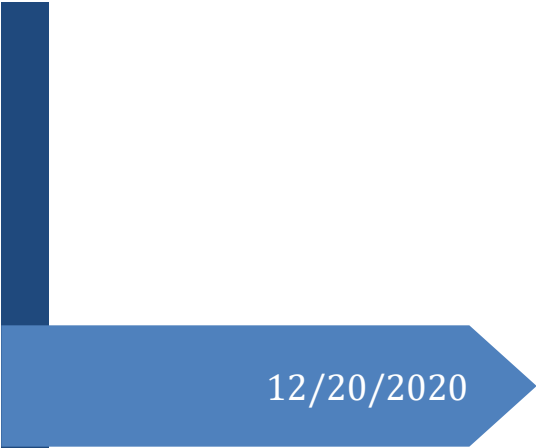


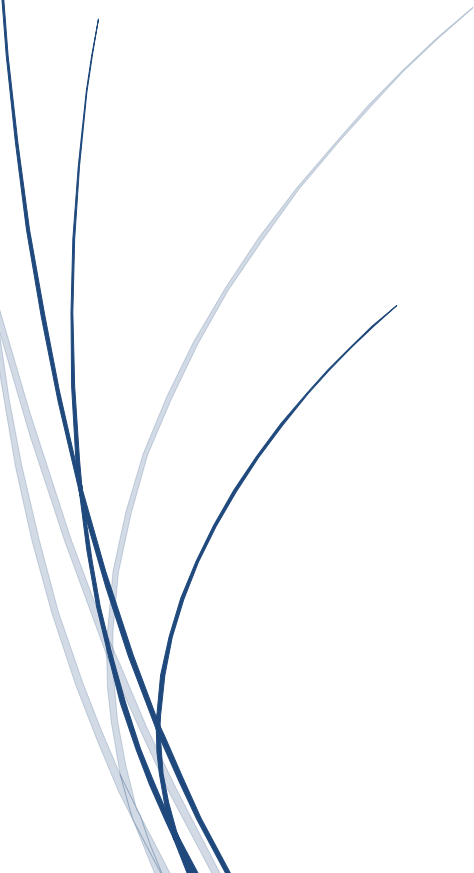


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PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION MAKING

BMSW4004

TASK 2 INDIVIDUAL REPORT



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Executive summary

The purpose of this report is to discuss and analyse a conflict situation in a well-known retail giant in the United Kingdom. There was a total breakdown in communication at the workplace based on multiple reasons stemming from unfair treatment, low pay and communication breakdown. In order to resolve this problem group decision making techniques will be considered by management and the nominal group technique will be used in finding a solution to the crisis. With the implementation of this technique the company was able to resolve the problem.

1. Introduction

Workplaces that are multicultural and diverse need a balance of intelligent management in order to avoid conflict situations. Sensitive issues like racism need to be dealt with and employee grievances based on low pay and breakdown in communication also need to be addressed using the appropriate decision-making tools. The conflict situation in this retail leader will be discussed and management's application of the best possible decision-making technique to address the issues of a breakdown in communication, discrimination and low pay will be addressed. Conflicts at the workplace arise most of the time from problems that are not recognised or are known but not addressed appropriately.

2. Definition of a complex workplace problem

After a complete breakdown in negotiations with the representatives of the trade union who represented the views of the workers an industrial action was called at this retail giant's largest distribution centre in Dagenham (socialist party, 2018) the workers decided to down tools for 24 hours (Stevens, 2018). Majority of those employed at the distribution center were Eastern Europeans with low level of understanding of the English Language and they felt exploited, but they could not effectively communicate their grievances to management due to the language barrier and fear of being targeted by some members of management.

Scope: Majority of the employees could not understand why the employees of the same retail giant in another distribution centre in Lakeside which was about a mile away where being paid £2 more than them, they felt betrayed and unappreciated especially because the site was closer to London and cost of living was higher. Minority groups were also underrepresented in management which was manifested by the fact that of over 50 managers in the distribution centre, only one Black and one Asian origin managers were employed while the rest were all White; furthermore, lessons can be drawn from the study of various models of communication like the linear, interactional and the transactional models of communication. Noise levels, lack of dynamism and the importance of feedback are some of the aspects associated with some of these models of communication and knowledge of this models will benefit management. The conflict was worsened by victimisation and harassment of employees who tried to air their grievances.

