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Problem Solving and Decision Making (BMSW 4004)

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ABSTRACT

It is important to identify the problems and to know how to make a decision. Following the necessary steps, a correct decision-making technique can be executed. After making a decision, it has to be implemented on the team and the process followed. The method used to see which of the options would be better is the PMI technique (plus, minus, interesting). Sometimes the best solutions come from within the company, relying on workers can be beneficial for both parties.

INTRODUCTION

What is a problem? How can we solve it? The problem can be described in many ways, but one of the definitions that we can find in Collins Dictionary (www.collinsdictionary.com, n.d.) is 'A problem is a situation that is unsatisfactory and causes difficulties for people.'

There are problems in the workplace, at home, at school, with our friends, etc., finding them on time can help us manage them more easily, and solve them before it is too late. In this case, I will talk about the problems in the workplace. These can be general (in almost all workplaces) and those that only happen in one workplace.

I will explain the different steps (seven) to follow to solve a problem, how to identify them; the different decision-making techniques; a plan for implementing a solution, etc; in a specific situation in my workplace. I am going to apply the different tools used in class during this term.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Solving a problem can be complicated but learning to identify them can save us a lot of time. There are different steps to follow to solve a problem. Following these steps will provide us with a guide to solve problems effectively and correctly.

1. Problem Definition
2. Data Collection
3. Alternatives
4. Decision Making
5. Implementation
6. Communication to stakeholders
7. Evaluation of Process

1. Identifying the Problem

I work as a waitress in a hotel, and I am responsible for the minibar. I have to check if the guests took something, refill it, and put in the system what they took. With this, the hotel can charge them with the exact amount. The problem is that we never have enough drinks or snacks to refill the minibar 100%. There is no communication between my department and the department who order the materials we need.

2. Analyse the Problem

We are responsible for refill the minibar in the rooms. We check the system of each floor, and there we can see which drinks or snacks are missing and in which room. We take the trolley, and we go to the warehouse where the drinks are, it is never full. Always is missing something, the water (one of the most important things, came to every two or three months). When an item finally arrives, it runs out in one day, and it is not enough for every room. The cause is poor communication. Although we enter the missing items of the minibar into the system, there is no continuous monitoring. They do not have a clear projection of how many guests will come or a defined average of what they consume. Drinks are sometimes used to replenish the main bar or breakfasts; this also influences our stock control.

3. Alternative Solutions

An alternative to the stock problem is that those responsible for the minibar could be trained to make the orders as well. We have daily control of the drinks and snacks; it would be easier if we took care of making the orders. We would know exactly what we need, and in what quantity to order it.

There should also be a continuous control with the stock of the main bar, that way they would not need the drinks from the minibar. An alternative for this would be to order together but considering what is necessary for both places. Ordering drinks in large quantities such as water, which is what is most consumed and not expired, would solve many complaints from guests.

4. Decision Making Technique

To see which of these options would be the best, I will use the PMI technique studied in class. With this technique, it is possible to see which are the plus, minus, and interesting points of each option. This will help to choose the option that best suits the whole team.

- That those responsible for the minibar also make the orders

PLUS	MINUS	INTERESTING
It is practical and direct (+3)	Those responsible will have less time to collaborate in the restaurant (-3)	Meet people from other departments (+2)
Easier for stock control (+3)	Time has to be invested in training workers (-4)	Know brands and increase commercial awareness (+2)
Improvement of employee skills (+5)	Less control over costs (-5)	Less time with the team (-1)
Tasks delegated to workers increases confidence (+5)		
+16	-12	+3

Plus = +16 Minus = -12 Interesting = +3 Total = +7

As can be seen from the table, the first option is viable, delegating this task to the minibar staff could increase efficiency and decrease complaints from guests. It is a fast and direct way to control the stock, in addition to motivating the staff.

- Continuous control with the stock of the main bar

PLUS	MINUS	INTERESTING
Higher prediction when planning orders (+2) Avoid running out of stock (+3) Control over the expiration of products (+3)	More time spent (-3) Does not directly influence our main problem (-5) Train specific workers for the task (-3)	Implement new work techniques (+2) Modification of schedules (-2)
+8	-11	0

Plus = +8 Minus = -11 Interesting = 0 Total = -3

In this case, the option is not viable at all. Although they would have more control over the stock, they will also need to modify the rotations, because they will need to train some specific workers for the task. They will have to implement a new way of controlling the stock (doing a routine). It would not fix the problem with the minibar items either it would just reduce it by a small percentage.

