

TOPIC TWO MONITORING AND IMPROVING YOUR WORK

The aims and objective of this topic are:

- Introduce some problem solving methods
- Discuss ways of showing initiative
- Outline the need to accept and participate in change management

Assessment:

Details of your assessment tasks are given in the Assessment Manual.



SAMPLE

WORK'S LITTLE PROBLEMS

Just as 'Work Happens' so do problems. When a problem happens it is important to take a 'No Blame approach'.

Find out how the problem happened and 'why' – the 'who' is less important unless it is a recurring problem due to:

- lack of training on how to do the task effectively
- lack of understanding of why the task has to be done a certain way
- a case of the wrong person in the wrong job or with the wrong team

The first two are generally corrected by retraining coaching and mentoring. This can occur within the work team and you might be called on to help others or to be helped by others, depending upon the circumstances.

However, if the person genuinely has the wrong attitude or lack of aptitude for a specific job, this has to be addressed by management. Job redesign or being shifted to another position with different duties might be the answer. A person with an 'attitude' gets counselling either into or out of a job.

So, if there is a problem you have to ask yourself:

- How did this happen?
- Why did it happen?
- Can it be fixed without difficulty?
- Will it cause bigger problems if left untreated?
- Does my supervisor need to be informed?



We are human beings, and most errors creep in due to:

- Distractions
- Forgetfulness
- Personal priorities taking precedence over work priorities
- Poor time management skills
- Lack of clarification on allocated duties
- Failing to allocate tasks effectively within a team
- Expecting someone else to do a task and then not checking that they have followed through

So, when a problem happens, the questions are:

- How can this be fixed?
- Can I fix this without help?
- Who can fix this problem if I can't?
- Can I stop this problem happening again?

Sometimes a problem cannot be 'fixed' and have to be 'worn'. If this happens, then apologies are generally required and people are best advised to work on preventing a similar thing happening in future.

The important thing is to be 'hard on the problem', soft on the person.

Monitoring and improving on your own work performance is one of the most important things you can do because it helps you:

- get things right the first time
- provide a service or products without errors, omissions and defects
- reduces the need to 'put out fires', which are the crises and problems caused by lack of planning and organisation

Studies have shown that the biggest cost-waste factor in business is 'doing things over'. This includes:

- Hunting for information that should always be kept to hand
- 'Re-inventing the wheel' by not checking that someone in your team already knows how the task should be done
- Changing the format of workplace documents so that there is no standard or 'house style'
- Making mistakes that could have been prevented by following the set procedures
- Forgetting to do something which puts everything else 'out of synch'
- Doing work inefficiently

Time is money: so the more time that is wasted, the less value the organisation gets from your work team. This can result in loss of profitability, loss of productivity or loss of goodwill.

To counter this, get into some good habits:

- Check your spelling before you print off a document
- If the spellchecker keeps coming up with the same errors, time to learn how to spell the word correctly (use your dictionary)
- Make sure you are using the right words as homophones (words that sound alike) can trip you up. Learn the difference between common homophones.
- If you keep making the same errors in a task, write down the procedure and check that you have not missed a step.
- Ask a co-worker to go through unfamiliar procedures with you so you can be confident before you start a task.
- Ask for feedback on your work so that you can get an honest appraisal of the areas where you need to make improvements.
- Follow the procedure until you have learned the correct way.
- If there are written work instructions, use them when you do an unfamiliar task or one which you do less often. It is easy to forget the steps in things you do infrequently.
- If you have a bad memory or if your day is full of interruptions, use a 'To do' list or written schedule so that important deadlines do not get missed
- Keep a work journal in which you write down all the 'tricks of the trade' or important new information you have found out during the day. This will give you something to refer back to.

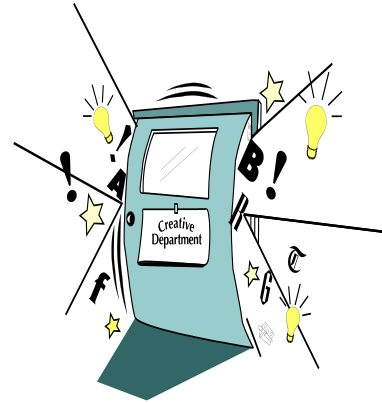
Whenever you consider how you do your work, do not forget that your co-workers are often also looking for the same solutions to the same problems.

People like to be consulted. Asking others if they are having the same problems can often trigger the whole team to work on a creative solution that helps everybody.

TAKING THE INITIATIVE

Taking the initiative to self-check and correct your work is only the first step. The second is to look for ways to improve the quality of the work and the productivity of the work flow.

