Assessment 1: Work Based Project – Interim Submission

Evaluate the benefits of introducing operational and administrative work flow processes with instructions

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1. Research Proposal

1.1. Proposed Project Title

An evaluation of the benefits and drawbacks of implementing workflow processes with instructions within the built environment.

1.2. Overview

The built environment sector has a varied compilation of generic service providers, with the scale of difference between different aspects of construction, there is no one single workflow process to fit all. From bricklaying to carpentry, working on different projects, with different materials, methods and tools to achieve a different purpose. and whilst all of these circumstances pertain to construction, no two are the same.

Adding to this mix the specialist niche service providers, often operating under unique circumstances, then we have an even more complex environment. To succeed in a career with such companies requires specialist knowledge and skills often over and above those that may be required for more generic build environment roles. Attracting and retaining good employees is important and whilst only time can create experience, perhaps a company can make efforts to aid this process? This raises an argument for the need of workflow processes. Would they make learning about a new profession easier? Or would they overcomplicate the learning process by providing too much information at once?

The researcher is newly employed by a fire suppression company, moving into a niche industry with no prior knowledge of the construction industry and so has the necessary knowledge of working without these processes in place and can consider both sides of the question.

1.3. Hypotheses to be Tested

The hypothesis of this research project is to consider if the management of fire suppression projects could be enhanced in newer workers in this niche discipline by the provision of workflow processes.

1.4. Objectives

The aim of the project is to consult with colleagues, to review existing arrangements, to create and test a Beta version of an operational and administrative workflow process to consider and ultimately determin the impacts of introducing such on a larger scale.

A sample document will be produced, collated from internal sources. This document will be a workflow process instruction highlighting how to correctly place orders on the-house order software within the researcher's company. This will then be distributed to some new and existing staff to see if any benefits or better practices are observed, thusly highlighting firsthand the benefit of these processes.

1.5. Research Methodology(ies) and Justification:

Primary data will be sourced from colleagues and external partners in the form of interviews verbal questioning and online questionnaires.

I will also take consideration from forms of literature and research on this topic to broaden my information sources and to build upon solid groundwork towards my research project.

Ultimately the success of introducing a full suite of operational and administrative workflow processes with instructions would see; improved performance of staff with correct internal processes followed from the outset. Additionally, although not measurable in the time available, improved statistics in the hiring and retaining of good staff.

1.6. Chapters

The chapiters are envisaged as:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Research Review

Chapter 3 – Beta Test

Chapter 4 – Conclusion of Findings

Chapter 5 – Consideration of Conclusion

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Bibliography

1.7. Information Sources

Information will be collated from colleagues and other industry professionals via online questionnaires and verbal discussions. This information will be stored in a secure, password protected file, as required by data protection laws.

Referenced information will be obtained from published articles & journals, as well as printed information from books.

The purpose of the different types of information would be to mix already established principles and findings and correlate them to the findings of the data obtained by the researcher from colleagues and professionals.

A mix of information retrieval from colleagues will be necessary due to the time constraints. The method to be used will allow for broader questions being presented to all parties via the questionnaire, and also allow for a more direct line a questioning of specific individuals to gain more exact information.

The questionnaire will be distributed via email or other preferred electronic means so as to make the storage of the information more practical to find and sort. It will involve questions pertaining to the perceived benefits of the implementation of workflow processes and instructions in the day-to-day operations of the employee. I will engage an audience with a range of ages and abilities so as to understand any trends in terms of age, experience and ability with theoretical usefulness and need for the implementation of such aids.

As I am specifically targeting the fire suppression industry with my research, I will be selectively targeting whom the communicative research comes from, so as to gather information pertaining to the specified industry.

With regards to the beta testing data, it will be obtained from new and existing employees of the researcher's company. It will contain a workflow process on how to correctly raise an order using the inhouse purchasing software.

After a week of implementation, the participants will then be given a questionnaire containing targeted questions to determine whether or not the workflow process' guidance matches the theoretical usefulness which will be deduced from the original questionnaire.

Positives and negatives of the implementation will then be noted to offer potential improvements needed to make this a worthwhile tool should this be carried out again in the future, with conclusions drawn based upon comparison of the initial questionnaire against the questionnaire regarding physical implementation.

2. Research & Literature Review

2.1. Independent Research Method

To gage the current workplace situation regarding the use and inclusion of workflow processes, a questionnaire was given to sprinkler industry professionals to gain an understanding of the frequency of use, ease of use, accessibility and applicability of the workflow processes within different businesses, if they are at all made available.

