Strategic Leadership Consulting

What'SOP? An MVP Guide[1] to Standard Operating Procedures

Executive Summary (Full procedure on following pages)

You should set up Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for important tasks that can be predicted. Prioritize SOP development based on the tasks that take the most time or create the most pain. Take a minimalist MVP approach to SOPs. Something is better than nothing and something right now is way better than almost perfect three months from now.

Some Benefits of SOPs
1. Increase quality of results
2. Decrease effort and save time
3. Decrease stress
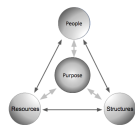4. Ensure compliance with policy
5. Improve safety

MVP Process for Writing a Procedure:
Part I: Creation
1. Name the SOP
2. Identify the priorities. Why write a SOP? How will you know if it is successful?
3. Identify the desired end point (when is the procedure complete?)
4. Identify the first step
5. Map the A-B steps from the first one to the final outcome
6. Implement, monitor, and adjust

- Steps 1-5 should take a minimum amount of time.
- The SOP doesn't need to be good, just good enough to test.
- Create a better procedure over time based on results

A more detailed explanation with examples is on the following pages

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[1] An MVP guide is, by definition, a minimally viable product. As such, it is in a continual state of improvement and is not meant to be a definitive work. Errors are to be expected. If you have suggestions, please email me and I will be grateful.

Dr. Frederick Buskey, frederick@frederickbuskey.com

What'SOP? An MVP Guide[2] to Standard Operating Procedures

The goal of this MVP guide is to help you use processes, procedures, and protocols. As an MVP guide, we'll take a minimalist approach to developing standard operating procedures (SOPs). I'll include additional steps and ideas at the end for refining procedures, but the first part of the guide sticks to the basics. But first, definitions…

SOP: May refer to a standard operating process or a standard operating procedure. In this guide, we will use SOP to denote a standard operating *procedure*. A SOP is a standardized set of actions applied to a

Process: A series of steps that move from the beginning of a routine task to its completion

Procedure: A step-by-step set of exact instructions for completing a simple routine task or part of a complex routine task

**Protocol**: A tool used for completing a procedure

Routine task: Something that needs to be done that can be predicted and prepared for. Frequency may vary from rare to often to constant. Complexity may vary from simple to very complex.

Note that tasks that may seem unpredictable (a sudden request from above for information, or an angry parent/partner/customer demanding immediate attention) are often predictable. We know that at some point they will happen, so they are predictable. We don't know when they will happen and we may not know the scope or intensity, but the event itself is something we can anticipate. If we can anticipate it, we can create a procedure that makes it routine.

Why Create SOPs?
1. Increase service
2. Increase quality of results
3. Decrease effort and save time
4. Decrease error
5. Increase number/role of people capable of completing the procedure
6. Increase predictability in the environment
7. Decrease stress
8. Improve organizational resiliency
9. Ensure compliance with policy
10. Improve safety
11. Facilitate building leadership capacity

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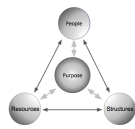
SOPs yield these benefits because they bring structure, support, transparency, and consistency to operations.

MVP Process for Writing a Procedure:
Part I: Creation
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3. Identify the first step
4. Map the A-B steps from the first one to the final outcome
5. Name the SOP
6. Implement, monitor, and adjust

Using an MVP approach, simply getting something down on paper is a win. Steps 1-5 should take a minimum amount of time. The SOP doesn't need to be good, just good enough to test. Step 6 is the critical step for creating a better procedure over time but deploying something flawed will have a bigger immediate impact than spending six months developing a modern wonder of engineering precision.

