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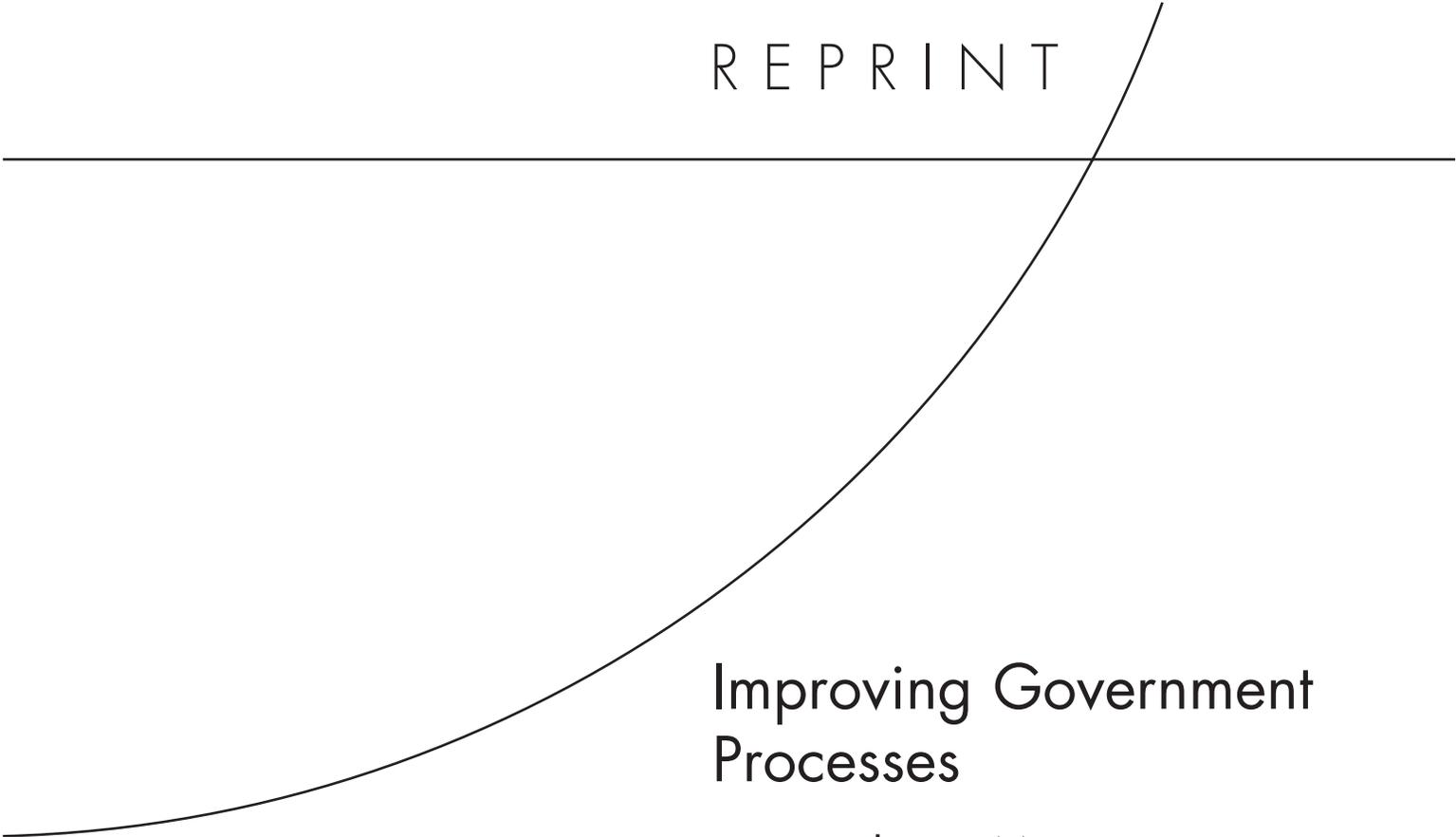
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# Improving Government Processes

From Velocity Management to Presidential Appointments

John Dumond, Rick Eden

Reprinted from  
*High-Performance Government:  
Structure, Leadership, Incentives*



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## Preface

This RAND Reprint presents one chapter from a RAND Monograph entitled *High Performance Government: Structure, Leadership, Incentives*, edited by Robert Klitgaard and Paul C. Light (<http://www.rand.org/publications/MG/MG256/>). The book is a collection of essays by RAND researchers that provide an outline for government reforms and improved management based on lessons learned from past successes in improving governmental performance.

The chapter reprinted here outlines a new approach to reforming the presidential appointments process, the process through which the President nominates and the Senate confirms senior federal officials. Criticism of the presidential appointments process is longstanding: many have complained that it needs to be streamlined, accelerated, and made less burdensome in order to better identify and attract the best candidates. Worthwhile reforms have been proposed, but without the desired results. The chapter suggests that such reforms can be accomplished by adopting a proven management approach focused on process improvement. The efficacy of the approach has been established in several initiatives conducted within the Department of Defense. Under this approach, a coalition of senior managers from the executive and legislative branches would provide leadership and guidance throughout the improvement process. The coalition would use a systematic, iterative process improvement methodology to develop and implement process changes, monitor progress, and measure results.

The first version of the chapter was presented in August 2003 at the Pardee RAND Graduate School in a two-week course convened by Paul C. Light. A second version was presented in March 2004 at a PRGS conference held in RAND's headquarters in Santa Monica, CA.

The course, conference, and book were made possible by the generosity of donors to the Pardee RAND Graduate School, particularly Paul Volcker and Eugene and Maxine Rosenfeld.



## **Improving Government Processes: From Velocity Management to Presidential Appointments**

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*John Dumond and Rick Eden*

We have two objectives in this chapter. The first is to substantiate the claim of the Volcker Commission that “governments and government agencies can change, even in ways that seem far-reaching, and those changes can produce significant improvements in efficiency and performance” (Chapter 2 of this volume, p. 26). In support of this claim, we present a case study (observed firsthand by us) in which governmental agencies worked together to achieve successful change. This study involved the Velocity Management (VM) initiative, which the U.S. Army began in 1994 to improve its order fulfillment and related processes, and which the National Partnership for Reinventing Government recognized with a Golden Hammer award in 1998.<sup>1</sup>

Our second objective is to suggest how the VM approach might be applied to other governmental processes. Because of the Volcker Commission’s concern with the quality of senior governmental executives, we focus here on the presidential appointments process. As with military logistics processes, this process is complex, has both chronic and acute performance problems, and involves many stakeholders. The problems have been well described for decades, and many reasonable recommendations have been proposed. Nevertheless, the per-

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<sup>1</sup> Another case of successful reform that we studied, Strategic Distribution, was a joint 1999 initiative of the U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) to improve the strategic distribution process serving all four services (see Robbins, Boren, and Leuschner, 2003). Both of these cases reveal dramatically improved performance in large and complex processes involving multiple agencies and organizations.

formance problems have continued to worsen to the point that the system is now considered to be in crisis. A proven approach to implementing and managing change through interagency cooperation may be the missing catalyst.

## **Part One: Improving Military Logistics Processes**

In the commercial business world, the term *logistics* often refers simply to the distribution of material, particularly finished goods. In the military, the term has a broader meaning. Military logistics comprises the set of business processes that acquire and deliver the products and services needed by military units to operate. These processes include procurement, order fulfillment, distribution, inventory management, retrograde (“reverse logistics”), and maintenance—all with familiar commercial analogs.

The military logistics system is a far-flung supply chain whose customers are military units worldwide. Its providers, however, are not limited to the military. They include various agencies within the four services (such as the Army Materiel Command and the Air Force Air Mobility Command); other Department of Defense (DoD) agencies (such as USTRANSCOM and the DLA); non-DoD agencies (such as the General Services Administration [GSA]); and literally tens of thousands of both domestic and foreign commercial firms that design, manufacture, store, transport, maintain, modify, and dispose of all matter of items used by the military.

### **A Crisis of Performance—and Trust**

At the end of the Cold War, the U.S. military logistics system needed to change for three primary reasons: to respond to environmental and structural changes, to correct chronic performance problems, and to address the fact that it had lost the trust of its customers, the warfighters.

By environmental and structural changes we mean changes that have occurred in the national security environment and U.S. force posture since the end of the Cold War. For instance, the military

fielded a new generation of increasingly high-technology weapon systems, which presented consumption, failure, and maintenance profiles quite different from those of the weapon systems they replaced. These new systems could not be supported effectively and efficiently in the same ways. As forces were drawn down from their Cold War levels, demand for logistics support also declined, affecting the utilization and productivity of logistics resources. As the military shifted to a posture emphasizing basing in the continental United States (CONUS), the logistics supply chain had to be reconfigured to adjust for the changed locations of both many customers and many providers. The demand for logistics support also changed to reflect an increased emphasis on force projection and humanitarian missions. Finally, through much of the last decade of the twentieth century, the expectation of a “peace dividend” created pressure to reduce military costs in general and logistics support costs more specifically.

