

THE
Playscript Procedure:
A New Tool of Administration

By Leslie H. Matthies

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Contents

	Procedures Score Sheet	1
	Prologue	5
Act I	What Is a Good Procedure?	17
Act II	Efforts to Improve Procedures	27
Act III	Research in Procedures Communication	37
Act IV	Selecting the Action Cycle	61
Act V	People, Playscript, and Action	77
Act VI	Results from Playscript	109
Act VII	Common Errors in Procedures	127
Act VIII	Procedures Behind Procedures	153
	Index	179

SCORE YOUR OWN PROCEDURE ON THIS

Procedures Score Sheet

FIRST IMPRESSION 10 Points

1. Does the procedure have a heading that says "Procedure"? (2 Points)
2. Does the procedure's general appearance make it look interesting? (2 Points)
3. Does it avoid a cluttered dull look due to many boxes and approvals? (2 Points)
4. Is it balanced on the page? Does it have wide white margins? (1 Point)
5. Are the paragraphs short? Do they invite easy reading? (3 Points)

IMPRESSION SCORE

THOUGHT BEHIND THE PROCEDURE 20 Points

1. Does the subject (title) really tell what the procedure is about? (5 Points)
2. Does the writing reveal the purpose of the procedure? (Not "talk around about" the subject.) (5 Points)
3. Does the procedure seem to "package up" the subject matter well? Do sub-sections go together logically? (3 Points)

4. Does the procedure answer all how-to-proceed questions? (2 Points) _____
5. Is the action pattern in logical, step-by-step order? (5 Points) _____

THOUGHT SCORE _____

HOW WELL DOES IT GUIDE? 30 Points

1. Does it tell each doer the steps he is to take in the action pattern? (10 Points) _____
2. Does it do a good job of coordinating the action? Secure cooperation? (6 Points) _____
3. Can the reader understand it without "study"? (6 Points) _____
4. Does it specifically spell out forms, approvals, conditions? (6 Points) _____
5. Does it tell each man enough about the other man's role so he can work *with* the other man intelligently? (2 Points) _____

GUIDANCE SCORE _____

WRITING STYLE 30 Points

1. Is the writing perfectly clear? (8 Points) _____
2. Does it avoid technical jargon and general procedur-e-z-e? (5 Points) _____
3. Are the sentences short? (5 Points) _____
4. Are the words familiar? Working men's words? (5 Points) _____
5. Does it avoid the imperatives "will" and "shall"? (4 Points) _____
6. Is the grammar, punctuation, and spelling correct? (3 Points) _____

WRITING STYLE SCORE _____

TONE 10 Points

1. Does it sound as if one man had written it to another?
 (not stuffed shirts trying to impress) (5 Points)

2. Is it direct and crisp, yet courteous, and tactful? (5
 Points)

TONE SCORE

TOTAL GRAND SCORE

The perfect procedure is 100 points. Where does yours rate?

Prologue

1. What executives think of procedures
2. What do operating people think of procedures?
3. The cost of procedures
4. The procedure as a good tool
5. Top executives like action procedures

THIS book probes an everyday form of communication—the administrative procedure.

Let's look at the word *procedure*. A speaker once said: "Why speak of *systems* and *procedures*? Are we not being redundant? Isn't this like speaking of *horses* and *equines*?"

The speaker thinks of a procedure as a synonym for a system. In the confused state of administrative communication today, one thing we don't need is the synonym. What we do need is one restricted meaning for each key word.

The word *procedure* must mean one definite thing. We ask: "Do we need *two* words that mean *system*? We need one word that will indicate the over-all, the complete assembly of parts, which is a system. We need a word for one part that we use *in the system*, for the written document."

When we use the word *procedure* here, we mean a plan for proceeding, a written plan. How can you communicate a plan, if you don't write it?

These are the meanings of *system* and of *procedure* in this book:

System: The complete requirements for executing a selected segment of work. Includes people and their skills, layout,

equipment, machines, supplies, tools, forms, and a procedure (a plan on how to proceed).

Procedure: A document that explains the way to proceed to do work.

In this book, a system and a procedure are *not* redundant. They mean different things, like horse and bridle.

