

Understanding the business of your workplace

All employees are expected to work towards achieving the goals of the business or organisation and should reflect the values and expectations of that business or organisation. This means that all employees should have a clear knowledge and understanding of exactly what the business purpose and direction is. It also requires each worker within that business to understand what is expected of them in the daily work routine.

There are two forms of information that work in businesses and organisations:

- Formal, documented requirements
- Inferred or implied requirements

The formal documented requirements

The formal component of this understanding may be found in the documents that are used to guide and manage the business. Here are examples of the types of organisational requirements that all workers must be aware of:

Goals, objectives, plans, systems and processes

It is essential all workers have a clear understanding of the goals and objectives of the business or organisation. All workers must have a clear idea of what these are and how they contribute to the success of the business. Remember: if the business is not successful, then the job may not exist!

Goals and objectives will nearly always be directly related to the work procedures that workers are to follow in the business; policies and procedures will be found in formal documents within the workplace, e.g. a specific manual, employee handbook, etc.

Organisation policy / guidelines and requirements

Depending upon the business there could be a large volume of organisational requirements, i.e. working hours, WHE rules, etc. Often many of the organisation requirements will be based on specific laws and regulations which mark certain work behaviours and activities mandatory.

These requirements are generally to be found in formal documents (e.g. a specific manual, employee handbook, etc.) and must be strictly adhered to – it is not a matter of ‘having a choice’ as failure to follow such rules could lead to dismissal. This area is used to measure the performance of workers and so worker adherence to these requirements is used by supervisors to judge the standard of work and performance of staff members.

Business and performance plans

No successful business or organisations just “does things”! All successful businesses and organisations plan their work and establish a direction well in advance of starting the actual work. Employees should understand the plans of their employing businesses and organisations and align their efforts to support this intention.

Understanding the plan of the business is critical to the success of all employees in a job.

Access and equity principles and practice

Equity, equality and Access are important principles for businesses and organisations in Australian society. These are mandated rights established in several laws and regulations within our country. They cannot be ignored.

These principles are based on the assumption that a core human right that all of us are treated equally and these are now the basis for several laws this must be recognised in the practices and operations of businesses. It may be reflected in employment practices, in the policies and procedures of the workplace or in the way products and services are marketed and provided. Regardless, these principles will underpin some of what occurs in the workplace and the supporting documents should be easily accessed by all staff members.

Anti-discrimination and related policy

Related to the ideas of equity, equality and access is the concept of anti-discrimination. Anti-discrimination policies are those policies that establish that no person may be discriminated against in their work. This area is also firmly established within law and regulations and workplace documents will be available that outline the parameters of what should occur in workplaces as well as the dispute resolution procedures that could be followed if needed.

Ethical behaviour

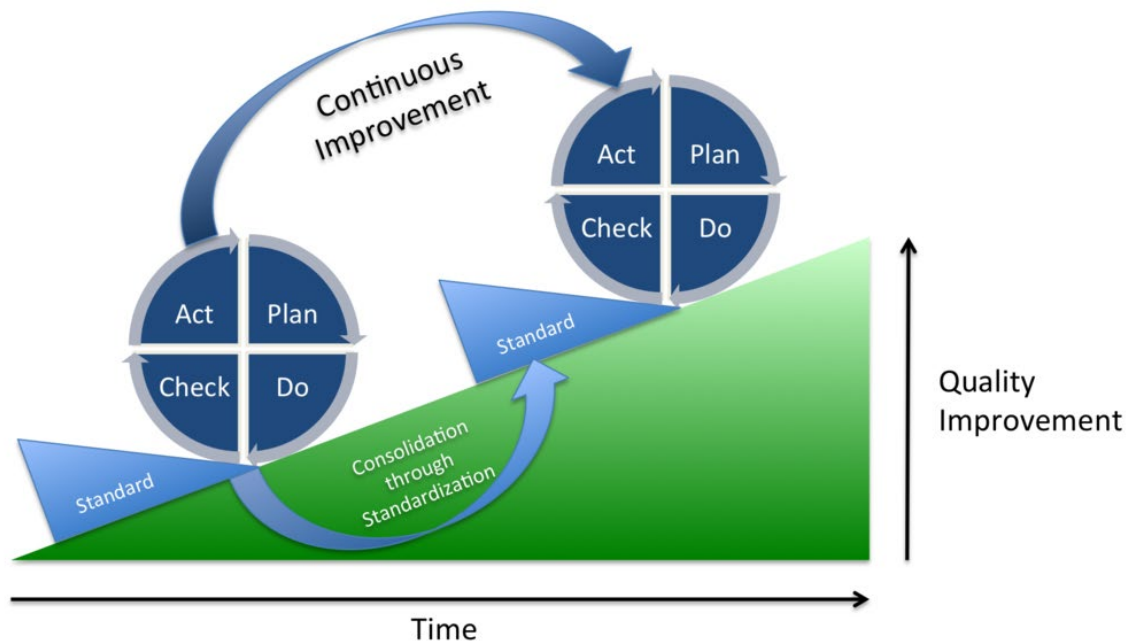
In some workplaces ethical work standards may not be written down. Common standards such as honesty and truthfulness have traditionally been regarded as a normal part of westernised, working life. It is imagined that such social values are inherent in each person and so there is no need to provide written policies. This assumption however is no longer current. In a world of multiple cultural interpretations and a decline in a homogenised value system, it is essential that core values expected by a business are clearly articulated and documented.

