SUMS Consulting

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Participative Process Change

Good Practice Guide

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1 Introduction: Participative Process Change

This SUMS Consulting Good Practice Guide outlines a participative approach to process change developed collaboratively within the SUMS Consulting consortium which has been applied by a number of member universities.

The aim of process change in higher education is to develop effective support and management activities that underpin academic delivery. The aim of participation in process change is to ensure that proposals are realistic and will be implemented, with process review and redesign leading to process improvement and effective process management.

1.1 Why Redesign Processes?

There are three general reasons for redesigning processes:

To address identified issues
These may include:

- Quality of service, such as failure to meet service standards
- Performance, such as excessive response times
- Resource constraints, and the need to control costs
- Excessive or unbalanced workloads.

To investigate new ideas
Areas of innovation may include:

- Enhancing service standards
- Re-sequencing activities
- Organisational and role changes
- Exploiting new information systems, especially online.

As part of a programme of quality assurance and performance management
To ensure that activities are:

- Efficient and effective
- Aligned with organisational strategies and policies.

1.2 Why a Process Perspective?

The process perspective is especially powerful where activities, issues or potential changes carry across functions, organisational units, budget heads and management roles. Processes are concerned with the entirety of activities that are needed to produce an output or to deliver a service to a service user, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Examples of these processes include:

- Course development, involving academic staff, academic boards, central administration and marketing

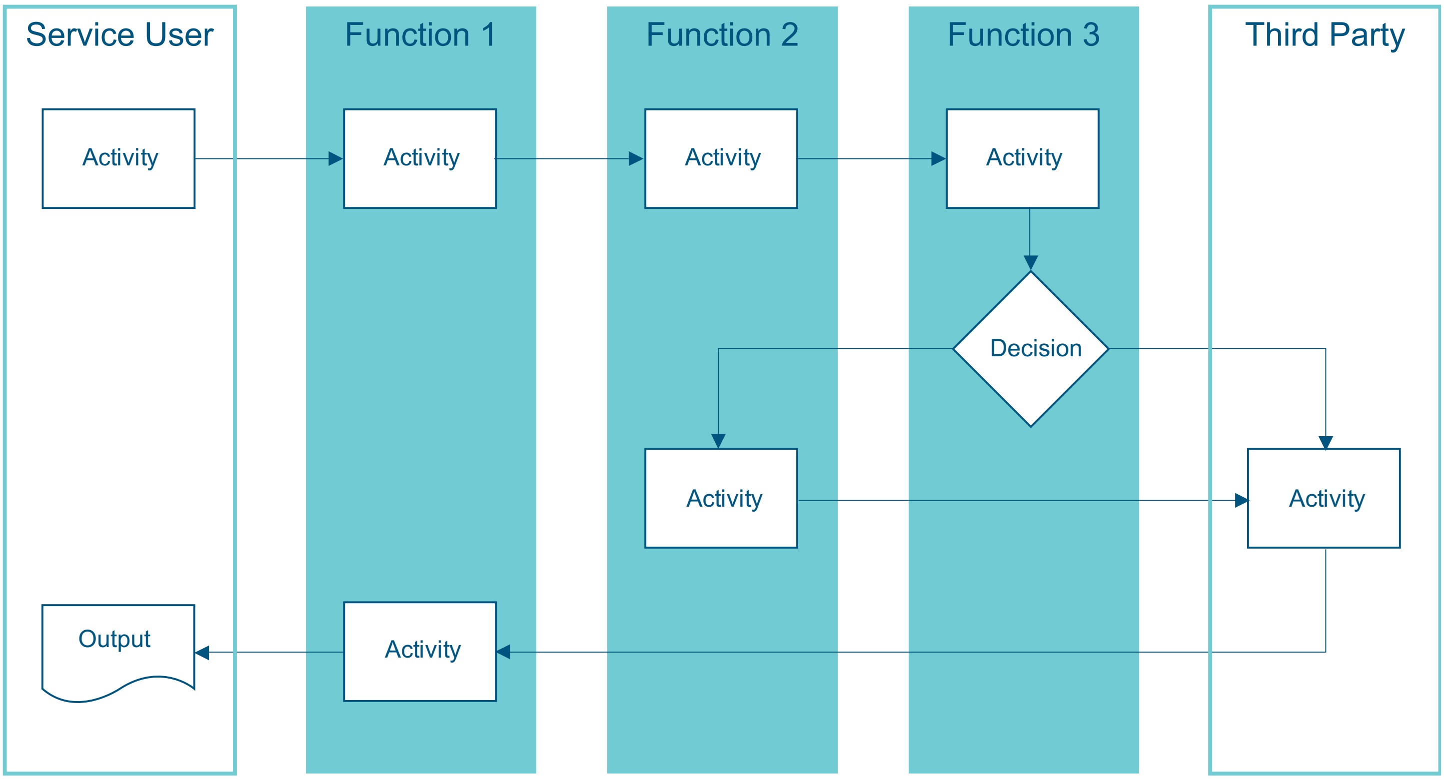

Figure 1 Process Schematic

- Student recruitment and admissions, involving applicants, marketing, recruitment officers, admissions administrators and academic staff
- Research contract negotiation, involving the research sponsor, the research group, and finance, legal and personnel functions
- Procurement and purchasing, involving the users of goods and services, purchasing staff, procurement officers, finance administrators and suppliers.

The process approach makes the 'service user' perspective explicit, and integrates the activities carried out by service users and other process users, whether applicants, students, research sponsors or researchers, with related activities carried out by academic, support and management staff.

While process modelling provides a rigorous foundation for redesigning processes, a process perspective also enables all aspects of an organisation to be considered, including processes, policies, organisation, roles, resources, information needs, facilities and technologies.

However, while the perspective and rigour of a process based approach are invaluable, they are not sufficient alone to deliver improvements. If proposed changes are to be implemented successfully, they should be informed by operational knowledge and have the support of those who are asked to take them forward. This requires a participative approach.

2 Participative Process Change in Brief

Participative process change is led by internal Change Teams as part of a continuing programme.

2.1 Foundations

It is important to establish a clear foundation on which a process change programme can work. The first stage of a successful process change programme is therefore to:

- Establish sponsorship from senior staff
- Establish programme governance, through a Board (which may be the existing Senior Management Team)
- Establish project management
- Set out a two-way communication plan
- Define and document the approach to be used
- Select processes for individual redesign and change
- Set terms of reference for each individual Change Team, outlining scope, aims and timescale.

2.2 Selecting Processes for Redesign

A process change programme should cover all processes over a period of time, but it can be worthwhile to prioritise key areas, such as those that:

- Are critical to delivering strategic aims, such as the course, student, or research lifecycles
- Underpin many activities, such as identity management, purchasing, or personnel.

