

Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church
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- I. The first step in defusing fear of change and facilitating change in the church is discerning the challenges.
 - A. Change is inevitable but not always positive or desired. Two common factors often produce undesirable changes.
 - 1. Unsupervised change, e.g., when leaders fail to manage their areas of responsibility as carefully as they should.
 - 2. Mismanaged change, e.g., when mistakes are made in planning and implementation of innovations.
 - B. Change is a constant for believers in Christ: sanctification is a life-long process.
 - C. Human beings generally resist change.
 - D. A major part of the church leader's call is to be a change agent.
 - E. We can defuse fear of change by understanding and carefully initiating and implementing the innovation-decision process.
- II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating corporate and individual decision-making.
 - A. Ask eight essential questions.
 - 1. How am I perceived by the people in my church?
 - 2. Whose needs will this innovation primarily meet?
 - 3. Do I have the social capital to facilitate this change?
 - 4. Am I perceived as a one who listens carefully?
 - 5. Is the change I want to implement moral and ethical?
 - 6. Is there a more opportune time for this innovation?

7. Is this change I'm considering supported by the facts?
8. Will this innovation uproot and destroy a need-meeting tradition?

B. Corporate innovation decisions are made in five stages over time.

1. Agenda-setting: Identify a need and an innovation that will meet that need.
2. Matching: Relate the need to the innovation to determine feasibility and effectiveness.
3. Redefining and/or restructuring: Quickly make any modifications needed.
4. Clarifying: Explain how the innovation benefits the organization.
5. Routinizing: Recognize incorporation of the change but continue to affirm its benefits while significant opposition exists.

C. Individuals' innovation decisions occur over time in a five-stage process.

1. Knowledge: Provide information as to how the innovation functions and its benefits; avoid language of fiat and permanency.
2. Persuasion: Work with and through opinion leaders to encourage others in the church to adopt the change.
3. Decision: To help members conclude they'll adopt an innovation assure them that it will be implemented on a trial basis and discontinued if it doesn't work out as expected.

4. Implementation: As the change is made, carefully monitor how it is functioning and being received; search out feedback and make any necessary modifications in the change itself and/or the plan to initiate the innovation.
5. Confirmation: Continue to emphasize the benefits of the innovation as long as any question remains in people's minds.
VERY IMPORTANT

III. Carefully implementing the change defuses fear and facilitates its acceptance.

A. Prayer is powerful and effective.

B. Four attributes of innovations effectively defuse fear and facilitate change; the fifth, complexity, hinders acceptance.

1. Relative advantage: Show clearly how the change will be better than what is now in place, according to what the people value.
(+)
2. Compatibility: Assure people that the proposed change is congruent with their felt needs, values, and previous understandings. (+)
3. Trialability: Present the proposed change as an opportunity that can be discontinued if desired at any time. "We can always go back to what we were doing before." (+)
4. Observability: The easier it is for people to see the results of an innovation, the more likely they will adopt it. (+)
5. Complexity: The more difficult to understand and use an innovation, the less likely people will adopt it. Leaders should keep explanations simple and concise. (-)

C. Carefully employ opinion leaders.

- D. Demonstrate homophily, the degree to which the people see their leaders as similar to themselves, regarding, e.g., values, interests, and social characteristics.
 - E. Understand the five different types of people in a social system, and use this information in relating to them according to their orientations and expectations.
 - 1. Innovators (2.5%)
 - 2. Early Adopters (13.5%)
 - 3. Early Majority (34%)
 - 4. Late Majority (34%)
 - 5. Laggards (16%)
 - F. Establish credibility by walking the talk in Christlikeness.
 - G. Outlast the opposition by committing to a long-term ministry in that church and loving the people, including opponents (Matthew 5:44).
 - H. Monitor consequences to modify or eliminate any unexpected outcomes that are not desired.
- IV. Implications and applications
- A. The church belongs to Christ, who came not to be served but to serve. (Matthew 20:28)
 - B. We, who have been called to be leaders of Christ's body, need to have that same servant-leader mentality and behavior.
 - C. In the light of diffusion research what representatives to you want on your team, and from what adopter categories? Don't leave out the "laggards."

NOTES