Unit BR9:   Contemporary Issues in Business

Unit code:	F/503/7388
QCF level:	6
Credit value:	15

Aim

This unit aims to give the learner understanding of contemporary issues in business resulting from changes in the business environment, together with the skills to apply this understanding in an organisational context.

Unit abstract

The contemporary issues in engineering result from the ever-changing business environment. All organisations, whatever their size and whether in the public or private sector, operate in a constantly changing environment. Within this change, organisations have the opportunity to develop and grow. This unit explores the issues and the resultant skills needed to work effectively in this changing environment.

Organisations need to be concerned with the social, cultural and moral issues that affect their business activities and in this unit learners will examine the implications of this behaviour for an engineering organisation and its stakeholders. Taking an ethical stance on topical issues such as whistleblowing, work-life balance and using social networking as a business communication tool are all issues that learners will investigate in this unit.

Learners will understand that key aspects of the business environment overlap and interlink and that any changes cannot be neatly fitted into one specific area. This unit will enable learners to appreciate the importance of understanding an organisation's environment in order to assure business success by being able to react to and anticipate any changes that might affect it.

Finally, learners will assess how changes in the environment impact on business skills requirements. They will investigate what business skills they need and the communication requirements as a result of changes to the environment.

Learning outcomes

On successful completion of this unit a learner will:

1 understand the social, cultural and moral issues that affect organisations in the current business environment

2 understand the ethical issues that affect organisations in the current business environment

3 be able to evaluate current ethical issues in a business

4 be able to assess how changes in the environment are impacting upon business skills requirements.

Unit content

1 **Understand the social, cultural and moral issues that affect organisations in the current business environment**

   Social, cultural and moral issues: equal opportunities, diversity; disability; discrimination; racism; harassment; bullying; whistleblowing; privacy; confidentiality (up-to-date legislation covering these issues must be used); workforce profiling; dignity in the workplace; multi-culturalism, stereotyping; labelling; prejudice, glass ceilings; human rights; moral imperatives; value rigidity; empowerment; management styles; work-life balance; childcare provision; professional development; employee participation

   Implications: adapting business behaviour; influence of stakeholders and pressure groups; impact on competitiveness; reputation; public image; ethical trade; value-added; complying with relevant legislation and codes of practice

2 **Understand the ethical issues that affect organisations in the current business environment**

   Ethical issues: corporate governance; corporate social responsibility; environment; sustainability; human rights; corruption; trading fairly; legal and regulatory compliance; business practices; working conditions; individual ethical responsibilities; stakeholders' interests

3 **Be able to evaluate current ethical issues in a business**

   Issues: ethical issues, eg corporate social responsibility, globalisation, cultural imperialism, ecology, environment, fair trade, corruption, child labour, carbon footprint, sources of timber, outsourcing, personal attitudes, whistleblowing, contribution of business to the community, ethics in sales and marketing, product placement, 'green washing', ethics in intellectual property (software piracy, counterfeiting, peer-to-peer file sharing)

   Implications: responding to ethical pressures; implementing ethical practices; global, eg environment; corporate, eg legal and regulatory compliance, policies and practices; individual (employee, consumer)

4 **Be able to assess how changes in the environment are impacting upon business skills requirements**

   Drivers for change: drivers, eg technology, globalisation, information; need for instant information; current business and economic climate; political trends

   Business skills: cross-cultural skills; collaborative working; management style; customer service; team development; social and interpersonal skills; entrepreneurial skills; online and direct communication processes; social networking; impact of technology on interpersonal skills; communication etiquettes.

Learning outcomes and assessment criteria

Learning outcomes On successful completion of this unit a learner will:	Assessment criteria for pass The learner can:
LO1 Understand the social, cultural and moral issues that affect organisations in the current business environment	1.1 Explain ways in which organisations can improve workplace welfare 1.2 Assess approaches used by organisations to the management of diversity 1.3 Evaluate the impact on stakeholders of the social, cultural and moral issues facing a selected organisation
LO2 Understand the ethical issues that affect organisations in the current business environment	2.1 Explain the ethical issues businesses should consider in the current business environment 2.2 Evaluate the implications of ethical behaviour on the stakeholders and the business
LO3 Be able to evaluate current ethical issues in a business	3.1 Research a current ethical issue which is affecting a selected organisation 3.2 Propose ways in which an organisation could improve the ethics of their operations
LO4 Be able to assess how changes in the environment are impacting upon business skills requirements	4.1 Examine the drivers for change affecting required business skills 4.2 Report on the impact of changes on business skill requirements in a selected organisation 4.3 Plan to improve communication skills requirements

Guidance

Links to National Occupational Standards

The content of this unit has been mapped against the Engineering Council's current Learning Outcomes for IEng Accreditation. The completion of the learning outcomes for this unit will contribute knowledge, understanding and skills towards the evidence requirements for IEng Registration.

See *Annexe B* for summary of mapping information for IEng Accreditation.

Essential requirements

There are no special requirements for this unit.