A second reason for needing change was that the military logistics system was suffering from chronic performance problems. The basic business processes (given above) were all slow and unreliable. Increasingly, the system’s performance was being unfavorably compared to that of leading commercial firms engaged in similar business activities, such as FedEx for distribution and Wal-Mart for inventory management.

Third, the performance problems were causing a loss of trust. Military units were engaging in rational but inefficient behaviors, such as hoarding spare parts and other supplies, to protect themselves from the risks associated with slow and unpredictable processes. These behaviors further hurt system performance.

It is important to note that these chronic deficiencies in process performance persisted despite widespread recognition and despite waves of reforms attempted by talented experts and powerful leaders. Repeated failures to improve performance suggest that a new management approach may be needed to support a sustained and coordinated implementation of reforms across processes neither owned nor controlled by any single organization. Some of these deficiencies are visible in other areas of low-performance government, such as the presidential appointment process.

### **The Velocity Management Approach**

A key realization that led to the Army's decision to use a process improvement approach to improve its logistics system was that no "process owner" had the authority or responsibility to undertake the needed improvement actions. Logistics processes such as order fulfillment and equipment maintenance have many stakeholders; therefore, the Army needed to form a coalition of military and civilian managers to build a consensus of purpose and a community for action. The coalition included both customer and provider representatives and extended outside the Army, since many organizations in the logistics system were not owned or controlled by the Army.

The Velocity Group (VG) has a broad membership.<sup>2</sup> The group is led by the general officers representing the three major logistics elements in the Army—that is, the Deputy Commander of the Army Materiel Command, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics (now called the "G4"), and the Commander of the Combined Arms Support Command (CASCOM). Their organizations have responsibility, respectively, for decisions regarding wholesale-level logistics, policy and budget, and training and doctrine. The VG also includes representatives of the Army units that are the customers of the logistics system, including units in both the active and the Reserve components of the Army, both in garrison and deployed. Finally, the group includes other logistics providers in DoD, such as USTRANSCOM and the DLA.

The Commander of CASCOM acts as the executive agent for the VM initiative, and a small cell at CASCOM was given responsibility for coordinating the VM implementation and for serving as a clearinghouse for VM-related information (for instance, the cell manages a website devoted to the initiative: <http://www.cascom.army.mil/adm/>). Several times a year, the CASCOM people organize a systemwide meeting in which the VG receives updates on implementation progress and provides assistance and guidance. That does not

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<sup>2</sup>This group was recently renamed the Distribution Management Board of Directors.

mean, though, that actions take place only to support the meetings—rather, the meetings take place to support the ongoing actions.

The managers in this coalition span the logistics system. Together they can create the conditions for changing it and can help to lower barriers to change. They can also provide a vision of the desired end state. But they need subordinate entities that are similarly cross-organizational in membership to identify and develop specific changes, implement them, measure their effect, and then report progress toward goals. Because the Army logistics system crosses organizational boundaries and because every segment is technically complex, no single organization or individual has sufficient knowledge, control, or leverage to make dramatic change if operating alone. To improve a process in the logistics system, teams of technical experts and line managers drawn from all segments of the process must be established in order to develop and implement improvement actions that are not suboptimal to the system as a whole.

VM was implemented by teams of two types: Army-wide process improvement teams (PITs) and local site improvement teams (SITs) at each installation.

A PIT consists of technical experts representing all segments of a process. PITs are charged with walking through their respective processes to establish common, detailed definitions and understandings; developing processwide metrics and performance reports; and recommending process changes designed to improve performance. The leader of each PIT is a general officer or civilian equivalent in the senior executive service.

A SIT is made up of local technical experts and managers at a specific site, and each major Army installation (i.e., fort) establishes its own VM SIT. These SITs are responsible for improving local processes and serve as a mechanism for the PITs to implement changes across the Army.

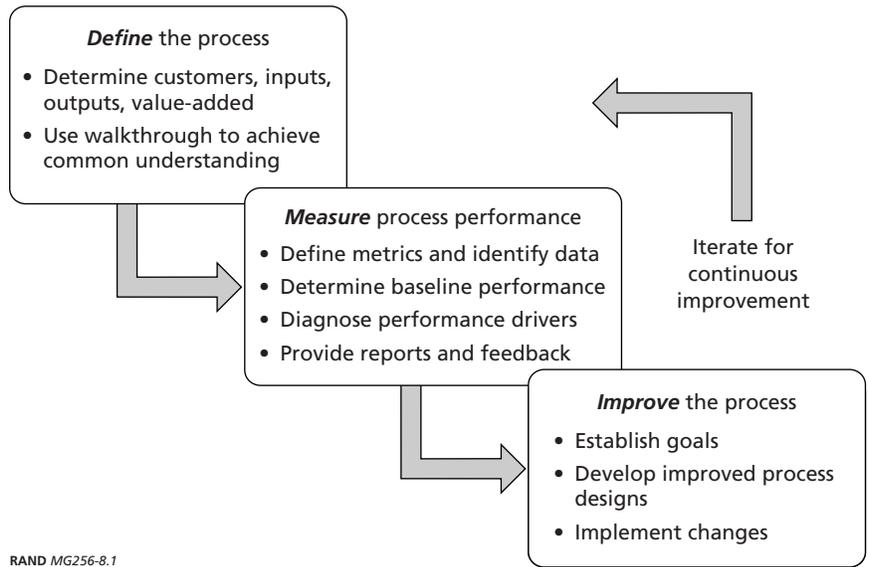
### **Define-Measure-Improve**

Many organizations undertake improvement initiatives only to see them end inconclusively or quietly fail. One reason this occurs is that the organization has not prepared sufficiently to sustain the initiatives

once the initial enthusiasm passes. Sometimes an organization addresses this problem by institutionalizing an improvement methodology to help sustain change. The two best-known examples of this are probably Toyota’s four-step method (Plan-Do-Check-Act, sometimes known as the Shewhart cycle, after Walter Shewhart, the “father” of statistical quality control) and Motorola’s six-step method. Embedding an improvement method into an organization’s culture makes the expectation of and search for improvement a standard operating procedure—that is, an accustomed way of doing business.

As part of VM, the Army adopted a streamlined version of methods that had propelled successful change initiatives in large commercial firms. To improve the performance of the processes, three readily understood and executed steps are applied in what is called the DMI method: **Define** the process, **Measure** process performance, and **Improve** the process. These steps are cycled continuously. Figure 8.1 indicates the key activities encompassed within each of these steps.

**Figure 8.1**  
**Steps in the Define-Measure-Improve Method**



The application of DMI disciplines the impulse to make quick changes. In the DMI method, improvement is undertaken only after the organization has taken the preparatory steps of Define and Measure. These two steps improve knowledge about the process targeted for improvement, in terms of both the expertise of the individuals charged with changing the process and the quantitative data available to them regarding process performance.

### **Define the Process**

The first step in the DMI approach, Define, focuses on understanding customer needs and the outputs of the particular process under study. Detailed walkthroughs of the process by teams of technical experts improve the organization's understanding of what procedures and actions are involved and how they affect performance. It is eye opening for the participants to discover that they all have different and limited views of the same process. Teams learn that previous improvement efforts focusing on particular segments of the process may have been working at cross-purposes. On the positive side, they learn that easy-to-fix issues can be immediately exposed during walkthroughs. These help to satisfy the desire to see quick action, and they build support for the improvement effort.

More important, though, is the fact that walkthroughs develop a cadre that collectively embodies new expertise. These individuals share an end-to-end understanding of the process, a common framework for assessing performance that focuses on customer satisfaction, well-informed hypotheses about the sources of performance deficits, and the collective authority to devise and recommend innovations to improve process performance.

### **Measure the Process**

Like the Define step, the Measure step of the DMI method represents an investment that must be made before a higher level of performance can be reasonably expected.

The most critical aspect of measurement is the development and implementation of appropriate metrics that span the full process and reflect key customer values. Metrics are the *lingua franca* by which all

stakeholders in a process communicate with one another regarding the goals and status of their improvement efforts. The choice of metrics is critical, because what gets measured is what gets attended to. VM advocates the use of multiple metrics to guide improvement on all dimensions of process performance—time, quality, and cost—and to ensure that improvements on one dimension (e.g., cost) are not achieved at the expense of others (e.g., quality). Because improvement aims to reduce the variability in process performance, metrics should, as a rule, measure both median performance and variance. Metrics for overall performance should comprise submetrics that permit diagnosis and analysis of the sources of poor performance (for example, total process time should be analyzable into time attributable to each sub-process).

