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SEE's Membership Development Strategy to Engage Chinese Entrepreneurs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study examines the membership development of SEE as they are at a critical stage of managing its over 200 entrepreneur members all over China. SEE is a nation-wide organization working on environmental protection issues by developing Chinese entrepreneur members and engage them on environmental protection regulations and activities.

The case study highlights the key issues in developing a membership engagement strategy and it explores how to better engage with Chinese entrepreneurs by membership development, membership participation and membership service. The case study focuses on BSR's lessons learned from developing the strategy through interviews with different stakeholders and workshops with internal staff of SEE. Based on this there are 7 recommendations:

1. Clear goals of developing the strategy
2. Seek to understand different perspectives of the organization
3. Be ambitious but realistic
4. Be neutral during the analysis process
5. Align different expectations and adapt priorities
6. Construct a logical thinking
7. Stakeholder engagement skills are needed

Lastly, from BSR's experience developing the strategy, we've included lessons specific to third party consultancies.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

SEE is a nation-wide and member-based organization that provides a platform for Chinese entrepreneurs to participate in environmental protection. Since the foundation was established eight years ago, the number of SEE's member entrepreneurs has increased rapidly. As more entrepreneurs join SEE, their demands and requirements have become more diversified, and the organization has been facing many challenges relating to membership engagement, and a clear membership engagement strategy aligning with the organizational strategy became necessary to fulfill SEE's mission.

The concept of the membership engagement strategy is to develop more entrepreneur members, encourage broader participation among SEE's members in its environmental protection activities, provide better member services and promote corporate social responsibility among the members' companies.

BSR developed the membership engagement strategy by reviewing documents, interviewing SEE's key department leaders and entrepreneur members, and conducting workshops with the membership department.

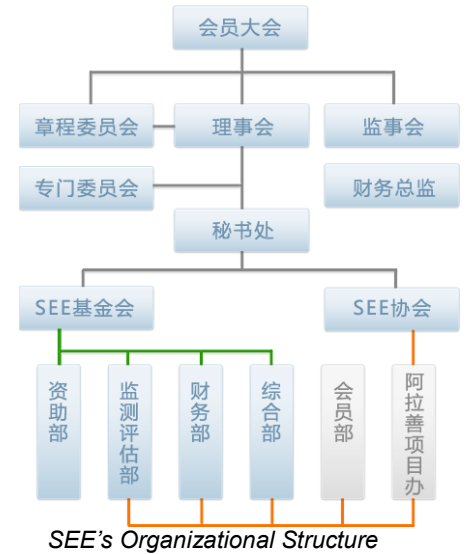
SEE'S UNIQUE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

SEE 独特的组织结构

The SEE organization is composed by a SEE Ecological Association and Beijing Entrepreneur Environmental Protection Foundation. Chinese entrepreneur members join the association and are required to donate 100,000 RMB each year to foundation, which facilitates the organization's environmental protection activities around China.

As the entrepreneur members are from many areas of the country. SEE established 8 regional groups for its members to work on environmental protection issues more effectively and efficiently. Members can both participate in the SEE's environmental protection activities and have their own environmental protection initiatives in their regional groups (in SEE's name).

The executive teams of the organization and each regional group are elected from the entrepreneur members every two years. These people are responsible for developing the organizational constitution and supervising the operation of the organization and regional groups (as shown in the picture). There are also specific divisions running by full time employees such as the membership department, the finance department and the project department.



STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS

Documentation Review:

We asked SEE for their documentation of their member information, previous strategy and member participation records. A statistical analysis was formed based on the data from the document to understand SEE's current situation of member development and participation of activities. We also reviewed SEE's previous strategy and strategy for other departments for a better understanding of the overall philosophy of the organization.

The number of SEE's entrepreneur members started to increase rapidly in 2009, so far SEE has over 200 entrepreneur members mostly from northern, eastern and southern part of China. More than 60% of them are from the Real Estate, Financial and Manufacturing industries. Only a few of them are significantly active in participating organization events. The other members only attend the annual member conference and participate activities in their own regional groups.

Evaluation Questionnaires:

Following developing a questionnaire with staff from SEE's membership department, a survey was conducted and 73 responses from the entrepreneur members were collected. Another statistical analysis was formed to understand how satisfied the members were with SEE's membership services. We also received valuable comments from the questionnaires.

