How-To Guide:
Ensure Employee Accountability
& Compliance through Effective
Policy Management

The Set-Up

Running an efficient, profitable and safe organization depends on having a strong company culture to guide and govern employees on their responsibilities and roles within the company. This corporate culture sets the tone for the company's business practices, ensuring it and its employees adhere to regulatory standards and best practices. The connection between company culture and local, state and federal regulations is the organization's policies and procedures.

Having a policy management system to ensure employee accountability and corporate compliance is thus critical to growing a company. Without an effective system, employees are often unaware of ever-changing policies, lack buy-in and are not held accountable to their job responsibilities — all of which can contribute to costly mistakes that result in fines and penalties for non-compliance.

The Challenge

As someone in a managerial or leadership role, you have three important responsibilities to your employees when it comes to policies and procedures: access, education and enforcement. Have you given your employees all the tools and ensured they're properly trained on all policies and procedures so they can be successful at their jobs?

Access

- When a new employee joins your company, who trains him/her on how to access company policies and procedures, and your department's policies and procedures specifically?
- Do your employees know where your company's policies are stored and how they're organized?
- Are the policies easily accessible, or do employees have to hunt through share drives, Excel spreadsheets, email inboxes, company handbooks and physical folders for answers?
- Do your employees know how to find information when they have specific questions about a policy or procedure?

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Education
- When a new employee joins your company, who trains him/her on company policies and procedures?
- How do employees learn about new or recently updated policies and procedures?
- Do employees know the reasoning behind each policy's creation (whether to comply with company ethics and mission statement; trade organizations' guidelines; or local, state and federal laws) and why it's critical they comply and uphold each policy?
- What happens when an employee comes to you with a question about the company's policy on sick days, overtime, vacation, confidentiality about company information, taking lunch or a task related to his/her job function?

Enforcement
- Who is in charge of updating and refining your department's policies and procedures?
- Do you participate in helping create, review or update your department's policies?
- How do you lead by example and guide your employees in complying with your company's policies?
- How do you carry out your job responsibilities and enforce company policies on hiring, firing, promotions or performance reviews?
- How do your employees help hold each other accountable?

If you hesitated in answering any of the questions above, or if it's sometimes difficult to access, learn or enforce your company's policies and procedures, it's time to reevaluate your policy management system.

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The Common Inefficiencies

Take a look at your current policy management system, and look for warning signs of an inefficient system:

- Do employees spend countless hours searching through multiple share drives, electronic folders in email inboxes or hard copy company handbooks for the latest version of a policy? Do employees sometimes accidentally reference the wrong policy?
- Does your compliance team struggle to keep policies updated with the latest regulatory standards, whether local, state or federal law, or in line with company culture or trade associations' best practices?
- Once policies are updated, are they distributed via email? Are subsequent emails sent to ensure employees have opened, read, trained and signed off on the updated policies?
- Are managers spending time digging through old emails or Excel spreadsheets, looking for policy details, expiration or renewal dates and training acknowledgments?
- Are up-to-date reports a time-intensive process that often gets pushed to the bottom of the priority list?

The Signs of an Effective Policy Management System

When evaluating and looking to improve your current policy and procedure management system, first make a list of objectives for the new system that include:

- Store all policies in one central location that can be easily searched
- Enable employees to quickly locate the latest version of policies and procedures, ensuring they do not mistakenly reference an outdated, unrevised or unapproved version
- Automate the policy renewal or expiration process so your compliance team can ensure policies are kept up-to-date with industry best practices and the latest legislation
- Better track that employees have read, understood and been trained on the latest policies
- Easily compile real-time, ad hoc reports

From there, you're ready to take your policy management system to the next level — by automating current processes.

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The Features & Benefits of an Automated System

To achieve the most effective policy management system, consider eliminating the potential for human error (or forgetfulness) by automating the full policy lifecycle with Policy Management Software. Find a robust system, such as ConvergePoint's Policy Management Software, that both addresses your goals listed above and is user-friendly for your employees.

Features to Look for:

- **Microsoft SharePoint –** your employees are already most likely comfortable with Microsoft Exchange for email, Microsoft Office for productivity tools and Microsoft Active Directory for your email address book, so why not simply extend Microsoft SharePoint's capabilities and make it easier for your employees to learn and transition to the new system?

- **Custom Workflows & Role-Based User Access –** don't bog down employees' day by sending them policies that don't apply to them. Instead, use a system that restricts policy documents to people who need to have access only.

- **Search from One Central Document Repository –** choose software that allows employees to run targeted searches for detailed policy results, so they don't become frustrated searching through share drives, email inboxes and hard copy handbooks for specific policy information.

- **Full Audit Trails, Version History & Reporting –** ensure the software saves related metadata, approvals, notes, discussions and previous versions for auditing and reporting purposes, while also making certain employees only work from and view the latest version of the policy.

- **Document Expiration Notifications –** help your employees stay on top of their responsibilities, by finding a system that sends automated email reminders when a policy is up for renewal, needs review or updating, or is ready to be retired.

- **Policy Acknowledgments –** look for software that sends automated email notifications when a new policy has been distributed and tracks when and how many employees have read and acknowledged the new policy.

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The Features & Benefits of an Automated System Cont.

An effective policy management system results not only in streamlined processes, but also better trained employees who are invested in a company culture that values compliance. With no excuses for not having access to and being trained on the latest policies, employees can then be held more accountable to their job responsibilities. In addition, these employees often become the best spokespeople for your organization, advocating your company's safety and compliance values to your customers.

Let's Discuss Your Needs

At ConvergePoint, we've partnered with healthcare, financial, energy and utilities, manufacturing and retail organizations in more than 30 states across the U.S., working with their HR, HSE and compliance teams to streamline their policy management systems. As the leading compliance software solution provider on the Microsoft SharePoint platform, let us help streamline your policy lifecycle management needs, whether it's looking at your current processes and offering guidance or implementing a software solution and sharing best practices.