In some instances, Process Change Teams might focus on areas that have evident performance issues to address, which will be specific to each institution. When this happens, it is doubly important that they are understood as an opportunity to achieve positive change rather than as punitive exercises.

It is useful to produce a high-level map of all the university's processes, to provide a framework for selecting areas for attention, and as a cross-check to ensure that the process change programme is comprehensive. Figure 2 shows an example high-level process map - though in practice, process changes are likely to be scoped at a lower level.

2.3 Individual Process Change

An individual Process Change consists of the following phases, as shown in Figure 3:

Set up and Preparation
The Board should set the scope, aims and timescale, and then identify members of the Change Team, and commission a process brief that sets out the context for the change, describing the process, and offering initial ideas for potential alternatives to be considered.

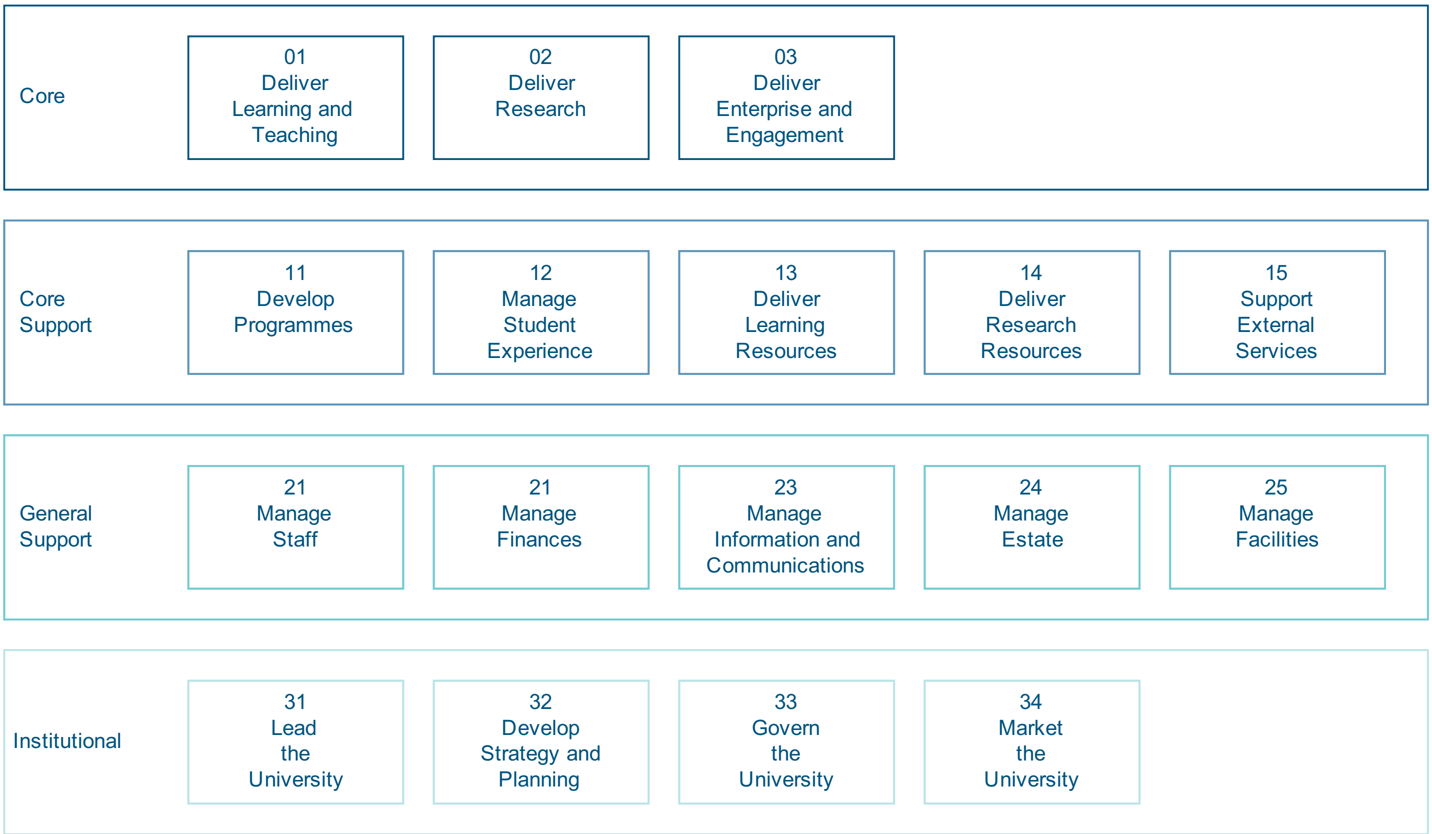

Figure 2 Example Process Map

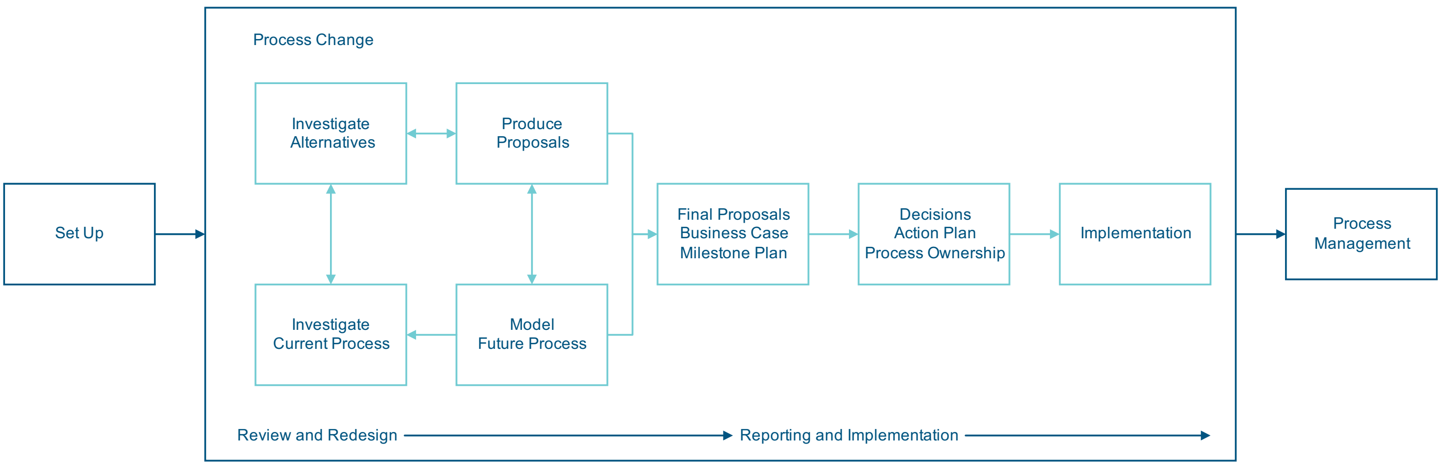

Figure 3 Process Change Phases

Review and Redesign

The key activities in the review and redesign phase are:

- Mobilising the Change Team
- Engaging with stakeholders
- Generating ideas and investigating alternatives
- Investigating current processes and transferable good practice
- Designing future processes
- Developing proposals
- Reporting proposals and developing a milestone plan and outline business case.

