

Enabling Breakthroughs

Conditions for Radical Process Simplification

Author: Anton Boonstra

Original written in 2016, revised version 2025

Content of this booklet

Chapter 1: Effective Business Processes	3
Chapter 2: The importance of a Project Approach	7
Chapter 3: Analysis.....	11
Chapter 4: The Breakthrough.....	18
Chapter 6: Key Attention Points	32
Chapter 7: Examples	34
Chapter 8: Summary	40
Appendix I: Belbin team roles	41

Chapter 1: Effective Business Processes

Introduction

I have always been fascinated by business processes, because I am convinced they play a crucial role in driving the success of any business. Naturally, the product concept and the quality of the product are key factors, but they can only truly succeed when supported by an effective business process.

Like the Japanese, I believe that the Western world has been relying too heavily on Marketing for decades. Marketing is certainly important, but if the product itself doesn't deliver, even the best marketing in the world won't make it a success. Does a good product sell itself? Of course not—it would be too simplistic to think so—but in essence, yes: a good product *does* sell. To truly make it a success, however, there must be an effective business process behind it.

So yes, I firmly believe that the key to success lies in having both a good product and a strong business process. All other—still very important—factors are, in my opinion, secondary to these two fundamentals.

What makes a product a good product? A good product is one that is genuinely wanted—or even better, desired—by consumers and consistently delivers a predictable level of quality. I'm aware of the classic 4 Ps of marketing, but I believe that *desirability* and *quality consistency* are the real drivers behind a successful product.

What makes a business process a good business process? It is one that guarantees the desired product is delivered at a consistent level of quality, in the most effective and efficient way possible.

The Difference Between Efficient and Effective

To properly understand the rest of this booklet, I'd like to spend a few words on the distinction between *efficient* and *effective*. These words are often used interchangeably, yet they represent very different ideas—and very powerful ones at that.

I define *efficiency* as doing what you already do, but faster—with fewer resources. The essence of efficiency is optimization: improving an existing process without changing its fundamental direction.

Effectiveness, on the other hand, is really changing the final result and with that changing the process. It's about doing things differently with a better final result. It requires rethinking of the process altogether.

This difference also ties into speed and timing. Efficiency can be improved while the process is running. You need to be very familiar with the details to optimize while staying in motion. Effectiveness, however, requires you to step outside the process. You need distance to see clearly. It demands creativity, perhaps even a touch of impulsiveness—but always applied in a controlled way.

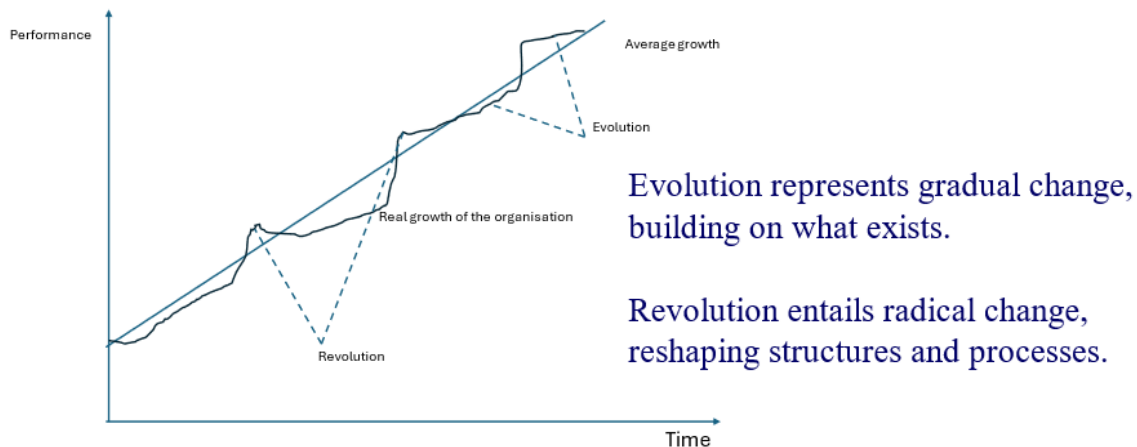
Effectiveness is not something you should focus on constantly; doing so would disrupt day-to-day operations. Instead, it's something to be re-evaluated every four years or so and acted upon within a one-year window. In the meantime, during the other three years, you focus on efficiency—continually fine-tuning your process.

Sometimes I use the terms *evolution* and *revolution* to explain the difference between efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency is evolutionary: you refine and improve what already exists. Effectiveness is revolutionary: it requires you to break away from existing structures and think in new directions.

Why is this necessary? Because the world often evolves faster than most organizations can keep up with. You have to choose your priorities carefully and allow time to adapt. Meanwhile, many other changes will simply pass you by. That's why, every now and then, a 'catch-up manoeuvre' is needed to close the gap between where you are and where the world is heading.

Naturally, the most successful organizations are those that grow faster than the world around them. The less successful ones fall behind. I hope you're among the faster ones.

Difference between evolution and revolution



Differences between making processes better or newer and development

Better	New	Development
How?	Why?	Where going to?
Think <i>within</i> the box	Think out of the box	Try to find ways to do it really different
Do to do the same with less	Do it different but still with the same objective	Try to do really completely different
Focus on efficiency	Focus on effectivity	What do we really want to do and reach?
Change of processes	Change of organisation and culture	Change of identity and changes of goals and objectives
Single-cycle learning (that means try to learn things within existing structures and procedures)	Double cycle learning (try to learn behind the existing structures and procedures)	Triple-cycle learning (try to change the fundamentals of the structures and procedures)

Source: translated model (Swieringa en Wierdsma 1990), op weg naar een lerende organisatie, Wolters Noordhoff, Groningen, 1990

The Right Timing for Change

As I mentioned earlier, you shouldn't organize a revolution continuously. You need time to absorb changes before initiating the next one. When revolutions follow each other too quickly, you lose the space needed to reflect and evaluate. Evolutionary processes require time and energy. As stated before, a revolution should take place once every four years and last no longer than one year, while a typical evolutionary period would take about three years.

So one of the key questions is: **when is the right moment to start a revolution?** Some examples might include:

- when two companies merge
- when profit or performance is lower than expected
- after a long period of organizational stability

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it illustrates the kinds of situations I have in mind.

What we're really looking for is the **golden key** in the theory of business process reengineering: the *breakthrough*. But you can't simply go out and "find a breakthrough." Instead, you must create the right setting—a solid foundation—in which a breakthrough can emerge. Because the breakthrough is so essential to this entire process, we'll return to it in detail during the analysis phase.

It's also important to involve **external eyes**. External consultants often guide the process better than internal people, due to their objective distance. They're usually more experienced with these types of projects and, importantly, play a key role in the creative stages of discovering breakthroughs.

The **cultural setting** of the organization is also vital. Edgar Schein has written extensively about this; I highly recommend his book “*De bedrijfscultuur als ziel van de onderneming*” (The Corporate Culture as the Soul of the Organization).

Link to Other Concepts

Of course, none of what I’m saying is entirely new. Social science studies (so-called gamma studies) rarely introduce something completely original. What you do see, however, is that certain ideas suddenly become fashionable or turn into hypes. That’s the moment to step in—because *that* is when change becomes truly possible.

When a topic becomes a hype, more people are open to it. They’re curious, looking for growth and profit. These trendy subjects often serve as enablers for the change that organizations need. So **timing is crucial** when launching certain projects.

Much of what I describe here can also be found in methodologies like:

- **TQM** (Total Quality Management)
- **BPR** (Business Process Reengineering)
- and more recently, **Lean Manufacturing**

Ultimately, it all comes down to **focus**—and my focus here is on **Business Processes**.

