

Flexibility Boot Camp

workbook



Flexibility Notions

- T F 1. It works best to have new people join existing groups rather than form new groups just for them.



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| T | F | 2. Overall, persons in a church who are under 35 years in age have the same priorities for the church as those who are older. |
| T | F | 3. The factor that has the greatest impact on how people are feeling about the church overall is the level of friendliness in the congregation. |
| T | F | 4. It is critical to make sure that a new approach will succeed before making a decision in favor of it. |
| T | F | 5. It is impossible to have a vital church without families with children and youth. |
| T | F | 6. Every person is resistant to change to about the same degree. |
| T | F | 7. It is important to have a complete, three year plan in place before making any changes. |
| T | F | 8. Dissatisfaction is the greatest obstacle to change. |
| T | F | 9. Members of congregations are generally more satisfied with their churches than they are with their public libraries. |
| T | F | 10. People who indicate they try to carry their faith over into every aspect of their lives tend to be more accepting of changes in the church. |

Notes



Bible Study Exercise

Matthew 9: 14-17

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast often,* but your disciples do not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The wedding-guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.

1. A first person at the table reads the passage aloud as others listen for the *word or phrase that stands out to them*—the word or phrase that is “for” them.
2. Go around the circle. Each person shares his or her word or phrase aloud (anyone can pass).
3. A second person at the table reads the passage aloud as each person listens for *what the passage is saying to him or her*.
4. Go around the circle. Each person shares: What does the passage seem to be saying to you? (anyone can pass)
5. A third person at the table reads the passage aloud as each person listens for what *the passage is saying about renewal and change in his or her congregation*.
6. Going around the circle, each person shares: What does this passage say about renewal and change in my congregation? (anyone can pass)
7. End with all praying the following prayer:

Eternal God of unchanging power and light: Look with mercy on your whole church. Bring to completion your saving work that the whole world may see the fallen lifted up, the old made new, and all things brought to perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Learning

Our birthright as the Body of Christ is an abundant life that we share and offer to one another.

Listening to the answers to two questions in a congregation gives us insight into how members experience that promised abundant life.

1. How satisfied are we?
2. How energized are we?

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being low and 5 being high, how would you rate how satisfied you are with your congregation?

Low 1	2	3	4	High 5

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being low and 5 being high, how would you rate the level of energy in your congregation?

Low 1	2	3	4	High 5

Another factor related to how people feel about a congregation is the congregation's ability *to be flexible* that is, *to deal with change*. On a scale



of 1-5, with 1 being low and 5 being high, how would you rate your congregation's comfort with change?

Low 1	2	3	4	High 5

Some Basic Frameworks and Definitions

There are two issues all organizations and congregations must deal with:

- **Internal Integration:** Developing a “way we do things” that allows us to function and to adapt
- **Adaptation or Flexibility:** Surviving and growing in the environment, in the context, in which we are located or live

Both of these are important to the health, faithfulness and sustainability of a congregation.

A Working Definition of *Flexibility*

We'll be using the following definition of flexibility as we think about congregational renewal and change:

Flexibility: The ability to adapt or make a change as you seek to become a healthier, more faithful, more sustainable congregation (one in which people have high levels of satisfaction and energy)

Some Key Points

- Change for the sake of change alone is not a good idea and will not “save” us or our congregations.
- Change and the learning related to change is not a one-time thing, but is a continual activity.



- Change related to increasing congregational growth needs to focus on strengthening the fundamental “there” there in a congregation (worship, formation etc.) and how newcomers hear about, get into a congregation and stay connected to the congregation over time.
- Remember that integration and adaptation are partners and, to some degree, will always be in a creative tension with one another.
- In places where flexibility (appropriate change to become healthier, more faithful and more sustainable) is not a tried and true practice and/or a skill we have, doing it may feel like writing with your non-dominant hand!

Learning

A lack of flexibility is often the underlying cause of many different problems that tend to occur over and over again.

- Problems with expectations regarding the pastor, especially when there is a pastoral change.
- Problems with decisions made by the governing board.
- Problems with changes in worship such as service times, music, or style.
- Problems with the education and formation ministries, especially when there is a change in the curriculum or program.
- Problems with eliminating programs that are no longer effective.
- Problems with starting new programs to reach more people.
- Problems with decisions about the color, style, or placement of furnishings.
- Problems with changes in the use of building space.



- Problems with the allocation of financial resources or the approval of the budget.

All churches have conflicts. How might a lack of flexibility make conflicts worse or occur in a repeating pattern over the years?



