Process and Task Identification

A process is work that must be done: if you ask someone what he/she does at work, this is usually what they answer. For example, “I reconcile accounts receivable” or “I check in hotel guests.” Processes are usually made up of tasks – tasks that must be completed in order to complete the process. In this case, a task indicates the transformation of data; work is being done on or with the data. The data leaving a task is generally different from the data that entered. The transformations could include changing the status of the data, say by editing an input whose validity is unknown, and delivering the transformed data as either definitely valid or definitely invalid. The name of the task tells its general purpose. The first word of a process name should be a precise active verb such as “calculate,” “edit,” or “write.” Verbs such as “process” and “update” are too vague.

In order to identify processes and tasks, begin with the basics. Ask questions to help you understand the function you are analyzing. The following questions are good starting points:

- What is the purpose of the business activity?
- What steps are performed?
- Where are they performed?
- Who performs them?
- Who uses the resulting information?

Once the activities (processes) and tasks are identified, you need to find out what data is used to perform each process. Next you need to find out what information is produced and what happens to that information – is it data for another process, it is stored for later retrieval, is it presented to a user, etc.?

For example, in reviewing the handling of checking accounts in a bank, you might uncover the following:

**What is the purpose of the activity?**
It is important that transactions against a customer’s account be handled correctly and be tracked for reconciliation purposes. The monthly statement provides the means for the customer to reconcile the transactions received by the bank with the transactions the customer believes happened.

**What steps are performed?**
Customers deposit funds into an account, which raises the account balance.
Customers write checks against an account, which lowers the account balance.
Customers can have bills automatically paid by the bank.

Once a month, monthly statements are produced that report the transactions for that month as well as the opening and ending balances of the account.

**Where are they performed?**
Checks against accounts can come in via other banks or be on the bank.
Customers can deposit funds at the bank or their employer can directly deposit them.
Generated monthly statements are sent to the customers.

**Who performs them?**
Customers (or their employers) initiate transactions.

**Who uses the resulting information?**
Customers primarily. The bank uses the statement to answer customer questions.

The processes that are identified are Deposit Funds, Withdraw Funds, Pay Bills, and Generate Monthly Statements. The next step is to identify the data each of these processes need to perform their task and what information (or data) they generate that is either sent to another process or stored.