



Ashesi University

FINAL DRAFT: REVAMPING THE HEDEN GOLF HOTEL IN THE POST-CORONAVIRUS

ERA

By

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## CHAPTER I: INTRO

### Introduction

Heden Golf Hotel is amongst the list of luxury hotels in Abidjan, the capital of Côte d'Ivoire, that host many business leaders from all over the World. It has been the place for many seminars and business conferences that took place in Cote d'Ivoire. Located in one of the beautiful areas of Cote d'Ivoire, Riviera Beverly Hills, Heden Golf Hotel is one of the best hotels in the business segment. However, since its opening in 1976, the hotel has never proceeded to a renovation program. After almost four decades of operation, the hotel needs to upgrade its services and facilities as many other new entrants offer modern equipment in their premises. As at now, Heden Golf Hotel needs a modernization that will come through a series of rebranding. With the pandemic, the hotel has lost the majority of its clients and now face financial challenges. In the aftermath of the pandemic, the hotel management realized that it needed to reevaluate its operations as travelers are less enthusiastic when it comes to stay in hotels. In its efforts to make the hotel experience safe for its guests, the hotel has taken certain actions related to operations management by implementing health and safety measures, but this does not seem enough to attract the clientele they are used to. Indeed, to increase their competitive advantage in the post-covid 19 era, Heden Golf Hotel is looking for a unique service identity that could be superior to competitors, thus needs to consider rebranding strategies. The purpose of this project, therefore, is to contribute to the fulfilment of the hotel's goals by developing a new brand identity and formulating an implementation plan aimed at dissociating the hotel from its old image. This plan will focus on well-thought-out policy for handling the eradication of an aging brand name and suggest a new service delivery for the front desk staff, guest relations

management, implement the rooms' renovation process and external marketing communications while ensuring that the customer's expectations will be met and exceeded.

#### Rationale for the selection of Heden Golf Hotel

As we embark into a new era, "the post COVID-19 era", many hotels are wondering what steps to take to make the hotel experience safe to reluctant customers. The Ivorian hospitality industry is now facing the challenge of COVID-19 and needs to follow strict regulations to prevent the country from another outbreak of the virus. Moreover, the government has instructed hotels and other providers of accommodation to put in place a system of operations which ensures the safety of their customers, especially foreign travelers. This challenge adds up to other challenges of the hospitality industry such as high energy costs, high seasonality in demand and lack of training for staff (Davidson & Sahli, 2009). With new players entering the market with new modernized equipment and facilities that attract more customers, the Heden Golf Hotel finds itself in a difficult position to compete in a market more and more competitive. The property is particularly very old with old equipment, the staff still functions under old standards and is losing a big part of the hotel market capitalization. The Heden Golf hotel now hopes to reposition itself as a leader in the hospitality industry as a 5-star luxury business hotel and take advantage of its location by implementing a rebranding strategy. In our efforts to help the hotel undertake such a project, we decided to determine the considerations, internal and external factors influencing service rebranding. This project of such dimension has never been undertaken by the hotel and there are limited cases of hotels' rebranding in Cote d'Ivoire.

## Company Profile

The Heden Golf is a 4-star hotel managed by the group Iroko since 2014 headed by General manager, Georges Angama and owned by the company Société des Lagunes which is a state-owned real estate company. Before associating its image to the group Iroko which has the standard of 4-star hotels, the Heden Golf hotel used to be called the Golf Hotel. It was only until 2015 that it earned the 4-star ranking and adopted the name 'Heden' through their collaboration with the group Iroko. In its early stages, the hotel was managed by the group Intercontinental before becoming a state-owned hotel. It opens its doors in and now is the oldest state-owned hotel. The hotel is located on an 8-acre space in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire in front of a golf court and has the Ebrie Lagoon on its opposite side, and benefits from close proximity to the airport, the HKB bridge which gives rapid access to the industrial area of Abidjan. It has 306 rooms and suites, a swimming pool, gym, four tennis courts, a football pitch, two conference rooms and three restaurants (*L'Ebrie and La Terrasse*), a bar (*Le Flamboyant*). It hosts many seminars and business conferences and positions itself as a business hotel welcoming many business leaders from foreign countries and political leaders. The primary market segment was business travelers and it made up 80% of the hotel's clientele. Since its creation, the hotel has never undergone renovation which is now at the disadvantage of the group Iroko.

## Mission and Vision of Heden Golf Hotel

The mission of the Heden Golf Hotel is to provide high-standards services to their clientele and compete with new majors entrants in the hospitality industry by modernizing their equipment, renovating the physical building, incorporate a rebranded service that aligns with the goal of the

hotel which to sell “excellency and comfort” by training the staff to learn the new service values. The vision is to become number one in the market as a business and recreational hotel.

## Industry Analysis

The industry analysis aims at putting light on Heden Golf Hotel in terms of its background and external forces impacting the decisions of its management team.

