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Workforce and Professional Development

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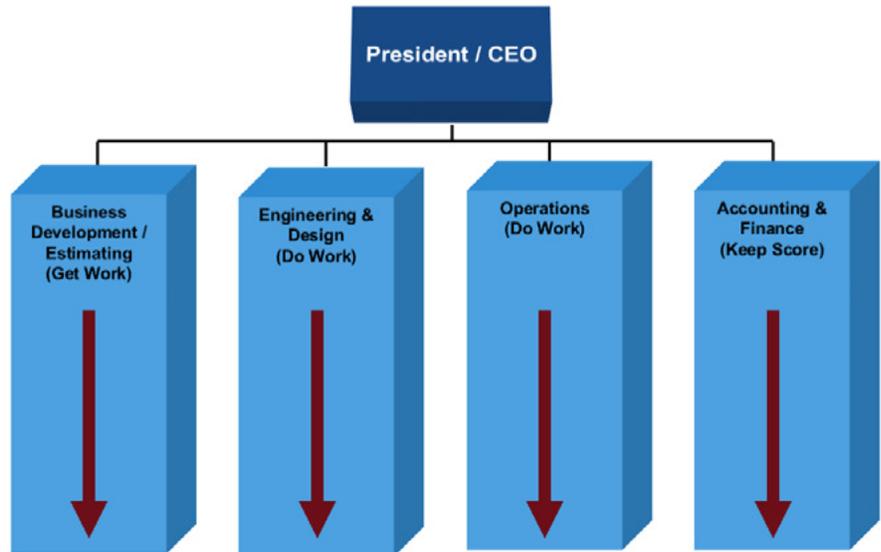# Professional Development—
It Begins with Workflow Definition

by Stephane McShane, Maxim Consulting Group

In many organizations, it seems that the method of promoting someone to a new position entails putting them into that position and "hoping" that they come up to speed quickly. In the construction world, hope is a risky, and costly, strategy. Many who grew into promotions in their career will share stories of being kicked off the deep end of the pier into a new job, with those around them watching to see if they could dog paddle fast enough to keep up with the changes. Culturally and operationally, this strategy is fast-becoming obsolete. It is distasteful and frustrating to those who have been identified as promotable. For professional development to be engaging, productive, and meaningful, the contractor needs three things: A value-stream map to develop defined system and process for how you do business, strong mentorship and leadership to provide the proper learning environment, and training that is created in the platform that will take us far into the future. This article will utilize simplified, illustrated example to depict the path for structured professional development and employee retention.

Workflow Definition

One of the many challenges many organizations face is that their workflow is defined into functional silos. That is, the workflow is only defined within the silo of the department in which that person resides. The silo approach does not outline how a specific position is to receive information, transform it, and transmit it forward across functional groups. This method can create some negative culture and competition between departments, instead of the synergy that is so highly desired.

TRADITIONAL METHOD:

That said, this is simply not how the most progressive firms define workflow. This example has processes that define the workflow that spans multiple departments so that the processes define the path, not the operational positions inside of the company. This is a very simplified example, but makes the point of transference between departments.

PROCESS DEFINED WORKFLOW:

Until the firm is able to process map into a defined-value stream map, drafting the roles and responsibilities for each position will be very difficult. However, if the time is taken to perform this critical function, the staff can become familiar with the expectations of their positions, what their role is in each process, how their performance will be measured, as well as the ability to look forward at the responsibility of future positions. At this point, you can easily create a career path map with the employee to engage them in their own success, and allow them input about where they would like to go based upon the requirements of the desired position.

Mentoring and Leadership

The benefit of the transparency defined in the roles and responsibilities cannot be realized without the ability to have mentoring and leadership. In what intervals do you meet with your employees to discuss their current performance, review their learning plans, and discuss their work goals? Developing greatness in performance does not stop at definition, but must be cultivated consistently.

Many performance evaluations are quite subjective. This means, the definition behind the terms "below average," "average," "above average," and "excellent" have not been defined. With this method, the employee is relying on the opinion of the evaluator and no specific skill set mastery definitions have been identified in order to achieve higher marks. Current performance should be an evaluation on whether the individual roles and responsibilities have been taught, used infrequently, used frequently, and mastered. For instance, if a project manager has specific roles in the preconstruction planning process, the specific task mastery involved in the process should be evaluated using the same definition of scale across all like positions, driving consistency into the process. An example of a performance evaluation matrix immediately follows.