Reporting and Implementation

Following review and redesign, proposals should be presented to the Board. If they are accepted, the Board should identify a Process Owner, and set in train the transition to implementation.

Successful implementation is of course a pre-requisite to achieving effective change. While responsibility and authority for co-ordinating implementation of agreed changes should rest with a Process Owner, supported by the Change Team, the key to success is the participative nature of process review and redesign. The foundations of commitment and involvement are laid in the review and redesign phase, with process users and process providers being involved and contributing throughout.

Ultimately, effective and embedded process management should be a key outcome of successful implementation.

3 Making it Work: Commitment and Participation

Proposals from Process Change Teams typically cut across academic and administrative areas, and across more than one organisational area, managerial role and budget head.

As with any successful change, Process Change should:

- Have sponsorship from senior stakeholders and management
- Be resourced with a team with the knowledge and skills to carry forward redesign and implementation
- Engage with the people using or delivering the process, and others with an interest in the outcomes of the process
- Be open and transparent, with effective two-way communication.

3.1 Sponsorship and Communication

To maximise participation, process change should be sponsored by a group rather than an individual. This may be an existing management group, or may be a Board specially formed for the process change programme. The Board should be of sufficient seniority to give authority and allocate resources to the programme, and to carry through eventual management and budget changes.

A typical Board is chaired by a Pro Vice-Chancellor, and the membership should cover such roles as the Head of the Administration, the Head of Information Services, and Academic Deans of Faculty or Heads of School. The Board also needs the support of a Programme Manager to carry through its decisions into action.

Effective two-way communications are vital, and a communication plan should be set out and implemented right from the beginning of the programme.

3.2 The Process Change Team

The Process Change Team is both a Review and an Action Team.

Skills

Taking forward process change requires a combination of skills, including:

- Understanding the process perspective and the specific approach being used
- Modelling and analysing processes
- Challenging received practices and generating new ideas
- Representing alternative viewpoints
- Communicating and championing proposals
- Planning and implementing change.

This combination of skills is more likely to be found in a team than in an individual.

Roles

The key roles in a Process Change Team are:

- The Team Chair, typically a senior academic, who moves the work forward, represents the academic viewpoint, and is able to champion proposed changes to the academic community

- The Team Leader, who prepares the process brief, co-ordinates the team's work, and prepares the final report and implementation plan
- Team Members, who provide experience, challenge and creativity, carry through the investigation, review alternatives, develop proposals, and champion implementation.

The Team is supported by the Programme Manager.

In addition to these functional roles, the team approach also brings a range of personal styles to the review, whether creative, investigative, critical, or focused on action, the interaction of which enriches the process.

Representation
The team approach provides an opportunity to represent a cross-section of process users, process providers, and other stakeholders. Team members should be chosen from all categories and grades of staff across the University, to bring a range of perspectives to the Team, with care being taken to achieve a balance between people with day-to-day contact with the operational process and those with a broader view. Where the process engages with students, the team should include at least one student member.

3.3 Engagement and Involvement

The University
Sponsorship and a participative team are necessary but not sufficient to guarantee successful change. To be successful, process change has to be open and transparent, and encourage participation and representation across the University. This can be done through interviews, workshops and questionnaires, and the use of web-based discussion forums.

University Managers
As has been noted, process changes typically cut across existing management roles, and senior academic and service managers have ultimate responsibility for implementing changes, as well as having observations on current processes and views on potential alternatives. It is therefore important that senior managers are engaged by the Board.

3.4 Communications

Two-way communications such as newsletters and briefing sessions, and the provision of channels for input and feedback, including web-based forums, are essential to:

- Ensure that the scope is understood
- Set clear expectations
- Maximise input to the Change Team
- Inform stakeholders of progress
- Test proposals
- Develop awareness as a basis for implementation.

4 Setting out the Situation

4.1 Briefing the Change Team

On the basis of the terms of reference set out by the Board, the Team Leader should prepare a brief for the Change Team. This should:

- Describe the purpose of the process and place it in the context of the University's wider activities and strategy
- Gather together available information on the existing process, such as activities, organisation and performance, and costs and income
- Include any initial suggestions for improving the process.

4.2 The Process Environment

An evaluation of the environment in which the process operates helps the Change Team to understand and investigate key current and potential future influences on process performance. It is also valuable to underpin the transition to implementation and eventual changes.

4.3 Stakeholders

One of the keys to successful process change is to identify the stakeholders in the process, and to understand their involvement. Stakeholder analysis enables the Change Team to question assumptions and establish who the key stakeholders are. This is an essential preparation for investigating the current situation and for identifying interviewees, workshop participants and questionnaire recipients.

The stakeholder analysis should identify the people, roles, organisations or departments that perform actions in the process, make inputs to or receive outputs from the process, or provide resources or support for the process. The drivers for each stakeholder group can then be established, and the active relationships between them analysed.

5 Investigating the Situation

The whole Change Team should be involved in investigating the situation, although it is important that team members are not diverted from the key roles of challenge and creativity.

5.1 Gathering Information

It is essential to be pragmatic rather than exhaustive in the collection, analysis and reporting of information: it is important to gather sufficient relevant information, impossible to gather all relevant information. Equally, while material should be relevant, it is often the interesting tangents and sidelines that spark off new ideas.

For process redesign the following are especially valuable, both from within the institution and from other institutions:

- Existing process models
- Operating manuals and procedures
- Forms and documents used in the process, whether paper or online
- Databases and reports used in the process
- Relevant organisational reports, strategies and policies
- Data indicating current process performance.

5.2 Engagement: Interviews, Workshops and Questionnaires

Whatever form of investigation is used, it is important to engage as far as possible with the whole range of stakeholders, while explaining the purpose of the review and the main purpose of the particular activity, whether it is seeking information, exploring issues and ideas, or establishing priorities and preferences.

Web Forum
A web forum is indispensable for gathering views, encouraging discussion of alternatives, and gathering feedback on proposals.

Interviews
Interviews are useful for gathering information about the current process, and for identifying issues and ideas for possible changes.

