

Navigating New Horizons: Strategic Expansion and Leadership in the Outdoor Recreation Industry

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ABSTRACT: This case study explores the strategic market expansion and leadership transformation of Delaware Hardware and Tractor Supply (DHTS), a regional chain aiming to enter the outdoor recreation market across Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina. As DHTS seeks to diversify its product offerings and penetrate new markets, the study examines the application of market research, leadership theories, and change management frameworks in supporting this expansion. Key outdoor recreation trends, such as the rise in camping, RVing, water sports, and eco-friendly products, are analyzed to inform DHTS's product selection and marketing strategies. The case highlights the use of tools like SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, and Blue Ocean Strategy to identify opportunities and minimize risks in the new market. Furthermore, transformational leadership behaviors are emphasized as critical drivers in guiding DHTS's workforce through the transition, fostering innovation, and enhancing employee engagement. Change management theories, including Lewin's Change Model, are employed to ensure a smooth transition, addressing employee concerns and solidifying new operational practices. Finally, the role of organizational culture in driving innovation and adaptability is discussed, using Schein's Organizational Culture Model as a guiding framework. This case study offers valuable lessons for companies looking to expand into new markets and industries, with a particular focus on leadership, organizational adaptation, and strategic decision-making in a dynamic business environment.

KEYWORDS: market expansion, outdoor recreation industry, strategic leadership, transformational leadership, change management, blue ocean strategy

Introduction

Delaware Hardware and Tractor Supply (DHTS) is a well-established regional chain of hardware and tractor supply stores operating exclusively within the state of Delaware. Over the years, DHTS has built a strong reputation for providing a wide range of products, exceptional customer service, and fostering a loyal customer base. The company's success within Delaware has prompted it to consider expansion into neighboring states, specifically Virginia (VA), Maryland (MD), and North Carolina (NC).

As part of its strategic growth plan, DHTS aims to diversify its product offerings to include items that cater to the outdoor recreation market. This initiative is driven by many objectives, including market expansion (understand the outdoor recreation market in the target states), product diversification (broaden the range of products offered and widen customer base), revenue growth (increase overall sales and profitability), and brand strengthening (enhance brand recognition and loyalty). The purpose of the assignment is to apply research, data collection, data analysis, leadership, organizational culture, and change management theories to develop a detailed marketing, outreach, and expansion strategy for DHTS.

Identifying Outdoor Recreation Trends

Staying updated on evolving outdoor recreation trends and consumer preferences is crucial, and conducting first-hand research provides insights into the market dynamics. To support various strategic initiatives, relevant academic and industry literature provides evidence of the importance

of staying informed about market trends and consumer preferences. Continuous market research, such as surveys, provides feedback from customers to understand their preferences and changing needs (Galvan and Galvan 2017). This can be done through online surveys, feedback forms at stores, and social media interactions. Analyzing industry reports and publications from organizations such as the Outdoor Industry Association and Parks and Recreation provide valuable insights and data on market trends and consumer behavior. Partnerships and collaborations with local outdoor organizations such as local outdoor clubs, environmental organizations, and recreational facilities can help DHTS stay informed about trends and community needs. Utilizing social media platforms to monitor discussions and trends related to outdoor recreation and engaging with online communities and influencers who are active in the outdoor space can provide gain insights and help in promoting new products (Evans 2010). Attending trade shows, expos, and industry conferences focused on outdoor recreation can provide opportunities to network with industry experts, discover new products, and stay updated on market trends.

