

Problem Solving and Decision Making

SHORTAGE OF STAFF IN A SEN SCHOOL

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Abstract

This report explores the process of problem solving in a work-based problem. The work-based problem is related to job dissatisfaction and the impact it has on employees and on the job itself. To find solution to the problem, different tools and techniques will be used to help identify what caused the employees being dissatisfied.

Introduction and Background

In the next few pages, after studying a few articles on the topic of job dissatisfaction, I will describe and analyze a problem in a school setting /SEN school to show if problems of job dissatisfaction are the same like in other organizations.

The aim of this report is to identify a problem in the workplace, apply tools to find the causes and come up with suitable solutions that can be implemented to solve the problem. Together with this, a literature review will be carried out to help in the process and a comparison with the work of others will be carried out to see how work-related issue regarding employee's dissatisfaction are being solved in other organizations.

Straus (2002) defines a problem as "a situation that someone wants to change." Problem solving, therefore, in its most general sense, is situation changing or acting. It includes most of what we do all day long: communicating, learning, planning, working, and making decisions.

Problem-solving is a complex and tricky technique, which allows a leader/organization to look out for different alternatives having the potential to resolve an issue. For this purpose, organizations are likely to use different tools and techniques aiming to solve the problems. However, cause and effect analysis can help in having a critical approach while solving an issue.

Problem (Shortage of staff)

In any organization trained and experienced staff plays an essential role in carrying out different organizational activities in the right way. However, the shortage of staff can create different issues between employees and impact on the way the organization is managed and productivity. An example of such an issue from a SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) school setting will be further discussed in this study to have a better idea about the situation. The school teaches and cares for children with learning difficulties and disabilities and helps them learn life skills and achieve their best. However, at times SEND starts facing

the issue of “shortage of staff” due to an increase in the number of staff being sick or missing work for family reasons like health and childcare. I observed that the shortage of staff is creating an issue between staff and has a negative impact on the children’s learning and behavior. The shortage of staff affects the daily routine of a class and the rest of the staff in the class or the teacher struggle to attend to the needs of the children because they might have to focus on behaviors and teaching is disrupted too. There are different reasons behind the shortage of staff, some of the permanent staff members are either sick and are unable to go to work or some are facing family issues or must take their children to see the doctor due to a sickness or just stay with them at home due to their school having an inset day. These are all unavoidable reasons, and the staff is unable to come to school and perform their jobs. The school might solve the problem by calling in agency staff or rely on other classes to help if some of the children are off for the day. But on the other hand, the agency staff that comes for the day might not have experience in working in SEND setting or any experience dealing with behavior, handling /administering medicine, or other medical issues that can occur in a normal day and this is a cause for the day to not go as planned. Also, the children might be upset because a new face is in their class again and this causes for them to be distressed and unhappy. The teachers and other staff are unhappy too because of the lack of experience the new staff has which is not helping at all as they have extra work that at times is too much for them and it becomes stressful.

Literature review

Bryson et al. (2017) question in their article if the employees’ wellbeing affects workplace performance. They argue that there is a “significant relationship between the average level of job satisfaction at the workplace and workplace performance”. And they found that Employee job satisfaction is positively associated with workplace financial performance, labor productivity and the quality of output and service. that employers who can raise employees’ job satisfaction may see improvements in the performance of their workplace as well.

According to Gazioglu and Tansel (2006) job satisfaction are related to a variety of personal and job characteristics. They studied the aspects of gender, wage growth, age, income and unemployment, work environment and relations with managers, job matching, and service sector. Their result was that employees in different sectors have the same satisfaction with their jobs. Employees who received job training were more satisfied than those who had no training opportunities. “Those in the education and health sector are less satisfied with their pay but more satisfied with their sense of achievement” (Gazioglu et al. 2006).

Both authors found that the problem of job satisfaction is related to the individual traits and the way they perform in their jobs and that trainings lead to job satisfaction in most industries.

Own Research conducted in the school

To help with the research, I have interviewed some of the staff in the school and asked their opinion on the shortage of staff. From 20 persons that I talked too, including parents, the answers were disappointing. Half of them said that they are not satisfied with the procedures put in place and the fact that they must rely on outside replacement staff. That this impacts a lot on children's learning, and they have extra work as well because a new person cannot do much if they do not know how things work. The parents were not pleased as there was no continuity in their children's learning and that this impacts on them emotionally. The other half have no complaints about working with new people as they can be shown what to do but they expressed their feelings on the fact that dealing with behavior is tricky when a routine is disturbed, and they would like the management to support them more and offer specific trainings to all staff to compensate when someone is missing for a day or more.

Cause and effect analysis or Fishbone diagram

Is a problem-solving tool for identifying all the possible causes of a problem in a visual format. "A fishbone diagram (the shape is similar to a fish skeleton) is a common tool used for a cause-and-effect analysis to identify a complex interplay of causes for a specific problem or event" (Coccia, 2017). In the figure below is a fishbone diagram to help determine the root causes of staff shortage within school.