MVP Example
Again, this is a minimalist approach for immediate deployment. *I will add additional thoughts in blue italics.*
1. Identify the priorities. Why write a SOP? How will you know if it is successful?
Parents come to the office unannounced and want to speak with an administrator. This disrupts leaders' abilities to consistently engage in classroom observations. The procedure needs to protect leaders' time without alienating parents.
2. Identify the desired end point (when is the procedure complete?)
When a meeting with the leader is scheduled or the parent no longer desires a meeting.
3. Identify the first step
Welcome the parent
4. Map the A-B steps from the first one to the final outcome
   a. Front office staff (FOS) welcomes the parent and ask how we may serve them
   b. Parent asks to see an administrator
   c. FOS says, "It sounds like this is urgent, so let's get some information so that we can resolve this issue as quickly as possible." *Using very specific language (a script) has many benefits such as increased accuracy, diplomacy and consistency. It also decreases stress on the person implementing the procedure as they can focus on the operation as opposed to wondering what to say.*
   d. FOS uses Parent Conference Protocol to record basic information. *This is something you will have to throw together as part of your MVP* procedure*. I'll include an MVP version in the appendix with some discussion. The protocol should have two purposes relating to step 1 priorities: help the parent feel like they are listened to and taken seriously and protect time of the administrator.*

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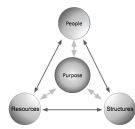
    e. FOS tells parent "I'm so sorry, but the administrator is in classrooms right now and is unavailable, but I can see this is an important issue so let's get you an appointment as soon as possible."

    f. FOS immediately checks administrator calendars and provides options for availability. *Note that this relies on a separate procedure: how and who administrator schedules are developed and managed. Another benefit of developing an SOP is that it can reveal other places that an SOP could be beneficial.*

    g. FOS says "The first available opening I have is X time of x day, can I schedule you for that time or would you like to look at another option? Of course, I will forward your concerns and information to the administrator immediately and they may be able to call you sooner. I understand this is important and we'll work as quickly as we can to help get this resolved."

    h. FOS schedules meeting time preferred by parent.

    i. FOS writes appointment time on a sticky and give to parent. *You could use something more sophisticated if it is easily available.*

    j. FOS says "Thank you so much for coming in. I'll make sure that x administrator has access to your information immediately and I will personally remind them of the appointment on xxx. If anything changes or you have additional information to share before the appointment please feel free to call me and I'll make sure that x administrator get's the updates. I hope the rest of your day goes well."

    k. FOS records appointment in admin's calendar with link to partially completed Parent Conference Protocol. *At this point the process is complete. A new procedure will begin for the administrator regarding responding to the parent. We could quibble over whether or not steps a-k are a complete procedure or actually a procedure that is part of a larger procedure about resolving a parent concern. In practice, the difference is irrelevant as our goal is to protect administrators' classroom observations without alienating the parent. This procedure should do that.*

5. Name the SOP

Parent in Office Procedure

6. Implement, monitor, and adjust

Review in December leadership meeting

This procedure addresses a complex and high-stress issue so it will require lots of updating. Eventually there will probably be decision points that may result in branching courses of action (if/then operations). However, this basic protocol should be effective at significantly reducing interruptions for administrators during classroom observation time without alienating parents. I've chosen to use an approach of relying on my front office staff to redirect parent expectations while gathering important data. This assumes front office support has the capacity to follow the procedure. If yours does not, then you might have a more pressing need, but we can only tackle one thing at a time.

Remember, your goal is to make things better than they were, not to make them perfect. It took me 60 minutes to write this SOP alone and another 15 for the Parent Conference Protocol. In

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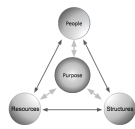
practice, I would meet with the FOS and administrators, and maybe include a parent or two to help draft the SOP. That might take two or even three hours. Is it worth the investment? Ask yourself these questions:

- *How many successful resolutions will it take to make back that time?*
- *What's the value of decreaed stress for administrators, FOS, and parents?*
- *How many parents will leave the office feeling like the school genuinely cares about their concerns and will take time to address them?*
- *How many parents might decide at the end of the procedure that they don't actually need an appointment because the FOS has helped the parent get through the raw emotion of the moment?*

Finally, notice how critical it was to be explicit about my priorities. Protecting observation time without alienating parents shapes the procedure. If my priorities had been different, the same procedure might look different. Know why you are doing what you are doing!

The Parent Conference Protocol
I've designed this assuming a fairly complex and adversarial situation. If the issue turns out to be less intense, skip unnecessary parts of the protocol. I used exact quotes for the same reason described earlier. I would suggest using the exact quotes until people became very comfortable with the procedure. Also note that by using the protocol you have an exact record of everything that has happened.

