

Visualizing process - worth 1000 words



Business is a complex mechanism

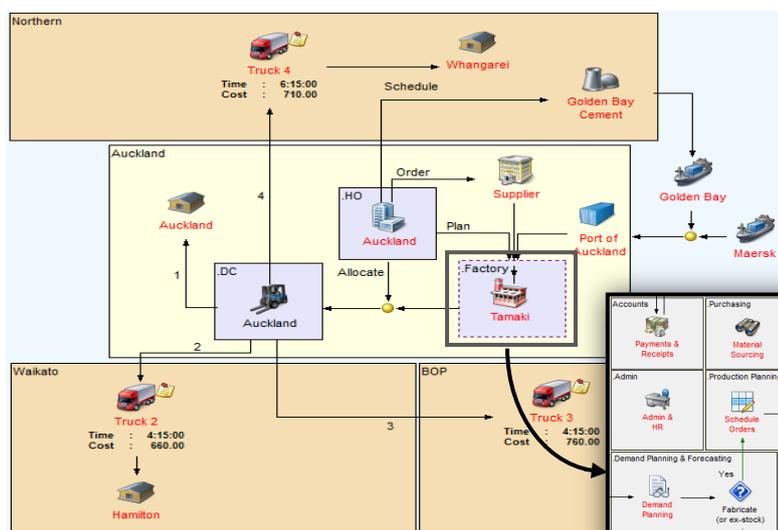
Complex structures have graphic plans that let people share their understanding of how they work. From construction to electronics, graphics are basic to a successful outcome.

Business has complex workings but to-date it has relied largely on written words, not visual images, to convey what it looks like and how it fits together to those who need to understand.

This approach is like an architect designing a house, then showing the builder and subcontractors pages and pages of words rather than elevations, floor plan, plumbing or electrical diagrams.

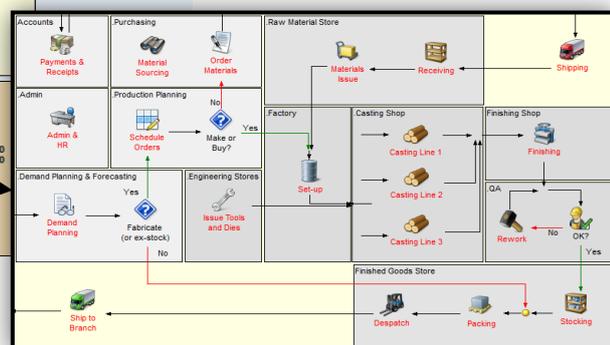
Understanding is critical to quality

The more complex the subject the more important it is to use the brevity of visualization which is unambiguous, not lengthy text that is open to interpretation. Graphics convey understanding that words cannot achieve. *“Unless I can picture it, I can’t understand it”, Albert Einstein.*



“Seeing this big picture allows us to be focusing on what we should be doing, and ask the questions is it sensible, is it aligned with strategy, does it meet the customer need?”

...University of Auckland.



Visualization lets you see how different bits of information can be understood at a glance that would otherwise take up a paragraph of text and may still not be clearly understood.

As Spire Consulting put it, *“We use XSOL because it gets us to the ‘aha’ moment better than any other method”*. In other words, engaging people in a process discussion can lead to blank looks as they come to grips with the concepts of process. Using XSOL gets them to a point of understanding quicker because it’s visualized.

Using process visualization lets staff see themselves in the process. This means they can understand what happens upstream and downstream of them, so when something is not what they expect they can immediately take informed corrective action.

Accuracy is critical to quality

If staff don’t think instructions are accurate they don’t use them. This is why out-of-date procedure manuals gather dust. Most software tools that have tried to fix this issue failed, because they still used written descriptions to capture the nuances of process, not visualization. Faced with reading pages of text, it’s only a matter of time before something critical to a process gets overlooked.

Seeing exceptions is critical

In a visual process you can see at a glance how to handle variations and exceptions that are difficult to convey in words. Software that is not visualization-enabled glosses over this critical factor, saying that this level of detail confuses the process and that 80% accuracy is good enough. But who knows the consequences of the missing 20%.

While an approximation of process is OK for management presentations, for those subject to third-party compliance, accuracy is vital. Who wants airline flight processes to be 80% good enough?

Skill is critical to quality

Defining process is a skill in the same way specialists such as architects define other complex systems. It takes skill to uncover tribal knowledge, exceptions and locally created solutions. Even when staff fill in predefined forms the quality and consistency of information varies from person to person. It is easy to omit key information unless prompted by a skilled process analyst

Deciphering the way people describe their processes and what they do is a necessary skill in order to define processes accurately. Like an architect, it isn't just a matter of drawing lines, it is a matter of understanding the nature of a problem, of knowing how to frame a question to ensure an accurate response, of knowing when something is missing and something doesn't *look right*.

Basic Workflow is not enough

Critical to *looking right* is ensuring that the visualization reflects real-life images that working staffs recognize from their workplace rather than artifacts created for the benefit of IT specialists.

The flow of work passing from desk to desk (or machine) has different controls to the sequencing of tasks undertaken at each desk. It requires a 2-tier approach, not a simple single level flow diagram.

The flow of work through a process can be easily elicited from the staff involved, at their workplace. With the flow agreed, getting details of tasks performed at each desk (or machine) is best achieved by an analyst to ensure consistency of detail company-wide. And with the 2-tier approach analysts only have to focus on capturing details of tasks that are critical to the outcome of the project.

Process Modeling vs Process Mapping

Process Mapping software uses words and flow diagrams to describe business process. Microsoft Word and Visio tools are the best known example. While this software is flexible, its lack of built-in integrity makes it difficult for even advanced users to change the content with any consistency.

Process Modeling, on the other hand, is centered on a preconfigured model of business activity and organizational structure. Process model visualization is powerful because the images that an analyst uses to define a process are in fact business model components whose predefined rules mean that if they are moved, the model's integrity is maintained. In Process Mapping the images are drawings, *boxes* with no relationship to other process elements. A common task can be defined multiple times with different descriptions, leading to different results from ostensibly the same activity.

Where accuracy and cost-effective process definition is required nothing beats Process Modelling, and XSOL InOrder is the leading Process Modelling software. But while XSOL promotes visualization it also allows for the capture of text, forms, images and analytics, and it integrates with other data sources such as SharePoint and specialist documentation systems such as quality control.

For more information visit www.xsol.com or contact enquiry@xsol.com

