FORMS ANALYSIS AND DESIGN
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DEFINITIONS officially adopted by the Business Forms Management Association

Design Analysis - in addition to resulting in the design layout, increases productivity by creating a basic business tool which is self-instructive, encourages cooperative response, provides for easy entry of data, reduces the potential for error, facilitates use of the information, and enhances the organization’s image.

Forms Analysis - the systematic execution of those steps necessary to assure that productivity is increased in preparation, use, filing, and retrieval; the total number of forms within the system is minimized; data element relationships are apparent through consistency and adherence to standards; the effectiveness of the entire system, as well as the individual form is enhanced; and the resulting business tool communicates.

Forms Management - the systematic process of increasing productivity and minimizing errors in information capture, transmission, and recovery through the use of workflow analysis and graphic design techniques; providing administrative control; reducing procurement, storage, distribution and use costs through standardization; and ensuring the adequacy, business as well as legal, of all historical records.

WHAT IS FORMS MANAGEMENT?

Forms management is involved with the creation of forms and business documents needed to run a company, elimination of paper work and the improvement in clerical efficiency, all leading to a reduction in a company’s expenses. Three ideas to keep in mind are

Fewer forms –
  • Eliminate forms
  • Consolidate or combine existing forms
  • Prevent the creation of a new form by revising a current form

Better forms - more clerically efficient forms enable higher productivity, reduced errors
  • Switch to electronic if you can and use all available features for data validation, error checking, and so forth
  • Design forms to fit a window envelope
  • Correct vertical and horizontal spacing for machine handling
  • Prepunch holes
  • Add fold marks to forms which fold into window envelopes
  • Provide ballot box information for repetitive choices
  • Eliminate information elements in a form
  • Eliminate photocopying by adding plies
  • Add rules to facilitate hand completion
  • Resequence information to facilitate flow, transfer
  • Add identification (title, number)
• Add instructions, routing
• Increase legibility

More economical forms - designed for printing economy, stored and distributed in a manner to reduce their costs
• Switch to electronic, if you can
• Use more economical but good quality paper, consistent with operating needs
• Have one ink color instead of two or more
• Use standards (inks, paper weights, form/paper sizes, stub width, envelope sizes, window position in envelopes, carbon weight, carbon length, paper color sequence)
• Use white paper when color paper is not necessary
• Consider marginal words instead of plate changes
• Change package amounts
• Reduce the number of parts or plies
• Design forms printed front to back instead of multiple sheets
• Redesign multiple pages to go on one sheet
• Specify serial numbers in their least restrictive classification
• Change units of issue:
  - correct number of sheets per pad according to use
  - convert unit sets to pads or sheets
  - convert book bound forms to unit sets
• Change the quantities ordered (can be increase or decrease)
• Use off the shelf forms
• Eliminate ink bleed

(Most of these examples relating to paper forms are from the BFMA Rocky Mountain Informer.)

FORM SPONSOR
The forms sponsor is a department in your company that is represented by the department manager or supervisor. It is important that the sponsor be a person who rightfully has final authority on a form and who can authorize expenditures for it.

Robert Barnett says “The sponsor is responsible for deciding what information is required and for approving the introduction of the form; the Forms Management Department is responsible for ensuring that it conforms to standards and reporting on whether or not it actually works.”

However, the form sponsor (manager, supervisor) is not necessarily the best person to interview during the forms analysis. It is better to interview the people who actually use the form, do the work, receive the copies, etc.

FORMS INITIATION
According to Robert Barnett, it is best to have a formal forms initiation request or a forms design request which
  - forces the requester to give the form and its use some thought
  - gives basic information about the request
  - gives the forms analyst a place to start
FORMS ANALYSIS AND DESIGN

The Business Forms Handbook says "forms analysis resolves what goes on the form, while forms design continues the analysis until it resolves how to best arrange and present the information." Simply stated, forms analysis determines the who, what, when, where, why and how a form is used. Forms design decides how the form looks and how it is constructed. Good work in analysis and design can speed a forms program to its goal of fewer forms, better forms and more economical forms.

