

The SSC Method

I. Introduction

Successful (technology) change should always focus on people, as well, taking into account their expectations and experiences as well as their thoughts, beliefs and feelings.

Before walking through the SSC working method, it is helpful to answer the following questions: When and why would you involve external experience, knowledge or delivery capacity?

The when question is easy to answer: at any stage of a change- or reorganization project or crisis situation. It could be at the very start of your vision and strategy sessions, bringing objective thinking and experience on board to ensure that best change management practice is woven into the project. It could also be at the very end of a project to get an in depth analysis of what happened and how the project developed compared to your goals, or at any other stage in between you feel external and neutral know-how is needed.

The general rule is: the earlier; the better.

Why you would want external expertise? Because you want specific expertise, experience, know-how or execution and delivery capacity on board to manage human behaviour and (re)actions, (you do not re-organise/-structure every day), or because you need neutral third party inputs (avoid tunnel vision and hidden agendas).

It's useful to note that over 70% of all initiatives fail when compared to the original goals and human behaviour is the single reason most often blamed for failure of change processes in any organisation. So there is a **good reason to involve and incorporate CM specialists in the project team.**

SSC works with a fixed team of very experienced consultants who cover all basic fields like Change, Communications or HR. They are supported by a large group of equally experienced experts in all relevant related expertise fields like IT, management or planning, which can be incorporated at any stage when needed. **Best practice is to propose to the client a tailor-made team** based upon the specifications of the project.

II. The SSC Method

The SSC working Method is based upon 30 years of practical experience in the field. It's not a theoretical concept but a proven, down to earth way of approaching and covering change management processes. You may recognise some future development tools like "future searching" or "Open Space" in our approach if you are familiar with them. That is correct. These are tools we use during execution when needed and we apply them to ourselves as well.

Step 1. Goals

Goal setting is still the first most important step in any project. Answering the "W" questions: "Why, where, what, when, how... are key. Having a clearly defined company mission and a well defined strategy to get there is the reference frame. Any future change project and goal-setting must be measured against your vision and strategy and fit it like a glove. You may want to do that exercise internally or you may want to involve external resources. Our experience shows that the most successful change projects are those where change has been woven into the project design from day 1 on, often involving stakeholder groups in the very early stage of project goal setting to learn lessons from the past, ensure early buy-in and avoid pitfalls.

SSC has many tools available to help management exercise through the goal setting process. Early stage first- second- and third level stakeholder mapping is therefore essential and should take place during the first steps.

Step 2. The Past

Mostly forgotten in planning cycles: the past experiences of the company with reorganisations, adaptations and change. Managers and staff of your company have probably been through earlier experiences (not necessarily in your company!) and they carry with them an emotional and experiential baggage, linked both to success and failure, which needs to be mapped and understood, as it can otherwise turn into one of the biggest motivational bottlenecks further down the road.

SSC sees looking back together with staff and relevant stakeholders as one of the key learning's for designing successful change. Directly related to this subject is Step 13 (Culture)

Step 3. Structure of change

The structuring of the change process is probably the most vital piece of the method. This is where the many years' experience brought by SSC, combined with your company know-how, are brought together into your goal setting in order to set up the best possible change structure.

Step 4. The contract

Being clear and specific in the business relationship you set up with your consultants is one of the critical success steps in the project. False expectations turn into pitfalls and disappointments. Once the goals are clear and the general structure of the project is defined, you should give detailed attention to the exact formulation of what you expect from your consultants. Clear definition of the KPI's is a basic necessity for a successful working agreement.

Step 5. Project planning

Change management planning needs to be an integrated part of your overall strategic plans. SSC can work with you to ensure that you have a clear understanding of when and where specific time is needed to get everybody is on board and then make sure they stay on board. You will find that this will alter your overall project planning significantly, as the technology roll-out is easier to plan and control than creating awareness, getting people on board and getting the right mindset for change and (accepted) training. An integrated technology and people change plan guarantees that both keep in step and neither one of them either gets ahead of schedule or falls back. So again; having specific CM experience in your team while doing your project planning is more than useful.

Step 6. See the whole elephant

"See the whole elephant" is an expression which comes from the "Future Searching" tool and refers to a specific exercise of making sure that we all see and understand the whole picture and are all on the same page.

Although this seems obvious, in practice it's the most frequently forgotten piece of the Strategy, and further down the road one often hears "I thought you meant..." "Didn't you say..." "Oooh, I didn't see that..." "What did you mean with...".

In our many years experience, time invested in making sure that all stakeholders are properly identified and that everybody sees and understands “the whole elephant” is extremely worthwhile. It is also one of the main steps both to get the management buy-in and help fine-tune the strategy and structure, assuming that you allow feedback sessions.

