"Life of a Story" systems flow: Key Takeaways

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It's important to think about the flow of work as a dynamic system

1. Holistic Perspective
   a. Forest Thinking: Approach flow mapping as if exploring the forest – consider each element as you would the food and water resources that affect a declining population of elk.
   b. Application: Identify not only the key workflow steps but also their interdependencies and the environment impacting them.

2. Dynamic Relationships
   a. Forest Ecosystems: Just as a forest changes with seasons, recognize that a workflow may evolve through the lifecycle of a project or product.
   b. Actionable Insight: Regularly revisit the workflow to reflect changes in influence, goals, and interactions.

3. Sustainability and Growth
   a. Forest Growth: Learn how to balance flow, capacity, and prioritization.
   b. Application: Encourage sustainable practices within your work system, promoting long-term benefits over short-term gains.

4. Resilience
   a. Forest Resiliency: A diverse forest is more resilient. It can better withstand challenges. An Elk population does better when there are multiple food and water sources, for example.
   b. Actionable Insight: Aim for diversity in your stakeholder group to enhance the ecosystem's or team's overall resilience.

5. Continuous Learning
   a. Forest Learning: Just as forest manager must include learning from the past, use historical data from your actor maps to anticipate future trends.
   b. Application: Use feedback loops to learn and adapt your strategies continuously.

Understanding the complex interconnection of actors within your initiative can be intricate and rewarding such as when the Elk population in Yellowstone made a comeback when Forest Rangers

realized they were missing an apex predator. Use the insights to manage your relationships more effectively so you can experience a healthier, more productive environment just like a thriving forest.

Exercise
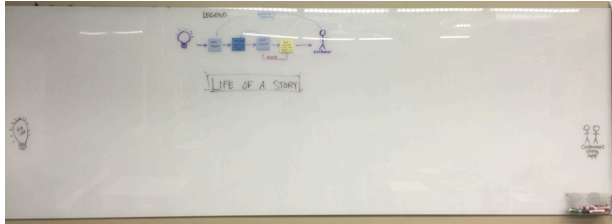
✔ Set up the visual map on a long whiteboard, wall, or online whiteboard
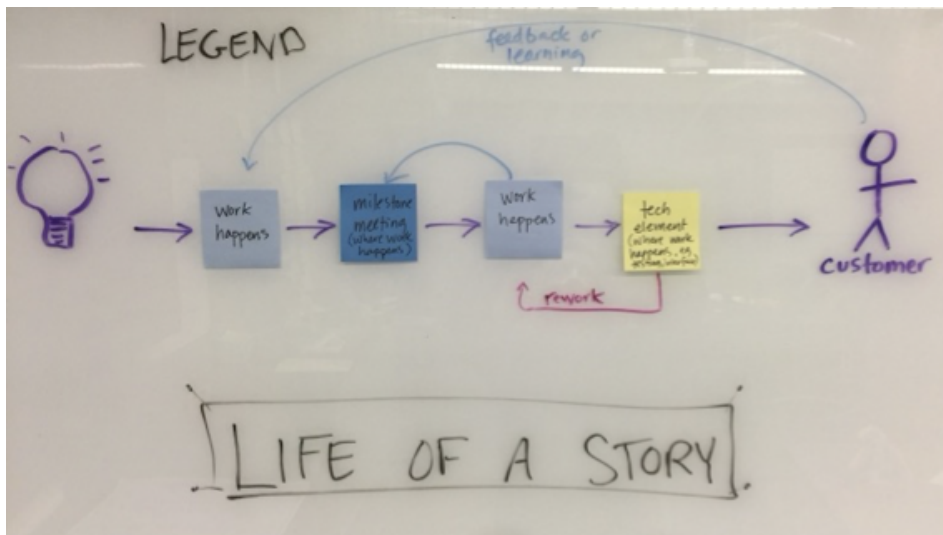
✔ Create a legend to help participants as they go. Use different colors to indicate categories.

✔ Demonstrate how to fill out the first few notes, and explain the arrows as you draw them.

✔ Ask participants to fill out their portion of the flow. You may have multiple people working at the same time.
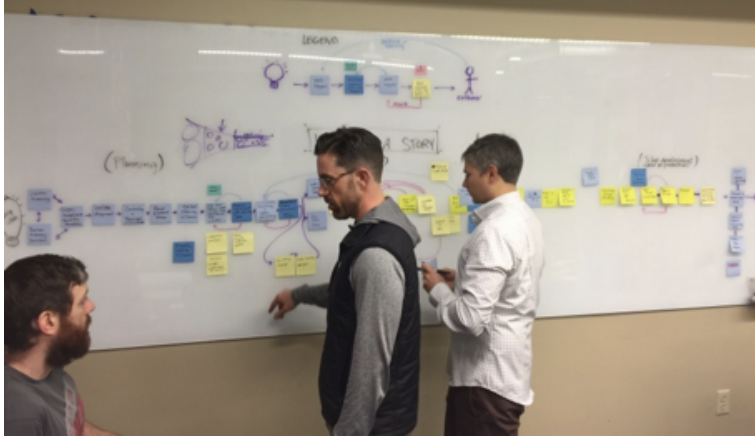
✔ As the flow fills in, stop frequently to talk through what's happening, with a focus on helping everyone understand the full flow. Trace an individual story through the entire flow to see the whole journey. Ask questions like, "What do you notice?" or "What surprises you?"

✔ Once the flow settles in, you can add in optional categories:
   o Risks (of delay, error, lack of clarity)
   o Dependencies
   o Manual vs automated work
   o Approval loops

✔ Optional
   o Use the flow to create definition of ready / definition of done. For example, determine all the steps that a story has to flow through before it's complete and then use those steps to create a "done" checklist.

✔ Talk through the final loop:
   o Prompt attendees with questions like "what