

High Flyers Case Study

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## **High Flyers Case Study**

### **Introduction**

Organizational change and evolution is a critical process that tags along with new deliverables and responsibilities for employees. Even though rapid organizational change can improve performance, save resources, increase employee morale and help the company attain a competitive advantage, the process relies on the ability of employees to adopt new practices and responsibilities (Rafferty & Jimmieson 2017). The lean approach espoused by Silvertail's new management has to be adopted by employees for the company to benefit from the evolution fully. This evolution process calls for an analysis of the current roles and responsibilities of workers, evaluation of the approaches that will create a competent workforce and develop a strategic plan that will cater for future human resource needs in essential areas such as recruitments and training.

### **Current Situation at Silvertail**

Although business and employees benefit from the long-term effect of the change, at the onset, evolution is a source of uncertainty to employees as they are concerned about their future and new or increased responsibilities (Shah et al. 2017). Currently, the employees have new deliverables and have to adopt suggested practices to fulfil their roles successfully. At Silvertail, the company has defined a new target market for its services. This rebranding tags along with a new image of a vibrant airline that can sufficiently address the needs of the young target market. The new image of the company has to be reflected through the employees especially the cabin crew as they have interaction with customers. The presence of old employees amongst the cabin crew challenges the new image of the company. For the company, a competent workforce should exemplify the new company's model, and approaches should be taken towards developing a young and vibrant workforce with the right initiative and enthusiasm.

### **Implications of the Plans suggested by Sam and Bobbi**

The approaches suggested by Sam and Bobbi are based on making new responsibilities and requirements hard for older employees, thereby making them resign. Even though older employees have more experience in the job, the evolution of the company does not suit them. Rewriting the job description and position requirements may have negative implications on the company in the form of age discrimination claims (Bayl-Smith & Griffin 2014). If the two

manage to introduce these change without infringing the rights of older employees, these tactics will affect the productivity of employees. For instance, keeping employees away from their families and on long-haul flights will reduce the motivation of employees. While some may resign, some will maintain their position but have a low commitment to performing exemplarily in their duties. Hence, the quest for a vibrant workforce will be disabled by these tactics as both young and old employees will put less effort towards achieving the new goals of the company.

Keeping employees motivated and encouraged ensures high commitment and hence better productivity. Peterson (2007) notes that respecting the dignity of employees, ensuring they receive their perks, and providing them with an opportunity to develop keeps them motivated and encouraged hence ensuring the company achieves its targets. Tactics such as making life less comfortable will make the entire workforce less energized and hence affect the operations of the cabin crew. Furthermore, reducing the number of cabin crew in a flight implies that cabin crew will have a higher number of customers to serve. This may lead to lower quality service that does not meet the expectations of the customers. In the services industry, meeting the expectations of the customer during interaction ensures high satisfaction. Therefore, reducing the number of cabin crew per flights will affect the quality of customer service thereby negatively influencing the satisfaction rates of customers. Tactics such as getting rid of travel concessions are short-term and affect the entire workforce. While they may result in the reduction of the older population, they may also lead to loss of young and innovative talent to competitors. Instead, the company should adopt a robust approach to reducing employees while still maintaining high levels of commitment and productivity

The increasingly dynamic and competitive market calls for a competent and efficient workforce that can help the company serve its new target market. Downsizing has to occur for the company to become leaner and meaner and also improve its efficiency and performance. However, downsizing has to be conducted in an intention and an efficient manner that allows the remaining workforce to thrive (Tsai & Yen 2018). Even though job elimination has already happened through the removal of middle management positions and closure of regional branches, the goals for downsizing are to ensure the cabin crew consists of a young, vibrant and innovative workforce that portrays the new company's image. To achieve this goal, some direct and intentional downsizing approaches have to be taken. Using indirect methods such as those

suggested by Sam and Bobbi may be inefficient, time-consuming and have adverse effects on operations as well as legal consequences for the company.