What This Booklet Is About

Changing an organization should be done in a structured way. That’s why it’s important to define a project, be clear about timelines, and specify the goals you want to achieve. We will discuss this in Chapter 2.

Before searching for breakthroughs, it’s important to perform a solid analysis. Chapter 3 explains how to conduct that analysis in detail.

Chapter 4 covers how we identify breakthroughs. Finding them isn’t easy—there’s no universal formula—but we can structure the process to make it easier to recognize true breakthroughs.

Once breakthroughs are found, they need to be implemented. We’ll address that in Chapter 5.

To stay focused, we’ll wrap up the key takeaways in Chapter 6.

Since the chapters may lean toward the theoretical, I’ll share some real-life examples in Chapter 7 to illustrate the ideas. A full summary of the content is presented in Chapter 8.

-/-/-

Chapter 2: The importance of a Project Approach

It may seem like stating the obvious, but changes of this magnitude should always be executed in a **project format**. This booklet is not about project management in general, so in this chapter I'll focus on the elements I believe are **crucial for making business processes more effective**.

Why a Project Approach?

There are several reasons why a project-based approach is essential:

- **These types of changes take time and are often complex.**
You need structure and oversight to keep track of what needs to be done and when. Such changes typically take 6 to 12 months, depending on the topic and the size of the organization.
- **Many people are involved.**
A project format provides a clear framework for communication, ensuring that everyone knows what is expected and when. It also reduces the dependency on the project manager alone.
- **You need structure.**
Due to the time span and the number of people involved, a structured setup is necessary to stay organized and aligned.
- **Key Project Elements**

Every project should address at least the following three dimensions:

- **Organization**
- **Timing**
- **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**

On the following pages, we'll explore each of these elements in more detail.

Organizing the Project

A typical project organization includes three layers:

1. Steering Committee

The steering committee includes the **key decision-makers and project sponsors**. These are the people who give approval, provide resources, and fund the project. It's essential to have their buy-in. During the start-up phase, it's recommended to meet **twice per month**, and later **once per month** as the project progresses.

2. Project Team

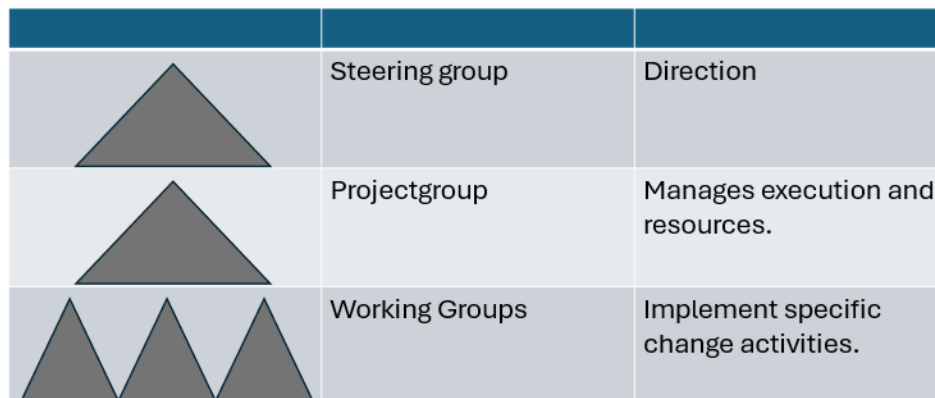
The project team is led by the **Project Leader** and includes his or her **direct reports**, typically the **working group leaders**. These individuals should be committed to working **at least three days per week** on the project. This group forms the **core engine** of the project, so visibility, dedication, and success are vital to its impact.

3. Working Groups

Each working group focuses on a **specific theme or topic** and consists of **people from within the organization**. They contribute their expertise and insight from the operational side of the business.

The **Project Leader** and the **Working Group Leaders** serve as the key **linking pins** between the working groups and the project team and steering committee above them.

Project-organisaton



Team Dynamics

The word *team* has become a bit of a buzzword over the years. Still, it remains absolutely essential—especially when you're undertaking major organizational change. In most cases, it's **not** the project leader who drives the actual change, but the **team members** themselves. They are the *soldiers*—the *change agents*—that you truly need.

When forming a team, it's not just about selecting the right individuals. The **fit between the members** is just as important. That chemistry determines whether you've built a *winning team* or not.

I often use the **Belbin Team Roles model** (see Appendix at the end of this booklet) as a guide when building teams. Sometimes I walk through the model together with the team, as it helps strengthen the bond and build understanding. Other times, I keep the model in mind and use it more intuitively during team formation.

Timing

As mentioned earlier, **timing is key** when planning a project. You need to think carefully about the activities that need to be carried out and plan them accordingly. This planning not only helps you develop a clear picture of what should happen when—it also helps others understand the status and expectations of the project.

There will be many moments during a project when people are curious or have questions. By sharing your **timeline**, you make the process transparent and help manage expectations around communication and progress.

Projects of this kind usually run **between 6 and 12 months**. You shouldn't overcomplicate your plan. Personally, I prefer project plans that fit on **one A4 page**, with **no more than 20 action lines**. Weekly time buckets are usually detailed enough for this kind of initiative.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPIs are always important—not only to track your own progress, but also to help stakeholders and superiors understand how things are going.

Typical KPIs for business process improvement projects might include:

- Lead time
- Target realization dates
- Earnings / profit impact
- Hours spent
- Budget versus plan
- And many others, depending on the context

The size and complexity of the project will determine how detailed your tracking needs to be. For small projects, I find it very effective to keep everything on **one simple A4 sheet**. In these cases, I often use **Excel** to manage the plan.

For larger, more complex projects, I prefer using **Microsoft Project**. It allows you to define multiple levels, manage dependencies, and maintain updates easily.

That said, **don't revise the plan too often**. It's better to stick to the original plan—even if it's slightly outdated—and use it as a reference to report against actual progress. People will recognize and remember the planned version, which gives a sense of continuity.

-/-/-

Chapter 3: Analysis

Starting the Analysis

The analysis is **crucial to the success** of any business process improvement project. The way you approach it will largely determine the outcome of the entire project. That's why it's so important to think carefully about *how* you plan to conduct the analysis.

My main advice at this stage: stay as **objective** as possible, and don't be too **impatient**. Pay close attention to how the analysis is performed—do it thoroughly and with an open mind. Only then will you be able to uncover the real opportunities.

The most difficult aspect at this stage is that you don't yet know exactly where you're going. That uncertainty makes the analysis particularly challenging. Of course, you may have an idea or a feeling, but that's also risky. You must stay open to **new and creative ideas**. Often, the breakthrough itself isn't that surprising—but the path to get there is unpredictable.

I'm a fan of the books by Paulo Coelho, especially *The Alchemist*. In that story, a man searches far and wide for a treasure, only to discover it was close to home all along. The point is: the *true value* was always near, but he had to undergo trials and learn from the journey to see it. Breakthroughs work the same way—what you discover may seem obvious in hindsight, but only if you've walked the right path to get there.

So yes—be thorough. But don't **overdo it**. One of the biggest pitfalls I often see is that teams want to analyze everything. The real art lies in analyzing **only what's necessary**. And even that is hard to define exactly. The best way is to discuss with a small group what kind of analysis makes sense, and what suits the company's needs at this moment. Try to aim just a bit higher than what the organization would normally do. That ambition can lift morale and help you “find the glue.”

Pre-Analysis

Before diving into the full analysis, you need to carry out a **pre-analysis**. The main goal here is to define the **primary process** and the **main processes** of the organization.

If you've already been working in the company for a while, try to take a step back from daily operations and ask yourself: *What is the primary process?* And more importantly: *Is this still the primary process?* Over time, the real primary process may have changed or evolved beyond the original understanding.