Using these data sources, we can see that there are several recent trends in the outdoor recreation market in VA, MD, and NC. The first trend is the uptick in the popularity of camping and RVing. Since COVID-19 when people were forced to live inside and travel options were limited, the camping and RVing markets have seen substantial growth, driven by a need for affordable travel options and a closer connection to nature (Beery et al. 2021; Duray et al. 2000; Fagerholm et al. 2021; Landry et al. 2021; Pröbstl-Haider et al. 2023). This includes tent camping, car camping, and the use of recreational vehicles (RVs). States like NC and VA offer numerous national parks, campgrounds, and RV parks that attract outdoor enthusiasts. Another growing segment is water sports and activities (Campón-Cerro et al. 2020; Wood et al. 2022). Water-based activities such as kayaking, canoeing, paddleboarding, and fishing have gained popularity, particularly in regions with access to rivers, lakes, and coastal areas. MD, with its extensive Chesapeake Bay coastline, and NC, known for its Outer Banks, are prime locations for these activities. The growing focus on healthy living has increased interest in hiking and trail activities (Miller 2023; Miller and Washington 2023; Moliere 2021). Hiking, trail running, and mountain biking are increasingly popular activities. The Appalachian Trail, which runs through VA and parts of MD, and the Blue Ridge Mountains in NC, are significant attractions for hikers and bikers. A closely related segment is the outdoor fitness and wellness sector (Makres and Seiler 2024; Vroman 2023). There is a growing trend towards outdoor fitness and wellness activities such as yoga, boot camps, and guided outdoor meditation sessions (Garrett 2022; Maloy 2022; Schulte 2023). This trend reflects a broader interest in health and well-being, coupled with a desire to spend more time in natural settings. Also, consumers are becoming more environmentally conscious and are seeking sustainable and eco-friendly products (Collins 2019; Novotná et al. 2024). This includes everything from camping gear made of recycled materials to eco-friendly water bottles and solar-powered gadgets (Gössling and Lund-Durlacher 2021; White 2023).

Selecting New Product Categories

DHTS can stay competitive on new outdoor recreation trends and consumer preferences identified in the previous trend analysis through a variety of ways, such as introducing new products for camping and RVing equipment, water sports and activities gear, hiking and trail activities equipment, outdoor fitness and wellness products, and sustainable and eco-friendly products. The table below contains a list of new products for each of the segment.

Table 1. New Product Innovations

Segment	Products	Description
Camping and RVing Equipment	Tents	A variety of tents suitable for car camping, backpacking, and family camping.
	RV Accessories	Products such as RV covers, leveling blocks, and portable grills.
	Camping Furniture	Chairs, tables, and portable kitchens designed for comfort and convenience.
	Sleeping Gear	Sleeping bags, air mattresses, and camping pillows.
Water Sports and Activities Gear	Kayaks and Canoes	Various types, including inflatable options for easy transport.
	Paddleboards	Both hard and inflatable models.
	Fishing Equipment	Rods, reels, tackle, and bait suitable for freshwater and saltwater fishing.
	Safety Gear	Life jackets, helmets, and waterproof bags.
Hiking and Trail Activities Equipment	Hiking Gear	Backpacks, trekking poles, and hydration systems.
	Footwear	Hiking boots, trail running shoes, and sandals.
	Navigation and Safety Equipment	GPS devices, compasses, and first aid kits.
	Apparel	Moisture-wicking clothing, hats, and sun protection gear.
Outdoor Fitness and Wellness Products	Fitness Equipment	Portable workout gear like resistance bands, yoga mats, and kettlebells.
	Wearables	Fitness trackers and smartwatches.
	Outdoor Wellness Kits	Items for outdoor yoga and meditation sessions, including mats, blankets, and portable speakers.
Sustainable and Eco-Friendly Products	Camping Gear	Products made from recycled materials or sustainable sources, such as bamboo utensils and eco-friendly tents.
	Reusable Items	Water bottles, food containers, and shopping bags.
	Solar-Powered Gadgets	Chargers, lanterns, and flashlights.
	Clothing	Eco-friendly and sustainable outdoor apparel.

To assess the demand and profitability of potential new product categories, DHTS can utilize various management frameworks such as SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, and Blue Ocean strategy. SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning tool used to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in an initiative or a project to evaluate the organization's competitive position and direct the development of strategic plans (Benzaghta et al. 2021). The SWOT analysis guides decision-making on various levels and is critical because it allows companies to identify both internal and external factors that can impact their success, and the analysis helps in strategic planning by focusing on maximizing strengths and opportunities while minimizing weaknesses and threats. Another framework is PEST/PESTEL analysis (an acronym for Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal factors), which is a tool that helps organizations analyze and monitor the six macro-

environmental factors that have a profound impact on their strategy (Reznowski 2023; Zoričić et al. 2022). It is essential for corporate strategy as it helps in understanding the bigger picture of the environment in which the business operates and in identifying potential opportunities and threats outside the company's control. This analysis is crucial for risk management and strategic planning, enabling companies to adapt to external changes and align their strategies accordingly. Finally, the Blue Ocean Strategy (Kim and Mauborgne 2004) can help DHTS identify differentiating products or services that will create new uncontested market spaces that make the competition irrelevant, which can lead to sustainable growth and help companies avoid the cutthroat competition of "red oceans."