### **Downsizing tactics and their implications to Silvertail**

Having a new target market calls for a different composition of employees. There are different approaches that Silvertail can use to define a new workforce that fits the new market requirements and helps the company compete with low-cost carriers. Workforce reduction, organization redesign and a systematic approach are potent approaches that can be utilized and allow the company to maintain a young, innovative and driven workforce (Boyd et al. 2014). The downsizing tactic of choice of the company has to ensure that it achieves these goals without minimal disruptive industrial action as experienced during the onset of organizational change and minimal effects on the operations of the airline.

#### **1. Workforce Reduction**

Workforce reduction has been widely applied as a downsizing approach. This tactic aims to reduce headcount by eliminating unnecessary positions. Reduction in workforce numbers is achieved through natural attrition, encouraging early retirement and layoffs (Judd et al. 2014). In this case, the primary reason for laying off old employees is the fact that they do not fit into the organization's new image of a young and innovative airline. Also, they lack initiative and enthusiasm that could be influential to a company facing stiff competition. This tactic is immediate and provides room for a smooth transition into a new organization. With a reduced headcount, the tactic allows the organization to recruit young and innovative talent with the requirements that the company needs for now and the future. It also allows the company to adopt the lean structure and sets the company on the right track of achieving set goals.

#### **2. Work redesign**

Apart from reducing the headcount of employees, work redesign is also used to downsize an employee population. However, Silvertail has already conducted an organization reshuffle and restructuring that resulted in the abolishment of middle management structures, regional branches as well as unnecessary roles in the organization. The goal of the redesign was to become leaner and meaner and hence reduce expenditure and maximize output. As Sam notes, the old cabin crew could have been shifted to some desk jobs, but this cannot happen as the company has become leaner and has no room for redundant roles. Work redesign increases

efficiency, reduces the costs of operation, increases interactions and teamwork and allows smooth workflow and hence supporting high productivity (Boyd et al. 2014)

### **3. Systematic approach**

A systematic approach is also an equally influential approach to downsizing. Even though it is a long-term approach, it focuses less on job loss and company gain but customer satisfaction (Datta & Basuil 2015). As a long-term plan, the older cabin crew will be informed and given ample time to prepare for change. Given it is a long-term procedure, this can take up to two years and the employees will be made to understand that these actions have been made for the interest of the business.

### **Implications of Downsizing**

Whereas the benefits of reducing the number of employees through early retirement and laying off have an impact on the cost, efficiency and rebranding of Silvertail, they may have negative implications on the public image of the company. This practice may be understood as unethical behavior by the general public and potential customers of the airline (Homburg et al. 2015). Hence, using this tactic both in the short term and long term will affect the credibility and reputation of Silvertail as a good employer. Furthermore, Tsai & Yen (2018) note that these antics affect the morale of employees as all other remaining employees have to work for more extended hours with more responsibilities and increased uncertainty about their future with the company. This not only hinders the ability of the employees to commit their efforts to better customer care but also breeds political behaviors with the mission of safeguarding their jobs thereby increasing disruptions to service delivery (Tajzadeh-Namin 2012).

