



**Applied Leadership and Management in the Workplace
Module Assignment Submission**

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1.0 Introduction

Complex problem solving is recognised as a critical and transferable skill. It involves the ability to navigate dynamic and interconnected issues where solutions require dynamic thinking, adaptability and informed decision making. (Funke, 2009)

This report examines a complex operational issue affecting a small, sole proprietorship hair salon. The business offers a variety of hair services, including cutting, colouring, and treatments and operates in a small salon outside the town centre. Despite consistently delivering high-quality services and receiving positive client feedback, the salon has experienced a noticeable decline in client retention over the past year. Clients often fail to rebook, leading to fluctuating income levels and reduced customer loyalty.

Initial analysis suggests that the absence of an online booking system and digital client engagement tools may be contributing to the lower retention rate. Appointment scheduling is currently conducted manually which can be inconvenient for clients and inefficient for the business. The lack of automation also increases the risk of missed appointments, scheduling errors and communication delays, all of which can negatively affect the client experience.

The aim of this report is to investigate the root cause of the low client retention rate and explore how the implementation of digital tools, specifically an online booking system could improve the client experience and overall business performance.

The report applies and uses tools to investigate the problems scope, underlying causes and contributing factors. Evidence based decision making techniques will then be used to evaluate potential solutions. The proposed intervention will be supported by a detailed implementation plan, stakeholder engagement strategy and monitoring framework to ensure successful delivery and long-term impact.

To aid visualisation, AI-assisted tools were used to support the development of selected diagrams. A declaration is provided in Appendix B.

2.0 Complex Problem

The key issue is a decline in client retention, which is limiting income stability and long-term growth. While service quality remains high, the lack of an online booking system and digital engagement tools is creating barriers for clients. Currently appointments are made manually via phone calls, messages and social media, restricting client access and increasing the risk of scheduling errors.

This issue qualifies as complex due to its multi-faceted nature, encompassing operational, communicational and strategic challenges:

- Operational inefficiency due to manual scheduling

- Limited availability of the owner, who manages all aspects of the business
- Inconsistent and delayed client communication
- Reduced ability to track client behaviour and feedback
- Competitive disadvantage in a digitally evolving market

Any attempt to resolve the problem must consider the need for affordability, ease of use and minimal disruption to current workflow. The problem cannot be resolved through a single quick fix but requires a strategic and informed decision-making process. (Sascha Wüstenberg et al., 2011)

2.1 Operational Scope and Impact

The scope of issue extends beyond operations, potentially resulting in reduces revenue, operational inefficiencies and damage to business growth, reputation and stakeholder trust. (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014)

The decline in client retention caused by an absence of an online booking system affects several key areas of the business. As a sole trader, the owner manages all aspects of the salon, and the current manual appointment system limits efficiency, client convenience and potential growth. The problem impacts:

- Clients – Inconvenient booking process discourages rebooking.
- Owner – Increased admin time, reduced focus on service and marketing.
- Operations – Higher risk of missed or double bookings.
- Business Strategy – Limited access to client data restricts loyalty building
- Competitiveness – Falling behind salons with digital systems.

A solution must address these areas while remaining cost effective and manageable for the sole trader.

3.0 Structured Approach to Problem Solving

The Big Six Skills model helps guide decision making by breaking the process into clear steps making it a useful tool for solving problems in small businesses. (Baji et al., 2018)

1. Identify the Problem
2. Analyse the Problem
3. Generate Possible Solutions
4. Evaluate and Select the Best Solution
5. Implement the chosen Solution

6. Monitor and Review the Results

This structured approach ensures that each stage of the problem-solving process is methodical, evidence based and aligned with strategic business objectives.