Impacts: The leadership structure at the distribution centre was hierarchical in nature, ranks were assigned authority and workers took instructions from superior authority (Saez, 2011). Prevalent discriminatory practices were a violation of the company's code of conduct and ethics, this was compounded with the failure in communication which created a difficult work environment. Staff confidence fell as a result of the habitual nature of the breakdown in communication. Managers with hidden agendas influenced decisions to the detriment of the employees and the organisation. The refusal of top management to adhere to the demands of the employees led to the industrial action which caused the company to lose over £5 million in 24 hours and severe shortage of items at the smaller supermarkets of the retail giant scattered all over London. Attempts by the management of the company to divert groceries to nearby distribution centres caused a logistics nightmare coupled with astronomical rise in costs. Over 2000 employees which included pickers, loaders and drivers refused to come to work until their demands were heard and addressed. Customers became disenchanted and unhappy at the sight of empty shelves at their favourite supermarket and they switched to other competitors which meant a loss in sales and revenue for the company.

3. Analysing information regarding the identified problem, to assist in the decision-making process

Unchecked pervasive problems relating to racial injustice, systematic racism and low pay eclipsed and manifested through the breakdown in communication and failure in management. Management decided to take steps to identify the problems, understand the interests of all parties involved, make a list of all the possible solutions to the problem, evaluate the available options, evaluate the options, make a choice or choices of options, then document and monitor the process and decisions (Hicks, 2015). After a careful analysis of the problem the company's management chose the most effective way to deal with the problems. Problem solving is the analytical processes employed to identify the possible solutions to a given problem while decision making is the act of choosing between multiple courses of action, management must take this into consideration so they can arrive at an effective decision.

4. Proposition of a variety of alternative solutions to the identified problem

Generally, a problem cannot be solved if a decision is not taken. Management should encourage workers who have been treated unfairly to document the unfair treatment, make sure it is reported and gather evidence, this is important because a miserable workplace can increase the incidence of heart disease, depression, and increased sickness levels which is detrimental to the organisation (Novotney, 2010). The low pay problem can be addressed by negotiating with the employee's representatives with an intention to arrive at a gradual increase that will be just and equitable. To improve communication messages should be clearly defined, clearly delivered, the medium should be appropriate, lines of communication should be open, and parties should listen attentively while demonstrating empathy (Page, 2019).

5. Utilise a technique of making decisions to assess a variety of solutions in order to pinpoint a suitable option

In order to arrive at a solution, the company management looked at various decision-making styles and techniques some of which are brainstorming, nominal group technique, electronic meeting, Delphi, fish bowling and didactic interaction.

