PROCESS IMPROVEMENT TOOLKIT

A Simplified and Accelerated Approach for Continuous Improvement

Revised July 31, 2012
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Introduction

This toolkit is designed to help you initiate and launch a process improvement effort. It provides a framework, tools, and exercises to help you work through the process of identifying, analyzing and improving a process.

This toolkit is for you if:

- You are not achieving desired outcomes in a key area or process.
- Important work is piling up or taking too long.
- You are receiving complaints from customers and/or stakeholders (parents, students, teachers, staff, etc.).
- Your leaders or direct reports have been talking to you about ongoing issues and problems in your organization.
- You are aware of a problem you need to solve but don’t know where to start.

This toolkit can be used as a reference or as a detailed step-by-step guide to walk you through an improvement effort. It provides the steps needed to complete an improvement effort. Every process improvement may not need all of the steps outlined in this toolkit, so feel free to jump to the most helpful step when that fits your situation.
Process Improvement Methodology Overview

Below is a visual overview of the steps in the methodology that follows. Click on any step for more detailed information on that step.

1. Identify Process to Improve
2. Convene Team
3. Define Objective
4. Analyze Current Process
5. Envision Future Process
6. Implement Changes
7. Assess New Process
8. Team Recognition
## Process Improvement Toolkit Outline

Below is an outline of each step in the aforementioned methodology. Each row contains the methodology step, a suggestion for completing the step, tools, and deliverables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology Step</th>
<th>How to Complete This Step</th>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Deliverables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1 – Identify the process to improve** | • Determine what process you need to improve  
• If unsure of the process to improve, conduct “Start, Stop, Continue” exercise by asking multiple stakeholders:  
  o What is going well?  
  o What is not going well?  
  o What should we start doing?  
• Aggregate the data and identify trends (what is being mentioned most often as an area for improvement?) | • Utilize flip chart paper, index cards or the template included | • A list of processes or areas that need improvement |
| **2 – Decide on the process improvement team** | • Composition  
  o Representation of people who work inside the boundaries of process  
  o Have knowledge of the process  
  o From various levels, departments, divisions and schools  
• In some cases, the “team” may be those who you collect feedback from – you may not meet with everyone regularly or even need to  
• Develop ground rules for how the team will work together | • Steps for convening your team | • A list of names of colleagues comprising the team  
• Team ground rules |
### 3 – Define the process improvement objective

- Establish boundaries for process improvement effort
- New ideas and needs can surface during an effort – defining the scope keeps this under control
- Clear definition of problem and expected process improvement
- As a team, come to agreement on the timeline for your effort (ideal range is 6 – 12 weeks maximum to complete effort)

- Utilize flip chart paper, index cards, or other tools to help facilitation the conversation
- [Sample problem definition and outcome statements](#)
- A clear statement on the scope of the effort

### 4 – Analyze the current process

- Discuss with team members and stakeholders how the process looks today
- Map the current process
- As much as possible “walk” the process to ensure it is mapped accurately

- [Process mapping worksheet & a primer on process mapping](#)
- [Five Whys](#)
- [Brainstorming](#)
- An “as is” process map

### 5 – Envision the future process

- Map the new “to be” process through discussions with team

- [Process mapping worksheet & a primer on process mapping](#)
- Finalized “to be” process map
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 – Implement the changes</th>
<th>7 – Assess the new process</th>
<th>8 – Recognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Communicate the new process</td>
<td>• Create dashboard and/or identify key process metrics to track</td>
<td>• Ask team how they would like to celebrate and recognize efforts of team</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Begin using the new process</td>
<td>• Conduct retrospective</td>
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<td>• Risk assessment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Risk assessment template</td>
<td>• N/A</td>
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<td>• Communication plan template</td>
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<td>• Communication plan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Risk plan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Retrospective (utilize Start, Stop, Continue tool)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Results of Start, Stop, Continue exercise</td>
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<td>• N/A</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**TOOL #1 – Start, Stop, Continue Exercise**

Use this exercise when you want to get feedback from a group of people or a team. This can also be used as a checkpoint in the middle of a project or as a retrospective at the end of a project. The results of this exercise can tell you how to proceed.

