

The Journey Toward a People-First Culture and Engineering Process Efficiency

CASE STUDY | Project Portfolio & Process Management



Industry

Hardware Product Development

Size

Enterprise

Company Overview

A leading global manufacturer of electronic components with multiple R&D centres and manufacturing sites worldwide, demonstrates how strategic acquisitions and process improvements can drive substantial business growth whilst implementing a people-first culture.


This case study explores the journey following the strategic acquisition of a specialised R&D company in Switzerland. The acquisition, completed in 2019, was made to strengthen the corporation's position in a niche electronic components market. The story showcases how the integration process led to significant operational improvements and the development of a more efficient, people-centric approach to project management.

To better understand their story, we sat down with key players involved in the transition and implementation process.

The Power of Transparency & People Involvement in Strategic Decisions

Before the decision to acquire the R&D company was finalised, the future General Manager was hired to build a business case evaluating the strategic move.

Instead of presenting a simple yes-or-no recommendation, he gathered the manufacturer's management team and organised a series of risk management workshops. As he remarks:

 "Involve people, don't teach them! Make your problems relevant to their problems. Then, you're not alone".

The keys to success in this acquisition decision were transparency, involvement and visualisation. As we'll see, these became the foundational building blocks for a new management approach throughout.

Managing The Transition

After the acquisition, one of the first steps was to integrate a standardised approach for project and process management. However, there was a challenge:

- At that time, the organisation didn't have any formalised project management processes.

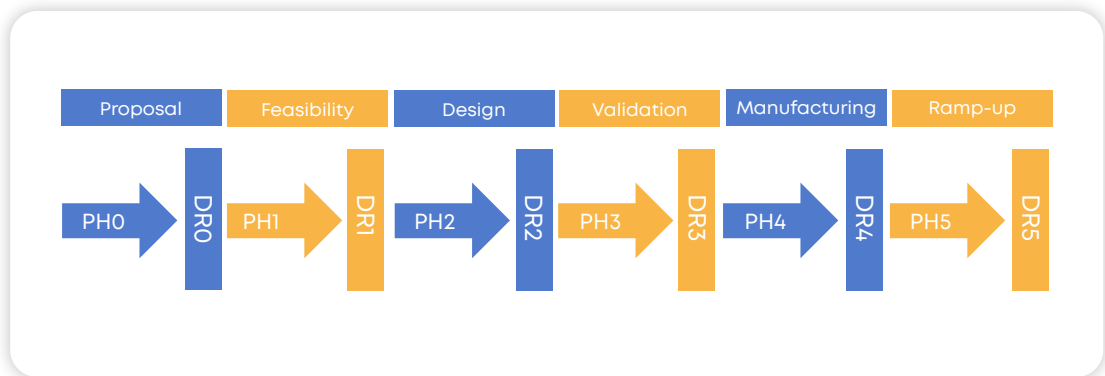
Following the values of transparency, the management team created several Excel files visualising project charters, goals, and work package breakdowns. However, Excel proved to be too static as a project management tool, especially in an environment where priorities frequently changed.

The company faced additional challenges such as:

- Shared resources – complex product development processes that moved through several teams/departments
- Multiple locations – dependencies between different manufacturing sites
- Different working methodologies – teams across divisions used varying approaches to manage their work
- Diverse experiences and expertise across the organisation, varying expectations, and unknowns

This raised the critical question: “How do we manage all of this?”

To address these challenges, project leads collaborated with colleagues from another European subsidiary to study existing processes.



