Delivering Business Nirvana with Value Stream Management
What’s your business nirvana? I know, odd question, but bear with me. If you’re a business leader, a product owner, or an application development head it’s probably being able to consistently deliver solutions that optimize value for your clients and your organization. It will include being able to make investment decisions with the confidence that you are focused on the right things – achieving the most effective results as efficiently as possible.

If you’re an IT leader – a CIO, CTO, the head of any technology function or engineering lead, that concept of efficiency will be at the core of your nirvana – automating everywhere you can without increasing risk or losing oversight ability and ensuring all of your teams are focused on delivering business value across each stage of software delivery.

Finally, if you’re a member of one of those technology teams, whether it’s development, change management, operations or support, you just want to be able to get on with your jobs without disruption and with immediate access to the tools and data you need – and nothing else.

Well, welcome to nirvana.

It’s called Value Stream Management or VSM.

The VSM concept has been around for a few years now but it’s still finding its way into the mainstream. Simply put it’s the process of integrating every aspect of your business workflow – the end to end process of developing and delivering software to your clients. That operates in a continuous cycle starting with the feedback from clients that drives demand, and ending with the operational management of the features that support that demand which in turn drives new feedback. That business workflow is supported by the integration of technical solutions at every step of the way from prioritizing and planning through building, testing and deploying and onto operational and service management.

But integration is only the mechanics of VSM. The true value comes from, well, value. Workflow has to be able to optimize the flow of value to the client and by extension the business. VSM not only helps you achieve that, done well it helps to identify and resolve the bottlenecks, viewing your business as an integrated stream, not a series of individual points.

**Effective Value Stream Management**

Effective VSM must be both broad and deep. The breadth comes from the need to support the value stream from beginning to end.

It must:

Allow business executives to consolidate and analyze feedback in order to make the right investment decisions, ensuring the limited discretionary funds are driving the most effective and efficient solutions.
Allow the delivery teams that turn plans into reality to operate without disruption within the tools they are comfortable and familiar with.

Developers must have the confidence that they are being fed the right features at the right time.

Deployment and change management teams must know that they are getting as close as possible to continuous delivery without exposing the business to unnecessary risk.

Operations must be able to manage an environment that is stable, secure and high performing in a climate that can continuously delivery if desired.

And, VSM must allow technology executives to manage an agile planning and DevOps delivery environment that optimizes performance of people and systems while controlling risks and improving efficiency.

Breadth creates the concept of the stream in VSM, but alone it isn’t enough to optimize value. For that you also need depth. The depth of a VSM solution will be the key differentiator for business and technology leaders.

For business leaders, optimizing business value is the single most important KPI. That comes from delivering consistent, sustainable customer value, and that requires the ability to effectively and efficiently deliver on customer demand. But all of those variables are highly fluid. It’s not enough to integrate systems around a common data model and produce reports showing what’s happening. Business leaders also need to understand what is about to happen and why trends are occurring. That requires powerful analytical tools that can interpret data, provide early warnings of variances and recommend courses of action that will improve customer and business value.

That same analytics is needed by technology leaders to drive efficient software delivery. Optimizing the value stream isn’t just about delivering fast, that might just get you to the point of failure sooner. It’s about delivering sustainable speed and successful outcomes. It’s about understanding where your controls can be automated and where manual intervention is needed. It’s about scheduling multiple deployments to avoid conflicts and disruption and it’s about learning from your operations and service management data to improve future builds, tests and deployments. All with optimized efficiency.

That only happens when you understand not only what is happening in your technology environment, but why. With so many different moving parts you need real insight into where your opportunities and threats are – you need powerful analytics to help you distinguish between issues and noise. And your teams need you to have that analytics driven insight because otherwise you are looking to them to provide it, and that takes them away from their focus of driving value.
You need VSM – today

The problem with most promises of nirvana is that you have to be standing next to it already in order to take advantage. Not so with VSM. It’s not just a solution for those organizations that have already achieved continuous delivery across multiple platforms, or for those businesses that are well into their digital transformation journey. VSM can help you take the first few tentative steps as you build on agile successes and on to your DevOps journey.

Most importantly, VSM helps you shift your thinking from traditional bottom up approaches (incident driven work management, feature driven planning, etc.) to top down, business value approaches. Your business decisions are now driven by what will achieve value for your clients and yourself and your management of the value stream optimizes performance every step of the way.

VSM also broadens your thinking. Instead of focusing on pain points or bottlenecks, VSM broadens your focus to the entire business workflow. For the first time you truly have an end to end value stream and the ability to manage it as a single, cohesive whole. But only with the right VSM platform and the right approach.

VSM is a way of thinking about how your business operates. It’s about having data shared across all platforms. Resources operating in the tools they are familiar with. Intelligent workflows and powerful analytics. It’s no wonder ServiceNow was named a leader in The Forrester Wave for VSM.

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