Why Should You Care About Documentation?
You’ve undoubtedly heard the phrase “You Can’t Manage What You Can’t Measure”. This simple statement implies that effective management is dependent upon measurable activities. To take this notion a step further, measurable activities are dependent upon repeatable processes. And this brings us to the topic at hand - process documentation.

Most of us encounter various forms of documentation on a daily basis without giving much thought as to why it was created and how it relates to larger business principles, such as policies, financial objectives, service level expectations, or operational metrics. Historically, many businesses have functioned effectively strictly on “tribal knowledge”; i.e., people who know what to do, how to do it, and are willing to pass on that information to new employees. The new reality, however, is that people and processes change on an increasingly frequent basis. For businesses to function with any degree of operational stability, they must focus on capturing tribal knowledge and rendering it into content and mediums suitable for knowledge transfer. The key to operational success in business is identification, documentation, and communication of repeatable processes that can be measured and improved. Good documentation empowers a business to scale, improve, and react appropriately to changes in the business environment. Whether you are pursuing ISO certification or just trying to improve business efficiency, operational consistency based on quality, documented processes are a cornerstone for getting it done.

The purpose of this article is to examine the business structures and procedural elements that encompass the life cycle of process documentation. For illustration, we will be using examples from the facility management discipline; however, the principles discussed are applicable across most business functions.

What Are The Components of Process Documentation?
A full-featured documentation set will generally consist of several document types organized in a hierarchical structure.

To give a practical example, consider the ISO 9001: Quality Management Systems standard from the International Organization of Standardization. For companies that operate globally, ISO 9001 certification is considered a basic requirement for conducting business in many countries outside the United States. ISO 9001, along with other ISO standards, defines a set of procedures covering all key operational processes for a business.

Even though your company may not be interested in pursuing an ISO certification, using the ISO structure and some general definitions of various document types can be very helpful. In general, the primary operational document types are defined as follows.

Policy
A policy is defined as a statement of commitment to a broad requirement, often used in an organization to instruct personnel of general goals and acceptable procedures as to a required outcome. As such, policies are often brief statements indicating what must be done, but not necessarily how it is to be accomplished.

Process
A process defines a particular course of action intended to achieve a result that takes place within a timeframe. Often described using a flow of events or tasks; all processes consist of an input (or start), a set of events or tasks, and an output (or end). A well defined process will clearly identify these elements, address any decision points (or branches) in the process, and ensure there are no dead-ends (a branch or action that does not lead to an output or logical end). In addition, a process must define how its effectiveness will be measured.

You may also encounter the terms macro-process or micro-process. Although we won’t go into great detail for the purposes of this article, a macro-process is essentially a high-level view of a larger set of processes or business systems that depicts the interrelationships between these process functions or business organizations. Conversely, a micro-process illustrates the details of a single function or organizational role.

Note that process development is a recognized discipline and often requires formal training, depending upon the complexities of the processes being defined.

Standards
A standard is an established norm, method, definite rule, principle, process, practice or measure that is established by an authority such as uniform engineering standards or technical criteria. Examples would include LEED® for New Construction Rating System or ANSI/ASHRAE 62.1-2007: Ventilation for Acceptable Indoor Air Quality. The LEED rating system is the standard for achieving LEED certification, but the standard itself does not explicitly specify materials or construction methods. The ANSI Ventilation standard likewise does not specify materials or construction methods, but does establish a uniform
ventilation standard for engineers and building operators to follow. Standards are frequently referenced by processes and/or procedures.

**Procedures**

Procedures represent a particular method for performing a task; most often a series of actions or operations leading to an end result. In other words, procedures are a collection of small tasks or steps taken to accomplish an end. Whereas a process is a generic description of a given course of action; procedures provide explicit details necessary to complete a given task. For example, in facilities management, while the process for changing air filters for an HVAC system may be the same, the procedures will likely be different from one building (site) to another based upon the specific HVAC equipment being used.

While it is not always necessary to segment these items into separate documents, it can be advantageous when it comes to maintenance of the document down the road.