Flow Chart of Stage Gate Process

This led to the adoption of the Stage Gate Project Management Process, structured as follows:

1. DR0 – Proposal
2. DR1 – Feasibility
3. DR2 – Design
4. DR3 – Validation
5. DR4 – Manufacturing
6. DR5 – Ramp-up

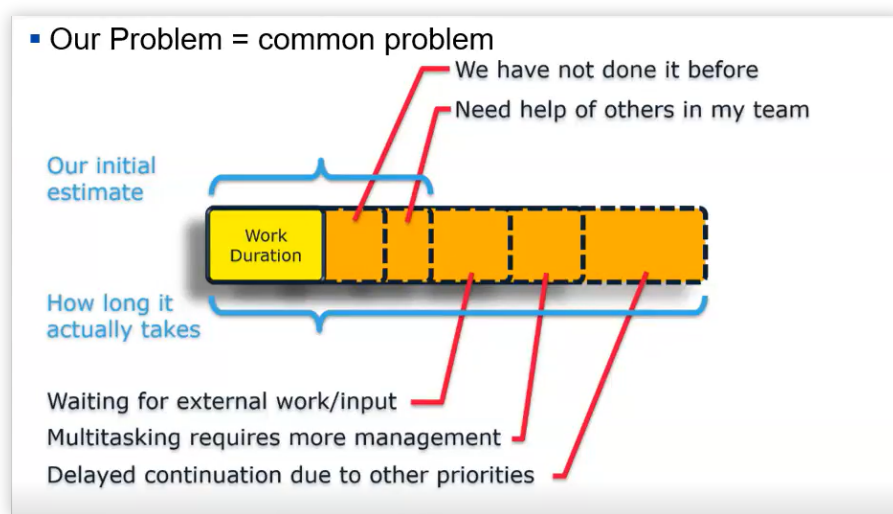
The immediate result was clarity across teams and a common understanding of how a product progresses from initial concept to market.

So, Was Everything “Sailing Smoothly”?

Six months after adopting the Stage Gate approach, one of the key managers noted:

“I am spending most of my time with status updates. My work is to disturb people’s workflow, get an update, and key it into our Excel sheets. It’s a HUGE WASTE OF TIME.”

This inefficiency stemmed from challenges in project planning, where teams would spend significant time estimating tasks that ultimately took much longer to complete.



Both the R&D and management teams agreed they needed a more dynamic system where everything happens in real-time. The main requirements were to:

- Get real-time visual updates of the current status
- Have a clear view of work packages with multiple hierarchical levels

- Visualise dependencies between teams
- Achieve alignment between different teams and team members

After several months of assessment, Businessmap (formerly Kanbanize) was chosen as project and process management platform.

First Steps on a Modern Project Management Journey with Xuviate & Businessmap

Strategic acquisitions of start-ups by large corporations are often accompanied by disruptions in operational management and cultural shifts. This was the primary concern for the R&D team of the acquired company.

While **Businessmap provided a robust Project Portfolio Management (PPM) platform**, leadership recognised that technology alone would not be enough to instil values such as knowledge sharing, visual management, and openness across the entire organisation.

To address this challenge, they sought expert partners for their Kanban journey, which led them to collaborate with **Xuviate, an international project management consultancy based in Germany**.

As Platinum Partners of Businessmap, Xuviate has developed a personalised training and implementation programme known as the Kanban Bootcamp. This training focuses on Lean Management through the Kanban method and puts theory into practice with the support of Businessmap.

The structured training and implementation programme ensured that the adoption of Kanban was not just a procedural change but a fundamental shift in how teams managed their work.

As a result of the approach, the R&D Manager is pleased to report that their start-up culture of agility remains intact and is now spreading to other divisions within the organisation.

Using Businessmap for Lean Management & Engineering Excellency

Moving to the actual implementation of processes, the division started with one simple principle:

➤ *"Start with what you do now!"*

As the R&D Manager mentioned, this ensured less disturbance and stress among team members when the change in processes happened. He adds that people already knew how to work, they just needed a set of policies and procedures to follow for the execution of product development.

Step 1: Collaboration

To address the initial resistance to change, the first step was to establish a **common understanding of existing processes**. By introducing **visual workflows**, teams could agree on standard rules of cooperation and alignment.

Step 2: Strategy Development

Once workflows were clear, leadership focused on **defining a divisional strategy** that aligned with corporate objectives.

The goal was to prepare a **common vision for everyone** to follow and adopt an **outcome-based culture**.

