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Tutor Top Ten List: Implement a Sustainable Document Management Environment

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Executive Overview

Your organization (executives, managers, and employees) understands the value of having written business process documents (process maps, procedures, instructions, reference documents, and form abstracts). Policies and procedures should be in writing because they help to reduce the range of individual decisions and encourage management by exception: the manager only needs to give special attention to unusual problems, not covered by a specific policy or procedure. As more and more procedures are written to cover recurring situations, managers will begin to make decisions which will be consistent from one functional area to the next.

Introduction

Companies should take a project management approach when implementing an environment for a sustainable documentation program and do the following:

1. Identify an Executive Champion
2. Put together a winning team
3. Assign ownership
4. Centralize publishing
5. Establish the Document Maintenance Process Up Front
6. Document critical activities only
7. Document actual practice
8. Minimize documentation
9. Support continuous improvement
10. Keep it simple

Guidelines

Identify an Executive Champion

Appoint a top down driver. Select one key individual to be a mentor for the procedure planning team. The individual should be a senior manager, such as your company president, CIO, CFO, the vice-president of quality, manufacturing, or engineering. Written policies and procedures can be important supportive aids when known to express the thinking for the chief executive officer and / or the president and to have his or her full support.

Put Together a Winning Team

Choose a strong Project Management Leader and staff the procedure planning team with management members from cross functional groups. Make sure team members have the responsibility – and the authority – to make things happen.

The winning team should consist of the Documentation Project Manager, Document Owners (one for each functional area), a Document Controller, and Document Specialists (as needed). The *Tutor Implementation Guide* has complete job descriptions for these roles.

Assign Ownership

It is virtually impossible to keep process documentation simple and meaningful if employees who are far removed from the activity itself create it. It is impossible to keep documentation up-to-date when responsibility for the document is not clearly understood.

Key to the Tutor methodology, therefore, is the concept of ownership. Each document has a single owner, who is responsible for ensuring that the document is necessary and that it reflects actual practice. The owner must be a person who is knowledgeable about the activity and who has the authority to build consensus among the persons who participate in the activity as well as the authority to define or change the way an activity is performed. The owner must be an advocate of the performers and negotiate, not dictate practices.

In the Tutor environment, a document's owner is the only person with the authority to approve an update to that document.

Centralize Publishing

Although it is tempting (especially in a networked environment and with document management software solutions) to decentralize the control of all documents -- with each owner updating and distributing his own -- Tutor promotes centralized publishing by assigning the Document Controller (gate keeper) to manage the updates and distribution of the procedures library.

With centralized publishing, the Document Controller insures that:

1. Updated documents are distributed only with the proper authorization.
2. Updated documents are distributed to all affected employees (that is, no one is left out of the loop).
3. All process documentation reflects a consistent format and structure.
4. Integration between documents is easier to achieve.
5. Most importantly, the time and effort required by an owner to update and distribute his/her documentation is dramatically reduced.

This last advantage is especially important in a busy environment where many document owners are likely to view documentation as a low priority or too time-consuming.

Not all documents, of course, need centralized publishing. Some documents, especially those that are unique to a single department or esoteric in information, are best maintained at the department level. Nevertheless, documents that involve multiple employees, documents that cross department lines, and documents that address key activities should be centrally controlled.

Establish a Document Maintenance Process Up Front (and stick to it)

Everyone in your organization should know they are invited to suggest changes to procedures and should understand exactly what steps to take to do so. Tutor provides a set of procedures to help your company set up a healthy document control system.

- Adding a Process Document
- Modifying a Process Document
- Auditing Process Documents

Should we use a content management database to store our documents?

There are many document management products available to automate some of the document change and maintenance steps. Depending on the size of your organization, a simple document management system can reduce the effort it takes to track and distribute document changes and updates. Whether your company decides to store the written policies and procedures on a file server or in a database, the essential tasks for maintaining documents are the same, though some tasks are automated. Your company can tailor the document control procedures to reflect the automated tasks.

Document Critical Activities Only

The best way to keep your documentation simple is to reduce the number of process documents to a bare minimum and to include in those documents only as much detail as is absolutely necessary.

The first step to reducing process documentation is to document only those activities that are deemed critical. Not all activities require documentation. In fact, some critical activities cannot and should not

be standardized. Others may be sufficiently documented with an instruction or a checklist and may not require a procedure.

A document should only be created when it enhances the performance of the employee performing the activity. If it does not help the employee, then there is no reason to maintain the document.

Activities that represent little risk (such as project status), activities that cannot be defined in terms of specific tasks (such as product research), and activities that can be performed in a variety of ways (such as advertising) often do not require documentation.

