of business processes:

- Management processes, the processes that govern the operation of a system. Typical management processes include "Corporate Governance" and "Strategic Management."
- Operational processes, processes that constitute the core business and create the primary value stream. Typical operational processes are Purchasing, Manufacturing, Marketing, and Sales.
- Supporting processes, which support the core processes. Examples include Accounting, Recruitment, and IT-support.

A business process can be decomposed into several subordinate-processes which have their own attributes but also contribute to achieving the goal of the "super-process." The analysis of business processes typically includes the mapping of processes and subordinate-processes down to the activity level.

PROTOCOL[4, 5]

What is a Protocol?

A "protocol" is a set of rules or conventions that govern *context*—the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc. Protocols govern *procedures* and are often subsidiary components of processes narrowing the focus of activity to specific actions and encouraging uniform awareness of the nature of the context. Thus, protocols promote a common understanding from which we can reference the *intent* of activity within the scope of the context.

pro·to·col (prō'tə-kôl', -kōl', -kŏl') *n*.

The forms of ceremony and etiquette observed by diplomats and heads of state.

[4] Dictionary.com

[5] American Heritage Dictionary

A code of correct conduct: safety protocols; academic protocol.

The first copy of a treaty or other such document before its ratification.

A preliminary draft or record of a transaction.

The plan for a course of medical treatment or for a scientific experiment.

Computer Science A standard procedure for regulating data transmission between computers.

Also called ***protocol statement, protocol sentence, protocol proposition.***

Philosophy*: a statement reporting an observation or experience in the most fundamental terms without interpretation: sometimes taken as the basis of empirical verification, as of scientific laws.*

PROCEDURE[6]

What is a Procedure?

Again, by definition, a "procedure" is a series of enumerated steps taken to accomplish a specific task or to achieve a particular objective. Procedures are, very often, standardized making their manner of performance predictable and repeatable.[7] Procedures can stand alone as a set of rules to follow for achieving any specific outcome or they can be incorporated into a *protocol* that governs why, how, and when their execution must be determined necessary and/or appropriate.

pro·ce·dure (prə-sē'jər) *n.*

a) A manner of proceeding; a way of performing or affecting something: *standard procedure.*
b) A series of steps taken to accomplish an end: *a medical procedure; evacuation procedures.*
c) A set of established forms or methods for conducting the affairs of an organized body such as a business, club, or government.
d) *Computer Science.* A set of instructions that performs a specific task; a subroutine or function.

[6] Dictionary.com

[7] As in "ITIL-compliant" procedures.

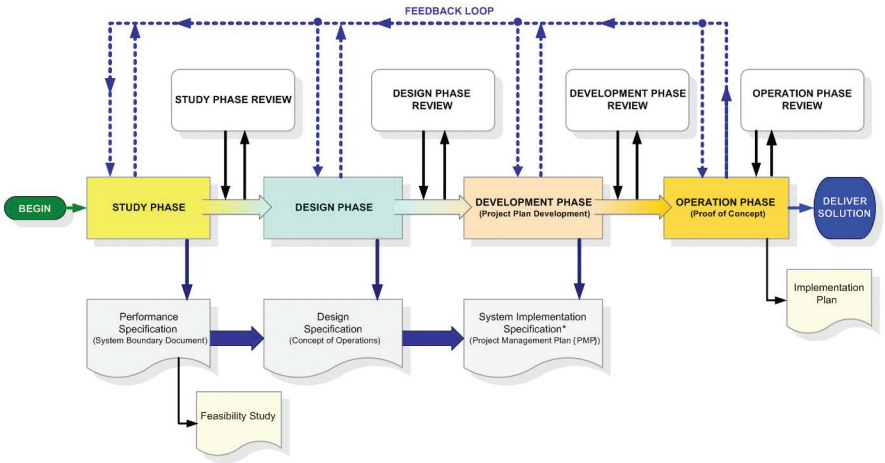
UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF A LIFE CYCLE[8]

In the context of an Information management system, processes, protocols, and procedures are created by a *dynamic* process that moves through a series of stages or "phases." The concept of a "life cycle" has evolved, over the years, to describe the relationship between these phases. This concept not only includes *forward* time motion but also the possibility of having to return, or "cycle back", to the activity previously completed. This "feedback" may occur because of the failure of the system to meet a real-world performance objective, or it may be the result of a user's "redefinition" of the original system objectives. When such feedback is permitted, the methodology is known to be "agile."

The key to modifying the life cycle concept for the management of information systems or the development processes within which protocols and procedures may reside is the observation that, while supporting documentation accompanies a "physical" end product throughout its development, documentation often *is* the end-product. This naturally leads to the identification of *four* major phases in the life cycle of a business process as it is developed. As illustrated in Figure 1, they are:

(1) The Study Phase
(2) The Design Phase
(3) The Development Phase
(4) The Operation Phase

Figure 1: The Life Cycle of a Computer-Based Information Management System



[8] Taken from readings of works by Marvin Gore and John Stubbe who originally mapped out the formal analysis process using this method of illustration.

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