Research and Data Collection Approaches

For DHTS, adopting a mixed-methods research approach is crucial to address the research questions of selecting new product categories based on outdoor recreation trends, assessing the demand and profitability of potential new products, and ensuring a successful expansion strategy into neighboring states (Creswell 2014). This approach integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a detailed analysis of all the challenges.

Qualitative research with focus groups within the outdoor recreation market, including outdoor enthusiasts, industry experts, and end consumers in Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina, will yield qualitative insights into perceptions of DHTS's potential new product offerings, competitive positioning, and areas for product expansion (Billups 2021). These discussions can explore participants' views on product quality, brand recognition, and expectations from a hardware and tractor supply store entering the outdoor recreation market. Additionally, interviews with DHTS executives and managers can offer a deeper understanding of internal challenges and strategic priorities, particularly in terms of supply chain optimization and inventory management (Cortellazzo et al. 2019). On top of this, quantitative research consisting of a survey across DHTS's organizational levels and target markets will help quantify internal perceptions regarding operational practices, efficiency measures, and the demand for new product categories. This survey could measure the perceived effectiveness of potential new product introductions, employee and customer satisfaction, and suggestions for further improvements (Machi and McEvoy 2022).

Analyzing secondary data such as market analyses, competitor reports, and industry publications will provide a quantitative backbone to support the insights gathered from primary research (Galvan and Galvan 2017, 2017). This includes studying trends in the outdoor recreation market, shifts in consumer preferences, and competitive impacts as reported in documents from market research firms and industry bodies. Reviewing financial reports and market data from competitors to track trends in profitability and market share, and compare these with industry benchmarks provided by market research firms like MarketLine and IBISWorld (Bose 2008; Kahaner 1998). Examining policy documents, industry reports, and regulatory updates relevant to the outdoor recreation sector will provide a contextual understanding of the external factors impacting DHTS (Pinto et al. 2023). This can include changes in environmental regulations, economic conditions, and competitive strategies from peer companies. The recent trends in outdoor recreation participation and eco-friendly product preferences will be analyzed to evaluate their impact on DHTS's product selection and market strategy.

By combining these methodologies, DHTS can gain a well-rounded view of its current position and the dynamics of the outdoor recreation market. This approach not only aids in identifying areas needing improvement but also helps in strategizing for future growth and successful expansion. In addition, to assess the competitive landscape and consumer preferences for outdoor recreation, DHTS can collect a variety of specific market data, as outlined in the following table (Green and Thorogood 2018; Jansen 2010).

Table 2. Types of Market Data to Be Collected

Types	Topics	Purpose
Demographic Data	Age, Gender, Income, and Education Levels	To understand the demographic profile of potential customers in VA, MD, and NC.
	Lifestyle and Interests	To identify hobbies and lifestyle choices related to outdoor recreation.
Consumer Preferences	Product Preferences	Determine which outdoor recreation products are most in demand.
	Brand Preferences	Identify preferred brands and reasons behind their popularity.
	Price Sensitivity	Understand how much consumers are willing to pay for different product categories.
	Purchase Behavior	Analyze frequency and channels (online or in-store) of purchases for outdoor recreation products.
Competitive Analysis	Competitor Product Offerings	Identify the range of products offered by key competitors.
	Pricing Strategies	Examine pricing models used by competitors.
	Market Share	Determine the market share of major competitors in the target states.
	Marketing and Promotions	Study competitors' marketing campaigns, promotions, and advertising strategies.
Market Trends	Emerging Trends	Identify new and emerging trends in outdoor recreation.
	Seasonal Trends	Analyze how demand fluctuates with seasons and holidays.
	Technological Advancements	Understand the impact of new technologies on consumer preferences and product usage.
Sales and Distribution Channels	Preferred Sales Channels	Determine whether consumers prefer online shopping, in-store purchases, or a combination of both.
	Distribution Networks	Analyze the effectiveness of different distribution channels used by competitors.
Customer Feedback and Reviews	Product Reviews	Collect and analyze customer reviews and ratings of existing products.
	Feedback on Competitors	Gather feedback on competitors' products and services to identify gaps and opportunities.
Economic and Environmental Factors	Economic Conditions	Assess the overall economic environment and its impact on consumer spending in the target states.
	Environmental Concerns	Understand how environmental factors and sustainability influence consumer preferences.

