

Getting Started with Policy & Procedure Management (Part 1)

Policies and procedures are the backbone of every organization. When properly managed, policies and procedures help shape workplace culture and reinforce a standard set of behaviors that reduce risk. When poorly managed, internal teams can struggle to maintain and disseminate up-to-date policies, leading to increased risk.

When properly written, distributed and managed, these key policy documents codify priorities and an approach to doing business. They are an essential tool for reducing risk, establishing shared standards and expectations for workplace behaviors while providing guidance for decision making. In some cases, policies and related expectations on the workforce are also a mandatory legal or regulatory requirement.

“Policy management” is the practice of effectively developing, maintaining, distributing, training and tracking adoption of the policies and procedures that define expected workplace conduct. It is a strategic approach to this essential obligation, where more mature programs impact all parts of the organization with optimal efficiency and measured effectiveness.

Organizations just getting started in maturing their policy management process should lay a foundation establishing the right people, a clear approach and a prioritization of important policies and procedures. This ensures that the implementation proceeds smoothly, and that the resulting program continues to be effective.

Components of an effective policy and procedure management program include:

- **Updates and Version Control** . Policies must change periodically in response to changed regulatory requirements or business conditions. Employees who are following the guidance of an older version of a policy, even in good faith, could inadvertently expose the organization to risk. Effective programs only allow access to current, approved versions of a policy. Multinational organizations must also maintain updated versions of policies in local languages.

- **Enterprise-Wide Access.** Employees should be able to access current policies, procedures and compliance information online at any time of day. Accessing this information should be easy – employees should know exactly where to look, and be confident that the information is up to date.
- **Training.** Employees must know a policy exists and understand its expectations in order for that policy to have a meaningful impact on behavior. Regular training on policies and procedures is a key element of a successful policy management program.
- **Enforcement and Communication.** If a policy is not enforced, it should be eliminated. While enforcement is essential in response to individual policy violations, consistent enforcement is also crucial for broadcasting an organization’s cultural values. A policy that is enforced inconsistently casts doubt on an organization’s commitment to its beliefs and commitments.

A related component is a mechanism for employees to anonymously or confidentially report observed policy violations. This incident management system must also assure reporting parties that violations are investigated and appropriate correction actions are taken. (For more on this topic, see our Getting Started with Reporting and Incident Management guide.)

Attestation and Certification

While employee training helps outline and encourage desired behaviors, implementation of specific policies and regulations is often required by law. In these cases, a policy management program should also support a mechanism for an employee to attest to having read and understood the policy, as well as a way for the employer to certify that a training was delivered. The need to gather and maintain a record of attestations is a strong argument for implementing an automated policy management system; one where an employee’s attestation automatically creates an auditable record.

Measurement and Improvement

Effective policy management programs generate metrics that inform ways to improve. Some key program metrics include data on training attendance for both individuals and groups, attestation rates, and tracking of how often policies are accessed online and by whom.

Getting Started Steps:

■ Assemble the Right Team

There is one consistent, all-important element of your policy management approach – people. While the right technology can transform the nature of policy management, technology does not make strategic decisions or determine content. There are several stakeholder types that should have a seat at the table in the development of a new or improved policy management program.

- **The Policy Oversight Committee.** This group includes senior leaders and key policy stakeholders responsible for developing and implementing policies, procedures and controls throughout the organization. The committee ensures alignment with the organization’s vision, mission and values. These leaders also establish enterprise-wide respect for policy practice by making policy management a priority worthy of time and resources.
- **Document Control Administrators.** Also known as policy coordinators, these individuals are in charge of all policy and procedure management functions – particularly when an organization uses policy management software. The best document control administrators are effective trainers and skilled facilitators because they are responsible for guiding others through the policy creation process.
- **Document Owners and Authors.** These stakeholders monitor the implementation and lifecycle of the policy from the time it is enacted. The owner is typically the same as the policy author. It’s essential these individuals are well versed in issues relevant to the policy.
- **Reviewers.** Document owners assign reviewers to particular documents, and reviewers have the option to accept, reject or revise a policy under review. These individuals evaluate existing and new policies during all stages of the policy lifecycle.
- **Approvers.** Approvers are similar to reviewers, but they have the authority to approve final sign-off. Approvers can also serve as reviewers.

There are a number of additional roles, such as translators, that may be necessary in an effective policy management program. Yet the core responsibilities defined above are a good start.

■ Define Your Approach

Organizations should have a strategic approach that serves as the foundation for every step that follows in the policy management program. If one does not already exist, develop a vision statement or declaration document to serve as a reference point for policy creation. A code of conduct can be that overarching policy that frames all other decisions – properly written and communicated, it can serve to define the corporate culture and set behavioral expectations.

If there are policies that do not support the organization’s vision and code of conduct, they should be eliminated or modified. An organization can also adjust its vision in light of certain policies.

A meta-policy is a policy on policies. Among a policy oversight committee’s chief tasks is creating this meta-policy, which establishes the approach to the policy lifecycle from creation, review and approval to distribution, tracking and updating. Defining consistent guidelines and processes for creating and managing organizational policies is critical to having policies that consistently work toward the achievement of the organization’s vision.

Defining your policy management program’s approach will serve as the foundation of every step that follows.

■ **Prioritize Policies and Procedures**

Having too many policies burdens the organization, but having too few exposes it to unnecessary risk. Prioritize which policies you will develop or revise first. Generally, policies are necessary when they define organizational values or mandates, address regulatory obligations or manage potential risk or liability.

With the right people, approach and prioritization established, the next stage – implementation – has all the pieces in place to succeed. This stage includes a number of elements to consider in itself, including effective design of actual written policies, methodologies of training and creation of effective program metrics. Learn more about the implementation phase for policy management in part two of this guide.

A thoughtful policy management program does more than check a regulatory requirement box. It builds both trust and confidence among the workforce, and demonstrates an organization's commitment to its values.

NAVEX provides extensive guidance on successful policy management – [visit our resource library for more information](#).