

Problem Solving and Decision Making.

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Over Working Staff in the Care Home.

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Introduction

Problem solving is a cognitive process to achieve the best outcome when the solution is not obvious to the solver. In the work place a problem may arise where no obvious solution is available, or it may also be that there are too many solutions available, and the aim is picking the best answer. (Mayer and Wittrock, 2012, p.287)

Problem solving in organisations is a skill that workers in any position must acquire as the decisions are what affect staff or customers wellbeing. In the article Moral intensity and Managerial Problem Solving they outline that the categorization of problems and subsequently the method that are used to problem solve is where issues can arise. (Dunkerich et al, 2000, p.29)

This report will discuss and analyse the various problem-solving strategies that will be used in categorizing problems and the best methods to problem solve, finding a solution to ensure the best possible outcome to complications, improving the quality of problem solving at the workplace.

Work-Place Experience.

The learning disability home in Sherbourne (Autism Wessex) known for its varied and far-reaching services available to all those who need it, struggled with overworked staff due to Covid-19 (Autism Wessex, 2021). They were unable to have external staff, example, agency staff. As a result of this, staff are being over worked, tired, weak, and weary and complaining of being both physically and emotionally stressed. Parents of services users are also then complaining that they are not getting the best out of the staff. Reported cases from service users show uncategorized non-verbal behaviour and this is a concern for staff, management, parents, and service users.

History of the Issue

In the UK, a person cannot work more than 48 Hours a week on average according to the 'Working time Directive' from EU law domestically legislated into UK law as the 'Working time regulations.' (Government digital service, 2021.) However, in comparison to 34% of all European managers overworking more than 60 hours a week the UK's average is 42%. There is also evidence that work intensity increased alongside overworking hours. However, an interesting culprit to increased working hours is due to toxic work ideals instilled in professionals. Professionals themselves choose to work longer hours because they believe this will show "seniors, managers, and bosses their commitment to the job and organisation." Their success of their career hinges on the longer hours they can work and is seen as essential to professionals. (Burke and Cooper, 2008, pp. xi, xiii)

In the early 2000s the topic of overworking and the work-life balance was at the fore front of government topics due to the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women and Equality. As a result, in the 2000s the Prime minister (Tony Blair) started the 'Work-life campaign' (Bach, 2005, p.149) as well as enacting the (*Employment Act 2002*). The act introduced Flexible working which applied to parents, that if an employer had worked for 26 weeks they could apply for flexible working. These included.

- Changes of working hours.
- Requests to work from home.
- Request for shift swapping.
- Voluntarily reducing their working time and much more.

Scope

The National Health Service has been severely impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic. Patients with Covid put unprecedented demands on acute care particularly, intensive care units (ICU's). In March nearly 7000 retired nurses returned to help deal with the shortage of staff to combat the pandemic. However, despite this, there was still staff shortages to treat patients considering other illnesses aside from Covid-19. In addition, the pandemic was causing staff shortages with nurses, doctors or carers who caught the virus either having to self-isolate or losing their lives in the process. Therefore, NHS workers, able to work, had to work longer than required with these shortages. (Propper, 2020, pp.345-356)

Overworking staff in Autism Wessex is a new issue that has suddenly arose due to the covid-19 pandemic. However, in the general grand scheme this has been an ongoing issue specifically for migrant key workers in care. (Cangiano, 2012, p.52). As the pandemic shows no quick exit this may continue to become an increasing and continuous problem.

It is important to note the growing concerns of workforce shortages in social care before the pandemic. It is no secret that often in the UK care work is associated to being a "low social job force" and difficulties improving the face of the job has led to a deficit of workers. (Henwood, 2020)

Due to UK nationals unwilling to apply for these jobs and in turn the burden falling heavily on migrant workers. There was little to be done when a pandemic occurred, and staff were then overworked.

Impact

Overworking affects both physical and mental stability and it is notable that this could be detrimental to the workplace thus making it a problem to be addressed sooner rather than later.

