

Problem Solving and Decision Making

BMSW4004

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1. INTRODUCTION

My name is Corina, I am currently employed as a housekeeping manager in a large hotel in London and the purpose of this report is to focus on resolving a complex problem in my current work place by using not only my professional experience but also analysis and decision making techniques that I've learned while studying at UWTSD. In the current post-COVID climate, a limited pool of workforce availability has affected almost every business in the UK, faced with the prospect of a sudden full re-opening following Covid restrictions being lifted at the end of July. A recent article published by Fortune Magazine speaks volumes in terms of the labour shortages affecting various sectors in the UK in recent months and weeks, with the economy recovery hopes placed at risk by lack of workforce in industries such as care homes, retail, hospitality, construction and food industry. As an independently owned Hotel chain, we are also experiencing the same issues facing our competitors within the hospitality business, with lack of staff being the most evident and pressing issue that stands to be resolved while we are also facing problems with clean linen items shortages at the same time. Both challenges pose a serious threat to our business at the moment and are impacting staff morale and performance.

2. DEFINING COMPLEX ISSUE

According to online article published by Staff Writer on March 31, 2020 "Complex problems are question or issues that cannot be answered through simple logical procedures". When a multitude of options are being presented as a solution to a complex situation, a number of competing or conflicting possible outcomes demand an analysis of the issues at hand in trying to determine a suitable resolve. As mentioned earlier, over the general post pandemic climate, our hotel chain is facing a double challenge in what shortage of staff and linen supplies are concerned with an overall effect on the amount of rooms sold and cleaned on a daily basis versus actual availability of accommodation, and delays or problems experienced by guests when looking to make reservations and check in into our premises.

3. ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION

Since March 2020, a large proportion of the hospitality employees have suffered during the pandemic, with the hospitality sector being one of the most-hard hit by redundancies, reduction of workforce and job losses. Although consumer's spending starting to increase as of May 2021, it still remains at an overall 70% level as compared to pre-pandemic levels. However, factors such as Brexit and restrictions introduced to free movement of EU citizens to UK, paired with significant numbers migrating back to their origin countries during the pandemic, have had a direct impact on the workforce availability for the summer of 2021.

The post-pandemic social, financial and economic climate factors have had a major impact on the availability of skilled workers in service-related industries, affecting preponderantly the hospitality sector and similarly other sectors and business. In making a business decision or looking to resolve a complex issue, analysing the general context of a situation, the factors involved, the law and the policies outlined by the government as well as the political climate and contributing factors to the challenges experienced would provide the insight to understanding the nature of the problem and determining answers for a suitable resolve. To build a clear picture of a scenario, PESTEL analysis can be used as a practical tool in trying to determine correctly the influencing factors leading to a complex issue. Asking critical questions and carefully examining information will definitely help in making important connections to correctly identify, decode and interpret the elements affecting the overall scenario of a complex situation.

PESTLE Analysis

P	E	S	T	L	E
POLITICAL	ECONOMICAL	SOCIAL	TECHNOLOGICAL	LEGAL	ENVIRONMENTAL
Example: • Current tax policy • Brexit • Trade policies • Political stability • Government policy	Example: • Inflation rate • Exchange rates • Economic growth • Interest rates • Disposable income • Unemployment rate	Example: • Lifestyle attitudes • Cultural barriers • Population growth • Population age • Health consciousness • Target demographics	Example: • Level of innovation • Automation • Technological awareness • Cybersecurity • Technological change • Internet availability/speed	Example: • Employment laws • Discrimination laws • Health and safety • Copyright protection • Consumer safety	Example: • Weather • Climate change • Environmental policies • NGO pressure • Recycling • Pollution • Sustainability

<https://www.impact-innovation.co.uk/pestle-analysis>

4. SOLUTIONS RANGE

The range of solutions to a complex problem can often be determined by the quality, effort and time spent in the research or analysis of a situation. In order to be able to choose a solution from a range of solution, a screening process is required where the most viable, effective, simple and easy to implement decision making tool is selected from a range of possible alternatives. However, the path to reaching a viable solution may not be as simple

as though at a first glance. The factors contributing to influencing a situation are both external and internal factors while their impact can be immediate or long term.