Sometimes, an activity will evolve to the point where documentation is necessary. For example, an activity performed by single employee may be straightforward and uncomplicated -- that is, until the activity is performed by multiple employees. Sometimes, it is the interaction between co-workers that necessitates documentation; sometimes, it is the complexity or the diversity of the activity.

Before documenting an activity, you should ask:

- What are the risks if this activity is performed in a variety of ways?
- Is there a high probability for error if this activity is not taught consistently?
- Do interactions between personnel make this activity complex? Does this activity involve employees in different departments?
- Has this activity historically been a problem area?
- Is there a right way (or best way) to perform this activity?
- Does this activity represent a consensus that needs to be documented?

For regulatory compliance, here are a few more questions you should ask to determine whether to document an activity.

- Is it required by law?
- Is it specified by contract? (including purchase order)
- Is it necessary for prudent business operations (e.g., compliance with a quality standard)
- Would any harm come to the organization if the document, or part of it, was eliminated?
- Would any harm come to the organization if the document, or part of it, existed?

Once you determine that an activity requires documentation, you should ask:

- Is there existing material which can help accelerate the documentation process?
- What is the minimum amount of documentation required?
- Do I need to write a procedure to cover the entire activity, or do I simply need to document certain tasks within the activity?

  Remember: a procedure describes an activity; an instruction, business form, or reference document focuses on a task within an activity.

The Tutor model documents reflect those activities that generally require documentation. Comparable activities in your company may be less complex, however, requiring no formal documentation. On the other hand, your company may have critical activities not covered by Tutor's models. In this case, you will want to create new documents to cover these activities. Either way, you should strive to document only those activities that require it.

Document Actual Practices

The only reason to maintain process documentation is to enhance the performance of the employee performing the activity. And documentation can only enhance performance if it reflects reality -- that is, current best practice. Documentation that reflects an unattainable ideal or outdated practices will end up on the shelf, unused and forgotten.

Documenting actual practice means (1) auditing the activity to understand how the work is really performed, (2) identifying best practices with employees who are involved in the activity, (3) building consensus so that everyone agrees on a common method, and (4) recording that consensus.

Process documentation should reflect reality. Therefore, Tutor provides model documents for you to customize, rather than canned procedures for you to implement. Each Tutor document reflects generally accepted business practices, but none of these documents reflects your environment precisely. A critical part of the Tutor solution is the customization of the model documents to reflect your company's best practices.

Minimize Documentation

One way to *keep it simple* is to document at the highest level possible. That is, include in your documents only as much detail as is absolutely necessary.

When writing a document, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the purpose of this document? That is, what problem will it solve?
  By focusing on this question, you can target the critical information.
- What questions are the end users likely to have?
- What level of detail is required?
- Is any of this information extraneous to the document's purpose?

Short, concise documents are user friendly *and* they are easier to keep up to date. In writing documents, therefore, remember: if in doubt, leave it out.

Support Continuous Improvement

Employees who perform an activity are often in the best position to identify improvements to the process. In other words, continuous improvement is a natural byproduct of the work itself -- but only if the improvements are communicated to all employees who are involved in the process, and only if there is consensus among those employees.

Traditionally, process documentation has been used to dictate performance, to limit employees' actions. In the Tutor environment, process documents are used to communicate improvements identified by employees.

How does this work? The Tutor methodology requires a process document to reflect actual practice, so the owner of a document must routinely audit its content -- *does the document match what the employees are doing?* If it doesn't, the owner has the responsibility to evaluate the process, to build consensus among the employees, to identify "best practices," and to communicate these improvements via a document update.

Continuous improvement can also be an outgrowth of corrective action -- but only if the solutions to problems are communicated effectively. The goal should be to solve a problem once and only once, which means not only identifying the solution, but ensuring that the solution becomes part of the process.

The Tutor system provides the method through which improvements and solutions are documented and communicated to all affected employees in a cost-effective, timely manner; it ensures that improvements are not lost or confined to a single employee.

Conclusion

Keep it Simple

Process documents don't have to be complex and unfriendly. In fact, the simpler the format and organization, the more likely the documents will be used. And the simpler the method of maintenance, the more likely the documents will be kept up-to-date.

Keep it simply by:

- Minimizing skills and training required
- Following the established Tutor document format and layout
- Avoiding technology just for technology's sake

No other rule has as major an impact on the success of your internal documentation as -- *keep it simple*.

Learn More

For more information about Tutor, visit Oracle.Com or the Tutor Blog.
Post your questions at the Tutor Forum.

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