# PARSABLE

How to Go Paperless in Manufacturing with Digital SOPs

Introduction

Within manufacturing, institutional knowledge refers to information and "best" practices that reside in the minds of experienced employees, aren't known by others and aren't documented — but are critical to day-to-day operations. Workers with this knowledge have spent years, if not decades, accumulating this knowledge that doesn't live in training manuals and standard operating procedures (SOPs).

The fact that many employees rely on institutional knowledge to carry out their daily processes leads to information gaps and a serious expertise crisis. Find out how you can easily capture that knowledge and create digital SOPs to fill in the gaps and prevent valuable information from being lost, and how connected worker technology can help.
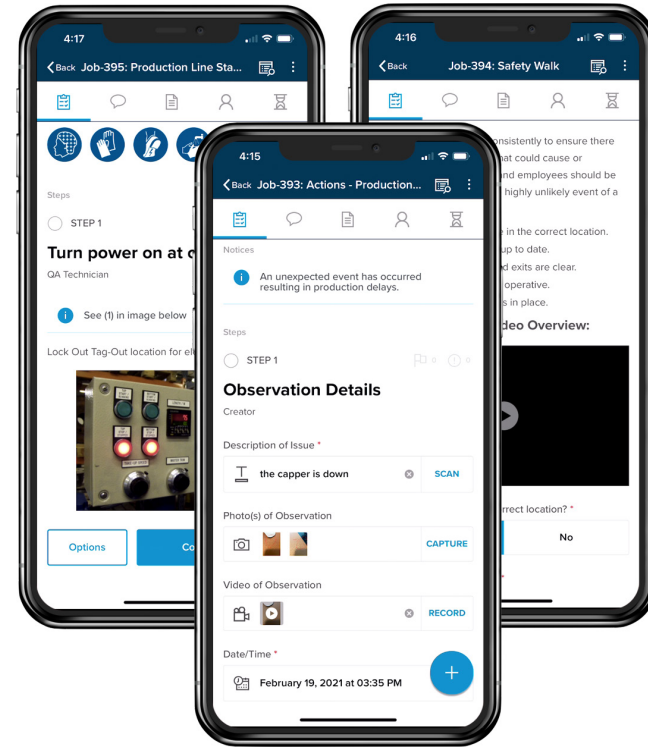
What is Connected Worker Technology?

Connected worker technology connects frontline workers to the people, information, systems and machines to improve productivity, quality and safety.

It allows for a deeper layer of insights that informs next steps within a work process, identifies patterns and predicts outcomes — ultimately driving continuous improvement.

Institutional Knowledge on the Factory Floor Today

Employees that have been at the same manufacturing company for 10, 20 or 30 years develop idiosyncrasies over time that keep operations running smoothly. On the manufacturing floor, for example, this can include exception processes, which are situations that require adjustments to production that are unplanned. Or they can be escalation policies, when plant operators notify and collaborate with other departments to take action against process deviations.

> **It's imperative that institutional knowledge and experience be systematically captured as digital SOPs; otherwise, once an employee leaves or retires, that information is lost.**

U.S. manufacturing is expected to have 2.1 million unfilled jobs, costing the economy $1 trillion, by 2030.[1] As Boomers phase out, they'll take with them years of institutional knowledge – resulting in a brain drain. Manufacturing companies can't ignore the onset of the retiring workforce. There's little manufacturers can do now to stop their retirement; however plant managers and executives alike can absorb and document as much institutional knowledge as possible, before the Boomer generation retires, to equip the younger Millennial and incoming Generation Z workforce.

[1] Deloitte and The Manufacturing Institute Manufacturing Talent Study, 2021

How Your Reliance on Institutional Knowledge Impacts Day-to-Day Operations

1. Gaps in Documentation — There's a critical gap in current documentation. This could be because it's out of date and hasn't yet been updated. Or, perhaps there's a better way of doing something that was never shared with the people who are responsible for updating the content or process.

2. Lengthy Onboarding Times — When a new employee joins the team, their onboarding training usually consists of classroom activity and/or shadowing someone on the factory floor to learn operations and procedures. Without updated, well-documented SOPs, it takes longer to train people on what to do and how to do it, because of the reliance on experts and the gaps in documentation.

3. Over Reliance on Experts — Since institutional knowledge isn't documented anywhere and isolated to a few individuals, there's a reliance on experts in the field. What happens when the people with that information aren't around? What delays does this lead to? Often, that institutional knowledge is incorrect or may not reflect the correct procedure, which is what organizations will be audited against. So, if the process or procedure says one thing and a worker does something else, there's a potential for failure. This becomes problematic when new employees are incorrectly trained by veteran employees.

4. Variation in Standard Work — Since workers are relying on their own knowledge of how to complete a job, there's a lack of standardization and consistency in work executed. This leads to variance in how things are done.
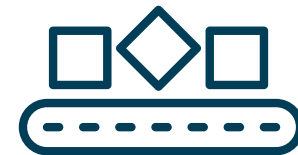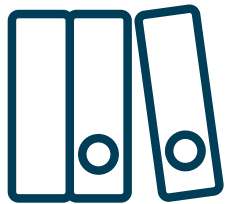
Capture Institutional Knowledge and Create Digital SOPs

Here are several ways you can begin to capture institutional knowledge to create digital SOPs:

1. Identify Knowledge Leaders — The first step begins with identifying employees who are most knowledgeable about the processes and operations related to your manufacturing organization. Employees that have the most experience in a respective area, that no one else has access to, is a good place to start.

