

# Wibbly-wobbly, Process-y Wocess-y Stuff

**Are you wondering** what in the world the title of this column refers to? Let me start with a quick quiz—just one question: What was the most simultaneously watched TV event in the world?

Many of you are thinking the Apollo 11 landing, right? That's the obvious answer. Wrong. It was the Thanksgiving 2013 episode of Dr. Who, "The Day of the Doctor." According to Guinness, "World Records can confirm that the special 50th Anniversary episode of Doctor Who ... has set a new world for the largest ever simulcast of a TV drama after the episode was shown in 94 countries across six continents. In addition to the TV broadcast, the episode was screened in over 1,500 cinemas worldwide, including the UK, US, Canada, Latin America, Germany, Russia and Scandinavia."

I am a "Whovian." I have been a fan of Dr. Who since the 1960s, have watched the escapades of every Doctor, and have a Tardis (Time And Relative Dimension In Space) replica in my office (for you non-Whovians, it's a replica of a British police box). A properly maintained and piloted TARDIS can transport its occupants to any point in time and any place in the universe. The interior of a TARDIS is much larger than its exterior, which can blend in with its surroundings and adapt to changing conditions using the ship's "chameleon circuit."

Which brings us to processes. In one of my favorite episodes of Dr. Who (Blink, from 2007), the Doctor has a great line, talking about time. "People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect, but actually from a non-linear, non-subjective viewpoint - it's more like a big ball of wibbly wobbly... time-y wimey... stuff."

Just like a process. A good process, from a non-linear viewpoint is not a strict progression of cause-and-effect. If it's going to work, it's more like a big ball of...well, wibbly wobbly process-y wocess-y stuff. Tools are not—you need a disciplined process that incorporates the use of your tools, and also modifies itself as needed to stay a useful process.

That's about the highest praise you can pay a process—it works under different situations, slightly modifying itself as needed. A process is a set of tools (or, actually, a meta-tool—it tells you how to use other tools). Need a screwdriver? Bet you have more than one! You have Philips, slotted, small, large, and that really old one at the back of your toolbox you use when you really should have a chisel. My Dad, who was a lifelong user of Sears Craftsman tools (which used to have a lifetime warranty, and for all I know, still do) used to say, "When you need a hammer, nothing beats a good Craftsman wrench!"

How do you know you have a "tailorable" process—one that is good enough to handle variations in the work process and use your tools effectively? It all about the maturity of the process—a reference to the Capability Maturity Model (CMM). Good processes produce better results—more reliable results. I was trying to come up with a good way to simply explain a good process, then it hit me.

See, I decided not to teach any classes this summer, and take the summer off. I spent a good deal of the time traveling (business related). I had a conference overseas, and then drove back-and-forth from Texas to DC twice. I drove to a family reunion near Atlanta, and took one final trip (driving) from Texas to Boston for my mother-in-law's birthday party. And,

given all the driving, I spent a lot of time using my GPS. Wouldn't it be nice to have a process for directions? So, without further ado, I present Cook's Guide to GPS Process Levels.

**Level 0** —You start out driving, having awoken in a strange car. You really don't know where you are, nor do you have a destination in mind. The GPS is broken, so you drive around a while, hoping that something will appeal to you. Every time you find something you think you like, you change your mind, return to your starting location (if you can find it) and start aimlessly looking again.

**Level 1** —You and several of your co-workers need to find a drugstore, so you each take separate cars, and each drive in a different direction looking for one. Nobody has a working GPS. You find a drugstore by trial and error; and when you find one, you stand on top of the car, and yell, "I found one!" Few hear you, and nobody believes you.

**Level 2** —You and several of your friends are still looking a drugstore. You all get in one car, and follow poorly written directions taped to the front of the GPS, directions that say things such as "Turn left where Sally's Bicycle Repair used to be" and "Take a slight left when passing where the big oak tree burned down." You forget to write down better directions as you drive, so you have to re-discover the route each time.

**Level 3** —The GPS is pre-programmed with a single route to the drugstore. You have one route to get from your house to the drugstore. As long as nothing strange happens, you can always find the drugstore. If there is a detour—the GPS spends hours "searching for satellites."

**Level 4** —You have a GPS that tells you how far to the drugstore and how long until you get there, based on your speed. It will always pick the closest drugstore. It reroutes if you detour.

**Level 5** —Your GPS receives traffic updates, reroutes as necessary, and takes you the whatever drugstore makes sense based upon traffic and construction.

Is your process like a wandering driver? Do you find yourself driving around, hoping to find your destination? Does it fail to tell you when or how to incorporate your latest tools? Or do you have a highly optimized and managed process, that updates itself as needed, and optimizes based on current events and needs.

Maybe it's time to update or replace your current GPS.

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