

Process Improvement

Case Study #1 – Commitment Tracking System

A nuclear power plant tracks commitments made to regulatory agencies. A missed commitment resulted in a \$600,000 fine from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The tracking system needed to be improved so no commitments were missed. The system contained 3000 action items and the number of open action items would range between 150 and 350. The system and related processes were evaluated and the following issues were noted:

- Commitment action items were inconsistently written and logged
- Commitment action items were frequently late
- Completed action items were often misrouted, misplaced or lost
- Workload was disproportionably high around the middle and end of the month
- Workgroups were highly dependent on assigning unit for status information
- Queries did not always return all the item anticipated
- Reviewers had insufficient time to process items turned in on due date
- Duplicate and skipped item numbers caused confusion

Process Improvement

Immediate Actions Taken

- Each commitment action item in the database reviewed and updated with consistent terminology, references and format.
- A commitment number check sheet was posted and assigners were required to initial numbers used.
- Data entry was limited to one primary person, with two others trained as backups.
- Status and summary reports were revised to be more accurate and readable.

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Additional Actions Taken

- Custom reports were created for each workgroup and key personnel were trained to access and run the reports when needed.
- A receipt form for action items turned in was implemented.
- A deliberate effort to spread out action item due dates was implemented.
- Additional review time was factored into the due dates.

Process Improvement

Qualitative Results

- Missed commitments were eliminated.
- Workload was much more evenly distributed over the month.
- Workgroups were empowered and took a more proactive role.
- Workgroup tracking efforts became much more efficient.
- Late action items were effectively eliminated.
- Lost and misplaced action items were effectively eliminated.
- Numbering problems were eliminated.
- Assigning group workload dramatically decreased.
- Quality Assurance monitoring of commitment tracking was reduced.
- Confidence in the system was achieved.

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Quantitative Results

- No commitments were missed over the next four years.
- Action items due during the last week of the year was reduced from 50 to 3.
- Late action items were reduced from 3-5 per day to 3-5 per year.
- Numbering problems were reduced to zero.
- Personnel requirements in the assigning were significantly reduced:

<u>Employee FTEs</u>	<u>Before</u>	<u>After</u>
Senior Engineers	1.00	0.25
Clerical Staff	1.75	0.50
Annual savings:	\$50,000 per year	

Process Improvement

Are your processes as efficient as they could be?

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www.abundant-solutions.com

Contact Douglas M. Smith

doug@abundant-solutions.com