3.1 Creating Thinking and Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a useful method for producing a variety of ideas early in the problem-solving process. It allows for open discussion without immediate evaluation, which can help reveal underlying or less obvious causes to the issue. (Putman & Paulus, 2009)

To address the identified problem, a brainstorming session was conducted to explore all the possible factors contributing to low client retention in the salon. The process involved identifying internal and external influences that may discourage repeat visits. Ideas generated during brainstorm:

- No online booking system
- Clients cannot book outside working hours
- Manual scheduling errors and double bookings
- No automated appointment reminders
- Delayed response in booking requests
- No formal loyalty or rebooking scheme
- Limited client data, preferences or visit history
- No support staff to help with administrative tasks
- Difficulty balancing service delivery and customer care

The brainstorming session generated a range of potential factors contributing to low retention, highlighting both operational and client facing challenges. From this, a range of viable options will be used to create a mind map.

3.2 Concept Mapping of Potential Solutions

To build on the outcomes of the brainstorming process, a mind map has been created to visually structure and categorise the identified factors contributing to low client retention. This approach offers a visual framework for understanding how the identified factors are interrelated, enabling the recognition of the key problem areas and guiding and direction of the further analysis. (Davies, 2010)



The mind map illustrates that there are several factors contributing to low client retention, requiring deeper analysis and targeted intervention.

3.3 Root Cause Analysis

To move beyond surface level symptoms and identify the underlying reasons for low client retention, the 5 Why's and the Ishikawa model will be used. These methods provide a structured framework to explore the root causes of complex business issues, supporting informed and targeted decision-making. (Peerally et al., 2016)

3.4 5 WHYS

The 5 Whys analysis is a simple but effective problem-solving tool used to identify the root cause of an issue by repeatedly asking 'Why?' until the underlying cause is revealed. (Card, 2016) Clients appear happy with the salon services suggesting that the root cause may not lie in service delivery. To investigate this further, the 5 Whys method was applied to explore the underlying causes of lower rebooking rates. The following analysis outlines how this approach was used to identify the root cause:

1. Why are clients not rebooking?

Because they find the current booking process inconvenient.

2. Why is the booking process inconvenient?

Because there is no online booking system available, they must call or message.

3. Why is there no online booking system in place?

Because the business relies on manual scheduling and has not adapted digital tools.

4. Why hasn't the business adopted digital tools?

Due to limited time, knowledge, and resources as a sole trader.

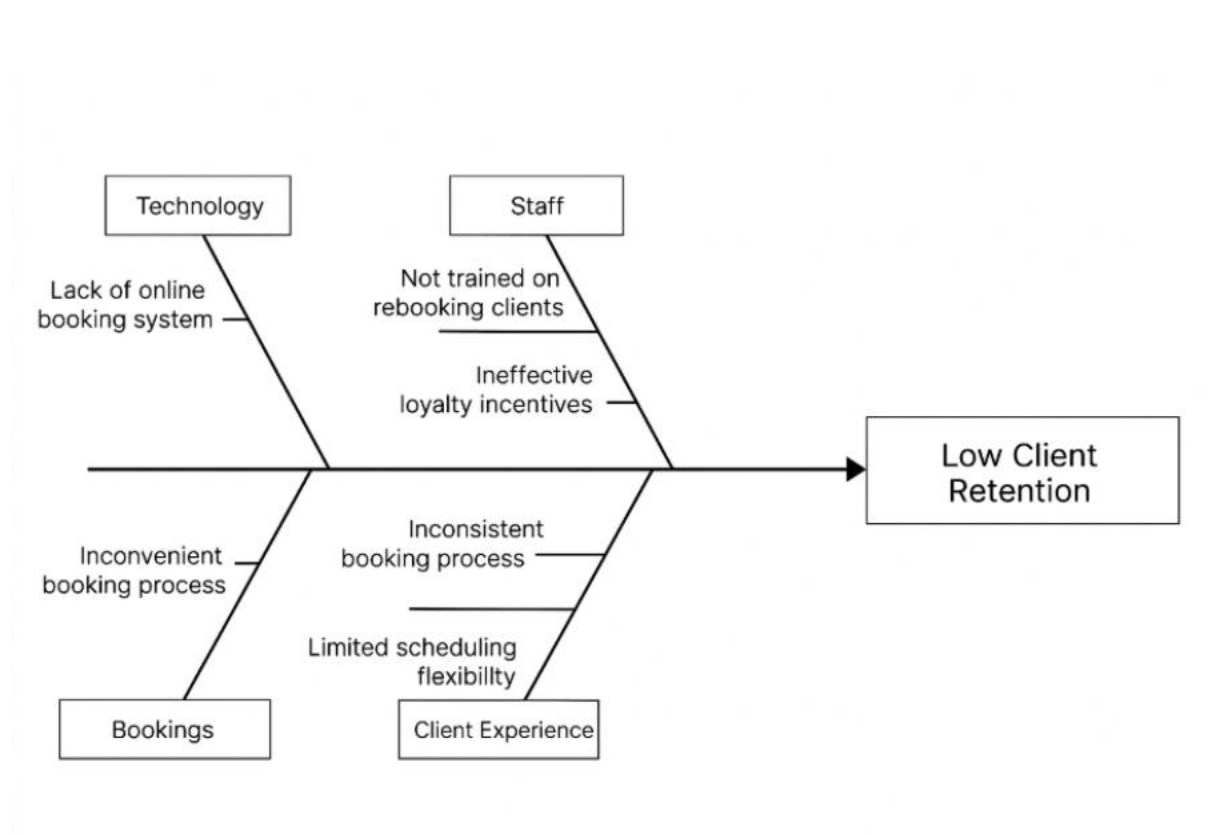
5. Why are time and resources limited?

