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 many pages of written text to the owner, builder and subcontractors - but no 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. *"If I can't picture it, I can't understand it"*, Albert Einstein. Or in the words of University of Auckland, *"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?'"*
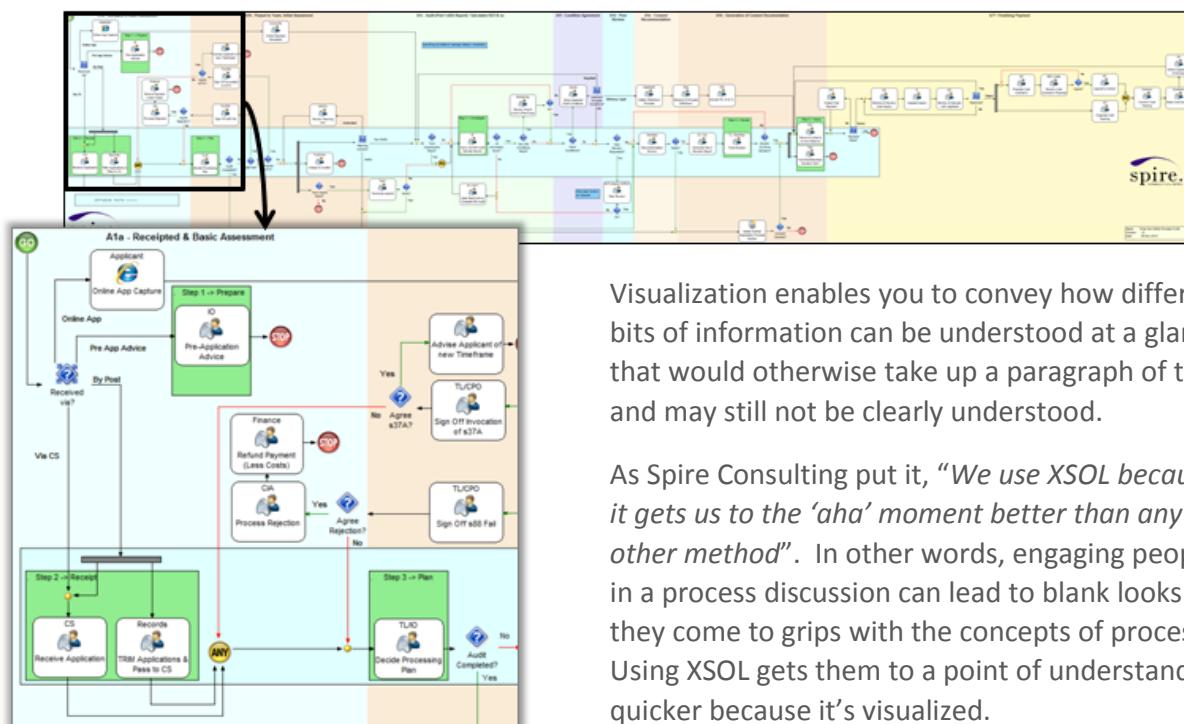
Visualization enables you to convey how different bits of information can be understood at a glance that would otherwise take up a paragraph of text and may still not be clearly understood.

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 This is why out-of-date procedure manuals gather dust.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.

Flow variations and decisions that you can see at a glance in a visual process are difficult to convey in words. But for software that is not visualization enabled, users are advised that adding this detail will result in complexity that hides or confuses the real process, and that 80% accuracy is 'good enough' - even though customer service may suffer as a result 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

The flow of work passing from desk to desk (or machine) has different constraints 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 members involved, at their desk or 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, an analyst only has to focus on capturing details of tasks that are critical to the outcome of the project.

Process Modeling vs Process Mapping

Process Mapping software describes business process in words and flow charts, typified by Microsoft Word and Visio drawing tools. These Mapping tools are flexible, but a lack of built-in integrity makes it difficult for even the most advanced user to change their content to any substantial degree.

Process Modelling, as the name suggests, is centered on a preconfigured model of business activity and organizational structure. Process model visualization is powerful because the images actually represent business components that can be reorganized without compromising integrity. In Process Mapping the images are drawings, *boxes* with no relationship to other process elements, enabling a common task to be duplicated with different descriptions, leading to different results from ostensibly the same work.

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, analytics, and 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**