

Problem Solving and Decision Making

Name: Sarina Bright

Student ID: 2133584

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Lecturer: Aparna Venkatesan

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Introduction

In this module, we studied the topic of problem solving and decision making. We learnt a variety of techniques which can be applied to everyday situations but especially when mediating in a workplace or facing threats as a new business company. During this class, we studied case study examples to apply these techniques. We also looked at the different influences which may affect how a decision is made in addition to communicating and executing a proposed solution.

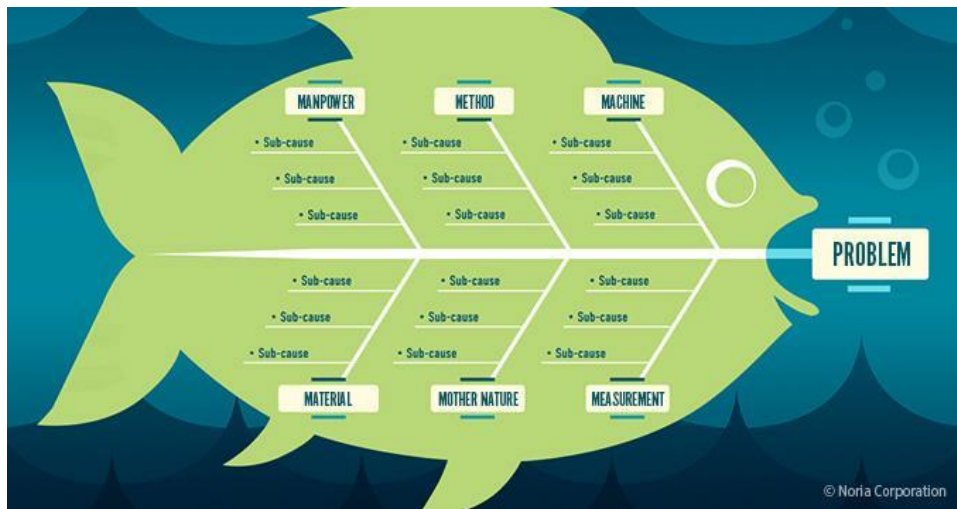
Problem

As an example of a problem in the workplace, we have a slow service in the food industry. As a result of this, the business is losing customers due to dissatisfaction. Therefore, we must identify the causes to tackle the root of the problem before weighing the viable solutions with the use of a proper decision-making technique. Another problem is a lack of recognition and appreciation of an employee which could affect their work performance or quality as these problems can also be personal regarding the workplace.

Fishbone Analysis (Ishikawa Diagram)

The Ishikawa diagram, better known as the fishbone diagram or analysis, “is a cause-and-effect discovery tool that helps figure out the reason(s) for defects, variations or failures within a process,” as explained in a Reliable Plant article (Trout, n.d). This diagram follows a 6 M’s process, also known by their corresponding P’s. These are known as manpower, machinery, methods, materials, measurement, and mother nature. Within the context of this problem, a shortage of staff correlates to a fault in manpower. There is also a lack of regular training in addition to broken machinery and a low-quality service.

Below is a visual of the diagram as found in the article;



Solutions

As there is no one root cause to the problem, there are multiple actions we can take to solve this problem. For example, a quicker hiring process within HR to employ more staff and have regularly updated training in addition to better working machinery, or equipment, as well as having management involved in the improved running of business and collaborate with staff alongside HR.

On an individual level, if an employee is unsatisfied with their working conditions, it would indicate a problem with manpower as they do not feel valued by their colleagues. There may be a need to revise the company's policies and to discuss with management how they can improve their staff's overall satisfaction as it is important to establish trust and reliability among both staff and customers which in turn generates loyalty.

However, these solutions must also be taken in the form of a proper decision-making technique to maximise results. These are generally taken in form of problem identification, generating alternating ideas for evaluation, and finally plan implementation.

When analysing changes and, or solutions, we can also apply the Five force contingency model. As a Business to you article explains, "Porter's Five Forces analysis is a framework that helps analysing the level of competition within a certain industry" (De Bruin, 2016). These basic competitive threats are identified as the threat of new entrants, bargaining power of suppliers, bargaining power of buyers, threat of substitute products or services, and existing industry rivalry.

It is also important to note however that changes can be due to a variety of factors such as technological, ethical, and increased competition.

Additionally, the proposed solutions will also be influenced by the company's organisational culture so care must be taken in finding the most appropriate solution.

These varied influences are due to the range of different cultures depending on a workplace's business or industry.

Decision Making Evaluation

There are numerous decision techniques we can use to plan the best course of action in resolving the problem. One such technique is the SWOT analysis which helps us to better comprehend a situation. This analysis is divided into four categories; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This can be further divided into internal, negative, positive, and external factors respectively. It is generally advised to assess the external components first.

