

## MANAGEMENT OF AN INNOVATIVE PROJECT BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF SPIROLIFE

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### **Abstract:**

The objective of the study is to identify and analyse management methods of an innovative enterprise based on the example of Spirolife, a project under implementation since 2015 by Spiropharm. Spirolife is a health and motivation program combining the latest developments in medicine with Japanese holistic approach. The program consists of several elements – motivation, physical activity, education, nutrition, preventive healthcare and habits. The program addresses mainly the corporates who have little time and motivation to care for a healthy lifestyle. In order to assist them on the way to changing bad habits, the position of the Health Partner was established. Their role is to assist program's participants in defining their individual objectives and making small steps towards achieving these. Empirical studies were conducted by means of a partly categorised interview. The interview encompassed areas associated with the establishment of the program, recruitment and selection of employees, their development, team management, achievement of objectives. In addition, an attempt at the identification of the program's development opportunities and potential risks' analysis were undertaken as well.

*Keywords: innovative project, diversity management, entrepreneurship, competences*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Modern companies function in the conditions of a permanent change, necessity of adjusting to new conditions, requirements and clients' needs. This requires particular competences to be present in the organization, managers and all employees. The ability to manage a diverse team composed of various generations, sexes, competences, religions and statuses gains importance as well.

The necessity of generating innovation, which constitutes a fundamental determinant of market success, has become an additional challenge for companies. In such environment, new companies are frequently established in order to bring the owner's innovative ideas to life.

The present study discusses the issue of management of an innovative health program, whose implementation is facilitated by appropriate diverse team management.

## 2. THE ISSUE IN THE LITERATURE OF THE SUBJECT

Globalisation, technological advancement, the necessity of functioning in the state of change, are only a few challenges modern companies are exposed to. These require a particular approach to management to be adopted by business owners and managers, and competences facilitating the company's success to be developed.

Innovation, which constitutes one of the fundamental elements of entrepreneurship, has gained significance in this respect (Shane, 2003, p.5). Entrepreneurial process requires innovations, which are not necessarily breakthrough in character, to be introduced. The literature of the subject highlights the fact that innovations may be of various character, scope and impact. They can also have various origins- some require years of systematic work, others result from a sudden realisation or a coincidence (Glinka & Gudkova, 2011, p.89).

From the perspective of the present paper, innovations implemented by small companies, are of particular interest. Such innovations are usually characterised by a smaller scale than innovations introduced by larger companies or corporations. Small companies, due to their specific operations, frequently undertake projects which may not be profitable for larger businesses. They also search for niches or develop ones themselves. In addition, such companies are frequently established for an innovative project, based on the owner's unique knowledge, to be implemented (Glinka & Gudkova, 2011, p.102).

Managing a modern business requires a novel approach towards developing business strategy. It can no longer be perceived as permanent and unchangeable (Montgomery, 2008). Operating in the state of the permanent flux requires strategies to be flexible, which enables opportunities offering additional benefits to be taken. Diversity, redundancy and environment monitoring constitute the main determinants of flexibility (Krupski, 2004, pp. 82-83). In response to challenges as regards the company's strategy, further, innovative projects may be implemented.

New markets generate new needs of clients. They exert key influence upon modern companies. Companies must generate new values for themselves, their employees and consumers. It is innovation that constitutes one of the fundamental tools for accomplishing objectives by modern companies. In turn, employees stimulate innovation by their knowledge, skills and knowledge-sharing (Bassett-Jones, 2005, pp.169-170). Success in implementing innovation largely depends on available resources (especially human capital) and their skilful application. Their proper utilisation requires effective management- team-members' commitment, generating atmosphere facilitating innovation, refinement of ideas.

At present, the literature of the subject devotes much attention to diversity management. The issue is relatively new, but due to globalisation, internationalisation of businesses, demographic and legal changes, gains significance. Diversity is multi-dimensional and may be perceived narrowly and broadly. The narrow perception of the term denotes that merely one or two dimensions, e.g. sex and age, are considered. On the other hand, the broad understanding encompasses more dimensions (e.g. age, sex, sexual orientation, severity of disablement, financial status, religion, etc.) (Rakowska, 2014, p.10).