Here are some instructions to get you started:

**Step 1:** Begin with "Stop." Ask the group,"What should we stop doing? Think of activities or practices that may need to stop in order to improve or have better results. Depending upon how many items are on your list you may want to go back and prioritize the top five so you have a workable list.

**Step 2:** Move to "Continue." Ask,"What are we doing well?” List ideas and items that are successful, working well and the team wants to keep.

**Step 3:** Finish with the question,"What should we start doing?” List new ideas and items that the group is not doing but you think they should be.
**TOOL #1** – STOP – Start, Stop, Continue Exercise Part I of III

What is not going well? What activities or practices should we stop doing that are keeping us from getting the results we want?
**TOOL #1** – CONTINUE – Start, Stop, Continue Exercise Part II of III

*What is going well? “CONTINUE” – What activities are we doing that are bringing us good results and that we want to continue doing?*
"START" - What things do we want to start doing to get better results?
Steps for Convening Your Team

Once you know which process you will focus on, it is time to convene a team to assist. Ideally, you will follow the following steps to launch a team of 6 – 8 people.

1. Convene team

2. Determine who will fill the following roles:
   a. Facilitator
   b. Co-Facilitator
   c. Scribe

3. Develop and agree on team ground rules with team (See suggested ground rules following)

4. Discuss and publish:
   a. Final list of team members
   b. Meeting schedule
   c. Meeting notes/attendees and overviews of discussion
Suggested Team Ground Rules

Review and adjust for your own needs.

- **Attitude and Culture**
  - We treat each other with respect.
  - We intend to develop personal relationships to enhance trust and open communication.
  - We value constructive feedback. We will avoid being defensive and give feedback in a constructive manner.
  - We treat all team members in the same way.
  - We strive to recognize and celebrate individual and team accomplishments.
  - We will pitch in to help where necessary to help solve problems and catch-up on behind schedule work.
  - We will have full discussion and resolution of issues.

- **Team Meetings**
  - We will attend and contribute to regular weekly meetings.
  - We agree to attend additional meetings to discuss critical issues or to complete the work.
  - All team members are expected to attend team meetings unless they are out of town, on vacation or sick. If a team member is unavailable, he or she should have a designated representative from their functional organization attend and make decisions in their absence.
The team leader can cancel or reschedule a team meeting if sufficient team members are unavailable or there is insufficient subject matter to discuss.

The team leader will publish and distribute an agenda.

Team members are responsible for contacting team leader or leaving a voice message or sending an email with any agenda items they want to include.

Agenda items can be added at meeting with concurrence of team.

Meetings will start promptly on time. All members are expected to be on-time. If, for extenuating circumstances a member is late, another team member will help her/him catch-up.

An action item list with responsibilities will be maintained, reviewed in meetings, and distributed with meeting minutes.

No responsibilities will be assigned unless the person assigned the responsibility accepts. If a person not in attendance is assigned an action, the team leader must review assignment or action item with the person.

The recorder will be responsible for taking and distributing meeting minutes.

Meeting minutes will be distributed within 24 hours after the meeting.

**Communication and Decision-Making**

One person talks at a time; there are no side discussions.

Each person is given a chance to speak their mind while at the same time respecting the group’s time and the meeting timetables. We will be brief and focus on facts, not opinions.
– We emphasize open and honest communication - there are no hidden agendas.
– We de-personalize discussion of issues - no attacks on people.
– We will listen, be non-judgmental and keep an open mind on issues until it is time to decide.
– We emphasize balanced participation of all team members.
– We will emphasize collaboration and use consensus for important decisions and issues. For less important issues, we will rely on the subject matter expert with input from others.

• Planning and Management

– We will mutually commit to our team’s charge as stated by the Superintendent/ designee.
– We accept the responsibility and accountability along with the authority given to us.
– We will maintain the team work plan and schedule.
– If a team member believes they are being asked to do a task outside the scope of the team’s charge he/she will bring this to the attention of the team leader for resolution.
– When we pose an issue or a problem, we will also try to present a solution.
– We will focus sufficient time on team process and conduct process checks when a member believes we are deviating from our ground rules.
Problem Statements and Outcome Statements

Once your team is convened, it is important that each team member understand the project scope through clearly defining the problem and desired outcome of the team’s efforts.