### Overview of the Hospitality Industry in Cote d’Ivoire

Tourism is one of the major revenue earners around the world that has been the most affected by covid-19. Many countries faced measures that were meant to protect the population of each country and the restrictions rules aimed at limiting the effect of the pandemic. As part of that, the travel bans, and other restrictions forced hotels to shut down. This became a very chaotic situation for the hospitality industry which suffered from revenues losses and had to cut down costs by any means causing an increase of unemployment rate within the sector. As at now, governments have eased the restrictions and permitted certain businesses to reopen focusing on ways to be productive without putting the population at risk of another outbreak of the virus. In face of this situation, the hospitality industry is undergoing transformation and improvement, looking at different strategies to be competitive and host business travelers. In Côte d’Ivoire, the hotel segment falls in this category and hotels like the Heden Golf Hotel, located in Abidjan Riviera, Côte d’Ivoire, have to adapt to this new situation and ensure that their operations put high priority on the health and safety of their customers. This 4-star ranked hotel has high expectations from customers that they need to meet to get back the trust of travellers and foreign investors.

Cote d'Ivoire is a French-speaking West African country bordered on the northwest by Mali and Guinea, on the west by Liberia, on the northeast by Burkina Faso and on the east by Ghana and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. The country has gained attention during the past decades thanks to its well-developed economy and its citizens' hospitality.

The country's return to stability following the post-elections crisis in 2010 has been instrumental in the growth of the tourism sector. In April 2017, Tourism's total contribution to the nation's GDP was estimated at 7.5% compared to 4.8% recorded in 2015. This sector is growing as interest in African tourism rises and now represents domestically 2.3 billion euros. According to the WTTC's 2017 report, Cote d'Ivoire Tourism is on a steady rise and will continue to rise over the next two decades if the economy continues to average a GDP growth of 9% which makes the country one of the TOP TEN fastest-growing economies in the world. From this, emerged the business tourism segment which currently surpasses that of leisure. According to an article of Jumia Travel published in 2016, Abidjan is now regarded as the business capital of francophone West Africa welcoming numerous international business conferences and events gathering some of the most outstanding business leaders.

The growth in the numbers of business visitors has influenced the number of investments in the hospitality industry which has been materialized through the increase of developments of hotel infrastructure in the Ivorian economic capital, Abidjan. This means that the hospitality industry is becoming more and more competitive with the entry of new players into the market. Thus, players already in the market need to improve their strategies and adapt their operations plan to meet the expectations of potential customers if they do not want to lose out on opportunities to their competitors.



Most importantly, the hospitality industry has a big new challenge to overcome which is how to face the reality of the presence of a virus in our everyday lives. The pandemic has caused enough damage to the hotel industry and performance as it is responsible for tourists' unwillingness to stay in hotels or travel. Now, hotel owners need to find ways to deal with shortage of labor and cash and still create a safe environment for tourists as the pandemic is starting to slow down. The hotel market should be witnessing for the next couple months positive signs.

## CHAPTER II: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the current situation that prompted the need for new ideas to reinstate the luxury brand image of the Heden Golf Hotel. Basically, this chapter contains insights on the specific and general needs of the management with regards to rebranding and development. Our intention when conducting the needs assessment was to determine whether rebranding the Heden Golf Hotel will help the management team enhance their competitive advantage, what areas need to be touched in this process and path the way for strategies that could be implemented.

### Description of Needs Assessment

A needs assessment can be regarded as a systematic approach when conducting a study on the state of knowledge, ability, interest or attitude of a defined audience or group involving a particular subject (McCawley, 2014). The purpose of the needs assessment is to identify how business is being carried out in an organization as opposed to the way it could be operated to

contribute to the fulfilment of the organization's objectives (University of Minnesota, 2018). Indeed, it gives us a clear idea of the needs that are being met and those that are yet to be addressed using information from organizational documents or insights from focus group discussions, interviews, and surveys. Interviews and focus group discussion are the most convenient methods to conduct primary research. They are more direct and formal, nevertheless employing a direct or indirect method depends on the type of problem that we intend to solve.

Conducting a needs assessment on the rebranding process of the hotel requires several considerations. It is important to understand the drivers of the rebranding process, better understand the external factors that influenced the hotel's decision to rebrand, determine the duration of the planning process, have knowledge of the implementation stages and the challenges that this implies. Given the organization's resources, mission, and vision, we need to evaluate the potential of a rebranding strategy.

## Methodology

The research objective for this needs assessment is to identify the appropriate rebranding strategy that Heden Golf Hotel could implement to maintain its desirability and create competitive advantage in a growing market. To accomplish this objective, data is gathered by focusing on key elements:

- The current state of the hotel
- the need for a rebranding strategy to evolve in a post-coronavirus era
- the resources and opportunities available to the hotel

These information and ideas from management team will objectively help us design the process of rebranding, determine the elements of the appropriate rebranding strategy, formulate a rebranding model, explore the steps of rebranding that could be implemented and assess the extent the luxury business hotel will apply the elements of our rebranding model.

Our research is a qualitative one using primary methods such as interviews and observation. The methods of data collection helped us effectively capture the perceptions of the management team and catch sight of the deteriorating conditions of the premises, thus the current state of the hotel that prompted the idea of a rebranding. The specific tool used for our qualitative research was the semi-structured interview. This type of qualitative method is more convenient as it allows participants to give their objective opinions on the issue raised. Using a convenience sampling approach, we were able to get ideas from management and identify areas that need improvements. Convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling in which the sample people are considered as convenient sources of data for researchers (Lavrakas, 2011). The particularity of the semi-structured or guided interview is that it allows a set of open questions that are used to dig deeper in terms of information, especially when answers provided for the questions are unclear (Vanderstoep & Johnson, 2009). Our needs assessment contains insights from the director of finances and managing director of Heden Golf Hotel.

#### Data Collection Process

Due to the internal problems and busy working environment of the Heden Golf Hotel, we were able to conduct only one interview with two heads of administration. The interview took place on March 30<sup>th</sup> at the Heden Golf Hotel with the director of finances, Mr. Coulibaly Hubert and the managing director, Mr. Coulibaly Nanguin, two important figures of the management of the

Group that manages the hotel. With the convenience sampling method being employed in our data collection process, we can say that our needs assessment is insightful and could contribute to achieve the objectives of this project. A rebranding strategy, being a matter of administrative affairs, it appeared more judicious to gather ideas of management heads. Key insights from their interview are summarized in the section below:

## Summary and Analysis of Insights

### Current State of Heden Golf Hotel

According to both interviewees, the Hotel is going through difficult times. Its operations have slowed down since the pandemic as they had to close down the swimming pool, restaurants as well due to very low demand and reduce their staff. It is said that their room occupancy rate has slumped to 2%. As a luxury business hotel, their main clientele is business travelers who are now nonexistent due to restrictions and travel ban while they contribute to 80% of the revenues of the hotel. Indeed, the hotels offer conference rooms and services that are their main sources of revenues. The absence of clients has disrupted the operations of the restaurants and other services that the hotel provides putting the group in a financial crisis. Although there is optimism with the Covid-19 vaccination programs and expectations that life will return to normal, the hotel is hardly affected by the entrants of new players with hotels such as the Radisson Blu, Movenpick, Sofitel and Azalai that provides high-standards services with modern equipment that attract majority of the business travelers and tourists. The Heden Golf Hotel is now positioned at the bottom of the Top 5 luxury business hotels in Cote d'Ivoire and is losing value due to past events that also tarnished its reputation. In 2010, it was closed to the public and used as the headquarters of the opponent of then President Laurent Gbagbo during the post-electoral crisis

that led to the deaths of over 3000 people. Despite being well located with a nice architectural building that did not go outdated, the hotel is getting old. The facilities and equipment need to be renovated and renewed. The administration is looking for ways to give a modern look to its premises.

#### Opportunities post-covid 19 and measures taken

Heden Golf Hotel is reliant on meetings, incentives, conferences, and events revenue so it was hit hard by the pandemic as mass gatherings were not allowed so they faced deep shortfalls. Nevertheless, By the end of year 2021, the management expects that the covid-19 vaccinations programs and restrictions ease will permit the return to better performance of luxury hotels. Occupancy for luxury hotels in Cote d'Ivoire could average around 40 percent which is quite considerable. However, hotels with less competitive advantage could remain open at lower occupancy rates, thus not tap in into the opportunities the sector has to offer. In addition, the environmental forces in Cote d'Ivoire offer numerous attractive incentives that could drive the tourism sector. This is the result of many development projects undertaken by the ministry of Tourism in their effort to make Cote d'Ivoire, not only a business travel destination for big conferences but also a touristic destination for vacancies. This plan aims to double the number of tourists by 2030. All these tourism development plans will have a direct impact on the occupancy rates in hotels and Heden Golf Hotel plans to take advantage of these extensive Tourism developments.

#### New vision of the Hotel

The 45-year-old state owned hotel, Heden Golf hopes to reposition itself as a leader in the luxury hotels market and proceed to a rebranding that will help them dissociate themselves from the old

image and incorporate a modern look with standards of an international luxury hotel group. The vision is to become a 5-star luxury business hotel as it has the potential that could be exploited. However, to take advantage of the opportunities the sector has to offer and attracts customers, it is necessary to undertake a massive renovation process included in the rebranding strategy. Nevertheless, the lack of resources and the financial issues of the hotel has led to the option of an affiliation with an international hotel brand that could put the hotel on a better scale.

#### Determining the need for rebranding strategy

While the number of international hotel brands have increased in Cote d'Ivoire, the Heden Golf Hotel is losing its status as a luxury business hotel. The outdated nature of its equipment and the deteriorating conditions of its facilities have impacted on the brand image. The low patronage of the hotel's operations and the losses occurred during the pandemic are signs that the hotel needs a new and freshened image. In the post-coronavirus era, Heden golf hotel is trying to adapt itself to new market perspectives by incorporating a new identity to the group. This transformation and development of the hotel can only be possible through a rebranding process.

