

‘Making work flow, doesn’t have to be hard work’

A guide to planning automated workflows — here, for you



Challenges, both new and old



The pandemic swept across the Asia Pacific region, presenting a challenge that both businesses and governments were unprepared for — and lockdown was inevitable. But, suppressing COVID-19 came at a steep cost to economic activity.

As the pandemic continues to develop, the outlook for many Australian businesses is fraught with urgency and uncertainty. The challenges facing businesses across Australia start with the immediate and end with the question of future stability and how to prepare for another similarly disruptive event.

It is slowly becoming clear that the pathway into the new normal is far more winding and complex than hopes of a rapid recovery might have suggested.

SHORT TERM

The slow return to business after COVID represents a number of immediate challenges:

Slow trading and cashflow

For a large portion of businesses, trading will have ceased or slowed to such an extent to have damaged sales forecasts for the near future¹. Cashflow follows closely behind sales — with levels far below pre-pandemic forecasts.

The true impact of this is far more profound than the figures alone, with Finance and HR continuing to make difficult decisions — even for those eligible for the governments Jobkeeper Scheme. Businesses are also asking themselves how — and how quickly — will sectors get back on their feet?

The health and wellbeing of employees

The first priority for businesses should be safeguarding their staff — guaranteeing that they're equipped and supported to deal with new health and safety requirements. It also goes without saying that the pandemic will have placed an inordinate amount of psychological stress on employees and this will have to be considered when it comes to changes to policies and working environments.

Employee wellbeing needs to be in the forefront of leaders' decision-making processes as they build strategies to mitigate pressing financial concerns. For example, laying off employees, or bringing back only a skeleton staff to run low-value but essential back-office functions will ratchet up the pressure on those — already vulnerable — employees. Leaders must express empathy and compassion and not squeeze resources to the point of creating bad working environments².

1. COVID-19 response: Cashflow is biggest worry for Finance Directors <https://www.theaccessgroup.com/blog/fms-covid-19-response-cashflow-is-biggest-worry-for-finance-directors/>

2. Deloitte: The heart of resilient leadership: Responding to COVID-19 <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/economy/covid-19/heart-of-resilient-leadership-responding-to-covid-19.html>



LONG TERM

In-tandem with immediate issues, businesses will have to prepare for the long-term challenges — many of which existed pre-pandemic and have only been compounded by the current situation.

Reliance on outdated processes

Schedules, work orders, reports and contracts continue to be physically distributed and managed — often seen as a necessary labour. However, not only do these incur the obvious costs of salaries, materials, and processing and distribution, but each juncture is prone to error — leading to a further spiralling of costs. Right now, those Australian businesses that are not offering digital services internally or to their customers are jeopardising the business's success.

Data management and security

Most businesses do not approach manual tasks from a holistic perspective. This is because they lack the visibility that shows how data is produced, stored and accessed. Operating in the dark like this and running antiquated processes increases the likelihood of data privacy or security breach, such as misplacing a sensitive document. The other side of the coin is the growing volume, complexity and diversity of data is only making managing it increasingly challenging.

Combining human errors, the risks of paper-based and repetitive tasks with the growing complexity of data and IT systems makes the chance of security failures — and the related costs — much higher.

AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK?

This mix of immediate and long-term considerations present a challenge with a tempting solution: to tighten belts. However, by cutting resources to address urgent cashflow issues, businesses will be sacrificing the quality of operations and data security.



PRODUCTIVITY

Rising concerns on excessive bottlenecks

If every critical task in a business — including paper-based ones — could be rendered into a real-time flowchart, at some point along the workflow business leaders would see jobs collecting into a pool, waiting for an employee.

Regardless of how fast work is done either side of a bottleneck, the nature of the beast is that it will slow the entire process — from jobs-in to cash-in. In other words: work can only flow as fast as the narrowest waypoint.

Workflow automation standardises and simplifies. For example, contract life cycle management applications digitise and automate the contracting process, improving the speed, efficiency, visibility and compliance of legal-document management across an organisation.

Cost and disruption of paper-based processes

Paper causes disruptions, with 72% of customers reporting problems while completing a transaction in the last 12 months due to paper and manual processing errors. This is proven to damage reputation, in fact, 56% of people feel that companies who require them to complete paper forms are outdated — with almost a third of all customers seeing paper as an inconvenience³.