If you're new to the organization, conduct interviews to learn how things work and identify the core processes. Typically, you'll need around **5 to 10 interviews** to get a good feel. This phase is not about details—it's about understanding the main flows and structure.

In most organizations, you can define **one primary process** and around **four main processes**.

After completing the interviews, I usually **take time alone** to reflect. I think through possible outcome directions and decide what additional analysis might be needed to support those directions. It's important to keep **more options open** than you may actually need—this prevents you from heading toward a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I then present my initial ideas to a small group (usually the same people I interviewed) and test my assumptions. Their feedback helps me fine-tune the approach. It's okay to make some **early assumptions** at this stage. They help focus the analysis and make it stronger.

During the project, the analysis method will likely evolve and become more complex—but ideally, the overall **direction should remain stable**. If it changes too much, that's a sign the initial analysis was flawed.

In life, when something goes wrong, you often can change course—but you may not get a second chance. That's why you need to get the analysis right the first time. If you're not confident it's good enough, take more time before proceeding. You don't have unlimited time—but better to **pause briefly** than to go forward on shaky ground.

How to Approach the Analysis

Start with your own thoughts and discuss them with a **small, trusted group**. Why?

- You are vulnerable at this stage.
- You don't have unlimited time.
- The more people you speak with, the more expectations they will project onto your analysis—people naturally look for their own ideas reflected in your conclusions.

So **keep the group small**, and engage the people who truly matter at this stage—particularly the **creative thinkers**. These aren't necessarily the formal leaders in the hierarchy.

By the end of the pre-analysis, you should be clear on:

- What the **primary** and **main processes** are
- How the **analysis will be carried out**

Executing the Analysis

After the pre-analysis, you have more than just a rough idea—you've defined your focus, outlined key processes, and identified potential directions (even if they're not communicated yet). Now it's time to conduct the full analysis.

At this point, the analysis plan should be **finalized**—there should be **no more changes** to the process design or focus. Last-minute changes can derail the project and slow progress significantly.

Now, it's time to **scale up**: more people from the organization will be involved, including key decision-makers. This is no longer a boardroom exercise—it has become an organization-wide initiative.

You need to **communicate clearly and persuasively**. Make sure people understand what you're doing, what's expected of them, and what the possible outcomes could be. Create **enthusiasm**—this can be a powerful and exciting phase of the project.

What I usually do is give a **company-wide presentation** explaining the project and the analysis phase. Why?

- You need cooperation
- You need **creativity**
- You may have to deliver **difficult messages**—perhaps even about job changes or power shifts
- You need to **build trust** and **buy-in**

You'll present the **project organization**, including the people who are part of the analysis team—and by doing so, you're also (implicitly) naming those who are *not* involved. Be mindful: this may cause disappointment for some. You also explain the **methodology**, including a distinction between the **IST** and **SOLL** phases.

IST Phase – The As Is State

“Ist” is the German word for “as is.” In this phase, your job is to create a clear and neutral **snapshot** of the current way of working.

It's tempting to jump ahead to the desired future state (*SOLL*), but **don't do that yet**.

Focus on the **current reality**, and collect the relevant data and figures.

I usually organize a **workshop** to summarize the current (IST) situation. Sometimes a second session is needed to finalize it.

Before doing a time analysis, you'll need a complete list of all **processes and subprocesses** (primary + main). Everyone filling out time sheets must use this predefined list—this ensures consistent reporting and allows you to summarize results meaningfully. That's why it's so important to get the process structure right in the pre-analysis—you'll be working with it from this point onward.

Time Analysis

I always use **time analysis** in this phase. It's incredibly valuable because:

- It gives insight into **how time is actually spent**
- It helps people feel **involved**
- It opens the door to **discussions, insights**, and often new perspectives

How to use the time sheet:

- Ask people to reflect on **one average working week**. Exclude exceptional projects or unusual tasks.
- Let them select their activities based on the predefined process list—assign numbers for easier aggregation.
- Ask each person to name what they think is the **key driver** of their process. It doesn't have to be something that currently exists—just something that triggers thought about productivity.
- Leave room for people to suggest **improvements**. This section almost always yields great ideas.

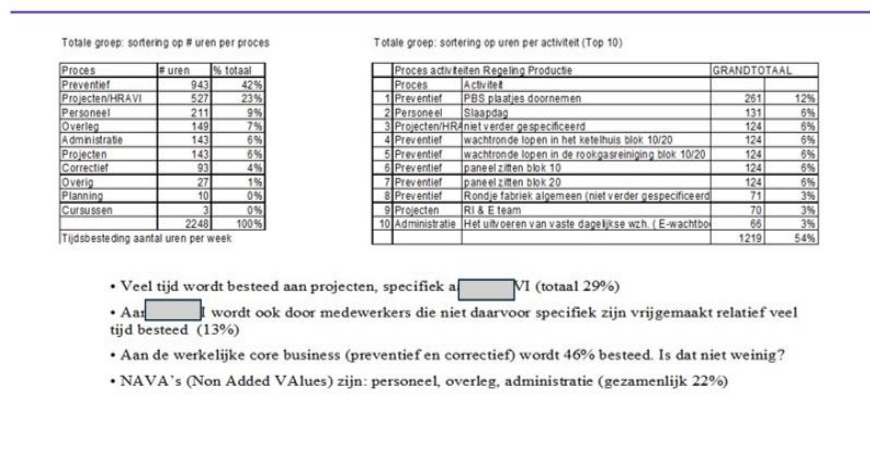
- **Describe the process in writing** (to explain how it works in real life)

The **diagram** serves as a visual summary, while the **written explanation** provides the detail needed to fully understand the process.

While it's great to use diagrams, remember: just like PowerPoint presentations, they make sense primarily to the people who *created* them. When shown to outsiders, they can be confusing. That's why I recommend combining **a written description with a visual summary**.

I also suggest **implementing some standardization** in how processes are documented within the company. This makes them easier to read and understand, even for those not directly involved. It can also be useful when pursuing external certifications like **ISO**.

Activiteiten analyse



Creating the Right Setting for Analysis

To make it clear why this phase matters, I often use a **game or exercise** that helps participants understand the importance of openness. I strongly recommend creating an environment where people feel safe to **say whatever they want**. It should be a space of **trust and comfort**, where no one feels that their openness will be used against them.

I cannot stress this enough: **focus on how and why things are done**, not on jumping ahead to solutions (the *soll* situation). I know it's tempting—but don't do it. To reinforce this message, I often put a large poster on the wall showing the difference between **problems** and **solutions**.

In the *ist* phase, your goal is to develop a **clear picture of the problems**, not the solutions. The reason? The sooner you jump to solutions, the higher the risk of **missing a critical issue**. And often, the real root cause lies in a **very small detail**. The only way to uncover that is to stay focused on identifying and understanding the problems.

SOLL – The To Be State

Soll is a German word that means “what should be” or “what it’s going to be”—the **future state**. This is often the most exciting part of the project, but it can also be **frustrating and difficult**. It’s also the **most critical** phase: this is where the actual solutions are developed. If this part goes wrong, the project will likely not succeed.

That’s why it’s essential to ensure:

- You have the **right people** at the table.
- People are **able to think beyond their daily routines**.
- They feel **safe and free** to share any ideas they may have.

You can, of course, use input from the *ist* workshops as a starting point. During the *soll* workshop, the team brainstorms how the future process could look. You’re aiming for **breakthroughs**—and because they are so essential, I’ve dedicated an entire chapter to them.

