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How to Create Lasting Change Through Process Improvement

by Noor Coenen

As your organization evolves, it is critical to implement a process improvement plan to eliminate errors and inefficiencies in roles, procedures, and workflows. Just because something worked three, five, or even ten years ago does not mean those same methods align with your organization's current needs. Yet, far too often, companies cling to obsolete ways of working simply because they feel safe and familiar. In other cases, leaders may realize they need to adapt but have no idea how to begin implementing change.

Imagine a scenario in which a company is struggling with outmoded recruitment methods. The interview process requires extensive testing of a candidate's knowledge, skill, and ability, but the testing process is so inefficient that it takes a candidate four to six months to complete. Using this scenario as an example, let's examine how to create a process improvement plan that will help you align working methods to current organizational objectives, create more efficient workflows, and reduce budgetary waste.

How to Uncover Inefficiencies in Your Organization

Build Your Process Improvement Team

The first step is building a team of knowledgeable individuals who will manage the initiative to streamline candidate testing. Ideally, you want to keep the team small to avoid overcomplicating things, so aim for around seven or eight people. While the individuals you select should all be

trained in process improvement methodologies, try to assemble individuals from diverse backgrounds so that you have a variety of perspectives.

Here are some sample roles to consider for your team:

Project manager

Serves as the mediator between the team and upper management, gaining their buy-in and approval.

Team leader

Provides leadership and acts as the point of contact with the project manager; reports the team's progress and ensures objectives are completed.

Team member(s)

Performs functions such as collecting and analyzing data, charting progress, offering insights, and supporting the team.

Coordinator

Organizes the team's meetings, activities, and agenda; since coordinators are not involved in the team's work, they keep the rest of the team on track and provide an objective perspective when the team makes important decisions.



Identify and Interview Key Stakeholders

Next, you will want to identify key stakeholders that are tied to the problem area or areas. Collecting a variety of different perspectives is crucial. While HR managers would be essential stakeholders in our candidate testing scenario, you would also want to speak with facilitators who administer the tests and the employees who manage the testing schedule. It might also be beneficial to talk to someone in IT who can help assess the process from a technological perspective. Keep in mind that everyone has a different point of view. Speaking with employees

in a variety of roles will help you uncover insights that may not be apparent to those in a leadership role.

Gathering information is a critical aspect of process improvement—one that you should not shortchange. In our scenario, there may be several different factors contributing to the testing issue, so be sure to invest the time necessary to look beyond the most obvious solutions and completely diagnose the problem.

Set KPIs

When launching a process improvement initiative, it is critical to establish a set of relevant key performance indicators (KPIs). Be sure that the metrics you select directly align with the goals of your improvement plan. In some cases, you may find that a process or workflow isn't working because its KPIs are not tied to specific company goals. Your KPIs should also be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound

(SMART). Finally, be sure to develop both lagging indicators that reflect past performance and leading indicators that will be used to predict future performance.

The goal in our scenario is to shorten the candidate testing process. Some effective KPIs for this scenario might be:

- 1 Time to hire
- 2 Cost per hire
- 3 Length of each testing session
- 4 Frequency of testing sessions
- 5 Average number of candidates per testing session
- 6 Average cost per testing session
- 7 Candidate experience (using Net Promoter Score)



Perform a Benchmark Analysis

Once you have established a set of KPIs, you can use them to perform a benchmark analysis. Benchmarking is an effective way to evaluate your organization’s performance by measuring it against industry standards and best practices.

Comparing your processes to those of your competitors can help identify gaps in workflows, set realistic improvement goals, and identify effective strategies. There are several different types of benchmarks you can use.

Internal benchmark	Competitive benchmark	Functional benchmark
Compares the processes of different departments within your own organization.	Compares your processes to those of direct competitors.	Compares your processes to companies with similar processes in unrelated industries.


Regardless of which style of benchmarking you use, the goal here is to provide you with an ideal model that you can compare to your own ways of working. This will help you identify specific areas where your process falls short and provide

you with ideas to improve. For example, in our scenario, studying the assessment methods used at other companies may provide insights into more efficient testing strategies.


Leverage Measurement Mapping

Measurement mapping visualizes a process to make it easier to identify potential bottlenecks, errors, or delays. In a measurement map, each step of a process is diagrammed along with symbols that tie key methods, processes, and decision points to various steps along the way.


Processes can be long and complicated, which makes them difficult to analyze. Visualizing each step helps to simplify the actions and makes it much easier to pinpoint where things are going wrong. Reviewing measurement maps can help spur important questions like:



Are employees using resources effectively?



Could technology make things more efficient?



Are workers being forced to take on too much responsibility?

When consulting a measurement map, you may uncover instances of duplicate work or unnecessary steps, as well as areas that require better communication or clearer employee expectations. Applying measurement mapping

to the company from our candidate testing scenario might uncover issues such as outdated testing equipment or areas where employees are manually performing tasks that could easily be automated.



Best Practices for Creating Improvements

Create Reliable, Viable, and Sustainable Solutions

Once you have gathered your data, it is time to analyze your findings and begin brainstorming improvements. Be sure that the solutions you recommend are tied specifically to your KPIs.

This will help ensure that they address your goals and enable you to measure whether your changes are having the intended effect. You should also strive to create improvements that are:



Reliable

Ensure that the process is consistent and predictable. This will provide more accurate details that help you measure its effectiveness.



Viable

A good process must be feasible, realistic, and cost-effective. This will make it scalable across the organization.



Sustainable

By using resources efficiently, the new process can be implemented into existing workflows and continued indefinitely.

Let's suppose that the process improvement team from our scenario has suggested transferring the organization's testing operations to a new platform. This solution would make the organization more **reliable** by providing them

with accurate reporting, more **viable** by enabling them to automate key procedures, and more **sustainable** by freeing up resources that can be invested more efficiently.

Implement a Change Management Program

Adoption is the final obstacle in a process improvement initiative and one of the most important things to get right. Remember: no matter how elegant or innovative your solution is, it will ultimately fail if your users do not adopt it. While the employees from our scenario may actively dislike the current testing process, many will still feel compelled to stick with what they know rather than adopt something new.

This is why it is critically important to implement a [change management](#) program. Leverage your team's project manager to create buy-in

from upper management and create advocates that can help break down employee resistance. Prioritize open communication that demonstrates the value of the change—a new testing method that saves time and effort—and that clearly lays out the reasons, roles, pathways, and partners involved in the implementation. Provide a clear timetable of the process and offer coaching, troubleshooting, and reinforcement activities to your employees. Remember that change management efforts are more effective the earlier they begin, so do not wait until implementation to begin thinking about them.

Create a Measurement Plan

In our scenario, utilizing a new testing method may seem like a guaranteed solution, but it may not address the full problem. That's why a well-structured measurement plan is essential for tracking the effectiveness of your solution. Map each of the KPIs you identified earlier to specific steps on your measurement map. This will ensure you are measuring the right things at the correct points in the workflow.

Then, establish a data collection process by identifying the tools and systems you will use to gather and analyze performance data. Be sure to assign responsibility for tracking and reporting on KPIs to ensure accountability. Finally, set up regular review intervals to assess the results, adjust the plan if necessary, and continuously improve your processes.





The Benefits of Partnering with a Process Improvement Consultant

Process improvement is an important but often overlooked element in an organization's design strategy. If your organization is struggling to create change, consider partnering with an organizational design consultant.

Bringing in someone from outside your organization will provide you with an objective point of view that will make it much easier to identify inefficiencies, eliminate disruptions, and innovate new solutions.

Learn more about how we can help [streamline your organization](#).



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