Chapter 1
How the 5C Framework Facilitates Corporate Change Initiatives: The Icelandair Case

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Introduction

When organizations transform their daily operations to improve quality, cut costs, increase earnings, streamline processes and so on, internal stakeholders, particularly employees, need to accept and implement the change initiatives, large or small (Naslund & Norrman, 2022), otherwise, innovation fails (Lozano, 2012). One pertinent tool is the 5C framework, that focuses on 1) companies and leadership *commitment*, 2) *configuration* of business elements such as the structure, principles, codes of conduct, 3) *core business* which differs depending on companies operations, 4) *communication*, both internal and external, and 5) *continuous improvement* (Johannsdottir & McInerney, 2018). The framework also emphasis the driving forces of actions, namely internal and external driving forces.

It should then be noted that organizations run the risk of unsuccessful implementation if employees resist the targeted changes (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Coetsee, 1999). On the other end of the spectrum is employee acceptance of change, which has four dimensions, depending on the nature of the support, namely *openly expressive, concealed, active support, or passive* (Bovey & Hede, 2001). The support offered depends on the nature of the change. If it is seen to improve a specific situation, such as sustainability-related matters, employees may be more willing to support the initiative so long as a vision has been developed and shared with them (Johannsdottir, Olafsson, & Davidsdottir, 2015). The outcome is therefore more likely to be successful (Steinburg, 1992).

The purpose of the change must also be "relevant, justified, urgent, [have] a clear destination, clear scope and explicit goals". These aspects need to be communicated to the relevant employees (Naslund & Norrman, 2022, p. 1). If the vision and goals are clear and follow a thorough analysis of a problem, acceptance of change is more likely to occur. The clear commitment and support from company leaders is another

prerequisite for a successful implementation of change initiative (Naslund & Norrman, 2022).

Building on the ideas of employee resistance or acceptance of change, the aim of this chapter is to analyse change management efforts influencing the daily operations of the main Icelandic airline company, Icelandair. Furthermore, the relevance of the 5C framework will be evaluated in relation to the change initiatives discussed.

The chapter is structured in the following manner: First, the theoretical aspects of change management and the 5C framework are explained. Second, the case of Icelandair is documented. Third, the questions and debate topics for classroom discussion are presented. Fourth, further readings will be suggested, before the list of references is presented.

Keywords: acceptance, change management, core business, integration, human resource management, readiness, resistance, stakeholder, performance

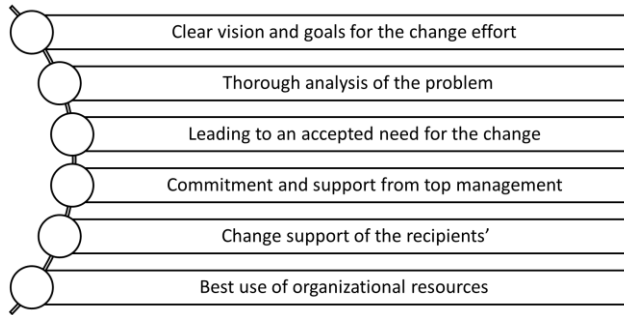### *Theoretical Aspects of Change Management and the 5C Framework*

Various change management models exist. They contain some common elements and steps to follow (Johannsdottir & McInerney, 2018; Kotter, 2007; Naslund & Norrman, 2022). These include: to "unfreeze" current situations; implement change and move towards new situations; and institutionalize the situation (Johannsdottir & McInerney, 2018; Naslund & Norrman, 2022).

To implement change initiatives, the current situation must be analysed (Hoffman, 2000), stakeholders must be engaged (Cramer, 2005) and then the change effort justified, as these elements may influence the readiness of the organization. These steps are commonly emphasised in change management models (Self, Armenakis & Schraeder, 2007).