Because the owner is managing both service delivery and administration without external support.

This analysis highlights that while service quality is not a concern, further analysis is required to explore all contributing factors in more detail.

3.4 Ishikawa Diagram

To explore the broader range of factors contributing to low client retention, an Ishikawa diagram has been developed following brainstorming and mind mappings ideas. This model created by Karou Ishikawa, is a visual problem-solving tool that is used to categorise potential root causes across key business domains. (Coccia, 2018)



In summary, the Ishikawa analysis confirms that low client retention is the result of multiple interrelated factors, with the absence of an online booking system emerging as the most critical.

4.0 Proposed Strategic Interventions

Based on the root cause analysis and the lack of an online booking system, the following solutions have been identified to improve client retention:

- Implement an online booking system
- Introduce Automated Appointment Reminders
- Launch a Loyalty Scheme
- Utilise Social Media
- Set Up Post Appointment Follow Ups

To determine which option offers the most effective and practical outcome, each will need to be evaluated using a structured decision-making technique.

5.0 Evaluation of Proposed Solutions

To ensure the most appropriate solution is selected, each option must be assessed against key business criteria. (Stalnaker, 1994)

5.1 Grid Analysis

To evaluate the potential solutions identified, a Grid Analysis was used to compare each option against key decision-making criteria. Grid Analysis is a structured decision-making tool that helps weigh alternatives based on multiple factors, using a scoring system to identify the most suitable choice. This method ensures that decisions are logical, transparent and aligned with business objectives. (Nafisah Aslam-Zainudeen & Labib, 2011)

Solution	Cost (30%)	Ease (2%)	Impact (25%)	Time (20%)	Total Score
Online Booking system	5(1.5)	5(1.25)	5(1.25)	5(1.0)	5.0
Appointment Reminders	4(1.2)	4(1.0)	4(1.0)	5(1.0)	4.2
Loyalty Programme	4(1.2)	3(0.75)	4(1.0)	3(0.6)	3.55
Social media engagement	3(0.9)	3(0.75)	3(0.75)	3(0.6)	3.0

Post-appointment follow-ups	4(1.2)	4(1.0)	4(1.0)	4(0.8)	4.0
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The grid analysis confirms that implementing an online booking system is the most effective method to address the problem of low client retention.

5.2 Cost Benefit Analysis

A Cost benefit analysis is a decision-making tool used to assess whether financial benefits of a solution outweigh its associated costs over time. It supports evidence-based decisions by quantifying both the expected returns and the investment required. (Mishan & Euston Quah, 2020)

To assess long term viability of implementing an online booking system, a five-year projection has been developed. The table below presents the estimated annual costs and benefits along with the net and cumulative gains over this period factoring in inflation and anticipated improvements in client retention.