#### Summary and analysis of insights

Heden Golf Hotel is planning to go through a rebranding process that will enable them to create competitive advantage and benefit from an affiliation with an international hotel brand. This idea of the affiliation set the tone for the vision of the group Iroko that manages Heden Golf Hotel. They intend to take advantage of an internationally well-known hotel brand that has its clientele and associate their image with them to build a better brand. All this comes with the high standards associated with this international brand. It is with no surprise that the director of finances revealed that this will be done as an extension to the brand that Iroko has already built

with Heden Golf Hotel. The Group Sheraton is said to partner with them to incorporate the Marriott brand and transform the Heden Golf Hotel to the Four points by Sheraton. When analyzing this idea, we found that the Heden Golf Hotel was looking to update its stodgy service ambiance, hire younger staff members, and renovate the hotel with amenities that could exceed the expectations of their clientele. This indeed could help us compete with international chain hotels that are making their way into the Ivorian Hospitality Industry. Indeed, the needs assessment revealed that Heden Golf Hotel clientele is expecting five-star service while they recognize that the hotel lacks a sense of modernization. The poor quality of equipment, an aging staff, and the lack of proper amenities have created a gap between the image the hotel used to present and what they actually provide to customers which resulted in low demand.

### CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a review of literature on rebranding within the hospitality industry to better understand the real needs of Heden Golf Hotel and ways in which we could help. The literature review provides information on the following:

- The factors surrounding rebranding
- The process of choosing the appropriate rebranding strategy
- Service Rebranding Model

## Introduction

Studies by Teare (1998) showed that service branding is increasingly being used by hotels as a differentiator, something that makes them unique amongst themselves. Hotels use rebranding strategies focused on Service quality by adopting a new brand name during a merger and acquisition or when the service management needs changes or just to upgrade the service delivery making it stand out in the market. “A Brand is the source of a distinctive promise for customers from a product, service or place. Everything the lead organization does in collaboration with its partners and community should be oriented around delivering and constantly enhancing this promise”. (Baker 2012, 193). The concept of building a brand is a targeted marketing strategy that aims at creating long-term consumer loyalty in a service. Branding, in the context of hotels, is a strategy of differentiation that is applied to promote services to the market and create a long-term relationship with customers based on customers-values being reflected in the image of the hotel. Simply, branding aims at creating a popular image of service offered to consumers taking into the history and mission of the hotel. In the case of the Heden Golf Hotel, rebranding comes as a way to give a new image to the reputation of the hotel. Rebranding algorithms includes seven steps that need to be followed to effectively arrive at a change in organizational structure. Firstly, it is important to determine the reasons behind the changes to determine the aims and objectives. Then, the hotel needs to indicate the desired results when transitioning. The fourth step has to do with the development of a concept of the actions followed by research and analysis of the target market. The sixth step is to come up with creative solutions that should be implemented in operations to develop an effective branding strategy. (Baker, 2012). Several key aspects need to be considered to proceed with the rebranding strategy. Firstly, it is important to measure the brand’s health by identifying the



customers of the hotel and determining to what extent they are loyal to the brand. We need to know the main barriers and motivation behind a rebranding strategy, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages associated with the old and new brand image. The second aspect will focus on Brand repositioning which consists basically in how we can change the brand characteristics to attract our target customer. The third and last part will be to determine ways to implement innovations within the operations of the Heden Golf Hotel and communicating the meaning and significance of our rebranding strategy to internal and external stakeholders.

### Factors surrounding rebranding

Corporate rebranding is sometimes perceived as reinvention, brand renaming, re-visioning, renewal, brand refreshment and repositioning (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). This idea of corporate rebranding is the result of the desire to change the image of the company (Lomax & Mador, 2006). However, this change needs to be reflected within the organization to assess that it was effective (Lomax & Mador, 2006). The factors that drive rebranding are of macro environmental nature. Indeed, in our case, they are associated with the changing perception of the hotel, rude competition within the luxury hotel sector, emerging new technologies, and the low patronage of hotel's operations. To add up to that, the rebranding process can be the result of structural changes such as business take-over, demerger, merger, renaming or repositioning (Lomax & Mador, 2006).

According to Merrilees and Miller (2008), it is important for companies to consider innovation of their brands at its different life cycles stages to stay viable. Heden Golf Hotel in this sense was once called the Golf Hotel at its early stages and became Heden Golf Hotel when it transitioned

to a four-star hotel. Presented as an extensive exercise, Rebranding requires the change in many aspects of the hotel.

#### Process of Choosing rebranding strategy in the hospitality industry

There are six options or combination of them in the selection of a rebranding strategy (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2003): The first one is the phase-in/phase out strategy that consists in associating the new brand to the existing brand for a specific introductory period until the phase-out process eradicates it completely. The second one is the combined branding strategy which puts the new and existing brands under one umbrella. The third one is the translucent warning strategy in which customers are made aware of the changes within the organization and a potential shift to a new brand. Then, there is also the sudden eradication strategy which is more common in cases where the old brand is dying out and the organization wants to disassociate itself from it to expand and remain desirable in the eyes of customers. This, however, requires a well-thought-out policy that includes few steps to transition. The fifth one is the counter-takeover rebranding. This strategy is adopted when the brand acquired is popular and respected than the proposed one. The last strategy is the retrobranding whereby the company reevaluates its old decision-making that led to the abandon of an old brand as they try to regain lost or potentially lost customers.

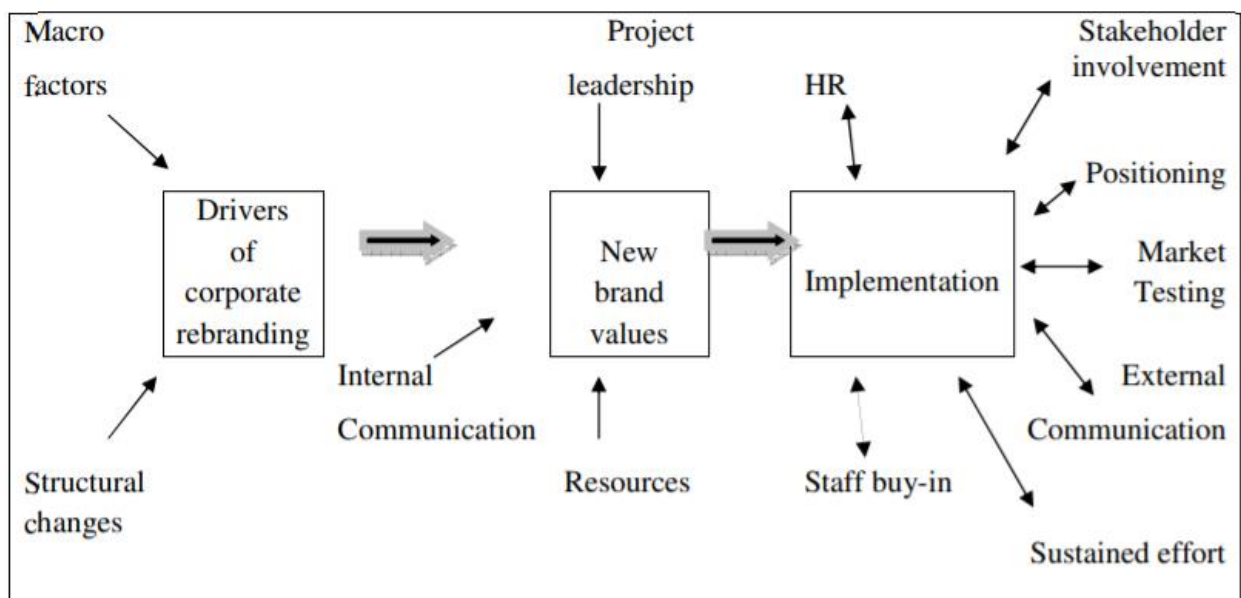
#### Service Rebranding model

The Service Rebranding is a process whereby the values to be retained within an organization are identified, modified, or discarded. The new values that replace the old brand identity of the service brand are to be communicated and delivered effectively to all stakeholders. This process goes deeper than just a change in name or value proposition. The entire service delivery chain is affected to incorporate this new brand identity to an organization. According to de Chernatony

et al. (2003), the principles of service brand building process show similarities with corporate brand building. For an organization that intends to implement a new service brand, it is judicious for the management to incorporate the new service values into the existing corporate brand than proceeding to a complete eradication of the brand. In that sense, the service brand building is regarded as a process whereby new service values are incorporated to the existing corporate brand. The idea of this process is to identify the right service identity to compete in the market and that take into consideration leadership, commitment of the staff, and needs of the customers. Management leaders are responsible for decisions regarding the rebranding process that involves the change of brand values. The framework shows that sufficient financial and human resources are indeed necessary to ensure that the rebranding process is sustainable. Also, it is imperative to take into consideration the staff's ability to deliver on brand experiences constantly as we intend to make the rebranding process a successful one. In that sense, the change in brand values requires the involvement of the stakeholders, a clear communication of the new brand identity to the stakeholders, and a well-designed service delivery system.