Workshops
Workshops can be used in process review to:

- Seek ideas, issues, questions and options, and to open out problems (divergence)
- Redesign processes based on identified process activities, and redeploy process activities across organisational units and roles
- Review, evaluate and prioritise proposals (convergence).

Workshops are generally not useful for producing initial process models.

Questionnaires
Questionnaires can be useful, but can also be deceptive. The advantages include wide involvement, comparability of questions asked, responses that are susceptible to analysis, and identification of areas for follow-up by interview. However, the disadvantages include the difficulty of predicting, controlling and adjusting respondents' perceptions, and the time and resource required to prepare, distribute, collect and analyse questionnaires.

6 Modeling Processes

6.1 Why Model Processes?

Working with process models is an important aspect of process redesign: the models provide a powerful tool for analysing current processes and for designing improved processes. They also help to create an objective discussion of how things might be done rather than of 'the way we do things round here'.

The point of process design is not to ‘get the perfect process’, but to achieve useful change while maintaining ‘buy-in’. It is essential to balance analysis with participation, and therefore to:

- Involve people at every stage
- Keep the model as simple as possible, only modelling the level of detail required
- Review and refine models as a group activity
- Select key areas and issues when reporting, rather than presenting the whole model.

It is important to use a simple modelling approach, so that process models are easy for the Change Team to produce and analyse, are easily understood by a wider audience, and are easy to maintain as part of ongoing process development.

Figure 4 shows a process model format. The first case study includes an example model.

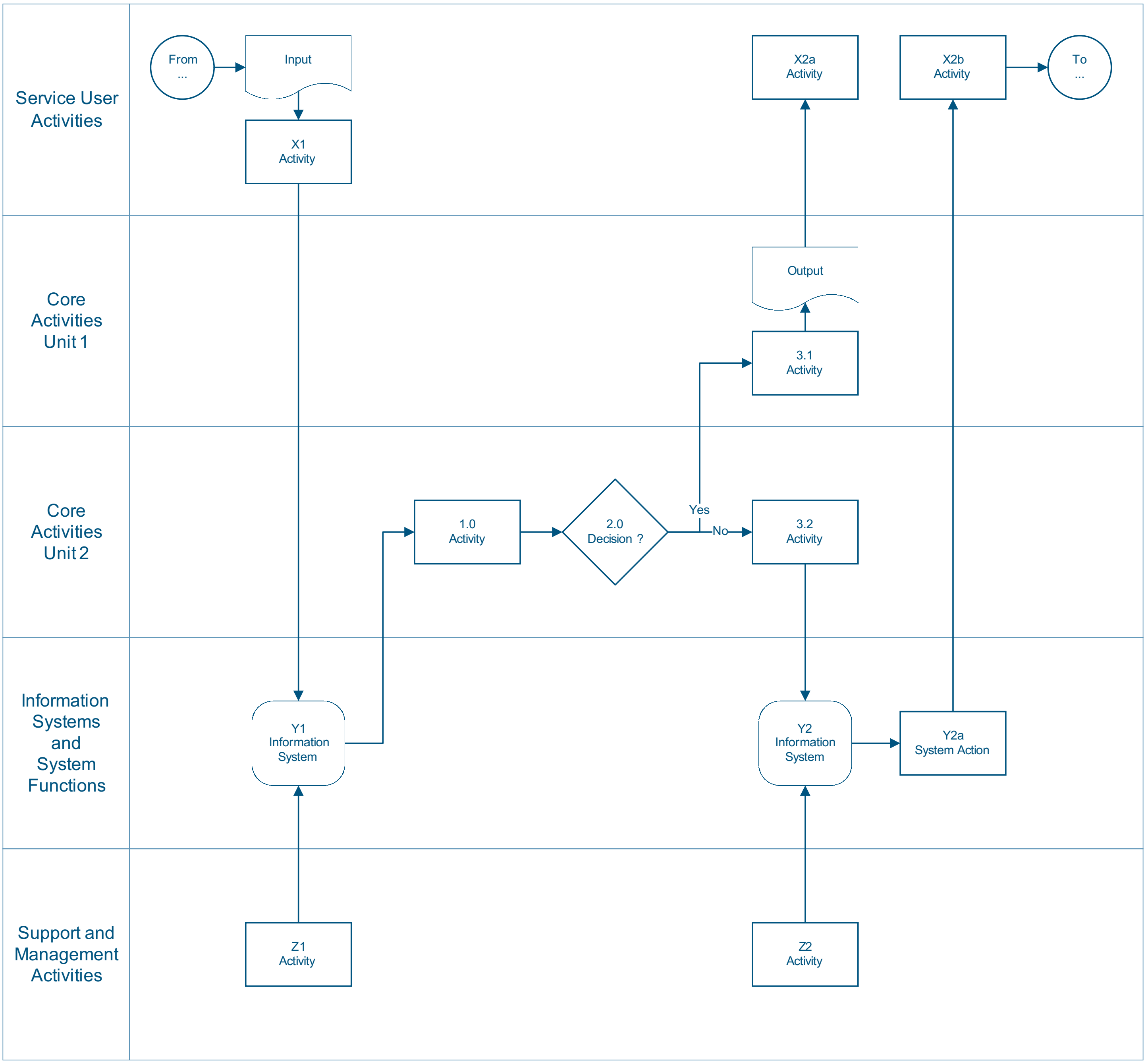

Figure 4 Example Process Model Format

It is worth noting that while flowcharts are invaluable tools showing how activities connect with other activities (and where they do not connect), and how processes cross organisational interfaces, tabulated versions should also be made available for those stakeholders that prefer text to diagrams.

6.2 Stages of Process Modelling

A standard approach to process analysis and redesign involves the production of four models:

Current Actual

The initial models of current processes should show the activities in the process, and indicate which departments or roles carry out which activities, including any significant variations. These models provide the basis for analysis, and also for establishing current process performance; they also provide a framework for understanding and documenting issues.

Current Schematic

Models can then be produced based on current processes indicating service user, core, support and management activities, and indicating evident areas for improvement such as duplicate activities or gaps in the process. If there are significant variations of current processes, a master version should be created, with sub-processes for the main alternatives.

Future Schematic

The models of future processes should show the process with duplicate activities removed, gaps in the process filled, and the process re-sequenced. They should not show which departments or roles might carry out activities. These models form the basis for further analysis, for comparing the impact of options, and for establishing future performance indicators and targets.

Future Proposed

The final version of a process model shows which departments or roles will carry out activities, and forms the basis for summarising, presenting and justifying proposals, and for eventual implementation.

6.3 Using Baseline Process Models

Process review and redesign can be greatly accelerated by using baseline process models based on sector good practice as a starting point, rather than modelling current processes within the institution from scratch.

