How to Investigate Procedure Not Followed

These are the five most common categories, buckets or stopping points for investigations. They indicate an incomplete analysis.

“Procedure not followed” is typically a stopping point in an investigation. It should really be thought of as a starting point to find the “good stuff.” The Why questions here will reveal specifically how the incident can be prevented.

The “End” of Most Investigations

- Human Error
- Equipment Failure
- Procedure Not Followed
- Training Inadequate
- Design

When managers ask “Why wasn’t the procedure followed?” or “Why was the error made?” a person may respond with the “I don’t know.” Because the question is too general, the responses are vague. People also don’t want to incriminate themselves so they sometime say “I don’t remember.”

The questions should be specific. Which work process wasn’t followed? Which step was it? Which part of the step? Then walk through the details of that work process and map out the specific steps.
Procedure Not Followed, continued

A process is a series of steps to produce an end. A work process is simply how work is done in your organization.

A work process should not be confused with a procedure. A procedure is a written explanation of a work process, but the work process is what is actually done “in the field.” The slide to the left shows some example tools and activities that align with the ThinkReliability approach to work process.

A process map is a visual representation of how work is done. Every work process can be built at a basic level, an intermediate level and a detailed level. The detailed level represents the level at which people actually work. The only people who can explain the details at this level are the people who do the work.

Terms like “management systems” and “human error” are too general and simply reinforce finger pointing. The overall goals of the organization connect labor and management. The question isn’t “Whose fault is it?” but rather “What could we have done to prevent this from occurring?”

This mentality minimizes blame and actually increases accountability. The blamers are the ones who don’t take responsibility.
Procedure Not Followed, continued

It’s possible to have a work process that is more reliable than the people who do the work. Commercial flights have a pilot and a co-pilot who are required to step through checklists in a particular order. Some items on those checklists require a specific sequence and specific communication. Even if one of the pilots missed a step, the likelihood that the other pilot misses the same step is $(1/1000 \times 1/1000)$ which is 1 in a million. The Cause Map shows that both causes are required for the error to occur.

These are some of the advantages of focusing on process. The overall theme is a clear understanding of the task and clearer communication with those who perform the work. Process improvement is a term that is used frequently within organizations, but we see a significant opportunity within an organization if they focus first on process clarity.

This Eyelash curve used by Brian Joiner in his book 4th Generation Management shows this unfortunate re-learning of information that occurs within organizations. It’s the people doing the work who see what goes well and what needs to be improved. The process map helps people be more objective about the work they do. Standing back and looking at the detailed steps is sometimes surprising. People don’t realize how many steps are in a process because they’ve become routine.
Documenting a work process in a process map can begin by simply writing the steps on a piece of paper or a dry-erase board. Any work processes with significant detail are best captured electronically. There are many software tools that can be used, but one of the best is Microsoft Excel. All of the boxes and connector arrows are built into all versions of Microsoft Excel.

We suggest starting with just one work process that is not delivering the intended results. Getting details from the people who do the work is the best way to get accurate information. They are the subject matter experts. They need to be involved. Some of the improvements may only be subtle changes, but if it makes the task simpler, clearer or quicker the results can be significant.

There are two different Procedure Not Followed webinars. The introductory webinar is complimentary and provides information our clients can apply immediately.

The Advanced Webinar is a more in-depth and detailed training session which includes summary information, templates and examples. There is a $150 fee per PC connection, but you can have multiple people viewing that one connection. CEUs are awarded for the Advanced Webinar.

We also provide remote assistance to dissect and document your specific work process issue to reveal specific areas where it can be improved. The people closest to the work ideally need to be involved in this effort.

We show clients how to utilize the knowledge and experience within their organization to prevent problems and improve reliability. Remember, problems don’t happen because the task was too clear. Improve your problem solving skills by attending one of our public workshops or conducting a workshop at your site. For more information visit our website at www.thinkreliability.com.