Allenna Leonard

Viable System Model Play Shop Restaurant Case Study

Allenna Leonard will facilitate a playshop where participants will have an opportunity to role-play the questions and decisions entailed at each of the five systems in the Viable System Model.

Thomosina’s Table is a downtown restaurant seating about ninety people that specializes in fresh and locally grown ingredients. It has a liquor license but does not have a bar separate from the restaurant.

The restaurant is owned by four friends. Two of them work in the restaurant and pay themselves a modest salary while the other two are investors. It has been in operation two years and makes a small profit but does not have much cushion. It also has some financial risk due to renting its premises. Additional financial risk may be assumed in expansion but taking advantage of the opportunities for additional revenue streams is necessary to achieve a more secure standard of living for the owner/managers and to retain staff.

In addition to its two owner/managers, it employs a staff of sixteen including two cooks, two assistant cooks, two bakers, two dishwasher/cleanup people, six wait staff, a delivery person and a cashier. One owner/manager keeps the books and does the ordering and inventory management. The other manages the kitchen. Both also sometimes cook and will pitch in if things get busy or they are short staffed.

The restaurant serves lunch, afternoon tea and dinner, sells baked goods from its counter and offers a catering service. One of the local independent grocery stores has asked them about offering some of their prepared salads, soups and stews in their store. The owner/managers do not know what to do about it. Other opportunities are emerging such as expanding the catering business, adding another counter to sell frozen meals, participating in the local food tour and adding patio service in the summer. Expansion would also put additional strain on the kitchen if items were to be produced in bulk. Some restaurants also rent space in a commercial kitchen for several shifts a week to do their larger scale production.

Among the questions they must answer include whether they wish to undergo the changes that substantial expansion would entail, whether they wish to change from a personal service focus to a distribution arm for their prepared meals and how many and what kind of new staff members they would need to hire and train. They must also consider what new rules and regulations regarding safety, labeling and packaging would apply if they move in these new directions.