Delivery

The approach to delivery should provide a theoretical underpinning and draw from current news media or professional journals. An active learning environment should be provided in which learners are encouraged to explore the implications of the contemporary issues raised in this unit. Activities should be designed to encourage learners to develop the ability to evaluate issues from different viewpoints.

The delivery of learning outcome 1 could begin with a group exercise where learners discuss how to improve workplace welfare. Learners should be encouraged to draw on their own experiences of work and they could record their discussions on paper that is posted around the classroom to enable other learners to share their thoughts. The tutor could then use this work to conduct a whole-class discussion on the implications of any recommendations on organisations and on individuals. Other useful classroom activities include learners using the internet to research examples of good and bad practice relating to the social, cultural and moral issues raised. It is important that the tutor thoroughly examines each of the social, cultural and moral issues affecting organisations and provides up-to-date information on relevant legislation. Where possible, tutors should bring in current examples from organisations.

For learning outcome 2, it is important that the tutor provides a theoretical underpinning of the ethical issues raised, as well as drawing on current ethical issues from news media. It would be a useful exercise to look at leading examples of ethical business and explore the implications on stakeholders and the organisation.

For learning outcome 3, learners will build on what they have already studied about ethical issues by exploring the impact of ethical issues on selected organisations. Learners could be asked to lead the delivery of this learning outcome by individually selecting a different ethical issue and exploring how it is affecting a selected business. Learners could then share their findings with the rest of the class. This activity could contribute towards their assessment.

In learning outcome 4, learners will study drivers for change and how these drivers impact on business skills requirements. It should be possible to build on learners' existing knowledge of changes in the environment and the tutor could conduct a tutor-led discussion on the impact of these changes on work skills. Looking at some current, well-selected examples from business that illustrate this process would be beneficial. It may be an interesting exercise for learners to explore their own work skills and assess whether they need to plan to improve their skills based on changes in the environment. In doing this the tutor could provide a workshop-style session where learners take part in a carousel of activities designed to update their work skills based on the changing environment.

Assessment

The assessments need to be based on carefully selected and well-developed case studies or on real organisation(s). The assessment can be designed to direct learners to find their own organisations or learners can be given suitable real organisations. If learners are employed they may be able to use their own organisations for some of the assessment criteria. Where possible, an organisation can be used for more than one or all of the learning outcomes but it is equally acceptable to use a different organisation for each learning outcome.

For learning outcomes 1 and 2 learners could be given a scenario where they have to provide an information pack for organisations to help them understand current social, cultural, moral and ethical issues affecting organisations. Learners need to provide enough detail with required analysis and evaluation to show that they have met the assessment criteria. A number of tasks are needed to ensure that learners have met the assessment criteria and tasks should direct learners to provide an explanation of ways in which organisations can improve workplace welfare and an assessment of approaches used by organisations to manage diversity and ethical issues in the current business environment. Learners also need to select an organisation to use to evaluate the impact of social, cultural and moral issues on stakeholders and the impact of ethical behaviour on stakeholders and the organisation. The organisation used could be the same one that the information pack is directed towards or the learner could bring in other organisations.

For learning outcome 3 learners could produce a report on the findings of their own research into how one current ethical issue is affecting a selected organisation. It is likely that the organisation selected will be one that has received negative media attention for its business ethics. The report should include their own proposals about how the organisation could improve the ethics of their operations.

For learning outcome 4, learners could be given a made-up scenario where they have been asked to provide training for their colleagues of a selected organisation about how changes in the environment impact on business skills requirements. This could involve learners producing a presentation where they examine, in general, how drivers for change are affecting required business skills, before exploring how these drivers have brought about change in the business skill requirements in a selected organisation. Finally, learners need to put together a plan to help their colleagues to improve communication skills in a selected organisation.

Resources

Books

Crane A and Matten D – *Business Ethics: Managing Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability in the Age of Globalization* (Oxford University Press, 2006) ISBN 978-0199284993

Kotler P and Lee N – *Corporate Social Responsibility: Doing the Most Good for Your Company and Your Cause* (John Wiley and Sons, 2005) ISBN 978-0471476115

Mallin C – *Corporate Governance* (Oxford University Press, 2009) ISBN 978-0199566457

Solomon J – *Corporate Governance and Accountability* (John Wiley and Sons, 2010) ISBN 978-0470695098

Visser W, Matten D, Pohl M and Tolhurst N – *The A to Z of Corporate Social Responsibility* (John Wiley and Sons, 2010) ISBN 978-0470686508

Journals

Management Today (Haymarket Business Publications)

Professional Manager (Chartered Management Institute)

The Economist (The Economist Group) has articles on corporate social responsibility from time to time.

The Times (Times Newspapers Ltd) has daily business pages which feature items on a corporate social responsibility from time to time.

Websites

www.businesslink.gov.uk	Government's online resource for businesses including advice on environmental issues and efficiency
www.ilo.org/declaration/lang	International Labour Organisation's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work
www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/ CAC/index.html	United National Convention Against Corruption
www.un.org/esa/dsd/agenda21/ res_agenda21_00.shtml	Rio Declaration on Environment and Development

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