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Part 1 – Skills for tackling problems successfully

Problem – definition, stages and examples.

A problem is a situation that arises in a working environment or outside that has undesirable effect on what is being tried to achieve. The problem needs to be overcome either by tackling and fixing the issue or finding a way around it. In this report we will look at example of problems that may arise within a selected retail company. TK Maxx.

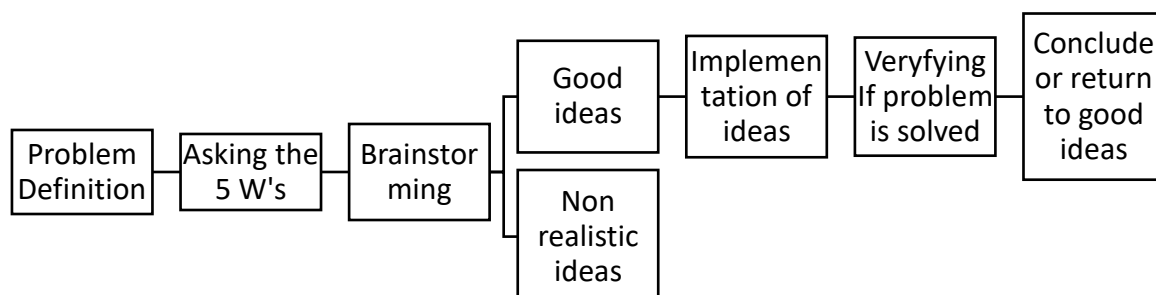
To solve this problem, or any other problem the stages to follow are similar. We ask the five W questions. First we define the problem and define who it affects and what might be causing it. And quite importantly, if this problem needs to be solved. This is, if the problem is only affecting a small amount of people in a negligible way, it may be discarded as an inconvenience rather than a problem. This is, the scope of the problem should be considered. Another factor to consider is when the problem started to occur, or was it always present and where does it happen. Lastly, we need to identify why the problem is happening. This part, for complex problems can take a long time and might require help from external sources. (Cottrell, 2003)

Secondly, the team brainstorms ideas about possible fixes to the issue. At the brainstorming stage it is important to not be excessively judgemental of the ideas even they sound crazy. Otherwise we risk restricting ourselves to a small set of solutions. (Cottrell, 2003)

After an initial list of ideas is produced by brainstorming, the team should go over the list and select the idea, or ideas, they find to be most practical for solving the problem at hand. At this stage the team should be more serious about which ideas are considered as discarded. Only practical ideas should be allowed past the initial stages of brainstorming.

After generating ideas, the next step in problem solving is to implement the ideas/solutions created previously. After implementation of the ideas comes the critical analysis and review stage. At this stage the team gets together and discusses if the problem has been solved and if so to what level of success and take notes for future problem solving exercises. (Cottrell, 2003)

The problem solving process can be visualized by a flow chart.



An example of a simple problem that a retailer such as TK Maxx could face is not having sufficient people on call during periods such as Christmas holidays. These could be due to everyone having taken days off, or lack of recruitment drive during the past months.

An example of a complex problem could be a measured decrease in sales through the year while other retailers are doing fine. This, given all other things are similar to the others retailers could a complex problem with no simple solution in sign and require a much effort in fixing, possibly even recruiting outside consultants to help get the business back in track.

Critical thinking – what is it?

Critical thinking has many definitions, but in essence it means to be able to make an unbiased observation of your surroundings. A definitions given by (Beyer, 1995) states critical thinking as being the means by which one makes clear and reasoned judgments.

It should be made clear that critical thinking, as often as we associate the word criticism with, does not always mean a bad thing. Thinking critically means to questions and reflect on something you are told or see. For example, if your boss tells you do your job in a particular way. You think about what your boss said and analyse the instructions he gave and try to find a better more efficient way of doing your job. (Cottrell, 2003)

A successful critical thinker will question the things presented to him or her and rejects poorly supported or non-scientific evidence and examines in detail the source of the information. Questioning the source and method by which information was gathered is a large part of the critical thinking process. This is the reason why at university students are encouraged to seek quality references. In a work environment it is also important to seek good quality information to avoid making decisions that can hamper business growth. (Beyer, 1995)

The main stages in critical thinking are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysing, synthesis and action

To begin the process we must as what the problem is and why do we need to solve it. In the next stage we gather information about the problem through research and set a deadline to solve the problem. In the application we stage we continue researching into the problem and link the information gathered with the resources available to solve the problem. During the analysing phase we look at the links that were created previously and try to identify challenged that might loom ahead. During the synthesis phase we evaluate all the options available and chose one solution to carry out to try to solve the problem. The last stage, action, is where we put our chosen to solution to use.

Part 2 – Understanding organisation analysis and communication skills

PEST – definition and examples

PEST is short for Political, Economic, Social and Technological. These are a range of problems that business may encounter. A PEST analysis can be carried out a business to determine how it will react to changing factors in the future and how it has been performing over a certain period. (www.businessnewsdaily.com, 2017)

The political factors in PEST analysis revolve around how government policies affect businesses. In the UK a very clear example of this is how Brexit is affecting businesses, some businesses positively while others are being affected negatively. Ramification of Brexit will involve changes to environmental laws, trade restriction and tariffs, and all of this will impact businesses all over the country. Any business wishing to grow in will have consider political factors heavily when performing a PEST analysis. (www.businessnewsdaily.com, 2017)

The economic part of the analysis looks at how external factors affect the companies income. Things to consider when performing the analysis are economic growth, if the business is export oriented then it also needs to consider exchange rates, interest rates and how they could change in the future are crucial for businesses that rely on bank loans. Somewhat related to political factors, a thorough analysis should also consider economic stability and if there will any changes in law that could affect credit availability or employment policies.

