What is the problem you are trying to solve?

I work for a large theatre in London's West End. We are a producing house (a theatre that makes its own work, rather than hosting other peoples' productions), and frequently the shows that we make tour internationally to other countries' theatres. As a result, for every production that we make, there is an enormous amount of paperwork covering the details of every aspect of the production – where to rig the lights and how many are used, how all of the pieces of set fit together and how their machinery operates, who is wearing what and when and how to mend them if they fray, where each book or candle or small hand prop should be at any given moment in the show and, of course, where every actor moves and why it makes dramatic sense for them to do so.

Having worked on a number of productions – and also been in charge of putting them again (or "reviving") them years later based on the paperwork collated at the time – it has become clear that various departments are often duplicating each others' work with their own version of show documents, oftentimes contradicting one another or with one set of documents updated while those updates haven't been communicated to other departments, who are relying on outdated versions of things. with incomplete information.

This is the broad systemic problem that I am setting out to solve – how to make our paperwork more streamlined, avoid overlap and disjunction, and determine the most efficient way to present the maximum amount of information.

What research methodologies and techniques learned in this course were you able to use to find a solution for this problem?

INITIAL IDEA

In choosing a workplace problem to address, I was mindful of the advice of entrepreneur **Ryan Robinson** who advocated that success was more likely if you were working in **an industry you're already familiar with** and **serving customers you already know**. On this basis, I looked closely at my own industry which I am of course very familiar with, and elected to focus on an issue that resonates with a very specific customer base – me and my colleagues who have to interact with this system of documentation every day.

I resolved to make use of the **Root Cause Analysis process** as the framework for my investigation into the problem, using it as a guide for exploration of the issue, as this seemed the most appropriate process to employ for a small workplace issue of procedure.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

As I began to look at the overarching systems that governed the process of documentation in my workplace, I could see that wholescale reform of the process would not be something that would fall within the scope of this project. Instead, I referenced the principles of the **Think Big to Solve Small Problems** movement, and sought to reframe my issue as something very specific and with measurable success outcomes baked into the statement of problem. In keeping with the ideas of this methodology, I sought to avoid **weighting the question against** any particular outcome, and instead find a **simple solution to a basic aspect** of the larger systemic issue.

I employed the **5 WHYS** technique to explore the issue a little further, and ended up with this list; the * indicates which of them I felt was both closest to a generalised statement of intent:

prevent overwhelm and overwork

reduce the total work hours required for each project

spend less time in meetings and doing paperwork

* create more efficient means of creating collaborative work documents for my projects

eliminate documents that reproduce similar information

reduce all paperwork to the most efficient and fewest in number

Following this investigation to uncover the root of the problem, I sought to rephrase my problem as a statement of positive intent, following the guidance of the system outlined by **The Open University** & **Save the Children**, I sought to develop a Research Question that focussed clearly on the **PURPOSE** of the research (in this case, in order to **inform future programs** of documentation. I had to mindful also of the **SCOPE** of this project, and with its limited resources of time and staffing (in this case, just me!).

On this basis, I arrived at a refined Research Question of:

How do we create one master Costume Breakdown Document that can be used for all productions involving costumes and can service the needs of various departments including Stage Management, Stage Directors, Wardrobe, Wigs, Hair, Make-up, Personnel and International Touring?

GATHERING DATA

Based on the **2014 Gallup research** indicating that success in a venture is more likely if you **stick to your natural strengths**, I was keen to make sure I was engaging with my dominant attributes to selecting methods to investigate the problem.

I had discovered through this course that I am more of a **Driver** in my social style, with an emphasis on **Controlled Telling** as a hallmark of my approach to things. Based on this proclivity towards wanting firm information to use a basis for decision making (and an affection for administrative-driven work), I elected to develop a plan for obtaining concrete data that would help me in ascertaining both **what was wrong** and **what was needed** in a potential solution. I decided that in order to obtain appropriate research to base my further investigations on, I needed to obtain **qualitative data** from those who might be affected, and then turn that into **quantitative data** upon which to base my next steps. I decided that **conducting individual interviews** would be the best way to gather this information.

Entering into this data-gathering phase, I wanted to remain conscious of the precepts of the **Hermann Whole Brain model**, and combine various elements of my distinct quadrants so that I could get the most out of the process. In particular, I wanted to remind myself to use my B-Quadrant's **Planning** abilities to maintain a sequential and organised data collection process. Within that process, I would rely on my C-Quadrant's **Emotion**-based interpersonal skills to draw out relevant information from my interviewees, before using my A-Quadrant's **Logical** analysis processes to identify trends and key stakeholder needs. Finally, I would utilise my D-Quadrant's **Synthesising** capacities to bring all the various information strands together to point to a way forward.

I was more interested in identifying participants in the study who were intimately engaged with the processes under consideration than in obtaining a statistical average of participants, and so I engaged the criteria of **Typical Case Sampling** in order to purposefully select those participants who **possessed first-hand knowledge** of the topic. While in this selection phase, I also used some aspects of **Snowball Sampling** by asking others in the organisation who might interview well about this issue.

Each of my interviews was conducted one-on-one and involved **open-ended questions** about their personal experiences with the current system, as well as utilising the **Picture Story method** to allow the opportunity for respondents to use a more creative way to express their feelings about the procedure as currently implemented.

ANALYSING DATA

Following the interviews, I collated the information and used the **Inductive Thematic Coding Framework** to **code the raw data** into abstraction levels, with commonly-cited issues used as subject headings. By using this aspect of **Thematic Network Analysis**, I ended up with roughly 30 coded **Needs** as expressed by the subjects of interview.