What executives think of procedures

When they think about them at all, top management men don't have a high opinion of the average procedure. A few years ago, I was in the office of a general manager—one of those fellows who said what he thought. He was high enough in the organization to get away with bluntness. He was known to be impatient with second-rate work. Here's what he said: "You systems people don't know how to write a clear procedure. You belly-ache because people don't follow them, but look at this thing. Ha! How could anybody even read it, let alone follow it!"

He slapped his hand down on a procedure that had just come into his office that morning and continued in a similar vein: "I read that thing and I can't understand it. And if I can't understand it, I don't see how in the hell the man down on the job can understand it. You people do a pretty lousy job when it comes to writing procedures."

It was a shock to hear a top executive talk like that. I sneaked a look at the procedure on his desk. In that organization, each systems man normally had his initials in the lower left-hand corner of any procedure that he wrote and coordinated. Fortunately, those weren't my initials. (If I was guilty of writing poor procedures, at least I wasn't guilty of writing *that* one.)

Did I write my procedures so that people understood them? Had I drifted from the simple style of my newspaper training

to the boring gobbledegook that is so prevalent in most organizations? I wondered. When I got back to my office, I took a copy of the maligned procedure out of the file. Here is one of its paragraphs:

Company boards and committees shall be appointed when necessary to effectively accomplish programs and/or fulfill contractual obligations and in those instances where problems involve two or more departments, require extensive investigation and analysis by a body of persons possessing specialized skills, and of sufficient importance that official records must be maintained. The company boards and committees shall also be appointed to process and/or approve such operating paper as management determines requires official action by any interdepartmental body.

Can you understand the manager's reaction to that type of writing? I tried to understand it. I think the writer tried to say: "When a problem gets bigger than one department, somebody will set up a committee."

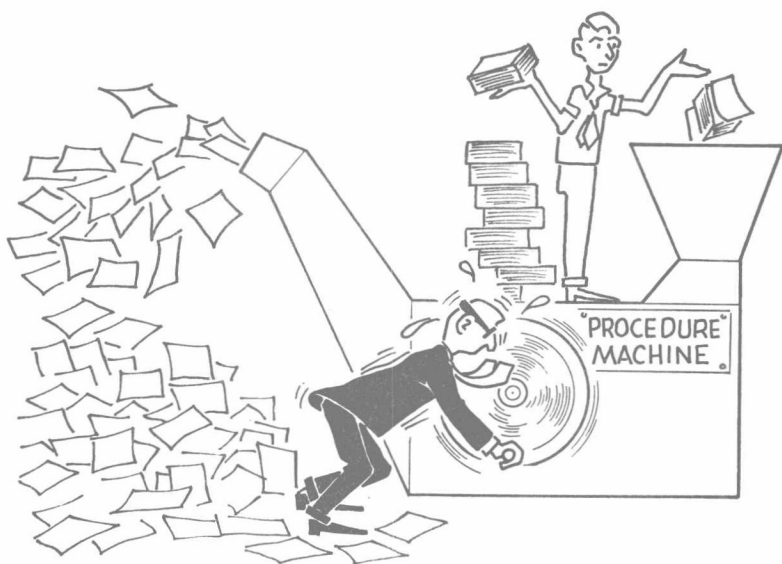
I didn't understand who appoints the committee? What the committee is to do? What records are maintained? Why?

Analyze that passage and you realize that it isn't a procedure at all, even though it was a document that said *Procedure*: It is more of a policy statement, and a very obscure one.

What do operating people think of procedures?

We studied some of the other procedures in our manual. They weren't all as bad as the one that riled the manager. But they could hardly be called easy-to-read. We had been grinding out hundreds of procedures over the last several years, and hadn't paused long enough to check on their effectiveness. We had turned out quantity but we had given no thought to quality.

We had taken for granted that what we wrote in our procedures would be understood by the operating people. Seven man-years of work had gone into our procedures manual. Yet we hadn't once checked to see if they were useful. Everyone in the systems group agreed that we should find out just how effective our procedures were. We have had problems with getting people to follow them. Possibly it was because they didn't understand them.



