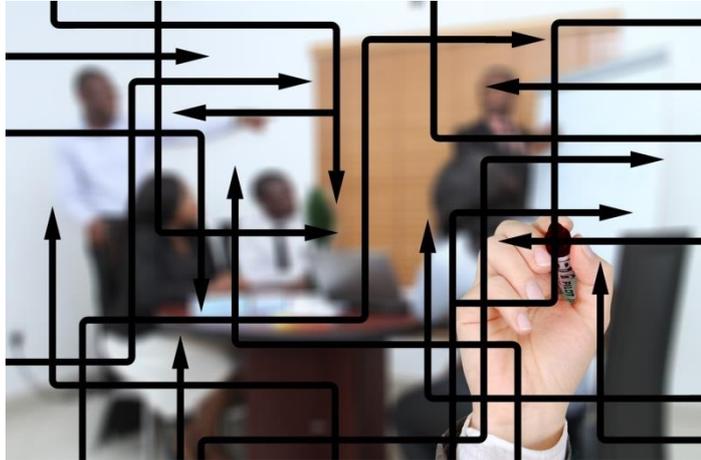




Managing Change

Change is very much part of life - you only have to return to the place you were born or grew up to be reminded of that. 'Time stands still for no man - or woman.' At a deeper level, though, it is at the heart of all we are called to be. Agents of change. David Cormack notes:

Change is the Church's business. It is the Church's business because change is God's business. The Bible reveals a master plan for change - personal, relational, social and universal. He is the creator God who transforms darkness into light. He is the God of resurrection who changes death into life. He is the God of eternity whose pleasure it is to continually make all things new.¹



Despite all that, there are few situations where it seems to be more challenging to introduce change than church! Those involved in leading through change need to do so with a measure of skill and sensitivity - recognising that many people will find it difficult. Below, is a proven process for journeying with people through change along with some hints.

A process for journey with people through change

1. Create an environment where people accept that change is necessary

This is about looking at the big picture and if you don't do this, every small change will feel like a battle. After all, why should anyone agree to change if they don't believe it is necessary? To help with this, give people time to talk about what will happen if no change takes place and help them face up to the reality of this. It will raise doubts and fears that you will need to help people explore and work through with sensitivity but only after people have explored this will they genuinely be ready to move on to the next stage.

2. Talk together about what you would like the future to look like and why

This will help to draw people together and create a measure of trust. As you do this, try to focus on the big picture. Encourage them to talk about what they would like to see and why - don't

¹ David Cormack, *Change Directions - New Ways Forward for Your Life, Church and Business* (Crowborough: Monarch, 1995), 17.



allow them to get distracted by the small details but ask them to express their dreams and speak of their vision for the future.

Also, encourage them to think through what this will mean for them. There is a cost involved in change (much of it an emotional cost as people lose something) and it is best to acknowledge this right from the very beginning. People will appreciate your honesty and so trust develops.

3. Identify some practical steps you can take

All you can do to begin with is take some small steps in the right direction. They will not take you in one step to where you want to be - but after you have taken the first steps, the next steps will become clear and likewise.

Some practical hints

- **Give people space and time to talk**

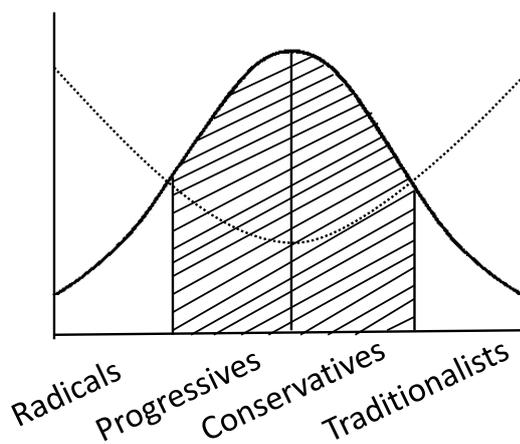
Not only at the start, but all the way through, acknowledge people's feelings and help them as they move through the changes. Don't be caught out by strong feelings or become overly defensive. Instead be prepared to listen and help people work through their feelings.

- **Use outside facilitators**

Outside facilitators bring three things: an expertise in guiding people through the change process; an independence and an ability to moderate behaviour!

- **Make sure the important voices are heard**

The most important people to hear from are **not** those who make the most noise at meetings! (See illustration below – the “noise” curve is the dotted curve.) Instead, it is important to hear from those who occupy the middle ground, who represent the majority. They are usually the least vocal and it is important that they have opportunity to speak. One simple way of doing this at Kirk Session meetings is to break into discussion groups and then feedback from those groups.





- **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate**

The most frequently heard complaint is quite simply 'we don't know what is happening'. This can be misread as a desire by others to control, manipulate or hold back what is going on. Usually it is exactly what it presents as - a desire to know what is going on! So let people know what you're thinking right from the beginning and then find lots of different ways to communicate as decisions are made.

- **Involve all generations in decision making**

Whilst this can be overplayed, if you want to build a multi-generational church which will draw in all generations then decision making needs to involve all generations. Many younger people are hesitant about taking on long term commitments and as a result most of our Kirk Session do not have a balance of generations. Look for other ways of genuinely involving them in decision making.

Further reading and resources

David Cormack, *Change Directions - New Ways Forward for Your Life, Church and Business* (Crowborough: Monarch, 1995).