

Alternative views of the process

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Abstract

A process can be seen aggregated as a transformation operation, or considered ‘openly’ to visualise the actions and the states as they develop.

1 Introduction

A process¹ is a set of actions taken in order to achieve an intended outcome, and is viewed differently by those interested in performance (§ 2) and those interested in procedure (§ 3).

2 Transformation (I/O) view

A focus on the requirements (input, or ‘I’) and achievements (output, or ‘O’) of a process reduces it to its ‘transformational’ value (Figure 1). Hence, the true attention is not given to the process itself, but rather to its capacity to *transform* inputs into outputs (ISO, 2008). This shift of attention is quite realistic in mainstream ‘investment’ thinking: after all, resources (inputs) are valuable and results (output) are important.

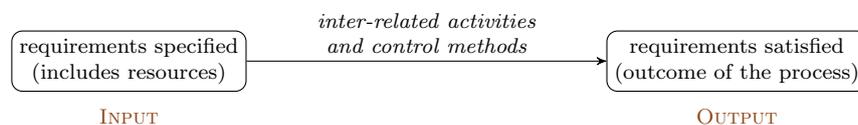


FIGURE 1 In the ISO (2008) view, the process is aggregated and importance is given to I/O

The analysis and inspection of the process follow in a matching ‘I/O’ fashion, concerned with performance and based on a numerical facet of reality — e.g. ‘*Analyze and evaluate process information obtained from monitoring and measuring data, in order to quantify process performance. Where appropriate, use statistical methods.*’ (ISO, 2008, p.10).

¹From *pro* [L], forth + *cedere* [L], to go.

3 Stepwise view

A stepwise analytic view of a process with interest in procedure² (Perdicoulis, 2010, pp.67–70) provides sufficient detail to identify (a) ‘action units’ (e.g. work packages, tasks) as well as (b) the intermediate states that the action requires and/ or produces — Figure 2. Hence, the output of one action becomes a unique or partial input for the action(s) downstream (Perdicoulis, 2015a).

The complexity of the process revealed by the stepwise view needs to be organised conveniently — for instance, processes can be divided into segments known as ‘sub-processes’, ‘phases’, or ‘routines’ (Figure 2). Such groupings create convenient ‘zoom levels’ to keep the contents of the process view sufficiently simple and meaningful (Perdicoulis, 2015a).

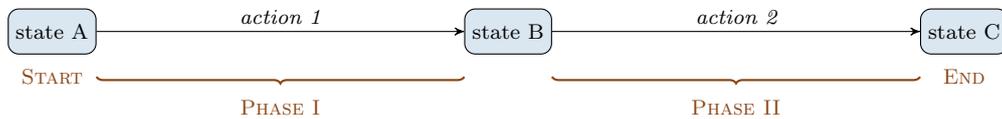


FIGURE 2 Stepwise process view — concise process diagram (CPD)

Being analytic, the stepwise view of a process can provide details for each state and action — for instance, describing each state by selected parameters (e.g. indicators), and each action by a number of tasks and respective methods (Perdicoulis, 2013a) — Figure 3.

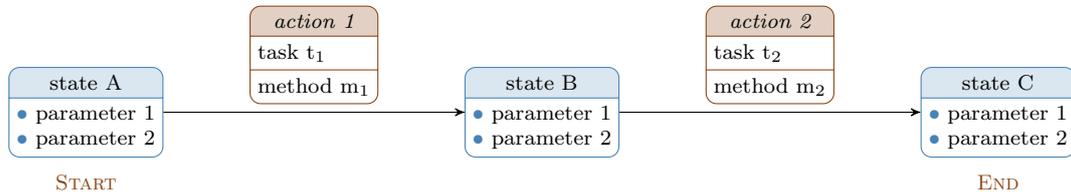


FIGURE 3 Stepwise process view — extended process diagram (EPD)

In addition to the procedural detail, it is a good practice to attribute responsibilities to team members, which facilitates both execution and auditing. Hence, for different purposes, the process view may remain global (as in CPDs or EPDs) or become ‘personalised’ as in PPDs (Perdicoulis, 2013b) — Figure 4.

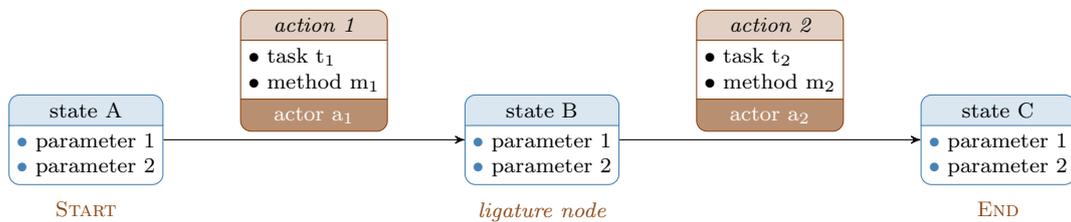


FIGURE 4 Stepwise process view — personalised process diagram (PPD); *ligature*: {a₁, a₂}

²From *pro* [L], *forth* + *cedere* [L], to go — a specified, particular, established, or official way of carrying out an activity or operation; synonym of *method*.

4 Discussion

Performance is one of the major concerns with processes: ‘things must go as expected’. Consequently, there is strong demand in competitive environments (e.g. industry, business administration) to measure and demonstrate the extent of the success of a process in numerical results, and the I/O approach seems well suited. In addition, and since time (and often knowledge or data) is often limited, not much opportunity is given to the stepwise view of processes.

Nonetheless, it is indeed — or perhaps more — important to know *why* or *how* ‘things went as expected’: was it because of our team’s preparation and skills? Or was it luck? (Perdicoulis, 2015b) Excluding pure³ gamblers, who trust their luck, most other people interested in processes want to know details, and this becomes imperative in the cases when ‘things go wrong’: the culprits must be discovered, and their alleged wrongdoings studied, understood, and corrected before the next process cycle.

5 Conclusion

For performance-minders, studying a process has value mainly for its transformational capacity: to produce certain outcomes with the expenditure of minimal resources. However, they will not master the process if they do not ‘crack it open’ to see ‘how it works’, inspecting the development of its states and actions, as well as the links between them. This is harder work than numerical calculations, but returns valuable insight and control in the process.

References

- ISO (2008) *ISO 9000 Introduction and Support Package: Guidance on the Concept and Use of the Process Approach for management systems (ISO/TC 176/SC 2/N 544R3)*. Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.
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³Allegedly, ‘technical’ gamblers lend a hand to their luck with artifices.