Organizations crank out hundreds of procedures and seldom check their effectiveness.

If people could not understand our procedures we had nothing on which to build. This was a basic question that we had to resolve. We agreed to do some probing when we had the chance. We'd use spare moments to find out how effective our procedures were, and most important, if they weren't effective, what we could do about them.

We had a total of 314 procedure manuals. During the following year, we interviewed 71 users of manuals—men and women who had a clear need for the manual's information in their daily work. Each one should have felt that the manual was useful. We had not scattered manuals around helter-skelter, regardless of need. We asked four basic questions:

1. Do you find the procedures in your manual always useful?
2. Do you find them fairly useful?
3. Do you find them occasionally useful?
4. Do you find them not useful at all?

We asked that last question with some trepidation. We were fearful of what people might tell us. Here are the answers:

1. Nine said they thought the procedures were always useful.
2. Twenty-two said they were fairly useful.
3. Twenty-seven said they were useful occasionally.
4. Thirteen people said they never found the procedures useful.

Each of these 71 persons had possessed the manual for a year or longer. So they had time to find some use for the procedures in it. The "degree of use" answers to our four basic questions surprised us. But before we could do anything about it, we had to have specifics. Why were the manuals so relatively useless? The universal complaint about the procedures was that people could not find the exact information at the time they needed it.

These comments are typical of the hundreds that we received:

1. Your procedures are written with too many legal terms.

2. I hate a procedure that makes a lot of references to others. Why should I have to look up a second, and sometimes a third procedure? Often your reference is only a sentence or two.
3. Your paragraphs are too long. I can't follow them.
4. You certainly use a lot of big words. Most of them seem to be unnecessary. Who are you trying to impress?
5. You always seem to be adding or revising procedures without first checking to see if there's a duplication in some other procedure. It confuses me no end.
6. You make one mistake. You check a new procedure with my boss but you never check it with me. I'm the one who has to live with it. My boss doesn't always know what I need. He just thinks he does.
7. You revise too often. You seem to try to supersede your decisions by re-publishing the paper.
8. I don't like your procedures at all. I can't find any specific information without having to read an entire procedure, and I haven't time to fool around with it. I just ask somebody what to do.

The fellow who said he hated references to other procedures (comment number 2 above) pointed out this little classic in one of them:

See Standard Practice Instruction #117, revised 8-57, P. 3, C, 2, a, (1), on the Proper Routing of Correspondence.

Of course, all these comments were negative, but we had asked for them. We tried other "usefulness" tests. We asked one man if he'd try to look up some information. *We* knew it was in one specific procedure, but he could not find it. In the course of research, you often pick up unexpected information. One of the men told us: "Yes, I need that information but I have never seen a procedures manual. My boss keeps it locked up in his desk drawer. He says it's secret."

We were astounded to find that a supervisor regarded a procedure, a device for telling how to work, as a secret, to be kept hidden from an employee who needed it.

The cost of procedures

Were we turning out procedures that were a costly luxury? What do they really cost? James G. Hendrick * states:

The development of the average written procedure involves five days of work for an experienced procedures analyst.

This includes time for determining the present flow of paper-work, making minor paper-work improvements, a period of draft, a period of approvals, and editing for publication.

Thus, if there are 500 procedures to be written, which appears to be the minimum for many companies, the job of preparing a completed procedures manual involves more than 10 man-years of tedious work.

From our own experience we feel that Mr. Hendrick's estimate of an average of five days to develop a procedure is conservative. We'd place it between 10 and 15 days.

Procedures require coordination, and in that process we consume the time of many executives, all of whom are involved in the proposed procedure. Ten man-years of work by senior systems men would require at least a \$100,000 investment to produce the procedures for a 500-procedure manual. \$100,000 just in salaries is a sizeable investment.

There's more expense. Add the typists' time on drafts and on duplicating masters and the time to reproduce the copies, and mail them.

This much we can say: The average procedures manual is a substantial investment. If the manual and the procedures it

* James G. Hendrick, *Company Manuals* in Victor Lazzaro, Ed., *Systems and Procedures: A Handbook for Business & Industry*, 1959, Prentice-Hall, Inc.