



High-Yield Methods

A world leader in Outside-In planning & process.

ESSENTIAL VISUAL WORKFLOW

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What is Visual Workflow?

“VW,” as commonly referred to, is a customer-centric business process methodology. Unlike traditional process, where 90° of focus is on *how* existing work is done, VW addresses: what *work* people should do; *who* (functionally) should do it; *how* work should be done; *enabling data and communication technologies*; and *organizational implications* of change.

VW is the first approach designed for use in highly variable work environments, where decision-making knowledge workers frequently determine process flow on a case-by-case basis. These environments include the front and back offices, service companies and highly variable production settings. VW also owns the distinction of being *the first* “outside-in” (customer-centric) process approach – and it’s by far the most comprehensive O-I approach in use today.

Who developed VW, when & why?

Dick Lee, Principal of High-Yield Methods (HYM) designed VW and launched it in 1996. Dick had become frustrated trying to adapt traditional process approaches to find root causes of issues preventing clients from achieving customer-centricity. He was also keenly aware of the very high failure rate of traditional approaches in office/service (O/S) settings, caused in large part by consultants and internal process professionals not fully engaging “the business-side”¹ while redesigning their work.

What’s so different about O/S service settings?

The following chart illustrates why, as an HYM client (a Six Sigma Master Black Belt, BTW) is fond of saying, “All process is context-sensitive.” This gentleman was hired by a global company to improve the quality of customer experience. As he described to Dick Lee, his first day in his new position he said to himself, “No Six Sigma here.” No Lean Sigma either. He opted for VW instead.

As you peruse the chart, ask yourself, “How well would a process approach fully adapted to one environment work in the other?” This is why HYM won’t take VW into repetitive work, production settings, despite requests from clients.

¹ Front/back office and service people as opposed to IT and other technically trained workers and consultants.

Office/Service Process	Manufacturing Process
80 - 90% of defects up at workflow level	Majority of defects down at individual work process level
Low repetition	High repetition
Decision-based business process	Fixed business process
Adaptability critical	Consistency critical
Hundreds of key workflows	Dozens of key workflows
Majority of work activities interdependent	Most work activities independent
Cross-functional process ownership	Function owns process
Invisible defects	Visible defects
Knowledge workers	Rote workers
Empowered staff	Compliant staff
Resist "external" input	Accept "external" input
Business process is the work	Business process guides the work
Fully joined workflow & information flow	Largely detached workflow & information flow
High-dependence on application software	Limited use of application software

How is Visual Workflow specially adapted for O/S process?

Adoptive Element	Rationale
Uncouple flow level from individual process	The majority of O/S process issues occur in work, communication and data flow, not at individual work stations. Assessing individual process simultaneously with flows makes seeing the forest (flows) through the trees (individual process) virtually impossible.
Design flows cross-functionally	Most production flows run independently within functional boundaries. Virtually all O/S flows cross functional lines. Plus, designing good hand-offs among functions is critical
"Speed-scan" the flow level	Designing interdependent flows requires an "MRI" approach for quickly scanning a wide swath of cross-functional flows. Traditional process starts off with surgery at the individual process, which takes too long and costs too much.
Work in cross-functional teams	VW puts customer interests above silo interests, a necessity for working in sync to add customer value.
Use no process-speak or symbology	Knowledge workers must help design their own work. Verbal and visual communication must be understandable by all involved.
Identify technology enablement requirements	In addition to adding automation software, effective O/S process requires changing data and communication flow and devices.
Identify organizational change implications	Changing what work people do and which function does with what technology has organizational consequences.

What are typical outcomes?

From inception, VW has produced seemingly counter-intuitive outcomes. On one hand, designing process from the customer in dramatically improves customer experience, which in turn generates significant new revenue. But on the other hand, VW more effectively reduces operating costs than process initiatives specifically focused on cost containment. In fact, typical HYM VW engagements typically reduce FTE requirements in affected areas by 20% to 25%.

Who Uses VW?

Large companies including American Express, eBay, HB Fuller & Honeywell have utilized VW, So have small-to-medium enterprise organizations ranging all the way down to less than \$5M in annual sales. VW has been successfully applied in automotive sales and service, capital goods selling, financial services, government, higher education, industrial distribution, oil and gas, retail distribution and multiple service sectors – both in the U.S. and abroad. Anyplace you find knowledge workers and decision-based work, there's a place for Visual Workflow.

Should you be considering Visual Workflow?

Regardless of the type company you're in, take out your calculator, add up all your office and service payroll costs. Next take 20% of the sum. Is that enough savings for you?

Projecting new revenue is much more subjective, but most VW users are focused on customers and revenue, with cost-cutting a side benefit. That says a lot.

If you're in a knowledge worker environment and want to increase the productivity of your customer relationships while improving internal productivity – and cutting costs – please contact Dick Lee at dlee@h-ym.com or 651-483-2067.