

Introduction

If you ask people, in large or small numbers, what is frustrating them in their organisations, one topic is sure to come up and that is **bureaucracy**. We held a series of events for one IT services division of a large oil company and sure enough every event mentioned '*too much bureaucracy*'. More recently in a UK Government department a desire was expressed to '*drop*' unnecessary bureaucracy and '*keep*' necessary bureaucracy.

The difficulty of course is sorting one from the other!

In the mid 80s GE's Jack Walsh created Work-Out to allow people to take the unnecessary work out of work. They had several simple ground rules that enabled them to be quickly successful

- **Let people chose the issues themselves**
- **Involve a full cross sectional team – those who have a stake in any changes**
- **No blaming and no complaining**
- **Immediate management response to recommendations**

Since its original use at GE the basic Work-Out framework has been adopted and adapted by many organisations. At VISTA we have worked with our clients to develop an approach, which not only busts through bureaucracy and frees up time, but also supports creative compliance. This means that the revised processes and systems are ones that everyone is prepared to commit to because they know they are the basis for effective working. If no rework takes place, individuals often develop personal strategies to make systems and processes work for them. Such "work-arounds" may be effective for the individual, but are often sub-optimal for the whole, if not destructive.

The process used allows people to focus on the things that are causing them most frustration - '*the problems*' - but to tackle them in a more creative way than *merely* solving them and in line with the organisational strategy. We have added tools from the 'Quality' toolkit to allow for mapping of the issues and workflows and to assist the collective discovery of the inherent complexity and 'noise' – also to tee-up subsequent continual improvement of the process/system. We have also taken lessons from the Envisioning and Scenarios fields to ensure that people are moving beyond the present and imagining what might be possible.

The Bureaucracy Busting Principles

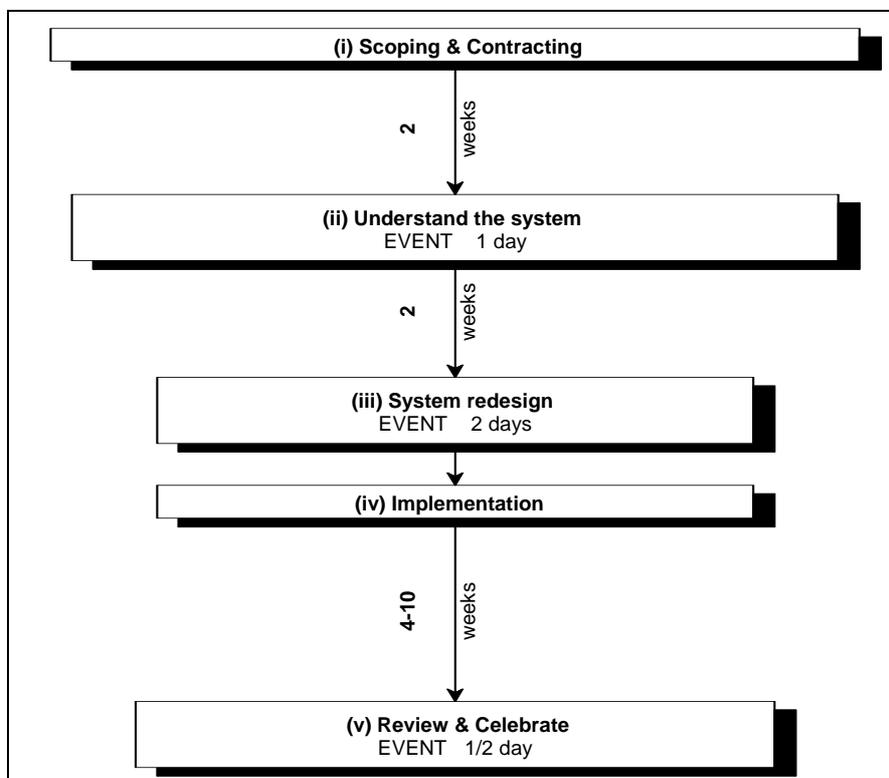
We have settled on a set of eleven principles that enable all concerned to remember that the focus is on working out the issues and building sustainable solutions that will support creative compliance.



