

## BPM on the Freudian Couch

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Once upon a time there was a process called Underwriting Audit. He was a sad process, because all his so-called friends nicknamed him “Undie.” That was not the worst of it, though. He got a reputation for being a mean, ornery process who found fault with everyone. They even made up a little ditty about him, singing at him as he passed by in a huff:

*The process called Undie  
Is as messed up as Ted Bundy.  
He hacks and he sacks  
And calls the rest of us lax.  
To him, no process is tidy.*

He did have a few supporters – “friends” would be a bit of a stretch – who knew that he kept the rest of the processes in line. His supporters, mostly senior managers, called him “Rite,” because they said he knew right from wrong.

No, he was not wholly sad because of the silly nickname or the ridiculous limerick. He was depressed because he was all confused inside his head. He had no sense of identity, no clear understanding of who he was or what his role in life was. He was frequently asked all kinds of questions by senior managers, but he had no ready answers. The junior employees asked him why he did what he did, or why he behaved in a certain way, and he had no clue. He usually retorted, “That’s policy! That’s how I have to do my job. It’s nothing personal, see?”

But they didn’t see, of course. They wanted logical explanations – as if logic mattered in business! He wanted to have friends, to build some meaningful relationships, but he found that impossible. Other processes were unapproachable. He seemed to be an island unto himself. He suspected that the other processes were also islands, and he wished he could somehow help them. But policy dictated that he constantly criticize them, hover over them, waiting for them to make a mistake and slip up.

No sir, he was not a happy process at all. He couldn’t go on like this. Why, just the other day, while waiting to get on the subway train, he caught himself wondering how it would feel like to throw himself onto the tracks in front of an oncoming locomotive.

He knew the time had come to go and consult a shrink. A hollow laugh of bitter irony escaped his lips. He, the product of a LEAN workout, was going to the shrink!

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Dr. Jeffrey Sterllings leaned back in his chair, his fingers forming a steeple in front of his nose, a slight frown furrowed on his smooth forehead, and he looked at his patient over the top of his glasses. He was a tall man in his mid-forties, with a good head of unkempt hair. His face was all angles except for his cheeks, which drooped just a tad. If he let himself go, he might closely resemble Rev. Jim, the eccentric, befuddled character from the old TV sitcom, “Taxi.” Dr. Sterllings was, however, far from addled. His major clients were companies of all sizes who sent him confused and muddled-up processes. He helped these unfortunate processes get untangled, simplifying their lives enormously, improving their relationships with other processes, and helping them lead long, productive, and happy lives.

Mr. Audit lay on the couch on his back, one hand thrown across his eyes, sobbing softly. He held soggy tissues in the other hand, and dabbed his eyes ineffectually from time to time.

“Mr. Audit,” said Dr. Sterllings, softly, “would you like to tell me how you are feeling?”

“I feel like terminating!” sobbed poor Mr. Audit. “You don’t know the pressure! The nature of my job makes me unpopular. The others hate me. But if it were not for me, their unruly behavior could cause our company enormous losses. Why don’t they understand that?”

“What makes you think they don’t understand the importance of what you do?”

“For starters, they call me names,” said Mr. Audit. He told Dr. Sterllings the nickname they gave him, and with burning cheeks recited the disgraceful ditty.

“It gets especially terrible at fiscal close! Everyone, including senior management, who normally support me, want to shove me aside. They don’t let me do my job. They say I hold up the transactions, when, in reality, they are the ones making all the mistakes.”

“I think I can help you resolve these issues. Let’s start with a psychological test, ok? I’m going to show you some pictures. You tell me what you see in them, all right?”

Dr. Sterllings pulled out a plaque on which was pasted a Rorschach ink-blot. It looked like an abstract, pointillist painting (if pointillism could be called painting). Subjects were supposed to name the object or objects that the Rorschach blot evoked in their minds.

“Wipe your eyes and tell me what you see here, Mr. Audit,” said Dr. Sterllings.

Mr. Audit squinted at the plaque.

“That looks like an ink blot,” he ventured tentatively.

