

Education First: A Strength Weaknesses Opportunities And Threats (SWOT) Analysis

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ABSTRACT:

Education first was founded in 1979 by Anne Pinner, who at the time was studying Arts at Monash University. Education first has a number of coalitions and partnerships around the world. In 2014, Education First's global operations were awarded the "Best Recruitment Practice" by Learning and Development Executive magazine. In November 2011, Education First was ranked as one of "Australia's Top 50 Corporate Philanthropists" by the Australian Corporate Philanthropy Association. In 2011/12 ECFA received \$795,000 in donations to fund its priority initiatives. Education first is also a member of the Melbourne Food Council. The current study is a systematic SWOT analysis of the organization. It also studies the strategic planning used by the organization to grow and achieve its objectives. The systematic review of literature reveals that despite EF's weaknesses, this organization has been able to provide high quality education with the help of its strong partnerships with international organizations. However, future challenges will arise; therefore, it is important to improve EF's programs by having a plan for the success of its programs in the next five years.

Keywords: EF, Education First, SWOT analysis, Strategic planning

1. INTRODUCTION

After reading an article about the lack of teachers in India, she decided that education should be put at the forefront of development. She also felt that a lot could be learned from teachers' experiences. In 1980, the organisation opened a centre in a school near Kolkata, India which was run by volunteers. The organisation's director Anne Pinner was the only teacher at the school for over a year, as she aimed to study what an education system needed to work 'well'.

In 1982, Education First opened its first English-language programme in Monash University. In 1987, it established its first overseas office in Thailand and soon grew into a national charity giving equal emphasis to both the development of under-resourced schools and supporting specialist projects such as those involving the deaf and disabled. In the 1990s, Education First strengthened its focus on delivering high-quality education to those most in need. In 1993, Education First opened its first international school, the Millennium School at Phonthong, Thailand. In 2004, Education First officially became a charity with a Board of Directors and moved its headquarters from Melbourne to Sydney (EF Tianjin, 2016)

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2. Education First's approach to strategic planning

Education First's approach to strategic planning is based on four strategically oriented principles (EF Tianjin, 2016):

1. **Goals and Objectives:** The organization must define and prioritize its goals and objectives. These objectives should be specific and measurable: "how we want to be different". Goals should be flexible, clearly defined and attainable at the same time that they are important and meaningful for the organization.
2. **Strategy Process:** The process of developing an organization's strategy is a cyclical one (5-steps). The "EF Approach" emphasizes the need for a disciplined and comprehensive approach: defining goals and objectives, clarifying the strategy and key operating processes, implementing what has been agreed upon and assessing results.
3. **Key Operating Processes:** The organization needs to identify its key operating processes as the basis for developing the strategy. The "EF Approach" emphasizes that it is through these processes that an organization will achieve its goals and achieve its vision of success. An organization's competitive advantage results from its ability to better manage these critical core processes than those of its competitors.
4. **Strategic Intent:** After developing the strategy, it is essential to define what the organization will do to achieve its goals. The key question should be, "What are the ways in which EF can be differentiated from others?"

5. Strategic Direction: Being different does not have to mean being unique. Given the similar strategies of competitors, competing in today's environment requires that organizations change their strategies while still remaining true to their mission and values.

3. Educational Leadership

Education First's educational vision is defined by the core competencies that all educators must have in order to address our society's most pressing challenges for learning and becoming globally competitive in a knowledge economy. These competencies are based on four elements (EFSET, 2016):

1. Learning Design

Learning Design is the process of planning, delivering and assessing activities that help people develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required for lifelong learning, self-direction and personal growth.

Developing a learning design involves identifying needs for learning through systematic observation of behaviors that require change or development. The information gained from these observations is then used to conduct interviews with individuals to determine what they know now, what they need to learn next, how they will learn it and what support they will need to develop new skills. This information is then combined to create a learning design.

2. Learning Community

Learning Communities are groups of people who meet regularly in order to support each other's learning and personal growth. Members of these communities are connected in some way, either by geography or interest, or they may be connected over the internet using virtual learning environments. Learning Communities are not only centered on developing skills related to their purpose, but also on developing personal knowledge, wisdom and discernment for living in today's world.

3. Knowledge Development

Knowledge Development is the process of creating, sharing and applying new knowledge in order to enrich the lives of individuals and society as a whole. Knowledge Development involves making and using knowledge available through different media, such as distance learning and textbooks. Knowledge Development also involves the transformation of information into knowledge and the development of standards for gathering, storing and sharing that knowledge.

