Category

Consulting

Process Mapping & Improvement Playbook (SIPOC, Swimlanes, Lean Tools)

A hands-on method for mapping current-state processes with SIPOC and swimlanes, then redesigning them using core Lean tools.

- Practitioner
- Intermediate
- Template Included
- Workshop Ready

- Mithun A. Sridharan

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- 7 minute(s)

Overview

A practical system for mapping current-state processes with SIPOC and swimlane diagrams, identifying waste with Lean tools, and designing a validated future state -- workshop-ready.

What's the difference between a SIPOC and a swimlane diagram?

A SIPOC is a one-page, high-level boundary map — 5 to 7 steps — used to agree scope before detailed work starts. A swimlane diagram is the detailed, step-by-step map that places each activity in a lane by role or system, showing every handoff and wait.

How big should the mapping workshop group be?

Six to ten people works best — enough to cover every role that touches the process, small enough that everyone can contribute. Beyond twelve, split into a core mapping group and a wider validation review.

What counts as business-value-add versus non-value-add?

Business-value-add steps don't add value the customer would pay for, but removing them creates real risk — a regulatory approval or an audit trail, for example. Non-value-add steps serve no purpose the customer or the business genuinely needs; they exist as legacy habit, system limitation, or unaddressed rework.

How do we handle a process that spans multiple systems with no data?

Map it anyway using estimated cycle times gathered directly from the people doing the work, clearly labeled as estimates, and prioritize instrumenting the highest-volume steps with real data before the next review cycle.

Should we map the current state if we already know it's broken?

Yes — skipping straight to future-state design without a validated current-state map is the single most common reason redesigns fail in implementation, because the team builds a future state that ignores a real constraint the current-state map would have surfaced.

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Author

Mithun A. Sridharan Thought Leader

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