Dr. Sterllings’ jaw tightened. This was going to be difficult.

“Yes,” he said, managing a gentle tone. “I know that. What does it remind you of? What everyday object comes to your mind when you look at it?”

“Decision boxes,” said Mr. Audit, this time more confidently.

Aha! thought Dr. Sterllings, now we are getting somewhere.

“How about this one?” he asked, producing another ink-blot.

“Branchings.”

“This one?”

“Multiple paths.”

“Now we’ll go on to a different exercise. I’ll mention a word. Say the first word that comes to your mind when you hear it. Don’t think about it. Let’s start. Ok?”

“End.”

“No, no,” said Dr. Sterllings. “I did not start yet. *Now* we start. Rectangle.”

“Failure,” said Mr. Audit promptly.

“Path.”

“Split.”

Dr. Sterllings scratched his chin. “Start,” he barked.

“Stop.”

“Begin.”

“End.”

“Diamond.”

“Problem.”

Dr. Sterllings was silent. He was mulling over Mr. Audit’s responses.

“I see,” he began, having formulated his diagnosis.

“Darkness,” cried out Mr. Audit.

“No, no,” said Dr. Sterllings, more sharply than he intended. “We are done with the word association exercise. I can now tell you what your problem is. I see that you suffer from a narcissistic, neurotic, manic-depressive self-absorption leading to diadikasiophobic multiple-schizophrenia.”

“Huh?” Mr. Audit was pleasantly surprised. This seemed important and impressive. And all the time he was thinking he suffered from a run-of-the-mill depression.

“Let me put it more simply. You suffer from overly complex, self-referential, multiple, bi-directional graphs leading to frequent and abnormal terminations.”

“Huh?” Mr. Audit was even more impressed. Even the simple explanation sounded suitably intimidating.

“Let me put it even more simply,” said Dr. Sterllings. “Too much thinkum makes you crackum.”

“Oh! What’s the cure-um?”

Dr. Sterllings ran a hand through his hair.

“Let’s analyze this first before breaking out the medicine bottle.”

He led Mr. Audit away from the couch and seated him informally in the corner sofa. He poured them both cups of steaming coffee.

“Now, do you know how many steps there are in what you do?”

“Let’s see,” said Mr. Audit, holding up the fingers of one hand. He began counting, and promptly ran out of fingers. “Of course,” he said, reflectively, “I have a few subprocesses. Three? No, I think five. But the fourth one is not really my subprocess. It is a D&B check.” He was referring to the Dun & Bradstreet company information service. “Maybe it really *is* my subprocess. So perhaps I really do have five subprocesses. No, wait, what about the ‘pricing table check’ subprocess? That would be the sixth, though I think the ‘pricing table check’ subprocess is

actually a child of the 'check economics' subprocess. Do you really want me to count *all* the process steps that I have? Do you want me to include the process steps in all my subprocesses, and *their* subprocesses?"

"Do you think that would be helpful?" asked Dr. Sterllings. "Do you think if you had an inventory of your process steps you would start getting a handle on who you are?"

"Yes, I think so. Unfortunately, I don't really know all the steps I perform. I don't even know with certainty who my children are, not to speak of who *their* children are. I am really confused," said Mr. Audit, unhappily.

"I think we should take that as an action item for your therapy. I know it will be difficult, but trust me, you'll feel a whole lot better when you know."

"But how can I take an inventory of all my processes?" asked Mr. Audit, desperately. "I tried that last year when I felt really blue. I documented as many steps as I could discover. I used A4 size papers and taped them all up on a wall to show how my process flows looked."

"So where is that map now? Why aren't you referring to it whenever you feel confused and depressed?"

"Oh, it got unwieldy. I got my process steps changed so often that I couldn't keep up with the changes anymore, so I gave up."

"Did you find out that someone else influenced your children to change their behavior without your knowledge?"

"How did you guess?"

Dr. Sterllings sighed. "I've seen too many cases like yours. I know all the problem spots."

"So how do we fix that, doc?"

"I'll give you a prescription at the end of our session. Now, let's continue our investigation. Do you know how many decision points you have?"