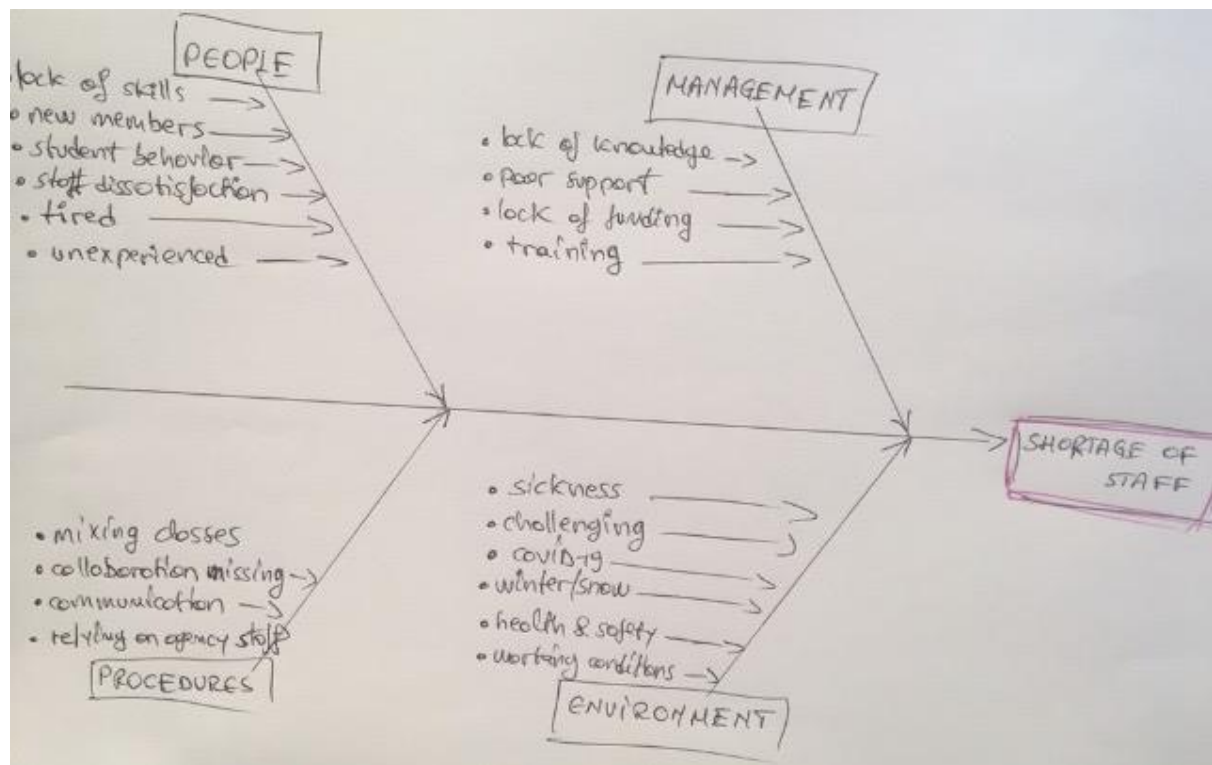


Figure 1 – Fishbone Diagram

Analysis of the problem

The problem of 'short staffing' is an issue for the school **administration/management** as the issue has the potential to ruin the learning process of the students. In addition, a shortage in teachers' staff can result in a decline in students' performance (Darling-Hammond et al, 2018). Henceforth, it can be said that students in SEND need highly trained staff to meet their educational and learning needs. It is difficult for the school to find new teachers in a short period of time and train them according to the teaching standards of SEND. **The environment** also affects the shortage of staff. Firstly, due to them being sick, then the COVID-19 with staff missing because they need to isolate or wait to access a test or a result that has delays. Also, the environment is challenging and causes stress plus in winter if there is snow some of the staff cannot drive to school and they must remain home. The **people** include firstly the students being frustrated with the new staff, which are inexperienced and lack certain skills and this impacts on the other staff having more work and responsibility and they are finding this unfair. **Procedures** used are not working properly as there is not much communication/interaction between children and agency staff; there is a need of mixing classes or staff as well.

Possible solutions

Sending students to other classes

The number of students can be sent to other classes having a teacher, but it reduces the quality of education as it is difficult for one teacher to manage a lot of students at one time. In addition, overcrowding can create problems for the students as they will not be able to participate in different class activities as they can do with a fewer number of students.

Hiring agency staff

Agency staff can teach the students on a temporary basis by replacing the permanent staff member (until they are absent). But agency might have no experience regarding the working environment of SEND, they are not able to deal with the day-to-day issues faced by the students (medical or learning-related issues) and they are not trained enough to deal with the students in a precise manner. The lack of expertise can create a negative impact on learning as well as the teaching environment.