Data sources to support the metrics must be identified and evaluated. To date, the VM implementation has been able to proceed utilizing data available from standard Army data systems, although these data have frequently been combined and used in innovative ways. A beneficial by-product of using data to support process improvement is that the data quality improves very quickly: Those who are trying to use the data uncover previously unnoticed quality problems, and those who are responsible for inputting and maintaining the data are alerted to the importance of their accuracy, completeness, and timeliness.

Measurement includes reporting, another activity critical to sustaining continuous improvement. Reporting helps to build support and maintain momentum over a long period. Measurement offers maximum benefit when the results are widely shared among stakeholders in the process. Improvement is difficult to guide and sustain unless performance feedback is consistent and rapid.

Because the DMI method depends centrally on the measurement of process performance, analytic support is needed for its use. For its analytic support, the VM initiative relied principally on RAND Corporation analysts conducting studies sponsored by the Army. The PITs counted RAND's analysts among their members, and their analyses helped to identify potential improvements to logistics processes and provided technical support as the changes were im-

plemented and evaluated. RAND analysts also helped to develop metrics and reports, to analyze data, to diagnose performance problems, and to develop process changes and evaluate their implementation.

### **Improve the Process**

The third step in the DMI method, Improve, capitalizes on the knowledge developed during the first two steps. In conducting the Define and Measure steps of the method, teams develop a better understanding of the performance deficits in a process and where reform might begin.

The measurements tell the teams which processes and sub-processes they should examine in more detail and which ones present the best opportunity for improvement. More fine-grained measurements give the team clues about what they should be looking for when walking through the process at a particular time or site. Generally, teams look for activities that are time consuming, error prone, or costly and that add little value, on scales large and small. For instance, they look for long periods of waiting, overprocessing, overproduction, multiple handling, duplication, unnecessary movement, and any action or item whose purpose the involved personnel cannot readily explain. In addition to looking for non-value-adding activities to eliminate, the teams look for ways to improve and streamline value-adding activities. Sometimes this might be accomplished through increased use of information technology—for instance, to place information in a shared dataset once it has been gathered, rather than to gather it several times in the course of a process.

The process experts also use metrics to articulate realistic but challenging goals for improved performance. Progress toward these goals, which operationalize the vision of the senior-level coalition, occurs incrementally. However, big payoffs can be produced early on by making a few quick, easy changes almost immediately to improve a process that is out of control and performing very erratically. For example, one might be able to reduce reliance on a provider whose service has been inordinately expensive. Besides providing benefits to performance, these initial improvements will build momentum for

subsequent efforts. Metrics enable the improvement teams to measure whether performance improves after the implementation of process changes. Moreover, by comparing performance trends at these implementation sites to those at similar sites, the teams can create quasi-experimental demonstrations of the beneficial effects of a given intervention.

As performance of the process improves, the DMI cycle begins again, with repeated walkthroughs and a remapping of the changed process, continued measurement, and additional process changes.

### **The Army's Order Fulfillment Process**

The Army's successful effort to improve spare parts support is a good illustration of the VM paradigm in action. In particular, it demonstrates how improvement teams employ the DMI method to build the collective expertise and coordination necessary to achieve and sustain dramatic improvement.

What was called the order fulfillment process had for decades been plagued by stubborn problems. Each segment of the process—from placing an order for a part to receiving the shipment—was slow and highly variable. Previous remedies had failed, and a chronic problem was becoming acute.

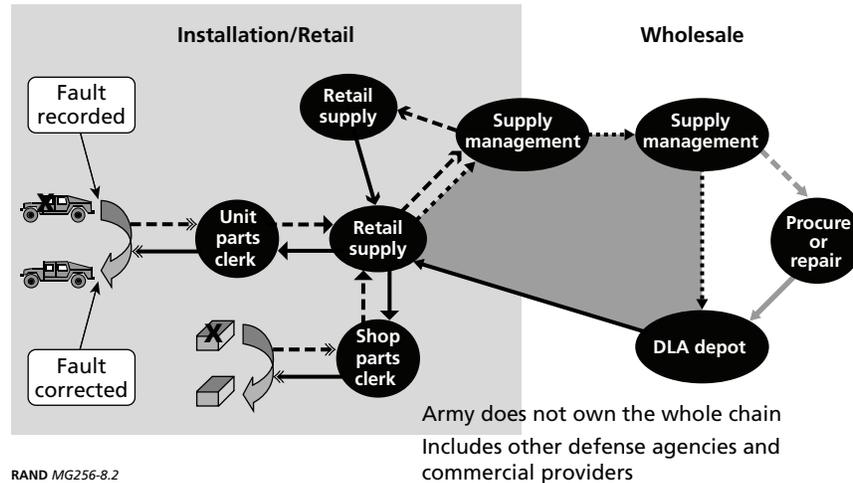
Figure 8.2 provides a schematic of the order fulfillment process for Army units in CONUS. The VG commissioned a PIT to focus on this process. The team was made up of experts representing each subprocess of the order fulfillment process.<sup>3</sup>

**Defining the Order Fulfillment Process.** The PIT began by defining the order fulfillment process. The outputs of the process are the parts needed to repair and support weapon systems; the customers are the maintainers of the systems and the supply clerks who manage local inventories of spare parts. As Figure 8.2 shows, the parts that were requested could be available at a number of locations through-

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<sup>3</sup> These experts included maintainers, transporters, and inventory managers, as well as representatives from non-Army stakeholders such as the DLA, USTRANSCOM, and government contractors (e.g., J.B. Trucking, FedEx, and Emery). RAND provided researchers to guide the application of the DMI process and to provide analytic support.

**Figure 8.2**  
**Order Fulfillment Process for Army Units in CONUS**



out the Army. Some parts are available at local warehouses, called Supply Support Activities (SSAs), which are situated near the Army units and their maintenance facilities. These are usually the quickest source of spare parts, but they cannot carry all parts that might be needed. When an item is not available at a customer's SSA, another warehouse is asked to fill the order. If the part is unavailable at all nearby warehouses, the order is passed to what is referred to as the national, or wholesale, supply system, which includes commercial vendors.<sup>4</sup>

Members of the PIT and the SITs walked through each step of the process, including ordering, sourcing, picking, packing, shipping, delivery, and receipting. The PIT members spoke to customers about how the process worked. They looked at financial and information flows in addition to the more easily observable flows of materiel; they

<sup>4</sup> The PIT initially focused on the order fulfillment process for orders for spare parts that were filled by supply points in the wholesale system. This wholesale process can be defined as a cycle that begins at the SSA when a supply clerk places an order for a spare part to be filled by a wholesale supply depot or, rarely, by direct delivery from a vendor. The cycle ends at the same point when a supply clerk at the SSA retail supply organization receives the part.

also reviewed the software, scrutinizing “virtual” aspects of the process such as embedded algorithms, parameters, and thresholds. The activities of the Define stage produced a cadre of processwide experts in the Army’s order fulfillment process, representing a new level of expertise not available before.

**Measuring the Order Fulfillment Process.** Once the process was defined, a determination had to be made about what constituted “goodness” in order fulfillment.

During the walkthroughs, members of the PIT and the SITs found that managers often focused on local effectiveness or efficiency but did not necessarily also focus on good service from the customer’s perspective. For example, in some segments of the process, organizations sought to make efficient use of trucks, with the result that ordered materiel was delayed until a full truckload could be assembled. This “batching” of items in the process was done without regard for the urgency with which any given part might be needed by the customer many steps away in the process.

A process approach such as VM is typically concerned with three dimensions of performance—time, quality, and cost. Because of many complaints about delays, the PIT focused initially on the time dimension. The Army’s dataset Logistics Intelligence File (LIF) contained time stamps for orders and deliveries of spare parts, and these data permitted time measurement of the process as a whole and of major segments.

