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Assessment 1

Module: Problem Solving EMPL4008

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1.1 Definition of a problem and the steps to solve it

A problem as defined as an undesirable situation that has negative effects on the goals a person or a company is trying to achieve. A problem can arise in any situation, be at work or be it on way to work on the bus. The ramification of problems can be varied as the problems themselves, some simple problems might take a single person a few minutes to find a solution other problems will take large teams years to find a good solution to. (Cottrell, 2003)

For this report I will assume I am working in administrative management at Tesco and will present likely problems to arise in this industry.

The basics of problem solving are similar, be in retail industry or high tech manufacturing or business consulting, etc. There are set of steps that a team will follow to go from a problem being reported and verifying that the problem has been solved. The journey to solve a problem starts by asking the five W's. These are:

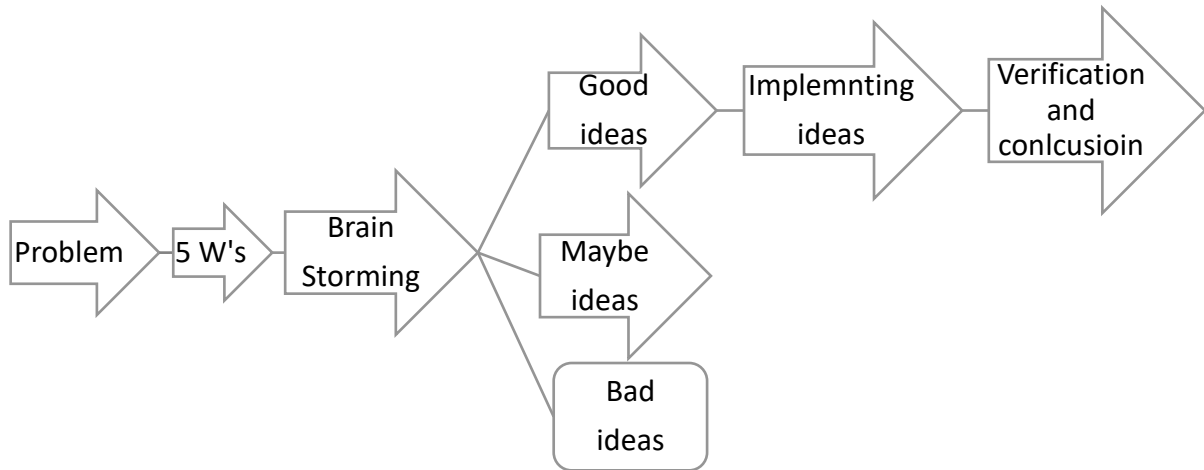
- Who? Who is having the problem, and to some extent how many are having the problem. Is this an isolated incident or a company wide issue
- What is the impact of this problem? Is it affecting business critical processes or is something as important as a squeaky office door
- When did the problem first manifest? Has the problem been present since ever or did it start after some specific change was made
- Where is happening? Is it happening in shopfloors, head quarters, staff rooms, etc. This helps to allocate resources appropriately to investigate the issue
- Why is it happening? This is the most important question to ask, the previous four W's will help to arrive at this, and it is needed to proceed to an effective brainstorming phase.

Once the five W's have been answered the next stage in problem solving consists in gathering the team for brainstorming sessions. In this stage the teams proposes ideas that could fix the problem. Some of the ideas will be good and some will not, but it is important to at the beginning of brainstorming not to be too restrictive with the feasibility of ideas. Some completely unrealistic might inspire others or have parts that can salvaged. Once the team feels sufficient ideas have been generated the brainstorming phase ends and the ideas are listed and categorised in: good, maybe, bad. The good ideas are prioritised for application while maybe ideas are held in reserve and bad ideas discarded.

After the list finalised the good ideas are implemented. For example, a refrigeration unit at Tesco is not working. It is decided that's it's a good idea to hire a mechanic to fix rather than buying a new system. At this stage a mechanic would be contacted and asked to come to store and carry out the repairs.

After the implementation stage, the team would observe and verify if the problem was solved. Otherwise they would go back to the list of good ideas and repeat the process until a solution was found. (Cottrell, 2003)

The process can be summarised by the following flow chart



The example above with a broken refrigerator is an example of a simple problem that takes one person to figure out a solution. However, there are many complex problems that arise in the workplace that require multiple teams and often external consultants.

1.2 Critical thinking in the workplace

Critical thinking is the ability to think clearly of bias and make clear and reasoned judgments. This is, being able to set aside ones prejudices and looking at the problem at hand objectively without being hindered by unverified arguments. (Beyer, 1995)

An important distinction that must be made before proceeding further is that unlike the normal connotation of the word critical which is generally negative, when it is used to mention critical thinking we are discussing the act of comparing both the good and bad of any idea that is proposed and making an educated and, as much as possible, factual judgment. The judgment might denounce the new ideas just as likely it could embrace and replace previous ideas.

A person who is a good critical thinker is able to distinguish between good and bad in an argument by analysing the part of the argument using factual information and by filtering out poorly justified statement by others. A good critical thinker will also emphasise quality of information, this means they will look not at the information but also where it comes from to make sure the accuracy and reliability of the information has been verified by an independent review.

There are six main steps to critical thinking. These are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. (Beyer, 1995)

In the first step we acquire knowledge that lets us identify what the key points of the problem are.

The second step involves understanding the knowledge gathered and making connections between the segments of information gathered so far and thus generating new information about the problem.

In the third step we apply the information generated in the comprehension step to the problem at hand by building linkages between the information and resources. Mind maps can often be used to organise information at this step.

In the fourth step the strong and weak points are identified as well any problems that might be encountered during the solution of the problem.

