**Value Stream Mapping**

**Value Stream Mapping (VSM)** is a classic lean methodology for analyzing the Current State and designing a Future State for the series of steps (the “stream”) that take a product or service from its beginning (typically at the “first touch” of the customer’s request) through to customer fulfillment (the “value”).

Highly visual – using colored Post-Its® – and very collaborative (see photo), the act of story boarding the Value Stream is often a process of discovery and realization for those closest to the work, and for their supervisors.

“We never knew it took so many steps!” is a common refrain. “Why do we do that?!” Creating the Current Map leads to insights – called *Kaizen Bursts* – into ways we can lean up the stream and create even more value. This becomes clearer the next day or the next week, when together we create the Future State Map: our vision of what our process could look like if we get smarter. Count on the Future State Map being a lot shorter stream than the Current State. The next step is to develop the Transformation Plan, comprised of no-brainer “Just-Do-Its”, medium-term “Kaizen Events” and longer term “Projects”.

As the graphic at left shows, Value Stream Mapping is a Macro process, a global overview of a single stream of work. The bridges between individual steps and the Value Stream are the Processes (discrete chunks of steps that perhaps only involve one or two departments or silos of work).

**Process Mapping** is a similar, shorter process that looks at these smaller chunks.

**Benefits of both**: cost and time savings, reliability increases, more visible and visual problems and constraints, slicing through functional silos that block information flow and trust, leadership alignment which accelerates improvement cycles.
**Real Stories**

1. **Designing Design**
   When a respected architecture firm found its staff had doubled in 18 months, it needed to standardize processes. For years each lead designer had her or his own way to do the work and staff learned to do it “Fred’s Way” or “Molly’s Way”. With the explosion of staff and the need to move staff back and forth between projects to meet deadlines, the need for standard work was clear. As the 30 designers, marketers, IT and support staff mapped their Current processes (photo on above page) they were surprised at how convoluted the work had become. They also discovered not only how varied were the methodologies of the leaders but how wasteful this confusion had become. By the end of the day they had plotted an agreed Current State and identified over 30 opportunities to do work earlier or eliminate it completely. When they met a few days later and mapped their ideal Future State, they needed 1/3 less paper and about 30% fewer steps. With the Principal’s guidance they made some crucial decisions much earlier, reducing confusion at the end. It has been a slow and steady process to reach out for the bold Future State, but the journey has begun and the vision is clear.

2. **Schooling FF&E Efficiencies**
   At a large public college district a fast-paced capital improvement program was underway and the two young contract staff dedicated to procuring and installing the Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment were feeling the pressure. There were so many bases to touch: faculty needs, State funding regulations, district processes, architectural designs, budgets, schedules. Moreover, the district Procurement Office was required to handle much of the paperwork using its own processes. As the program was approaching its peak number of buildings underway, the FF&E staff requested another position. “Maybe you need another person,” the college executive told them, “but let’s make sure you’re not busy managing waste instead of those things that lead to actual value.”

   The two FF&E staff and the two top Procurement Office leaders came together to map the Current State and were shocked to see the amount of duplication. One was doing what really belonged to the other, but with a lack of trust and protecting turf, the reality was substantial waste. This forced both duos to confront and define their unique missions. On Day 2 as the Future State emerged, clarity appeared as though fog were lifting. “Oh, so you’re already doing that. I’ll use your work.” The Transformation Plan included some easily procured software that one group was already considering and would work for both groups to streamline communication. Bottom line, they didn’t need more people, just less waste.

3. **Mechanical Value Streams**
   A respected mechanical engineering firm decided to assess how “lean” they had become after two initiatives. Early results were concerning. Staff in different departments didn’t trust the work of the others and ended up redesigning systems several times before they got to the fabrication plant. In Value Stream Mapping the metric “Percent Complete and Accurate” ("%C&A") was shockingly low. The Future State Map was not that much different from the Current State, but the team decided what they really needed was a deep dive handoff by handoff to address the mistrust of the work of others. So VSM was followed by two Kaizen Events (aka Rapid Improvement Events), four days each, in which staff from two departments reviewed the work product of the “supplying” group to the “consuming” group. The biggest gain was redesigning the form and format of the work being handed off. When the calculations and designs were in understandable and usable formats, “%C&A” rose substantially and significant waste (effort, time, money, opportunity) was eliminated. The company could grow and do more with existing resources.

**In an industry where there’s never enough time and never enough people, why get better at managing waste, when you can streamline the flow and produce more value?**

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