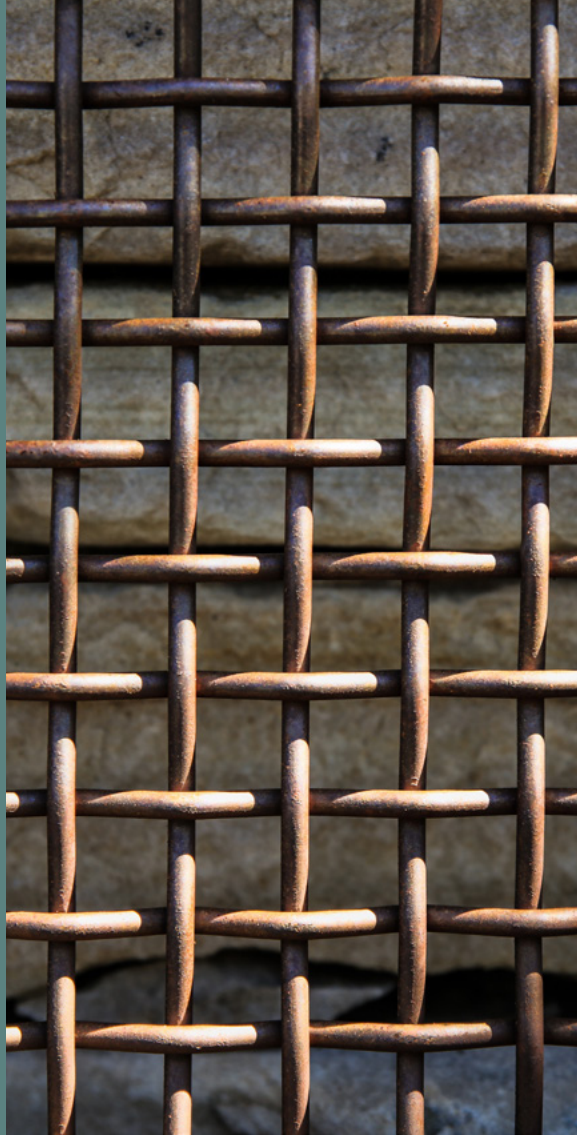
ARTICLE

Facilitating effective Process Mapping Workshops



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Do you ever consider why the outcome of a process mapping workshop did not really match your expectations – despite the presence of the deepest subject matter experts within the area and a presumably well-prepared workshop?

Probably, the resulting process maps either became too detailed and/or too unstructured – and even during the workshops, you did not feel comfortable. You can rarely blame the Subject Matter Experts – they know their area of expertise.

In our experience, you need to master the following four themes to get an optimal outcome from a process mapping workshop.

1. A precise scope definition.
2. A precise purpose and outcome of the process to be mapped.
3. Complexity of the process.
4. Effective communication with Subject Matter Experts

Not mastering one or more of these themes is often the root cause of the imperfect workshop outcomes. To tackle these themes correctly, you can further categorise them as either personality-related or content-related, or a combination of both. Some of the themes must be addressed before the workshop, while others can only be addressed during the workshop in which they appear. The themes are different by nature and so are the resolutions:

	Content-related	Personality-related
Manage before the workshop	A precise definition of scope, purpose, and outcome	Effective communication with Subject Matter Experts
Manage during the workshop	Complexity of the process	Effective communication with Subject Matter Experts

Before the workshop – Content-related

An imprecise scope definition leads to an unclear start and end of the process map. You do not know exactly when or by whom the process is initiated. Thus, in the preparation, you must understand what "has just happened" when this process is about to start – what was the end event of the previous process – and who delivered that. If you do not know this, how can you then pose the question to the participants: Now X has happened, what happens next?