1. Work on the whole system – with permeable and collaboratively-defined boundaries
2. Establish the questions early – and never stop exploring and improving them
3. Actively involve representatives of all stakeholder groups
4. Go where the energy is and flex the process to match
5. Clarify strategic imperatives, and other givens, with leaders
6. Treat all suggestions for improvement as valid whether they come from afar, from below or from on-high
7. Ensure any implemented improvement is sustainable by measuring it
8. Ensure that proposed benefits will outweigh anticipated costs within a specified period e.g. four months
9. Get approval directly from the Process Owner – however senior this person is
10. Begin implementation immediately (if you've stuck to all the principles you won't be able to stop it)
11. Make full use of language and tools already being used within the organisation

The Bureaucracy Busting Process

This has 5 simple steps as the core of the process with multiple process choices and options at each stage.





Step	Core Work	Choices and Options
(i) Scoping and Contracting	<p>Informally converse with people from each stakeholder group to begin hearing about the “problem” from different perspectives. It is critical at this early stage to allow <i>questions</i> to emerge – and be experimented with – so that better questions may then surface. Usually a small number of potential <i>processes</i> will emerge too at this early stage.</p> <p>A senior sponsor will also be pinpointed, and their suggestions gathered for possible invitees. Most importantly of all a leader for the project is identified – who may be the original initiator, but is usually the person most accountable for the processes in question. It is this person who invites the nominated participants to the first event, and works with the consultant to establish a Terms of Reference (TOR) document.</p> <p>Sometimes, for particularly complex problems or issues, an extra event lasting up to a day may be arranged – in order to collaboratively write a fully informed TOR.</p>	<p><i>Identify opportunities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leadership meetings ▪ Leader Coaching sessions ▪ Extended Leadership EVENTS ▪ Town Hall meetings ▪ Suggestions scheme ▪ Asking what is going well, what is bugging people, and what is the core work, etc ... <p><i>Initiate BB</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Check against framework ▪ Review objectives ▪ Begin to describe ▪ Identify sponsor <p><i>Agree Terms Of Reference</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting with sponsor and initiator ▪ Scoping meeting ▪ Define boundaries and roles ▪ Identify potential participants ▪ Arrange dates, facilitation etc...
(ii) Understand the System	<p>The main purpose of the first event is to hear from each stakeholder group, to select the processes needing development, to describe these processes as they currently are, and to identify bottlenecks and glitches.</p> <p>A data collection process is also co-designed so that findings can be validated with those – especially customers – affected in the wider organisation.</p>	<p>Several tools may be used as part of the facilitation:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Story Telling, Appreciative Inquiry, Process Mapping, System Archetypes, Affinity Diagrams, Interrelationship Diagrams, Pareto Diagrams, Scattergrams, Histograms, Run Charts and Timelines.</p>



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(iii) System Redesign	<p>The purpose of this event is to hear about the validated process data assembled in and after the first event, question the fundamentals and then redesign the processes so that they are fit-for-purpose.</p> <p>During the second day, proposals are worked-up into a project and implementation plan ready for presentation to the sponsor.</p>	<p>Again several tools may be used – all of the ones used in the first event are revisited and if necessary reshaped – plus new ones such as Scenario Planning, Control Charts, Six Sigma, and a variety of Project Planning tools. These are always chosen according to what is already on hand in the organisation, for example if a Balanced Scorecard methodology is in use, KPIs would be aligned with whatever process measures are recommended.</p>
(iv) Implementation	<p>Once approval is gained from the sponsor and process owners, work starts in earnest. Typically energy is high and it is hard to stop this – indeed many improvements are already happening because they were simple enough and cost little or nothing to get done. A date is set for reviewing progress formally, although the Project Leader shepherds the implementation continually.</p>	<p>Tools used here will depend on the design of the recommendations. As a principle (see No. 11 overleaf) make full use of language and tools already being used within the organisation.</p>
(v) Review and Celebrate	<p>The power of a Bureaucracy Busting process lies in enabling all stakeholders and all levels to become strategically engaged (not only the executives) – by tapping their voices, passions, perspectives, conversations, and the power of collaborative experimentation and implementation. Naturally progress requires some kind of formal review – usually for half a day – and preferably with some kind of planned celebration.</p>	<p>Again, depending on the nature of the workout. Processes and methods can include:</p> <p>Story Telling, Appreciative Inquiry, Recognition Awards, Review of stages, assumptions and key learnings, After Action Review, Metaphors, Sponsor appreciation and sign off, and final celebratory activities.</p>

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