



AI & AUTOMATION

Human-in-the-loop workflow canvas

Design review, authority and exception handling

Define where human judgement belongs in an automated workflow and make every approval, correction, escalation and rejection lead to a controlled outcome.

THE WORK

Map the task, permitted action, evidence presented to the reviewer and the authority needed at each decision.

THE RESULT

A reusable workflow canvas with explicit routes, queue ownership, timeout behaviour and completion checks.

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01 / TASK BOUNDARY

Scope and decision authority

A human control point needs a defined decision. "Someone reviews it" leaves the authority, evidence and consequence unresolved.

Name the action being controlled

Describe the incoming task, the proposed output and the action that would follow approval.

Identify the point where the workflow changes a record, communicates externally, spends money or creates another consequential commitment.

Place the control before that point when the consequence requires prior approval. A reviewer who only sees a completed action may support detection and correction, but cannot prevent the original action.

Assign distinct responsibilities

The workflow owner defines the permitted use and accepts the operating risk. The reviewer decides an individual case within a stated authority. A specialist resolves cases beyond that authority. The technical operator maintains routing, permissions and recovery.

One person may hold several roles in a small team, but the decisions still need to be distinct. Record a deputy and identify who can pause the process when the normal owner is unavailable.

Define the eligibility boundary

Specify which requests may enter the workflow: accepted task types, required inputs, allowed users and supported conditions. Requests outside the boundary need a return, manual route or escalation before an output is prepared.

Separate missing information from a substantive rejection. The user may be able to correct an incomplete request. A prohibited action should not become eligible simply because more information is supplied.

State the approval limit

Give reviewers a clear limit on what they can authorise. Identify decisions requiring a second approver or specialist review under the organisation's policy. Enforce the limit in permissions where the system supports it.

A reviewer should never need to approve a case merely to move it out of a queue. Provide a hold or escalation action that preserves the current state and explains what remains unresolved.

A complete authority statement

Name the role, permitted decision, required evidence, limits and escalation destination. Test whether another authorised person can apply the statement to the same case.

02 / ROUTING

Decision routes and state changes

Every route should name the next owner, the next state and whether the proposed action is allowed to execute.

APPROVE

Authorise the defined action

Approval applies to the exact output and action shown to the reviewer. Record who approved, when, and which version was reviewed. A material edit after approval should invalidate it and return the case to review.

Completion check

The executor checks current approval and permissions, performs the action once and records a confirmed result.

CORRECT

Return for revision

Send the case to a named person or controlled preparation step with the correction reason. Preserve the reviewed version and make the changed content visible on return. Define how repeated corrections become a specialist escalation.

Completion check

The revised output returns to the appropriate review route; a previous approval cannot authorise the changed version.

ESCALATE

Hold for a qualified decision

Route unresolved evidence, policy conflicts or decisions beyond authority to the appropriate specialist. Preserve the proposed action in a held state and show the reason and destination to the current owner.

Completion check

No action executes while the case is escalated. The specialist can approve within authority, request correction or reject.

REJECT

Close without executing

Record why the requested action cannot proceed and communicate the next step where appropriate. Distinguish a final rejection from a request that can be resubmitted after a specific condition changes.

Completion check

The case closes without the proposed action. Any later resubmission creates a traceable new review.

Missing evidence, an expired review window or an unavailable reviewer should follow a defined hold or manual route. They should not be interpreted as approval.

03 / REVIEW INTERFACE

Information the reviewer needs

The review screen should make the decision legible without requiring the reviewer to reconstruct the entire process.

Show the request and proposed action

Present the original request, the output being reviewed, the intended recipient and the effect of approval. If the action changes a system record, show the relevant current state and proposed change.

Use precise action labels. "Approve and send" conveys a consequence that "Continue" may hide. Keep editing, approval and execution states distinguishable so the reviewer can tell what has actually happened.

Make disagreement usable

Offer correction reasons that help the next owner act: missing input, incorrect content, unsupported action, policy conflict or wrong destination. Allow a short explanation when a fixed reason is insufficient.

Retain reviewer decisions for quality analysis. A high approval rate may indicate good preparation, weak review or a design that makes rejection difficult; investigate the pattern before interpreting it as success.