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As a basic tool of clerical operations, a thoroughly analyzed and well designed form will
- make the form look good
- provide for easier entry of data
- allow for easier use of the data
- reduce the chance of error
- be self instructing

FORMS ANALYSIS

WHAT is the purpose of the form? WHY does this form need to exist? These are the most important questions to ask.

WHO initiates the form?
- one person or one department
- many people within the company
- public use
  Know their educational level, age group, etc.
  Do the people completing the form have access to the information you are asking?

WHO receives the form?
- one person or one department
- many people within the company
- public use

WHEN is the form completed?
- interval – daily, weekly, monthly
- time of stress?

WHERE is the form used?
- office
- manufacturing environment
- shipping or receiving area
- warehouse
- truck
  Keep lighting, movement and work surface in mind.

WHERE is the form stored?
HOW does the form work with other forms?
Is there information copied from or to it?
Is the information sequence correct?
Is information from this form keyed into a computer system?
Does it work with bar codes, MICR or another optical system?

HOW is the form completed?
by hand
by machine such as a typewriter, word processor, computer

HOW is the form distributed?
mail
e-mail

HOW is the form filed?
  binder or folder
  hole punching
  filing reference - serial number, company name, customer name

KEY USAGE CHARACTERISTICS
Marc Durbin uses the terminology “key usage characteristics” to define those things you learn in an
interview that have a fundamental effect on a design. Some examples:
  File hole punching requires space in the design
  Window envelopes require the address to be in a particular place
  Scanning or imaging requires a high contrast between paper and ink
  Completion in remote locations could require special binding
  Elderly form users need larger type size

CONCEPT OF DIVERGENT THINKING
Every decision, every bit of information leads to another decision, another bit of information and another
decision. Facts gathered in one question affect the next question or decision. It is the
fact/decision/question interrelationship at work in divergent thinking.

Each answer has another consequence or another question.

FORM IDENTIFICATION - FORM TITLES
The form number is most useful to the people who control the forms program, e.g., forms management,
forms warehouse, purchasing. The title is most useful to the forms users. Good forms analysis helps you
determine the correct title for the form.

A form title should be brief but descriptive:
  include a subject such as "cash" or "shipment" or "employee"
  include an action or function such as "to report" or "to notify" or "to agree"
  place the subject first and the action second
THINGS TO REMEMBER DURING THE ANALYSIS PROCESS

1. Be of service to the people you are interviewing
   • let them know you are trying to do something for their form, not something to them
   • realize that they may have a personal “I created this, don’t change it” stake in the form they bring to you, so this could affect their attitude

2. Per Dr. Ben Graham, be professional
   • make an appointment and then be on time for the interview
   • take adequate notes during the interview and then transcribe them as necessary immediately afterwards so as to not lose any information
   • support your comments or advice with sound technical background

3. Know your design standards and understand how they could affect the information you gather

4. Remember the concept of divergent thinking. Every answer leads to another question.

5. Understand the consequences of the information you gather during the analysis.

6. Remember the journalism questions of who, what, when, where, why, how. Most important of all is to understand what is the purpose and why the form is needed before you do anything else. Communicate! Probe! Ask questions! You have to do this because people won’t tell you. They don’t know that you need to know.

Forms analysis is never finished. The company changes, the business process changes and the forms must change as well. With each revision comes the opportunity to review the facts gathered previously and determine if changes need to be made to the form.

WHAT'S A MINUTE WORTH?
BFMA Rocky Mountain Informer

Let's suppose you have a clerk in your company who fills out one form per day. Let's also suppose that due to inefficient forms layout and design, it takes your clerk one extra minute per day to fill out the form than it would if the form was arranged in a logical sequence and properly designed.

You might say this is no big deal. One minute a day for one person is hardly worth fixing up. But let's do a little figuring. There are 260 working days per year. One minute a day adds up to 260 minutes or 4.33 hours of wasted time. If your clerk makes $5.00 per hour, you've wasted $21.65 on one form, filled out just once a day for a year.

If you happen to be a very large company with say 100 clerks, each filling out 100 forms per day, and each form wastes one minute, the cost escalates to $216,500 per year.

Examine your clerical processing areas, and you're likely to find inefficiencies in forms design. There is always room for improvement, even in companies with good forms control programs. The potential to save is there, its up to you.
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