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General Certificate of Education

Applied Business 8616/8619

BS12   Managing People

Report on the Examination

2008 examination - June series

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General Comments

There is evidence that some centres are teaching this unit very well, with most candidates in these centres able to tackle the full range of the unit specification. In these centres the candidates have also clearly been schooled in analysis and in the full development of their answers. These candidates focus on the key trigger words in the questions and make firm conclusions supported by their analysis.

In the evaluative (12 and 14 mark) questions, candidates must focus on developing in depth answers. Particularly in question 3(c), weaker candidates came up with long lists of actions that the manager could take, but none of these were developed beyond a very basic identification level. Inevitably, this affects their ability to score well in all levels of response marks scheme. In some cases, candidates only scored two or three marks out of a maximum of 14 despite having written two pages. The mark scheme is quite explicit in that to get beyond Level 1 candidates have to apply, analyse and evaluate their proposals. Simply including lots of disparate ideas does not allow candidates to score higher marks.

Time management appears to have been more of a problem than in past papers. However, there does not appear to have been a problem with the complexity or challenge of the paper. Unfortunately, some candidates seem to believe that they have to fill all the extra space provided for every question. This, inevitably, leads to candidates with poor exam technique writing more than is needed for some questions with a consequential impact on their time management. It is perfectly possible to produce a full answer attracting full marks without having to use the extra space.

Question One

(a)   Most candidates could identify why a new organisational structure was needed, although some candidates became confused about how to describe the structure and change correctly, eg spans of control, tall or flat etc.

(b)   Most candidates were able to clearly identify problems with John's approach to management. However, a significant number of candidates identified the same issue twice rather than explaining two different problems and this, inevitably, affected their marks.

(c)   This question allowed candidates to analyse how John needed to change his leadership style and was generally answered well. Weaker candidates needed to develop their answers more to go beyond pure identification of the problem and to explain how the leadership style affects the business and why change could help improve the situation.

Question Two

(a)   Whilst most candidates do understand the term strategic, it was disappointing that some centres did not appear to have taught this basic concept.

(b)   Candidates clearly understood that John had limited ability to exert his authority over Sarah. Whilst most answers were good, some candidates still need to develop a clearer understanding of the difference between power and authority.

(c)   This question was answered at a basic level by virtually all candidates. Weaker candidates needed to develop their answers by addressing the question more directly: they needed to look at the impact on the business and not just the staff. Judgements for Assessment Objective 4 were generally weak and candidates needed to demonstrate both more evaluation of the impact of the change as well as being prepared to make a firm judgement, ie will it help the business or not.

Question Three

(a)   Most candidates coped well with the scenario and produced good answers on why the changes made would impact on the managers. For higher marks candidates needed to make the link to motivation and the performance of the managers.

(b)   Some centres do not appear to have taught Critical Path Analysis (CPA) and this was clearly a problem for their candidates. It is also concerning that many candidates appear to have been taught that CPA is not suitable for large projects and is often unusable because the estimates of time are likely to be incorrect. Both of these are, in fact, reasons why CPA or similar network/task-based planning tools should be used.

CPA was originally developed and is still used by industry in situations which are large and complex as it allows large projects to be broken down into manageable 'chunks', which managers can understand and control. In this scenario, and given the lack of dependency for resources between the refurbishment and the recruitment of a new team, it would have at least two 'chunks', one for each of these major areas of work which would be controlled by different managers in most businesses.

On the question of time estimates, it is accepted that estimates are often incorrect, but not using a time and task-based planning tool as a result will make time management much harder or impossible. CPA itself does not produce the time estimates used. The key point is that managers are responsible for the estimates, and must ensure that sensible figures are used. This would be the same whatever planning tool was used to organise a sequence of tasks and to estimate how long a project will take, and to suggest, as some candidates did, that large projects should not try to estimate times is a recipe for failure.

Good candidates who had been taught CPA in an applied way did understand these issues and produced very good answers.

(c)   As a large evaluative question candidates need to develop issues fully. Unfortunately, many candidates produced a list of many different actions which could be taken, but failed to really explain or develop any of them. Candidates need to recognise that in evaluative questions they need to demonstrate not only an idea, but explain why this would work and evaluate its likelihood of success.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results statistics** page of the AQA Website.