



The Role of Workflow Management and Change Control Systems in the Evolving Business Environment

Executive Summary

Business is by nature a dynamic process. It's a rare organization that can succeed without a great deal of human interaction and some method of tracking action items, communications, and outcomes. This is all the more challenging within today's fluid and rapidly-evolving business cycles. If there's one constant in business, it is that everything changes constantly.

This is confirmed by a 2014 report by consulting firm KPMG indicating that 93% of U.S. based companies are in some state of change regarding their business model.¹ Yet recent research records high failure rates for change implementation, ranging between 28% to as high as 93%.

While there are many factors that impact success or otherwise in managing change, there is an acknowledged need for greater control and knowledge in any change program. Effective workflow processes, applied to change management, will contribute substantially to delivering the degree of control and shared knowledge required to transform a potentially disruptive process into an opportunity for success.

Many companies still manage workflows manually and handle change requests on an ad hoc basis. In many organizations, email programs or spreadsheets are commonly used to manage such activities, but these do a poor job of supporting team or interdepartmental communication, relying heavily on individuals to perform the correct steps to move the task to the next stage and opening the door to human error and failures.

While talented individuals make substantial contributions to the performance of an organization, behavioral research shows that good teams consistently outperform even great individuals when it comes to delivering successful business outcomes over time. Workflow and change management software helps people come together as great teams.

In this paper, we 1) outline some of the characteristics and benefits of workflow and change management applications, 2) provide considerations for selecting the right software package, 3) offer guidelines on how to draw the line between essential and non-essential features, and 4) illustrate how to calculate the ROI from workflow and change management software. We also draw on real case examples to illustrate the value of lean, automated systems that have solved problems, reduced costs, and greatly improved organizational outcomes.

¹ [Forbes Insights](#), November, 2014

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1 – Workflow Management and Change Control Software as Organizational Enablers

The goal of workflow management and change control software is to make our lives easier. It can be effectively applied in any organization of any size to automate and track workflows as well as manage and control change across all functions.

The right software package will increase efficiency, decrease costs, reduce redundancy, avoid human error, and ensure that best practices are used throughout the organizations. It will automate and streamline the way documents, information or tasks are passed from participants or groups to others. It will point team members to next steps in an orderly and regulated manner according to a pre-defined set of rules and procedures.

Automation is a key benefit of workflow management and change management software. It helps shorten time frames by eliminating the need for employees to perform tedious, mundane, or time-sensitive tasks that interrupt other activities, as well as delivering better throughput and accuracy. It improves the control of a process with less manual intervention, eliminating misplaced work, reducing delays, and ensuring tasks are performed according to your company's policies and procedures.

This is particularly important in controlling and managing change requests. Instead of manually assessing and approving/rejecting change requests, templates within the software allow project managers to store levels of control for specific attributes that need to be monitored, such as impact on project dates, resources, budgets, or even cross-project dependencies. When a change request ticket is entered, the template automatically populates.

But for automation to deliver on its promise, it must be designed for ordinary individuals, not technical experts. It must also recognize that all businesses are not the same. The wrong choice of software can deliver deadlock and delay instead of speed and efficiency.

Many systems are too cumbersome, costly and inflexible. Some are simple and effective at entry level but don't scale or lack features. Others can't easily be customized. Organizations expect that higher-priced products can be adapted to fit like a glove, but the reality is that a big ticket, feature-loaded, all-embracing system might not be able to deliver on its promise. Many self-designated enterprise systems are difficult to use, bloated with unnecessary features, and don't give autonomy to anyone outside the data center. That's not going to fly in a distributed organization or a start-up running on minimal staffing and maximum speed.

