

# SIMPLE PROCESS IMPROVEMENT TOOLS ENABLE FIRM'S MARKETING AGILITY

*Process & Business Analysis Case Study*

## CLIENT SITUATION

A global pharmaceutical and consumer products company faced a difficult challenge with its marketing agency SOW approval process. Despite having an automation system in place to review and approve SOWs, it was rare that the end-to-end process finishes on time. Because the scopes guide the annual brand marketing campaigns, it's essential that they be completed in a timely manner each January. However, the process currently takes more than six months which frequently leads to SOWs not being approved until the end of Q1 or during Q2, threatening the execution of strategic marketing initiatives.

As a result, this process puts the company's relationships with agencies and top-tier talent at risk due to delays in payments and contract signing. Without continuity with its strategic marketing partners, loss of institutional knowledge was common with the agencies, further slowing the delivery and effectiveness of marketing projects.

Our client needed to complete the entire SOW process by year-end in order to secure the right contracts and retain key talent. To develop a better process, the company decided to partner with North Highland to execute a Kaizen event—a low-risk, short-term project aimed at uncovering a creative solution to a specific problem.

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A global pharmaceutical company's annual scope of work (SOW) process for strategic marketing agency projects took nearly six months due to complex procedures, a highly-matrixed organizational structure, and multiple approval steps. After several weeks of process discovery, North Highland brought stakeholders together in a two-day session to design a new process that saves the company substantial time and ensures alignment with agency partners to deliver marketing strategy.

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## OUR APPROACH

North Highland looked at the SOW process holistically with the goal of shortening the number of steps, cycle times, and lead time. First, the project team defined and reviewed the current process and key elements such as decision makers, tools, and policies. North Highland used its findings from the discovery phase to inform planning and facilitation of a two-day Kaizen event to focus on improving the end-to-end SOW process by eliminating waste and reducing defects.

During the event, lock-in sessions were held where multiple stakeholders came together to assess and refine processes using tools and techniques such as brainstorming, Affinity grouping, and PICK charts. North Highland facilitated negotiations between the marketing, agencies, and procurement teams to help both sides understand each other's needs. To expand the participation in the process improvement effort, the project team leveraged a third party's innovation tool to solicit feedback from the extended stakeholder group—over 60 people, allowing the team to understand all of the pain points in the scoping process. This approach enabled North Highland to seamlessly integrate the ideas and feedback into the Kaizen event.

Through the workshop, North Highland was able to identify and remove numerous unnecessary decision points. It was determined that only the procurement business unit needed to approve the SOWs, eliminating the need for finance and marketing to take part in the approval process. Tasks that didn't add value to the core SOW process were also identified. Some were moved to parallel paths that could be started prior to the approval process, while others were eliminated completely.

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## VALUE DELIVERED

Ultimately, through the three-week initiative culminating in the two-day Kaizen workshop, the company was able to remove decision-making barriers that prevented SOWs from being signed on time and put its brand strategies at risk. With guidance from North Highland, the organization gained buy-in from all stakeholders in the new process and SOW lead time was reduced substantially: the end-to-end process was reduced by 50 percent—from six months to three months—while the approval stage had 15 steps removed for a 33 percent time savings. As a result, the company redesigned a critical process central to its \$50 million-per-year

investment in agency partners and set the stage for ongoing successful marketing execution.

**NORTH HIGHLAND SHORTENED THE NUMBER OF DECISION-MAKING STEPS IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY'S MARKETING SCOPE OF WORK PROCESS, REDUCING IT FROM SIX TO THREE MONTHS AND POTENTIALLY SAVING THE COMPANY BOTH MONEY AND STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS WITH AGENCY PARTNERS.**

## ABOUT NORTH HIGHLAND

North Highland is a global management consulting firm known for helping clients solve their most complex challenges related to customer experience, performance improvement, technology and digital, and transformation. We add value and support our clients across the full spectrum of consulting, from strategy through delivery. We bring the big ideas, then we make them real.

North Highland is an employee-owned firm, headquartered in Atlanta, Ga., with more than 3,000 consultants worldwide and 60+ offices around the globe. The firm is a member of [Cordence Worldwide](#), a global management consulting alliance. For more information, visit and connect with us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).