By collecting and analyzing this market data, DHTS can gain a detailed understanding of the competitive landscape and consumer preferences, enabling it to make informed decisions that will enhance its outdoor recreation offerings and better serve the public.

Customer Surveys and Feedback

It is crucial to collect customer feedback as it provides direct insights into customer needs and preferences, helping businesses to customize their products and services to better meet market demands (Creswell 2014). It helps identify areas for improvement and innovation, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Additionally, feedback can guide strategic decisions, reducing risks and increasing the likelihood of successful product launches and business growth. There are several ways to collect customer feedback. The most popular formats are surveys and questionnaires, which can be conducted in three ways, such as online surveys (which utilize platforms like SurveyMonkey or Google Forms), in-person surveys (where customers are provided with tablets or printed surveys while customers are shopping in a store or in a high foot traffic areas such as a public park or mall), and mailing the surveys (Dunwoodie et al. 2023; Ricci et al. 2018). Offering small incentives, such as discounts or coupons, can increase participation. The next most popular format is the focus group study, which can be in-person focus groups or virtual (Billups 2021; Selman et al. 2018). Sessions are conducted with selected participants from the target market to discuss their outdoor recreation needs and preferences, and this method allows for in-depth qualitative insights and the exploration of customer sentiments and opinions. Another popular method is the one-on-one qualitative interview (Corbin and Strauss 2014; Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2007). Here, interviews are scheduled with customers, industry experts, and outdoor enthusiasts to gather detailed and personal insights about their preferences, buying behaviors, and experiences with outdoor recreation products, either as an in-person interview or telephone interview (Aspers and Corte 2019; Flick et al. 2004). An increasingly new method of customer research is social media listening (Evans 2010; Moe 2014). Monitoring social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit to track mentions, comments, and discussions about outdoor recreation platforms can provide valuable insights into customer needs. In social media, you can also actively engage with customers by posting questions, conducting polls, and encouraging discussions to directly gather feedback (Dijkmans et al. 2015; Luttrell 2019). This can also be done on platforms like Amazon, Yelp, and Trustpilot to understand customer satisfaction and areas for improvement. By employing these methods, DHTS can effectively gather detailed customer feedback and insights regarding their outdoor recreation needs and preferences, enabling better-informed decisions for product offerings and market strategies.

A detailed survey should encompass a variety of question types to capture a holistic view of customer preferences (Hague et al. 2004; Jansen 2010). Firstly, demographic questions are essential to understand the characteristics of the respondents, such as age, gender, income level, and location. This information allows for segmentation and targeted marketing strategies. Secondly, behavioral questions help understand the customer's past and current experiences and may provide details about frequency of use, preferred brands, purchase channels, and overall satisfaction levels (Hwang and Seo 2016; Sawhney 2016; Zeithaml et al. 2020). Thirdly, attitudinal questions aim to uncover the underlying motivations and opinions behind customer choices, especially data regarding product features, perceived value, brand perception, and willingness to pay (Baburajan et al. 2022). Different types of questions, such as open-ended, structured, or quantitative scaling questions, provide different insights. In open-ended questions, customer can provide their thoughts and opinions freely, and these questions can be used to gather qualitative data on specific product attributes, unmet needs, and suggestions for improvement (Denscombe 2008; Weller et al. 2018). Open-ended questions often reveal valuable insights that may not have been captured by structured questions. Finally, scaling questions allow for quantitative analysis and comparison of responses. These questions typically use a Likert scale (e.g., strongly agree to strongly disagree) or a numerical rating (e.g., 1 to 10) to measure customer satisfaction, likelihood to purchase, and overall product perception. Scaling questions provide a structured way to assess customer preferences and compare them across different product options.

In-Store Observations

To gather data on customer behavior and product preferences, DHTS should conduct in-store observations by first defining clear objectives and scope, focusing on specific product categories and customer actions (Foster 2006; Sigurdsson et al. 2016). DHTS should develop a detailed observation plan, schedule sessions at various times, and identify key observation points within the store. Trained observers can use manual note-taking and checklists to systematically record customer interactions and preferences. Employing video recording, such as CCTV or mobile cameras, can capture detailed footage for later analysis. Tracking technologies like heat maps and RFID tags can visualize high-traffic areas and product engagement. Customer intercept surveys, conducted immediately post-shopping, can provide direct feedback on preferences and behaviors. The collected data should be analyzed to identify trends, popular products, and the impact of store layout on customer behavior (Phillips and Stawarski 2008; Zozus 2020). These insights can then be used to optimize product placement, improve store layout, and enhance marketing strategies to better meet customer needs and drive sales.