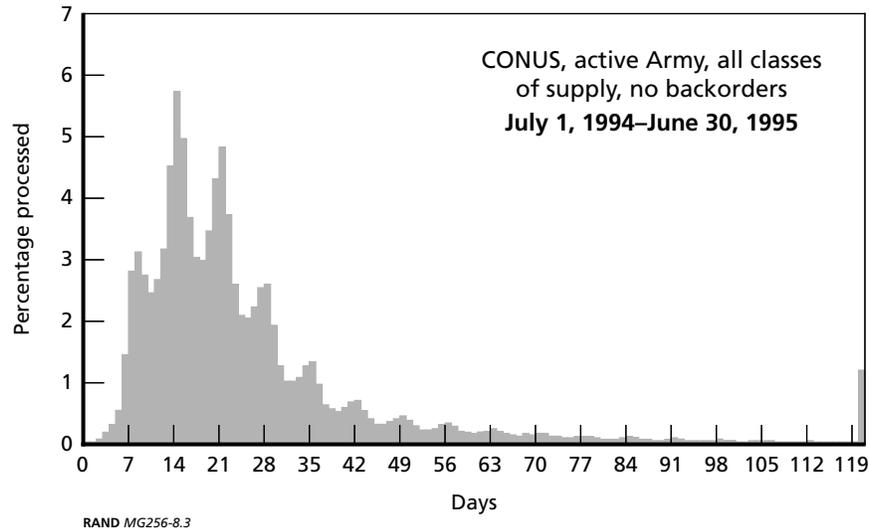
The time from order placed to package receipted was referred to as order and ship time (OST).<sup>5</sup> LIF data were used to define a baseline against which to gauge subsequent success; the baseline period was from mid-1994 to mid-1995 (see Figure 8.3).<sup>6</sup> The Army knew

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<sup>5</sup> As an improvement effort progresses, the suite of metrics evolves. In the case of VM, OST was subsequently replaced by requisition wait time (RWT), in part to reflect later changes in the order fulfillment process and the Army’s capabilities to measure it. In addition, RWT was complemented by customer wait time, a composite metric that represented the time needed to obtain parts from all sources of supply, rather than from the national-level supply system alone.

<sup>6</sup> See Girardini et al., 1996, for a detailed discussion of the development of metrics and the creation of a baseline measurement.

**Figure 8.3**  
**Order and Ship Time, Baseline Performance**



that the average OST was very long—almost a month—and recognized how extremely slow this OST was compared to the rapidly improving order fulfillment times in the commercial sector (which widely advertised “overnight” and “next day” delivery). However, the Army had not recognized that its OST performance was also highly variable, with a long right-hand tail. This variability, more than slowness per se, was what had led to customer distrust of the process.

To cope with an unreliable process, mechanics were placing duplicate orders, hoarding parts, and finding alternatives to the supply system. This was their way to handle the fact that since a repair must wait until every needed part is at hand, even one part lying in the tail of the OST distribution could hold it up.

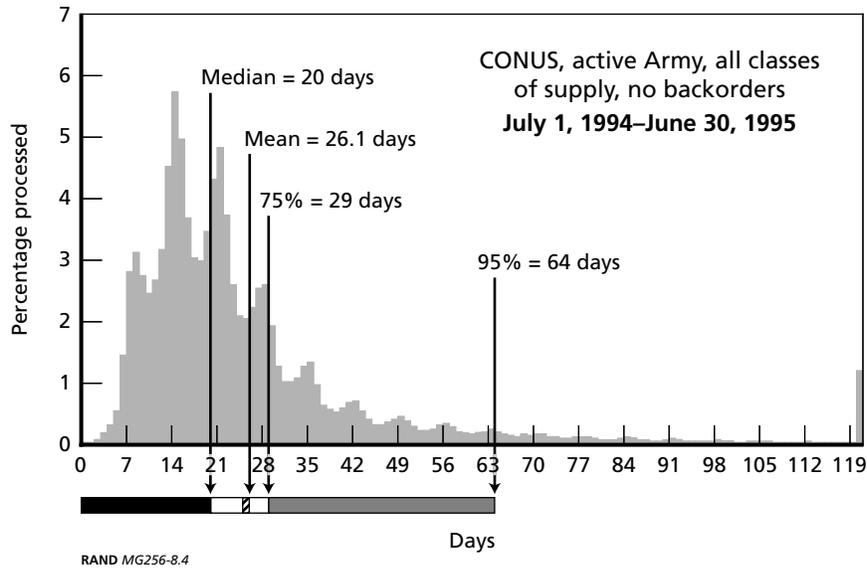
The PIT proposed three new metrics: the median OST (to measure “typical” rather than average speed of the process), the 75th percentile, and the 95th percentile. The purpose of the 75th percentile was to indicate the time by which three quarters of the filled orders had been received and receipted. The 95th percentile was useful for focusing attention on the “outliers” in the process that represent

its worst performance. The new metrics for measuring OST performance became standard in Army reports, which used overlaid bars to depict them graphically (see Figure 8.4).

**Improving the Order Fulfillment Process.** The VG used the metrics to specify ambitious goals for improvement. The goals were feasible yet challenging, and they signaled that dramatic improvement was needed. This encouraged an innovative and aggressive attitude toward developing and testing process changes.

The PIT and SITs discovered that many factors contributed to the long and highly variable OSTs. Some of these factors were easily fixed at the local level, without any investment in or increases to total process cost, and these resulted in quick “wins.” For example, SITs helped their home installations strengthen oversight, simplify rules, improve the use of new requisitioning and receipting technologies (such as bar code scanners), reduce review processes so as to require

**Figure 8.4**  
**New Metrics for the Order Fulfillment Process: Median OST, 75th Percentile, and 95th Percentile**



fewer signatures, and streamline on-post delivery processes and routes.

Other changes required new coordination among organizations that controlled various segments of the order fulfillment process. Collaboration was facilitated by the relationships developed through the PIT. To take just one example, the Army had to work closely with the DLA, which operates many of the major supply depots, as well as with commercial trucking and small package delivery firms. The Army and the DLA worked together to establish a network of regularly scheduled trucks (similar to regular mail deliveries) as the primary shipping mode between DLA depots and large Army installations. Depending on how far the depot was from a particular installation in its customer region, these routes could provide at a very low cost a level of performance that was comparable to the relatively expensive “next day” service offered by small package air delivery firms. To capitalize on these routes, the supply depots started to increase the breadth of materiel that they routinely stocked for their major customers.

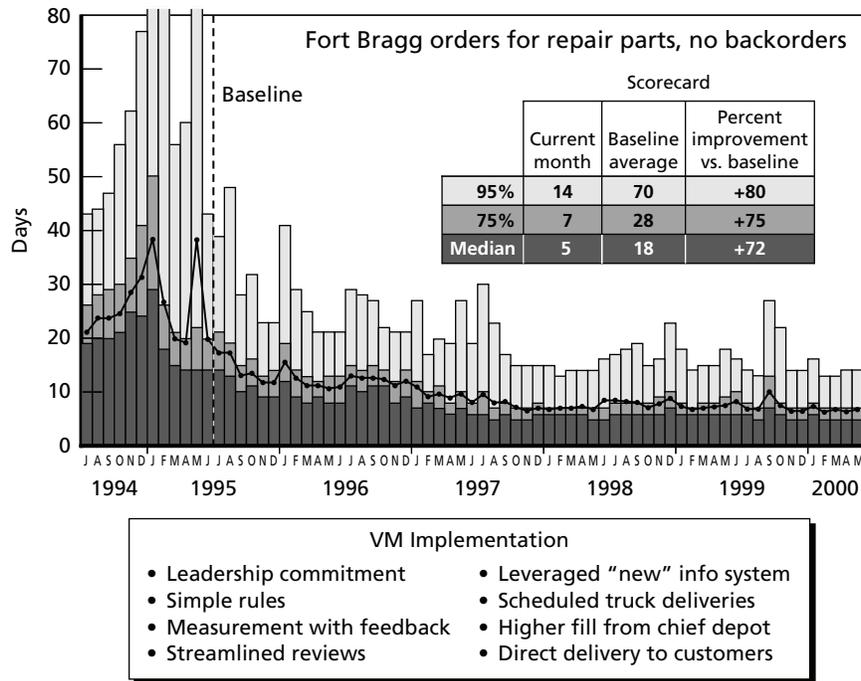
The new metrics, reported monthly, enabled everyone involved in efforts to improve the order fulfillment process to understand and monitor the effects of process changes. Two or three times per year, at meetings convened by the VG, the PIT and selected SITs could use the metrics to communicate their progress toward the goals.

The result of many improvements was a much faster, more reliable order fulfillment process (see Figure 8.5).