Social components that are looked at in a PEST analysis include demographic aspects of the companies market. For example, if the business targets younger costumers or senior costumer. Cultural norms are also important, if the costumers are particularly religious than its wise to sell modest clothes rather than short dresses. A business looking into long term growth will also analyse population growth including birth rates. It is also worth analysing job market status, to determine if there are people with sufficient income to sustain the business. For the case of TK Maxx, if there aren't enough people with sufficient disposable income, there is no need to invest in higher end products such as tailored suits. All of these social factors will have an impact of business growth. (www.businessnewsdaily.com, 2017)

Technological factors revolve around how new tools and technologies change the way a company like TK Maxx provides its services. Among other factors how much the government spends of development of new technology will affect the rate at which business acquires new technology and thus the rate at which changes that lead to growth are implemented. For retailers this is particularly important given the rise and competition from online retailers such as Amazon and Ebay.

However, a PEST analysis does have its limitations. It does not account for internal factors within the company. And also doesn't consider how political, social or any other factors could change in the near future.

Letter about PEST analysis

To Line Manager,

I have noticed over the past months since joining TK Maxx, that the company has not had a detailed and comprehensive PEST analysis in a few years.

It is my belief that the company will struggle to grow within the foreseeable future as much of the information our business strategies are reliant upon do include external factors such as recent dramatic changes in politics, the changes in the financial industry that TK Maxx

relies to operate, the generational shift that we are witnessing at the moment and also the large growth of online retailers.

In the political field much has changed and as result very soon a large amount of the laws in the country will also change. I strongly recommend that a analysis be made into the possible changes and how they affect our growth forecast for the next few years.

Economically, there has been growing trend since the latest recession. We should update our strategies based on this and consider that people have more expendable money nowadays. I recommend an economical analysis be carried to see if we can sell more luxury items.

Socially, a new generation will soon be our main source clients. I recommend we change our strategies and research into the products they are most interested in and find way to focus our suppliers to the new generations wants.

Lastly, there has been exponential growth in online business. Our strategies need to be updated to accommodate for online sales.

I recommend a PEST analysis be carried out to find ramification of recent political events, the changes in global economy and how we can expand, what younger costumers want and how we take part in the online business segment.

Part 3 – Working with others and understanding employees behaviour

What is employee behaviour

Employee behaviour refers to the set of attitudes an employee has in the work place. This differs from what the employee might consider appropriate behaviour outside of work. For example a bad joke made outside of work, would be just that, but in an work environment this could be considered harassment or discrimination. (Notredame, 2017)

The behaviours an employee has can be distinguished into two groups: positive behaviour that forwards the companies goals and negative behaviours that hampers the company from achieving its targets.

Among the positive behaviours an employee can possess is an “Can-Do” attitude. This is being ready and available and willing to get the work or take on new work when asked, are behaviours that help the business. An employee that actively pursues quality in his work is sought highly in any business. (Notredame, 2017)

Another positive behaviour that an employee can possess in being courteous and friendly. Having good team cohesion within a company eases communication and teamwork and this propels a company forward.

An example of a bad employee behaviour is one who looks for the smallest amount of effort possible. This isn't being efficient with how the work is done, rather looking for the least amount of work possible. (Notredame, 2017)

The main strategies used to change and mould employee behaviour are positive reinforcement, discipline and extinction.

Positive reinforcement is a practical method of changing someone's behaviour. It involves giving praise or some other form of reward when the employee performs the correct tasks and exhibits the behaviours that the company values. In workplaces the rewards often include promotions and bonuses. The aim of this strategy for changing behaviour is to persuade the employee to repeat the actions for which he receives a praise more often and while doing so recognise a pattern of behaviour that are appreciated more than others. The downside of using positive reinforcement is that if not managed properly and the rewards are given too frequently, the employee might develop an affinity for the reward (monetary, physical or otherwise) rather than the process and behaviour that the company is trying to encourage. (Notredame, 2017)

Discipline is the opposite of positive reinforcement. Using this strategy the company would punish for behaviour that they deem unsuitable and that does not contribute to their goals. Disciplining an employee might involve an informal chat where a manager sets out clearly what the employee is doing wrong and should improve on. Or, this strategy could also involve delay or freezes in promotion or raises. However, when using this strategy to change an employee's behaviour it is worth bearing in mind not to push the employee too hard or that could result in a disgruntled employee who either leaves the job or becomes unresponsive to disciplinary threats.

The other major method used to mould employee behaviour is extinction. Using this strategy, behaviours that are counterproductive to the company's aims and objectives are suppressed by using management policies that make it hard for employees to behave in the undesired manner. This would involve changes to company policies and actively disrupting employee habits. This strategy requires the most effort to implement, but it allows the company to avoid direct confrontation with employees which is beneficial for team cohesion. (Notredame, 2017)

A good strategy for managing employee behaviour will involve bits of all three strategies and in the correct amount.

Park 4 – Data analysis skill and information communication technology

Advantages and disadvantages of using technology at work

Broadly speaking, technology has been of benefit to many companies who have adapted well to emerging technologies. However, those who fail to adapt often find their revenue declining rapidly. (Forbes, 2017)

For a retailer like TK Maxx technology has allowed the company to automate much of the repeat tasks such administrative document handling and basic accounting. Technology such as mobile internet and emails have allowed managers to be constant contact with the store and make important quick decisions while not being present at the store. Growing ease of online shopping has also allowed the company to grow its sales through online costumers.

However using increasingly sophisticated technology to carry out business critical tasks such as bookkeeping, employee payroll management, costumer bank data handling, has presented TK Maxx with ever greater security threats from hackers. Additionally, being hyper connected to work due to technology often leaves managers with little time off. This is, even when not working they will get important emails and calls that they must be content with during time off work.

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