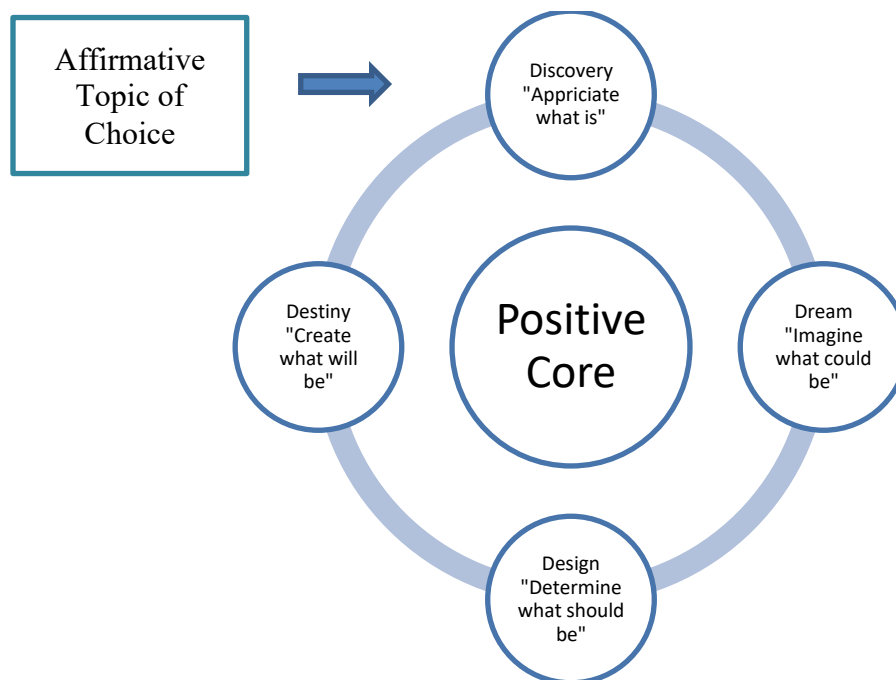
The use of downsizing methods has a direct effect on the workforce quality even within the cabin crew. Although the business requires young and innovative individuals, they are less experienced as the older employees. Hence, reducing the population of employees by giving out early retirement is likely to encourage senior employees to leave. This not only leads to loss of invaluable experience but also institutional memory. This affects the quality of the workforce left as they may lack mentors in their lines of duty. This setback couples up with the survivor mentality that the remaining workers have. Datta & Basuil (2015) note that the survivor notion tags along with a lower work commitment and few random acts of goodwill that mean a lot in the airline industry.

The implications of work redesign begin with the disruptive industrial action that Silvertail experienced while making the redesign. This hurts the image of the company. Further, this tactic may lead to a poor distribution of workloads with some employees getting more work than others. Vulnerable structural design as well as difficulty in adjustment make the initial effect of the tactic detrimental to the productivity of the company (Boyd et al. 2014). Also, the Silvertail may lose talent as well as experienced workers who could help the organization move forward. A systematic approach is the only tactic that may help the company to retain its reputation while also improving efficiency and profit margins in the long term (Datta & Basuil 2015). However, the effects of the tactic take too long to manifest and may lead to eventual loss of expertise and a smaller workforce due to high levels of natural attrition.

### **Appreciative Inquiry**

Appreciative inquiry (AI) calls for a positive, strength-based approach for change which aims at finding the best in people while advocating for a positive shift. Cooperrider & Whitney, the developers, note that the process entails asking the positive questions that strengthen a systems potential to cultivate positive prospective (Lewis 2016). Therefore, instead of focusing on the wrong aspects of the company such as an older cabin crew, this approach encourages asking positive questions that will bring the best in these employees and hence maximize the positive potential of the organization. Ideally, it changes the focus from being problem-oriented to possibility focus.

Lewis (2016) notes that AI banks on the 4-D model that could help Silvertail in this transition period,



*Figure 1 Appreciative Inquiry*

#### **The 4 stages of AI cycle**

1. **The Discovery stage-** involves an inquiry into the best of the past with an emphasis on the positive aspects.
2. **The Dream stage-** utilizes findings and stories collected from the discovery phase to imagine a desired future, how different things can be and an ambitious picture of how you want things to be.
3. **The Design Phase-** This involves the creation of shared images of a preferred future by determination of what should be. This stage consists of the identification of the steps that have to be taken to make the dream a reality.
4. **The Destiny phase-** This stage narrows down to get the termination of what will be and finding innovative ways to create the desired future.

An appreciative inquiry has an affirming nature that allows smooth change and transition where the management can develop core facilitators of success rather than address problems (Lewis et al. 2016). This approach is a non-threatening and empowering and has a long-term benefit to the company through employee motivation and confidence in their skills (Fitzgerald et



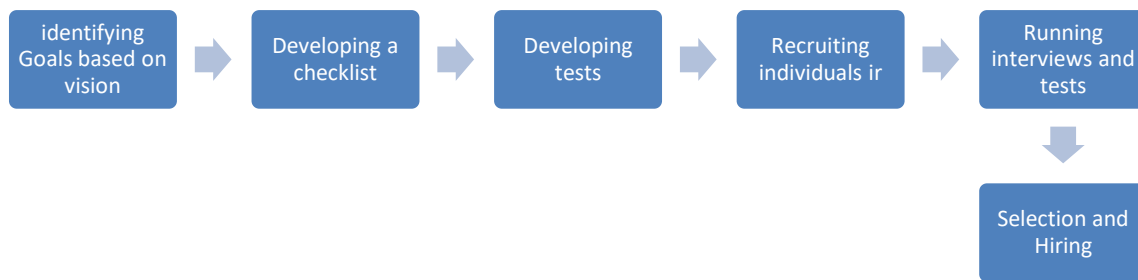
al., 2010). The approach is applicable in the case of any affirmative topic of choice and can be influential in analyzing various alternatives to downsizing.

**Alternatives to downsizing**

**1. Hiring Linked to vision**

This involves an analysis of the current position of the company and also the desired future of the company. Once the company understands its future which in this case is a young and innovative cabin crew, then it can align hiring structures to suit this vision. The hiring process will be geared towards identifying individuals that can meet future challenges defined through appreciate inquiry (Delery & Roumpi 2017). The implementation of this approach may cover a timeline of 6 months. However, the process and business needs have to readdress on a regular period.

The steps of hiring with an understanding of vision can include;



**Figure 2 Hiring Linked to Vision**

| Action plan                     | Persons Involved  | Start Date | End Date   |
|---------------------------------|---|------------|------------|
|                                 | HR, cabin crew director and cabin and ground crew employees | 03/01/1990 | 09/01/1990 |
| Move/ Change (transition Phase) | HR, cabin crew director, cabin crew and ground crew         | 10/01/1990 | 31/05/1990 |
| Refreeze                        | HR, cabin crew director, cabin crew and ground crew         | 01/06/1990 | 04/06/1990 |

**2. Succession planning**

This involves the identification of the needs of different positions. For instance, identifying the technical skills and capabilities that a competent cabin crew worker should possess will help in identifying likely candidates and preparing them once the position becomes

vacant. This will make the young workers well equipped for change and also help in maintain workforce quality. Succession planning is a long-term course of action that will require the commitment of HR and line managers in defining job descriptions and appraising performance (Whitney & Fredrickson 2015). This long term nature makes the timeline for its implementation to be 24 months as the business can redefine its employee composition sufficiently. The steps include;



**Figure 3: Succession Planning**

- I. **Identifying the critical positions** that will be the focus of succession planning. For instance, if the flight attendants are old and expected to leave, succession planning will focus on the positions and design a compelling position description for the next flight attendants.
- II. **Identify Competencies**, A succinct definition of the abilities and skills needed to be successful in these position. This includes identifying the future needs of the business and developing a profile of the effective and competent employee (Piturro 1999). This aids in guiding learning and development plans and also help the current and future employees understand the requirements, performance expectations and behavioral and technical competencies.
- III. **Developing succession management approaches**- choosing a sufficient strategy for succession planning such as improving internal talent pools, onboarding and recruitment to address succession planning (Rothwell 2010).
- IV. **Implementation of succession plans**- after choosing the right succession plan, it is essential to document the strategies in an action plan that defines the timelines of the application as well as the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders.

- V. **Evaluate effectiveness;** this entails monitoring workforce data, performance appraisals and development of necessary adjustments (Rothwell 2010).

| Action plan                        | Persons Involved  | Start Date | End Date   |
|------------------------------------|---|------------|------------|
| Identifying the critical positions | HR, cabin crew director and cabin and ground crew employees | 03/01/1990 | 09/01/1990 |
| Move/ Change (transition Phase)    | HR, cabin crew director, cabin crew and ground crew         | 10/01/1990 | 31/05/1990 |
| Refreeze                           | HR, cabin crew director, cabin crew and ground crew         | 01/06/1990 | 04/06/1990 |

### 3. Cross training

This approach entails assessing the skills of today employees and linking these skills to those needed in the future of the organization. Maurer (1998) notes that this assessment allows the employees to determine what they should undertake to remain gainfully employed. Cross training benefits form appreciative inquiry which identifies the future and the type of employees needed to make the future a reality (Cascio, 2014). It also informs the organization of the training that could be beneficial to employees. Cross training is also a long term alternative that can be done on an annual basis. Due to the changing requirements of the roles of employees, cross training will implemented within the first three months and then renewed on an annual basis. The following are steps used to define a proper training program;

- i. Define tasks to be performed and assign tasks that can be performed according to the skills level of employees
- ii. Identify the individuals who are voluntarily willing to participate in the program
- iii. Perform cross training on the employees while identifying the employees with the capabilities to perform tasks defined as cross-trainable.
- iv. Introduce coaching that will help the employees during the challenging learning process

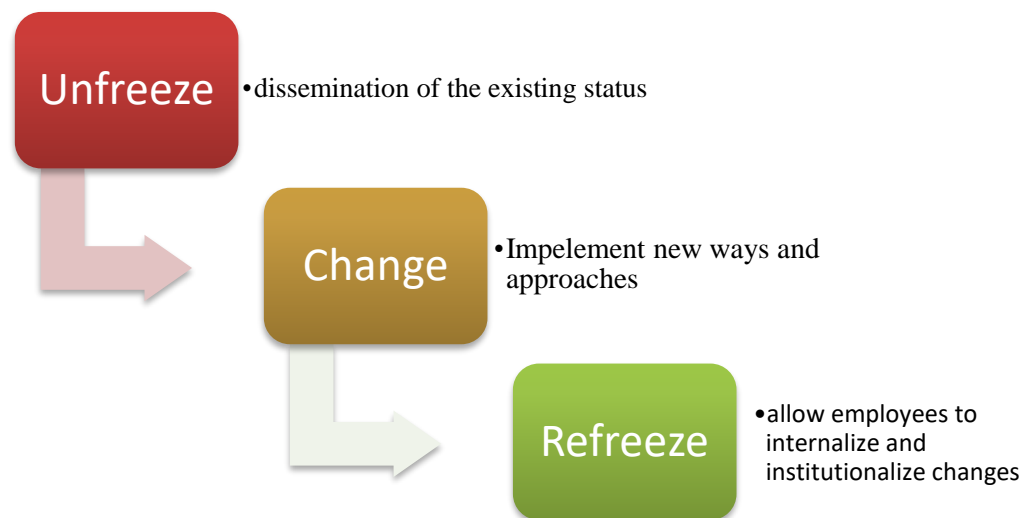
- v. Reduce the workload of employees during training to avoid work stress that can hamper the learning process
- vi. Recognize employees and reward them for the new skills and motivate them to practice the skills and hence enhance retention.
- vii. Seek feedback from the employees on the process and how the process could be improved to benefit the company better

#### Implementation Timeline

| Action plan                                   | Persons Involved                                       | Start Date | End Date   |
|---|--|------------|------------|
| Define Tasks and identify volunteer employees | Volunteer employees<br>Cabin and ground crew employees | 03/01/1990 | 06/01/1990 |
| Perform cross training                        | Volunteer employees<br>Cabin and ground crew employees | 10/0/1990  | 31/03/1990 |
| Assess Skills and obtain feedback             | Volunteer employees<br>Cabin and ground crew employees | 01/04/1990 | 31/04/1990 |

#### 4. The Lewin Module

Silvertail can also use the Lewin model for change. Kurt Lewin, the developer of the module, noted that change requires three steps namely unfreezing the organization, implementing the change and refreezing the change (Miner, 2015). However, before conducting change, one the company must understand why evolution is the solution. In the case of Silvertail, low-cost carriers increased the competition within the field, and if the company does not change, a drastic decline is inevitable. With this motivation in mind, the Silvertail can use the Lewin model to manage change within the Cabin Crew. Unlike other alternatives to downsizing, the Lewin module approach can be implemented within a timeline of six months. This is due to the flexibility of the approach and the ability to monitor progress.