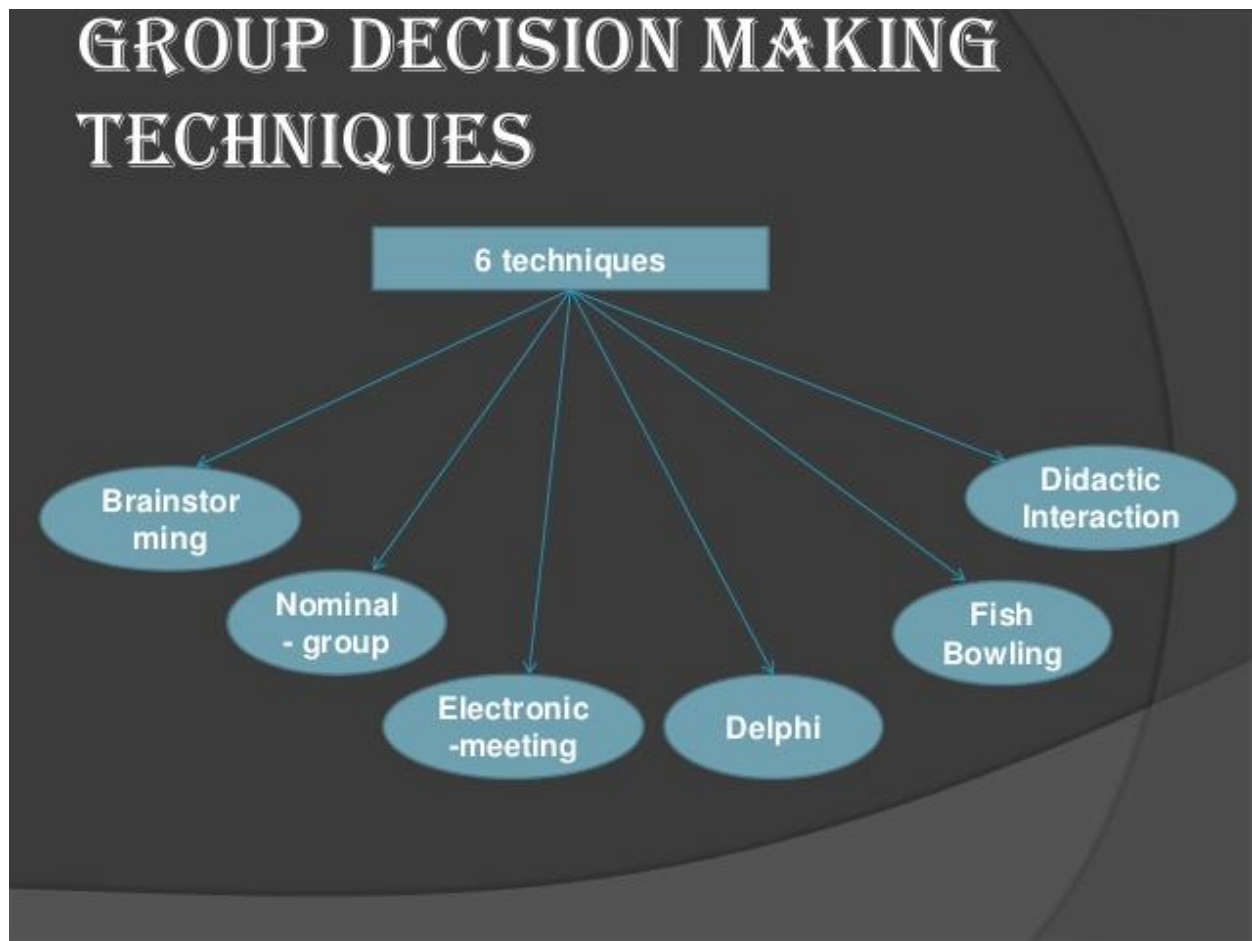


Figure 1: Decision-making processes
(Source: slideshare.net, 2013).

The technique known as Delphi: This technique is employed by management to reach a collective or group-based decision by questioning a team of experts. The aggregated responses of the experts are given to the group after each round (Twin, 2020). management professionals can modify the responses they gave which is based on their own interpretation of the response of the group given to them. results arrived at should be of a consensual nature which reflects the wishes of the entire group.

Brain storming: This is a creative process that involves generating ideas and it encourages quantity of ideas rather than the quality at the same time discourages evaluation and criticizing. It is effective in the sense that it allows multiple ideas to surface to find the best solution (Rahim,

2019). Judgement and analysis during the session limits creativity, ideas are then evaluated at the end of the session (Mind Tools, 1996).

The nominal group technique: This is an organized method for discussion in a group or brainstorming that encourages inputs from everyone in order to reach a consensus (CDC, 2018). It is an effective way for management to get pooled judgement or to get a group decision. This technique allows for the generation of a vast number of ideas that are creative, and it is designed to encourage the expression of ideas while minimizing the influence of the participants. It empowers the participants in the group to have their opinion or voices heard (McMillan et al., 2016).

Management should take into consideration that the Delphi method makes use of a moderator and the input is unknown in comparison to the brainstorming session that allows ideas to be expressed openly. Although brain storming technique has often been regarded as cost effective and fast the Delphi method is very important in avoiding bias and favoritism.

Based on the nature of the problem, the appropriate technique to employ in resolving this conflict would be the **nominal group technique**. The variety of people from varied backgrounds in the group like management personnel and representatives of the employees, will bring different perspectives and priorities to the discussion. The fact that the ideas are written will be a motivating factor to the participants in taking active part in the subsequent planned action. The technique allows for one facilitator and can produce an answer with less resources spent; moreover, effective decisions are made at the end of the meeting.

Advantages of this technique far outweigh the disadvantages. It allows for almost equal participation of the employees and all stakeholders. The anonymity of the origin of the ideas eliminates the fear of victimization by top management against low level employees.

Distractions or communication noise that is prevalent in other models are reduced to the minimum. (Sample, 1984). Furthermore, it enables the avoidance of conflict creation in groups which some members want to avoid and research has demonstrated that it tends to reduce having a tense and hostile environment which any group might pass through while engaged in decision making. It also provides a sense of closure that is nonexistent in other methods (Brahm and

Kleiner, 1996). Moreover, the application of this technique by the management of the retail organization and the intentional attempt to bridge the communication gaps coupled with meetings with trade union representatives resulted in the suspension of the industrial action (Usdaw, 2018).