External factors

These are factors that our company can't control and these are the sort of factors mentioned above in terms of policies, the socio-economic climate and the current legislation in the UK and the immigration restrictions in place following Brexit.

Internal factors

The internal factors are within the reach of organisation to control, manage and amend in line with the business requirements and needs to best suit and serve the organisation in making sustainable progress.

Impact

The issues currently affecting our company is the inability of meeting the current business demand due to lack of staff and clean linen items. Both issues are subject but not limited to immediate loss of revenue, credibility and business opportunities as well as a further negative impact down the line in the winter months where payroll, utility spent, staff morale and retention are likely to be affected seriously while not making the required revenue in the busy summer months. In order to build a comprehensive analysis of the situation affecting our business and before making a business decision, a SWOT analysis was employed to detail our company's strengths, weakness opportunities and threats.



<https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/knowledge/strategy/swot-analysis/>

5. DECISION MAKING TECHNIQUES

The types of decision making techniques that you can use in trying to accomplish the best possible outcome in a situation vary from brainstorming to ADKAR or using the fishbone analogy for instance, where every aspect of an issue has been questioned, looked at from different angles and evaluated. These types of decision making techniques are essential in drawing a map of the underlying aspects of an issue before actually attempting a resolve. Depending on their complexity, decisions rank in classification such as for instance routine, adaptive or innovative decisions-as explained below:

Routine decisions or habitual decisions are probably some of the most natural decisions that someone can make-from the time they wake up in the mornings or the time they go to bed in the evenings, to what to wear for the day or have for lunch or dinner. Routine decisions do not involve intense or elaborate thinking or planning; instead they are basic and require very little time to make.

Adaptive decisions, these are the types of decisions acquired from enhanced learning as a result of a change in a situation.

Innovative decisions involve creative processes to optimize future plans in five steps ranging from knowledge to persuasion and leading to decision, implementation and confirmation.

While studying Problem Solving and Decision making module in class, at UWTSD, I learned about decision making techniques and facing a complex issue at work, I decided to employ one of the methods that I have studied during class, in order to get some clarity and draw the most suitable solutions. As a result, I decided to use the Fishbone Analogy to draw the map of the insufficient clean line items shortages. In the process, I looked at every aspect related to clean linen supplies, ranging from ordering and deliveries, numbers of rooms cleaned against number of linen items being ordered, process of distributing linen to the floors, shelving of clean linen, use and potential misuse, internal and external storage and transportation as well as collection of soiled linen items and processing times and schedules at linen plant.

External issues

- a.) In effect, it has been noted that soiled linen items were often not collected on the same day of the deliveries being made, leaving the hotel short for deliveries of stock on linen items for days in a row.
- b.) Missed soiled linen collections lead to severe perturbation of washing, drying and ironing schedules at the linen plant, adding further delays to stock processing

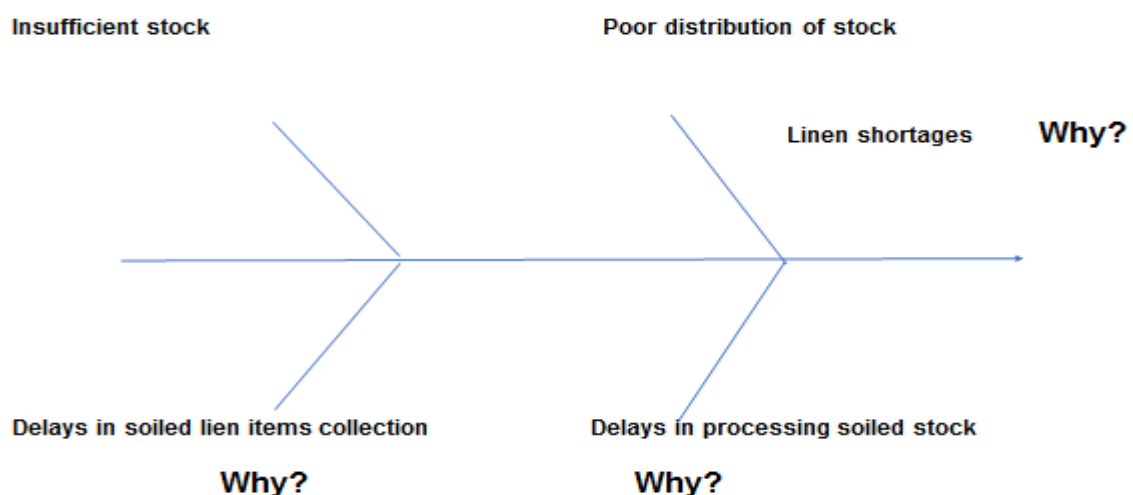
- c.) As a result, at the linen plant the cleaning schedules became ineffective and staff at the plant had either been overwhelmed by the work load or had insufficient stock to process at times