## **Part Two: Improving the Presidential Appointments Process**

The presidential appointments process is the set of activities by which the executive branch of the federal government staffs most of the major management positions charged with executing the policies of an administration. Just like the Army’s order fulfillment process before VM implementation, the presidential appointments process suffers long-standing performance deficits. Successive commissions and

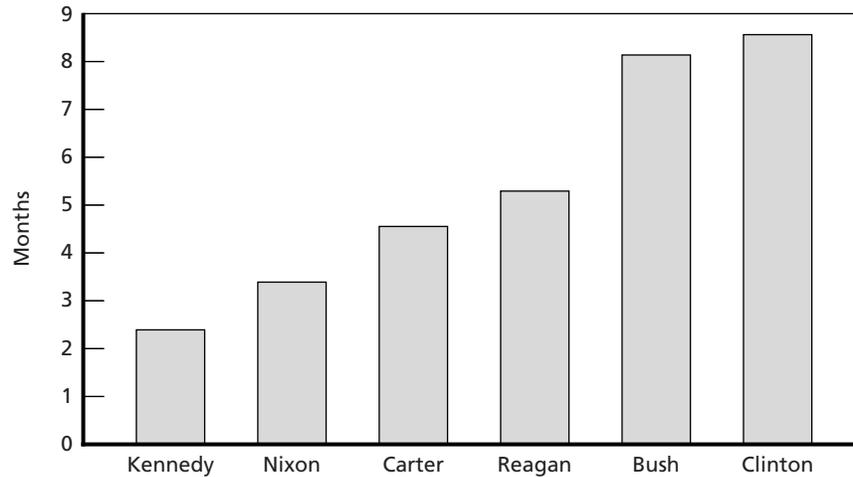
**Figure 8.5**  
**Improved Order Fulfillment Process as a Result of Velocity Management Implementation**



RAND MG256-8.5

commentators have suggested well-conceived solutions for remedying the sources of the problems. However, these recommendations have not been implemented successfully and the problems have remained, only increasing in severity. The National Academy of Sciences complains that “the appointment process is slow, duplicative, and unpredictable” (Panel on Presidentially Appointed Scientists and Engineers, 1992, p. 5). The situation has grown worse with each administration of the past forty years, as shown in Figure 8.6. Between 1964 and 1984, the presidential appointment process rarely took longer than six months (Light and Thomas, 2000, p. 8). In the last two administrations—those of Bush and then Clinton—it averaged eight months (Brookings Institution, 2000).

**Figure 8.6**  
**Length of Presidential Appointments Process, Kennedy Through Clinton**



RAND MG256-8.6

SOURCE: Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996.

What was a long and unpredictable process has only become longer and more unpredictable. In fact, reform efforts may have backfired, exacerbating the problems they were intended to fix. According to a leading critic of the process, G. Calvin Mackenzie (1998), “The decades old effort to improve the process of selecting and confirming presidential appointees has produced an outcome directly opposite its intentions. It repels the appointees it ought to attract. It shortens the tenure in office it ought to sustain.”

The history of failed reforms to date suggests that a new approach may be warranted in order to produce the “significant improvements in efficiency and performance” of the type sought by the Volcker Commission.

Might insights from Velocity Management be applied to this seemingly intractable problem? In considering the appropriateness of applying a VM-like approach to the presidential appointments process in order to improve it, we need to address questions such as the following:

- Can a case be made that there is an urgent need for change?
- Is there a vision of a better way?
- What does the vision suggest are the measures of goodness?
- Are there strong leaders committed to change?
- What coalition is needed to achieve change?
- What expertise must the process improvement teams have?
- What sites need improvement teams?
- Who will provide analytic support to the change initiatives?
- How will progress be reported?
- Where is the low-hanging fruit (the “now-term” initiatives)?

We begin to develop answers to many of these questions in the remainder of this chapter.

A sense of urgency may already be in place. Nancy Kassebaum Baker, former U.S. Senator from Kansas, testified to the United States Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs that “the current [presidential appointments] process desperately needs reform” (Baker, 2001). Paul Light of the Brookings Institution and New York University, and Virginia Thomas of the Heritage Foundation (Light and Thomas, 2000) have warned that “the presidential [appointments] process is broken in several places” (p. 11) and “now verges on complete collapse” (p. 3).

An effective case for change must include not only a compelling indictment of the present process, but also a vision of an improved process. The vision statement need not be detailed; in fact, it needs to be relatively broad in order to permit many competing perspectives to accede to it.<sup>7</sup> A vision statement such as this one, offered by Light and Thomas, might well be sufficient:

[The presidential appointment process] should give nominees enough information so that they can act in their best interest throughout the process, move fast enough to give departments and agencies the leadership they need to faithfully execute the

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<sup>7</sup> See Setear et al., 1990, for a discussion of what makes an effective organizational vision.

laws, and be fair enough to draw talented people into service, while rigorous enough to assure that individual nominees are fit for their jobs (2000, p. 7).

Even more succinctly, the Brookings Institution's Presidential Appointee Initiative (PAI) calls for "making the presidential appointment process easier, faster, and more respectful toward the people who have accepted the call to service" (Brookings Institution, 2000, p. 3).

In addition to a sense of urgency and a vision, the VM approach requires strong commitment and participation from all the organizations that are stakeholders in the process to be improved. It has long been recognized that no one organization owns or controls the presidential appointments process and that its reform will require the cooperation of the executive and legislative branches. For instance, Mackenzie writes that "since both the executive and legislative branches share responsibility for reducing the obstacles to public service, a bipartisan framework—that includes representatives of the executive branch, Congress, and the Office of Government Ethics—is needed to identify actions that should be taken by the President and Congress to broaden and deepen the pool of qualified persons willing to consider presidential appointments" (Mackenzie, 1998).

The Army's experience with VM suggests how to form and use a senior coalition to guide improvement. A standing coalition of stakeholders in the process would together act as the process owner and manager. The crucial political question is, of course, whether those now responsible for delay-making in opposing political parties would be willing to make a long-term agreement across several administrations to make up such a senior coalition. By analogy with the VG, what we might call a Leadership Coalition for the presidential appointments process would have responsibility for providing guidance and feedback to all those involved as to the focus and efficacy of their improvement efforts. Once they agree on the crisis, the vision, and the improvement approach, the members of the coalition can accomplish a great deal. This group would not be convened on an ad hoc or one-time basis; rather, it would constitute an ongoing man-

agement function focused on continuous improvement. It would develop metrics to measure the goodness of the process, establish goals in terms of those metrics, develop and implement process improvements, and monitor the process for progress toward goals.

A Leadership Coalition should include leaders from the key offices and agencies involved in the presidential appointments process. These would almost certainly include the senior managers of several White House offices (Office of Presidential Personnel and Office of Counsel to the President) and the Office of Government Ethics. The coalition should probably include high-level representatives from the agencies headed by the appointees, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and the Senate. And the coalition might even be extended to include participants from the many other organizations that play informal yet very powerful roles in the process, including the media, industries and their lobbies, watchdog and special interest groups, and the House of Representatives.

The Leadership Coalition will need to charter a PIT to develop and help execute specific actions to improve the presidential appointments process. Like the coalition itself, the PIT should be cross-functional in its membership, composed of experts drawn from the key organizations that perform the activities. The PIT would conduct walkthroughs of the process and work together to develop proposals for improvements that it would recommend to the Leadership Coalition. Each of the organizations represented in the Leadership Coalition and the PIT will also need to establish SITs to complement the PIT and to execute its recommendations.

Both the PIT and the SITs should use the Define-Measure-Improve (DMI) methodology to guide their activities. In the next three subsections, we outline the application of each step to the presidential appointments process.

### **Defining the Presidential Appointments Process**

In the Define step of the DMI method, the PIT would identify the major activities of the presidential appointments process, its inputs

and outputs, and its customers. This step would clarify for all PIT members the function of the process, its value, and its day-to-day detailed operation.

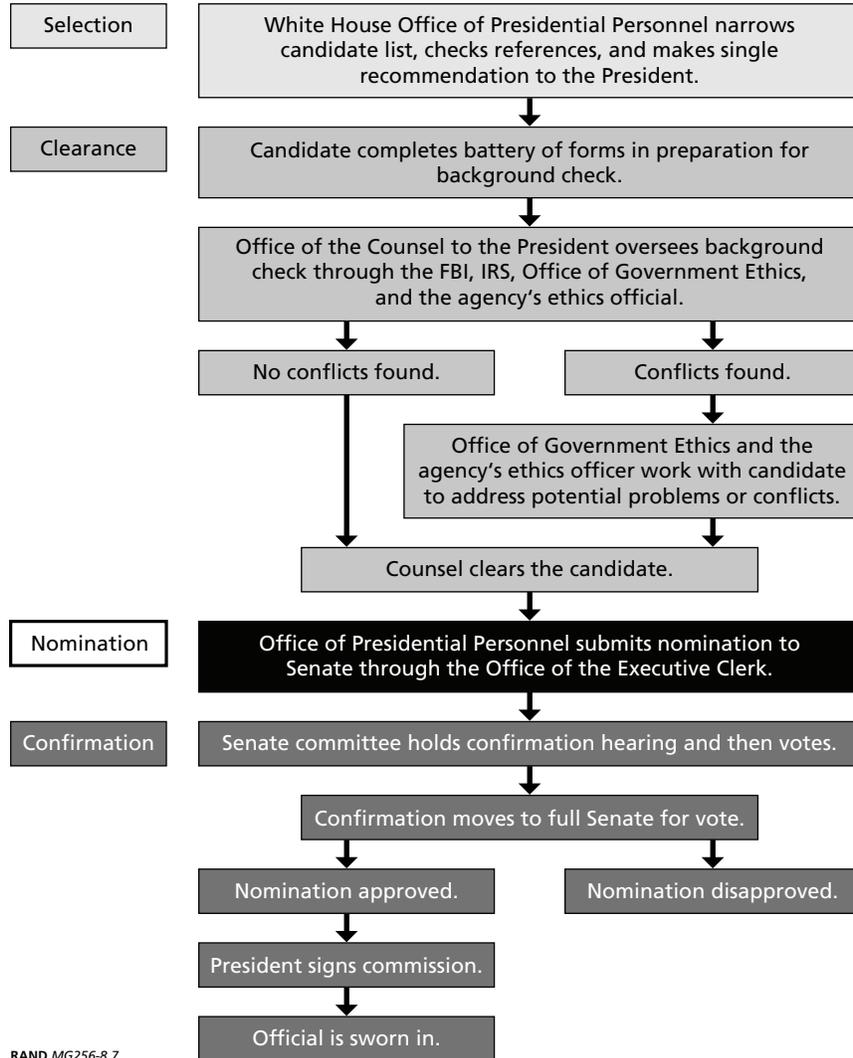
The outputs of the presidential appointments process are confirmed appointees. Each administration must fill approximately 1,000 managerial positions that require Senate confirmation and another 2,000 that do not.