Cangiano (2010) states the detrimental effects of staff being over worked. Firstly, if a person's time is far stretched between too many clients, they never have the time to build a good relationship. Secondly doing jobs that are not required of them such as taking on nurses' roles. (Cangiano, 2010, p.53)

The three main impacts that rose due to overworking in the workplace was Sleep deprivation, impact on driving, unfamiliar homes, and family impact.

Sleep deprivation

Massar et al's book states that "sleep deprivation causes physiological alterations (e.g., decreased arousal)" that affects the performance of cognitive behaviour. Decreased arousal affects a person's effort to reach great or desired performance goals. In the workplace we can see how this can affect the work performance of carers. With a worker sleep deprived their motivation or as Massar et al puts it their arousal to work hard at their job is thoroughly reduced and therefore their performance decreased. (Massar et al. 2019, p.1)

Alongside cognitive disturbance due to sleep deprivation a meta-analysis by (Pilcher et al, 1996, p.318-326) found that a person's mood is also heavily affected by sleep deprivation. This effect could have a staggering negative downside in relation to being a support worker. Most of the service users in Autism Wessex are non-verbal and are on the autism spectrum. Displaying brooding and temperamental body language may cause service users behavioural changes and can lead to stress, anxiety, withdrawnness, and uncooperative conduct making working with them harder.

Driving

In the case of Autism Wessex, the company owns several homes in different locations and counties. Due to the many different locations these can then include long driving hours. However, with fatigue and stress this can negatively affect a person driving and has become a problem due to these long and far shifts. Figures and studies have compared fatigue to driving with alcohol. A study showed that 24 hours of no sleep produces a parallel “impairment to blood alcohol concentration of 0.05%”. (Hartley, 2001, p.446)

In another study where 10 % of truck drivers reported that fatigue was often a problem compared to the 36% reporting otherwise. However, in 107 truck crashes 58% were fatigue related with 80% claiming to have good or excellent sleep.

It is obvious that humans overestimate the control we can sometimes have over our own bodies to what is naturally required. Although the safety of driving with fatigue is very serious, it does not seem to be talked about or addressed. Specifically, now having to work long hours and drive long durations. It has come to an attention the importance of good sleep to avoid impairment of driving which is distinguished in the case of Bartley and Shute 1947 being a consequence of “Prolonged activity” with long driving classed as “prolonged activity”. (Hartley, 2001, pp.446-448)

Unfamiliar homes.

As Covid was impacting different regions to different effects the Prime Minister of the UK Boris Johnson implemented a three-tier system of coronavirus restrictions (The Telegraph, 2020) on the 14th of October 2020 that lasted till 5th November (Hunter et al, 2020).

As stated, above Autism Wessex runs different homes in different regions and this tier system had a big impact on staffing as staff could not now move from one tier to the other to work. This had a negative impact on service users. Familiar staff that they would usually have to support them were no longer available. Notably, in staffing homes which had much less staff numbers could no longer get the support and were left to take on heavy loads of work by themselves.

Family Impact.

Due to the tiering system, parents of residents could not visit their children, hence putting more pressure on service users missing their parents as well as staff to provide parental care. As a result, service users started to show different mood swings and feelings of anxiety.

Due to the anxiety of service users some behavioural signs included:

- “Restlessness and agitation,
- In ability to sit still and remain calm,
- social withdrawal,
- Decreased ability to perform normal activities of daily life and
- Irritability.” (Valley Behavioural Health System, 2021)

However, it is also important to acknowledge the family impact on workers at the care homes. With more hours to work and higher pressure to work well given the circumstances. Staff must work more hours away from home, and these can have a real impact on family dynamics.

Research on Work Family interference is extensive. "Barnett, 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Parasuraman 1999; Lambert, 1990" (Greenhaus et al, 2003, pp. 511). There are two concepts usually stated and given. These are,

1. "Work-to- family conflict, and
2. Family- to- work conflict."

Work-to-family conflict occurs when work experiences negatively affect family life. Examples of these conflicts are "irregular and inflexible work hours, work overload and extensive travel". All of which were occurring at Autism Wessex due to the pandemic. However, the second concept of family conflict interfering work life could very well be an outcome of work-related conflict and stress creating a vicious cycle.

Conflict between work and family is associated with "absenteeism, increased turnover, decreased performance and poorer mental health". All of which we can agree is detrimental to the workplace and individual. (Psychology wikia, 2021).