Supplier and Vendor Research

Identifying suitable suppliers and vendors is a critical step in the successful launch of new product categories for the DHTS. A systematic approach ensures that the selected partners align with DHTS' mission, quality standards, and budgetary constraints (Easton et al. 2014; Mukherjee 2017). Firstly, DHTS should conduct thorough market research to identify potential suppliers and vendors specializing in the desired product categories (Callingham 2004; Maestrini et al. 2016). This can involve online searches, attending industry trade shows, and consulting with relevant associations or organizations. Additionally, seeking recommendations from other government agencies or trusted partners can provide valuable leads. Secondly, DHTS should develop a detailed set of criteria for evaluating potential suppliers and vendors (Easton et al. 2014; Mukherjee 2017). These criteria should encompass factors such as experience and expertise (does the supplier or vendor have a proven track record in the specific product category?), quality and compliance (does the supplier or vendor adhere to relevant industry standards and regulations?), financial stability (is the supplier or vendor financially sound and capable of fulfilling long-term contracts?), capacity and scalability (can the supplier or vendor meet DHTS' current and future demand for the products?), pricing and value (does the supplier or vendor offer competitive pricing and value for money?), and sustainability and social responsibility (does the supplier or vendor have a commitment to environmental and social responsibility?). Thirdly, DHTS should issue a Request for Information (RFI) or a Request for Proposal (RFP) to potential suppliers and vendors (Costello 2013). This document should outline DHTS' requirements, including product specifications, quality standards, delivery timelines, and pricing expectations. The RFI or RFP should also request information on the supplier or vendor's experience, capacity, financial stability, and commitment to sustainability. Fourthly, DHTS should carefully evaluate the responses received from potential suppliers and vendors. This evaluation should involve a thorough review of their proposals, references, and past performance (Rebelo et al. 2019). Additionally, DHTS may conduct site visits or interviews to assess the supplier or vendor's capabilities and commitment to quality. Finally, DHTS should select the supplier or vendor that best meets its needs and negotiate a contract. The contract should clearly define the terms of the agreement, including product specifications, delivery timelines, pricing, payment terms, and performance metrics (Guth 2007). It should also include provisions for quality control, dispute resolution, and termination. By following these steps, DHTS can identify and select reliable suppliers and vendors who can provide high-quality products that meet the needs of its target audience. This will ultimately contribute to the success of the new product categories and further DHTS's mission of promoting health and well-being.

Competitor Analysis

DHTS can gather detailed data on competitors' product offerings, pricing strategies, and market share to make informed product selection and pricing decisions. Employing a variety of data collection methods ensures a well-rounded understanding of the competitive environment (Bose 2008; Kahaner 1998). There are several methods DHTS can use to gather competitor data and explain how this competitive intelligence can inform strategic decisions (Phillips and Stawarski 2008). Subscribing to market research reports from market research firms such as IBISWorld, MarketLine, and Euromonitor specializing in the outdoor recreation industry can provide detailed data on competitor offerings, market trends, and consumer preferences. These reports often include detailed analyses of product features, pricing benchmarks, and market share distribution (Zozus 2020). Reviewing publications and whitepapers specific to the outdoor recreation industry can help DHTS stay updated on market trends and competitor activities. After this, DHTS needs to conduct benchmarking studies by systematically comparing DHTS' products, prices, and performance metrics with those of key competitors (Boxwell 1994; Hong et al. 2012). This can help identify best practices and areas where DHTS can improve. A key method followed by many companies in the retail industry is mystery shopping (Arif and Sarfraz 2020; Moran 2014). Engaging in mystery shopping, where employees or hired individuals visit competitors' stores to observe product offerings, pricing, customer service, and promotional activities, can provide firsthand experience and provide direct insights into competitor strategies (Goldberg 2020). As noted earlier in customer research, online monitoring and analysis are key sources of competitive data. Monitoring competitors' websites, e-commerce platforms, and social media channels to track new product launches, pricing changes, and promotional campaigns using tools like Google Alerts, SEMrush, and SimilarWeb can help keep track of competitors' online activities and performance (Pinto et al. 2023). Also, analysis of online platforms such as Amazon, Yelp, and specialized forums can help in understanding customer perceptions and areas where competitors excel or fall short (Moe 2014). Secondary data analysis, such as analysis of public financial statements, annual reports, and earnings calls of publicly traded competitors, can provide insights into their financial health, market share, and strategic priorities (Galvan and Galvan 2017; Haft 2009). Finally, attending trade shows, expos, and industry conferences to observe competitors' product displays, gather marketing materials, and network with industry professionals can provide insider knowledge (Boxwell, 1994; Hong et al. 2012). Conducting all these data collection methods can reveal valuable insights into competitor strengths and customer preferences.