- Is there a better way?
- Is there a quicker way?
- Is there an easier way?
- Will it improve the product or document?
- Will it improve the service to customers?
- What resources do I need to make this change work?



It seems that we have less and less time to do things these days, so finding better ways to get your work done and meet deadlines is worth discussing with colleagues.

Here are some examples of work improvement questions people have discussed in team meetings

- Can we develop proforma letters or use mail merge so that correspondence that is sent out often has the right 'corporate image'?
- Can a form be redesigned to capture the information better or to improve the ability of the respondent to fill it out accurately?
- If we change the sequence or process of how a task is done, will this result in time savings and improved quality?

Before you discuss the possible improvements with others, you need to clarify what the advantages and disadvantages are:

- What is wrong with the way things are now?
- How will the new way improve things
- Will the changes save time and money?

The more information you can put together about the reasons you are suggesting change, the easier it is to discuss the proposals with your work colleagues.

Improving 'The Big Australian'

Businesses and organisations that are the most effective and productive become that way through planning and harnessing the good ideas of their employees.

A senior manager at BHP once told me that any person in the organisation who had a bright idea that would improve productivity or reduce costs could take the ideas to management.

First, they would discuss it with their direct supervisor and then document their proposal on no more than one sheet of A4 paper. This was to set out the advantages and disadvantages of both the way things were done presently and those of the new ideas. Proposals that set out estimates of time and cost savings were given the most attention.

Even the smallest savings or improvements could potentially result in productivity and profit boosts worth millions of dollars. People with worthwhile ideas were flown down to present their ideas to management in person and rewarded with productivity bonuses.

Organisations which value the ideas of their workforce are not only the most productive, but they provide a better place to work.

ASSESSMENT RECORD

Student Name:	
Student Number:	
Postcode:	
e-mail:	
Assessor/Trainer:	
Telephone:	
e-mail:	

Assessment for topic:	Tasks	Date	CA	NYC
Two: Monitoring and improving your work	4. Problem solving			
	5. Reducing time loss factors			
	6. Accepting the need for change			

Assessor's comments:

Assessor Signature: _____

Student Signature: _____

Sign-off date: _____

5. Problem solving

Read the following case studies and work out what the person could do about the problem.

Case number one:

Mary works in a training organisation and is responsible for ordering copies of trainee workbooks from a commercial supplier. She is given a Excel database spreadsheet of when the trainees are to start each Unit and is told to order the stock each month.

When the stock arrives it is marked on the spreadsheet with a highlighter and filed in a suspension file so that the trainer can pick it up. For trainers who work in other offices, the resources have a post it note attached to them with the trainee name and are sent over by courier.

This worked well for a while, but then the problems started to surface:

- Trainers would change the schedule without informing administration and so resources were bought when they were not required. Unused stock on hand built up to several thousand dollars worth of inventory and caused a storage problem.
- Trainers would change the Units in individual training plans without telling anybody and then take stock from other trainee's suspension file, also without reporting this. When the resource for the original trainee was supposed to be use, it was missing and the admin clerk is blamed for mismanagement.

Mary gets upset because she is being blamed for problems she has not caused. She threatens to leave. If you were Mary, what would you do?

Ask yourself:	
Whose problem is it really?	
Can it be fixed without difficulty?	
Will it cause bigger problems if left untreated?	
Who should be responsible for sorting out the problem?	
What could be done to sort out the problem?	

Case number two:

George is working as a receptionist for a building which has three businesses in it. Part of his duties also include being steward for the board room and setting up meetings and arranging for lunches and refreshments for clients who use it.

This takes him away from the front counter quite a lot.

One day a big fight broke out between George and the admin assistant who worked in the office closest to reception. Jane could hear the phone ringing and often interrupted her work to answer it if George was not there.

She found this difficult because she did not really know what people did in the other organisations and to whom she should refer callers. In addition, managers would often leave the building without telling anyone they were going or what time they would be back.

Jane got more and more distressed because of the interruptions to her work and the fact that none of the admin assistants in the other businesses ever answered the phone, even if it was for them.

George got blamed for everything because Jane felt he should be at his desk at all times. George got upset because the company who owned the building made money from hiring out the board room for functions and saw George's services being more important than his reception duties.

If you were George, what would you do?

Ask yourself:	
Whose problem is it really?	
Can it be fixed without difficulty?	
Will it cause bigger problems if left untreated?	
Who should be responsible for sorting out the problem?	
What could be done to sort out the problem?	

