

# How Boring Is Your Business?

/ by Dr. Philip Zimmermann

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One of the non-profits I started many years ago really took off, and we rode the wave of momentum. However, in a very entrepreneurial way, we jumped on every opportunity that presented itself, leading to an organization I would describe as ten start-ups in one. The complexity became a real challenge.

The real difficulty was that the diversity was also its beauty, attracting people, funding, and publicity. But my brain increasingly struggled as I felt I had to make a thousand decisions a day. We didn't have processes and systems set up to manage what needed to be managed. Since everything was a start-up culture, we didn't have a passion for systemizing it, as things were changing so fast. We were proud to be a speedboat that could change direction at any time and did so.

That's when I realized we were great at project management but really bad at implementing processes. As an entrepreneur, I like creating new things out of nothing, having a goal without knowing how to accomplish it. But this brings complications and challenges. Now I know there needs to be a balance in an organization between process management and project management. Both play vital and important roles.

## Project Management vs. Process Management

Project management brings change, momentum, vision, and excitement. These are the drivers in an organization and even in society. Processes on the other hand are what makes up the core of every organization. Every organization has processes. The problem is that most are not optimized or well documented. From

payroll to invoice reconciliation, recruiting, hiring, email campaigns, staffing, marketing, sales - nearly all the foundational elements of running a business are processes. Managing repeatable processes, which any staff member can do after a little training, ensures scalability and prevents burnout and decision fatigue.

In my experience, true entrepreneurship is thrilling at the beginning, but as an organization scales, its operational aspects must become more predictable and, in a sense, "boring." In this context, boring is advantageous because it ensures consistent results as the organization continues to grow. I have even seen how

some entrepreneurs sabotage their own business success because they are addicted to change and excitement. But as the old saying goes: What got you here won't get you there.

I think we all understand what a process is. By

definition (see Wikipedia), it is a set of activities that interact to produce a result. In a business, a process is defined as a series of structured, often chained, activities conducted by people or equipment to produce a specific service or product, as noted by Techopedia.com. Processes are documentations that involve creating a detailed, often step-by-step description of how something needs to be done from start to finish.

Many see this process of documenting processes as a boring, redundant, and often unnecessary chore. It takes up time, and many entrepreneurs feel it could be spent in a better way. But process documentation is perhaps the number one key to creating a scalable business. It really mitigates business risks, saves time, money, reduces error, and creates more consistent outputs. It can dramatically increase the value of a company in the eyes of investors, and is particularly a requirement for explosive business growth. It really

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sets the foundation on how and when we can scale an organization. Process documentation is as close to cloning yourself or your staff as you can get.

Now, the reason why I think entrepreneurs and business owners are a little bit hesitant when it comes to process management is because our world is the world of project management.

We already know that projects are used to create something out of nothing, which is the heart of what an entrepreneur does. With a project, you are typically doing something for the first time. They are often one-off situations. They deal with unknowns.

Processes, on the other hand, deal with what is already known. They are repeatable. Unlike a project, the path to the desired outcome is virtually always the same.

can take steps to turn it into a process, where most business owners and entrepreneurs fail, because that's where they feel it gets boring.

But that's really where process management comes in since process management really makes sure that the project is turned into a process that is repeatable, scalable, and predictable, and can be done by an employee who can be trained by that process. The idea is to transition ad hoc work into repeatable work over time that you can delegate.

## Resist the temptation

So you first have to realize that there is a problem if you are tempted to work only on projects. If you are going from one project to the next, always needing the kick and the excitement of something new, this is great if

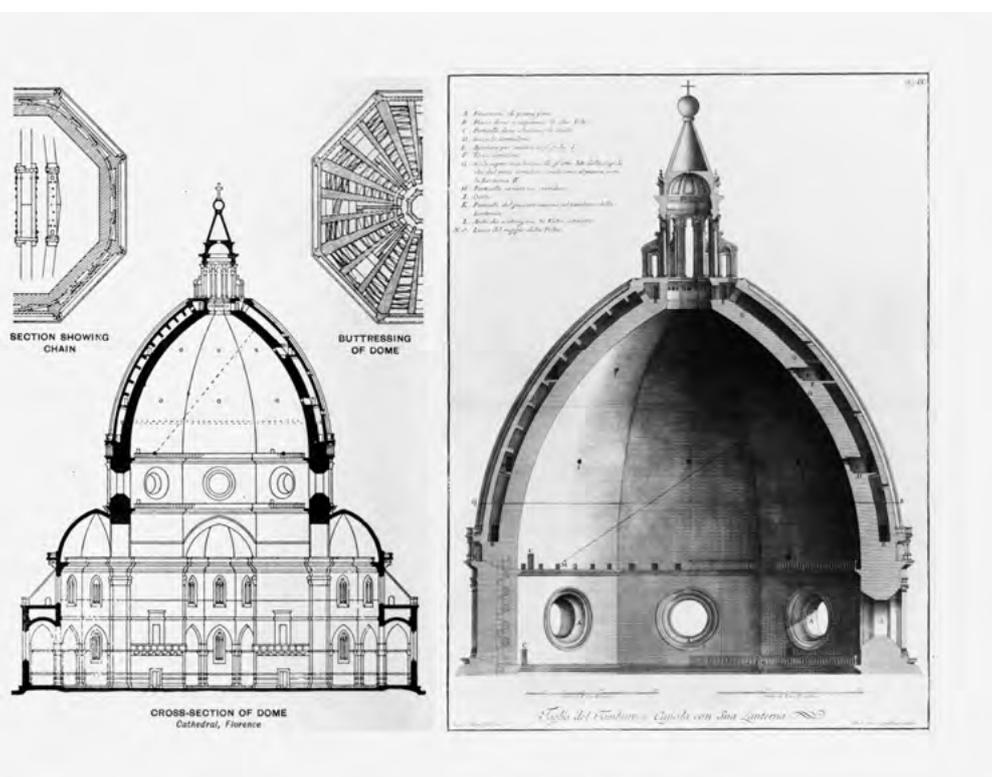
you are a freelancer, but it's not great if you want to build a business that functions like a machine that can be run without you.