Planning the Analysis Phase

A solid analysis doesn’t guarantee fast implementation—but it **greatly improves your chances**. Many projects fail because the analysis was rushed or done poorly. On the other hand, you shouldn’t overanalyze either. The analysis should be **short and effective**.

A typical timeline for the analysis phase might look like this:

- **Pre-analysis**: max. 2 weeks
- **Main analysis**: 2–3 weeks
- **Workshops**: At least two—one for the *ist* and one for the *soll*.
 - Plan a **2-week buffer** between these workshops to allow time for the *ist* outcome to settle before moving on to the *soll*.
- **Validation period after the *soll***: At least 2 weeks.
 - Use this time to validate the outcomes and start preparing the **implementation** phase.

For both the *ist* and *soll* workshops, I recommend **half-day to full-day sessions**. Try to avoid strict time limits—focus instead on reaching a meaningful level of progress. Ideally, a workshop ends **when the goal is truly achieved**, not at a fixed hour.

Why Workshops Work

Workshops are incredibly powerful—especially in this kind of setting. Why?

- You need **different personalities and thinking styles** to find real solutions (here again, the **Belbin model** is useful—we'll come back to that).
- Workshops are **objective and inclusive**—everyone has a chance to contribute.
- All the brains are in one room, and together they **own the outcome**.

Could you do this through one-on-one or small-group sessions? Technically yes—but I wouldn't recommend it. Coordinating between multiple groups is hard, and you won't save time in the end. In fact, it often creates **more confusion and misalignment**. So, **use workshops**—they are well worth the effort.

The Mercedes Wheel

I was trained using the so-called **Mercedes Wheel**—a simple but helpful tool for prioritizing early in the analysis phase. While it may seem simplistic, it's a great way to frame your initial thinking and set a solid foundation.

Outcome of the Analysis

The most important outcome of the analysis is, of course, the **set of solutions** that come out of the *soll* workshops.

After the workshops, take time to **document the entire process**. If you don't do it right away, it becomes much harder to reconstruct later on.

Why is this important?

- It allows a small group to **evaluate how the solutions were developed**.
- It helps you recognize who contributed and in what way.
- It serves as a reference point for future decisions and communications.

So—**make a report**, even if only for yourself. You will not regret it.

-/-/-

Chapter 4: The Breakthrough

Finding the **breakthrough** is the true key to success in the entire process. That's why this stage deserves **special attention**.

A breakthrough is an **eye-opener**—a powerful insight that simplifies and accelerates a process so significantly that it impacts performance in ways previously thought unimaginable.

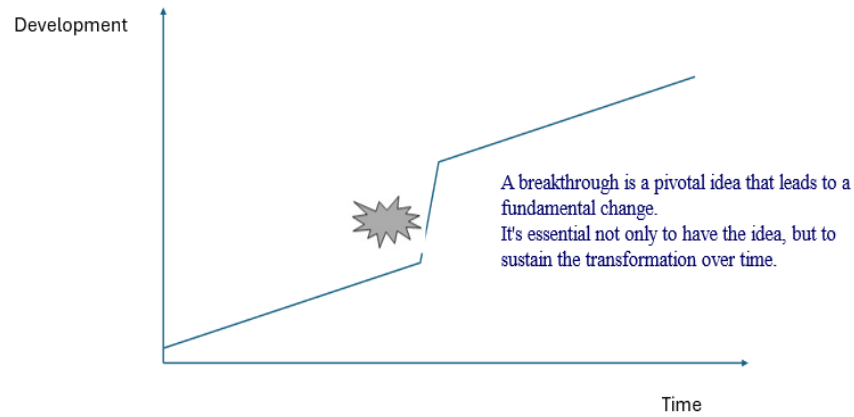
It's not something you can schedule or force. **Breakthroughs are creative in nature**, and as such, they often arise unexpectedly. What you *can* do, however, is **create the right environment** in which a breakthrough is more likely to happen.

Here are some critical conditions to foster that environment:

- **Psychological safety:** People need to feel free to speak openly, without fear of judgment or consequences. There should be no sense of threat or hierarchy that stifles creativity.
- **Timing:** Ideas rarely come when forced. Breakthroughs often appear when there is **enough time and mental space** for reflection and experimentation.
- **The right mix of people:** Group composition matters. Make sure you bring together people with **different personalities and thinking styles**. Here, the **Belbin Team Roles** model can be a great tool to ensure balance and complementary strengths.
- **Idea generation techniques:** While you can't force a breakthrough, you can use **structured creativity tools**—like brainstorming, mind mapping, “what-if” scenarios, or reverse thinking—to spark fresh perspectives.

Breakthroughs are powerful not because they improve *everything*, but because they improve the *right thing* in a way that shifts the game entirely. That's what we're looking for in this phase: a **small spark that lights a much bigger fire**.

Breakthrough



Creating the Right Environment for Breakthroughs

Psychological Safety and Setting the Tone

The people in the team don't necessarily have to be the highest-ranking or most influential individuals. The composition of the team will be discussed in the next section—here, we focus on **creating the environment** in which ideas can flourish.

Make it clear that **being part of this team is special**. Team members should feel proud to have been selected—part of the “happy few.” Ensure they have the **backing of their managers**, and communicate clearly that their involvement is valued and purposeful.

Set aside **at least one full day** for the breakthrough session—even if it seems like half a day might suffice. Avoid rigid time slots. If you finish early (which rarely happens), that's fine—but don't force a hard stop.

Choose a **location that's completely different** from their usual working environment. The setting should be **relaxing and inspiring**, like a quiet restaurant in the woods. Avoid generic conference centers filled with other corporate groups—this dilutes the sense of uniqueness and creativity.

Limit accessibility: ask participants to **turn off their phones** and **stay offline**. Provide a central contact number (your own or that of the venue) for emergencies. People should feel slightly “cut off” to shift their mindset—yet still know they're reachable if really needed.

Timing and Building Momentum

Breakthrough sessions are **crucial**, but they only take up a **small portion of the overall project time**. Because the stakes are high, you must create **positive tension** and **anticipation** leading up to them.

During the analysis phase, **build toward the workshops**. Keep reminding the team that something important is coming. I often create a bit of **mystery** around it—just enough to spark curiosity, but without overhyping it.

The breakthrough session should take place **shortly after** the analysis is complete. That way, the energy and clarity of the analysis are still fresh and relevant. Make it clear that the **output of the workshops will shape the final direction of the project**.

The Right People Around the Table

You need people with **diverse perspectives**, who can **think beyond their own department or discipline**. Not necessarily the formal leaders—but certainly those who are **respected and credible** within the organization. The ideas generated need to be **defended** and carried forward, so the team members must be seen as **authentic representatives** of the broader group.

Diversity of thought is essential, so I always use the **Belbin Team Roles** model to help shape the team. Sharing this with the group helps them understand **why they were selected** and what their expected contributions are. This improves **group acceptance** and **clarity of roles**.

Brainstorming: The Core Technique

Some background theory is fine—but don't overdo it. People want to **be creative**. Think of creativity as a flower trying to open: don't force it, but also don't smother it with structure.

I'm a fan of the **brainstorming method**. Here's how I usually run it:

Step 1: Focus on Problems

Start by giving people time to write down what they see as the **main problems**. Be clear: you want **problems**, not solutions—yet.

Once everyone has contributed, list all problems on a board or screen. Discuss and group them until the whole team agrees the list is **complete and accurate**.

Step 2: Move to Solutions

Only when the problem list is finalized do you shift to **solutions**. Again, make sure everyone is heard. Some people speak easily; others withdraw. As facilitator, it's your job to **draw out everyone's input**. That's how you get the **best and most balanced ideas**.

Avoid ending the session abruptly. Always take time for a **wrap-up** and **summary**, so nothing is lost.