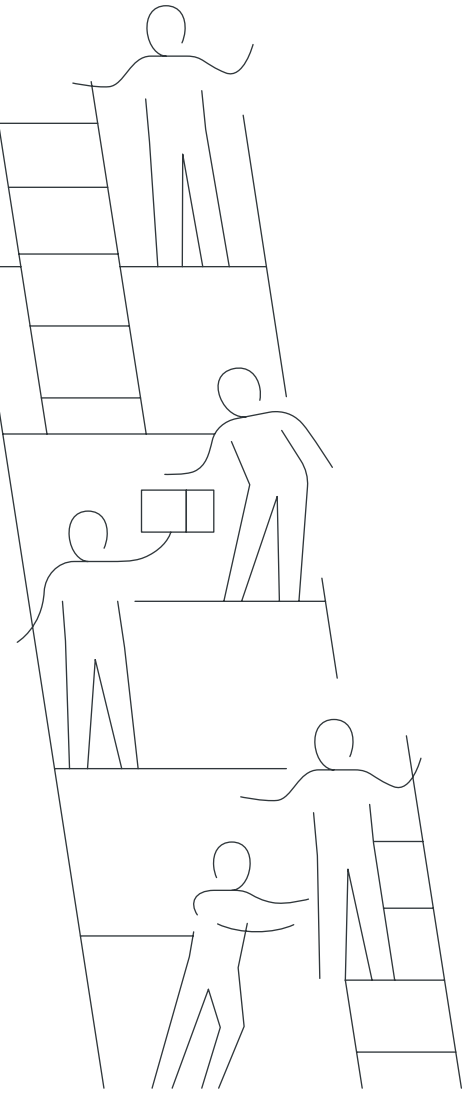
Furthermore, you must, of course, be precise about the end of your own process. What does it deliver? What does the next process expect from your process?

An imprecise purpose and/or outcome of the process to be mapped leads to confusion and inefficiency in the mapping workshop, but also in reality when the process is live. Without a clear understanding of the intended goal or result of the process, it becomes challenging to accurately define the end point(s) of the process map. Defining the scope in the form "from something happens (the start event) until this and that have been delivered (the end event)" is essential for a clear purpose definition. What has been delivered at the end is often related to the purpose of the process. Understanding the relationship between the end event and the purpose of the process is crucial for effective mapping. For example, if the end event is "A printed and signed form is delivered", it may not directly represent the purpose of the process. However, if this form is a necessary quality approval form, then it is closely related to the purpose of the process: "Check quality".

Before the workshop – Personality-related

Considering the personality-related issues, some issues can be avoided or reduced if you manage them before the workshop. Other personality-related issues can only be managed during the workshop. As people are different by nature, the resolutions for handling the different types are also different. Consider the following 10 personality types.

- **Controlling Carrie:** Carrie may have a strong need for control and may tend to dominate the conversation during the process mapping workshop.
- **Detailed Dory:** Dory is detail-oriented and may focus on thoroughness in the process mapping exercise.
- **Grumpy Gary:** Gary's frustration may stem from various sources. But his negativity and bitter outbursts may create an awkward feeling at the workshop.
- **Talking Tina:** Tina's strong communication skills can facilitate discussions and collaboration, but may also dominate conversations.
- **Superficial Sally:** Sally may tend to focus on surface-level details and may not delve deeply into the underlying complexities of the process mapping exercise.
- **Analytical Alan:** Alan's focus on data and metrics can bring valuable analytical thinking to the process mapping workshop.
- **Harmonious Hannah:** Hannah values harmony and teamwork, which can help to run a smooth process mapping workshop.
- **Innovator Irene:** Irene's inclination towards radical changes can bring creativity to the process mapping workshop.
- **Sceptical Sam:** Sam's scepticism can raise important questions about feasibility and potential pitfalls, which can lead to a more thorough and realistic process mapping outcome.
- **Visionary Victor:** Victor's strong vision for the future can ensure that the process mapping aligns with long-term strategic goals, but Victor often dreams without being specific.



These types are archetypes. You may encounter them to varying degrees, with one person potentially embodying multiple types.

As the Subject Matter Experts can often be characterised as one or more of these types, you must be able to deal with the various types at yourmapping workshops.

In the preparation phase of the mapping workshop, you might consider whether it is possible to select / deselect people for the workshop. It is always an advantage to select the right team. This also means deselecting some types or personalities if you consider them too big a burden. However, that is only an option if they are substitutable in terms of knowledge. Also consider that the focus is on mapping the current state, where we need facts and data about the current process. In such a workshop, ideas and innovation are less important. We can therefore plan a workshop without types like **Innovator Irene, Visionary Victor** and **Sceptical Sam** as – personality-wise – they are expected to be less focused on the current state of the process and more on the future setup. Therefore, they would be good to include in a design workshop, where the new process is to be developed, tested and designed.

