



Introducing Change

This gives some practical steps to help successfully introduce change to a church or Christian organisation.

Vision drives Change

Previous sheets in this toolkit have discussed ways of sharing a future vision for a church or organisation. If this has been done successfully, this will create a favourable background to the change. People will understand the rationale behind the vision, and will anticipate change, even if they do not necessarily support the change. The greater extent to which the vision is shared and fully supported, the easier it is to create an environment which seeks to move forwards into the future.

Forming a Change Team

The purpose of a change team is to ensure that the change is introduced as quickly as is appropriate, as smoothly as is possible, and with maximum acceptance by the wider organisation. A team offers a number of advantages over an individual introducing the change:

- ♦ there is greater diversity of experience, gifts and knowledge to help introduce the change
- ♦ it provides a greater base of energy behind the change
- ♦ it forces the organisation to think through the impact of the change.
- ♦ it provides broader base of relationships to handle issues with the change on a personal level.
- ♦ it communicates a sense of importance and purpose about the need to change.

The primary purpose of the team is not to work out what the change should be, but rather to introduce the change to the organisation. The best size for the team will depend upon the scale of the change to be introduced, and the size of the organisation, but will most often be between 3 and 7 members

Reactions to Change

Reactions to change fall into a number of groups. This is not an attempt to pigeon-hole people, since most of us will fall into each of these groupings for different changes. Rather it helps explain the process by which change is adopted.

1. **"Early Risers"** - these people like change, almost for change's sake. They are the first people you see with the new craze - often before you realise that it is a craze. Very often this group are into technology, and have gadgets galore. They are a relatively rare breed!
2. The **"Early Adapters"** - will follow the "Early Risers" once they are comfortable that the change is a good one, or at least that it is likely to be OK. Seeing the logic behind the change helps them accept it. They often accept that there is some element of risk involved.
3. The **"Crowd"** - the majority of the population will follow into a change once it is becoming the accepted norm. With no strong feelings one way or the other beforehand, they are swayed by the way the wind is blowing.
4. The **"Legitimisers"**, - found within the crowd, and often amongst the slowest to be convinced naturally. They are people with two important characteristics. Firstly, they will carefully evaluate new ideas, because they are independent thinkers who need to make up their minds for themselves. Secondly, they are known and respected by the crowd - once their minds are made up, it can help others to reach their decisions.
5. Finally, the **"Resisters"** - people who are against the change from the moment they hear about it. Their resistance may be passive - they will do absolutely nothing to help the change, and may grumble consistently, or it may be active resistance - where they will lobby against the change, trying to prevent it from happening

A change team should be biased towards those who are in favour of the change (Early Risers/Early Adapters) but also include one or two legitimisers, who will lend credibility to the team.

The Strategy for Change

The first job for the change team is to understand what the change involves, and why it is happening. They then need to tackle three areas -

- ❶ The timetable for change - how quickly will the change be introduced? Specifically, will there be a pilot/transition period for people to get used to the change. (nb there is a considerable difference between a trial period to see if a change will work, and a transition period to help people into a change. Both are appropriate, but the change team and the leadership need to be totally clear on the purpose of any trial or transition period.) This decision will be influenced by the degree of resistance anticipated.
- ❷ To what degree will people be involved in the change process? For some changes, the change team should aim for complete transparency - the process of introducing the change is so well managed, that the organisation barely

notices. In this case the organisation should still be told of the change and the reasons for it to avoid feeling manipulated.

- ③ Is there any learning that can be taken from previous experiences within the organisation, or from similar changes introduced elsewhere. Whilst we need to be careful of mapping the issues of one particular situation onto another, there are many more similarities between situations than we often give credit for!

Implementing The Change

It is vital at this stage to be clear on the purpose of the change team. They are responsible for introducing the change, and not for the change itself (although this is unlikely to be perceived clearly by the wider organisation!) Thus any issues and decisions involved in the process for introducing the change e.g. running of a transition period, the communication involved, or the other issues that will arise alongside the change are their responsibility. Any desired amendments to what is introduced (the change itself) should be passed back to the individual or group who are responsible for the change itself. This is likely to occur during the planning process for implementing the change, and the introduction itself, almost however well the planning group has tried to anticipate the change.

Two tools that can help introduce the change are :

- ♦ A timetable for change - either published to the wider organisation, or kept as a tracking document by the change team.
- ♦ A task list, with a member of the change team nominated as being responsible for ensuring that each task gets done, someone nominated to do the task itself, and a date by which the change needs to be completed. An example of such a task list is given in the box on the right.

TASK LIST - SWITCHING VENUE FOR YOUTH GROUP

WHAT	WHO Responsible	WHO DO	BY WHEN
Book new hall	Jim	Jim	Sept 3 rd
Design Posters	Helen	Helen	Oct 15 th
Print Posters	Helen	Print Shop	Oct 22 nd
Letter to parents	Julie	Youth Leaders	Oct 22 nd

Handling Resistance

One of the largest pieces of work to be done in introducing change is to help those who will naturally want to resist the change come to terms with it. One of the distinctive features of a Christian organisation should be that it handles resistance with a loving approach to members, and a clear separation of the people from the issue.

Brian Pearson, in an excellent Administry "How to" guide on change, wrote this "*It is both an unachievable aim, and an inappropriate one to eliminate resistance completely. There will always be a residue, even if it remains well concealed. Its presence (in moderation) is a valuable leaven which can be a productive agent in the overall process.*"

The change team needs to group its actions into two elements. There are some actions which can be handled with the whole organisation or in large groups, by clearly communicating how the change will NOT see people's worst fears realised. This will require the change team to talk with people to sensitively understand what their worst fears are!

The second group of actions is to identify those individuals who are likely to resist the change and to talk with them. Very often the process of empathetic listening and careful explanation can help to encourage those whose resistance is based on misunderstanding or on personal fears. Where there is room for flexibility within the change, it should be accommodated. Indeed, the whole process of handling resistance to the change can make a significant contribution to the change itself, by forcing a critical appraisal of the change, and by allowing an organisation to vigorously debate the issues associated with it.

Review

It is important to review the introduction of a major change a while after it has been implemented to check that the desired outcome has been reached, and that the organisation is happy with it. The change team are the ideal group to conduct the review, although the results of the review may need to be presented to the sponsoring group or to the leadership. Four areas are suggested for a review :

1. **Has it happened?** : Take the vision statement for the change - has it been accomplished? Where are there gaps?
2. **How has the change been received?** How are people feeling?
3. **What are the problems?** How can these be resolved ?
4. **What can be learned from the process of introducing the change ?** What would you do differently next time?

SUMMARY

Using a structured approach for change will not guarantee success, and does not in any way replace a need to pray through the work at each stage. Flexibility and common sense will be needed to determine the degree to which this approach needs to be followed. This approach is designed for major changes associated with a church or Christian organisation stepping out to reach its vision - smaller changes will not need to go through each stage in detail, although the principles outlined should normally be followed! Whilst we need to carefully consider all aspects of introducing change, and to be sensitive to people's needs, perhaps most of all we need to have the confidence to step out prayerfully and in faith.