

The Success Case Method

Presented by Gail V. Barrington, PhD, CMC
Barrington Research Group, Inc.

Based on Robert O. Brinkerhoff *The Success Case Method* (Berrett-Koehler 2003), and a new book by Brinkerhoff and Valerie Brown (to be published by Berrett Koehler in 2004).

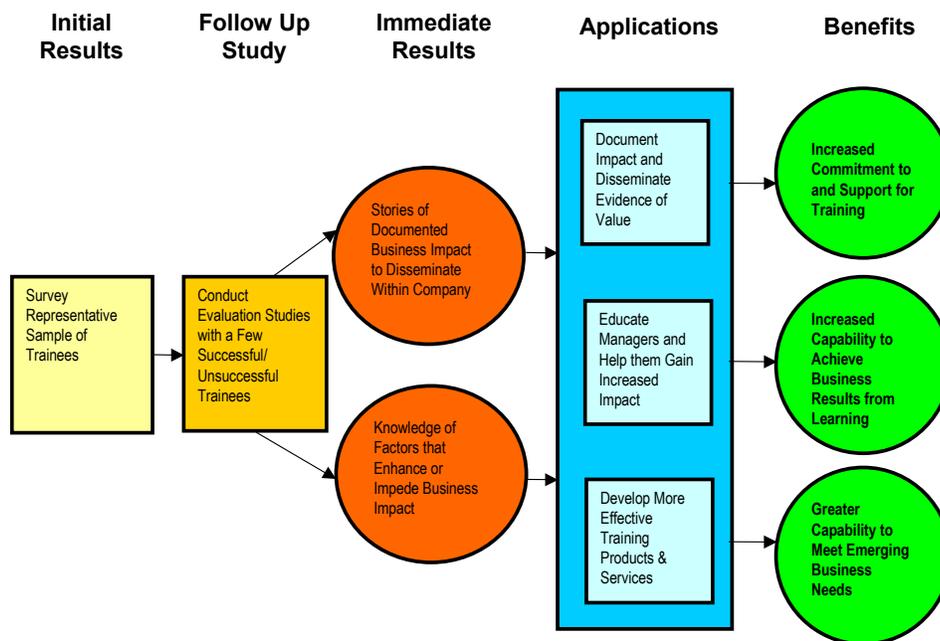
Overview

Developed by Robert O. Brinkerhoff, the Success Case Method is a fast, credible and effective way to evaluate organizational change. The Success Case Method measures the impact of training, and uses the results to build organizational performance and learning capability. This new method addresses six key questions in a change initiative:

1. What results is the program producing?
2. What parts of the program work better than others?
3. What factors in the work environment are helping or hindering the change?
4. How widespread is the scope of the success?
5. What is the return on investment?
6. How much additional value could be derived from the program?

The Success Case Method employs purposive versus random sampling, and focuses the bulk of its inquiry on a relatively small number of individuals. The Method is based on the idea that we can learn best from those individuals who have been most successful in applying their learning in their work, and from those individuals who have been the least successful.

The following model provides an overview of the Success Case Method.



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Implementation

There are five primary steps to implementing and applying the Success Case Method:

1. Focus and plan a Success Case Study

The purpose of the study should be defined and clarified. Examples of a study purpose include:

- To determine what parts of a new program are working well, and what parts are not.
- To provide exemplary models of behaviour and program applications that can be used to inspire and motivate others.

Once the purpose of the study has been defined, key stakeholders should be identified along with their information needs, interests, and concerns. A study design should then be developed taking into account time frame, resource requirements, and other factors.

2. Create the “impact model” that defines what success should look like

The next step in the Success Case Method is to define success for the program: If the initiative is really working, what will success look like? Impact results should be identified, and an impact model can be developed that focuses on intended results by intended users.

3. Design and implement a survey to search for best and worst cases

A short survey (five to seven Likert-type questions) can be designed and administered to determine where success is being most/least experienced. The survey may list key behaviours, tasks, actions, tools, etc. that have been associated with success, and respondents are asked to report on which key actions and tools they are using and what results, if any, are being achieved. The surveys are then analyzed, and high and low (if required) performers are identified for follow-up interviews.

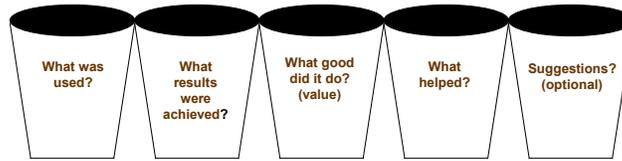
4. Interview and document success and non-success cases

High and low performers are randomly selected for interviews (usually about 45 minutes in length). One goal of the interviews is to document the very individual ways in which the innovation or intervention has been used. A second goal is to identify and document factors in the organizational environment that facilitate or hinder implementation and adoption. The critical dimensions of success or failure are also explored and documented.

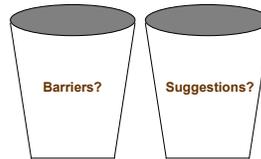
Issues that contribute to success and non-success can be grouped into the following buckets:



Success Case Interview Buckets



Non-Success Case Interview Buckets



Source: Brinkerhoff, Robert O. The Success Case Method. San Francisco: Bennett-Koehler (2003)

It is important that evidence exists to support the claim of success or failure. If no evidence is found during the interview to support the claim, the claim is discarded.

5. Communicate findings, conclusions and recommendations

A meeting can then be held with key decision makers to help them understand the study's results, and reach consensus about the key implications of the findings. The recommendations are crafted by the key decision makers, with support and facilitation provided by the evaluator. A summary report is then prepared.

Possible Applications and Learnings for Evaluators

The Success Case Method can produce a number of benefits to organizations including an increased commitment to and support for training, an increased capability to achieve business results from learning, and a greater capability to meet emerging business needs. It is cost effective and can usually be completed in about 12 weeks. It can help to determine if a full-fledged evaluation study is required.

Additional Resources

High Impact Learning. R. Brinkerhoff and A. Apking, Perseus, 2002.

The Success Case Method. R. Brinkerhoff, Berrett-Koehler, 2003.