Critical Areas Requiring Flexibility

Just as there are certain joints in the body that require more flexibility, research suggests that it is critical that the church be flexible in a number of areas.

Worship

Churches must be flexible enough to create a high quality, meaningful worship experience not only for members but also for those they want to reach in the community.

Pastoral leadership

Churches must be flexible enough to allow their clergy to invest significant amounts of time and energy in preaching and leadership without having to spend excessive time doing pastoral care.

Education and formation

Churches must be flexible enough to offer education and formation in a variety of formats, venues, and schedules. They must be willing to engage in a process of learning how to be effective in the world today.

Relational networks

Churches must be flexible enough to relate to and serve people of various backgrounds and stations in life. They must be willing create new groups for new persons.

Community focus

Churches must be flexible enough to listen to the needs of the persons in their community and include those needs in their decision-making.

Why do you believe these areas to be so critical to the growth of a church?



Your Flexibility Pattern

We all tend to respond to change differently.

For example, when you go on a vacation, would you say that you

1. Like to plan everything before you leave?
2. Like to go without a detailed plan and discover what happens along the way?

When changes are made in the church in an area where you regularly participate (worship times, new music, different order of service, meeting spaces) how do you tend to feel? (Circle the top three.)



When those changes are made, what are your first thoughts about the leaders who made them?

- I wonder if this is a good idea.
- I wonder if they have thought about how this affects me.
- I wonder if they have a purpose in mind that they don't want to talk about.



- I wonder what they are trying to accomplish with this change.

Some other thoughts about leaders:

A Change Model

(from Richard Beckhard's *Organizational Transitions: Managing Complex Change*)

$$C = D \times V \times F > R$$

D = Dissatisfaction with the current situation

A first step in lasting organizational change is for individuals and the organization as a whole to share a common sense of dissatisfaction with how things are right now. Best if this can arise from a process by which all views are shared, respected and heard as a way to get to a *common* sense of dissatisfaction. In other theories, this is called “readiness”

V = Vision of a positive possibility, more than the absence of pain in the current situation

Establishing a common vision or direction that describes the endpoint that the organization hopes to achieve. A description of the next hoped-for stop on the horizon for the organization. Can be very short: “We will grow in numbers.”

F = First steps in the direction of the vision

Agreement on the significant first steps to get to begin to move toward the vision. The concrete actions that demonstrate progress toward the vision. May involve training people to do a specific thing!

R = Resistance to change

The natural and understandable forces of resistance to change that exist within any individual or organization.



Note: If any of the three elements on the left are zero, the change effort cannot overcome the natural forces of resistance (“R”).

A Change Worksheet

To work on in leadership groups

Decide on one change you believe needs to be implemented in your congregation related to one of the key areas listed on page 7 of these materials. What is the one change? (write below)

Now analyze the change using the Beckhard model:

$$\mathbf{C = D \times V \times F > R}$$

What strengths do you see for change in your congregation in any of the areas represented by the letters “D”, “V” or “F”? What are the area(s) that will need work on in your congregation to help the change occur? Make notes below:



Steps toward Managing Change

Churches can grow in their flexibility. Here are some steps that can contribute to that growth.

- Adopt a “let’s try it” attitude. Make change an “experiment” to see what works...and what doesn’t. If we are not making some mistakes, we are generally not learning fast enough.
- Assign a fixed amount of time for a change. Many of your members’ initial, apprehensive feelings tend to ease with time.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of change at the end of the period and communicate that evaluation to the congregation.
- Begin change with folks who find change easier. These are called early adopters. Let them help you bring in other people who may be a little slower to adopt.
- Realize that there are some things your members cannot learn from a discussion or reading a book (like riding a bicycle!). They have to try it. As someone said, you often can’t think yourself into a new way of acting, you have to act into a new way of thinking.
- Model good change practices and attitudes in your own life.
- Seek resources that will help you understand why changes are needed in the church today and the kinds of changes that are likely to bear fruit. Make resources available to members of the congregation.



- Be aware of your own change profile and how that tends to affect the way you deal with change.
- Preach and teach from passages of Scripture dealing with change such as the Israelites on the wilderness journey and Jesus in his transition from being a carpenter to becoming an itinerate preacher.
- Listen to the thoughts and feelings of others as non-defensively as possible and offer positive encouragement to others who may be struggling.

What is one insight you've had in this session about flexibility in you or your congregation?

What is one thing you can do (as a leader or a congregant) to help your congregation become more flexible?