There are many customers of the process. From one perspective, the customer of the process is the President, who needs executive managers to execute his policies. This is reflected in the term *presidential appointee*. From another perspective, reflected in the term *public service*, the customer of the process is the department or agency that needs a director to help execute its mission of serving the American public. The legislature is another stakeholder in the process, which cuts across executive and legislative branches. Key offices and agencies involved include several White House offices (Offices of Presidential Personnel and of Counsel to the President), the Office of Government Ethics, the agencies headed by the appointees, the FBI, the IRS, sixteen Senate committees, and the full Senate. Each of these might be a candidate for a SIT targeted to improve the site's activities related to the presidential appointments process. Many other organizations may play informal yet very powerful roles, including the media, industries and their lobbies, watchdog and special interest groups, the major political parties, and the House of Representatives.

The inputs to the process include the financial and personnel resources devoted to the process in the participating organizations. They also include information of various sorts, including information on the required outputs and on the pool of potential candidates. Much of the latter is provided by the selected candidates as the process unfolds.

Figure 8.7 diagrams the process from the perspective of the candidates. From this perspective, there are four stages, or what we call subprocesses: selection, clearance, nomination, and confirmation. Each subprocess is composed of activities performed by a number of participants. As Figure 8.7 suggests, these four stages vary in complexity. Whereas nomination is quite simple, almost clerical, Senate

**Figure 8.7**  
**Presidential Appointments Process from the Candidate's Perspective**



SOURCE: Adapted from Brookings Institution, 2000.

confirmation can range from straightforward to harrowing. The four subprocesses are described in order in the following paragraphs.

**Selection.** This first subprocess involves activities such as candidate identification, screening, interviewing, contacting, and recruiting. The main participants are the administration's transition team, the Office of Presidential Personnel, and the candidates themselves. The outputs of this subprocess are preferred candidates that can move to the next stage.

**Clearance.** Once a candidate is selected, he or she must be investigated to ensure that his or her background is "clear" of anything that might provide grounds for denying confirmation or creating political difficulties or embarrassment for the President. Examples of background items that are looked for are tax evasion, conflicts of interest, medical problems, and personal problems. The clearance subprocess is overseen by the Office of the Counsel to the President. A number of types of clearance are desired; thus, other major participants are the FBI, the IRS, the Office of Government Ethics, the ethics office of the agency where the appointment resides, and of course the candidate, who must fill out all the forms required by these entities. The outputs of this subprocess are names of qualified candidates that are suitable for nomination by the President.

**Nomination.** In this third subprocess, the cleared candidate is submitted to the Senate for confirmation. The major participants are the White House offices of the Counsel, of Presidential Appointments, of the Executive Clerk, and of the Press (for press releases). The outputs of this subprocess are nominations.

**Confirmation.** This last subprocess is overseen by one of sixteen Senate committees.<sup>8</sup> The chief activities are informal interviews ("courtesy calls") between the committee members and the candidate, together with formal hearings. There are separate votes by the committee and then the full Senate. As in previous subprocesses, the candidate is responsible for completing many forms; he or she also needs to develop detailed answers to specific policy questions pertaining to the position. The committee may undertake additional background investigations. The output of this subprocess is a list of confirmed

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<sup>8</sup> The current status of candidates in the confirmation stage can be tracked at Senate website [http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/a\\_three\\_sections\\_with\\_teasers/nominations.htm](http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/a_three_sections_with_teasers/nominations.htm).

candidates whose appointments the President completes by signing their commissions.

We have now sketched out the skeletal outline of the presidential appointments process by way of illustrating the Define step of the DMI method. If a VM improvement approach were applied to the presidential appointments process, a PIT would walk through the process from end to end. The walkthrough would consist of site visits by the team as a whole to each one of the organizations that participate in the process. At each site, experts responsible for that part of the process would describe and demonstrate how specific activities are performed. For most team members, this site visit would be their first opportunity to gain a detailed understanding of the other subprocesses of the process—that is, those subprocesses other than their own. It would also be their first opportunity to share with others their observations on how elements of the design or aspects of the execution of specific activities might bear on other activities upstream or downstream in the process.

Over the course of successive site visits, the members of the PIT would build a common and detailed understanding of the process from end to end. The goal of the walkthroughs is to build a team of experts who have the background, knowledge, and influence (through their mandate from the senior coalition) needed to begin measuring and improving the presidential appointments process.

### **Measuring the Presidential Appointments Process**

Having mapped the presidential appointments process, we turn to Measure, the second step in the DMI method. The targeted process needs to be measured with respect to the dimensions of time, quality, and cost. The primary question here is, How might a PIT measure the goodness of the presidential appointment process along these dimensions?

**Time Measures.** Everyone seems to agree with Mackenzie: “It takes too long for a new president to staff the senior positions in the administration” (Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996, p. 73). Moreover, the growing delays are not confined to specific segments. According to Baker: “There is not a single stage of the appointments process—not

one—where appointees do not say that it takes longer than it should” (Baker, 2001). For example, the clearance subprocess alone can take several months, and within that single subprocess, certification of the financial statements by the Office of Government Ethics can take two months (Brookings Institution, 2000, p. 42).

As these complaints suggest, obvious time metrics to consider in an improvement effort are total process time and total time within each of the four major subprocesses.<sup>9</sup>

Another lesson from VM is that measurement on all dimensions should address variability in performance as well as typical performance. Both very fast and very slow appointments may hold lessons for improvement efforts.

**Quality Measures.** When a process is long, unpredictable, and costly, quality must suffer. Measuring the quality dimension of process performance is usually more difficult than measuring the time dimension. One common strategy is to infer the quality of a process by measuring the quality of its outputs. But measuring the quality of inputs is also of interest, if one assumes that a good process can produce better outputs if it is given better inputs.

Critics usually tread lightly when complaining about the quality of the presidential appointees that finally emerge from today’s very long process. For example, in describing the quality of appointees to science and technology leadership positions, the National Academy of Sciences states that “the quality of past appointees has been high” (Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, 2001, p. 3). Light and Thomas (2000) note that “it is difficult, if not impossible,

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<sup>9</sup> Though the value of such metrics appears obvious, their precise definitions may not be straightforward and are subject to analysis and negotiation. It will be necessary for a PIT to stipulate for measurement purposes the beginning and end point of the process as a whole and of each subprocess. Moreover, care must be taken to leave no “air gaps” of unmeasured time for which no organization is accountable. Consider, for instance, the issues in defining when the process as a whole begins. For an individual candidate, one might say that the process begins with initial contact, typically by the White House transition team or Office of Presidential Personnel. This might also be the President’s perspective. However, from the perspective of a department or agency needing its executive position filled, the process might be said to begin when the position becomes vacant. The department is clearly a customer of the process, and this would be the point at which a customer need is identified.

to know whether the quality of presidential appointments has changed with the passage of time” (p. 8). Nevertheless, the survey reported on by Light and Thomas did ask appointees to rate their colleagues as a cohort in order to determine appointee quality. The responses were lukewarm, with 79 percent of respondents describing Senate-confirmed appointees as “a mixed lot: some are highly talented, while others do not have the skills and experience their positions require” (p. 9).