The baseline process models replace the current actual and current schematic models. They are reviewed and customised by the Change Team in the light of their knowledge of the institution and any positive features of its current processes, to produce a future schematic and future proposed models.

6.4 Analysing Processes

Relationship to Strategy

The first question to ask is whether the outputs from the process support the university in delivering its core activities. For example, recruiting students clearly contributes to delivering teaching and learning, and also assures a revenue stream to support that mission, but an undergraduate recruitment process focused on full-time school-leavers does not deliver to a widening participation strategy.

User, Core, Support, and Management Activities

It is equally important to understand how each individual process activity contributes to achieving the process aim, and how it affects process performance. To analyse this, it is useful to distinguish the following categories of activities:

- Service User activities, where the service user is being asked to do something
- Core activities, that contribute directly to the objectives of the process - which may include information system functions as well as ‘human’ activities
- Support activities, which enable the process to be carried out, such as maintaining information resources, and
- Management activities, which are concerned with monitoring and controlling the process.

This analysis enables the Change Team to focus on the service user perspective, and to ask questions such as whether service user interactions are optimised, whether support activities are properly integrated, or whether monitoring is inadequate or excessive.

Process Steps
The process should be analysed to identify:

- Obvious duplication, redundancy and omissions, focusing on what is necessary and sufficient
- Simplifications such as re-sequencing or reducing organisational interfaces
- Potential parallel processing, to reduce process time
- Whether process versions are needed, such as an interim process including immediate improvements and an e-enabled process for the medium-term.

e-Enabled Processes
In many cases, processes need to be comprehensively redesigned to take full advantage of the capabilities of online systems. General features of good e-enabled processes include:

- Increasing self-service and direct data entry by service users
- Increasing automated workflow through information systems, replacing routing and chasing of documents by administrative staff
- Increasing the proportion of time that administrative staff spend on value-adding activities, rather than on data entry, routing and chasing
- A requirement to set out procedures and criteria 'up-front', and building them into online systems, replacing 'just-in-time/just-too-late' manual reactions
- Moving activities 'forward' in the process
- Building in acknowledgement, notification and tracking mechanisms that meet service user expectations of online systems.

It is of course also essential when designing e-enabled processes to ensure that offline options are made available for those service users that need them, including print and audio. However, these can generally be sourced from the online system.

Process Organisation
Activities may be assigned either across existing units and functions (though these may carry out some different activities), or by grouping activities and re-structuring around them. Movement across the interfaces between units or roles should be minimised.

External transfer of activities can also be considered: contracting out in-house activities or bringing contracted-out activities back in-house.

7 Developing Options and Alternatives

7.1 Asking Questions

There is rarely any shortage of suggestions for change. In addition, many questions will arise out of the process analysis. Equally, it is important to encourage lateral thinking, and it can be the case that the process itself does not need substantial redesign, but that other factors need to change to improve process performance or achieve strategic aims.

With this in mind, the following areas should also be considered:

- Policy changes
- Quality and performance targets
- Resourcing changes and budget transfers
- Information resources, guidance and training
- Information systems development and use of new technologies.

The important question here is 'what if': for example, 'what if we change the policy?', 'what if the process was resourced differently?', 'what if the staff were properly trained?', or 'what if we put this on the web?'

7.2 Comparisons and Benchmarking

Comparisons with other universities and organisations operating similar processes can also be a valuable source of options and alternatives. The Change Team should seek out good practice elsewhere, and perhaps make study visits. While practice may not be directly transferable, for example because of different strategic priorities or different resource profiles, it is important and illuminating to ask 'why not?'

8 Performance Indicators

Performance indicators should be used by the Process Change Team to:

- Evaluate current performance and identify areas for investigation
- Enable meaningful comparisons with similar processes in other organisations
- Evaluate proposed changes and establish the business case.

They also provide a baseline for:

- Evaluating the strategic impact of changes made
- Comparing actual with planned operational performance, and explaining differences
- Evaluating resource use, balancing resources used for activities across the process in the light of identified priorities, and controlling total process costs.

8.1 Process Measures

The key principles in identifying process measures are to:

- 'Measure the whole process' - to ensure that activities contribute to the ultimate objective and to avoid incentives that optimise local performance at the expense of the ultimate process
- 'Measure what matters' – operational measures that can help to diagnose and improve performance
- 'Build buy-in' - involving people carrying out the process in developing the measures and setting any targets.

Indicators should be balanced between:

- Ultimate strategic and immediate operational measures
- Service user impact, organisational impact, and financial impact
- Quantitative and qualitative measures.

The relationship between strategic performance indicators and operational diagnostic measures is illustrated in Figure 5.

The standard measures applied to processes and process activities are:

- Time, such as total time taken, timeliness of delivery, significant delays
- Cost, whether staff effort or financial cost
- Quantity, such as the number of transactions completed
- Quality, including service quality, product quality, service user satisfaction, staff satisfaction.

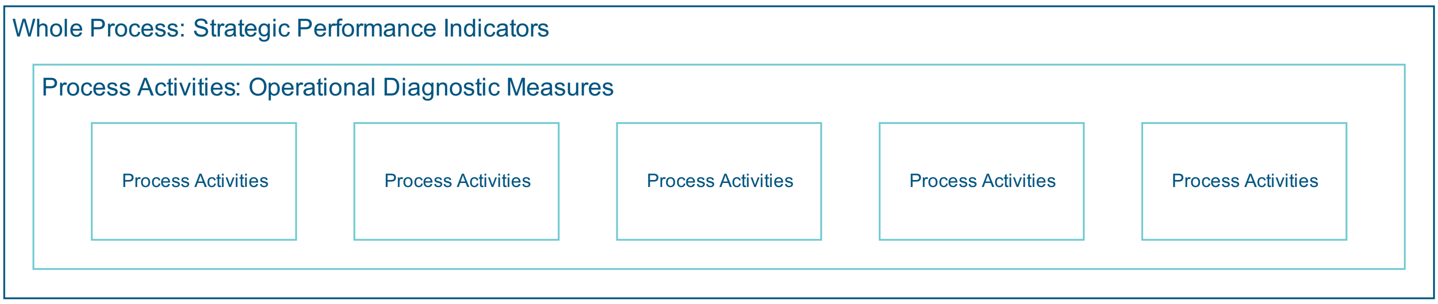

Figure 5 Strategic Indicators and Operational Measures

8.2 Deriving Performance Measures from Process Models

Process models can be used as a basis for defining operational performance measures. Examples include:

- Activity achievement (i.e. whether or not an activity is performed)
- Process time between process activities, and summed to the process as a whole.
- Quality of inputs and outputs
- Activity resource use and cost.

