Workflows for Document Management

Workflow and document management have grown together like hardware and software.

Document management is the use of a computer system and software to store, manage, and track electronic documents—including images or documents captured with a document scanner. Workflow is the progression of steps (tasks, events, interactions) that comprise a work process, involve two or more people, and create or add value to the organization's activities.

In today's business environment, there is little point in having one and not the other. The combination creates powerful efficiencies through automation.

This insight piece provides an example of how document workflow can be improved through document management software.

Document workflow applies to all industries

Document workflow can be applied to any industry, from healthcare to legal to retail apparel, as it includes horizontal processes found in every business. Examples are the production of annual reports, the approval of travel expenses, and the on-boarding of new clients.

**Common example: travel expense claims**

Travel expense claims is an example that many can relate to. Gone are the days when receipts were collected, copied, added to an envelope as part of an expense claim, handed (or mailed) to a line-of-business manager for approval, and then delivered to accounting. Depending on how often people traveled and submitted paperwork, expense claims could take up to two months to complete.

The benefits of document management workflow software

This process could be significantly quickened and improved upon through document management workflow software. Not only does the software free up resources for other activities, but it also eliminates concerns over losing receipts or waiting for expenses to be paid.

In the scenario shown below, expense report submission is digitized through scanning and/or the provision of digital material. The material goes directly into a document management system, which sends an automatic update to the line-of-business manager.

Once the manager approves the claim in the system, a notification is sent to accounting. Once accounting processes the claim, a check is directly deposited into the employee's bank account.
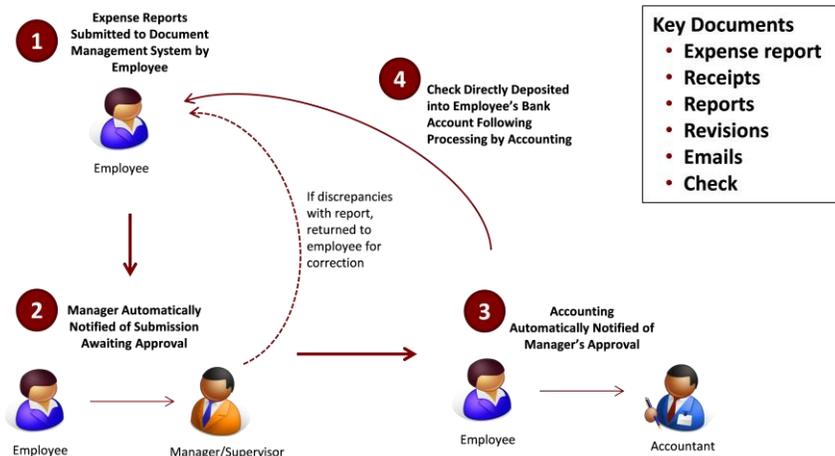
This highly digital and automated process cuts down on wait times as well as errors. Other benefits of a document management system include:

- Automatic recording and archiving of receipts and claims
- Automatic recording of any modifications
- Ability to track what has happened at any time in the process
- Ability to see what remains to happen, based on action items
- Ability to assign authorization levels (e.g., if the manager is on vacation, a subordinate can be assigned to complete tasks)

Compliance and workflow go hand in hand

Many industries must adhere to governmental regulations around document handling. Regulations also apply to horizontal processes, such as tax returns, that impact every company.

Document workflow software can be configured so it aligns with any number of conditions or regulations. For example, documents can be automatically date-stamped as well as archived for search. The automatic recording of document versions is also possible.

These features help protect against missed deadlines as well as compliance fines. They are crucial if a company is subject to audit.

Summary of document management workflow benefits

When documents are managed electronically, and workflows are visible at every step, work proceeds faster and more efficiently. Less time and money are wasted; fewer errors take place. Document workflow solutions vary in capability and sophistication, but they can benefit organizations of any size and type.

3 takeaways

- Document management solutions with workflow capabilities can help organizations across industries quicken and improve upon business processes.

- Common business processes that can benefit from document management workflow features include the production of marketing material, the approval of travel expenses, and the on-boarding of new clients.

- Document management workflow features include the automatic archiving of documents, the ability to track modifications and approvals, and the ability to assign authorization levels.