*[This tool helps to clarify how (standardised) processes actually take place in an organisation, and to determine how you want them to take place. It is therefore both a planning and a monitoring tool.]*

# Process flow chart

## What is it?

A process flow chart is an instrument that visualises and analyses the various systems and procedures (e.g. delivery of services, decision-making, funds allocation, accounting and monitoring) within an organisation.

## What can you do with it?

The flow chart analysis helps to identify the bottlenecks in the different processes within the organisation. It identifies unnecessary involvement of people, loopholes in decision making or unnecessary delays in the process. It assists to make the organisation more efficient in its operations.

The process flow chart helps to design new processes for the primary process, support processes and supervisory processes, and helps to analyse the bottlenecks in existing procedures. It is very useful to help participants understand the interrelation of the work activities and to realise how the work of one person influences the others.

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**Questions this tool may answer**

- How should the process be redesigned to be more effective and/or efficient?
- What are strengths and weaknesses in the core process(es) of the organisation?
- Is the organisation sufficiently effective to play a key role?

**Results**

- What are the major steps in what sequence?
- Who is responsible for an activity?
- What are the major decision moments?
- Are decisions communicated to all relevant persons?
- What are the major information moments (into the flow)?
- What are the delays and bottlenecks in the process?
- What are strengths and weaknesses of current practice?
- What are co-ordination bottlenecks?
- What should be done to improve the process?

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## How to use it?

### Process

A process flow chart can be made on an individual basis or in a group (not more than 20 people) on a participatory basis. If made with a few key people it should be adjusted and/or endorsed by all actors in the process. Decision-making is to be prepared for the

management concerned to improve the process. It is also a useful tool for presentation purposes to show how processes actually take place (or should look like). Depending on complexity of the process it will take 1-2 hours per process.

### Ground work

The choice of which process to analyse should be made in a clear and clever manner: Relevant to the (core) problem owner, and of interest to the other involved stakeholders. A process flow chart can very well be a starting point of an organisation analysis, but may also be chosen if other observations indicate confusion or problems in the way the organisation acts what it does.

### Follow up

Depending on the problems identified it can be followed by other analysis tools e.g. using the Integrated Organisation Model to dig deeper into the problem or combining the problems with other related problems in a problem tree analysis or a SWOT.

## Requirements and limitations

It is important not to mix up different processes or different levels of abstraction (activities and sub-activities) in one chart. Sometimes it is difficult to define the process to analyse. Certain activities are cyclic and do not have a clear beginning and end. If not used adequately it may turn simple activities into a complicated chart. In a participatory approach there is a danger that participants mix up the present (actual practice), planned (official way of working) and the desired situation. We recommend visualising only one at the time.