Through an integration of the elements of corporate rebranding and elements of service brand building, a framework for service rebranding is constructed. The service rebranding model (Figure) is a three stages concept that evolve around key elements required to conduct a service rebranding exercise. The first stage of the rebranding exercise consists in analyzing the drivers that led to the rebranding decision. The reasons to rebrand could be associated with internal structural changes and/ or environmental factors. The second stage focuses on new brand development. Indeed, the decision to rebrand is part of the managerial responsibilities that inherit the board of directors. It is important at that stage to ensure that sufficient monetary and human resources are available to carry out a project of this kind. In that same spectrum, the degree of

management and employee communications need to be controlled to guarantee the success of the rebranding exercise. First and foremost, a psychological training for employees and staff is necessary in the efforts of management to implement the idea of the new service delivery method in the minds of employees. As a matter of fact, frontline employees who are in direct contact with customers need to be involved in the process of selecting the new brand values as they know more about the significance of the brand to their customers. Now, the implementation of rebranding strategy is the third stage of the service rebranding model. Service rebranding of hotels requires the contribution of all departments and its staff. The marketing department is responsible for the new brand positioning strategies and communication of the new values to both internal and external stakeholders. The Human resource department focuses on staff training and implementation of new policies that align with the new service value. To ensure the sustainability of the rebranding exercise, which is the biggest challenge when building a successful service brand, management needs to implement tactical methods such as continuous staff-buy in and constantly conduct an evaluation of the success of its rebranding strategy using varied market testing tactics.



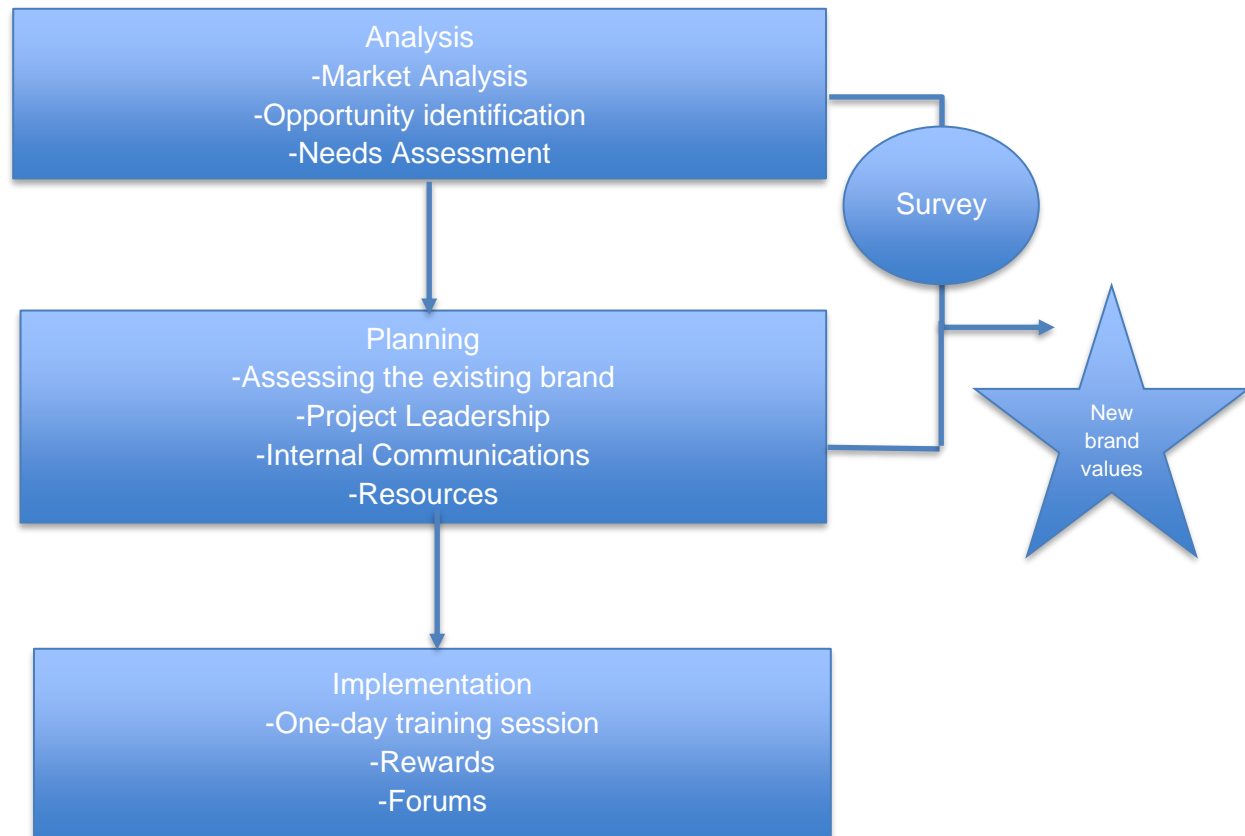
## CHAPTER IV: SOLUTION and IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

### Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how we intend to accomplish the necessary tasks that could help the Heden Golf Hotel in meeting their institutional needs and achieve their objectives. Based on our understanding of Heden Golf Hotel's rebranding needs and a thorough review of literature on the subject matter, we designed a rebranding strategy out of the service rebranding model drafted in the literature review from the works of Merrilees and Miller (2008), Gotsi and Andriopoulos (2007), Lomax and Mador, (2006) and de Chermatony, Drury and Segal-Horn (2003). This involves employees across all functional departments of the hotel and will be used by the employees in their relationships with the customers of the hotel.