It is equally important to recognise that not all relevant performance indicators can be derived in this way. Staff satisfaction, for example, can probably only sensibly be assigned to an overall job, rather than to specific process activities. Service user satisfaction ratings can however be used as a measure of the quality of process outputs.

9 Prioritising Proposals and Reporting

Proposals from Process Change Teams have to be prioritised in relation to other activities and initiatives, and the proposals made by an individual Change Team should themselves be prioritised, to ensure that the most important are taken forward first.

9.1 Prioritising Proposals

Proposals should be considered in terms of:

- Desirability, such as being critical to delivering strategic aims, freeing resources for re-investment, or making a substantial impact on performance
- Feasibility, for example in terms of available resources, or political acceptability or necessity, and taking account of the analysis of the internal environment.

To support the decision-making process and the allocation of resources, it is useful to identify the likely implementation period and the scale of change:

- Systemic and cultural changes in the management framework or beyond the current budget framework
- Operational changes within the current management and budget framework but with transfers of responsibilities and resources
- Operational changes within current management responsibilities and current budgets.

This is illustrated in Figure 6.

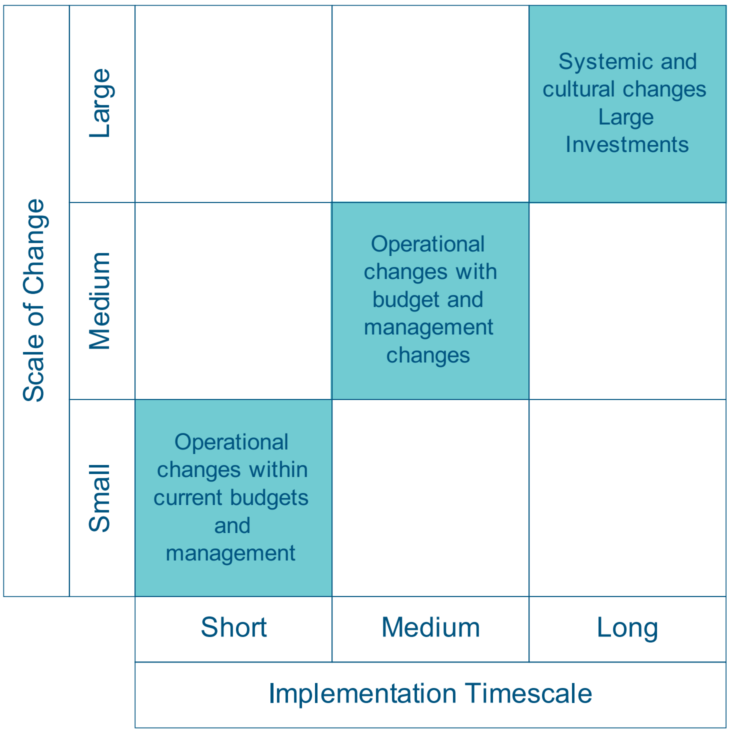

Figure 6 Change Scale and Timescale

9.2 Reporting

Everyone should be able to see clearly what is (or is not) being proposed, and why, with each stakeholder group being addressed.

Reports can usually be brief. Notes of the significant characteristics of the process and of the aims and scope for the Change Team should be included, but the main part of the report should outline each alternative that has been investigated, including both:

- Those that are being proposed, with the expected benefits, specific measures and performance targets, and the scale and implementation period, and
- Those that are not being proposed, with reasons.

Process models setting out the current and proposed processes, a milestone plan, and an outline business case should be attached to the report, as well as any other useful material such as proposed service descriptions or draft policy changes.

10 Making it Happen: Process Change

10.1 Deliverables

There is little point in review and redesign unless useful changes are implemented. The transition to implementation is the critical point in successful process change; key deliverables to facilitate this are:

A Business Case

A clear business case setting out benefits, risks and costs, including the organisational impact:

- Process Impact, such as process time, quality of service
- Service User Impact, such as teaching quality, course completion, student satisfaction, research quality, research project completion, sponsor satisfaction
- Staff Impact, such as staff capability, staff turnover, staff satisfaction

and the financial impact:

- Capital and One-Off Expenditure
- Recurrent Costs, whether additional, saved or avoided
- Recurrent Income, whether additional or protected.

An Implementation Action and Monitoring Plan

The implementation and monitoring plan should outline

- The Proposals
- Scale and Timescale
- Potential Start Date and End Date for implementation
- Summary Benefit and Opportunities
- Summary Costs and Risks
- The Board Decision
- The Implementation Owner
- Resources Required.

In addition.

- Status and Progress

should be reported and added to this as implementation goes forward.

Note that while the Process Owner will be the overall implementation owner, specific proposals may have a specific owner, for example the Head of Information Systems for system changes.

A Milestone Plan

A simple milestone plan, outlining:

- Tasks - process changes, people changes, information and information systems changes, organisation changes, facilities and IT changes
- Timescales
- Resources.

10.2 Decision Making and Resourcing

Clear decisions from the Board and the University's planning and resources committees, concerning:

- Decision-making routes, including forwarding proposals for approvals
- What should or should not happen - and when
- Who is responsible for action
- Priorities in relation to other initiatives
- Resource allocation
- Measures and targets.

The range of Board decisions against proposals:

- To agree for action (typically small and medium scale)
- To agree for action subject to specific conditions, for example detailed costs estimates and scheduling against available budget
- To support and refer to another body for authority and resources (typically large scale)
- To refer back to the Change Team for reconsideration
- To reject.

Decisions should be recorded against the implementation and monitoring plan, to enable implementation and the monitoring of implementation.

10.3 The Process Owner and the Change Team

The key role in realising change is that of Process Owner, who is given authority by the Board to implement the changes as agreed.

Since proposals for process change typically range widely, the Process Owner should be empowered to use authority and influence to achieve changes where there is no direct line of management. This can be a cultural challenge. The Process Owner is supported by the Change Team, now in effect the Action Team, which may take on one or two additional members with specific expertise such as in Personnel or Information Systems. Where immediate user feedback is required during implementation, a web Forum or events can be set up, open to process users, process providers, and academic and service managers.

Continuing Involvement, Communication and Training
The process review and redesign phase should have established the participation of a wide range of providers and users, and so created the basis for an understanding of the validity of proposed change. The continuing involvement of process providers and process users is vital throughout implementation.

This should be supplemented by briefings and training relating to the proposals and the new process.

Monitoring
Process providers and users should be enabled and encouraged to provide feedback to the Process Owner and Board at any time. The Board and the planning and resources committee should monitor the implementation of the agreed changes and their impact on performance indicators on a regular basis.

