Strategy vs. Tactics

10 SIGNS THAT YOUR COMPANY LACKS DC AWARENESS

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EDITORIAL

In today's fast-paced business environment, efficient document management is no longer just a convenience; it's a necessity.

As organisations navigate the complexities of collaborative work, regulatory compliance, legal requirements, and data security, the need for a robust document management system has never been clearer.

The integration of automation and artificial intelligence into document management systems is revolutionising the way we handle information.

AI can automate routine tasks, such as data entry and file classification, freeing Document Controllers to focus on more strategic actions. As we move forward, organizations that adopt innovative document management practices will gain a competitive edge.

Advanced analytics tools can also provide insights into document usage patterns, helping organisations identify bottlenecks and optimise workflows.

However, the shift to digital is not without its challenges. Companies must prioritize quality over speediness, as well compliance and control without compromising collaboration.

By transforming how we manage information, we can unlock greater efficiency, foster collaboration, and ultimately drive business growth. The future is digital: let's embrace it.

However, maintaining control over content is essential to avoid chaos. Without a structured approach, the risk of information overload and disorganization looms. By prioritizing content governance, organisations can harness the full potential of their digital tools, ensuring that efficiency and order go hand in hand.

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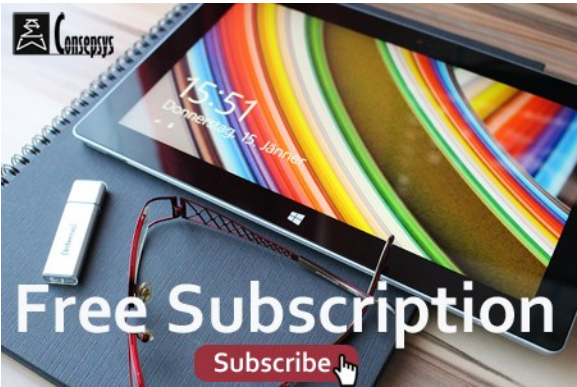
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DOCUMENT OWNERSHIP:
A GATEWAY TO BETTER TRACEABILITY

In today's digital world, documents are the backbone of operations in nearly every organisation. Documents hold vital information that can impact decision-making, compliance, and day-to-day operations. One concept that is crucial but often overlooked in this context is **document ownership**: the **clarity around who holds responsibility for a document throughout its lifecycle**. This article explores the importance of document ownership and why it is critical for businesses to have clear protocols in place.

1. Accountability and Responsibility

Document ownership ensures that someone is always accountable for the creation, update and maintenance of a document. Without clear ownership, documents may become neglected, out-of-date, or fail to comply with legal or operational standards.

It's crucial that **only document owners modify a document** to ensure its accuracy, integrity, and security. Document owners are responsible for maintaining the content's validity, ensuring that it meets the necessary standards and that it is aligned with the organisation's requirements.

Allowing unauthorised individuals to make changes can introduce errors, it can lead to conflicting versions and lack of traceability.

The document owner is often the document author, or it could be the team responsible for the creation, or primary use of the document. The key is that the document owner should be someone who has the expertise, responsibility, and authority to manage the content effectively.

2. Traceability & record of modification

A piece of content should always be traceable to a person (and its entity or company) **and a date**. This is why, during review cycles, it is important that reviewers **do not modify the original documents**. Indeed, reviewers play a critical role in providing feedback, suggesting improvements, or identifying issues, but altering the original document directly can lead to confusion, and loss of traceability. By keeping the original document intact, ownership and accountability remain clear, and any changes or updates can be properly vetted, tracked, and approved by the designated document owner. This approach ensures a structured review process, maintains version control, and protects the document from unintended modifications that could impact its quality or compliance.

3. Legal and Compliance Benefits

Clear document ownership is also crucial in projects involving multiple companies, such as a client and a main contractor, to avoid legal disputes and ensure accountability.

When document ownership is well-defined, it is clear who is responsible for the creation, modification, review, and approval of deliverables. This transparency helps **avoid misunderstandings over document changes** or responsibilities, **which can lead to costly legal conflicts**. If an issue arises, the document owner can provide the authoritative revision of the document, showing when changes were made and who authorized them. This clear chain of responsibility helps establish accountability, ensures compliance

with legal agreements, and strengthens the legal standing of both parties by providing a verifiable record of actions and decisions.

4. Enhanced Collaboration

Having clear document ownership significantly reduces rework by ensuring that only authorised individuals make updates, maintaining revision control, and preventing conflicting edits. The document owner ensures all changes are properly reviewed and aligned with the project's requirements. This minimises the risk of errors, duplicated efforts, or misunderstandings during collaboration. By centralising accountability, it **streamlines workflows** and ensures everyone works from the correct, most up-to-date revision.