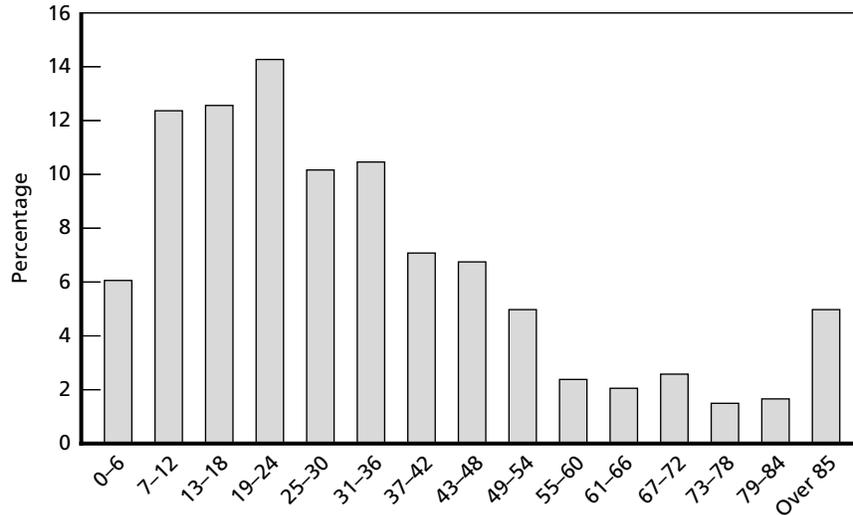
One metric might be the percentage of first-choice candidates that are appointed. Several candidates for each position are identified in the selection stage of the current process, and it might be reasonable to assume that the first-choice candidates are considered higher quality. A similar metric might be the percentage of contacted candidates who agree to be considered for appointment.

To complement individual-level metrics of quality, one might develop metrics to assess the quality of a cohort of presidential appointments. For instance, cohort metrics might measure the quality of presidential appointments in terms of desired personal characteristics (such as diversity in religion, gender, age, race) or background characteristics (such as ideology, business experience, or previous public service).

In addition to measuring inputs and outputs, it is possible to measure outcomes and gauge the quality of a process on that basis. For example, an outcome-oriented quality measure for the presidential appointments process might be length of tenure in the appointed position. Using such a metric would be analogous to assessing the quality of the equipment repair process by measuring the length of time between needed repair actions: The implication is that the better a piece of equipment is repaired, the longer it stays fixed. The average tenure of presidential appointments is now only 24 months (see Figure 8.8).

Judged by the measure of length of tenure, the quality of the appointments process has fallen as the process has lengthened and become more burdensome:

**Figure 8.8**  
**Common Length of Service for Presidential Appointees (months)**



SOURCE: Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996, p. 45; based on General Accounting Office analysis of period October 10, 1982, through September 20, 1991.

RAND MG256-8.8

SOURCE: Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996, p. 45; based on General Accounting Office analysis of period October 10, 1982, through September 20, 1991.

Over recent decades, the average tenure of presidential appointees has been declining. A Brookings study of assistant secretaries serving between 1933 and 1962 found an average tenure of 2.7 years. A study by the National Academy of Public Administration of Senate-confirmed appointees (excluding regulatory commissioners who have fixed terms) found that tenure for the period 1964–84 had declined to an average of 2.2 years. A General Accounting Office study in April 1994 found that the average tenure of contemporary political appointees was down to 2.1 years. In many positions tenure is even shorter. From 1981 to 1991, for example, there were 7 assistant secretaries for trade development in the Commerce Department and 7 deputy attorney generals. The Federal Aviation Administration had 7 appointed and 4 acting administrators in 15 years, the Federal Housing Administration had 13 commissioners in 14 years, and the General Services Administration has 18 commissioners in 24 years (Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996, pp. 4–5).

If such a metric were used to help improve the presidential appointments process, it would be important to measure variability in tenure as well as average tenure in office.

In addition to length of tenure, one might measure the vacancy rate for presidential appointments. Mackenzie notes that in the late nineties, “the administration as a whole experienced a vacancy rate in appointed positions in the executive branch that frequently exceeded 25 percent,” whereas “judicial vacancies reached levels so high that the efficiency of the federal courts was deeply affected” (Mackenzie, 1998, p. 2). If it takes the better part of a year to complete a presidential appointment, it follows that many departments and agencies will need to limp along. “Acting officials are disinclined to initiate anything, they shy away from difficult administrative problems, they avoid congressional testimony and public representations of their actions whenever possible, and they escape accountability for most of their decisions” (Mackenzie, 1998, p. 13). The end result is that governmental performance suffers.

A quality metric similar to vacancy rate might be percentage of time that a position was filled by a confirmed appointee (that is, was neither vacant nor filled by an acting or temporary appointee). This metric reflects not only how quickly a new appointee arrives, but also how quickly the existing officeholder departs. As Mackenzie (1998) points out, “Many of those departing do not time their departures to coincide with the arrival of their replacement. They quickly move on, leaving their position vacant—often for months on end” (p. 13). Moreover, such early departures are exacerbated by the slowness and unpredictability of the replacement process: “Because the appointments process now moves so slowly, few departing officials are willing to peg their last day of work to their replacement’s first day. They have lives to resume” (p. 13).

**Cost Metrics.** Costs are of many kinds. Government organizations have budgets for the appointments process. Within specific subprocesses, other proxy measures of cost are possible. For example, in the confirmation subprocess, one might be able to measure total hours devoted to confirmation hearings and to courtesy calls on committee members.

One reason to measure the cost of a process is to help identify and eliminate waste. Aside from duplication in the clearance stage, perhaps the most obvious kind of waste in the current presidential process is that created when a candidate removes him- or herself from further consideration. In such a case, the process must begin anew in order to fill the position for which the candidate was being considered. An analog in the military logistics system would be the need to submit a new order for an item because a shipment has been lost on route. One could use percentage of “lost candidates” as a cost metric of the presidential appointments process.

Costs are borne by the candidates, as well. Light and Thomas note that many appointees must incur thousands of dollars of lawyer and accountant fees in order to complete all the forms, and that a fifth of those surveyed spent more than \$6,000 on such fees (2000, p. 7).

Throughout this discussion, our goal has been to illustrate the kinds and range of metrics that might be useful. In a VM-like improvement effort, it would be up to the PIT and the senior coalition to select metrics.

Moreover, metrics definition is not the end of the DMI process’s Measure step. The PIT would also address related issues, such as how to define the population to be measured (being mindful that more candidates enter the process than emerge as appointees); what data exist or need to be developed; and how the data should be collected, integrated, analyzed, and reported. Once the PIT has identified a feasible measurement system, the senior coalition would approve its use to guide and monitor improvement actions.

This brings us to the third step of the DMI method.

### **Improving the Presidential Appointments Process**

Participants in improvement efforts often wish to avoid tradeoffs. For instance, they would like to get a faster and higher-quality process without having to pay more. When a process is very much out of control, as the presidential appointments process appears to be, there are opportunities for synergy among performance improvements on multiple dimensions. That is, a PIT might be able to identify actions

that not only speed up the presidential appointments process, but also reduce the number of errors and instances of waste—in other words, no tradeoff necessary.

A PIT could begin with some generic strategies for improving process performance. Two very broad strategies to help the process perform better are to redesign the process and to reduce demands on the process. The process can be redesigned by eliminating activities that do not add value and by streamlining those that do. It is possible to reduce demands on the process both by reducing or smoothing the requirements for its output and by improving the quality of its inputs. In this respect, a process can be thought of as a factory that works best when orders for its products are steady without straining its capacity and when it receives high-quality raw material from its suppliers. All of these strategies are aided by improved measurement of process performance.

### ***Redesign the Process***

When the PIT sets out to redesign the presidential appointments process, it is important to establish what degree of change is desired. If the process needs only to improve marginally, then minor modifications to evolve the current design may be sufficient. But if the process needs to improve dramatically, the PIT should consider more revolutionary design changes. The coalition should signal the degree of desired change by stating goals in terms of the metrics it has approved. Such goals will greatly influence the activities of the PIT. Consider, for instance, the time goal for the process as a whole once suggested: “The President should, in collaboration with the Senate, adopt the goal of completing 80–90% of appointments within 4 months” (Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, 2001, p. 2). Judged in the context of current process times, this time could probably be achieved without a radical redesign of the process. The challenge would be quite different if the coalition chose a still more challenging stretch goal and directed the PIT to design a process that completed most appointments in just two or three months. The hope is that a dramatically streamlined process would attract a

richer pool of highly qualified applicants, yielding “wins” in terms of not only time, but also quality and cost.

***Eliminate activities that do not add value.*** The strategy of improving a process by eliminating activities that do not add value considers both their total elimination and their more selective use. Mackenzie’s observation that “the appointments process has become a maelstrom of complexity, much of which serves little public service” (Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996, p. 7) suggests that value is not always added by the activities of the process as currently designed.