On the other hand, if the process mapping of the current state is the initial task in improving a process – first understand the current situation then improve – then these types (**Innovator Irene, Visionary Victor,** and **Sceptical Sam**) may be very useful.

If we do not need the knowledge of **Grumpy Gary**, leave him out for now – or meet with him alone. In small intimate workshops, you are often allowed to get closer to people and build their trust (faster). If you know that the grumpiness of Gary relates to the work you are doing, you may try to meet him face to face to understand his potential worries (perceived as grumpiness) and thereby remove (or reduce) the risks that trigger his grumpiness.

If you cannot avoid having him in the workshop, where he might be moody and disrupt the workshop, consider inviting his boss (with a valid official reason, of course) to the workshop. The sheer presence of the boss can often reduce Gary's grumpy outbursts in the workshop.

Before the workshop, you could inform **Controlling Carrie** about the value and importance of hearing from her knowledgeable colleagues as well. Ask her to assist you in ensuring that this happens in case it slips your mind. This way, she will have an "important" role, maintain control, and actively contribute to the success of the workshop.

Harmonious Hannah is the born diplomat and could therefore be very useful in workshops where you foresee potential clashes in either personality or even in the subject-matter discussion. Invite her for her knowledge, but also for her abilities as a diplomat.

During the workshop – Content-related

Complexity of the process requires more than strong coffee to keep your head clear. Sometimes, the process we are about to describe just is complex. You cannot avoid that.

How do you eat an elephant? You eat it in small bites…

How do you map a complex process? You map it in 7±2 steps…

Good practice when mapping a process is to keep the maps as simple as possible. You do that by applying the rule of 7±2 steps, as originated in Miller's Law[1] . When creating a top-down process model, good practice is to apply Miller's Law and limit the number of steps included at each level of the map to around 7±2. This helps to ensure that the maps remain manageable and understandable for the people who are going to use it.

When you need to add more details, you simply detail these 7±2 steps into new diagrams with another 7±2 steps. Eventually moving down the hierarchy, you will have enough steps to map the many detailed and tiny steps – if you need those details at all! Luckily this also means that if you stay at the upper levels, it remains simple with only 7±2 steps.

[1] Miller's Law is described in the original paper by George A. Miller titled The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information. Miller's Law is a psychological principle proposed by George A. Miller, a prominent cognitive psychologist. It states that the average human can only retain about seven items in their working memory at any given time.

You can test the rule on yourself. Look at the table in front of you. Look at a group of objects. If there are seven or fewer, you do not need to count them. You can see the number of objects directly. If there are more, you need to count – one by one – or create groups of seven or less to count. Only a few humans can see bigger numbers.

You may find this rule annoying because you are restricted to only mapping up to nine steps. For example, you have a process that will end up with 15 steps. So, why can't you just map all 15 steps?

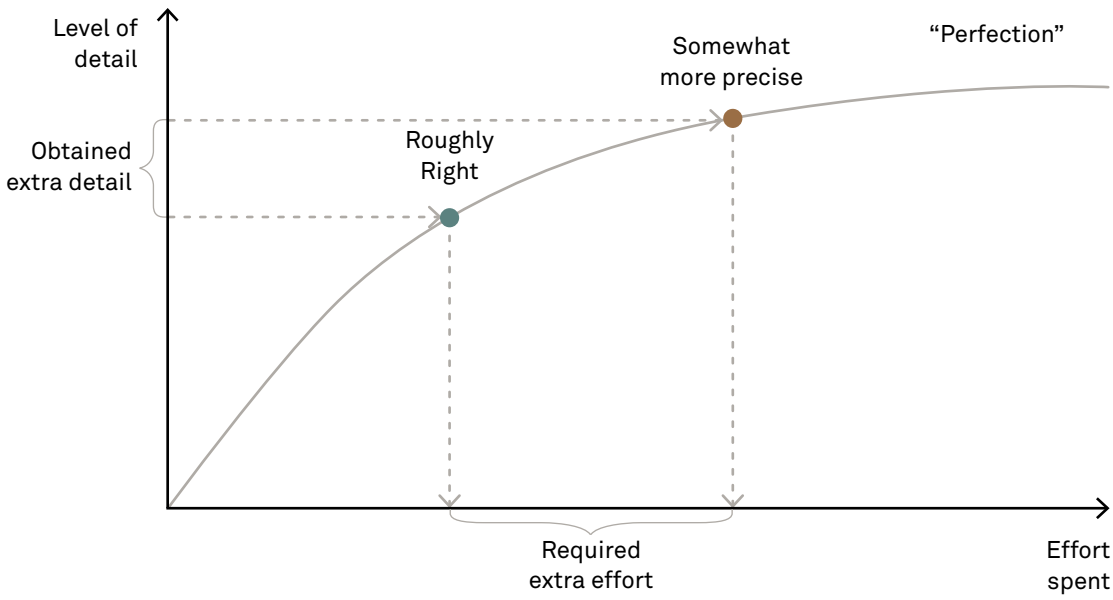
There are many benefits to following the 7±2 steps: You create process maps that are easy to handle, you improve the user-friendliness and understanding, and you cut down on information overload for better concentration, training and communication. Also, you reduce the cost of maintaining the process map. The more details in a process map, the more time you must spend updating it. Consequently, you should only add the details if necessary.