Kofodimos states that to combat this, balance is required, and his definition of balance is "a satisfying, healthy, and productive life that includes work, play and love..." (Kofodimos 1993).

A balance which would have to be found albeit the pandemic for workers to work to the best of their abilities.

Problem solving techniques.

For these negative impacts of over worked staff to be solved, is for the problem to be solved in a smart way that suits every stakeholder (services users, support care workers, manager, parents of services users).

To analyse and problem solve the issue of over worked staff in the care home this section will utilise the SWOT, Pestel and Fish Bone analysis.

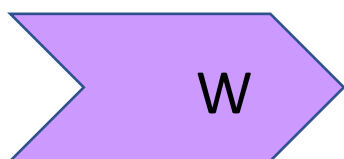
SWOT Analysis.

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats. “A simple but powerful tool for sizing up an organisations resource capabilities and deficiencies, its market opportunities, and the external threats to its future”. (Thompson et al, 2007, p.97, Gurel and Tat, 2017, p.995)

The SWOT analysis is a great tool to understand where the home is lacking, and it brings about awareness of not only its weaknesses but also the opportunities and advantages available outside of the organisation that could create a good impact. The SWOT analysis will be used to analyse the circumstance and the current positions surrounding overworked staff before deciding on a plan and strategy. It will analyse what strengths we can make the most of and the things to avoid eliminating failure.



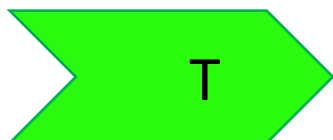
A major strength is that the issue has been recognised in its early stages therefore it can be tackled before it escalates. Importantly, its early recognition shows that the workplace has a well lead manager and stakeholders are very aware of the homes workers well being and the quality of care that they should provide. Secondly, the ultimate vision and mission of Autism Wessex is to “provide constant high quality education care and support to anyone affected by autism” therefore, are willing to take any necessary steps to achieve their motive. (Autism Wessex, 2020)



Management makes decisions that affect all stakeholders without proper consultation or meetings to allow other staff members to share their views. There is a clear lack of a bottom-up approach. More ideas and opinions could be beneficial to the workplace as no two minds think alike and ideas to how the situation may be resolved effectively is not being listening to or given the chance to be voiced.



Autism Wessex has excellent training facilities, therefore recruiting employees to work to the standard that they desire would not be an issue. Furthermore, there is a great support from charity organisations from trustees with a great external fund to train these new staff members. (Autism Wessex, 2020)



If the issue persists staff members may be reluctant to stay in such environment and therefore the company may lose service users to better running homes where overworking is not an issue. Additionally, the lack of already trained support care workers to hire, may cause a delay to increase the number of staff which would see the issue continue to persist. (Autism Wessex, 2020)

Pestal Analysis.

Pestal analysis is used to assess the “external variables” or influences to an organisation. Pest stands for “Political, Economic, Social and Technological” aspects all of which can be beneficial in problem solving specific scenarios. (Ortega et al, 2019, p.105)

P

- As a defence against the coronavirus the government implemented ‘Social distancing’ on the 16th of March to ‘stop non-essential contact with others’ (Open Government Licence, 2020) As a result many workplaces stopped the use of agency staff and workers who were working at multiple care homes to stop the possible spread of coronavirus. (Long, 2020, pp.248-250)

E

- Autism Wessex at has a great outlook on staff investment. With a good foundation of funds from its trustees and commitment to staff members who represent their “greatest investment and greatest asset.” They hold no problem when speaking of the economic factors to recruit more staff members. (Autism Wessex, 2019)

