WORKFLOW –
A blueprint for improvement

PART #2 PROCESS

Process workflow – Is this your typical day?

You've loaded the wagon, hitched up the horses and then realised, you've forgotten to build wagon wheels! That trip is indefinitely 'on hold'. Like all workflow processes "All the items to complete the task need to come together".

If this type of event occurs regularly in your workday, the probability of losing clients will sky-rocket and recall of products and service will become the norm.

"There is no simple answer to a complex question?"
For example, "could you briefly explain how nuclear fission works in a few minutes?"
OR
"I'm having a few issues producing sign and print products, can you suggest how to sort it?"

Workflow is a complex and ever-changing dynamic. I agree not all components and steps are needed in a very small print and sign shop. However, smaller businesses do have the opportunity to be more agile and they can scale ideas and processes down more easily.
For the larger, 7-10+ people, the dynamics are completely different and different again for those with 20-30 people.

Steps to improve the process

Consider the whole process. This is part 2 of Workflow – have you read part 1 –"People" in the last issue? Email me if you need a copy.

1. Learning to trust each other. Values of trust, respect, honesty and integrity are just a few elements that people need a double dose of before taking on the bumpy road of refining processes and working towards the self-sufficiency of an independent and inspiring workplace, where people come first! Not just a 'fluffy' statement in the foyer. True results for the people who dare to dream! Knowing the journey ahead isn't going to be simple, quick and easy. It needs a leap of faith, a swig of courage and truck loads of patience. All we can ask is, with your help, TOGETHER WE CAN BUILD A GREAT COMPANY. No looking back, we are aiming for tomorrow.

2. Is your company CLEVER? To keep pace, you need to observe and develop your own in-house strategies to match or better your clients' demands. If you plan to be their logistics partner, "Reflect on your capital investment over recent years, have you matched the same rate of investment in your business, in your administration, education or people or your processes and systems?" My findings reveal that an overwhelming number of sign and print operators know they need to invest in their knowledge base, unfortunately in many cases they don't even know how or where to start. The concept of CLEVER basically puts forward the routine rethinking of traditional methods of making signs and print, in fact anything. For example – put the end of the project first – when it comes to installing a sign consider a comprehensive site survey before you start the design, to ensure a fit for purpose match.

3. Capture the data accurately and comprehensively. Phone rings, you answer, then what? The aim of the game is specification, specification, specification. Should you leave out a single piece of the puzzle you will pay the price! Accuracy, a comprehensive understanding of the work and end product requirements, fine detail skills and an uncompromising need to 'get it right'. Easy said, as the gathering of design concepts, ideas and bespoke marketing material and media is troublesome at least. Potentially the client may not have an idea of the manufacturing process/s, time frames, materials and/or products. They just hand over their problem. Best practice is to follow the existing process piece by piece while looking for the low hanging gains. Review the results of the people who work in the areas and build on capturing people skills and process via an agile development plan. Develop a little, review, implement – repeat.

4. Develop precise quoting systems. The key to profit is selling the product for more than it costs to make it. Unless you constantly refine and develop your processes you are potentially risking doing the opposite. The fast-paced world pushes even recently developed systems to their limits. Why? The new paradigm is 'instant' – I want the quote NOW! The correct review process, for accurate results, is time-consuming but a must. A short term solution

may be creation of price lists linked to an on-going validation of estimated versus actual costs. When the pressure and stress decrease, then it's practical to introduce a quoting and estimating process.

5. Ordering and purchasing. In an artificially intelligent world, the process of ordering could be achieved by the estimator using a software program, adding products and materials from the resource and materials section of the software. The purchase orders are automatically created! In 2004, KIM Software developed such a system but like many smart and clever innovations, it relies on people adding correctly priced products into the software. Even more important is the training of Estimators and the accuracy of data entry. That acknowledged, once the company grows to 7-10+ people, ordering the raw materials becomes time consuming. The Estimators and Account Managers typically "creatively" submit the quotation, not necessarily based on a traditional component constructed from bill of materials and generally lacking full details. Rather the quote is a few numbers assumed and allowances for gross products, not itemised – therefore rendering the purchasing procedure more of a witch hunt for the purchasing people to guess or chase down that elusive "someone" who knows? Solutions that work for one, don't necessarily work for all. A review of key stakeholders will result in a bipartisan approach to ordering and assuming everyone is on board – it will work!