Readiness may relate to individuals, groups, or organizations (Holt, Armenakis, Feild, & Harris, 2007; Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2012; Weiner, Amick, & Lee, 2008), including "alignment between the value system of the change intervention and of those members of an organization undergoing the change" (Burnes & Jackson, 2011, p. 133). This posture consequently determines the acceptance or resistance to change (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Coetsee, 1999; Johannsdottir et al., 2015).

In assessing different models for evaluating readiness for change, at least six inter-related steps should be followed systematically (Naslund & Norrman, 2022) (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Change readiness steps

| Clear vision and goals for the change effort |
| Thorough analysis of the problem |
| Leading to an accepted need for the change |
| Commitment and support from top management |
| Change support of the recipients' |
| Best use of organizational resources |

Sources: inspired by Naslund & Norrman (2022), p. 5.

Furthermore, to understand how change purpose is accepted, detailed steps must be followed, both regarding change purpose and how the purpose is communicated. The relevant steps suggested are (Naslund & Norrman, 2022):

Change purpose

1. Relevance: Problem analysis based on facts and business processes addressed.
2. Justification: Actional reasons and indicators.
3. Urgency: Need addressed and burning platform, or sense of urgency.
4. Clarity of destination: Future business processes made understandable.
5. Scope of the change: Timeline, scale, functional or cross-functional impacts, speed.
6. Explicit goals: Measurability and related to the outcome expected.

Communication

1. Support: Top management
2. Prioritization: Decisions and resources
3. Change champions: indicators, sponsors, drivers
4. Alignment: Values, strategy, and processes

Crises, such as dire economic situations, natural disasters, pandemics or health emergencies, or political instability, are examples of drastic conditions that can help establish the sense of urgency needed for organizational change to take place, particularly in case of work situations and human resource management (Edvardsson & Durst, 2021). This is, however, not always the case, as other factors may influence the success or failure of change management initiatives. In some cases, changes are minor, but in others they are of great importance and can impact core business. To emphasise the criticality of the core business aspect in change initiatives, the 5C framework was developed, in the context of sustainability responsibility of businesses. 5C is relevant for other change initiatives as well, as it is based on the change management literature and framework (Johannsdottir & McInerney, 2018). It explains both the internal and the external driving forces establishing the need for change (Naslund & Norrman, 2022).

The key elements of the 5C framework are: (1) commitment; (2) configuration (formulation, arrangement or organization of actions); (3) core business; (4) communication; and (5) continuous improvement (Johannsdottir & McInerney, 2018), see Figure 2. Commitment entails elements such as leadership commitment to the change initiative, training of employees, employees' skills and training, and their empowerment which enables them to integrate changes into their daily jobs. Configuration considers aspects of the business that need to be reconsidered and, in many cases, changed such as corporate governance, policies, codes of conduct, the organizational chart, mapping and measurement systems and so on. Core business revolve around the daily operation of each business, but these are the areas of operation where companies can have most impacts, either positive or negative.

In this context, it is important to emphasise the core business element, otherwise the level of change will be minor, not supported or low on the agenda of organizational leaders, and therefore likely to fail (Johannsdottir & McInerney, 2018). Communication includes stakeholder engagement, internal and external communication, partnership and collaboration, and transparency and disclosing of information. To ensure that operations do not revert to the old ways, it is important that improvements are continuous (Johannsdottir & McInerney, 2018).

