



Activa Newsletter May 2003

Process maps

We have spoken at length about the use of process maps in a modern quality system. So this month we thought we would devote our newsletter to the use of process maps.

What is a process map?

For each of your key processes (or sub processes) a process map describes everything which goes on within it and the sequence in which they take place. The process map includes the inputs and outputs of the process and responsibilities within it. It may well consider mentioning the status / location of any product / service at any point of the process or any documentation which supports it as it moves through the process. Typically process maps are best described as flowcharts, although other methods can be used.

Why use process maps?

Flowcharts are best created and used on a company's intranet as click through to supporting documents. These help you and any team members understand the process as it stands and provides clear information for reference as the process is improved either on a pilot basis or cell basis.

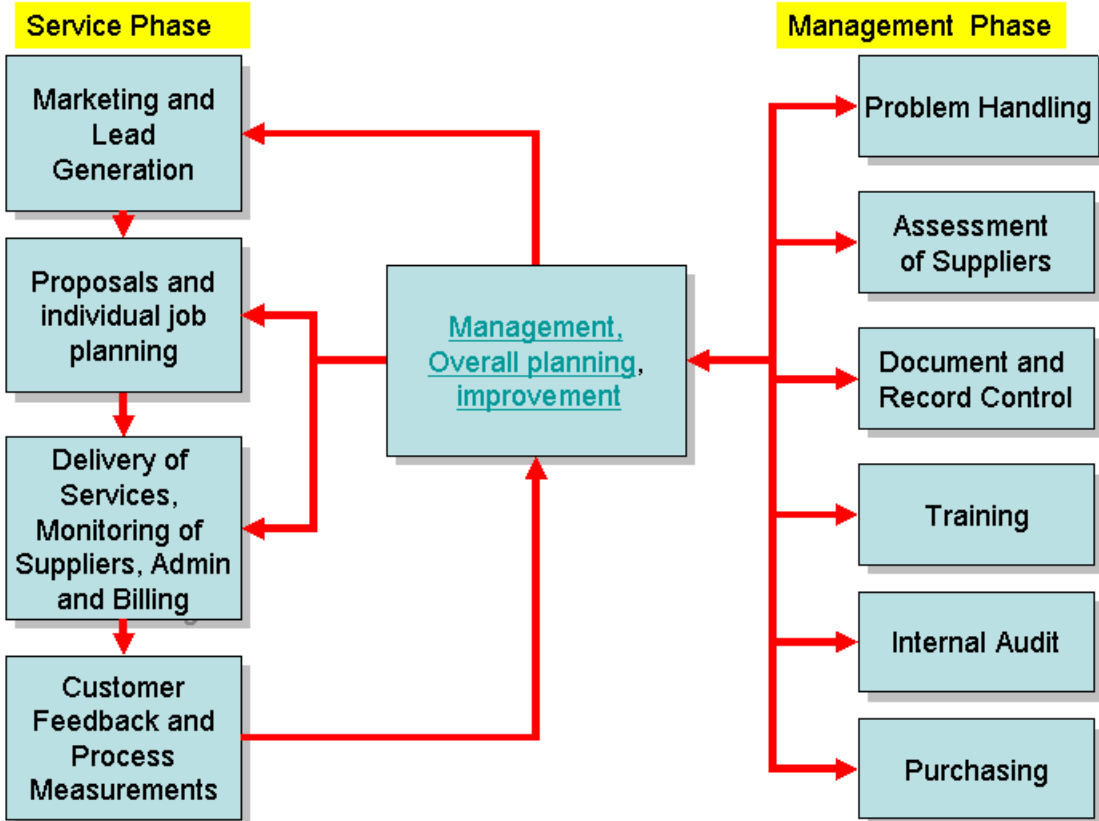
A well made process map can replace an enormous amount of words that would ordinarily make up a procedure, this saves you time and effort. They are also much easier to keep up to date and best of all, against the new standard they are permitted.

What level of detail goes into a process map depends upon how you wish to use it. On the macro level, (and a requirement for your quality manual) you might have an interrelationship of all your key processes and how they fit together to form your business. On a micro level you may well include every single check you perform and link out to a checklist where these can be recorded – this is straightforward to do on an intranet. Example of a Macro process map and a micro process map are shown below.

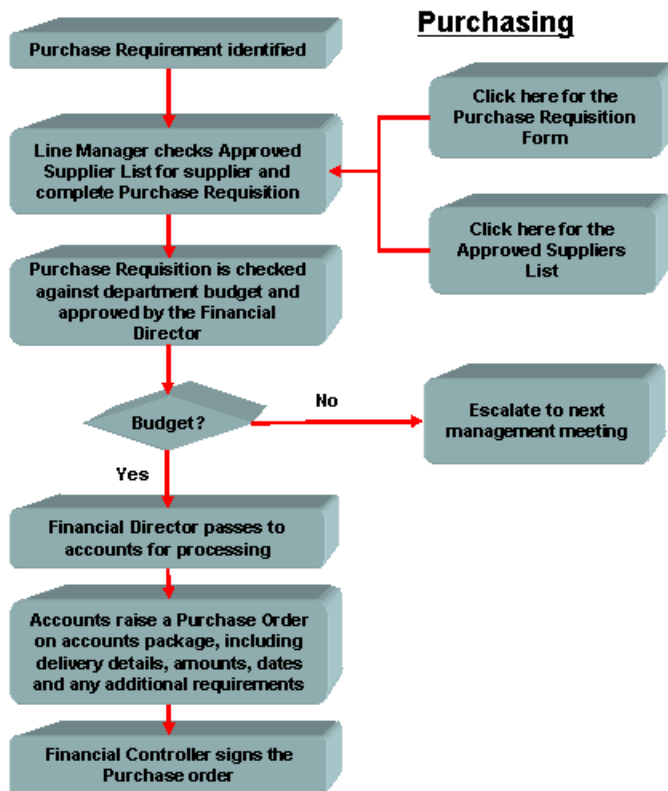
How to map

Start with the macro picture. Now walk through the process as it is, not how you think it is, but how it is. Write each step in a box you can move around on your screen. (The easiest tool to use for this is Microsoft PowerPoint, although Visio is a dedicated tool, not many people have this software.). You may choose at this point to only use Post-It notes on a large sheet of paper to achieve the same thing – just write all the post-it notes with all the actions required, only then stick them to the paper. Remember do not try to connect them up at this stage, only record the actions. Only once you have all the actions recorded do you connect them. This forms your first process map. You might consider to use common methodology in shapes ie, boxes for processes, diamonds for decisions, etc but quite often your own text is self explanatory so you might find that unnecessary. Now you are using your process map on a network it is easy for you to hyperlink all the various documents you need to support the process into the relevant boxes of your map, and before you know it – your own online business and quality system.

A Macro Process Map



A Micro Process Map



Further Assistance

If you would like help mapping your current processes or improving them using the process maps as a baseline. Activa Consulting are happy to assist you. We can build systems for you on your own intranet, on our client specific, password protected website, or give your staff training courses on how to build maps themselves, and how to implement a continuous improvement program.

For further information regarding converting your QMS to ISO 9001:2000 please email David Murfet – david@activa-uk.com

We would also extend our invitation to participate in our forum which is accessible from our home page – <http://www.activa-uk.com/home.htm> is this we would hope you can meet other companies seeking to exchange ideas about continual improvement and the running of business performance systems.