48

Issue processing

David Adams

Purpose

This is a simple but extremely effective process to get the most out of an individual's issue, using the combined experience and wisdom of the group to reach an optimum solution.

Description

The issue holder is invited to state succinctly the issue s/he wishes to resolve, what the ideal outcome would look like, what they have done about it to date and what help they would like from the group. Where appropriate, the raiser of the issue is asked to ascribe a monetary value thereto. This part of the exercise should be allowed to take no more than three to four minutes. This is a very powerful process, enabling group wisdom to be focused on one group member's issue.

Process

The group then begins to ask clarifying questions to elicit a clear understanding of the problem. Under no circumstances may any member be permitted to introduce a solution at this stage by framing a solution in the guise of a question (for example, 'Have you thought about doing . . .?').

Questioning continues until the group feels that it really understands what is going on – the skilled facilitator/coach will know instinctively when this point has been

reached. The facilitator will then ask a member of the group to restate the issue. It is often the case that the originally verbalized issue is not the underlying one. The clarifying questions will have enabled the real issue to be exposed. Often the issue is about relationships; thus, an issue about the performance of a direct report can often turn out to be about the leadership skills of the manager. This part of the process should be allocated the bulk of the time available (at least 30 minutes).

Once the issue has been restated and reframed if necessary, the group will go into solution mode. Each member will, in turn, proffer advice – ideally, members will build on what has already been said and members may be asked to go out of turn if they wish to 'piggy-back' on what has just been said. The piggy-back process is also encouraged during the clarification stage. During the solution stage the issue holder keeps silent, avoiding such obvious reactions as 'We've tried that – it doesn't work.'

Once all the solutions have been voiced and a few moments taken for reflection, the issue holder responds with what s/he has heard, feeds back the viability of the ideas presented and finally tells the assembly the actions that will be taken next. A commitment to report back to next meeting of the group is requested and acknowledged.

A variation on the direct solution mode is where the group voices concerns for the issue holder – particularly powerful in poor trading conditions that have not been identified or acted upon properly; this can then be followed by a round of 'on the other hand, I see an opportunity'.

Pitfalls

The process requires able and skilful facilitation.