Implementing the solution through the development of a plan.

Planning the implementation of the identified solution is the next phase and in order to do this the facilitator of the meeting must first prepare the **focus and logistics** of the meeting this involves venue preparation, piloting the test question, printing questions on worksheets for participants and choosing the voting method. The next step is **the silent generation of ideas** where the facilitator encourages the members to write down their ideas. The ideas are next **recorded** in this stage, this is important because it provides a written record of the idea. The next stage after the recording of the ideas is the **discussion of the ideas**, this involves taking the ideas serially and discussing it before the voting. After this **preliminary voting** is carried out which involves ranking and rating. method. The next step is a **discussion of the preliminary voting**, this helps to achieve a more accurate final vote. **The final voting** is the last step in the process where the outcome is determined.

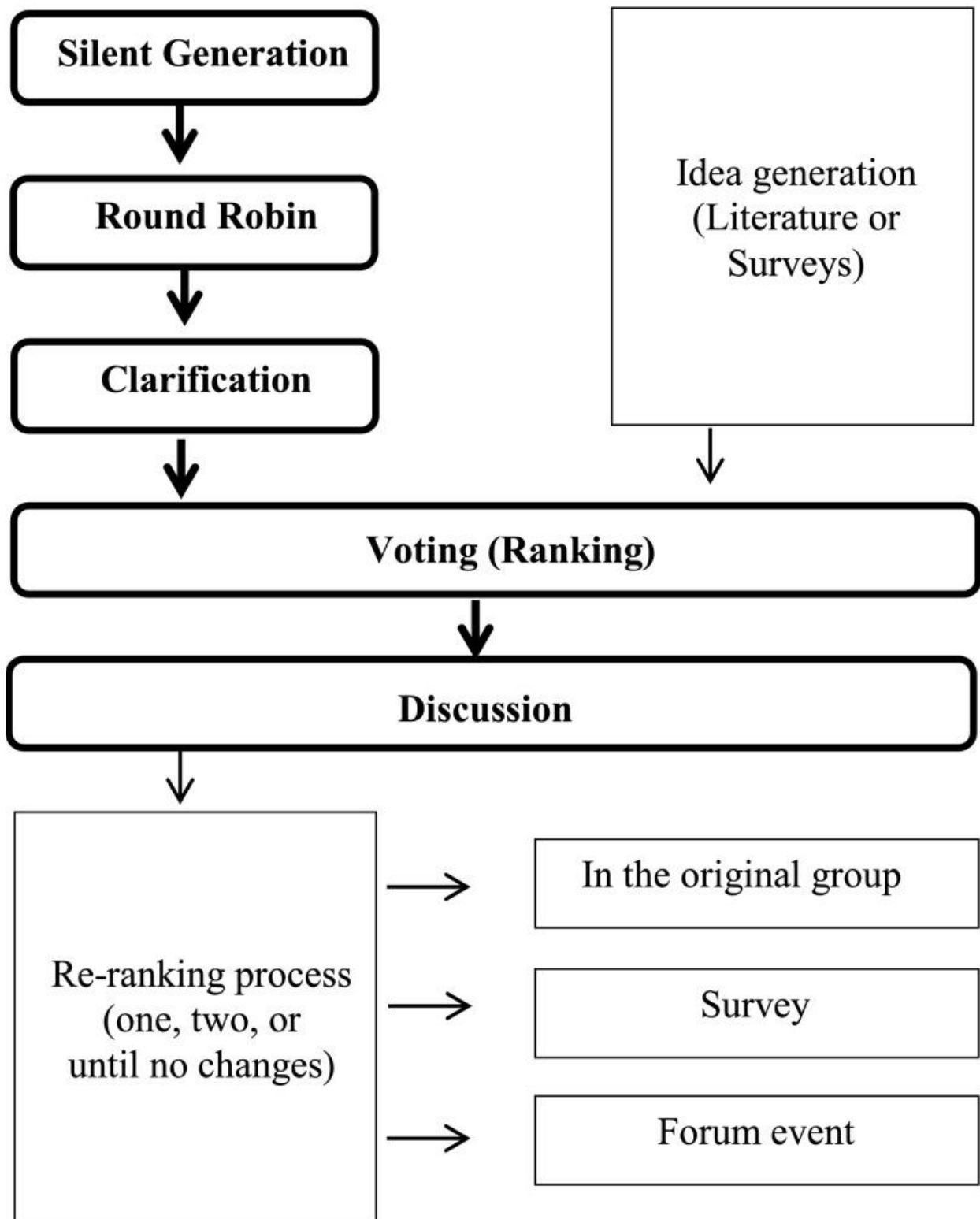


Figure 2: A simplified model of the NGT process.
(Source: (McMillan et al., 2016).