Year	Estimated Annual cost (£)	Estimated Annual Benefit (£)	Net Benefit (£)	Cumulative Net Benefit (£)
1	440	7,800	7,360	7,360
2	460	8,000	7,540	14,900
3	480	8,250	7,770	22,670
4	500	8,500	8,000	30,670
5	520	8,750	8,230	38,900

The analysis demonstrates that the proposed solution is both financially sustainable and advantageous. With relatively low recurring costs and consistently high returns, the cumulative net gain is £38,900 over five years support the implementation of the system as the most effective response to the identified business challenge.

5.3 Financial Ratios

Financial ratios offer quantitative means of evaluating the viability and profitability of proposed business growth. In this case, they have been applied to assess the return and annual benefit of implementing an online booking system Applying such measures

ensures that the chosen solution is not only effective but also delivers measurable value aligned with the business strategic and financial objectives. (Beaver, 1966)

Return on Investment (ROA)

Total Benefits - £ 38,900 / Total Costs - £2,400

$ROA = (\text{£}38,900 / \text{£}2,400) \times 100$

=1.620 %

Net Annual Benefit

Net Benefit / Number of years

$\text{£}38,900 / 5 = \text{£}7,780$

These figures indicate that the investment in an online booking system yields substantial financial benefits, with ROA and consistent annual gains. This supports the conclusion that the system would be a profitable and strategic enhancement to the business.

5.4 SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a strategic tool used to evaluate internal and external factors that could influence the success of a proposed decision. (Benzaghta et al., 2021) This analysis supports informed decision making by identifying potential advantages and limitations associated with the implementation of the online booking system.

Strengths - Internal	Weaknesses – Internal
• Improves client conveniences. • Reduces no shows through automated reminders. • Saves administrative time. • Enhances professional image and digital presence.	• Initial learning curve and set up required. • Potential resistance to change from some existing clients. • Ongoing monthly costs. • Dependence on internet connectivity and system reliability.
Opportunities – External	Threats – External

• Attracts new, tech savvy clients. • Enables digital marketing integration, promotions via texts/email. • Opportunities for upselling with add on services. • Potential to expand services or hours based on demand visibility.	• Competitors may adopt similar system reducing competitive advantage. • Cyber security risks or data privacy issues if not managed properly. • Risk of technical issues or service outages from third-party. • Negative feedback if system is not user friendly or well maintained.
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The analysis indicates that although some internal and external risks exist, the strength and opportunities outweigh them. The system presents considerable benefits.

