Time Management in the Workplace

Booklet 2 – Carrying out the work

Anjark Services' Employee Guide

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An important part of any job is being able to carry out work and complete all allocated tasks. Anjark Services expects our employees to have the ability to make decisions within their scope of authority and do their work in such a way that they will enhance our business.

It is the employee's ability to make decisions and do work that is consistent with his/her own level of knowledge and expertise, and scope of responsibility that is important. This means that employees should try to avoid making decisions when they are not fully conversant with the area/process or which is outside of their scope of responsibility – it is likely such decisions will be of poor quality and result in in mistakes being made. When such decisions are needed in an urgent sense, it makes greater sense for the employee to seek further information and advice from management than to work blindly and make poor decisions.

Assistance can always be sought from:

• Coach/mentor

• Other members of the organisation

• Peers/work colleagues/team

• Supervisor or manager.

Dealing with Interruptions

There are many interruptions that may occur in a workplace and may disrupt the routine workflow. These interruptions could come from:

- Competing work demands
- Changes to procedures or new procedures
- Changes to stock levels
- Environmental factors such as time, weather
- Staff issues
- Resource issues
- Technology/equipment breakdowns.

When attempting to better manage time, it is important to consider those things that may disrupt or interrupt the workday. There are many different interruptions, e.g. incoming telephone calls while trying to type business documents; receiving visits

from other staff or site visitors which are nonurgent or unscheduled or both; and undisciplined conversations about personal matters with other people in the office.

There are techniques that workers can employ when there is a need to pay full attention to the task at hand. Some of these techniques include:

Blocking: Blocking is the simplest technique to avoid disruption. The worker simply does not allow themself to take telephone calls, check emails or receive internal/external visitors. This may necessitate moving your work from your normal desk to somewhere else, e.g. the patio, lunchroom, meeting room, etc.; directing the telephone to voicemail and closing the email application to avoid the temptation of reading emails as they come in.

Screening (filtering): Screening is a technique that only allows very important calls or visitors to be passed through to the worker. In larger offices this can be organised with the front office receptionist so that they are aware of who may and may not interrupt the worker, so that only important calls and visitors are passed through.

Grouping (batching) and call back: Grouping is a technique whereby the worker undertakes all similar tasks at one time. As an example, the worker may combine all their telephone messages and when they have a list of people who need contacting make all the telephone calls within a scheduled time.

Scheduling time availability: This is often referred to as 'office hours', which is where a worker assigns, with supervisor approval, a certain time when they will be available for any type of interaction. For example, a worker may say that they are available between 10am-12pm and 1pm-3pm – outside of these hours, the worker is not available and focuses on the other duties such as research, preparing reports and other business documents, and preparing projects.

Contingency Planning

There is always something that will cause the best-laid plans to be disrupted. For this reason when a worker is setting schedules and deadlines, it is important that consideration is given to contingencies. To identify the potential contingencies, the following process could be followed:

1. **Identify potential problems**

   Attempt to determine those things that may prevent the worker from meeting a deadline or meeting their schedule for the day. There will always be contingencies that cannot be foreseen so all deadlines and schedules should have some flexibility built into them. But there are others which can reasonably be identified as potentially occurring, e.g. a lack of knowledge and management difficulties.

2. **Assess degree of probability and impact**

   For each problem that has the potential to occur, the responsible person should attempt to evaluate the probability of it occurring and the likely impact that it will have upon the schedule or the required deadline. The higher the probability of the problem occurring, the more the worker should consider the problem. Similarly, the greater the impact, the more the problem should be considered and planned for. If a problem is extremely unlikely or is not going to create a significant impact, then the less likely it needs to be considered in the contingencies.

3. **Prevent and correct**

   For all the potential problems identified and priorities established, those likely to occur should have additional consideration either to prevent the problem occurring or find a quick way of dealing with it if it does occur.

   If a solution to the problem can be planned for, then its potential impact is lessened.

Areas where contingency planning may be required include:

- Competing work demands
- Changes to procedures or new procedures
- Changes to stock levels
- Environmental factors such as time, weather
- Staff issues
- Resource issues
- Technology/equipment breakdowns.

Use Business Technology

Technology

Technology is generally a significant advantage to the competitiveness and profitability of a business. All employees are encouraged to use this organisation's technology in ways that support better management of time and quality completion of tasks.

Examples: Email is more rapid and has shorter response times than traditional mail-based correspondence. Additionally, as a digital media it has advantages in terms of filing and storage, i.e. less costly, less space, rapid retrieval, etc. to file/store.

A list of common office technology that can assist in managing worker time efficiently and enhance productivity include:

Photocopiers

These digital machines photocopy documents, maps, drawings or plans on to paper.

Fax machine

While slowly going out of major use, all offices still retain these machines. These are used for sending and receiving handwritten, typed or graphic messages over telephone lines.

Printers

There are various types of printers dependent upon the purpose required and cost available. Their main purpose is to produce hard copies (i.e. copies on paper) of information stored in a computer. This may include words or pictures.

Note it is now common in large offices for printers/photocopiers to be within the unit, i.e. a combined unit.

Telephones

This type of business equipment is used for internal, external or international voice communication though a lot of voice communication is now also carried out via Internet based applications, i.e. Voice Over Internet protocol (VOIP). Mobile telephones are common within organisations.

Answering machines

This equipment is designed to answer the telephones when the person is unavailable. The caller generally will hear a recorded message requesting that a message be left.

Shredders

This machinery is used for the destruction of records in paper format and are of value in organisations where confidential information is collected.

Binding equipment

This type of equipment is used to produce bound volumes of documents.