Furthermore, consider a huge map of e.g. 40 steps. When reading that map, you cannot remember each of the steps. Consequently, to get an overview, you mentally group the steps in clusters that make it comprehensible. You will most likely end up with around 7 groups.

Another rule that works well with the 7±2 rule is this: RRRTPW – Rather Roughly Right Than Precisely Wrong. This means that if you pay too much attention to some details, you might end up making one part of the process model very detailed but another part very vague. This makes the model unbalanced and hard to read. As a reader, you will either lack details in the vague part or get overwhelmed by details in the detailed part.

Consider the law of the diminishing marginal return (see figure below).

The law of the diminishing marginal return:



How much do you get from moving from a process map that is Roughly right to a process map that is Somewhat more precise? And how big is the effort required to get there? Also, this extra effort is not a one-off. Every time this map is to be maintained – yearly or whatever is the rule, you must spend that relative extra effort in maintaining the details.

While precision in process mapping is important, it is essential to recognise that after a certain point, the return on investment when adding more detail diminishes. Process maps should aim to be accurate and useful without becoming overly complex and difficult to maintain.

During the workshop – Personality-related.

Returning to the personality-related challenges of the process mapping workshop, the facilitator must ensure that the participants and their knowledge are utilised in the best possible way during the workshop.

There is not much to say about **Controlling Carrie** (and **Talking Tina** who are often the same person), apart from the fact that you must actively ask others around her as well, to make sure that she does not take all the airtime. Her knowledge may be useful, but you must both respect other participants (giving them airtime) and also make sure you draw out their knowledge. “What do you think, George, do you see it the same way as Carrie, or do you have any other experiences with the process – e.g. flowing differently?”, could be a shift away from Carrie.

A traditional technique during a physical workshop is to stand near **Talking Tina** while facilitating the workshop. This way, your body language and posture can signal whether you are inviting her to speak (by turning towards her) or discouraging her from speaking (by turning away from her).

In virtual workshops, you can take the more formal facilitating role, where you ask people to mute their mikes (due to “background” noise – or other reasons). Through this more formal setup, you can direct questions to named persons and thereby reduce the airtime of **Talking Tina**.

Analytical Alan is always good to bring along, as he is fact and data-focused. If you are mapping current state processes with the purpose of improving, then the obvious questions for Alan are, “how many transactions do you have through this process?”, “What Full-Time Equivalent capacity is allocated to this process?”, and so forth. Such data points enable you to identify where the potential problems are and thereby focus the effort.

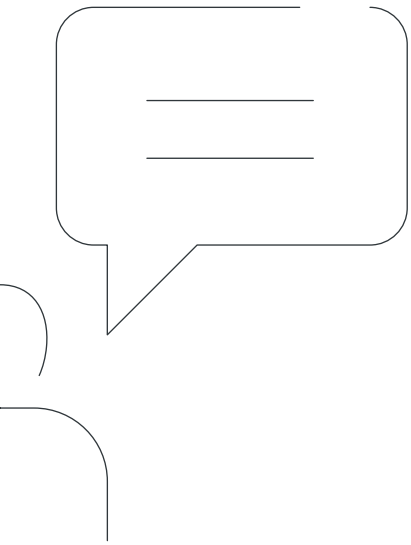
In workshops where you are not seeking improvements but simply want a “descriptive map”, you can utilise him to determine whether a specific situation represents only a small area of the process, accounting for just 2% of cases, and thus may be disregarded in the broader context.

