**Business Administration Level 4**

**Unit 1: Resolve Administrative Problems**





 Introduction

This unit support guide is designed to assist you development knowledge and understanding of how to be able to identify administrative problems.

Problem solving is a key skill and it is one that can make a huge difference to your career. At work, problems are at the centre of what many people do every day, you are either solving a problem for a client, supporting those who are solving problems, or discovering new problems to solve.

The problems you face can be large or small, simple or complex, and easy or difficult to solve. Regardless of the nature of the problems, a fundamental part of every manager's role is finding ways to solve them. So, being a confident problem solver is important to your success. Much of that confidence comes from having a good process to use when approaching a problem. With a good process, you can solve problems quickly and effectively, without one, your solutions may be ineffective or you will get stuck and do nothing, sometimes with consequences.

This unit will teach you skills and techniques which will help you identify and resolve a range of problems, associated specifically, to an administrative or business environment.

You will develop an awareness of the importance of ***risk assessment*** as a preventative measure to avoid impact and risk when problems occur as well as reduce the effect.

You will explore and ***implement techniques*** to ***monitor, manage, control and analyse*** the potential for problems.

You will demonstrate effective selection and ***application of problem solving strategies*** within the context of identified administrative problems.

This unit consists of three Learning Outcomes:

1. ***Understand the principles underpinning the resolution of administrative problems***
2. ***Be able to identify administrative problems***
3. ***Be able to resolve administrative problems***

Learning Outcome 1 looks at the principles that underpin the resolution of problems.

The first ***assessment criteria*** 1.1 for this outcome asks you to

***‘Evaluate the effectiveness of different types of information on an administrative function’***

In all, there are six major considerations to be made when trying to evaluate information, these being:

1. Types of information
2. Sources
3. Information needs
4. Information requirements
5. Ways of storing information
6. Effectiveness of inform

Please access the accompanying PowerPoint Presentation for a detailed expansion of these points

Assessment Criteria 1.2 calls for you to

***‘Explain the basis for selecting tools, techniques and strategies to analyse administrative functions’***

Let’s begin by looking first at Administrative functions, these may include:

* human resources or sales and marketing
* research and development and or production/operations
* customer service or finance and accounts
* administration and IT

Some of the areas for consideration are:

* Business strategies and objectives - strategy analysis, e.g. external business environment, internal capability; strategy definition, strategy implementation and performance management
* Investigation – e.g qualitative or quantitative, documenting results
* Consider perspectives - stakeholder identification; stakeholder analysis; stakeholder management
* Analyse needs - organisation modelling, business process analysis, business change identification
* Evaluate options - e.g. identification, shortlist, business case, e.g. preparation, presentation
* Define requirements – elicitation, analysis, development, modelling
* Manage change – organisation, people, benefit management and realisation

Assessment Criteria 1.3 requires for you to

***‘Explain the constraints attached to the use of resources needed to resolve administrative problems’***

When considering all the constraints attached to the use of resources, you will need to consider and be aware of constraints linked to:

* Time - deadlines, working hours, delays, time management
* People - workforce numbers; skills and knowledge, management, stakeholders needs and expectations
* Physical resources - technology; consumables, furniture, premises
* Environment – Space, waste and carbon footprint
* Information – Sufficiency, accuracy, validity, reliability, sources of information
* Processes – Workflow and productivity
* Costs – budgets and operating funds, salary payments, taxation, debt or credit
* Legal and ethical – relevant legislation, employment law, fraud

Assessment criteria 1.4 needs you to:

‘***Explain how to apply risk assessment and management techniques to identify and resolve administrative problems’***

Look carefully at areas such as:

* ***Risk assessment techniques*** - assessments, e.g. impact, probability, contingency planning, project management, frequency, scale of risk, how it affects quality of work and how it affects others
* ***Risk management*** – avoidance altogether, reduction of risk, transfer of risk, acceptance. Risk strategy, e.g. set objectives, identify risks, assess risks, treat risks, control risks, communicate and monitor

Finally, Assessment Criteria 1.5 requires you to:

***‘Analyse the effectiveness of different techniques used to resolve administrative problems’***

Look carefully at areas such as:

* **Administrative problems –**
* Internal, e.g. people, processes, productivity, environment, resources, time, budget, information
* External, e.g. suppliers, customers, legislation
* Business objectives, are these being met
* **Measuring effectiveness** – objectives, efficiencies, relevance, appropriateness; review; evaluation, stakeholder perception, stakeholder satisfaction

**Summary**

***Resolve Administrative problems***

Whilst careful planning can prevent many problems occurring with work, there is always likely to be something that happens to delay or interrupt the expected flow of work.

Problems that may occur and cause a delay to work are:

* equipment failure
* staff sickness
* supplier problems
* breakdown in systems or procedures
* communication problems
* the specification for the work is altered/widened
* other people not fulfilling their commitments
* work has not been completed to specification and has to be redone
* constant distractions and interruptions
* unforeseen (weather, industrial action, break-ins).