Regardless of the scope and model, diversity may constitute a vital source of creativity and innovation of a modern company. However, a skilful application of diversity's potential is vital in order to avoid negative consequences resulting from misunderstandings and conflicts at the workplace. Therefore, modern companies are faced with a critical challenge. Considering diversity as a value and source of potential, they risk the emergence of conflicts. However, should they avoid diversity, they risk the loss of competitiveness (Héroux & Fortin, 2016, pp. 18-19).

When such point of view is considered, managerial skills in effective management of a diverse team gain particular significance. Managers' soft skills, such as those facilitating coordination of multi-generational teams, are especially important. The modern manager must not be a mere expert in the field. He must maximize the potential of diverse talents in their team. Understanding values, features, motivation of each of the team- members become critical. Such approach enables fundamental competences facilitating the organisation's success to be identified, cooperation to be fostered, and favourable conditions for effective communication and experience-sharing to emerge. Employees' expect to be supported by the management, by their comments, opinions, and to be effectively integrated. The management is also required to act consequently towards accomplishing the organisation's objectives. The manager becomes a sort of a coach for their employees, which fosters loyalty and team trust (Salopek, 2006, pp. 22).

### **3. RESEARCH METODOLOGY**

Empirical studies were conducted by means of a case study, a fundamental method of qualitative research. The case study focuses on the analysis of an internally complex object (or objects) and intensive relationships with their environment, by means of a variety of information sources (documents, observations, interviews). The study takes the context of the case into consideration (Creswell, 2007, pp. 73-75; Baxter & Jack, pp. 544-545).

The case study approach is frequently selected in instances where the research problem encompasses a considerable number of inter-related variables and the researcher has little control over the object of the study. Case studies are preferred when the evaluation encompasses cause and effect relationships which may be too complex for a survey study, an analysis of actions taken and outcomes of a program from the point of view of their effectiveness. In addition, case studies facilitate the comprehensive assessment of activity outcomes whose results may be difficult to predict (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003, pp. 63-65).

Such an approach was applied in the present study due to the stipulation that a highly standardised questionnaire may lead to far-reaching simplifications, which would result in superficial conclusions being drawn.

A partly categorised interview constituted an element of the case study. The interview took place in January 2016 at the premises of Spiropharm in Lublin. Six people were interviewed – the owner of the company, Health Partners' Manager, and Spirolife program's employees. The interview was supplemented with the observation and documents' analysis (a guide to Spirolife program).

The objective of the study was the identification of factors determining the efficiency of management of an innovative enterprise on the basis of Spirolife program. As a result of the observation of the program's implementation and initial interviews with the manager and employees, the interview questionnaire was developed.

The interview encompassed several thematic areas i.e.:

- the idea behind the business;
- the program's span;
- recruitment, selection, and team-building;
- employees' competences;
- diverse team management.

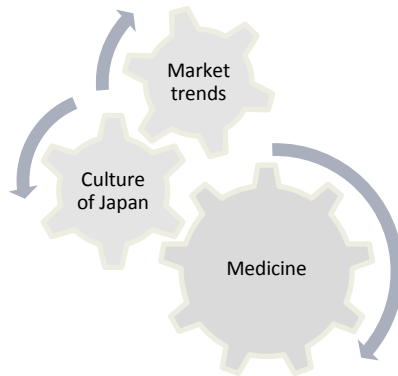
An attempt at the identification of the program's development opportunities and potential threats was undertaken as well.

### **4. SPIROLIFE PROGRAM**

#### 4.1. The idea behind the business

Spirolife is implemented by Spiropharm<sup>1</sup>. The company was established in 2014 by a Lublin-based entrepreneur, who himself claims that since early years, has known he would be operating his own business. Currently, he is busy running a few companies employing 200 people in total. Despite holding a diploma of university studies in management, he leads naturally and charismatically<sup>2</sup>.

**Picture 1:** Origins of Spiropharm's idea



Source: authors' own findings

The idea of Spiropharm emerged as a result of several areas being combined (Picture 1):

1. Medicine (following the family background, personal interest in medicine).
2. Culture of Japan, especially Japanese approach to business, based on Kaizen<sup>3</sup> philosophy. Japanese values serving as the company's fundament include honesty towards oneself and others, transparency of actions, and respect.
3. Market trends- pro-health and medicine branches, which will be rapidly growing due to the aging of societies, them becoming wealthier, as well as a greater awareness of preventive healthcare's significance and the dynamic growth of dietary supplements' market.

The idea behind Spirolife was the intention to fill the gap between medical (especially associated with healthcare) and consulting services. According to the founders of the program, the greatest problem in Poland is the insufficient awareness of preventive healthcare's importance and inappropriate approach to health in general (many initiatives lack funding).

#### 4.2. Program's span

Spirolife is a health and motivation program implemented by a Polish-Japanese company named Spiropharm. The program offers universal support in a gradual change of habits towards a healthier lifestyle. The program addresses employees of large companies and corporations who intend to make a conscious impact upon their lives. Addressees consist mainly of the overworked, tired people who have little or no time to look after their lifestyles, and are consequently exposed to the loss of well-being. The objective of the program is to offer comprehensive support in making a gradual change of habits in order to lead a healthier lifestyle. In practice, the program may be defined as an offer of tailor-made assistance on the road to a permanent change of lifestyle.

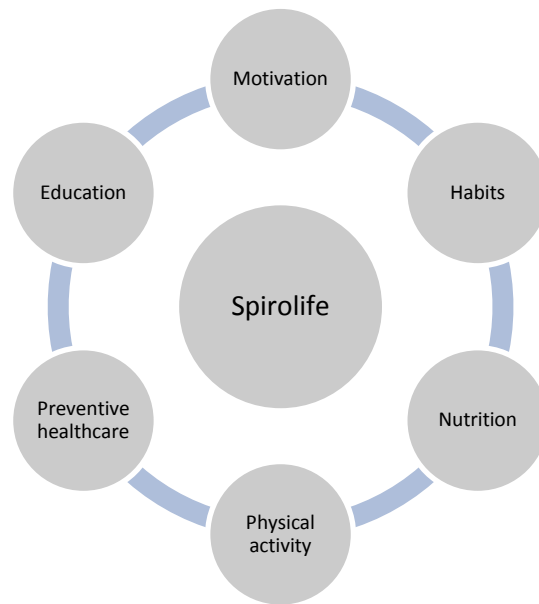
Spirolife encompasses six thematic areas diagnosed as having significant impact upon individuals (Picture 2.).

**Picture 2:** Spirolife's span

<sup>1</sup>Spiropharm produces spirulina-based dietary supplements.

<sup>2</sup> Professional poker constitutes the owner's second area of interest. Recently, he received the title of the Polish Player of 2015. Poker wins are invested in further business ideas.

<sup>3</sup> The owner's wife delivered inspiration for the establishment of Spiropharm. She was born in Japan, a country where traditional rules constitute a fundamental value.



Source: <http://spiro.life/>

The program aims at introducing the change gradually, by means of small steps. Such approach allows individuals to become used to the gradual transition. The small-steps' approach originated from the popular Japanese Kaizen philosophy and allows the habit of looking after one's own health and life to be developed.

### 4.3. Development of the program

Picture 3 outlines Spirolife's development stages. Creating a team of several experts to take the position of Health Partners (HPs) became the key element in the process. The position of the HP was developed especially with the program in mind.

Performing particular tasks is not what the position is only about. Job advertisement used for recruitment mentioned that prospective employees will be required to actively participate and contribute to the program.

**Picture 2:** Stages of Spirolife's development



Source: authors' own findings

Recruitment of HPs was interesting and non-standard. HP Manager<sup>4</sup> was responsible for developing the job description and conducting recruitment and selection.

After the competence profile was determined (outlined in 4.4.), the job advertisement was designed. The advertisement addressed therapists, nutritionists, coaches and psychologists, who were requested to submit their CVs and cover letters. However, the documents had merely supplementary character. The fundamental recruitment procedure encompassed Harrison Assessments Talent Solutions (Harrison, 2007).

Upon the completion of the tests by applicants and detailed analysis of test results, job interviews commenced. Only those applicants possessing both hard, and soft natural competences were invited to attend. Interviews were non-standard. It was not stress-interviewing, but rather a meeting of people conducted with the view of becoming familiar with the potential partner and their motivation. At the moment of making final decisions as regards applicants, the usually significant features considered by recruiters (education, professional results, performance reviews, etc.) were not decisive. Recruiters focused primarily on advanced emotional intelligence enabling a multi-level situation within a team to be analysed, clients' needs recognised and a suitable solution to a given problem selected. As a consequence, the HP Manager made final decisions on the basis of her expert intuition resulting from long-term professional experience. As she herself observed, such experience allows her to recognise a true desire for professional improvement and the need for cooperation.

