Process Improvement - Summary

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**What is Problem Solving?**

Everyday business organizations face different problems, which creates difficulty in business operations. Process solving is the method of identifying the problem and going through certain steps, which lead to the solution of the problem. The detailed problem-solving method consists of different stages, which starts at problem definition and ends at monitoring and evaluation. Every business organization needs managers and leaders to have effective problem-solving skills to solve the problems ranging from simple to complex and minor to major. Problem-solving is the critical part of every organization to maintain the quality of its operations and provide quality services and products to the customers.

Problem solving also makes use of certain tools and techniques that have been employed by many organizations to achieve the desired results. Some of the problem-solving tools consist of Pareto chart, scatter plot and Fishbone diagram, etc. the detailed problem-solving method consists of six steps, ranging from problem definition, cause determination, identifying available alternatives, choosing the best alternative and evaluation of results after implementation (Boutros, 2014).

**Various Stages of Problem-Solving**

The problem-solving method is the approach to find out the best possible solution to the problem. The six steps in the problem-solving methods are as follows:

**Defining Problem**

The first step is to make a deeper understanding of the problem that involves analyzing the background and context of the problem. This stage also involves collecting the required data from the employees and other people in the organization to get to know the problem clearly

**Analyzing Problem**

Analysis of the problem is essential to determine the root cause of the problem. The problem is analyzed using different tools and techniques such as Fishbone diagram, Scatter Plot, and Pareto Chart. These tools help in identifying the main cause or the leading causes of the problem and helps develop an understanding of the core of the problem.

**Analysis of Alternatives**

This stage involves analyzing the available alternative solutions to a problem by looking at the problem profoundly. This stage identifies a number of available alternatives using different techniques such as brainstorming and data collection.

**Choosing the Best Solution**

The best solution is the one, which eliminates the problem from its roots and is selected by the opinions of all. The best solution is obtained from the list of available alternatives sometimes by combining two or more solutions.

**Implementing the Solution**

After making the best choice, the solution is enacted using some implementation plan having timelines and tools.

**Monitoring the Results**

After the solution is being implemented the results and outcome is evaluated to examine if the desired outcome is achieved or not. This stage also involves obtaining feedbacks from the employees affected by the solution.

**Essential tools for process improvement and problem-solving.**

Process improvement and problem-solving makes use of different tools and techniques. Some of them are as follows:

**Process Mapping**

It is the process of transferring information into a map to have a visual presentation and a deeper understanding of the process. The study shows the way companies use process maps to evaluate their processes and use it as a foundation to implement lean strategies (Chen, 2010). In addition, it also guides in identifying the problem area of a process.

**5 Why’s**

This question asking technique makes use of different questions to reach the root cause of the problem. The five why questions are focused on the reasons behind any cause. Repetition of the question makes some clues which lead to their answer. Studies reveal the use of five why technique in a small manufacturing firm in the US to disclose the root cause of the problem (Chen, 2010).

**Fishbone Diagram**

Ishikawa invented this diagram, and therefore it is also referred to as the Ishikawa diagram. It functions by detecting the cause of the problem and hence making the problem solution easier (Boutros, 2014). It also helps in identifying different categories of causes making up the issue.

**Force Field Analysis** This tool discloses the factors, which creates an obstacle in improvements in an organization. After identifying these factors, their negative impact can be reduced (Boutros, 2014).

**Pareto Analysis**

This bar chart prioritizes the problems based on their frequency of occurrence and then the frequently occurring problem is solved first (Boutros, 2014).

**Brainstorming**

It is the most effective technique, which helps to obtain ideas from the group of experts and then using those to choose the best possible outcome (Boutros, 2014).

**Affinity Diagram**

This diagram prioritizes the solutions available from the brainstorming and other methods. Affinity sets are used to understand the issues.

**Scatter Diagram**

Scatter Plot analyzes the relationship, if it exists between two variables and the results are used to solve the problem.

**Process Management and Problem-Solving Tools**

Process management and improvement are aimed at improving organizational performance, which is the aim of every business organization. Companies implement different tools and techniques of process improvement and management such as kaizen and lean manufacturing (Chen, 2010). ‘Just do it' is one the process management and problem-solving methodology that is employed as soon as a problem arises. Kaizen, a Japanese philosophy of process improvement as the purpose to identify and eliminate waste for the sole purpose of process improvement (Chen, 2010). Lean six-sigma methodology is the ultimate process improvement technique that is known for its effectiveness in enhancing productivity and quality of business processes (Chen, 2010). Implementation of lean sigma technology results consists of various steps (Chen, 2010). Geary Rummler and Alan Brach’e approach are based on a systematic process which guides changing the work process. It emphasizes three areas for making changes, the organization, its processes, and workforce.

# **References**

Boutros, T. &. (2014). *The process improvement handbook: A blueprint for managing change and increasing organizational performance.* McGraw-Hill Education.

Chen, J. C. (2010). From value stream mapping toward a lean/sigma continuous improvement process: an industrial case study. *International Journal of Production Research, 48(4)*, 1069-1086.