Case Study: Applying Process to High Volume Issues

Silver Diner, with 17 locations across Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia, aims to track and follow up on every customer comment. Serving some four million guests a year, Silver Diner receives 20-30 comments every day across all its restaurants. The company searched for a technology solution to ensure that all comments received a response and to allow management to monitor customer feedback and implement changes – such as the introduction of gluten free and vegetarian options. Given the workflow nature of processing comments, the IT department realized they already had an appropriate system in house. A few years before, IT had implemented Issuetrak software to manage technology related problems and requests from the 1,500 Silver Diner associates and managers. In doing so, IT moved its help desk from mostly phone calls and paper notes to an electronic, workflow driven approach. “Issuetrak had everything we were looking for, looked pretty simple to use, and it fit our budget,” the Senior Network Administrator said. It also offered the opportunity for Silver Diner to host the solution in house, as well as much-needed reporting to help the team identify training and replacement needs.

Every day, people, processes and operations need to be managed. But no two organizations are alike, and this makes the search for the right solution even more confusing, since the odds are against any workflow management package looking like an exact fit. Organization size, purpose, budget and staff expertise all have a bearing on which offering is going to work for you. This is compounded by the fact that most software searches today begin online. The majority of prospective buyers will find it very difficult indeed to distinguish between the near-identical claims of software vendors.

2 – Barriers to Adoption: Risks, Misconception, and False Alternatives

With so much riding on the efficiency of workflow and management software, it’s surprising that many companies hesitate to deploy purpose-built applications.

Some familiar but ultimately unworkable alternatives to purpose-built systems include:

- Email: These systems are tied to individuals’ inboxes; options integrated in email packages require plugins; collaboration is limited by the highly personal nature of email systems.
- Spreadsheets: Spreadsheet systems are not scalable; they are subject to human error; updates are painstaking and time consuming.
- Subsets of sales enablement packages: Such systems can be complex; licenses are costly and it can be difficult to add users; they are not designed for purpose.

There are many reasons for staying with known workflow and change management methods, the chief of which is *perceived* convenience—there is no need to learn a new system or go through a software selection. Yet the stress of manual monitoring and management is considerable and consistently leads to mistakes, inefficiencies, and lack of clarity about departmental processes.

As organizations grow, micro-hiccups in workflow management become major organizational challenges. The disadvantage of email tracking, spreadsheets, or manual systems is that they don’t support growth, collaboration, or rapidly-evolving situations. Moreover, they introduce multiple opportunities for human failure. With manual processes, all that’s needed is the absence of a single key staff member for systems to grind to a halt. This is an everyday scenario in business.

Case Study: Accuracy, Automation and Easy Adaptation to Growth

Within North America, 5,000 Hudson Global employees rely on the payroll department for accurate, timely paychecks. Prior to Issuetrak, they used Excel spreadsheets to track adjustments, but they experienced problems making sure everything was recorded. “The manual processes were susceptible to data integrity issues,” said the Director of Payroll. “It’s easy in our fast-paced life to correct the problem, but then forget to log it. You want to move on to the next issue, but you still need to manually put this into the spreadsheet.” Payroll’s first Issuetrak system enables staff to request corrections, monitor the progress of their requests, and build a repository of changes to ensure proper controls are met and metrics captured. On payroll processing day, the team used to get hundreds of e-mails and phone calls. “Issuetrak has streamlined my process,” said the payroll director, “and lets us get to the crux of items that need to be addressed quickly.” A series of aggressive acquisitions further challenged Hudson’s payroll team including 60 acquisitions, 17 federal ID number consolidations, a spin off, and outsourcing of their payroll taxes. Rather than use a database, Issuetrak was deployed in four areas of payroll in order to manage communication flows, store details, report, and track items. The payroll director added, “I have taken Issuetrak and diversified it to achieve a wide variety of useful tools. Moreover, in each phase we literally went from design, to implementation, to launch within days.”

Best of breed, purpose-built workflow and change management software systems are easy and intuitive – and very affordable. Any organization can improve its bottom line, staff satisfaction, and customer retention using workflow management software. The question is, why don’t more people get off the spreadsheet/email merry-go-round and on to an easier and more effective system?

