SOP Best Practices

7/5/2019

Topic:

➢ This document covers the topic of writing standard operating procedures as well as creative and informational documents. It also suggests best practices for creation, structure and format.

Mission:

➢ The mission is to provide examples, descriptions and recommendations for a consistent way to create useful procedural documents, eliminate system variation and provide training/reference material for new and existing employees.

Purpose:

➢ The purpose of providing best practices in writing SOP's is to unify the collective efforts of instilling its *platform* and accessibility to the organization. To magnify *communication* by written detailed explanations of our existing optimal methods of operation and then be complied for reference to anyone in the origination whether a new or existing employee.

Procedure:

➢ *Template* - Start SOP's on a template that will help ensure that all areas are covered so there is complete detail for the topic, mission and purpose of the document.

➢ *Relevance* - Begin with the end in mind considering the audience, all relevant data and what the document is to accomplish. Above all the document accurately explains what the procedure needs to deliver from start to finish.

➢ *Prerequisites* – There may be some areas to cover before this procedure begins so be sure to include any necessary prior steps.

➢ *References*/*Resources* – Include any helpful websites, links to documents, flow charts, pictures, specific measurements, dates, times and contact information. Provide any relevant information needed to understand the procedure.

➢ *Scope* – If the process or procedure is too broad to be either concise or not focused in a particular area; break the document out into several. Ideally focused on one particular point.

➢ *Terminology* – Define any frequently used terms, abbreviations or acronyms to ensure the understanding of the specific procedure and or document.

➢ *Access* – Be sure that any new documents, addendums or corrections are loaded onto on repository where all employee may access them. Also, notify the relevant parties when a procedure has been added.

➢ *Process written by* - The process is best written by the team or department head that either designed the original process or work the process regularly. Once written, go through the complete process to ensure the accuracy of the document.

➢ *Responsible* - Be sure to include the responsible/accountable departments and position titles to the process.

> ➢ **SOP Works** – Follow the SOP Works process as stated in MOD's Strategic Plan. SOP Works document follows:

Standard operating procedures: Standardizing procedures is foundational and elemental in optimizing communication efficiencies through an organization. MOD's plan includes producing an accessible repository of useful polices & procedures to all employees. Our workable process for executing the writing of these procedures will be called the *"SOP Works"* and will be discussed at our weekly and monthly team meetings. The elements of the SOP Works processes are as follows:

Compile a list of necessary procedures: The MOD leadership team will embrace the responsibility of identifying necessary standard operating procedures to be written by communicating with their teams and each other. The plan is to have a large list of written procedures needs to draw from in the form of Scripts, punch/check lists, flow charts, manuals, training materials and general business flow & regular recurring operations.

Determine priority and rank: Once we have compiled a list of documents we intend to compose, the plan is to prioritize and rank the list of importance or urgency.

Assign, set goals and measure: Once the most important document needs are outlined, the assigning of who sees the documents through to completion by either writing them themselves, having their team write them or even having a group type input session to get them written will occur. The important part is that each SOP or document will have one owner to see it through. Then once an owner is assigned to the document(s), time goals will be specified and measured on their individual scorecard.

Example: Write 3 SOP documents selected from the SOP Works list per month.

Vet documents/process then repeat: The final drafts of SOP documents can be vetted via team at our weekly and monthly team meetings. They will be vetted for accuracy, thoroughness and that they actually add value to the process. Once it's been vetted it's added to the accessible repository for reference to all employees. Our SOP Works process will also be vetted and evaluated for improvements once per quarter.

Other documents and Information regarding MOD's SOP compilation.

Informational Document – Some documents may be to just provide information or specific subject matter relevant to several procedures or to a specific project.

Creative Document – These are documents that provoke though and or aid in training like the Scorecard worksheet.

Legal Document – These documents are likely to be either written by a third party or gathered from government agencies specific to regulatory compliance and added into our policies and procedures for reference.

Checklist – Checklists, punch lists and criteria based scripts typically accompany a complete SOP.

Conclusion:

Ideally SOP's are written with clear intent with only the necessary detail. It's important to note that documents less than concise, can fall short of a quick reference or helpful guide and into a mind numbing page after page digest expansion. The writing structure wants to jump out at you if reading a table of contents or index. Bulleted lists, bold and italic headings can be helpful to structure the document for quick reference. As long as the written document as an effective communication tool, explaining subtle distinctions between a successful process and not so successful process, then that's the pivot point of what needs to be written.

