

# Assessing the Maturity Grade of Policies & Procedures Programs

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*Policies & Procedures (P&P) refers to the types of communication about an organization's internal operating practices. A P&P program refers to the context in which an organization develops and manages its P&P communications. Because a P&P program is an on-going investment, its role and value to an organization should be assessed. A P&P program must provide performance-based communication, using performance-based means, for an organization that is performance oriented. Urgo & Associates devised a model to assess the maturity of P&P programs. The model consists of a questionnaire and matrix that work together in measuring and describing four grades (levels) of maturity according to five functions commonly found in P&P programs.*

## **Introduction to P&P and P&P Programs**

**Policies & Procedures defined.** The term *Policies and Procedures (P&P)* is the umbrella name used to describe the various types of communication about an organization's internal operating practices, whether administrative or technical. In addition to policies and procedures related information, internal operating practices may also be communicated in the form of standards, guidelines, rules, processes, and instructions. All organizations have P&P whether communicated formally or informally. The primary purpose for having policies and procedures communication is to provide the training curriculum on internal practices for the organization's members. In essence, P&P communication serves as reference-based learning for new members and on-going reference for seasoned members.

**Policies & Procedures Programs defined.** The term *P&P program* refers to the context in which an organization designs, develops, implements, and manages its P&P communications. The context may be formal (a department, unit, or group) or informal (merely efforts) within or to the organization it supports. P&P programs vary in formality, size, services, and outputs based upon such factors as an organization's

- size (head count),
- the nature of business,
- rate of growth or change being experienced,

- the complexity of business processes,
- technology for communicating and learning,
- management's concern for training and learning, and
- industry and government requirements.

**Importance of P&P programs.** When people speak about P&P communications, they typically focus on P&P as documentation. While documentation is important, one needs to also consider the context in which P&P documentation takes place and its contributing value to individuals (users) and the organization at large. P&P communication requires an ongoing investment to coincide with an organization's evolving business practices. As a result, the P&P investment may become sizable in organizations and questionable as to its role and value.

**Role and value of P&P programs.** Probably more than ever, organizations are increasingly becoming performance oriented (focusing on valued results rather than on activities and events) to maintain strides in a highly competitive and global economy. Likewise, a P&P program must become performance oriented not just in *what* it provides (communication) but also in *how* it provides P&P communication (such as the strategies, processes, methods, techniques, tools, and talents) to the organization. In other words, a P&P program must provide performance-based communication, using performance-based means, especially for an organization that strives to be performance oriented. In so doing, the P&P program plays a synergistic role in its approach to what it contributes to the organization.

## **About the Assessment Model**

### **Components and purpose of assessment model.**

How then does one assess the role that a P&P program plays in its contributions to its organization? Urgo & Associates' approach was to develop an assessment model comprised of a questionnaire and a matrix. The purpose of the questionnaire, called the *Preliminary Self-Assessment Questionnaire*, is for an individual to self-assess a P&P program, the result of which is a score that maps directly into the matrix. The purpose

of the matrix, called the *Organizational Policies & Procedures Maturity-Grade Matrix*, is to explain various grades of maturity for a P&P program's performance. The overall purpose of the model (questionnaire and matrix) is not only to assess and describe maturity, but also to improve a P&P program to strategically support a performance-oriented organization into the 21st century.

**Basis for devising model.** Urgo & Associates devised its model by incorporating principles and features of other models and assessment tools concerned with P&P communications (1) (2), technical publications (3), organizational development (4), and performance improvement (5). These sources are mostly from the last ten years, yet as early as the 1960s. Urgo & Associates also devised its model by incorporating more than 20 years' experience with policies and procedures communication in more than a dozen industries and on more than a dozen subject areas.

**Functions identified within model.** To more easily understand the maturity grade of P&P programs, Urgo & Associates identified five functions of P&P programs. In this way, one can assess not only the *overall* maturity of a P&P program, but also the maturity for *specific* functions. Within each of these functions, the model addresses such characteristics of P&P programs as strategic goals, methods, processes, techniques, tools, and talents for developing, evaluating, and implementing P&P communications. An organization can then identify specific functions for setting goals to improve upon. The five P&P functions are:

- Managing P&P programs (addresses reasons for having P&P, and type of talents for P&P development)
- Managing P&P development (addresses extent of having processes, planning, and project management of P&P development)
- Analyzing and designing P&P (addresses approaches for planning and collecting information for P&P development)
- Communicating P&P (addresses how P&P information is organized and presented, including methods, formats, and styles)
- Validating and using P&P (addresses how P&P information is verified and approved, and users' awareness of P&P existence and availability).

**Grades identified within model.** An overall score, derived from the self-assessment questionnaire,

translates into one of four grades (levels) in the maturity-grade matrix.

- Grade A: Performance Improvement-based P&P (development is planned, organized, repeatable, and performed by identifiable talents; approach is future oriented with evaluative feedback for learning and organizational improvement)
- Grade B: Performance-based P&P (development is planned, organized, repeatable, and performed by identifiable talents; approach is mainly for the present and for learning)
- Grade C: Elementary-based P&P (development is usually mandated by outside entity; some planning exists; performed by some identifiable talents; approach is often more for present outside requirements than for learning)
- Grade D: Informal-based P&P (development is reactionary, unplanned, with mostly unidentifiable talent; approach is for immediacy).

In essence, these four grades address a range of usefulness of procedures communications of the organization's operating practices in the organization: from a mere reporting job (Grade D) to performance enhancement (Grade A).

**Using the assessment model.** The typical approach for determining the maturity grade of a P&P program is through the use of the *Preliminary Self-Assessment Questionnaire*. After answering the questions, respondents can follow a set of simple, self-scoring instructions to derive a maturity grade. The questionnaire can be administered to obtain a variety of perspectives (such as for the P&P communicator, the P&P program manager, and the P&P user) and an overall average for comparisons of deviations. Once an organization learns its maturity grade, it can use the matrix to determine which P&P functions it may want to improve upon and then learn what it will take to reach that goal, most likely with the advice of a P&P consultant. The model can also be used to attain an equal maturity balance among the five identified functions of P&P programs. Maturity grades can also be used to compare P&P programs serving organizations having similar characteristics as size, age, location, industry, or available technologies.

**Experience with assessment model.** Urgo & Associates' experience with its self-assessment model indicates that most organizations self score a grade of C or D. Few score B, and rarely any score an A. We recommend organizations strive to attain a grade level of B. We have found the need to administer the assessment in different ways depending upon the organization and its situation at the time. For example,

the assessment can be performed by the organization's individuals alone or together. We have administered the assessment with other assessment techniques (such as interviews, focus groups, and presentations) to validate findings and to cultivate a collaborative approach to working with the organization on their P&P needs.

## REFERENCES

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