Defining a Process with SIPOC

What is SIPOC?

SIPOC is an abbreviation of:

Suppliers – Inputs – Process – Outputs – Customers

It provides a "template" for defining a process, before you begin to map, measure, or improve it.

Why use it?

Whenever you are planning to start some process management or improvement activity, it's important to get a high-level understanding of the scope of the process first. A SIPOC Process Definition helps the Process Owner and those working on the process to agree the boundaries of what they will be working on.

It provides a structured way to discuss the process and get consensus on what it involves before rushing off and drawing process maps.

How to use it:

To create a SIPOC process definition:

1. Agree the name of the process. Use a Verb + Noun format (e.g. Recruit Staff).

2. Define the Outputs of the process. These are the tangible things that the process produces (e.g. a report, or letter).

3. Define the Customers of the process. These are the people who receive the Outputs. Every Output should have a Customer.

4. Define the Inputs to the process. These are the things that trigger the process. They will often be tangible (e.g. a customer request)

5. Define the Suppliers to the process. These are the people who supply the inputs. Every input should have a Supplier. In some "end-to-end" processes, the supplier and the customer may be the same person.

6. Define the sub-processes that make up the process. These are the activities that are carried out to convert the inputs into outputs. They will form the basis of a process map.

SIPOC Example:

Process: Recruit Staff				
Suppliers	**Inputs**	**Process**	**Outputs**	**Customers**
Line Manager	Request to fill a vacancy	1. Specify needs 2. Authorise recruitment 3. Place adverts 4. Assess applicants 5. Offer appointment 6. Confirm start	New member of staff	Line Manager

Above is a simplified example of a SIPOC. In practice, you may need to include several other suppliers (e.g. Candidates, Recruitment Agencies) and other customers (HR Dept., Candidates).

Adding more definition:

There are several elements that you can add to make a SIPOC process definition more useful…

Include a **Process Purpose** statement. Define why the process exists; e.g. the recruit Staff process exists to provide the right people, with the right skills at the right time. The purpose should reflect a benefit to the organisation, not simply be a re-statement of the name of the process.

Identify the **Process Owner**. Decide who is the single, named individual with responsibility for the end-to end process. That person needs to be involved in any definition and improvement activities.

Define the **start and end-points** of the process. These will be the first and last activities on the process map. Note that some processes may have multiple start and end points.

Define any **boundaries**, or scope limitations for the process. For example, does the process deal with all types of customer, or just some (e.g. Retail vs. Business Customers)? Or, does the process only deal with a particular type of transaction (e.g. high risk vs. low risk)? These boundaries can help you decide whether you need more than one process map, or if everything can be included in one map.
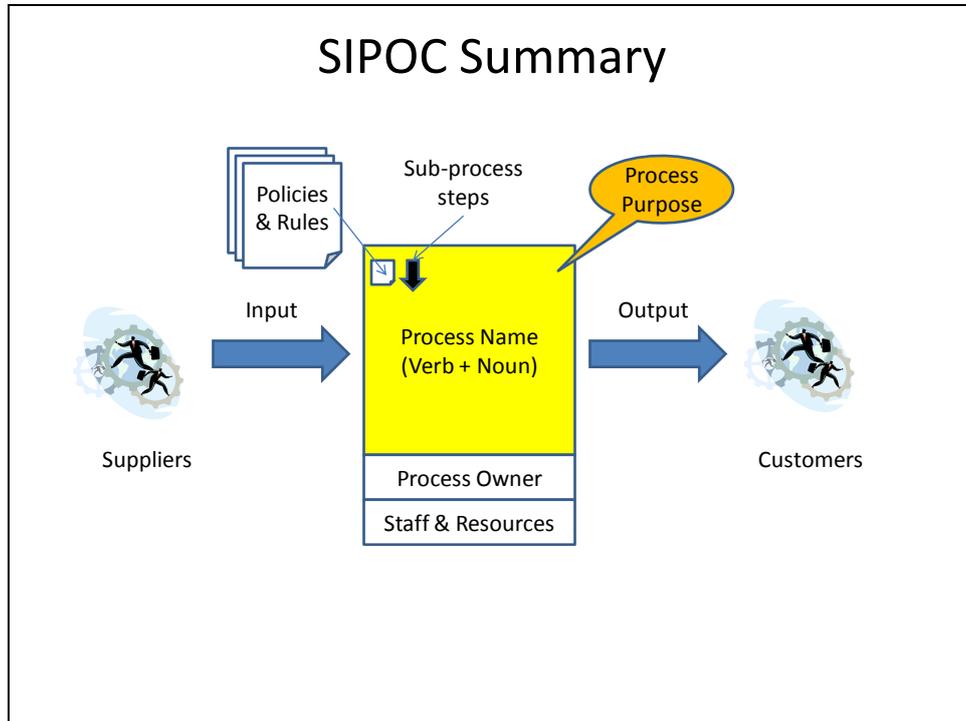
Getting it right:

To be useful, your SIPOC process definition needs to follow the basic steps listed above. There are some common errors that people make when defining a process. Here's how to avoid them…

	Good practice	**Common errors**
Process names define how you "do stuff"; no more, no less.	Use Verb + Noun format: e.g. "Recruit Staff" or "Prepare Reports".	Names that use the "past tense": e.g. "Staff Recruited", or "Reports Produced"
Process names should not define performance requirements or improvement objectives.	Use the Process Purpose Statement to define why the process exists. That will help you to identify improvement objectives and performance measurements.	Names that define what the process is trying to achieve: e.g. "Recruit Staff Quickly", or "Improve Report Timeliness". These are improvement objectives, not names of the process.
Outputs should specify what the process delivers, not what it achieves.	Outputs are "things". They may be right, or with errors. They may meet customer needs, or not.	Outputs that are actually outcomes; e.g. "Satisfied Customers" or "On-time Reports".
Inputs should specify what triggers the process and what gets "worked on" by the process.	Inputs are "things" provided by suppliers to the process.	Staff and other resources included as inputs. They don't trigger the process and don't get worked on by it. Policies and Rules included as inputs. These guide the process, but don't get worked on by it.

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SIPOC Summary

Policies & Rules

Sub-process steps

Process Purpose

Input

Process Name
(Verb + Noun)

Output

Suppliers

Process Owner

Staff & Resources

Customers

Defining a Process with SIPOC

SIPOC Process Definition Template:

Process:				
Purpose:				
Owner:				
Suppliers	**Inputs**	**Process Steps**	**Outputs**	**Customers**

Boundaries:

Start-point:	End-point:
Includes:	Excludes: