

CEO and subsequent integration of a European Group

Background:

As CEO the first challenge was to carve the plastics business out of the existing structure. The remaining part was to be sold and the plastics business expanded via the acquisition of another major European player. Challenges: Split of manufacturing in France with a downsizing of the other operations to make it saleable. Rationalization of plastics manufacturing in France and Belgium. Subsequent integration of the acquired competitor into the European operations (7 factories)

Ability to integrate into the client company:

Had to adapt very quickly to the “French way” of doing business. Discovered that the hidden agenda of management was to sink the Belgium subsidiary with all the debts of France to keep their own position. This forced me to act more swiftly and decisively than anticipated, by replacing part of the management team in France. Won respect from the factory in Belgium for saving them. Built a great team in France.

Impact on the business / bottom line:

Successfully split the plastics and other operations, allowing each unit to focus better on their respective businesses. The other division was consolidated and reduced by 80 FTEs (but not yet sold when I left the company). Plastic manufacturing, sales & marketing was subsequently streamlined to achieve a 10% EBIT in an oversaturated market. Also settled all legal issues out of court, making a sizable book profit. People could now focus on their core jobs. Integrated the operations of the newly acquired company to help create the a major player in the sector. Primarily focused on product rationalization and repositioning of brands to avoid cannibalization Reorganised sales and marketing across Europe. Created an anti-cyclical pipeline-filling strategy to generate more sales with industrial customers (B-to-B)

Achievement of objectives

Due to the “hidden agenda’s” had to redefine my own objectives very quickly. I believe the result was very satisfying (see above). The acquisition was integrated within a year and the group was able to break even, which was a good result considering the acquisition was making heavy losses when they were bought. However, over-capacity still remained a problem when I left the company.

Working style

Diplomacy, flexibility and creativity did the trick for the initial turnaround. Worked under high pressure due to the time bombs of political, legal and union issues. Always informed the organization on what was happening to eradicate suspicion and hidden agenda’s. This included the workforce wherever possible. With the integration of the new acquisition, a more co-operative style was followed. Listening to the wishes of the shareholders was paramount in order to determine the long-term strategy of the group.

Leadership / people management skills

Hands-on approach for the initial turn around. Very down-to-earth and decisive leadership because of immediate issues.

For the integration of the acquisition, it was much less a one-man show. Collaborative leadership, with a more advisory role to shareholders.

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