S

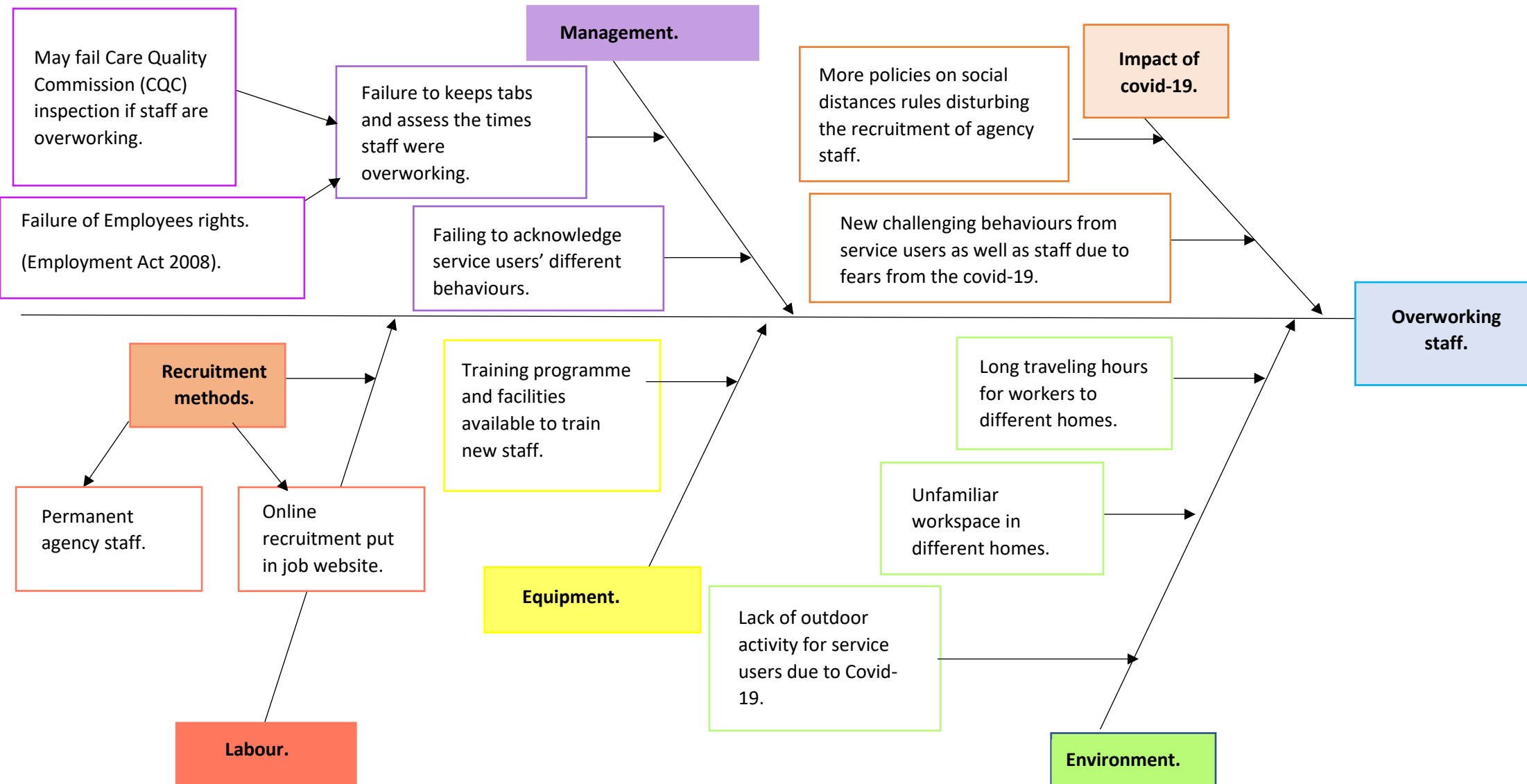
- Overworking can negatively affect the mental and physical health of the staff. There was a research on British civil servants in 2006 by Passport Health (2021) highlighting the effects of “work stress” and “metabolic syndrome.” They were at a higher risk of diabetes, stroke, and heart disease. With another study in 2015 by Harvard Medical school backing these results. If staff are impacted this way, how can they function as members of society. These issues could cause a multitude of a domino effect into their family lives. Such as withdrawal from relationships and not enough attention to their children. Similarly, these could also affect their work function. With stress and physical health issues causing a decrease in work ethic and the standard of work. There is also a fear of losing England workers to burnout. These already occurs in Asian countries (China, Japan, and South Korea) where overworking is so prevalent. To the point where words meaning “death due to overwork” have derived from this phenomenon. In Japan it is “Karoshi 過労死”, in Chinese it is “guolaosi 过劳死” and in South Korea it is “gwarosa 과로사”. The social implications from people committing suicide due to stress from work is to be avoided at all costs. (Passport Health, 2021).