In conclusion, clear document ownership is essential for maintaining accountability, ensuring accuracy, and reducing inefficiencies. By designating responsible individuals, businesses can minimise errors, enhance collaboration, and safeguard legal compliance, ultimately leading to more efficient workflows and better overall outcomes.

ALIGNING STRATEGY AND TACTICS FOR EFFECTIVE DOCUMENT CONTROL

In any business, entity or project, both strategy and tactics play crucial roles in achieving success. Though often used interchangeably, the two terms represent **distinct concepts**, and understanding their differences can greatly enhance your approach to problem-solving.

STRATEGY: THE LONG-TERM VISION

"*Strategy*" refers to the overarching plan that aligns with a long-term vision. It provides the **"why"** behind actions, setting the foundation for decisions that drive the organisation toward its goals.

Strategic planning involves:

- identifying core objectives,
- recognizing potential challenges,
- and laying out a roadmap that integrates resources, timing, and positioning.

For example, a document controller's strategy might be "*to implement a streamlined document management system to ensure efficient access and compliance with regulatory standards.*"

A well-defined strategy is adaptable yet firmly rooted in the organisation's mission and values. It's about foresight, assessing future trends, and **making decisions that align with broader goals, not necessarily immediate wins**.

This big-picture approach is crucial to remain competitive and relevant over time.

TACTICS: THE ACTIONABLE STEPS

On the other hand, "*tactics*" are the specific actions taken to implement the strategy.

They are more short-term and focus on the **"how"** of the process. While strategy is about setting direction, tactics are about the execution.

For example, for Document control, it could include implementing systematic quality checks on documents, digitising physical files, creating a naming convention for files, generalising the use of templates, implementing strict revision control, etc.

Tactics must be **agile, adaptable** to market conditions, and **aligned** with the larger strategy. While they are the steps that move the organisation forward, they require constant monitoring and adjustment to ensure they are effective in meeting strategic goals.

WHY BOTH ARE IMPORTANT

Both strategy and tactics are essential to the success of an organisation. A company with a brilliant strategy but poor tactics will struggle to achieve its vision.

Conversely, excellent tactics without a clear strategy may lead to short-term wins but long-term disarray.

For example, a company may decide to implement a document management system as its strategy, but without effective tactics like placing Document Control in a gatekeeping role, visible support from high level management, and staff training on system, procedure & templates, the system will fail to provide the intended benefits.

On the other hand, if an organisation focuses too heavily on tactics like restructuring the filing system without considering how it aligns with the overall document management strategy, it risks inefficiency and missed compliance goals.

ACHIEVING ALIGNMENT BETWEEN STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The key to success is ensuring that strategy and tactics are always aligned.

This requires clear communication, ongoing evaluation, and a feedback loop that allows for adjustments to both.

We must regularly assess whether current tactics support the larger strategy and, if necessary, pivot to maintain alignment.

Balancing strategy and tactics is crucial for long-term success. Strategy sets the vision and direction, while tactics focus on execution. Aligning both ensures that every action contributes to broader goals, creating a cohesive plan that drives sustainable growth and operational efficiency, whether managing documents or leading large-scale projects.

AUTOMATION IN DOCUMENT CONTROL: DO MORE WITH LESS TIME

DOING MORE WITH LESS TIME

Document Control teams are often under-resourced, grappling with a high volume of tasks despite limited personnel and budgets. This constraint forces them to be innovative in their approach to managing documents and maintaining compliance. However, sacrificing quality, compliance or traceability should never be an option when looking at reducing manhours spent on Document Control tasks.

One of the options we have is leveraging automation tools. By finding clever ways to optimise their processes, Document Control teams not only cope with the demands placed upon them but also concentrate on tasks that add more value to the organisation.

AUTOMATION?

"Automation" refers to the use of technology and software tools to perform repetitive and time-consuming tasks without human intervention.

This can encompass a range of functions, including:

- Data Entry

- Upload of documents in EDMSs

- Distribution

- Creation of documents from automated templates

- Launching review & approval cycles via workflow automations

- Improved search capabilities leveraging on a better and more consistent data entry of metadata

CONCRETE EXAMPLES AND SUCCESS STORIES

Let's review a few concrete examples:

Automation softwares like Zapier, PowerAutomate or Make can significantly streamline data entry processes when working with multiple document management software by automating the transfer of information between different applications.

