

FAQ: Document & Debate Culture

1. What tools do you use for the Document and Debate Culture?

Answer: There are no specific tools required. Any word processor such as Word or Pages, will do. It is preferred that a common document storage location is identified to keep a high volume of documents organized.

2. Can you build the Document and Debate Culture in a department rather than an entire organization?

Answer: Yes. The Document and Debate Culture is built on principles that recognize the benefits of good thinking through thoughtful writing. If these are correct principles, they can be applied everywhere. They are beneficial in a department as well as the whole organization. However, to applying the principles to the entire organization will bring more benefits and greater synergy.

3. How long does it take to become effective at writing documents?

Answer: It depends on the current skills and background of the individual writers. It also depends on how thoroughly the team commits to writing. Based on experience though, if the writers are committed and actively practicing, you can expect them to be competent in 3-6 months. To become an expert takes years of practice.

4. How is success measured?

Answer: The results of implementing the Document and Debate Culture is more qualitative than quantitative. However, there are key metrics to look to that are a sign of success. Project success rates will increase because projects are better thought out and there is greater alignment with stakeholders. Cost per project is reduced since there is clarity on priorities before executing a project.

5. Who else has had success with the Document and Debate Culture?

Answer: Amazon is the most notable, but the practice is spreading. Generally, there is not a formal adoption, but recruiters report a significant demand for employees with written communication skills.

6. Does this approach replace Agile or waterfall?

Answer: No. Documentation and debate are tools to improve understanding. The Agile and waterfall project management frameworks provide a standard way to manage change. They can both co-exist with different purposes. There needs to be some definition of where the document writing, and reviews fit into the process, but the benefits of each enhance each other.

7. What resources can help someone learn writing?

Answer: Writing is best learned by practicing and receiving feedback. Courses in business writing are available through Pluralsight, Lynda, etc. Some basic principles for learning to write well are: understand the basics, practice a lot, read and pay attention to how it is written, and get feedback.

8. Are there templates for the documents?

Answer: No. The written documents are generally free format. An organization may want to standardize text size, spacing, titles, etc., but the ideas are what is important.

9. How long does writing a 6-page narrative take?

Answer: The answer could be, 'as long as you have'. A document is never perfect and as long as the goal of clarity and alignment are not achieved, the document should be re-written and re-reviewed until that goal is accomplished. Generally, though, a 2-4-week period is typical. This accounts for writing, review, revisions, and multiple review meetings. It will also vary depending on the complexity of the project.