



Ten Minutes of Your Time. Lasting Business Impact.

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"We love your product; we just hate to get it from you."

- Customer of a Fortune 50 company

What's On My Mind This Week

Terminal "E" Illogical

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Improving business processes can reduce variation and eliminate hassle, but unlike cutting costs or increasing throughput, most managers don't appreciate these benefits. After all, customers don't normally complain about variation, and some amount of hassle just seems inevitable. In fact, variation *creates* uncertainty and hassle - which produces unhappy customers and employees. Eliminating variation, therefore, is critical to the success of your organization.

A prime example is the Terminal "E" cab stand at Boston's Logan Airport. The lone taxi stand has a simple job: get people quickly into a car and moving to their next destination. Two employees work the process: one requests cabs from central dispatch and ensures drivers have paid the required US\$1.50 airport fee, while the other directs passengers to waiting cars.

The cycle begins when people arrive at the stand. Taxis are requested from central dispatch and sent to the terminal. Arriving cars line up along a sharply-curving sidewalk, and once all cabs have stopped, the attendant directs passengers to specific cars. Once the loaded taxis depart, the process repeats.

As I watched a group of cars leave, the procedure seemed logical: people got cabs, drivers got fares, and the state of Massachusetts got a cut of the action. But upon further observation, I realized the process left all parties unhappy because it handled variation poorly. Worse still, the process itself created some of the problems.

Seeing the Hassle

Stepping out of the terminal into a pleasant July evening, I welcomed the chance to stand and stretch after a long flight. When the man behind me lit his second cigarette, I began paying more attention to the loading operation.

Six cabs came in one group, then four in another, followed by a group of seven, leaving people uncertain of their waiting time. Sometimes the lead taxi stopped beyond the cab stand, forcing the first passenger to navigate around the enclosure and lengthening the boarding process. At other times, the first cab stopped far short of the stand and made all passengers walk farther to their cars.

One customer exited a loaded taxi when he discovered the driver didn't take credit cards. Since the one behind him did, the passengers traded cabs, unloading and reloading both sets of baggage.

The line kept growing. It now stretched beyond the defined boundaries and spilled awkwardly along the terminal. Where the entry point had been fixed and easily recognizable, it now changed with each new arrival, creating conflicts when new customers inadvertently cut in front of those already waiting.

Travelers with overloaded luggage carts created another problem. Fixed railings that defined the line allowed passage of moderately-loaded carts, but faced with large rental fees, customers tended to overload them. People with heavily burdened carts veered down the sidewalk and waited as a separate group when the procession entered the defined area.

Of course, these passengers wanted to preserve their place in the original line, creating havoc for the employee directing customers to cabs. He never knew if the "next" person was at the front of the queue or alongside a loaded baggage cart. More than one person returned to the line after a heated exchange with someone from the luggage cart group.

It didn't take long before limo drivers began stealing frustrated customers from the beleaguered cab operation.

Looking For the Logic

Eventually I boarded a cab and left the airport. My driver was an engineer from the former Soviet Union who drove cabs for several years, so I asked his opinion of the boarding process. "I once asked the dispatcher how he allocated cabs to the terminals," he replied. "I was simply told, 'don't look for the logic.'" "Don't look for the logic," he repeated to himself, and shook his head in despair.

Everyone looked for the logic that evening, and at first glance the process *had* seemed logical. It also seemed adequate on previous trips, when fewer passengers were present. But the flaws of the process became painfully evident as greater volumes magnified their effects.

Variation - in line length, cab stopping points, and preferred payment types, for example - can be effectively handled with robust processes and clear requirements.

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But the Terminal "E" process didn't address any of these issues. Instead, variation created an ever-changing set of conditions for Terminal "E" customers, drivers, and employees alike. Because any disruption in boarding increased the waiting time for all customers, each problem added to everyone's frustration.

However, just because problems are most noticeable at high volumes doesn't mean they disappear during normal operations - logical processes do not become illogical at higher volumes. When demand is low there are simply fewer issues per hour, and more time between them for frustration to diffuse. Illogical processes, when exposed to greater scrutiny, can no longer hide their flaws.

The next time I arrived, there were three waiting cabs, and one other passenger pushing an overburdened cart. He took the familiar path around the railings and stopped his cart in my path, forcing me to wait while it was unloaded. Before, this would have been a minor inconvenience - part of the daily frustration we all encounter. But now I saw the situation differently. The Terminal "E" process continued to cause problems.

I may keep using the cab stand this summer, but come October I'll switch to a car service. The number of flights into Terminal "E" continues to rise. And this *is* Boston; by October the temperature will begin to vary as well.

Take Ten Minutes

Consider your current processes and answer the following questions:

- Where does my organization tolerate - or suffer through - variation?
- What would it take to eliminate this variation permanently and prevent new sources of variation from arising?
- If incoming variation can't be eliminated, how can our processes handle it flawlessly?
- How does eliminating variation throughout the organization eliminate hassle for customers and employees?

About Take Ten Minutes

Take Ten Minutes is a weekly publication of [Philip Crosby Associates](#) and [The Capability Group](#).

The premise behind *Take Ten Minutes* is simple: take ten minutes out of every week to refocus and recommit to business improvement. *Take Ten Minutes* features quotes and interviews to inspire you. We also pull articles from today's headlines as examples of the power of the preventive culture (or the deep problems caused by not having one).

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As the name suggests, *Take Ten Minutes* is relentless with the editing razor and keeps each issue tight - each issue should take you no more than ten minutes to read, start to finish. You'll reap even bigger rewards if you kick in an extra ten minutes to discuss the ideas with a colleague or to take an idea found here and plan to roll it out in your organization. We hope *Take Ten Minutes* becomes the business improvement equivalent of your running partner, providing the inspiration you need to lace up and "just do it" on those weeks when the couch seems oh-so preferable.

We hope you enjoy *Take Ten Minutes*. As Philip Crosby said, improving your business "is a journey that never ends." So let the journey...*continue!*

Please send story ideas or comments to editor@taketenminutes.com.

About Our Companies

In today's marketplace, only capable companies will survive and thrive. The overarching goal of [Philip Crosby Associates](#) (PCA) and [The Capability Group](#) (TCG) is to give companies the culture, tools, methodology and results-focused support to become 'Capable Organizations' - useful, reliable, adaptable, and ever-focused on achieving customer success.

PCA and TCG deliver on this goal by first working with clients to assess where they are on the maturity spectrum and where they want to go. For companies early in the process, we work hand-in-hand with management to install a culture of prevention - the culture that has been championed by the PCA side of our business since quality management guru and PCA founder Philip Crosby published *Quality is Free* in 1979. Over the past two decades, Crosby's techniques have been implemented by many of the Fortune 500, as well as small and mid-sized companies seeking excellence.

Once the foundation of the Capable Organization is present, TCG steps in to help clients take their efforts to the next level by further reducing costs, enhancing quality and promoting growth. TCG was founded by Kevin Weiss, who was a Quality Leader and Master Black Belt for General Electric when that company first implemented Six Sigma - a program CEO Jack Welch has attributed with "changing the DNA of GE". With a proprietary Cost-Quality-Growth™ Model created based on the knowledge that GE's success was due to much more than a typical Six Sigma deployment, TCG has helped shape Cost-Quality-Growth Programs for companies such as Shimano, American Express and Sony.

Along the journey to the Capable Organization, PCA and TCG provide a comprehensive set of training programs and materials as well as consulting and assessment services to accelerate progress. Products and services range from courses and CDs geared towards the education of hourly workers to intensive seminars for managers and executive teams.

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