

# **Improving Processes Where You Work:**

**Individuals Can Make A difference**

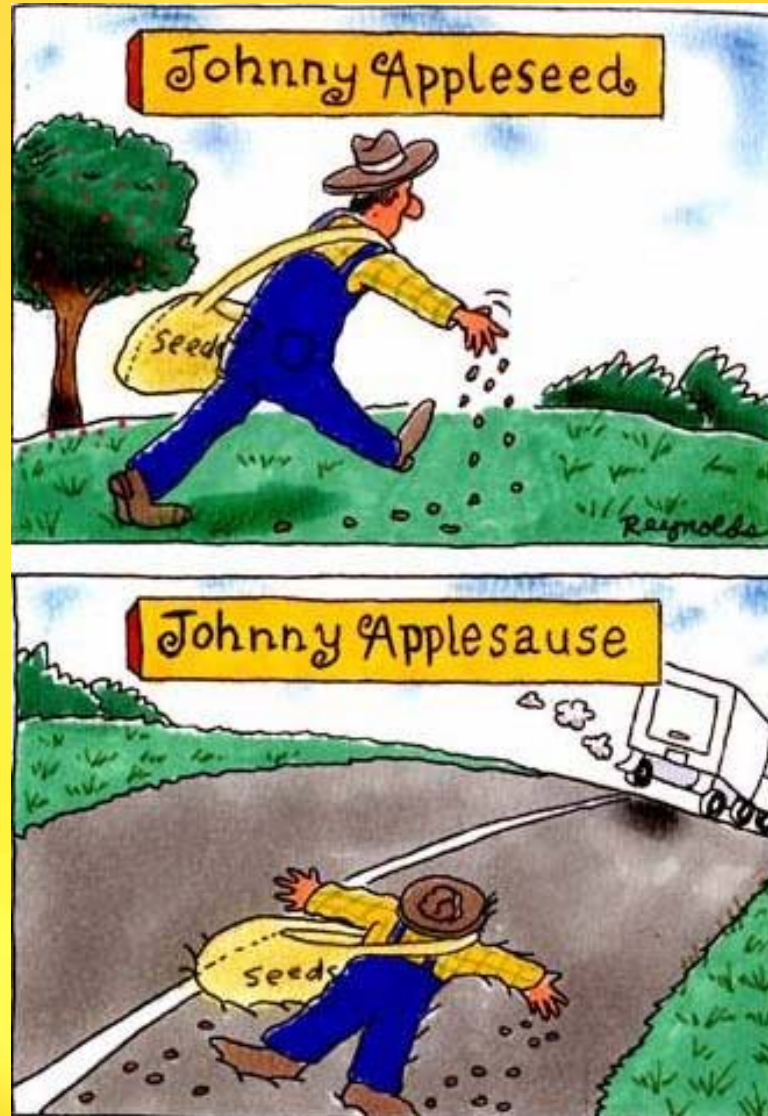
**Presented April 15, 2004 in Bellevue, WA**

**By Cordell Vail, cste**

**For the Seattle Area Software Quality Assurance Group**



# THE ISSUE



Cartoon used with permission from cartoonist Dan Reynolds

# THE ISSUE

**When you start a new job, return from a training session or just learn a new concept, how can you use what you have learned to help improve the processes where you work?**

# **When you leave here today you will know**

**Why you need to understand the cultural environment**

**Why you need to become a resource for valued information**

**The definition of what a process is and does**

**How to identify processes that can be improved**

**Why you need to learn the process before improving it**

**The importance of knowing the risks involved with change**

**Why you need to create a plan to improve processes**

**That compliance makes or breaks processes**

**That individuals can make a difference**

**In order to improve a process you need to:**

- **Understand the cultural environment**

# Understand the cultural environment

Here are just two examples of differences in company culture taken from a survey done by the Vault\* Company.

**Employer:** [The Topps Company](#) (Workplace Survey)

**Job title:** Brand Manager

Topps has a culture that encourages taking risks to grow the business. Topps' biggest hits have come from items that managers had a gut feeling would work (i.e. minimal research was done before launching). They really encourage the marketing team to investigate new ideas and concepts. While this sounds great (and it is), the company expects the marketing people to do the bulk of the work when it comes to these projects. You really have to roll up your sleeve to get the job done as support groups such as R&D are understaffed. ...

**Employer:** [Bank of New York](#) (Workplace Survey)

**Job title:** Vice President

BNY is a "safe" place to work if you're interested in having job security. However, if you have any ideas about coming in and shaking things up, forget about it. There is a real complacency here and no one is willing to break lock step for fear they'll be labeled a "cowboy". I have no idea what anyone in my department, including my manager, does all day...

