

Volume	6	Support and Development
Chapter	03	Quality and Processes
Section	04	Process Basics
Key Word Tags	Frustration, Inefficiency	

## THE PRE-PROCESS EXPLOSION

File No. 6.030403 | 2019-08-15

Quick Summary: Re-work and inefficiency due to a lack of processes can be tolerated -- until they can't!

### Abstract:

*There are few true surprises in business – someone always knows well in advance. This is especially true for internal issues that seem to bubble just below the surface until one day, a tipping point is reached. It can be like a small natural gas leak in a building until one small spark sets off a totally unexpected explosion. Obviously, addressing issues before they reach the tipping point is the best approach. However, how one responds when the unexpected “explosion” occurs can lead the way to future success by instituting a mechanism to avoid explosions in the future.*

This article is strategically placed between the articles 6.030402, *Processes: Why Bother*, and 6.030501, *Processes: When to Start*. It highlights the most common reason for beginning to implement processes or a single process. In retrospect, there were plenty of warning signs, such as animals acting unnaturally or subtle rumblings before an earthquake. In this case, the lack of a process is usually preceded by frustration by some people performing or impacted by the process. Individuals “make do” or “find a way” to move forward, often never sharing their frustration for fear of being labeled as a complainer.

Then one day it happens. It can be triggered by a minor event or a significant issue that immediately gets elevated. Whatever the cause, the chain reaction begins, including high finger-pointing levels, excuses, and deteriorating relationships. All too often, management “steps in” with an immediate “fix” to the apparent symptoms. Little time or effort is placed on determining the root cause of the issue. Instead, the goal is to return the apparent tranquility that was present immediately before the “unnecessary” blowup. The situation and the “fix” described above are rarely as obvious as stated. Most people want to avoid confrontation and meekly accept returning to the status quo.

A far better approach is to respond (not react) to the explosion by performing a simple two-part exercise to capture both the impacts and root causes of the disconnect. The exercise consists of both venting and vetting. Although these two words sound similar, the differences are significant.

- Venting is defined as giving free expression to a situation, often with strong emotion.
- Vetting is defined as making a careful and critical examination of an issue.

Venting can be thought of as a “heart” issue, while Vetting can be thought of as a “head” issue. Both the “feelings” and the “logic” of an issue are equally important and must be dealt with to arrive at an effective solution. With the definitions of venting and vetting, the two-step process is called the Double

Vee process. When the (lack-of-process) explosion occurs, instituting the Double Vee process, in the order described below, can provide immediate relief to the situation and start the groundwork for long-term corrective action.

The Double Vee process needs to involve individuals at all levels and include those involved IN the process and those impacted BY the process. In this context, “process” refers to the activities in question. Instead of an actual process, the activities could be near-random activities with considerable variation from instance to instance. The Double Vee setting needs to be in a round-table environment with leaders, managers, and employees all having equal status and feeling free to express their true thoughts and feelings. A respected leader, not necessarily a manager, should lead the discussions.

It must be emphasized that the Double Vee exercise is not a “fix-it” exercise. Counter-intuitively, improvement suggestions should be quickly discouraged! There must be a singular focus for each activity, and equal weight must be given to every comment.

The first portion of the exercise is to ask each participant in a sequential round-robin format to identify one (and only one) issue that is “wrong.” This should be an emotional “venting” activity. It is important to allow the usually pent-up feelings to be expressed early in the exercise. If not, many individuals may be distracted or disengaged, mentally focused on “their” issues. Items could include:

- I never receive the correct information the first time.
- I never know when something is required until it has become a crisis.
- I get duplicate or triplicate inputs – all about the same thing but are all different.
- I end up correcting errors done by others.
- I find that I am doing almost the same thing as someone else.
- What I am doing seems to go nowhere and serve no useful purpose.

Expect generalizations as well as very specific instances and examples. Continue accumulating inputs sequentially until everyone has vented their pet peeves and frustrations. Remove duplicate entries. Do not prioritize the list. If issues are raised, it will have been very important to someone, if an attempt is made to prioritize the list, the issues that end up at the bottom of the list will implicitly cause the person that raised the issue to tune out because “They didn’t listen to me.”

The second part of the Double Vee exercise is documenting the activities (“process”) as they are actually performed today. This involves vetting the situation – logically examining how and by whom the activities being examined (the current “process”) are being performed. It must be emphasized that what is documented is the actual way it is performed, not the way it is supposed to be performed. In formal process mapping textbooks, this is referred to as the “As-Is” activity. It is not uncommon for individuals to become defensive when some of the steps they take or do not take are mentioned. Everyone must keep in mind that the goal is to set the stage for addressing the troublesome issues that exist. During this phase, just as in the first phase, it is important to NOT attempt to “fix” or correct any of the issues addressed.

After the “As-Is” portion of the Double Vee exercise is complete, stop the meeting! Do not jump into the “Should Be” phase of addressing the issues. Instead, document the results of the two exercises, distribute them to all participants, and let the dust settle. Give participants the opportunity to add to

both lists after they have had time to rehash the session and the lists. Expect lots of “water cooler” conversations by the participants. They will anxiously await what the company does to resolve the situation.

Waiting to start the “fix it” or “Should Be” phase is also important because during the Double Vee exercise. It may become obvious that others who are not involved in the exercise need to be brought into the discussions. Providing these individuals with the exercise notes and additional background will help these individuals quickly get up to speed on the issues that need to be addressed. The article in this collection, 4.03041, “*Open Dialogue: Really,*” discusses typical internal communications issues and offers some directly applicable suggestions.

The results of the Double Vee exercise will be binary based on what happens next. If no action is taken and business as usual continues, fuses will get shorter, frustration will grow, and more explosions with more intensity will occur more frequently. Cynicism will prevail. If, on the other hand, an action plan to address the core issues (develop processes) is implemented, individuals will become more tolerant of the current situation and patiently await resolution.

As a word of caution, be careful to set the correct expectations. Commonly, the scope of the problematic issues is very large and often needs to involve far more and varied resources than may be available. Further, others only indirectly involved may have different priorities and resources available that may be required to assist in the solution. An example of a classic, almost universal, example of this issue is a sales and marketing organization “needing” development resources to “immediately” help them resolve “their” issues –everyone’s intention may be noble. Still, priorities and performance metrics may significantly differ.

Find small and quick changes that can be implemented with obvious improvements to show progress. As described in other articles, divide the process into “bite-size” pieces. A good method to limit the scope of a process is to build a process flow diagram that can be completely shown on one page. If it is too complex for one page, divide it into smaller processes. The article in this collection, 3.040305, “*Tiny Goals for Maximum Results,*” discusses this concept. The articles and tools provided in Volum8, Chapter 3, Section 1, “Process Documentation”, provide one-page process examples.

Remember, the explosive issues did not appear overnight. Do not feel compelled to fix them overnight either. Find the root causes and address them, not the obvious symptoms. The Double Vee exercise can be used whenever a disconnect or differing expectations arise. It addresses both the emotional and logical sides of the issue. Think of them as edges of the double-bladed sword in which either edge can cut through an organization.