



# WORKFLOW – A blueprint for improvement

## PART #1 PEOPLE

There are an almost infinite quantity of identifiable problems and issues you can ponder, debate and try to explain when it comes to assessing workflow and processes in creative industries! It's fair to say, the reality of working with creative people who like to make 'great stuff' is well documented – that's the easy and exciting part! What is also well documented is the inherent dramas, lack of results and unexpected outcomes of having those creatives manage the workflow!

### Point to Ponder – WHY is this so difficult?

In my role I witness creatives managing workflow pretty much every day so I would need volumes to list problem after problem, mistake after mistake that I have personally seen. They seem to be never-ending and if you are too close to the problems you may be having great difficulty understanding how to solve the tsunami of reoccurring issues.

Perhaps I can offer some observations? So, grab a coffee, relax and I will offer a blueprint you may find helpful in your quest to solve the mystery. First up, I stress that each business has its own culture, own people and own clients.

Therefore, I've streamlined my approach into an overview of potential steps. You may feel it is best to use all, some or none of them. I encourage you to only use those that suit your application, after all it's your business and you should know what best suits your operation.

The very first step is to recognise that the problem is not singular by nature. 'Production problems' are just the manifestation of a great many people and process related situations, experiences and seemingly unrelated issues. Sure, the post-mortem of any problem or mistake is helpful, as it establishes patterns and influences. You can rest assured I deal with that in "celebrating mistakes" in part 2 of this article.

The clear and concise warning signs and alarm bells are statements like these:

- "I haven't got time to produce concise job sheets"
- "I'm far too busy to read job sheets and take time to understand them"
- "If I took time to read the work in progress report I wouldn't have time to do the job!"

Yet, experience and the resultant errors and redos prove otherwise. Therefore the correct reply to that statement is "yet it would appear you always have time to do the job twice?"

Ok, you may think this is off-hand. I ask the question over and over "what percentage of mistakes do you make?" On average – the typical range is 20 – 50% and the new record recently is 70%! Imagine a world where 70% of everything you make has to be redone – this business is a ticking time bomb.

**Develop a clear workplace objective, such as:** "To work together in a seamless and cohesive process to ensure quality output, minimise errors to zero, create timely delivery and effective utilisation of people and equipment". Sounds simple enough, but achieving this in reality is far from easy.

The blueprint I put forward to you is the distillation of observations and actual outcomes, both good and bad, in the sign and print industry. The fact is, the business or industry don't really matter, as my observations have crossed many industries and the problems are as common as the elusive solutions.

**Here is a simple concept.** Assuming all your team desire to enjoy work, well, why not strive for enjoying work – more?

Even more desirable would be improving the business, meeting deadlines easier and make less mistakes, as effective and efficient workplace habits and job satisfaction usually live side by side in a happy workplace, which focuses on building a great culture.



## Let's start at the start –

### 1. PEOPLE – Employ the right person for the role.

The employment interview is where you need to honestly start the whole process. After all, IF you don't employ the right person with the right aptitude and attitude for the role, then I suggest you are starting well behind the real starting line and handicapping your business from that point on.

#### What are the risks if you don't value the people in your organisation?

If you are not enjoying what you do... why do it! Let's look a little deeper into the reality of not enjoying work while ignoring the creeping cultural changes taking place and its potential outcomes.

- Poor morale and job satisfaction
- Increased levels of mistakes and errors
- Often product quality decreases
- Failed delivery times or even days
- General and rapid decline in commitment
- The blame game – it's everyone else's problem
- Culminating in loss of key customers
- At any point above – you will see loss of KEY staff members

#### Ask and ye shall find

If you wish to constantly develop the effectiveness of your people you simply have to ask to discover the best way to discover the issues you don't know about. ASK those who can help the most. ASK yourself and your employees, the questions you create which can help develop people, improve skills, understand the types of skills we have currently and in the future gain and develop a more comprehensive vision of future needs.