The questionnaire required participants to state their name, age, industry experience and occupancy, for categorisation of the results by these topics. There were 13 participants involved with the answering of this questionnaire, and they were of a broad variety of ages and experience levels. The short questionnaire is captured below:

Name					
Age	<18	18 - 25	26 - 35	36 - 49	>50
Experience	<1	<5	<10	<20	>20

	Rating					
Statement	Strongly Disa	Disagr	Neutr	Agre	Strongly A	Comments
There are currently ample workflow processes available to me						
The workflow processes in place are easily to follow						
The workflow processes are informative and helpful						
I use the necessary workflow processes when possible						
I have input with the topics and information within the workflow processes						
My ability and knowledge is taken into consideration based on the complexity						
I understand the purpose of workflow processes and their uses						
I know what a workflow process is						
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS						

2.2. Independent Research Responses

There were some common themes from the responses seen in the questionnaire as, people who were in the same demographics provided similar responses. As the age went up, naturally so did the experience of individuals. A prime issue noticed was that the workflow processes in place were mainly focused on more complicated processes that needed breaking down for the sake of correct processes and actions being imperative. This led to the few workflow processes available to most individuals very specific and not aimed at them and, in doing so, they didn't assist in their roles. This was because the younger and less experienced individuals were not targeted by these workflow processes and found them unhelpful and overly complicated for their roles, whilst the more senior and experienced interviewees already had knowledge and experience of the topics included and so didn't provide any additional advice nor value to their knowledge base.

Whilst making specific workflow processes for niche topics is not an issue, far from it as it provides the correct methods to topics that may be hard to garner information elsewhere on. The specific issue was that there were no real workflow processes for the basics of the interviewees roles that would benefit newer and more inexperienced industry professionals. From comments left in the "Additional Comments" section if the questionnaire, the issue of no real suitable beginner processes as discussed above was the most prominent issue raised within the less experienced demographic.

Whilst not an issue in and of itself, a concern for the accuracy of the workflow processes in place was raised by the older, more experienced demographic of the fact that, despite holding senior positions, they were not in any way involved with the making, reviewing or informational content of the workflow processes. They suggested that the processes came from the corporate side of their companies and were more guides on purchasing, legal processes and review processes. The available workflow processes were not specific to their industry and did not highlight any useful information on performing their job role nor help improve the overall awareness and knowledge of the industry they were involved in.

2.3. Literature Review

There are many benefits of using workflow processes in the workplace. The main two being a reduction in errors as task processes are spelt out step by step and the second being increased productivity due to having the correct way to complete assigned tasks readily available, as opposed to wasting time trying to work out by trial and error and potential still produced an incorrect outcome.

Furthermore, when producing a workflow process, it can highlight menial tasks that could be outsourced or automated to reduce time spent on time consuming tasks. “A workflow process helps organizations identify opportunities for automation. For instance, during the employee onboarding process, a new hire triggers a series of actions such as granting system access and assigning corporate assets. These time-consuming tasks can be automated, allowing HR staff to focus on higher-value tasks like training new employees.” (ProcessMaker.com)

A further benefit of using these process diagrams is to reduce lost time between workers communicating about how to complete tasks. They could even replace the need to have some meetings due to their immediate and “easy, visual method to help team members instantly understand what they should do step by step”

