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# RETHINKING PROCESSES BEFORE TECH

In the rush to digitize, one truth remains: (IT) technology doesn't fix processes, it reflects them. Without first understanding and redesigning how work gets done, even the best tools risk scaling inefficiencies. This article explores the core principles and frameworks that underpin effective, intentional process transformation.

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF PROCESS REDESIGN

Process redesign is not a new discipline. Its intellectual roots span several decades and disciplines, from operations research and systems thinking to organizational behavior and lean manufacturing. While terminology and tools have evolved, the central premise has remained consistent: processes are the invisible architecture of how organizations function. They determine how decisions are made, how work flows, and how value is created (or lost).

One of the earliest and most influential voices in this space argued that organizations should not simply automate existing processes but "obliterate" and rebuild them from scratch. This school of thought, often associated with Business Process Reengineering (BPR), emphasized radical change over incremental improvement. It challenged organizations to question every assumption, eliminate non-value-adding steps, and design processes around outcomes rather than legacy structures.

In contrast, the Lean school, rooted in manufacturing but now widely applied across sectors, focuses on continuous improvement. It encourages organizations to identify and eliminate waste ("muda"), reduce variation, and empower frontline employees to improve the flow of work. Lean thinking is less about

radical redesign and more about disciplined, ongoing refinement.

A third perspective, often associated with enterprise architecture and process management maturity models, emphasizes structure, governance, and standardization. It views processes as assets to be documented, measured, and optimized over time. This approach often leverages reference models and maturity assessments to benchmark performance and guide improvement.

These schools of thought are not mutually exclusive. The most effective redesigns often blend elements of all three: the boldness of reengineering, the discipline of Lean, and the structure of process governance.

Interestingly, many newly established or fast-scaling organizations, particularly those born in the recent digital era, often design processes that naturally align with many of the principles outlined here. Starting from a blank canvas allows them to embed clarity, simplicity, and outcome-driven thinking from the outset. In contrast, legacy organizations face the added challenge of unlearning deeply embedded habits, navigating historical complexity, and shifting long-standing mindsets. In such environments, process redesign is not just a technical exercise, it becomes a cultural one.

## WHY PROCESS CLARITY MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

In today's digital context, the stakes are higher. Every automation, AI model, or workflow tool encodes a version of the process it supports. If that process is unclear, outdated, or misaligned, the technology will not correct it, it will harden it. This is why process redesign is not a preparatory step. It is a strategic imperative. It ensures that the logic being scaled is intentional, not accidental.

Design choices like required fields, workflow triggers, limited data models, or selective dashboards all encode assumptions about what matters and when those assumptions are flawed, the consequences are magnified.

## PRINCIPLES FOR RESPONSIBLE PROCESS REDESIGN

To avoid these pitfalls, organizations should base their redesign efforts on a few core principles:

1. Start with outcomes, not outputs. A completed task is not the same as a meaningful result. Redesign efforts should begin by clarifying what success looks like for customers, employees, and the business.
2. Map the process end-to-end. Most inefficiencies occur at the boundaries between teams, not within them. Understanding the full journey (including handoffs, exceptions, and decision points) is essential.

3. Clarify decision ownership. Tasks can be assigned, but decisions require accountability. Without clear ownership, automation will expose (and exacerbate) ambiguity.
4. Challenge legacy rules. Many process rules were created in response to specific incidents or constraints that no longer apply. Redesign is an opportunity to question what still makes sense.
5. Balance automation with judgment. Not everything should be automated. Some steps require human discretion, empathy, or contextual awareness. The goal is not full automation, but optimal orchestration.
6. Sequence matters. The most effective transformations follow a deliberate order: eliminate what no longer adds value, standardize what remains, simplify where possible, and only then automate.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF PROCESS

Process redesign is as much about people as it is about workflows. It requires engagement of stakeholders across functions, exposure of unspoken assumptions, and navigation of organizational politics. It often reveals tensions between efficiency and control, standardization and flexibility, speed and quality.

Successful redesign efforts create space for these conversations. They treat process as a

shared language for how the organization works. They recognize that every process is a negotiation between what is possible, what is permitted, and what is practical.

Addressing these challenges effectively requires more than a single framework or a lone expert. Successful process redesign depends on a multidisciplinary team that brings together strategic thinkers and detail-oriented analysts, process experts and technologists, insiders with deep operational knowledge and outsiders who can challenge assumptions. This blend of perspectives ensures that redesign efforts are both grounded in reality and open to reinvention.

## DESIGNING FOR SCALABILITY, NOT JUST SPEED

In a world of accelerating technology, the temptation to build quickly is understandable, but speed without clarity is a false economy. It leads to rework, resistance, and missed opportunities. Process redesign is not about slowing down progress. It is about ensuring that progress is built on a foundation worth scaling. It means asking the right questions before encoding workflows into permanent systems.

In the end, technology will always amplify what is already there. The only question is whether that foundation deserves to be scaled.