#### Here are some examples:

- Ask – “How can we improve the enjoyment level of people?” after all, if everyone loves the work they are employed to do, you simply end up with happy people working well typically delivering minimal mistakes – yes, it can be that easy.
- When you see a load of mistakes and missed delivery dates – potentially there are loads of hidden issues that the pressure of a 'reactive' market place creates – in the world we live in everyone wants it now...ASK “How can we together develop better tools to help us build a better and effective workplace?”
- Ask your people “If we can accurately assess and understand the roles and tasks people don't wish to do, we may find other people within the organisation that are happy to do tasks someone else doesn't like doing?”
- Or perhaps ASK: “How can we better assess internal growth paths for people who wish to up-skill their current roles and position?”

- Or ask: “How can we develop better skill sets for people and processes for the business to support those people?”
- Another option could be to create specific positions where you can place strong emphasis on the skills and tasks people are limited on, while not looking for people who possess the skills we are strong on.
- Ask people doing a role “do they have the correct training in that skill?”
- If you don't invest in written instructions to guide and assist them – “how do they learn?”
- If you have no organisation structure – ask yourself “where do they fit into our business?”
- If you have no job descriptions – “how do they know what to do in their role?”
- If you have no work instructions – “how do they do the task or process you have given them?”
- Typically, and easily understood, is the adage – “wake up every morning and can't wait to get to work” ...YES, that may be a perfect world, but we can dream. So do you want to help create a better world for you? Fact is “it's up to you” So, YES a little tongue in cheek humour – however in bullet point and hand on my heart YES, I can.

When a new person is employed – if you have no personality assessment, or no formal written work skills review, or no formal induction or no planned training – well it is fair to say you have a “throw them into the deep end approach” - foolish at best, highly risky at worst.

Considering you may not have written structure, definition or road map of the process of how the workflow works, potentially opens your business up to perpetual training and changes. Whereas written overview structure gives people a road map. The worst part is, if you are not providing your people with a visual and written an end-to-end road map, it is likely to be chaos at best. While in a worst case scenario it is likely to be a total disenfranchise of people and process. Effectively it is every person for themselves.

Right now you should be stepping back and considering this – if you add all these bullet points up and multiply them by the fact that every NEW face brings their own – baggage, experience, and skills – they start with hope, dreams and wishes. If you don't deliver on that promise as the employer – “how can one ever expect seamless integration of your end-to-end processes starting at the first phone call from the client to final delivery or installation?”

#### Ongoing maintenance is sustainability

If you wish to build and implement the tools, I can virtually promise they WILL work following

a few tweaks here and there over the years. Amazing – done and dusted...

Well, I'm sorry this story is no fairy tale. The process will ALWAYS be prone to attack by the lazy ones, those who think it is smart to short cut, cut a corner and all and sundry, during the frenzied panic of rush work. However, like any good gardener a little on-going maintenance and perhaps trimming a few dead branches to save the tree will grow strength into the system. Like a tree needs fertiliser and water to grow strong and steadfast, so will your workflow system.

All involved will, at one point, try to challenge and try to break it! However, that is just an opportunity to adjust and humanise the workflow system you are all developing to improve the business and their jobs. Eventually, all will become advocates and builders as they will learn good systems are designed to support people. That is an exciting and positive change from seemingly self-serving individuals who unknowingly effectively destroy morale and workflow and put simply, they protect the system that protects them unlike what a poor or failed systems has taught them, year after year, job after job – protect thine self.

Happy people working together in a fun workplace is a beautiful thing – they don't just happen they are designed, planned, built, nurtured and maintained

#### Tools you need at this point:

- You need to consider the development and introduction of documentation at the beginning of the employee journey including:
- a. A comprehensive interview form
  - b. A personality profile questionnaire
  - c. A full step by step induction sheet, approved and read, understood and signed by the employee
  - d. This must become the staple of your employment agreement and be in line with your state or national employment laws.

Next month we continue **Workflow – a blueprint for improvement Part #2 Process**. This includes the nuts and bolts of the how, what and why of the tools and steps in building your own end to end process.

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