The problem definition clearly describes the problem and what needs to be fixed. The outcome statement indicates what a successful outcome will look like.

What does the problem definition/scope statement do? It:

- Describes the improvement or challenge being addressed
- Indicates who is affected and reason for the change
- Clarifies what needs to be fixed
- Defines what will and will not be changed through this effort

Outcome statement

- What a successful outcome will look like
- “When we have finished our work and implemented the changes, our success will be evidenced by a change from ________ to ________ ?”

Sample Outcome Statements

1. “When the team finishes the work, APS will have a process for closing schools that includes best practices and protects APS assets while minimizing the stress levels of all stakeholders affected by school closings. The process will be ready for immediate implementation following the approval of Senior Cabinet and will become the way APS conducts the business of

Organizational Advancement Division
closing schools through board policy.”

2. “Implement an online bank loan management system for all employees of the loan department by 11/05/2002.”

After the problem and outcome statements have been clearly defined, the team should move to documenting what the current process looks like.
# TOOL #2 – Process Mapping Worksheet

**Name of process:**

*Please list the steps in the process*

**Purpose of process:**

*What problems arise at each step?*

*How often does this happen?*

**Waste**

*Where does the work go after it leaves you?*

**Impact**

*What is the impact?*
**Name of process:**

*Please list the steps in the process*

**Purpose of process:**

*What problems arise at each step?*

*How often does this happen?*

**What is the impact?**

*Where does the work go after it leaves you?*
A Short Primer on Process Mapping

- What is a Process Map
  - A tool used to understand, analyze, and document processes
  - Visual representation of a series of connected activities
  - Displays steps involved in converting inputs to required output

- Why Map
  - To improve a process you must understand it
  - Helps communicate process to management, staff, and users
  - Promotes understanding of process and resource allocation
  - A map is a powerful tool that can be used for training
  - Maps promote adoption of processes – once people understand, they will utilize the process
  - Sustainability
  - Images inspire ideas
  - Makes process visual
  - Helps look at problems differently than if you just rely on words or numbers
Basic Process Mapping Symbols

- Start
- Activity
- Decision
- Document
- End
- Direction of Flow
Root Cause Analysis - The Five Whys Technique

- Why do root cause analysis?
  - Most problems don't have obvious solutions
  - There is risk associated with quickly leaping from problem to solution
  - If you do a poor job identifying the root cause of a problem, you could waste time and resources putting Band-Aids on symptoms
  - Need to correct or eliminate causes to prevent a problem from recurring

- Key elements to effective use of the Five Whys technique
  - Accurate and complete statements of problems
  - Complete honesty in answering questions
  - Determination to get to the bottom of problems and resolve

- What is the Five Whys?
  - Questions-asking method used to explore cause/effect relationships underlying a problem
  - Goal of applying 5 Whys method is to determine a root cause of a defect or problem
  - Philosophy of repeatedly asking “why” to find direct sources of problems and root of those sources
Our company is going in the wrong direction.

WHY?
- Shoddy product
- Bad design
- Too many silos
- Culture
- Lack of cohesion
- No customers
- Bad product
- No marketing
- No budget for it
- Not seen as important
- Leadership

1. Beta product
2. Not tested enough
3. No budget for tests
4. Other bad products
5. Additional factors

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Example

- My car will not start. (the problem or abnormal condition)
  - Why? - The battery is dead. (first why)
  - Why? - The alternator is not functioning. (second why)
  - Why? - The alternator belt has broken. (third why)
  - Why? - The alternator belt was well beyond its useful service life and has never been replaced. (fourth why)
    - Why? - I have not been maintaining my car according to the recommended service schedule. (fifth why, a root cause)
    - Why? - Replacement parts are not available because of the extreme age of my vehicle. (sixth why, optional footnote)
  - I will start maintaining my car according to the recommended service schedule. (solution)