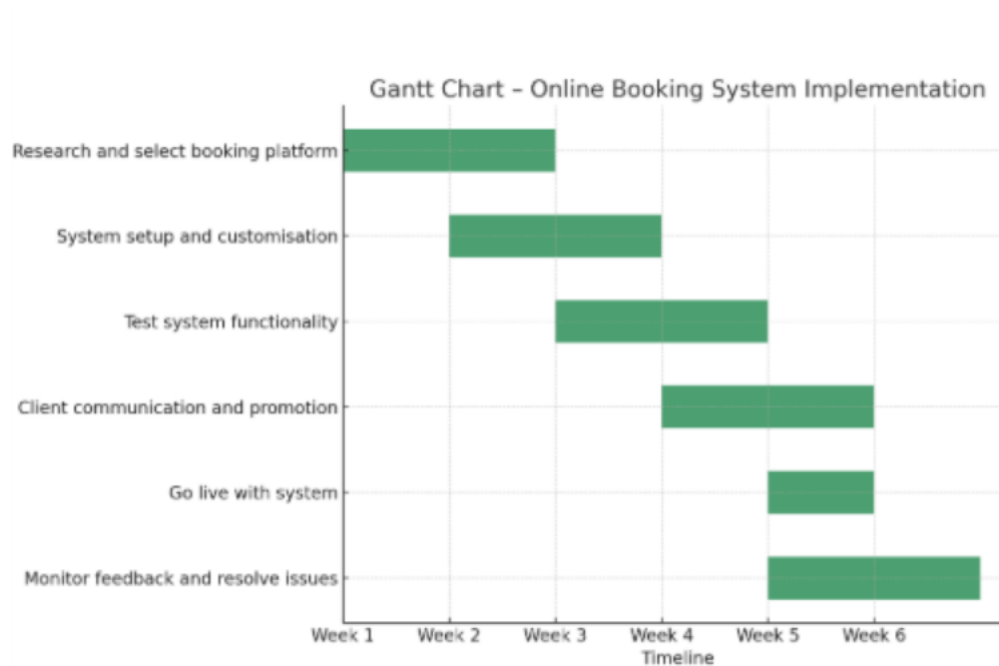
6.0 Solution Implementation Strategy

Effective communication of a solution requires a structured planning and coordination to ensure its success. By clearly outlining what needs to be done, by whom, when and how, businesses can reduce the risk of delays, misunderstanding, or resistance to change. (Helo et al., 2008)

6.1 Gantt Chart

A Gantt chart is a visible project management tool that illustrates the timing, duration and sequence of tasks involved in a project. It is effective for planning and monitoring implementation. (Wilson, 2003)

The following Gantt chart outlines the proposed solution with a clear visual timeline, enabling effective progress tracking and prioritisation of key tasks.



The Gantt chart offers a visual timeline for implementing the online booking system over a period of six weeks, helping to keep the project on schedule and ensure resources are allocated effectively.

6.2 Stakeholder Engagement Mapping

A Stakeholder analysis helps to identify all individuals or groups who are directly or indirectly affected by the proposed change and ensures their expectations, influence and communication needs are clearly understood. (Reed et al., 2009)

Stakeholder Interests in the Online Booking System

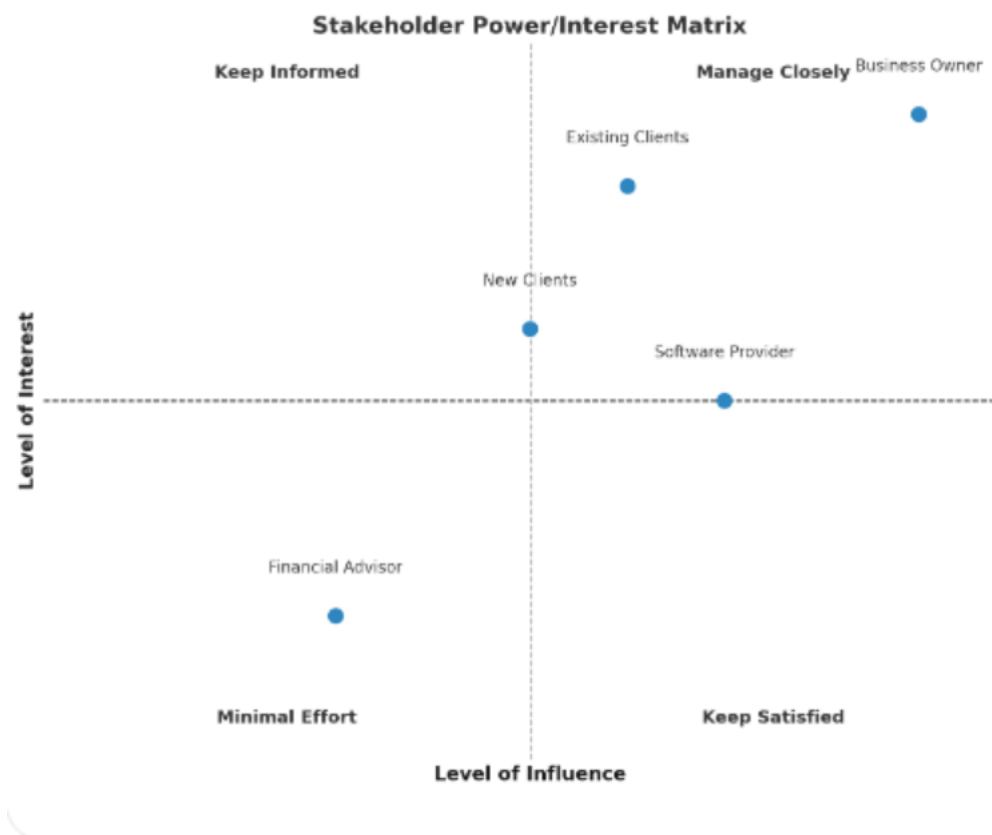
Stakeholder	Interest/Expectation
Business Owner	- Efficient management - Cost effectiveness - Client satisfaction
Existing Clients	- Ease of use - Privacy and security of personal information
Potential Clients	- Digital convenience - First impressions of professionalism
Software Provider	Platform functionality