### Proposed plan

The purpose for using the service rebranding model is to provide Heden Golf Hotel with a new brand identity that aims at delivering excellent service with a unique touch different from the script-guided service that 5-star luxury business hotel mostly adopt. In our effort to provide the most effective service rebranding strategy and implementation plan, we are developing a survey that will be studied and analyzed to determine the expectations and desired service experience for staff and hotel's guests. Our survey will only serve as guide during the implementation plan and to design the new brand values of customer service for the hotel as it is capable of delivering more than generic service to its business clients. Our suggested solution to create competitive advantage for the hotel against the newly installed international brand hotels in Abidjan and reposition the hotel as one of the top luxury business hotels in Cote d'Ivoire is the service rebranding strategy in Three Steps illustrated in the diagram below:



## Analysis Phase

The Analysis phase is the preliminary stage of the rebranding strategy. It involves defining the key elements that need to be assessed to better map out how the rebranding process will be conducted in the organization. It will start with a market analysis which will give insights on the positioning of the Heden Golf Hotel in the luxury business hotels in Cote d'Ivoire. From the market analysis, it will be determined whether the brand of the hotel is fading and losing its impact on business travelers. More importantly, it will help the hotel management in identifying their strengths and weaknesses that play a big role in assessing the power force of the Hotel against its competitors. The market analysis is done using financial reports and summaries issued by the Ministry of Tourism and competitors.

Then, the second aspect of our preliminary stage is opportunity identification. Development projects and plans for the future of Business Tourism in Cote d'Ivoire are key information to identify the scale of opportunities that the sector represents. Identifying the opportunities will guide us in measuring the efforts and resources that can be allocated for an important rebranding project. The benefits of the rebranding strategy need to be in conjunction with the financial opportunities that the sector will be offering in the following years. Thus, by analyzing these factors on a macro-level scale and in terms of the structural changes that the Hotel needs, we are able to provide the drivers of the corporate rebranding strategy.

A needs assessment as conducted in the second chapter of the report will involve key figures of the management team to identify the orientation the hotel is considering in regard to the brand. This process is used to demonstrate there is a need for the proposed solution. If it is found that a rebranding strategy is necessary, the management has the right to make such decision and involve every other stakeholder in order to implement a plan. In the case of the Heden golf hotel, the Group Iroko is in charge of every aspect of the development plans of the hotel. A survey designed for staff and guests which may be used in the needs assessment process to be studied and analyzed to accompany the decision of the management to undertake a rebranding strategy. This survey will be used to determine the expectations and desired customer service experience that could make the hotel stand out in this competitive market. Using the answers from the surveys, the hotel will be able to draw effectively the objectives and goals of the rebranding strategy as it will give insights on the ideal environment for the hotel. These decisions will affect

the people that need to be employed, the renovation process needed, and the transitioning to a higher quality service experience.

### Planning Phase

The planning phase has more to do with how the new brand decision involves every department and needs to be executed in respect with the objectives and mission of the organization. As we were considering the ideal rebranding strategies presented in the literature, we came to a realization that the changing completely the hotel's existing core values could harm more the hotel. Indeed, there is a risk of alienating the hotel's current clientele, stakeholders and employees as they relate more with these current core values. According to Merrilees and Miller (2008) and Gotsi and Andripoulos (2007), Rebranding is better off as an extensive exercise meaning that it is in the advantage of companies to retain part of their core values and add on new values instead on a radical change. The first part of the planning phase is centered around the development of the new brand values which starts with assessing the existing brand.

The old or existing brand of Heden Golf Hotel has been associated with many events that had a negative effect on the luxury image that it was meant to reflect. Thus, we need to replace the obsolete values of this brand with innovative and modern brand values that could attract new market segments. To effectively assess the existing brand, we will use internal perceptions of key management and employees in every department on the brand. We will evaluate how customers interact with the hotel's existing brand on Social media by posting more on the existing core values of the hotel and aspects of the hotel that makes it one of the luxury hotels of Cote d'Ivoire. As we get feedbacks from these posts, we will determine the brand elements to be



maintained. We intend to use them as a bridge to the new brand values. The process of rebranding has different aspects that contributes to its success.

### Project Leadership

Management needs to ensure that they choose the most competent person to oversee the rebranding process. In regard to this matter, the CEO is the one that will be in charge of the rebranding implementation process as he is more familiar with the strategic direction and vision of the group Iroko for the Heden Golf Hotel. The CEO will need to orchestrate the allocation of resources required to create an impact on the different functional departments, lead by example while motivating its staff to deliver excellent service. He will be helped by the marketing and HR department to communicate the new brand values to internal and external stakeholders.

However, the CEO can decide to hire a brand agency if he gets the approval from the group.