Caveats

Note that in this example the fifth why suggests a broken process or an alterable behavior, which is typical of reaching the root-cause level.
- Try not to stop at symptoms (A symptom is evidence that something is present)
- Proceed to lower-level root causes if possible

- People do not fail, processes do
  - It’s not about pointing fingers at people
  - It’s about improving processes

There can be multiple answers – in that case, “branch” analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why 1</th>
<th>Why 2</th>
<th>Why 3</th>
<th>Why 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is no computerized solution to handle job applications</td>
<td>There was staff resistance</td>
<td>They were not explained the full benefits of the system</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>They feared being made redundant</td>
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<td>They were uncomfortable about changing the way they worked</td>
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<td>The company grew at an exponential rate that there was no time to document anything.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There was no formal set of procedures to handle job requests, and procedures were passed on by mouth as opposed to being documented.</td>
<td>There was no system in place to do so.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Five Whys Steps

- First, write the observed problem at the top of the page
- Why is this taking place? Record answer (3 or 4 answers)
- Ask four more successive whys
- Post each answer near associated “why”
- Root cause is identified when asking “why” yields no additional useful information

- Look at the answers to the last asked “why” for systemic causes
- Which “why” offers most meaningful insight into problem?
- Discuss and report out the most likely cause and your analysis of this exercise
# TOOL #3 – Five Whys Worksheet

Enter a description of the issue, problem or performance gap.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Why is this happening? Enter the most direct cause of the issue listed above.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Why is this happening? Enter the most direct cause of the issue listed above.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Why is this happening? Enter the most direct cause of the issue listed above.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Why is this happening? Enter the most direct cause of the issue listed above.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Why is this happening? Enter the most direct cause of the issue listed above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Brainstorming

- A tool used to bring out ideas of each individual
- Need an environment free of criticism for creative and unrestricted exploration of options and solutions
- Why brainstorm
  - You can identify a wide range of options
  - Rapidly produce a large number of ideas
  - Fosters sense of ownership
- Ground rules
  - Everyone participates
  - During the brainstorm, no
    - Discussion
    - Criticism
    - Compliments
    - Comments
- Set a time limit
- After brainstorm, clarify ideas
• Ideal group size is 5 – 15 people with diverse backgrounds
• Set time limit and assign a timekeeper and data recorder
• Rapid generation of ideas for 10 – 30 minutes
• State topic in the form of a question
  o “What can be done to ...?”
  o “How could we improve ...?”
• Can do silent or “call-out” style of brainstorming
• When recording ideas
  o Write down idea as spoken (no interpretation)
  o Do so in no particular order
  o Do not associate names with ideas
  o Delay judgment
• After session
  o Clarify ideas
  o Point to each idea and ask for clarification of meaning
  o Eliminate duplication of ideas
• During brainstorming, don’t say
  o That will never work.
  o There’s no time for this.
  o How will we pay for this?
  o You can’t be serious.
  o You are completely missing the point.
  o We studied that years ago.
  o How long have you been with APS?

• After the brainstorming, then evaluate the ideas.

• After the team has completed root cause analysis and brainstorming, the team should be able to move to mapping the new, “to be” process utilizing process mapping techniques found in this toolkit.
Risk Assessment

- What is a risk?
  - An uncertain future event
  - Can be positive or negative

- Example risks
  - Insufficient senior management support
  - Resistance from employees
  - Process improvement initiative is too costly to maintain

The purpose of managing risk is to prevent potential problems from turning into real ones.
• Risk assessment steps
  o Identify risks
  o Analyze (or quantify) risks
  o Develop risk response plan

• Probability
  o What is the likelihood that this risk could occur?

• Impact
  o What is the impact of this risk on our process (or process improvement initiative) if it occurred?

• Both probability and impact can be rated on a high/medium/low scale or 1-5.

  What are the options for responding to risk?