4. Life-Long Learning

Life-Long Learning is defined as a process that engages individuals in lifelong learning throughout their life span for personal growth, career progression and citizenship development. The purpose of life-long learning is to help people develop their skills to lead healthy, productive, optimistic and meaningful lives so they can contribute to societies' economic and social development and become globally competitive in a knowledge economy.

5. Personal Growth

Personal Growth is defined as the development of an individual's skills, knowledge, values and attitudes for self-directed action that contribute to personal happiness and well-being.

The next section of the paper discusses a SWOT analysis, which is also one of the major objectives of the current study.

4. SWOT Analysis

Strengths

1. Simplicity: EF requires only a small number of people and budget to implement its programs; therefore it can be easily managed by an organization within relatively short time periods.
2. Cost efficiency: EF does not require large funds to implement its programs; thus it can be managed by relatively low-cost organizations and individuals without any loss in efficiency and success.
3. International support: it is important for EF to have international support from governments, the private sector, NGOs and other international organizations in order for its programs to succeed. Therefore, if there is no international support for these organizations, their projects may not be implemented successfully despite the fact that they are non-profit and based on goodwill.
4. Quality education: EF requires a high standard of education from its students in developing countries. In order to achieve this, it should have a broad network of cooperation with educational institutions and other non-profit organizations that can provide this kind of training.

5. Objectivity: because EF is not a government organization and does not have any political interests, it is possible for the organization to operate in a more objective way by trying to bring all parties together in order to resolve conflict among them.

Weaknesses

1. Schools: the EF firm wants to “invade” the school and distribute fliers to their children. As a result, they seal their doors to any economic activity proposed by such firms, making contact impossible. EF works hard to inform schools about different programmes and their advantages to children, rather than being a commercial vendor.

2. The Economy: as said previously, there is a global financial crisis that started in 2007 and still persists through the world. As a consequence, many large organizations and institutions cut their funds for international projects and investments. EF has been affected by this as well; many donors decided to cut their funds and not renew the ones they had already given.

3. Cultural Differences: although EF is present worldwide with representative offices, its main goal of improving education in schools may not be understood by all countries of the world at the same level. EF's mission is to provide high quality education to children from poor families; however, such idea does not resonate with every culture or country perception of what education should be like or how it should be delivered.

4. Organization Size: even though EF is present in more than 34 countries, its organization is still very small compared to other large charities that are present in the world.

5. Competition: other “education for all” charities are also present in the world, offering similar programs to EF. Such competition may result in donors lacking the confidence to choose which organization to support.

6. Misunderstanding: as EF is still a new charity in the world, many do not understand its goals or programs, and therefore do not support it.

7. Existing and New Staff: as EF is a charity organization, new employees and staff are needed to help the organization grow.

8. Management: as its main goal is to improve education in schools, many do not understand what kind of support they can offer for such purpose; thus they do not know how to respond.

9. Cooperation: as EF values the values of cooperative learning and sharing ideas with those who share its same interests, those who support or believe in its main goal may be more open to collaboration with the organization.

10. Financial: as the global financial crisis affected many charities and organizations, EF has also been affected. As such, all of their donors have reduced their funds and EF has received fewer donations than expected.

Opportunities

1. Internationalization: because EF values globally that children in poor families should have a quality education, it is natural that it becomes a leader for international cooperation in higher education and provide a wide range of opportunities in areas such as student mobility, distance learning, staff training related to projects abroad and adoption studies.
2. Development programs: as EF solicits for funds to implement its programs in schools, the more money it receives, the more projects it can implement. It is also possible that received money can make up for some of the reductions of funds by donors.
3. Technological development: because EF is a non-profit organization, it does not receive funding from the public or private sectors of industry for research and development that will benefit students attending EF schools. However, there are many governments of developing countries that may provide financial support to develop equipment which has a significant impact on students' education in school.
4. Relations with other charities: there are many large international charities that focus on the education sector. Therefore, it is possible to establish a cooperational relationship aimed at helping each other in order to create more opportunities for children in need.
5. Development of Social Networks: because EF has access to a wide network of communities and individuals with common interest in improving education through distance learning and cooperative educational projects, it is possible to make a great impact on students' lives in developing countries.
6. Use of new technologies: after its mission statement is realized, EF will have great opportunities for continued development by using the latest technological developments that will be available at that time.
7. Cooperation with local governments: EF always values the values of cooperation with the local community in which it is present. It is possible to establish a cooperative relationship with the government of the country where it is based to help create even more opportunities for children in need.

