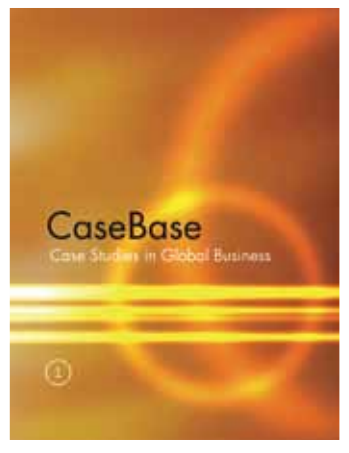


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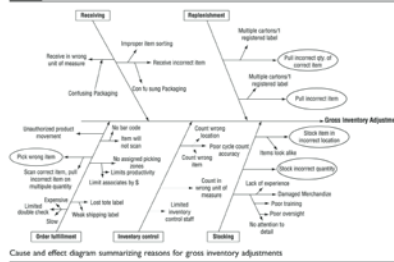
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SAMPLE SPREAD

FIGURE 3



Cause and effect diagram summarizing reasons for gross inventory adjustments

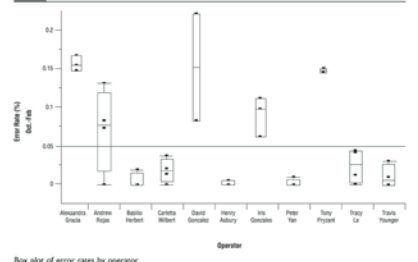
in this analysis (i.e., items circled in Figure 3). These included picking the wrong item, picking the incorrect quantity, stocking items in the incorrect locations, and stocking the incorrect quantity. When John discussed these problems with the operators, a seasoned operator, Albert Ross, complained that the aisles were organized in a different order than the picks forms. Jon Wing, a relatively new operator, agreed and added that sometimes the labeling of the bins was confusing, with the random colors, numbers, and letters.

To better understand the degree of the problem associated with operator errors, the team collected data and created a box plot to analyze error rates by operator (see Figure 4). In this diagram, the bottom and top of the box represents the twenty-fifth and seventy-fifth percentile, respectively (the variation in the data set), and the band near the middle of the box is the fiftieth percentile (the median of the data set) (Tague). Figure 4 indicates that some operators have high error rates and/or a larger amount of variation in their performance as compared to other operators. The operators with the lowest error rates and least amount of variation in their performance are Brasilio Herbert, Peter Yan, and Henry Asbury.

Improve

Based on the information uncovered in the analyze phase, the team turned its attention to developing improvement ideas to reduce operator errors that lead to gross inventory adjustments. Some team members thought that inventory

FIGURE 4



Box plot of error rates by operator

management procedures should be revised based on the practices of those identified as the best operators (i.e., those with the lowest error rates and least amount of variation in their performance). Through discussions with these operators and observations of their practices, the team could write improved standard operating procedures and then retrain all operators to use these new practices.

Other team members thought that the improvements needed to go one step further and address infrastructure-related issues that may be preventing operators from always being able to achieve their best performance. In studying the Six Sigma methodology, John had been introduced to the concept of error proofing (also known as mistake proofing, fool proofing, poka-yoke, etc.). The philosophy behind error proofing is that it's not acceptable to make even a very small number of errors or mistakes, and the only way to make no errors is to put countermeasures in place to prevent the occurrence of errors or mistakes and/or mitigate/detect their occurrence before they cause a negative effect. This approach specifically involves improving the work environment/practices with the aim of preventing problems that may occur as a result of human error (Gosst).

CONCLUSION

Over the last three months, John and his team at JDV's Houston Division put in a lot of hard work on their Six Sigma project. They successfully completed the define, measure, and analyze phases of their project, and their next step is to

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Key Elements in Strategic Planning: Cases from the Middle East

Andrew Athwin • Content Developer, BizEd, Cengage Learning EMEA

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this case study and completing the questions, students should be able to do the following:

- Define the essential characteristics of the term *strategy*
- Explain some of the key issues to consider in *strategic planning*
- Explain how *short-term investment decisions* can help deliver *long-term strategic goals*
- Explain how *strategic planning* can help generate *competitive advantage*

This case was prepared for classroom discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative, ethical, or legal decision by management. Information was gathered from corporate as well as public sources.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning involves various elements. In many cases, decision-making with regard to strategic planning is not about immediate results to the bottom line; instead, managers may have to consider spending big on investment projects that will build future capacity and flexibility. Doing so requires managers and leaders to see into the future, not an easy task by any means. Some of their decisions are made with the intention of building some competence that will allow the firm to exploit a possible competitive advantage at some point in the future. These decisions may not see bottom-line results for many years, but the skill of the leader is seeing that investment made now can build the potential of the business to better meet the market demands and the needs of its customers and other stakeholders.

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In-depth information is complemented by learning objectives and discussion topics.

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