6. Building a flow. A "CLEVER" process or even a quality assured process as per Australian and International Standard ISO 9002 very clearly define, and the 22 systems requirement or rules, must be followed to be compliant. This process takes years to develop and is bullet proof IF the users are totally committed. However, for 90% of print and signage businesses I wouldn't recommend it, as it is rigid, unforgiving and requires total discipline. My recommendation is review the process, measure the problem areas and then we must develop and build your own software driven or manual process. This can be as simple as a few sorting trays to a sophisticated LED flat screen when each process flow is completed the person responsible 'clicks' and the whole system updates.

7. Scheduling or priority based systems. The debate rages on with staunch advocates for both. Schedule, typically assumes a workflow is intelligent and passive with lead times offering a certain old world charm and calmness. The format is usually displayed as a week, fortnight or monthly calendar. This workflow offers balance where the output is planned, routine and of a non-urgent nature. E.g. Institutional signage, non-retail corporates

or to some degree tourism. Priority based planning is driven by chaos, tight deadlines and literally a never-ending rash of changes without delaying timeframes. The visual interface generally is LED interactive and automated and is driven by a knowledgeable and highly experienced expert with a strong controller skillsets. The other click through are people in process with position based PCs. Then a moderate crossover of both persuader and analyser. Business areas are fashion, most retail, travel, alcohol, sports and high demand food franchises.

8. Celebrating mistakes. Understanding how mistakes occur and manifesting this in your business is an amazing journey for those who are serious about increasing profits. "In a typical month, on how many jobs do we make a mistake, no matter how large or small? what percentage?" Commonly, I hear 25% to a record breaking 70% from my clients. To fix this – non-conformance is the failure to comply with the job requirement. The NCR is a who, what, where and when, with the aim and purpose to ensure the fundamental causes of NCRs are identified, corrected and prevented in future. An NCR can be driven by any deviation of work standards, practices, procedures, regulations, management systems, failing to follow procedures, etc. Detail and identify NCRs in a clear, concise and accurate definition of the problem so that the corrective action can be initiated. The outcome is constantly measuring the effectiveness of your processes and striving to meet all objectives. It becomes a routine responsibility of all employees to bring suspected non-conformances to the nominated NCR person. Once the NCR has been identified and documented, reference needs to be done to prevent the fault from happening again by stating corrective and preventative actions

9. Systems and Procedures. Single outlay – Single return, is where you create a process method then every time you perform that same process over again you reinvent it, over and over again never harnessing the process. Single Outlay – Multiple Return varies, as once you witness the original process and investment you tweak and improve, and then next return is using the same process again and again – building the perfect model to maximise the process and effectively increase profit by speed and efficiencies. On-going returns continue via faster training, documented procedure, scalable growth and more confident and content people. Remember, "Train your people so they can work anywhere, but reward them so they never leave."

10. Planned or Organic Growth. With company growth, staffing levels increase, management of complexity, production processes exponentially multiply. Many lose

sight of simple yet highly critical changes while struggling to comprehend why the frustration of additional mistakes, production delays and lost customers and/or profits causes such pain! If you are a sole trader and add one staff member that is a 100% change! You invest in a new printer, your old printer output was 20sqm per hour, the new one produces 60sqm per hour – that is a 200% capacity increase. So "Where are you going to sell it? And, how is the output going to be designed, prepared for print, printed, laminated, packed and installed?" PLAN your business for growth and importantly talk to your people about the journey.

11. Innovation. A Manager wants to control innovation and that's where it ends. A leader leads innovation and that's where it starts. Managing innovation in a controlling methodology will never work, as by definition real innovation is a high-risk venture with many uncertainties. Innovation does carry risk. If you manage real innovations like 'a normal project', it will never work. Getting an idea to market takes a long time and is full of iterations. Trying to control it, in a conventional structure will kill it for sure. Understand that small business are much more agile and interdependent in relationship to risk. In implementing risk, the nimble SME moves quickly and sees innovation as 'just' problem solving. Larger companies can carry the risk in the financial sense however the management layers and structure create restrictions which makes innovation unlikely. Best course of action – Think big, act agile and cherish innovation for process improvement, however, be fiscally responsible.

How do you summarise such a complex and potentially overwhelming concept?

Well, you don't. The article is aimed to provoke on-going change. The steps are dynamic, flexible and should focus on re-invention. Not just because you must, but because you enjoy your work and every day you're ready to plan your future.

Tools you need at this point:

You need to consider the development and introduction of documentation and tools for each of the steps in the article, if you need assistance send us an email or take our survey http://www.controlzone.com.au/blueprint_for_workflow_survey