## Practical references

- Instrument based on methods like Critical Path Method and Information Systems design.
- Staveren, J.M. van & D.B.W.M. van Dusseldorp (1980): Framework for Regional Planning in Developing Countries.
- Zevenbergen, W. (1984): Een raamwerk voor de inspectie van procesmatige aangepakte streek ontwikkeling.
- Brinkerhoff, Derick W. & Marcus D. Ingle (1989): Integrating Blueprint and Process: A structured flexibility approach to development management. Public Administration & Development, Vol. 9, no.5,
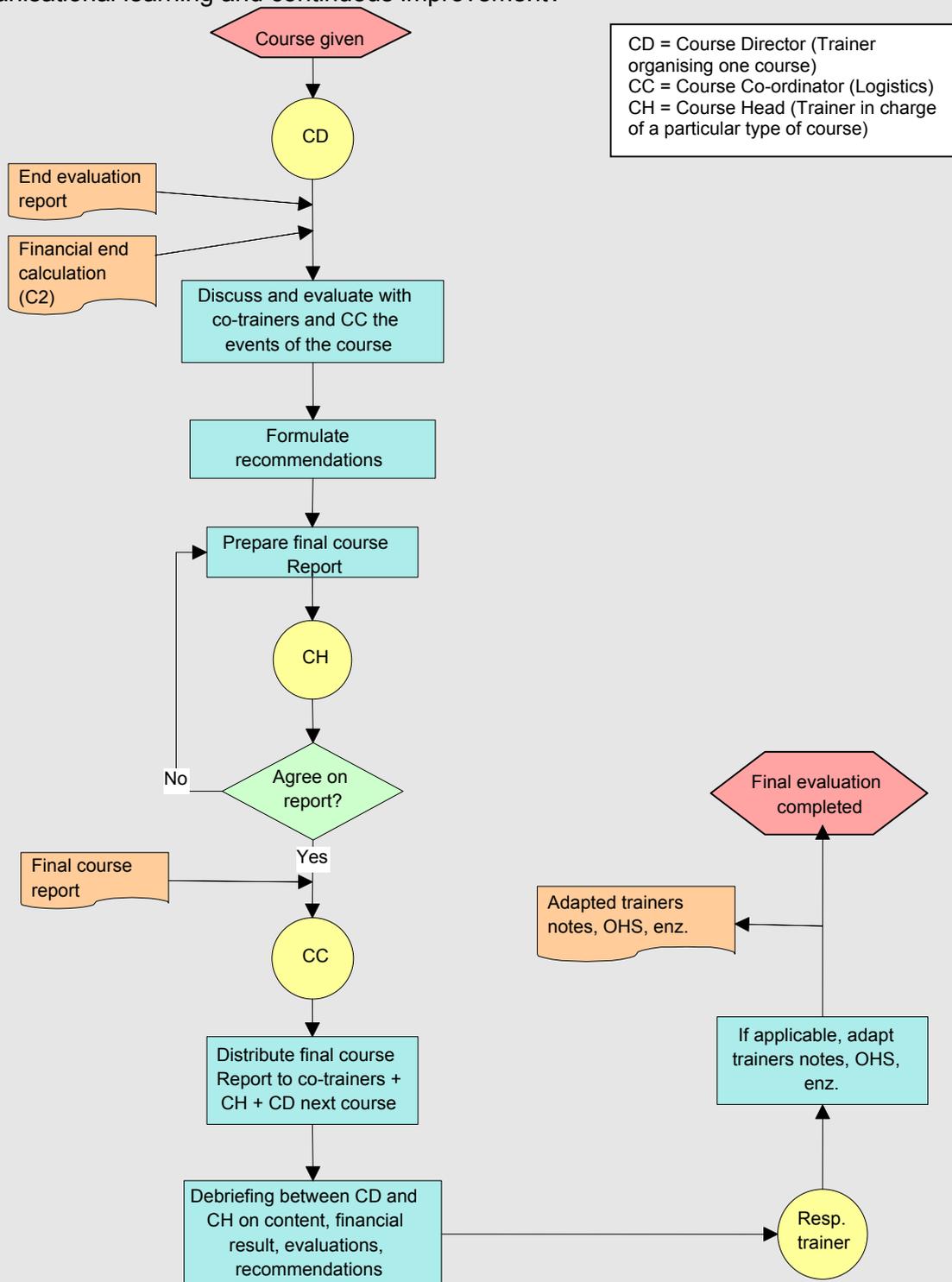- SNV (1997): A process approach.

