TROCAIRE COLLEGE/
RACHEL R. SAVARINO LIBRARY:
"PROCESS NEW ITEMS"

by Judith Schwartz, Mary Miller,
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"Process new items" was our team's first Continuous Assessment, Continuous Improvement (CACI) project. We intended to improve this process for faster, easier, and more successful training of new staff members.

STANDARDIZING AND IMPROVING OUR PROCESS

We thoroughly assessed the process by means of the various techniques learned in our workshop sessions and standardized it by:

- Creating a Flowchart of the process.

- Completing A-chart Screens to identify key steps to meet needs of external and internal customers and to identify needs from suppliers.

- Detailing instructions in a Key Steps Worksheet, including visuals showing exact placement of stamps, barcodes and labels, and in some cases, additional mapping of sub-processes.

- Deciding a process measure—time elapsed from receipt of materials to shelving on the new materials shelf—and a method for recording this data.

We explored possible causes of slow processing with a Cause-and-Effect (Fishbone) Diagram. We found this to be one of the most effective tools used. The gathered data was displayed in two formats—a Histogram and a Process Behavior Chart.

After we analyzed and recorded the current situation, we decided on steps to streamline the process. The team tried improvements suggested and recorded in the Parking Lot list generated earlier during flowcharting. We eliminated some steps, including stamping, embossing, book jacketing, and creating an acquisitions list, which our new library catalog can do automatically. We refined other steps, such as standardizing font sizes and placement of labels and stamps and barcoding on the outside front cover. We created "dummies" or sample items to show correct placement of bar codes and labels at a glance.

Our processing slip for each item became an abbreviated checklist of instructions. This form also served as our data collection agent by using it to record dates work on the item began and ended.

Discussions and presentations at interim CACI meetings and the regular reports of the entire group by email helped us to sharpen our observation skills. Understanding and contemplation of others' problems and their solutions sometimes offered a way to handle our own issues or simplify our decision-making. We learned to focus only on critical elements. We also heard about tools which others had found effective.

OUTCOMES

Although we knew that our processes improved, working with specific data gave us a visible measure of our success. Our Process Behavior Chart (see Figure 1) provided positive and easily understood feedback to the team and administrators, and can be used for monitoring future progress. Average processing time decreased from 20.4 days to 9.0 days, a 56 percent reduction. The expected variation in processing time was also reduced from 43.5 to 14.4 days.

Our next challenge is to eliminate the need for inspection points. The time spent inspecting versus the consequences of mistakes must be considered and balanced. Our goal is to make it impossible to do the process incorrectly, even without inspections.

LESSONS LEARNED:

As we reflected on our participation in CACI, we realized we had learned a number of valuable lessons:

- Include all possible staff members on the team—Understanding and thinking about processes helped staff take ownership of the process, apply themselves to improvement and feel part of the achievements. Being involved in the process was a priority that got their attention and enlisted their interest and aid.

- Parking Lot lists were among the most useful tools we encountered in our CACI training. This technique helped elicit ideas and suggestions for all library processes.

- Try it all. Some procedures such as A-charts and the Fishbone Cause-and-Effect Diagram, which at first consideration, were thought not to "fit" with our process, became useful tools when actually tried. They also brought up more Parking Lot items, enhancing morale and providing ideas for new improvements.

- Priorities need to be set and clear.

- Use of guidelines must be appropriate for individual staff members. An emphasis on pictures and examples rather than detailed written instructions pleases younger staff members. Eliminate wording as much as possible and make available quick reference tools for instruction and training.

- Training still needs to be complete no matter how few hours an individual staff member works per week.

- Exceptions need separate process masters.

- Equipment condition and working environment are vitally important to morale.

- First achieve consistency of inputs, reduce variability in the process, and then improve the process. If these steps are not done in order, transitions are less smoothly accomplished.

- Recording and presenting data is extremely helpful for clarifying issues and reporting accomplishments to the team and others.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Judy Schwartz is the Library Director at Trocaire College in Buffalo, NY. Among her priorities are improving library processes, and using data for visual presentations to College administration, accreditation teams, and others.

Mary Miller, Erna Tominich, and Janet Guda, Librarians at Trocaire College, are united in their interest in standardizing and recording processes for staff training purposes, improving library communications, and reducing variation in procedures used by all librarians.

