

Workflow: Operational Guidance and Execution

Toolkit 3.6

Standard Work

target audience

Managers, supervisors, and team leaders.

what it is

"Practice does not make perfect. Practice of perfection makes perfect."

It is clear to everybody just how well something is done when a master does it. The task, activity, or action is performed in the best possible way and produces a consistently good result. This holds true whether it is a musician, an athlete, a bricklayer, or a fruit picker. In all cases, it means knowing the best method or technique and then practicing it until it can be efficiently and consistently performed.

Similarly, standard work exists in operations to align all employees on the best way to perform a task, or set of tasks, that are important to the operation. There are two primary tools used to drive standard work:

- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** – These are typically detailed, text-based, step-by-step instructions created to cover virtually all job tasks in the operation. SOPs are used heavily during new employee training and employee recertification and may serve as a reference for particularly complicated or high-compliance job tasks.
- **Visual Work Instructions (WINs)** – These are typically simple, visual (i.e., pictures or drawings) instructions that are located near point of use. Unlike SOPs, which should be broadly applied, WINs are typically used to meet a specific need, such as troubleshooting a recurring operational problem or reminding operators how to safely perform a job task that occurs infrequently or irregularly.

why it is important

In operations where the objective is to generate consistent, repeatable results, variability is the enemy of good process. When employees within and across shifts perform the same tasks in different ways, whether in a different order or following a different set of steps entirely, the greater the likelihood of mistakes. In his book *The Checklist Manifesto*, Atul Gawande documents his effort to reduce patient care error rates in hospitals. He introduced simple checklists for surgical teams to use when operating on, or otherwise caring for, their patients. The purpose of these checklists was to make sure that the surgical team remembered to execute all of their standard procedures. Here are some of the results:

- When introductory steps were followed within the surgical team before the surgery as required by the checklist, complications and deaths dropped by 35%
- Line infection rates in one hospital dropped from 11% to 0%
- Line infection rates in another hospital dropped by 66%

In a packhouse context, when implemented correctly, standard work should improve the stability of the operation and reduce errors or negligence in key tasks that may not have immediate consequences but ultimately determine fruit quality, e.g., receiving procedures, pre-sorting, packing and wrapping, palletising etc.

In particular, standard work, whether through SOPs or Visual Work Instructions and checklists, is fundamentally important to a “new” team. There may be teams that have embedded best practice to such an extent that they do it automatically, but even there it is almost certain that poor practice (short cuts, poor compliance, areas of neglect etc.) will creep in. Best practice determines performance (result) – standard work defines and focuses on best practice.

success factors

- **Agree on a standard format** – There are a variety of software tools to assist in developing SOPs, from free templates offered in Microsoft Word to more advanced software tools that companies contract to use. Regardless of the solutions, it is important to agree on what needs to be in the SOP and establish a standard format. A typical SOP will have the following categories of information (Refer to the [SOP Template](#).):

- SOP Number.
- Version Number.
- Effective Date.
- Objective (of the procedure).
- Scope (of the procedure).
- Responsibilities (for executing the procedure) .
- Documents/Attachments (links or references to supporting documentation).
- Procedure Steps.
- Approval Signatures.

A typical WIN would contain fewer categories but would include pictures to aid employees in understanding and following the procedure steps. WINs should reference the SOP number(s) and version number(s) and any SOP that also has an associated WIN should reference that WIN in Documents/Attachments.

- **Engage a wide audience** – When writing or updating SOPs, it is important to pull together those experienced employees and others with knowledge of the equipment and/or the process. It is particularly important to engage those who will be asked to execute the procedure both to establish buy-in and to ensure that the procedure is written in an understandable manner. In some cases, particularly if the procedure applies to a new or relatively unknown piece of equipment, it may be wise to include a representative from the equipment manufacturer.
- **Develop an SOP review and update process** – SOP development is not a point-in-time process. Over time employees will come up with ideas for how to execute their work more

efficiently (without compromising safety), which will necessitate updating the SOP and WINs. Reviewing and updating the SOPs and WINs should be an integral step in the Management of Change process to ensure safe work practices. In particular, it is important to match their SOP and WIN updates with new market specifications regarding phytosanitary and packaging compliance. Refer to [Toolkit 1.5 – Leading for Change and Improvement](#), and [Toolkit 6.5 - Change Control](#) for more information.

One way to manage this effort is to build SOP reviews into employees' standard work. In other words, establish that each team needs to review a certain number of SOPs for accuracy and comprehensiveness each month and recommend upgrades/improvements to their team leader. This approach is typically more manageable than waiting until a certain point in the year and trying to review a large number of SOPs all at once.

- **Develop an SOP Quality Assurance Process** – It is important to periodically observe employees performing certain job tasks compared to the steps outlined in the SOP, particularly for job tasks that are high risk from a safety or business perspective. The primary purpose of these observations is not to catch employees working in a non- standard way in order to punish them, but to better understand if the SOP properly documents the correct steps in the right order. If differences are found between the SOP and the employee's actions, then take the time to talk to that employee to understand the root cause of those differences. Potential root causes may include:
- The SOP is outdated – it does not reflect changes to the equipment or process.
 - The SOP is not detailed enough or not clearly written.
 - The employee is not fully aware of the process as outlined in the SOP and needs to be coached.

execution steps

1. List the key operational areas and tasks that are most important and require SOPs. This Handbook will assist you in this task.
2. Agree on a SOP format (the simpler the better), and steadily develop the SOPs in order of priority.
3. As a regular process, conduct a spot audit of existing SOPs to determine if they meet the following criteria:
 - Accurate and up to date with how the procedure is currently performed.
 - Appropriately considers employee safety.
 - Comprehensive.
 - Written in a way that employees can understand/execute.
4. If the spot audit indicates a significant opportunity to improve/upgrade SOPs, then agree work teams and other key stakeholders on a process to systematically review and update SOPs, starting with the most critical ones (i.e., SOPs for job tasks that are high risk either due to safety or business impact).
5. Analyse the ongoing SOP review process to ensure that, going forward, all SOPs are reviewed and upgraded at the appropriate frequency to ensure safe, stable operations. Consider how to build SOP reviews into the standard work of employees.

6. Conduct field observations compared to the SOP standard, develop a process, and build it into the standard work of the team leaders and/or others who should be qualified to conduct such observations.
7. Determine how to best make use of WINs in the operation and solicit support in developing them and making them available in the operation.

assessment questions

Please Note: There is no minimum / maximum number of questions you can add.

1.	Does the packhouse make extensive use of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to certify employees in performing routine job tasks and assist employees in performing complicated job tasks correctly and safely?
2.	Does the packhouse use Visual Work Instructions (WIN) in the work area near the point of use to reinforce standard work for select tasks that are either critical to the operation or occur infrequently or irregularly?
3.	Does the packhouse have an effective review process in place for SOPs and WINs to ensure that they are accurate and up to date?
4.	Do employees rigorously follow the standard operating procedures that have been established?
5.	Does the business have a high level of confidence that process variation due to operating variability (i.e., employees not following the standard procedures) has been minimized?

resources

1.	SOP Template
2.	WINs Template