- Order items together and in large quantity

PLUS	MINUS	INTERESTING
Timesaving when ordering (+2) Chances of getting better deals with the supplier (+3)	Probabilities that there is not enough stock for both (-4) Disagreement on the amounts to be distributed (-3) Confusion about who has to order and when (-3) Waste of time informing the other person in the time in which the order could be made (-2)	Both services working together (+3)
+5	-12	+3

Plus = +5 Minus = -12 Interesting = +3 Total = -4

In the last alternative, it can also be seen that it is not viable. It would create a lot of confusion and waste of time exchanging the list of required items. Although the two services worked together, both would need at least one worker from each, to prepare and place the correct order.

After analysing the three alternatives, it can be concluded that implementing the first (where those responsible for the minibar also take care of the orders) is the most viable. It is the option that best adapts to the situation and the one that least affects the different departments. Having more frequent control of the stock of the main bar will hardly affect the stock of the minibar. And placing orders together would only create confusion among workers and tension (we are prone to blame someone when something goes wrong).

5. Implementing the Solution

The hotel staff involved in the improvement must follow a few steps to implement the solution to the problem.

- **Introduction.** New training will be offered to those responsible for the minibar. They will oversee placing the orders. The purpose is that there is control over the stock to manage drinks and snacks.
- **Define objectives.** By controlling the orders, the minibars will be able to be filled and the complaints of the guests will decrease.
- **Management overview.** Training will be in the morning, before starting to refill the minibar. All three workers will be trained equally, two of them will be required to work at the same time. They must be able to individually resolve any setback. The training will last between one and two weeks until the workers are confident enough to do it alone. Workers will be available depending on how busy the hotel is and the workers' days off.
- **Allocate resources.** The three responsible of the minibars will be trained by the manager of the purchasing department. The manager will teach the workers how to introduce the required items into the system. They will also have to communicate with the staff that receives the stock from the hotel. They should learn how to manage the schedules with the managers. To place orders, they will use the general offices, where they can find computers with their users.
- **Implementation schedule.** To see how it works, the first months the orders will be made every 2 weeks. Even if nothing has to be ordered workers can practice on the system, they will meet every Friday to talk about the stock. They will also follow their daily routine by completing the documentation for the minibar. In this way, they will update the inventory every day. After 5-7 months, the goal is to have at least 75-80% of the minibars full. In the first months, we will try to make a total count of the required items, after these months it is expected little by little to fill the minibars by buildings (following the routine of filling the rest of the hotel).
- **Documentation.** Those responsible for ordering, each Friday deliver the report to their manager for continuous communication. In this way, they can receive feedback and improve performance. Besides, every month the manager of the purchasing department will pass a report to the F&B department (food and beverage) with the follow-up of the orders, and if there are any suggestions. Those responsible for the minibar will continue to use their daily documents for stock control. See Gantt Chart attached at the end of the document.

