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**Operational Excellence:**  
8 Elements of an Effective  
Document Control System

# 8 Elements of Effective Document Control:

## 1. Workflows for All Document Types

No two documents are alike. For instance, a job description has different people and steps involved in review and approval than a work instruction or engineering specification.

A document control system designed around best practices will allow you to configure dedicated workflows for different document types and customize the entire document cycle. A flexible solution lets you build the document control system around your processes, rather than having to adapt your processes to a piece of software.

## 2. Ability to Configure Metadata

Another critical aspect of document control is the ability to segment metadata, or high-level information that describes each document. Examples of metadata include information on a document's:

- Department owner
- Priority level
- Related ISO elements

Metadata is important for tasks like categorizing, reporting, searching and filtering documents. A system that lets you customize metadata based on document type, allows you to create custom fields, categories, keywords and more. These configurable forms are essential to optimizing your document control system to meet your organization's unique needs.

## 3. Integration with Microsoft Office

Word, Excel and PowerPoint are the standard for creating documents in most companies today. That's why you want to look for a document control system that works well with Microsoft Office.

When these systems are integrated, any changes you make in a document control form will sync with the Word file (and vice versa) while preserving metadata. This linkage ensures consistency among files, so you don't have to deal with costly and time-consuming versioning errors.

### Document Control in Context

Comprehensive (QMS) and EHS management software provide added benefits that include:

- **Flexibility:** A configurable system that matches the look and feel of your organization's other systems makes a huge difference in terms of getting people to use the software.
- **Ease of Use:** A user-friendly interface is an important aspect of productivity and user adoption, simplifying quality and EHS operations.
- **Best Practices:** A QMS or EHS management system with built-in best practices streamlines other business process and workflows, including training, audits and corrective action.
- **Integration:** Tools that can "talk" to each other and external systems facilitate collaboration and help uncover process gaps and break down departmental silos.

## 4. Intelligent Business Rules for Review and Approval

A good document control system isn't just one that lets you check in and check out documents. You also need a controlled process for review, approval and distribution according to the workflow you've configured for the specific document type.

Flexible routing options are a necessity, as are intelligent business rules that eliminate inefficiencies and bottlenecks in the process. What specifically should you look for?

- Delegation rules to send documents to a designated alternate when the responsible party is out of the office
- Escalation rules to send reminders for impending due dates and notify supervisors of overdue documents
- Conditional routing options for more complex business processes
- Sequential routing to send documents to people in a specific order

- Parallel routing to send documents to a group all at once, with the option for more detailed rules like moving the document forward if three out of five people approve it

## 5. Integration with Employee Training

Critical to any document control system is the ability to train your workforce on changes to documents like procedures and specifications. During document creation or revision, you should be able to specify the type of training associated with the document and link new requirements to the employee training system.

Process excellence demands automated document control, since manual tracking and training leaves room for error. A flexible document control system integrated with employee training lets you automatically:

- Define who needs training for each document
- Update employee training records
- Create and track post-training test results

Some companies put documents in a holding pattern before releasing them, allowing employees to undergo training while documents are awaiting release. This process ensures employees are knowledgeable about the new document when it goes live. Some systems even allow you to create tests to verify that people actually understand the updates.

## 6. Change Request and Revision Control

Given the inevitable changes that you'll need to make to documents, change request and revision control both need their own customized workflows. These processes are all about driving consistency, efficiency and control to ensure:

- Nobody can make unauthorized changes
- New documents replace old ones and previous documents are held until the new one is released
- You can make global changes to multiple documents, instead of having to waste time on individual change requests

## 7. Integrated Reporting Capabilities

When your organization has a lot of documents and associated data within its system, you need flexible tools that help you visualize, streamline and share that data.

The ability to filter documents based on metadata is only one crucial aspect. Built-in reporting engines that let you create ad-hoc or scheduled reports on the health of the document control system are also important. Not only does this keep people on track with overdue documents, it simplifies the details so you can focus on the strategic priorities that matter most.

## 8. Intuitive Filtering and Data Security

Data and document security is fundamental to compliance and process excellence. You need to make sure that only appropriate levels of personnel can access, approve, review and make necessary revisions to key documents.

### Mobility Matters

With the increased prevalence of mobile devices in the workplace, many QMS applications now offer mobile document control capabilities. What are some of the advantages of using mobile document control software?

- **Mobile review and approval:** The ability to review documents on the go lets you make changes, approve and distribute documents more efficiently.
- **Quick views of system reports:** Mobile dashboards allow you to quickly identify overdue documents or other issues that you need to address.
- **Access to records in the field:** Mobile apps let you retrieve specifications, design documents or procedures when you're not in front of a computer.

Your document control system should make it easy to configure viewing, editing and approval permissions for individual users or groups. By making documents available on a need to know basis, you can be sure that your team is working efficiently, safely and securely, even in multi-site organizations.

### Key Takeaways

The document control system is a central hub for the information that drives your quality system. It is the foundation for compliance and provides a single source of truth for the policies, practices and regulations behind your QMS and EHS initiatives.

An effective document control system:

- Intelligently automates review and approval processes
- Links documents and records into flexible workflows based on best practices
- Integrates document control with training and change management to streamline processes
- Improves visibility while protecting the security of sensitive documents

Backed by an integrated QMS, these capabilities deliver a powerful platform for process excellence, unleashing new opportunities to drive your business forward.

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### About ETQ

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