

Problem Solving and Decision Making Report

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MODULE: PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION MAKING

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INTRODUCTION

One of the modules for this year's certificate was Problem Solving and Decision Making. It was interesting because it helps me understand how important is to have problem solving skills in my professional life and also in my day-to-day life.

According to Kaplan Z. , 2022 in an article companies hire people to help them solve problems, and in one short sentence resumes the importance of this soft skill which is problem solving.

Problem solving has different phases: first we must identify and define the problem. Then we must come up with possible solutions, after that we have to evaluate the options, then we choose the best solution, after we implement this solution and at the end, we evaluate the results. This is a whole process of a problem solving and critical thinking.

I am working for a company called Vertus. This company is part of the Canary Wharf Group and it started in February 2019 with one building of 360 apartments all of them on rent. The owner of the building is Canary Wharf Group and they entered the renting apartments market in 2019 with this first building. Is worth mentioning that until 2019 Canary Wharf was just renting office spaces. Since 2019 the business became profitable having at the moment 2 more buildings with a total of 1000 plus apartments in rent. The occupancy of all the buildings is around 90% with more than 1500 people living inside these buildings. I work as Concierge in these buildings, and I am faced every day with different and new problems that I have to solve the best I can.

The workplace problem

One of these problems is the fact that leasing team with the purpose of renting the apartments as fast as they can are promising special services that we don't offer. These special services are for example: if the person renting is not at home, he or she can ask the Concierge to wet their plants and helped them check the apartment. Another thing that is promised by the leasing team is the special appliances that they have in the apartment which is not always true.

All these small details create a bad experience for our customers who will visit the Concierge desk for clarifications and most of the time result in complaints and upset customers. These initial inexactitudes create a bad image for the company due to the fact that people will comment on different websites dedicated for rating living space and of course these things on the long run will affect the sales negatively. Also, the relationship between Concierge and the person renting the apartment will suffer because they are expecting different type of service

that we cannot offer due to the fact of the short stuff on site in regards to the number of apartments in the building.

I consider that this problem is really important because it affects the image of the department that I am working on and also the image of the company.

ANALYSING INFORMATION

During our module in this term in one interesting lecture presented by Dr. Faizu Edu we were presented the fishbone model which analyse the cause and effect of the problem and helps us understand the possible root of the problem.

Dr. Kaoru Ishikawa created this fishbone analysis tool to help employees identify and solve the root problem instead of just addressing only the symptoms of the problem. This is a visual tool and at the head of the fish you have the root problem and from there we have to identify different causes of this problem. There are different categories of the problem that we can identify, and these are: methods, skills, equipment, people, materials, environment or measurements. Depending on our problem we can defined the bones of the fish in base of these categories. This tool (the diagram) is considered one of the seven basic quality tools and are used in the “analyze” phase of DMAIC(define, measure, analyze, improve, control) approach to problem-solving.(Lewis, S., 2014).

In regard to our specific problem, I can say that one of the causes that I could identify is that the real estate agents that work for Vertus, are not really employed by Vertus permanently. They are working for agencies like Savills and Knight Frank and Vertus is giving them 6 months contracts, so they don't have the responsibility that a permanent employee has.

Another cause of our problem that I could identify is that Vertus management is placing the real estate agents under a lot of pressure to rent the apartments and because of that the agents tend to exaggerate the things.

I consider also that the real estate agents not having a specific script when they present the apartments and a clear information at hand all the time might create also small discrepancies.

Useful information like Concierge services and list of appliances that are contained in the apartments should help the real estate agent to give the right and correct information to the possible tenants.

The lack of management to supervise the apartment presentations to the possible clients is

certainly, another cause of this misleading presentation. If from time to time a manager would be present during the presentations he or she will be able to correct these small details that create an important first impression to our customers.

All these causes I consider that they contribute to the problem at hand. The main negative that they have is the company image has to suffer from the bad reviews that our customers leave after that. These small details they influence the company's reputation on the renting market negatively affecting the credibility of our company.

At the same time, they create a toxic work environment because the clients are unhappy and they feel betrayed and they are more disposed to complaint about other issues that may have during the length of their leasing contract.

SWOT Analysis

Next, I will do a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) of Vertus in order to understand how this complex problem can affect the company.

In strengths I will say that being a company under the tutelage of Canary Wharf Group is pretty stable from the financing point of view. It is a big investment from Canary Wharf Group and is financially backed up from Canary Wharf.

One major weakness is the fact that being a new company it needs a lot of marketing to attract clients and it depends so much on the reviews of our customers.

The most important opportunity is the fact that the renting market in London is growing and Vertus can become an important player inside this renting market.

The most important threat is the economic environment lately all over the world and the continue increase in taxes.

Having all these elements in mind we can definitely say that the home reviews are one of the key elements at insuring business growth. That is why I consider that all these small details that the real estate agents are missing must be addressed and solved as soon as possible.

RANGE OF ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

I will say the most obvious solution will be to hire permanent real estate agents that are compromised with the company's values. Training them and through experience regarding our services and appliances can give a clear and accurate presentation of the apartments to our future customers.

An alternate solution if Vertus continues to employ the temporary real estate agents is to have more training in regard to our offered services and also apartment appliances, management supervision at the moment of the presentations will also help and creating booklets with the most important information about apartments and services I think will help.