11 Looking to the future: Process Management

Participative process change is not concerned only with making immediate changes; it also provides a foundation for:

- **Process management**, the ongoing management of the process as a whole, and of individual activities from the perspective of their impact in the process as a whole
- **Continuous development and improvement**, with the continuing participation of process users and providers, administrative and academic staff
- **Future planning and resourcing**, with process performance measures informing forward planning and decision-making.

12 Resources for Process Change

Elapsed Time
In our experience, it takes two to four months to set up a Process Change Programme, including customising the approach and setting up the Board if it is not an existing body.

Individual Process Change initiatives need to balance sufficient time for a thorough investigation against achieving timely results. A process review and redesign can be done in a day, but is unlikely to be thorough - or it could take a year, but by the time it reports events may have passed it by. Our experience suggests the following timescales:

- Set up of individual Change Team: one to two months
- Review and redesign: two to four months, depending on the scope
- Transition to implementation: two to four months depending on the scale of the proposals.

Note that the review and redesign phase can be considerably accelerated by the use of baseline process models as a starting point, rather than modelling current processes from scratch, with a timescale of one to two months.

Staff

Increasing participation in process change increases the chances of useful outcomes, with a corresponding outlay of staff time and effort. Our experience suggests the following rough time inputs for Review and Redesign

- Team Chair: five to ten days
- Team Leader: fifteen to thirty days
- Team Members: five to ten days each
- Project Manager: five to ten days.

Time inputs required for implementation self-evidently depend on the scale and timescale of changes, the following annualised figures are offered by way of guidance:

- Process Owner: eighteen to thirty-six days
- Team Chair, Leader and Members: six to twelve days each
- Project Manager: eighteen to thirty-six days

As noted above, the Change Team may take on additional members with specific expertise, but it is better to keep the Team small, with highly skilled and well-focused staff. Large teams can easily end up spending too much time communicating with each other, too little communicating with stakeholders and service users or actually implementing change.

Other Resources

Other resources for Review and Redesign include:

- Space: meeting rooms for workshops and a team room
- Equipment, including process modelling applications, flip charts and so on.

Other resources for implementation depend on the scale of the change.

Case Study: Process Review – Postgraduate Admissions

Claire Axel-Berg, Review Leader, University of Bristol

Objectives

The process review aimed to:

- Raise the number of good applicants successfully registered as postgraduate students, by improving the quality of service for applicants
- Control staff workload while handling increasing numbers of applications.

Approach

The review was carried out by a Review Panel including administrative and academic staff, reporting to the Process Review Programme Board. The Programme Board reported directly to the University Planning and Resources Committee. We engaged with people throughout the university through interviews, group meetings, and questionnaires, and visited other universities to make comparisons.

As we went along, we developed a flowchart model for the current process, and ultimately redesigned the model to show the proposed process. A part of the process model is shown in Figure A.

The main challenges centred on lack of understanding between staff in academic departments and central offices, and on disentangling necessary tasks from habit and inherited procedures.

As Review Leader, I devoted about forty days to the review. The Chair and the five other Panel members gave about ten days each.

Outcomes

Our main proposals were to implement a streamlined admissions process using a single application form and online applications, to provide better information to applicants and admissions staff, and to pilot the charging of deposits on acceptance of an offer.

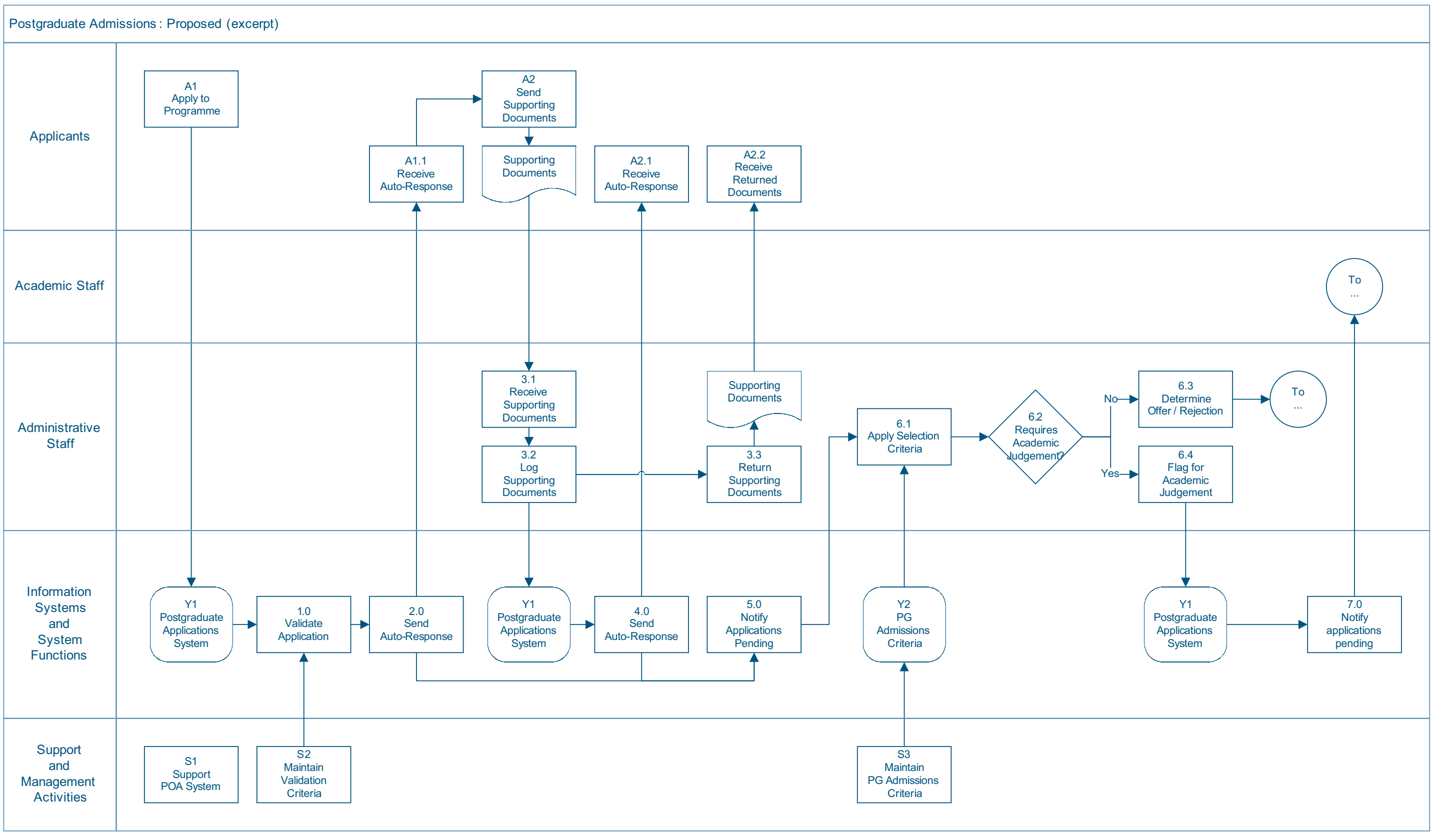

Figure A Excerpt from Process Model

Interestingly, the option of forming a graduate office was not taken forward at the time, even though it had initially seemed a likely proposal, as we identified excellent service at departmental level, which the proposals aimed to support and develop.