So I'm not saying that companies should stop working on projects and turn everything into a process. It's more a function of growing up and maturing. The more a company grows, the more they should invest time and money into turning ad hoc work into repeatable work, so it can be managed and it can be scaled.

New companies can, and likely should, skip this stuff in the beginning, because paying the bills takes priority over nearly everything else.

And young companies also have such a high rate of change that it doesn't make sense to document many processes that may change in the next month. But as a company grows, that cannot be the modus operandi, otherwise you will burn out and you will feel like you're spinning plates in the air, hoping nothing drops.

As your company grows, the ratio of processes to projects should ideally increase.



## Turning Projects into Processes

Often projects will turn into processes if it is done correctly. You first do something for the first time. When you do something for the first time, it's a project. You don't know how to achieve the desired result. Part of the project is figuring out how you will get there, which is exciting, which is the entrepreneurial journey. But once the desired result has been achieved, you

# The difference between Projects and Processes

To clarify, here are some high-level theoretical distinctions between projects and processes that show why it's beneficial to move away from ad hoc work projects and into repeatable work processes. This list comes from the book, "Come Up For Air" by Nick Sonnenberg, that really goes more into depth about the difference between projects and processes.

## Project (AD-HOC):

- Costs are largely estimated
- Requires a discovery and planning phase
- Steps to completion are not 100% clear
- Higher risk of mistakes
- Someone leaving may have large effects on the outcome
- Difficult to scale

## Processes (REPEATABLE)

- Costs are roughly known
- Discovery and planning have already been done
- Step-by-step path from start to finish
- Low risk of mistakes
- Someone leaving has minimal effects on the outcome
- Easy to scale

## A story

Let me illustrate the difference between a project manager and a process manager with a short story:

In the heart of Nework lies a neglected plot of land, overgrown with weeds and strewn with litter. The townspeople dreamed of transforming it into a beautiful green park where families could gather, children could play, and everyone could enjoy nature. This vision sparked the beginning of the Green Park Initiative, a project led by Project Manager Peter.

Peter's initial task was to develop a comprehensive plan. He organized community meetings to gather ideas and enlisted the help of landscape architects, environmentalists, and volunteers. Together, they designed a park that featured walking trails, playgrounds, picnic areas, and a small pond.



Peter broke the project down into phases:

### **1. Planning and Designing:**

Finalizing the layout and securing necessary permits.

### **2. Fundraising:**

Organizing events and campaigns to raise funds.

### **3. Construction:**

Clearing the land, planting trees, installing playground equipment, and building pathways.

### **4. Grand Opening:**

Organizing an event to celebrate the park's completion and invite the community to enjoy the new space.

With Peter's leadership, the project progressed smoothly. Volunteers showed up in droves to help with the construction, and local businesses donated materials. After months of hard work, Green Park was ready for its grand opening.

As the park opened to the public, Peter's role began to wind down. However, it quickly became clear that maintaining Green Park required ongoing effort that Peter did not even have the passion or skills for. This is where Process Manager Pam came into the picture.

Pam saw that while Peter had successfully completed the project, the park now needed a sustainable management approach to keep it thriving. She stepped in to transition the one-time project into a continuous process.

Pam began by identifying the key activities needed to maintain Green Park:

#### **1. Regular Maintenance:**

Mowing lawns, trimming hedges, and cleaning up litter.

#### **2. Seasonal Care:**

Planting flowers in spring, raking leaves in fall, and preparing for winter.

#### **3. Safety Inspections:**

Regular checks of playground equipment and pathways to ensure safety.

#### **4. Community Engagement:**

Organizing events and volunteer clean-up days to keep the community involved.

Pam set up a detailed schedule for each activity. She recruited a team of park rangers and gardeners, trained them according to standardized procedures, and established a reporting system for any issues or improvements needed.

Pam also introduced feedback mechanisms to continually improve the park's upkeep. She held quarterly meetings with her team to review performance, gather insights from park visitors, and implement any necessary changes.

Over time, Green Park became a cherished community space. What started as a one-time project under Peter's management evolved into an ongoing process overseen by Pam. The park remained beautiful and well-maintained, thanks to her meticulous planning and commitment to continuous improvement.

Peter and Pam often reminisced about their journey over coffee at the park's café. They marveled at how their combined efforts had created something lasting for Nework—a testament to what could be achieved when projects evolve into processes.

## **Conclusion**

At this point I believe that you have a clear picture of the importance and difference between project management and process management.

Since the Medici Community is only for business owners my experience tells me that you are more comfortable and see more value in project management. But to truly build a successful lasting business you have to make a plan where projects move into processes. That way you can build something meaningful that can be scaled. Don't sabotage your success because of your entrepreneurial bias towards projects. Make a good plan so that establishing good processes and systems becomes an absolute priority.



### Dr. Philip Zimmermann

Dr. Philip Zimmermann is a strategist and entrepreneur who has launched and led different businesses and nonprofits.

As the co-founder, CEO and Strategic Coach of Global Medici Ventures he develops strategies to help business owners gain clarity, focus and achieve their personal and professional goals.





