
Introduction

Making the same mistakes again and again.....

“How many times has he got that wrong?”

“Is he thick or careless?”

“How many times do you need to be shown?”

“Why won’t this system do what I want it to?”

Are these phrases familiar to you? Are you continually shaking your head because you appear to be having trouble getting your people to follow basic procedures?????

At all levels within any business mistakes are made. As humans we can’t entirely avoid them.

This however, is not what this article is about. This edition we will be looking at why businesses make often repeated mistakes and how you can minimise or overcome them.

1. Don’t panic!

The first rule to understand is that there are very few situations which cannot be overcome or corrected so its no use getting hot and bothered or stressing about potential doom and gloom. Regardless of how desperate or difficult it may appear, remember that you, as the business owner, through your actions will ultimately dictate what the outcome will become.

2. Recording Issues

There needs to be a mechanism or system to identify where mistakes are being made. You need to realise that recurrent mistake are a real cost to your business.

Depending on the size of your business, it is quite possible that you are unable to know exactly where mistakes are occurring and then recurring. Anecdotal evidence from staff can not always provide you with clear evidence or proof of what is actually happening. People will embellish situations to cover themselves and are prone to generalisations, rather than providing concrete evidence of the error. This can paint an entirely different picture to what is actually happening.

Therefore, it is essential that some type of tracking, or logging system is established to record actual events, which can then lead to accurate resolutions.

Within this recording should be details of what took place, the cause of the incident and if possible, preliminary thoughts on how to rectify the fault

At the end of a pre-determined period, a review of this log should reveal which mistakes are recurring against those that are “one-offs”. Concentration on the recurrent errors requires an analysis of the root cause or actual source of the error, determining if the error occurred due to:

- Human behaviour
- Systems issues
- Skill deficiencies
- Lack of written procedures

All of the above can be overcome by management focus as per the following-

Human Behaviour

As mentioned in previous articles, the best asset of any business is their employees. That being said, poorly performing staff members can also be a major liability. People who show up on your radar as regular offenders or mistake makers need to be examined as to their fitness to complete their job in a satisfactory manner.

- Have they been adequately trained?
- Do they need to be trained?
- Can they be trained?

Sometimes, regardless of how much you have invested in their training, you must concede that some employees are not performing to your expectations. This requires you as the owner/boss to closely manage them to achieve either better results, or determine an exit strategy so you can move on to more productive endeavours. Non productive or underperforming people become a cancer within your business, not only underperforming themselves but providing a distraction to others and dragging their performance down as well.

So be aware that it directly affects your bottom line to not face into this issue. You need to record errors and you must to adopt solutions and put actions in place to address them as early as possible. However if you do not know what is going wrong, it is difficult to correct. Remember lost productivity due to correction of their errors time and time again will directly affect your bottom line.

So once you have identified the actual issues from the issues log they will more than likely be able to be categorised under the following headings. Some thought starters for you are listed and discussed but ultimately, it is up to your discretion on which way you turn. It invariably means more expenditure!

Systems Issues

Your register of errors may also show that some errors are occurring due to systems constraints or limitations.

Recognising that not many businesses cannot simply put their hands in their pockets and fix each and every system problem, there is a need to identify the critical systems issues the ones that provide your business with the biggest opportunity and therefore have the largest risk associated with it. This can manifest itself through time lost, inactive employees and at worst ceasing production altogether.

A priority list needs to be created from data collected from the issues register. This will provide the executive management with a total view of what is a nice to have vs what is a non negotiable to assist with budget allocations for IT investment. Overcoming systems limitations can provide further returns to the business by providing confidence to employees that the owners are willing to invest in the business and make their day more productive.

Skill Deficiencies

Errors can also at times be attributed to employees who simply do not have the requisite skills for their roles. At times, employers may make the mistake of promoting existing staff to fill a gap created by the departure of another employee, rather than going through the exercise of interviewing and then hiring external to the company.

You may be doing yourself and your business a disservice by not employing a person with the correct skills and competencies. You cannot assume that because an employee fulfilled one role well they will naturally transfer into a completely different role and perform at similar levels. If it is a critical role within your team you would be short changing yourself by going for this easy option, which in the long run could again impact on your bottom line and which in hindsight may prove to be the wrong decision.

Ask yourself the question: "Who could I blame if this appointment went wrong?"

Lack of Written Procedures

Your register of issues may also show that there is either a deviation from written procedures or in some cases, no procedures to follow. Typically, a lot of hands on training takes place in most businesses, with experienced staff passing along their know how to newer employees.

This is known as on the job training.

When these “mentors” pass on the correct information things are good. But what about when they pass on shortcuts or “bad habits?” This simply means that over time, these become the “norm” and once again have a direct effect on your business.

Procedures and protocols need to be available to all staff, to determine at any given point in time what the correct thing to do is. A ready reference point will give them the confidence to act in a decisive way, knowing that they have the full backing of the business owners.

Error rates will drop through adherence to established protocols and this will naturally lead to a reduced cost in operations and for you as the owner.

They also provide you with an objective mechanism and record should you need to performance manage an employee for non adherence to written instructions pertaining to their role.

Good luck with tis one. Its complex and varied.

Just remember to record the errors and the review for common themes. Address these and you will be on your way to improving your business.