**Figure 4 Three Phases of the Lewin Model**

### **1. Unfreezing the organization**

This involves dissemination of the existing status by developing an understanding that the current approach cannot continue. Explaining to the employee through falling numbers and declining customers will enable them to understand that the company's strategy for business has to change. Unfreezing challenges attitudes, behaviors, practices and values and examines the core of the core of the organization and in this case the service offered by the cabin crew (Hussain et al. 2016).

### **2. Implementing the Change**

Silvertail has already recognized that it needs to have a young and innovative workforce. However, the unfreezing stage will create uncertainty, and new ways and approaches can be implemented in this phase. However, the transition phase takes time and requires to be done keenly (Hussain et al. 2016). Also, the employees have to participate proactively in the change for it to happen smoothly.

### **3. Refreeze the Change**

When the change begins taking shape, and the cabin crew has embraced the new ways of action, refreeze can occur. The signs of refreezing include consistent job descriptions, a stable organizational chart as well as positive feedback from customers. The refreeze can also serve as a way of allowing employees to internalize and institutionalize changes which involve the application of new practices in everyday business (Miner 2015).

### Implementation Timelines

| Action plan                     | Persons Involved  | Start Date | End Date   |
|---------------------------------|---|------------|------------|
| Unfreeze (unlearn)              | HR, cabin crew director and cabin and ground crew employees | 03/01/1990 | 09/01/1990 |
| Move/ Change (transition Phase) | HR, cabin crew director, cabin crew and ground crew         | 10/01/1990 | 31/05/1990 |
| Refreeze                        | HR, cabin crew director, cabin crew and ground crew         | 01/06/1990 | 04/06/1990 |

### Human Resource plan to address Future Needs

#### I. Employer's brand

Employer branding involves defining the organization's personality and proposition and hence making Silvertail a great place to work with current and potential employees. Retaining and attracting talent is one of the methods of ensuring the company meets customer needs and competes well in the volatile airline markets. A strong Silvertail employer brand should provide a coherent framework for management to simplify and focus priorities, increase productivity and improve retention, recruitment and commitment (Mosley, 2014). This calls for practices and attributes that promote Silvertail as an employer of choice and hence making the organization distinctive and appealing to people who will thrive and perform best in its culture. However, this is a long term

The employer brand will help Silvertail attract future talent improving the employer image will have a positive effect on the quality and quantity of candidates that the company attracts in a different role. Also, having a strong employee builds the talent bank and ensures cost savings as it reduces the time of hire and improves employee retention (Viktoria & Kenning, 2014). It helps the company stand out and connect with customers by encouraging loyalty.

#### Approaches;

##### a) Deconstruct Silvertail's Employee Value Proposition

The airline can begin by defining what it offers employees that its competitors don't. This reevaluation can help in realizing the strengths of the company as an employer (Sengupta et al. 2015). The process involves identifying the unique values that Silvertail has, the organization's culture and personality as well as the values that guide the actions of employees on a daily basis. Myrden & Kelloway (2015) note that this information can guide the identification of characteristics, behaviors and character that the company wants to display in the future.

**b) Aligning the employer brand to the overall direction of the company**

After an internal analysis of the current traits of Silvertail as an employer, and establishment of the characteristics to keep, the employer brand should be aligned to the corporate brand (Uen 2015). The fact that Silvertail is in the transition process provides room to redefine the employer brand with a keen emphasis on the new young and innovative image. Hence, the commitment to serve the needs of a young target market should be reflected in the employer brand. It should ensure that employees have an experience that is a representative of and faithful of the brand. These brand values can be incorporated through training, effective communication and promoting general organizational cohesiveness.

