Adopting a design-based approach to a global workflow

120K
staff globally supported by the new infrastructure

30%
reduction in approval procedure lead times

Better UX
leads to improved employee performance

“The platform allows us to incorporate global knowledge and best practices built up by ServiceNow into our workflows.”

Kanna Kimura, Manager, Platform Division, Digital System Department Enterprise Service Management, Fujitsu Limited

Renewing an aging approval system

The approval systems used by Fujitsu were over 20 years old, which made expansion difficult. Compounding the issue, Fujitsu Group companies all used their own custom-built approval workflows, which created bottlenecks for the implementation of agile management.

As part of efforts to implement a new mission to “make the world more sustainable by building trust in society through innovation,” Fujitsu launched a new business brand, Fujitsu Uvance, in October 2021.
This brand consists of seven key elements: the cross-industry fields of Sustainable Manufacturing, Consumer Experience, Healthy Living, and Trusted Society aim to address societal issues, while Digital Shifts, Business Applications, and Hybrid IT cover the technological fields that support them.

To build a sustainable society, Fujitsu is striving to transcend industry and national boundaries, and support corporate reforms and the work styles and lives of individuals. In particular, Digital Shifts promotes agile management and employee work-life shifts that make full use of Fujitsu’s in-house data and technology.

One aspect of the initiative has been the full-scale advancement of an updated approval system. The current system was built in the late 1990s and was growing increasingly obsolete, making it difficult to expand its capabilities.

Kanna Kimura, Manager of the Enterprise Service Management Department of Fujitsu’s Digital System Platform Division, explains:

“We had strong expectations for ServiceNow to provide a platform to build workflows quickly, and flexibly allow future modifications and expansions.”

Takeshi Horikawa, Senior Manager, Corporate Governance Legal Dept, Legal, Intellectual Property, & Internal Control Advancement Division, Fujitsu Limited

“The current approval system basically just takes a paper version of a circular, and digitizes and distributes it. As a result, we haven’t been able to effectively meet the demands of globalization or mobilization.”

Fujitsu’s own structures have also changed radically since the system was built, and the gap between its capabilities and Fujitsu’s operations has become increasingly apparent. Fujitsu therefore announced a corporate policy to review the approval rules along with the system of implementation.

The move tied in with an initiative in 2020 to unify approval rules across the Fujitsu Group. This meant that group companies with approval operations based on their own rules would have processes standardized. However, approval operations varied significantly between companies, with some simply moving processes along by email as they lacked adequate infrastructure. This would make it effectively impossible to achieve true unification.

Takeshi Horikawa, Senior Manager of Fujitsu’s Corporate Governance Legal Department of the Legal, Intellectual Property, and Internal Control Advancement Division, says: “Given the approval system’s background, we decided to renew it from the infrastructure up. Rebuilding the system through a general-use workflow designed to support approvals globally, we will enhance efficiency and the UX, and ensure appropriate governance. We also need a high level of scalability to withstand ongoing data-based process reforms.”
Six areas of focus for the new system

With Fujitsu operating around 400 group companies in 180 countries, building a new approval system for around 120,000 staff would not be easy. It therefore chose a design-oriented approach as part of a process to map out the ideal new ‘To-Be’ system.

Horikawa explains: “We consulted a wide range of users across various ranks, from employees responsible for drafting various matters to management-level staff. In addition to the opinions we received, we also built a greater understanding among project members about the goal we were trying to achieve.”

The ‘To-Be’ concept consisted of six objectives, the most of important of which was to enhance approval speed and enable agile management. It also sought to enhance the UX and resolve dissatisfaction and areas of confusion surrounding the old system. Optimized governance would ensure consistency and continuity of decisions by enabling users to search for and reference past procedures, while improved use of data would enable greater visibility and remove bottlenecks. The fifth objective was to globalize, enabling group companies worldwide to use the same system, while a final objective of co-ordination would ensure compatibility with existing peripheral work systems.

A common platform for all workflows

To meet these six criteria, Fujitsu selected ServiceNow as the platform for its new approval system.

Fujitsu previously operated systems that were custom-made for each region, group company, or even department, but will now promote the One Fujitsu Program to aggregate all processes into a single system. ServiceNow App Engine was selected based on this premise, and all systems related to workflow will be built on and operated using App Engine shared instances.

We will run a continuous cycle on App Engine to analyze problems identified as we operate the approval workflow, and reflect process improvements in new workflows. This will allow us to realize a more agile form of management.

Takeshi Horikawa, Senior Manager, Corporate Governance Legal Department, Legal, Intellectual Property, and Internal Control Advancement Division, Fujitsu Limited
"The new approval system will be our first act under this policy," says Kimura. "By integrating various workflows into shared instances, we can promote data coordination. We also felt that the platform came with the strong added benefit of allowing us to easily incorporate the global knowledge and best practices built up by ServiceNow into our workflows."

The platform would also give Fujitsu an opportunity to shift the focus of approval operations away from Japan.

"If we are going to standardize approval rules and processes throughout the Fujitsu Group, we will need to make sure they fit global standards," says Horikawa. "We want a platform that allows us to realize and build a workflow that can take us in this direction quickly, and can flexibly adapt to future modifications and expansions. As users, we had a number of different options available, but we ultimately told the Digital System Platform Division we want to use ServiceNow App Engine."

**Approval lead times cut by 30%, boosting greater workflow improvements**

The project to build an approval system based on ServiceNow App Engine began in August 2021, and included a ServiceNow consultant. The process that would become Step 1 of the project was launched in January 2022.

Kimura explains: "The system targets group companies that ran their approval workflows by email, and services 61 domestic and 44 overseas companies. The system is accessed an average of 128 times a day by around 8.7 users."

Fujitsu also continued its work by building Step 2, which targets other group companies and Fujitsu itself, and began operations in late May 2022.

"When Step 2 is underway, all workflows – from preliminary consultations to deliberations and approvals, which were segregated under the current system – will be interlocked seamlessly," continues Kimura. "We expect to reduce the lead time for approval procedures by at least 30%.

Horikawa adds: "The UI is so simple and refined that anyone will be able to use it after spending a little time with it."

And while Horikawa expects the new approval system to have a major impact on operations across Fujitsu and its group companies, the release of Step 2 will not mean the end of renewal efforts. Fujitsu will, he believes, continue to face challenges.

"All data regarding approval operations for the group as a whole will be centrally aggregated, so we must first reform processes based on data analysis," Horikawa notes. "We will run a continuous cycle on the App Engine to analyze problems identified as we operate the approval workflow, and reflect process improvements in new workflows. This will allow us to realize a more agile form of management."