Clear Vision

Speech Processing Solutions

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Detaching a business unit from a company is a challenge in itself. To develop this detached organization further from a hardware manufacturer into a digital solution provider is even more challenging. A new identity has to be found and entrenched, new teams have to be built and new lines of communication established.

by Michael Liehmann and Manfred Höfler

Disentanglement

Speech Processing Solutions is a global communication company with production sites in Austria and Hungary and a global distribution network. The company has developed from a Philips business unit into an independent company by turning from a hardware manufacturer into a digital solution provider. This process comprised five phases:

1. Separation

A detailed project plan was generated during several workshops together with the client. It included a work breakdown structure, as well as a schedule for the disentanglement by »day X« and also a follow-up plan. The management and communication perspectives, as well as the operative business units' perspectives were considered. During the actual disentanglement procedure, we supported the project management and monitoring by covering several countries and the set-up of new business processes. The employees were informed about the process and its strategic consequences, their fears and aspirations being tackled in a separate workshop.

2. Positioning and strategic alignment

We facilitated three cultural exploration workshops with employees from all regions. The goal was to define the current state of the business and the teams. Additionally, a first impression regarding the identity of the teams was gathered. Several strategy meetings were conducted together in parallel, together with senior management and the extended management team. The main focus here was on developing a vision and a strategy. We used various creativity methods (sketches of the future, vision image etc.) to get a holistic picture of the future.

During one meeting we connected the management team to the company's many different stakeholders. Representatives of the regions and of the cultural exploration workshops had the chance to bring in the view of their teams. The management team presented the vision and the strategy. All groups discussed together the strategy in order to acquire an even clearer picture and to establish the hot issues and corporate priorities for 2013 and beyond.

To support the management team even better, team experiences were designed and sprinkled in during the two days. ►

»We moved our company from a rather
unclear and diffuse state into one with an
explicit vision which everyone supports
and works to achieve.«

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3. International customization

After establishing the global vision and strategy we started to work in the regions. Compact strategy implementation workshops were conducted in all five regions globally, together with the local management, sales and marketing people. In these workshops:
— the business strategy was transferred to the region,
— the renewed product roadmap and sales strategy were deployed,
— the strategy was analyzed based on a local strategic data factbook,
— strategic priorities for two years and working programs for organizational development and strategy implementation in 2013 were developed,
— ideas for cross regional processes were generated.

4. Alignment

To consolidate all regional working programs and strategies a two-day workshop with more than 80 key people from all over the world was designed. The goal was to achieve overall strategic alignment, to receive commitment and attention for the cross-regional processes and, last but not least, to work on the team and identity building of the new company. Another objective was for the headquarters, to set up new cross-regional processes.

The underlying theme of the workshop was the newly devised Speech Processing Solutions values (»we deliver excellence«, »we act to win« and »we think solutions«). These values were always visible. After an initial warm-up session, people from the different regions were brought together to inform the others about the current situation in their markets and their teams. A strategy input from the management team was followed by an analog session, where employees painted colorful images of Speech Processing Solutions in 2016. The resulting pictures were placed on the wall to form a gallery. At this stage, the cross-regional working programs were initiated. Teams from different locations came together to discuss their respective needs and came up with ideas on how to solve them. At the end of the day, interregional teams were asked to perform two humorous sketches of the company today and 2016.

Day two was built entirely around the regional working programs and their interconnection. After a team-building exercise, the new teams established from different regions were asked to discuss their working programs and to generate ideas on how to improve them. The fresh ideas were then displayed and shared in a group expo session. The management team was asked to give feedback, as well. After a very detailed discussion regarding the outcome of the meeting and the following steps, two different sessions were facilitated. The employees were asked »What can Speech Processing Solutions HR do for you?« and »How could the communication between headquarters and the regions be improved?«

Later in the evening the whole group went to the mountains for a sledging experience.

Key people worked with various creativity methods.

5. Further company development

The workshop series was concluded with further alignment meetings with key players from headquarters, together with colleagues from R&D, Operations, Service and Support and other internal departments. The strategy was presented and discussed. Also, on the agenda there were the current and future internal cooperation structures. HR received feedback on international leadership development programs and future career paths. In order to support the yearly controlling circle, a quarterly review of the organizational development and ongoing programs in the regions was initiated.

A clearer future

The overall objectives of the change process were to create of a new identity with a clear vision, clear strategic goals and key values that are shared by the management, as well as by all other levels. This new spirit was spread by company-wide work programs for all regions and cross-border functions. A further important aspect for the successful change process was the implementation of the core values in the company and in everyday work. The mindset shift from »box mover« to the solution provider was a great success.

Strategy development is not a once-in-a-lifetime project. It is a constant approach that should be visible all the time throughout the entire business year. Speech Processing Solutions is geared towards the future and the team is ready to face it.

Interview

Dr. Thomas Brauner, CEO of Speech Processing Solutions, talked with Michael Liehmann about the change process:

In your opinion, what was the most crucial success factor for the project?

Thomas Brauner: The consultants, namely the persons. Honestly, my learning is that the consulting company is actually a minor matter – the people make the difference. Consulting is simply a »people business«. In our case, success factors of the consultants were their high identification with the customer, the employees and their topics, as well as their high systemic qualification.

How did you benefit personally?

Thomas Brauner: From observing the »outsiders«. And I benefited from the workshops and the systemic approach including the tools that were brought in.

What surprised you most while working with ICG?

Thomas Brauner: I was astonished by how very involved a management team member of ICG got in our topic and also the dedication of the whole team during the entire project. ●