Policy & Procedure	Points
Always follows company policy and procedure	10
Usually follows company policy and procedure	8
Makes an effort to understand and follow policy and procedure	6
Understands what to do but does not always follow suit	4
Gives little regard to established policy or procedure	2

Utilizing this type of objective criteria, it would also allow you to create levels within a larger organization as specific stages of mastery (point levels) have been achieved. An example would be titles such as Project Manager I, II, and III. In this way, the employee drives their own success in reaching the next level, because they understand the metrics in which they are being evaluated and can strive to meet and exceed those goals. This creates a win-win for the employee and the organization as the best practices have been defined, the employee owns their own progression which is influenced and encouraged by leadership, and the resulting behavior is incentivized by promotion and compensation.

Education and Training

The platform utilized to train today and into the future looks quite different than the methods of the past. Does anyone remember the days of the job manual? Many of the manuals still sitting on the shelves in construction offices are out of date, do not contain the latest information, and are rarely referenced. There is a reason.

Process Flow Charts

Many of our employees are visual learners, yet many organizations have not updated their process definitions and translated them to visual media. Remembering that the future of our industry lies in technology, it would make sense that our training and education methods would follow suit. During the value-stream mapping process, it would be easy to identify specific processes, including where they begin and end. An example of a very simplified Job Startup Overview is
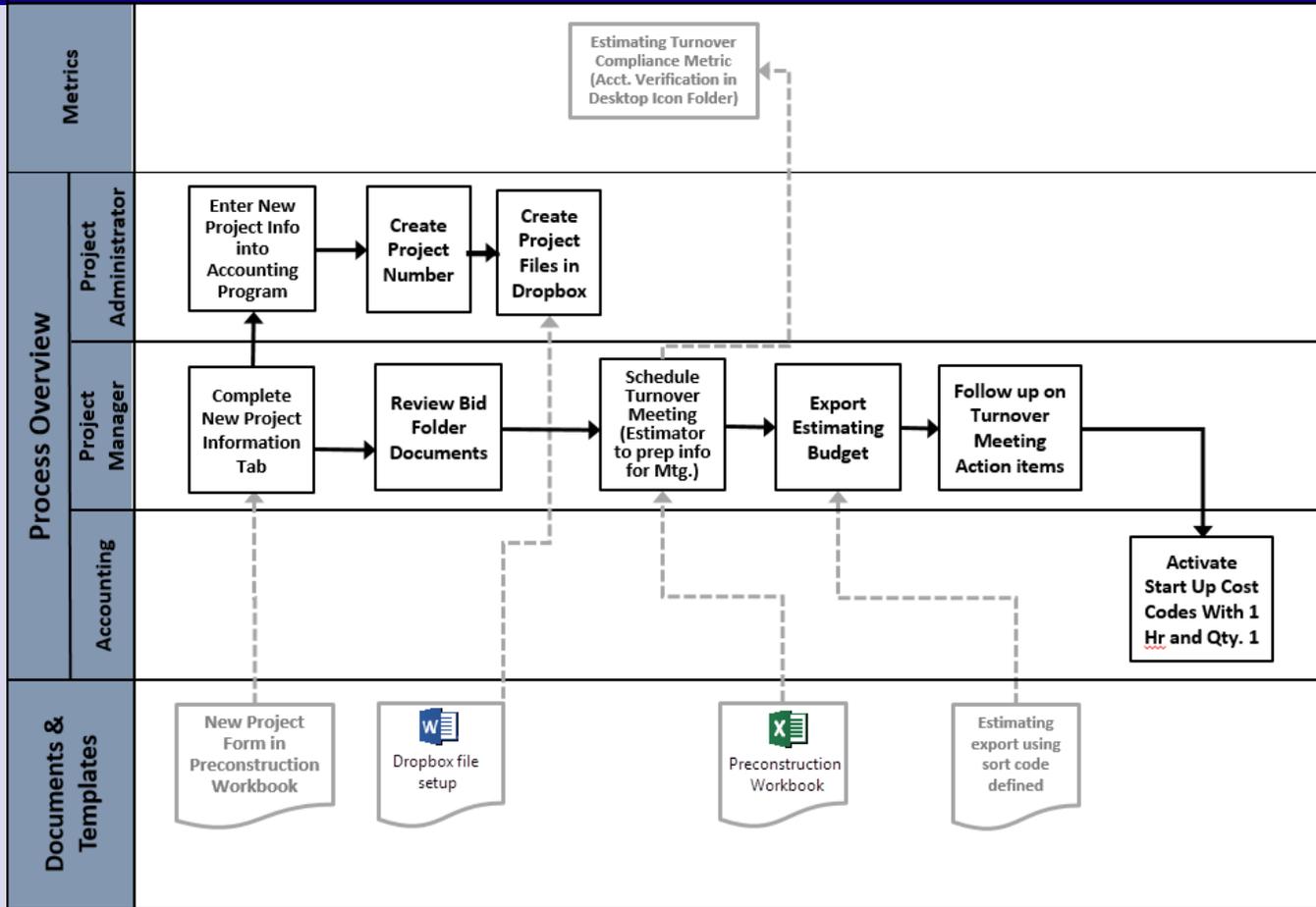
shown on the next page. With a swim lane flow chart such as this, it depicts the process and shows who owns each task. Each of the three horizontal lanes in the center represent a job title who is responsible for that action. The swim lane up top is reserved for the metrics or evaluation of whether or not this was completed. The lane on the bottom is reserved for examples of documents, templates, or to embed video training as necessary. This creates a repeatable, measurable process that can be saved and used during onboarding of new staff or promotion of individuals into a new position.