Below is a *copy of text* from Digicast Productions, digicast.com added to provide more insight to writing SOP's.

Quote:

5 Mistakes Companies make with their Standard Operating Procedures

Here is a list of five of the top mistakes we find time and time again in standard operating procedures (or SOP's):

1. **Head office or Committees write the documents** - if ever there was a bad way to write documents, it's like this. Usually the procedures are written in corporate speak with big words and long sentences. It's always about "persons" and what they can and can't do. Using a language that no-one would speak out on the floor (or in an office, unless they are an uptight lawyer with no friends). They read like legal documents where the focus is on protecting the company (and those who wrote it) and little effort is made to help staff members understand what to do correctly (I could go on for days about this, as it's a pet hate of mine). Often, the procedures are incorrect and head office or committees don't know how to improve them nor do they have the time to care.
2. **Supervisors and other staff members write the documents** - This is a better option than head office or committees because they should know what they're writing about. Sort of. But then usually because they don't feel comfortable writing, they write to impress their high school teacher. So again, out come the big words and long sentences. But because one site often does processes in a different way, you often get procedures that are irrelevant for different sites. This results in standard operating procedures that are not necessarily based on best practice. Generally, these SOP's get ignored because procedures are incorrect and inconsistent for a particular site.
3. **Pass on the how but forget the why** - A lot of SOPs pass on the 'how', but not the 'why'? This means that company processes get repeated without people ever questioning why they need to do something. Over time, staff are taught processes that solve problems that no longer exist. Empower your staff by explaining why they have to something, so they know whether that process is redundant when things change. Read more about this in "The Importance of Why in Workplace Training".
4. **Boring formatting and lots of text** - Educational researchers have found that 83% of human learning occurs visually. We all know how easy it is to learn from a picture than a page of poorly written or complicated text. Yet, probably less than 50% of the standard operating procedures I've had to trawl through have used any photos or diagrams.

5. **Negative, unfriendly writing style** - Humans tend to ignore negative words such as "don't or "can't", instead hearing the word after. So if you say "Don't run" many will just hear run. Rather than tell people what you don't want them to do, say what you want. So say "Walk slowly" instead. Often, standard operating procedures are full of lots of negative language. In fact, I worked on one that was so negative it treated the reader like they were already disobedient and a little on the stupid side. It was very off-putting and if I was a new starter, I would have been making plans to look for a new job (interestingly, this company has low turnover and good levels of morale, it was just head office protecting themselves, while the individual sites must have been making new starters feel welcome, regardless of the training manuals).

Three Steps to Fixing Up your Standard Operating Procedures

The better types of standard operating procedures I've read have been written by training managers or really, really passionate OHS managers who are always trying to work out the best way to communicate training messages. But they usually have mistakes lurking somewhere - a few incorrect procedures or challenging language.

Here are tips to improve your SOPs or even your <u>induction and training manuals</u>:

1. **Get an outsider to read your standard operating procedures**. This is a great litmus test, as to how well a lay-person understands the information. Often, when you're an expert in your field you have "The Curse of Knowledge". This means the more you know in a certain field the harder it is to break the information down, so that a new person to the field can understand it. Either you give more information than a person needs to understand or too little. Give your SOPs to your kids, friends, family or external business colleagues to read. If it's written well, a child should be able to understand it.
2. **Ask Why** - Go through every procedure and ask why do we do that? You'll be surprised about how much redundant information you have that can be deleted. I regularly do this with clients (yes, I ring people up and annoy them by asking "Why do you this?" and "Why do you do that?" and it's amazing to discover how much information I can delete.
3. **Go out and do the procedures according to the SOPs** - This is a great way to test if they're still relevant and whether they make sense. Use this time to take clear photos, which you can add into your documents. Our clients get a lot of benefit from us querying why they do a procedure out in the field and getting the process documented and filmed correctly.

Having consistent and up-to-date training materials is a legal requirement. Ensuring that your standard operating procedures are correct is important for business safety and productivity. Start improving your procedures now and ensure all staff are doing the right procedure every time, everywhere.

End Quote: