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Succession Planning- A Success Story – A case study of Skyline University College

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Abstract

Skyline University College was established in the year 1990 by Mr. Kamal Puri in Sharjah under the patronage of his highness, Dr. Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, member of the supreme council of the United Arab Emirates and ruler of Sharjah. Currently it is one of the premier higher educational institutions in the northern emirates offering undergraduate and post graduate degrees in business studies. SUC also offers various professional certificate courses from IATA, CTH, ACCA, CIMA etc. under Centre for professional development.

Being in this industry for more than 25 years, the founder president decided to transfer the reins to a successor who has the potential and fire in the belly to take the institution's legacy to new heights. In this process, he identified Mr. Nitin Anand as the successor based on evaluating his competencies and observing his performance in the initial years. During the succession process he trained Mr. Nitin for more than ten years and handed over the responsibility to him to run the institution so as to pursue the mission and vision of the organization.

This case explains about how the succession process was carried out starting from identifying people for critical positions with required competencies. And also the case discusses succession planning strategies used, documenting and implementing the succession plans and evaluating the effectiveness of the succession Plan at various stages. The case discusses effective succession planning followed in the university. This case also demonstrates how good succession planning will help not only in the smooth transition of an organization but also helps it to grow and excel as per the founder's Vision.

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Skyline University College (SUC) was established by Mr. Kamal Puri who started his career as a traffic officer with Indian Airlines in New Delhi, followed by a five year stint with Kuwait Airways in Kuwait. Mr. Puri's passion to reach greater heights in life and to do something different and contribute to society, made him establish the Skyline Institute in Kuwait. He analysed the status of education and training facilities related to the travel and tourism industry in the region and then ventured to start a training institute that would provide this vital industry with competent manpower. Due to the gulf war in 1990, he had to shift his entire operations from Kuwait to Sharjah. Thus, Skyline University College was established under the patronage of his highness, Dr. Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, member of UAE supreme council and ruler of Sharjah with a focus on business studies appropriate for this region. Some of the critical driving industries of the region that boost economic development are retail industry, aviation, travel and tourism, construction and hotel industry. Along with these sectors government services and banking play a major role.

SUC started with a modest strength of 78 students housed in two rooms at the Sharjah airport. The college shifted in 1993 to an independent villa in the Mansoura area of the emirate. Today, it operates from a forty acre campus allocated by the ruler of Sharjah. The college is now recognized as a center of excellence as per global standards. This phenomenal success is attributed to his vision and steadfast efforts and the determination to pursue his dream even against all odds. Currently one of the premier institutes in northern emirates offers undergraduate degrees in the areas of International Management, Finance, Information Systems, Marketing and Retail Management, Public Administration and Travel and Tourism. It also offers MBA in Strategic Management & Leadership, E-Governance, Marketing, Human Resource Management and Finance. The courses have been approved and accredited by the UAE's ministry of higher education and scientific research. The college offers BBA and MBA degrees that are globally accepted by accredited institutions. In addition to offering indigenous courses, the college has articulation agreements with 68 institutions around the globe including colleges/universities in the U.S, Canada, the UK, New Zealand, Australia etc., which help students transfer credits to other colleges at various destinations for further studies.

Mr. Kamal Puri believes that people play an important role in running an organization. Selecting, training, developing and retaining employees has been his strength and this can be highlighted by the fact that there are faculty and staff who are still working with Skyline University College right from the initial years. He always acknowledges the contribution of faculty and staff in the growth of Skyline University College. As the institute was growing at a fast pace and was shaping into a recognized higher education provider in the UAE and the region the need for a good successor who would take the organization to the next level as per the Vision and Mission of the University was being contemplated.

Mr. Nitin Anand was identified by Mr. Kamal Puri from among the 60 staff and 30 faculty members after identifying his competencies and observing his performance in

various capacities in different departments of the organization. Mr. Puri had the belief and trust in Mr. Nitin that he could lead Skyline University and take it to the next level on the lines of the vision of the founder president.