In the fifth step we put together the part that were analysed and create an original solution, or list solutions to the problem at hand.

At the last step we transfer the results of critical thinking process into published argument and/or actions to follow. This should always be last step, otherwise we risk giving a rushed judgment.

2.1 PEST analysis for business

PEST analysis is a comprehensive study of political, economic, social and technological factors that can affect a business in the future or that are affecting at the moment. However, PEST factors are external and the business will have little to no way to manipulating them. (Notredame, 2017)

The political factors that would be studied in a PEST analysis would include things such as laws regarding trade nationally and internationally, environmental regulations, tariffs, laws in exporting countries, stability of the political system. Any of these factors can make business considerably harder or easier depending on what parliament decides.

The economic factors studied in a PEST analysis would include tax laws and in particular commercial tax laws work, for international trade the analysis would consider exchange rates, companies dependent on loans would need to know interest rates, general economic trends such as recessions or boom times or looming crisis. As with political factors these too could make or break a business. For example is Tesco invested a lot in Europe without knowing how the Pound to Euro exchange rates will be change in the future this could mean large losses in profit at the border.

The social factors studied in a PEST analysis would focus on things such as demographics of the target market, the cultural aspect of the target market, any possible social unrest. For example if the target market were mainly senior citizens a PEST analysis would show that the business should focus on what might be considered vintage products. Or, for example, if the majority of the target costumers do not eat pork the PEST analysis would recommend against investing too heavily in pork meat.

The technological factors studied in a PEST analysis would research into how immerging trends in technology are changing the industry, which of the new technologies pose a risk of disrupting existing business practises and how to adapt to them. For example, Tesco by

knowing and adapting to online sales can easily increase its customer base by delivering groceries to customer's homes.

It is worth noting however, that in real life not many of the PEST factors would act independently of each other. Any political factor would be attached and affected by economic factors, and vice-versa. Politico-economic factors would have impact on social factors. It is worth remembering ourselves of the limitations of this analysis.

2.2 Writing a letter to manager

Hi Manager,

I have noticed that the last time Tesco did a PEST analysis of its business model was a while ago. I recommend that we review and renew our PEST analysis and update the existing business strategies accordingly.

A PEST analysis would have four components: political, economic, social and technological. It would analyse how changes of these factors would affect our business in the future.

The political landscape of UK has changed significantly since the Brexit referendum. I believe it is worth carrying out a detailed PEST analysis to study the impact of any new laws could have on our business. In particular how exports to Europe could become restricted. Europe being a major trading partner this is likely impact our revenue significantly.

The economy has recovered considerably since the last global recession. I believe a PEST analysis should be carried to research how the amount of disposable income among our customers has changed since. If they have more disposable income we could focus more on luxury items and increase our revenue. A PEST analysis would also help determine if the economy is healthy enough for opening a new branches.

The social stratification of the population has been observed to be a bit more unstable than previously expected. As seen during the 2011 riots where we lost a large amount of revenue due to stores being broken and looted. We should carry a PEST analysis to determine if this a likely scenario in the future and if so what precautions should we take.

The technology infrastructure, specially internet communication and logistics have developed significantly in the recent years. We should carry a PEST analysis to find if there is scope for business development or reaching new customers via online services. It would also be worth carrying out a PEST analysis to research if the internal IT infrastructure requires an update.

3.1 Employee behaviour and behaviour management

The behaviour that we have practice in every day life, while acceptable, might not up to the standards of a work environment. Some friendly physical contact or particular vocabulary

among friends might be considered acceptable, however at work this could be considered harassment.

There are two general types of behaviours that are observed in employees. Positive behaviour that further the goals and aims of the company and negative behaviours that hamper or do not contribute to the goals of the company. (Notredame, 2017)

A simple example of a positive behaviour is an employee being friendly and courteous to others in the team. This behaviour allows everyone work in a relaxed environment without worry of internal conflicts, thus leading to a more productive team. Another example of a positive behaviour is an employee taking one more work out his own initiative and getting them done with quality and ahead of deadlines. This too allows the team company to more productive and therefore is considered beneficial.

An example of a negative behaviour of an employee would be the employee letting disagreements with his peers escalate to point where the grudge he holds is visible to others and the friction caused is slowing down the work of others.

Managers often try to mould employees behaviour to align with what the company looks for. The primary techniques used for changing employee behaviour include positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement and extinction.

Using positive reinforcement the manager will praise or give a reward for when the employee demonstrated positive behaviour. This can be in the form of a bonus, raise or promotion or a small chat letting him know he doing well and to keep it up.

Using negative reinforcement a manager will discipline an employee who shows negative behaviour. The disciplinary action could involve an informal chat or a demotion or a warning that if the behaviour continues he could be fired. The main issue with negative reinforcement is that it can cause friction between the employee and company and make the problem worst.

The third alternative for moulding behaviour is to impose policies that make it harder for employees to have negative behaviours at work. For example, a manager might inforce a strict dress code to make sure all employees are dressed appropriately. However, this strategy risks causing friction with other members of the team who were not being problematic and also changing company policies comes with additional costs.

A good manager will be able to balance behaviour control strategies and find an optimal balance.

3.2 Impact of IT business

Technology has brought significant chances to the retail groceries industry, including allowing access to new costumer via online sales.

Across the board, companies that have adapted well to changing technologies have prospered. But those who failed to adapt have been left behind. For example amazon-foods

has made in ways into online groceries industry, something held primarily by large chains such as Tesco and Sainsbury in previous years.

Among the advantages that IT brings are easier management, interconnectivity across the company and access to new costumers.

However, mismanagement or poor understanding of IT systems can lead to security breaches by hacker or failure of business critical systems. These could bring the company to stand still.

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