Using Brainstorming Tools

I usually start the session with a **brief summary of the analysis phase**, just to align everyone's understanding.

Then we dive into brainstorming using **sticky notes (like yellow 3M's)**. Each idea goes on a separate note. The brainstorm continues until either **no new ideas emerge** or the **energy naturally fades**.

At that point, we **cluster the ideas into groups**, and—hopefully—the discussion continues toward the next level of clarity or even potential solutions.

When Brainstorming Isn't Enough

Sometimes a standard brainstorm isn't enough. Then, as facilitator, you need to provide **additional stimuli** to restart the creative engine. A few approaches I use:

1. Storytelling

Tell a short, unusual story that seems unrelated. The goal is to **shock the group slightly**—to shift their perspective and help them “see the other side of the room.” These mental nudges often unlock surprising new ideas.

2. Simulation Games

I sometimes use **simple management games**, especially when the company is in manufacturing. These simulations mimic production environments and introduce familiar concepts in a **playful and disarming way**, helping participants reset their mindset.

3. Greenfield Thinking

The **Greenfield approach** is another powerful tool. Ask participants to imagine they're building the process **from scratch**—no limits, no barriers. Once the ideal solution is found, gradually reintroduce real-world constraints and adjust the plan accordingly.

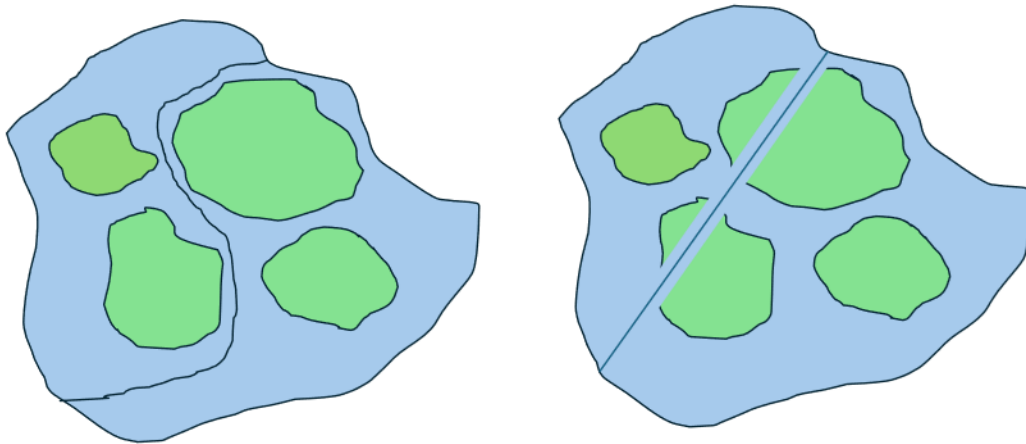
This approach helps **remove mental blocks**. People often struggle to see solutions because they're fixated on what's “not possible.” Many of these barriers don't exist in reality—they live **only in people's minds**.

The Japanese Lake Story

A story that illustrates this beautifully is that of the **Japanese lake**. The Japanese approach to problem-solving is fundamentally different from the European one. While Europeans are masters of **creating bypasses** around obstacles, the Japanese ask: *Why is there a block? Can we remove it?*

Sometimes it's better to stop finding ways around a problem and focus instead on **eliminating the block itself**.

The Japanese lake



When a rock blocks your path, blow it away – or find a new way around.
What seems impossible can often be achieved with creativity and persistence.

Validating and Developing the Breakthrough

Once you *feel* you've reached a breakthrough, don't try to **develop it immediately**—especially not on the same day you found it. That rarely works. What you need is **distance**.

Sometimes it's best to take a break, focus on something completely unrelated, and then come back to the idea **a week later**. This gives your mind space to reflect and helps you evaluate whether the so-called breakthrough was truly something powerful—or simply a nice idea in the moment.

After a week, you'll be in a better position to **judge the idea with fresh eyes**:

- Was it really a breakthrough?
- Does it still make sense?
- Can it actually work in your organization?
- Why might it not work?

Once you've confirmed that the idea still holds value, it's time to **develop it further**—not in full operational detail yet, but enough to present it clearly and convincingly to others in the organization.

At this stage, it's also a good moment to **involve new people**. Invite others—who weren't part of the breakthrough session—to look at the idea and **test its validity**. Does it

resonate? Is it realistic? This outside perspective helps you move the breakthrough from **concept to traction**

-/-/

Chapter 5: Implementation & Change

From Model to Reality

I'm a strong believer in using **models** to structure change—it brings clarity and consistency. For this kind of transformation, I often rely on the classic **Unfreeze–Change–Refreeze** model. Originally developed by Kurt Lewin and later adapted by others, its power lies in its simplicity.

- First, you **unfreeze** the current situation by making people aware of the need for change.
- Then you **introduce the change** itself.
- Finally, you **refreeze** the new situation to embed the change into daily operations.

This cycle can be repeated continuously—change becomes part of a broader development journey.

The **analysis phase** we described earlier is essentially the *unfreezing* stage. People start to see new possibilities and recognize the need for change. The **change phase** itself is often short and intense, but the **implementation** that follows typically takes up the **majority of the time** and effort.

The Core of Implementation: Communication

The three most important elements of implementation are:
Communication. Communication. Communication.

One of the biggest risks in this phase is **watering down the breakthrough**. It's tempting to compromise when challenges arise—but that undermines the power of the original idea.

The hardest part is knowing **how much flexibility to allow**:

- If you're too rigid, you risk **losing people** and facing resistance.
- If you're too flexible, the change loses **clarity and impact**.

Using Workshops for Structured Rollout

As in the analysis phase, **workshops remain a key communication tool**—but in implementation, their role becomes even more critical.

These workshops are used to:

- Align on the action plan

- Break the change down into **clear steps**
- Discuss emerging **problems and solutions**
- Maintain momentum and involvement


It's vital that one of the **future leaders of the organization** takes ownership of leading these workshops. They can be supported by others (including external consultants), but **credibility and authority** are key.

Implementation Isn't Easy—Even If It Looks That Way

Implementation often *seems* like the easiest part—but it's not. In fact, **everything that went wrong earlier** will surface here. If you're not confident in your preparation, **don't start**.

The most important thing is to have a **clear plan—and stick to it**. If you're unsure about the readiness of the project, delay the launch. Starting too early and making major changes midstream is far worse than waiting a little longer.

And if things really start to go wrong:

 **Stop the project.**

Trying to “fix things on the go” rarely works. Accept the delay, regroup, and relaunch when you're ready.

When You Know It's Failing

It's hard to admit a project is failing—especially in the middle of it. But sometimes, deep down, you know. And instead of admitting failure, teams often **scale down ambitions**, declare small victories, or shift the goalposts.

That's why **most failed projects aren't recognized as failures until years later**, when people finally reflect and acknowledge what went wrong.

Why Projects Fail: Lessons Learned

Before you implement anything, **ask yourself repeatedly** if all **prerequisites** are in place. Don't launch until you're sure.

Here are common causes of failure:

- Weak or incomplete start (e.g. no real breakthrough)
- Trying to do **too much too quickly**
- Unclear goals and vague KPIs/CSFs (Critical Success Factors)
- Moving forward even when key phases weren't completed successfully

- Loss of commitment or shifting priorities
- Poor stakeholder involvement or motivation
- The wrong project manager—either too operational or too high-level

“The pain is usually in the detail—but you can’t lose sight of the bigger picture.”