**First Things First – The Order of Precedence**

As previously indicated, documentation will typically follow a hierarchy. The following diagram shows a typical hierarchy.

![Diagram](image)

A policy to outline a broad requirement is a good place to start. Then, identify the standards and develop the processes and procedures needed to support the policy.

However, not all processes and procedures are driven by higher level policies. A good rule of thumb is to determine if there are consequences or penalties for not following a process. If the answer is no, then a policy is not likely required. Similarly, a separate process may not be required if there is no variation in subsequent operational procedures. For example, if the procedure only applies to one location or the procedure is identical for all locations, then an overarching process document is not likely required.

Standards tend to support policies, processes and procedures. However, a standard is only required if there is a definitive specification, product, or service that must be utilized in conjunction with a process or procedure. For example, IEEE is considered the world's leading professional association for the advancement of technology. IEEE is responsible for the 802.11 set of standards for wireless local area network (WLAN) computer communications using the 2.4, 3.6, and 5 GHz frequency bands. The vast majority of business and home wireless networking devices are designed and built using the specifications of this standard. Consequently, devices produced by different manufacturers, but adhering to this standard, should interoperate with little or no difficulty.

**So, What Get’s Documented?**

Moving beyond the discussion of document types and hierarchies, let’s list some practical examples of FM documentation. For illustration purposes, let’s list a few document examples framed within the eleven certified facility manager (CFM) disciplines.

1. Communication
   - Employee Broadcast Communication Procedure
2. Emergency Preparedness and Business Continuity
   - Building Emergency Response Process & Procedures
   - Building Closure Process (i.e., weather)
3. Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability
   - Recycling Standard and Procedures
   - Energy Management Standard
   - Lighting Design Standard
   - Indoor Air Quality Process and Procedures
4. Finance and Business
   - Operating Budget Planning Process
   - Capital Budget Planning Process
   - Vendor Payment Approval Procedures
5. Human Factors
   - Workstation Ergonomics Standard
   - Indoor Environmental Quality Standard
6. Leadership and Strategy
   - Real Estate Portfolio Strategy
   - Real Estate and Facilities Management Process
7. Operations and Maintenance
   - HVAC Maintenance Procedures
   - Custodial Cleaning Standard and Process
   - Building Automation Systems Procedures
8. Project Management
   - Company Project Management Principals, Roles and Responsibilities
   - Project Resource Planning Procedure
9. Quality
   - Facility Management Key Performance Indicators
   - Administrative Service Level Standards
10. Real Estate and Property Management
    - Real Estate Acquisition and Leasing Guidelines
    - Real Estate Portfolio Strategic Assessment
11. Technology
    - Integrated Workplace Management System (IWMS) Standard
    - Video Conferencing Equipment Standard

While this is not intended to be a comprehensive list of facility management documentation, you can see where process and procedures play a significant role in the life of a facility manager. This (fictitious) list of documents represents but a small subset of what is required to adequately articulate a typical facility management organization’s responsibilities.

What Constitutes Effective Documentation?
The objective of good process documentation, including process narratives and flow diagrams, is to generate an accurate representation of how work is actually performed. The key purpose of good documentation is to make processes repeatable and measurable. Having a template makes creating multiple process documents easier and provides a common format for the users of the documents.

The main elements and standard formats of process documentation include the following.

1. **Scope Statement.** This is a clear and all encompassing description of the process. The scope statement provides a high level summary of the purpose of the process and the business objectives that it supports. Every process documentation effort should tie back to a key business value or initiative. Ask how this business process creates value in your organization? And don’t go any further until you’ve clearly captured this in the scope statement.

