

SIPPOOC (SIPOC Plus) An Extended SIPOC

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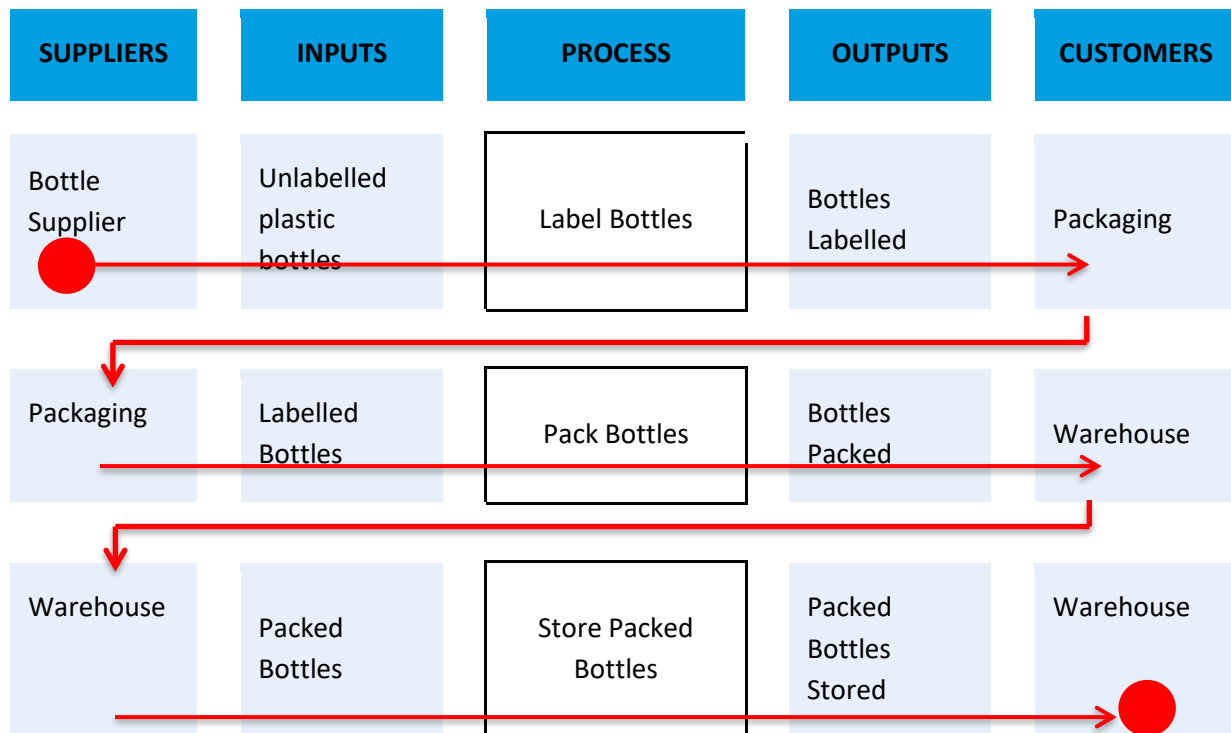
Page | 1

SIPOC has been widely adopted as a supportive process mapping tool to capture the elements of a process in table form to facilitate communication with stakeholders. SIPOC stands for Supplier, Input, Process, Output, and Customer. As a tabular visualization of the process, SIPOC has been used in a variety of ways, sometimes more confusing to those outside the Business Process Management (BPM) world and without exaggeration, to many process analysts within BPM.

The confusion apparently stems from the unfortunate primary, conventional meanings of “Supplier” as (a person or organization that provides something needed such as a product or service) and “Customer” as (a person who buys goods or services from a shop or business), as well as from the deficient understanding of how each process activity row links to the next. The result is a list of disjointed line items in both Supplier and Customer columns, comparable to a shopping list, all lumped together often without a process sequence. To add value to the process capture and analysis effort, it can be argued that the original intention of SIPOC was to connect the rows to produce a process story from start to finish—with each row capturing the activity or step (depending on the process level SIPOC depicts) in the process. In this sense:

- Suppliers are participants in the process who provide input in each activity in the process (information, materials, etc.). There may be more than one supplier per activity, depending on the complexity of the process.
- The output of one activity in the process becomes the input of the next activity in the process.
- Customers are participants in the process who receive the output of each activity in the process (information, materials, etc.) and hand it over to the Supplier in the activity in the process. There may be more than one customer per activity depending on the complexity of the process.
- Customers in SIPOC must not be confused with business customers. In SIPOC, Customers are participants in the process sequence.