For example, imagine a scenario where a document controller must upload a document into the Client's EDMS once the document has been already uploaded and approved into their own organisation's EDMS: using automations, we can automatically extract relevant data from EDMS #1, and create a corresponding document in EDMS #2 with that information. This eliminates the need for double entry, saving time and reducing the risk of errors.

Another example where automations can be useful is in the management of transmittal sheets: a well crafted automation can create a transmittal sheet that includes all the relevant information (recipient, sender, list of documents, dates, etc), eliminating the need for manual entry. In the same way, we can automate the import of data from a transmittal sheet into the EDMS, in order to reduce data entry to a minimum.

We can also leverage automations when it comes to reviews and approvals, by designing pre-set review workflows (for example as per a distribution matrix): the automation could then automatically notify recipients of the action required, send them reminders and close out their actions once they finished their part of the workflow.

When distributing by email, we can use automations to create drafts of emails with the subject, content, recipient, deadline, already pre-filled: the Document Controller would then just have to check and send.

One last example, you could, if you handle an Excel register for example, automate most tasks in order to reduce drastically the manhours spent on repetitive tasks.

The key question you can ask yourself is: do I perform repetitive tasks regularly, where I copy / paste, fill out the same info, or correct the same data systematically? If so, these would be ideal candidates for automation.

BENEFITS OF AUTOMATION IN REDUCING MANHOURS FOR DOCUMENT CONTROLLERS

The adoption of automation in document control can lead to substantial reductions in manhours for document controllers:

- **Increased Efficiency:** By automating repetitive tasks, document controllers can focus on higher-value activities that require critical thinking and problem-solving. Rather than manually doing data entry or sending reminders, they can devote more time to strategic initiatives.

- **Minimised Errors:** Human errors can be costly and time-consuming to rectify. Automated systems reduce the risk of mistakes associated with manual entry, such as mislabelled documents or incorrect revisions being distributed. This not only saves time spent correcting errors but also enhances the integrity of the information being managed.

- **Faster Turnaround Times:** Automation streamlines workflows, reducing bottlenecks and accelerating document flows. For instance, a well-configured approval workflow can shorten what once took days into mere hours, allowing document controllers to meet deadlines more efficiently.

- **Scalability**: As organisations grow, their document management needs become more complex. Automated document control systems can scale with the business, handling increased volumes of documents without a proportional increase in manpower. This adaptability allows document controllers to manage their workloads more effectively as demands change.

- **Enhanced Visibility:** Automation provides real-time insights into document status, approval processes, and access history. This visibility allows document controllers to identify potential delays and intervene before they impact productivity, ultimately leading to better project management.

AUTOMATION SOFTWARE PACKAGES

The following automation software packages can be considered when looking at automating tasks in the workplace:

- **Make**: This platform allows users to create complex automations with a visual interface. It supports numerous apps and services and provides advanced features like data transformation and error handling.

- **Microsoft PowerAutomate**: Part of the Microsoft ecosystem, this tool allows users to automate workflows between Microsoft services and third-party applications, with robust features for businesses already using Microsoft products.

- **Zapier**: A popular automation tool that connects thousands of apps, allowing users to create simple to complex workflows without needing coding skills. It's user-friendly and offers a wide range of integrations.

"Hanging in there" with D. Ceecee - the Document Controller   by Tuffmee

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Panel 1:
D., are you prone to fits of anger?

Not normally...
What have you done, James?

Panel 2:
I have given the final acceptance for the final documentation package from the main sub-contractor, without having it checked by Document Control.

The thing is... After a quick check, I have realised that about 30% of documents are incorrect...

Oh, James...

Panel 3:
I will give you a 7-second head start...

Start running!

Follow D. Ceecee on Consepsys and on f

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Graphical concept: Myranda Saffarine

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PORTRAIT OF A DOCUMENT CONTROLLER

MARIE LESLIE

Senior Document Controller
for ABL Aberdeen, in Scotland

Marie attended the Consepsys Certified Document Controller course in June 2024 (Live Online instructor-led session)

Can you tell us a bit about you?

My name is Marie Leslie, I am 55 years old, happily married and have a 30 year old son.

I was born and live in Aberdeen, Scotland. My husband was previously in the armed forces, so I have also lived in Germany, Ireland and Edinburgh.

In my spare time, I enjoy socialising with my friends and spending time with my two French bulldogs, Trevor and Millie.

What is your current role?

I am the senior Document Controller at ABL, Aberdeen.

ABL, part of ABL Group, is a leading independent global energy and marine consultancy, working in energy and oceans.