2. **Role Matrix.** This enables the users of the process to see, at a glance, who are the owners of and key participants in this process. Most organizations view themselves in an organizational chart view. Instead, plan to build your process documentation organized by company activities and identify the job roles that participate in those activities. For example, organize company activities by functional groups, such as building management or new employee set up, instead of departments such as Real Estate or Human Resources. Keep in mind that you may need to look across the traditionally defined geographical, functional, and product-based groups that may be firmly entrenched in your organization. Your process mapping will identify what resources are needed in order to champion or execute the business process. Listing this information in a table in the process document helps to define who is accountable for what. Remember process roles are not tied to a particular person – instead a person fills a particular role. If a job role is clearly defined then anyone can be designated to fill it.

3. **Process Map and Workflow.** This is the main element to showcase in your process documentation. Start at the highest level and step through the process categories to identify the key process areas. Typical workflow diagrams are created with a software tool such as Microsoft VISIO, but any flow chart application will work. Flow diagrams use icons and symbols for to represent different types of activities. Each process flow needs a start and end point, action or process steps, decision points, and documents or materials as output. Additional items like interactions with systems, control points, and risk areas can also be represented. The flow captures the steps and uses “swim lanes” to depict which job role is responsible for each step using “swim lanes”. A sample process map is shown below.

4. **Process and Procedure Details.** This is the textual explanation of the graphical process map and workflow. This section typically has numbered steps with detailed, but simple explanations of each of the process steps. Beginning with the start point, the
activities and decisions are explained, as well as interactions with systems. The outputs are also defined, such as reports, documents, or other results. This step-by-step detail may also be re-used as a job aid or desk-level instruction.

5. **Standard Documentation Elements.** A good documentation effort will provide the “meta” data or key descriptors about the process documentation that are appropriate for your culture. Other documentation elements include: 1) Business Owner, 2) Date Developed and Date Issued, 3) File Naming Convention – (this may need to be integrated within your corporate library and document management system.), and 4) Document Security Classification (Confidential, Proprietary, etc), 5) Related Processes, Policies, and Procedures.

**How Do You Publish and Distribute Your Documentation?**

Communication and distribution are key elements of successful documentation deployment. Most people still tend to think in terms of documentation as simply a Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat file. These may be but one of many methods your documentation finds its way into daily use. Many companies are migrating to a strictly digital deployment medium. With tools such as Microsoft SharePoint, you can simplify posting and searching for individual documents (files). A more sophisticated approach might include a company Wikipedia site (wiki), which could also cross-reference and link items within the process content to other related materials.

If you have a mobile workforce, you might publish your reference material in formats suitable for the iPhone, Blackberry or other handheld devices. You may also need to consider items such as computer based training and job aides. All of these examples have the potential to evolve your initial policy, standards, and procedures from paper-based documents to on-the-go tools that are accessible 24/7.

**Documentation is Never Having to Say You’re Finished…**

Once you have created, reviewed, and gained sign-off from the business process owners and value chain champions, you are not done. After spending the hours and effort to create the process documentation, you need to put a maintenance and review plan in place for the “care and feeding” of the materials. Tools can help. Select a tool that meets these requirements:

- Provides easy graphics capabilities, such as MS VISIO or PowerPoint
- Simple enough for business users, such as MS Word, Adobe Acrobat
- Quickly deployable to a large number of users – SharePoint, corporate Intranet, or RoboHelp
- Supports collaboration, such as SharePoint
- Easy version control, to allow one author to “check out” a document at a time and “check in”, when finished, such as Saba, Docent, or SharePoint
- Provides a sustainable repository

Create a maintenance schedule for reviewing and updating the process documentation at least annually. In addition, audit cycles can be used to review the materials and get feedback from users. By integrating your process documentation updates with business cycles when audits and controls are completed, you can be most effective with your maintenance plan. When reviewing a process, job roles should be evaluated, system efficiencies should be confirmed, and best practices should be integrated in order to streamline the process. Other events that might trigger a documentation review are reorganizations, mergers and acquisitions, new product purchases or deployments, or significant changes to higher level company policies or procedures.

**Where To Go From Here?**

Hopefully this overview has given you some insight into expressing what you do and how you do it. If after reading this, you look around and determine your current documentation is inadequate - then now is as good a time as any to get a fresh start!

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