	• Customisation • Ongoing technical support
Financial Advisor	• Budget alignment • Cost tracking • ROI reporting

Engaging with stakeholders at the right time ensures smoother adoption and fewer disruptions.

To further support stakeholder analysis, a matrix is used to map stakeholders based on their level of influence and degree of interest in the implementation of the online booking system. This tool helps prioritise communication efforts and determine the most appropriate engagement strategies for each stakeholder group. (Polonsky & Scott, 2005)

The matrix below categorises each stakeholder into one of four cells, guiding how much attention and involvement in each task.



6.3 Timeline of Key Activities

An action plan is a step-by-step guide that transfers strategic goals into specific tasks, assigning clear responsibilities and timelines to ensure successful implementation. The structured approach ensures clarity, accountability and efficient execution of each step involved in the rollout. (Flanagan & Johansson, 2003)

The table below outlines the detailed action plan for implementing the online booking system.

Task	Action Details	Person Responsible	Deadline	Resources Needed	Success Criteria
Platform research and selection	Compare three top rated systems for price/features	Business Owner	Week 2	Internet, user reviews	Platform selected and purchased
System set up and configuration	Customise platform to match business needs	Business Owner	Week 3	POS System, account and laptop	Booking flow tested and functional
Testing and quality check	Trial bookings across devices	Owner and Tester	Week 4	Mobile tablet and client feedback	Booking system works without error
Go live	Make system public and operational	Business Owner	WEEK 5	POS System	System available and receiving bookings
Feedback collection and improvements	Survey clients, adjust as needed	Business Owner	Week 6	Google forms and client input	Positive client feedback and system adjustments

This action plan provides a clear map for delivering the proposed solution, ensuring that each task is well coordinated and measurable.

6.4 Communication Strategy

An effective communication plan ensures that all stakeholders receive the right information at the right time using the most appropriate methods, reducing

misunderstandings and ensures that everyone concerned understands their roles.
(Littlemore, 2003)

The table below outlines the communication strategy for the booking system implementation.

Stakeholder	Information to Share	Communication Method	Frequency	Purpose
Business Owner	Updates, testing results	In person Email	Weekly	Track implementation and make decisions
Existing Clients	Launch information, booking instructions, support	Email, Social Media Ads	Twice before launch	Increase awareness and encourage early adoption
Potential Clients	Booking features and benefits	Websites, social media advertisements	Ongoing	Promote professionalism and convenience
Software Provider	Set-up support, customisation updates	Email, Live Chat	As needed	Resolve technical issues and ensure configuration
Financial Advisor	Cost updated, software subscriptions, tracking	Email	Monthly	Monitor expenses and ROI

The communication plan will be executed in phases, beginning with pre-launch engagement and followed by ongoing communication to ensure continued stakeholder support and responsiveness.

7.0 Critical Reflection on Problem Solving and Decision Making

Monitoring and progression are essential components of effective project management, ensuring that activities are carried out as planned and that objectives remain achievable within the set timeframe and budget. (Qin, 1998)

To ensure the effective implementation of the online booking system, a combination of monitoring tools will be implemented. These include a Gantt chart for tracking progression, an action plan for performance comparison, and feedback mechanisms including client surveys. Additionally, system analytics and financial tracking will provide real time insights into usage and effectiveness. Together, these techniques support timely intervention, promote continuous improvement and ensure the solution remains aligned with the business objectives and stakeholder expectations.

To effectively assess user satisfaction and service performance post implementation, a structured client feedback template has been developed (see Appendix A). This tool will gather client insights on their booking experience, communication clarity and overall satisfaction, allowing for responsive adjustment to the system as needed.