As part of the ABL Group, we do third party verification of documents for small and large projects: I am the central point of contact for all project incoming & outgoing documents and deliverables for the Aberdeen office.

I am also a super user for the ABL document control software.

Can you describe your professional experience?

I started working in Retail management at the age of 19, I continued working in this profession in a few different retail stores, Chelsea Girl, River Island, Oliver Timpson's, my last position being a Dual Site Manager for Bravissimo & Pepperberry in 2012.

I wanted a change from working in retail management, so I started working at Falck Safety Services in April 2012. I stayed at Falck Safety Services for 6 years holding a few different roles such as Receptionist, Administrator and Administration Team Leader.

I then moved to ABL (previously LOC) in 2018, I took on a multi-functional role of carrying out all Administration, Finance Support, Office Manager and Document Control duties.

As ABL grew, an opportunity to streamline my role became available and I naturally moved from carrying out a multi-functional role to a Document Control role which I thoroughly enjoy.

"I came away from the course with lots of new ideas to enhance the current document control processes currently in place within my company"

Which Consepsys course did you attend and when?

I attended the Certified Document Controller Course in June 2024.

As part of my development in this profession, I intend to do the Advanced Document Control and the Certified Lead Document Controller Course with Consepsys too.

What did you think about the course? How did it help you in your current role and career development?

I found the course to be well prepared, easy to follow and enjoyable with a good balance of theory, practical and homework.

I came away from the course with lots of new ideas to enhance the current document control processes currently in place within my company.

I created an action plan of things I would like to change/amend with target dates and am currently working through this, the benefits are being seen and appreciated by the team in Aberdeen already.

In my experience of Document Control I work with documents received for third party verification purposes, the course allowed me to see Document Control as a whole profession and gave me an insight into our clients side of things and Document Control as a whole.

If you attended one of our courses and would like to apply to be featured in one of our upcoming issues, drop us an email at:

dctribune@consepsys.com

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New problems to face

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10 SIGNS THAT YOUR ORGANISATION LACKS DOCUMENT CONTROL AWARENESS

Here are 10 key signs that an organisation is not paying enough attention to Document Control (DC):

1. Exclusion from key meetings

A major red flag is when Document Controllers are not invited to important meetings (for example, project and progress meetings, kick-off meetings, etc). This suggests that management does not fully understand the value of Document Control or how integral it is to the organisation's success, leading to serious mistakes down the line.

2. Lack of awareness of Document Control's role

In organisations with poor Document Control awareness, management may have little understanding of the role of Document Controllers. This can result in underutilising the DC team or relegating them to administrative tasks, instead of recognising their crucial role in maintaining compliance, mitigating risk, and improving operational efficiency.

3. Poor communication around document-related changes

When Document Controllers are not informed of updates or changes to important documentation, it's a sign of poor organisational awareness. Effective Document Control relies on timely communication regarding changes to processes, policies, or documentation standards.

4. Documents are treated as an afterthought

In an organisation lacking DC awareness, documents are often created as a reactive measure rather than a proactive one, hastily, without proper oversight or review. This can lead to errors, missing information, and difficulties in maintaining an accurate historical record. Proper Document Control requires that documentation is planned for, carefully managed, and continually updated as part of an ongoing process.

5. Frequent last-minute requests for documentation

A disorganised approach to Document Control is often revealed when users constantly make Document Control requests at the last minute, creating a sense of urgency and panic. This indicates a lack of planning and places unnecessary pressure on Document Controllers.

6. Document Controllers are not given decision-making authority

Without this authority, Document Controllers are unable to enforce best practices or ensure compliance, leading to disorganisation, inefficiency and increased risks for the organisation.

7. Over-reliance on informal communication channels

Another common sign of poor DC awareness is when important document-related information is communicated through informal channels, such as verbal instructions, quick chats, or instant messages. These channels by essence lack traceability and formality, often leading to mistakes.

8. Documents are stored in disorganised locations

A clear indicator is the disorganised storage of documents, often spread across personal folders, shared spaces, unregulated cloud services, or email attachments. This makes it difficult for teams to locate the correct revision of a document and increases the risk of using outdated or incorrect information.

9. No emphasis on compliance or regulatory standards

If there is no focus on keeping documentation up to date with regulatory requirements, the organisation is exposed to significant legal and financial risks.

10. Document Control is not integrated into core processes

Number 10 is when Document Control is treated as a standalone function, disconnected from the organisation's core processes. This can happen when Document Controllers are not integrated into project teams, or when management sees documentation as a separate task rather than an integral part of business operations.

THE DOCUMENT CONTROL TRIBUNE