



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Intake form completion at a professional services firm.

One workflow, audited over ten business days. This is what lands on your desk: the workflow as it actually runs, what it costs, what is recoverable, what it would take to fix and whether it is worth fixing. The firm is anonymised and the figures are illustrative, but the structure, the assumptions and the discipline are exactly what a real audit produces.

28

forms a week

Client intake form, completed by three people across two systems.

1.4 h

to 0.35 h per form

Observed time today, and the forecast after the rebuild.

1,529 h

released a year

Of which 459 hours were overtime and casual cover: real cash.

5 to 8

months to payback

Conservative to expected case, on a twelve-month cost of \$57,600.

THE RECOMMENDATION

Build. Then measure it.

The audit recommends a build. The leak is large, the exception paths are known, both systems have usable interfaces, and the people who do the work want it gone. Payback is inside a year in the conservative case and inside six months in the expected case. The build is scoped as fixed fee, inside the firm's existing practice management and document systems, with the first version live within four to six weeks of kickoff and measured at twelve months. That measured result is the receipt. This document is the forecast.

HOW TO READ THIS

Cash and capacity are shown separately. Cash is money that stops leaving the firm. Capacity is time that comes back, and it only counts when it has somewhere billable to go. Every number carries its assumption, and the payback is a range because the assumptions move.



01 · THE MAP

The workflow as it ran. Nine steps, three people, two systems.

STEP	WHAT HAPPENS	DETAIL	WHO	SYSTEM
01	Enquiry arrives	Email or phone. Reception logs it in the CRM by hand.	Reception	CRM
02	Conflict check	Partner or paralegal searches the practice system and two spreadsheets.	Paralegal	PMS, Excel
03	Intake form sent	PDF attached to a templated email. Client fills it in by hand or in Word.	Reception	Email
04	Form returned	Arrives as PDF, photo or Word. Re-keyed into the practice system.	Paralegal	PMS
05	Identity documents	Requested separately if not attached. Chased by phone on average 1.6 times.	Reception	Email, phone
06	Matter opened	Paralegal creates the matter, copies fields from the form, sets fee earner.	Paralegal	PMS
07	Engagement letter	Generated from a template. Fields corrected by hand where the form was unclear.	Paralegal	Word, PMS
08	Partner review	Partner checks the letter and the conflict result. Returns about one in six.	Partner	Email
09	Trust and billing set-up	Finance adds billing details and trust instructions from the form.	Finance	PMS, Xero

Four exception paths nobody had written down: a conflict hit that needs a second partner; a client who returns the form incomplete (about one in four); identity documents that fail the check; and a matter that changes fee earner after the letter is sent. Each one restarts part of the sequence. None appeared in the firm's procedure manual.

02 · THE ASSUMPTIONS

How we measured it, and where each number came from.

INPUT	VALUE	SOURCE AND METHOD
Time per form	1.4 hours	Observed across 31 forms in week one, three people, median. Range 0.9 to 3.1 h.
Volume	28 a week, 52 weeks	Practice system intake count, trailing twelve months, no seasonality adjustment.
Loaded cost per hour	\$92	Payroll: blended rate of the three roles, plus on-costs and overheads at 28 per cent.
Rework	1 in 4 forms	Rework log and email trail. Each incomplete form adds 0.5 h on average, included in the 1.4 h.
Overtime and casual share	30 per cent of hours	Payroll: overtime and casual cover attributable to intake backlog over twelve months.
Time after rebuild	0.35 hours	Forecast. Partner review and judgement calls remain manual; capture, re-keying and chasing do not.



03 · CASH AND CAPACITY

What was actually recoverable, shown separately.