2. Adopt a Bottoms Up Approach — It's crucial that the ownership of a project like this comes from your shop floor employees. They're the ones encountering the flaws and process workflows on a daily basis, and have the knowledge to drive improvements to operational processes.

3. Document, Digitize and Distribute Information — Now it's time to document and digitize your teams' institutional knowledge. This'll ensure it stays within your company regardless if employees leave or retire. After transferring processes and procedures into a digital SOP, you'll want to incorporate it into new-hire training and share it widely across your company to drive operational consistency.

4. Organize Your Information — Not all institutional knowledge is good knowledge. Years of accumulated experience and knowledge are great; however, it's important to understand what information you want to retain in your digital SOPs and what's actually beneficial for your organization. Best practices should have the data to earn the title.

3 SOP Best Practices with Connected Worker Technology

1. **SOPs Give You On-the-Go Access to Always Up-to-Date Information**

   A connected worker is always connected to the information they need to successfully complete and log the details of a task, no matter where they are. This includes SOPs, forms and checklists and standard work instructions, even quick and easily digestible training or lessons accessible on demand. It promotes a harmonious working relationship between the worker, the information they need to get the job done right, and the data the company needs to track and monitor operations in real-time. In order to make this a reality, the SOP must be digital and interactive, and the workers must be equipped with smart, mobile devices.

   With modern digital tools like Connected Worker® by Parsable, process owners can create digital SOPs in just a few minutes. The content authoring tool makes the move from paper to digital as easy as possible. Forms, checklists, work instructions, procedures and more can be built, tailored, distributed and updated in just a few clicks. This latter point is critical since it's what enables an organization to make and scale changes quickly. Workers on the factory floor – line operators, mechanics, area supervisors and more – can use Parsable's mobile app to access dynamic digital SOPs that were created. The data captured both manually and automatically, in addition to direct feedback submitted by workers, drives continuous improvement and helps every frontline worker feel a part of the process.

2. **Connections to People (or Remote Experts)**

   A connected worker is always connected to the people they need to collaborate with in order to keep the factory running. A worker can reach out to another worker directly, in which the SOP promotes seamless collaboration between people, departments, organizations and more. One aspect of work that will not change is the need for multiple individuals from different groups to work together. What will change is the how, when and for what, so building those pathways from one worker to other workers puts an organization in a position to become more adaptable as new technology emerges, consumer demands change, and workforce dynamics shift.

   Through Parsable, workers can reach out directly to their peers, managers, third-party contractors and others within the context of the assigned tasks and activities. This is particularly useful during the transition from undocumented institutional knowledge, since workers can reach out to experts remotely to provide guidance or expertise.

3. User-Friendly Knowledge Capture

The process of documenting institutional knowledge into SOPs should be a simple and straightforward process.

> **Parsable's no-code authoring platform makes it easy to create digital SOPs for tasks at hand.**

What's particularly helpful is empowering workers to capture quick walkthroughs on video to supplement gaps in one-point lessons or training modules. The hands-on walkthroughs, coming directly from the experts, take little-to-no effort for the expert to record and submit, while the process owners get invaluable content that helps future-proof operations in the face of the changing workforce. And, with the cycle mentioned before, in which it only takes a few clicks to update, those same revisions submitted by the experts can be scaled quickly.

Some manufacturing leaders are so far removed from the day-to-day operations on the factory floor that they may not fully understand the wealth of knowledge that seasoned employees possess. These insights are often taken for granted and overlooked. But, it's not too late to capture institutional knowledge.
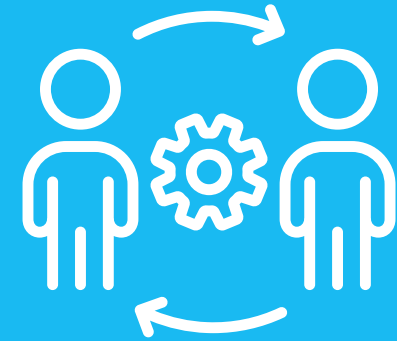
Connected Worker in Action

With Parsable's *Connected Worker*, a worker can ping an individual or role within the embedded "Chat & Collaboration" space, share photos or videos, and have a documented discussion that other members of the organization can benefit from. With the capabilities *Connected Worker* brings to assign tasks to specific roles, manufacturers can bring structure to collaboration, making it clear who's responsible for what, when and how, and the status of those efforts. And, to help eliminate delayed responses, it's easy for a worker to let the assignee know what they are up with a simple ping.

Conclusion

The challenge for most manufacturing companies is that their IT and operational capabilities are siloed, and trying to deconstruct and rebuild them is a challenge in and of itself. Many companies are met with roadblocks when transitioning to a digital factory, not because of technology but due to cultural and organizational change.

Institutional knowledge still remains a constraint from shift to shift and site to site. In order to successfully drive change, you need to break down old paradigms and create an operational model that captures institutional knowledge and embraces a digitally future. With connected worker technology like Parsable's *Connected Worker*, you'll have the tools to help set you up for success, enable employees to move beyond operating in silos, and close information gaps by creating digital SOPs.

LEARN HOW TO DIGITIZE YOUR SOPs TODAY

About Parsable

Parsable empowers industrial workers with modern digital tools to improve productivity, quality and safety. Connected Worker® by Parsable transforms static, paper-based procedures into mobile and interactive work instructions, enabling workers to leverage multimedia formats and collaborate in real time. With Parsable, companies gain unprecedented insight into human work by capturing essential data to improve their operations. A member of the World Economic Forum's Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Parsable is trusted by top global companies in the manufacturing, energy, consumer packaged goods, chemical, aerospace, industrial equipment, automotive and packaging industries. Learn more at **parsable.com**.

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