At present, HPs operate in a team of twelve, which directly cooperates with the HP Manager. The team is actively supported by a team of external experts (e.g. doctors, physiotherapists, personal coaches, business psychologists, nutritionists, etc.).

#### **4.4. Health Partners' role and competences**

Health Partners constitute a team of experts in the following fields: nutrition, physiotherapy, medical rescue, journalism, psychology, coaching and personal development. Each of the HPs is an expert in a particular area. Their commitment and synergy of expertise makes their work successful.

The work of a Health Partner is about developing relations with participants in Spirolife program. Health Partners' main objective is the support of a healthy lifestyle of people in their care.

As far as the position of the HP is concerned, education is less important than the innate inclination towards offering assistance. Due to the fact that such predispositions are difficult to verify, an advanced tool in the form of Harrison Assessments was applied. The tool allows the innate predispositions towards taking particular professional roles to be assessed.

The competence profile of HPs was quite complex. The main focus was placed upon the following competences:

- Empathy,
- Ability to establish cooperation and develop relations,
- Ability to improve constantly,
- Focus on other people's well-being,
- Willingness to work in a changing environment,
- Readiness to work in a structureless environment,
- Flexibility, receptiveness to change,
- Ability to question one's own beliefs (and to undertake further attempts at solving a problem),
- Focus on active listening and data analysis, ability to cooperate with others,
- Ability to make independent decisions,
- Ability to approach issues holistically and draw conclusions from a broader context,
- Commitment and desire to broaden knowledge of healthy lifestyles,
- Ability to contribute and be creative, focus on permanent improvement.

Each of the HPs performs their independent tasks and drives the consulting process with clients. At the same time, HPs cooperate within a team, thus must manifest advanced competences enabling

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<sup>4</sup> The manager boasts several years of professional experience holding executive positions in large companies and corporations.

such cooperation. As a consequence, the choice of such candidates who would be able to work together not only as individuals, but also as an independent team, presented the greatest challenge in the selection process.

Candidates had to be able to work in a structureless environment. If an individual required a well-defined structure to function properly, they would face difficulties in working with the team, despite possessing advanced competences.

Directly after the conclusion of recruitment and selection, the whole team underwent a 3-month initial training preparing them for work as Health Partners, and supplementing their knowledge in order for them to work with clients effectively (grounding and unifying their knowledge so that they are able to perform well as HPs). In addition, as a result of becoming familiar with clients' requirements, HPs' needs as regards customer service, competence development (e.g. nutrition, coaching tools, stress management, motivation, psychological aspects of work, development and change of habits, medicine, etc.) further trainings are offered.

The daily responsibilities of the team encompass the following:

1. Work with clients, including: telephone conversations and emails with them, monitoring their progress and performance, work with IT tools, search for new individual solutions to clients' problems, meeting clients' needs, competence development;
2. Contribution to the development of Spirolife program and other projects, including: social media fan page, blog, co-organisation of events (TEDx, health, beauty, nutrition, personal development, etc.), collecting opinions on HPs and on clients' participation in the program, developing documentation, presentations, designing and testing tools, etc.

#### **4.5. Innovation of the program**

Spirolife constitutes an innovative program. The innovation is manifested in the following:

1. Holistic approach to clients and tailor-made character of the offer. The idea behind the program involves the commitment of each individual participating in it. The offer is not a general, ready-made solution targeting a company and their employees. Both methods and tools are made to measure with each individual client in mind<sup>5</sup>.
2. Self-motivation of each individual participant constitutes the driving force towards a change. Health Partners are committed to maintain their clients' motivation.
3. Innovative and unique level of the team's commitment to building relations among employees, which constitutes a basis for any change.
4. Innovative approach towards team management and program building based on the lack of structure, standards, models. This results from the lack of similar organisations and the owner's belief in the greater significance of commitments and beliefs over hard skills and management methods.
5. Work with clients on the basis of small steps' methodology originating from Kaizen philosophy.
6. Working conditions- facilities and decoration based on Japanese standards. Such approach facilitates cooperation, exchange of experiences, improvement of competences, enabling independent work with clients at the same time.