Careful planning is essential to avoid as many problems as possible. For example, as a supervisor you will plan to ensure there are always adequate resources, eg staff cover, particularly around task/project deadlines which will mean carefully controlling staff time off. You should consider in advance all the potential problems that may occur so that there are contingency plans ready.

It may be that you become aware of a problem during the course of carrying out your own work – perhaps you chase up some information you are waiting for and find out the person responsible for supplying it is away sick for the next week. It may be that you can work around this by rescheduling your own work, but you should ensure that you make the problem known in order to avoid it having a more serious impact.

Alternatively, you may be notified about a problem via a complaint from either internal or external customers. In this case, the complaint will need to be investigated to find out the cause and a solution put in place. Whilst it may be relatively easy to resolve the problem to the customer’s satisfaction, the investigation into the cause is important as it may be that there is the potential for it to recur, and a change or review of systems and procedures is required.

Generally, problems fall into one of two categories: minor or major problems. It may be that you are able to solve minor problems yourself without involving anyone else, eg you receive information you have been waiting for later than expected and have to work late in order to complete your own part of the job.

* Possible methods to use for resolving problems could be, e.g.
* Re-planning/reprioritising own work
* gaining the support of others
* identifying and implementing a solution
* referring the problem on.

However, if you become aware of a major problem that arises in the course of your work, you should ensure that the appropriate persons are notified. Major problems can broadly be distinguished as they typically:

* affect more than one person
* have a financial impact
* require serious re-planning in order to meet targets.

When assessing a problem, you should consider the seriousness in terms of

* health and safety
* disruption or delay to work
* the effect on the organisation’s reputation.

You need to be clear about what the consequences of any delay in finding a solution to the problem may be, and the limits of your own authority in implementing solutions.

***Problem Solving Techniques***

Essentially to solve problems you will need to:

* understand the problem
* identify the cause
* discuss possible solutions
* solve the problem.

Problem solving requires those involved in the process to understand what the problem is and then consider the solution. In seeking a solution you should always check the facts of the problem and make sure you have all the information to hand. Depending on the scale of the problem, it is likely that you will involve others in seeking a solution. Problem-solving often means that you have a number of solutions which need to be considered with the possible suitability of each evaluated.

For any problem that occurs, you should:

* assess the immediate impact it will have on the day to day operation of the organisation
* ensure that you have all information as to how and why it occurred
* consider the range of options for solving it.

To find a solution to any problem it is necessary to analyse it first – what is the problem, what was the cause, who is involved, what is required to solve it and how can that be done. Pick the best solution to resolve the problem by identifying the options and working with others to identify and confirm the options to resolve the problem within the organisational guidelines. When a solution is reached it is important that it is evaluated and its success analysed.

Some problems may only be solved by involving outside agencies; in these cases ensure you check any authorisation procedures that may need to be followed. There will be budget implications and there may be other restrictions on the organisations that may be used for, e.g. repairing or supplying equipment.

In more complex problem solving within organisations various tools and techniques are used. These include SWOT Analysis, Risk Analysis, Porter’s Five Forces and PEST Analysis.

* A SWOT Analysis is when an organisation identifies its Strengths, Weaknesses, and examines the Opportunities and Threats it faces. By using a SWOT framework an organisation can develop a strategy that helps them, e.g. compete in the market, successfully introduce a new product or deal with increased competition.
* Risk Analysis is where an organisation identifies the threats to its business, estimates the risks and then manages them. Risk analysis forms the basis for risk management and focuses on cost effectiveness. Risk management involves adapting the use of existing resources, contingency planning and good use of new resources.
* Porter’s Five Forces tool is a simple but powerful tool for understanding where power lies in a business situation. It assists organisations to understand both the strength of their current competitive position, and the strength of a position they may be looking to move into. Supplier power, buyer power, competitive rivalry, threat of substitution, threat of new entry are the five forces that are considered.
* A PEST Analysis is a simple but important and widely-used tool that helps organisations consider the Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural and Technological environment they are operating in. PEST is used by organisations to assist them in building their vision of the future.

Very occasionally, a problem may occur that is potentially a disaster – problems such fire, flood or complete IT failure. It is likely that your organisation will have measures in place to cover such emergencies. These disaster recovery plans are put in place in advance to mitigate the loss of information and enable business operations to recover as soon as possible.

Whatever the tool or method used, all problems have a solution. However not always within resource limitations. In other words with limitless money, staff, equipment, the problem could be solved; however it is not usually the case that there are limitless resources and for this reason solutions need to be identified that solve the problem within the organisation’s limits.

The problem doesn’t end with a solution: as with all working practices it is important to review what has happened. This is particularly important when dealing with problems in order to prevent recurrence if possible. It is not only important to identify the cause of the problem, but also to review the way it was handled and the approach taken and also to consider whether the solution put in place was the most effective and what the possible alternatives could have been.

Only with a process of reflection and review can we hope to learn from mistakes and problems and improve practices for the future.