## Example of Process flow chart Training evaluation
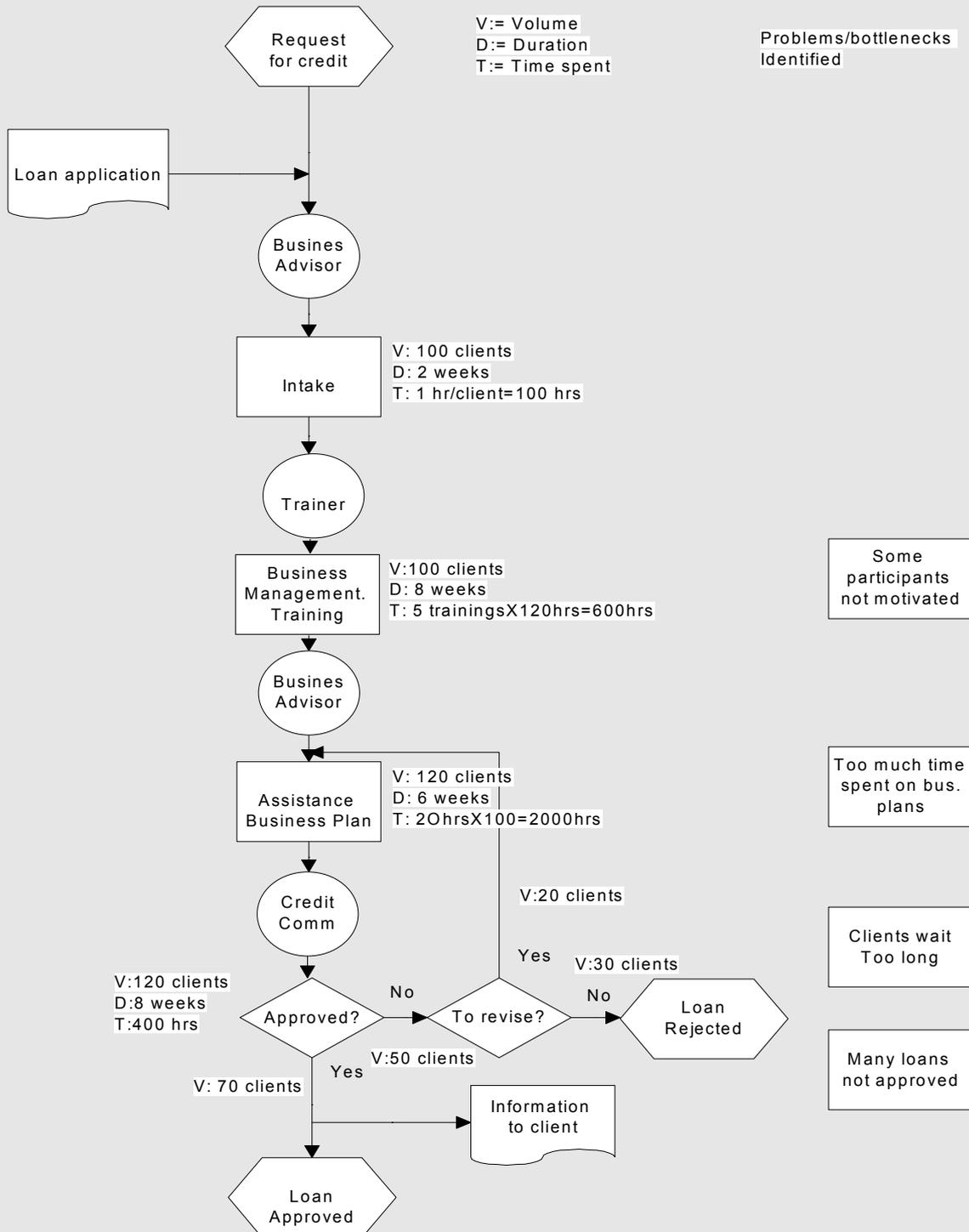
### Problem owner

MDF Training & Consultancy

### Basic Question

How should MDF standardise the evaluation of its regular course in order to ensure organisational learning and continuous improvement?

**Legend:**

CD = Course Director (Trainer organising one course)
CC = Course Co-ordinator (Logistics)
CH = Course Head (Trainer in charge of a particular type of course)

**Flow chart:**

- Course given
- CD
  - Inputs: End evaluation report; Financial end calculation (C2)
- Discuss and evaluate with co-trainers and CC the events of the course
- Formulate recommendations
- Prepare final course Report
- CH
- Agree on report?
  - No → back to Prepare final course Report
  - Yes → (input: Final course report)
- CC
- Distribute final course Report to co-trainers + CH + CD next course
- Debriefing between CD and CH on content, financial result, evaluations, recommendations
- Resp. trainer
- If applicable, adapt trainers notes, OHS, enz.
  - Output: Adapted trainers notes, OHS, enz.
- Final evaluation completed

## Example of Process flow chart Credit approval: Primary Process

### Basic question

How can the Business support project (which provides credit and training) approve credit requests faster?



