

UNIVERSITY OF WALES: TRINITY SAINT DAVID

Problem Solving and Decision Making BMSK4004

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Introduction

This report is has been drafted outlining a number of problems that a small carpet import company in London was facing. The report first identifies the problems and then provides and avenue on how best to resolve these problems.

Body

Identify the problem

The following problem is a hypothetical problem that has been identified and applied to this assignment in order to be able to identify and document the process required to address this problem using different tools and techniques available in addressing this problem.

In this hypothetical situation, we have an organisation that has been having problems related to high staff turnover. The organisation is small and is made up of a team of 15 people employed in Accounts, sales, administration and in the warehouse. The company imports carpets and then redistributes to different shops across the UK.

With the heavy demand for carpets and business growth the company has been increasing sales and acquiring new staff to help with the workload. The problem however the company is facing is it is unable to meet demand for its carpets. It has received an increase in the number of complaints from customers who have paid and ordered their carpets but have not received their shipment. Some of the delay has been up to 4 months where customers have not received their orders. This places a lot of strain on the sales team who are facing the brunt of the customers' complaints.

Following internal meeting and discussions, a number of key problems were identified as the root cause of the delays in delivery. This report will follow a systematic approach in helping to identifying these underlying problems and to employ different tools and techniques to be able to identify a solution or a number of different solutions to address these problems.

To kick start the process of identify solutions to these problems, staff were invited to join group session, where the problems were presented and feedback and comments were made by staff. The approach taken is similar to Dr Edward de Bono's decision making framework. The approach referred to as PMI takes the approach of using brainstorming, decision making and critical thinking tool. In the session staff members were presented with the problem and each member was invited to comment on the pros and cons of the solutions that were identified to resolve the problems. A number of underlying causes were identified during the brainstorming and discussion session and these causes have been captured into the table below.

Problem Identified	Cause
Delay in products being delivered to customers	Delay along the supply chain
	Suppliers not able to keep up with the production
	Inadequate storage and warehouse facilities
	Slow payments of shipment so suppliers want payment up front
	Not enough staff in the warehouse to dispatch orders

This approach is similar to the notion of cause and effect analysis technique where based on discussion with the various team members, various inputs to the problems were identified. These inputs or possible causes affect specific areas within the organisation and supply chain, by breaking down the problems into smaller chunks it provides an opportunity to be able to identify the various root causes to the problems. Although this process can be long and time consuming by

following this approach provides a clear understanding of what the problem is and what effective solutions can be identified to address these specific problems.

Once the underlying causes were identified the groups were broken down into two smaller groups comprising of staff from different departments in the company. The reason behind this approach was to ensure that staff were being mixed and to collaborate with other people in the company as well as to give them an insight to getting feedback and comments from different people who view the problem with a different perspective. It is important the group focuses on the causes of the problems and not to focus on the symptoms in order to better understand why the problem is happening in the first place.

- Focusing on causes not symptoms capturing the collective knowledge and experience of a group
- Providing a picture of why an effect/problem is happening
- Establishing a sound basis for further data gathering and action
- Cause and Effect Analysis can also be used to identify all of the areas that need to be tackled to generate a positive effect.

The approach to taken with the group in identify the solution was through encouraging creative problem solving approach. The reason behind taking this approach allowed for the problems to be discussed within a group setting allowing for sharing ideas to come to address the problems.

Secondly it allowed for better communication, as staff from different areas in the company were able to hear firsthand the problems being identified and to feel that they can contribute to addressing these problems. Other advantages of taking a creative approach to problem solving allowed for staff to share their knowledge, encouraged and improved team work amongst staff members.

The following tables identified the different solutions that each of the two groups came up with during the group discussion.

Cause	Solutions
Delay along the supply chain	1. Work on identifying new suppliers 2. Have regular site visits to supplier factory to develop better relationship 3. Provide advance notice to suppliers on expected increase in order where possible 4. Better coordination with accounts and sales force through regular meetings 5. Employee additional staff into the warehouse and storage 6. Identify new storage facilities 7. Review existing facilities contract to see what room for expansion is available
Suppliers not able to keep up with the production	
Inadequate storage and warehouse facilities	
Slow payments of shipment so suppliers want payment up front	
Not enough staff in the warehouse to dispatch orders	

Following the discussion, and based on the solutions that were put forward by the different team members, this provides an opportunity now work on how best to identify further data and information on the possible solutions.

Conclusion

To summarise on this report, there are ways that communication in a work place can be improved. Below is a list of points that have been identified and expanded on which I feel will help to improve communication in the work place.

Have in place regular feedback to employees which should be on going and on regular basis. This should be both negative and constructive feedback. Make sure that the resources are made available to the staff to allow them to make the necessary changes and to be able to improve themselves.

Be aware of the use of words and language between the employee and the employer. The employer needs to be able to adjust their words and language depending on the situation. For example if the staff is not performing, time should be set aside whereby the employee feels comfortable to be able to discuss their performance. Avoid public confrontation with the employee and belittling of the staff due to their mistakes. Consider using the I concept instead of the your statement, for example a staff member who has not submitted a report, so instead of saying "your report is late "the employer could rephrase by saying "I had hoped to get your report today, do you think the deadline can still be met?". This sort of approach removes the negativity and conflict between parties. Using the I statement allows for further interaction between the two parties (HR 360, 2016).

Use of active listening, as highlighted earlier, where time is set aside for one on one discussion, the employer should engage in active listening. Generally in times of conflict, it is easy for the employer or the receiver to pass judgement on the person or situation. Griffiths & Dunham (2015) point out that active listening, the receiver listens to the perspective of the sender and refrains from making judgement. This highlights the idea of looking at the problem through the eyes of the sender before responding. By better understanding the perspective of the employee, this approach allows for both parties to understand the situation and then work together on addressing any problems or issues. Just as active listening is important that employer can also look other non-visual cues that the sender maybe displaying. Their posture, facial expression and body language can all help reinforce the message the sender is sending.

In the Shannon and Weaver Model (2015) reference is made to the idea of noise that can affect the delivery of the message, how the message is perceived or how the receiver will interpret the message. This concept although very basic does highlight a very important point, when information is exchanged between two or more individuals, there is a chance of interference affecting how the message is received. From the context of employment, sometimes an Employer may communicate to its employees, without checking to see if the content of the message is understood by all those receiving the message. Misunderstanding can be further deepened when there is some cultural difference. For example where English may not be the first language of some employees, the choice of words and the use of colloquialism can distort the message and affect how the receiver understands the message. In situations of one on one discussion or during performance reviews, the sender needs to take time to ensure that the receiver has understood the message and that there are no ambiguity in the content of the message. To avoid this, the sender can ask follow up questions or allow time for the receiver to ask questions or clarify parts of the information. This ultimately helps to breakdown the noise and ensure that the true content of the message is being understood by the receiver.

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