**c) Promote Interactions and Build engagement**

Interactions may be in the form of social media posts or direct interactions with employees. The goal is to make Silvertail's employer's brand shine on social media and other professional interaction spaces. This could involve hosting industrial events, sharing photos of the cabin crew on social media, and also offer professional advice and guidance to the target talent (Gill 2015). This will build the company as a reliable place to work.

**d) Make Employees Brand Ambassadors**

Word of mouth is one of the most effective methods of marketing and employee endorsements are the best way to promote the brand (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014). However, employees have to be allowed to be honest and creative in the recommendation or testimonials on any platform. Additional factors such as a referral program could encourage employees to promote the values and brand of the company.

## **II. Career Management**

Career management entails the provision of opportunities for people to develop their capabilities and their careers to ensure the Silvertail has a flow of talent. Successful career

management can result in increased productivity for the company and also personal fulfilment and pride for the employee (Popescu, 2015).

**a) Implementation of a supportive career management practices**

Silvertail can incorporate both active and passive career management strategies. Active plans include career workshops, employee training to create more competent individuals. Passive approaches will consist of regular performance reviews and provision of key performance indicators (KPI) that allow the employee's career to thrive (Popescu, 2015).

The practices to be implemented include

- Placing clear expectations on employees
- Giving employees an opportunity to develop and explore roles such as transferring to other office locations
- Encouraging performance through rewards and recognition
- Providing employees with the necessary resources for short and long-term career goals
- Encouraging employees to assess their skills and career direction continually

**b) Elimination of barriers to employees' career advancement**

Silvertail will eliminate current barriers that hinder career advancement. Even though it can be hard for cabin crew to keep up with career advancement opportunities due to their schedule, it would be encouraging to provide them with an environment that fosters career advancement. Santos (2016) specifies the barriers to be;

- i. Lack of time, resources and budgets to plan and undertake training and development
- ii. Rigid job specifications, lack of support from leaders and the management's short-term focus
- iii. Lack of career opportunities and pathways within the organization for employees

**III. Application of Theory Y style of motivation and management**

The current system of control bears several similarities with Theory X of employee motivation. In the discussion, one notes that current employees lack initiative and enthusiasm and hence assumes that the employees had to be closely supervised and monitored as well as trained for them to fulfil their roles. However, Silvertail will have to change this approach to motivation as well as management to cater for future HR needs.



Due to the enormous role that the company places on employees through the new image, Silvertail can use theory Y in the management of employees. The theory requires managers to be optimistic and have a positive opinion on the employees. The approach will institute a decentralized system of governance. Whereas appraisals and passive strategies will be regular, the system will encourage open communication rather than control staff (Gürbüz et al. 2014). This approach helps employees to be innovative and creative and also ensures they are more involved in decisions such as making rosters and designing training programs (Peterson 2007). This approach will culture initiative and enthusiasm at work that lacks within the current workforce. A combination of Theory Y management and active career management strategies will ensure that employees develop to their optimum potential.

#### **IV. Compensation**

This includes all the rewards earned by the employees in return for labor. Benefits may be directly financial, indirect financial and non-financial compensation. While most employees focus on direct monetary compensation, non-financial rewards contribute more to long-term employee engagement (Bryant & Allen 2013). Hence, redesigning and implementing a new compensation program will help Silvertail meet its future human resource needs, the stages include:

##### **a) Developing a compensation philosophy**

This defines what the company wants to pay for, how to pay for it, the competitive posture and how to ensure equity. A compensation mission statement would describe all the aspects of payments, the foundation of the organization on compensations and serve as a beacon to guide the implementation process (Martocchio 2011).

##### **b) Link compensation to the overall business strategy**

Compensation and rewards can be used as a tool to move employees to the particular direction that it needs to be for it to be successful. Payment has to be connected to the goals and objectives of the organization (Bryant & Allen 2013).

##### **c) Equity**

Silvertail will ensure that all compensations are fair and equitable as employees are awarded according to the value of their work to the organization. This will motivate employees

to work hard, enhance their skills through training and also develop competencies for promotion viability (Martocchio 2011).

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