Trocaire College/Savarino Library																		Process New Items 3-14-07		
Group #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Average Days	10	32	13	19	23	24	25	17	20	14	12	5	6	5	7	12	11	8	7	7	3
Moving range		22.0	19.0	6.0	4.0	1.0	1.0	8.0	3.0	6.0	2.0	7.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	5.0	1.0	3.0	1.0	.0	4.0

Individuals

UPL = 43.6
Average = 20.4
LPL = 0
UPL = 16.4
Average = 9.0
LPL = 1.6

Moving Range (2)

UPL = 28.5
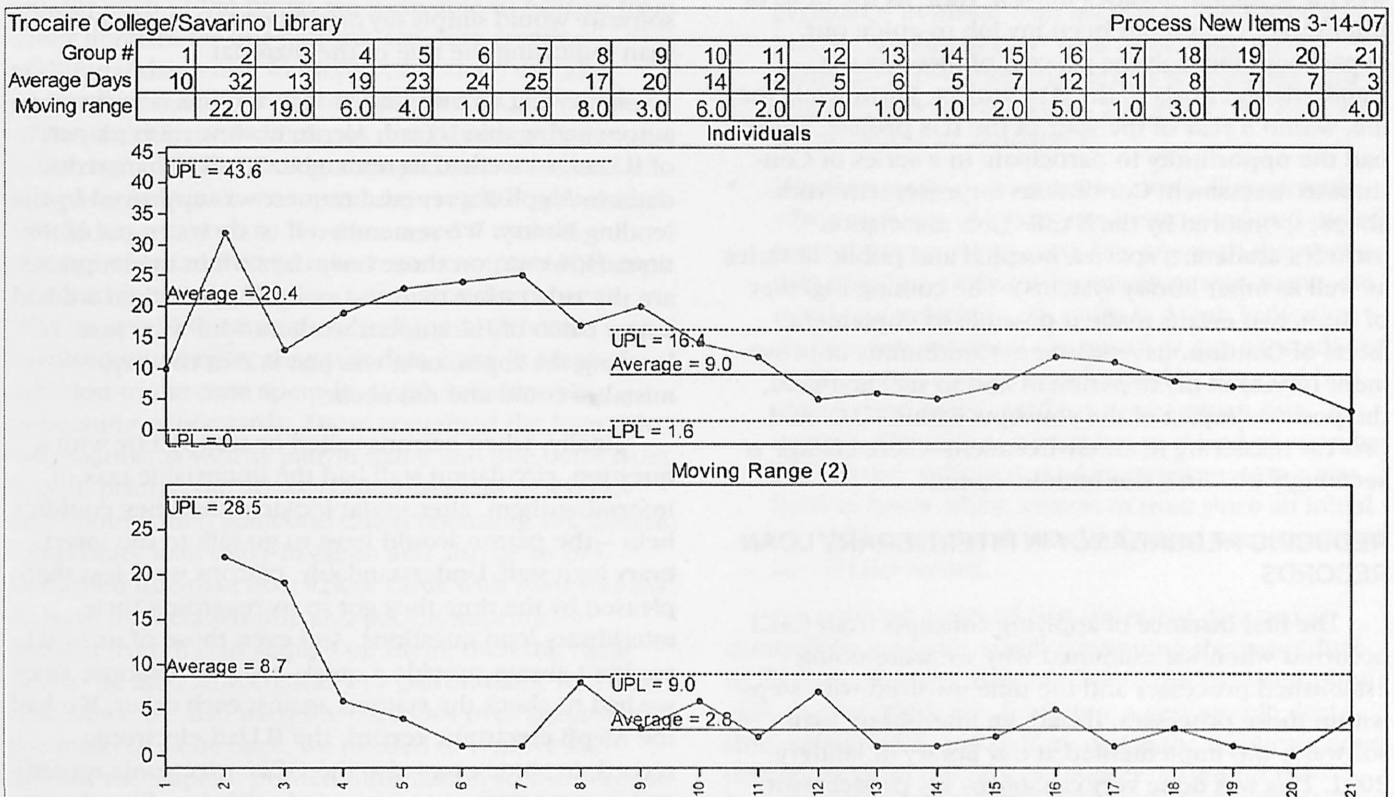Average = 8.7
UPL = 9.0
Average = 2.8

Figure 1: Process behavior chart showing reduction in average days for processing new items as result of rapid cycle improvement. Notice that the average days (top chart) and the average variation (bottom chart) are both reduced.