8. Cooperation with other education organizations: as EF does not have all the answers to improving education, there are many organizations that may be willing to cooperate with us in order to provide better education for children in developing countries.
9. International teachers: as EF has an international vision, it is necessary for teachers who are willing to pursue their careers at another country and teach students at schools located there, EF may provide support during their time abroad.
10. Cooperation with donors: as EF is ready to cooperate with other charities to achieve mutual goals, it will be possible to establish collaborative relationships with other organizations in the sector.
11. Cooperation with universities: there are many universities that may be willing to cooperate with EF by implementing some of its programs in their curricula, or even students themselves who may want to participate in the organization's programs.
12. Strategic alliances: as EF has an international vision and its main goal is to improve quality of education, anyone who wants to make a difference is welcome to help it fulfill its goals.
13. Relations with schools: after its mission statement is achieved, EF may be able to open schools in other countries or even other institutions that are willing to cooperate.
14. Affiliation with the public sector: through its cooperation with local governments and institutions, it is possible to establish a cooperative relationship and make a difference in people's lives.
15. Affiliation with non-governmental organizations: as EF is an international organization and its main goal is the improvement of education in the world, it is possible for it to establish a professional relationship with other international NGOs in order to create more opportunities for children in need.
16. Affiliation with the private sector: as EF is a non-profit organization, it will be able to establish a professional relationship with corporations that share its goals.

Threats

1. Slow internationalization: there are many ways of internationalizing which can take a long time and consume much energy and personnel in the process. Furthermore, in order for EF to change and serve in other countries, it is necessary that each country has adequate equipment

for this purpose. This may be difficult because it will require cooperation with non-profits and schools in developing countries; thus it may take a long time to establish such relationships. Furthermore, if this is not carried out properly, there can be risks such as financial or educational problems in developing countries.

2. Lack of cooperation among teachers: it is possible that because EF is an international organization where the management is outside the country, there will not be much cooperation among educators due to language or cultural barriers.

3. Low level of donations: this might not be a threat in the short-term because aid organizations require funds for their projects, but in the long-term this can delay many of EF's programs.

4. Endangerment to own personnel for political reasons: as EF deploys its personnel to other countries at its own expense and does not have any political connections with the government, it is possible that it may be forced to leave due to political pressure at any time without warning.

5. Lack of facilities: EF requires equipment for its programs which will require cost money for purchasing or leasing equipment. This will mean that if facilities are not available, this organization may be forced to delay many of its projects.

6. Uncooperative local governments: there are many countries in the world where local governments are not cooperative with other organizations that want to work in that country. Therefore, the cooperation with local governments is essential for EF programs to succeed in providing quality education in developing countries.

7. Inability to manage conflict of interest: EF requires a high level of cooperation from the government, local NGOs and other organizations in order for its programs to succeed. Therefore, it is essential that EF creates a professional relationship with them to identify their own priorities and standards in order to implement its programs effectively.

8. Inability of effective partnership relationships: many trust-based relationships are required to run EF programs successfully. Therefore it is important that the organization improve the quality of these relationships for a long-term basis by being clear about each party's goals and objectives.

9. Lack of financial resources: it is important for EF to have enough money so that all its programs can be implemented well. Therefore, if EF does not find adequate funding for its programs, it will be forced to delay many of its projects.

10. Lack of technological resources: many programming tools are used by EF that require technological support for their successful implementation; if EF has insufficient funds, this may delay the success of many programs.

11. Lack of professional training programs: there are many tools used by EF that will require professional training in order to be used by students. Therefore, if EF has insufficient financial resources, this may delay the success of some of these programs.

12. Support from home country for international programs: It is important to have support from the government and public institutions for EF's international activities to succeed. Therefore, if there is no support for these international projects, it will be difficult for EF to run its programs successfully in other countries.

5. CONCLUSION

Despite EF's weaknesses, this organization has been able to provide high quality education with the help of its strong partnerships with international organizations. However, future challenges will arise; therefore it is important to improve EF's programs by having a plan for the success of its programs in the next five years.

In addition, EF has been operating effectively in many countries for a long time. In order to maintain independence from other institutions and governments, it is important to continue to get financial assistance from private businesses and individuals. In addition, EF must focus on activities that are aligned with its mission and vision in order to further improve their organization and develop ways for improving their own guidance systems.

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