By understanding competitors' product offerings, DHTS can identify gaps in the market and opportunities for differentiation. For instance, if competitors lack eco-friendly products, DHTS can introduce a line of sustainable outdoor gear to attract environmentally conscious consumers. Competitive intelligence can also highlight popular product features and innovations that DHTS can incorporate into its own offerings to meet customer expectations and stay competitive. Analyzing competitors' pricing strategies enables DHTS to set competitive prices that balance profitability with market attractiveness. If competitors are engaging in aggressive pricing, DHTS can consider implementing dynamic pricing strategies or bundling products to offer better value. Understanding price points for different product categories helps DHTS position its products appropriately in the market, ensuring they are neither overpriced nor underpriced compared to competitors. Insights into competitors' promotional campaigns and marketing tactics allow DHTS to develop more effective marketing strategies. For example, if competitors are leveraging social media influencers, DHTS can explore similar partnerships to enhance brand visibility. Knowing when competitors launch promotions or discounts can help DHTS plan its own campaigns to counteract competitive moves and retain customer interest. Analyzing customer feedback on competitors' products and services helps DHTS identify areas for improvement in their own customer experience. Addressing pain points that customers highlight in competitor reviews can give DHTS a

competitive edge. Utilizing this competitive intelligence allows DHTS to make informed product selection and pricing decisions, ultimately enhancing its market position and driving business success in the outdoor recreation sector.

Theoretical Applications - Leadership Strategies

To drive the successful implementation of a new product strategy at DHTS, transformational leadership behaviors are essential. Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating employees to exceed their own self-interests for the sake of the organization (Bass 1998, 2006; Wagner et al. 2004). There are several components of transformational leadership behaviors that can drive the successful implementation of this new product strategy.

A. Inspirational Motivation

Transformational leaders develop and communicate a compelling vision of the future (Jensen et al. 2018; Wagner et al. 2004), and for DHTS, this involves clearly articulating the benefits of expanding into the outdoor recreation market. The vision should highlight the potential for growth, increased market share, and enhanced brand recognition, and leaders should communicate how this strategy aligns with the company's core values and long-term goals (Chai et al. 2017; Kaslow et al. 2012; Khatri et al. 2012). Leaders must generate excitement and enthusiasm among employees, and this can be done through town hall meetings, internal newsletters, and informal discussions that emphasize the positive impact of the new strategy on the company and employees' future opportunities (Hayati et al. 2014; Bojović and Jovanović 2020; Wagner et al. 2004). For example, they might highlight stories of successful market entries or share optimistic projections about sales growth and career advancements.

B. Intellectual Stimulation

Leaders should encourage employees to think creatively and challenge the status quo (Bojović and Jovanović 2020; Khatri et al. 2012; Wagner et al. 2004). In the context of DHTS, this means fostering an environment where employees feel comfortable proposing new products, services, or ways to engage with the outdoor recreation market. This could include brainstorming sessions, innovation contests, or cross-departmental teams tasked with exploring new ideas. To successfully introduce new products, DHTS needs to innovate in product development, marketing, and customer engagement strategies. Leaders should encourage teams to explore unconventional methods, such as leveraging digital tools for customer insights or partnering with influencers in the outdoor community to promote new products (Koehler 1997; Vermeulen et al. 2015).

C. Individualized Consideration

Transformational leaders invest in the development of their employees, and at DHTS, this could involve providing specialized training on outdoor recreation products, sales techniques, and customer service (Bass 1998; Wagner et al. 2004). Leaders should identify individual strengths and provide opportunities for employees to grow, such as through mentorship programs or leadership training workshops. Recognizing and valuing each employee's contributions can boost morale and motivation (Dwyer et al. 2013; Khatri et al. 2012). Leaders should celebrate successes, whether they are product launches, creative marketing campaigns, or improvements in customer service. This recognition can be formal (awards, bonuses) or informal (public acknowledgment, thank-you notes) (Gilbert et al. 2016; Roberto 2011).