Figure 1.2 The key elements of the 5C framework

| Commitment | Configuration | Core business | Communication |
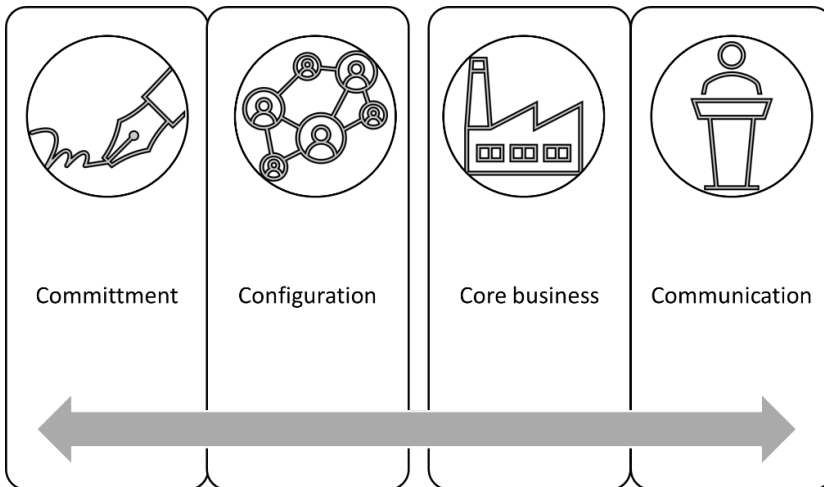
Source: authors' illustration, inspired by Johannsdottir & McInerney, 2018, p. 1259.

Indicators are significant, both in the case of individual organizations and in the wider economic context. They can be used to trace and influence the performance of individual employees, groups of employees, organizations, sector of the society, or the economy. Indicators relevant to organizational performance are often categorized as financial, customer-related, internal/business process-related and learning and growth indicators (Kaplan & Norton, 2001), and they need to be *SMART, or* specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (Doran, 1981). Indicators can also be focused on an individual level, such as in human resource management

(Gabčanová, 2012). It should be emphasised that, particularly with economic downturns, gender equality, i.e., pay, may be affected (Conley & Page, 2018; Patterson & Benuyenah, 2021). Therefore, it is important to track gender balance aspects, in the case of change management initiatives, or on different levels of the society, such as has been done in a proposed Gender Equality Scorecard developed for the Icelandic economy (Ólafsson et al., 2020).

As a part of the communication element of the 5C framework, standards, including the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), are relevant both in terms of measuring andcommunicating performance in case of environmental, social and governance aspects of the daily operation (Global Reporting Initiative, n.d.; Global Reporting Initiative & Global Sustainability Standards Board, 2020). GRI is an international standardization organization that helps the private sector, governments, and various organizations understand, through data collection and analysis, their impacts on issues such as human rights, climate change and corruption (Global Reporting Initiative, n.d.).

The Case of Icelandair Group and Icelandair

The Icelandair Group consists of the commercial airline Icelandair, Icelandair Cargo, Loftleiðir Iceland and the tour operator VITA. With headquarters in Iceland, Icelandair Group is traded on Nasdaq Iceland´s main market under the symbol ICEAIR. In 2021, Icelandair's first Annual and Sustainability report was published, with the intention to use the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards in the subsequent reporting cycle (Global Reporting Initiative, n.d.). The Icelandair Group also frames its operations around the United Nations´ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, n.d.). Figure 1 shows that it has prioritized four of the SDGs, namely decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), climate action (Goal 13) responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and gender equality (Goal 5). Figure 1, the responsibility model of Icelandair, also reveals the shared value ideology (Porter & Kramer, 2011). See details in"Further Reading".

Figure 1.3 Shared value of Icelandair Group and key elements of responsible business

Source: Icelandair Group, 2022

Alongside the SDGs, the Icelandair Group has defined three main focal areas i.e., economy, society, and the environment and have performed a materiality analysis on relevant matters in these areas. In addition, Iceland has defined its primary stakeholders, who are their business partners and suppliers, employees, customers, shareholders, NGOs and business associations, government and regulators, tourism industry and shareholders. The responsibilities defined in relation to each stakeholder group can be seen in Table 1 (Icelandair Group, n.d.).