Part I: Intake
Parent name: Date:
What is your concern today?

What should we know about the situation (bullet points):

How is this situation affecting your child's success?

What are some thoughts you have about improving the situation?

Intake completed by:
Administrator assigned:
Date and time of appointment:

Part II: Meeting with Administrator, Opening (Listen and paraphrase only)
Parent and others present:

Thank you so much for coming in today. I'm sorry I couldn't meet with you on xxx when you first came to us but I'm glad we have the opportunity now to improve the situation.

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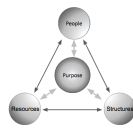
Let me make sure I understand the situation clearly. *Restate concern and summarize the situation (bullet points)*.

Is this summary accurate? (*If not, add clarifying notes*)

And this is a really important issue because it is having X effect on your child's learning, is that correct? *Note this provides an opportunity to shift the conversation later to one about the child's learning, which may provide more options for dealing with the issue.*

Is there anything you want to add before we work to make this better? (*Add notes if necessary*)

Part III: Problem Solving
So, we've identified the issue as x. The negative effect on your child is x.

(*If the case is clear cut, ignore this step. If not, work to discover if there are other contributing factors. If there was a fight or a child is being bullied or had an altercation with a teacher, those are all symptoms. Figure out what the problem is so you can work to resolve it.*) I'd like to make sure that we are very clear about the actual root problem before we go further. May I ask you some questions that might help us dig a little deeper?

Question stems:
Why?
What are some other possibilities?
I wonder if…

This has been very helpful. May I share with you some of the factors that impact what I'm able to do about this situation? (*Identify applicable school policies*)

(*This part of the conversation can be reflective, collaborative, or directive based on what has happened before*) So, x is the root problem. Any solution should help your child with x negative effect. Given your child's needs and the school policies…

(*Directive*) …here's what I can do.

(*Collaborative*) …here are a couple of options we can talk about.

(*Reflective*) …what do see as being a solution?

Part IV: Resolution
(*Identify a clear course of action. Try and include an action the parent must also take, even if it is just talking to their child. This creates mutual accountability*) So, I will do x by x time. You will do x by x time. This should have x impact on the situation. I will let you know by (note home, email, phone call) what happens on my end.

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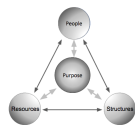
I'm so glad you made time to come in today. Your child is so fortunate to have a parent who is willing and able to be an advocate for them.

(If parent is satisfied) I'm glad we were able to resolve this situation.
(If parent is dissatisfied) I'm sorry we haven't come to 100% agreement, but I'm glad we've been able to have this conversation. Your child's success is critical, and if the actions I've committed to taking don't improve the situation you have my commitment that we will explore other options.

Completed by _____ at _____ on _____, 2019

CC Superintendent/Supervisor ___yes ___no
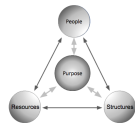
Part V: Follow-Up Action
Action taken

Result

Parent notified by (form) on (date)

Load/file completed protocol at:

-End of Protocol

*See next page for optional additional tips

Dr. Frederick Buskey, frederick@frederickbuskey.com

Beyond the MVP Procedure

Here are some additional details for the second and third phases of the SOP development procedure. These are not necessary but are beneficial.

Part II: Refinement
Note: not all procedures need the same level of refinement. Simpler is better and less is more
1. Tweak steps as use indicates
2. Add decision points (if any)
3. Identify criteria for making decision
4. Map decision path in A-B steps
5. Add transition steps where the procedure moves to different people or units
6. Add relevant information
7. Decide what degree of documentation is necessary
8. Create documentation forms as needed
9. Add dates/timelines if needed
10. Create a cover page that includes:
    a. Title
    b. All necessary forms (including protocols)
    c. Policy references
    d. Review/change procedures
11. Create procedures for complex SOPS by grouping A-B steps and adding additional detail
12. Create protocols for routines as necessary (see below)

Part III: Systemization
1. Make sure that the procedure (and protocols) are centrally available
2. Teach the procedure to the applicable parties
3. Reinforce the procedure by questioning/redirecting as needed
4. Define a procedure for getting feedback
5. Review the procedure periodically with all stakeholders – is the SOP addressing the priority you identified?

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