LINE	VALUE	BASIS
Hours released a year	1,529 h	28 forms × 52 weeks × (1.4 h – 0.35 h). Forecast.
Of which: cash cost removed	459 h · \$42,228	The 30 per cent that was overtime and casual cover. Stops being paid. Counted in full.
Of which: capacity released	1,070 h	Salaried time that comes back. Worth nothing until it is redeployed.
Capacity redeployed, conservative	25 per cent · 268 h · \$48,150	Redeployed to billable work at \$180 an hour realised. The partners' own low estimate.
Capacity redeployed, expected	50 per cent · 535 h · \$96,300	Same rate. The firm has a billable backlog in two practice areas, so this is plausible, not certain.

Capacity only counts when it has somewhere billable to go. If the firm cannot redeploy the hours, the honest year-one benefit is the cash line alone: \$42,228. The audit says so, and the payback range below starts from there.

04 · THE COSTS

Build, software and running cost. Twelve-month total.

ITEM	AMOUNT	WHAT IT COVERS
Build	\$48,000	Fixed fee. Intake capture, conflict pre-check, re-keying removed, document chasing automated, engagement letter pre-filled.
Third-party licences	\$3,600	Form and document-capture tooling, twelve months. Quoted separately so you can see it.
Review and maintenance	\$6,000	Monthly review of exceptions and rule changes, twelve months.
Twelve-month total	\$57,600	Inc GST. Excludes the firm's own staff time in weeks one to six, estimated at 20 hours.

05 · PAYBACK

The range, not a point.

CASE	YEAR-ONE BENEFIT	YEAR-ONE COST	PAYBACK	ASSUMPTION
Cash only	\$42,228	\$57,600	16.4 months	If no released capacity is redeployed. The floor.
Conservative	\$90,378	\$57,600	7.6 months	Cash plus 25 per cent of capacity redeployed.
Expected	\$138,528	\$57,600	5.0 months	Cash plus 50 per cent of capacity redeployed.

What moves it. Volume: every two forms a week either way shifts payback by about three weeks. Time after rebuild: if partner review stays at today's rate the forecast holds; if the firm keeps the paper form for some clients it slips. Redeployment: this is the assumption that matters most, which is why the range is stated and the firm, not N+1, chose the percentages.



06 · THE CALL

Build. Here is why, and here is what would have made it a no.

Why build. The leak is measured, not guessed. Three of the four exception paths can be handled by rules the partners already apply in their heads. Both systems have usable interfaces. The people who do the work asked for it. And the conservative case pays back inside eight months on a fixed fee.

What would have made it a no. Volume under about twelve a week. A practice system with no usable interface. Partners unwilling to write down the conflict rules. Or no billable work to redeploy capacity into, which would leave the cash line alone carrying a sixteen-month payback. In two of the last five audits the answer was do not build, and the firm kept the map and the plan.

THE 90-DAY PLAN

What to build, what to buy, what to leave alone.

WHEN	ACTION	WHAT
Weeks 1 to 2	Build	Structured intake form with identity capture, replacing the PDF. Conflict pre-check against the practice system and both spreadsheets.
Weeks 3 to 4	Build	Form data written straight into the practice system. Engagement letter pre-filled. Chasing sequence for incomplete forms and missing documents.
Weeks 5 to 6	Operate	Live with one practice group. Exceptions routed to a named paralegal. First measurement against the week-one baseline.
Weeks 7 to 12	Extend	Second practice group. Trust and billing set-up fields passed to finance. Exception rules tightened from live data.
Leave alone	—	Partner review of the engagement letter. The judgement in it is the firm's asset and the time is small.
Buy, not build	—	Identity verification. A licensed service does it better and carries the compliance burden.

WHAT A REAL AUDIT ADDS

What you get that this example cannot show.

The full audit runs to about twenty pages: the process map as a diagram with every exception path drawn, the observation log, the cost model as a spreadsheet you can change, the integration notes for your systems, the build scope and fixed fee, and the twelve-month measurement plan that produces the receipt. All of it is yours, to use with anyone.

THE WORKFLOW AUDIT

Ten business days. \$4,950 inc GST, fixed and paid up front. Your workflow mapped as it actually runs, the leak measured in hours and dollars, a 90-day plan and a business case like this one, built from your numbers.

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