Survey Insights: Why Projects Fail (and Succeed)

In a well-known survey conducted by **Bull (1998)** based on 203 telephone interviews with IT and project managers, the key **project failure reasons** were:

- Missed deadlines (75%)
- Exceeded budgets (55%)
- Poor communication (40%)
- Inability to meet requirements (37%)

The main **success factors** were:

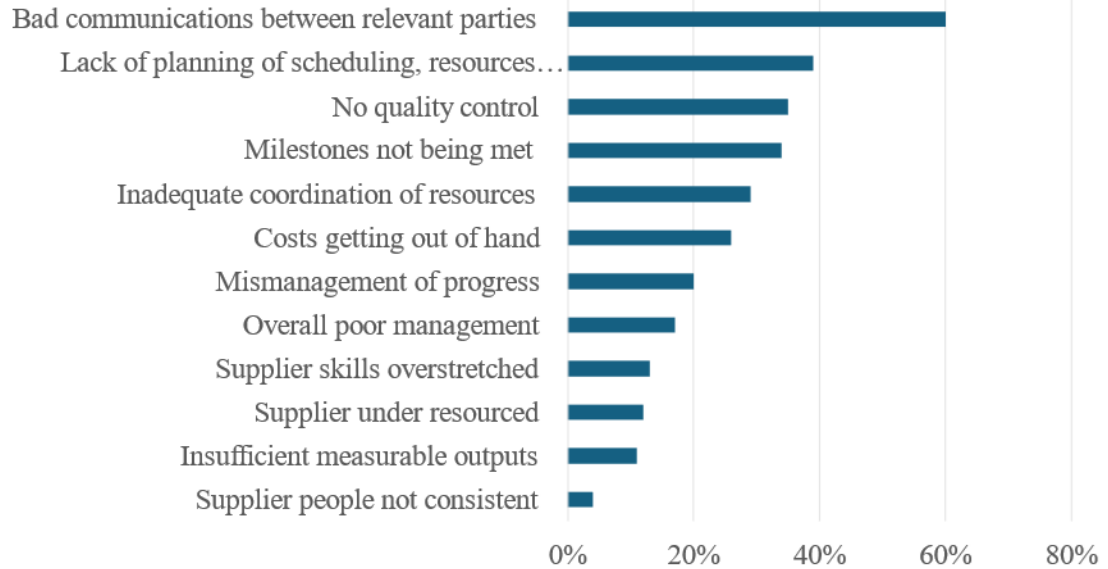
- Meeting milestones (51%)
- Maintaining quality (32%)
- Staying within budget (31%)

More importantly, the biggest causes of failure **during the lifecycle** of a project were:

- **Breakdown in communication** (57%)
- **Lack of planning** (39%)
- **Poor quality control** (35%)

These findings still hold true today. That’s why **clear planning, open communication, structured implementation, and strong leadership** remain the cornerstones of any successful change initiative.

Major Causes of Project-Failure



Prerequisites for Success

It's easy to focus on why projects fail—but even more important is asking:

What will make *my* project a success?

What's the **real differentiator**?

Of course, there are several **prerequisites** you need to get right to increase your chances of success:

Key Success Factors

- **Thorough preparation**
- **Realistic planning**
- **Strong, credible teams**

1. Preparation

As I've said before:

If you're not confident in your success, **don't start**.

You will encounter resistance—even when you're absolutely convinced you're right. But if you're unsure or hesitant from the beginning, **failure is almost guaranteed**.

2. Phasing the Implementation

Implementation takes time. To manage it better, divide the project into **smaller, logical components**. I often use the “**Mercedes wheel**” as a framework, with categories such as:

- Organization
- Procedures
- Information
- KPIs

You could use a different structure, but make sure it’s **clear and intuitive**.

Don’t make it overly complicated. A well-designed change project should **fit on one page**. Avoid elaborate schemes that no one understands. Unlike technical projects, **organizational change needs clarity and accessibility**.

3. The Right Team

A strong team is not just about internal chemistry—it’s also about **external trust**. People in the organization need to believe:

"This is a tough project, but I believe it will succeed—**because *that* person is part of the team.**"

Team members must have the **respect and credibility** of their colleagues.

Dealing with Resistance

Resistance is normal.

Anyone who claims to implement change without resistance is, in my view, not being honest. Resistance doesn’t mean the idea is wrong—it often helps clarify arguments and sharpen your story.

The problem arises when **resistance grows and persists**—then it must be addressed.

Here’s a practical list of resistance types I found online (source unknown):

Forms of Resistance:

- **Self-Interest**
Individuals may fear loss of status, privilege, or overtime pay tied to the old system.
- **Fear of the Unknown**
People may doubt their own ability to work in the new system or take on new roles.

- **Conscientious Objection or Differing Perspectives**
Some may genuinely believe the change is wrong or incompatible with their values or goals.
 - **Suspicion**
A lack of trust in the project or its leaders.
 - **Conservatism**
Opposition to change for the sake of stability or routine.
-

Insights from Research: Prosci (2003)

A study by **Prosci**, based on 288 organizations across 51 countries, found several **employee resistance factors**:

- **Lack of understanding of the vision and need for change**
Employees don't know *why* the change is happening or *how* it will impact them (the classic "WIIFM"—What's In It For Me?).
 - **Comfort with the status quo**
People feel safe in the current system and fear being pushed out of their comfort zone.
 - **Cultural fatigue**
Previous failed change efforts have desensitized staff. The project is seen as the latest "flavor of the month."
 - **Opposition to the content of the change**
Some believe the new systems won't work or will increase workload, visibility, or accountability.
 - **Fear of job loss**
Uncertainty about job security or individual capability in the new structure.
-

Manager Resistance

Prosci also identified **manager-level resistance**, with these top causes:

- **Loss of power and control**
- **Overload and lack of time**
- **Lack of change management skills**
- **Fear of job loss**
- **Disagreement with the solution**
- **Skepticism about the need for change**

Managers who weren't involved in design phases or don't feel ownership are **more likely to resist**.

John Kotter's 8-Step Change Model

In *Leading Change* (1995) and *The Heart of Change* (2002), John Kotter outlines eight steps for sustainable transformation:

1. **Create urgency** – Inspire movement; make the goals relevant and real.
2. **Build the guiding coalition** – Gather the right people with commitment and influence.
3. **Develop the vision** – Keep it simple, emotionally compelling, and strategically sound.
4. **Communicate for buy-in** – Repeat, clarify, simplify. Involve many people.
5. **Empower action** – Remove obstacles, offer support, and recognize progress.
6. **Generate short-term wins** – Celebrate early successes.
7. **Don't let up** – Sustain the momentum, track progress, and finish each phase.
8. **Anchor change in culture** – Embed new behaviors into routines and leadership structures.

How I Handle Resistance in Practice

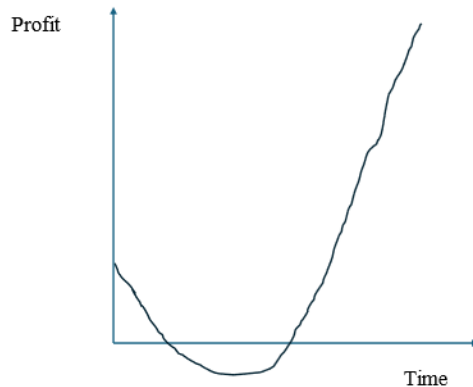
In my own work, I use several approaches to turn resistance into engagement:

- **Create a burning platform**
The world is changing. Doing nothing is not an option.
- **Draw the final picture**
Help people see what the future will look like—use it to bring focus and calm.
- **Use the “hockey stick” effect**
Things may get worse before they get better—**expect a dip before progress.**

Insert graphic: hockey stick curve

- **Go for quick wins**
Early success builds momentum and helps convince others of long-term value.