For example, Baker (2001) suggests that the final stage of the presidential appointments process, Senate confirmation, does not add value for whole classes of positions: “military, foreign service, and public health service promotions,” as well as “part-time appointments to the government’s many boards and commissions.” For such positions, the requirement for Senate confirmation only adds delay and cost and may hurt quality by resulting in the loss of some highly qualified candidates. Eliminating the Senate confirmation stage for some positions might benefit the approval process for all positions. Those for which this stage is eliminated will shift to a shorter, simpler appointments process; and those remaining in the longer process should move along faster because of the reduced need for confirmations: “A simpler, more focused set of confirmation obligations can only yield a more efficient and more consistent performance of the Senate’s confirmation responsibilities.” These remaining positions, according to Baker’s recommendation, would be restricted to “judges, ambassadors, executive-level positions in the departments and agencies, and promotions of officers in the highest rank . . . in each of the service branches.”

Even for positions for which the Senate confirmation subprocess adds value, it may be possible to eliminate some activities within the subprocess. For instance, Baker (2001) suggests that a public hearing often adds no value: “For a great many nominations . . . confirmation hearings are little more than a time-consuming ritual.” No value is added if the candidate has met privately with the senators on the confirming committee and if no issues have arisen. Scheduling these creates delays and adds costs—not just for the Senate, but also for the

candidate and for his or her future department, which must prepare for the hearing. In such cases, Baker argues, public hearings could be eliminated. A PIT could consider such recommendations.

Another candidate for reform is the Senate practice of “holds”: “Few features of the modern appointment process are as troublesome as the Senate practice [of holds] that permits any single Senator to delay indefinitely the confirmation of a nominee” (Baker, 2001). And holds do not add value to the appointments process, because “most of the holds have little to do with the qualifications of the nominees upon whom they are placed” (Mackenzie, 1998, p. 12). In addition, Mackenzie suggests that if holds cannot be eliminated, they should be limited in duration to “a week or ten days” (Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996, p. 18).

Mackenzie also suggests that clearances could be safely removed from the process for some posts: “FBI full-field investigations should be eliminated for some appointments and substantially revised for others” (Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996, p. 11). Other activities in the presidential appointments process add value, but need to be done only once. The elimination of duplicative activities makes the process faster and cheaper and eliminates a possible source of errors. From the candidate’s perspective at least, there is a great deal of redundancy and duplication in the current process. For example, many agencies involved often need the same information regarding the candidate. Currently, they gather this information independently. Candidates resent the duplicative submission of information and “want the redundancy in data collection to stop. Presumably this duplication is amenable to a technological solution whereby candidates enter their information into a database once and it is then made available to all agencies that need it, as they need it” (Light and Thomas, 2000, p. 21). Mackenzie adds that “all parties to the appointment process should agree on a single financial disclosure form and one set of general background questions” (Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996, p. 13).

Some of the redundancy may reflect distrust. For instance, even though the executive branch conducts extensive clearance activities on each candidate, the Senate committee with jurisdiction over the candidate’s nomination may sometimes undertake its own investigation.

The situation is analogous to the multiple inspections of a shipped item that can occur in a distribution process. The solution in logistics is to consolidate the inspections to a single activity that is fast, reliable, and efficient. Such consolidation can be achieved if the various stakeholders can cooperate in developing a trusted inspection activity that meets all their needs. The formation of a PIT can help build trust and cooperation among participating organizations, particularly because they all stand to gain from an improved process. Through the activities of the PIT, it may be possible to remove duplicative, non-value-adding activities from the gathering of information on candidate presidential appointees.

***Streamline value-adding activities.*** Measurement of the presidential appointments process using time metrics can help the PIT to identify those steps that can be redesigned to speed up the process. Among the subprocesses plagued by delays, Senate confirmation is perhaps the worst. Baker (2001) proposes that the Senate limit how long this stage may take: “The Senate should adopt a rule that mandates a confirmation vote on every nominee no later than the 45th day after receipt of a nomination.” More specifically, Mackenzie suggests that tighter control over the debates would help speed up the confirmation subprocess: “Confirmation debates on executive branch appointments should be granted “fast-track” status in the Senate to shield them from filibusters” (Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996, p. 18).

In any process, it is worthwhile to identify and reduce periods of time that constitute nothing more than waiting for the next value-adding activity to begin. In the order fulfillment process, orders can pile up on a desk as they wait to be processed, and packages can pile up on a loading dock as they wait for the arrival of a truck. Often, waiting periods are designed into the process intentionally, the thought being that processing a number of items together in a “batch” will be more efficient than processing them individually. This form of batching is evident in the presidential appointments process. Mackenzie (1998) highlights, for example, how the batching of candidates for regulatory positions slows the process for those appointments. The nominees move through the confirmation stage of the appointments process as a “team,” which means that the time needed

to confirm the most problematic of the nominees on the “team” defines the time needed for all nominees on the team. The elimination of batching might break up logjams in confirmation.

***Reduce Demands on the Process***

Reducing the demand for a process may permit it to operate more smoothly and quickly; this is particularly true if the demand is very “spiky” and surges to overwhelm the capacity of the process from time to time. This happens to the presidential appointments process at the onset of each new administration, and it doubles in difficulty if the new and old administrations are drawn from opposing political parties.

***Reduce the needed outputs.*** Several critics of the appointments process have suggested that it is overly relied upon to fill senior executive positions in the government. For instance, Mackenzie suggests that the number should be reduced by about one third. Specifically, he recommends that “appointments to most advisory commissions and routine promotions of military officers, foreign service officers, public health services officers, except those at the very highest ranks, should cease to be presidential appointments” (Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996, p. 9).

Presumably, removing these positions from the regular presidential appointments process will permit the remaining positions to be handled more expeditiously.

***Improve the quality of inputs.*** A fourth process improvement strategy is to improve the quality of inputs: personnel, capital, information, and infrastructure (including “virtual” elements of the infrastructure, such as the structure of relationships among key players).

The VM approach begins with activities intended to improve these inputs. For example, the formation of cross-functional teams improves the relationships among key players in the process, and as the players interact to perform the Define and Measure steps of the method, information about the process is also improved.

Light and Thomas (2000) focus on improving the candidates’ information about the appointments process, something that should

help candidates complete their activities more quickly and accurately, as well as improve their attitudes toward the process.

When candidates seek information about what is expected of them, they can encounter a great deal of variability, which may confuse them: “Variations in preemployment and postemployment requirements among agencies, departments, and congressional committees create an environment of uncertainty and inequity for appointees” (Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, 2001, p. 2). Mackenzie suggests that information about candidate requirements could be improved by having departments and agencies work to standardize requirements (Mackenzie and Shogan, 1996).

### **Conclusion: Moving to a New Approach**

The presidential appointments process appears ideal for application of a process improvement methodology. It fails on all three dimensions of process performance: it is slow, it is costly, and it produces uneven quality. What is remarkable about the presidential appointments process is how long it has been ripe for reform, how visible and long-standing its problems have been, how firm a consensus exists on the causes of its failings, and how many excellent proposals have been advanced for its improvement. Yet the process has successfully resisted change even as its performance has continued to degrade.

This situation may be common in complex processes that cut across many organizations and lack a single owner or manager. In such processes, many organizations and individuals typically are working hard in multiple, well-intentioned improvement efforts. But due to the complexity of the process, their efforts are isolated, uncoordinated, and suboptimized. Often they may improve performance on one measure or in one part of a process while making performance worse on other measures or in other subprocesses. The organizations involved in the process simply lack sufficient capability and incentives to change it.

The VM approach offers a way to institutionalize new capabilities for change. The approach begins by building leadership coalitions of senior managers and by creating teams of experts in each of the process's major activities. Then it develops new sources of information through the Define and Measure steps of the DMI method. We have observed firsthand how this approach can help governmental agencies achieve the kind of "significant improvements in efficiency and performance" that the Volcker Commission has called for. Beyond good ideas for improvement, what is needed is a better management approach.

Of course, moving to a new management approach is not easy. It requires more than a few individuals with courage, vision, and persistence. The VM initiative, as well as the Strategic Distribution (SD) initiative,<sup>10</sup> benefited from the emergence of "inside champions" who were senior enough to be engaged, committed enough to dedicate a great deal of time and energy, and enough of a believer to take on challengers. These individuals enabled the initiatives to survive the first challenges of those who resisted change and to persist long enough to get positive change.

Both initiatives also benefited from the "behind the scenes" actions to get things started and move beyond the finger pointing that develops between organizations that share responsibility for a poorly performing process. In addition to the analytic role it played, RAND also served as an "honest agent" to seek out and develop the coalition for change. Because RAND had a reputation for being objective and had no stake in the process, it was able to help persuade a group of leaders to commit to making dramatic changes happen. When a critical mass "of the willing" was committed to trying this approach, a private meeting was held among the senior leaders of the various organizations to formally start the change process. Similar dealings might be required of leaders involved in the management of the presidential appointments process.

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<sup>10</sup> As noted at the very beginning of this chapter, the SD initiative is another case of successful reform.

The VM approach is tailored to the reform of complex processes that cut across organizational boundaries. It can be used to improve the presidential appointments process so that it will be faster, cheaper, and able to produce better appointees.



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