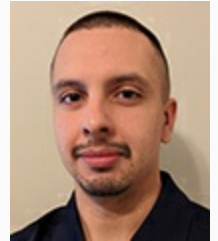


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Improving process design and follow-through by using flowcharts

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For many compliance professionals, designing, implementing, and modifying processes is an ongoing challenge. It can be exacerbated by the ongoing development of complex requirements by third parties the organization deals with, such as regulatory bodies, accrediting organizations, and other entities. In addition, the organization may also define requirements that it has adopted in its efforts to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse. A flowchart is a very effective tool that compliance professionals can use to help in designing these processes.

Given its visual nature, a well-designed flowchart can break down processes into easy-to-follow steps. Through its use of decision points, a flowchart can increase the likelihood that a process is followed consistently by illustrating what steps to follow based on the answers to questions, which are used to define a flowchart's logical flow.^[1]

It is important to keep in mind that a tool's effectiveness is often a function of the skill or expertise of the person using it. The good news is that flowcharts are relatively easy to put together—with some basic education, most people can put together a very well designed and effective flowchart. Here are some important considerations for designing a flowchart that can promote a higher level of process consistency and effectiveness.

Basic elements

A flowchart can be created using very simple shapes connected with lines. They can be created easily with computer-based programs or applications or with a pencil, paper, and a ruler. What is important to remember is that the flowchart is a tool and should not become a project in and of itself. The goal of using a flowchart is to help you work more efficiently and not to add more work to your already busy day.

Several conventions have evolved over time that define the different shapes used in flowcharts. The most recognized reference of flowchart symbols and their definitions is the ISO 5807:1985, which was last reviewed and confirmed in 2019.^[2]

Flowcharts contain rounded rectangles that are referred to as terminators.^[3] A terminator is used at the beginning of a flowchart to identify its starting point and as its final symbol to show where the flowchart ends. A plain rectangle is often the most used symbol within a flowchart. It is used to represent a process, step, or action. Though not required, using rectangles of the same dimension adds an element of symmetry to a flowchart that makes it easier to follow. A diamond represents where a question or decision point occurs within a flowchart. The purpose of diamonds is to identify questions that, based on the answers to them, direct the logical flow of the flowchart. The use of decision points provides a flowchart with the flexibility to illustrate alternative paths that may exist within the same process. Arrows and lines are used to connect a flowchart's symbols in a sequential

and logical way. To help provide a clear depiction of the flowchart, use arrows at the endpoints of the lines to connect one symbol to another. Think of them as directional signs telling you which path to follow along the flowchart.

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