Video Education

So much of our work in construction is on the computer. Whether the construction organization is large and can retain the services of online training producers, or the firm needs to perform this in house, video education provides tremendously beneficial results.

Considering the depth and detail needed in training for specific processes, especially those tasks done on our devices, video becomes one of the easiest methods of capturing the needed information, while still making it a human interface. For example, in reviewing the flow chart above, there is a task to "open the start-up cost codes with 1 hour and a quantity of 1" so that they are active and available for immediate use. The contractor could simply use any online resource which would allow us to record an online meeting to capture voice and screen contents to follow someone doing this exact process. Take someone who is familiar with this task, have them start the meeting,

Job Startup Overview

Process Overview

Metrics

Estimating Turnover Compliance Metric (Acct. Verification in Desktop Icon Folder)

Project Administrator

Enter New Project Info into Accounting Program → Create Project Number → Create Project Files in Dropbox

Project Manager

Complete New Project Information Tab → Review Bid Folder Documents → Schedule Turnover Meeting (Estimator to prep info for Mtg.) → Export Estimating Budget → Follow up on Turnover Meeting Action items

Accounting

Activate Start Up Cost Codes With 1 Hr and Qty. 1

Documents & Templates

New Project Form in Preconstruction Workbook

Dropbox file setup

Preconstruction Workbook

Estimating export using sort code defined

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share their screen, record the session, then simply talk through each step and option of the task while they are doing it. Once the recording is stopped, it can be converted into a video file, renamed appropriately, and stored in a training repository on the contractor's network. A link to this video could also be embedded into the contractor's process flow chart for ease in training use. It's quite easy as many of us now have two monitors (or more), and can have the training video up on one screen, and the software or program up on the other screen. They can watch a segment, then do that segment, and repeat.

This should not replace training and mentoring in person. However, it is understood that if the process or task is not done frequently after the training, the in-person session education is lost. Another method of utilizing video is to record the training so that the employee can refer to it over and over again, in lieu of asking for multiple rounds of in person training. This would certainly avoid duplication of effort and give a strong platform for others to use.

Outside of large, progressive firms who have staff dedicated to professional development, educational resources and career-path mapping can be fairly slim or simply non-existent. The end goal is to set our teams up to succeed, and understand how to accomplish their goals. With the speed of change in our industry, the structure and methods of training in the past has been replaced with value-stream mapping, process definition, and roles and responsibility clarification. The contractor must also allow for the mentorship and leadership to guide in the educational process by providing attainable milestones, objective evaluations of performance, free access to education, and technology solutions to measure and track the change. External training resources are available should the contractor require help developing their own programs, bringing external paid trainers in-house, or sending their staff to courses offered through associations or other groups. In short, effective professional development is the greatest opportunity to inspire growth

and loyalty in our employees and, more importantly, put the ability to excel into their own hands.

Stephane McShane is a director at Maxim Consulting Group responsible for the assessment and implementation processes with our clients. McShane works with construction-related firms of all sizes to evaluate business practices and assist with management challenges. With a large depth of experience working in the construction industry from the field to executive leadership, McShane is keenly aware of the business and, most specifically, operational challenges firms' face. Her areas of expertise include leadership development, organizational assessments, strategic planning, project execution, business development, productivity improvement, and training programs. McShane is an internationally recognized speaker, mentor, author, and teacher. Her ability to motivate, inspire, and create confidence among your work groups is extremely rare and very effective.