Personal management applications

These are software packages operating on personal computers and often also sharing connection with the person's mobile phone. These applications allow the user to run a digital diary, schedules, contacts and a host of other data often also integrating email operations, A common work example is the Microsoft Outlook application.

Communicate Progress on Task

Communicating Progress

Most workplaces involve working in teams. Teams are effective when all team members are familiar with what their task is, how the work is progressing and issues that arise that affect their goals and schedules. Without progress being reported, there is a chance that work may be repeated by multiple staff members.

Reporting progress across a team may be achieved by:

- Formal progress meetings
- Informal feedback through conversations, email or other form of communication
- Project management software
- Online collaboration tools
- Schedules and timelines.

Whichever method is adopted, it is important that any problems that occur with the are reported across the team members on a continuous basis. By reporting progress and problems, each team member can deal with problems before these impact on progress.

Summary

1. Work tasks should be completed within the designated timelines that are set by the worker or their supervisor and in accordance with organisational requirements (i.e. WHS procedures and organisational policies).

2. Whenever a worker experiences difficulties in achieving their allocated tasks, they should seek assistance from supervisors and/or colleagues.

3. Contingency planning involves attempting to identify and organise action for any factor that affects a task's work requirements.

4. Always try to use business technology efficiently and effectively to complete work tasks.

5. Progress towards work goals should be communicated on a continual basis to ensure work goals are achieved.

Review Work Performance

Workers should actively seek honest feedback on their work performance from their supervisors or colleagues.

Reviewing Work Progress

The final stage of any task is to review of the work that has been completed and from this review determine if the planned work was effective and whether improvements to the work planning and activity need to be made. With objectives and criteria for acceptable performance established at the start of a task, it becomes easy to review the work.

A review is simply the gathering of information that will enable the worker or their supervisor to gauge whether the completed task has met the required performance criteria.

There are numerous methods that could be used to gather the information and the methods selected will vary significantly depending on the actual performance measures needed. Some common methods include:

Work Measurement and Sampling

Work measurement involves using various techniques to obtain direct measurement of the work. This is particularly useful for assessing whether the worker managed to complete the work they were assigned. This direct measurement can be conducted in several ways. It is only useful for gaining objective information, such as whether a particular task was completed to a required standard (e.g. report distributed by 4pm). Samples are the most common method of work measurement; a sample of work can be evaluated against set criteria to determine whether it is meeting the agreed upon quality standards.

Feedback

Feedback is a process that involves seeking the opinions of those involved in the work process. A supervisor or colleague may ask the internal or external clients of the worker's efforts for feedback. This feedback should tell provide an insight into how these internal/external clients feel about the result, the work methods and work processes. Feedback can also be sought from managers, supervisors and other workers to gain an understanding of how they feel about the process that are currently being used. The information gained from the feedback process may be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the completed work, e.g. comparing the review results with the planned objectives.

The methods used to gather information should be aimed the type of information required to determine whether the work objectives are being met.

Once the right information is obtained, this needs to be compared against the work plans that were set at the beginning of the process. One useful means of doing this is to create a table in which the day's tasks are listed and as these are completed, they are marked off.

- Feedback could be obtained through:
- Formal/informal performance appraisals
- Obtaining feedback from clients
- Obtaining feedback from supervisors and colleagues
- Personal, reflective behaviour strategies
- Routine organisational methods for monitoring service delivery.

Monitor and Adjust Work According to Feedback

Seeking feedback is an important skill for the workplace. Being able to identify areas of concern and act before they become problems will improve a worker's chances of success in the workplace.

Treating each work task as a learning opportunity is a good way of building competency. Receiving feedback from the employer or supervisor on completed tasks enables the worker to know whether they have completed the task successfully or unsuccessfully. Employers should always consider feedback as information that can be used to improve their future work skills.

Few employees request feedback; they miss a valuable opportunity to gain an insight into their skills and abilities at a job. Gaining the greatest benefit from feedback involves listening carefully to the reply without being defensive or trying to 'explain'.

A few general tips for employees:

- Seek feedback as soon as possible after the job is completed as the supervisor or manager may forget the specifics of the task.
- Thank the person for the feedback they provide as it takes up their time to give it.
- Be positive and enthusiastic about the job you have done.

Feedback should always be made against standards. The type of standard being used will depend on the type of work that is being done. However standards may include:

- Australian standards
- Legislation
- Organisation policies and procedures, guidelines and requirements
- Specified work standards

- Standards set by work group.

Identify and Plan Opportunities for Improvement

Feedback is generally considered to be a way in which improvements can be made. By seeking feedback, employees are attempting to find areas where they could improve. By establishing this, an employee may find ways of becoming a better worker.

The methods for personal improvement that can be used will depend on what areas need improvement, but some of the major methods that can be used to plan worker improvement include:

- Coaching, mentoring and/or supervision
- Internal/external training provision
- Personal study
- Recognition of current competence
- Workplace skills assessment.

In terms of improvement programs, employees should negotiate with their manager or supervisor in determining the most appropriate methods to use. Ongoing discussions of staff improvement will form part of a staff member's regular performance reviews.

Summary

Ensure that work is monitored and adjusted according to feedback received through supervision and comparison with the established team and organisational standards and goals.

Employees should always seek out opportunities for improvement and plan these in liaison with colleagues and supervisors.

Use feedback to enhance skills and knowledge.

Conclusion

Work planning involves three distinct parts: the planning, the implementation and the review.

The initial stage of work planning involves establishing a plan that lists what needs to be done and the order in which it will be best accomplished.

Once the plan is set, the process of implementing that plan starts, i.e. doing the required work to achieve the objectives.

The next stage is to review (i.e. look back) at what has been achieved and try to learn from the experience. What can be done better next time?

By following this process, employees can continually improve the way they undertake their work and become a more productive and efficient member of their work team.