Developing a workflow automation strategy is about more than simply translating your paper to digital, it means enabling a 360-degree view of document transactions. With complete visibility, businesses can be more efficient and make better decisions both for their staff and customers.

Empathy and compassion enable business resilience

An essential step in succeeding down any path post-crisis is recognising the impact that the uncertainty is having on the people who drive the business. Employees running time-consuming, critical tasks, such as in HR or finance, must be acknowledged and supported — this is not possible if their resources are cut in favour of boosting short-term cashflow.

This element of the COVID-19 upheaval must be pivotal in both short and long term decision making. Deloitte found that expressing empathy and compassion for the human side of a crisis in business decisions is a fundamental quality of resilient leadership post-crisis².



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The case for Workflow Automation

With the right technology and the right support, getting back to work can be easier than when businesses left.

COVID has set a precedence for businesses — they need to cut costs and elevate productivity. But, how can businesses address the immediate concerns without sacrificing the accuracy of operations and data security? Not to mention without overworking staff already living through a stressful time.

WHAT IS WORKFLOW AUTOMATION?

Workflow automation enables organisations to address the immediate concerns by cutting costs and boosting productivity, while simultaneously preparing for the future by securing processes and elevating customer and employee experience.

Workflow automation is a purpose-built series of automated actions that make up the steps in business process. It is used to take over everyday business tasks, freeing up staff so they can focus on more value-adding and fulfilling work. In other words — Workflow automation allows teams to spend more time on the actual purpose of work rather than on the processes that are supposed to support them.

By digitising and automating predominantly paper-based processes like contract lifecycle management, businesses can improve the speed, efficiency, visibility and compliance of document management across the organisation.

SECURITY

Digital approval process

As more parts of a business goes digital, more communication takes place outside the current remit of security best practices. Without digital signatures, documents can be intercepted, viewed, duplicated or altered by a third party.

Digital signatures provide the assurance to sender and receiver, giving evidence of the origin, identity and status of an electronic document, transaction or message through informed consent by the signer. Digital signatures are providing efficiency and document integrity across sectors, such as Government, healthcare, law, manufacturing and financial services.

Preventing the misuse of physical signatures

Where laws governing the use of physical signatures meet digital documents, things become unclear. A major concern for businesses remains the misuse of signatures, either by forgery or scanning a legitimate signature. However, with encrypted digital signatures, businesses can protect their internal processes against this kind of fraud.

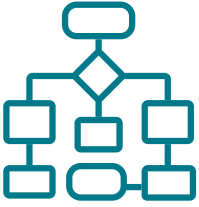


Implementing Automation into a business workflow starts in one place: identifying the flaws in current processes and mapping the changes to match the desired business outcomes.

This process must be thorough and take place before the right software solution is considered — because the right software will depend entirely on the results of said planning.

In order to achieve faster, more efficient and cheaper day-to-day functioning, businesses need to prepare their operations for automation. Automation on its own will not fix a bad process, it will simply... automate it and provide little benefit. Some of the discovered — or known — flaws will only require minor tweaking; the key is in finding the larger, systemic problems that will require infrastructure changes.

The Five Steps



Step 1 Map

Define all of the steps in your current process and draw them into a physical workflow. There are many tools available that can help you drag and drop workflows.

As you map each of your individual processes, look for opportunities to improve them:

- Where and how are you behind competitors?
- Are the systems that are being used at each stage delivering (at least) desirable business outcomes?
- Are there any bottlenecks?
- Are the technologies that are in place suitable? Are they ranked well in Gartner's Magic Quadrant?



Step 2 Define

Now that you have a workflow, define whether the information from one point to another is either static or entered by the user.

- Is this contributing to a poor process?
- If so, what is the core of the issue?



Step 3 Identify

Now identify which users are performing certain roles.

- Create guidelines for how those users can interact with the workflow and what their level of access should be.
- Make sure processes align with any laws and regulations to remain compliant.
- Update or re-build the exact procedures that will be followed for each new/ amended process.



Step 4 Notify

Do you need to integrate notifications that will alert users when their assigned and upcoming tasks are urgent?



Step 5 Evaluate

Improve your processes using analytics.

- Are there any persisting bottlenecks?
- If so, why? Use data to further tweak and streamline your processes.

Workflow Automation in practice

Using Workflow Automation as a diagnosing method and a tool is a key into the core reason we innovate business processes: it's not about what technology is implemented, it's about whether or not it facilitates the desired outcomes.

