

## **WHY DOES IT ALL SEEM SO DIFFICULT?**

Processes are a fact of life – life itself is a process, and recent research suggests that even death may be a process rather than an event. Despite this, many people find great difficulty in recognising a process, let alone in defining one. And this seems especially the case in business, despite the “popularity” of business process re-engineering (BPR) in the 1990s and the current emphasis on process management in international standards such as ISO9000 and the European Business Excellence Model.

Business processes, like quality standards, are not confined to a factory or production line, although some commentators (especially engineers) imply as such. “Business” and “processes” are essentially interlinked – understand your processes better and you will understand your business better. You may even understand yourself better.

Even firms which advise organisations on how to define, measure and improve how they work do not always find it easy to identify an organisation’s key business processes. Nor do they always describe them in a way which others can easily understand and to which they can relate. Narrative is very often used to describe a process. When a narrative explanation is found to be confusing (as is often the case), the response is invariably to add (even) more words and more confusion.

Processes should not be viewed as just a sequence of related actions which convert some sort of input into some sort of output.

They are at the core of how a business operates. They require resources, skills and management. You cannot improve or change how you operate until you understand what you are doing at present. For some managers, even this can be a major step forward!

These articles aim to explain and rectify the confusion which now exists around the understanding and definition of the processes which exist within an organisation. We have tried to clarify and simplify the subject using a mix of cynicism, pedantry, years of practical experience and a desire not to take things too seriously. We trust that this does not detract from our message!