Time constraint is a huge factor. Today’s business environment fosters a get-it-done-now approach that leaves little space for buying, learning, and becoming familiar with a new system. Fear of costs, uncertainty about potential ROI, lack of budget, lack of knowledge of selection criteria and, above all, confusion—where all applications begin to look the same—are all barriers to adoption. In the following sections, we provide guidelines for considering, selecting, and benchmarking workflow management software.

3 – Key Signs That Software Will Improve Your Economics

A surprisingly large number of organizations and, within these, individual departments, continue to manage workflow and change requests manually *despite* complaints about time-consuming, non-collaborative methods; high error rates; or difficulties in sharing information.

The more consequences that are attached to business processes, the more critical it becomes to ensure that the processes don’t create occasions for human error, financial loss, or organizational breakdown.

During times of change, workflow management becomes an even larger challenge. For example, an organization undergoing expansion or downsizing will find itself in a more complex HR situation with people, compliance issues and departmental structures overturning the status quo. Manual processes that were once straightforward become fractured and inefficient. Even if the old processes somehow hang together, it is a mistake to become so bogged down in managing workflows that other important aspects of change – for example, employee morale – are overlooked.

Case Example: Managing Rapid Expansion Drives Strategic Software Decision

For a major global insurance brokerage and risk management firm—one of the largest of its kind in the world - a series of acquisitions and ongoing growth meant that the Human Resources (HR) department had to deal with more employee requests than the existing, manual system could handle. The company added over 7,000 employees to its workforce in recent years, both organically and through acquisitions, and now numbers over 20,000 employees worldwide. To streamline the process and ensure compliance with regulations across multiple countries, the company selected Issuetrak as the HR workflow and issue management tool. "It offered the best combination of ease of use, functionality and features to streamline the workflow without making life complicated for users," said the HR manager. In addition to monitoring issues and requests, Issuetrak is also used as a tool to ensure that compliance regulations are met in all the countries in which they operate.

Similarly, organizations may be able to handle IT help desk requests using a spreadsheet or email system if day-to-day business continues in a straight line. Since the nature of IT is to adapt and evolve, new systems are regularly introduced, **and this is where the spreadsheet begins to show the strain.**

All areas of every organization spend the majority of their effort on managing recurring tasks and processes, which frequently means that an entire business can be operating on the basis of duplicated effort and excessively time-consuming administration.

Case Example: Eliminate Duplicated Effort

A branch of the Air Force with some 2,300 workers on site was struggling to keep up with facilities management requests, often reaching 75 a day. The existing system, a subset of a larger software package, was strained beyond its capacity. The supervisor commented, "Unmanaged, this could quickly mount up to overwhelming proportions. It was essential to look at purpose-built systems." The acquisition project officer's criteria for the new software program were that it needed to 1) help reduce administration, 2) improve workflow, and 3) save time wasted on duplicated effort, repetitive status checking, and manual tracking. The application also needed to provide greater flexibility, customization, and reporting capabilities; calendaring and task allocation features; the ability to provide instruction within the system; integrated, shared work folders; a central database for capturing best practices and workarounds; and ease of use. After evaluating 25 potential software packages, the Air Force branch selected Issuetrak. **As a result, a team of five people successfully manages the increasing level of requests, with a high satisfaction rate and a 55% improvement in effectiveness of service.**

Here are some of the most common indications that current workflow management methods are failing:

- Escalation in error numbers
- Inaccurate reporting
- Project or delivery delays
- Inability to track or monitor status of key activities
- Growing requirement for overtime
- Increase in administrative support requests
- Rise in general and administrative costs
- Low morale
- Change management under strain

If an organization is to thrive, it is critically important to ensure there is a process for tracking and managing workflows. From academic applications, complaints, product development, delivery systems, or facilities management, streamlined workflow management allows organizations to adapt rapidly to change, track complex issues, and provide access or information to all relevant personnel. Workflow management software allows businesses to run in a lean and agile way. This type of solution connects people, processes, and content and streamlines business workflows that would otherwise be time-consuming, error-ridden, and non-compliant.

