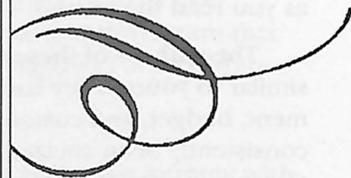


## OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

by Ray Wilson & Sara Laughlin



s with any discipline, continuous improvement has its own specialized language. The operational definitions below will help readers understand some new concepts presented in the articles in this issue. Those with an asterisk (\*) in front are continuous improvement tools which are described in more detail in *The Library's Continuous Improvement Field Book: 29 Ready-to-use Tools*, by Sara Laughlin, Denise Sisco Shockley, and Ray W. Wilson (Chicago: American Library Association, 2003). Many of the tools are standards in the quality improvement world, so the reader will also find additional information about them through an Internet search or in the quality literature.

In addition, some familiar words have very specific meanings in the continuous improvement context and those are defined below. For example, "system," which in the library world might refer to the software package that runs a library's circulation system and online catalog, or might refer to a consortium to which the library belongs, in the continuous improvement world has another meaning.

### **\*Cause Analysis**

A method to help evaluate which potential causes of an undesirable effect, a failure, or a problem are the best choices to evaluate for improvement.

### **\*Cause and Effect Diagram**

A visual brainstorming tool, often called a "fishbone diagram," used to explore all the potential causes that result in a single effect.

### **\*Charter**

A document written to clearly confer responsibility for accomplishing a task or project on another person or team.

### **\*Check Sheet**

A tool for recording the number of occurrences of an action or event. Generally a good data-gathering tool to use at the beginning of any problem-solving cycle.

### **\*Consensogram**

A survey used to measure a group's current knowledge or perception of an issue.

### **Constancy of Purpose Statement**

A succinct statement, composed of the organization's Mission, Vision, Values, and key performance measures.

### **Continuum**

A matrix describing states of progress toward a desired innovation.

### **Customer**

An individual who receives an output from a system or a process. An external customer is one who receives the final output. An internal customer is a person inside the organization who receives an intermediate output during creation of the final output.

### **\*Flowchart-Deployment**

A visual representation of all the steps in a process, displayed in a manner that indicates who is responsible for the steps and in what order they are accomplished.

### **\*Flowchart-Top-down**

A visual representation of all the steps in a process, segregated into major steps and sub-steps, placed in the order in which they are accomplished.

### **\*Force Field Diagram**

A tool for brainstorming the forces that support progress toward a particular desired objective or state and those that restrain progress.

### **\*Group Norms**

Rules of operation agreed upon by a group that define how the group has decided to manage itself and its work.

### **\*Histogram**

A bar graph that shows the frequency and distribution of data.

## **Input**

A supply or raw material that is transformed by the process or system. The input may be a tangible item like a book or an intangible supply like information.

## **Key Steps Worksheet**

A chart detailing the key steps in a process, usually identified through Customer and Supplier Screens, which describes in some detail the actions and "tricks of the trade" needed to complete the step correctly and possible consequences of making an error during this step.

## **Multivoting**

A method through which each individual in a group chooses a few possible options over others, thereby helping the group efficiently reach consensus about which option(s) to select.

## **Operational Definition**

A description of what something is, within a particular context

## **Output**

A product or service resulting from a process or system and delivered to an external or internal customer.

## **\*Pareto Chart**

A bar graph representation of data arranged in order from most frequently occurring to least frequently occurring.

## **\*Parking Lot**

A tool used to gather and retain ideas that may be outside the focus of a group's (or individual's) current work, but that might be needed in the future.

## **\*Plus Delta**

A tool used to get feedback from individuals, at the end of a meeting or other session, about what went well and what could be improved.

## **Process**

A series of inter-related tasks or steps that transform inputs into outputs. A group of inter-related processes makes up a system.

## **\*Process Behavior Chart**

A visual tool for presenting data that shows average performance and variation of a process and the upper and lower statistical boundaries of its performance over time.

## **Process Master**

The finished product of standardizing a process, including a Top-down Flowchart, Customer and Supplier Screens, Key Steps Worksheet, and Measures. All those who work in the process agree to follow this method until the process master is changed.

## **Process Mastering**

A controlled method, used by a team to standardize and then improve a process.

## **Rapid Cycle Improvement**

A method for quickly improving a process, during which a team decides what it is trying to change, how it will measure change, and what it will try (PLAN). The team tries a new method (DO) and records data using a Process Behavior Chart to determine if the change is statistically significant, then studies results (STUDY) and takes action to adopt the new method or try another (ACT). The cycle is repeated until the desired change is accomplished

## **\*Run Chart**

A visual representation of data over time or in sequence.

## **Screen, Customer**

A tool that helps a process mastering team identify the needs of external or internal customers and the process steps that meet those needs.

## **Screen, Supplier**

A tool that helps a process mastering team identify what the process needs from inputs received from suppliers and which process steps are impacted by those inputs.

## **Step**

A single task or action taken as part of a process. A process is made up of several inter-related steps.

## **Step, Key**

A step that is critical to meeting the need of internal or external customers, one that depends on inputs from suppliers, one that is important to the organization's needs, one where errors or difficulties often occur, one where a measurement is taken, or one where safety is an issue.

## **Supplier**

An individual or organization or business that provides inputs for the system or process.

## System

A series of inter-related processes, with suppliers and inputs, customers and outputs.

## System Map

A visual tool that shows the Mission, Vision, Values, Suppliers, Inputs, Processes, Outputs, and Customers, and Feedback Loops that make up a system.

## Task (see Step)