Step 3: Project Management Implementation

Moving forward, the division needed clear standards for project management such as:

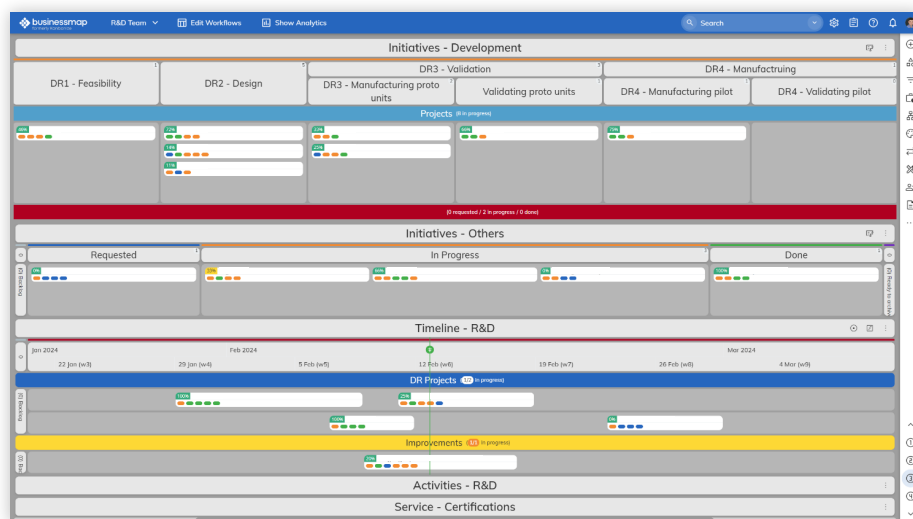
- **Defining the WBS (work breakdown structure)**
- **Making process policies explicit**
- **Agreeing on how to work together**
- **Understanding dependencies**

The implementation of Kanban work management through Businessmap focused on several areas, some of which we pinpoint below.

Structuring Engineering Operations (Pilot Project)

The first workflow improvement implementation occurred in the Engineering team. They created a board in Businessmap and over time kept up continuous development. By now they visualise a work-breakdown structure in the following way:

- 2 Project Workflows (visualising projects ranging from 6-36 months including their stage-gate flow)
- 7 Services Workflows (visualising smaller projects/deliverables ranging from 3-8 months)
- 1 Activities Workflow (visualising daily work ranging from 1-100 days)



Example: Engineering work management board in Businessmap

Key Benefits:

Having this type of visualisation in a single place, brought several benefits to the division including:

- **More time spent on innovation and strategy development** rather than operational management
- **Tracking and managing WIP (work in progress)** of both projects and tasks
- Understanding **who is working on what** and **where work is coming from**
- Effectively **managing workload and reprioritising capacity as needed**

Quality Management System Integration & Management

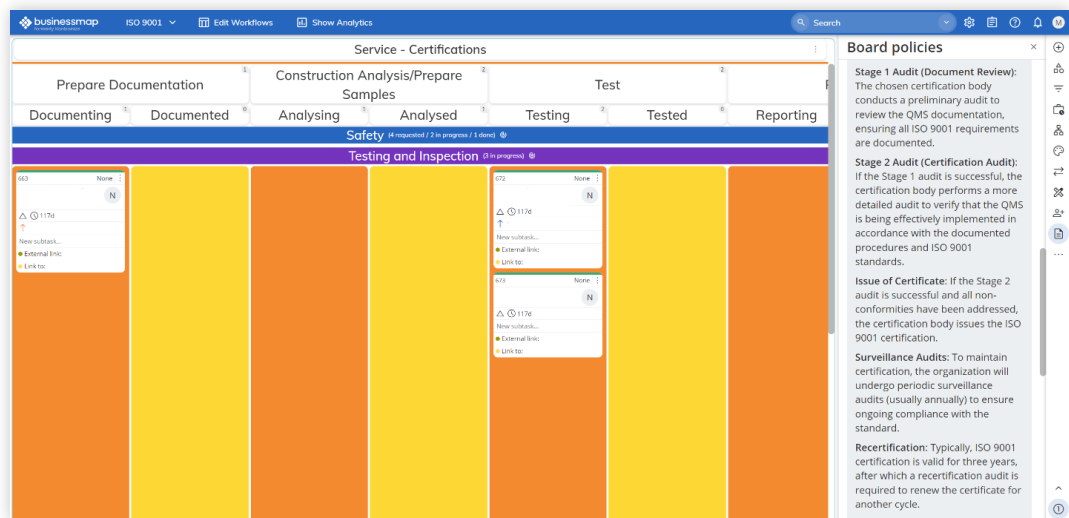
Ensuring compliance with **ISO 9001** standards is critical for maintaining high-quality product development.

