

Is your procedure set actually usable?

A twelve-point review you can run in an afternoon

Writing a procedure is the part of the job that feels like work. Getting it to the person who needs it, at the moment they need it, in a form they will read standing at a bench — that is the part that decides whether any of it mattered.

Run these twelve checks against your own procedure set. Each one has a "what to do if the answer is no" because a checklist that only tells you what is wrong is half a tool.

Can people find them?

- ☐ **Someone in their second month can find the procedure for a routine task in under ninety seconds.**
If not, the procedure functionally does not exist, whatever the document register says. Fix findability before you write another word.
- ☐ **Procedures are named after the task, in the words people actually use for it — not after the department that owns them.**
Rename them. "Processing a membership renewal" beats "Membership Services Procedure 4.2".
- ☐ **The four or five used daily are separated from the forty used annually.**
Split them. The organization with 200 procedures and the one with 12 procedures plus 188 reference documents have identical content and completely different outcomes.

Do people trust them?

- ☐ **Every procedure has a date and an owner on it.**
Add both. An undated procedure is one nobody can tell is current.
- ☐ **You can name the last thing that was retired from the set.**
If nothing has ever been removed, some of it is wrong and there is no way to tell which parts — which is why people stop trusting all of it.
- ☐ **When a procedure and reality disagree, people report it rather than working around it.**
Find out where the workarounds are. They are the map of where your documented process stopped matching the work.

Are they written to be used?

- ☐ **A procedure fits on one page, or says clearly at the top that it does not.**
Split the ones that do not. A seven-page procedure is a policy with steps buried in it.
- ☐ **Steps are instructions, not descriptions. "Check the calibration log" rather than "calibration should be verified".**
Rewrite in the imperative. The passive voice hides who does it.
- ☐ **Anything conditional says so before the step, not after.**
Move the condition first. People stop reading at the step number.

Will they survive?

- ☐ **There is a stated review cycle with a named owner, not just a history of revisions.**
Write one down. Fifteen years of well-intentioned edits by different people is how a good procedure set drifts into an inconsistent one.
- ☐ **At least two people can perform each critical procedure from the document alone.**
Test it. Ask the second person to do it while the first watches and says nothing.
- ☐ **If your most experienced person left tomorrow, the set would still be enough.**
This is the whole test. If the honest answer is no, you have a careful person rather than a procedure set — and that is a different, more urgent problem.

If most of your no answers cluster in one section, that tells you what to fix first. Findability problems are cheap and fast; trust problems take longer because they are usually accumulated rather than caused.

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