Collaboration with other schools

There are multiple schools providing educational facilities like SEND, which provides SEND with an opportunity to use the expertise of these schools. For this purpose, some of the teachers from another school can temporarily join SEND and take some classes by changing the timings of the classes in accordance with the convenience of the teachers.

Decision making

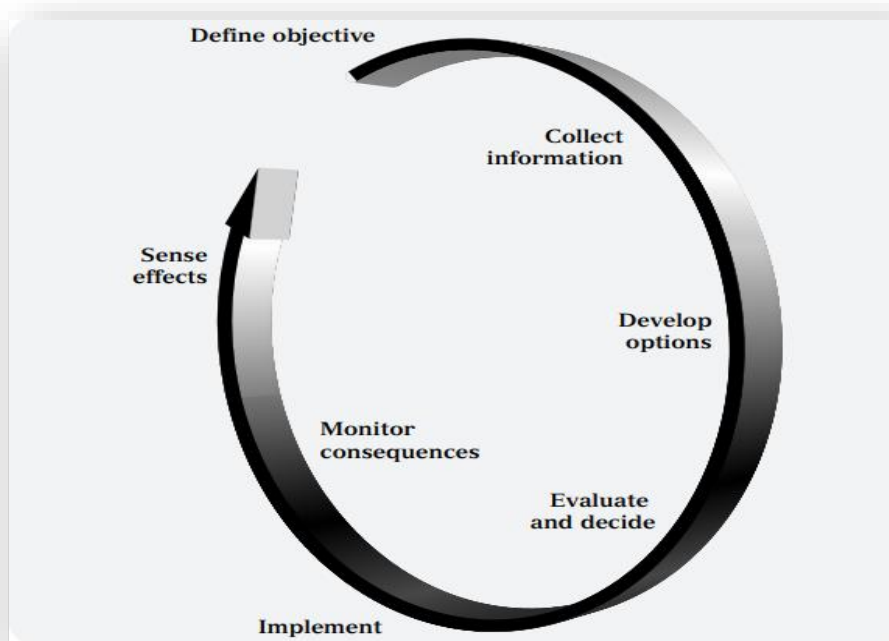


Figure 2: Decision-making process

According to figure 2 decision-making process needs to define objects (to find staff for SEND), then collect information (availability of different individuals for temporary replacement), develop options (students can be sent to other class, agency staff can be recruited or cooperate with other schools), evaluate and decide (choosing the best possible solution according to cause and effect analysis), implement (implementation of final decision/solution), monitoring the consequences (checking the results and monitoring the behavior of students and new staff) and sense effect (it is the final stage when decision-makers try to evaluate the results of the implemented changes to determine the effectiveness of the solution based on the performance of the students).

After reviewing all the possible solutions decision-makers can choose the best solution for implementation. The best possible solution for the 'staff shortage' is to cooperate with other schools, as it will allow their teachers to train the agency staff as well as to teach in SEND at alternate timings.

Monitoring and Review

After the implementation of any changes, it is necessary to assess the impact of it through different techniques. While talking about SEND the proposed changes are supposed to resolve the issue of 'short staffing' by allowing the school to use the assistance and expertise

of the other school staff and agency staff. To keep an eye on the overall performance and results of the changes, there are different ways to monitor the system.

Observation: Throughout the time the processes will be observed by the management of SEND (by attending some of the classes as well as training sessions) to see what the current progress is and how students are responding to the changes. Besides, it allows to understand how agency staff is learning and the individual who is unable to fit in can be replaced with other candidates. Henceforth, it can be said that the observation will allow us to understand the progress and success of the implemented changes during the process.

Work performance and Output: the trainees (agency staff) will be assessed based on their performance after the period of 10 days to check if they are able to deal with the students or still require training. As for the students, they will be asked about the behavior and their level of satisfaction with the new teaching staff. It will help in making a final decision about how effective the solution was and how it affected the children, who needed education and care.

Conclusion

In the pages above we have seen that compared to other organizations, the employees in a school setting are more likely to be dissatisfied with their work for the same reasons as most of the organizations out there. Workload, stress, sickness, and their wellbeing are affected, lack of skills and experience which leads in them being less productive are reasons of dissatisfaction that lead to employees under performing, missing work and companies losing as well. Moreover, the proposed solutions for a problem can vary according to organizational structure and the nature of the problem. While looking at SEND, the issue faced by the organization was related to 'shortage of staff'. To solve these issues, various solutions were proposed aiming to select the most viable one. Due to shortage of time, it was difficult for the decision-makers to find skilled staff to replace the permanent staff on a temporary basis. Henceforth, the cooperation with other schools and inviting the expert staff to train (agency staff) and replace permanent staff and the progress was being assessed via observation and monitoring. It shows that an effective strategic decision-making process can assist organizations in making final decisions in a better way.

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