• Avoid
  o Modify process so that the risk event cannot occur

• Accept
  o Do nothing preventative as the impact will be low

• Mitigate
- Take preventative actions to lower the probability and/or impact of the risk event
  - Transfer
    - Find a third party to assume responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Number</th>
<th>Risk Description</th>
<th>Probability</th>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Planned Response</th>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>Risk Owner</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>
Communication Plan

Communication that has to occur to ensure all parties receive the appropriate information to prepare them for the change or improvement

- Often overlooked tool in rolling out new processes and initiatives
- Introducing a new process means introducing change and you must communicate change
- Your team should generate ideas for communication plan

Steps to develop communication plan

- Determine communication goal
  - State what you hope to accomplish with each audience
  - Awareness of changes, gain approval, obtain feedback
- Identify the audiences (the who)
- Determine key message points (the what)
  - What each group needs to know about the change
  - May need to design different messages for each audience
  - Key dates
- Best communication vehicles to use (the how)
  - Best way to communicate with each audience
  - Example vehicles
    - Face-to-face meetings
    - Email
    - Brochures
    - Flyers
    - Newsletters
    - Letters
    - Phone calls

- Right timing for communication (the when) – best time to communicate with each audience
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Communication Goal</th>
<th>Key Message Points</th>
<th>Communication Vehicles</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and Principals</td>
<td>Feedback and support</td>
<td>- What's changing</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>July 31</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Benefit to client/customer</td>
<td>Email follow up</td>
<td>August 10 (email)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Timeline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>- Benefits</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRT and Central Office Staff</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>- What's changing and why</td>
<td>Adobe Captivate presentation on SharePoint</td>
<td>September 12</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Their role and responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliverable/Description</td>
<td>Type (Man/Mktg/Info)</td>
<td>Target Audience(s)</td>
<td>Delivery Method</td>
<td>Delivery Frequency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status Reports</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>Sponsor Managers Steering committee</td>
<td>Project Status Report template e-mailed to audience.</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Awareness-Building</td>
<td>Info</td>
<td>Local user community</td>
<td>Stand-up presentations.</td>
<td>Schedule twice weekly</td>
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<td>Sessions</td>
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<td>until all users covered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remote Awareness-Building</td>
<td>Info</td>
<td>Remote user community</td>
<td>Webcast presentations.</td>
<td>Hold sessions three times</td>
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<td>Sessions</td>
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<td>a week until all users</td>
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<td>Inform people of the project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Pins</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>All users, customers, and stakeholders</td>
<td>Hand out to those that attend the awareness</td>
<td>Same frequency as</td>
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<td>presentations.</td>
<td>awareness sessions</td>
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<td>Pins will be given out to all</td>
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<td>Send pin in intercompany mail to those that attend</td>
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<td>people attending the awareness</td>
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<td>Webcasts.</td>
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<td>presentations to build</td>
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<td>enthusiasm and brand image.</td>
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Measuring the Success of the New Process

Once you have implemented your process, it is important to measure its success. The team should brainstorm possible measures and then make a final decision on the process measures. The team should decide if it makes sense to look at leading measures, lagging measures or both. What exactly are the different types of measures?

Leading Measures

- Performance drivers (see below for information on drivers)
- Outcome is predictive of lagging results
- Often the same thing as a driver metric.
- predict what will happen (ex: # of incidents, teacher evaluation)

Lagging Measures

- Actual results of leading measures
- measures show results or outcomes (ex: customer perception, teacher retention)

Drivers

- Provide immediate feedback on the performance of the process
- Facilitate immediate improvement and help identify what should immediately change in the process to better predict the final performance outcome
- Generally it is best to have more drivers (leading measures) than lagging measures as a focus on drivers can have a significant impact on your final results
Given the above, with your team, ask the following questions:

1. Given the new process changes, what measurable results should we see?
2. Do you agree or disagree and why?
3. What existing measures do we currently use to measure this process? Do these still make sense? Why or why not?
# Measure Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric Name</th>
<th>Performance Target/Goal</th>
<th>Is this a leading or a lagging measure?</th>
<th>How will it be measured? Who will measure it and how often?</th>
<th>Will taking the effort to track this really help us be successful? What will the results tell us and how will we use the result?</th>
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