Mr. Nitin was rigorously trained for more than 10 years wherein he was exposed to the functioning of various departments and its challenges before he was made the Chair of the Executive Council and Director of Skyline University College. Working closely with the employees of the institution he was also given an opportunity to understand the dynamics of organizational culture and behavioural aspects of employee diversity and its related challenges. Initially Mr. Nitin Anand joined Skyline University as a Purchase and maintenance supervisor on 1 September 2002. He streamlined the purchase department and also understood the nitty-gritties of maintaining the infrastructural requirements of the organization. On 13 September 2004 he was promoted as Manager of Learning Support Systems which includes the IT department and library. During his tenure he initiated the indigenous development and implementation of ERP for streamlining all the operations of the University. Today all operations of the university are linked to ERP and the credit goes to him. On 15 September 2006, Mr. Nitin Anand became manager of SSD (Student Services Department) in addition to Manager of LSS during which he understood the requirements of the students and the problems faced by students during their period of study. In the month of September 2007, he was elevated as Head of Academic Support Services during this stint he supervised all the academic support services including Finance, HR, Marketing, SSD and Administration. He got full grasp of the Administrative department where he was trained in the entire student registration process right from the day a student joins the institute till he graduates from the University. He also quickly grasped the process of academics in which he understood the attendance policy, student advising, student academic progression and examination system.

Mr. Nitin had a full understanding of the HR policies and procedures, and played a lead role in getting people across the globe to join the Skyline University in various positions. Mr. Nitin supervised the finance department as Head of Academic Support Services and he understood all the issues related to finance right from the collection of fees, disbursement of salaries, making payments to various vendors to managing the finances of the organization as per the requirements and availability of funds. Mr. Nitin Anand was actively involved in the marketing activities of the organization which focused on branding and establishing a good public image of the organization.

In September 2009, Mr. Nitin Anand was promoted as Director of Academic Support Services and he was given a free hand to make decisions related to the academic support services. Mr. Kamal Puri thoroughly trained him and monitored him closely before he was elevated as the Chair of the executive council and Director of Skyline University College in the year 2012. Mr. Nitin implemented the ERP system with the help of the computer department and streamlined all the operations of the organization using an indigenously developed ERP package which is being successfully implemented. He

runs the organization so meticulously that he has full control of all the operations of the organization. He is steering the University to scale greater heights in the coming 25 years.

After Mr. Nitin Anand took over the management of SUC, he continued to work as per the vision and mission set by the founder president. SUC added more programs at BBA and MBA and got the accreditation from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR). Along with the academic programs the need for developing soft skills and competencies among student community was becoming necessary for the employment market. To support student's personality development the faculty was motivated to introduce PSDP (Professional Skill Development Program) to hone their soft skills and prepare them for the requirements of the industry. Corporate Affairs Office was established to have more industry interaction so that the students become aware of the nitty gritty's of corporate sector. CEO series was initiated in 2014 where CEO'S from various companies across the globe are invited to the University to interact with students and share their experiences. Faculty are encouraged to do high quality research and were provided financial support to carry out their research work. All the stakeholders are encouraged to actively participate in community services. Scholarships for students from different sections of the society to various nationalities including locals to study their bachelors and master program. SUC focuses on student centered teaching and motivates its faculty to use different teaching methodologies to engage students actively in the classroom. A Quality Assurance office was established in the year 2012 to focus on quality and ensure that all the procedures are followed as per the policy. SEIC club (Skyline Entrepreneurship and Innovation Club) was established in 2104 which plays a pivotal role in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship among the student community. SUC established a Media & Communication department in the year 2014 to focus more on digital media as the print media was losing its position day by day and the present generation is more active on Digital media.

To ensure smooth functioning of various academic and academic support services clear roles of committees were defined to carry out operations of the institution. These operations are planned ahead and compliance to the timelines are expected. Teaching, research and services committee looks into their respective areas of operations of the organization to strengthening the existing program. The community development programs reach out to various sections of the society in UAE as part of Corporate Social Responsibility. They conduct various events like Blood Donation camps, Training for Taxi Drivers, Water conservation Day, and environment preservation ventures like planting trees. It also organizes various events for the differently abled people to engage them in social activities with the students of the Skyline University College. Looking at the changing needs of the industry Skyline University has begun to expand its operations in new areas of specializations like starting an IT school and also commence a DBA program at par with international standards. The University

under the new leadership is progressing and scaling greater heights and envision the growth for 20 years down the line.

Growing size and structure of the organization normally encounters some challenges and also leads to implementing succession planning. Ambitious employees who are performing well will get discouraged and may lead to some dissatisfaction as they are not selected for the position. It may also result in confrontation between the potential candidate selected and the employees who are not selected. Skyline too has undergone all these challenges during the transition however; few of the senior employees remained with the organization and overcame all the hardships. The organization believes in encouraging all stakeholders to actively participate in decision making, and there are enough platforms and situations where all the stakeholders can express their views and concerns.