Expose the evidence and gaps

Provide the source information needed to verify the output, with enough context to detect a missing qualification or conflicting record. Make absent, outdated or inaccessible evidence visible.

Separate what the system observed from what it inferred. The reviewer should be able to correct a fact without accepting an unrelated recommendation. Avoid a confident presentation that conceals the absence of supporting material.

Keep sensitive information controlled

Show only the information required for the reviewer's role. Apply the same access rules to attachments, exports and notification messages as to the main case.

Log the decision, relevant version and execution result without copying unnecessary sensitive content into broad-access audit trails. Set retention and access with the responsible information owner.

Test the review process

Observe qualified reviewers handling ordinary, incomplete and conflicting cases. Check whether they notice the issue, choose the correct route and understand what approval will do.

04 / OPERATION

Queue capacity and failure handling

A workflow remains controlled only while its review and escalation routes can keep up with the work.

Estimate the full human workload

Measure incoming volume, the share of cases on each route and the time needed for review, correction and specialist handling. Include context switching and repeat reviews when they are material.

Compare the required hours with available qualified capacity during the relevant operating window. Averages can conceal a peak queue or an absent specialist. Identify who watches backlog and who can reduce intake or switch to the manual process.

Handle partial execution

Separate approval from execution success. If an external system times out, the action may have completed even though no response arrived. Check the authoritative record before retrying and use duplicate prevention where supported.

Record partial outcomes so an operator can complete or reverse the remaining work deliberately. Never turn an unknown result into a completed status solely to clear an error.

Define waiting and expiry

Give waiting cases a visible status and a named owner. Set service expectations appropriate to the task. Explain what happens if the review expires or the information becomes stale before execution.

Notify the right person before a missed deadline becomes an unattended failure. Avoid repeatedly escalating the same case to people who lack authority to resolve it. Preserve a single current owner even when several people are consulted.

Make stopping operational

Document who can pause intake, revoke execution permission and activate the fallback. State what happens to queued, approved and partially completed cases when the process stops.

Test restart as well as shutdown. Revalidate stale approvals and changed inputs; do not release the accumulated queue automatically without confirming that its conditions still hold.

05 / ACCEPTANCE

Checks before using the workflow

Run these checks with the people who will review, operate and own the process.
Retain the result and resolve failures before expanding use.

01	Authority is enforced Attempt a decision beyond the reviewer's permitted scope and verify the case routes to the correct role.	Verified ☐ Evidence to retain Role permissions, observed route and the owner who accepted the escalation.
02	Changed content returns to review Alter an approved output or an input that changes the decision. Confirm execution requires a current approval.	Verified ☐ Evidence to retain Version history and the invalidated approval state.
03	Every decision has a destination Exercise approve, correct, escalate and reject. Verify the case state, next owner and execution permission.	Verified ☐ Evidence to retain A trace for each route, including closure and resubmission behaviour.
04	Unavailability does not authorise action Remove the primary reviewer and allow a case to reach its waiting limit. Check the deputy, hold or manual route.	Verified ☐ Evidence to retain Notification delivery, queue ownership and absence of unintended execution.
05	Execution failure is recoverable Test timeout, retry and partial completion in a controlled environment. Confirm the authoritative result is checked.	Verified ☐ Evidence to retain A single final outcome, operator recovery record and no duplicate action.

Human-in-the-loop workflow canvas

Complete the canvas for one controlled action. Name roles rather than relying on an individual's availability. Keep the task, decision routes and execution checks consistent.

1. Scope & authority

Define what may enter and what approval permits.

Task, input and controlled action

Eligibility and excluded uses

Reviewer authority and limits

Workflow owner, operator and deputies

2. Decision routes

Each route needs an owner and a next state.

Approve: authorised action and executor

Correct: destination and re-review rule

Escalate: specialist, hold and resolution

Reject: closure reason and communication

3. Evidence & operation

Specify what enables a reliable review.

Evidence shown and required checks

Queue owner, capacity and waiting limit

Unavailable reviewer and fallback route

Pause authority and restart condition

4. Execution & assurance

Verify that the decision creates the intended result.

Version, approval and permission check

Success, duplicate and partial-failure checks

Decision record, access and retention

Acceptance owner and review date