The process of conducting and implementing the solution includes four key stages: which are silent generation, round robin of ideas, clarification and voting. These stages are briefly explained below. The primary phase is to create ideas. A variety of questions and problem questionnaires is presented by managers to the participants to be answered. The discussion is arranged by the manager and moderator who directs everyone to give their ideas briefly and join heads together. Each participant generates ideas are generated and presented by each participant to find a solution to the problem. There have been various modifications to the process over the years (Laufman, et al., 1981). The next stage is when the moderator then asks one member at a time to give a single idea to the entire group, at this stage each member can think of their own ideas, but they must wait for their turn to share it. The third stage on the model is the clarification of ideas and the final stage is the voting or ranking stage where they are encouraged to choose their preferences from the list before the final decision is reached.

6. Communicate the plan to stakeholders

The nature of the nominal group technique allows for engagement of stakeholders in the process. The consensus method is a practical method to engage stakeholders in the decision-making process to solve a problem (Antcliff et al., 2019). Discussions that are held in real time is one of the advantages of communicating to the stakeholders by using the NGT method, they are aware of the decisions taken. Different stakeholders that are experts make the communication process easier. The end of project report or summary of the nominal group meeting is an effective way of communicating to the stakeholders. Screen to screen meetings, sending of newsletters, scheduling a conference call and lunch meetings are some of the ways to communicate to stakeholders and parties concerned (Jordev, 2016).

7. Evaluate suitable review and monitoring techniques to guarantee successful execution of the solution

Using the nominal group technique employees can express their views without the threat of victimisation. Multiple tools exist to effectively monitor the result of the nominal group process, some of which are PDSA, the GANTT charts, THE 8 STEP CHANGE MODEL OF KOTTER, SMART, RACI etc.

The PDSA cycle is an effective monitoring technique to monitor the solution reached through the nominal group technique. The four-stage process implements the solution at the last stage (ACT). (Werry Workforce, 2015).