Request for credit

Loan application

Busines Advisor

Intake — V: 100 clients / D: 2 weeks / T: 1 hr/client=100 hrs

Trainer

Business Management. Training — V:100 clients / D: 8 weeks / T: 5 trainingsX120hrs=600hrs

Busines Advisor

Assistance Business Plan — V: 120 clients / D: 6 weeks / T: 2OhrsX100=2000hrs

Credit Comm

V:120 clients / D:8 weeks / T:400 hrs

Approved? — No → To revise? — No → Loan Rejected

V:20 clients — Yes

V:30 clients

V:50 clients

Yes — V: 70 clients

Information to client

Loan Approved

V:= Volume
D:= Duration
T:= Time spent

Problems/bottlenecks Identified

Some participants not motivated

Too much time spent on bus. plans

Clients wait Too long

Many loans not approved

**Conclusions**

- It will be useful to improve the intake and to reject clients right after the intake (selection), so that no time is spent on clients that are not worth continuing with.
- It will be useful to select those clients for training that really need the training or to identify more different training paths, to focus on the real needs of the clients.
- It is useful to improve efficiency in making business plans.
- It is useful to see if for certain clients (small loans/clients with good repayment status) the procedure can be shortened (training, business plans, credit committees).

## Example of Process flow chart

**Problem owner**

Planning and Development Department

**Basic question**

How can Planning and Development Department raise the Project proposals that receive funding from 35 to 80% in 2004?

**Sub-question**

What are bottlenecks to transparent, effective and efficient appraisal and improvement of project proposals?
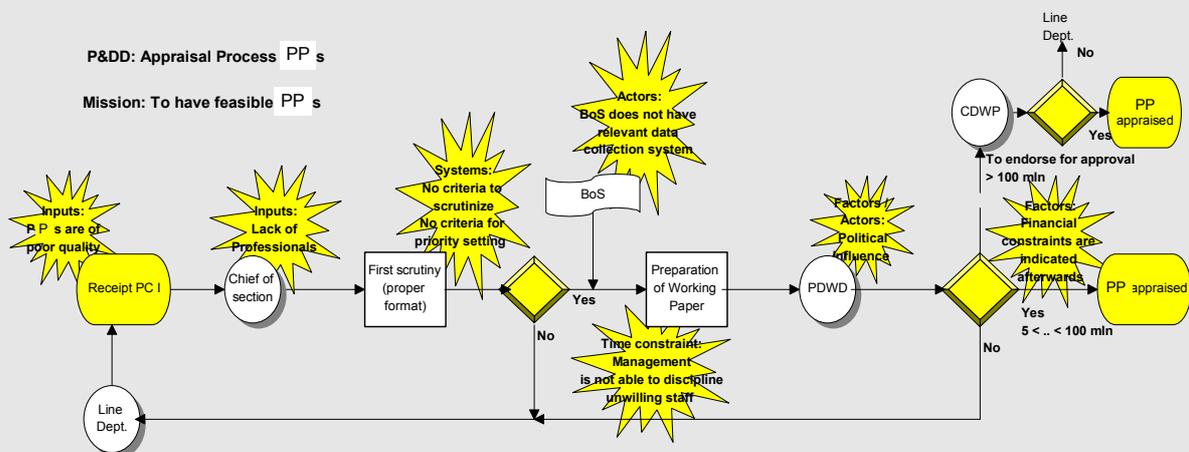


Observations: Problem analysis in reference to the (IOM) elements that hamper to fulfil the mission:

| Inputs | • Project proposals (PP's), handed in by the line departments, are of poor quality (garbage in - garbage out) |
| | • There is insufficient professional staff within the Planning & Development Department to appraise PP's from technical point of view |
| Systems | • Standard criteria to scrutinise and to prioritise need to be developed (to stop the garbage at the doorstep) |
| Management | • Management causes time constraints, as it is unable to discipline unwilling staff and those who are willing are over-burdened. |
| Actors | • Bureau of Statistics (BoS) is not able to give clear framework of reference, as it does not have a relevant data collection system. |
| Factors | • Political lobby PDWP enforces Planning Dept. to accept poor PP's |
| | • Financial constraints are announced after PP's have been appraised. |

