

# THE DOCUMENT CONTROL TRIBUNE

Issue 26

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**How does a DC  
procedure  
become weak?**

**Effective DC  
communication - a  
few principles  
that work**

**The Document  
Control recognition  
paradox**

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## EDITORIAL

Sometimes, it is good to stop and to reflect on who we are, on what we do and on our impact on the world.

Modern life runs at such a fast pace that we can be in too deep to take a neutral and critical perspective on ourselves.

In this issue of the Document Control Tribune, we try and keep our feet firmly on the ground, with realism, perspective and self-assessment.

We explore self-awareness, we discuss what can be done to be a real go-getter, we establish parallels between Document Control issues and real-life ‘non-DC’ issues.

We also reflect on the impact of Document Control on real, everyday life.

As we turn inwards, we also seek the inner resources to go out there and to bounce back with the world economy.

So much strength and confidence can be developed from a candid approach to how to always be better and sharper.

The strength of the world-wide Document Control community can help to make a brighter future, one document at a time.







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# EFFECTIVE DC COMMUNICATION – A FEW PRINCIPLES THAT WORK

**T**hey say that “a good relationship starts with good communication”.

This tells us that **Document Control professionals must work at their communication** to develop a good relationship with their teams.

Communication skills are hard to come by, and communication techniques too.

Lucky for you, Consepsys consultants were asked in 2020 to observe and to collect over a period of one year the best practices in Document Control communication from our interactions with our community of thousands around the world.

Below are some of the most interesting findings.

## (1) Give the rules of the ‘game’ in advance:

It may sound obvious, but in the core of day-to-day activities, it is easy to forget fundamentals. Many Document Control professionals struggle because they forget to announce what the rules are before they play referee. When you play a new board game, the first thing that you do is to go through the rules and to make sure that all players hear and understand those rules. The same applies to Document Control: if users are given the rules in advance, they are more likely to comply with them. But also, it is easier to tell someone that their action is not compliant if you have told them the rules in advance.

## (2) Train users – don’t send them ‘novels’ to read:

Even very experienced Document Control professionals struggle to avoid this pitfall. Empirical observation and ex-

perience has shown that, when it comes to Document Control rules, it is significantly more effective to put users in a room, to train them and to go through the rules one by one - than to send them a 50-page procedure and to expect them to read and to comply.

Users are as busy as Document Control professionals, and their human nature results in that, because Document Control is neither their job nor their priority, they will not invest the time to go through written material. They have to be invited to a forum wherein they can give their full attention, and wherein the rules are explained and clarified to them.

## (3) Use a ‘language’ with which users can relate:

Document Control professionals are typically specialists in their field and, like many other specialists, they can forget to place themselves in the shoes of whom they are talking to. As a result, they may fail to adapt their communication to the ‘language’ and the perspective of their interfaces.

Imagine for a second an Engineer coming to you with this question: “Where can I find the document that contains the specific heat capacity of the heating oil?” In all likelihood, you would not know. But if the engineer came and said: “Where can I find the Basis of Design document for project ABC?”, then, that is a question that you, Document Control professional, know how to deal with. This second question is asked in a ‘language’ that a Document Controller can understand.

Therefore, when you interact with users, try and communicate in a way with which they can relate.



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# HOW DOES A DC PROCEDURE BECOME WEAK?

**A** surprising proportion of Document Control professionals work without a procedure.

What is more surprising yet is that, among those who do have a procedure, a surprising proportion do not work by it, because **it is not adapted to their actual day-to-day practices**. In this case, let's agree that this is the same as not having a procedure at all.

It is highly undesirable and discommended not to have a functional set of rules and procedures. After all, Document Control is a by essence a procedural profession. With no rules to defend, it makes no sense. Document Control with no rules to uphold is like the police with no law to uphold.

**The absence of rules and procedures generates much stress for Document Control professionals, but so do existing procedures that are ill-adapted**, out of date, weak or irrelevant. Weak rules and procedures open the door to user resistance, sterile discussions and potentially harmful mistakes. How can you convince a user to proceed through a certain process if you have no process to show? How can you tell a user that their action is not compliant if you have no compliance reference?

But how do a set of rules and a procedure become weak, ill-adapted, out-of-date or irrelevant?

**First**, it appears that the initial set of rules was not complied with, if no one at any point realised that day-to-day practices were straying away from the 'book'.

A Document Control procedure should be always open, whether in hard-copy form on a desk, or electronically, so that Document Control professionals working by that procedure can refer to it day after day, all day.

**Second**, it appears that there is no periodic review of the applicability of the set of rules and the procedure. The best organisations review the applicability of their Document Control rules and procedures at least once a year.

Every year, the question must be asked, for each section of the rules, for each process, for each section of the procedure: "Does it still match our day-to-day practices? Is it still applicable?"