The challenge that many companies face when implementing and especially maintaining ISO 9001 is not the documentation of the process itself, but rather "living it" in reality.

It is not uncommon that one set of consultants writes the procedure manual and another external company audits it, whilst the actual process is materially different.

This is where Businessmap helps.

The digital system now enables the R&D division to map their workflow on a Kanban board together with a visualisation of the policies that each process step needs to abide by.



Integrating QMS Policies into the Workflow

In other words, both work and policies management "live" in the same system, giving team members unmatched clarity into the "definition of done" for each process step.

This structured approach helped the organisation pass its most recent ISO 9001 audit with **strong validation from external auditors**, who noted that the company truly **"lives and breathes" its processes**.

Key Benefits:

The key benefits from combining process and policies management in a single place are:

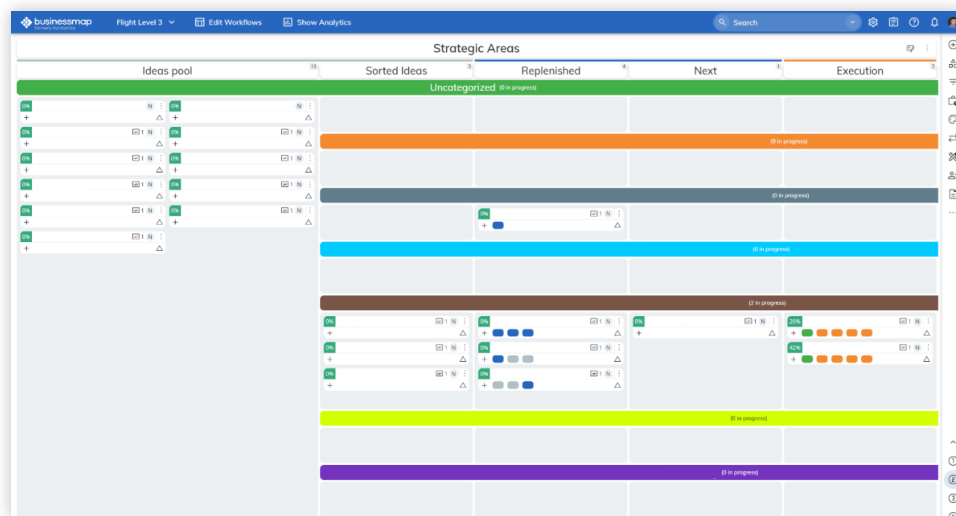
- Clear **end-to-end visibility and common understanding** of how work moves across the entire project development cycle.
- Improved **synergy between quality management and engineering teams**.
- Increased **efficiency in product development and compliance efforts**.

Bridging the Gap Between Strategy & Execution with Flight Levels

True agility is achieved when there is a **seamless connection between strategic objectives and their execution** — in other words, when strategy and operations are fully aligned. This alignment is precisely what the organisation is aiming for as they begin to adopt the Flight Levels model of business agility developed by Klaus Leopold.

Leveraging the flexibility of the Businessmap platform, which scales both vertically and horizontally across the organisation, they are implementing a hierarchy of three board levels corresponding to the Flight Levels thinking model:

- Strategic Projects (Flight Level 3): At this level, the leadership team is starting to visualise a pool of ideas and their refinement, enabling the company to map out long-term strategic initiatives.



Example: Flight Level 3 board implementation is beginning to visualise strategic projects, ensuring that high-level objectives are being defined and made accessible

- Value Streams (Flight Level 2): Boards with linked workflows in Businessmap are used to visualise coordination between different teams or services, promoting cross-functional collaboration.