This case explores various dimensions of Succession Planning process and how it was successfully carried out and experienced a smooth transition. In the light of the case details evaluate the succession planning of the institution and make your observations in the light of additional information provided in the exhibits.

Exhibit-1 -Vision, Mission & Goals of Skyline University College

VISION

The University College will strive to enhance its quality, size and diversity while developing three main attributes:

Academic Excellence: Achieving excellence in academic standards to enhance the University College's academic standing for the benefit of students and society.

Professional Education: Enriching students' professional education experiences to enhance the employment skills which will enable graduates to pursue and develop successful lifelong careers.

Competitive Advantage: Promote competitive advantage of the University College through Education, Training & Development and Research & Consultancy.

MISSION

The Mission of Skyline University College (SUC) is to impart knowledge, develop professional skills and inculcate values at higher education level, enabling students of diverse backgrounds to achieve their academic goals and develop overall personality to become effective and socially responsible professionals in a dynamic national, regional and global environment. In pursuing this mission SUC focuses on innovative and creative approaches in all areas of education, research & community services and empowering SUC employees as core members of the learning community facilitating their growth and development.

GOALS

Institutional

To continue to operate as a private University College, committed to serve with dedication in the field of higher education, and prepare students to contribute to the betterment of business and society.

To offer quality education to a diverse student body enrolled nationally, regionally and globally, irrespective of race, color, gender, religion, physical disabilities and age.

To expand its higher education programs as per the needs of dynamic global environment

To provide required support services conducive to its academic needs by regularly updating learning resources and integrating with new technologies.

To develop and maintain significant networks between SUC, alumni and industry

To continue to maintain meaningful relationships with the community through socially responsible activities

To continue to pursue ethical conduct and high order of integrity in all spheres of institutional functions

Students

To orient the students with knowledge through under graduate and post graduate programs thereby grooming them for suitable career opportunities nationally, regionally and globally.

To prepare students equipped with creative and entrepreneurial skills suitable for life long career building

To integrate general education at the under graduate level programs

To further enhance higher order skills in problem solving, leadership, analysis and decision making among post graduate program students.

To develop the complete personality of the student through quality education and extra-curricular activities that will enable them to serve society optimally.

Employees

To employ faculty and staff from various cultural, educational, research backgrounds and work experience.

To provide facilities that enhance long term SUC employee welfare, satisfaction and growth

To facilitate conducive research and consultancy environment for faculty to pursue scholarly activities.

To conduct various faculty and staff development programs in order to prepare them to meet challenges posed by the dynamic global environment.

Exhibit –No-2: Do’s and Don’ts for Succession Planning

Many leaders readily acknowledge the importance of succession planning in companies. However, they often don’t follow that philosophy with action. Research shows that less than half of executives believe that their organizations do an adequate job of grooming successors. Unplanned vacancies take about three months to fill, leaving a significant gap in the organization’s leadership team. The following do’s and don’ts represent the best practices for effective succession planning.

- Do be forward focused. Look to the future and determine what competencies will be needed in the next five to ten years. Simply duplicating the leadership skills and style of current leaders is not likely to move the organization forward as times and demands change.
- Do align compensation with succession planning. Incentivize key leaders to create a working succession plan and mentor individuals identified as possible successors.
- Do consider soft skills. Development efforts should key in on interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, problem solving, creativity, and other vital leadership competencies. Investing too much time in functional, technical training will produce successors who are not effective at leading their team or organizations.
- Don’t wait until a vacancy occurs to begin succession planning. At that point it is a race to the finish, not an orderly thoughtful development process. Every manager’s number one priority should be in identifying and preparing potential successors.
- Don’t identify only one individual for each role. Putting all of your eggs in one basket is a risky proposition. The successor may leave the organization prematurely or may not develop successfully. Leading firms bring along multiple candidates with the understanding that choosing from among a pool is superior to having only one choice.
- Don’t keep succession plans a secret. Stakeholders have a vested interest in knowing that executives are planning for the future. Share the overall strategy with important parties. While specially naming successors may not be necessary, assuring stakeholders that there is a living, working process calms their concerns

Key Competencies: Leadership & Navigation, Consultation; HR Expertise: People/Talent acquisition & retention, Strategy/Business & HR Strategy, Organizational workforce management.

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