6. Communicate to stakeholders

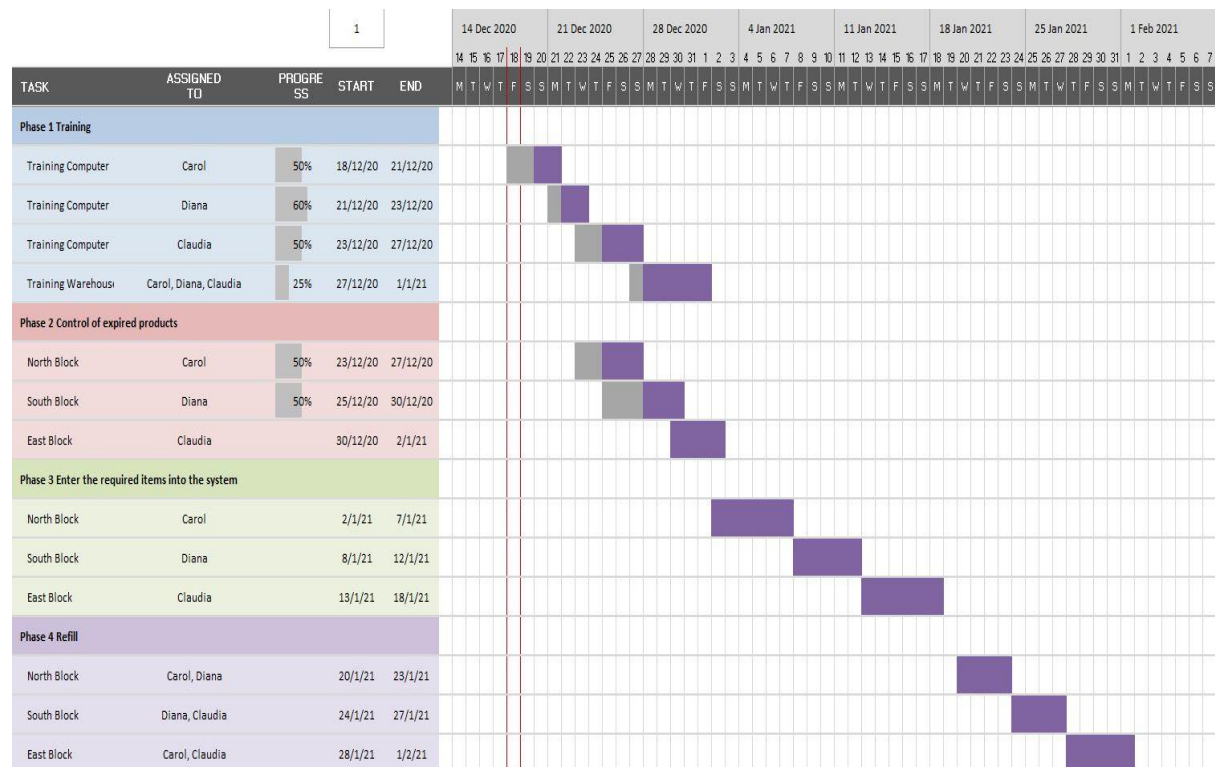
The communication between the responsible for the minibar will be two ways. They will exchange the necessary information every week to write the report. The manager will meet with them each week to discuss progress. The managers of each department will also have a meeting every week, to clarify doubts and follow up. Every two weeks, they all met (face to face or video call) to discuss progress on the new implantation. Although the meetings will be scheduled, they can always communicate via email. When necessary they can also meet before starting with the minibar.

7. Evaluation of Process

The purpose is to reduce guest complaints, each week complaints will be compared to see if the implementation is working. The manager of the F&B department (in charge of the minibar) will have direct supervision of those responsible. The manager will oversee teaching the workers, will be aware of their performance and will provide any tool they need. Surveys will also be conducted among workers to measure their satisfaction. It is important to know if this will affect them positively or negatively.

GANTT CHART

TASK	ASSIGNED TO	PROGRESS	START	END
Phase 1 Training				
Training Computer	Carol	50%	18/12/20	21/12/20
Training Computer	Diana	60%	21/12/20	23/12/20
Training Computer	Claudia	50%	23/12/20	27/12/20
Training Warehouse	Carol, Diana, Claudia	25%	27/12/20	1/1/21
Phase 2 Control of expired products				
North Block	Carol	50%	23/12/20	27/12/20
South Block	Diana	50%	25/12/20	30/12/20
East Block	Claudia		30/12/20	2/1/21
Phase 3 Enter the required items into the system				
North Block	Carol		2/1/21	7/1/21
South Block	Diana		8/1/21	12/1/21
East Block	Claudia		13/1/21	18/1/21
Phase 4 Refill				
North Block	Carol, Diana		20/1/21	23/1/21
South Block	Diana, Claudia		24/1/21	27/1/21
East Block	Carol, Claudia		28/1/21	1/2/21



CONCLUSION

By implementing this new measure, it will be possible to have better control of the stock, this will help to have an estimate of how much to order and when. It is also possible to prioritize those rooms in which the items in the minibar are most consumed or the VIP rooms. Having control over the orders, workers will be able to order those things in advance, since they will have an average of how much that item is consumed per month.

Delegation this task to workers, their confidence will increase and with it their job performance. They will improve their business, management, time management and communication skills. This can be an opportunity for workers and for the company. The workers will be able to show that they can take on more responsibility, and the hotel will be able to motivate its employees and create a good image (brand).

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