D. Idealized Influence

1) Leading by Example

Leaders at DHTS should model the behaviors and attitudes they wish to see in their employees, and this includes demonstrating commitment to the new strategy, showing enthusiasm for the company's direction, and maintaining high ethical standards (Jensen et al. 2018; Wagner et al. 2004). When leaders embody the company's values and mission, it inspires employees to follow suit.

Transformational leaders gain respect and trust from their employees through consistent and transparent actions (Dwyer et al. 2013; Koehler 1997). By openly discussing the challenges and opportunities related to the new strategy and by being transparent about decision-making processes, leaders can build a strong foundation of trust, as this trust is crucial for fostering a cooperative and motivated workforce.

E. Implementation in DHTS Context

In the context of DHTS's strategy to expand into the outdoor recreation market, transformational leadership can significantly impact several areas. In market research and product selection, leaders need to encourage a culture of innovation and open communication, and leaders can leverage insights from employees who interact directly with customers to gain valuable information on customer preferences and market trends (Chen et al. 2014). In the training and development area, through individualized consideration, leaders can ensure that employees are well-equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to promote and sell new product categories, thereby enhancing customer service and sales performance (Cavazotte et al. 2020). In customer engagement and marketing, leaders who inspire and motivate can help drive creative marketing initiatives, such as community events, social media campaigns, and partnerships with local outdoor organizations (Liaw et al. 2010).

By adopting transformational leadership behaviors, DHTS can create a motivated and adaptable workforce capable of executing the new product strategy effectively, leading to successful market expansion and growth.

Theoretical Applications - Organizational Culture

Several organizational culture theories can be used to foster innovation and adaptation to new product offerings at DHTS. Schein's Organizational Culture Model provides a framework for understanding and developing an organization's culture, and the model divides organizational culture into three levels: artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions (Schein 1985, 1992, 2010). An ideal organizational culture can be described as using these levels to foster innovation and adaptation to new product offerings, such as in the case of DHTS expanding into the outdoor recreation market.

A. Artifacts

Artifacts are the most visible level of culture, including an organization's physical and social environment (Hogan and Coote 2014; Schein 2010). In a culture that fosters innovation and adaptation, the following elements are crucial - open and collaborative workspaces, symbols of innovation, and transparent communication channels. Open and collaborative workspaces include physical spaces that should encourage interaction and collaboration. For example, open-plan offices, common areas for informal meetings, and flexible workspaces can facilitate communication and idea exchange among employees. In symbols of innovation, artifacts should include symbols and rituals that emphasize innovation, such as innovation awards, idea walls where employees can post suggestions, or dedicated time for creative thinking (for example., "innovation Fridays") (Brunzel 2020; Schein 2019). Finally, in transparent communication channels, the organization should promote open communication channels, such as regular town hall meetings, transparent feedback mechanisms, and accessible leadership (Phaopat and Pruetipibultham 2018). This openness fosters trust and encourages employees to share ideas and concerns.

B. Espoused Values

Espoused values represent the organization's explicitly stated values and norms, which guide employees' behaviors and decision-making processes. (Makumbe and Washaya 2022; Schein 2010) Many factors are critical to fostering innovation and adaptability. First, commitment to innovation is paramount, as organizations should explicitly state their commitment to innovation in the mission

statement, corporate values, and strategic objectives (Barclay et al. 2013). This includes valuing creativity, encouraging risk-taking, and being open to new ideas. Next, a customer-centric approach is important as it emphasizes the importance of understanding and responding to customer needs and preferences (Dimitrov 2013). This value drives the organization to innovate directly to address market demands, such as through new product offerings or enhanced services. On top of that, continuous learning and development is another major factor. The organizational culture should prioritize learning and professional development (Cataldo et al. 2009). This can include offering training programs, workshops, and opportunities for employees to learn new skills related to emerging technologies and industry trends. Finally, a diverse workforce brings many perspectives, which is crucial for innovation (Schein 2019). The organization should value inclusivity and create an environment where diverse ideas and viewpoints are encouraged and respected.