Primary stakeholders and the Icelandair Group responsibility towards them

Table 1.1

Primary stakeholders	Our responsibility
Business partners and suppliers	+ Sustainability + Good business practices + Responsible supply chain
Employees	+ Health and safety + Equal rights and equal pay + Employee satisfaction + Training and competence development
Customers	+ Health and safety + Simplicity in booking process and change process
NGOs and business associations	+ Sustainability + Good business practices
Government and regulators	+ Compliance with regulations
Tourism industry	+ Cooperation groups + Sustainability
Shareholders	+ Good business practices + Good governance practices + Sustainable growth

Source: Icelandair Group, 2022

Icelandair Group's strategic vision is: *"We bring the spirit of Iceland to the world"*. Its stated mission is: *"We offer smooth and enjoyable journeys to, from, via and within Iceland – our hub and home"*. The values selected are *"passion, responsibility, simplicity" (Icelandair Group, 2022)*. The strategic initiatives cover five targets: 1) excellence in all operations; 2) be the most customer-focused airline in the market; 3) commercial excellence; 4) culture of teamwork and high performance and 5) an agile and sustainable network (Icelandair Group, 2022).

In 2021, the Icelandair Group received the World-class Workplace award (Pellikaan, 2021), thanks to its score above the global benchmark. This award relies on the opinions of employees. According to Sveina Berglind Jónsdóttir, the director of personnel operations at Icelandair:

> *We are very proud of this label, especially after last year, which was very challenging for our business, as for other airlines. It's truly rewarding and encouraging.… I think it is important to use measures like employee surveys and help each team create action-plans based on the results of such a survey. For the management team, communication is very important to keep employees informed, be as honest and transparent as possible, and give employees the chance to have a voice* (Pellikaan, 2021).

More on Icelandair

Icelandair is a part of the Icelandair Group and is the leading airline offering flights to, from, via and within Iceland. In 2021, the fleet consisted of 41 aircraft, mainly Boeing 757s, 737s and 767s. Icelandair has around 430 flights in and out of Iceland weekly to some 50 destinations – 16 in North America, 27 in Europe, 3 within Iceland and 4 in Greenland (Icelandair, n.d.-a). The number of employees was around 1.500 in early 2021 but increased significantly to around 2.500, after tourism picked up in 2022 (Icelandair, n.d.-a).

With regard to social responsibility, Icelandair aims to achieve gender equality (SDG 5), across the company; their target is to have less than 40% of either gender in management positions. Icelandair's target for 2025 is to increase the number of female pilot positions by 25%, grow the number of male cabin crew positions by 25%, and augment the number of female aircraft maintenance staff by promoting the craft and training to girls (Icelandair, n.d.-a). Icelandair, along with the Group, implemented an equal pay policy in 2018 and has been certified by a third party to receive Equal Pay Certification inn 2021 (Icelandair, n.d.-a).

Icelandair is committed to providing an attractive place to work where people can thrive. They aim for safe and reliable flights with exceptional service. Icelandair looks to retain talent (Icelandair, n.d.-a) and with the new strategic vision introduced in 2019, cabin crew members (CCMs) play a major role delivering Icelandair's vision, namely bringing the spirit of Iceland to the world, i.e., warmth, optimism, and determination (Icelandair, n.d.-b). Considering the emphasis placed by Icelandair on customer experience (Icelandair, n.d.-b), front line CCMs are the key component in the travel experience and a core business aspect.

According to Guðný Halla Hauksdóttir, the director of Customer Experience Development & Innovation:

> *Customer focus is in our DNA and our goal is to be the most customer-focused airline in our markets. In our outside-in approach, we emphasize understanding our customer's needs and we put our*

customers first in all our decisions and actions. With a strong culture of customer focus, our employees go out of their way to find solutions that cater to our customers' needs and the goal is to have our customers travel with us again (Icelandair Group, 2022).

