

## **Partial Change Management projects challenge successful implementation and consolidation**

Change management projects are meant to guide organisations, or rather selected parts of them, from an existing way of behaving and working that is no longer required to a distinctive, future model of behaviour which will permit the company to serve their clients more effectively by optimizing processes.

CM projects often do not target company-wide transformation but affect only selected parts of the organisation or specific groups of employees, those relevant to, for example, new IT applications, new instrumentation or technology deployment. Those changes often demand acquisition of new skills, different working methods and changes to specific professional and social behaviour. On many occasions, it means moving from more traditional, often siloed organisational formats (and behaviours) to team-oriented ways of working. The company then designs a change management, communications and HR strategy to support the innovations, designs the training programmes for the staff members directly involved, organises the social plan for those who are no longer needed, identifies and prepares the relevant management layers and starts the project within the limits defined by the programme.

Soon after the kick-off things often get stuck, project deployment doesn't run on time and shows severe resistance not just from those directly affected, but curiously also from other parts of the company that are not involved. Even leadership and sponsorship from project management in the affected units seems to weaken. How could that happen?

### **Mismatch**

During the implementation phase of partial change management projects, other parts of the company, often the specialised and staff units, are required to help and support getting the job done. Change projects are often dumped upon the existing structure and on top of existing workloads. A detailed upfront analysis is rarely carried out to map the time needs and emotional impact upon those secondary stakeholders. What's more, top management and project management often forget to identify and involve those secondary stakeholders in the early stages of preparation, or simply do not recognise the relevance of doing so.

By the time management (and staff) of those units find out about the project they immediately react negatively. They feel left out and, above all, they understand much more clearly than corporate management the direct consequences the implementation work will have for them and have no resources or budget to cope with that extra workload. This last aspect could be overcome with some goodwill and micro planning but negative emotions, which result from not being involved so far, get in the way. Anger (why was I left out?) and fairness (how is this going to affect my career?) turn into blockers and stoppers and soon the project management will start to complain about the lack of collaboration from those staff and specialized units.

What's more, if top management doesn't react fast and deal with these issues immediately, and depending on how strongly project managers feel about the change project themselves, they will start to back off under the pressure they receive from other managers. If they perceive that the project might harm their careers (my top management doesn't really support me and I'm getting my ass kicked by my colleagues), they will stop exercising committed, strong leadership, will start to "go

through the motions” and the project will fail, as everybody starts to perceive that this change is a paper tiger.

### **Defining the real boundaries of change**

So far we have only been looking at the implementation phase of change management. If the project is implemented, the business will have some business units, or parts of business units, which are prepared to work in different ways and will do so with their new team mates and also trained colleagues. But what happens to their relationships with other parts of the company? All those people who didn't go through specific new behavioural training but keep on interacting with their now trained colleagues? Does that affect the outcome of the project?

In my experience it does- and a lot. In fact, existing old behaviours will soon absorb the newly learned skills of the minority and those people will fall back into their old ways of doing things. It will be impossible to anchor and consolidate the desired behaviour. Partial CM projects therefore need to be seen in a much wider scope if you really want to gain the hard benefits. You need to carry out early and thorough stakeholder and relationship pattern analysis throughout all layers to define the real boundaries of any successful change project.

SSC uses a 16 step planning and execution method which includes clarifying those contexts, trying to see “the whole elephant” and defining participation and information structures of several layers of stakeholders, besides seeing resistance and conflict handling as integrated parts of the project.

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