C. Basic Underlying Assumptions

These are the deeply embedded, taken-for-granted behaviors that are usually unspoken but form the core of the organization's culture. For a culture that supports innovation and adaptation, there should be a fundamental belief that change is normal and necessary for growth (Hogan and Coote 2014). This mindset helps employees view new challenges and changes, such as the introduction of new products, as opportunities rather than threats. Also, a deep-seated belief in the value of experimentation and learning from failures is important to drive growth (Cataldo et al. 2009). This means that the organization supports trying out new approaches, even if they might not succeed, as long as they provide valuable learning experiences. In addition, an assumption that collaboration is more effective than isolated effort is critical as this belief promotes a team-oriented approach where sharing knowledge and resources is seen as a path to greater innovation and efficiency. Finally, an underlying assumption that sustainable success requires a long-term perspective helps in prioritizing long-term gains over short-term wins, encouraging investments in R&D, and maintaining a focus on the future needs of the market and customers (Mamatha and Geetanjali 2020).

D. Implementing Schein's Model at DHTS

For DHTS, aiming to expand into the outdoor recreation market, fostering a culture of innovation and adaptation involves several steps. The leadership team in DHTS needs to create visible structures that support innovation, such as innovation labs or hubs, flexible workspaces, and regular innovation-focused events or meetings (Schein 2019). Leadership team should be clearly communicating the importance of innovation and customer focus in all company materials, encouraging cross-functional collaboration, and recognizing and rewarding innovative efforts (Brunzel 2020). Finally, leadership team should focus on embedding a belief system that values continuous improvement, learning from both successes and failures, and viewing change as a natural and beneficial aspect of the business (Cataldo et al. 2009). By aligning all three levels of Schein's Organizational Culture Model, DHTS can create an environment that not only supports the introduction of new products but also encourages ongoing innovation and adaptation in response to market changes and customer needs.

Theoretical Applications - Change Management

DHTS can employ several change management theories to navigate the complexities of expanding product lines and entering new markets. Lewin's Change Management Model, with its three stages—Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze—provides a clear roadmap for DHTS to navigate its expansion into new product lines and markets (Burnes 2020; Levasseur 2001).

A. Unfreeze

To prepare for change, DHTS must first break down existing practices and beliefs, as open communication is key, the company should transparently share the reasons for the expansion,

highlighting both market opportunities and potential risks of inaction (Cone and Unni 2020). Addressing employee concerns through surveys and meetings will help alleviate resistance and foster understanding. Engaging key influencers to champion the change can create a shared sense of urgency.

B. Change (Transition)

This is when the actual implementation takes place. Providing detailed training programs and establishing support systems, like help desks or mentoring programs, will equip employees with the necessary skills for the transition (Bakari et al. 2017). Regular and transparent communication, utilizing diverse channels, is crucial to keep the team informed and engaged. Encouraging employee participation through cross-functional teams and idea contribution can boost ownership of the process (Memon et al. 2021). Piloting changes in smaller scales before a full rollout allows for adjustments and refinements.

C. Refreeze

Once the changes are implemented, it's time to solidify them. Consistent application of new practices, positive reinforcement of desired behaviors, and updated performance metrics will reinforce the change (Hussain et al. 2018). To embed it into the company culture, DHTS should consider updating mission statements and values to reflect the new focus. Sharing success stories related to the change helps build a shared understanding and appreciation. Ongoing training, feedback mechanisms, and continuous improvement efforts ensure that the organization remains adaptable and responsive to evolving market conditions.

By systematically following Lewin's model, DHTS can not only manage the intricacies of expansion but also cultivate a culture of innovation and adaptability, setting the stage for sustained growth and success.

Conclusion

In conclusion, DHTS's strategic expansion into the outdoor recreation market in Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina presents a promising avenue for growth and diversification. By leveraging a mixed-methods research approach, DHTS can gain a detailed understanding of market trends, consumer preferences, and competitive landscapes. The integration of qualitative insights from focus groups and interviews with quantitative data from surveys and secondary sources will enable DHTS to make informed decisions regarding product selection, pricing, and marketing strategies. The application of change management theories, such as Lewin's model, will facilitate a smooth transition and ensure that employees are equipped to embrace the new product lines and market expansion. Additionally, fostering a culture of innovation and adaptation, guided by Schein's Organizational Culture Model, will empower DHTS to continuously evolve and respond to the dynamic outdoor recreation market. By embracing transformational leadership behaviors, DHTS can inspire and motivate its workforce to achieve exceptional results in this new venture. The combination of rigorous research, strategic planning, and a commitment to innovation positions DHTS for success in the expanding outdoor recreation market.

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