Hockeystick-effect



Hockeystick -effect

=

On the short term you have to spend, invest or make more costs to be able to earn/save more on the long run

5.1 Ahaus (2005) talks about interesting theory of Nathans (1995) how to act in case of resistance. The following scheme summaries this theory: -

Phases in change	How to deal with resistance	How to (re-) act?
Start	Information on goal; tell very good why change is necessary	React and go with the flow
Denial	Listen, showing real interest and then focus on the reality	Go with the flow but react people who are lacking behind
Loss	Listen carefully, show interest, try to understanding, don't give advise what people should do	Go with the flow, don't react
Let it free	Positive energy, focus on the future, celebrate	Go with the flow
Change	Change, evaluate and praise	Go with the flow
Integrate	Conclude that change took place	Go with the flow

Chapter 6: Key Attention Points

When you consider changing business processes, remember:

Only do so during a revolution phase (as explained in Chapter 1). Attempting major process changes during a period of evolution will most likely fail.

Below are the essential points to keep in mind for a successful transformation:

1. Define a Project

Only move forward once you're **truly convinced** that change is needed. Formalize it into a **structured project** with a clear scope, timeline, and goals.

2. Conduct a Pre-Analysis

Before starting the actual analysis, carry out a **pre-analysis** to understand your current operations.

Make a clear distinction between:

- **Main processes**
- **Sub-processes**

3. Analyze in Two Phases: IST and SOLL

Structure your analysis by separating:

- **IST** – the current state ("what is")
- **SOLL** – the desired future state ("what should be")

This separation helps clarify the gap and sharpen focus.

4. Create the Right Conditions for Breakthroughs

To find a real breakthrough:

- Bring together the **right mix of people**
- Create an **open, safe, and inspiring environment** that encourages creativity

5. Be Prepared for Resistance

During implementation, expect resistance—and plan for it. Also prepare for other common roadblocks such as:

- Communication breakdowns
- Lack of clarity
- Stakeholder hesitation

Success will depend on how well you **manage these challenges**.

-/-/-

Chapter 7: Examples

In this chapter, I'll share a few examples from my own experience that illustrate the principles discussed in the previous chapters. These are not just theoretical—they show how applying the right structure and mindset can lead to real breakthroughs.

Example 1: Door Manufacturer

Situation

The company produced doors—both for large-scale building projects and for individual consumers. This meant the customer base was **large and highly diverse**.

They offered both **standard doors** and **customized doors**. In the **standard segment**, competition was fierce and profit margins were razor-thin. The **analysis revealed** that the company should focus more on **customized doors**, where the added value was higher, and reduce attention on standard products.

The **order intake process** was extremely complex. It involved:

- An **order intake department**
- An **engineering department** that had to translate the order into production details

In reality, even more departments were involved, and **coordination was poor**—especially around **forwarding and logistics**, which were often neglected.

Breakthrough / Solution

The breakthrough came with the development of a **system that allowed detailed orders to be configured without requiring engineering knowledge**.

- The system enabled sales staff to configure doors with all valid options during the intake stage.
- Once configured, the order could be sent directly to production—**no further questions, no additional detailing needed**.
- Even **delivery planning** was handled during order intake—at the moment the customer placed the order.

This significantly **reduced lead times**, eliminated errors, and improved customer satisfaction.

Example 2: Confectionery Producer

Situation

This company was part of a **large multinational** with four factories in the Benelux. Each factory operated almost as a **standalone unit**, with its own:

- HR department
- Technical services
- Finance and administration

There was also a headquarters, but it focused mainly on **marketing and finance**.

The company was **facing serious financial losses**, and internal complexity had grown beyond control.

Breakthrough / Solution

Initial steps included **centralizing support functions** like HR, marketing, technical services, and procurement. But the **real breakthrough** came from a **process-oriented reorganization**—shifting away from traditional functions toward **cross-functional processes**.

This reduced the need for coordination, and **throughput times were drastically shortened**. The following end-to-end processes were defined:

- **Value Creation**

Focus: long-term (>1 year)
Combines marketing and R&D to create product innovation.

- **Operations**

Focus: short-term (<1 year)
Combines manufacturing, logistics, and finance—integrated for faster decision-making.

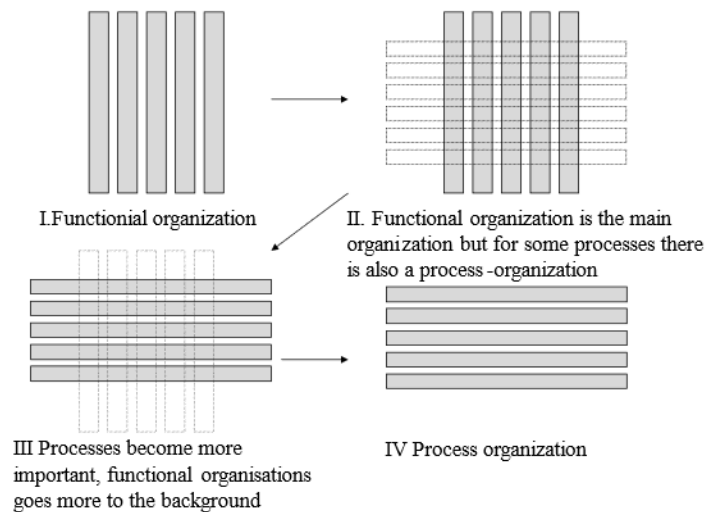
- **Information**

Focus: enabling IT systems and support to ensure data flows across processes.

- **People & Culture**

Focus: managing personnel and building capabilities across the new structure.

From a functional to a process organisation



Example 3: Bakery (1) – Outsourced Logistics

Situation

A bakery had outsourced its **warehousing and transport**. On-site, a large team from the logistics provider was working full-time. Their main task was to fix issues that had already gone wrong earlier in the internal process.

Breakthrough

The breakthrough came from a **simple but powerful shift**:

The **order was specified in detail at the time of intake**, and stock availability was checked immediately. The **delivery commitment was made at the same moment the order was placed**.

This **eliminated the need for repairs or adjustments** by the forwarding team. The change only required a **minor increase in capacity** at the order intake department—and saved significant time and cost downstream.

Energy Producer – 24/7 Shift Coordination

Situation

An energy company that generated electricity from waste ran on a **24/7 shift schedule**. Every shift began with a handover, covering:

- What went wrong

- What had been fixed
- What still needed to be done

Each shift created its own plan for what needed to happen.

Breakthrough

The real shift came with a new mindset:

“Trust the previous shift.”

Rather than redoing or checking previous work, **planning and execution became continuous across shifts.**

This increased efficiency and morale. **Trust** became the keyword—trust that your colleague had done what they were supposed to do, and that you could move forward from there.

Example 4: Bakery (2) – Premix Producer

Situation

A privately owned bakery held a large market share in producing **premises for industrial bakeries**. The company was to be sold, but since profits hadn't been a focus in the years before, they now had to **make profitability visible**.

The **manufacturing process** was full of inefficiencies.

Breakthrough

The breakthrough was changing the mindset around waste.

In the food industry, **waste isn't always garbage**.

Reducing waste not only cuts disposal costs, but also **increases the yield of sellable product**. Once this became clear, employees became **surprisingly creative**:

- **New working methods** were introduced
- Even **physical changes** were made—like **shortening pipes** to minimize residue

This led to substantial improvements with relatively simple changes.

Example 5: Worktop Manufacturer

Situation

This company manufactured worktops (wood and stone) for **kitchens and office interiors**.

Most employees worked on the shop floor, and **labor cost** was the primary expense.