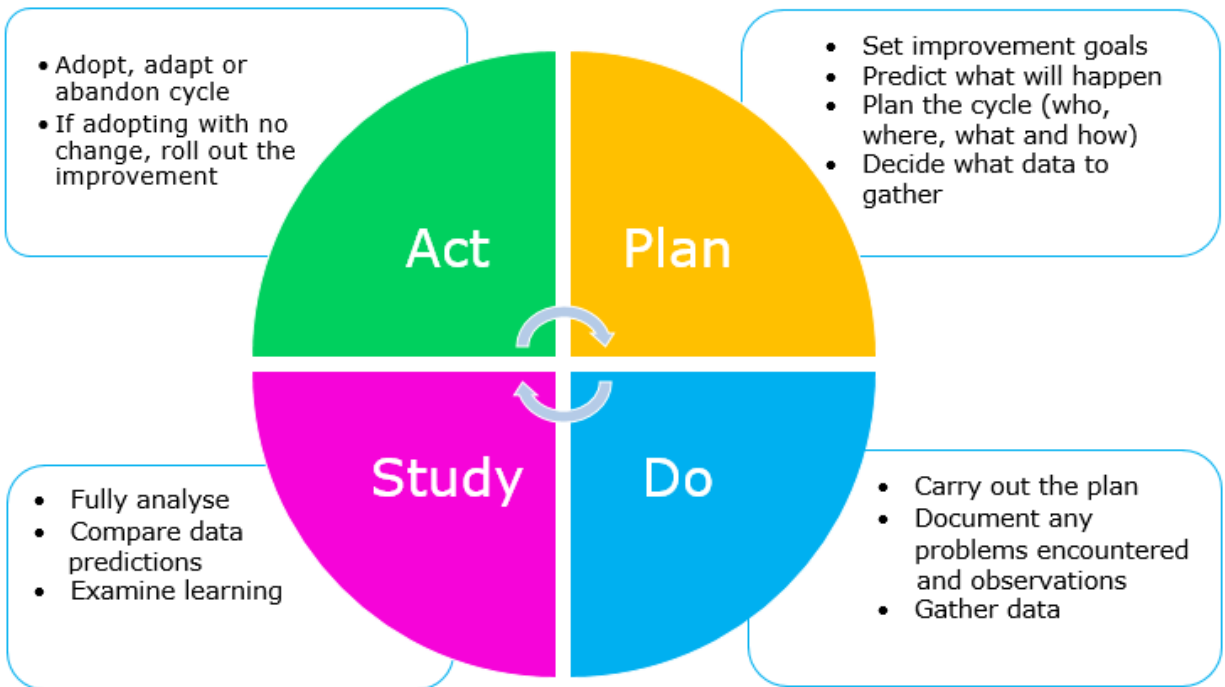


Figure 3: PDSA CYCLE

(Source: Werry Workforce, 2015)

The GANTT chart gives a visual view of the tasks that are scheduled and the date and time the work is to be carried out, this is very useful in monitoring the outcome of the nominal group technique. (Werry Workforce, 2015).

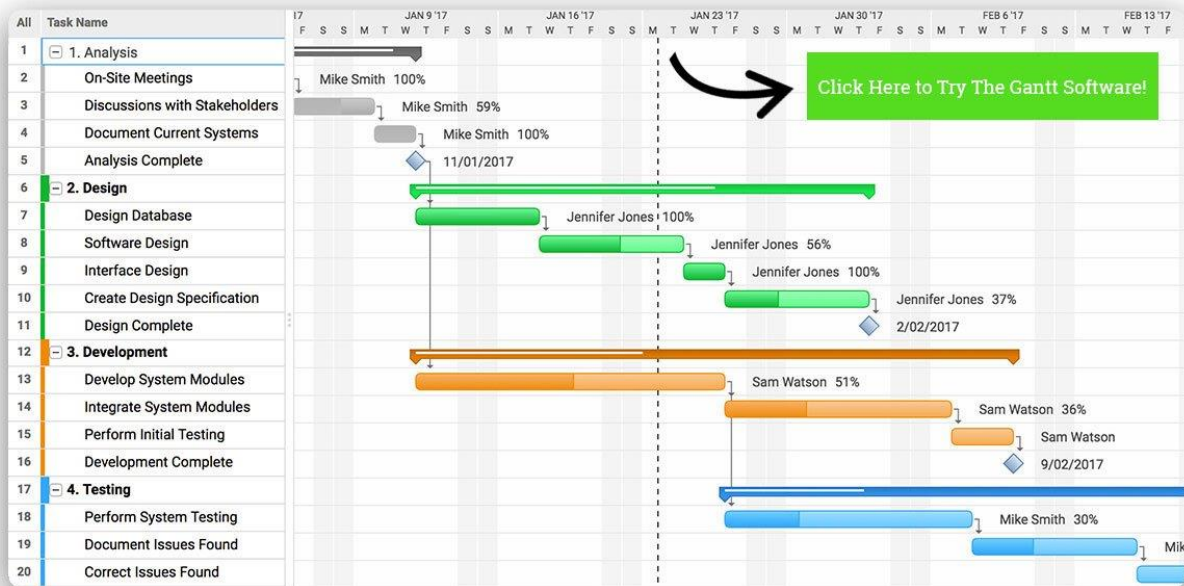


Figure 4: THE GANTT CHART

Source: Projectmanager.com, 2019).

A RACI is a visual representation of those responsible for a project and who will be held accountable for the project's execution. It is a useful chart for ensuring that management and employees are aware of those responsible for certain actions in order to avoid confusion.

RACI Chart

Activity	Project Sponsor	Project Manager	Project Team	Department Manager
Prepare Bill of Materials		A	R	C
Prepare Estimate	I	A	R	I
Authorize Expenditure	R	I	I	I
Send Procurement Documents		R	C	
Evaluate Bids	A	R	C	
Perform Inspections	I	A	R	

R = Responsible A = Accountable C = Consult I = Inform

Figure 5: RACI CHART

Source: (Hartney, 2019)

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the breakdown in communications, unfair treatment and low pay has been addressed by management using the nominal group technique, this technique rooted out the underlying problems and encouraged management to take effective action to redress the wrongs. Furthermore, with knowledge of monitoring tools like the GANTT chart, PDSA cycle and RACI chart, further and costly industrial action was avoided, and staff morale was boosted leading to an improved employee turnover rate in the company.

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