The review enabled staff to examine both their own role and the overall applicant experience. As a result, small changes are being made at every stage in the process, with more responsive relationships between staff and applicants, and we have sought to establish the principle of a 'seamless' administration from the student perspective. This is a process of small victories, but will lead to the best service for applicants and the highest level of job satisfaction for staff.

Implementation

The Programme Board endorsed our proposals, and they have been taken forward. The outcomes of the review have been widely accepted across the university, largely we think because of the inclusive approach used, and also by the locking in of the review programme with decision-making at the University Planning & Resources Committee.

A single postgraduate application form is now in use. Intranet application support information has been developed and is being used by undergraduate and postgraduate admissions tutors alike. This was relatively easy to implement, and has had a very strong impact, underlining the Panel's confidence that the departmental staff involved in admissions required support.

The online applications system took longer to implement due to the tender process, and the product needed development to provide the functions that the Panel identified. However, this was perhaps inevitable, and the first pilot programmes ran for applications to the next academic year.

Impact of Process Review

We believe that the best service to applicants comes from a clear understanding of the processes involved. This is being taken forward in the management of the process. Starting with staff and extending to the applicants, this clarity minimises potential confusion and duplication of effort. Increased application numbers can be coped with, and opportunities for enhancement of the experience can be identified and exploited.

Case Study: Participative Process Change - Research and Enterprise

Sally Dimeo, Panel and Process Leader, University of Stirling

Objectives

A rolling programme of reviews of process change has been established at the University of Stirling. The first review, completed in March 2008, covered Enterprise and Commercialisation activities, and was followed by a review of the Research Lifecycle, completed in June 2008.

By encouraging staff to take a radical look at the processes they use, the programme aims:

- To ensure that all processes are fit for purpose and contribute to the University's strategic goals
- To identify opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Approach

The approach recognised that processes generally cross organisational boundaries and have many stakeholders; therefore the whole process is reviewed rather than any single area of the support services. The approach is highly participative, and enables and encourages the involvement of staff of all kinds from across the University.

The programme is overseen by a Board, which identifies areas for review and establishes Panels to undertake each review, each consisting of a Chair, a Leader, and five or six members representing a cross section of users and providers. The Panels investigate current processes, generate ideas and investigate alternatives, then design the proposed process and report to the Board. The Board determines its decisions, then designates a Process Leader to take forward implementation of agreed actions.

Colleagues were invited to take part through a combination of one to one interviews and workshops. Even aside from the agreed actions, this has resulted in very useful communication and interaction across and between service and academic areas.

As Review Leader, I devoted about twenty days to each review. The Chairs and the other Panel members gave about five days each.

Outcomes

The Enterprise and Commercialisation Panel made 24 recommendations to the Board, of which 16 were accepted, 7 were referred either for due diligence or for decision by the Principal's Executive Group, and one was rejected.

The Research Lifecycle Panel made 28 recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Board, with a small number referred to other groups for detailed consideration.

In each case, the Board identified Process Leaders and the transition to implementation began with defining forward paths in detail, especially where recommendations had been referred for due diligence, and for the costing and prioritisation of information systems work.

The reviews also identified a number of principles that were felt to be important in redesigning processes: efficiency; flexibility; responsiveness; simplification; transparency; and trust.

Implementation

The Outline Action and Monitoring Plan, shown in schematic form in Figure B, is a key tool underpinning implementation. This is used to report progress to the Board. By December 2008, 16 of the 23 agreed actions for Enterprise and Commercialisation were in progress, as were 13 of the 28 agreed for the Research Lifecycle.

Unsurprisingly, the greatest challenges arose:

- With the implementation of information systems, notably a system for costing and pricing, where developments had to be integrated with other development and spending plans - but this has now been implemented with an eventual live date of 1 April 2009
- Where changes cross organisational boundaries, beyond the Research and Enterprise Office where the Process Owner works, requiring resolution of how process ownership meshes with the existing management structure - presenting a cultural challenge.

Process	**Research and Enterprise**								
Process Leader	Monty Cantsin								
Ref	Status	Recommendation	Board Decision	Timescale	Implementation Owner	Progress June 2008	Progress October 2008	Progress December 2008	Action
1	Complete	To permit Heads of Department to authorise appointment of staff on fixed term contracts for research and enterprise activities	Accepted	Short 31 July 2008	Director of Research & Enterprise (with Personnel Director)	Policy changed and HoDs notified	Complete	N/A	N/A
2	On target	To implement a web-based costing and pricing tool accessible to Heads of Department and academic staff	Accepted subject to complete business case being submitted by June 2008	Short 30 Sept 2008 Revised to Medium 31 March 2009	Director of Research & Enterprise (with IS Team)	Business case accepted. Software purchased. Servers not yet configured	Software loaded. Roll out plan in place	Configuration in progress	Progress plan to go live 01 April 2009
3	At risk	To establish standard University contracts for standard types of enterprise activity, and revise processes for variations and customer-originated contracts.	Accepted	Medium 31 January 2009	Director of Research & Enterprise (with Contracts Manager)	Included in Research & Enterprise Office annual plan	Some standard contracts available	Holding meetings to confirm specific departmental requirements	Progress plan to complete by end of academic year
4	Critical	To permit Heads of Department to delegate authorisation of appointment of staff on fixed term contracts for research and enterprise activities	Accepted Now referred to Senior Management Team	Short 30 Sept 2008	Director of Research & Enterprise (with Personnel Director)	Policy drafted	Agreed with Personnel Director. Personnel Office procedures to be put in place	On hold: concerns that those delegated to are not aware of possible long term implications	Policy paper to Senior Management Team

Note: This figure is a schematic and does not represent the real situation at the University of Stirling

Figure B Action Plan Schematic

Further Resources and Acknowledgements

SUMS Consulting has developed a Participative Process Change Approach and Toolkit, available to members. SUMS Consulting also delivers consultant-led process change.

This Good Practice Guide is a revision and development of the previous Good Practice Guide to Participative Process Review.

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Notes

SUMS Consulting

The University of Reading
London Road
Reading RG1 5AQ

T 0118 378 2401
F 0118 378 2403

E sums@reading.ac.uk
W www.sums.org.uk

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