\* "Used with permission from Vault. These surveys are excerpts from the employer survey database at Vault.com. Vault has collected workplace surveys at more than 2,000 major employers. The entire database can be found at [www.vault.com](http://www.vault.com)."



# Certification wall at Washington School Information Processing Cooperative



## **Understand the cultural environment**

- **What works well in one company may not in another.**
- **Do not begin by challenging the status quo.**
- **Understand the big picture.**
- **Learn the team strategy and company methodology**
- **Remember that management sets the pace.**
- **People want to be right.**



**In order to improve a process you need to:**

- Understand the cultural environment
- **Become a resource for valued information**

# Become a resource for valued information

- **Start with yourself.**
- **Stay at the leading edge of your field.**
- **Be the best of the best at what you do.**
- **Become good at one or two things.**
- **Be known as a “Jack of all trades but a master of ONE”.**

## In order to improve a process you need to:

- Understand the cultural environment
- Become a resource for valued information
- **Define what a process is**

## Define what a process is

- **A process is anything that has steps.**
- **Steps are defined here as documented procedures.**
- **Procedures are controlled by company policy.**
- **Management's policies become the company methodology.**
- **Methodology is greatly influenced by the environment.**

## In order to improve a process you need to:

- Become a resource for valued information
- Understand the cultural environment
- Define what a process is
- **Learn the process before trying to improve it**

## **Learn the process before trying to improving it**

- **You can not improve what you do not understand.**
- **Define how this process fits into the overall process.**
- **Know who the stakeholders are.**
- **Find out why the process is done this way.**



## In order to improve a process you need to:

- Understand the cultural environment
- Become a resource for valued information
- Define what a process is
- Learn the process
- **Document the process**

# Document the process

- Experience is a hard teacher.
- Repeating an undocumented process is a lucky break.
- Documentation makes a process repeatable.
- A repeatable documented process brings uniformity.
- Documentation makes a process perform consistently.
- Documentation gives management usable controls.

## In order to improve a process you need to:

- Understand the cultural environment
- Become a resource for valued information
- Define what a process is
- Learn the process
- Document the process
- **Identify processes that can be improved**



Should we warn  
the drivers about  
the falling cows,

or should we  
build a fence?

## **Identify processes that can be improved**

- **Consult with management.**
- **Talk to team members about your ideas for improvements**
- **If the process is not repeatable you can not improve it.**
- **If you do not repeat the process there is no reason to improve it.**
- **Focus on your area of responsibility.**
- **Heroic change is not always good change.**

## In order to improve a process you need to:

- Understand the cultural environment
- Become a resource for valued information
- Define what a process is
- Learn the process
- Document the process
- Identify processes that can be improved
- **Know the risks involved with change**





This picture used with permission of photographer [Kurt Jones](#). Picture taken on 9 April 2003 at Surfrider Beach in Malibu

Do you really want to go surfing at this beach?

## **Know the risks involved with change**

- **You may improve the process, but the risk of change may be greater than the value received.**
- **The fear of risk may hamper change.**
- **Changing one thing may break something else.**
- **Changing a process may mean more work for others.**

## In order to improve a process you need to:

- Understand the cultural environment
- Become a resource for valued information
- Define what a process is
- Learn the process
- Document the process
- Identify processes that can be improved
- Know the risks involved with change
- **Create a plan to implement the improved process**

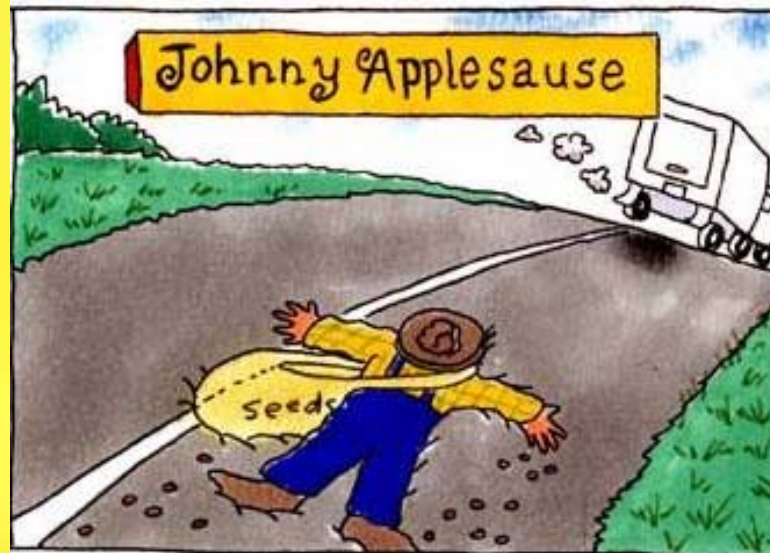
A 3D signpost with a blue sign and a black post. The sign is rectangular with a black border and contains the text "It Helps To Plan Ahead" in red. The post is a thick black vertical bar.

