

The Decoded Method Playbook

The three-layer system for documenting how your business actually runs, so it can be handed over instead of held in one person's head.

DECODED OPS

Why the Best Process Is the One You Can Hand Over

Most businesses keep their processes in one place: someone's head. It works, right up until that person is on holiday, off sick, or leaves. Then the process leaves with them, and everyone else is guessing. There is always one spreadsheet, usually maintained by one person, and when they go, nobody quite knows how anything works.

The usual fix is a giant quality manual. That fails for the opposite reason. It is too long to keep up to date, so it goes stale, and once it is stale nobody trusts it or reads it. You have spent money to produce a document that sits in a drawer.

The Decoded Method is the middle path. It is a three-layer process and quality system, deliberately lean. ISO 9001 principles without the ISO overhead. A continuous improvement habit without the ceremony. It is how I run Decoded Ops, and it is the same system I build into the businesses I work with.

The Three Layers

Layer	What it is	In one line
1. Process Register	The spine	Every process you have, listed, owned, and dated, on one page.
2. SOPs	The how-to	One page per process. Five fixed sections. Plain English.
3. Improvement Log	The kaizen loop	Three lines whenever something breaks or gets better.

The point of the whole thing: if the least experienced person on your team can follow a process without asking anyone, it is documented. If they cannot, it is still living in someone's head, and that is a risk you are carrying whether you can see it or not.

LAYER ONE

The Process Register

The spine of the whole system. One row per process: what it is called, who owns it, and when it was last looked at. For most businesses it is the first time everything they do is written down in one place. That alone is worth the exercise, because you cannot improve or hand over what you have never actually listed.

What each row holds

Field	What it holds
Ref	A short code, e.g. TB-PR-001 . Project shortcode plus a number.
Owner	One named person. Never "the team". Accountability needs a name.
Category	Delivery, Sales, Admin, Finance, Marketing, or Tech.
Status	Active, draft, review, or archived.
Last reviewed	The month it was last checked, or a dash if never.

A worked example: the register we run Decoded Ops on

Ref	Process	Status
DO-PR-001	Discovery Day Delivery	active
DO-PR-002	Clarity Audit & Report	active
DO-PR-004	Proposal Build & Sign-off	active
DO-PR-006	ERP / eCommerce Integration Scoping	active
DO-PR-009	Client Handover & Sign-off	draft
DO-PR-011	Content Publishing	review

Why it works: the register is never "finished". A draft status is honest. A dash in "last reviewed" tells you exactly where the risk sits. The document earns trust because it admits what it does not yet cover.

LAYER TWO

One Page Per Process

The how-to layer. The hard limit is one page. If a process needs more than a page, it is two processes, not one. Each SOP has five sections, no more and no fewer. The discipline is the point: five sections forces clarity, and one page forces you to leave out everything that is not actually a step.

The five fixed sections, as a real SOP

DO-SOP-004 · Proposal Build & Sign-off

Owner: Craig · Updated: Jul 2026

WHAT THIS PROCESS DOES

Turns a scoped opportunity into a fixed-price proposal the client can accept, and records it so nothing is quoted twice or forgotten.

TRIGGER

A discovery call is complete and the client has asked for something in writing. Specific event, not "when needed".

STEPS

1. Confirm scope and tier. 2. Pull pricing from the canonical architecture. 3. Generate the document from the template. 4. Copy it into the client folder. 5. Send and log the quote.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Proposal sent within two working days, priced from the canonical model, and saved in the client's own folder. Measurable, so you know it worked.

AI SKILLS

Load **decoded-ops** for voice, then **proposal-writer**. Tools named in order, so the process is repeatable by anyone.

The test: hand this page to someone who has never done the job. If they can follow it without asking you a single question, it is finished. If they cannot, it is still a draft.

LAYER THREE

The Improvement Log

The kaizen layer, and the one most businesses skip. When something breaks or something gets better, you log it in three fields and nothing more. Every entry points back to the process it changed, so the register stays honest over time instead of drifting away from reality.

What broke	What changed	Result
Proposals were going out priced from memory, so two were under-quoted in a month.	Step 2 of DO-SOP-004 now forces pricing to be pulled from the canonical architecture, not recalled.	No under-quotes since. The fix took ten minutes and lives in the SOP, not in a conversation.

The Six Principles

Plain English

If the least experienced person cannot follow it without asking, it is still a draft.

One page per process

If it needs more than a page, split it into two processes.

Owner on everything

One named person. Not a team. Accountability needs a name.

Reviewed regularly

Quarterly for most; at each milestone for active builds.

Delivery-linked

Every system handed over ships with its process pack. Handover is never verbal only.

ISO-ready, not ISO-burdened

Maps to ISO 9001 principles without the certification weight.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

How Documented Is Your Operation?

Score each row honestly. The score is for you, not for sharing. It tells you how much of your business is written down and how much is still carried in people's heads.

Score 1	Score 2	Score 3
Lives in someone's head. Informal, verbal, depends on the person.	Partly written down. Exists somewhere but not owned or reviewed.	Written, owned, dated, and reviewed. A living document.

Question	Score (1-3)	Notes
Do you have a single list of every process you run?	_____	
Does each process have one named owner?	_____	
Could a new starter follow your key processes unaided?	_____	
Is anything reviewed on a set schedule?	_____	
Do you record what changed when a process improves?	_____	
If a key person left tomorrow, would the work survive?	_____	
TOTAL (out of 18)	_____	

6 – 9 In the head

Your operation depends on people, not systems. Knowledge leaves with every departure. This is the highest-risk band and the fastest to improve.

10 – 14 Partly written

Some discipline exists, but not everywhere. Inconsistency is the main risk. A solid base to build on, and the gains from here are structural.

15 – 18 A living system

Your process is an asset, not a liability. The work now is review and refinement, keeping it honest as the business changes.

WHAT NEXT?

From a List on Paper to a Living System

This playbook gives you the structure and an honest starting score. But a score on paper and a working system are different things. The hard part is not knowing that you should document your processes. It is doing it in a way that survives contact with a busy week, and then keeping it alive.

That is the work I do. In a Clarity engagement I build your Process Register with you, mapping what you actually do, who owns it, and where the gaps are. In Deliver, the SOPs and Improvement Log get built as each system or workflow goes live, so what you hand over is a living pack, not a verbal handover.

The Clarity Audit

Decoded Ops runs a fixed-price operational and technology audit for product-based businesses. It maps your processes, systems, and the gaps between them, and delivers a written action plan sequenced by impact, in plain English.

Being upfront, I would not ask you to spend the money if I did not think it would save you considerably more. The audit is designed so that if it does not identify at least three times the fee in recoverable cost or lost revenue, you get a full refund. No conditions.

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Decoded Ops is a technology and operations consultancy for businesses in the garment decoration, print, embroidery, workwear, and promotional merchandise sectors. The Decoded Method reflects Craig Blackman's direct experience across 25+ years in product-based operations, worked at every level from the warehouse floor to ERP implementation.