### Internal communications

The rebranding strategy has to be accepted and adopted by the staff. Indeed, staff buy-in is favorable for the success of the rebranding strategy and staff are more implicated when it benefits them, the organization, and their customers (Hankinson, Lomax & Hand, 2007). Also, Gotsi and Andriopoulos (2007) showed that there can be failure in the rebranding exercise if the new values are not well incorporated in the daily activities of the organization. To make it easy for the organization, the HR department needs to release staff that are expected to retire and hire young, enthusiast and well-trained people to replace the old employees. The new staff is more likely to incorporate easily and timely the attitudes and behavior to reflect the new brand values. In that sense, it is important to schedule training programs and use internal communication

media. The training programs should help the staff in achieving the necessary knowledge and techniques to deliver the new brand values effectively. Poor conceptualization and non-comprehensive execution as suggested by Gotsi and Andriopoulos (2007) are the results of poor internal communication within the organization as the management fails to implement a transition plan for the internal and external stakeholders to adjust to the new brand.

## Resources

Heden Golf Hotel is under the management of the group Iroko but remains a state-owned hotel so the general manager has to get approval for financing of the rebranding exercise by the ministry of budget although the financial resources will come from a state bank. In the same spectrum, there are different costs that need to be taken into consideration such as renovation, salaries of staff when closure of the hotel during renovation, the losses as operation will be disrupted, cost of new uniforms, internal and external communication materials. The Group Sheraton has been in discussion with the group Iroko to send officials that will train the new staff so that they could deliver excellent service.

## Implementation Phase

The implementation phase will consist in exploring ways to ensure that our rebranding strategy is sustainable. First of all, there will be a one-day training session before the public launch of the new service identity of the Heden Golf Hotel. This one-day training session will gather all employees to train them on how to effectively deliver the new brand values and excellent customer experience. Internal communications such as boards with different mentions of the service values will be placed in every corners of the hotel to remind employees of their roles.

Annual forums will be organized with the help of the general manager every year to report on performances and reward staff to motivate them.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key Insights

The decision of rebranding was supported by the management of the hotel. The general manager was responsible of coordinating the rebranding exercise and advocating for such project to be done. Strategic planning of the rebranding exercise was effectively conducted with the help of the management team. Although, the decision for rebranding is in the hands of management, it appeared fundamental that this could not be conducted with the approval of staff. The adoption of the new service brand depends on the ability of employees to incorporate it in their daily relationships with the customers. The service rebranding of Heden Golf Hotel is supposed to start during the Summer. The expectations of the hotel's management are that the room rates will experience an increase in percentage. Prices will be adjusted to recoup the revenues lost during the pandemic and rebranding process. The occupancy rate is expected to rise and remain between 75% and 80% as travel bans are lifted and the hotel is more competitive. Ultimately, the Heden Golf Hotel will be able to penetrate the 5-star luxury business market with its new service values. As of now, we can say that the rebranding exercise undertaken by the Heden Golf Hotel is costly but needed. If implemented effectively, the rebranding strategy could change the service delivery process within the hotel and change the generic delivery to an excellent service delivery by the staff. The name of the hotel could change as well as the brand's symbol and corporate colors.

## Limitations

The hotel has never undertaken such project in forty years of operation and the difficult financial situation of the hotel due to the pandemic is retarding the start of the process. Also, by wanting to penetrate the 5-star luxury business market, the hotel could face harsh competition as there is level of standing that needs to be kept which could be very costly and put the group in a worsen financial condition. Their new primary competitors will be Movenpick, Sofitel which are financially backed by international group with financial power. The hotel could also face challenges associated with change of expectations of stakeholders especially customers.

## Recommendations

In order to achieve the impact desired, it is important that the Heden Golf Hotel also proceed with hardware renovations, software revisioning works as the system being used at the moment is outdated. The renovation should not only focus on guests room but also includes other facilities of the hotel. Some of the guests room need to be refurnished with new equipment and technology that other 5-star hotels provide that satisfy customers. Indeed, customer satisfaction is at the center of the success of the hotel. Also, the hotel can create its own manual that will serve as a guide during training sessions. More importantly, the management team needs to conduct future studies on the customers' expectations and assess whether their new service values correspond to guests desired. Creating awareness is also important as the hotel is trying to build a new brand that will be the most preferable in its market segment.

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## Appendix

### Appendix i. Pictures of the Heden Golf Hotel





## Appendix ii. Interview Questions

1. What is the current state of the hotel?
2. How has the pandemic impacted the operations within the hotel?
3. What are the measures taken by management team to recoup gains post COVID-19 ?
4. What solutions have your competitors adopted ?
5. To what extent have your finances been affected?
6. Why the need for an operational plan?



7. History and reason behind the rebranding of the hotel that happened five years ago?
8. How does the hotel make its profits?
9. What services did you provide during the pandemic?
10. How are your clients reached?
11. How do you intend to reach potential clients despite fears over the new COVID-19 situation?
12. What are the benefits of the current media choices for the hotel ?
13. Who are your competitors?
14. Do you have any competitive advantage over any of your competitors?
15. What marketing channels does the hotel use ?
16. What position do you occupy in the industry at the moment? i.e. market leaders
17. Would a new marketing strategy or branding strategy help the hotel reinstall itself as a luxury hotel brand that puts priority on the safety of its clients?
18. What do you hope to achieve with a new operational plan?
19. What does success of an operational plan look like for you?