Flowcharts

A flowchart is a visual representation of a process. Flowcharts employ a variety of symbols and geometric representations to depict the interrelationships among the various activities within a process, including important precedence relationships. By decomposing the process into its elemental steps or activities, flowcharts can be useful in identifying system flaws, errors, and non value-added activities. Since one of the principal purposes of the flowchart is to communicate information, it is desirable to use only a few basic symbols that are easily understandable to construct a flowchart. Figure 6.16 shows a simple flowchart example.

Figure 6.16 Structure of a Simple Process Flowchart

A flowchart can be a very useful diagnostic and interpretive tool; it reflects the collective wisdom of the quality improvement team. A flowchart should be constructed to illustrate the manner in which the process is actually performed, as opposed to describing the way it is supposed to be executed. The steps within an accounts payable process are shown in the flowchart of Figure 6.17. This process will be examined in more detail in Chapter 14.

Figure 6.17 Flowchart for an Accounts Payable Process