- **Team Management (Flight Level 1):** At the operational level, teams plan and execute their daily work, ensuring that individual tasks contribute to broader organisational goals.

Key Benefits:

Although still in the initial stages, the implementation of the Flight Levels structure is expected to bring several significant improvements:

- **Dedicated Review Cadences:** Establishing regular Flow Reviews (monthly) and Strategy Reviews (every 6-12 months) to align on goals and assess progress.
- **Coherence Between Market Requirements and Team Activities:** Ensuring that team efforts are directly aligned with market demands and strategic priorities.
- **Single Source of Truth:** Creating a unified project management platform that provides real-time information, enhancing transparency and decision-making

Embracing Continuous Improvement & Next Steps

Fast forward to today, and this implementation is just the beginning of the organization's transformation journey. The division has wholeheartedly embraced a **Kaizen (continuous improvement) mindset**, integrating structured feedback loops at various hierarchical levels to drive ongoing optimization.

A key aspect of this culture is embedding **retrospectives and lessons learned** as exit criteria in every major process stage. For example, at **DR4**, one key deliverable is a comprehensive **lessons learned document**. This document captures feedback and improvement proposals from all involved teams—including **project management, R&D, certification, industrial engineering, purchasing, manufacturing, and product management**. Crucially, it also includes a clear implementation proposal (experiment) that is reviewed and agreed upon by all stakeholders.

This structured approach ensures a **self-learning organization** that continuously refines and enhances its processes. By institutionalising reflection and iterative improvement, the organisation remains **agile, adaptive, and primed for sustainable growth**, fostering transparency across operations.

After all, as the General Manager likes to point out:

"Happy employees (or rather team members) make great products, great products make happy customers, happy customers happily pay invoices."

Looking ahead, the company is expanding its use of the Kanban method across additional European divisions, driving greater efficiency and transparency across operations.

Key Achievements So Far

Due to the commitment to continuous improvement, the division has achieved several noteworthy results. So far on their journey, they have:

- **Reduced the average development time** of products from 36 to 26 months — a nearly 30% decrease (Target: 18 months)
- **Increased divisional turnover** by 250%
- Established a **connection between strategic projects and execution**, enhancing organisational alignment
- **Passed ISO 9001 audits and other quality management procedures** with flying colours
- Embraced a **culture of continuous improvement** throughout the division

At Businessmap and Xuviate, we are pleased to support this transformation and look forward to being long-term partners in this organisation's Lean/Agile journey.

About Xuviate

Industrial manufacturing organisations face increasing pressure to optimise operations while managing **hundreds of long-running, interdependent projects** across teams with **highly skilled experts who are often not interchangeable**. When critical workflows rely on static tools like Excel, this creates **siloed processes, delays at handover points, and a lack of visibility**, making it difficult to coordinate across disciplines such as **engineering, R&D, process control, and manufacturing technology**.

Xuviate helps you **gain control, improve collaboration, and reduce inefficiencies** by implementing **structured, visual, and scalable project & process management systems**.

What sets us apart is our comprehensive approach – we don't just provide training and coaching; we roll up our sleeves and work alongside your team to implement solutions using tools like Businessmap. This hands-on strategy delivers quick wins, helping teams break free from outdated spreadsheets and transition to **real-time visual management**.

Companies like **BASF, TDK, and MEWA** have already experienced **better communication, faster project cycles, improved workload management, and reduced bottlenecks**—without disrupting critical operations. If your teams struggle with project coordination, scattered workflows, overload, or unclear priorities, let's talk.

Find us on: <https://www.xuviate.com/>



Lean Portfolio & Strategy Execution at Scale

Visualize your department or company workflows.
Automate dependencies.
Integrate with existing tools

Try for Free

About Businessmap



Businessmap is an enterprise-ready platform for agile project, product and portfolio management. It provides visibility across all teams, connects strategy with execution, and helps teams deliver faster. Built upon the idea that all processes evolve, Businessmap can easily adapt to changes in your organization, regardless of it being a start-up or a fortune 100 enterprise.