

Transforming an Organization

NAME

I was excited to join the newly formed “China Undergraduate Student Association” at XXXX University. However, I soon learned this organization suffered from problems encountered by many new organizations: disorganization, a lack of a coherent vision, and funding issues. I decided to take the initiative to analyze the structure and management style of this valuable organization, and ultimately, helped transform our organization into a model student association at XXXX University.

Our biggest problem was funding, so I focused my efforts on overhauling the fundraising apparatus to create a sophisticated and efficient fund raising team. The organization adopted a broad mission: to help, protect and support Chinese students on campus, and at home. In addition, we expanded our vision to promote Chinese cultural understanding at XXXX University through cultural events. All of these goals required money, and the funding from the Office of International Student and Scholars was insufficient.

I was assigned to be the team leader for the fund raising team, which included eight team members. Unfortunately, I soon learned they did not act as a “team” but instead operated independently. They had their own ideas about the best ways to solicit funds, which resulted in a chaotic situation that often meant multiple contacts with the same potential sponsors. Another complex problem was that our team members had different proficiencies in English, and some were not suited for the “sales” element of marketing.

As inspiration, I remembered the SBU-Strategic Business Unit organizational model. The SBU method divides an entire organization into smaller divisions to act independently to complete tasks. Even though we did not have a large organizational structure, I felt this concept might assist our operational issues. I began by selecting three people with the most out-going personalities who also had sufficient English skills to be team leaders.

Then I conducted interviews with the eight members and divided the eight members into three groups, and matched their personalities and English proficiency. After the groups were formed, I assigned different tasks. One group was responsible for identifying new sources of funding; this worked extremely well as they contacted the Chinese Embassy and arranged funding through this organization. The remaining two teams were assigned different territories to solicit businesses in the Lansing area.

After rearranging our organizational structure, my next goal was to revise our marketing strategies. I initiated a meeting with all the members and asked for feedback based on their experiences with fundraising. I introduced some strategies learned from my psychology class, including the “reject and retreat strategy,” and the “commitment strategy.” I encouraged team members to prepare two sets of

proposals – an ambitious goal, and a fallback goal. If the sponsor accepted our ambitious proposal, we gained the most benefits; if not, we requested a more modest amount, which increased our overall success rate.

Another strategy that we employed involved asking our sponsor how he/she was willing to support our group without offering specific terms. This often made our target feel less pressured. Finally, I emphasized a better marketing approach by offering a grander vision of what we hoped to accomplish, and how specifically their group could contribute to our success.

Perhaps my greatest innovation was to encourage our leaders to document their experiences. Our success rates, how different clients reacted to different approaches, and what information was needed from our organization, were all documented. We evaluated this information as a team and continuously modified our process. For example, we learned that a letter signed by the president of the organization increases our sponsor's belief in the validity of our organization. I also encouraged more brainstorming by our members to develop new approaches based on their successes and their failures.

These efforts not only dramatically improved our organization's funding; it also improved team morale, and the cohesion of our organization. It allowed us to offer several unique cultural events to promote our country and our heritage including the China Spring Festival Gala and the XXXX University International Affair. We also assisted students by arranging for transportation to and from the airport, and performed other helpful tasks to help new Chinese students feel more integrated into the XXXX State community.

Although this experience began with an idea to transform an organization – it also showed me the importance of vision, leadership, teamwork, and in the importance of applying academic principles to solve real-world problems. I plan to expand and augment these skills at XXXX University.