Internal issues

- a.) Poor, incorrect or incomplete distribution, un even shelving of linen items to the floors
- b.) Misuse of linen by the room attendants and use of incorrect linen for the room categories cleaned, overstocking of certain linen items
- c.) Need of additional training, monitoring of stock, better communication with the linen company and checks to facilitate soiled line collections on time and avoid further delays

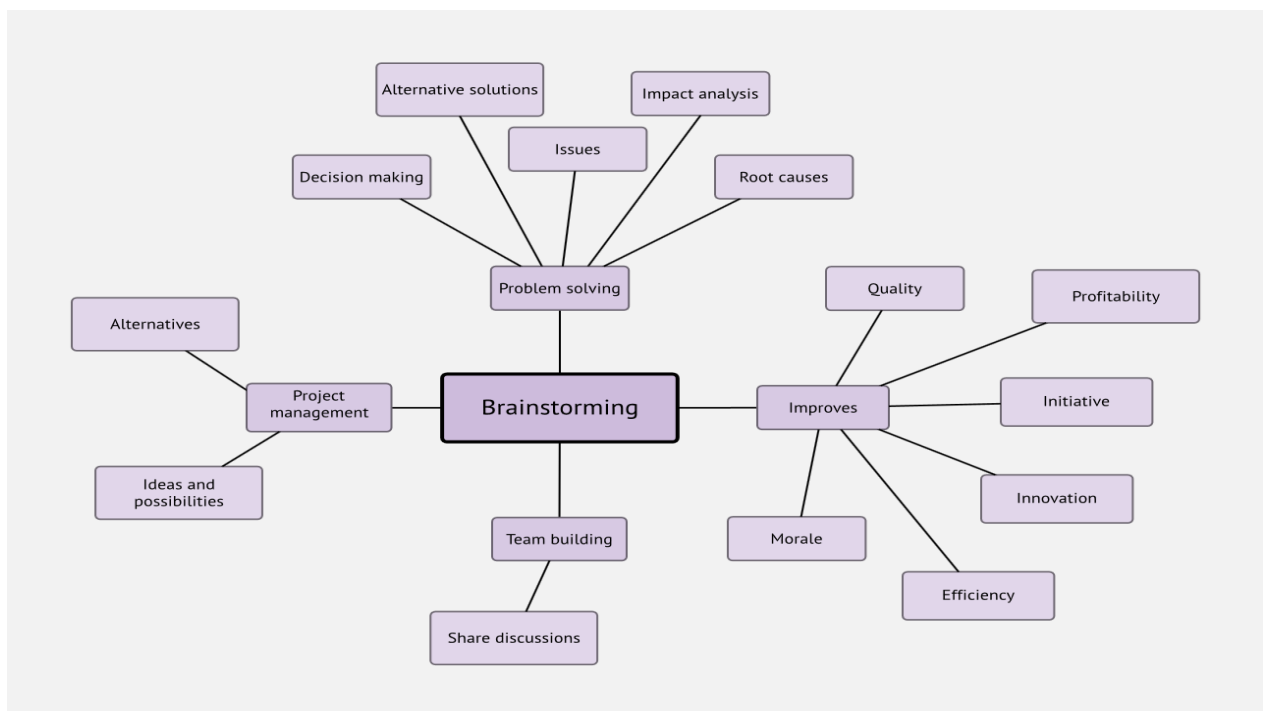
Impact

- a.) Significant delays in delivering clean rooms to front office, resulting in guest's dissatisfaction
- b.) Low staff morale and productivity while having to wait or search for linen items to make beds
- c.) Decreased efficiency of the room cleaning progress, slow or delayed check in processes, damaging Hotel's reputation reports