If the answer is no, a further strategic question must be asked: "If the rules, the processes and the procedure no longer match our day-to-day practices, do we correct our practices, or do we modify the rules to reflect how we work now?"

In any case, during this periodic review, action must be taken to ensure that the rules and day-to-day practices are the same, regardless of the selected strategy.

**Third**, it appears that there is no culture of Continuous Improvement (topic discussed in The Document Control Tribune, [issue number 10, page 6](#) and in [issue number 11, page 5](#)).

The best Document Controllers put into practice this culture wherein each Document Control incident, each learning opportunity and each improvement opportunity is discussed, logged, reflected on and integrated in the rules, the processes and the procedure.

Consepsys Tips of the Month for [September 2017](#) and [March 2021](#) explore this culture further. A Continuous Improvement culture allows to never let a set of rules and a procedure become weak, ill-adapted, out-of-date or irrelevant.



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# POOR DC CAUSES DAMAGE ONLY IN HAZARDOUS ACTIVITY SECTORS – TRUE OR FALSE? [EPISODE 2]

**A** couple decides to sell their apartment. Their financial situation is very bad, they are struggling with numerous debts, and they do not have any spare cash at all. They hire a property solicitor/lawyer/notary to handle the sale.

An initial sale asking price is decided – based on the market at that time. The notary sets out to develop paperwork and to calculate all due taxes and fees in reference to this initial asking price.

Unfortunately, the property market is going through a recession and, in the best-case scenario, the couple will sell at a lower price than what they paid for the apartment. After all fees and taxes are paid, this will leave them in even more debt. The couple reluctantly accepts this idea, considering that they would lose even more money if they keep the apartment. Fortunately for them, that additional debt is just about the limit of what they can cope with.

Over the course of the sale process, an offer is made on the apartment, which is higher than the initial asking price. The couple welcomes the higher offer, which they think will reduce the debt that they will be left with. They promptly notify the property lawyer and request that all paperwork calculations pertaining to fees and taxes be updated.

The day before final sale paperwork is signed by seller and buyer, the lawyer shows the couple a draft of the fees and taxes that they will have to pay. However, the couple notices that the sale price has not been updated, as per their

notification and request. The lawyer's office got mixed up between the two versions of the paperwork, and they proceeded with the superseded version of fees and tax calculations. This revision control mistake will unfortunately result in heavy consequences.

The next day, seller and buyer meet at the lawyer's office to sign the sale off. The lawyer has updated the selling price and pertaining calculations. When it is time for the couple to sign, they realise with horror that the fees and taxes to be paid are three times higher than what they expected. It turns out that, with the higher selling price, the sale fell into a higher fee and tax category, with a much higher percentage than the couple anticipated.

As a result, they are left with much more debt than they can cope with, including now debt to the lawyer himself. They are forced to take an expensive bank loan to re-pay the debt. Sadly, the stress caused by this ultimate financial debacle pushes the couple over the edge. They wind up separating and they each go through many years of financial hardship.

Ultimately, poor Document Control practices on the lawyer's part (using an incorrect version of documents and not self-checking before issuing fee notes to the clients) have resulted in heavy consequences for the couple.

This story shows, once again, that poor Document Control does not cause damage only in hazardous activity sectors or in dangerous industries.



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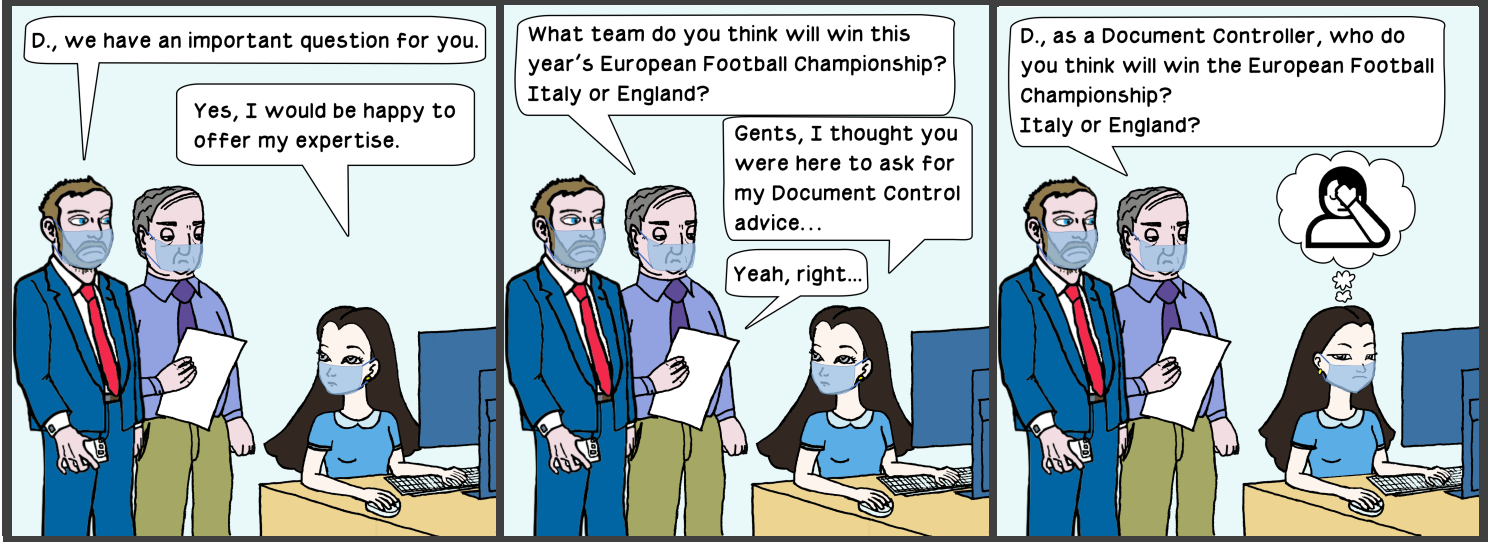