Step 7. Project handling

Step 8 deals with all the standard tasks of project handling, clarifying all responsibilities, KPI's, budgets and such. CM has a personal and media cost which needs proper budgeting.

Step 8. Project team

The project team will be defined during the first steps and, once done, this team needs special preparation and training, as it will take a leadership role throughout the project. It must therefore learn to work and act as a team, understand the pit -alls they will find on the road, together with how to avoid stepping into them, and they need to be motivated themselves in order to set the right example to everyone else. Preparing the project team properly is another key step to success.

Step 9. Support and sponsorship

Any change project needs real support and sponsorship from top and line management. The organisation must perceive that the planned change is for real and that it is close to the heart of top management. This means two things. Firstly, top management must initiate or at least understand and completely support the goals of the project, and facilitate all needed tools and budgets to get it done. Secondly, top management must show active and visible involvement, which must become an integral part of project planning. Top management must know what's expected from them, when and where. It might be necessary to prepare selected business leaders for public appearances.

Step 10. Intervention methods

Your CM team will define together with you the best and most suitable intervention methods and tools. There are a large number of tools available for each step of the method and experience will tell you which of these is most appropriate for each requirement. There is no need in this overview to get into the very details of specific interventions tool. What matters is that the consultants have in-depth experience of using them.

Step 11. Participation

We said at the start of this overview of the SSC method that the project will benefit from early involvement by key stakeholders. This is because their involvement, collaboration and feedback will not only improve project design, but above all because those stakeholders will not turn their backs on the project as it develops. On the contrary, they usually adopt it and become ambassadors for it.

So rapid identification of key stakeholders and their involvement at the earliest possible moment is the next key step. CM consultants have a specific coaching task here, as those stakeholders will feel initial resistance even though they are involved. CM consultants need to coach them through this emotional roller coaster to integrate them.

Step 12. Culture

Culture is “The way we do things around here”. An existing culture that is not in line with the behaviour and ways of organising and working planned for the future needs to be adjusted if you are to achieve maximum benefit from your investments. This is one of the most critical steps in any change process, as something people learn over many years can’t be changed in a matter of days or weeks.

SSC has developed specific tools to create the proper mindset with people to make this transition process less painful and as fast as possible. The first step is to map the existing culture so that change management plans can be fine-tuned to the specific situation. Another critical issue is the definition of who should be subject to behavioural change training. Practice shows that the more people are involved, the more effective the change.

Step 13. Information, Communication and HR

One key mistake frequently made in CM is that management tends to use standard tools for communication, such as websites, newsletters, billboards and posters. There is nothing wrong with that, but it’s nowhere near enough, as change requires much more influential communication tools. SSC has developed change management communications which add to the existing set of tools others that are more personal, direct and persuasive. SSC includes very senior experts in this field, who have been great experience of crisis communications, which is a useful school for CM, as resistance and conflict are inevitable parts of the process, like it or not.

Step 14. Resistance

Resistance is a normal response during any change project. People tend to resist change. This is a natural reaction, deeply imbedded in our genes, which needs to be addressed and managed. SSC has developed special mindset programmes to help people understand the emotions, motivations and actions that arise from changing circumstances. This new awareness helps individuals to understand their own internal resistance and cope with it.

Step 15. Irrationality of change, the conflict

The method described above follows the logical line of steps to be taken. Nevertheless there is an apparently irrational component to any change project, which happens when the product of people's thoughts, feelings and beliefs lead to confrontational behaviour. This may seem irrational to the project team, whose members feel they are doing all the right things. But what feels correct and honest to you might conflict with hidden agendas, expectations, dreams and fear for jobs, or can be misinterpreted or misunderstood in many ways.

The only clear thing in the CM process and expected results is that (irrational) behaviour will always be a reaction to what we want to achieve and how we explain and motivate it. This is where we can help you to avoid conflicts by proper formulation of what kind of change you present and how you motivate it. **Change must feel like justice**; so making you listen (before you talk) to your people is part of our method. In step 16 we try together with you to avoid, forecast and if necessary reduce conflict.

(Conflict is not to be confused with resistance. Emotional resistance is generic and common to everybody subject to change. Conflict rises where specific content of the change process and/or its results do not line up with people's expectations or beliefs).

III. When to take which steps

All steps of this method need to be discussed and developed before "walking". The whole project team must have a clear understanding of what each step means and implies and what is expected of each team member (and related stakeholders). Some are clearly preparative and others will come to life while executing the project. Fine tuning what needs to be done when must fit into the overall project planning and is therefore a joint planning effort.