A number of vendors offer solutions that allow a company to create a workflow model and components such as online forms, and then use this as a way to manage and enforce the consistent handling of work. For example, an insurance company could use a workflow automation application to ensure that a claim was handled consistently from initial call to final settlement. The workflow application would ensure that each person handling the claim used the correct online form and successfully completed their step before marking the process as concluded.

4 – Selection Guide: Fitting Workflow Management Software to Your Business Needs

Look for software that offers:

- Creation of workflows in business steps rather than technical activities
- Intuitive interfaces and forms for non-technical users
- Both cloud and on-premises options
- Role-based access control
- Ease of integration with other systems and software
- Streamlined configuration and deployment
- Customization, scalability and flexibility
- Multiple licensing options

Case Example: Ease of Use and Flexibility

Cruise passengers expect high standards on board ship, and Housekeeping's role is crucial in delivering a great experience. Housekeeping is responsible for cleaning everything aboard the ships, with each member of their staff specifically assigned to certain parts of the ship, several times a day. Everything has to be organized and checked, from mopping the main pool deck to cleaning the cabins to polishing the guard rails. Seeking ease of use, flexibility and role-based access control, the cruise ship chose Issuetrak to manage Housekeeping's daily workflow and ensure that staff and managers are able to track each task through to completion. Not only can they ensure that routine cleanings don't fall between the cracks but staff can also add issues with notes or pictures, so that problems can be resolved as quickly as possible. Reporting capabilities allow managers to review the type of issue, the numbers of staff involved, and time spent on each task. The result: efficiency, organization, and a sparkling fleet of cruise ships.

No workflow management solution is going to be an exact fit for every organization. However, nearly every solution shares a common set of key functions upon which a more customized management workflow can be created. Of course, these commonalities don't help the selection process.

So, above and beyond the functions themselves, ask the following questions when selecting workflow management systems:

- Does it have enough flexibility to evolve alongside the organization?
- Can it speed up the action-to-outcome cycle?
- Will it streamline internal systems?
- How user-friendly is it?
- Does it improve management's ability to plan for disruption and change?
- What kind of customer support is offered?
- What is the vendor company's reputation in the marketplace?

Organizations can certainly narrow down their choice by looking at industry analyst research such as the IDC [Marketscape](#), Gartner's [Magic Quadrant](#) or the Forrester [Wave](#), although the reports make for complex reading. [Product reviews](#) are another potential source of data, but unless you are clear about what will suit your organization it can be difficult to see the wood for the trees.

This checklist provides a list of pragmatic features and functions against which to evaluate potential systems. The systems you evaluate should give you the ability to:

- Automatically assign tasks with built-in workflow management
- Create new tasks or select a predefined task group
- Make tasks dependent on other tasks
- Automatically cancel tasks based on dependent relationships
- Use templates to turn tasks into routine processes
- Assign tasks to anyone
- Track actions, approvals, deadlines and key metrics
- Use information to continually optimize your processes
- Notify team members and assign tasks when actions arise
- Automatically assign and track requests
- Document correspondence within the workflow system
- Access the system through a web-based portal or mobile phone
- Customize a dashboard for at-a-glance data
- Conduct exceptions reporting
- Create and run reports on numerous data fields
- Schedule reports for automatic email delivery

When you have narrowed down your choice to a handful of vendor options, take a look at internal systems to see how they fit with your vendor selection:

a) Think beyond the immediate need

Evaluate the solution with an eye to potential future expansion. While the immediate need may be for improvements to HR processes, could other areas or departments benefit from the solution?

b) Know your organization

How does your company work and what areas are most critical to its success? Key factors to consider include the number of internal users, the markets you serve, mobile and BYOD usage, and geographic location. Do you work in multiple time zones or languages?

c) Deployment and customization

How will your software selections work with your existing technology infrastructure? While some level of

customization is always required, the longer and more complex the pre-deployment customization process, the longer you'll need to wait for meaningful results – and the more tightly you are locked into that solution. There are multiple, real-life instances of feature-heavy, complex configuration projects that have stretched through more than two years before a single department was deployed.