T

- There is a lack of technological use to monitor the hours that workers are over working. This could improve the issue, so no worker is overlooked, and management is able to keep tabs on workers. For example, apps like Playday (2021).

Fish Bone Analysis.

Ishikawa is a Japanese professor who used a visual diagram in the 1950's to analysis the cause and effect of a problem now known worldwide as the fish bone analysis. It is a “useful diagnostic tool in service improvement projects”. (Nursing Practice, 2021, p.18)



We can see from the diagram above the cause and effect of the problems that arose from staff being over worked. Covid-19 being a major cause of issues that arose made it difficult to bring in temporary agency staff due to social distancing rules and caused staff to have to work in different homes taking them away from their recognised working environment into one of uncertainty. Management then struggled to keep up with staff working times. These issues could be solved now as there is awareness of it to every stakeholder in the company.

“Meetings are the very heart of Management” (Baker, 2011, p.5) a statement that is important to problem solving. The first part to solving an issue in an organisation is to hold a meeting where management can make the right decision.

The first step is to have an Emergency Review Meeting.

Charity Head Offices will call all branch managers for a discussion on the ongoing problems/issues regarding overworked staff and the impact it is having on the Stakeholders.

The two possible solutions that has been assessed to ensure this issue is solved are.

- Recruiting new staff.

The organisation needs to invest in new recruits to help alleviate staffing issues. Before the Covid Pandemic, shortage of staff could have been resolved by getting temporary staff from care agencies, however, due to the Covid pandemic and the fear of cross contamination, this is not advisable, so urgent recruitment needs to start to help resolve the short staffing issues.

- Temporary agency recruitment.

The organisation can contact the care agencies who provided previous temporary cover to provide a set number of staff who will be trained and allocated to a particular home (forming bubbles as introduced by the government) (Guardian News, 2020) all the while being frequently tested for Covid. This will serve as an immediate measure to help with the current challenge of the short staffing.

Evaluation on possible solutions.

For long term staff the first solution is the best option to go for. Permanent staff will have more loyalty to the company as well having direct certainty to available staff members to divide shifts. Having enough permanent staff will also save the company money. Why? This will stop any use of agency staff which the care home has to pay the agency as well as pay the agency staff. On the negative side a recruit is new face that service users will have to grow accustomed to. This may set off different reactions to service users.

However, as the covid impact was very sudden. The option of using temporary staff in bubbles to allocated places to avoid social distancing issues is the best option to alleviate overworked staff now. Using temporary agency that are also well versed with the company, already trained, familiar with the environment, the people, and the service users sets this solution to a greater advantage.

PMI Technique Analysis.

PMI is an acronym that stands for 'Plus Minus Interesting'. Taking a step forward from the centuries-old pros and cons process. PMI is a method that allows you to analyse your choices in a diagram. The diagram involves a three-column table to determine a score for the positive, negative, and interesting outcome of the situation for "better evaluation". (Ahmed and Omotunde, 2012, p.53).

The PMI analysis will be used to derive a final decision from the possible solution given as stated above.

Solution 1: Recruiting New Staff		
Plus +	Minus -	Interesting
- Would not have to rely on temporary staff in another crisis. (+9) - More division of work hours amongst staff so people would not work overtime as much. (+9) - Families would be relaxed knowing their loved ones are being cared for by permanent posted staff. (+7) - Long term solution (+6)	- Service users will have to grow accustomed to a new working face and may cause behavioural changes. (-5) - Post job vacancies may take a while for people to see or apply. (-6) - Training involved may take a longer time. (-6)	- More loyal permanent working staff. (+8) - Staff and management would be at peace. (+10)
+31	-17	+18