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“Hanging in there” with **D. Ceecee** - the Document Controller by Tuffmee

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# THE DOCUMENT CONTROL RECOGNITION PARADOX - ALLEGORY

**F**or Document Control professionals, the path to recognition can be tortuous.

There can be many odds to fight against: organisation culture, lack of awareness of the role of DC, perception that DC represents unnecessary bureaucracy, low or no support from hierarchy, and more.

**None of those fights are easy, but the ownership of the fight lies with Document Control itself.**

And just as trust is something that is earned – so are respect and recognition. This is another way of saying that, to get the recognition that one seeks, one must go and get that recognition with strategy, hard work and communication.

**Trust is something that is earned — so are respect and recognition**

Let's consider this real-life 'non-DC' situation: in a Western country, two 30-year-old cousins are talking. Let's name them Cindy and Joe. They have not seen each other in a while, and therefore they catch up on each other's life. At some point, Cindy complains of the hold that her mother has on her life: she meddles, she wants to make decisions for her, she criticises her choice of life partner and her way of life. Joe is astonished.

"Your mother is still treating you like a child. Why do you think she does not give you recognition as an adult?"

Through the conversation, Joe learns that Cindy's mother has been helping her out financially, quite regularly.

Joe explains to Cindy that, as long as she accepts money from her mother, the latter will naturally feel more entitled to running her life, and she will be less likely to recognise her as an adult.

Joe suggests that Cindy stop taking money from her mother and that she take charge of her own life, to get the recognition that she wants from her mother. Cindy follows her cousin's advice, and it works.

Why this anecdote?

Let's transpose the situation to the work life of a Document Control professional – let's name him Bob, who complains to a Document Controller friend (Jane) that he does not get the recognition that he wants. His boss does not include him in meetings and important discussions, his interfaces do not respect him and his users do not comply with DC rules and processes.

Jane is astonished.

"Your boss, interfaces and users treat you like an unskilled

helper. Why do you think they do not give you recognition as a professional?"

Through the conversation, Jane learns that Bob's boss is the one writing procedures, designing DC workflows, chasing up comments from reviewers; Bob's boss even has to undertake the modification of Excel tools like registers or templates, when it is required. Jane learns that Bob's interfaces and users never get any clear guidance from Bob in terms of procedures and processes, because Bob himself is not knowledgeable about his own DC rules. Also, Jane learns that Bob does not understand the wider processes in which he takes part, as a Document Controller, and he makes frightening mistakes, without even being aware of it.

Jane explains to Bob that, as long as he does not take ownership and as long as he does not step up his skills and his perspective, his boss, interfaces and users will naturally consider him as an unskilled helper, and they will be less likely to recognise him as a professional.

Jane suggests that Bob take ownership of developing, updating and improving procedures and processes; she emphasises the importance of acquiring a strong theoretical and applied knowledge of Document Control. She urges Bob to improve his Excel skills, so that he can take charge of all modifications and improvements of Excel tools like registers or templates. Jane advises that Bob learn his rules, procedures and processes, that he know them like the back of his hand and that he take on the role of advisor

**As long as he does not step up his skills, his interfaces will consider him as an unskilled helper**

and expert in all Document Control matters. Also, Jane tells Bob to learn and to understand all the wider processes in which he takes

part, as a Document Controller, and to ask questions to develop a robust understanding.