d) IT knowledge and system usability

An intricate system, or one that's unforgiving of human error, will ultimately derail all the possible benefits of automated workflow management systems. Above all, look for an intuitive user interface. Even if your organization has high levels of technical support, users will steer away from complex systems with a steep learning curve.

e) Status reporting

Your selected system should allow you to review the current state of all aspects of every project at any time, create work-in-progress reports, and flag technical, customer, or management issues as they arise.

f) Automation and collaboration

Ensure that the solutions you evaluate allow authorized access to multiple relevant individuals so that they can retrieve the most up-to-date information about a process even if a manager or key team member is out of contact.

g) Actionable analytics

Ideally, you will want streamlined, actionable reporting and analytics capabilities that help identify trends, quantify results, track metrics such as time saved or better response times, and provide you and your IT team with tools to make ongoing recommendations for organizational improvement. Actionable analytics make for a powerful management tool.

Case Example: Purpose-Designed Workflow Software Improves Process

Meat products company Old Wisconsin Sausage needed to introduce an automated maintenance program, including preventive maintenance, on the the production equipment. Work orders were being lost between point A and point B," said the facility manager. "We were handling everything manually, so once a work order left its department of origin, we had difficulty tracking it. We were also losing points during customer-requested facility audits for not having a preventive maintenance program in place." Furthermore, the existing work order system made it difficult for the company to provide the USDA program with the comprehensive documentation it requires for periodic audits. Old Wisconsin was considering a software package used by its parent company but instead chose Issuetrak based on personal recommendations. With twelve departments in Old Wisconsin now using Issuetrak, the company has increased visibility into maintenance of its production line, streamlined internal processes, and minimized duplication of efforts. "I now have a greater understanding of what's going on," says the facility manager. "Not only can I see that we're averaging at least 200 work orders per month, I now have the ability to identify problem areas by the number of issues submitted. Issuetrak enables us to better develop corrective actions or policies in order to improve processes or eliminate problems, which is invaluable."

5 - Evaluating ROI from Workflow Management Software

Every organization is unique and therefore even if two companies may superficially share exactly the same characteristics, their best-case workflow management processes will be very different because of

tangible and intangible factors including company culture, business expectations, and economic and resource needs.

When supported by concrete ROI statistics, these benefits can provide actionable insights to the corporate management team, enabling best practices to be replicated and organizational issues to be solved.

Here are some key questions to ask in order to benchmark how well your workflow management software is performing. The most obvious relate to cost and time savings:

- Amount paid for software including licensing, installation, training and annual maintenance
- Time between installation and full productivity
- Scalability/costs to add users
- Cost of upgrades over one, two and five years?
- Average time spent per action before installing the software
- Average time spent per action after installing the software
- Average number of actions completed per day before installation
- Average number of actions completed after installation

Additionally, by asking further baseline questions at set intervals – e.g., before installation, six months after deployment, one year after deployment - you can also get a better handle on underlying improvements and benefits.

- Is the software used in multiple departments or for different purposes?
- Is workflow management software new to the organization or a replacement for an existing solution?
- How many users are involved?
- How many workflows are involved per day/week/month?
- How many staff are responsible for overall management of workflows?
- How much time do they spend on administration and reporting?
- How long does it take to get a snapshot of workflow progress?
- How long does it take for users to obtain technical support?
- How much time do users estimate they spend on workflow management?
- Do staff believe they spend too much/enough/less time than expected on workflow management?
- Are users satisfied/dissatisfied with the performance of their workflow management software?
- What issues and requests do they have for the software vendor?

The answers to these questions provide a fact-based benchmark on which to evaluate the expected and actual value of your workflow management software.

6. Conclusion

Workflow automation software can deliver true business benefits. Keep in mind a few criteria when embarking upon an implementation project: ensure that what you are doing will have an impact; don't overreach at the outset; know your expectations for ROI; and, crucially, choose an agile, customizable software platform that will allow you to grow and adapt the system to fit your specific needs.