



Initial Situation

Xella is a building materials manufacturer that was created out of the merger of three German companies in 2003, and now has manufacturing operations in 18 countries and sales and marketing ones in over 30 countries worldwide across its family of brands. Its 2014 turnover was 1.27 billion euros.

Challenges

As with many businesses in similar circumstances the focus had been very much on market expansion and revenue growth during this period of merger and acquisition. As often occurs in such times, less emphasis was placed on developing leadership skills and building managers' strategic thinking competencies in a fully structured way especially amongst the senior and high-potential talent groups.

Concept

In order to put more effort into developing the leadership capabilities in the company, in 2012, Xella identified three levels of programs to be implemented across the organization: a Potential Leaders Program (PLP); an Advanced Leaders Program (ALP); and a Strategic Leaders Program (SLP).

For the ALP, Xella focused on partnering with a leading European business school and quickly selected the Executive School of Management, Technology and Law at St Gallen as academic partner. The focus of the program was to help managers perform better in a fast-moving and challenging business environment giving the chance to not only develop improved strategy, leadership and finance skills but also apply those directly to Xella's specific challenges through action-oriented projects. The participants for the program were nominated from their local business units and approved by the board. A Development Center kicked off the program and gave the participants the chance to identify their strengths and weaknesses out of which they could generate a personalized plan for their own personal and professional development. This plan has been collaboratively set up with their line managers and gave both parties the chance to jointly agree on the most appropriate learning goals and helped ensure the commitment to the program on both sides.

From Content to Impact

Whereas the program design for the first cohort focused mainly on developing improved strategy, leadership and finance skills, this focus shifted towards **creating impact for the participants as well as for the company within the second run of the program.** This was achieved by including an "Growth and Innovation" module into the program. During this module, the participants worked on developing innovation projects, which they further developed in-between modules. Eventually the projects were presented to the executive board and integrated into the company's project portfolio.

Results

One of the big tangible take-aways from the program was the three projects with practical impact (see extra box). In February 2015 the participants got the chance to present the results of their project work to the Xella management board in the final session. The subsequent discussions with the C-level executives and the project sponsors on how to proceed with the approaches and solutions suggested for the existing challenges were very productive and gave great momentum for further action in the near future.

The Three Projects

Within the “Growth and Innovation” module the participants detected three promising topics alongside the innovation framework “10 types of innovation”. Subsequent to the module the participants elaborated - over a period of five months - on new delivery channels, new business models as well as new service offerings and ways how to leverage the considered innovation potential.

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