Competing in customer experience and service is a challenging task. There are rankings published annually for the world's top airlines, for example the World Airline Awards, where airlines are rated in categories such as the best airline, best low-cost airlines, best regional airlines, and best cabin crew (World Airline Awards, 2022b). In 2022, the airlines ranking 1-5 in the category *World´s Best Airlines* were Qatar Airways, Singapore Airlines, Emirates, ANA AII Nippon Airways, and Qantas Airways (World Airline Awards, 2022b). When looking at the awards for *Best Airline Staff in Europe* in 2022, British Airways, Air France, Turkish Airlines, Swiss International Airlines and Finnish Airlines hold the first five spots (World Airline Awards, 2022b). The *World's Best Airline Cabin Crew* award recognizes e.g., staff enthusiasm, attitude, friendliness, and hospitality. The top five airlines in this category for 2022 are: Singapore Airlines, ANA AII Nippon Airways, Garuda Indonesia, Thai Airways Japan Airlines, and Qatar Airways (World Airline Awards, 2022a). It should be noted that Icelandair did not appear in any of these award categories.

Companies who are operating in a competitive market strive to hire the best and the brightest, particularly when one of their goals is to provide outstanding service (Christensen Hughes & Rog, 2008). Not only is the hiring and training process extensive but following-up on employee performance becomes an ongoing priority to reach the strategic objectives of the organization (Barrick, Gatewood, & Feild, 2011). In this regard, it should be highlighted that sustainability focus of organizations can be used to attract and retain talent and extend the talent pool when hiring (Johannsdottir, Olafsson, & Davidsdottir, 2014). Human Resource Management research has indicated that performance evaluations that include a 360-degree feedback have been found most reliable, as they include feedback from subordinates and customers. This method however comes with its difficulties, as it can cause cynicism, suspicion and an "Us-against-Them" mentality (Peiperl, 2001). Other reasons for failure can be leniency in reviewing, cultural differences, competition, ineffective planning, and misguided feedback (Kim, Yu, & Hyun, 2022).

Evaluating CCM performance had been considered a challenge, as the work itself takes place far from headquarters. CCMs spend much of their work time at 30.000 feet; monitoring and following-up on performance becomes challenging particularly if evaluation covers staff enthusiasm, attitude, fendilines and hospitality towards passengers (Chen & Huang, 2018). However, performance reviews have been found a good way to evaluate where further training is needed and to detect poor job performance (Kim et al., 2022). In relation to CCMs, the most common performance failures include providing poor passenger service, lack of cooperation among team crew members, lack of self-management, inadequate job knowledge, and failure to respond to supervisors or to feedback (Kim et al., 2022).

In early 2021, a new performance measurement tool, called *My Motivation*, was introduced for CCMs at Icelandair (Ragnarsdóttir, 2022). The aim is for CCMs to rate their own, as well as their colleagues' motivation, attitude, and appearance after each flight. After a few months, two questions had to be eliminated from the app after feedback review by the Data Protection Authority (Ruv.is, 2022). They were related to how clear staff were about safety issues and what attitude CCMs had towards their employer. The remaining questions CCMs are asked to rate on a five-point scale are : *"Came well prepared to work"; "SCCM [Senior Cabin Crew Member] showed good leadership skills on this flight";* and *"I felt I could look to SCCM for assistance if needed" (Ragnarsdóttir, 2022).* Furthermore, CCMs are encouraged to write one positive work-related comment about their co-workers.

The past three years (2020-2022) have been a rough ride for Icelandair. When COVID-19 hit Icelandair, the Group laid off around 2.000 employees. A considerable storm ensued, as some of the former CCMs were not re-employed, contrary to decades of tradition (Blöndal, 2021). This was highlighted by headline news where CCMs expressed their anger and disappointment. However, after some time passed and Icelandair got back on its feet in 2022, Icelandair was making the headlines again, this time in relation to the new performance evaluation app. In that context, a CCM stated in a newspaper article (Ragnarsdóttir, 2022):

> *Initially when the app was introduced there was a lot of fear and anxiety. Everyone was trying to show off and prove themselves, employees were on the edge of whether other employees were going to report a negative rating on them in the app or complain about the smallest detail, Icelandair has stated that it evaluates, among other things, performance when it comes to permanently hiring employees. The only performance that managers can look at is the performance rating in the app and how the cabin crew rated each other.*