This is the secret to this whole situation: respect and recognition are earned. When the bosses, the interfaces and the users of a Document Controller feel that they cannot rely on him/her/them, when they feel that they have to do work that should be done by the Document Controller, and when they can see that the Document Controller does not understand what he/she/they is (are) doing – would you blame them for not recognising the Document Controller as a professional?





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# BOUNCING BACK WITH THE WORLD ECONOMY—TIPS TO STAND OUT ON THE JOB MARKET

**D**ue to the Covid-19 pandemic, the world economy has suffered a lot. Many activity sectors have been dormant and, this has resulted in job losses.

However, it appears that the second quarter of 2021 marks a change of trend in the economy: an increasing number of activity sectors are back in action, and this creates an economic dynamic that may be favourable to Document Control professionals. No one can say if it is a long-term trend, but it is visible enough to be noticed.

There are a few things to bear in mind for better chances of grabbing the job opportunities that this waking economy has to offer. As a start, these hacks from Consepsys can help:

- Blog article "[Winning the job race](#)";
- Webinar "[How to remain competitive on the job market – for Document Control professionals](#)";
- Consepsys Tip of the Month for May 2020 "[What makes a good and a bad CV?](#)".

Also, the following advice may be useful.

## (1) Avoid 'copy & paste' CVs

Managers who review a lot of CVs often share their frustration that people seem to simply copy and paste what is written on their job description. Some say that this "copy and paste" job is so obvious that they immediately discard the CV without even going through it.

Copying and pasting your job description onto your CV can have negative effects:

- (1) It gives an impression of laziness;
- (2) It gives the impression that you cannot think by himself/herself;
- (3) It raises suspicion as to whether you have really been doing all these things;
- (4) It sets higher expectations, that you may not be able to live up to;
- (5) It makes for a very long and wordy CV, with no personality.

A manager with whom we

spoke has this advice: "Describe what you have done in your own words. It allows you to go straight to the point and to defend your CV if you are asked in-depth questions about it."

Once you are satisfied with your CV, have it reviewed by peers, or contact Consepsys through our [CV Review service](#).

## (2) Sell competencies

You must realise that what you are selling, when you seek a job, is a set of competencies. Therefore, to do a good job of "selling" your skills, you need to understand what they are and to compare them with what potential employers are looking for; but you must also understand what your 'competition' has to offer (see [Consepsys Document Control Competency Matrix](#)), and you need to make sure that you attain or exceed what they have to offer (see blog article "[How to produce a career development plan?](#)").

Understanding the areas where you need to develop is of high importance. Nurture your competencies – strong competencies are what allows you to make a living, to take pride in your work and to be respected by your boss, your peers and your interfaces.

## (3) Think like a person trying to recruit

You need to step in the shoes of a team leader, a manager or a boss looking to hire a Document Control professional, and you need to understand what they expect from whomever they want to recruit. You can get some insight in The Document Control Tribune, issue 12, pages 6 and 7, article "[What does your boss expect from you?](#)".



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# DO YOUR USERS READ YOUR WEEKLY STATISTICS & REPORTS?

If you publish a weekly report pertaining to documentation, you have **a weekly opportunity to add value to the work of your interfaces and users.**

If you do not yet produce weekly reports, it is advised to consider introducing this practice.

**Weekly reports are meant to provide valuable information to their readers**, wherever they sit in the organisation chart. When weekly reporting is done well, recipients look forward to the week's revision – because it helps them plan their work, improve their practices and identify problems in advance.

However, **in some organisations, weekly reports are met with recipient indifference.**

Reasons may vary. The indifference can be due to:

1. Simple lack of intellectual curiosity on the part of recipients
2. Non-receptive organisation culture
3. Lack of understanding of the purpose of the report
4. An overwhelming quantity of weekly reports within the organisation
5. Inadequacy of reported information
6. Poor presentation of data, statistics, lists and dashboards

7. Poor level of detail (too detailed or not detailed enough) of information

8. Incorrect audience for the report(s), just to list a few.

Whatever the reason may be, it is important to understand why, because the reputation and the perceived importance of Document Control within the organisation depends on it.

You can physically visit report recipients for a short informal chat, and ask how they feel about the weekly report. Any provided feedback must be diligently noted down, to grab the chance to make improvements.

Asking your hierarchy to raise the issue during routine meetings may be a good idea too, to take advantage of the additional 'weight' of the boss in the room.

Those Document Control weekly reports are like the window of your shop. They must reflect the best that Document Control has to offer to the organisation and, for this reason, you need to ensure that as many recipients as possible open them on a weekly basis. It is one of the means that you can use to increase user collaboration.

You can develop your Excel reporting skills with our "[Excel for Document Controllers](#)" self-paced courses. Or you can attend our "[Advanced Document Control](#)" course, which helps you better understand what your boss, interfaces and users expect from Document Control.



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