A Contingency plan prepares a business to respond effectively to unexpected issues. This ensures minimal disruption to operations and growth toward project goals. (Smith, 1990)

Outlined below is a planned response for mitigating technological disruptions during implementation:

System Failure of technical issues

- Temporarily revert to manual booking methods
- Contact the software provider for immediate technical support

Delays in software setup

- Extend implementation for two weeks
- Inform clients of the delay with adjusted launch messaging

Data Protection Concerns

- Review and strengthen privacy policy
- Ensure the platform confirms with GDPR

Overall, effective monitoring and review practices will ensure that the online booking system remains on track. In the event of unexpected technical challenges, the contingency plan provides a structured response to minimise disruption.

7.1 Critical Reflection on Problem Solving and Decision Making

This project enhanced my ability to address complex business challenges through structured, evidence-based approaches. Tools like the Ishikawa diagram and 5 Whys supported deeper root analysis, while financial models such as cost benefit analysis and ROI guided solution selection. Balancing time, cost and client focus innovation was a key challenge. I have also recognised the critical role of stakeholder engagement and

proactive contingency planning. Overall, the experience strengthened my strategic thinking and highlighted the value of combining qualitative and quantitative data in effective decision making.

8.0 Conclusion

This report has explored the complex problem of low client retention within a sole proprietorship hair business, identifying the absence of an online booking system as a key contributing factor. Through structured problem-solving techniques such as brainstorming, the 5 Whys model and the Ishikawa diagram, the root causes were examined in depth. Several potential solutions were proposed and evaluated using Grid analysis, cost benefit analysis and financial ratios.

The findings clearly indicated that implementing an online booking system is the most viable and impactful solution scoring the highest in terms of customer accessibility, long term value and business efficiency. A cost benefit analysis confirmed a net benefit of £38,900 over five years, with an average annual gain of £7,780, reinforcing its financial viability.

A detailed implementation plan was developed, supported by a Gantt chart, stakeholder analysis, communication strategy and action plan. Key stakeholders were identified, and targeted communication methods were proposed to increase engagement and reduce resistance. Monitoring techniques, such as client tracking, client feedback and system analytics, were outlined to assess ongoing progress. A contingency plan was also prepared to address technical issues.

Overall, this report demonstrates the value of structured decision making and forward planning in addressing operational challenges. With the online booking system in place, the business is well positioned to improve client engagement to streamline operations and enhance long term sustainability.

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Appendix A – Client Feedback Template

Client Feedback

Post-Implementation Survey: Online Booking System

Thank you for using our new online booking system. Your feedback is important and will help us improve your experience. Please take a moment to answer the following questions.

Section 1: Booking Experience

- 1. How easy was it to use the online booking system?
☐ Very easy ☐ Easy ☐ Neutral ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult
- 2. Did you encounter any technical issues while booking?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, please describe:
[Free text box]
- 3. How satisfied are you with the speed and convenience of the booking system?
☐ Very satisfied ☐ Satisfied ☐ Neutral ☐ Dissatisfied ☐ Very dissatisfied

Section 2: Communication & Support

- 4. Were confirmation and reminder messages clear and timely?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- 5. Did you feel supported in using the new system?
☐ Yes ☐ No
Additional comments:
[Free text box]

Section 3: Overall Satisfaction

- 6. How likely are you to use the online booking system again?
☐ Very likely ☐ Likely ☐ Not sure ☐ Unlikely ☐ Very unlikely
- 7. Would you recommend this system to others?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- 8. Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
[Free text box]

Optional: Your Contact Details

(Only if you are happy to be contacted about your feedback)

Name: _____

Email: _____

Appendix B – Use of AI Tools

To support the visual representation of the key concepts within this report, OpenAI's Chat GBT was used to assist in generating diagram outlines for mind map and the Ishikawa diagram.

All diagrams were adapted, edited and interpreted by the author to align with reports specific analysis and objectives. The content, conclusions and recommendations are entirely original and the result of the authors independent research and critical evaluation.