



The Vine Project
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Phase 5: Maintain Momentum

The Vine Project proposes a five-phase process for implementing change in your church

- Phase 1: Clarification of core values
- Phase 2: Application of convictions to personal culture
- Phase 3: Evaluation of current ministry culture
- Phase 4: Innovate & Implement proposed changes
- Phase 5: Maintain Momentum

‘Strategic planning is actually the easy part. Execution is where nearly everyone falls down. The truly challenging stage in driving deep culture change is actually in executing your plans - persistently, flexibly and effectively over the considerable period of time that will be required for any change to take place’ p315

Five Main Sections in this Phase

1. Understanding the Obstacles
2. The Pressure on Pastors
3. The Pressure on our People
4. Leadership, Staffing & Governance
5. Practical Skills in Maintaining Momentum

1. Understanding the Obstacles

‘Culture change is not a commando operation, it’s more like an extended land war in Asia ...’ p316

Discussion: What are the ‘obstacles’ that threaten to derail implementation?

The following is the list of roadblocks or obstacles to change that we covered in Phase 3. Would you change your rating now as to which ones are likely to be the most challenging?

	Obstacle	
1	Our members have a variety of ways of thinking about church and ministry. We're not united around a common set of convictions.	
2	Many of our members are spectators or passengers rather than active participants.	
3	Those of our members who are active and who get involved would mostly see their role as serving on a particular roster or in a logistical capacity—on committees, organizing events, helping out with programs etc. They don't see their role as being to move people to the right one step at a time through the word and prayer.	
4	Many of our members don't have active friendships or engagement with non-Christian people.	
5	Our members lack the loving sacrificial spirit that is needed to get alongside people and encourage them toward Christ. We're all a bit consumed with our own problems and challenges.	
6	When we look at our church members, we see many who are anxious and broken and barely able to survive in life and faith day by day. How can we ask them to think about helping others to learn Christ when they are barely hanging on to Christ themselves?	
7	Our members are too busy in life. There's a feeling that getting everyone involved in ministry (i.e. in moving others to the right) is something that might work for youth or young adults or empty-nesters, but not for busy people like us.	
8	Because of our particular demographic, many of our people do not see themselves as initiators or leaders or contributors in any sphere, let alone as people who could help others know Christ.	
9	Many of our members feel inadequate in knowledge and skills to minister to other people.	
10	Our members have no expectation that God will use them in another person's life to see that person grow in Christ.	
11	Our local communities are very complex and seem out of reach. There is a huge social and cultural gap between our church members and our neighbours. We're not sure where to start in connecting and engaging with our community.	
12	There are some key strong personalities in our church who are very invested in things remaining the way they are. They are likely to oppose any efforts to change things.	
13	Our keen members are already busy serving in various ministries and on rosters for various tasks. It's hard to see how they could find time for anything else (e.g. any new plans we come up with).	
14	Our church program is very full. It's hard to see any 'space' (in time or in people's energy) for anything new or different.	

Here is a different list of obstacles—a list of reasons that churches have given, looking back, as to why their efforts to initiate growth and change have failed¹.

¹ Adapted from J Herrington, M Bonem and JH Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2000.

Which of these do you think is most likely to jeopardize your own efforts to reshape your church's culture?

1. The project was not really brought to God in prayer; we talked about praying, but ended up not praying much at all.
2. We failed to enlist a core group of passionate lay leaders or advocates to help model and lead the change.
3. We underestimated the power and inertia of the existing culture.
4. We didn't do enough to foster a sense of urgency for the changes.
5. We didn't give people enough time and space to make the emotional transition to some of the new structures and initiatives we introduced.
6. We bought someone else's solution. We attempted to 'bolt on' new programs and strategies to the existing work, rather than rebuild the culture from the ground up.
7. We backed off some key decisions because we didn't want to face the fallout or awkwardness of putting them into effect.
8. After a while we could not see the benefits of the changes, so we reverted to the status quo.
9. We did not really demonstrate the new ministry culture in such a way that people could see what it was all about.
10. We did not effectively communicate the reasons for change and what it would all mean for reaching more people with the gospel.
11. We were not willing to make changes to our organizational structures in order to remove obstacles to change.
12. We did not work out how to translate the vision into understandable and achievable implementation steps.
13. We tried to do too many new things at once. The process suffered death by a thousand initiatives.
14. We got started on the change process but lost momentum. We didn't have any plans in place for keeping ourselves going.

2. The Pressure on Pastors

There is a lot of discussion about our role as congregational leaders. It's faddish and inevitable. And we operate in an environment where everyone has an opinion on what we ought to be doing and how we ought to be spending our time.

The essence of the debate can be summed up in these words on p321

'Is my role to protect and guard and feed the sheep? Or is it to go out into the world and find lost sheep?'

It's worth pastors doing a careful audit of their time. Where is the time actually going? What could be rescheduled or delegated? What priorities and time allocations need to change?

3. The Pressure on our People

Discussion: what do you make of the following two comments?

'the first and most important thing to say is that we must understand and respond to the pressure our people are under theologically, in terms of what the Bible says about this fallen world. The kind of pressure we're talking about is situation normal in this present darkness, and its most significant effect is the temptation it brings to abandon Christ, to retreat into the darkness, to give up our hope, to yield to despair' p324

'There is an obvious need to be realistic about what our people can cope with in terms of time, energy and effort, given the stage of life that they are at. There's no point setting your whole project up for failure by embarking on plans that bear no realistic relation to the amount of time and energy that your people have available. It's a recipe for guilt, burnout and discouragement all round' p323

4. Leadership, Staffing & Governance

At some point, in order to gain momentum in these plans, we need to address the following three questions:

1. Who should be on the team that leads the growth of the 4P ministry in your congregation? [Leadership Team]
2. What full-time and part-time staffing is required to support and lead the growth of ministry? [Staff Team]
3. How does all this relate to the official governance structures of our congregational life? [Governance Team]

Those three groups of people are

1. Your gospel ministry people who implement culture change by doing it. You want people who make things happen.
2. Your training people who drive culture change by equipping people for it. You want people who can equip, empower and export people.
3. Your responsible people who enable culture change by freeing up other people to do it. You want people who will have your back and leave no stone unturned.

Team	Remit & Responsibilities
Leadership Team	
Governance Team	
Staff Team	

5. Practical Skills in Maintaining Momentum

1. Make the right sort of plans: good ones are best!
2. Review, learn, adapt - monitor, review and change!
3. Identify gaps in practical skills - and fill them!

1. Make the right sort of plans: good ones are best!

'If your plans are vague, unrealistic, poorly expressed or waffly, it is very unlikely that they will gain much traction or have much longevity' p330

If your plans are going to be understood, embraced and put into effect over time, they need to:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

2. Review, learn, adapt - monitor, review and change!

'Your plans need constant monitoring and review and adjustment' p332

- Monthly: keep things on track and co-ordinate
- Annual: review and plan ahead for the next year (May)
- 5 Yearly: a fresh re-evaluation of where the church has got to

Review is the engine for change.

3. Identify gaps in practical skills - and fill them!

The following practical skills are more important for leading in culture change than we might think. And it's worth being honest about where we come up short. We have to be willing to admit that there may be a personal skill deficit that's holding up the church.

Five Practical Management Skills for Leading Culture Change

1. Personal management and controlling the diary
2. Leading teams and team meetings
3. Managing ministry projects
4. Developing and running training programs
5. Coaching skills and delegating skills

Conclusion

What now?

What are you going to do with this?