Another solution is to have a move in manager welcoming the customers when they move in the building and give a tour to the customers and inform about all the appliances inside their apartment, and all the services that we provide.

Evaluation of the Alternate Solutions

To evaluate these solutions, I will use the PMI framework for lateral thinking. PMI means plus, minus, interesting and is a simple method to evaluate a solution where you mark down the plus, minus and interesting elements of a solution. The idea is to analyse a solution from different points of view and by doing this will help you have a more critical opinion about each solution.

For the first solution plus part it consists in building a real estate team that are committed to the company and can give accurate information to customers. The minus part is that there will be a transition period between changing the real estate agents that can affect the productivity of the company. The interesting part is that it might create more stability for the company in regards to the customers reviews.

The second solution plus is that we have more control on the information given to our potential customers. The minus is that more people are involved will take the focus out from other parts of the operation from the management. The interesting is that can create different conflicts between sales representatives and managers.

The plus part of the third solution is that customer service will improve because all the customers will feel important by the fact that somebody will wait for them and try to give them all the information necessary. The minus is that company has to allocate budget to pay for the salary of the move in manager. The interesting part is that people may arrive really late to move in and not all of them will get the valuable information.

IMPLEMENTING THE SOLUTION

Me personally I will choose to implement the third solution, because is the quickest one and the Vertus employee will make sure that the majority of the residents moving in will have the

correct information and also we make our customers feel special when somebody is waiting for them to show them their new home, giving an extra on the customer service point of view.

The Gannt Chart is the perfect tool in planning the implementation of the third solution. This tool was created especially for this. The chart works with 2 dimensions, the horizontal is represented by the time and the vertical dimensions is represented by the specific phases of the implementation.

In our case first we have to present the solution to the board of directors in order to be authorised. In this proposal we have to include a PMI evaluation of our solution and create a budget proposal for the initial salary of the moving manager and define the position. I will say this presentation we have to prepare in the first month.

The second phase if the proposal is successful, we have to do interviews and recruit the right person for this position, and I will say will take another month. Once we have the person hired, I consider another 2 weeks in training the moving manager together with the leasing team to be spend and then the moving manager to create their presentation and start welcoming our new residents. I will say that is our first milestone, and then we have to allow 3 months to see how it works. After 3 months we can analyse the reviews from our customers and see if the solution is effective or not having also the feedback from our Concierge team.

CONCLUSION

I enjoyed this module of problem-solving skills because it showed me that all the problems have solutions as long as you have a system to solve them. It helps you develop an analytical thinking and with the help of different tools like fishbone diagram and PMI evaluation helps you identify what is the real problem and what you will need to adjust. This is also valid for any problem that you might face in your life not only at the workplace.

REFERENCES

- Kaplan, Z. (2022), *What Are Problem-Solving Skills? Definition and Examples*, Available at <https://www.theforage.com/blog/skills/problem-solving-skills#:~:text=Problem%2Dsolving%20skills%20are%20the,and%20implement%20the%20best%20solutions> [Accessed on 01.01.2023]
- Lewis, S. (2014), *Fishbone diagram(Ishikawa cause and effect)* Available at <https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/fishbone-diagram> [Accessed on 01.01.2023]

APPENDIX

PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION MAKING

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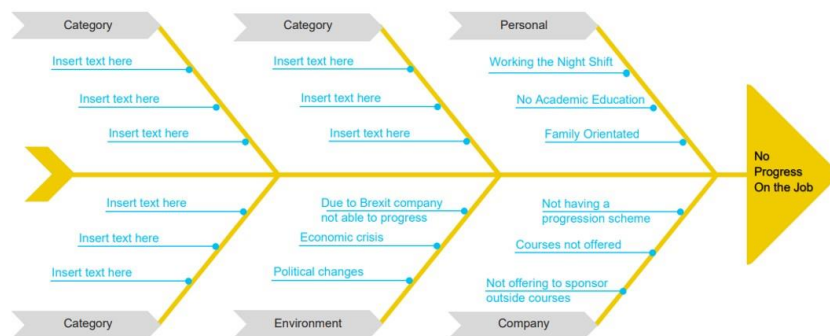
NATURE OF THE COMPLEX PROBLEM

- No opportunities to progress on the employee career path.
- Getting stuck in a low pay job



CAUSE-AND-EFFECT ANALYSIS

FISHBONE DIAGRAM



ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Consult HR in regard to job development

Search for outside courses to prepare for job progression

Personal training with the Building Manager a minimum of 2 hours per week

EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Plus	Minus	Interesting
More knowledge about the future job (+4)	Less time with my family(-4)	Would it be interesting? (-1)
Getting a diploma and showing to the management that I am ready for the new job (+3)	Spending amount of money on the course (-2)	Would it be useful? (-1)
Satisfaction to get more knowledge (+2)		Helpful for my career? (+3)
+9	-6	+1

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- First inform HR about the intention of the progress of the employee.
- Make sure that the employee is willing to give up family time in order to do courses.
- Search what courses are available and costs and register the employee for the courses.
- Practice the theory learned in courses by shadowing the Building Manager.
- Ask the Building Manager for feedback in regard to the employee.