As explained in one article, "used effectively, SWOT analysis can inform and enable good decision-making," as it allows us to visualise a conflict. (Angel, 2016).

Another approach we can take to outline a solution is the PESTLE analysis; an expansion on PEST. This technique consists of political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental. This tool allows users to assess their business or company from various angles as they can break down the factors which affect their organisation.

As a RapidBI article explains, "good use of PESTLE analysis helps you avoid taking action that is likely to lead to failure for reasons beyond your control" (Morrison, 2021) amongst other benefits.

In any instance, possible external factors should also be taken into account when considering impact to understand the full scope of the issue. For example, there may be an economic problem with funding that affects the entire chain of business. Cause and effect can equally be caused by factors such as these from economic and political, to legal and social.

In addition to this, there must also be a focus on the positive consequences of creating an agreed upon solution, such as employee and customer satisfaction, quality of services and products, and competitive advantage.

Therefore, based on our findings in the PESTLE analysis, we must consider and break down each factor by targeting every angle to yield maximum result.

Communication

Finally, the solution must be communicated to the stakeholders and management to gain influential support. These stakeholders may also be those with external influence such as customers and suppliers as well as those involved internally. It is best to map out a priority list among the stakeholder groups in order to decide where to invest the most efforts according to their influential status.

There are generally two stages in project planning known as risk management and project scheduling. In this process, ADKR is often used. ADKR is a set of building blocks that drive a successful change. These consist of Awareness of the need to change, Desire to be in active support of the change, Knowledge of how to change in addition to the ability to implement

the needed skills and behaviours, and Reinforcement to maintain this change. This model allows progression from the current to the transitory state and eventually the future state of the organisation.

As a Whatfix article further explains, “The ADKAR Model of Change Management is an outcome-oriented change management method that aims to limit resistance to organizational change.” (Malhotra, 2019). This is because each building block identifies an area of potential resistance.

The process also considers the necessary time frames and resources required which will be monitored throughout the duration of implementation.

Another factor to consider in the final decision making and communication process is the different types of leadership such as autocratic and democratic which may affect the results.

Within an organisation there may be first-line, middle, and top managers who work together towards a common goal through a chain of command. They often follow four functions which are planning, organising, leading, and controlling. However, they each have different roles to play in their part. Depending on this, varying levels of specific skills will be needed.

For example, there are three sections of roles in the Mintzberg model. These are interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles. Based on a manager's role, they will need a higher level of either conceptual, human, or technical skills.

One Business article explaining the Mintzberg theory states that breaking down management roles and responsibilities “helps streamline companies for efficiency, improves employee engagement and allows each team member to develop their own skills” (Peek, 2023).

Additionally, organisational systems may be defined by structure, technology, management, and culture.

Overall, it is important that management and staff work together to ensure the smooth running of plan implementation while taking out to time review and assess the changes.

Role Play Reflection

Kolb's Reflective Cycle

For this reflection, I will be using the Kolb's reflective cycle, made up of four components; concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active

experimentation. This cycle as described in a FourWeekMBA article (Cuofano, 2022), is a “four-stage process where the student acquires knowledge from each new experience.”

Concrete Experience

In week 10, we completed a situation roleplay which demonstrated a problem within the workplace. During this, we conjured three problems which may be found in the workplace to be worked out between an employer and an unsatisfied employee. As an employer, I sat down with my employee to discuss and resolve their issues. These issues included an overload of responsibilities in being expected to carry out menial tasks given by other employees, a lack of recognition for her work, and the lack of opportunity to grow.

Reflective Observation

Upon reflection of the roleplay, I found that keeping in mind the tools we learnt during this module was an essential factor to our success. However, I also found that there could've been a more detailed solution to ensure the implementation of change.

Abstract conceptualisation

After completing the reflection stage, I discovered pros and cons of the roleplay. Firstly, we applied the fishbone method to understand the root causes of their dissatisfaction which led us to find the most appropriate solutions and lastly, created a plan to implement the changes.

Therefore, by using this critique, we can further improve our stance on dealing with conflicts and problem solving.

Active Experimentation

In future, this experience will be used to deal with future problems which may arise within the workplace in addition to the tools mentioned above. This may be personal or professional as the techniques can be applied to most conflict settings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this module was useful in establishing tools we can use to combat both personal and professional problems. This is further strengthened by the fact that we could go through a step-by-step process on a case-to-case basis, using a range of tools and methods. Ultimately, these techniques we've learnt cannot just be used to solve problems but also to improve service and relationships.

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