#### **4.6. Management of a diverse team of experts – challenges**

According to the HP Manager, when working with such a diverse team of experts, the key to success lies in the diversity, which enables synergies to be formed, and the exchange of competences and experiences to be fostered. The following Japanese proverb has become the teams motto: "None of us is as versatile as all of us combined".

Diversity as regards age, sex, and competences is one of the priorities when building a team. Despite the lack of artificial parities, the team whose potential is based on diversity was successfully formed.

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<sup>5</sup>For example, some clients are contacted by HPs by means of a mobile application (e.g. once a month) because all they need is a reminder of appointments and objectives. On the other hand, HPs work with other clients solely by means of a conversation, coaching methods in order to assist them in defining their personal objectives and most effective means of accomplishing these. The approach is person-dependent and conditioned by the individual's needs, characteristic features, personal circumstances, etc.

When asked to comment on challenges she faces when managing the team, the Manager admitted that managing the energy and kinetics of the team constitutes the key element. When working with clients' motivation, employees' energy and motivation must be handled very sensibly. This is the most difficult task for Health Partners' manager, but the most satisfying at the same time.

## **5. PROGRAM'S FUTURE – DEVELOPMENT AND RISK FACTORS**

Spirolife is an innovative program, still in pilot stage of development. Therefore, it is difficult to summarise its business operations and evaluate them. This requires further in-depth studies supplanted with the evaluation of the program's outcomes, and the assessment of participants' and Health Partners' opinions.

However, the analysis of factors facilitating the development of the program, as well as potential threats seems worthwhile.

Factors facilitating the development of the program:

- Development of dietary supplements' and healthcare programs' markets;
- Growing public interest in slow life, care for oneself, maintaining professional- private life balance;
- Period of professional activity becoming longer, which results in a greater interest in pro-health programs;
- Growth opportunities as a result of the pilot stage experiences, introduction of ideas fulfilling clients' needs;
- Growing awareness of managers and employers as regards the significance of care for employees' development and balance;
- Introduction of further, innovative ideas owing to the utilization of the team's diversity potential, which will translate into the development of Spirolife itself;
- Development of long-term cooperation with businesses who recommend their employees to participate in Spirolife program;
- Adjustment to the needs of companies' abroad, and implementation of the program in these, so that it eventually becomes global.

Program's potential risk factors:

- Strong competition on the medical and consultancy markets, diversified offer of services (especially fitness, nutrition, psychological assistance, coaching);
- Lack of structure and intuitive management of Spirolife team can have several outcomes, which may only be evaluated in a longer time perspective;
- Demanding attitude of clients, unreasonable expectations as regards the program and Health Partners' assistance;
- Difficulties in developing relations, or the risk of the relationship with clients becoming personal, which may lead to occupational burnout of Spirolife's employees;
- Misunderstanding the program's offer, and as a consequence, no interest in participation;
- Should the client fail to accomplish their objectives, it may be perceived as Health Partners' failure. Meanwhile, such an outcome may result from several other factors;
- Clients' unwillingness to introduce changes in small steps. Some demand breakthrough changes, which goes contrary to the program's fundamentals;
- No interest in cooperation on the part of companies' managers, and resulting difficulties in reaching end users. The program promises no instant change of employees' efficiency. Meanwhile, companies' decision-makers would welcome the promise that program's participants will become more effective within a short period of time.

In conclusion, it can be stated that there exist several potential areas of the program's development, which result from an innovative offer combining coaching support with a motivational program providing the overworked an opportunity to achieve a balanced lifestyle. In light of the present market trends and a growing need of care for one's own health, such an initiative seems interesting and promising. Currently, apart from developing Spirolife, Spiropharm designs other programs for new end users (e.g. the elderly, pregnant women).



On the other hand, areas of potential difficulties may be diagnosed. These are mainly associated with the necessity of preventing occupational burnout. Such necessity results from the Health Partners' character of work involving client support, search for solutions to their problems, maintaining contact and building long-term relations with them. Such duties present a potential source of the burnout. In order to prevent such an outcome, rest and relaxation ought to be provided, variety of activities offered, mutual clinical-like supervisions conducted. Moreover, stress management methods and ways of overcoming difficulties ought to be discussed within the team, and if needed, psychological support considered. Health Partners claim that the source of their success originates from the fact that their work is their passion. They like what they do. This work is their way of life. The solutions offered to clients are usually tested on themselves first. As a consequence, they are authentic and convincing.

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