Solution 2: Temporary Agency Recruitment.		
Plus +	Minus -	Interesting
- Service users already know the temporary staff that come to the agency. (+8) - More division of work hours amongst staff so people would not work overtime as much. (+9) - Quick short solution especially as the situation demands it because covid-19 happened very quickly. (+9) - No training demanded with familiar temporary workers. (+7)	- Cannot rely on temporary staff, there is limited amount to how many staff the agencies can provide in limited times. (-5) - Not committed to the company. (-7) - Service users may become used to them for working longer hours in the home and may cause disruption when they leave. (-6) - Families would prefer permanent staff. (-5)	- Temporary staff would be considered permanent as they would be in bubbles till the pandemic is sorted. (+8) - Option of hiring temporary staff after the pandemic. (+6)
+33	-17	+14

From the PMI analysis above we can see that solution two's positives outweigh that of solution one. The negative figures are the same for both solutions. Therefore, the best option would be based on the positives which is the most important factor to account for the best possible solution. In retrospect of this the best solution would be Temporary Agency recruitment.

Implementation.

To implement the best possible solution this would have to be discussed between all the stakeholders in the company to ensure a smooth process.

Stakeholder Communication Plan.

Stakeholders	Power/interest	Issues	Communication vehicle	Frequency	Comments
Staff	Ensuring high quality of work for service users.	Reducing work hours.	Meetings Emails	Weekly updates	Better quality of work.
Service users	Safe and comfortable environment to dwell.	Safety and wellbeing uncompromised.	Pegs Pictures	Daily	Safe living environment.
Management	Good leadership	Making sure no staff is overworking	Emails Rota Calls	Weekly	Staff reliability and wellbeing
Parents.	Happy	Loved ones are cared for properly.	Emails Calls	Weekly	Happy for family members being cared for in proper environment.

Monitoring.

The implementation of the solution is a significant change to the company however is one that needs to be monitored to ensure that the issues with arose from staff being over worked will not occur against to ensure a smooth-running workplace.

Conclusion.

Due to Covid- 19 challenges occurred in the workplace and staff were being impacted as a result. Therefore, solutions had to be put forward to mitigate this challenge of overworked staff. This report used the SWOT, PEST, Fishbone diagram and PMI analysis to problem solve and come to a decision on the best cause of action to ensure a well-oiled running workplace.

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Appendixes

A Philips case study (Phillips's case study, Moodle, 2021)

Q1 – Identify different problems at different stages in the Philips and how it managed to solve those problems?

Problem 1- Competition mainly from Japan which had a volume advantage to reduce sale prices.

Solution- Innovated their products to survive the threats from competition. E.g., Video 2000. However, this failed due to the relevant market. Many at the time did not understand technology therefore complicated devices were less desirable.

Problem 2- Failed to understand their Market. Market is the “systematic process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information”.

Solution- Brand name staying as a classic consumer brand.

Problem 3 - Shareholders/ external investors being critical because market share was falling and therefore were getting no returns in money.

Solution- Triggered new leadership and management. Jan Timmer was made the new leader and in doing so he appointed the top 100 managers in the company to decide on benchmarks for the company against their competitors and implement drastic changes.

Problem 4- Complacency in the company.

Solution- Combated this which radical change in company ideals. They created a movement for change by introducing a centurion programme. The idea of the programme was to go back to the basics. They also implemented initiatives like ‘customer first’ and customer day.

Problem 5- Too many product areas with no niche.

Solution- They reduced and discontinued some products that were not making the sales money they needed.

Problem 6- Too many staff.

Solution- Reduced the staff numbers by about 15% had to let go of 45,000 people.

Problem 7- No joint unity between SBUS. (Strategic business unit). SBU's are functional units that have their own vision so can do something completely different to the company's vision.

Solution- Made the SBU's report to the head office so they could work together on a target market and customer needs.

Q2 – What do you understand of employee empowerment? How did Philips empower its employees?

The definition of empowerment “the process of becoming stronger and more confident”. Therefore, to empower an employee is to give them more confidence in the workplace as well as more power to realise their work makes a real difference. Spreitzer listed four cognitive ways to empower workers:

(1) find meaning in their work role.

(2) feel competent to perform their work role.

(3) have a feeling of self-determination with regard to specific means to achieve expected results; and

(4) believe that they can have a real impact on organizational outcomes

(Boudrais et al ,2009, p.626)