As noted above, CCMs are asked to give scores between one and five for each question. Icelandair has stated that the average outcome is three points; if a CCM wants to rank them higher or lower, such scores must be justified in a text. Icelandair further claims that it is optional for CCMs to use the app, but according to the CCM who was interviewed (Ragnarsdóttir, 2022):

> *It has been whispered among CCM´s that it is better for those who do not have permanent employment to follow the instructions and use the program.*

She further stated (Ragnarsdóttir, 2022):

> *People are on the edge and don't dare to say anything negative or criticize for fear of being laid off or not getting a permanent job at the company.*

According to the news article, several other former and current CCMs have in conversations with the reporter described similar experiences in the working

environment. Icelandair's HRM director, who was also interviewed, said she regretted hearing about the experience described by the informant. She claims that Icelandair took the accusations seriously, adding *"Fear management and complaint culture are big words that of course go against our goals in developing and maintaining a good workplace culture"*.

When organizations develop and integrate change initiatives, such initiatives will not be successfully integrated unless they are accepted by those they will impact, in this case the Icelandair airplane crews. To ensure successful implementation, elements from the 5C framework need to be considered. For instance, what are the driving forces behind the change initiative? Has the sense of urgency been established and explained to the relevant stakeholders? What was the role of organizational leaders in the process, is leadership commitment in place. What aspects of the business is being configured, and how does the change align with companies' strategic direction such as commitment to the SDGs, or standards being used, including the GRI's? Is the change of in strategic importance, and thus will the change have an impact on the core business or is it of less importance. Communication also play an important role, both internal and external communication, as well as the impact the change will have measured with relevant key performance indicators (KPIs). Finally, it should not be assumed that the change is a one-off project or an activity, but in many cases the success rests on continuous improvements after the initial implementation of the change.

Questions/Tasks/Debate topics for classroom discussion

The issues brought up in this chapter can inspire fruitful discussion about change management, human resource management, corporate governance, management models and frameworks, success or failure of change management initiatives, employee or leadership role in change management, and more.

- How well does the change initiative implemented by Icelandair follow steps in change management models?
- What is the core business of Icelandair?
- What relevance, if any, has the 5C framework for the change initiative implemented by Icelandair?
- How might Icelandair influence the resistance to change it experienced? Might the sustainability focus be used to overcome resistance?
- How well do the indicators in the app align with those relevant to organizational performance?
- Have indicators chosen by Icelandair implications (positive/negative) for gender equality towards employees as one of the primary group of stakeholders?
- How well do the indicators chosen by Icelandair align with its vision, mission, and values?
- What steps do you recommend Icelandair take in the aftermath of the public criticism?

- How might a situation of an industry coming out of a crisis, in this case COVID-19, impact the urgency for change?
- Is a company allowed to take more drastic (tougher) actions to drive change in times of turbulence? Or should a company always stick to the same change strategy?

Further reading

- A recent Harvard Business Review paper by Porter and Kramer (2011), *Creating Shared Value,* may be of interest in this context: http://www.relativimpact.com/ downloads/HBR-Shared-value.pdf.This article argues that companies can enhance their competitiveness while they simultaneously benefit society and the economy in communities where they operate. This approach has been criticized; some of the counterargument can be found in an article by Crane et al. (2014), titled *Contesting the Value of "Creating Shared Value"*, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1525/ cmr.2014.56.2.130.
- In the article *Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail*, the author discusses the mistakes companies often make when implementing change.

https://hbr.org/1995/05/leading-change-why-transformation-efforts-fail-2

- In the article *Why Do Employees Resist Change,* Paul Strebel discusses change initiatives which do not reach past the Excel sheet phase and how personal commitment by employees are necessary for the change initiative to take off.
 https://hbr.org/1996/05/why-do-employees-resist-change

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