

Best Practices in Policies and Procedures

Stephen B. Page. 2002. Westerville, Ohio: Process Improvement Publishing. [ISBN 1929065-07-8. 158 pages. \$19.95 USD (soft cover).]

Stephen Page's book, *Best Practices in Policies and Procedures*, is a unique addition to the bookshelf on policies and procedures communication. Although the book's title says best practices *in* policies and procedures, the book focuses on what Page considers best practices in formulating and finding content for an organization's P&P, both through the readers' own efforts and from examples. This book, more than any other book on P&P development to date, attempts to offer a broad and, in some areas, an in depth coverage for formulating organizational practices and finding P&P information. The book draws upon and reflects principles and techniques used in the Quality profession in which Page has extensive background. Intermittently, Page tailors the subject coverage for the P&P analyst's role, and in some instances on topics rarely or never addressed by other P&P books.

The book has five essential chapters. Most of the chapters end with a section called "References." The references listed are of other books (no page or chapter citations are indicated) which results in a bibliography to a chapter's content.

In Chapter 1, *Vision and Strategic Direction*, Page introduces the importance of aligning the formulation of P&P practices and information with the organization's vision, strategic direction, and core processes. These organizational dimensions are often ignored, forgotten, or never thought of by today's harried P&P analysts/writers who are often inclined to focus too much on their writing and not the big picture of the organization. Page astutely points out the future of the procedures analyst's involvement in the P&P function rests, among other factors, on being proactive in approaching problems and challenges for the organization, not merely the writing.

In Chapter 2, *Building Table of Contents*, Page offers and advocates using a combination of five methods for identifying topics (policy or procedure titles, subject areas, or problem statements) for a proposed table of contents. These methods include using examples from other organization's, building it from scratch by speaking with subject experts and users, seeking best practices through industry associations and standards, networking, and searching the Web for examples. P&P analysts/writers seeking to develop performance-based documentation are likely to find some of these methods unnecessary at times; they would probably prefer concentrating more on analyzing and formulating processes and tasks unique to their users' needs.

Chapter 3, *Developing P&P*, is about formulating P&P practices conceptually before writing them. Page describes in depth how to set up cross-functional teams, select team members, conduct team meetings, and disband teams. In conducting team meetings, he addresses how to research, develop, brainstorm, diagram, and identify alternative solutions. He also addresses how to select a solution and transform content into P&P information. He gives considerable in depth coverage and frequently indicates the tailored role of the P&P analyst where appropriate – an aspect that is very important yet rarely addressed in most books on P&P. The chapter concentrates more on effective team building and problem solving for formulating P&P practices than on developing P&P. For example, there are barely any examples given of formulating actual P&P practices.

Chapter 4, Writing P&P, briefly summarizes Page's 7-section format that he recommends be applied for each P&P document developed within his 5-step writing process. This chapter is covered fully in his other book *7 steps to better written policies and procedures* (2001) to which he refers the reader.

Chapter 5, Table of Contents Examples and Policy/Procedure URLs, functions more like an appendix or reference section. According to Page, this chapter focuses on helping one find content for table of contents pages and for policy and procedure documents. I had difficulty determining which of his many tables to use to find examples of P&P tables of contents. I was unable to find examples for P&P on auto dealers' wholesale financing and on information security (the latter a more popular subject requested for P&P analysts). I also had difficulty scanning some of Page's tables due to the formatting of unnecessary lines in the tables' cells and the fact that some tables spanned several pages. Many of the examples given were from government offices and institutions of higher education -- organizations that typically need to communicate their practices to the public. One example of a table of contents on P&P for hotel management gave what I perceived is a very useful listing of potential topics to consider. There were also some good examples of tables of contents on P&P for employment handbooks and for the actual content of their handbooks.

The book has shortcoming in its editing that caused confusion in locating and understanding its content. I found myself disoriented at times and had difficulty navigating through the content because the section headings and subheadings have too many subtle variations in type fonts and styles. Some chapter titles differ slightly from their listing in the table of contents. Some chapter titles do not accurately reflect the information presented. For example, Chapter 4 is entitled Developing P&P. Page says the focus of the chapter is on developing the content for P&P. However, most of the chapter is about describing, forming, and leading teams and in coordinating and conducting meetings with the ultimate purpose of developing content. Also, several chapters begin with a flow diagram showing the key activities of a process being addressed in several chapters. Unfortunately, the diagram and its wording changes in each chapter causing confusion in understanding what was and is about to be covered. Finally, an index would have been helpful to easily and quickly find and access information on the book's many sub-topics and information.

Despite the book's shortcomings, Page makes a first-known attempt to open the door to examples of tables of contents of P&P from a variety of organizations. He also makes an admirable attempt to position and show the P&P analyst/writer as more than a scribe; rather, as a leader adding value by formulating best P&P practices with others for their organization.

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