If you do decide to invite **Innovator Irene**, **Visionary Victor** and **Sceptical Sam** for the mapping of the current state (which is the prework for an improvement and later a design workshop), you must take special care. Their innovative, visionary and sceptical comments are to be noted down and remembered for the following workshops. However, their comments should not be part of describing the final current state map; they are merely notes on how to improve the current state. Consequently, in the workshop (to map the current state), when comments such as "the process is not working", "the process could be different", "would be smarter if", etc. arise, park those ideas for consideration in the following workshops.

You have the option of linking the parked items to particular objects on the process map, which can help you understand the note better later on.

Detailed Dory stands out as a preferred personality type when dealing with processes – although she is still challenging to handle. She consistently displays her in-depth understanding of the subject matter through elaborate explanations.

If the result of mapping a process based on Dory's explanations is an excessively detailed process map (significantly exceeding 7±2 steps), why is it not feasible for the facilitator to condense the process map into fewer, more comprehensive components after the workshop (with the necessary review, of course)? This would be bottom-up mapping and creating anything bottom-up is almost never feasible, nor does it give good results. When you aggregate steps and do not have the subject matter expertise, you potentially end up grouping steps in a way that makes sense to you but not to the final user of the map. Consequently, it becomes useless.



You must control Dory's flow of information. Often, when she is in her detailed explanation mode, she does not pay attention to the fact that you are not coping with her explanation – trying to catch up with her by typing faster, making abbreviations and hoping that, at a later stage, you will be able to remember the bits that you did not note down. All the above will fail at some point in time. Thus, you must make her slow down or make her explain at a slower pace and preferably at a more aggregated level ...or both.

A rule that always applies is the "7±2" rule (explained earlier). You should aim for 7±2 activities per diagram when mapping a process. The challenge is, how do you guide **Detailed Dory** to only describe the process in 7±2 steps?

Having defined the start event (the condition that kicks off this process) and the end event (the final state / outcome), you could ask "What five steps does it take to get from the start event [e.g. loan application received] until the process has delivered its planned outcome for the end event [e.g. loan provided]". Deliberately ask for five not seven steps. There should be room for initially having forgotten a couple of steps in the listing and then adding them without violating the rule.

Irrespective of your question "What five steps...", **Detailed Dory** may very well start in her default (detailed) mode, meaning that you will end up with 25–30 steps before you are done. If that is the case, do not panic. There are ways of dealing with that. Go with the flow! Write down the steps that she outlines.

If she says something that you would like to note down and you simply cannot cope with noting it down because she keeps on talking, say to her, "Dory, please help me. My buffer is full, I cannot make notes this fast." Always, take responsibility for such a problem. When you ask her to help you, she will most likely be willing to help. Later, when you need to remind her to speak more slowly, you only need to say, "Please Dory, my buffer is full again," or just "Dory, please help me."

If you are working virtually – or at least directly on the computer with a visible screen – you could also ask her to look at the screen and follow your typing so she can see how far you are in your typing (and so pause when you are unable to keep up).

Often – and this is not just a pace-reducing trick – you can ask her to help you phrase the sentence, process name or whatever that you are about to type.

Now, at some point in time, you will have 10, 15, 20 steps listed. Stop her and remind her that we have the 7±2-rule that we must adhere to.

Consequently, we must start grouping some of the elements that Dory listed. This exercise can of course be conducted with many different variants – all describing the same process (but depending on which items you group from the list). Apply the rule of 7±2 steps in total. An additional rule is that the steps should be of equal size and importance. Unless we are very deep in the hierarchy, the main steps (the 7±2 steps) should not be trivial like "print document" or "send mail" but have a "higher purpose within the process". Furthermore, the naming of the process step should correspond to the objectives or outcome of the step. For example, "Book customer meeting" is less important than "Understand customer needs." The latter could easily contain book customer meeting as a sub-step. Thus, one of the multiple steps for getting to understand customer needs is to book customer meeting.

Ask Dory to help you make some good groups. Look at the outcomes for each item on the list. Find the ones that create the important parts of the whole process. For example, a sub-step like "sign agreement" is a small thing (only takes a few seconds), but the consequence of the step is important – being the actual approval of the agreement that the signing is a formalisation of. Thus, an appropriate group name could here be "Approve agreement." Where "Approve agreement" entails "Create agreement", "Print agreement", "Mail agreement", "Sign agreement" and "Return agreement".