Here are some examples of real-world challenges that different levels of workflow automation solved.



Global Industry supplier facing pressure from outdated technology

Problem

A global distributor of industrial tools, safety equipment and heavy resources with hundreds of branches across Australia was dealing with delayed payments and cashflow disruptions. This was due to the use of outdated technology in its accounts payable departments that included a huge volume of paper-based work. This was resulting in high churn and continual damage to supplier relationships.

Solution

FUJIFILM Business Innovation Australia (FBAU) conducted a review of processes and proposed a solution: a fully configurable platform that was instantly scalable via the cloud. This approval process system that was completely compatible with any existing Enterprise Resource Planning platform.

The solution included real-time budget controls, automatic invoice capture, complete process audit trail and KPI management. In addition, it was all accessible via an easy-to-use web-based interface for both accounts payable staff and business approvers.

Benefit

The organisation streamlined their monthly receipt and processing workflow of 50,000 invoices. They also reduced invoice processing costs, centralised all invoice data onto a single system and boosted cashflow and performance across the business.

Leading Australian home builder dealing with surging demand and workflow bottlenecks

Problem

A leading Australian home-building organisation was dealing with a steep increase in demand from growing population and overseas immigration. They were also facing bottlenecks due to out-dated procedures.

The finance department of three full-time and two part-time employees had to manually process thousands of invoices per week and every invoice had to be physically delivered. This resulted in frequent delays to supplier payments and incredibly stressful working conditions for staff.

Solution

As part of a broader workflow automation Solution the home builder implemented an Enterprise Content Management system that enabled them to classify invoices digitally. This worked by extracting key information and validating it against established business rules then routing invoices through automated workflows.

The new solution enabled the seamless exchange of data with the existing infrastructure and archived all the approved invoices and any accompanying documents onto the system.

Benefit

By eliminating paper and creating a fully integrated workflow, more invoices were processed and routed to approvers faster — and with fewer errors. The organisation saved on operation costs, improved cash management, accelerated invoice approval cycles and met the rise in demand with ease. This also meant that the accounts team had more time to focus on delivering a high-quality customer and supplier experience.

FUJIFILM Business Innovation Australia

Any Workflow Automation Solution should begin in self-assessment — what have you already got in terms of infrastructure and resources — and where can you make both of them work harder for you?

The key is not the technology you buy, it is whether or not a solution will allow you to achieve your desired outcomes.



Our Workflow Automation Solution is all about solving the systemic, infrastructure-scale problems so you can achieve faster, more efficient and cheaper day-to-day tasks. Core to this is ensuring that your systems remain technologically agnostic. This means that regardless of your bespoke solution from FUJIFILM Business Innovation Australia, it will be compatible with your existing printers and systems. That way, you can digitise and automate process like contracting and the security, visibility and compliance of document management across the organisation.

With our 60 years of back-office expertise we can not only guide your workflow automation journey but offer you the leading technology for any specific challenge your business requires.

Digital approval process

Digital approval and signature solutions are the perfect example of cutting-edge tech that we can incorporate into your existing systems. We work with the leading and most widely used electronic signature solutions available, and enable you to easily and securely digitise any agreement or approval – from creation to data integration – on almost any device.

Contract lifecycle management

Contract life cycle management offers the ability to digitise and automate the contracting process, accelerating speed and efficiency, and providing visibility, auditing and compliance of legal-document management across the entire organisation.

As well as digital approval solutions, contract lifecycle management offers advanced features such as customisable templates for repeatable contract creation – all accessed via a polished user interface that's simple and easy to learn.

Here for You

The COVID challenges are being felt by nearly all organisations across Australia — the immediate productivity and cashflow vs. the quality of operations and data security. This conflict makes the road to the 'new normal' a twisting, uncertain pathway. Simply put, workflow automation is your Sat Nav; a tool that offers leaders and workers alike confidence in the immediate turns in the road, so they can focus on the journey as a whole once again.

In order to make automated workflows work correctly, people, process and technology need to come together seamlessly. Without proper planning, information can end up with the wrong team, or worse with no one at all.

At FUJIFILM Business Innovation Australia, we're here, for you. After all, chances are we're already working for your print infrastructure — so all you need to do is implement the right solution into systems that are set to work with them.

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To learn more about our Workflow Automation Solutions, talk to one of our experts: phone 13 14 12 or visit us at: [fujifilm.com/fbau](https://www.fujifilm.com/fbau)

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