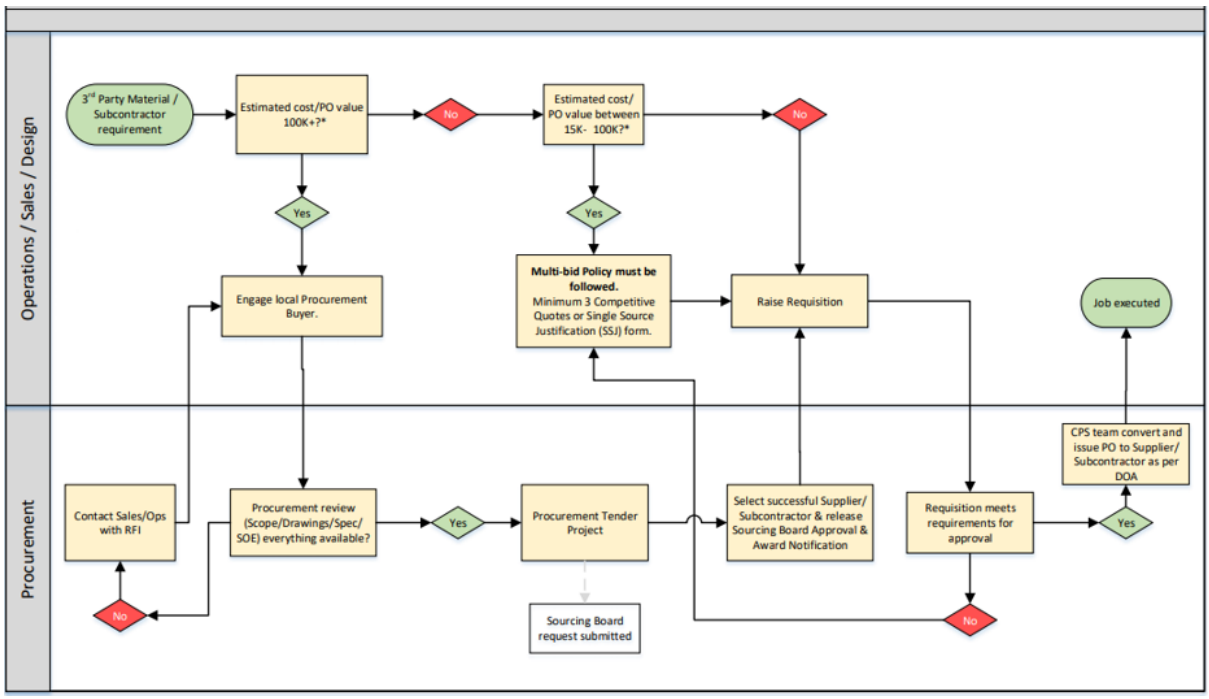
3. Beta Test

3.1. Beta Test Handout

A beta test for a workflow process was created and handed out to the recipients of the original questionnaire. Whilst not directly applicable to anyone’s work, its purpose was intended to solely be to gage complexity levels and the flow of the process so as to gain an understanding of what works and what doesn’t when forming a successful work process.

The work process follows a common purchase sequence depending on the order value which would potentially necessitate approvals from employees higher up in a

business's reporting line. This topic has been chosen as it is fairly complicated and as such provides a good marker as to whether or not the below work process is simple enough for all levels of experience and knowledge to follow and understand, learning the process required for the action topic.



3.2. Beta Test Research

As a follow up to the first questionnaire, a week after receiving the previously shown workflow process the recipients were sent another questionnaire. This time period was given as it allowed the interviewees to form opinions on what they had been sent to review.

The short questionnaire was sent across to gage the opinion of the interviewees on how easy it was to understand the process being conveyed across within the workflow process diagram. It also provided those who had not previously received one to learn what they are and how they work, making it ripe to gage the ease of use from a fresh perspective. The questionnaire given out is shown below:

Name					
Age	<18	18 - 25	26 - 35	36 - 49	>50
Experience	<1	<5	<10	<20	>20

	Rating					
Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Comments
The format of the workflow process was easy to follow						
I understood the information included in the workflow process						
The workflow process was clearly laid out						
The language used was easy to understand						
Having workflow processes such as this will aid me in my job role						
Having workflow processes such as these available would help me learn faster						
ANY OTHER COMMENTS						

3.3. Beta Test Responses

12 out of the 13 interviewees said that having these types of aids readily available for a broad variety of subject matters applicable to them would improve their ability to do their job.

The majority of feedback highlighted the importance of simplifying the workflow processes so that they can be understood and carried out by anyone. The low to medium experience demographic focused their comments on the help that could be provided by having these in place when they first entered the industry. They emphasised the learning curve of entering a new role with new responsibilities within a new company and highlighted the ability to quickly bridge the gap that could be provided had aids such as the workflow process been readily available to them from the beginning of their career.

The more experienced demographic shared this opinion, but went further to comment that, given their vast experience, they sometimes forget the correct processes to carry out tasks and would like a tool such as this available to them to refer back to and refresh their memories. This highlights workflow process diagrams as educational tools for all manners of experience.

4. Conclusion of Findings

4.1. Conclusion of Independent Research

The takeaways that can be made from the initial independent research, if a business would be looking to begin to incorporate or enhance their workflow processes are reasonably simple to incorporate to make them informative and beneficial and, therefore, boost employee knowledge and capabilities. Firstly, tasking the more senior members of staff to create them with a specific focus on basic knowledge and processes aimed at the newer, less experienced employees to make integration into the industry a more seamless transition. Secondly, the workflow processes should not be limited to specific, complex subject areas. Instead, they should encompass all aspects of the business. The effectiveness of this could be furthered if surveys or messages are sent out to gage what areas the workers lack understanding in and, thusly, require these documents in.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE CONCLUSION OF FINDINGS IS ½ DONE, IT IS NOT YET COMPLETE

Please can you also offer advice on what areas I could explore to add to my literature review aside from writing about the benefits?