Breakthrough 1: In the kitchen world, the consumer buys a kitchen at a retail store. A drawing is made of the entire kitchen, including the countertop. The countertop is made by a different manufacturer than the cabinets. So the order is translated into order lines and faxed. The kitchen countertop manufacturer then took the order lines off the fax and started drawing the kitchen countertop more or less, eventually it was put back into Autocad to get the kitchen countertops from CNC, the order itself went into the ERP-system. I guess you can feel it coming. Send the drawing (preferably already in Autocad) from the retailer directly to the AutoCAD department of the kitchentop-manufacturer. A department of 20 people could be reduced to 5. A solid move in efficiency and effectiveness that also resulted in solid savings.

As with the door manufacturer, the company had implemented a **smart order intake system**—but problems remained in manufacturing:

- Roles were unclear
- Workers wasted time searching for materials and orders
- The system felt too complex for many employees

Breakthrough 2: Role Specialization Employees were assigned **clear roles**:

- One person **produces**
- Another **moves materials**
- Another does **quality control**

Supervisors oversaw the flow.

The insight? While modern thinking often promotes generalist roles, in this case, **specialization was the answer**.

Breakthrough 3: System Simplification

- The **ERP system** was simplified
- **Visual management tools** were added on the shop floor (e.g., kanban-style rules)

Example: limiting the number of worktops allowed to queue at a station

These changes **restored control** and created a more efficient workflow.

Conclusion

What these examples show is this:

Breakthroughs are often not complex.

They're usually **simple, clear ideas**—yet they require a change in perspective to see them.

Often, after the fact, people say:

"Why didn't we think of this earlier?"

But the truth is, it's **not that easy**.

Important Lessons

- You need to understand the process **in detail**
- But you also need to **step back far enough to see the bigger picture**

Most importantly:

"The solution often lies in making the impossible... possible."

This has become my personal mantra.

If something is not done "for a logical reason," question that reason—and you may just find your solution.

-/-/-

Chapter 8: Summary

In this booklet, I've emphasized how **important business processes** are in daily operations. When organized effectively, they can make the difference between being **average or excellent, struggling or profitable**—and even between **surviving or leading** in your market.

That's why **structuring and optimizing your business processes** is not just a supporting activity—it's a **strategic one**.

The most critical chapters in this booklet are:

- **Chapter 3: Analysis**
A structured analysis is the foundation for meaningful change. It helps uncover inefficiencies and gives you a clearer view of what's truly going on.
- **Chapter 4: The Breakthrough**
Ultimately, effective process design depends on finding the right **breakthrough**—that insight or shift that simplifies, shortens, or strengthens a key part of your operation.

Of course, none of this happens in a vacuum.

You need the right **project structure** to support the analysis and foster breakthroughs—this is where **Chapter 2** comes in.

And even the best ideas will fail without solid **implementation**, as discussed in **Chapter 5**. Change is only successful when it becomes part of daily operations.

To bring the theory to life, I've included a number of **real-life examples** in **Chapter 7**—situations where process thinking led to tangible breakthroughs.

My goal has been to share a method that is:

- **Simple, yet powerful**
- **Structured, but not rigid**
- **Practical, and proven**

And if there's one idea I'd like you to remember, it's this:

The solution often lies in making the impossible... possible.

Dare to question what seems logical. That's often where the real value is found.

-/-/-

Appendix I: Belbin team roles

Like I said in chapter 2 it's important if you select a team that you try to balance the different roles. Belbin has worked this out: -

The 9 Belbin Team Roles are:

Action	Social	Thinking
Completer Finisher	Co-coordinator	Monitor Evaluator
		
Implementer	Resource Investigator	Plant
		
Shaper	Team worker	Specialist
		

Copied from: www.belbin.com

Action Oriented Roles:

Shapers (SH)

Shapers are people who challenge the team to improve. They are dynamic and usually extroverted people who enjoy stimulating others, questioning norms, and finding the best approaches to problems. The Shaper is the one who shakes things up to make sure that all possibilities are considered and that the team does not become complacent.

Shapers often see obstacles as exciting challenges and they tend to have the courage to push on when others feel like quitting.

Their potential weaknesses may be that they're argumentative, and that they may offend people's feelings.

Implementer (IMP)

Implementers are the people who get things done. They turn the team's ideas and concepts into practical actions and plans. They are typically conservative, disciplined people who work systematically and efficiently and are very well organized. These are the people who you can count on to get the job done.

On the downside, Implementers may be inflexible and somewhat resistant to change.

Completer – Finisher (CF)

Completer–Finishers are the people who see that projects are completed thoroughly. They ensure there have been no errors or omissions and they pay attention to the smallest of details.

They are very concerned with deadlines and will push the team to make sure the job is completed on time. They are described as perfectionists who are orderly, conscientious, and anxious.

However, a Completer-Finisher may worry unnecessarily and find it hard to delegate.

People Oriented Roles:

Coordinator (CO)

Coordinators are the ones who take on the traditional team–leader role and have also been referred to as the chairmen. They guide the team to what they perceive are the objectives. They are often excellent listeners and they are naturally able to recognize the value that each team member brings to the table. They are calm and good-natured and delegate tasks very effectively.

Their potential weaknesses are that they may delegate away too much personal responsibility, and may tend to be manipulative.

Team Worker (TW)

Team Workers are the people who provide support and make sure the team is working together. These people fill the role of negotiators within the team and they are flexible, diplomatic, and perceptive. These tend to be popular people who are very capable in their own right but who prioritize team cohesion and helping people getting along.

Their weaknesses may be a tendency to be indecisive, and maintain uncommitted positions during discussions and decision-making.

Resource Investigator (RI)

Resource Investigators are innovative and curious. They explore available options, develop contacts, and negotiate for resources on behalf of the team. They are enthusiastic team members, who identify and work with external stakeholders to help the team accomplish its objective. They are outgoing and are often extroverted, meaning that others are often receptive to them and their ideas.

On the downside, they may lose enthusiasm quickly, and are often overly optimistic.

Thought Oriented Roles:

Plant (PL)

The Plant is the creative innovator who comes up with new ideas and approaches. They thrive on praise but criticism is especially hard for them to deal with. Plants are often introverted and prefer to work apart from the team. Because their ideas are so novel, they can be impractical at times. They may also be poor communicators and can tend to ignore given parameters and constraints.

Monitor – Evaluator (ME)

Monitor-Evaluators are best at analyzing and evaluating ideas that other people (often Plants) come up with. These people are shrewd and objective and they carefully weigh the pros and cons of all the options before coming to a decision.

Monitor-Evaluators are critical thinkers and very strategic in their approach. They are often perceived as detached or unemotional. Sometimes they are poor motivators who react to events rather than instigating them

Specialist (SP)

Specialists are people who have specialized knowledge that is needed to get the job done. They pride themselves on their skills and abilities, and they work to maintain their professional status.

Their job within the team is to be an expert in the area, and they commit themselves fully to their field of expertise. This may limit their contribution, and lead to a preoccupation with technicalities at the expense of the bigger picture.

Figure 1: Belbin's Team Roles

Action Oriented Roles	Shaper	Challenges the team to improve.
	Implementer	Puts ideas into action.
	Completer Finisher	Ensures thorough, timely completion.
People Oriented Roles	Coordinator	Acts as a chairperson.
	Team Worker	Encourages cooperation.
	Resource Investigator	Explores outside opportunities.
Thought Oriented Roles	Plant	Presents new ideas and approaches.
	Monitor-Evaluator	Analyzes the options.
	Specialist	Provides specialized skills.

Bibliography

Balanced Scorecard & INK-management model, Ahaus & Diepman, 2006
ISBN9013022405

Business Process Redesign, David K. Carr and others, 1992 Coopers & Lybrand,
ISBN0944533043