## Steps in making a process flow chart

0. **Formulate the (sub-) question** that you want to answer by making a process flow chart. Aims for which a process flow chart is suitable are:
   - To decide how to optimise core processes (operational planning and strategic decision making)
   - To prepare strategic choices, identifying strengths and weaknesses (step to strategic decision making)
   - To judge organisation suitability and performance (to make funding and programme positioning decisions)

0. **Define the field of analysis**. Decide whether you depict:
   - Current practice (daily practice; the informal reality)
   - Current design (how it should happen according to 'the books')
   - Redesign (establishing the desired process)
     - Clearly distinguish current practice from current design and/or redesign
     - Analyse the redesign (and even current design) only after the current practice

1. **Choose the process**.
   - Which process are you going to analyse?
   - Unique or standard
   - Define the starting point
   - Specify the outcome/result of the process

2. **Describe the process** as indicated below, using the indicated symbolism:
   - State the start and end point (outcome/result)

   - Divide the process in 5-10 activities of the same level of analysis ("Giving a presentation" is of different level than "Conducting a course"). If you have more than 10 steps:
   - Cluster them or
   - Make more than one flow chart

   - Identify decision moments. Describe these decision moments in yes/no questions. Check that both the "Yes"-side and the "No"-side have a follow-up activity (arrow that leads somewhere), if that is reality.
     For example: Proposal approved?
   - Yes: Proceed + Send confirmation to client
   - No: File the proposal + Inform client with reasons
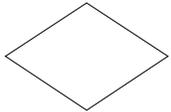
   - Identify the responsible person/unit for each activity (this may *not* be the same as the implementing person). All activities/ decision moments that follow the symbol are the responsibility of the person/unit indicated. Therefore, if the responsible person/unit stays the same, you need not repeat the in-charge
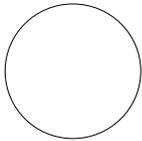
- Identify the information coming into the process and all information going out of the process. The arrows of the connecting lines indicate whether the information is going in or out

- Connect the symbols with arrows that indicate the flow of the process. Include loops to show that an earlier activity should be repeated

3. **Add key information** and write it next to the activities/decisions or arrows
   - Volume: The quantity of the product or service you process in a certain period of time. This indicates the magnitude of the subject
   - Time/Cost: The average or annual time/cost (expenditure) involved in each activity (write next to step). This indicates the organisation efficiency
   - Duration: The (average) time that passes between two steps (write next to arrow). This indicates the responsiveness to clients

4. **Identify possible bottlenecks**. Ask questions like:
   - Why does the activity/decision take place?
   - Why does the activity/decision take place at this point in the sequence?
   - Why does the activity/decision (or the time between them) take the time it takes?
   - (Why) is the activity/decision difficult to carry out?
   - Why is this person responsible for this activity/decision?
   - Who co-ordinates and supervises at different moments?
   - What is the effect of external (information, input, and means) dependencies?
   - What are the risks (what can go wrong) in the activity/decision?

5. **Assess options** for improvements. Check each option considering:
   - Can you leave out activities, decision points or information?
   - Can you combine/change activities, decision points or information?
   - Can you simplify activities, decision points or information?
   - Can you change the responsible person?

6. **Evaluate improvements**, considering whether the options result in:
   - Less effort (better methods, upgraded staff, better means and inputs) needed
   - Less time (better sequence or screening, less rejection) needed
   - Better quality service/product (better guidelines, control)
   - Less resources (optimising expenses and quality) needed
   - Better working conditions (more safety, fulfilment, less stress)

7. **Draw conclusions**, in relation to your (sub-) question. Write strengths and weaknesses (judged from the point of view of your question) on green and red cards respectively