It is becoming more common for ethical standards to be written down. Examples include: Expressing truth in dealing with customer complaints, providing explicit standards of behaviour when handling a conflict of interest and in some cases, defining what a conflict of interest may be. It is important that all employees have a clear understanding of the ethical standards that their employing business or organisation has so that there is no confusion when these need to be addressed in the routine of the work day.



Quality and continuous improvement processes and standards

A continuous improvement process means that essentially a business has a small step-by-step incremental improvement strategy. It is based upon a belief that continual improvement can be brought about by a never-ending series of small changes. Even in the face of enormous innovative improvement strategies, there will always be the need and opportunity to supplement such strategies and initiatives with continual small step changes.



Continuous Improvement. Source: [Define continuous improvement – 8 experts' definitions | Vetter Blog \(getvetter.com\)](https://www.getvetter.com)

Continuous improvement is a process which, in the long term, achieves a business focus on the customer, enhanced quality of service delivery, a simplified processes and procedures and an attitudinal change within the workforce.

Now that the traditional concept of customer loyalty is decreasing (i.e. customers now look for what product or service best meets their needs, not who is offering it) it is essential that businesses and their employees have a clear focus on all working together to continually improve the business.

Continuous improvement processes allow businesses to uncover problems and find ways to fix them. Small, positive changes made over time can dramatically impact a business's overall process and profit.

Work Health and Safety policies, procedures and programs

All businesses and organisations must endeavour to achieve high levels of Health and Safety in their workplaces. These plans and procedures will exist in businesses in specific documents which must be readily available to all workers.

Inferred or implied requirements

Sometimes the expectations of employees may not be written down but may be implied. Some examples include:

Organisational values and behaviours

A business will have its own set of values and behaviours that it expects of all its employees. It is important that all workers are aware of these values and attempt to reflect them in their daily work practices. For example, if an organisation strongly values environmental sustainability, workers will need to reflect this in their work practices by minimising waste.

By understanding the values and behaviours of the business, workers are better able to carry out their work in line with the business's requirements.

Responsiveness, Initiative and Responsiveness

There are many concepts of action that will not find their way into policies and procedures. Examples include things like responsiveness, initiative and flexibility. In larger corporations there may be documents that express the company's views and intentions, but generally small to medium businesses do not address these elements. However, these traits are important and, when demonstrated by employees, can be vital in the success of the business. These traits can also be essential in expressing duty of care, loyalty and commitment to the business.

Financial performance

Understanding the financial performance goals and the broad budget of an employer may, at first glance, not seem as though it will impact on an employee's work routine. However, a broad understanding of such goals and budgets allows workers to clearly see the alignment of their work with the big picture of a business.

Management of employees and interpersonal communication

How people are managed at work has a tremendous impact on the success of the business. Communicating effectively and clearly is all about a duty of care. By communicating clearly and ensuring the message is shared and understood, means that employees can work towards common goals, work together without negative competitive behaviour and build better teams.

Marketing and customer service

All employees have responsibilities in marketing and customer service regardless of their actual work duties.

In marketing, all employees have a duty to present the work of their employer in a positive light and to not denigrate or diminish the work of the business or their fellow workers. There is the story about the carpark at the Ford motor car manufacturing plant in Detroit (Michigan USA) – every car in the thousands that were parked there each day was a Ford; taking any other car to work was considered a slight on the work of everyone at the factory!

Remember: If you cannot actively be positive about your workplace, it is perhaps smarter to not say anything and look for another job!

There is a wide range of consumer legislation and it is important that all employees understand at the least the intent of this legislation – this sets what an employee can and cannot do with respect to customer service. Businesses have obligations and staff must know what these are in terms of customer service is important for fostering good will.