Over 90% of members are very satisfied with SEE's membership services. However they think there are still improvements needed such as the comprehensiveness and minutiae which can demonstrate whether SEE has put enough thought in its services.

Interviews:

To learn more about members' opinions, expectations and recommendations on SEE's membership engagement, we conducted 3 interviews with SEE's internal staff and 35 interviews with its entrepreneur members.

All interviewees have the same concern about the poor member participation in the organizational events, and they gave many recommendations to improve that. On the other hand, they have opposite opinions on developing new members. Some of them think the more the better, and some think SEE should slow down and focus on satisfying the existing members.

SWOT Analysis:

Based on the analysis and interviews, we summarized SEE's strength and weakness, and identified its threats and opportunities.

Desktop Research:

As there are many entrepreneur organizations in China, we conducted a market research to find out SEE's competition status with other organizations.

In China, there are five types of entrepreneur organizations; each type has a specific focus area: business, study, academy, hobby and philanthropy. SEE is currently the only entrepreneur organization specialized in environmental protection.

Strategy Structure Establishment:

To complete the strategy structure, we firstly clarified SEE's positioning in the society and the relationship between the headquarter and regional groups, set up the short, medium and long term strategic goals to align with SEE's mission and vision, and then identified the three most important focus areas.

**Workshop with Board and Membership Department:**

During the workshop, after the confirmation of the positioning and focus areas with the secretary general, BSR and SEE worked together to develop the strategic plan in detail.

Recommendations to Implement the Strategy:

The recommendations of how to fully implement the strategy are developed based on analyzing entrepreneur members and SEE internal staff we interviewed or surveyed.

PROJECT RESULTS AND LEARNINGS

The strategy will help SEE to develop and retain more entrepreneur members, improve the quality and quantity of the members' participation in its environmental activities, as well as enhance service satisfaction and communication to members.

SEE has also gained valuable insights from the project:

- To ensure every member has the same benefits and always get the same information is a very important aspect in membership management.
- Clear role and responsibility should be distributed to particular department or people.
- Use multiple channels to better understand member's interests, desires and expectation to provide better member services.
- Other than donating money, some donors nowadays like to participate in the public services and initiatives.
- Utilize resources of entrepreneur members as there are very influential over the company, public and even the government.

Strategy development recommendations

Following BSR's work, BSR identified the following key recommendations:

- 1. Clear goals of developing the strategy:** When developing long term strategy, clear and specific goals that identify the expected impacts on the organization as well as to broader society and to the stakeholders should be developed initially. If it is not an overall strategy for the organization, the goals should also be aligned with the overall organizational goals and strategy.
- 2. Seek to understand different perspectives of the organization:** Seek a broad variety of perspectives even from the same department and should thus engage management level staff as well as implementation level staff in order to have a complete and fair picture.
- 3. Be ambitious but realistic:** The organizational vision can be very ambitious and glorious, but within the strategic period the goals should be achievable. They need to be adapted they seem impossible to achieve in the planned period. This sometimes happens after interviewing stakeholders and getting better understand of the current situation of the organization. Furthermore, to achieve the strategic goals, short, medium and long term goals should be identified to ensure the achievement.
- 4. Be neutral during the analysis process:** Often comments and ideas of stakeholders are not consistent. It is needed to be neutral and not judge who or what is right or wrong, but understand the implications of any information for the success of the project according to its goals.
- 5. Align different expectations and adapt priorities:** In this project, the organization has over 200 members and most of them have multiple expectations and these expectations vary from different industries, areas and personal interests. It is important for the organization to be able to acknowledge the expectations to adapt priorities and respond to its mission and vision. The change in priority will make it difficult to develop strategic goals to fulfill the organizational mission and provide satisfying services to the members.
- 6. Construct a logical thinking:** When developing a new strategy, it is important to construct a clear and logical progress of the development. The conclusion of the first step should always be supportive for the next step. For example, the results of questionnaires and interviews led us to the results of the SWOT analysis; this analysis and the research supported us to clarify SEE's positioning; and then we developed the strategy based on the positioning.
- 7. Stakeholder engagement skills are needed:** Consultants should understand where a stakeholder is coming from in order to understand their opinions and ask the right questions to obtain the necessary insight. It is important to be able to ask the right questions, listen carefully and dig appropriately.