Once you have grouped the many sub-steps into fewer steps, you should check that the steps match in size and importance and that the naming of the steps makes sense with the sub-steps grouped for each. Sometimes you will need to adjust the naming of the steps and sometimes you will need to move some of the sub-steps into the previous or next step to get the naming and grouping right.

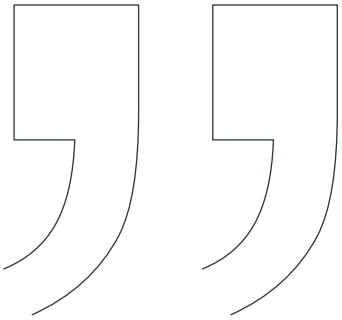
1) Suggest initial name of step (at the upper level).

3) At the upper level:
- Consider the scope that these sub-steps form.
- Potentially rename the step at the upper level.

2) Given the step name and context, create list of sub-steps to be included (at the lower level).

This may be referred to as the Wave-naming-technique: 1) You suggest a name for the process step (editing the upper level). 2) Then you look at the sub-steps (going down the wave, editing the lower level) included in that step. You might add another sub-step (as that fits better) and consequently the process step name does not really fit anymore. 3) You must find a name for the process step (returning up the wave, editing at the upper level again) that entails a "bigger" scope than the original one suggested.

All this should, of course, be done in agreement with Dory. She must always approve and agree with every grouping / naming in the map.



Opposed to **Detailed Dory**, Superficial Sally is a person of much fewer words. A dialogue with **Superficial Sally** could be:

Facilitator: In this case handling, what are the important steps?
Sally: Well, I basically handle the case.

But, when receiving the application, there must be some initial work?
Yes, of course, there is the preparation.

What does the preparation consist of? I could imagine that you read the application and case material, then you understand the case, and lastly you decide on the case?
Yes.

Your decision on the case, does that depend on something other than what you have read in the material?
Oh yes, of course. I might speak to the client and get input that affects the case.

Ok. So, we have the following steps: read application and case material, understand case, interact with client, decide on case.
Yes, that is pretty much it.

But something must happen after the decision is made. What is the outcome of the process?
Well, either the application is rejected, or it is accepted.

So, what is the form of the output? A status update in the system? An email to the client?
Yes, in fact both.

So, you email the decision to the client and update the case in the system?
Yes.

Can we call that "Inform client about the decision", where the system status update is part of that activity?
Yes, that is fine.

Preferably, you, as the facilitator, will have an initial idea of the process. If not, there is some preparation work to do when you know that you will be meeting Superficial Sally.

Furthermore, you really have to use the process syntax well to phrase questions right. You know that a process always starts with a status or condition. Thus, you must ask for the "what": What has happened? What is the status? Once you have a process step, you know that this step produces some kind of outcome which is a prerequisite for the next process step (e.g. reading the case is a prerequisite for understanding the case).

You must always test whether there can be multiple (different) outcomes (like acceptance vs rejection). Each of those different outcomes may be followed by different next steps. Accept might lead to transfer of the loan (money) to the customer account, whereas a rejection will only require a letter or email to be sent to the client.

Overall, Superficial Sally may be challenging to manage independently and should ideally be paired with a more communicative colleague. This way, Sally can be utilised to ensure the quality of the colleague's output.

Wrapping up

The three takeaways from this article are:

The importance of defining the scope, purpose and outcome of the process to be mapped: Before conducting a process mapping workshop, the facilitator should have a clear understanding of what triggers the process, what it delivers, and what its goal is. This can help to avoid confusion and inefficiency in the mapping workshop and in the actual process execution.

The challenges of dealing with different personality types among the subject matter experts: You may have encountered some of the personality types in a process mapping workshop, such as Controlling Carrie, Detailed Dory, Grumpy Gary, etc. Each type has unique needs, preferences and communication styles, which can affect the quality and flow of the process mapping exercise. Some may be handled by preparing and selecting well, others should be managed well during the workshop. All of them should be handled with respect for their personality.

The techniques to manage the complexity and level of detail of the process map: Follow the rule of 7±2 and the principle of RRRTPW (Rather Roughly Right Than Precisely Wrong) when mapping a complex process.

This will ultimately help you to facilitate effective process mapping workshops.