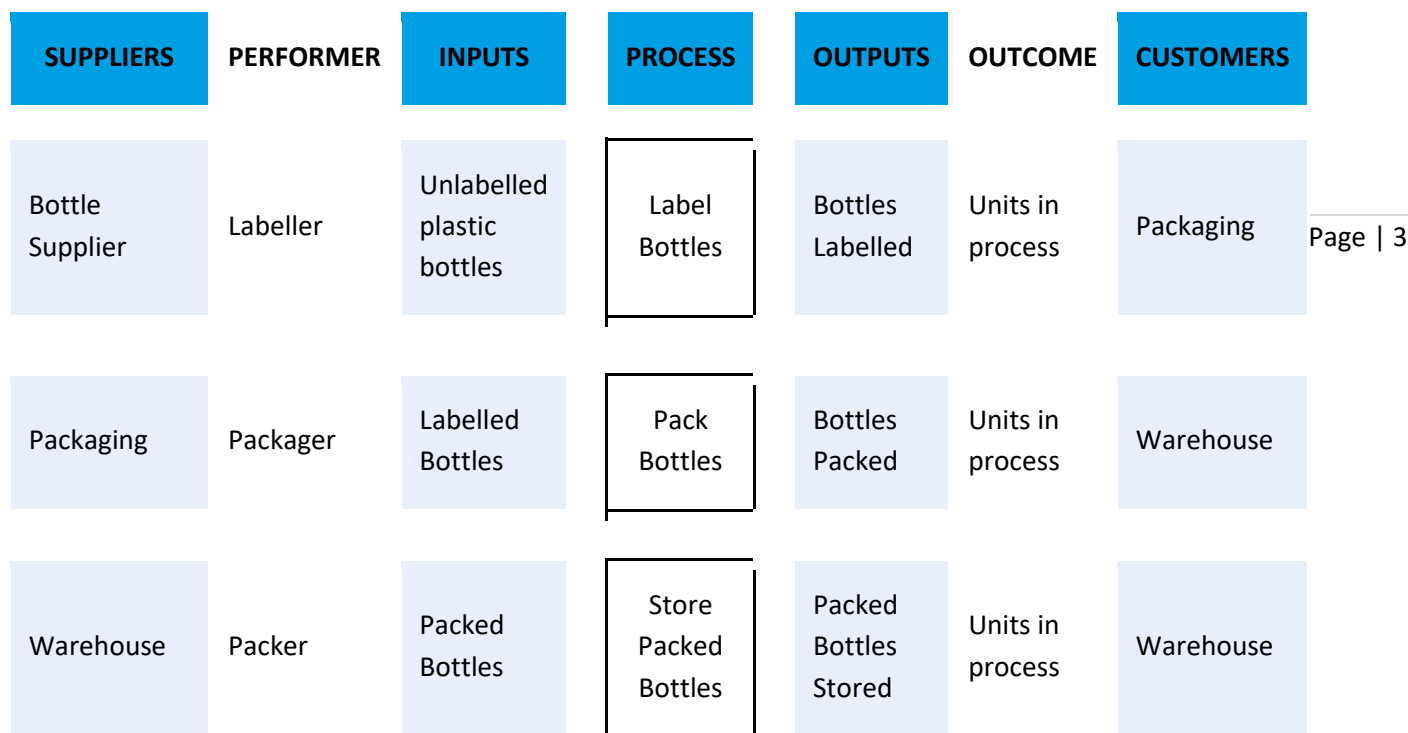
One inherent shortcoming of SIPOC is that it does not capture the activity performer, or differentiate between activity output and outcome. The **Supplier** and **Customer** do not necessarily perform the activities captured in the **Process** column. A Supplier may “supply” or provide information, materials, resources etc., to enable the activity to be performed and the supplied materials to be processed, or acted upon, to produce the expected outcome. Consider the following example.



SIPOC is not concerned with the outcome of each activity or the overall process outcome, as such, and there is a great deal of confusion in the application of SIPOC between the output of an activity and the outcome of the activity. As the argument goes, there is an important difference between a process/activity outcome and output. At the activity level, the output and outcome may not necessarily be one and the same. In fact, they should not, as they address two different types of process yield.

Outputs are the direct and measurable products of an activity in the process. For example, the number of bottles labelled or packed is the output of the activity or the process. In other words, output is what the activity or process churns out at the end of the processing of the input. In contrast, outcomes are the results or impact of these activities in terms of the expected levels of performance, quality, cost and time, and allowable defects.

An extended version of SIPOC that factors these elements (Performer and Outcome), will render this important tool more useful in providing a clearer high-level view of a particular process.



By incorporating Performer and Outcome into SIPOC a more comprehensive view of the essential elements of the process is provided. In particular, capturing the distinction between Supplier and Performer and Output and Outcome bolsters our understanding of the process at this high level of abstraction. Moreover, including a System column to capture the system(s) used to enable each activity in the process enhances the scope of the process information.

Taking SIPOC a step further, it can be combined with RACI to provide a birds-eye view of the process and the parties engaged in the process at each activity level. SIPOC and RACI are often used as two separate artefacts, often in a fragmented manner, when in fact they are interdependent. Our understanding of the process and ability to analyse and detect weaknesses in the process can be enhanced by juxtaposing SIPOC and RACI in the manner shown in the following diagram. Process design is essentially about piecing up together various artefacts that make up the process. Having both SIPOC (extended) and RACI in one place, on one page, certainly contributes to this objective.

[illegible]

This extended version can include the enabling system. Combined with RACI on one page, it proves to be a powerful tool of process communication. Give it a try!

References

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Page | 4

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About the Author

Ali Darwish, PhD, MIS, MBII, MA is an award-winning expert communication and business improvement consultant, for over 30 years, delivering best-in-class solutions in Australia, UK, and Middle East. He is also an active scholar, researcher and published author of international renown, specializing in cross-cultural social semiotics and communication. He has published more than 25 books on business process management, enabling methodologies, translation, communication, and knowledge management.