It Helps To Plan Ahead

## Create a plan to implement the improved process

- Start with management involvement
- Simplicity is the key to effective improvement.
- Start where you are.
- Do not try to make too many changes at once.
- Look for teaching moments.
- Expect change to take time.
- Have a “*lessons learned*” session after each project is completed so you do not repeat mistakes.







## In order to improve a process you need to:

- Understand the cultural environment
- Become a resource for valued information
- Define what a process is
- Learn the process
- Document the process
- Identify processes that can be improved
- Know the risks involved with change
- Create a plan to implement the improved process
- **Realize that compliance makes or breaks processes**

# **Realize that compliance makes or breaks processes**

- **We do not see things as they are; we see them as we are.  
(Anais Nin)**
- **Management acceptance of the process is key to success**
- **People don't like change and resist it even if it is better.**
- **In adversarial environments, improvement is difficult.**
- **If a process is not being used there is something wrong with it.**
- **The end user of the process is the KING and the QUEEN.**
- **A good process no one is using is the same as not having one.**
- **Everyone may not agree with the process but all need to come to a "I CAN LIVE WITH IT" agreement.**

## In order to improve a process you need to:

- Understand the cultural environment
- Become a resource for valued information
- Define what a process is
- Learn the process
- Document the process
- Identify processes that can be improved
- Know the risks involved with change
- Create a plan to implement the improved process
- Realize that compliance makes or breaks processes
- **Remember that individuals can make a difference**

## **Remember that individuals can make a difference**

**When I was young I decided I would change the world**

**But the world would not be changed**

**So I decided to change my country**

**But the country would not allow change**

**So I decided to change my community**

**But the community was set in their ways**

**So I decided to change my family**

**But my family would have nothing to do with it**

**So I decided to just change myself**

**Then I found that when I changed myself**

**My family changed**

**And when my family changed**

**They changed the community**

**And when the community changed**

**They changed the country**

**And when the country changed**

**Then the world changed with it**

Epitaph from a grave stone in London, England

# **SUMMARY**

**Understand the cultural environment**

**Become a resource for valued information**

**Define what a process is**

**Learn the process**

**Document the process**

**Identify processes that can be improved**

**Know the risks involved with change**

**Create a plan to implement the improved process**

**Realize that compliance makes or breaks processes**

**Remember that individuals can make a difference**

For additional Information

Web Page: <http://www.vcaa.com>

Email: [cordellv \[at\] yahoo \[dot\] com](mailto:cordellv@yahoo.com)

# Vail Consulting And Associates

Cordell Vail, cste

Automated Software Testing Specialist



Weekly  
Testing Tips

Software  
Testing Links

Testing  
Seminar Notes

Goal Setting  
Seminars

Research  
Library

Networking  
With Others

Book  
Store

Deaf Job  
Service

Consumer  
Information

Family  
Web Page

Contact  
Information

Subscribe To  
Monday Funnies





**QUESTIONS?**

**SUGGESTIONS?**

**Thank You**

# CREDITS

~~~~~

Vault company survey comments are being used with permission from Vault. These surveys are excerpts from the employer survey database at Vault.com. Vault has collected workplace surveys at more than 2,000 major employers. The entire database can be found at [www.vault.com](http://www.vault.com).

~~~~~

The shark and surfer picture is being used with permission of photographer Kirt Jones. You can see more of his work at <http://www.surfshooter.com/>  
The picture was taken on 9 April 2003 at Surfrider Beach in Malibu, CA

~~~~~

The Johnny Apple Seed cartoon is being used with permission from Dan Reynolds at REYNOLDS UNWRAPPED cartoons. You can see his cartoon work in the Reader's Digest, on greeting cards in every city in the country with Recycled Paper Greetings, and also at [www.reynoldsunwrapped.com](http://www.reynoldsunwrapped.com). He also has a new book "*NOW THEY ALL HAVE WINDOW SEATS*" and another one coming out later this year – "*HOW AGING AFFECTS BELT HEIGHT*". You can buy them in most book stores or you can order them on amazon.com