Mr. Audit closed his eyes and tried to count. His face contorted furiously as he tried to keep pace with the branches and loops that ran through his head like a clutch of hyperactive snakes. After five minutes of making horrible grimaces and twisting himself into shapes that dedicated yogis would have found challenging, he gave up on his mental – and physical – gymnastics.

Changing strategy, he spent another five minutes scribbling furiously on a number of pages, drawing complicated diagrams full of branches and probabilities. He gave that up as well when he found he had about a dozen messy pages strewn about, with no hope of assembling them into any semblance of order. He sat there, amid the chaos of crumpled papers, a dazed and distant look on his face.

"Well? Did you figure out how many decision points you have?" asked Dr. Sterllings, gently.

"Eh?" said Mr. Audit, slowing pulling himself together. "Not really," he declared, sniffing sadly.

“Don’t worry, we know how to fix it. But before we apply the poultice, do you really believe deep down that a knowledge of your decision points will make you a happier person?”

“I think it would help, but I have a feeling I should know a lot more than that. Is it really possible to get to know all my decision points and the resulting branches?”

“Absolutely! It takes the right medicine and the right discipline. You also need patience. But it can be done. But before I prescribe the medicine, I need to know some more about how self-aware you are. Do you know how many end-to-end paths are possible within your entire process?”

Mr. Audit closed his eyes, and started tracing in the air with his hands. After a couple of minutes, Dr. Sterllings interrupted him.

“Would it be safe to say,” he asked, “that you really have no clue?”

Mr. Audit looked deflated. “Yes,” he admitted. “You would be quite safe in saying that.”

“Just as I thought. How’s your knowledge of all the roles employed in all the tasks that you do?”

“Again, I know a few, but I can’t give you a definitive answer.”

“Just as I suspected. Do you know how many process steps on average any of your roles perform?”

“I don’t even know what you are talking about.”

“Just as I surmised. Do you know how many IT systems and applications you use to perform your job?”

“If you tell me we’ll both know.”

“Just as I hypothesized. If I asked you how many steps each of your applications performs on average, what would you say?”

“I would request that you please speak English.”

“Just as I conjectured. Then I won’t pose that question to you. How’s your governance?”

“He’s doing fine. He recently got re-elected.”

“Not your governor, your *governance*. If any of your children misbehave, do you know about it? What do you do about it?”

“I wouldn’t be able to recognize some of my children if I passed them on the street. I don’t even know how many I have at any given moment. How can I know what they are doing? My risk-exposure subprocess – assuming she is my child - could be doing a strip-tease for all I know.”

“Just as I assumed. You lack the capability to do a simple, single dimensional analysis of the contents of your consciousness.”

“That bad, eh, doc? How long have I got?”

“I don’t think you are a terminal case. You could survive for years without a total breakdown.”

“That’s supposed to console me? I think that’s a worse fate. I’d rather end it all now.”

“Take heart! I have successfully helped many processes like you. I am very confident I have a cure for you. My formula will improve your mind, smoothen your relationships with the other processes, and make you the envy of all processkind.”

“Ok, doc. Where’s the magic elixir?”

“The most important ingredient of the ambrosia is your ambition to improve yourself. Are you truly motivated to uncomplicate your life? Are you serious about finding lasting happiness? Do you really want to slim down and be able to turn on a dime? Think before you answer, because the cure will not be easy. It will require vision, commitment, and patience. The problems are deep-rooted, so the cure is by necessity also deep. It *can* be done, but you *must* truly want it.”

“Yes, yes, and a thousand times, yes! Let’s do it doc!”

“Excellent! That’s the spirit. I’ve mapped out a regimen for you. Let’s meet regularly every week and review our progress.”

Dr. Sterllings wrote on his prescription pad, tore out the sheet, and gave it to Mr. Audit with a flourish.

Mr. Underwriting Audit looked at the paper with burning curiosity. Dr. Sterllings had scrawled on it, in his sprawling hand, the following prescription:

*Bepium, qty365, tid.  
Unlimited refills*

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