Fishbone Analogy

The second issue that we have been facing as a company is the lack of skilled, able workforce to perform room cleaning. In trying to find a solution, the analysis of the situation lead to the conclusion that other hospitality venues on the market are facing similar issues and they increased exponentially the rate per hour offered to room attendants while some decided to use inexperienced agency workers. As a company recovering in the post-pandemic climate while we were able to perform some sensible rate increases to benefit our housekeeping staff, we were not able to match some of the rates provided by our competitors. Also, working with inexperienced staff while not having the resources to meet their need of adequate training and induction can prove to be a hazard to the business and the candidates Therefore I decided on this instance to make use of the brainstorming decision making technique in trying to come up with a solution and I decided to involve literally everyone from the higher management to room attendants in finding an urgent and effective solution.



<https://www.lucidchart.com/blog/mind-map-templates>

6. PLAN DEVELOPEMENT

In developing a plan to reduce the linen shortages I had to make use of the information gathered during conducting my research. Upon completion of the analysis, it turned out that effective communication; staff training and attentive monitoring of resources as well as careful planning formed the key strategy aspects in ensuring effectiveness of operations. Internally, I decided to implement the help of room attendants and the supervisors. Each

morning, every room attendant would produce a linen counting list based on their allocated rooms to clean. The information would be then centralised by housekeeping supervisors who would place an order docket for linen clean directly with the porter servicing the floors, who would deliver the exact numbers of clean linen to match the requirement from the supervisor. In this way, misuse, shortages or overstock of linen items would be avoided, ensuring even, timely and smooth distribution of stock. Alternatively as well, a number of staying over rooms each day would refuse service and only request for towels or bins to be emptied, therefore some linen items would not be required for these rooms, resulting in a surplus of clean linen to be discounted on the linen order docket for the following day. In this way we maximise the existing linen resources and minimise or eliminate issues.

7. COMMUNICATING THE PLAN

Communicating the plan and ensuring everyone is on the same page, is what has made the whole process successful and it happen over a few stages. The initial talks took part internally between the housekeeping management and the higher management followed then by talks with the linen company once an internal procedure has been established and agreed. After extensive discussions taking place between the 3 parties and alternative costly solutions have been discussed but later on discarded, I found that implementing a structured approach and rigorous checks of steps being followed and executed by all parties involved is what contributed to successfully addressing the current linen challenges and helped improve the situation.

8. REVISING AND MONITORING

During the analysis, I came across a multitude of issues, both internal and external that had to be discussed, resolved and monitored in processing and distribution of clean linen and closing any gaps leading to delays. During the process, I had the full support of our senior management team as well as our linen partner working side by side in trying to find the most suitable options in resolving the logistic aspects of the operation causing delays, beyond issues caused by staff shortages at the line hire plant. Some of the most effective ways for monitoring had also been the most basic ones as well and it only employed counting, recording and checking as well as effective distribution of linen to the floors. The other method of revising that we stay on track has been through ensuring that sustained, timely and effective communication took place regularly between our housekeeping office and the linen company in organising accordingly soiled linen collections schedules and deliveries in line with Hotel's occupancy and requirements, as much as possible. Where external shortages of linen still occurred, increased focus on internal resources careful monitoring,

utilising and distributing, meant that we were better prepared and likely able to manage up until the shortages had been addressed by the linen company.

9 CONCLUSIONS

Beyond the immediate challenges and limitations imposed by a complex matter arising, having to deal with complex matters in general is an opportunity in learning and eliminating immediate and long term constraints, as well as progressing and acquiring an experience to fall back on as part of the wider picture defining an individual's professional and personal gained set of skills, such as problem solving and decision making. It also helps to build team awareness, strategy and deliver palpable results, as its been the case when all the other departments in the Hotel offered to help with stripping soiled linen from check out rooms, while also preparing beds, dusting and vacuuming guest bedrooms and the room attendants having to clean the bathrooms only. This has been so effective and efficient that with the help from our colleagues we managed not only to clean well over and above the required rooms reserved by our guests, but we also managed successfully to continue delivering on the set Company's standards and our guest's expectations while maximising profitability and the revenue of the business overall.

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