The document can be easily used

The document can be updated simply

The document can be picked up years after it has been created and still make sense

The document can be used by anyone regardless of technical skills

The document can exist as easily online or as a print-out

The document has a simple format

The document can be edited simultaneously by multiple people

The document only contains relevant information for our project

The document can reduce paperwork for all departments

The document will supersede everyone else's documents

The document will not require constant updating when nothing has changed

The document is flexible enough to be used on all projects involving costumes

The document will update other affected areas automatically when I update it

The document can be updated at any time

The document will be a one-stop-shop

The document will live in one place so we don't have to email new versions to each other

The document has all the information I need to do my job

The document can house all the information from all the departments at once

The document can carry all the relevant information

The document can list who is wearing what and when

The document can list at a glance the fabric type, colour and detail

The document can contain photographs

The document can identify if someone needs to be under- or over-dressed and what they will be wearing in those moments

The document can indicate quick change times

The document can list the numbers of dressers needed for quick changes

The document can list hair, wigs and make up changes as well as costume

The document can list what side people come on- and off-stage from

The document must be compatible with other companies / countries

The document can work on other companies' systems

The document can be understood easily by people from outside our organisation

The document can be easily edited when it travels to countries with different names for things (eg Stage-Left in the UK is the opposite to Stage-Left in Germany)

The document can be used in accordance with organisational rules

The document can conform to organisational guidelines on language

What creative thinking techniques did you use to think innovatively and out-of-the-box?

GENERATING IDEAS

We now have a list of user needs, as defined by the people who will benefit from using whatever new system is created. The next step in the process is to **develop ideas**, in order to arrive at several protype models for further discussion.

Unfortunately, the current coronavirus epidemic prevents me from completing this step right now, but when it is safe to return to work and the key stakeholders are able to meet to discuss the way forward, this is my plan:

In keeping with **Prof. Brene Brown**'s encouragement to create situations where vulnerability is recognised as a key part of the creative process, I will gather those who are going to be involved in the use of the end product into a series of group meetings to discuss the best ways forward to address the needs as identified din the research. By using some aspects of the **Six Thinking Hats** and the **Delphi Technique**, I will serve as an **impartial facilitator** in the group discussions in order to generate ideas about ways to meet the identified needs. I will be particularly careful to lead the group away from aspects of **GroupThink** which may impact the efficacy of the conversations, and will be sure to lead the conversation about ways to avoid **peer pressure** and **stereotyping**, which experience tells me will be a temptation for this particular group of people.

These sessions will be divided over a 2-week period, with alternating **group and individual** sessions during that time allowing for people to take advantage of the **Wildcard principle** and allow their subconscious brains to continue to process while not being actively engaged in meetings about the issue and potential solutions. In this way, I hope that within the group we will develop a **Tolerance for Complexity**, as we alternate between **Creative Thinking** sessions with a focus on idea generation and **Critical Thinking** sessions where we will seek to **apply affirmative judgement** while also trying to **keep novelty alive**.

Finally, a strong emphasis on **playfulness** and **creating systems models** will feature as the group gets closer to arriving at implementable solutions. Making use of **sticky notes** to allow **group synthesis of ideas** will encourage participants in the group to communicate using visual representations of **nodes and links** within the new system that we are developing and, as a result, will mean that there is increased **engagement** in the process of redesign and a greater chance of **buy-in** as we develop a new model of documentation.

[IMAGE]

There are many of us in the room who are familiar with this example from a show I was working on recently.

[IMAGE]

After spending 7 hours in rehearsal, where things were chopped and changed and various stagings tried and rejected and tried and adjusted and tried again, I headed into the office to write up the latest changes of costume and entries-and-exits into our working document.

[IMAGE]

The laborious process of having to manually enter every change into every relevant scene and then make sure it tracked throughout the rest of the document was the last thing I wanted to spend four hours before heading home just before the building closed at midnight.

And, of course, about halfway through writing up the changes, I got a call from Wardrobe to ask about a rumour they'd heard that there had been some changes.

[IMAGE]

I assured them that I was in the process of amending *our* document, which I would then check to make sure there were no knock-on effects, and would then send through to them for them to merge into *their* paperwork. But, of course, before they could amend *their* document, they had to have the changes from *us*.

And those changes may impact the number of dressers they needed for the following day,

[IMAGE]

or the allocation of makers in the workroom,

[IMAGE]

or be something that they needed to communicate to the designer about.

[IMAGE]

Without a way for them to see the changes I was making in real time, they were stuck waiting for whenever I finished my updates and sent them an email with an updated copy.

[IMAGE]

This system is slow, cumbersome, and wastes time and effort in replication and waiting.

How do I know this?

[IMAGE]

Because I asked people from each department what they felt they needed in a new system

[IMAGE]

I am therefore asking for a small resource allocation to conduct ideas generation around how we can best solve this issue and increase efficiency

[IMAGE]

maximise staffing hours for casuals

[IMAGE]

and reduce unnecessary working hours for permanent staff

[IMAGE]

My proposal is:

[IMAGE]

to use 4 meeting slots over 2 weeks with representatives from each of the affected departments, which will include:

[IMAGE]

1 group meeting at the start of the process to generate new ideas

[IMAGE]

a one-on-one meeting with each participant a few days later to check in on their thinking in the interim

[IMAGE]

a one-on-one meeting with each participant the next week to present some prototypes of the ideas generated

[IMAGE]

a group meeting at the end of the process to come together as a unit and ratify the options preferred

[IMAGE]

In this way, we will develop:

[IMAGE]

a new documentation standard for the entire company

[IMAGE]

a way to quickly and effectively update information in real time

[IMAGE]

a means to eliminate late cancellation payments to casual staff and

[IMAGE]

a way to more efficiently use our work hours so that permanent staff aren't subject to overwhelm and can increase their general productivity across projects.

Happy to take any questions.